National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
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Gul Kitt Jaad Bernie Poitras Williams,
In relation to her mother, Katherine Rose Williams,
Noreen Joyce William & Sharlene MacAdams

Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette

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Assembly of First Nations Non-appearance
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Government of Canada Anne Turley (Legal Counsel)
Heiltsuk First Nation Non-appearance
Northwest Indigenous Council Society Non-appearance
Our Place – Ray Cam Co-Operative Centre Non-appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada Beth Symes (Legal Counsel)
Vancouver Sex Workers’ Rights Collective Non-appearance
Les Femmes Michif
Otipemisiwak/Women of the Metis Nation Non-appearance
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Commission Counsel: None.
Grandmothers, Elders, Knowledge-keepers: Laureen "Blu" Waters
Gaudio, Kathy Louis, Florence Catcheway, CeeJai Julian, Audrey
Siegl, Merle Williams, Deni Paquette, Donna Dickison, Ruth
Alfred, Harriet Prince, Gladys Radek, Louise Haulli, Reta Blind,
Elaine Bissonnette, Eunice McMillan, Candace Ruth, Janice Brown,
Theresa Russ, Deanna Lewis, Jennifer Thomas, Margerat George,
Juanita Desjarlais
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MR. PRESLEY WILLIAMS: I just want to introduce myself. I'm the son of Skundaal Bernie Williams. I just wanted to let everybody know that I really appreciate all the strong and powerful women that's been in my life. My mom's been there through thick and thin, and I'm very, very proud of all of you exposing what's really happened in our lives. It's lateral violence that needs to be taken care of, and I'm affected by that by having children of my own.

I'm very, very proud for my mother to stand and speak what is real because that's what people need to know, and that's what people need to hear. We -- we as young people still have a practical voice in this world, and yet our colonial minds tend to forget. We rely on our Elders and our young people to succeed our culture and our traditions.

My traditional name is Wadgadagaang (ph). I come from the Stlangng Laanaas clan of Old Masset. We have another subclan, the Dew Claw (ph) Stlangng Laanaas. We are in -- we are in positions to be Hereditary Chiefs as of this summer. My mother and I are the first two Hereditary Chiefs that will be in -- in that position in -- be the
first time in Haida history, and it'd be very, very pleased
to -- to be a part of this.

I've watched on the television. I've heard
a lot of stories in regards to a lot of the things that
occurred in our -- our Aboriginal world, and it just seems
to me that it's -- it's taken 40 to 50 years for our voices
to be heard, and now that we have a chance that we can
express ourselves, it's very -- very -- very awesome.

This -- to my right is my wife Jamie. We
would have liked to bring our children, although due to the
content of the conversations we're going to be having, it's
going to be a little bit difficult for them to understand.
I would have loved to have my brothers here, my older
brother and my younger brother here as representatives of
our people and our clan, although due to having young new
members of our awesome family, it's just too difficult to
kind of schedule everybody as well as how many people are
sitting beside us.

I'd also like to thank the Tsleil-Waututh
Musqueam and the Squamish Nations for letting us do our
business on their territory, and -- and I'd like to thank
the Tsawwassen aboriginals for also giving us the chance to
practice our -- our traditional -- our protocol for
expressing ourselves, and -- and I'd like to say thank you
for everybody else for attending; the media, thank you for
being here. Thank you for the Government officials to be here. Thank you for my Aunty Terri (ph). Thank you for all the beautiful family members that are here to support us. I know a lot of people that are standing beside us and behind us. I really love and appreciate you for helping and representing our -- our voice. It's really important that our -- our young people and our Elders have a voice. Right now, we're dealing with too many problems internally and externally. It's very challenging to express to our children how difficult it really is.

So that's the reason why I'm here, to support my mother and her voice, because it needs to be heard, and -- and a lot of the stories that are going to come out of this are going to really shake our people, but it's -- there's no more lateral violence. We are stopping this today. We need to have some closure, and I'm sure it's going to take longer than just this event to occur, but this is a step going forward for our people and for my mother, and -- and I hope -- you know, if I've said anything to offend anyone, I apologize. I'm still young in this world. As an Aboriginal man, I'm still a baby when it comes to tradition. I'm still learning our culture as well as our language and our songs, so it's very important that we touch back to our culture because that's the protocol that we live and succeed in our lives. This colonial mind
is just -- it's -- it's poison, and the only way we can beat it is by being chameleons under the eyes of the Government: Learning, speaking their tongue, and understanding the way they talk and understand the way they deal with things and how we can manipulate it. This is a perfect example of manipulating it. Now we have eyes all over the country that are watching us, and now we have the opportunity to express that feeling in -- in such a way where it's -- it's quite a large impact going from the residential schools to the '60s scoop to, you know, even -- even being adopted. A lot of these things are not spoken about, and it's very nice that I can hear other stories because I've never went through that, and my mom's hidden those things from us our entire lives, and this is one opportunity that I have to swallow my pride and listen to my mother. This is the way our culture is. You listen to your Elders, you listen to your matriarchs, and you listen to the women that are key in your life, and my mother is the one that's given me this strength and power in my voice, and I'm very nervous, but I'm very proud and courageous that I'm here standing beside my mom and my wife, and, you know, my aunts and my family members from Haida Gwaii and a lot of family that my mother's known and grown upon in her life before my life, and I -- I just want to say thank you and háw'aa.
Gul Kitt Jaad Bernie Poitras Williams,  
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In our culture -- or in our Haida, we -- I just learned this yesterday. Being a land-protector of our people is (speaking in Haida); means the warrior Haida, and this is a perfect example of a (speaking in Haida). This is a real warrior.

(APPLAUSE)

MR. PRESLEY WILLIAMS: And without further ado, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Háw'aa.

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I just want to say good morning, Madam Commissioner Audette, and to the territory of this -- this beautiful territory here that I've been so blessed to do my work since '86 here; and to the Elders, to the matriarchs, to the grandmothers, háw'aa; to the survivors, especially to the families.

My name is Gul Kit Jaad, which means Golden Spruce Woman. I'm from the territory of the Stlangng Laanaas. I am also a Hereditary Chief in Waiting along with my son. My Hereditary Chief's name is Tas Gai (ph), which means Chief of Two Villages.

And to the warrior women that I've been so blessed to work on the front lines with them, and to the women who are still suffering on those streets, and to the
women from the Downtown Eastside that are here, I really
honour you. I want to say háw’aa to you for being here
today.

I'm also known as Bernie Williams Poitras.
I want to make this very and openly clear that I have -- I
have declined a lawyer for this process. I spoke to my
Elders. I spoke to spiritual people here that I want to do
things the old -- the old protocol way. I was not coerced.
I was not ever given any advice to have or not have. I
just wanted to make that clear that this was of my own
choice that I have chosen to come before you,
Madam -- Madam Commissioner Audette, that this was my own.
I felt at the last minute -- I spoke to my niece Audrey
Siegl. Like I said, I spoke to the Elders that I want to
do things, you know, the proper way of my people, my
protocol is not to have a lawyer present.

I want to say háw’aa to my support, and
especially Rita Blind, and my cousin Penny and Terri and
Carol Martin, so many of you. I want to say háw'aa.

I'm not really clear on how to start this.
I'm probably just going to be, you know, trying
to -- because of time-wise and other family members, I
would like to just -- I'm probably going to zoom through it
really quick. I just want to make it known that my son
Presley and his brothers, this is the first time they're
going to be hearing my story.

For -- I'm going to be 61 this year. I have -- I've always tried to shelter and make sure that my children would -- would never, ever, ever go through the things that I've gone through, and I've never spoken to them. Like I said, this is my first time. I've -- and there's been many times I've been really misunderstood because of who I am.

So I want to say how much I honour my children. My children have sacrificed a lot through being on the front lines. Many times I've had to leave at 2, 3 in the morning when I got the calls about our loved ones, our women. Several days I've had to leave my children to go on the front lines, and I really honour them that they never gave up on me.

It wasn't until about ten years ago that my oldest son realized that the dynamics of the work that I was doing, and I know Carol went through the same thing, the sacrifices that our -- our children, so many family members across Turtle Island have had to sacrifice just for this work, just to keep the fight, and I really honour my three sons, and I am truly sorry that they felt abandoned. It was not my -- never my intentions.

