National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Statement Gathering
Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland-and-Labrador

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Statement - Volume 271
Sarah Ponniuk, In relation to Mark Obed, Hannah Obed, Hannah Obed’s Son & Priscilla Millick

Statement gathered by Alana Lee

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Documents submitted with testimony: none
Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador

--- Upon commencing on Thursday, March 8, 2018, at 11:53 a.m.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Perfect. Okay. So it is March 8th, 2018. This is Alana Lee, statement gatherer with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I'm here with Elder Sarah Ponniuk.

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** Ponniuk.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Ponniuk. There we go.

Thank you, Sarah. Sarah is originally from the Nutak area, but you mentioned you're a locatee?

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** M'hm.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Okay. And so you currently reside in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Sarah, you're going to speak about Mark and Hannah?

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** M'hm.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Okay. And you're here on a voluntary basis?

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** (No audible response).

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Okay. Perfect. What would you like -- oh, sorry. It is currently 11:53 a.m., and we're going to begin the interview. What would you like to -- what would you like to tell the Inquiry?

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** Well, I guess for a long
period of time, and I did some healing on it for a while, a long while ago, but sometimes when I hear stories of missing and murdered young women, or if I hear or listen to the news, and I start remembering how it was like for me --

MS. ALANA LEE: M’hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- and I understand how it must be for other people. I -- I have the year blocked. I can't remember the year, but I remember that I had a phone call. I believe it was in the morning during winter. I think it was either in January or -- or in February.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I had the call, and a person told me that, we have a bad news for you, Sarah. My cousin Hannah was shot by their son. So at that time, I seemed to be in a shocked stages. I couldn't really believe of what I heard, for one thing, and -- and I was wondering, what really happened? What I was told was that their son -- well, his name -- I didn't really know his name, but everybody called him [Hannah’s Son], that was his nickname -- been shot his mother and his father, and my brother died on the way to Halifax, and after he shot his parents, he completed suicide. So that was very, very difficult for me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I remember that time
that -- I don't even remember if we had mental health and
addictions at the time. The only support that I had at the
time was my husband, but one of the things that sometimes I
wonder, and when I hear so much about children being taken
away or the foster care or they have to leave -- move away
from Labrador and go somewhere else, it makes me kind of,
also, think back about my nephew --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- because when he was
away in group home and he went back, he -- it must have
been hard for him to have communication with his parents
where their parents might have speak little bit of English
but not much, but he couldn't really communicate because my
brother only spoke in Inuktitut, and he had to go back home
to a different surrounding he's so used to over the years.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And so it must have been
very difficult, and he must have had so much anger to go
back home, and all he hear is they talk in Inuktitut.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And, possibly, he lost
the culture, as well.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I do know there was
investigation done. I remember calling RCMP down -- down
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(Obeds & Millick)

Hopedale. I think it was few years after or more. I wanted to have a bit of knowledge, to understand better what really went on, and they wouldn't give it to me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. So Hopedale in Child and Family Services? Or --

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: No. I went direct to -- I really called Hopedale RCMP station.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And after that -- but anyway, after all that, I remember my husband made enough money to send me down to the funeral in -- in Hopedale.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And three of them was buried in the same -- same plot, same hole, actually. I found it very difficult, and there was no answers. It -- I never really put a closure.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So it mainly was the hardest for -- for their children, my niece and nephews, because at that time, the -- the children were also in foster care --

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- or in group home. I remember that I had to go to group home on -- on 10th Street. Someone came, they needed me to go to my
nephew and my niece, but I only see my nephew, [T.O.],
and -- so I had to tell him -- I only told him what I knew.
I didn't know the whole facts, and it was very, very
difficult. Can I stop a bit?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Do you want a breath?
Do you want me to turn the camera off?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: M'hm. Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: We're just -- it's 10:59,
and we're just going to pause.
--- Upon recessing at 10:59 a.m.
--- Upon resuming

MS. ALANA LEE: We're going to continue the
statement. Just when we -- when we break, I'm just going
to kind of recap a bit of what we talked about.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Okay.

MS. ALANA LEE: You were talking about your
experiences with your family, and then your -- your
strength and your resilience and what -- you know, how you
coped, I guess, with that traumatic experience and started
helping your community. You talked about being a mental
health worker, mental health and addictions, also within
Corrections. Do you want to tell a little bit more about
that?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: After trauma happened in
my family with my cousin, Hannah, with my nephew, [Hannah’s
Son] -- that's how I knew him, had been [Hannah’s Son] -- after a while, I -- I decided since I couldn't help my own family that I have to help others.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because at the time, I felt that I didn't have no support or help with myself.

MS. ALANA LEE: (Indiscernible).

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It was a long journey.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It wasn't easy before I decided my journey, and after burying them in Hopedale in the wintertime, to see three coffins go in -- in the hole, all three of them, together, and at that time, when we had funeral, I kind of numbed my feelings, and I went back home, and I started to drink, but after a while, I decided to get help from -- from what happened to my family. I started working as a janitor first, and I worked myself up. If there was a job opening, I applied, but on the end, I ended up with -- at the time, it was called LIDC, and I applied for a job at treatment centre called Sapichiwik (ph), and I ended up working as attendant.

