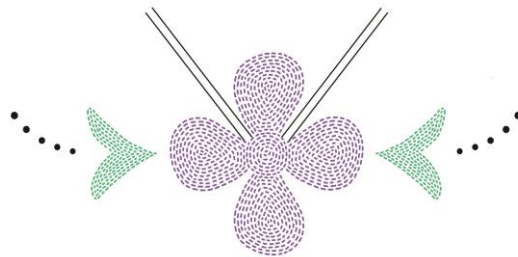


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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 I Statement Gathering
Alt Hotel
Winnipeg, Manitoba**



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Statement - Volume 57

Rachel Elders, In relation to Roberta Elders

Statement gathered by Frank Hope

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NOTE

Redactions to this public transcript have been made pursuant to Rule 55 of the Commission's *Legal Path: Rules of Respectful Practice*, which provides for "the discretion to redact private information of a sensitive nature where it is not material to the evidence to be given before distributing the information to the Parties. The National Inquiry will consider the public interest in releasing this type of information against the potential harmful impact on the individual whose personal information is at issue."

1 Winnipeg, Manitoba

2 --- Upon commencing on Friday, October 20, 2017 at 12:10

3 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** My name is Frank Hope,
4 statement gatherer. Today is October 20, 2017, we are in
5 Winnipeg, Manitoba, at the Radisson Hotel, room 1504, and
6 the statement provider is in the room, and your name is?

7 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Rachel Elders.

8 **UNKNOWN MALE:** (Indiscernible).

9 **MS. BROOKLYN ORCHARD:** Brooklyn Orchard
10 (ph).

11 **MS. CAITLIN HENDRICKSON:** Caitlin
12 Hendrickson.

13 **MS. BELINDA LACOMBE:** Belinda Lacombe (ph).

14 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Okay, and Belinda is the
15 health support today. Okay, thank you. And let's begin
16 with -- by asking what brings you in today and what would
17 you like the Commissioners to hear?

18 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** What brings me in today
19 is the issue that some time ago, my sister happened to be
20 murdered and the Commission has drawn attention to a number
21 of these cases over the past few years, and I just wanted
22 to be able to provide some context about her, her life and
23 what she meant to us as a part of our family.

24 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Tell me more about that.

1 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** About that, okay. I
2 have prepared some words to say if that's okay?

3 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

4 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** And I just want to
5 preface it by -- this morning at my work, I was involved in
6 a sharing circle where they, the Elder was talking about
7 teachings, and where they come from, and what they mean,
8 and the ones he provided to me were that the Creator is
9 with us, and we're all meant to go forward. And that spoke
10 to me because -- I'm sorry, I don't want to cry.

11 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** No, that's fine.

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** But, I just ---

13 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** That's fine.

14 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** But, for the last, I
15 think, almost 20 years, that has -- what our family has
16 been trying to do, and a result is that we have decided,
17 for the most part, to do that independent of each other.

18 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

19 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, the tragedy of it is
20 that without talking about it, we're not able to go forward
21 in a whole, in a whole way, and my hope -- I'm sorry.

22 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** No, that's fine.

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I'll get it right in a
24 minute.

25 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Take your time. Take your

1 time.

2 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** My hope is if I open the
3 door, it will really allow each of us to actually embrace
4 it, and heal from it, finally, and prevent it from touching
5 our family further, and that we'll be able to reach each
6 other to actually prevent it from happening from the exact
7 thing where my sister was -- her life was taken, where none
8 of my other sisters will fall into that risk again because
9 our family will be stronger by having some truth out there.
10 So, that's what I wanted to say.

11 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** First of all, that's
13 what I -- what I gathered from the participation in my work
14 sharing circle this morning. They choose the Elder. I
15 felt that's what he wanted to bring. So, I'm grateful for
16 that.

17 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

18 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Okay. So, what I wanted
19 to say, and I've prepared this over the last few days, and
20 I've prepared this in conjunction with this piece of work
21 behind me.

22 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Just to represent our
24 family and our family -- our whole family, not just me and
25 my support family, but my sisters, my mother, my father and

1 all of Roberta's sons and all of Roberta's grandchildren,
2 and that was where I want to start.

3 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Okay.