My journey -- I come from a family of 17 brothers and sisters. I have a stepfather that is -- who
is African-American, a stepfather that is non-Native, and
my First Nations dad. I was given up -- I like to -- I
always think that I was given up, but I was taken from my
mother when I was about three months old, and my
grandmother raised me.

As far back as I can remember -- and I also
want to -- I'm going to be giving the names of my
perpetrators. I've been told that I could risk everything,
but I cannot live in this hideous -- and to feel sick every
time I go home to Haida Gwaii or I see my perpetrators on
the streets in Vancouver.

My brother Douglas Williams; Hereditary
Chief Cecil Brown, Jr.; Nicholas Brown (ph); Alan Hill, Jr.
(ph); Godfrey Wilson (ph), also known as -- I can't think
of his nickname right now -- these are my abusers. If I am
to be stripped of my beliefs, of my Hereditary Chief's
name, you do what you need to do, but this is my truth. I
was always taught that you are only as sick as your secret.
My sion (ph), my spirit, I have to -- I have to tell the
story.

My abuse started when I was 3 years old. I
remember living in my grandmother's house with her. I had
two brothers, Paul Williams, who I thought was my father,
but he was my older brother; my brother, Douglas. My abuse
started when I was three 3 old, like I said, when he was
bathing me in the tub. My grandma used to put a metal -- metal tub outside where the rain can just drip into that tub, and I remember him touching me. I remember to this day, and as I got older, when I was walking, and it always happened when he was drunk, and that continued up until my grandmother passed away. I found a way to burrow myself -- I -- I didn't know that -- our relative Marina Dixon Nix (ph) had passed away a few months ago, but she was the one that -- she reminded me of so many things that where I used to burrow myself under my grandmother's house with my dog Lucky. I dug a hole in there. That was my only safety net because I could hear him coming home.

I always had to sleep on the floor because we were poor, and my grandmother had a -- had an old army cot bed. My grandmother was, to me, one of the greatest women in my life and I -- I always tried to believe that she didn't know about this, but I had to really accept that she knew about my abuse. It became so violent that I remember my brother -- older brother Paul, he had a Winchester shotgun, and I used to watch him and -- he used to clean it, never used it, but I remember the one day because the abuse was so bad, I was bleeding so bad, that I had nowhere to go to, and nobody would help me. I was going to Indian day school.
Then my dog -- you know, that was my little best friend. As many as my friends know that I don't like animals. This is one of the hardest thing I -- to talk about is where my brother tried to use the dog for me to perform oral sex on my dog, and then my cousin slaughtered my dog, skinned him and hung him on my grandmother's clothes line, so I had nobody.

When I -- when my grandmother died -- I'm going to skip a lot. When my grandmother died, though, ended up moving to my cousin's place, to my aunt, Ruby Brown, and my Uncle Cecil, who became the Hereditary Chief, end up moving there because nobody wanted me because my -- my aunt was willing to take me. Then my abuse started there with Hereditary Chief Cecil Brown, Jr., then his son. I was so terrified to come home after school and that because I knew one of them would be waiting for me.

My cousins Maureen and Deb tried to always protect me. We always tried to protect one another, but I was so little. We used to put dressers by the door to try to keep one of them out of there, especially her dad, but mine was always after school, and -- I used to take off down to my grandmother's old house after she died, and I used to just go underneath her house and hide there and not want to go -- ever go home.

Then when I spoke out about the touching,
about the rapes and sodomy and that that I was subjected
to, the Ministry was called. Then my journey began, and I
ended up in Prince Rupert in foster care. I spoke fluent
Haida. In my grandmother's house, you were not allowed to
speak English. She was a very, very strict, strict, tough
woman and that, that no, it was not -- not acceptable to
speak English there, so that was the only language that I
knew, and when I was flown over, I didn't even know where I
was going. I remember I was slapped in my face, and I was
called a liar.

When I started my monthly before I left, I
was at -- in a fishing boat with my uncle and his wife, and
that's when he raped me on the fishing boat there, too, and
I started my menstrual time cycle then.

When I ended up back in Prince Rupert, I
didn't know where I was going. I was met by -- my social
worker, Tover Brant (ph). I've -- I've never forgotten
her. I ended up in -- in care there in a home of -- with
five other kids, and during this time, I didn't know that I
had sisters. Didn't even know I had brothers other than my
two brothers. Didn't even know I even had a mother, but I
ended up in Rupert and that. Then we started running away,
and I met a man who's my dear friend, and I don't know if
he's here. His name is Darryl Hevner (ph). He was a man
that helped to protect us kids.
At the age of 11 to 12 years old, six of us girls were sold into the sex trade work -- we didn't know -- at the Empress Hotel in Prince Rupert. As many of you know that I wear shorts very -- don't wear shorts very often because of my legs. I've got cigarette burns all through my legs right up to my back. Around -- like, my buttock area is very -- scarred really bad. This is what we will endured. We were just kids.

We had nobody to -- to protect us but this man that I met because he was also a runaway kid. He became one of my dearest friends that I thought I'd lost -- I thought I actually lost him. So when we met him, like, he helped us to get out of that hotel that us kids were in. The only place that we could live was in these box cars. Like, they were grain cars. That -- that was our home. We would only come out at night to just go through the Dumpsters and to eat whatever we could eat out of the garbage can.

Then we -- we lost one of the women that was found in between Prince Rupert and Terrace on the railroad tracks with a -- a beautiful Chinese girl that we grew up on the streets with. She was found on the railroad tracks with a bottleneck, a Coke bottleneck inserted inside her. She was beaten, and we always felt that, you know, because of these men, these were fishermens, these were
Gul Kitt Jaad Bernie Poitras Williams,
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longshoremens, and I didn't realize at the time in that
hotel, my mother would -- you know, was drinking downstairs
in the bar while we were being abused upstairs.

Then from there, we started running away.
We started heading to Terrace, not even realizing that back
then that women, like, were being killed along the Highway
of Tears there. My story's no different than anybody's.
We all have a common thing, is that it's violence against
us women.

We managed to get out of the -- of the hands
of these men through this really courageous man that I
honour and respect so much. It's Darryl Hevner. If it
wasn't for him, I really sincerely believe that I would not
be alive today, or I would have been one of the statistics
on those streets, either becoming an addict or eventually
dying.

I learned how to read. I have a T-shirt
that used to say, "this is my favorite redhead," and a lot
of people that I know that really don't like redheads, but
it was Archie Andrews off of the Archie comics that I
learned how to read, so --

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I
learned years later that, yeah, he -- he was, like, the
first man in my life because I learned how to read through
them.

Ended up in residential school at the Native Institute of Canada outside of Nasgo. That was not recognized by the Federal Government. Ended up in there for about seven years, off and on. They would let us out during the summer. I had a foster family in Smithers. In Rupert, first, though -- in one year, because I was -- because I spoke Haida, that they didn't know what to do with me. I will never forget this one foster family that -- our meals were -- we were asked to be on all fours, and they would put dog food, be treated -- treated just like an animal, and we'd have to, on our fours, just to go and eat out of that bowl. That was our supper.

I'm really -- I'm really indifferent with food. I don't know if many of the workers here know that. I always pack Mr. Noodles with me. I don't eat fancy food. I don't eat many foods. I can't drink milk. I -- I -- there's things I just get really nauseous around. I learned to eat really fast -- my kids always say, slow down, Mom -- because I remember the plates always being pulled from us.

I don't ask for pity. I don't ask for sympathy. I -- I am -- I feel a little bit embarrassed that I'm sharing these things because it's -- I live a very private life, that's why, and I'm always worried that
whatever I say will be held against me or to be called a ho
or -- that's why I never shared my story because I didn't
want -- I'm always tired of being put down and called down,
and I tell people the only thing I haven't been accused of
is sleeping with a man because I'm a two-spirited woman.
I've been accused of everything, and it's -- anyways.

