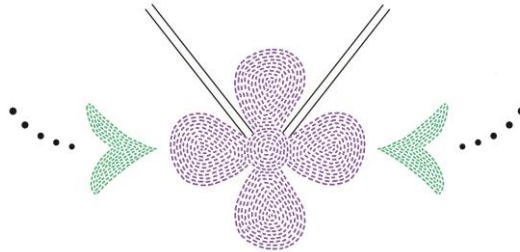


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Statement Gathering
Encore Services Plus Hotel
Grande Prairie, Alberta**



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Monday March 19, 2018

Statement – Volume 315

Sonia Vajna, In Relation to Her Son Jarrett Vajna

Statement gathered by Caitlin Hendrickson

Verbatim Words West Ltd.

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Documents submitted with testimony: none.

Grande Prairie, Alberta
March 19, 2018

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4 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: So my name is Caitlin
5 Hendrickson, and I'm a statement taker with the
6 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
7 Indigenous Women and Girls. It is 12:38 on
8 Monday, March 19th, and we're here in Grande
9 Prairie.

10 I'm here with Sonia, and you can introduce
11 yourself, and open up with what you would like the
12 commissioners to know today.

13 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. My name is Sonia Vajna, and I
14 would like to talk about the justice system.

15 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Okay. Go ahead.

16 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. So July 29th, 2012, I didn't
17 (sic) receive a phone call from the RCMP. My son,
18 Jarrett Daniel Vajna, he was in Wabasca, and he
19 was shot and killed by a drive-by shooting.

20 So I think it was about -- this happened
21 around 11:30 at night. I had gotten a phone call
22 at 1:30 in the morning from my sister, and I won't
23 say her name, but she called me and said that my
24 son was shot, and she didn't know how bad or what
25 happened. Just that it was a drive-by shooting.

26 So then I Googled or something. I think I
27 did 411, or I Googled the phone number. So I
28 phoned the hospital and I -- I was talking to
29 somebody, whoever answered the phone, maybe a
30 nurse or something, and I was asking them if there
31 was a shooting, and I got a phone call from my
32 sister stating that possibly it was -- could be my
33 son.

34 So then they -- they -- they called the
35 doctor, and the doctor came and he had talked to
36 me. And I was, like, "Hi, my name is Sonia Vajna,
37 and this might sound crazy, but I was told that my
38 son was shot and killed," and -- "or shot. I
39 don't know what -- how he is. Could you tell me
40 how he is?" And then he said, "I was the surgeon
41 on duty, and I'm sorry to tell you, ma'am, but he
42 did not make it."

43 And so then -- so then I said to him, "Can
44 you do me a favour? Can you tell me if his wallet
45 was on him?" And he said that there was no
46 wallet, and that there was a driver's licence.
47 And I said, "Okay. A driver's licence, anybody

1 coulda stole it, because my son always carried a
2 wallet." And then he said -- I said, "Can you do
3 me a favour? Can you go and look at him, and on
4 his right arm -- right arm there's a cherry
5 birthmark and it's really big, on his forearm.
6 Can you go see if that's my son?" Because he
7 doesn't have any tattoos. He didn't -- he had his
8 ear pierced, but I don't know if he had a earring
9 in or not, so that was the only way I would ever
10 know that was my son.

11 So then the doctor left, and then he come
12 back, and he said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but this is
13 your son. He has a cherry birthmark."

14 So it's like a -- like, his identity to me.
15 That's how I was always able to tell it was him.
16 And so then I woke up my ex-husband and my
17 daughters and -- well, it wasn't hard to wake 'em
18 up 'cause I was screaming and crying.

19 So then we took off to Wabasca. And so
20 we're an hour and ten minutes from Wabasca. And
21 the road was closed because they were still
22 looking for the shooters. And so then they let us
23 through and we talked to the RCMP. And then I
24 asked him if I could please see my son and they
25 said no 'cause it's a -- what would you call that?

26 MICHELLE MCISAAC: Evidence?

27 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. 'Cause he was shot and killed.

28 So I would -- I would contaminate.

29 MICHELLE MCISAAC: Contaminate the evidence.

30 SONIA VAJNA: So they didn't really want me to see
31 him. But then I kinda got really angry, so they
32 finally let me see him and it was my son.

33 So then we went to the police station, gave
34 some, I don't know, statements of, like, what we
35 knew about what - what my son was doing. But my
36 son always used to say, "Mom, you don't need to
37 know."

38 MICHELLE MCISAAC: Mm-hm.

39 SONIA VAJNA: He still lived at home. He was -- geez,
40 how old -- okay. He would be 30 this year, and it
41 would be six years ago, so he was 23, turning 24.

42 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: What's his birth date?

43 SONIA VAJNA: [Birthdate].

44 So then that was July 29th, 2012. April --
45 April 27th, 2013, I, got a phone call from an RCMP
46 officer and he said to me, "Sonja, we found them.
47 We have two people in custody." So I was --

1 that's good. Because as a drive-by shooting, what
2 are the chances of them to actually finding the
3 guys that did this? But the two guys that they
4 had caught, I already heard around town that they
5 -- they were the guys that shot my son. But you
6 still need to get evidence and everything, right?

7 So then we started going to court, and that
8 was a long lengthy procedure because they would
9 hire the lawyers, then they would fire the
10 lawyers. And then every time I had to go to the
11 courtroom, I'd see their faces.

12 I think one of the hardest times was --
13 well, in the court system it really frustrated me
14 because it felt like my son was a criminal and
15 these guys were the -- we were the criminals and
16 they were the --

17 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Victims?

18 SONIA VAJNA: Yes. Severely. Like, I know, and I
19 understand that my name is very hard to pronounce,
20 but every time they would say Jarrett -- they
21 would say Jarrett Vaigna (phonetic), Vanya
22 (phonetic), Vaijna (phonetic), Vanya, whatever,
23 right?

24 Out of respect, why wouldn't you learn how
25 to say his name properly? That is just out of
26 respect.

27 So I have the lawyers, and I kept on yelling
28 Jarrett Vajna, Vajna, Vajna, because it was really
29 starting to get to me. Because not only my son is
30 gone -- like, he's not going to ever come back.
31 They couldn't even take the time to say, "Can you
32 write it down so that I could pronounce it
33 properly?" I would write V-i-n-a, Vajna, so that
34 they could say it. So for five years they
35 couldn't even say my name -- my son's name right.

