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Statement - Volume 229

Matilda Wilson & Brenda Wilson,
In relation to Ramona Wilson

Statement gathered by Kerrie Reay

Coast Reporting Services Inc.
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Matilda Wilson
(Ramona Wilson)

FEBRUARY 6, 2018, 12:30 P.M.

KERRIE REAY: So for the record this is Kerrie Reay. I'm a statement taking -- taker with the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We are in Prince George today on February the 6th, 2018, and it is 12:30 in the afternoon.

Speaking today is Matilda Wilson from Smithers. Matilda is with -- from the Gitxsan Nation in Hazelton. That's G-i-t-x-s-a-n. And Matilda is here today to speak about the loss and murder of her daughter Ramona Wilson. Ramona went missing on June the 11th, 1994 in Smithers.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: Also in the room with Matilda is her daughter Brenda Wilson, her partner Doug Pete, P-e-t-e, along with Teddy Antoine.

MATILDA WILSON: Excuse me. Doug is my partner and Clarence is my daughter's. Have you got that?

KERRIE REAY: Yes.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay.

KERRIE REAY: It's good to clarify.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay.

KERRIE REAY: Totally, totally good to make sure we get everything right.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay.
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(Ramona Wilson)

KERRIE REAY: Okay. So I may have said that very quickly. So just for clarification, Doug Pete is Matilda's partner. Also in the room is Teddy Antoine, A-n-t-o-i-n-e, a support worker; Freda Ens -- that's F-r-e-d-a Ens -- with FILU, as a support worker; and Clarence John is son-in-law and partner to Brenda Wilson.

And, Matilda, you are here voluntarily. You understand that we are videotaping and audiotaping your truth so that the commissioners can hear what you have to say and that you understand that this will be in the public domain?

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: Okay. So, Matilda, as I said to you earlier, this is your space, this is your time. And please don't feel rushed. You are here to share your truth on the loss of your daughter Ramona. So I invite you to start whenever you're ready.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay. My name's Matilda Wilson. I'd like to invite the Commissioners of the National Inquiry. Thank you to listen to what we have to say. I have my supporters here and my family. It's -- it has been a very difficult journey for me and my families.

My youngest daughter, Ramona Lisa Wilson, was
murdered on June 11th, 1994. She was only 16 years old. And she was missing for 10 months, and she was found behind the Smithers Airport on April 10th, 1995. Her murderer has never been found to this day. That will -- this year will be 24 years. And we have a walk for Ramona every second Saturday of June, the Ramona Wilson Walk. Memorial Walk.

As I said before, Ramona was the youngest in the family. And as a mother of six children, it was very difficult for our family. I was married when I was very young. And my husband had passed away, and he left me with my children. I had five children from my first husband, and one was adopted out. And then -- and then many years later I had Ramona, which is the youngest, the sixth child. And I was a single mother at the time.

When Ramona was first missing, there was no consideration from the RCMP or any other authority that we got in touch with. I don't know if it was because I was a single mother on welfare at the time.

And -- and at that time in 1993, before this happened, I was just turning my life around.
Because I'd been -- I was fighting alcohol on and off since -- since I completed residential school.
Drinking was the answer for me to hide all my feelings, hurt, everything that happened to me.

So in 1993 I decided to go to treatment, which I did. I'm glad that I had gone there. Because in 1994, just the next -- in June my daughter was missing. And it took 10 months -- it took 10 months before her body was found.

And I think -- I think I would have -- I would not have made it if I hadn't gone to treatment. But for all these years, at 44 years old, 1994, I started struggling with alcohol on and off. I was fighting it so hard. Because I knew Ramona and her brothers and sisters wanted me to save myself and stop drinking. And I've been fighting it all this time.

I want you, National Inquiry, to know how I've been struggling so much. Sometimes I'd be sober for six months. That's half a year. And then -- and then I don't know what triggers me to start again. And then I don't give up, and I stay on for two months, and then I fall back down.

I don't know -- it's not only the loss of my daughter. It started from -- from my -- from my mother's death and my father's death, residential school, everything, and then now not finding out my
daughter for -- not finding out who murdered her after 24 years.