So my journey began from Smithers. I had a
foster family there that was ministers at the Pentecostal
church and that, and they tried to beat the Indians out of
us, and I -- I just could not conform to -- to their ways
because every Friday nights, they would make us go up to
the front, get on our knees and -- you know, everything,
and -- I don't put people down for their religious beliefs,
but I -- I know what happened to us.

From there, I ended up in the Native
Institute of Canada. Like I said, that was not recognized
as a residential school, and it was the most demeaning
place I would ever -- I would rather live in a boxcar than
to ever have to subject anybody to how we were treated in
there too. Like I said, my story is no different than
anybody's.

And at that residential school, the same
thing, they -- they were trying to cast demons out of us
and -- because we were -- as -- as First Nations people,
they said that we were savages and we need to change, and
then the one tried to use bleach on us because -- I -- I
would really get dark during the summer and that,
and -- and if we were good, you know, I was allowed to go
back to Smithers to be with my foster family there,
and -- but if I -- you know, like, if we didn't comply
and -- or follow their rules, it was through the
Arctic -- the Arctic Bible Institute of Canada, and -- we
started running away. I had the honour to -- when I was up
in Rankin Inlet, I remember this young man. His name was
James Carratuk (ph). I remember him because I thought it
was his brother, but it was his relative, that these were
two Inuktitut young men that were also taken from their
home, from Nunavut, that I'd -- I didn't realize until when
I was up there in Rankin Inlet, a couple months of ago,
that I went to residential school with him and how they
were treated because we spoke our language, and I finally
got to meet his -- his aunty who was, like, an
(indiscernible) MLA up there that I had the honours of
meeting them, and I was so happy to hear that he was -- he
was okay.

I have never knew -- you know, understood
anything about trauma because I always believed that this
is what -- sexual abuse or rape, you know, that seems so
normal, that it was okay to hurt us, and -- I started
drinking very young, when I was about 6, 7 years old,
because my brother -- my oldest brother drank, and I always
ended up drinking what he had -- had left, so that became
part of my life back then.

So when we used to run away from the
residential school, we ended up in places, Cache Creek,
then the cops would come and gets and bring us back, and
then I finally met these two women from the Okanagan
where -- that's where I met my son's father. So to get out
of that system, because his dad, you know, fell in love
with me, and -- but I -- always knew in my life that -- is
that I was very different, and -- but to -- I had to get
out of that system. I married my son's father because
I -- I just got tired of being target, tired of running.

This man that I married was the most
beautiful human man I've ever seen. If you ever watched
"Urban Cowboy," well, that was my cowboy.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
He was very dark, handsome, and man, he could dance on that
floor, and I was a friend to his girlfriend back then, but
I caught his eye. I was very slim. I'm still short yet.
I haven't grown any, but...

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
But I had no interest, but I knew that was my way out. I
had my oldest son Bobby. Then we got married in 1978, June 3rd. Never knew that this man that -- who said he loved me would become the most violent man in my life. Then my journey began with him.

I wasn't even married a week, and the abuse started. He threw me out of the car. We were heading down to Montana and Wyoming and -- because my ex-husband used to be a rodeo cowboy, and -- he was a bull-rider and a team-roper, and -- and a musician, and we were on our way down on our honeymoon, and -- and the beating started.

I understood that -- you know, now I understand many years down the road that, you know, violence, there are so many faces to it. I've had my ribs -- they had to wire my -- my jaw. I've had my legs, my feet broken deliberately. I had a plate in my back here. He snapped my arm right back because I wanted to play ball. I used to pitch Triple A women's fastball, and I couldn't even throw anymore.

And years down the road, when I finally left him because I ended up in transition houses with my kids, it was one thing to beat me, but when he started to abuse my sons, it's either fight or flight. I stood between my middle son Presley here where his dad had a big rodeo buckle, and he was going to start beating him because my ex-husband was hung over. He was a heavy drinker, very
heavy drinker, but he always maintained his job. He worked for Tolko Industry, a big sawmill, but when, like, that belt came out, and I stood between them, and I would -- he would physically go into the bedroom and drag -- drag me out of -- on -- on the floor, off the bed, and start grabbing the boys and throw them on the floor. When that started, that was it.

I got charged for -- back then, we had a joint bank account, my ex-husband and I, and because he took all the money, he was having affairs with a couple of women that I didn't care because I was not really -- trust me, I was not interested in. All I ever wanted was children in my life, to have (indiscernible). I would have had five children. Two died of crib death. All I ever wanted was babies, and that -- nobody could take that.

But when the abuse started with my children here, that's -- I had to bring my son to the hospital because he was -- he started bleeding internally through his penis, my son Presley here. That's when I had to decide because the only way that he would keep me at home was to beat me and to make sure that I was so badly beaten -- I don't know how many times I ended up in the hospital. Broken ribs. They had to wire my jaw shut. I couldn't walk. I had casts up to here, trying to hold the babies and to look after the home.
I'd phone the police and that. The police, because my ex-husband used to party with the police, the RCMP, they would tell -- like, they would tell my ex-husband exactly where my sons and I were, at the transition house, so we weren't safe anywhere.

And then, finally, when I got charged for theft because I pawned -- I pawned, like, a VCR because he drained our account, and we had no food, and the family would not help us, so I pawned that, and then he charged me. I got three months for doing that, and in that period, time period, I didn't know that he had already sexually assaulted my oldest boy Robert while I was in jail.

So through my lawyer that I met -- his name is Bob Williamson (ph), he's now retired -- he was the one that also became my saving grace, him and his wife. We set out a plan to remove my sons and myself totally out of the home. The family all knew what was going on. The family, their grandmother, their aunties, their uncles who are very elite, very -- they had a relative who is one of the first MPs in Canada. They protected him. They protected everything right down to the time when the grandmother died many years ago -- actually, a few years ago. I was told not to speak about it because it would do a lot of damage when she got sick. The grandmother got sick, so out of respect for my sons, like, I never said anything.
So it -- it was my lawyer, Bob Williamson, and his wife that -- we set a plan in motion. We left everything behind. This is how we ended up in Vancouver in 1983. My youngest boy was only three months old.

He stalked me for over two years, everywhere I went. Even when we moved down here, he was living in Surrey, yet we didn't even know that; and today, I don't think my children, other than maybe twice, have spoken with him.

It took me six years to leave that man that -- I told my son, you know, even though I am, like, a two-spirited woman, this was my -- all I wanted was children because I know what it was like to not have that love, to -- never to be shown that, and I just wanted to have my own, to love them, and that was in my little bubble world that I -- I've missed out a lot of stuff in between.

So when I ended up down here -- before I got married, I needed to find out who I was to apply for my marriage license, and I applied for it, and they denied me under Williams because I'm registered under my grandmother's name as Williams. I didn't know that I was registered under -- at birth, under a different name, LaRochelle. That -- that is not my name. My mother, I believe, was having an affair with a fisherman, and this is where that name came from, and -- so it was one of my
aunties that told me, you'll find your mother down on Skid Row, and I didn't know I had a mom. I always believed my grandmother was my mom because my grandmother never spoke about my mother. Nobody spoke about my mom. My mom was a very violent, violent drunk and person. I didn't know that. So when I found out that my last name was different, and -- then I got married and then ended up down here.

When I started to apprentice under Bill Reid, that's all I ever wanted to do was to be an artist. I just wanted to create because that was my healing. I didn't know anything else. Art became who I am. Still to this day, I can just sit for hours and just dream my life away and just, you know, create because that's my self-expression. I forgot to mention, too, that I stuttered really bad. I couldn't even hold a conversation with anybody. It's hard to believe I used to stutter because I'm so yappy now, but...

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

And music was the thing that saved me too. But when I started apprenticing with Bill Reid -- I met a woman years and -- you know, in that era of time, I met Viola Thomas. I used to play ball and we used to travel a lot, and when I lived in the Okanagan, and -- so I had the opportunity of
meeting Viola and that, and -- and I was in my early 20s, and she also used to ride -- I used to barrel-race too. I -- I think I'm probably the only Haida woman that's ever -- as short as I am, man, we were fast, though, on those horses for barrel-racing. I used to barrel-race with the Native Rodeo Circuit and that.

