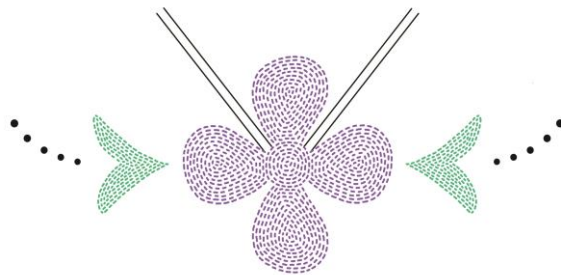


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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 Statement Gathering
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**



PUBLIC

Wednesday November 22, 2017

Statement - Volume 118

**Viola Weber,
In relation to her niece Linda Bighetty
Statement gathered by Francine Merasty,
Commission Counsel**

Coast Reporting Services Inc.

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Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

1

1 [NOVEMBER 22, 2017, 9:40 a.m.]

2 FRANCINE MERASTY: This is Francine Merasty with the

3 National Inquiry into missing and murdered

4 Indigenous women and girls speaking on the

5 record with ...

6 VIOLA WEBER: Viola Weber.

7 FRANCINE MERASTY: From ...

8 VIOLA WEBER: From Nelson House, Manitoba.

9 FRANCINE MERASTY: And she's travelled here from

10 Wilkie, Saskatchewan. We are here in Saskatoon,

11 Saskatchewan, and it's November 22, 2017. The

12 time is 9:40 a.m. Viola, you're here to

13 voluntarily give your statement in the matter of

14 Linda Bighetty, and present with us in the room

15 are ...

16 AMBER LINCHUK: Amber, RN. I'm from STC.

17 FRANCINE MERASTY: And your last name?

18 AMBER LINCHUK: Linchuk [phonetic].

19 LYNDA BANKLEY: And Lynda Bankley [phonetic] from

20 STC.

21 FRANCINE MERASTY: Your statement will be audio

22 recorded today, and you've -- and you have

23 allowed us to videotape your statement. Can you

24 please confirm that you agree with this.

25 VIOLA WEBER: Yes.

Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

2

1 FRANCINE MERASTY: So, Viola, what do you want to
2 share with the commissioners?

3 VIOLA WEBER: I want to share about my niece, Linda
4 Bighetty.

5 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

6 VIOLA WEBER: Well, that was my sister's daughter,
7 but her mother had died when she was only two
8 weeks old, so my mother raised her.

9 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

10 VIOLA WEBER: So she was partly -- well, my sister
11 and my niece, and I loved her very much. And
12 she has a sister that lives in Winnipeg, and she
13 has a brother that lives in Nelson House,
14 Manitoba. And she has two daughters. The name
15 of [K.L.] and Jenny Lay. I -- I raised two
16 girls.

17 I went to Grande Prairie, Alberta, to
18 testify against when that happened to Linda.
19 And I was in a courtroom, and I went to testify
20 to get custody of [K.L.] and Jenny. So I brought
21 them home to Thompson, Manitoba, and I raised
22 them.

23 It was hard but we managed, and we had
24 actually no help, no support from anybody but my
25 husband. And I worked. I worked for -- at the

1 school for 30 years, and my husband was a
2 Greyhound bus driver. So we managed, and plus
3 we had our children, our own children. We have
4 five children, one boy and four daughters.

5 One day, my daughter -- my daughter and I
6 went to Winnipeg because she was graduating. So
7 we went to Winnipeg to go shopping for her
8 graduation, to get prepared. And on our way
9 home, we were driving and we hit a bird. And it
10 splattered all over the car, and there was lots
11 of blood in it. And -- and I had this feeling,
12 like a lonely feeling, like -- I told my
13 daughter, I said, I feel so lonely, you know.
14 But I was told -- like, in my own culture, when
15 something like that happens, that means
16 something's going to happen in your family. So
17 I believe that. And the same night we heard
18 that Linda had died in Grande Prairie, Alberta.

19 So I went. A whole bunch of us went from
20 Nelson House, Manitoba. There was a chief and
21 counsellors and social workers, so we flew in a
22 little plane. And it was storming, and the
23 plane was going up and down like that, and --
24 but we made it from Thompson to Grande Prairie,
25 Alberta.

Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

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1 FRANCINE MERASTY: Oh, how long is that flight?

2 VIOLA WEBER: It is a very long flight, and we

3 actually had to stop at another town because of

4 the weather was bad; right?

5 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

6 VIOLA WEBER: So -- and then what happened was, I

7 guess I was just too frightened, like, you know.