In this little town of Smithers, National Inquiry, I want you to know there was only -- in 1994 there was only about -- the population there was from five to six thousand people. And that's a small little village compared to the cities. And then you wonder why -- why her murderer hasn't been found.

It's so difficult on Ramona's brothers and sisters and myself. One of my sons died from alcohol because he could not take the idea that his little baby sister died.

As of today, I'm dealing with my son's death. He got into a car accident in September, last September. Or was it -- last September. And I'm also dealing with my older brother. He had a massive heart attack in September.

Okay. I'll get this straight. In September 2nd, 2016, that's when my son Louis Wilson passed away from a car accident. He was heavily into -- into alcohol. He had told me at one time he was gonna try and go to treatment and quit. I said, "Your little sister Ramona would be happy for you because that's what she wants." But the alcohol was too
strong. He died in a car accident. He was driving the truck when this happened September 2016.

And then in September 2017, my brother had a massive heart attack and he passed away.

And then my oldest sister -- God bless her. Sarah is her name. She has two grandchildren that just passed away besides my brother. Her grandchildren -- her granddaughter died from cancer, ovarian cancer. She was very young. And then her grandson had an accidental death.

And this is what I'm carrying with me. I was still -- I'm still grieving my son, and then now I'm grieving my brother and my sister's two grandchildren. And it's a very big load to carry.

And this Inquiry. Thank you so much for this Inquiry. Because as you see now how hard we struggle to try and keep everything -- you know, to let the public know that we're still -- we're still hoping that some day we'll put a closure to my youngest daughter Ramona's death. She was murdered, and not a day goes by when I'm wondering how long she had lived before she died. It's a mother's feeling. I just pray to the Lord that she went right away.

I just want to say that I want to thank you for
putting up this National Inquiry. Because it's very important what you see now is from the heart. I try to be strong every day for myself and for my children. I could have easily went down and be in the gutter forever and never come back out, but I have faith and I have hope. I ask God to help me and guide me every day because it's very difficult to go on sometimes.

I am now 67 years old. In May I will be 68. I'm just wondering if there will ever be a closure on my daughter's murder. But I know -- I know the investigators are working hard to try and -- you know, they say the case is ongoing, and I believe in that.

Maybe someday we will -- our family -- it will be a glorious day for us if there's closure. There will be sadness. Ramona won't come back, but we'll know what happened, and we'll put it to rest.

As you know, how many -- how many children are lost now. The mothers and the other mothers that are murdered, their children are still crying for help to find their loved ones, because some of them have never been found, and that is so, so devastating. Because I went through 10 months of that, me and my family. And imagine going through
that when they were young. Some of them were babies when they lost their mother through murder, and they haven't had closure. I know how it felt, the 10 months. It was so, so -- you're right in the dark, and you're just wondering if they're holding her captive or they're torturing her. All these things go through your mind. And even today I pray not to think that what my youngest daughter's last breath would be. And I know I also want to protect her.

I want you all to know all the families are affected by just one murder. And then there's so many now. If you can solve -- I know they have solved some of the murders. But across BC here, there has never been bodies, remains found there. Just missing. Disappeared. And this is what -- that's what we're going to have to try and explain, especially the ones that are just recent. Where do you find them? Isn't that such a mystery, not to find remains of the loved ones that we've never heard of again ever since they've been missing? No body. Nothing. And I can imagine again what the families are going through. I pray -- I pray and I cry sometimes because I can feel their heart. It's so -- it's so difficult to go through this.

I want the National Inquiry to know what you've
done here is so big. They will be talking about the
National Inquiry for years to come. Because this is
what -- what you helped us go through. We fought
for this for so many years, and now the transit is
going, and it lifts our heart up. It gives us hope
that there will be less murders across BC.

I want to thank the National Inquiry for --
especially for the other young -- young people that
have lost their mother or their sisters and they let
them know what had happened to them, which is
another A plus. Because there's some -- there's
some families, like the children, that need to know
what happened to their -- to their mother or whoever
was murdered or things like this. And they take the
time to take out the records to let the people
know -- let the children know what happened to their
parents. And we thank -- we thank everyone that's
involved for that, to let -- you know, you don't
know if they were murdered or they were -- they were
just fighting alcohol or things like this. And it's
a peace of mind for each child. And they're grown
up now to know what happened to their families.