And so I met Viola, and we became friends, and -- so when I ended up down here, I reconnected with her, and -- and this is where my journey began with the murdered women and girls here. I met Harriet Nahanee, Kitty Sparrow, Marion Makasko (ph), Loni Bernice Brown (ph), and Rita, Carol, all these incredible women in my life.

Then I started finding out about my -- my own family -- I met my family back in 1992 for the first time, and one of the things that I want to say is that my sons never understood why they didn't have any uncles or aunts around them. Because of what I went through, I didn't want my children to ever go through the sexual abuse that I had been subjected to all these years and no accountability and -- for anything.

So it was finally a few years ago that I finally told them, this is the reason why. My brother Ron Victor LaRochelle is one of the biggest perpetrators around. He's a pedophile, and I have no problem saying
that publicly. My brother, Douglas George Williams (ph), another one of the biggest pedophiles around. These two have never, ever been charged for anything, even though we had enough evidence against them, and yet the Ministry still allowed these men to still perpetrate out there to this day.

So when I met my family, I felt, like, a sense of belonging, but there's a price to it because I was apprenticing yet with Bill Reid, and they knew that I had a pay cheque every two weeks, so I became -- just to be part of that family, they would really guilt me to death: Well, my hydro's getting shut off, this is getting done, I'm short on my rent, I'm this, so I just gave and gave and gave, but I still protected my children away from them. I didn't want my children to be near them, and finally, like I said, a few years ago, my children finally understood why.

But for many years, I would never, ever tell a lot of people that I was a Haida woman or even First Nations. I -- I told people I was, like, a Filipino woman because of the systemic racism that was so prevalent around us all the time. My children never really grew up with First Nations kids. I used to come home, 2:30 at night from work and that, and I'd have the United Nations at my home. I turned my garage into a little social area for my
children to have their friends, and my two older boys started learning how to speak Mandarin, Hindu, all these other languages, and I felt bad because, like, they couldn't even learn their own language because I was so ashamed.

So when my journey began, all I ever wanted to do was carve. I don't know, in my culture, Haida women, this is not part of our -- is our culture. Haida women, it's -- I mean, it's not against our culture. It's -- it's against protocol, but Sharon Hitchcock Baker Williams (ph), God rest her soul, that -- and Frieda Dazing (ph), you know, to pave the way for us women and how to do this work.

So we started working on the many projects with Bill Reid and that, knowing that he was so sick with Parkinson's and that, and I used to administer his medication, and weekends, I don't think I even had a day off sometimes because he would -- Skundaal, you need to pick up my Billmobile and come and pick me up, and -- we always had other projects to do, and then finally one day, through meeting Viola Thomas and Harriet Nahanee and them, and Harriet (indiscernible) and Kitty Sparrow came down to the studio one day and said, come on, and I honestly thought they were taking me for lunch. I was so happy to see them and that, and they said, no, you grab your stuff, you're coming with us, and that's where my journey began,
starting -- doing the front lines back in 1986. My
children were just little boys.

Then I started to find out about who I was,
realizing that I had such a large family and finding out
Who would have believed, you know, 40 years later I would
raise the survivor's totem pole on her very date that I
didn't even know.

I started finding about my mother, started
finding out about my sisters that I had and how they also
went unnoticed in the Downtown Eastside. They were
invisible. I blame the coroners. Those coroners should be
investigated. There is no due diligence on any of their
hearts, that they just wrote my family off as if they never
existed.

I'm very proud have to my niece Nicole here.
That's my second oldest sister's daughter that I just
finally got to meet a few years ago. I didn't even know
she existed.

But like I said, I met my family in 1992 and
that, and very -- a lot of family hidden secrets, and when
I found out about my mother, how she was -- ended up in a
hospital because of a beating so severely that she bled
internally and -- and that. My mother was 56 years old.

And I started finding out about my oldest
sister, Katherine, how she was strangled to death but yet written off, and I took pictures at her funeral in her casket because what I was told was that my sister did not like things around her neck. I -- and I just want to back up for a minute, about my mother, how her body, because the Haida Nation, through Frank Collison and them, would not decide whether to bring my mother's body home. She was left in that morgue for three months pending their decision, and yet Frank Collison and Reynold Russ are one of the two biggest perpetrators in my village, and one is alive yet, but never, ever been -- they have never, ever been charged. My Aunty Terri and her sister was so courageous to come up against them in court, and they walked. This was my mother that I was denied.

I've got a lot to say about the band council and that, but I just wanted to bring this back to this is how my mother was failed through the system but also through the Nation that I loved so dearly.

Then I find out about my oldest sister, like I said, and one of my aunties told me that she knew her very well. My sister Catherine Katherine was a beautiful woman, very quiet. She just went and checked around, like, treatment centre, apparently, and then when she came back, she was found dead at the Cobalt Hotel, but it was written off is that she died of asphyxiation from eating a pork
chop bone, but yet at the funeral home when I was asked to
go there, when I was told by my aunt that she never liked
things around her neck, and I'm curious why she had this
scarf around her neck. When everybody walked outside
waiting for the casket to come out, I stayed behind. I
asked the funeral director to, please, don't take her out
yet.

I took down the scarves, and there's
strangulation hand marks around her neck. Her shoulders
had -- were badly bruised. I took pictures of that. After
the funeral happened the following week, I went to the
coroner's. I said, explain this to me. You tell me that
she died of asphyxiation, and yet she's got
strangulation -- hand marks around her neck. Nothing had
ever happened.

My second-oldest sister, Noreen Joyce, the
man that was giving the alcohol to was a man that she had
been befriended to, and he was only charged on because it
was, like, a non-Native woman. He only got charged for
hers, and yet they wrote down that there was nine -- nine
First Nations women, but they never even cared about that
one of those women were -- was my sister.

My baby sister in Merritt, Sharlene
MacAdams, the RCMP was also alerted on her common law, and
yet -- I'm trying to figure out how the system, when we
phoned the RCMP, how they cremated my sister, baby sister, in one day without notifying the next of kin. My sister, Noreen was cremated right away, too, without notification.

This is what gave me the push to do this work. I don't get paid. I want to make this very clear too. I am not a staff on the National Inquiry. I'm a grandmother. We are not paid staff here. So I want to make that very clear. We are volunteers in -- we were asked to do this work, so just for the record, like, I want to make that clear.

So this was at the beginning. You know, Grandmother Rita Blind, we used to go to her place when -- because, like, the Elders knew back then about Robert willy Pickton. Nobody would listen to them. I believed even to this day that if they would have listened, that there would be many of our loved ones would be alive to this day. You know, Carol Martin, so many of us women who are on the front lines -- and I want -- I want to say this. You know, Carol and I, you know, talked about this years ago and that. I want to acknowledge her sister Delilah. Delilah was the one that started coming forth with informations about Robert Willy Pickton. This young girl by the name of -- her name is Angel, not the one from Haida Gwaii, I want to make that clear -- started coming forward, and I remember in those days how -- we're talking
about organizations and that, you know, what -- what roles you play in this, about how those roles were shut on our Elders. I never forget going to wish with them one night when it was at the First United Church. Harriet and Rita were looking for one of our women that was missing, and I'd never forget how those workers there stood like a police officer and try to block them from coming in and say, no, you are not going to come in here. This is our Elders that these organizations were doing this to, and how many of these doors were shut to these women? Right to this day.

We talk about lateral violence. It's very, very much -- and it -- it's right here today.

I blame a lot of these organizations. I've witnessed -- I remember back in our time era, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre was one of the safest places to go. There was not even 30 organizations down there. Now we're over 300. But there's a lot of good organizations out there that do work hard for the women: WAVA (ph), there's BWSS, the Aboriginal Mothers Centre. There's -- I can only count maybe five on my hand.

When I look at these statistics right now -- I'm going to jump ahead now -- through all these organizations that are down there, including the policing, including the court systems, including the City -- the City council, everywhere, (indiscernible) -- all these places
and that, you figure out that there's a million dollars a
day that's being spent in the Downtown Eastside -- spent in
the Downtown Eastside. So you're looking at 27 million to
31 million a month times 12. Why isn't our people still
safe? Why are they still living below the poverty line?
Why is our Elders standing in food bank lines? Why is
my -- why is my grandchildren not feeling safe and being
bullied in these schools with all this money that's being
spent every day, a million dollars a day? Why is there
still homeless people, you know, on those streets? We have
become the biggest commodity -- like Carol Martin has said
over and over, we have become the biggest commodity
anywhere in the Downtown Eastside.