4 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, I have a quote here
5 and it's one that spoke to me about truth and reason. So,
6 it says, it starts off, "For what does reason purport to
7 do? Establish what is true, eliminate what is false and
8 suspend judgment in doubtful cases. What else does reason
9 purport -- prescribe? It prescribes to accept the
10 consequence of what has been admitted to be correct." And
11 that's where I want to start because it speaks about truth
12 and reason and consequence, because that's where we all
13 live. And I want to make sure that I say this ---

14 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

15 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- that I wanted to
16 make this statement not for me but for -- only for Roberta,
17 because she was the victim, and we all suffer as a result
18 of that. That she was not able to speak for herself at the
19 time when this story about murdered and missing women
20 became a national pandemic, and her story was put forward
21 as a cautionary tale, a risqué kind of tale that didn't
22 actually represent her as a person. And so, I wanted to
23 just provide some context about her as a person in her
24 life, in our life and it's not about me being able to sit
25 here and grieve about it, but it's about me being able to

1 sit here and admit that I chose life over the pursuit of
2 justice, because justice meant shackling myself to a sad,
3 sad story. And this is how my family has dealt with that.

4 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

5 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Is that choosing life
6 means forgetting about justice, and that's part of the
7 system that we live with. And so, I just want to make sure
8 I said that.

9 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

10 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Okay. Sorry about that.

11 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, what do I want you
13 to know? I am not out for payment because that is not mine
14 to claim, and I am not here for notoriety because I can
15 live without that. I am not here to make a public display
16 of grief and pain because I chose to follow the example of
17 my family in stoicism and acceptance. The sure knowledge
18 that to allow grief and pain to rule, to rule me, is surely
19 inviting those feelings to overwhelm me. Instead, I choose
20 life.

21 I'm here to acknowledge the truth of what
22 happened and I'm here to acknowledge the truth of my
23 sister's existence and the truth of her death, because even
24 though I am not overwrought by grief and pain most days, it
25 does exist, and I know it exists in my extended family.

1 Until I put it down I will never be able to know that I
2 have also decided to accept healing.

3 I wanted to make this statement because I
4 know that no one else in my family has ever spoken up about
5 it, and I know no one else in my family will want to speak
6 up about it. But, I know and I believe that somebody has
7 to, to open the door so our whole family might draw the
8 life-giving breath of her spirit so that she can finally
9 know what we did and do carry on love in our life, and life
10 buried in memory of her, of our mother and our father that
11 we all knew.

12 The next few paragraphs, I will probably
13 have trouble with because I'm going to describe the event
14 and in context that I know. It's not of her actual
15 passing, but how we came to know about it.

16 That terrible day, my cousin, who was an
17 RCMP officer, called me at my home and told me my sister
18 was dead and it was suspected there was foul play and ---

19 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** What was the date?

20 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Pardon me?

21 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** What are the dates?

22 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** The date? I can't
23 remember. It was 2000. January 31, 2000.

24 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Okay.

25 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I believe it was 2000.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Yeah, yeah, it was 2000.

2 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, it was suspected
3 there was foul play. My first reaction to my cousin was,
4 "Have you told my mother?" My next reaction was, "How do I
5 get home? Now." What followed was a horrible week of
6 watching my mother try to bring her most damaged baby home,
7 and gathered together all of her bits of her life so that
8 she might be comforted on her final visit home.

9 My mother -- my mother contacted the social
10 workers in British Columbia so that she might have the
11 three sons that lived in British Columbia come back to
12 Ontario for their mother's funeral, and for the first and
13 final time, all five of Roberta's sons were together. That
14 horrible week was only made worst since there were delays
15 and expenses and miscommunications between our family and
16 the RCMP in British Columbia, and that put off the final
17 ceremony of her life for at least seven days, if not more.

18 So, it was a horrible, horrible, cruel week
19 of not knowing when we would finally be able to put her to
20 rest. While all this is true, it does no justice to
21 express only those things that describe the circumstances
22 that convey the level of visible pain we have suffered.
23 What's more relevant is that as systemically impoverished
24 people that our family was, we accepted the fact that there
25 would be, ultimately, no official justice in our sister's

1 case.

2 It did not -- it did not even cross our
3 minds to pursue it or protest it. We steeled ourselves
4 against knowing that we would never merit the additional
5 effort required to find justice for our sister,
6 indoctrinated as we were to understand the risks of her
7 life, however it turned out to be. Feeling ultimately
8 guilty and culpable for her state as much as any murderer
9 might, we, her family, loved her, and we could not prevent
10 this. In my estimation, that is probably the worst
11 injustice because we didn't feel empowered to push that, to
12 ask for the closure required in a case like that.

13 So, not only did I want to speak about my
14 family's connection to this national problem, I did also
15 want to tell you about my older, beautiful sister. This is
16 the sister that nobody knows because the only public
17 exposure that she's gotten to date is that ugly, awful
18 story on the CBC website.

19 She was born on September 26, 1961. Her
20 name was Roberta Jean Crow and, later, she was known as
21 Roberta Jean Elders. She was the first daughter of Mary
22 Elders and the oldest of five daughters that Bob and Mary
23 raised.