8 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

9 VIOLA WEBER: I got up and then I jumped on this

10 guy's lap. But I knew him; right? And then

11 he -- so we went, and then I -- that's when I

12 was in court. And then I testified. Like, I

13 talked about my own culture and how it is to be

14 with a family. Like, it's so important to learn

15 your own culture and follow your own tradition

16 and that, eh?

17 FRANCINE MERASTY: So court? What do you mean by

18 "court"? Like, whose court --

19 VIOLA WEBER: Court. It was custody for the two

20 girls, for Jenny and [K.L.]. And, well, his

21 family was there too; right? They were ...

22 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

23 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah.

24 FRANCINE MERASTY: So what had happened to Linda?

25 VIOLA WEBER: She -- before she died actually, she

1 came to Thompson, Manitoba. And me and her, we
2 were really close; right? She told me, like,
3 everything that -- you know, how she felt and --
4 you know, because she was like a sister to me.
5 And I -- she told me about it. She said, I'm
6 not happy. What do you mean you're not happy?
7 Like, she said, I'm not happy with my
8 relationship, she said, eh? So I told her, I
9 said -- well, I said, you have your two girls.
10 Your two daughters are very special to you, I
11 said. You have to make sure that they're safe,
12 I said. So I told her, I said, go, get your
13 girls and do something about it. I said, maybe
14 you get some support in Alberta. Or you can
15 always come back home, I said. Like, you know,
16 live in Thompson, Manitoba, and -- and come
17 home, I -- I told her.

18 But she -- she stayed, and she went to a
19 women's shelter. So she stayed there, and one
20 night she -- she got a phone call. I don't
21 know. The father wanted to see [K.L.] and Jenny.
22 So Linda, she went; right? She trusted him. So
23 she went to the house, and it must have been --
24 I don't know what had happened because I wasn't
25 there, and -- but the girls, they -- they used

Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

6

1 to talk about it. Like, [K.L.] was the oldest
2 girl, but Jenny was only four years old. She
3 didn't really understand what was going on. So
4 they told me there was lots of noise, you know.
5 But they -- they had been sleeping already, and
6 then they heard a lot of noise, banging and --
7 you know. And then their father came out and
8 said, it's just the TV, you know. Just go back
9 to sleep.

10 So I don't know what happened. I wasn't
11 there, but -- and she died. She died there. He
12 had beaten her up, and, you know, she had marks
13 on her neck, finger marks, and her neck broken.

14 When they brought her to Thompson,
15 Manitoba, to the -- to the morgue, the guy that
16 was preparing the body had told us because we
17 actually wanted to put a cross on her right
18 here, but we couldn't. And so my niece Karen
19 Bighetty, her sister, just -- she just cut a
20 piece of her hair. And she still has it. But
21 it was very hard. There was only two of us
22 there, me and my niece.

23 FRANCINE MERASTY: How long ago did this happen?

24 VIOLA WEBER: This was many years ago. A long time
25 ago.

Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

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1 FRANCINE MERASTY: Like 20 years ago?

2 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah. But she's -- I know she's in
3 heaven. And actually, the guy went to court,
4 but it got remanded, and then he -- he died
5 before he was convicted of murder. So he died
6 in his vehicle. I don't know what happened, but
7 he passed away. (unintelligible) We took the
8 girls, Jenny and [K.L.], and raised them. Jenny
9 goes to university, [University 1].

10 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

11 VIOLA WEBER: She's doing good for herself.

12 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

13 VIOLA WEBER: And [K.L.] has a family. She works with
14 autistic children. Yeah, they're very beautiful
15 girls. I actually have a picture of them.

16 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

17 VIOLA WEBER: If you want to see them.

18 FRANCINE MERASTY: Sure.

19 VIOLA WEBER: This is her sister actually, and that's
20 Jenny, and that's her son, Karen's son.

21 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay. So who are all these
22 people?

23 VIOLA WEBER: This is Karen, Linda's sister. And
24 this is Jenny. That's her mom that died.

25 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

8

1 VIOLA WEBER: Linda Bighetty.

2 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

3 VIOLA WEBER: And this is Karen's son, Ian. Ian.

4 FRANCINE MERASTY: So that's her family.

5 VIOLA WEBER: This is when they were just young, but
6 now they're adults, and ...

7 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

8 VIOLA WEBER: Very beautiful girls, very
9 intelligent.

10 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

11 VIOLA WEBER: This is Jenny (unintelligible) and
12 this is [K.L.].

13 FRANCINE MERASTY: Maybe I'll show them on the
14 video. So this one here is who?

15 VIOLA WEBER: Jenny Lay.

16 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay. And --

17 VIOLA WEBER: And the other one is [K.L.].

18 FRANCINE MERASTY: [K.L.]. But this is when they were
19 younger.

20 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah.