I've got nothing to lose with what
I'm -- you know, with what I'm talking about. I don't work
for your organizations. I'm on those front lines. I
always believe in my heart, if you were doing your job,
there shouldn't be one homeless person out there. I've
never had a cordon bleu in my life, but I sure see a lot of
these people going out and having those big fatties and
whatever out there because those are crumbs that you're
giving. I want that whole loaf of bread. I don't want
your crumbs. I want to be able to walk in my community,
the community that I love so much. I feel the safest in
that community is in the Downtown Eastside. I don't feel
Hearing - Public

Gul Kitt Jaad Bernie Poitras Williams,
(Katherine Rose Williams, Noreen Joyce William and Sharlene MacAdams)

1 safe walking up on Davies Street. I don't feel safe walking over well on Robson Street. I don't feel safe in Surrey. I feel safer on those streets and in those alleys, you know, because we go looking for those women in those alleys. We're the ones that are mopping up the blood.

What is your organization doing?

This is one of the reasons why that the Elders -- I remember Harriet and Rita were, 20 years ago, talking about a health, healing, and wellness centre, and still today, we are still fighting. I see Lorelai Hawkins fighting for the same thing, you know, back in that time; Grace Tait. These were the women, and yet we are sitting here, and nothing's been done yet. Why has it taken over 4,000 women and girls' names to sit here and to still keep asking the same question? We have this right.

When we did those walks across Canada, we sat one day with the walkers and that. We went through the human rights, the Indigenous human rights thing. It took us a week to go through it, you know, for our study, little things, you know, at nighttime and that. We counted 17 violations against our women and children out of, like, that. Seventeen violations, and yet nothing's done.

I was one of the very fortunate and lucky women that I thank my Creator every day I don't have to carry a medicine bag or anything, yet -- you know, and I
could tell you, you know, how my gratitude is, you know, for my Creator because that's not my journey. That's not my life. I respect you with the medicine, but I want to say I have seen and I have witnessed so much violence, and it's not because of the Walk4Justice or the Tears 4 Justice, all these coalitions that -- this is the reason we're here today. It's because of women like Rita, Harriet, Lorelai, all these women. This is women nationally that have sacrificed -- Jamie Lee Hamilton, all these women, courageous, Angela MacDougall, all these women nationally who have fought to the bitter -- almost to the bitter end, and yet nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. But instead, the system has set it up where the lateral violence, you know, to fight for those fundings, to -- you know -- you know, and to fight amongst one another.

The Government knows exactly what they're doing: Divide and conquer. We all know that, but why are we fighting one another? I'm trying to make sense of all of this. Why is it -- has to get so hurtful, yet we're fighting for the same thing? I -- I don't understand this. This is my only opportunity that I get to say what I need to say from my heart. This hurts me so much. I've been accused of raping a woman. I've been accused of extortion. I've been accused of holding my Elders' hostage. I've been
Hearing - Public

Gul Kitt Jaad Bernie Poitras Williams,
(Katherine Rose Williams, Noreen Joyce Williams and Sharlene MacAdams)

1 accused of -- you name it. How do you think I feel? My
2 sons didn't even know that I tried to commit suicide three
3 times at the hands of a spiritual person that clawed my
4 face down who was a pipe-carrier, who's a sun-dancer, and
5 lives in my community but clawed my face. Nobody stood
6 with me. I've been stabbed three times and shot at twice,
7 and I've never, ever had one of you stand beside me or walk
8 with me until after the fact. This is what I'm talking
9 about. You think about these women, how many doors have
10 been shut on them, and yet we're out there: Hey, we've got
11 to do this for the women. How dare you. How dare you
12 stand there in judgment of me and then open that door.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh --

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

14 Uh-uh. I only have one shot at this to say what I need to
15 do. Shame on you. You're not my friend. Get that knife
16 out of my back. How dare you call me your friend when
17 you're -- you're there, you know, moving that knife into my
18 gut? Because it's easier for you to tear me down than to
19 lift me up.

21 I made a comment to this woman. I said, I
22 want you to be one of my pallbearers. I want six of these
23 women, and I named those women out. I want you to be my
24 pallbearer, and this person said to me, oh, I feel so
25 honored. Why did you ask me that? And I said, so you
could let me down one more time. I mean what I said.

My reality is -- is I've walked with these women. I've listened to their cries. Why doesn't anybody want to help us? Don't we matter? I'm not in a leadership role here. I'm a humble servant in my community. Why would you want to be jealous of this? Like, come on. I'm short and I've got an attitude this big.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

You know? I tell people, I am hated by many and loved by a few. I could -- you know what? I don't care if you like me. I feel very secure with who I am. I got three amazing sons. I got incredible grandchildren. I got -- on two hands, I probably got ten good friends that I'm crazy with and I'm crazy about them. If you don't want to be in my life, don't slander me. You know what these women have gone through? The same thing. I was strong enough to have one Elder come into the hospital when I tried to commit suicide because I couldn't take that abuse coming from a spiritual person that clawed my face for accusations that I stole money from the murdered missing women, and I want this on the record too.

The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, and I'm going to say this one last time to you, and this -- publicly. When we did all these walks, the Union
of B.C. Indian Chiefs were looking after those monetaries -- not Gladys, not Bernie Williams, nobody -- because I am sick and tired of taking the brunt of people's bullshit and to be torn down. At whose expense? I make my own money. I'm a working poor woman. And for clarity, too, if I choose to go downtown and have a beer, who the hell are you to judge me when I see you sneaking around the corner with your pipe in hand? How dare you? You don't know my story.

I've only shared a little bit of who I am, but I'm going to tell you, it stops today, like my son said. You don't want to be, you know, in my life, bye-bye. I have a T-shirt that says, "want to care but don't." You know? Want to care but don't. I've got work to do. I have a family that I love, I adore, and I respect. These are my warrior men. I don't have time for your bullshit.

I hear all the gossip, you know, putting down, losing focus of why we're here, is about the women and those beautiful children that are gone. I don't care about these coalitions. You don't know my story. You don't know anything about my family, and if you think you've got, like, you know, answers on how to solve or resolve, you better step back because you don't. I have another T-shirt that says "stop" -- "stop trying to fix me." You don't know my story. Instead of trying to push
us down, wouldn't it be great -- I said this, like, to -- like these non-Native people, you know, who work in the big organizations downtown. What would happen hypothetically, I said, if we as Aboriginal people started getting healthy? What would happen? Your organization will just -- (unreportable sound) -- like that.

As Maya Angelou has one of the greatest sayings around that I love reading her stuff: We rise. Very simple. We rise. But the context of it, look within it. We are red women rising, and we rise. Because you know what? We've had enough.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

I've had enough. I've had enough. I can't speak for Gladys or Penny or for Carol and that, but I'm sick and tired of having to be the one sent to mop up the blood downtown. All these people that are pushing against, like, this National Inquiry, step back because we're coming through with or without you.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

Step back because if you don't understand -- there's many of you who have walked with us. I remember when we were doing these walks, and again, these organizations -- like I said, I don't care, I don't care if you close a door to me,
but I'm going to say this. When we started doing these walks across Canada, seven times and two times on the Highway of Tears, not one of these organizations came out to support us. Not one.

So don't stand in front of me and tell me that you -- you want to do all this good work now. Um, like, you're 30, 40 years too late, honey, because we're not going away. I watched you build your empires off the backs of our people. I should have owned a home by now. These women that have gone before us, they should have had, like, a better quality of life under your leaderships, but that didn't happen.

Now, speaking of leaderships, I also hold our leaderships well accountable. Instead of blaming the residential schools and that, we need to take a look within our own leaderships on our reserves, our villages. I've seen these men, our leaderships, on those front lines, you know, perpetrating our women, sitting in those bars, like, oh, swagging around, at the casinos, thousands of dollars going in, but yet you can't even provide safe housing for our Elders and our women and children? Shame on you.