24 Roberta was curious and gregarious. She
25 made friends quickly and enjoyed the fact that we lived in

1 the middle of the action at vacation resorts, teeming with
2 children and families. Because of her ease in social
3 situations, she was attracted to the hustle and bustle of
4 town life, and once she became familiar with it, she longed
5 for it and all her social connections, which in time became
6 her primary motivation.

7 In the meantime, my mother, though busy, did
8 influence us all in one way or another, and in Roberta, she
9 nurtured Roberta's talent for art. And though Roberta
10 never pursued it, she had enough talent to become a
11 successful artist, or designer, or graphics artist, and you
12 could see it in the works that she did produce. And it is
13 a gift that she never -- that she left un-nurtured, though
14 it was a place where she sought comfort in times of need.

15 Over the course of her life, Roberta became
16 a mother, and she was the mother to five sons. And, I know
17 that even in her darkest days, she longed to be an old
18 woman with her strapping sons at her side. As a result of
19 her death -- a result of her death was the saddest day when
20 her wish was finally fulfilled as each of her sons did
21 finally stand at her side, and they placed a wish for her
22 peace at last. It is nearly 20 years since she passed, and
23 I am here to report that the sad legacy is now a joyful
24 legacy as her biological grandchildren are in the world
25 today.

1 Her oldest son has three children, one --
2 her oldest grandchildren began university this year and her
3 -- probably her youngest grandchild is a baby girl who is 3
4 this year.

5 Her second son has two beautiful children,
6 beautiful little girls, and her fourth son has one young
7 son as well. Unfortunately, her third born son passed away
8 in 2011 due to autoimmune disease complications, and I'm
9 sad to report that her youngest son has not been in touch
10 with the family since the funeral, though I believe that he
11 is -- in his own right, he may be a father as well, since
12 they're all in their 20s at this time.

13 The names of her sons are [Son 1, Son 2, Son
14 3, Son 4 and Son 5]. And this fact -- and this is a fact,
15 and I want that to be known that these families, these five
16 families will live on forever in the dim light of her life.
17 This kind of legacy is not one to celebrate but to heal,
18 that some day they might reach through the time and
19 distance and know that whatever her shortcomings, she
20 longed, on a daily basis, to let them know that they were
21 her reason for living, that she tried to fight through
22 whatever plagued her, and she wanted to have a life with
23 them, and love them as any other mother would.

24 I'm here to make known that she was not just
25 a tragic story on the six o'clock news, that there are four

1 sisters here who love her. Through every battle she has
2 ever fought, that her mother and father wept for her and
3 that there are many people here at this time who also
4 grieve and know her as "Buttons", and appreciate her
5 caring, gregarious spirit and wish her peace at last. Even
6 though our peace might not -- might be at the end of a long
7 drawn out injustice, there may be hope only in the fact
8 that the men she has brought forward as her sons will go on
9 and live their lives. This will be in the statement here.

10 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

11 **MS. FREDA CAMPBELL:** Day after day, you re-
12 live the truth, your own guilt, and fear persists. Day
13 after day, you die.

14 I feel the total judgment of those people
15 who really don't know. It is every part of me. I'm
16 speaking with my family right now. It is every part of me.
17 It is every (indiscernible) it becomes me and the things I
18 do can't understand the fact that I cannot stop and grieve
19 because where do I stop? I just have to keep going. Where
20 are you really supposed -- what are you really supposed to
21 do? What is the real solution to it? I will be gone
22 before it's resolved, and the truth and justice will become
23 a moot point. You, you, you, we, I, me, there will be no
24 end when there is no acknowledgement of this justice
25 denied. And, that is my statement. Thank you.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** I have just a few follow up
2 questions I'd like to ask.

3 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Yes.

4 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** I want to say, first, thank
5 you for sharing that. So, just going back to when you
6 received that call from your cousin.

7 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Yes.

8 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** The RCMP, right?

9 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Yes.

10 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Were you advised and
11 informed of what happened? What happened and the cause?

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** No.

13 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** No.

14 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Not me personally. She
15 may have informed specifics to my mother, but I'm not
16 inclined to add the detail that they provided at that time.

17 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

18 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** There was more details
19 in the Times Colonist, and it was gruesome, graphic detail.

20 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. So, from the time
21 that she passed till you received the phone call, what was
22 the time span?

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I think it was almost 24
24 hours.

25 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Yeah? So, you were called

1 very, very soon, like, after?

2 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: I believe so, but I'm
3 not -- I'm not exactly sure on that point.

4 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay.

5 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: So...

6 MR. FRANK HOPE: So, was there a main
7 contact in your family that was receiving this information?

8 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: It would have been my
9 mother.

10 MR. FRANK HOPE: Your mother? So, your
11 mother was receiving all this information?

12 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: Yeah.