36 In the courtroom, those boys, they would
37 just look at me and snicker and smile.

38 I had Peace River -- once it got transferred
39 to the Court of Queen's Bench, because we were in
40 Wabasca going to court, going to court, I don't
41 know, four or five times, Victim Services kinda
42 came and helped me out.

43 And then I went there one day because I
44 talked to the police in Peace River, and they said
45 that Victim Services should be supporting me. And
46 so then I went to Victim Services in Slave Lake
47 and I said, "Well, you know, could we possibly get

1 a ride, or do you give, like, any vouchers for
2 fuel?" And she was, like, "We shouldn't even have
3 been talking to you or helping you. We did it out
4 of the kindness of our heart. You shoulda went to
5 Wabasca, 'cause that's where it happened."

6 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Not where you live?

7 SONIA VAJNA: Not in Slave Lake. So then I delete
8 blocked -- delete and blocked on my phone, and I
9 said, "Well, it doesn't matter to me." And I -- I
10 talked to one of the police officers. You know
11 his name. He talked to you. And I told him what
12 had happened and he said that's wrong. They
13 shouldn't have acted like that because, like -- I
14 don't know. Why would they do that? They come to
15 offer support but yet I got shot down?

16 So then I just started going to Peace River.
17 Once we started going to Peace River I just went
18 there and -- me and my daughter. My youngest
19 daughter was with me right from the beginning to
20 the end. My oldest daughter, she didn't really
21 come to the court cases with us at all. Just the
22 last two. So she didn't really get to see, like,
23 what was happening in court.

24 The judge -- the judge was, like -- I found
25 him to be very rude and not very -- didn't care
26 about -- how would I say -- he said, like, "Let's
27 look at the bigger box. There is a lotta
28 Indigenous people in jail." What am I? I'm
29 Indigenous.

30 They didn't ask me, like -- about, like,
31 Jarrett's background, or my background, or
32 anything like that. They just went on -- on the
33 boys -- the criminals, the two guys, the
34 criminals' background. And they were, like -- he
35 was, like, "They're of Indigenous descent, and
36 they are from a residential -- their parents are
37 from a residential school background. They had a
38 bad upbringing."

39 Well, pardon F'n me. I am Jarrett, his mom.
40 I didn't have a mom. She got killed by a drunk
41 driver. So when I was 18 months I was without a
42 mother. I didn't have any brothers or sisters, I
43 didn't have a father. So, like, could you not use
44 that for Jarrett? Is it because Jarrett was
45 involved in, what did they say, a gang -- a gang --
46 -- a gang -- like, for gangs.

47 And as far as I know, Jarrett wasn't part of

1 a gang. I don't know. Like, I can't sit here and
2 justify what Jarrett did, but Jarrett wasn't the
3 one that was standing trial. These two boys were.

4 And then they bring up the *Gladue* law. They
5 wanted to use it. And I understand that's a free
6 card for most Indigenous people. And I am
7 Indigenous, or Aboriginal, or Treaty Indian, I
8 don't know, whatever the government wants to
9 classify me as. I'm not an Indian, no Marcos
10 [indiscernible]. I'm not from India. I know that.

11 So, like, to be politically correct -- but
12 it just -- it makes me very angry to use that
13 card, the *Gladue* law, to say let's look at the
14 bigger picture. These boys are from -- their
15 parents weren't the greatest upbringing. Like why
16 would you bring that up? We're adults. They're
17 adults. They made an adult decision.

18 I don't know how else to say it. Just
19 really -- it really makes me angry. And the two
20 boys, the driver, he got -- so from April 27,
21 2013, he was in jail until -- this happened July,
22 I think, 19th or in that week, the 19th week.
23 They finally got sentenced 2017, July of 2017.

24 So the shoot -- the drive-by, the guy that
25 was driving the vehicle, he got 19 months, and
26 then the guy that shot and killed my son, he got
27 five years. And then the guy that shot my son was
28 saying -- his lawyer goes -- oh, he says -- first
29 he says, "My friends would like to apologize for
30 how they're dressed. They had to wear the suits
31 that the jail gave them. They couldn't wear their
32 street clothes." Like, really? You're apologizing
33 for what you have to wear for attire but you're
34 not apologizing for what you had done? Not once
35 did these boys -- did anybody ever say I'm sorry.
36 I can't undo what I've done, but I'm sorry.

37 So I -- I guess because they never took
38 ownership it really -- really pisses me off of
39 what they did. Because, you know, when you grab a
40 gun and you load it, and you start shooting it,
41 you know you're going to kill somebody. There's
42 just no way you're not going to unless if you're
43 going to go to a gun range and shoot then, yeah,
44 you're not going to shoot anybody. You're going
45 the hit the target, right?

46 But the way the judge was -- was saying,
47 like, from the residential school and stuff like

1 that, it really bothered me because I was in the
2 residential school. You don't see me running
3 around shooting people, right? I know everybody's
4 different, but we all have to take responsibility
5 for our actions.

6 And I just -- I don't know if the judge knew
7 that I was First Nations. Like, I don't know.

8 Because of my last name, I'm pretty dark,
9 but -- I don't know. But it -- it -- at no time
10 for -- it doesn't matter how much time these boys
11 got, because ultimately my son will never walk
12 through that door. He's gone. I think I need a
13 smoke.

14 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Do you want to take break and go
15 take a smoke?

16 MICHELLE McISAAC: She quit smoking.

17 SONIA VAJNA: I think I need one.

18 MICHELLE McISAAC: That's good. It's coming out,
19 Sonja.

20 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Even if you want to step out for
21 five minutes of air before we continue, that's
22 totally fine.

23 SONIA VAJNA: I'm not sure even -- like, what to talk
24 about. I'm just really frustrated with the
25 justice system.

26 MICHELLE McISAAC: There's some parts you left out.
27 Can I ask you a couple questions? Okay. So you
28 talked about when Jarrett was shot was in July,
29 and these guys were on the run until April.

30 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah.

31 MICHELLE McISAAC: Okay. So there was community talk
32 about who was doing this, and you were hearing
33 those stories. I want to know more of why it took
34 so long. I also want to know at the court
35 process, why it had to go Court of Queen's Bench.
36 I think that's very important.

37 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Can you identify yourself,
38 please, for the record?

39 MICHELLE McISAAC: My name's Michelle McIsaac, and I
40 am Sonja's support person, and I work with The
41 Family Liaison Information Unit --

42 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Thank you.

43 MICHELLE McISAAC: -- for Missing and Murdered
44 Indigenous Women and Girls.

45 So I think that's something very important,
46 too.

47 SONIA VAJNA: I don't know. Okay. So from my -- it

1 was kind of like hush hush, right? Nobody was
2 really, really talking. The police weren't really
3 talking.

