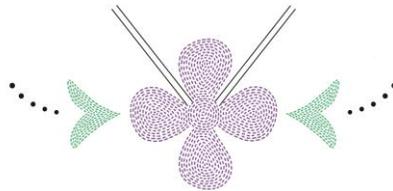


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process – Part 1 Public Hearings
Riverlodge Place
Thompson, Manitoba**



PUBLIC

Tuesday March 20, 2018

**Public Volume 74:
Rita Thomas & Mark Thomas
In Relation to Marina Spence**

Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette

Commission Counsel: Christa Big Canoe

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APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	Stuart Wuttke (Legal counsel) Julie McGregor (Legal counsel)
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs	Non-appearance
Government of Canada	Lucy Bell (Legal Counsel)
Government of Manitoba	Samuel Thomson (Legal counsel)
Manitoba Moon Voices Inc.	Non-appearance
MMIWG Coalition (Manitoba)	Non-appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada & Manitoba Inuit Association	Non-appearance
Winnipeg Police Service	Non-appearance
Women of the Metis Nation	Non-appearance

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Registrar: Bryan Zandberg	

1 Thompson, Manitoba

2 --- Upon commencing on Tuesday, March 20, 2018 at 6:01 p.m.

3 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Good afternoon
4 [sic]. Commissioner Audette, I would like to introduce you
5 to the next family. Sitting right beside me is Mark Thomas
6 and beside him is his wife, Rita Thomas. Today Rita and
7 Mark will be sharing the story of Rita's sister, Marina
8 Spence. Marina at the age of 17 went missing back in
9 August 1990 from the foster care system.

10 And so before we get started, I'd ask that
11 the Registrar swear in the witness.

12 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Good afternoon, Mark, I see
13 you're holding the Bible already, so I'll begin with you.

14 **MARK THOMAS, Sworn:**

15 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Thank you. And if you could
16 just pass the Bible to Rita.

17 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible) here.

18 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Oh, you've got -- both of
19 you? Okay, all right, they're multiplying.

20 **RITA THOMAS, Sworn:**

21 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Okay. Thank you.

22 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And, Commissioner
23 Audette, before we actually start hearing the truth from
24 this family, we -- we kindly ask that Debra Merasty start
25 with a prayer.

1 --- OPENING PRAYER

2 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So, Rita, I
3 understand that you really today want to speak about
4 Marina, but before we start talking about her strengths and
5 your fond memories, can I ask you a couple of questions
6 about your background and where you're from? So where are
7 you from?

8 MS. RITA THOMAS: I am from South Indian
9 Lake.

10 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Whereabouts is South
11 Indian Lake? From here, how far is that?

12 MS. RITA THOMAS: A three-hour drive.

13 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. And does the
14 community always have a year-round road? Is it accessible?
15 Is it fly-in?

16 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, we have a 24-hour
17 ferry.

18 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: A 24-hour ferry?
19 And is South Indian Lake large? Does it have, like, more
20 than one store in it?

21 MS. RITA THOMAS: No, it's a very small
22 community and, yeah, we do have a store.

23 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. So I
24 understand that when you were growing up, you -- you have a
25 number of siblings. You have five siblings, right?

1 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah.

2 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: How many brothers
3 and sisters do you have?

4 MS. RITA THOMAS: I have one brother and I
5 have four sisters living plus my deceased sister.

6 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And so can you tell
7 me a little bit about your childhood growing up in South
8 Indian Lake?

9 MS. RITA THOMAS: Growing up was hard.

10 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: It's okay. Take
11 your time.

12 MS. RITA THOMAS: I lived in a home where
13 there was a lot of alcohol and drugs and violence.

14 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I understand that
15 you're one of the older siblings; is that true?

16 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yes, I'm one of the
17 oldest. My sister, Marina was the oldest.

18 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Did you and Marina
19 spend a lot of time helping raise and take care of your
20 younger siblings?

21 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, we were the main
22 caregivers for our -- for our siblings.

23 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And that's -- that's
24 because you were touching on the fact that there was a lot
25 of alcohol in the home. So did you often find yourself

1 being the caregiver for the other four siblings?

2 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yes, when my -- my granny
3 wasn't around, me and my older sisters -- my older sister
4 would be the ones to look after the kids, but mainly it was
5 my grandmother that raised us.

6 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Did either of your
7 parents attend Indian Residential School or have any
8 impacts in their life?

9 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, my mom told me
10 stories about being in residential school.

11 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I'm going to guess
12 those stories weren't great stories. Were they stories of
13 abuse?

14 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yes.

15 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So your mother had a
16 hard time coping with some of the pain she was dealing with
17 from her school experience?

18 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah.

19 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And you mentioned
20 your granny, so when you said your -- when your granny was
21 around, did your granny live in South Indian Lake too?

22 MS. RITA THOMAS: She lived in the same
23 house as us.

24 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So when she was
25 there, she was really the person that helped provide

1 guidance and care?

2 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yes.

3 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Would she have to go
4 away from time to time to visit other family?

5 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, she used to leave
6 every summer to go to Nelson House and look after her
7 brother.

8 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Would she take all
9 the kids with her?

10 MS. RITA THOMAS: No, she would always take
11 my sister, Marina, the oldest. That was her -- her girl
12 then. She always looked after Marina.

13 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I understand that
14 you lost your mom too, that your mom passed away when you
15 were about 15. Can you just tell us a little bit about
16 that?

17 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, my mom passed away
18 when I was 15 years old and from there, my granny and my
19 dad looked after us.

20 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I understand around
21 the time you were 15, a bunch of things happened all at
22 once. So first you lost your mom and then what happened?

23 MS. RITA THOMAS: Well, first I lost my mom
24 and then after my mom passed away, CFS apprehended all of
25 us, even though my granny was there to look after us. And

1 she was the one that always looked after us. And I don't
2 know why CFS had to take us away from her because she was
3 always our mother. She's the one that looked out for us
4 and did everything for us.

5 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So when you guys
6 were apprehended by the -- when you say, "CFS", that's the
7 Child and Family Services here in Manitoba?

8 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yes.

9 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. So when he
10 CFS took you all away, did they take you all at once?

11 MS. RITA THOMAS: No, my dad was at home
12 with the other kids and my granny -- my granny and I went
13 to Nelson House to go visit her brother. And while we were
14 in Nelson House, my siblings got apprehended from CFS.