And I really want to say that I would never give
my heart out to anybody, even my daughter and my
family here, that I've always kept everything to
myself because it hurts too much. I want -- I want people to know it's every day that goes by you always think of your child.

I want everybody to know you have done so much for putting this National Inquiry, but I wish my brother was here and his wife, because they were my supporter, my family supporters, too. But they -- they didn't have a room for them to stay in Prince George to be with me today and tomorrow. And I wish they could have just allowed us to have two family members. That's my brother and his wife. Because they were always with me all the time for their support.

And I thank the supporters here and my family here and my daughter here. My daughter Brenda, she's the one that kept me up to keep going.

I've seen so many that have lost their loved ones through the years, 24 years, and some of them couldn't get up anymore, like my son. I pray to God every day that I will be strong enough to keep this journey going.

I want to -- I want to let everyone know it has took a toll on my -- on my life. Because I'm fighting high blood pressure, and my head is always hurting because of the operations I had from my ear.
Because in residential schools they didn't -- they
didn't give you a medical checkup whatsoever and
your teeth and everything. And I have to suffer
through that, too. And I'm just struggling for --
to make sure my blood pressure goes down right now.
It's very high and I have to -- I just wanted to
send that message to all of you. I have to complete
this right now.

I want to say that I am so glad for my daughter
and I standing up for Ramona. We had to make this
public, and now we have done this. We thought we
had worked for Ramona, and all of a sudden we just
realized how many were missing. And we just started
asking the families to start -- start making noise
and start making -- you know, start making the
public aware of what's happening. And there is so
many now, and we're so glad that they are all coming
out to speak their mind to let the authorities know
where they stand with all the murders that has
happened across BC and other areas, Winnipeg, all
over.

I've travelled in quite a few areas, and I'll
tell you, there was a lot of discrimination and a
lot of the authorities not caring what happened to
the Indigenous people. And that has to stop. There
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has to be a training course for the RCMP and the
authorities to understand where we come from.

Does it matter if your relative or your daughter
was a prostitute? Would you change that for how
much you love them? No, you would never do it. And
that's what you have to all think about no matter
where you come from: On welfare, welfare mother,
single mother.

I had a husband, and he died and left me with
children. And I had the youngest child of my own,
the youngest one, and she was murdered. It will be
24 years now. And we shall be doing another Ramona
Lisa Wilson Memorial Walk in Smithers the second
Saturday of June.

We wish to make it known that we won't give up
and we won't give up for the -- for the missing now
and for the murdered. We're walking for them. Not
only for my daughter, but for everyone and
especially the unsolved murders.

And I thank you again. Thank you for everything
that you've done for us. And again, my name's
Matilda Wilson. I would like to say that I
appreciate everything. The authorities are starting
to understand us a little. And as I said before,
where we come from, why -- why this has been going on for years, the abuse and the drugs and the alcohol.

It stemmed from the residential school. They took our culture away, and they took our parents away, and it did something to every one of us.

I was five years old when I was taken away from my parents. I was still -- I was still sleeping with my mom and dad, me and my brother Joe. And something happened after that. And I want you to understand this has really done something to everyone that has gone to residential school, and we're trying our best now to try and have faith and to start walking, because we are strong.

We are strong. Our forefathers, foremothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, they were strong. And we shall walk that walk. And the Creator knows that we're there. We shall be -- we are proud of who we are. We respect the authorities. We respect everyone that tries to help us in every way they can. And I thank you so very much again. Thank you. That's it.

KERRIE REAY: Well, thank you. That's a -- it takes a lot of courage to share what you have said today. Would you mind if I ask some questions?
MATILDA WILSON: I have to go to the washroom first.

KERRIE REAY: We'll take a break, then. It is 1:03.

[PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 1:03 P.M.]

[PROCEEDINGS RESUMED AT 1:14 P.M.]

KERRIE REAY: And we are back on the record, and it is 1:14.

