National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part I Statement Gathering

Sheraton Four Points
Moncton, New Brunswick

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Statement - Volume 257

Madison Donovan

Statement gathered by Shelby Thomas, Commission Counsel

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Documents submitted with testimony: none.
Moncton, New Brunswick

--- Upon commencing on Wednesday, February 14, 2018

at 6:45 p.m.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS:  All right. This is

Shelby Thomas, Commission Counsel with the National
Inquiry. It is February 14th at 6:45 p.m. We're in
Moncton, New Brunswick, for the community hearings here,
and it's a statement gathering session with Madison
Donovan. Madison, if you could just start off with telling
us a little bit about yourself, and then you can flow into
your story however you choose.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN:  Okay. So, um, first
of all, I'll start with the basics. I'm 21 years old. I
come from a very big family. I have 7 siblings, actually;
six brothers and one sister. They're all, all half-
siblings, but I love them all equally. I came from a very
dysfunctional family growing up. Like, when my mom had me,
she had no one, really, to help her, and she -- you'd kind
of try to stay away from my first father -- with my father,
and he didn't love he and he didn't want to be with he. He
 basically told us to go back to New Brunswick.

We were living in Ontario at the time.

She was, and she lived with me for about a year, maybe two,
when we lived in Ontario, then we moved to New Brunswick
when I was around 2-ish. And we, like, mostly were just me
and my mom for a little bit. I can't remember a while lot because I was really young at the time.

Um, she met this man who was very, very abusive, sexually and physically. She had two children with him who were my brothers. Um, he was sexually abusive to not only me, to [Family members], as well, and physically to us. I was about four at the time when he did those things to me. And he would tell my mother that I'd always say that I, that he'd be touching me and stuff, and that's why he didn't want me around him and stuff. And she thought that it was lies; but it wasn't. It was me saying, "I don't want to be around him." And him forcing me to be locked in rooms with him and sexually assaulting me.

That's actually the earliest memories I can remember as a child, is her first husband sexually assaulting me. Um, she was with him for about a year and, like, my brothers, they're basically, um, twins, nine months apart.

And he got arrested for kidnapping and also for something car-related. He kidnapped a teenage girl, I believe, my mother had said. And she thought that he had just done something stupid and the police said, "No. Your husband has kidnapped this young girl, and, like, has been following her and been trying to do this to her." So she got a divorce after that. She still didn't know that he was touching. [One sentence redacted - private]
information]. And he lost full custody of the boys and I knew that he was touching me, but I didn't know it was wrong until I was ten. And that's when I started to tell my mom, you know, the stuff that he did, it wasn't just whatever. He was, like, assaulting me and not only physically, but sexually. I'd tell her and she, like, tried to, like, brush it off or whatever. And that hurt, a lot, because it felt like I didn't really matter. And that was the first time I was ever sexually assaulted. And it hurt a lot.

And here I am 21 years old, and I still think about it all the time. And like, I wish I could say that was the first time that I was ever -- I mean, the last time I was ever sexually assaulted, but it wasn't.

And when I was around nine or ten years old, this man who -- well, not a man, but he was 16, 17, so I thought of it more as a man than anything. He was Chinese, and he'd always grab me and, like, force me down on the couch and, like, touch me. And I had told my mother this time, and my step-father at the time - which was a different man - what was going on, and they believed me this time. I don't know why they wouldn't believe me the first time, but this time they did. And that he brought him to court, and he faced charges, and was sent back to China.

A little after that, my mom had my brother
Eric (ph), and he was born with D.S., down syndrome. And it was very hard on our family. He was on an oxygen tank and had a lot of brain problems, so it was hard on all of us. Um, he only lasted three years, and my mother had [Brother 1] about a year and a half, maybe, before he died -- which is my other brother.