15 And we came -- me and my granny came to
16 Thompson to come and see my siblings and when we got here,
17 they took me and they paid my granny's way home. And my
18 granny was heartbroken there too.

19 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So you then found
20 yourself here in Thompson with your siblings. Where were
21 you guys all staying?

22 MS. RITA THOMAS: I was put in the Marymound
23 and my two sisters were taken to Wabowden and my older
24 sister was put -- put in the YWCA to stay by herself
25 because she was 17 years old. And she told CFS that she

1 didn't want to be in care anymore because she was 17 and
2 she was turning 18 that next month. In September she was
3 going to be 18, but the social worker insisted that she
4 stay at the Y and learn to live on her own. She told them
5 she wanted to live on her own, but not here. She wanted to
6 go home, back to South Indian, but they wouldn't get --
7 they wouldn't let her.

8 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Were you still at
9 the Y or were you somewhere else at that time -- sorry,
10 were you also at the Y, and the "Y" being YMCA [sic]? Is
11 that what it was?

12 MS. RITA THOMAS: No, I was -- I was placed
13 at the Marymount.

14 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So you guys weren't
15 even actually at the same spot, even though you both in
16 Thompson?

17 MS. RITA THOMAS: No, we were all separated.

18 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. So before we
19 get into when Marina went missing, can you tell us a little
20 bit about some of her strengths? Some of the things that
21 you want everybody to know about who your sister was?

22 MS. RITA THOMAS: My sister was -- my sister
23 was a beautiful, loving person. She did anything for us
24 because she was the oldest. She guided us and she made
25 sure that we were okay. Both me and her looked after the

1 kids, but she was -- she was the one that kept us together.
2 She was always there for us and she had a lot of friends.
3 She had a lot of good friends. And she was a good -- she
4 was good. She didn't, you know, go out and party and all
5 that.

6 It was when we came to Thompson, just
7 meeting new people and, they -- we started drinking with
8 them and stuff.

9 Yeah, but we had a hard time losing my mom
10 and we were trying to -- we were trying to go back to South
11 Indian and asking, Why, why can't we go to South Indian?
12 Why do we have to be in Thompson? And the social worker
13 told us that nobody wanted us over there and my granny was
14 still over there, she wanted us, but they said that she as
15 too old to look after us. But she was more -- more than
16 capable of -- of still looking after us, but they never
17 gave -- gave us that choice to stay in South Indian and be
18 with our granny.

19 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So you guys were
20 actually not -- you were the two oldest, but you were close
21 in age, right? You're only -- how -- how old apart are
22 you?

23 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** She is a year apart. Me
24 and her were a year apart. She was the oldest.

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And so when you

1 found yourself here in Thompson, your sister is at the Y,
2 you're at another house, did you ever get a chance to still
3 see each other?

4 MS. RITA THOMAS: Every day, every chance we
5 had. As soon as I get up, she'd get up, we'd go look for
6 each other right away. We -- we always looked after each
7 other and wanted to be together and -- because we were
8 close, we were always together, all our lives and all of a
9 sudden, we weren't.

10 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Did you want to
11 share with the Commissioner about when your sister actually
12 went missing in August 1990?

13 MS. RITA THOMAS: Well, on -- we went out
14 drinking and we got drunk and then the next morning I got
15 up, I was in jail. I was in jail. I got up. I could
16 barely move, I was just weak. My body was sore. And right
17 away, the first person that came to mind was my sister,
18 Marina. I was, like, Where's my sister? Is she here or is
19 she a different cell? He said, No, you're the only one
20 here.

21 And then CFS came and picked me up, but I
22 knew that something was wrong because my heart just hurt.
23 I knew that something was wrong. I asked them, I said -- I
24 said, You have to find my sister. She's at the Y, can
25 somebody go see if she's there? Because they wouldn't let

1 me go out when I got back to the Marymound.

2 And they kept me in the Marymound for five
3 days, not letting me go out to go look for her or at least
4 go ask around for her. They didn't allow me. And I just
5 got so tired of nobody listening to me, so I fought my way
6 out of the Marymound, I fought those workers.

7 And I ran straight to the -- I ran straight
8 to the police station and I was just buzzing and buzzing
9 and there's no answer. All of a sudden I heard a voice
10 coming from the wall, asking me what I wanted and I told
11 them about my sister. My sister -- I haven't seen my
12 sister in -- I don't know where she is, but I know that
13 something is wrong and I need somebody to help me.

14 And then he says, Press the button when
15 you're talking to me because I was just talking to a wall,
16 to a speaker. And I said, Well, are you going to do
17 something? I said, are you going to look for my sister?
18 And he says, Yeah, well, we'll get back to you.

19 About a week or two, a police officer came
20 and -- a police officer came and talked to me and took a
21 statement and that was it. That was it. I did never hear
22 from the cops again or -- and I kept telling he social
23 worker, I kept telling him too, I said, Where's my sister?
24 I said, You know, Marina is missing, I said, And I already
25 told the cops and he was just so upset with me. He says,

1 Why did you go to the cops? Why are you making things up?
2 I said, I'm not making anything up, I said, I know
3 something is wrong with my sister or she's somewhere
4 missing. I said, You need to find her. And he -- he told
5 me, he says, You don't say -- go tell the cops that your
6 sister is missing. Your sister is in Leaf Rapids and she's
7 going to be at the Family Court on Wednesday.

8 And then I felt better -- I felt better for
9 a while. I was just so happy that he said that she was in
10 Leaf Rapids. And right away my plan was to run away to
11 Leaf Rapids and go see her.

12 And then Wednesday came, I was sitting at
13 the Family Court, every time that door opened, I'd look --
14 looking for my sister. No, the court is almost ending and
15 it's, like, Where's my sister? I said that real loud. You
16 said, She was going to be here. And he says, Settle down,
17 why are you making a big deal out of your sister? She's
18 somewhere. She said she was going to make it and she
19 didn't. I was, like, Is that what she said? She said she
20 was going to be here? No, she had a subpoena to come to
21 Family Court. And I said, Well, you said he wasn't -- you
22 said that she was in Leaf Rapids, is she still over there?
23 And then he didn't say nothing to me because he lied to me.
24 He lied that he said that Marina was in Leaf Rapids and
25 Marina wasn't even over there. He had no clue where Marina

1 was, but yet he lied to me, trying to -- I don't know.