So, Matilda, again, I just want to thank you so much for the courage that it took to come and speak of such pain here today. You've got wonderful family that have come to support you.

But when you spoke, you raised some issues that I'd like to ask some questions about, if I can, that I think is important to this Inquiry. It's important to understand about what happened or what didn't happen when you reported Ramona missing and the response from policing.

I think it's also important, if you are ready, if you feel comfortable, to speak about in more detail the impact of the residential experience for you and your family and how that experience that you had in residential school affected your children. And that is one of the things that the Inquiry is really trying to understand, is those systemic issues that continue to go from generation to generation.

And what you've spoken about earlier was about the impact of being taken at five. And what I felt
we were sharing was the loss of your parents still, still so painful for you and the loss of other families' members as well to alcohol.

So if we can, you spoke about the police. You felt that the police didn't respond to you reporting Ramona's being missing because you were a single mother. And I'm just wondering if you can tell the Inquiry what it was for you and working -- interacting with the RCMP at Smithers and what happened and what was that like for you and your family.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay. It was -- it just felt like there was nowhere to turn to the authorities. If even one authority could understand, "Okay, your daughter's missing. We'll try and help you out." But that wasn't the response. And I keep on wondering myself if I was a working mother and wasn't on welfare they'd have more consideration.

KERRIE REAY: Okay. So when did you -- and this isn't investigative. This is to put it in context about how the experience went for you. So when did you report Ramona missing?

MATILDA WILSON: Just a week after. And they had told me that she might have took time off or she could be with one of her friends. And I said, "No. Ramona always
tells me where she's going and when she's coming back." And I stressed that to them. Anywhere that Ramona wants to go, she will tell me, or either she phones me and tells me where she's at and when she was coming back.

At one time or another, she had stayed with friends, and I knew where she was. And she stayed there for quite a few days, and she was still going to school, so it was okay with me. Because, you know, she wanted to spend time away from home for a while. And that's how I know -- I told the RCMP I know she goes to her friends' when she wants time out. She's not gonna go running away somewhere.

KERRIE REAY: Right. And so when you went there -- did you go to the police station or did you phone?

MATILDA WILSON: We -- my daughter and I and a worker from the friendship centre -- Smithers Friendship Centre went to talk to the RCMP.

KERRIE REAY: Okay. Did they invite you in from the counter? Like, did you go into a room, or did everything that you were talking about occur at the counter?

MATILDA WILSON: No. We were just at the window, --

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MATILDA WILSON: -- right in front of the door.

KERRIE REAY: So when that conversation ended, had they opened a
file?

MATILDA WILSON: No.

KERRIE REAY: So you went away?

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: And what happened next?

MATILDA WILSON: We -- me and Brenda and the social -- the worker from the friendship centre started looking around all over town. We drove and we walked and we did everything we could.

KERRIE REAY: And how long do you recall that you were looking and the police still weren't involved? Like, how long did it take before they got involved, and what did it take to get them to be involved?

MATILDA WILSON: It happened, like, about -- do you recall?

BRENDA WILSON: Yeah. So it wasn't a week later after she went missing. It was -- she went missing on the Saturday.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

BRENDA WILSON: Which would have been, like, June 11th.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

BRENDA WILSON: And she would have come back on the Sunday.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

BRENDA WILSON: But there was -- nobody had heard from her on Sunday. And my mom contacted all her friends, and nobody had seen her. So it was the Monday that we
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(Ramona Wilson)

reported her missing because we couldn't find her anywhere and nobody heard from her. She hadn't made it to the dance where she was heading to or to her friends'. And like my mom said, they did the -- we did the report at the window --

KERRIE REAY: Oh, so they did take -- they took a report?
BRENDA WILSON: They took the information.
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
BRENDA WILSON: They didn't tell us if there was a file. They never gave us a file number or anything.
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
BRENDA WILSON: They just said, "Okay, we'll look into it."
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
BRENDA WILSON: And they would get back to us.
KERRIE REAY: Did they?
BRENDA WILSON: We hadn't heard anything for about three days.
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
BRENDA WILSON: And during that time we kept looking and putting out posters. We put it on our local radio, which was -- which was club notes and messages at that time, where it's like, "Ramona, please call home. We're worried about you." And they would actually say it as the message was put out there.
And then after that, we started to bring -- we were contacted. Then a missing person's report was
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put out there. I can't remember if it was us or Crime Stoppers or ...