Although I was an attendant in the evenings, people came and talked to me. I just listened. I didn't push them away, and after that, I applied for addiction counsellor, and I got a job and started doing programs and
doing one-on-ones, and after that, I started doing -- after
a while, I started doing after-care work, and after-care
work, I had to do five communities, and I tell you, right
now, they don't have an after-care workers in place, but
they do have mental health workers in place, but I really
feel they need after-care workers in place because mental
health and addiction can't do everything.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yes.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That was my experience.

Then after that, I applied for a job, down Nain, as a
mental health and addictions senior counsellor, and I got a
job. It was very difficult at the time, I found, that
moving from Goose Bay, try to rent our house and -- and
go -- and going back home to Nain, and there was
no -- although at the time, our organization had houses or
apartments, and I couldn't get one. So -- but the people
that came in from outside, they had an apartment right
away, but as for me, I couldn't get any, so I ended up
buying a house from someone else in Nain.

So it was hard, and I was doing what I loved
doing, is helping my people. So as a mental health
addictions senior counsellor, I also volunteered with the
mental health and the staff and crisis response team, so I
help in that too.

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: There -- I remember it happened in 2000.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: A lot -- I went down for the support, and I think it was 2001, I was still continuing, and on the end, I -- that's where I went, and me and team leader at the time, I think she's still team leader, we did everything along with the other volunteers.

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But the first priority was the family.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So because of what happened to my family, I was -- my aim was to help others because I couldn't help my own, and after returning to Happy Valley-Goose Bay because of my husband's health, I end up having a job at LCC Labrador Corrections Centre as Inuit person liaison with officer. Anyway, although it was different title, I was still doing mental health and addiction work.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And although I used to be told that I am -- I'm only there -- or I used to be
told, you are only here with Inuit.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But my father did not taught me that, so I didn't listen, and I -- and I seen people that needed my help. Could have been Inuit, Innu, or whoever came through those doors that needed to see me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And right now, I -- I'm retired.

MS. ALANA LEE: How are you enjoying your retirement?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Oh, I'm not enjoying it one bit.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I've got to use humor, so don't mind me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. No, that's great. You don't seem like somebody who'd like to sit still for very long.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: You mentioned earlier, this is part of some recommendations, that you think that -- you don't think that there's any after-care being offered. Can
you tell me more about what -- what do you mean by after-care?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: After-care, I find -- we always have mental health workers, right?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Okay. In place.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: They do everything. They also have to do programming in their communities, each person doing something --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- a person to go see them, but I feel strongly, it doesn't need to be just in Labrador, but after-care needs to be put in place.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Someone that will do the work and go see the -- the family members.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It's very, very important.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because sometimes families, especially if they're seniors, and they might speak a little bit of English --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- a work -- a worker might come in, but the Elders, the seniors are left out.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because the workers only speak in English.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I got nothing against them.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But -- although they -- they does excellent counseling --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- and stuff like that, but our seniors are left out, their needs --

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- in -- in our mother tongue.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. That's how I feel.

MS. ALANA LEE: Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. So everybody should be able to have -- well, and that's just -- that's access to counseling.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: M'hm.

MS. ALANA LEE: And that would
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Sarah Ponniuk
(Obeds & Millick)

just -- that's an accessibility issue, right?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: They should be able to receive counseling in your own language.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: So would you would say more culturally -- culturally based support services --

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: M'hm.

MS. ALANA LEE: -- for after-care and counseling and language?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay. So that's a recommendation.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And another thing that -- that I feel -- that's me. That's my feelings.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: When I talk, I'm not putting anyone down.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, no.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I'm going to say -- I'm going to say how I feel.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yes.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Another thing is in the offices.

MS. ALANA LEE: M-hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I believe for the seniors, especially on the north coast --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- they also should hire a person that speaks or understand in Inuktitut, so maybe the seniors may be more -- although them have seniors programming. That's a different story.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? But we need Inuit that speak both language --

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- or understand.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because nowadays, the society have changed so much. They might have a coordinator that's -- that is the boss over mental health. I -- I don't have -- I don't have anything against people from outside getting a job, but they're doing a job that's sometimes not really -- it's not based on the community needs.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It's important. Each community is different.
MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Okay?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And the program they run, it should rely what the community needs, what the big boss wants, not -- not what they want.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But how the community should be run.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Oh, I'm saying a little bit too much, I think.