2 I don't even know why she had to be in care,
3 she's -- she was going to be of age the next month. And he
4 says, No, I want her to live independently. My sister
5 said, I can live independently at home. I can go live with
6 my granny. But he said, No, this is what's best for you.
7 There's nothing in South Indian. There's more to do around
8 here.

9 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. I'm going to
10 take a step back to -- I just want to -- to ask a couple of
11 questions, when you were talking about when you went to
12 report to the police your sister was missing, you said you
13 were talking to a wall and that you had to talk to a
14 button. So when you got to the detachment, that was here
15 in Thompson, did they let you in?

16 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** No, they didn't let me in.
17 I just spoke to them through their speaker. That's how I
18 made my statement, my report for a missing -- a missing --

19 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So you're standing
20 outside, looking at a brick wall, a little speaker with a
21 button. You press the button to talk and then the officer
22 asks you questions. What were the types of questions the
23 police officer asked you?

24 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** They asked me when the
25 last I was with her and does she usually take off with not

1 letting anybody know or did -- was she a runaway? And I
2 was, like, No, no, she wasn't.

3 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Can -- can I ask you
4 a question, Mark?

5 MR. MARK THOMAS: M'hm.

6 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Because when you
7 first told me this, I was like, What do you mean you were
8 standing outside the police detachment? How long was the
9 police detachment like that, where you had to walk up and
10 press a button here in Thompson; do you know?

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

12 MR. MARK THOMAS: No, I wouldn't know.

13 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: No? Are you aware
14 if they've recently made changes though?

15 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah, they have a glass
16 there now and you can walk in and then you still have to
17 wait for the cops to talk to.

18 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: But now you can
19 actually walk into a space more recently?

20 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

21 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And you can actually
22 physically see a police officer?

23 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

24 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. If a Native
25 person was going to press that button, would they stand

1 outside? And do you know if they were non-Native, would
2 they be let in?

3 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Yeah. Yeah, they'd
4 probably be let in right away, if they were non-Native.
5 It's just the appearance of a Native person that always --
6 like, you know, makes the cops go -- I don't know, just
7 make their hair stand up, I guess you can say.

8 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So was that like
9 a -- a really bad assumption, that every Native person
10 might be a safety risk or what do you think is working
11 there?

12 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Well, I don't know.

13 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Fair enough. So I
14 also understand that you guys first got together, you're
15 husband and wife now, but it's around the same time frame,
16 maybe after Marina goes missing that you guys get together,
17 but, you know, each other, right, before? It was before?

18 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Before, yeah.

19 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So you guys have
20 been together since the '90s?

21 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Yeah.

22 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Yeah? So what were
23 some of the things once she was able to finally get out of
24 the house, what were the ways that you or your family were
25 able to, kind of, help provide some support, so that Rita

1 had some other help?

2 MR. MARK THOMAS: Well, my auntie had, like,
3 a search party going on, on the -- in Thompson here. Like,
4 getting volunteers to come and help her to search for her
5 sister.

6 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And when you say
7 your auntie helped set up a search, what does that look
8 like? Is that, like, he working with the police or is it
9 working -- her working with only the community? Who was
10 doing the searching?

11 MR. MARK THOMAS: It was her and just the
12 volunteers that were searching. The police weren't even
13 helping. They said they were too busy. They were too busy
14 to look for a Native girl, I guess.

15 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Was there ever a --
16 a -- did they just assume she as runaway maybe?

17 MR. MARK THOMAS: I guess so, yeah, for
18 sure. That's all they assumed is a runaway.

19 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And your aunt, why
20 did she decide to help?

21 MR. MARK THOMAS: Well, the -- because
22 nobody was -- nobody was doing nothing about it, so she
23 stepped up and started looking for her.

24 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Wow, good aunt. A
25 good aunt to help that way. And there was other community

1 members too that were helping to search?

2 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

3 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. Rita,
4 after -- after you made the report, you told the
5 Commissioner just now that the C -- CFS was upset with you
6 about telling the police and for saying things. Like,
7 Don't make up stories. How did that make you feel?

8 MS. RITA THOMAS: It made me angry. I was
9 really upset with him. I was so upset with him that I
10 attacked him and I told him that he didn't care and why did
11 he have to take us away from South Indian and then bring us
12 here and start lying to us and giving me heck for making up
13 stories.

14 And I didn't even make up any stories, all I
15 said was, My sister is missing. And he thought that -- he
16 says, You know, you can't -- you don't -- you're going to
17 get me into trouble for this. He never ever gave me any
18 straight answers. And I kept bugging him, I said, Please,
19 just get somebody to look for Marina. He says, Why do you
20 keep saying that she's missing? I was, like, Well, if she
21 wasn't -- if she wasn't missing, she'd be here with me,
22 she's always with me. We're always together and this is
23 not her, not to come and find me or to go. And, if
24 anything, if she was going to leave Thompson, she would go
25 home. She would go home and be with my granny.

1 She never -- he never listened to anything
2 that I said. I just kept begging him. I just kept
3 begging, Please, just try and find Marina. No.

4 I ran -- ran away home to South Indian just
5 going everywhere, asking people, Did you see Marina? Do
6 you -- no? Asking people that knew her, Did Marina come
7 here? Did Marina call you? Nobody knew where she was,
8 nobody seen her. Then I had to go back the next day. I
9 was only there one day and the RCMP came to look for me to
10 go back to -- to come back here to Thompson. And they put
11 me on a bus in Leaf Rapids to come here.

12 And Klaus (ph), the social worker -- his
13 name was Klaus Buhler (ph) was at the bus depot waiting for
14 me and then he looked at me, What a waste of a trip, right?
15 Did you find her over there? I said, Leaf Rapids. I was,
16 like, What would my sister be doing in Leaf Rapids, there's
17 nobody there for her. And I just kept telling him, I was,
18 like, Why can't you help me find Marina? You're the one
19 that brought her here. You're the one that brought her
20 here, why can't you do anything about it? And he says, I
21 can't -- that's not my job, my job is to look after you. I
22 was, like, Well, why didn't you look after my sister? And
23 why is it so hard for you to get the RCMP or somebody to
24 look -- look for her. But he just kept -- he just kept
25 lying. I never believed anything he said after that.