4 I had the -- one of the police officers come
5 to my house, and he was, like, I'm sorry, Sonia,
6 and I'm sorry, Rod Vajna, but before I can talk
7 with you guys with any more information, you two
8 need therapy 'cause you're sitting there, and
9 you're sitting way over there, so --

10 MICHELLE McISAAC: Mm-hm.

11 SONIA VAJNA: -- the house is falling apart. He goes,
12 you need to try and do something.

13 MICHELLE McISAAC: [C.M.].

14 SONIA VAJNA: No. He was a police officer right from
15 Edmonton. I think his name is Donald. He -- no,
16 not Donald. I shouldn't say his name probably
17 anyways. He's -- he was the lead investigation,
18 and he was right from Edmonton, and he come right
19 to my house and talked.

20 And then we -- we had asked, like, "Are we
21 in any danger?" Like - 'cause I don't know -- I
22 don't know what my son was doing. I don't. Like
23 my son lived in my house, and I honestly couldn't
24 tell you what he did. Like he stayed up all night
25 and he slept all day. He was on the computer, and
26 I don't know -- like, I -- I don't know.

27 So I'm not going to sit here and try and
28 paint you a picture that my son was the most
29 innocent person in this because I can't. I -- I
30 don't know what happened. And I don't want to sit
31 here and blame myself anymore stating -- saying --
32 like, for myself, like I -- for a couple years I
33 blamed myself. I'm an unfit mother, I didn't do
34 the best for my son, I should have been more for
35 him. There's so many things that I shoulda,
36 coulda, woulda did, but I -- I didn't do it, and
37 it's done. What's done is done and I can't change
38 nothing.

39 So we had the police only from Edmonton. I
40 think it's the gang unit. Gang?

41 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah, there's a gang unit.

42 SONIA VAJNA: And they were doing the investigation.
43 And why it took six months, I have no idea why it
44 took so long. But that's when they were arrested
45 and put in jail, was in April. But then I heard
46 stories also that they -- the one guy was out. He
47 got - he got let out for a bit, and then they

1 arrested him again and put him back in jail. So I
2 don't know what -- why they let him out and then
3 put him back in. I have no idea.
4 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: He may have had bail conditions
5 and he might have violated them. We wouldn't know
6 unless we actually list all the - the records.
7 SONIA VAJNA: But the one guy, the shooter, the lawyer
8 did say, he goes - "And my friend" - "my friend
9 here, he got beat up in jail so bad his" - "his
10 retina" - "his eyeball almost popped out."
11 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
12 SONIA VAJNA: Like, I - I don't -- I don't know,
13 right? It could have been nothing to do with my
14 son. Like I have no idea what happens in jail,
15 and I would never want to be there anyway, so I
16 wouldn't want to find out. But that's besides the
17 point. But he used that also. Like, "my friend
18 got hurt in jail," so we should lessen the
19 sentence because he got hurt.
20 And what was your second question?
21 MICHELLE McISAAC: Okay. So that was the part about
22 why it took so long. Why did it go to court?
23 Like, I know you kept going to court, but why did
24 it go to Court of Queen's Bench? Was -- were they
25 finally charged with something and they -- like,
26 why did it go to that level? Like, I want to know
27 about that.
28 SONIA VAJNA: First -- first it was they were being
29 tried first degree murder, and then it got
30 lessened to second degree murder, and then I think
31 it got dropped to manslaughter.
32 MICHELLE McISAAC: And the rumors that were going
33 around - around Wabasca community, Slave Lake,
34 about the guys who'd done it, was it the same guys
35 who were charged?
36 SONIA VAJNA: Yes. It took six months --
37 MICHELLE McISAAC: People knew?
38 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. Nine months to figure -- I guess
39 they also had to build a case, evidence. It was a
40 drive-by shooting. The vehicle, the gun, I don't
41 know. Like, myself -- now that court's over and
42 done with now, I have the right to go to talk to
43 the coronary (sic).
44 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Coroner.
45 SONIA VAJNA: Because I don't know where my son was
46 shot. But what the doctor did tell me, that it
47 was fatal. Like, he couldn't save him at all. He

1 -- he had already passed away by the time he
2 reached the hospital. But they did try to revive
3 him, but he was already gone. So that -- I don't
4 know if he was shot, like, how many times. If he
5 was shot once, or if he was shot five times. I
6 know he wasn't shot in the face because at the
7 ceremony of life we had an open casket, but we
8 were not allowed to touch him. So I don't even
9 know.

10 But it's -- it's the justice system where --
11 where I have a lot of frustration with. I see --
12 I know as Aboriginal, Indigenous people, the
13 courts may not be as hard as on us. But then if
14 you look at even non-Aboriginal, when you hear of
15 a murder case it's still not a lot of time that
16 they do get.

17 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

18 SONIA VAJNA: Like if you walked up to a cat or a dog
19 and shot a dog, you'd probably go to jail longer
20 than the people that shot my son.

21 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: What do you think needs to
22 change?

23 SONIA VAJNA: I think Canada needs to grow some balls.

24 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Well put.

25 SONIA VAJNA: I'm not too sure how the justice system
26 should change. But honestly, things got to
27 change. There is so many people getting killed
28 and it's getting worse. Like people getting
29 kidnapped. The guy that killed that other guy on
30 the bus, on the Greyhound, you know. He got to go
31 to a mental institution and I do believe he's out
32 now.

33 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm. I think he's highly
34 supervised still. But, I know.

35 SONIA VAJNA: But still that's -- it just seems that
36 everybody disregards human life. That is just --
37 it is what it is. Like, oh, you were in a gang?
38 Okay. You deserve to get shot. Okay, you sell
39 drugs? Okay, you deserve to get shot.

40 So it's -- even if it's to do with drugs, or
41 gangs and stuff, they did the crime. It's still a
42 human life. I could be walking down the street or
43 even -- okay, actually Highway 43, I heard there's
44 a lot of people getting shot at on there. My
45 heart was kinda pounding because I had to go down
46 Highway 43.

47 But what happened if I got shot? Would it

1 be, like -- oh, would they get more time because I
2 don't do drugs? I'm not a gang? I'm not in a
3 gang? Like, I'm -- I think I'm a pretty good
4 citizen.

5 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: You're kind of describing, like,
6 they're weighing the value of a life --

7 SONIA VAJNA: Yes. For - for who you are. Like, if
8 it was, like, somebody, like, I don't know,
9 somebody important. If it was somebody important
10 would they get a harder time to go to jail? So
11 why is that?