MATILDA WILSON: It was just on CFTK radio.

BRENDA WILSON: Yeah, we put -- we actually made our own posters. And they were just black-and-white photocopies that we put all over town and faxed out. Because at that time there's no social media.

KERRIE REAY: Right, right.

BRENDA WILSON: So we -- we had to drive around, put those posters up, send them out by fax wherever we could. And that had a lot to do with -- if my mom -- if I wasn't connected to a lot of the organizations that I had known, my mom wouldn't have had that resource to put those posters up and send it out to all the different organizations that we had known. So we did that.

And there are timelines where the police said they contacted us, but, you know, we don't recall them contacting us until like, like my mom says, probably a week. Just probably about the third day was when they said they would -- they would start a missing -- a missing file on her.

But then after that there was no place to look. Like, there was nobody to contact except the friendship centre on what we should do. Like, the
RCMP never gave us any tips or clues on what we should be doing. There was no resources available in Smithers at that time as to what we should be doing. We just did everything on instinct of what we should do to try to find her.

So it was just consistently doing vigils. We had vigils in Moricetown. We had vigils in Smithers and Hazelton. There were searches done along Highway 16.

KERRIE REAY: And can I ask -- and just for the record, it's Brenda Wilson who is providing the information in terms of what was happening in terms of the search for her sister Ramona.

When you talk about doing the searches, were the RCMP involved? Did the RCMP -- did they have members come out? Did they have the dogs out?

MATILDA WILSON: No.

KERRIE REAY: Was there any involvement with the RCMP, --

MATILDA WILSON: No.

KERRIE REAY: -- connecting with you about searches?

MATILDA WILSON: No.

KERRIE REAY: So this is about the family and the community getting out there, searching for Ramona?

MATILDA WILSON: The search and rescue.

BRENDA WILSON: Yeah, Moricetown.
MATILDA WILSON: In Moricetown.

KERRIE REAY: And that is the community of Moricetown. That's a volunteer rescue -- search and rescue --

BRENDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: -- that came out. And at what point did the RCMP come to take statements from you?

MATILDA WILSON: I'm not sure on that.

BRENDA WILSON: A lot of that's pretty -- is not clear.

Because, as a family member, you have to understand that the process and the events that happened throughout this whole thing is very foggy. Because the focus at that time was just to find Ramona. So everything else is just a blur because of the situation. Our family's in shock. Our family is looking for our sister. We're trying to figure out which avenue to go. So, you know, my mom was unable to really give a clear timeline as to how the events rolled out.

So when they did take the statements, that is unclear, but it was probably not too long after when they put the missing -- missing posters out on her. There wasn't an official one, but they started an investigation.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MATILDA WILSON: And on CTV for a few seconds.
BRENDA WILSON: Yeah. We had contacts with the media just
through the work that I did as a support worker --
family support worker. And so we were able to
contact CFTK TV and also the radio station to put
start putting ads out on her missing.

KERRIE REAY: And so in terms of the timeline, were the police
in contact with you very much in terms of giving you
updates on their investigation?

MATILDA WILSON: No. I had just given them of what Ramona was
wearing that weekend and where she went to her
friends. I had given them the names of her friends,
and that was it for the time being. And there was
not very much. They weren't at the door, as you may
say, knocking on my door, no.

KERRIE REAY: And how did you find out that Ramona had been
found?

MATILDA WILSON: I was in Hazelton at the time, and I was given
a phone call. And --

KERRIE REAY: Phone call from who? Was it the police?

MATILDA WILSON: No, no.

KERRIE REAY: That's okay if you can't remember.

MATILDA WILSON: It was ...

BRENDA WILSON: Victim Services?

MATILDA WILSON: [Victims services worker 1], wasn't it? Or was it one of
the friendship centre? I don't know. I'm not sure who
was that that phoned me. 1995 --

BRENDA WILSON: Was it [Victims services worker 2]?