1 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: It's interesting too
2 because they managed to send somebody to find you to bring
3 you back, so do you find it frustrating that they couldn't
4 send someone to look for your sister?

5 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, that's what I mean,
6 it was fast for them to come and get me because I got there
7 that day and I went walking around, asking around for my
8 sister. And that night -- that night, the RCMP came and
9 look for me. They took me to Leaf to go on the bus back
10 here.

11 That's what I told Klaus, I said, You got
12 the RCMP to come and look for me and someone is missing, my
13 sister is missing, how come you're not getting the RCMP to
14 go look for her? It's, like, you knew where I was, you
15 didn't need the RCMP to come and look for me. You should
16 have looked for my sister, she's the one that's missing. I
17 was only going there to go try and find her.

18 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I understand at one
19 point, there was some information on the radio about your
20 sister. Can you tell us a little bit about that, the
21 Commissioner a little bit about that?

22 MS. RITA THOMAS: It was my husband's auntie
23 that put something on the radio, just asking to see if
24 anybody seen Marina or know her whereabouts. Nobody --
25 nobody knew nothing.

1 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Was there -- at the
2 time, was there talk that maybe she was a runaway?

3 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, they labelled --
4 labelled her as a runaway, but that wasn't my sister. My
5 sister didn't run away. She -- she was the responsible
6 one. She was the one that stayed home and looked after
7 everything.

8 Me, I was -- I was different from my sister.
9 I -- I ran away. I used to run away from home. I got
10 tired of being the parent. I got tired of the violence. I
11 got tired of the alcohol. I got tired of everything, so I
12 -- I used to run away, but not -- not my sister. She would
13 be so scared to leave my siblings. She had to stay and
14 look after them.

15 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So I understand, you
16 know, years pass, about ten years pass and you don't have
17 any luck in finding Marina, but eventually her remains were
18 discovered. Can you tell us a little bit about that,
19 please?

20 MS. RITA THOMAS: I don't know -- I don't
21 really know much about it, all I know is that somebody was
22 fishing at the Burntwood Bridge, pulled up some remains,
23 but they didn't let anybody know until three months later
24 when they identified her through her dental records.

25 And then I was at work and my husband came

1 and looked for me and told me that my sister's remains were
2 -- were found. I was -- I was happy at this. I was happy
3 that we found her remains, but I was hurt because I didn't
4 have my sister no more. And I was happy to be able to bury
5 my sister properly.

6 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So Mark came to tell
7 you, does that mean the police didn't actually notify you,
8 the next of kin?

9 MS. RITA THOMAS: No, the constables, the
10 community constables were the ones that come to tell me and
11 Mark was with them.

12 We had a funeral -- we had a funeral for her
13 and my dad had a hard time. My dad never talks about it.
14 He never -- he never -- he doesn't express his feelings and
15 he never talks about it and he still drinks every day to
16 this day. Not at -- I don't think he's accepting it. I
17 don't know, he just doesn't show no feelings, no nothing,
18 which can just -- the sadness is in his eyes because my dad
19 is a quiet guy. He's hurt, he just doesn't -- he doesn't
20 express his feelings.

21 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: How about your
22 grandma?

23 MS. RITA THOMAS: My granny? My granny
24 passed away -- my granny passed away before they even found
25 my sister's remains. She died a year after that -- after

1 my sister went missing. My granny went into a big
2 depression and she died of a broken heart because her baby
3 was gone. Nobody knew where she was.

4 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Is it okay if we
5 talk about some of the impacts this has all had on your
6 life and in your relationship?

7 MS. RITA THOMAS: (No audible response).

8 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yeah? How were you
9 coping with the pain when your sister went missing?

10 MS. RITA THOMAS: My sister went missing, I
11 gave up on everything. I drank. I drank every day of my
12 life since I was 17. I did drugs. I had two -- two of my
13 own children that I didn't look after. My mother-in-law
14 raised my children, my two kids. I neglected my kids
15 because all I did was drink and do drugs. I didn't want to
16 live. I tried so hard so many times to end my life. I
17 could never succeed and I'd always get up and I was like,
18 Ah, why do I still have to be alive?

19 Practically everybody that I loved so much
20 was gone. My mom was gone, my sister was gone, my granny
21 was gone. I was in a foster home, but I got out of the
22 system on my own. I went to court when I was 16 and then
23 they let me go on my own. I was no longer with CFS because
24 I told the courts I didn't want to be in CFS and I didn't
25 want to be in Thompson.

1 I had a rough life. I never really wanted
2 to be -- to have a life. It took me so long to sober up.
3 I'm 43 right now. I quit drinking when I was 31. And then
4 when I quit drinking, my kids come to live with me and I
5 started drinking again and that's all I did is drink and it
6 destroyed my children.

7 My son is in -- in jail right now. He -- he
8 also was struggling with alcohol and drugs. And that's
9 when I finally realized who the Lord was because I had
10 nobody to turn to. And this woman here introduced me to
11 the Lord, so now I don't try and turn to the bottle or to
12 drugs, I give it all to God. I put it all in God's hands.

13 I have a -- I have four beautiful
14 granddaughters. My son had two daughters and my daughter
15 had two daughters, a set of twins. And my daughter named
16 one of her twin after her Auntie Marina. And my son-in-law
17 named the other twin after his Auntie Dawn, Dawn Anderson
18 that was mentioned this morning.

19 She -- Dawn was one of Marina's good
20 friends. She was also my friend too. We lived in the same
21 street. And that's somewhere we would run to too when
22 there was something happening at the house.

23 I thought I put this in my past, I thought I
24 just let it -- I let it go. I used to always try and share
25 my story with people or -- but when I was drinking, I

1 guess, like, all these years, I would always -- tried to
2 talk about my sister and I just, you know, I realized that
3 some people don't care. They don't want to hear. It's,
4 like, That's okay, that's the past, forget about it.
5 People kept telling me that. Just forget about it, it's
6 the past. How are you going to bring her back? And I did,
7 I forgot about it, I left it behind me.

8 Sometimes I'll tell stories about her,
9 people would -- didn't even know I had a sister, Marina.
10 They'd say, Marina, what -- what happened to her? And I
11 would tell them. That's how forgotten my sister was and
12 still is because nobody was there to voice for her. I
13 wasn't there to voice for her because I was busy drinking,
14 not caring about anything, not caring about myself, my
15 children, but I know for a fact that CFS failed my family
16 and the RCMP.