13 MR. FRANK HOPE: And so, does it remain an
14 open case, the investigation into her death?

15 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: Yeah, I'm not sure that
16 it's being investigated, but it's open.

17 MR. FRANK HOPE: Have you been -- has there
18 been a contact person within the ---

19 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: No.

20 MR. FRANK HOPE: No contact person in the
21 investigation?

22 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: It was very quickly
23 dropped as soon as it was -- as soon as her body left the
24 province. It was never -- and if there was a main contact,
25 it was probably one of her associates.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

2 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** She at the time lived in
3 Victoria, but she had been living in the lower mainland, in
4 East Vancouver, and Victoria, in the south Vancouver Island
5 region.

6 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

7 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, anybody who she
8 might have known in those areas may have been the primary
9 contact, but that person did not know us.

10 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** So, how do you think it
11 could have been handled in regards to that?

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** What do you mean?

13 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** With the RCMP and your
14 family. How do you think that could have been handled?

15 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Probably, maybe, they
16 could have an advocate for families in that situation,
17 someone who's, like, okay, these are -- this is pertinent
18 information for the families to know, how -- and actually
19 express what kind of communication plan they're going to
20 establish, and make that an extended plan because in a case
21 where it's unsolved, there's absolutely no communication
22 with the family at all, you know?

23 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** And in terms of support,
24 too?

25 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** There is no support

1 given, aside from the fact that -- I don't know. Maybe
2 thank God it was fortunate that my cousin happened to be an
3 RCMP officer at the time herself, and could establish
4 communication, but that's not her primary job to do that.
5 She's also a regular RCMP officer and she was stationed, at
6 the time, in Kenora. So, she just happened to be local and
7 be appointed to tell her cousins that one of their sisters
8 is dead.

9 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

10 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, it just -- it must
11 have been fortunate for them that my cousin worked there.
12 It wasn't -- there was never any follow up with that and no
13 clear understanding of what kind of communication plan
14 would be set up. If they were going to allow the case to
15 go cold, they didn't inform us. If they were going to
16 pursue leads and follow ups, they didn't inform us.
17 Although my sister, who lives in Victoria still, quite
18 wisely said that, you know, they're not -- it's not their
19 priority to keep us informed because we're so far away, but
20 that they're working leads that might be just in Victoria.
21 But, to not have any information come out of British
22 Columbia since that time is quite unfortunate.

23 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. Did the family
24 receive a coroner's report?

25 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I don't think so.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** No?

2 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** But, like I said, the
3 main contact probably was not our family; it was probably
4 one of her associates in Victoria with no idea that she
5 ever had extended family.

6 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Okay.

7 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Which is the report
8 that's filed in the CBC website. It doesn't even allude to
9 the fact she was born outside of British Columbia.

10 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

11 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** It just says that she
12 lived in British Columbia.

13 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

14 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** And that's not a truth.
15 It's -- it just denies she existed before she lived in
16 Victoria.

17 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

18 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, it's unfortunate
19 that their main contact was someone who was unreliable for
20 specific information about her, and someone who wouldn't
21 necessarily care 20 years later.

22 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know, so...

24 **MS. CAITLIN HENDRICKSON:** Sorry, do you mind
25 if I just add as well? Sorry, just for the record, it's

1 Caitlin Hendrickson. I'm Rachel's niece. In regards to
2 the CBC publishing that awful profile, my mother, [Mother],
3 emailed the CBC to say that there was gross inaccuracies
4 about this. They never responded to her and then I
5 personally emailed them as well, and I explained to them
6 that this is unacceptable that you would disregard
7 everything about her that makes her who she is.

8 It was dehumanizing, disrespectful and they
9 wouldn't tell me who gave them that information, but they
10 did respond to me saying they wanted to correct it and they
11 wanted to make it right, and I said I'm not the person to
12 talk to. You need to talk to her sisters, and I gave them
13 my mother's contact information, saying she had tried to
14 contact them, and they never did anything about it. That
15 profile, I printed it today, and it still says word for
16 word exactly what they published three years ago. And,
17 that's all I want to say about that.

18 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Thank you. If I could ask,
19 growing up, your sister was the oldest.

20 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Yes.

21 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** And so, growing up as young
22 children, can you describe how life was, growing up with
23 her and what type of sister she was, and if she experienced
24 any discrimination or racism in school or -- you know, as
25 she's growing up and kind of get a picture of ---

1 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Right.

2 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** --- her growing up.

3 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Growing up, we lived in
4 a little town called Sioux Narrows, and we were part of the
5 community at large. We were not part of an Indigenous
6 community; we were just part of the regular community in
7 the town. I -- she was -- she always seemed much older to
8 me. Like, I was, like, the middle child, and as a young
9 person, as a young sister, I just remember her seeming all
10 so much older than me, so much wiser, having all the
11 answers.