MATILDA WILSON: Pardon?

BRENDA WILSON: [Victims services worker 2].

MATILDA WILSON: Who?

BRENDA WILSON: [Victims services worker 2].

MATILDA WILSON: Oh, yes, [Victims services worker 2]. Yeah, she's one of the --

BRENDA WILSON: Police-based Victim Services.

MATILDA WILSON: Yeah, yeah, she was the one that phoned me.

KERRIE REAY: Did she ask you to come to the police station?

MATILDA WILSON: They said that they would phone me the next day. Because they were working on Ramona's -- where she was found. She just told me where she was found.

KERRIE REAY: So they told you over the telephone?

MATILDA WILSON: Mm-hm, yes.

KERRIE REAY: And --

MATILDA WILSON: We went there, didn't we?

BRENDA WILSON: After.

MATILDA WILSON: After, yeah.

KERRIE REAY: And did Victim Services, were they able to provide you with any support in the next while after Ramona was found?

MATILDA WILSON: They were trying, yes. [Victims services worker 2] was
there to try and give us, you know, some support.

BRENDA WILSON: I just want to respond to that. Because the
support that was required wasn't there.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

BRENDA WILSON: Like, the way things are done today, being
trauma informed and to include that practice, that
wasn't available at that time. We weren't brought
together as a family or anything like that to -- to
talk about or to deal with the grief or pain at that
time. There was no real plan in place to say -- to
even come together as a family to say this is what's
gonna happen and how to deal with the grief or
anything like that. So there were no -- there was
nothing.

MATILDA WILSON: It was more formal than anything. You know,
there's a missing person. That's it. And ...

BRENDA WILSON: Deal with the grief on your own.

MATILDA WILSON: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: Even though there was a Victim Services program in
Smithers?

BRENDA WILSON: Yeah. They didn't have the training to deal
with this -- this kind of grief and loss.

KERRIE REAY: Okay, okay.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: And have -- have any services been provided to
help support -- and it sounds like, Brenda, that you've got a lot of that support and training yourself and has helped the family. At the time was there -- it doesn't sound like Smithers had the services at all.

MATILDA WILSON: We had to work through -- through the years with publicizing that Ramona was missing. We had to publicize it ourselves with the help of friends, family, and the Smithers Friendship Centre. And then we started this walk for Ramona. And from there everything -- everything -- people started noticing what we were doing. Yes.

KERRIE REAY: When you made the comment about being a single mom as maybe the reason that the police were slow to respond, what about racism? Did you think that maybe that that was part of the being slow to say that she was off at a friend's place or, you know, she needed a break? Because that's one of the themes that the Inquiry is looking at in terms of -- and you spoke as well about the needing -- the need for placing training to have cultural sensitivity and that. Was there a feeling that there was some racism with the detachment?

MATILDA WILSON: I would say in 1994 it had a lot to do with racism.
KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes, through the years. Especially mentioning Melanie Carpenter. We were trying to put up a benefit dance for Ramona, and then they had a big benefit dance for her, and nobody hardly showed up at our benefit dance. And this was the community of Smithers. And they had more support than we had.

BRENDA WILSON: For Melanie Carpenter.

KERRIE REAY: Did she go missing near Houston? Was she --

BRENDA WILSON: In Surrey.

MATILDA WILSON: In Surrey.

KERRIE REAY: Oh, yes.

BRENDA WILSON: In Surrey.

KERRIE REAY: Right, right.

BRENDA WILSON: So they did a benefit dance for Melanie Carpenter who was not even a part of our community. And the mayor and everyone initiated that. And we had -- we had also started a benefit dance, and we had the dates and everything set, and then they came along with the same date. So it wasn't supported by our community.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

BRENDA WILSON: So that's when we realized what we were up against. So we just kept pushing forward.

Last year, after, like, 23 -- actually, it's two
years ago now. Twenty-two years after Ramona's death, it was the very first time we ever had Ramona's Memorial Walk on Main Street.

KERRIE REAY: Oh, okay, okay. And what a great way to commemorate, right? An honour.