The leadership -- the leadership that I've been given, I take it very seriously, and so does my son. We want to be the change. We are going to be the change, and we need to step back and hold those men in power, right
up to Perry Bellegarde. I've been at those fine dining AFN Congress of Aboriginal People's meetings. So has Carol, so has Penny. We've all been there. So has Viola. We see what's going on there. You ever ask them how much money it costs, like, to put one of those on and at the end of the week, woo-hoo, party on, panties off. That's what it is. I seen our leadership so drunk in their monkey suits. These are our leaders. I'm not ashamed to talk about this. Because I hope that you hold me accountable in my leadership if I ever done shit like that. I apologize for swearing.

But I've watched them. Why is all the blame -- I understand, yes, the Government plays a really big key role, but why is it targeted towards the Government when it's right in front of us? Clean up your own backyard with your own people, but nothing -- they -- every time I see these meetings, I just cringe. It took us 20 years with the grass roots movement that we were -- you know, have been in, 20 years to get through those doors in these leadership meetings. It shouldn't have been that way. Everybody blames the Government, like, for water, housing. You remember something. I live off-reserve. My reserve is getting money for me still, and I live off-reserve. Why aren't we going after them? The Government is the one that is giving the money out, and our
leaders are taking those monetaries. Are we seeing it? I still haven't got a house yet. I got property. Because I don't fit in. I'm not a relative to that Chief that day, or I haven't slept with him or her, whatever way it is. I don't get those perks. Education, the same thing. Why do I have to fight? I took four student loans out to go to school for four years because my band. You think that these women had that opportunity too? You wonder why these women ended up on these streets? Wasn't because of the Government. It was because of what's going on on those reserves or individuals. I hold our leadership accountable for that.

I have talked to many of our First Nations women on the streets. Sexual abuse. You can't get a job because it's nepotism. Our Elders. I cannot believe some of the housing that we are looking at in my village. The Elders are living below third-world country. Why is it that? But my name is on that band list, and you're getting money for me and my children and my grandchildren. Why is there nothing to sustain us over there?

Haida Gwaii is one of the most beautiful country -- or areas in the world, very pristine. Why can't I go home and have a house there to make sure that my grandchildren will learn the language, the culture, and everything? Why does it have to be separate or segregated
because I don't fit in with that group over here, I don't fit in with this drum group here, or because I don't speak my language anymore, I'm not Haida? I have been told that: You are not Haida because you don't speak your language. Excuse me? You guys are the ones that signed the paper me to go to Provo, Utah, where I ended up in care. You signed those documents to show my quantum blood as a Haida woman, that I ended up in care.

Viola Thomas and I spoke about this years ago, that I wanted to sue the Haida Nation because of that. How can you sign me away? You signed me away to another country. How many other children, you know at -- they had this welcoming home ceremony. I never got the call.

My sisters were on that band list, too, so was my mother, but they collected that money all those years but never helped them. You think about these women, like, the First Nations women. How many of those bands, you know, called, like, to see? I've only seen one Chief come down here from -- from Lake Babine. She came down here, and she still comes down here to see her people, asking them, would you come home? Do you see these Chiefs on the front line other than going into the bars and having a drink and trying to schmooze around?

I'm not saying that all Chiefs are bad because there is some great Chiefs that are great leaders,
but the ones that I know, mm-mm, should be ashamed of
yourself. But you think about these women, is were they
given that chance? No.

I wanted to talk about that. I wanted to
say what I needed to say about, like, that leadership
because I am so appalled, and I'm appalled at how the
National Inquiry is -- always been, like, a target of
silliness and that and -- because -- I'm only going to
speak for myself -- because I'm with Michèle Audette as,
like -- you know, like, a grandmother, and I want to make
this clear. I'm speaking as a family member now, not as a
grandmother. I'm not an Elder, and I don't think the
Elders would even want me because I get really silly mouth
here, so...

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

And that's not part of my role. I -- I knew my role when I
was -- you know, I was given my role at a very early age
that I'm a land-defender and I'm a peace-keeper. That's my
role. I will never be an Elder. That's not my -- but my
role is not only with one Commissioner. It's for all the
staff. I'm not a hired -- I don't get -- no. But is what
we have in common with the work that we do is that I hear
it over and over, especially from Michèle Audette. This
woman wears her heart on her sleeves. All the
Commissioners do, and what I hear more than anything is that family's first. It's about the family. I'm not trying to toot, you know, Michèle's horn, but, you know, that's what it's about.

And I apologize if I've said anything -- it's like my son says, because I -- you know, I've always taught him, if I've said anything to offend anybody -- I -- I've really condensed everything down. My sole purpose here as a survivor was to finally put an end and to name my abusers, and is it going to make me feel all warm and fuzzy after? No. The work still goes on. But what I do, and I will never stop. I will never stop this fight for -- the justice for these women, my mother and my three sisters, and for all the families across Canada and to the north.

And this Commissioner Madam Michèle Audette is -- I'm acting as my own lawyer. Do you got anything to ask me?

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: (Speaking in French)?

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

Oui.

(LAUGHTER)
COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: I just sworn you.

(LAUGHTER)

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: You know, in our tradition, in the east, I don't know in your beautiful territory, but when a person come with a traditional approach, it's automatically sworn for us, that every words that would come from that person, it's the truth, their truth.

So I know usually we ask, are you going to do this in a good way, and -- because it's a talking and sharing circle, and because you choose to do it that way, I want to reassure you that everything you said and will say, we know it's the truth. And -- how do we say that? I feel petite. I feel small beside you.

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
Well, now you know how I feel.

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Big time.

Usually I'm a tough cookie, not afraid of anything, but now I'm very nervous -- in a good way, of course -- and before I ask some question, I just want to say the teaching you're giving us, the four of us, the Commissioners, but also the staff that I call my new family, the love that you're
giving us every day, you're lifting up us because it's not 
an easy journey, but we have to do it, and we do it because 
women like you, Gladys, we had Cynthia and Bonnie who were 
here, we had Myrna, women from different region, and like 
you and, of course, your niece, to remind us why we have to 
do this and how we have to do it, and the how, it's very 
different, very different depending where we're from the 
north, the south, the east, the west, or the prairies. And 
you never said no to us, ever. It was a Sunday night or a 
Monday night. It didn't matter. It was five days in a row 
or a month in a row. You never said that. You never said 
no, and I'm including all the families and survivors. 

And you brought some people for a few hours 
in your beautiful community, but also for me, a very tough 
place, and you changed them. (Indiscernible) changed. He 
didn't wear his tie this morning because of you. 

(LAUGHTER)

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: And I know 
you have many, many, many years of dedication. You met so 
many people, you're very humble, you're not running after 
camera, hey, I did this, I did that, but because I know, I 
know, I was young when I was watching you, and one of my 
mentor was one of your friends, Viola Thomas. When we were 
young, she was involved with the Quebec Native Women and 
talked about you, and that's how I started to know who is
COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: So can you help us, because we have one shot. You mentioned it couple times, and your beautiful testimony, we have one shot, and I will use your expression, we have one shot to do this right, this Inquiry, something that you fought with your sisters, with your grandmothers, and we can start with the coroners, we can start with the police, we can start with the leadership, we can start where you want us to start in this part of this conversation we're having, the recommendation, the action that we have to bring in that report, and this is not my report, but it's our report for those who believes in the Inquiry. For those who doesn't believe, I respect that. Why I respect that? Because we're all different. We have something in common, though: Racism, discrimination, but how we live it, probably it's different. Remember, we have to remember, many of us didn't want this Inquiry. They wanted the money directly to the organizations or services or a program, and we have to honour that and respect that, but there's some of us, also, who said we need this, and Lori Ojic (ph), Lanny Morrison (ph), Sue Martin (ph), you, Gladys, were the first one to answer my calls two years ago: How do we do this? How do we do this to make sure that it's working? And you
have that expertise. You are my expert. You -- I mean, all the women that you mentioned and the women who are listening -- what do we have to bring in that report? And when I'll be finishing this mandate, I will be so proud and so loud to make sure that those recommendation, those totem poles that we have to put in your beautiful territory, Gladys, and other commemorating --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: -- yeah, monument that we have to put across Canada, I will stand beside the people who will wish and wants that. I want to hear from you, les recommandations.