And I think that's when everything got out of hand, because after my brother died, I couldn't anymore. I started to, like, try to hurt myself constantly. I was suicidal, I was angry, I had nobody to talk to, everybody who I talked to that I thought were my friends thought I was a freak, that I had a dead brother, and, like, I was just emotionally not okay. And my bipolar started to get bad, too, at the time. And I did try to kill myself multiple times by cutting myself, and, like, none of that would ever work. Um, but my [family member] would always leave prescription bottles of morphine and, like, other prescription drugs lying around.

So one night I got really, really, depressed, the darkest I had ever been, ever. I was about 11-and-a-half years old and I took about 15 oxycontins and tried to end my life that night. Um, my mother found me having a seizure in my room and brought me to the hospital, and they pumped my stomach and everything to get it out. Sometimes, when I was younger, I wished that I would be
dead, because if I would be dead, then, I wouldn't have
gone through years of drug abuse after that. I just wanted
more painkillers because it felt good. I didn't care
about, like, killing myself anymore as long as I felt dead
inside at the time, it didn't matter.

Um, this went on until I was 17, 16 years
old, and my mother had finally found out I was using,
stealing her drugs and stuff and she had brought me to
rehab. I needed six months there, um, and then when I got
home, I left because I had done six months and I wasn't
going any further in my recovery. I was sober, but I
wasn't going up in rank, as they would say. It was a place
called Portage where you used start as level one, and you'd
make your way up to level five. And I was a level three,
and they'd never let me go up to level four. Um, so I just
said, "Screw it. I've had enough" because I was supposed
to be graduated because six months is the time you're
supposed to be graduated and out of there.

So I went back home. My mother was furious
that I wasn't in rehab. She wouldn't even pick me up,
actually, when I left rehab. I had to hitchhike all the
way from Sussex to Moncton, just so I could get home.
Nobody would help me, um. Then when I showed up at my
mother's house, she let me, like, come home for a day and
then, like, she started saying that -- I should mention,
first of all, after my brother died, [two lines redacted - personal information]. I'd watch all three of my brothers that were there because my other brother - my brother lived with my biological father - and I'd take care of them. I made sure they were fed, that she had everything taken care of, while I was on drugs. [Two lines redacted - personal information]. She'd just yell at us and tell us how we're, like, screwing up. Like, we were doing adult things at 13 years old. Like, I was, like, getting a job so I could help pay for, like, stuff we needed. And it was very, very hard on us.

Um, but anyway, like, I was getting -- I had come home for a day and my mother, being not right in the head from, like, my brother dying, she sent me to live in a homeless shelter because I refused to go back to rehab. And I begged and begged. I didn't want to stay in a shelter. I was sober. I had six months and I was, like, I just don't want to. And then as soon as I hit shelter, I relapsed. And, like, right away. I had started getting that other stuff. I started touching speed, opiates. I am -- no, not opiates. Sorry. Speed, ecstasy, a bunch of things, really. I can't name off all the things I've done, but if you think of it, I probably, most likely have done it. Um, and it got to the point where it was hard to make money and, like, I didn't know how to do it at the time.
So I had no other way to feed my drug habit then to work, and that's what I'd do. I think I made $20 while I was working -- which makes you feel like a complete piece of shit. Sorry, I didn't mean to swear.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: You can swear if you want.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: But once you, like, like, sell your soul and someone just hands you $20, there's a part of you that dies. And it hurts so badly, and the worst part, I think, is, I spent it on, like, two pills and a pack of cigarettes. And I went out and did it again because I had given up on myself completely. I didn't care what people thought of me no more, I had no family, my mother refused to let me live at home, um.

A little into it and stuff, I started to, like, to do work, like, at streets and stuff, and I'd give some of the money to my pimp, and he'd never, really, slept with me like, ever. It was more, like, me and him always being friends and stuff and, like, me getting money for us, until I got really messed up on speed one night. And I was drunk, and I was too drunk and high to go to the shelter because they have a rule if you go there drunk or high, you're kicked out for a certain period of time. And I actually had to go to this abandoned house on the back deck and make a little spot out of blankets so I could sleep.
there. And I thought nothing of, like, my pimp, like, sleeping there with me because I thought, oh, he will just, whatever, go to bed, too.