BRENDA WILSON: But it took that long for them to actually let us use Main Street to do this event. And it wasn't initiated by our family. It was initiated by a non-Native -- one of Ramona's non-Native friends.

KERRIE REAY: Isn't that nice. What a tribute.

MATILDA WILSON: Yeah.

BRENDA WILSON: But the thing is, it's a true fact that you had to be non-Native to initiate that.

KERRIE REAY: Yes. And I think that's important for the Inquiry to hear, that in -- 2016?

BRENDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: In 2016 that it still takes a non-Indigenous person in a community that is very much an Indigenous community -- Smithers and the area. It took a non-Indigenous person to make a wave for somebody who had been so tragically taken in their community that just happen to be Indigenous.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

BRENDA WILSON: And even with that fact, she still received backlash, some of the merchants not wanting her to
post Ramona's picture up in their stores and the
fact of -- or to raise awareness about missing and
murdered or to raise awareness that this event was
happening on Main Street.

KERRIE REAY: And I think, you know, the Commissioners, as part
of their recommendations, is how can -- going
forward, how can Canada come together to understand
that we are all people from Canada and that being
Indigenous should not -- should not be taken in a
way that you're not important. Because that's what
I'm hearing from -- even from the police. "Oh, you
know, we're not gonna look for her now because, you
know, she's out partying." It's an attitude. And
how we can come up with recommendations to help
educate people.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay. As my way of thinking, it's still
happening today with social services taking children
away. There has to be another way around for the
children to be traumatized for losing their mom and
dad again, because they're already being traumatized
with everything else that's happening.

And there should be a program with all the mom
and daddy and the little kids together to work
together that they will be together to fight their
drugs and alcohol and they'd still be with their
family and they can have a person that will look
after the children while they're working with the
parents so they can still see them at the end of the
day. And things like this should be worked out for
all families.

Because this residential school has really done a
toll on most of the Elders that are gone now. And
it's still happening today. And that -- I know that
would be the answer, if they would have the families
together and -- you know, and they have the
counselling for the little children, too, and the
teenagers and their parents still fighting alcohol.
There's a lot of teenagers out there that are lost.
And the adults, too. The alcoholics' children,
adult children. They also still need counselling,
too. And for being taken away to the foster homes
and things like this, that all stems from the
residential schools.

KERRIE REAY: And you spoke briefly --

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: -- about being a five-year-old being taken away
from your parents.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: So you truly understand that impact on --
emotionally and the pain that that created for you.
MATILDA WILSON: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: Would you like to share anything more about that experience? Because we are talking now --

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: -- in 2018 about the child welfare system across Canada, and your talking is very similar -- what's happening with children going into a foster care system, if I hear what you're saying, is very similar in the sense of what it felt like to be taken and placed in a residential school.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: Is there anything you would like to share?

MATILDA WILSON: Okay. My brother and I -- all my other siblings had already gone to residential school, the older ones. And then we're the second generation, younger ones. And my brother and I were ready to go, so they took us. And me and my brother were 11 months apart. So he was -- I was gonna be six in the residential school, and he was gonna be five at the time.

And what happened was they put us -- well, Mom and Dad got a taxi, and they told us that we're gonna be going to residential school in Lejac.

KERRIE REAY: Now, Lejac, is that in Lower -- in Lower Post?

MATILDA WILSON: Indian residential school in Fraser Lake.
KERRIE REAY: Fraser Lake, right.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MATILDA WILSON: Yes. But the first thing that happened was, I remember the priest coming in a few days before September 5th or 6th, I think it was. They told my parents that my brother Joe and I were -- they were gonna send us away to Lejac Indian Residential School. And Mom had to tell us this, and she was just crying so much, and she said she didn't want to lose us.

My dad was just sitting there. He had his handkerchief with him. His tears were just coming down. He said, you know, "We don't want to send you kids away." He said -- my dad said, you know, "I've already tried. They said they're gonna put me in jail if I try and keep the kids away from going."

And that's what their threat was, that they would put my parents in jail if we didn't -- if they didn't allow us to go to residential school.