MS. ALANA LEE: No. Those are very valid points, and services do need to be community --

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: -- and culturally based.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: And if they're to do -- if they're to support and, you know, help with real healing, it can't be somebody just telling the community what they need. The community can tell what they need, and they have to be culturally and community-based because, like you said, each community is different.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: So thank you for sharing
that, and no, you're not saying too much. Those are very
great, strong points. Thank you, Sarah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because now I'm not
working.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I am no longer going to
be scared.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. I -- I kept my
mouth shut too long.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I really enjoy
helping people --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- that experience
trauma.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Although I worked in
many issues in my own treatment and had -- and had many
help from different -- they didn't have to be Inuit. I had
help from a person that I really respect. He's the Mi'qmaq
that helped me, and I did a lot of healing; although it's
not part of my culture, I had a lot of healing in the
sweat.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So that's me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I listen to my -- my father's words all time, eh, to help anyone, not just my people.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But sometimes, I can't help my own family.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Somebody -- that's somebody else's job.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Unless they request my help.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

Sometimes -- sometimes when I pray or when I talk, I don't plan nothing, how I'm going to say it. Like, in the morning I might pray. I ask for guidance. Sometimes, I don't know what I'm going to say.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I just says whatever comes in my heart, so that's where I am. Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And -- but I'm willing
to help anyone that is -- needs my assistance or help --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- because I don't think

I'm -- I just going to do what I can.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. What else? We

have to learn how to cope because -- I'll -- because -- one

of the things I always remember is my parents.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: People always talk about

residential school, but I always remember my mother's

stories before she died, is that she -- my father and my

mother, they survived the Spanish flu, and they also

survived -- my mother also survived is Ikis Moravian (ph).

At the time, they took children. I don't know if they

called it residential school, but Moravian took them in

because they had no parents.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And so I never, ever

forgot her stories. I still have them.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And so residential

school just didn't happen when it happened. It happened
long before, and people, I -- and even I wondered, how far
did that go? People nowadays only talk about residential
school, their year, but it happened long before that.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because in Spanish flu,
the families, their parents died.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And so it goes further
than the stories that we've been hearing.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So -- and I -- I have
responsibility to break the chain by breaking it, I have to
talk about it, of what my mother told me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And maybe this isn't the
time, but --

MS. ALANA LEE: Yes, it is.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- that's me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yes.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: You can --
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.
MS. ALANA LEE: You can share whatever you would like to share.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.
MS. ALANA LEE: And maybe -- when we were talking earlier, you mentioned the community that you were from, the area that you were from, but then you were relocated, or a locatee is the word you used?
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I was about 5.
MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: What I remember is I go -- to a younger age, what I remember, but I remember the day we got relocated. I remember my parents. We were -- we left from our -- my father had cabins in different seasons.
MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So one of the places he left, and we went very early, and the -- and the -- back then, we call the boat tuqitut (ph) in my language, tuqitut, the boat.
MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So I remember my family and some of my family members -- I was a kid. I was in the front looking at them because I didn't really understand what was going on at the time, and to this day when I talk
about it, I could really see the expression on their face. The only one that didn't have expression, that was very quiet, is the person that was guiding, or whatever, the boat. At the time, they didn't have this, but they had steering, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That's what we call tuqitut, and I still remember to this very day the faces of my family.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Some of them never spoke a word, but they looked back to our homeland and looked at it until we got out of sight, and I didn't realize at the time, as a child, that what I seen, it was like a movie, a video in here and in here that I never, ever forgot to this day, and going to the communities, well, some people move to Nain, some moved to Hopedale, Makkovik, North West River; and, you know, at the time, family used to be very close-knit family one time before then. So some families went to Nain, but some of the relatives may went to, say, Makkovik. Later on over the years, it seemed the family members got kind of distant.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But now -- now it seemed that they only seemed to know who their relatives is that's
in the community, might have a little bit knowledge of who they might be related to.

The reason why I mention this is because I work with guys, and one -- one time, one of the guys wanted -- if I know their family, and I said, I only knew who they were, but I didn't know them personally, and the guys started asking me, what was it like for you guys even as children when you've got relocated? How was it, and how was it afterwards, and how is it now; I didn't know I was related to this and that; I was never told because my parents only drink. And after they left, they said -- some of them said, I thought violence was normal compared to somebody else's house that never, ever drink.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So I think after relocation, after few years, this violence and sexual abuse, the whole works that too play an addiction --

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. As a result of relocation.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- came in place even more so than before, than in the past.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I really believe that. I remember as a child before we were relocated, I remember we were (indiscernible) -- we were away, like, in the
spring, hey?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Before breakup, and I had a sister named Priscilla. She was about a year old -- maybe a year older, but I don't think she was a year -- I think she was a year younger than me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: One of my brothers had him on his back, holding on, and he was jumping or running, and it was -- the rocks were kind of slippery, and it happened to when they jumped, he fall back, and my sister's back was broke, so (indiscernible), they had to take her -- I believe it was to Nutak area, and -- to Nutak, that's the place, Nutak, where the community, it was where the store was, and...

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But anyway, while she was gone, she died out St. Anthony, and the hard part is that me or my family never put a closure. Her remains wasn't ever brought back, so she must be buried in St. Anthony somewhere because that's where she died.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. Was she in the hospital?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Her remains never returned.
MS. ALANA LEE: What year was that?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That must have been early 1950s.