17 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Once you learned --
18 sorry, once you learned about the remains -- and I don't
19 mean to step backwards in this story, but I just want to
20 understand. Mark is the one that tells you because he's
21 learned from the community constable. Was there any
22 investigation in terms of what happened with the remains?
23 Were you ever provided information or given communication
24 about anything other than the fact that they found remains?

25 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Nothing. They didn't tell

1 me nothing. I asked about -- I asked about it once and
2 they told me they were going to look into -- well, after
3 they found her -- probably about a couple of years after
4 they found her, I asked one of the RCMP about, Did they --
5 are they doing anything for my sister, Marina? And he's,
6 like, Oh, I have no clue. I was, like, Well, who would
7 know? He says, I'll get that information to you as soon as
8 I can get it, and I'm still waiting.

9 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: That was, what,
10 2000ish?

11 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, about there.

12 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Some of the other
13 impacts, is it okay if I ask some questions about that,
14 both you and Mark?

15 MS. RITA THOMAS: What's that?

16 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Can I ask some more
17 questions about the impacts of both you and Mark?

18 MS. RITA THOMAS: (No audible response).

19 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Mark, I know that
20 you guys have been together now for a number of years, well
21 over 25, hey? How was the -- her coping and -- with the
22 means that she was coping by, how was that working in your
23 relationship? Were you both in a good place? Were you
24 both struggling? Can you tell me a little -- can you tell
25 the Commissioner a little bit about that? Mark, are you

1 comfortable answering that?

2 MR. MARK THOMAS: What was that?

3 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: When you guys -- you
4 guys have been together for years. Like, over 25 now,
5 right?

6 MR. MARK THOMAS: M'hm.

7 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: How was life
8 together while she was having her issues around drinking?
9 Were you both coping well together? Were there other
10 issues in your life as a couple?

11 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah, we went through
12 lots, me and my wife. You know, it's -- and we are still
13 always -- we're still struggling. Like, you know, we're
14 just going day by day.

15 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I understand -- Rita
16 was just telling us, you know, when she first got sober,
17 you guys had a period where you were both abstaining from
18 alcohol for a number of years. Can you tell us a little
19 bit about that? I guess it's yours.

20 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah, I ended up really --
21 we managed to quit for six years of drinking and then this
22 -- we had an accident at the ferry landing where I worked.
23 Two of our co-workers got shot and killed over there and
24 the -- I ended up going to see a mental health worker in
25 Winnipeg. Then they ended up, like, you know, asking me to

1 start drinking. Like, you know, and I already quit
2 drinking for six years and then this mental health worker
3 started telling me, like, you know, Have a shot here and
4 there and stuff like that and then that's where we started
5 drinking from.

6 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Oh, so as you were
7 trying to cope with a new traumatic event, you were
8 experiencing some post-traumatic stress?

9 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Yeah. Yeah, PTSD. I was
10 diagnosed with PTSD and I -- like, until this -- this day,
11 like, I'm still -- you know, I'm still not in my right mind
12 all the time. And, like, you know, I still struggle lots
13 and, like, the government can only help you so much and
14 then they kick you out the door. You know, just when you
15 still need help, they practically push you out the door and
16 tell you that you don't need no more help. Because it's
17 probably costing them too much money for me to go over
18 there.

19 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Because you were
20 going all the way down to Winnipeg for that help, hey?

21 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Yeah.

22 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Is that because
23 there weren't the resources here for you?

24 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** No, I didn't -- I don't
25 know why they sent me to Winnipeg when it was at Winnipeg

1 anyways.

2 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So if I could just
3 take a step back. Is it fair to say that during your guys'
4 relationship, you both have had some drinking problems?

5 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

6 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yeah? Yes, alcohol
7 and drug misuse, is that a better way to characterize it?

8 MS. RITA THOMAS: M'hm.

9 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

10 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: But you've found
11 years where you've had opportunities to, kind of, heal and
12 work together, but you continue to struggle from time to
13 time?

14 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

15 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: What has the impact?
16 Obviously, I can see your caring husband here, doting on
17 her and making sure she has Kleenex, but what is the impact
18 of her losing her sister been on you throughout the years
19 too?

20 MR. MARK THOMAS: Well, she always mentions
21 her sister. Like, you know, she often wonders what
22 happened to her and, like, you know, is there -- if there
23 is anything going to be done about her sister being
24 missing, like, you know, all those years? And, like, you
25 know, nothing was done. And, I guess, to this day, nothing

1 is done right now too.

2 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: But you've managed
3 to keep supporting her throughout these years given your
4 ups and downs, and obviously your family has cared too
5 because they've helped where it seems other services
6 haven't helped, your family has, kind of, stepped in?

7 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

8 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Is that fairly
9 common up here? Are you aware that it's the community that
10 has to be -- come together to mobilize, to help search and
11 look for Indigenous women or girls when they're missing?

12 MR. MARK THOMAS: Yeah.

13 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I wanted to talk to
14 you guys a little bit about recommendations, if that's
15 okay, because you've raised a number of issues. You've
16 raised some resource issues obviously. And I know that you
17 have a very strong opinion on how the CFS has failed your
18 family. So is it okay if I ask a couple of questions?

19 MS. RITA THOMAS: (No audible response).

20 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yeah? So what do
21 you think -- well, I think, you've already, kind of,
22 articulated that your sister was old enough. She could
23 have been at home with your granny. Would it be fair to
24 say that one of your recommendations -- and I know there's
25 been movements towards this with CFS more recently, but

1 would you think that someone who's close to reaching an
2 age, like 18, should try to always be placed with family
3 and that things like age or what community they come from
4 shouldn't be as big of a factor?

5 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Yeah, I think that
6 children that are remote from their homes should be put in
7 a safe place where people know that -- know the child.

8 And, you know, my siblings and I went
9 through a lot -- went through hell with CFS. A lot of bad
10 things happened to my siblings, not only my sister missing,
11 but my siblings were treated bad. They were sexually
12 abused.

13 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** You were lucky --
14 lucky enough to -- or strong enough to emancipate or gain
15 your own independence by going to court. Did your younger
16 siblings also try and do that when they were 16?