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

No.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: No? Okay. You're the boss. She's my boss.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I think -- I remember, you know, conversations going back over 20 years ago, like I said earlier, and the conversations was with Rita. I -- I -- I really want everybody to acknowledge there's only Rita. As -- as I mentioned the other day at the opening, Carol and I were just, like -- we were like the point guards, and we still are. I really want to acknowledge these two incredible
women that are the only two left out of that -- we have our
group of seven, you know, the artists that they talk about,
the Group of Seven and that? Well, we got our group of
seven, and these two women, I really want to acknowledge
them and that because these were the ones that really
helped to guide Carol and I, you know, through our long
years and -- of being on the front line, is our Elder Rita
Blind, if she could be so kind to stand, and Viola Thomas.
Are you standing, Viola?

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
Again, too, Viola Thomas and Rita Blind, we also have our
oldest walker from -- from Fort St. James that every time
there was a walk and she was raring to go, and as
grandmother Mabel Todd (ph) from Fort St. James, wants
to -- we want to acknowledge her.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I
just want to say that she's done all the seven walks across
Canada. She's done, like, the two walks for the -- for the
Highway of Tears, and she hasn't been feeling well lately,
but she still wants to do one more walk, and we're saying,
no, granny, that's enough.

(LAUGHTER)
MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
Granny's gone wild again. But I also want to recognize, also -- just like me, she's very misunderstood a lot of times and that, and the reason why I want everybody to recognize these women because these women were -- are part of the heart of the community. They work -- we're -- we're always misunderstood in that, eh? I want to acknowledge Kelly White here.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
And before I -- before I give my closing, I -- I really want to acknowledge, also, Carol Martin and Penny Kerrigan and Grace Tait here too.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
This is all the hard work that these women have done on these front lines and to help bring to it where it is today. I just want to really acknowledge all these women, but to also acknowledge all of you, though, too, and there was times that, okay, you know, we wanted to throw the towel in because not being heard, just not being heard, and all these doors, you know, being closed in our faces, and -- the other person is Gladys Radek. She's -- I've got to share a little story with you.

(LAUGHTER)
MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I have to stand up for this one.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are you standing?

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: Ha, ha, ha, ha.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: When we were on the walk and that -- I have to put some little lightness to this, okay? When we were on the walk, when -- can't remember which one it was, but anyway, she really pissed me off and that, and she was sitting on --

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: She was sitting -- everybody knows that her and I would be scrappitty-doo a lot along the route here, and, you know -- of, like, the places we were going to, but she was sitting down, and she took her prosthetic leg off, and man, she just pissed me right off, so like a football, I went and grabbed her prosthetic leg, and I said, come and get it, you bitch, you.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I just ran with it, realizing that she couldn't get up anyways to come after me because I had her leg.

(LAUGHTER)
MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
And the other time -- I just want to lighten the load for a minute, and -- the other time was -- I had my red Jeep, and so we had -- her van was side by side of my Jeep and that, and I was so tired that -- I usually slept in my Jeep because that's how small I am. Like, I could fit right in the back, and -- so anyways, they had a mattress inside the van, so they pulled everything in, so I finally ended up laying down, and they never even told me that the van got hit by lightning. It got struck by lightning, and --

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
-- nobody came to wake me, like, Bernie, are you okay, or --

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
-- you know, shake-and-baked or anything like this? No.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
So I get up and, just, like, stretching away, and then they just looked at me. Like, not one of you came to -- even her, never came to check and see if I was --

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
But they just told me, um, I think your Jeep, all the wires and everything were blown because, like, the Jeep was so close to the van that I just -- it blew my whole panel out, but they didn't even care that I was --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We did care. We did care.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I never seen them until eight hours later, but -- anyways, my colleague -- just my sister, Gladys Radek, we've been scrappers together, fighting -- you know, I was scrapping together, words said, but at the end of the day, we always would work it out. This is Gladys Radek here.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I'm just going to wrap it up now. I just want to acknowledge all the families, NFAC (ph) families, also, that have been on those front lines, that have been fighting so hard, and I also like to acknowledge Bev Jacobs and Bridget Tully (ph), so many of these women who have fought so hard, and to please keep in mind that we need to put our differences aside for this great cause and that. I always believe that the Government, you know, has set this up for it to fail. We are not going to let this fail.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.
MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

We've got too many families that have been waiting for so many years. Mine is just a small part of it, and my recommendation to you is, like I said, about 20 -- over 20 years ago that these Elders had already spoken about -- to Carol and I, about the health, healing, and wellness center. This health, healing, and well center, I remember it with the TRC how much money was spent in every province that I -- I believe, and it's only my belief, it's not nothing to do with anybody -- that those monies could have been put towards like, a health, healing, and wellness, that all those millions of dollars that could have been built, and I would like to see as part of that health, healing, and wellness center is, like, for -- a place for the children, for their trauma. Their trauma. They need to be --

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: -- trauma-informed. One of the things that I have asked about. Everybody knows part of my story, but what about my children? Have you heard their story? Have you heard the children's story on, you know, what it was like have to my mother either in jail or on the streets or, you know, having to go out and make a few dollars just to bring a loaf of bread or a thing of milk? Like, you know,
what about these children? I would like to see a
trauma-informed place that is safe for the children lead by
our spiritual Elders.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

That's what I would like to see, that we bring it back to,
you know, our culture, and I honour Patrick Smith from
Kwagiulth Nation, for Culture Saves Lives and that.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

-- because I -- I have noticed, too, that this
is really made an incredible difference. When I see these
beautiful women, like Tara in the back here, and Nancy,
that these are beautiful women from the Downtown Eastside,
and I just honour them.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

And I'm so glad they're here. Come on, give us
some -- some love.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

These are the women that society would like to throw away.
These are the women that I work for, that are suffering on
these front lines. These are the women that have endured
so much, that people turned their backs and their faces
away from them. These are the true survivors. These are
the ones that ask for nothing, and they get nothing because
when they ask, they have to go through process sometimes.

I would like to see as part of the -- Viola, Shelly Lewis (ph), Carol -- there's many of us that have
asked for -- we want to do our own exiting program, to have
a place set up that when our women and our boys that are
being subjected to sexual exploitation or human
trafficking, that there is a place immediately put in place
so that these -- our families, that would have a place to
go, and that is not from 9 to 5 that these doors shut down.
We would like as part of that health, healing, and wellness
centre that we have a place to bring our children who have
been exploited in. We will do the work to get you there.

Pam Lewis (ph) was a great advocate, like, for this. She
passed away a few years ago and that. This was one of her
dreams.

We've been working with Viola as part of,
like, a pilot project that we want to implement in -- as,
like, for down the road and that to work within the
Thompson/Okanagan and that where we could bring the women
out of these areas from the Downtown Eastside to -- into
safe, healthy, places, as to be part of nature and their
culture out there.

We also spoke with Annita McPhee (ph) here
who's our warrior sister from the Tahltan Nation and that, that we are serious about this. This is --

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

-- Annita McPhee here, one of the -- one of our great women here, warriors.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

These are the women that we've been networking with to try to implement, like, those changes and because we know that we're getting a lot of resistance and that, and I understand, like, the organizations. I -- I really do. But I -- I would really like to see that this would be -- is culturally lead by our spiritual Elders and our grandmothers that are out here and our grandfathers to keep that balance and that, but this health, healing, and wellness centre has to be run by our own people. Our own people.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:

That's a really, you know, important, you know, component to this. It's -- it's got to be culturally, you know, done properly and that, and the youth; we got our children, we got our Elders here, but our youth. What we have noticed on the front lines, Downtown Eastside, is we have more
youth downtown. We don't have anywhere for them to go. We have -- yes, you know, we have, you know, Britannia, we got places, but if we want to take our youth out of these places, there's nowhere to bring them. We have nowhere to bring them.