12 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: That's the question. That's the
13 question that I think we all have with -- the
14 justice system is such a prevalent theme in a lot
15 of what we hear from the people that we've spoken
16 to. I mean, we've heard from seven, 800 families
17 now, and we've got still another seven, 800 to go.
18 So I don't know what the answer is. But I
19 do have the question of do you have any idea of
20 what could be preventative in that? What do you
21 think would stop people from even getting that far
22 to need to be sentenced in -- in such a crime?
23 Like what would stop somebody from doing that, do
24 you think?

25 SONIA VAJNA: Better parenting? Like, I was brought
26 up with a good spanking. There's nothing wrong
27 with that. Nowadays? I'm phoning child welfare
28 on you. I hate to say it that way. I don't know
29 if it comes -- if it stems right from home. I
30 don't know. Like a lot of people say it's the
31 video games. You know, the video games that they
32 play.

33 Kids -- it's easier for a parent to make
34 their child go on a computer. Like -- like
35 gadgets, than to actually deal with them. So I'm
36 not too sure. Like I did the best job that I
37 could do raising my three children.

38 MICHELLE McISAAC: And many more.

39 SONIA VAJNA: And plus I was a foster parent and --
40 yes.

41 MICHELLE McISAAC: Many more.

42 SONIA VAJNA: Many more. I would like to just see
43 change, though, in the justice system, and I don't
44 even know where to start with that. Like I was
45 thinking to start a petition, but -- for myself.
46 Like I don't even know how to even start that.
47 Talk to my MLA? Talk to -- I don't know who to

1 talk to. Because if things don't change, it's
2 just even going to get worse.
3 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
4 SONIA VAJNA: And it seems like it's mostly on the
5 Indigenous people. And it's almost like we're
6 killing our own people.
7 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah.
8 SONIA VAJNA: Like we're taking each other out. Bring
9 back the residential school. I shouldn't be
10 joking and laughing about this but ...
11 I don't -- I don't know how to change this,
12 and I ask myself that all the time. Like how
13 could -- how could I have prevented this? Like,
14 as a parent, what could have I done differently?
15 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: I don't think it's what you
16 could have done differently, but what would have
17 changed the lives of those two boys that were in
18 the car and the one that shot the gun? What would
19 have changed things for them? Because then that
20 would be a different story for your son.
21 SONIA VAJNA: Actually -- actually, there wasn't only
22 two guys in that vehicle, there was four.
23 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Oh, okay.
24 SONIA VAJNA: There was four. The two people in the
25 back seat turned on the two people in the front
26 and that's how they were caught.
27 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: So they didn't get anything
28 because they were the informants?
29 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. So that's kind of like a change
30 in the story, a twist in the story right there,
31 but --
32 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
33 SONIA VAJNA: -- yeah, there was four people in the
34 vehicle. There was the driver, and then there was
35 the shooter, and then there was the two guys in
36 the back. The two guys in the back turned on the
37 two people in the front.
38 MICHELLE McISAAC: And they told the police?
39 SONIA VAJNA: They came forward. And they were --
40 what were they -- they were, like, protected
41 witnesses or something because there was --
42 because they went to the RCMP, their lives came at
43 risk. And they were all four Natives, Aboriginal
44 --
45 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
46 SONIA VAJNA: -- that done this. And then it happened
47 on the reserve.

1 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

2 SONIA VAJNA: Where my son shouldn't have been to
3 start off with. In Wabasca there was -- I think
4 it was a year or two years -- I think -- okay,
5 that was 2012. 2011 there was a shooting, and
6 this young man, I actually knew him very well. He
7 -- he was one of my foster daughter's half-
8 brother. But he was shot at, I think, three
9 times. He did live. And then he moved to Slave
10 Lake, tried to turn things around, and then 2013
11 or '14 -- he lived in Slave Lake and some things
12 happened. There was a break-in or something in
13 the house. They went downstairs and they killed
14 him. He lived in the basement suite in Slave Lake
15 and he was killed. So he survived being shot at,
16 but then later, a couple years later, he was
17 killed.

18 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

19 SONIA VAJNA: And the person who did that got eight
20 years and the court case was over like that. I
21 can't remember if it was before my son died or
22 after. I'm kinda missing, like --

23 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah.

24 SONIA VAJNA: -- missing years. Like I was there, and
25 I remember some stuff, but I'm not really aware of
26 dates and times, and what really happened.

27 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: That's okay. That's trauma.
28 Trauma does that.

29 SONIA VAJNA: Oh, well I just thought I was going
30 crazy.

31 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: No.

32 MICHELLE McISAAC: When you think of, like, the boys
33 from Slave Lake, and you think about what kind of
34 supports and services were available to many of
35 the youth growing up, was there anything or --

36 SONIA VAJNA: There was nothing.

37 MICHELLE McISAAC: -- or is there something that needs
38 to be changed there?

39 SONIA VAJNA: Slave Lake -- like, when I talk to my
40 police officer -- like, I -- I still talk to him
41 even though court's over. And when I have talked
42 about a couple of my son's friends, he told me to
43 forget them. He said, "When they were little kids
44 and they used to come to your house and you used
45 to bake them cookies, right, that was fine. But
46 now they're adults and they're not very good
47 people. Stay away from them."

1 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah.

2 SONIA VAJNA: So I stay -- I -- I pretty much -- like,
3 in Slave Lake, I keep to myself. I go to work, go
4 home, go to work, go home. So I don't really -
5 I'm not really out there. I'm more or less at
6 home in my safe -- safe zone. That's -- there's
7 where I probably feel the safest is at home.

8 And for these boys, I think what happened to
9 my son, it's done. And I - I don't have any fear
10 of -- of them coming after me or anything.

11 The grandfather of - of one of the guys that
12 shot my son, I don't know if it was the shooter or
13 if it was the guy that was driving the vehicle.
14 On the last day of court, it -- the judge didn't
15 even read the sentence out. He handed us a piece
16 of paper. He said, "You can get the" -- I don't
17 know what the right word is, "the copy of the
18 sentencing from your lawyer." And then I'm pretty
19 sure he just put his hammer down and walked out.