17 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** No, they -- no, they
18 didn't. They -- they were brought back to the community
19 and placed in with our families, family members. And
20 sometimes it's -- family members don't treat you the way
21 you're supposed to be treated as a child. They don't give
22 you that love that you need because they have their own
23 kids and they focus their -- their parenting on them.

24 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Mark, you've made a
25 comment about the system -- to me, made a comment about the

1 system is set up to make sure people get money for
2 apprehending kids. That's one of the problems that you see
3 with the CFS?

4 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** Well, yeah, it's just what
5 I think of the -- the CFS. For some people, it's just for
6 dollar signs for kids. Just to -- just to get the extra
7 money for their -- for their finances, but they really
8 don't take care of the kids they're supposed to be taking
9 care of.

10 Like, for instance, my wife's sister had two
11 of her nieces apprehended and they're still apprehended and
12 they went to their mom for -- for a while. And when they
13 got out of the CFS care, they didn't have nothing. They
14 didn't have no clothes. And one older sister was telling
15 us too, like, all they ate was Kraft Dinner. They never --
16 never -- nothing else, just Kraft Dinner straight Kraft
17 Dinner.

18 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So you say --

19 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** And they --

20 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Sorry.

21 **MR. MARK THOMAS:** And they were wishing they
22 died instead of being in care.

23 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And you said when
24 they left care, so is that like when they age out when
25 they're no longer in the system? Like, what are ways the

1 services could be better when a kid no longer is in foster
2 care? Once they're too old, they leave without clothes or
3 anything else, without supports. What type of supports do
4 they need? Either one of you?

5 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** They need -- they need to
6 look after these -- these children that they apprehend and
7 find resources -- resources for them and life skills. And
8 -- and not only the children that are apprehended, even the
9 parents. There's obviously something wrong what -- the
10 reason why they can't parent and they keep these kids away
11 from their parents and parents want to visit.

12 Like, for instance, my sister wants to visit
13 her kids for -- for Christmas. Right away, they say no to
14 her. Those are her children and why does -- why can't she
15 have them for a couple of days?

16 And my nieces are -- my nieces have been
17 going through hell. You know, they've been -- the stories
18 they told us when they first came out of CFS and how are
19 they -- how they were locked in a room and how the little
20 girl they lived with, showed them all these awful things.
21 Because they were doing them -- when they came to visit,
22 they were doing all these things and I was, like, Why are
23 you doing that? And they always say, Well, this kid showed
24 me how to do this and that.

25 And, like, I don't know, but I -- I believe

1 there should be better services for kids that are
2 apprehended and give the families a chance, give the
3 parents a chance. Yeah, you can send them to AFM, Anger
4 Management Parenting Program, but they -- they don't --
5 they need to be -- somebody needs to lead them, to lead
6 them to go to AFM and to go to all these things, but they
7 don't.

8 Because it -- there is one CFS worker, I
9 told the CFS worker, I was, like, Well, why don't you send
10 Aggie to this place and she can -- she can go there?
11 Because she knows she needs help and she's asking for help,
12 but they can't send her back to AFM because she already
13 went there once. And she's, like, Well, that's her
14 problem, if she wants her kids back, she needs to do this
15 and that. And I was, like, Listen, my sister has no money,
16 she has no job, she has no home, I said, Why can't somebody
17 help her? I said, I can help her, she can live in my house
18 with her children.

19 And that's what happened, because they
20 couldn't give me a straight answer why they couldn't help
21 her and I took my sister in and her daughters and they
22 lived with me for a year. And then my sister couldn't
23 handle it because her daughters were abusing her and
24 threatening to kill her while she's sleeping. And to do
25 all these awful things to their mom.

1 My sister is not a very big woman. She's a
2 tiny, little lady. Her daughters are bigger than her and
3 she was getting scared of her kids, so she -- so she
4 decided to give them to CFS voluntarily until she can find
5 her own place and get a job.

6 And so she did all that, she got a job. She
7 got a place. She went to go live with my dad and then CFS
8 said, Oh, no, you got to wait another six months. Why wait
9 another six months when she's done what she wanted to do,
10 to help her children and find a home? So that broke my
11 sister. She gave up, came to Thompson.

12 And my -- I have an adopted son from my
13 sister. It's the one I'm talking about. She was in an
14 abusive relationship and she was carrying her baby and the
15 father threatened to kill the baby when the baby was born.
16 Like, he had it all set up. He's, like, I'm going to give
17 the baby a bath and drown it and I'll just say I left the
18 baby there and I came back and he drowned.

19 Like, I was, like, What are you going to do?
20 And she said, Well, I'm not even two months' pregnant, I'll
21 just have an abortion because I don't want him to do that
22 to the baby. I was, like, No. I was, like, No, that's not
23 going to happen. I was, like, you're not going to get rid
24 of that baby. I was, like, I'll -- I'll take that baby.
25 I'll look after the baby. I said, All you have to do is

1 just carry her or him for nine months and I'll -- I'll get
2 the (indiscernible).

3 Sure enough, I went and got the baby out of
4 the hospital and CFS wanted me to put my son under CFS. I
5 was, like, No, this is my baby. It's my baby. I'm not
6 putting him under CFS. He says, Well, you -- he'll still
7 be your son, but you'll get cheques every month for him. I
8 was, like, Well, I don't want a cheque, all I want is him.
9 I said, I can provide for him. I don't need cheques from
10 CFS. They gave me a few options and I was, like, No, I'm
11 not putting my son under CFS.

12 And then the girls didn't know. That was
13 part of their anger towards their mom is for giving --
14 giving up the baby to us and asking, Why, why didn't you
15 take Regan (ph)? How come you don't want Regan? It's,
16 like, because that's auntie's baby.

17 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** It's a custom
18 adoption, you didn't need the paperwork. Yeah, I'm
19 understanding. Can we have a little conversation about
20 that? Because, I think, there's a difference between, sort
21 of, Aboriginally aware or Indigenous aware type of
22 programming versus cultural programming. Do you think it
23 would be helpful if there was more Indigenous workers or
24 people providing the supports within either the Child and
25 Family Services if there is understanding around things

1 like custom adoption, around kinship, understanding
2 Indigenous practices? Would that be helpful?

3 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Yeah, that would be
4 helpful.