12 She was someone who we could count on. The
13 careers that my parents had meant that they worked in the
14 summer. And so, every summer, she was kind of like our
15 babysitter for the most part, you know, until we all got
16 old enough. We didn't need a caregiver. But she was --
17 she was the one who was responsible for us. She nurtured
18 us and cared for us and that's who she was.

19 So -- but it -- I don't think that -- I
20 don't think discrimination was necessarily a part of her
21 upbringing, unless it was very subtle. I mean, we all went
22 to the same school as every other child in town, whereas
23 there was -- there was a school separate for the children
24 who lived on reserve, but that wasn't -- that wasn't us.
25 But, it didn't matter to the rest of the community that we

1 were part of the regular public school. And as far as I
2 know, she didn't mention that or didn't feel discriminated
3 against.

4 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

5 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** But, she also had --
6 like I said, she was gregarious and social, curious, and
7 she made friends very easily. So, that -- even if she'd
8 been rebuffed by someone who was hesitant to make friends
9 with Native kids, she would have overpowered them with her
10 personality, eventually.

11 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, it didn't matter to
13 her. I think you'll see that in her sons. So, as I
14 remember them and as I know them, that's how they are, that
15 they have her social skills of making friends and for being
16 part of the community.

17 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

18 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, as far as a young
19 person, she was really caring, gregarious, social and
20 really kind of like the life of the party kind of person
21 and [Partner of Witness] knew her that way as well, so...

22 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, it was -- yeah. And
24 that's how I think everybody who was part of -- part of
25 Sioux Narrows remembers her.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

2 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** It's really unfortunate
3 to say but it was -- everybody -- I think everybody in
4 Sioux Narrows actually came to the funeral. It was huge.
5 It's just -- that's an awful thing to remember but I was
6 just happy that they felt -- they felt the need to come see
7 her off.

8 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. Tell me about her
9 teenage years.

10 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Her teenage years?

11 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Yes.

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** She was -- well, I guess
13 you could say if her elementary school years were fun, then
14 her teenage years were even more fun because she -- she was
15 really -- the way she lived her life was just like out
16 there and social, and she just wanted to be in the middle,
17 in the centre of it all which, you know, was her lifestyle.
18 She made friends easily and she -- she would often stay at
19 friends' houses. Like, we lived in Sioux Narrows which is,
20 at the time when she was in high school, required a bus
21 ride of about an hour to get to school. So, there was --
22 there was the long bus ride home and the long bus ride to
23 school.

24 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

25 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** But often times, she

1 would -- she made friends close enough that she would just
2 stay at their homes and she became part of, you know, like
3 part of their family and part of, you know, the families
4 whose, whose -- whichever friend she was staying with, she
5 never let it inhibit her from being friendly with their
6 whole extended family, and I just know that's how she was.
7 She had several families where she would say, "I'm staying
8 at Suzie's house," or I'm staying at (indiscernible).
9 Norma. You know, so she would stay at their homes for part
10 of the school week so that she could avoid having to do
11 that bus ride.

12 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

13 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** But, it also allowed her
14 to maintain her social connections throughout the week.

15 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. Was she into
16 sports?

17 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** No, she was into
18 snagging.

19 So, yeah. No. Like I said, she was very
20 social and that's -- she wanted to maintain that social
21 thread throughout her -- throughout her life, and that's
22 how she -- how she lived.

23 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Did she finish her
24 education there?

25 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I know she went to grade

1 10.

2 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

3 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: So, she -- that's where
4 she finished, grade 10 or grade 11. She didn't, like,
5 finish high school-high school, but she did go until she
6 was 17.

7 MR. FRANK HOPE: And then what happened?

8 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: And then that's when she
9 had her first son, and her oldest son was born when she was
10 17 or 18, and he was born in December 1979.

11 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

12 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: I believe that's right.
13 He'll correct me, but that was her first son was born then.

14 MR. FRANK HOPE: And that was a big life
15 change for her.

16 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: It was. It was very
17 much.

18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Do you remember that?

19 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: Yeah. Yeah. She -- at
20 the time, she was -- lived at home for some time, and her
21 and her boyfriend tried to -- tried to live together. But,
22 being that they were both so young, it was difficult for
23 them to maintain any stability at that time. And so, they
24 kind of went back and forth between his parents' house, my
25 parents' house, on their own, for a couple years. That's -

1 - that's kind of what her lifestyle was like.

2 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

3 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: With their son and
4 trying to provide stability for their youngster at the
5 time.

6 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

7 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: I believe it was when
8 they -- when they finally decided to part ways, she
9 happened to be pregnant at that time with her second son,
10 and my mother -- my mother, I don't want to say took
11 custody, but we took care of the oldest son in our home ---

12 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

13 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: --- at that time, and it
14 was decided that her second son would be adopted.