MS. ALANA LEE: 1950s?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Sometimes, the years, I got a -- quite a few years blocked, but I think that was it -- that was long before we relocated.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But -- so my parents never, ever had closure. I never, either. One time, I went to St. Anthony, for the hospital, for myself, and that's all I thought about. I'd like to know where she's buried.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So I put the closure, and I really didn't know who to ask because I was thinking maybe the doctors didn't -- they maybe all didn't knew (indiscernible) wouldn't even know, but my sister's body was never returned to us, and to this day, I don't have closure.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So -- and her name was Priscilla.

MS. ALANA LEE: Priscilla?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.
MS. ALANA LEE: Same last name as you?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Pardon?

MS. ALANA LEE: Same last name or different last name?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: My surname before I got married was Millick.

MS. ALANA LEE: What was it?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Millick, M-I-L-L-I-C-K.

MS. ALANA LEE: Millick? Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. So -- and I guess -- and I -- I guess one of the things is that -- one of the things that I always thought about was, you know, as -- I had an addiction problem, my family do, not all, but there's a story behind their addiction, eh? But -- so all the hurt I had, the most support that I had and I still have, I have support of my family, I have support of my friends, and sometimes my coworkers, but at the time when I really needed the support, sometimes even to now, my faith is stronger than anything else.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. But I -- I love to -- I love to do presentations.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Those kind of stuff, I like.
Sarah Ponniuk  
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MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I like doing one-on-ones.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I miss counseling. I -- sometimes, I tell people -- I'll tell you how I does it, and I want to be honest with you. You could see me. It's your choice if you want to continue to see me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: When I think it's right, I will challenge you. I will confront you.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I work with you long as you want me to, but it's going be your choice, and I always say, I am not going to change you. I am going to give you the tools. That's all I can do.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: The rest is your responsibility. That's how I worked.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. And I said, if nobody don't like me, that's okay. I'm not going to lose no sleep over it.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)
MS. ALANA LEE: That's right.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So -- I don't think I will ever stop trying to help someone.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I guess the hardest part is -- I could support my family, but the hardest part is I can't really help them.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I'm there for them.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. It's a different kind of relationship, isn't it?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Because when -- when you've been working, you go home. You got to take off your hat --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- that you use when you're at work.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You go home, you just been a mom, a person that bawls and screams and -- you know?

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It's like having two
different personalities. Hey?

(LAUGHTER)

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You know what I mean?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Absolutely.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So in this kind of work that I done, I -- I try to use -- I have used kind of different humor because the -- I also did a lot of grief work with individuals, and that was heavy for them.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? So I have to use humor.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Even in a large group.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It takes the tension away.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah, it's necessary.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You want to ask me more questions?

MS. ALANA LEE: Do you have anything else you would like to share?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I -- I just -- I shared
about my brother and -- and his wife, my nephew, 
(indiscernible). The Obeds are my relatives.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And what they share was a kind of -- although (indiscernible) was mine before, 
little thing start to open.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I couldn't keep it in.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? And just it's all part of healing.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I appreciate everyone, different cultures.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And other than that, I'm okay.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: The reason why I didn't -- didn't want anyone here with me, when I lived in -- in Nain as the mental health senior counsellor, we was going through so much at the time, like, crisis suicides happening, and one time we had -- we were able to get counseling from -- I think it was in Toronto.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I forgot what it was called now, but if we needed counseling, we let them know, eh? So I had a colleague --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- for me, and she was a counsellor. We never met. We just talked over the phone, and the first thing she asked me was, can you tell me your title, please? So I told her, and I -- and I -- I was there to express how I felt and what was bothering me, affecting me, and she said to me, oh, you should know all that already; you're a senior counsellor. But I wasn't there because of my title. I wanted to talk about what was affecting me. She didn't help me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So I never tried, so I never really...

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: It's --

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I like support, I understand that, but my faith is stronger.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And if I need help, I will ask for it.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Well, what she should have known is what makes a really good counsellor is when they seek out --

(LAUGHTER)

MS. ALANA LEE: -- and they know themselves, and they need counseling, too, right?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Right? That's what makes -- so -- yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. It's one of those things, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. But anyway, that was back then.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I just thought I'd share that.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. So you said your faith, that's what helps you.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: (No audible response).