21 FRANCINE MERASTY: But they're older now.

22 VIOLA WEBER: But now they're older, yeah. I should
23 have actually brought their pictures, but ...
24 And this is me and my husband.

25 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay. Wow, that's a nice

Viola Weber

(Linda Bighetty)

1 picture. I like it.

2 So that's her and her husband.

3 So do you want to tell me more about Linda?

4 Like --

5 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah.

6 FRANCINE MERASTY: -- how she was as a person

7 and --

8 VIOLA WEBER: Oh.

9 FRANCINE MERASTY: -- growing up.

10 VIOLA WEBER: She was -- actually, my mother raised
11 her, right, since she was two weeks old. And
12 she was very spoiled actually. My mother -- my
13 mother spoiled her, but that's how my mother
14 was. But, yeah, my -- my mother liked to raise
15 her properly. Like, you know, go to church and
16 that. And Linda, she was very humorous. Like,
17 she loved to laugh. And every time we'd go --
18 we'd go walking because we lived far away from
19 the store; right? So we had to walk in the
20 bush, me and her.

21 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

22 VIOLA WEBER: And then she told me all kinds of
23 stories, funny stories, and we'd laugh and --
24 you know. And my mother actually -- she had
25 cancer, so me and Linda and my husband, we took

1 care of my mom. And Linda was there, but she
2 had a really hard time. Well, it's
3 understandable because she was very young;
4 right? Young age. And, well, it was her
5 mother, I guess, like, considered as her mother.
6 And then she -- she got depressed. Well, I got
7 depressed too, but -- and then I was happy my --
8 my husband was there to guide us, like, you
9 know, to talk to us and stuff like that.

10 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah. And they were living in
11 Nelson House?

12 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah.

13 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay. Yeah.

14 VIOLA WEBER: This is in Nelson House, and -- yeah.

15 FRANCINE MERASTY: So what had happened to Linda's
16 mother?

17 VIOLA WEBER: She died of a sickness. My sister had
18 just had Linda; right? And they had to fly
19 in -- out of the community to have their baby.
20 So she -- she had to go to The Pas and fly
21 there, and then she told me -- well, I always --
22 always with my sister too. And she said to me,
23 she said, did you know that I have to go back to
24 The Pas? And I said, why? And then she said,
25 because I have appendicitis. But she -- she

Viola Weber

(Linda Bighetty)

1 died before her appointment, so she -- she died.

2 And Linda was only like two weeks old, so my

3 mother took her.

4 FRANCINE MERASTY: Was that your sister's only child?

5 VIOLA WEBER: No, she had other children, Karen,

6 Charles, and Emerson.

7 FRANCINE MERASTY: So how about like when she was

8 getting older? How was she?

9 VIOLA WEBER: When she was older, she -- well, of

10 course she had boyfriends; right? And then

11 my -- my mom would make sure that she was always

12 okay. Like, you know, had food and proper

13 clothes, and -- yeah. She was very close to her

14 sister Karen. Karen was raised -- my -- my

15 sister raised her. So they were very close.

16 And my mom would make sure that Linda and Karen

17 were together, like, visit each other.

18 Actually, I had a picture of -- I should have

19 brought. It was Linda and her sister and my mom

20 and my other nieces.

21 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

22 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah, we come from a really big family.

23 FRANCINE MERASTY: So how did she meet this other --

24 this guy that --

25 VIOLA WEBER: Oh, how did she meet -- when she was --

Viola Weber

(Linda Bighetty)

1 after my mom had passed away, Karen, her sister,
2 came.

3 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

4 VIOLA WEBER: Karen was older, and Linda was only
5 like 16. And she actually stayed with her
6 sister for a little while, and they -- they went
7 to Alberta. Well, I guess she was 18. And then
8 she met him.

9 Actually, she used to -- when I went to
10 Brandon University, she came to visit me, and
11 then she -- she was happy. Her mother -- her
12 mother-in-law -- well, she wasn't married, but
13 she called her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law
14 was very supportive. Like, that -- that old
15 woman would give them money and -- you know.
16 Yeah.

17 FRANCINE MERASTY: How long did she stay with
18 this --

19 VIOLA WEBER: This --

20 FRANCINE MERASTY: -- man?

21 VIOLA WEBER: The man?

22 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

23 VIOLA WEBER: At least, well, six years.

24 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

25 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah. It might have been longer. I'm

1 not too sure. But after the -- the man -- we
2 don't know. He -- he took off into the bush,
3 and then he stuffed her under the bed wrapped up
4 in a rug.