Then I woke up and I had noticed that it was really, really cold out. It was around November, it was snowing, and I looked down, and I saw that my pants were all the way down and his stuff was over it. I felt so hurt because I thought, here it is, the one person I thought I could trust, and he just used me like I was nothing. And then I got more into the drugs. I got so heavy into it. I actually tried to, like, put him in jail for what he did to me. And you know what? He didn't even, like, and couldn't go through trial or anything. The judge looked at him and said, "You're free to go." Yeah. Not enough proof. I went to the hospital the night that, of the day he raped me, they did samples and everything. They saw the bruises, they saw the semen, they saw it all, and the judge said, "Not enough proof."

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Terrible.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. It hurt because here I am homeless and he's homeless, and I have no place to hide. I have no place to go. He's everywhere I'm at. Like, it was horrible.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And was this all happening in Moncton?
MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And how old were you when this was happening?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: I think I was, maybe, 19.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay. Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Maybe. No, I was 18, actually.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: I wasn't even like, able to, like, get assistance, actually, because you can't get assistance 'til you're 19 without parents' consent. If you're 18 and you want assistance, you need parents', like, consent. And that wasn't happening. I begged my mother for consent. She would not give it to me. And she'd yell, and she did lie to the social worker saying that I had a home to come to, I could go home whenever I wanted, when I didn't.

I've done some bad things to try to get home, too. I actually did a job for a John so he'd drive me straight away from my house, and my mother said, "No. You can't come home." And called me a selfish bitch for doing what I did. That's the sort of abuse I went through. She refused to have me around there.

And the biggest betrayal, I felt, wasn't
from the sexual abuse, it wasn't from all that, it was
from, like, the harm my mother did to me while I took care
of the boys. I got a job, I tried to do everything. It was
her telling me that I couldn't come home.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: I just want to say
that it's unimage- -- I can't imagine going through what
you've gone through, but you show so much strength, all
today, just now sharing it. And you're a beautiful and
lovely person and you deserve the world. I hope you know
that, and I can't imagine your relationship with your
mother and how you just said it's, that, that's what hurts
the most. But just know that you've done yourself super
well. And you're here and it's important, and you may have
made some not -- or poor choices, you have said, or bad
choices, but that doesn't define you as a person, who you
are right now. And I hope you know that.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Thank you.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And so, did you want
to continue about anything?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: I guess I'll go on
more about how, about my ex, the one who actually tried to
kill me. I was high on speed when I was with him. He got
me on all the speed I wanted, all the alcohol I wanted,
because I was only 18 at the time. And we actually broke up a week after my birthday, my 19th one. Um, he accused me of doing sexual acts with a woman when I was not, I was doing drugs with someone. And he refused to let me come inside and get my jacket. I was in shorts and a tank top and I just wanted my jacket, and it was raining out and it was just really bad weather. And he just started to push me away from the door, and he started to kick me down the staircase, and I was trying to hold on to the railing, so I wouldn't fall down and, like, he kicked he so hard that he broke one of my ribs, and he punched me and he choked me, he did a lot of things. I had to -- I don't know how I got out of it, but I managed to somehow call the police to come and, like, get him away from me. And they had taken him away and I charged him and, again, I got an unfair trial. He got three months for that. And I have a permanently damaged rib cage, now. I can't even move this part of it because it's that bad. Like, this is four years later and it's still in so much unbearable pain. You know, I had kept doing drugs and drinking until I met my husband Nathan. He actually was the one who dragged me out of a crack shack and got me sobered up. If it wasn't for Nathan, I wouldn't be here today. I really wouldn't. Like, he's gotten me clean. He's, like, made me feel worth it. He's done everything for me. I was actually beaten up
by this girl at the time, and, like, I was bleeding to
death, basically, at this crack shack, and he, like, came
and, like, dragged my ass out there and got me cleaned up,
got me sobered up. He, he got me fed and, like, we had,
like, started talking again, and we got together. And then
a year and a half later got married, and now I got three
years in July off of drugs. Yeah. If it wasn't for
Nathan, I'd still be the drug-addicted prostitute that I
was. And he didn't care about that stuff. All he cared
about was my safety and me being, like, okay.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: I'm happy that Nathan
did that for you, because it would be a true shame for you
not to be here, because you're powerful and you have so
much to offer. And I just feel pleasure to have met you
and for you to be sharing your story with me. Because I
know it can't be easy, but it's, it's a lot of strength and
I just feel honoured.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Thank you.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Is, is that, kind of,
where you wanted to end off, or?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: That's all I have to
say, really, unless you have questions.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Um, I just have a few.
So --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: -- you said you went to a homeless shelter, were there no -- did you know of a women's shelters available, or?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. I was in women's shelters, men, women's shelters. There were drugs everywhere.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And so, that was a big issue in that --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. The women's shelter, actually, was telling me how I could make money prostituting and stuff.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Oh, interesting.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And were those centers in Moncton?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Um. Are there a couple of centers in Moncton? Or are there very limited centers in Moncton?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: There's three centers, but I find none of them help the way that they should be helping someone who's a worker. You know what I mean?
MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Um hum. Yeah. They don't offer -- or they don't provide the support --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: -- to help workers get where they -- or help them out of their situation,