20 We drove all the way to Peace River to stand
21 up, all rise, and he didn't even read the
22 sentencing. And we were -- I asked -- I went to
23 the prosecutor and I asked him, "What's going on?
24 Like what happened?" And he goes, "It's over."
25 And I was, like, "What do you mean it's over? He
26 didn't even say, like, how much time these guys
27 got." And he's, like, "I have the copy of the
28 report if you want to read it." And I was, like,
29 "Okay." So I read it, and I was, like, "Well, I
30 don't understand." And he goes, "Well, he got
31 five years, and he got 18 months." But he didn't
32 even read it out.

33 And then I was walking by, and one of the
34 grandfathers, he goes, "You're not doing the happy
35 dance now are you?" as I walked out of court.
36 Like, really?

37 So that statement right there, no wonder why
38 -- like, his grandchildren will just keep on doing
39 what they're doing because he don't feel that they
40 should be punished.

41 And then I walked by one of the mothers, and
42 then she kinda gave me a dirty look and I just
43 turned around and I said, "You know what? I
44 forgive your son." And she started crying, and
45 she hugged me, and I left.

46 Because for me to carry around anger, it's
47 not going to do anything for me. What good is it

1 going to do? I've had so much anger for over five
2 years, it's time to let go and move on 'cause it's
3 not going to change anything. It's not gonna --
4 the only thing I have from my son is the memories,
5 a few pictures. 'Cause he was one that never ever
6 let you take his picture. Ever. Unless if he was
7 drunk. If he was drunk he let you take his
8 picture.

9 MICHELLE McISAAC: Okay.

10 SONIA VAJNA: But he's like me. He always thought he
11 was ugly, and I feel the same way. So the only
12 thing I have is I got my son cremated and here's
13 his ashes.

14 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Do you mind if I take the camera
15 and zoom in on that a little bit?

16 SONIA VAJNA: So for me, what I -- what I did, was I
17 -- my mom died when she was 18, so I cremated my
18 son and I put my son with my mom. And when I die
19 I'm going to get cremated and I'll be with my son
20 and my mom again. So we got three of these made.
21 One for my son -- or one more my daughter, two --
22 one for both of my daughters, so one each, and one
23 for me. So there's -- there's three of them for
24 all three of us.

25 MICHELLE McISAAC: I want you to talk about when you
26 got pregnant with Jarrett and his life. Like,
27 from -- you were just a young girl.

28 SONIA VAJNA: Oh, my God.

29 MICHELLE McISAAC: And just tell a little bit about
30 Jarrett. What he was like.

31 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. Jarrett -- I got pregnant with
32 Jarrett when I was told I would never have
33 children 'cause I have -- what is it called?
34 Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Disease. So for me
35 it's very hard to get pregnant.

36 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

37 SONIA VAJNA: So I was, like, yeah I don't have to be
38 on birth control anymore. Yeah, that -- when I
39 said "I don't have to be on birth control," hello.
40 So bang, I was pregnant.

41 So Jarrett's dad, I met him when I was 16,
42 and moved to Edmonton, and we lived together, got
43 pregnant with Jarrett. Jarrett was due November
44 25th, 1988. But for some odd reason he did not
45 want to come out.

46 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

47 SONIA VAJNA: So my auntie, she used to drive down one

1 road in Edmonton, and if you drove really fast it
2 would just go phew, like that, so she's trying to
3 scare Jarrett out, but it didn't work. So we
4 tried everything to scare Jarrett out but he would
5 not come.

6 And then December 7th, at five o'clock in
7 the morning, Danny went to work, and he worked at
8 the remand centre. He was a cook. And so I went
9 to the hospital. And it was really funny, because
10 I was over the age of 18 by a couple of months,
11 and so the lady was, like, "Oh, you don't have to
12 sign these papers." And I was, like, "Okay." So
13 then she's pushing me, and then she comes running,
14 the other nurse comes running and she goes,
15 "You're over 18. You have to sign these." And
16 I'm, like, "Yeah, I know." So I sign the papers.

17 And then went up and then at -- at twelve
18 o'clock I started having family come over, like,
19 to see me because I was still in labour. And
20 they're, like, oh, once your water breaks no
21 problem. The baby's just gonna come out. Well,
22 they were lying 'cause he - he didn't come 'til
23 10:57 that night. So I was in labour at 5:00 a.m.
24 'til three minutes to 11:00 that night. And he
25 came out 9 pounds 12 ounces. So I had him
26 naturally, and I was just like, oh, my God.

27 MICHELLE McISAAC: And you were about a hundred
28 pounds?

29 SONIA VAJNA: And I was --

30 MICHELLE McISAAC: [Indiscernible] natural before
31 pregnant?

32 SONIA VAJNA: I was a hundred pounds. Well, yeah.
33 And the day I delivered him I was 179 pounds or
34 something. So I gained, like, 79 pounds. So I
35 thought I was going to have a 79 pound baby, but
36 it wasn't like that.

37 So then -- I don't know why there was so
38 many doctors, and interns and nurses. I looked
39 up, and here's my son, and they plopped him on my
40 stomach. And there's so many -- everybody in
41 here, and I was, like, wow, why is everybody in
42 here? And then they're like, oh, they're just
43 seeing what it's like to have -- to give birth
44 because they haven't seen it before. And they
45 were, like, "He's 10 pounds. He's 10 pounds."
46 And I was, like, 10 pounds.

47 And then they put him on my stomach and I

1 looked at him and -- I'm dark. Danny, his
2 biological dad, is dark. Like black. Black eyes,
3 black hair, black. This baby is blond hair, blue
4 eyes and white. And I'm, like, "What the F?" And
5 then Danny's like, "That's not my baby."

6 So needless to say we broke up because he
7 didn't think that was his child. So we went for
8 blood - blood tests and stuff, and he was 99.99
9 percent the father.

10 How Jarrett came out that way, I - I
11 honestly couldn't tell you.

12 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Some regressive genes in there.

13 SONIA VAJNA: Somewheres. And later on in life,
14 Jarrett, his eyes turned green. So he had green
15 eyes with -- his hair didn't turn dark or
16 anything. It was like a -- like a blondish brown,
17 dirty brown.

18 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

19 SONIA VAJNA: But in the sun you could see blond, and
20 different angles of the sun you'd see red. So I
21 don't know where that came from. I don't. I'm
22 just, like, okay. But I was even saying to the
23 doctor, "This isn't my baby." And he goes, "He's
24 still attached." Just like, okay.

25 So with Jarrett, he -- he was -- he was
26 always the kinda kid that was -- was so easygoing,
27 didn't like to be away from me. He's the oldest
28 child of three. So he has two little sisters.
29 But his -- the next child -- my son and my
30 daughter are ten months and [a number of] days
31 apart.