5 And the next -- I don't know. The next
6 morning, the girls were asking, well, where's my
7 mom? You know, and then the man said, he -- she
8 took off. Like, she left. So the man took the
9 girls, Jenny and [K.L.], to a prostitute that he
10 had known, I guess, to look after the girls.
11 And then after that, he took off into the bush,
12 and then the police were looking for him, and
13 they found him. But then he passed away before
14 he was convicted of murder.

15 FRANCINE MERASTY: So what happened to the girls
16 after?

17 VIOLA WEBER: The girls?

18 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

19 VIOLA WEBER: Well, they -- I think his family took
20 the girls; right?

21 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

22 VIOLA WEBER: Because, well, they needed somebody to
23 look after the girls, yeah. Like, his side of
24 the family.

25 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

Viola Weber

(Linda Bighetty)

1 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah. And that's when decided to go
2 and try and get custody of the girls.

3 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

4 VIOLA WEBER: And bring them home.

5 FRANCINE MERASTY: So did that happen?

6 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah, I got the girls. Yeah. I spoke.
7 That was the hardest thing I ever done in my
8 life, to speak in front of lawyers and the judge
9 and -- but I don't know. Something helped me.
10 Like, I don't know. I felt so at peace and
11 safe, and I wasn't scared. And I pray lots. I
12 believe in prayer. And I believe in my culture,
13 my Cree culture. And I respect all -- all the
14 people. It doesn't matter what colour they are
15 or what race they are. Doesn't matter. No one
16 is allowed to take another person's life away.

17 And -- and I feel really like -- for these
18 people that can't find their -- their own
19 missing and murdered women, I feel it for them
20 here. Like, they must have a really hard time
21 because until they actually see their own flesh
22 and blood, you know, being buried and at peace,
23 you know ...

24 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

25 VIOLA WEBER: And me and my niece Karen, we always

1 talk about Linda. She -- she lives in Winnipeg
2 and we -- we speak in Cree, like, our own
3 language. And I believe, you know, it feels
4 good right here to speak your own language.

5 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

6 VIOLA WEBER: And we could speak, like, for a whole
7 hour and talk about our family, like -- you
8 know. Yeah, so I'm always happy to see her and,
9 well, my whole family actually. They're up
10 north, and every chance I get, I'll be -- I'll
11 be there. And I have a brother, and my sister's
12 in an old folks' home.

13 FRANCINE MERASTY: What about -- what do you think
14 might have helped Linda?

15 VIOLA WEBER: Well, you can't really tell people what
16 to do; right? They have their own mind. And
17 I -- I -- I tried my best, like, to help her.
18 Like, you know, to come home and, you know, go
19 for help, yeah. Because it's always good to
20 talk to other people when there's something
21 going on, a social worker, your best friend, or
22 a nurse, or an elder, yeah. I always told her
23 that.

24 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

25 VIOLA WEBER: Mm-hm.

Statement - Public
Viola Weber
(Linda Bighetty)

16

1 FRANCINE MERASTY: How old was Linda?

2 VIOLA WEBER: She was in her 30s, yeah. She was
3 quite young. She -- yeah, she had come for her
4 birthday the last time I saw her. She was -- we
5 had fun. Talked and visited. And I just made
6 her a cake, and her sister was there too. The
7 last time we saw her. This was in May.

8 FRANCINE MERASTY: Mm-hm.

9 VIOLA WEBER: And then she died in June, yeah. I
10 still miss her very much.

11 FRANCINE MERASTY: Is there anything else you would
12 like to share?

13 VIOLA WEBER: Oh, not really. I'm kind of tired.

14 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

15 VIOLA WEBER: I didn't have a very good sleep last
16 night.

17 FRANCINE MERASTY: Oh, yeah.

18 VIOLA WEBER: And just worried about
19 (unintelligible) -- you know, I don't want to
20 say the wrong words or, you know, stuff like
21 that. But I managed.

22 FRANCINE MERASTY: Yeah.

23 VIOLA WEBER: I -- I phoned my husband, and I said,
24 let's talk.

25 FRANCINE MERASTY: Is that all you wanted to share?

1 VIOLA WEBER: Yeah. (unintelligible)

2 FRANCINE MERASTY: Okay.

3 VIOLA WEBER: [INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SPOKEN] Thank
4 you.

5 FRANCINE MERASTY: All right. Well, it is

6 10:06 a.m., November 22nd, and we're done.

7 [PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED 10:06 a.m.]

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Reporter's Certificate

I, Sheena Aicken, Official Reporter in the Province of British Columbia, Canada, do hereby certify:

That this is a true and accurate transcript of these proceedings recorded on sound-recording apparatus, transcribed to the best of my skill and ability in accordance with applicable standards.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name this 16th day of April, 2018.

Sheena Aicken

Official Reporter