5 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** But I know you guys
6 also have an opinion on this, and so I want to talk a
7 little bit about this. You don't actually identify as a
8 traditionalist, you're both Christian. So is it important
9 to also make sure that there's programming and support that
10 recognize that -- that an Indigenous Program can be
11 Indigenous, with Indigenous people, but not necessarily
12 traditionally based? So it can be Christian based or
13 non-faith based.

14 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Yeah.

15 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Would that be
16 helpful?

17 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Yeah, I think, that would
18 be helpful. It's --

19 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** I just want to make
20 sure before I ask the Commissioner if she has any
21 questions, if there is any recommendations, suggestions or
22 ideas that you have around, you know, anything that you've
23 experienced? Whether it's been about policing or things
24 that should be done. Are there any recommendations you'd
25 like to share?

1 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, I think it would be
2 helpful if the RCMP would at least go to the family and let
3 them know, Okay, we did this, we're doing this and notify
4 the families on the ongoing investigation, if they ever do
5 investigate on any of the cases.

6 It seems like everybody is always kept in
7 the dark. Like, I don't know nothing. Like, even I asked
8 the RCMP and he told me he was going to come back -- get
9 back to me. That was like 15 years ago, I'm still waiting.
10 And my sister had some belongings -- belongings at the Y
11 and I asked, I was, like, Can I get my sister's belongings?
12 And then they told me, Yeah, they're -- they should be at
13 archives or whatever and we'll get -- we'll get them to
14 you. We just need your address. I gave them my address
15 and I was, like, the same time, 15 years ago, I still never
16 received my sister's belongings. I don't know what they
17 did to them.

18 Or -- and I believe that children that are
19 apprehended from CFS, they should just leave them in the
20 community where they belong. You know, like, we go out
21 into -- out in the world and anything can happen. Women
22 get murdered almost every day.

23 And, like, they have Marymound here in
24 Thompson, why can't every community get a Marymound, so the
25 kids can go stay there. There's no foster parents

1 available.

2 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Just a clarification
3 question, Marymound, that's the foster house here that you
4 had to go to, so having something like a foster house or
5 some type of community hub where you could have kids, is
6 that what you're suggesting?

7 MS. RITA THOMAS: Yeah, that's what I'm
8 suggestion [sic] and it would be better the children stay
9 in the community. And that was promised to South Indian
10 when my sister went missing. That's what they said,
11 that -- the mayor and council made a resolution or
12 something and they said that there wouldn't be anymore
13 children taken out of the community. That the children
14 would stay in the community and the community would look
15 after them. And -- but that's not -- that's not what's
16 happening. Children are still getting taken away from the
17 community. They're still at the Marymound. Because I know
18 two of my nieces are at the Marymound right now.

19 And maybe the government or anybody can
20 build those kind of places in the reserves and keep our
21 children in our community.

22 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Is there anything
23 else you wanted to add, even though (indiscernible). So
24 this will be my last question, what is a way to remember
25 your sister or memorialize her? What would you do if you

1 could, so that everyone knew exactly who Marina was?

2 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** I don't know, it's been so
3 hard for me to -- well, first of all, it's so hard for me
4 to come here and do this. I didn't think I'd make it
5 because for me, my sister was forgotten and just hearing
6 people telling me to get over it and all that. And I did
7 that, I blocked it out of my life, out of my mind, and I
8 still feel so guilty for that.

9 But I never had the strength to do anything
10 for her, at least put a cross at the Burntwood Bridge where
11 she was found, where her remains were found, but I want to
12 do that for my sister. I want to do something for her too
13 at home.

14 I'm a CHR in my community for the last --
15 last four years I've been having Missing and Murdered Women
16 Walk on October 4th. I've done it four years in a row, so
17 that's what I do for my sister. But, I think, I'm going to
18 do more for her because I don't want her to be forgotten
19 and I want to let people know who she really was.

20 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** You were strong for
21 coming today and sharing about her. It was very important
22 you did and thank you very much for doing so.

23 I imagine that the Commissioner will have
24 some questions or comments for you.

25 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** *Merci*

1 *Beaucoup. Merci Beaucoup, Maitre Big Canoe.*

2 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Mon --

3 I was going to speak French, I'm so sorry.
4 Maybe I didn't understand, my questions is -- and, sorry,
5 if I have -- I'm making you repeating. When you told CSF
6 [sic] and RCMP that your sister was missing, how long it
7 took for them, the police to start the investigation or the
8 search about --

9 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** They didn't do an
10 investigation and they didn't do a search.

11 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Never?

12 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Never. They -- the search
13 was done by my husband's auntie, Annie Thomas. She did the
14 search. Got some volunteers to do the search. And the
15 only time I ever spoke with the RCMP about my sister was
16 through the speaker and they came and got a statement off
17 me once and that was it. I never heard from them again.

18 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Did they
19 explain to you why they didn't want to do a -- that search
20 and investigate?

21 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Well, Mark's -- Mark's
22 auntie, the one that organized the search, asked the
23 cops -- the RCMP to -- if they would be able to help with
24 the search and they said, they were too busy.

25 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Well, I hope

1 Canada is listening. Well, I did, I listen and I know my
2 colleagues are also listening from --

3 So did you -- you and your family met with
4 ULIF [sic]? Is it ULIF in English? UCLIF [sic], the
5 family liaison.

6 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Oh, FILU

7 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** FILU?

8 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Yeah,
9 (indiscernible).

10 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** French again.
11 Did you meet with FILU, the family liaison?

12 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** It's Hilda.

13 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Hilda, there
14 she is. Okay.

15 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Just more recently.

16 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible).

17 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Okay.

18 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** The more recently.

19 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Yeah.

20 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Why? Oh,
21 okay, it's good to know it's her. Very good.

22 I have one of your recommendation. When we
23 were in Yellowknife, two families in private and one in
24 public said that they had a good relationship with the
25 police. Why I remember, it's because when it's rare,

1 it's -- you know, it struck, so it -- and they said that
2 when that relationship and trust is there, the trauma is
3 less or the stress or the reaction.

4 So when you say notify the families, that
5 the police should notify, it's something we hear across
6 Canada, everywhere. Everywhere. And more and more also
7 with the Indigenous police. Some province, Quebec, Ontario
8 and other places, we have Indigenous police and families
9 are telling us that trust need to be built also with every
10 police force.

11 So I totally am -- I say that I receive very
12 well your -- that recommendation. The institutions and the
13 police needs to make sure that they share the information
14 that they're able to share, of course, to the -- the
15 families and the people affected by somebody who
16 disappeared or got killed.