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. You don't have to
go the church to have faith.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Faith is -- is my choice, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Yeah. So not -- like so many others, but I could only talk about me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I survived so many things, you know?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: One time working down Nain, one time, they had (indiscernible) say -- because I -- I had to go leave Nain. I wanted to get out of there to get help for me, so we went somewhere in New Brunswick to get help, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And at that time, they thought -- I knew I didn't have to tell them. At that time, they thought my work was affecting me, but to be honest, all those crisis was going on. It wasn't my work that was affecting me. It was home.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because of my husband's health.
MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And not my work. I really love crisis -- not -- I don't want crisis, but that was my cup of tea.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Mental health and addiction and crisis response was, like, front-line work.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But more than one person asked me in the past, are you stressed out from your work? And I said, no, it got nothing to do with my work.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I love my work. I didn't -- sometimes I didn't tell people (indiscernible), two separate things.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because at the time, my husband had -- he had chronic pain, 24/7.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I go home from work, and I try to do my best to take care of him, too, so it was home.
MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So that's my experience.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. And you had mentioned earlier that your husband was one of your big supports?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: He was.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: He support me to go in Nain. He made me my choice.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: When I told him, I got a job, and I spoke -- first, I spoke to him and told him, there's a job in Nain opening, I'd like to apply.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I said, what do you think? And he said -- he said, whatever you decide.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: He said, it doesn't mean you're going to get hired. He was, like, preparing me at the same time.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I said -- anyway, I said, I'm going to apply, and I -- and I did, and he told me he's going to support me.
MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. And from there, went Nain.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Wow.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And the day we was leaving Nain to go back to Goose Bay, valley, I cried my heart out.

MS. ALANA LEE: Ah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: From -- we got picked up from -- from our house --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- and down to the airport. I cry all the way down.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And we got to Goose Bay, my -- at the time, my husband said, I never heard you cry so much all your life from our house to the airport. (LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because it -- it reminded me how -- the feeling that I got when we were relocated.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Hey?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And all those memories
come back, and leaving Nain --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- and the people that I
serve, my home people.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Especially the seniors
that I was very close to, and sometimes, some of the
seniors that wanted to see me, they spoke in Inuktitut.
They didn't want anyone else. That was -- young ones.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because the young ones
don't understand.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But they are supportive,
but they need someone that speak Inuksuit and understand.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So -- and when I was
leaving Nain, I cried my heart out.

MS. ALANA LEE: Ah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. I thought better
afterwards.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But other than that, you
know --

MS. ALANA LEE: How long have you been away
from Nain now?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Well, it must have been -- this year, I believe since I came back, I think in August is going to be nine years since I came back here.

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: My husband died about five years ago.

MS. ALANA LEE: Ah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So that's the reason why. He's buried here.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because he's buried here, I don't plan to leave.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, yeah. Oh, Sarah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. And he was my biggest support, although we had our own issues like everybody else.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: No one is perfect, but that's me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And one other things, too, is that -- that I feel very strongly that our people
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as -- some of my people don't have a voice.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I also learn to be voice
for them.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? Because some of
them don't have a voice. We have to be their voice.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And -- you want to ask
me more questions?

MS. ALANA LEE: Is there anything else you
would like to share? We talked about -- we came in, and
you wanted to talk about Hannah and Mark. How -- how did
you say his name? Markus (ph)?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Markus.

MS. ALANA LEE: Markus. Okay. You shared a
lot about -- you know, a bit about your history, where
you're from, and your resilience, your strength, how you
coped with that and how you've been helping and it sounds
like still are continuing to help, like, families and
communities, and -- you know, people in general. Is there
anything else you would like to share?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Well --

MS. ALANA LEE: Anything that you feel like
you left out?
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I guess one of the things I left out is after relocation and -- first time I ever went to school was (indiscernible).

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And that was the scariest place to go to. That's the first time I ever heard someone talk in English.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because I didn't understand.

MS. ALANA LEE: And it was --

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I didn't even know how to say "hi."

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So that was scary for me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay. So this school, was it a -- did you have to stay at this school? Like, was it, like, a boarding school, or were you able to go home in the evening?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Actually, when we moved to North West, my father decide to build a little house on Sheeshayshet (ph).

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: My father was very
restless, especially in the fall, spring, summer, because he was so used to four seasons.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. That's right.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? And I remember going to school -- like so many others, I went to school in North West River, Goose Bay, Rigolet, Makkovik, and Hopedale, and, you know, after a while, there was a lot of individuals -- not a whole lot of people, but to me, anyway, there was a lot of -- some -- were some bullies, you know?

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Putting us down, being an Inuk, calling Eskimos, or -- putting us really down, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay. And so were these -- were these -- were the bullies Inuit or Inuk, as well, or no?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: At the -- way back then.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Way back then, they were called Native settlers.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But now, as Inuit for our government, we got them with us, so we calls them Innu now.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I feel there needs to be some forgiveness done --

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- to move on because for all the people, they (indiscernible).

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I don't think forgiveness was ever done.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But we are Inuit now. Yes, I'm very proud of that, but at the same time, it was very hard.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. Who ran the schools?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Pardon?