But anyways, they brought us to the train station in New Hazelton. And my mom and dad got off, and they told the taxi to come back in half an hour.

And the train came. And Mom -- Mom was just crying, and Dad was holding her. The rest of the little
kids -- my sisters were there, too. They were all
crying. They know that we're going. And they just
kissed us.

And then the conductor took my hand and brought
me up on the train, told us where to sit. And the
train was ready to go. My mom was on the platform
there, and Dad was trying to hold her. And she
just -- just collapsed on the platform, and she just
started crying. I just seen that. And I was trying
to wave to her, and she looked up, and she just
went -- tears just -- Dad, too. Just tears coming
down. I wish they didn't have to suffer like that.

And then when we got there, they stripped us off
our clothes. And they put this powder on our hair.
They put us in the shower. They sent us off to bed.
They told us that we had to go in the supper room
because that's where they're having supper, but I
can't eat because I was just going -- I couldn't --
I couldn't swallow. I was just [REGURGITATION
NOISE]. I keep on doing that, like, for about a --
a whole month I couldn't stop that -- from doing
that. I kept [REGURGITATION NOISE]. Sometimes I'd
lose my breath. Five or so.

And I see the other little kids crying because
they just got in there, too. And we're all crying
at night. The nuns didn't say anything because they
were in the next room. They had their bedroom
there. And they just told us to pray. They said
that will help you. I couldn't hardly understand
what they were saying because I didn't have too much
English. My mom and dad always talked to us in our
language.

But I don't know how long, but I got really sick.
My nose started bleeding, and I couldn't swallow
anything for about a whole month.

I could imagine what my little brother was going
through. Because he was just always hanging on to
Mom and Dad. I asked him that a few times. He
said, "I don't want to talk about it." He's 66
years old now, and he doesn't want to recall it. I
said how -- I wanted to really know how he -- how he
survived the first few weeks.

I tried very hard to swallow stuff, and till to
this day I still have that. She knows about it. So
it really does something to every little child that
goes there.

I was -- I was 24 when my mother died of a
massive heart attack. She was only -- she was only
55 years old. And my dad -- I was 29 years old when
my dad passed away. He didn't live very long after
Mom passed away.

So that's why I wonder -- I did go to a few counselling on my own when I moved to Smithers. Because I had too many nightmares. I did this self-help counselling quite a few times because it was -- the nightmares were too harsh.

I just don't want to talk about the sexual abuse, what went through that -- through that school. That was kept very quiet, and nobody ever heard about it. It happened to some of the children there, but I prayed so hard that it wouldn't happen to me.

And to this day, I know it really -- it really took a toll on all of us, all our families, our children, our children's children, everyone. I know this today. I don't want to say any more about this because I've left it behind.

Any more questions?

KERRIE REAY: I'd say just you've had enough.

MATILDA WILSON: Okay.

KERRIE REAY: Is there anything for the commissioners in terms of any last comments -- in terms of any last comments that you would like to make and then we can turn it off?

MATILDA WILSON: Pardon?

KERRIE REAY: Is there any last comments you would like to make
to the commissioners before we turn it off?

MATILDA WILSON: Okay. Like I said before, if they can work
with all the families together and not separate
them, if they have a daycare, they're good. As long
as they can see their families at the end of the
day, this will all work together with them. And
even the little children. And, you know, the
teenagers now that are trying to fight alcohol, they
can get help, too, from all this.

I know my boys are still fighting alcohol right
now, too. If they can go with their families, it's
not too late to do it now. I had wanted that for
my -- for my son Louis, but now he's gone. You
know, like they say, family that works together
stays together. And that's the whole answer to
everything: Not to be ever parted again.

Not -- please don't ever take the children away
from their parents no matter what. You know, all
the families know, the little kids know no matter
how, you know, they get hungry or anything, they
still love their mom and dad no matter what happens.
And that's the way it is. That's all I have to say.

Thank you.

KERRIE REAY: Thank you. And it's 1:53.

[PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 1:53 P.M.]
CERTIFICATION

I, GRACE DMITROVIC, 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 10th day of March, 2018.

GRACE DMITROVIC
Official Reporter