32 So every year was a fight. Because
33 [birthdate] my daughter will be -- okay, would be,
34 say, six, and then she would say to him, "I don't
35 have to listen to you because you're not older
36 than me right now." So the fight would be on.
37 Like they would literally beat each other up. And
38 then he would turn seven December 7th. So a [a
39 certain period of time] they would be the same
40 age. So in that [period of time] that was holy
41 hell because they would fight and she would always
42 say "I don't have to listen to you." So ...

43 But I don't know where he got his tallness
44 from because Jarrett was 6'4", and he was about
45 150 pounds. He loved playing the guitar. So what
46 we did, was -- my youngest daughter, there's an
47 eight year difference between the two oldest,

1 Jarrett and my youngest. And so when Jarrett had
2 passed away she designed a tattoo, and it's his
3 initials, Jarrett Vajna.

4 So here's his birthstone, and Jarrett played
5 the guitar, and his birthday's December. So we
6 put his birth -- birthstone there, and then we put
7 a line there to say "Jarrett" and then have "V"
8 for Vajna. But if you don't know it, you don't
9 know what you're looking at. You just think it's
10 a musical note, but it's not. So we did that in
11 honour of my son. So all three of us, again, have
12 this tattoo.

13 What else could I say about Jarrett? He did
14 try to go back to school. He was very shy. I
15 always used to ask him, "How come you don't bring
16 me your girlfriends home? How come I never get to
17 meet your girlfriends?" And he goes, "Mom, first
18 you gotta slay the dragons and then you get the
19 princess."

20 So when Jarrett passed away I was cleaning
21 up his room downstairs and I found about 15 pairs
22 of earrings. So when I went to bed at night
23 somebody was coming in. So that's what I mean. I
24 did not know my son, right? I always thought he
25 was -- like, didn't go out with girls. Well, I
26 knew he went out with girls, but I didn't know --
27 like, I couldn't even tell you what they looked
28 like. Were they pretty, or were they dragons,
29 like he said. Like, you know, he was -- he was a
30 character.

31 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: You have them crawling in your
32 window?

33 SONIA VAJNA: Yes. The girls, I think, were crawling
34 in the window.

35 He always used to do videos. Jarrett was
36 one that would play -- do you know a show called
37 Jackass?

38 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

39 SONIA VAJNA: Jarrett used to play Jackass.

40 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Oh, risky.

41 SONIA VAJNA: And he would make skits. He would do
42 skits all the time with the video camera.

43
44 (VIDEO PLAYED)

45
46 MICHELLE McISAAC: He was -- had a chunkier face
47 there. When was that? 2006. Oh, wow.

1 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Can you tilt it a little towards
2 the camera?

3 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. I have to start it over again.
4 I'll turn it up. But he's -- he's doing a skit
5 here.

6 MICHELLE McISAAC: Are you trying to put it on there?
7 Oh. Yeah.

8

9

(VIDEO PLAYED)

10

11 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Is he picking his nose?

12

SONIA VAJNA: Yeah.

13

CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Is that your daughter?

14

SONIA VAJNA: Grandson.

15

He -- you'd give him a video camera and he
would be a totally different person. You'd give
him a guitar and he would play you a song. And
Jarrett was one -- he wanted a guitar, so we
bought him a guitar for Christmas. Then we found
out that a brand new guitar isn't good. Better to
buy second-hand because it's worn in.

16

17

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22

So Jarrett learned how to play the guitar on
YouTube. And you could hand Jarrett a guitar, and
he could tune a guitar like no tomorrow. He was
never ever -- never did music classes or anything.
He -- strictly YouTube.

23

24

25

26

27

But he was -- I don't know. He was always
so close to me. Like, I used to work at the truck
stop and I would get off work at midnight. And
instead of having the door closed he would be the
only person up in the house and he would leave the
door open a little bit so I just had to push it.

28

29

30

31

32

33 MICHELLE McISAAC: And didn't he go work at the truck
34 stop?

35

36 SONIA VAJNA: He worked at the truck stop with me,
37 too. And he goes, "Mom, you're just way too
friendly with men."

36

37

38

CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: You're working for tips.

39

40 MICHELLE McISAAC: He was always home from what I
remember.

40

41

42 SONIA VAJNA: He was always home. He -- he didn't
stray away. He was always at home. He -- he
didn't go out. He always helped me, like, with my
youngest. If -- he went to school at Outreach,
and he used to tell -- tell his youngest sister,
"Don't ever go to Outreach because then you're not
going to complete school. That's the worst thing.

42

43

44

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46

47

1 Don't be like me. Like, be different than me."

2 And I think it was in 1992, so he would have
3 been, like, four years old or something, '95 --
4 no, '93 or something. '92 or '93. We -- I was
5 working for the government, for Alberta Highways.
6 So my ex was working at the mill, he did nights,
7 and I had a babysitter, and she'd come in the home
8 and watch the two kids. And little did I know
9 this, but the babysitter was spanking him.

10 And when he was 11 -- 12. He was 12 years
11 old. I said, "Well, I'm going to go back to work
12 and I'm going to get a babysitter for your little
13 sister." And he goes, "Don't ever get a
14 babysitter." And I was, like, "Why not?" He
15 goes, "You know when you were working and dad was
16 sleeping 'cause he worked nights?" I said,
17 "Yeah." He goes, "You know the babysitter used to
18 spank us?" And I was, like, "Why didn't you tell
19 me then?" And he goes, "Because I knew you'd beat
20 her up." So he already knew that about me. He
21 knew how protective I was of him and of all my
22 kids. Not - not only Jarrett, but of all my kids.

23 But the bond that I had with my son is
24 different than the bonds that I have with my
25 daughter -- like, daughters. My son was my first
26 love. Like, he was my everything. He -- he
27 rocked my world.

28 Like there's a song, it's a country song,
29 and I play it every once in a while. It's Looking
30 At You Dad, I think. But it's a song about me and
31 him. It's not about him and his dad.

32 When we used to live in Edmonton and it was
33 just me and Jarrett, he -- we'd drive by
34 McDonald's, and I was always broke, single parent.
35 So I would kinda blindfold his eyes because he
36 would see McDonald's and he'd go "Mommy,
37 McDonald's." And I was, like, "I -- I don't have
38 any money. I'm broke."

39 And so the few times when we did stop, I
40 would -- I would give him his food and he would
41 eat his food in the back seat, in his car seat.
42 And if I come to a red light I'd have to slam on
43 the brakes and his pop would go flying. And he
44 knew he wasn't allowed to have his toy until his
45 food was done, because a Happy Meal you get a
46 little toy.