MS. ALANA LEE: Who ran the schools? Like, was it -- was it the -- was it -- -- were they government-run schools?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. I remember going to school. My parents were told if they take me to -- to (indiscernible), if they go to their camp place or put up a tent or whatever -- like, say it's spring and the school's still on --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- they will take the little (indiscernible) -- the family allowance. That was only $6 at the time.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That's how -- that was a threat.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay. So did you have to stay in the schools, like, year-round?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I -- sometimes -- my mother was a survivor of Moravian after her parents died.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It was like residential schools.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: She was also survivor of sexually abused.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And because the way she -- she grow up, as a child, she never, ever wanted to see me at the door.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: At first, I didn't understand. Only later, I understand that she was a survivor, and she didn't want me to go through what she went through.
MS. ALANA LEE: She was protecting you.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because of what she went through.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So -- but I still attended residential school.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I -- I don't -- sometimes I talk about it, but I don't really -- I really don't sometimes.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It depends on how comfortable I am.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because I -- I really don't want to be judged by my own people.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. But -- but my mother, no, she never, ever wanted to see me (indiscernible), is because of how she grow up as a child.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: She was an orphan when the Spanish flu hit, and how -- she was in Makkovik in Moravian. I think they had, like, a boarding school or something.
MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And the way she was treated, she just -- I don't think she ever did her own healing.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So she never, ever let me --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I understand now.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: At first I couldn't. So every time they going to go away in the fall or in the spring, they make sure I stayed with someone where I would be safe.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. At first, I didn't understand.

MS. ALANA LEE: What was your experience at school like?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Rigolet was the best place to go to school. Some places I went to -- like, in Makkovik, there was this old teacher. Aunty Kate (ph), that is her name was, but everybody called her Aunty Kate although she wasn't our aunt. I -- she was really just -- but she was nice to some people, but she...
MS. ALANA LEE: Take a deep breath, Sarah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: She -- she used to call me to her office one time. I might be late for school. I remember I had to go in her office. I had to put my hand out. She either had a big ruler or a big long willow. She says, either you go up and you had to be like that. You had to -- just the feeling of the straps, you know, hitting your hands.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I guess one of the things is that -- become a teenager or young adult, I used to wonder why if she had to be a Christian and why she was sometimes so cruel. Then later on, I got older and became a counsellor myself and moved to Nain. I remember some Mi'gmaw women that (indiscernible) to go to school but they worked there as a teacher. They were there -- they were her victims. Then I understood more.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I will never say their names.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But they were survivors. I used to hear so much awful stories and understood. Later, I understood why they drink so much.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Yeah.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: M'hm. I remember -- I remember so well that sometimes privately, she may -- we were not allowed to speak Inuktitut in the class, in the hallway, or in recess, so grown-ups sometimes -- I used to get confused going home, and my parents only speak Inuktitut. Later on, I start losing my language a little bit. I -- I could speak it, but I'll never forget the willows.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. It must have been difficult in that counseling position, hearing about -- stories about abuse when you were abused by that -- by that same woman.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I -- but I learned -- but I learned -- like, this morning, before I went up there, I prayed for God to give me a boundary, eh? Always a boundary, because if I pray, where I'm praying, that's the holy ground. Even in sweat, when they pray --

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- our ancestors are there.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But, you know -- I counselled one children, adolescent, young adult, adults, and seniors, but a lot of those I'll take to my grave because I promised them.
MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But they're not mine. I pray and give it to God because I can't handle. If I try to handle their issues, holy. I be crazy.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. ALANA LEE: That's right. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But the -- you know -- so when -- later on when I start hearing people talking to me that were way older than me, and I didn't tell them no different. I didn't tell them what happened to me. Nothing when hearing their stories. You know, I used to say to myself, I wasn't alone, but they had it worse than me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I also counsel people that were also survivors, way back then, survivors of abuse from very own minister, and nobody -- it's, like, my people never talked about it because my people respected the ministers, the doctors, the RCMP, because they had all the knowledge, you know? Holy.

But my people, we had our own elders. I remember in Hopedale, my dad was one of the amilukakti (ph), one of the leaders. There were -- there were my dad, but there amilukat (ph), their leader, was somebody-Frieda (ph), and there was my dad, and there was
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Boss-Boss (ph), and there was William Anali (ph), and I can't remember why -- and if somebody did something wrong, the women had to get out of their house. The men, they did, like, a -- almost like court. Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. Okay. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And the person either had to sit in the middle, or they made the circle, and he had to sit over there because some -- women -- my mother and my sister-in-law, they had to fix the -- the chair, like, a circle.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And the man that had abused his wife, the woman had to go out, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And they had their own circle.

MS. ALANA LEE: Self-governance. Their own ways of -- hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So --

MS. ALANA LEE: And you remember this growing up, watching this?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I wasn't (indiscernible), but I remember the circle.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I remember
that -- what they were called.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So my dad used to kick the women out until they finished.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because it was almost like -- now, it could be like court.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah, like a justice circle, but --

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. But they were amilikatiki (ph), amilikaks (ph), eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And they had one leader. He was the leader, but the rest -- but now they calls -- amilikak now was Nunatsiavut, they're not doing what -- the way the old people used to do. It's different now.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: To be a amilikak, (indiscernible), you have to walk the talk, but later, that was also broken, and a lot of my people lost respect of older people because they were starting to drink so much because there wasn't -- ever got help, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But now, I think now we
have to learn to earn the respect back, and we have to try
to walk very closely with younger generation.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? Because they are
going to be our leaders.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I want to make sure
they know our culture.