Right now, we're looking at about 43 percent of our women that are dying at a high random rate right now is, like, through the Fentanyl crisis now, but now it's becoming our youth that are dying. So we're losing, like, a whole generation right there because, again, it goes back to the leadership, and I -- I would really like to challenge the -- the Commissioners to -- I would like to have, you know, ideally is to have the Chiefs, you know, sit at those tables with the grass roots and the grandmothers and Elders.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
That's what I would like to see. I would really like to, you know, push that, and just to have that time because I want to be able to ask the -- you know -- you know, because people talk about what they think it's working. I want to ask a question, what's not working? Reverse it around because we know what's not working, and -- I think that's about it, you know? Like I said, health, healing, and wellness centre that the Elders have fought so hard for and
it's still not, and -- and -- you know, what is that going
to look like? I don't know. That's up to the Elders,
and -- you know, and to the spiritual people, but I -- I am
really -- really sick and tired, and it's no offense to any
race or anything. I'm not a racist person, but I'm really
tired of the nonNative people telling me what's good for
me, what they think.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I
really am. I'm -- and one of the things that I know that
Carol is really passionate about, and she's always fought
for this, is how the overmedication of our people, they're
undermedicated, they're overmedicated, Downtown Eastside,
and I think that we really need to step it up to get a hold
of the -- like, the board of physicians and that, that it
should be a -- working with our spiritual people again
instead of handing out these medications.

I remember when I had a breakdown, they
Prozaced me. They put me on Paxil and Prozac, that I was
walking around like a zombie, and how it -- it almost
killed me because I went in -- out of suicide mode. I was
found on the streets walking, and then I picked up a small
handgun, that I was going to kill myself. I paid 50 bucks
for this handgun on the streets. My sons were in the
Okanagan with their grandparents, like, for the summer and
that. This is -- it is distorting so many, you know, of our people, and if you don't take those medications, then you're reported because you're not complying with them, and I'm sure that -- that the child apprehension unit has been already spoken about, and I really don't want to go there because my children were -- you know, were also in care that nobody knew about. My ex-husband decided, like, that he wanted to get help to fix us, our marriage, so the best thing to do was to, you know, put my children in care, which I fought hard to get them back out, and -- you know, like, we all know what's wrong with that system. I'm not going to beat that one up and that, but all I know is that these -- that these doctors are -- some of them should be charged. Some of them should be, because you can go down to the Downtown Eastside to a certain doctor's offices and pay 30 to 40 bucks to buy any kind of medication you want, and it's shameful.

But my whole thing is about that health, healing, and wellness centre, and stopping the, you know, exploitation of our women and children and that and to have a safe place, you know, for these wonderful people and that, and that's all I have to say.

And again, it -- it is not my intent to insult or hurt anybody, and I hope my words -- you know, this is my truth, this is my story, and I have a lot more
to say, but, you know, out of respect for the other family,
I would just like to -- do you have anything more to say or
ask or whatever?

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
Feel free to do it.

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: I have your
number.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
That's an old number in the bathroom.

(LAUGHTER)

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Yeah, when
you sit, you know? Anyway. Let's be sérieux.

I would like to ask Audrey, Grandmother Blu,
Grandmother Louise, and Rita to come here. You started
something with the eagle feathers, and now it's our time.
It's a beautiful circle, and I would like the people that
are here to guide us are the one giving you this eagle
feather, and my gift for you will be a blanket.

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
Are we spooning?

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Tonight.

(LAUGHTER)

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: We'll spoon
tonight. We're so --

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I would just -- I would just like to say hâw'aa to all my support and to my beautiful niece. I want you guys to see my beautiful niece Nicole. This is my second-oldest sister, Noreen Joyce, this is her daughter, Nicole.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS: I'm so glad she's here.

(SILENCE DURING GIFTING)

MS. LAUREEN "BLU" WATERS: Oh, gee, that's a first. Somebody calling (indiscernible). Of course it wasn't working.

Bernie, the love you've shown to all the women and the children and those that have experienced violence, we wrap you today. We wrap you and comfort you and hug you and protect you because you have done that for all these other people, selfishless, with humility, with honour and respect you treated every person who came in your path, and we acknowledge that because a lot of the time, it goes unseen, and you need to know that we love you, we want you well, we want you protected, and we want to let you know how much we love you because you've shown your love to everyone you've come into contact with. We're not getting a bill from you.
MS. LAUREEN "BLU" WATERS: So, Bernie,
I -- it's a pleasure that I've -- I've gotten to know you so well, that we stand almost shoulder to shoulder. You're an inch higher.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. LAUREEN "BLU" WATERS: But I've learned so much from you, Bernie, and I've seen the compassion and the humility that you carry, and I hope to continue walking in the way that you have and showing that compassion to the people in the way you have, so I honour you today.

MS. GUL KIT JAAD/BERNIE POITRAS WILLIAMS:
Háw'aa.

MS. AUDREY SIEGL: I'm trying not to get emotional. Where the love that I missed from so much of my life, from my own mother, I found in you. The support and the unconditional strength, I found in you. I'm proud of you and your beautiful family, and I thank you for sharing your mother. I see who you are. I see who you've always been. I see all the women you come from. I see not just the strength that's carried you through but that big beautiful heart that always finds a way to keep moving forward. You inspire me. You kick my ass when I need it, and you show me what love really looks like. You have shared so much with so many, and I know you're working very
hard on learning to let people love you, and I thank you
for letting me be one of those people.

This blanket represents so much than just
the fabric that it's made of. This blanket is some of the
good that you have done coming back to you. I will always
walk with you. I will always be wherever you need me to
be, especially in there and in here, not just because I
love you, but because it's what you have always deserved.
Háw’aa.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. LOUISE HAULLI: Bernie, I'm speechless
because you've taught me so much. You taught me how to
stand up for yourself, which I have never learned to do.
You taught me so much. I'll walk with you to the end.
Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: I have one
more thing, Bernie. I've been carrying this all week. My
mom made it, and I want you to come with me and give it to
your son with the eagle feathers.

(APPLAUSE)

(SILENCE DURING GIFTING)

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Thank you.

(LAUGHTER)

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:
(Indiscernible). It speaks Innu and French.

(LAUGHTER)

MR. PRESLEY WILLIAMS: Thank you so very much. Háw'aa. I don't know if people know this, but in our Haida culture, the moment you are blanketed, it's the highest respect, it's the highest gift that you can get given to each other aside from given -- given copper. I had the opportunity, you know, to be bared from my mother and did not realize how much her life went through so much turmoils, and just showing the respect from the Commissioners to myself, I'm -- I'm -- I'm a loss for words, but that tells me the Commissioners have it in themselves to make this change happen.

Like my mother said, it starts from the leadership. It also starts from the Federal Government. They are also at fault. They also need to be put in their place. Culture reigns supreme. We've been here for 25,000 years.

(APPLAUSE)

MR. PRESLEY WILLIAMS: And we are still going to be here, and our culture is still succeeding, and that is why it works. The Government has -- has to take their step back and reanalyze how culture has perceived better for our people.

(APPLAUSE)
MR. PRESLEY WILLIAMS: When we put these leaders and cultural leaders in these positions that my mother's requesting, you will see a difference. These aren't certified government people. This is the way our oral teaching has been brought to us. It is not a certified document saying that you're learned this way and now you can teach it. My grandmother taught me this. My great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandmother taught my great, great, great -- and so on and so forth. That is the practical pride of our people, of being Aboriginal. That is what's real, and that is what needs to be rectified through the Canadian Government.

Thank you very much for the Commissioners to give this me. I really thank my mom to express herself, but it is a very challenge, and I did give the opportunity to share my mom with you, and it's been a very hard road, but I'm working on myself in therapy and teaching my children how beautiful my family is, and I thank you. Háw'aa. Háw'aa.

(APPLAUSE)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible). I'm a citizen of the (indiscernible). I want to say a prayer for -- for all the families and (indiscernible) háw'aa to (indiscernible) here. We were both in the same village. We grew up together.
(HAIDA PRAYER SONG)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's a wrap.

(LAUGHTER)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is a wrap.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So this one is adjourned, and we're going to return here in 20 minutes at 11:40. Next hearing, 20 minutes at 11:40.

-- Upon adjourning at 11:18 a.m.
LEGAL Dicta-TyPist’S CeRtiFICaTe

I, Jenessa Leriger, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Jenessa Leriger
April 12, 2018