47 But there's a song that refers right to it

1 to a tee. And my daughters and I'll listen to it
2 and they're, like, "That's yours and Jarrett's
3 song."

4 He was -- he was very mouthy when he was a
5 kid. Very mouthy. I let him swear. The girls
6 weren't allowed to swear but he was allowed to
7 swear. I don't know why, but I did let him swear
8 because I didn't want to spank him. And if you
9 did spank him he would say -- he would be jumping
10 on the couch and I'd say, "What happens when you
11 jump on the couch?" And he goes, "I'm gonna" -
12 "I'm gonna get a dirty F'n whoppin'." So -- but
13 he would actually say it. And you would be, like,
14 oh, my God.

15 Or if he wanted to be, like, hugged and
16 kissed he would let you. But if you tried he
17 would push you away.

18 MICHELLE McISAAC: Mm-hm.

19 SONIA VAJNA: Like, he would say, "No. No." So he
20 had his boundaries. And people would cross his
21 boundaries and he would swear at them. And they'd
22 be, like, oh, my God. And everybody let Jarrett
23 swear. Like, they didn't punish him or anything.
24 And they were just like, Jarrett. And it was
25 always, just, Jarrett.

26 He did go to school. When he went to school
27 here in Slave Lake he was -- he was - he was
28 really smart. Like when he was in preschool he
29 was already reading. So I started my kids off
30 early, because in Slave Lake cutoff is December.
31 So he was three turning four, and he was in
32 preschool. At three years old he was already
33 reading books.

34 So in -- in that way he was very
35 intelligent. He had so much potential to be what
36 he wanted to be. I just -- I don't know what
37 happened.

38 Going to school in -- when we moved back to
39 Slave Lake they wanted to bump him a grade. And I
40 was, like, he's already so young. Like, he's --
41 he's, like, a year younger than all the kids, so I
42 didn't allow it.

43 And I think it was grade 8. He went riding
44 his bike, and -- we had a thing in our house where
45 -- this is really mean, but we used to scare each
46 other. And -- like, we would scare each other.
47 People would come over and we'd scare them and --

1 and they'd be, like, why do you do that? Your
2 family's so messed up. You just scared me out of
3 my skin.

4 So Jarrett went for a bike ride, and -- it
5 was only, like, seven o'clock he left, and it was
6 about nine o'clock when he come back home. And I
7 was, like, I'm gonna scare him. So he was coming
8 in through the garage, and there's a bathroom, a
9 hallway and a bathroom. So I was hiding in the
10 bathroom. And then he come, and then I come out
11 of the bathroom and I went "boo." And I looked at
12 him, and some girl smashed him in the face with a
13 beer bottle. He had two black eyes, and his
14 aurora, I think it's called, was cracked. And he
15 said that that killed his self-esteem right there.
16 It had totally killed him.

17 And he used to write in journals, and I have
18 his journals. And it says -- if you open his
19 journal it says, "Do not read. Have respect for
20 me" or something like that. So when he passed
21 away I had to read 'em. I know I shouldn't have,
22 but I did.

23 And so I -- I look at them, and I'll read
24 'em. And - and it says in one of them is, "I wish
25 I was a butterfly so I could just fly away."

26 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: He would have been a musician,
27 eh?

28 SONIA VAJNA: He was so --

29 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: He had a poetic essence?

30 SONIA VAJNA: You'd walk into the house and you'd say,
31 "Play me a song." And he would just grab the
32 guitar and he'd say, "What do you want to hear?"
33 And I -- my -- my favourite song was Stairway to
34 Heaven, so he used to play that for me. And he'd
35 just goof around with the guitar.

36 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

37 SONIA VAJNA: Just play with it. And his -- his
38 step-dad was -- his step-dad adopted him. I
39 allowed my children to be adopted by my ex-
40 husband. And they didn't see eye-to-eye ever.
41 Like, ever.

42 So I think that allowed a lot of stress.
43 Like, growing up, I was -- I was put into -- my
44 grandmother raised me. My grandmother was in a
45 residential school. So we were always called
46 little whores and bastards. So what was the moral
47 of the story?

Statement - Public
Sonja Vajna
(Jarrett Vajna)

22

1 MICHELLE McISAAC: Rod and Jarrett never saw eye-to-
2 eye and then you went there.
3 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. So for me, I have -- I have two
4 children from two different men. So I didn't want
5 to be labelled as a whore. So I got married and I
6 provided my children with something that I never
7 had. A mother, a father, and a home.
8 So I -- in my mind, I wanted to give my
9 children something that I never had. So I thought
10 I was doing good. So I stayed in the marriage.
11 We were married for 21 years. But in that 21
12 years, my son never felt like he was loved. And
13 he had said that to him. He said, "Dad, why can't
14 you just love me?"
15 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: So did he have a response to
16 that?
17 SONIA VAJNA: Our marriage fell apart six months after
18 my son was shot and killed. My ex-husband told me
19 to pack my stuff and get the F out. So I was
20 homeless. Devastated, because my son was just
21 shot and killed. I didn't even have time to
22 grieve. I still haven't even had time to just sit
23 back and say "my God." Like this all happened,
24 like, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. Pardon the
25 pun, but ...
26 So July Jarrett died. February I was
27 homeless. Didn't know what I was going to do. I
28 still had my job. I went to work. My daughter
29 -- my oldest daughter moved out. She provided my
30 youngest daughter with a roof over her head and I
31 asked if I could move in and she said no cause it
32 would cause conflict with their dad.
33 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Sorry, how old were your
34 daughters at this time?
35 SONIA VAJNA: So that's not --
36 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: You said one of them just shy of
37 Jarrett's age?
38 SONIA VAJNA: So that's - that's 2013. Okay. She'd
39 be -- she's 28 right now, so 2012 she would have
40 been 23. So she was 23, I think. I'm not good
41 with math.
42 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Born in '89?
43 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. So she -- she said, "No, you
44 can't live with me. I'll take [Daughter 1] in
45 though." Or sorry, I shouldn't say her name.
46 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: That's up to you if you want to
47 provide their names or not.

1 SONIA VAJNA: So she was 17. Just shy of her 17th
2 birthday. Because I got kicked out on the [date],
3 and her birthday's just a couple days after that.
4 So she let my youngest daughter live there,
5 and I had nowhere to go. I don't think I could
6 have went to the women's shelter. I don't know
7 what I wanted to do.

8 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: What did you end up doing?