MS. ALANA LEE: Thank you, Sarah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You're welcome.

MS. ALANA LEE: Those are wise words.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Thank you.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Those are the kind of
things I see.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: My father -- my father,
he was very humble, eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I also have to learn to
humble myself. Sometimes before I speak, I have to listen,
and sometimes I have to bite my tongue. Hm?

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So not -- so many of my
people, my family also went through a lot of stuff.
MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. How many siblings did you have growing up?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Huh?

MS. ALANA LEE: How many brothers and sisters did you have growing up?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Well, when it comes to my family -- wow. When I was growing up and before I grew up, my family had a -- because way back before I was born, they had their own bylaws.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? Not like now.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. Tell me about that.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Tell me about these bylaws.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But anyway, I could only talk about my family --

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- before everything came in place. I had -- I think -- I had two sisters, two -- after the Spanish flu, my father and my mother, they took in -- I think there was three that they took in. When they was looking after them, the children at the time had no pressure to call them "mother" and "father."

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So those that they took care of started to call my mom and their dad their parents, (Speaking in Inuktitut), okay, and later, I came in the picture; I'm a different story. My -- my father was married three times.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So his third wife couldn't have babies. Way back before I was born, if a woman couldn't have babies, they're -- I don't know how they work -- they work it out --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- with couples, that -- a woman that could have baby, and my father went --

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, made a baby.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yes -- yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Anyway, that's how it was.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So I came along in the picture, and my sister Priscilla came in the picture. My mother biological name was Emily. She was an Itulak (ph) before she became an Obed, married in Obed family.
MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So they had those arrangements, but back then, they never had no jealousy.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh. Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You know, compared to nowadays.

MS. ALANA LEE: I can't imagine if that happened nowadays.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Of course, I couldn't understand.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But they also listened to their Elders --

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- when they were younger, I guess, but in a white man's world, they would say I was born in sin, but in my culture, that wasn't born in sin. We had our own bylaws.

MS. ALANA LEE: Makes a lot of sense.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yes.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. ALANA LEE: Right? Win/win.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But -- I'm not ashamed of that.

MS. ALANA LEE: Mm-mm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But anyway, my biological mother, she -- when she married Ottoba (ph), Ottoba was also married twice before her --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- and he had children. So -- but anyway, my biological mere, I have brother, Hinook Obed (ph).

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And Nicky (ph), and -- but the other brothers that I call was Markus, Paulus (ph), Boris (ph). They had another brother, I was told, in -- I can't remember his name, but anyway, they also had a sister named Sarah, but -- that side, but when I was born, my biological mother and her husband, when I was born -- my parents were there. When I was born, they gave me to my biological father.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And my mother -- I never, ever called her my stepmother, but my mom --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- that's who I call my mom.
MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And that's how it was back then.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And so Hinook was my brother. That's my history.

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow, that's amazing. Thank you for sharing that.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And my father afterwards that took in children that wasn't theirs, but after the Spanish flu when my mother got back from Makkovik as a child, she was taken by -- I'm not sure if my mother was taken by someone, but anyway, after my father died, his wife, second marriage, she died, and he married my -- my mom.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And she raised Jonco Meister (ph) and Selma Lid (ph), Ed Markus Moses (ph), and they all call my mother -- my parents their parents.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And they call me their sister.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So although they had different surname, their children still call my parents
grandparents.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. And -- and their children still call me their aunt, and I'm not going to change the way it was.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. I can't change the past.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But that's how it was.

MS. ALANA LEE: Do you have children?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I got seven.

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. I -- I was married twice.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: First one was very abusive. I left that. I left my first marriage. I can't blame everything on him.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I'm also to blame, eh, because my father taught me not to hate.
MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I learned to forgive.

The forgiveness came from my father.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That I have to forgive people that did me wrong.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because if I don't forgive and I carry the anger, the revenge, later, the negativity is going to destroy my self-esteem.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Take over.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But I had to learn to forgive in my time. It doesn't mean I had to forgive them in person.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Some of them, I forgave their spirits.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I don't want -- I might not like somebody, but I still pray for them.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: It's their behavior I don't like.
MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So a lot of things that I learned, I learn a lot from my father mostly.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm. Wow. How many children did you have in your first marriage?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: In Goose Bay?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I had five of them here.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: One in New Brunswick and one in Nain.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Did you say New Brunswick?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Huh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Did you say -- sorry, what did you say?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: One is in New Brunswick.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay. Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: She works in Corrections.
MS. ALANA LEE: Wow.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. The other one is in Nain.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I have grandchildren.

MS. ALANA LEE: M’hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And I have great-grandchildren.