situations?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Um, um, if you're comfortable, can you talk about the relationship you have with your siblings, now? Are you, are you in contact with them? Or...

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Um. My brother [Brother 2], I'm not really in contact with. [Brother 1], not really, either, nor [Brother 3]. My other siblings, I don't really know them.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: It's kind of a mixed-up relationship between them all because my mother, when she and I fight, she an abandons me, and she takes away my brothers from me. So I'm not allowed to talk to them if I don't talk to her --

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: -- basically.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay. Now, I know, in, um, the youth panel, you gave some recommendations on
how to help workers, how to better support workers to help
them move forward. Um, did you want to add anything to
that? What you said earlier? Or you can repeat it, now,
if you want, if you wanted, um...

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Um, just like I
said. I really feel there should be a place for, like,
workers to go to, like, a place for them to live and, like,
a space for them to, like, find clothes and, like,
toiletries, and like, feel human again. You know what I
mean? Because when you're a worker, you don't got a lot.
Sometimes you'll be working in two outfits and you'd have
that for a week to wear, and it's hard. You lose
everything from, like, so many things, from, like, the
johns or, like, the pimps and stuff like that.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay. And because of
how your mom treated you and pretty much forced you on the
streets - from what I gather - and not providing you any
support, do you have any ideas that could help other
children or youth on those situations? Like, do centers
need to be created for children specifically in those
situations? And, and - not to say, like, the child, child
necessarily the child welfare system - but, like, you had a
lot of independence from a very young age because you were
forced into it. You were forced to help provide, um,
provide care for your siblings. So I guess I'm trying to
say, like, if you find a facility that -- creating a facility where youth who are being abandoned by their family, yet don't necessarily need parental guardianship because, you know, you, you, probably could, could have been fine on your own.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. Like, if I would have had some assistance, like I said, it would have been a lot easier if I had someone telling me how to manage things and how to do things. It would have been a lot, lot easier on my own.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And more from a supportive end than --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: -- than from a parental, um --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. I feel like we need a lot more support systems than a lot more parental sort of things. Like, people trying to tell you how to do things. Like, you need support. You can't just always have strictness. You need someone saying, "I know what you're going through. If you want to get out of it, I'm here for you, and if you don't want to get out of it, I'm still here for you." You know what I mean?