15 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

16 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: But, he was adopted by
17 our family member.

18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

19 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: So, they maintained
20 close ties with the youngster, all -- all their lives, and
21 the boys actually know that they are brothers.

22 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

23 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: So, they grew up close
24 together.

25 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

1 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: So...

2 MR. FRANK HOPE: And what about the three
3 following boys?

4 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: The other three boys?

5 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah, yeah.

6 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: They were born after she
7 moved to British Columbia.

8 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. And, how old was she
9 when she moved?

10 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: I believe she was, like,
11 maybe 22; 22, something like that. She was already --
12 well, [Son 1] would have been 17, 18. [Son 2] is maybe 19,
13 20, and then her older boys would have been after the age
14 of 21, I think, so...

15 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

16 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: So, then, two of her
17 boys were born with her and her partner; [Name of son, but
18 unclear in transcript] and (indiscernible) were born in
19 [Town 1], I think it was. Or [Town 2]. They lived on
20 Vancouver Island and that was kind of their lifestyle.
21 They lived doing fishing boats and stuff like that, so.
22 And I know one of the young boys actually worked with his
23 dad on boats as well, so.

24 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm. So, how -- once
25 your sister moved to B.C., how was the relationship with

1 the rest of the siblings and mom and dad?

2 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** It was -- well, mom and
3 dad actually maintained a close relationship with her ---

4 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

5 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- and well because I
6 think we were all teenagers at the time, I was very -- you
7 know, it's how sporadic teenagers are. You know, we might
8 phone her, or we might write her a letter. I know that two
9 of my sisters went, actually, out to live with her, you
10 know, for a short time, short periods of time. I think my
11 oldest -- older sister was there for two years, and then my
12 younger sister was there for two years. So, you know, off
13 and on throughout. It wasn't like we abandoned her or
14 anything.

15 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

16 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** It was, you know, it's
17 distance. It's time and distance, and being that we're not
18 made of money, it was just one of those things you had to
19 manage, however you could manage it.

20 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

21 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know? I know that
22 several times my mother made arrangements with her brother,
23 so our uncle, to go to British Columbia and visit, and she
24 did that three of four times ---

25 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

1 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- where they would
2 drive out there with my uncle, and she took my youngest
3 sister and the baby sister, and [Son 1], and I believe [Son
4 2], to go and visit.

5 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

6 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know, and that was
7 just because my mother wanted to go and visit.

8 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

9 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, my mother made these
10 arrangements several times for trips like that to -- just
11 to go and visit because she knew she had grandchildren out
12 there that she wanted to get to know, and she knew that she
13 wanted to maintain contact with Roberta, and there was
14 always concern and caring. There was never any point in
15 time where we didn't care for her ---

16 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

17 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- you know, and that's
18 one of the things, you know, that is totally lost in any
19 kind of context, in anything that's been published ---

20 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

21 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- about her, so. And,
22 that's one thing that I really -- like, she might have put
23 in her own drama about her relationship with our family,
24 but that was never the case really.

25 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

1 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know, she knew that
2 she could count on us because when I lived in Victoria, she
3 would visit me and we would just go -- she would just come
4 and visit, like have coffee and I would go and visit her.

5 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

6 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know, it was a
7 normal relationship. It wasn't like strained in any way
8 because there was problems.

9 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

10 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** It was a normal family
11 relationship. I mean, I don't know, how are you with your
12 sister? Do you go and, you know? how much support do you
13 require in a -- you know? You just have a normal
14 relationship. It's not extraordinary in any way except for
15 that it is your sister.

16 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

17 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So.

18 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** So, you mentioned mom and
19 dad. What did they do when you guys were growing up?

20 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** My mother was what they
21 call the cabin girl. They go into the cabins and clean
22 them, like a chambermaid ---

23 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

24 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- in a hotel, but
25 because it was a vacation resort ---

1 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay.

2 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: --- there was things
3 that -- instead of being a hotel, being in contiguous
4 units, they got separate independent units, and they lived
5 and maintained the cottages.

6 MR. FRANK HOPE: So, you said it's sort of a
7 seasonal, seasonal work?

8 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: Yeah. And, my dad was a
9 guide. A fishing guide.

10 MR. FRANK HOPE: Fishing guide?

11 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: Yeah.

12 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. Whereabouts?

13 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: In Sioux Narrows,
14 Ontario.

15 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay.

16 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: And in -- I think there
17 was three or four different resorts they worked for. When
18 Roberta was young, we lived on the resort, a sportsman
19 resort, and we lived in one of the cottages.

20 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

21 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: And that was year round
22 we lived on the resort.