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So my seed is growing.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. That's right.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. ALANA LEE: And you're probably the cool grandma.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah, but that's part of me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M’hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That's part of my history.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. But I'm not going
to stop helping someone else if they request my help.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Right now, it's -- last Friday, I -- I tried, but one showed up. That's okay, because I'm trying to start small but -- 'cause when I was working, although I mention to my boss a while back in the past, I'd like to have a shadow.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I have to pass on my teachings or whatever --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- to someone else because I -- I really don't want to die with me.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Pass it down so they can continue. So right now, I'm going to start very small, and I'm going to be teaching them. First, I have to see where they are at.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: That's how I (indiscernible).

MS. ALANA LEE: Wow. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: So those are the kind of things I want to continue.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Yeah. Just to kind
of go back, when we talked about recommendations a little bit, you said the need for, like, the culturally and community-based services, particular for after-care, and then you had also talked about -- I can't remember the name, the circle, but traditional practices that aren't there anymore and the need to kind of bring those back, so culturally -- like, cultural services, they're community-based that come -- you know, are bringing back their traditions for the after-care. Would you say -- is that kind -- would that kind of encompass what you meant by recommendations?

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** I -- I think that would work, but the communities would have to be willing to do it too.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** M'hm.

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** And I think they would have to be just walking the talk, not into their addictions.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Yeah.

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** Because it's really hard to walk the talk.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** Yeah.

**MS. SARAH PONNIUK:** Eh? But I -- I really think it needs to be done.

**MS. ALANA LEE:** M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Even if it's women started first or whatever, you know?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because women do go to jail, too, you know?

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, absolutely, they do.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And that would be a good start.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And that will be their support.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. I think -- I think start small would then -- maybe it would get stronger. Those women could also encourage the men --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- the leaders in the community.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Maybe even take on some of those leadership roles.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Those are the kind of things.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah, because I remember one time, one of my brothers Jack Olmeister (ph) -- I called him my brother. He's dead now. When we were living in Hopedale, he -- he also came back from Goose Bay, and he lived in Hopedale, and the amilukakitiks (ph), the leaders got together with him.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: They also got together with another man, but that was different issue, but with my brother, the amilukatikiks, I remember, told him that -- first, they wrote a letter to Nain, the amilukatikiks requested see if he could move to Nain, and I don't know what he done, maybe abuse his women, not quite sure, because my dad knew every talk. It was confidential, it was their little thing, but he moved Nain with his family.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And for I don't know how long period of time, if he behaved well in Nain, that he was also told, I believe, that he could return back to Hopedale.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Back then -- although there was RCMP, and court wasn't so strong like now.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: But then, the amilukatiki (ph) met with him, and he moved to Nain, and -- but when he moved to Nain, he didn't come back to -- he didn't go back to Hopedale.

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Yeah. But that was then.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because then the people in Hopedale, the amilukatiki would have wrote a letter to Nain and tell them -- they wrote letters back and forth, I guess, about, how's the person's behavior, and stuff like that --

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: -- and if they didn't
Sarah Ponniuk (Obeds & Millick)

want to return, they also let them know that they didn't want to return.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Those were the -- that's their communication back then is writing letters.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I guess for some, it worked, but we cannot change the past. It's just too bad in the past they didn't realize the Elders back then, the amilukatiki already had the bylaws.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh? They didn't ask if they had it or not.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: I remember growing up in Hopedale.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You know what? I think I was 13 or even 14 or 16, whatever, how old. The -- the church bell ring.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: 9 o'clock. You had
to -- oh, no matter how old you were, you had to go home.

Only adults were allowed out.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: 9 o'clock, you had to rush home.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Now they don't do that anymore.

MS. ALANA LEE: Hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. That's one of the rules the amilukatiki (indiscernible).

MS. ALANA LEE: Oh, okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: 9 o'clock. Oh.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Everybody went home.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. Yeah, I remember that.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Thank you for talking with me.

MS. ALANA LEE: Thank you for sharing,
Sarah. Thank you. Do you -- is there anything else you would like to add? Do you feel like you've been heard today and you were able to express everything that you wanted to?

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Well, I only shared what I think I should share.

MS. ALANA LEE: Okay.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Because the stuff I said, those are the kind of stuff who I been working with all my life.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm. M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: The most help I had was -- although it's not part of my culture, a lot of help I had was in the sweat.

MS. ALANA LEE: M'hm.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Eh?

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: And -- but although -- even though -- but they don't serve us as strong as they used to, but I think the stories still needs to be told.

MS. ALANA LEE: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. SARAH PONNIUK: Yeah. That's it.

MS. ALANA LEE: That's it? I think that's a great place to end. Thank you, Sarah.
MS. SARAH PONNIUK: You're welcome.

MS. ALANA LEE: I'm just going to -- it is 1:19, and we are going to conclude the statement.

--- Upon adjourning at 1:19 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Jenessa Leriger, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Jenessa Leriger

March 27, 2018