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Um hum. No, no judgment or -
MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: -- saying, and just be there for whatever you need and to support you to help you move forward.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. Exactly.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Because moving forward isn't necessarily a stepping stone, right? It's, kind of, you move forward and then sometimes you might take a few steps back, but, you know -- and I'm assuming that's what happened with you and Nathan's relationship.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Did you want --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: He had that support that I didn't get.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Oh. Okay. But then he, did he end up being that support that you needed?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Oh, yes. Definitely.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Yeah, yeah, that's, I'm super glad to hear that.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: He was that shoulder that I'd been looking everywhere to cry on. I remember one day I was at his house and I just started bawling my eyes out and he, like, wrapped his arms around me and told me, "It's okay." And that's what I always wanted to hear.
MS. SHELBY THOMAS: That's super great.

Um, I'm just trying to make sure, um, and you're from
Elsipogtog, right?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Yeah. And do you have
any connection and keep to your community?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: A little bit.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: A little bit? And do
you want to talk about what kind of connection you have
with it? Or...

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. I talk to a
lot of my family there, like, my aunts. Like, I'm also
very close to my uncle Wayne (ph). He's -- not as an elder
over there, but he's kind of one of those guys who are
just, like, those old smart asses. You know what I mean?

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Yeah. Okay. Well
that's -- so you're, you're kind of building ties to your -
not just your immediate family - your surrounding
relatives.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: That's nice to hear.

At least, you know, you can still have that connection with
your family and your roots and, um -- what, so, Nathan -
from what I understand - Nathan was a big support for you.
Were there any other things that you used to help you
become sober and through your healing process and how, how to move forward, how, how you have been able to move forward?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Well, God's been a big help. I'm not a huge, huge, spiritual person, but God's helped a lot.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Because I remember I, the day that Nathan picked me up, actually, I had a book bag packed and I said, "This is it, God. If you don't do anything today, I'm just going take my book bag and just start escorting in Halifax or something, I'm done." And then Nathan picked me up that day.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: That's goose bumps.

That's crazy how --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. And it's funny because he's, like, "Why did you have a book bag packed of clothes and stuff?" I'm like, "No reason."

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: He didn't know the whole bag plan?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: No, not until a couple years later.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And right now, what are you -- just talk about your life in general. We don't have to go always just about the, your past, but how are
you feeling in your life right now?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: I'm feeling good about my life right now. It's tiring, sometimes, because my son's eight months old and he doesn't like to sleep a lot. And I like to sleep a lot. So it's, like, love-hate relationship there.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Growing pains right now --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: -- just waiting until.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Waking up at 7:30 a.m. in the morning, just screaming at me, and it's just, like, "I just want to sleep."

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: All right. I --

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: He's basically my life.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Well, you know what? Children are so important, right? They just add a whole other part to your life and -- I don't have any children of my own, but I've worked with youth and children, and I can't imagine life without them, really. Um, I think I'm done with the questions I had. Um, is there, at this point, is there, did you think you have anything else to share?

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Um, no. I think I've
basically spilled my heart out.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: And I hope you're not, you're feeling okay about that right now.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: Yeah. There's a few stories I forgot to mention about, like, sexual abuse, but I think I've shared a few, eh?

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Yeah. Yeah. You don't need to share them all and -- yeah. You've shared a lot and you've given some good information just about how, how you were treated and even the services in the Moncton area and clearly where there needs to be change. And so, I think this will be super useful to the commissioners and help them with recommendations. So I want to thank you, so much, for coming forward and sharing your story with us. This is so important and having your voices is just -- we need them. This is for every woman, the survivors, the families. And we couldn't do this work without you guys coming forward. So just, thank you so much.

MS. MADISON DONOVAN: You're welcome.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: All right. I'm just gonna turn off all the devices. Um, that concludes the statement gathering session with Madison. It is 7:20 p.m. on February 14th, in Moncton, New Brunswick.

--- Whereupon the statement concluded at 7:20 p.m.
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I have, to the best of my skill and ability, accurately transcribed from a pre-existing recording the foregoing proceeding.

Carolyn McCarthy, Court Reporter