23 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

24 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: In the summer it was,
25 like I said, children and families all over the place, and

1 we'd have friends literally all over the States ---

2 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

3 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- because of that, and
4 we have friends who are -- you know, who really, really
5 mattered to Roberta, who really, really mattered to us, who
6 really cared for our family as family, you know. It wasn't
7 just the flitting people, because these people came year
8 after year to the same cottage, to the same camp, to the
9 same resort, and we got to know them, and we got to grow up
10 with them, and they got, you know, we got to see them grow
11 up.

12 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

13 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know, so it was a
14 very interesting -- interesting childhood.

15 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

16 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** And then, you know,
17 that's how -- that's how she grew up with that, you know.
18 So, being social was a natural part of her life and making
19 friends.

20 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. Were your parents
21 impacted -- your parents, your grandparents impacted by
22 residential school?

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Yes.

24 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Yeah?

25 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Yeah.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** They -- both your parents
2 went?

3 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** My mother went and she
4 went to Cecilia Jeffrey, and she -- I think she went to the
5 school when she was just over 4 years old. She's not quite
6 5 years old. And, she didn't come out of the school until
7 she was 16, but she never ever did go home. Like, she
8 didn't go home until she was 16 because there was no place
9 to go in the summers or anything like that. She would --
10 they were one of the few families that stayed at the
11 residential school kind of full time. But, that was her
12 and probably at least six or seven of her brothers and
13 sisters had that impact their lives as well.

14 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Yes.

15 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So.

16 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Did she ever share that
17 with you?

18 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Very slightly. Like,
19 you know, growing up, we did ask about it, and we did
20 inquire about it because it was so strange and interesting
21 to have this kind of thing, but she didn't actually talk
22 about whether it was tragic or not.

23 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

24 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** She said there was
25 instances when she was afraid but that was just, I mean,

1 organizational afraidness, you know? Like, you're in
2 school with no parents.

3 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

4 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You're in school where
5 you're not necessarily supported at all times by your
6 siblings because, well, they have their own -- like,
7 because of the way it was, you were really segregated by
8 age.

9 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm, yeah.

10 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** If you didn't make
11 friends close in your age group, you know, you couldn't
12 really rely on your brothers to help you because they
13 weren't there; they were in a different part of the school.

14 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

15 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You couldn't rely on
16 your sisters to help you because they were in a different
17 age group.

18 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

19 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, you know, my mother
20 learned that independence ---

21 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

22 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- very close -- very
23 young -- very well, and she learned discipline, and she
24 learned -- she learned what she wanted to be, actually, as
25 a parent.

1 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

2 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: You know, because she
3 brought a great level of caring to being a parent.

4 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

5 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: As opposed to what she
6 learned maybe at the school.

7 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm. You think that
8 impacted her family in any way in regards to her
9 experiences?

10 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: I'm going to say yes
11 because it's quite evident and, actually, if you look at
12 how all her siblings grew up, every -- like, what happened
13 in our family when this tragedy with my sister appeared was
14 we didn't come together. We went apart, and that's my
15 mother's family. Like they're -- like -- like, they're not
16 close, close. Like, they know each other but they're not
17 super close.

18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

19 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: You know? So, I think
20 definitely, you know, that's how just they deal with stuff,
21 "I'm going to do it on my own."

22 MR. FRANK HOPE: Were there issues of
23 addictions?

24 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: In my immediate family?
25 No. Well, okay, in my aunt -- like, in my extended family

1 on my mother's side there may have been, but we weren't --
2 like I said, we weren't very close with any specific
3 family. And, the same thing on my father's side, you know.
4 Maybe one or two of my uncles or aunts or something that
5 had issues with alcohol, but in our -- in my immediate
6 family, like my mom and dad chose just -- just chose not to
7 let that be an issue.

8 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

9 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Like, before it became
10 an issue, they just stopped drinking.

11 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

12 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** They just, you know, it
13 just was never something that impacted our lives on a daily
14 basis. So, I think we were fortunate in that way.

15 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

16 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** When I look at how
17 Roberta might have dealt with her problems, yes, there was
18 an issue with addiction in that context.

19 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Well, when do you think
20 that started with her?

21 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** It would be in her 20s,
22 like, in her -- in her early 20s. So, after she had
23 already given up -- I won't say give up, given up her first
24 -- her first two sons to be cared for by someone else.

25 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

1 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I think she just might
2 have let her own uncertainty about her ability to parent
3 influence her choices.

4 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

5 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** And I believe that's all
6 it was, just her own uncertainty, because she always
7 expressed how much she really did love her children and
8 that she wanted to be able to look after them, and it was
9 just her inability to get the right kind of support to be
10 able to do that and her -- the lifestyle in that being
11 probably more precarious than my parents' lifestyle, like
12 seasonal ---

13 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

14 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** --- anything seasonal is
15 a precarious trait. Fishing boats on the west coast, you
16 know, where you might be gone at sea for three weeks or
17 four weeks and -- and not work the rest of the year.