17 We have also in this mandate, a place where
18 we have to recommend how do we commemorate our stolen
19 sisters, our missing loved one. And you mention about the
20 cross over there and also in your community, so I don't
21 know when and how you're going to do that, but if you can
22 let us know or let me know and if we can be there that day
23 or walk beside you that day or light a candle from my
24 community when you do it, it would be important for me,
25 very important.

1 And we -- we have also the -- the
2 responsibility to make sure that what you share to us, it's
3 to make sure that your sister is not forgotten. It's not
4 forgot. So I say, thank you.

5 And it's unbelievable we didn't -- that they
6 didn't do an investigation or a search, so, of course, I'll
7 be questioning. I'll ask *Maitre* Big Canoe to help me to
8 understand what happened there because our women matter.
9 Your sister matter [sic], so *merci beaucoup*.

10 And thank you for your patient [sic]. I saw
11 you early this morning and every people who came here, we
12 said to them, Take the time you need and -- knowing that
13 other families will come or will be waiting to come and
14 share their truth, so but I was always making sure that you
15 were okay, even if I didn't know your truth, but I cared,
16 so I apologize, but you understand that it was very
17 important for all the families to take their time and same
18 for you. It was very important for us to respect the way
19 you want to share it and how much time you needed. So
20 thank you so much.

21 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Speaking in
22 Anishinaabe). Thank you for your story. I know it's very
23 hard. Your story is very special, your story is very
24 sacred. And we'll keep your story in our hearts and we
25 will think of you.

1 And when you were talking about being taken
2 away, you know, you were robbed and you were just a little
3 girl and that's not right. And it's still happening today
4 in our society. CFS robbing our children and our
5 grandchildren and that's not right. You were robbed with
6 your sister and your mom and your granny and your siblings
7 and I hope, you know, there will be a day that you'll be
8 together with your siblings, so you could express to each
9 other. You know, you'll miss that togetherness when you
10 were a little girls and little boys.

11 But there was always somebody taking care of
12 you and that's our higher power, our Creator was always
13 there. And that you're thankful for -- for your spiritual
14 helper that's sitting with you when your husband is always
15 there supporting you. And I just want to say, thank you
16 very much for your story and I love you.

17 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** That just reminded
18 me of one thing because we didn't introduce the -- everyone
19 who's sitting here in support and I know it's important for
20 Rita to introduce and thank them. So do you want me to
21 introduce them or do you want to introduce them?

22 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** (Indiscernible).

23 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. So obviously,
24 we already heard from Debra, as she did the opening prayer,
25 but sitting beside Debra is Annie Soolyer (ph) who's Rita's

1 cousin, and she was sitting in support. And we also have
2 Grandmother Elma (ph) behind us, as well as Carol Wood
3 (ph). And earlier Hilda was sitting -- and I know that you
4 just want to take a chance to quickly thank them.

5 **MS. RITA THOMAS:** Yeah, I just want to thank
6 you, Debbie, for coming. And my sister, Annie, taking the
7 time to come here with me. Thank you, Carol. And thank
8 God for Carol. She's always there even -- even -- I don't
9 even have to ask her, she's always there. And I thank
10 Dorothy for coming.

11 And Hilda, I just really, really want to
12 thank Hilda. Sometimes I just want to forget about missing
13 and murdered, but if it weren't for Hilda, I wouldn't be
14 here. She's been working on this for a long time and I'm
15 just so grateful that somebody in my community is working
16 for our women and our girls. Thank you, Hilda.

17 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** That's wonderful.

18 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Speaking in
19 Anishinaabe). Okay, I'll -- I'll talk English. I am of
20 the N dialect and you're the TH dialect. I'm forgetting.
21 It's -- I thank you for sharing your story.

22 And -- and my work is in the Indian
23 Residential School Programming. As you were telling your
24 story, it reminded me of -- it almost -- it reminds me of
25 Indian Residential School all over again. And that's what

1 a lot of people say that when they take away their
2 children, and it's an honour to hear you say the children
3 should remain in the community. It's so true.

4 And -- and, then, also and what you had said
5 about that they needed to have -- the parents need to have
6 skills. I thank you for the knowledge that you carry and
7 you're sharing with others.

8 Maybe the government -- you know, this will
9 go back. They'll hear, everybody will hear. I thank you.
10 (Speaking in Anishinaabe).

11 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** *Merci, Maitre*
12 *Big Canoe. Pouvez-vous expliquer les plumes s'il-vous*
13 *plaît? Merci.*

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So the Commissioner
15 would like to give you a gift, if you would like to accept
16 it. What she has is actually eagle feathers and the eagle
17 feathers -- the eagle feathers come -- it originally
18 started with some Matriarchs in Haida Gwaii and so some of
19 these grandmothers came together and thought, We'll collect
20 eagle feathers for anyone who is using their courage to
21 tell their story and what ended up happening is it, kind
22 of, spread almost like wildfire across the country. Other
23 communities started making donations as well.

24 Even people sometimes would even take apart
25 some of their regalia. Like, in Thunder Bay there was one

1 story where a young man took apart his bustle, so that they
2 could give feathers to any of the family members.

3 The -- really behind it is this -- you know,
4 a gift from one community reaching out to support other
5 people and so from human to human. And, you know, from
6 cultural perspective, eagles are important to us, but they
7 come from creation. They come from Creator, Jesus, God,
8 whoever you're -- you're thinking of there. One of the
9 Creators amazing animals and so it would be an honour if
10 you let us gift you one of those each.

11 And, I believe, there's also some seeds.
12 The seeds, the idea is -- behind the seeds is to plant
13 something new, some new growth, some new life and it's just
14 a small gift, so that you have an opportunity to try to
15 grow something new. And I know that if you end up doing it
16 and you grow something, if you send us a picture, we'd
17 really like that.

18 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** I'm adding
19 Labrador tea.

20 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Ah, Labradorean tea.

21 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Yes, Labrador
22 tea.

23 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So Michèle, as she
24 just explained, was born in Labrador, so she wants to give
25 you some Labradorean tea as well.

1 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: I don't have
2 green running shoes on, but --

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Speaking in Native
4 language).

5 --- Upon adjourning at 7:33 p.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Connie Sturtz, 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.



Connie Sturtz

May 11, 2018