18 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

19 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, it was -- her
20 lifestyle was pretty precarious at first when she was first
21 in British Columbia.

22 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** So, you know, couple
24 that with uncertainty in your ability to parent, of course
25 you're going to be -- provide an unstable environment at

1 times for your children, so.

2 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. Just slowly
3 wrapping it up, what do you think could have helped your
4 sister?

5 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Probably just support
6 in, like, recognizing when young people with children are
7 floundering, like intervening before their uncertainty
8 overwhelms them.

9 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

10 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** You know, like, I know
11 that that's probably going on today. Like, the foster care
12 system is overwhelmed with children who are abandoned
13 through -- people don't even know why, because they don't
14 know themselves well enough, and getting people help before
15 that happens where they're questioning every decision they
16 make would be probably -- you know, I don't even know how
17 to, how to put that into action because it's, it's huge and
18 I think it starts, like, okay, let's educate parents on how
19 to educate their children so that when their children have
20 children they can, you know, recognize themselves, you
21 know? I don't know.

22 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

23 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I have to point to my
24 partner here because we did get his children out of foster
25 care and we're still struggling ---

1 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

2 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: --- with issues---

3 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

4 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: --- and we're hoping to
5 change the cycle somehow.

6 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

7 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: But that's all we can do
8 is just hope because it's going to -- it takes a larger set
9 of tools and resources to help people regain the self-
10 confidence they need to face criticism.

11 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

12 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: Because not only are we
13 Native people, we're coupled with uncertainty, and the
14 decisions we make are coupled with uncertainty, and support
15 and the general public, like, it's just -- there's too many
16 things that layer onto an individual's ability to cope
17 sometimes.

18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

19 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: And unless you're given
20 a strong foundation, you're not going to be able to carry
21 all the things you need to when you're faced with a tough
22 situation.

23 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

24 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: You know, and that tough
25 situation might only just be, hey, do you want to go get a

1 beer? You know, sometimes that's the trigger ---

2 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

3 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: --- that will kill your
4 family.

5 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

6 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: You know, it's simple,
7 simple stuff and people don't know how to say, "that's not
8 good for me."

9 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

10 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: And recognizing what
11 those things are in your own person, in your own
12 individual, in your own, you know, in your own frailties
13 what those things are.

14 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

15 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: I don't think there's
16 enough people who are equipped to answer these questions
17 honestly.

18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

19 MS. RACHEL ELDERS: And it's how you answer
20 those questions honestly without feeling like a failure
21 because when you ask a young man today or you ask a young
22 person today some of those things, and if you have to
23 answer them, you know, like, if you're made to answer them
24 honestly, you feel like you've failed.

25 MR. FRANK HOPE: Mm-hmm.

1 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** And so, then, you're
2 putting yourself at risk, you know? It's changing the
3 framework of failure to the framework of learning.

4 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. I see. How would
5 you like your sister's memory honoured?

6 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I think I would like my
7 sister's memory honoured probably just in the fact that to
8 recognize that she's more than just that tragic story, the
9 cautionary tale that they put on the internet that, you
10 know, enter at your own risk kind of thing. Just chance
11 it. That's not an appropriate way to memorialize someone.
12 I mean, everybody is more than just an instant in time, you
13 know? It's like -- when I was -- when I was making this
14 piece of work here, it was meant to symbolize our whole
15 family.

16 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm.

17 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** Like, it's just our
18 whole family and this -- actually, this piece up here is
19 Roberta. So, this piece is Roberta, and these just
20 symbolize all the different pieces of our family. Our
21 family tree, how sparse and spread out it is, and this --
22 the synergy of my parents' family with Roberta's family is
23 in this and the simplicity of each of her sons and their
24 families because everything is simply mirrored through the
25 whole piece.

1 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Thank you. So, before I
2 conclude, is there any last comments you want to make in
3 regards to your statement?

4 **MS. RACHEL ELDERS:** I think I would just
5 like to thank my support people, and Caitlin, and yourself
6 for allowing me to provide this statement and just say that
7 I know that I don't want to be this story; I want it to be
8 about Roberta and I hope I provided that.

9 **MR. FRANK HOPE:** Mm-hmm. Thank you. So,
10 that concludes this statement. The start time was 12:10,
11 the end time is 1:22.

12 --- Upon adjourning at 13:22

13

14 LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

15

16 I, Shirley Chang, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I
17 have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and
18 accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this
19 matter.

20

21

22



23

Shirley Chang

24

March 8, 2018

25