9 SONIA VAJNA: Shacking up. First I stayed with my --
10 my biological dad has children, so she offered me
11 to stay with her, so I stayed with her for ten
12 days. And I -- I asked my ex-husband, like, "I'm
13 giving you, like, a hall pass, ten days. If, you
14 know, you want to reconcile, we can. Just go get
15 out whatever you want to get out." And he said,
16 "No, it's over."

17 So I had met a guy and he said I could live
18 with him. So I've actually been living with him
19 since then.

20 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: And that's a good relationship?

21 SONIA VAJNA: Well, I don't get abused. He's taught
22 me lots. I know how to -- I've gotten all
23 different experiences. Like, I ride horses. I
24 did a thing called mountain shooting, where you
25 get on a horse and you do a little circuit. So
26 you get on a horse, you take a handgun and you
27 shoot black powder and you make the balloons
28 explode. So you've got to ride as fast as you
29 can. And I did that twice, and that was a rush in
30 itself.

31 He's taken me to the States twice. He's
32 taught me how to ice fish. I've never been ice
33 fishing before, so I do that now. I hunt. I've
34 shot two bison, an elk and lots of chickens.

35 So I -- I'm -- he's opened a different door
36 of a way of life for me. And it's actually
37 really, really good. Something good came out of
38 it. Out of all the bad, I think something good.
39 Something positive.

40 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm. Just going back, because
41 I did write down questions as we were talking.

42 So, yeah, one of the questions was, like --
43 and I think you've kind of already opened up with,
44 like, how things shifted for you so drastically
45 when -- when he passed away.

46 But, you know, specifically to you, how did
47 your son's death change you and how did you cope

1 with the loss?

2 SONIA VAJNA: I'm just starting to deal with that now.
3 Like coming here is amazing. Like I've -- I've
4 went to therapy. Like the first time I went to
5 therapy, I have to say rest of peace to him
6 because he passed away. He had cancer and he
7 passed away, but he wasn't a very good therapist.
8 'Cause when I started crying he, like -- he was,
9 like, okay, you can't -- you can't cry. Count to
10 ten. You can't cry. So -- and it was, like --
11 but I thought that's what therapy's about. I
12 could come here and cry. Like it -- it was a safe
13 zone I thought. So I did, I think, three sessions
14 with him and the I was like, I can't do this
15 because he won't let me cry. Like, I wasn't able
16 to -- to just let loose and -- and feel like I was
17 in a safe place.

18 And then I just recently started therapy, I
19 think it's been two years now, and she's really
20 good. I haven't done any sweats yet to do the
21 Native way, but I would really like to. What else
22 have I done?

23 I've seen mediums, but I don't know, people
24 might think I'm crazy and what a waste of money
25 that is, but that's what I've done.

26 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: What works for you, right?

27 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah.

28 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: What you think you need, right?

29 MICHELLE McISAAC: She's here not only for this, but
30 to attend a healing family gathering that starts
31 tomorrow.

32 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Right. Yeah.

33 SONIA VAJNA: So I think I'm -- I'm starting on my
34 path to -- to kind of start helping myself, right?

35 MICHELLE McISAAC: Mm-hm.

36 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. Taking that - that extra step to
37 wanting to change.

38 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: I guess my follow up to that
39 would be how did your daughters cope with the loss
40 of their brother?

41 SONIA VAJNA: They're not.

42 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: And how so?

43 SONIA VAJNA: [One line redacted - personal
44 information]. Like everybody grieves differently,
45 right? And I really wanted them to come to this,
46 but they have to work. They have bills to pay.

47 My youngest daughter really wanted to come,

1 but [two lines redacted - personal information],
2 so she couldn't afford to come to -- to see what
3 this was all about.

4 My oldest daughter, she has a baby. I don't
5 think they're really coping with it. When we talk
6 about -- when we talk about Jarrett we're all
7 angry. Like, we get very mad and emotional. And
8 I think it stems from me, because for me, I -- I
9 don't think it affected anybody. I think it only
10 affected me, where it didn't only affect me.

11 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah.

12 SONIA VAJNA: It affected my two daughters. Like
13 Jarrett was -- Jarrett was a really good brother.
14 Even though he stole my car. That's a funny
15 story. He -- he -- I used to think I was going
16 crazy. He didn't have his learner's or his
17 driver's, but when I would wake up in the morning
18 my car -- my door -- my car wouldn't be parked in
19 the same spot, and the seat would be back, and the
20 tank would be empty, and I'm, like, huh. Years
21 and years I thought I was going crazy, and now I
22 know I wasn't. He stole my car. He used to steal
23 all the vehicles.

24 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: He wasn't evening being subtle
25 about it.

26 SONIA VAJNA: He used to steal the vehicles. I never
27 knew that.

28 But one thing that the girls do with me now
29 is we all hunt.

30 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: That's good.

31 SONIA VAJNA: So we all of our PALs. My daughters --
32 my youngest daughter, she just got her PAL this
33 past Sunday. She hunts. She's kicking my butt
34 right now. She's got a bison, she got a bull
35 moose, she got a -- a doe, she got a buck, a muley
36 buck, and she got a buck. So she's just kicking
37 my butt. We go to the gun range together, and
38 we'll go blow off some steam.

39 And my youngest daughter doesn't have her
40 restricted but, by law, if she's that far away
41 from me she can shoot my gun, so she comes and
42 shoots my 9mm. And we've done target practicing
43 together. And she's just, like, "Oh, mom, you're
44 a good shot." 'Cause --

45 MICHELLE McISAAC: Awesome.

46 SONIA VAJNA: -- that's something that we can do as
47 bonding.

1 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

2 SONIA VAJNA: That's something that we all enjoy to
3 do. We tried quadding, but I'm scared of quads.
4 My ex-husband flipped it twice on me after Jarrett
5 passed away so I'm, like, "Are you trying to kill
6 me? You just have to divorce me. You don't have
7 to try and kill me."

8 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: So it sounds like the hunting
9 is, like, a way of kind of --

10 SONIA VAJNA: Coping.

11 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: -- coping, but also getting back
12 to your own land traditionally.

13 SONIA VAJNA: Well, that's what -- that's what I want
14 to do, is -- is go back to the Native way. I
15 would love to learn how to shoot a bow, but I
16 don't know I would be strong enough to. I tried
17 to pull that thing back already, a compound bow,
18 and I can't. Like, maybe because it's a man's.
19 Because my boyfriend has one and I tried, and I
20 was, like, I gotta really lift weights and that's
21 one -- oh, that's one way of me coping is working
22 out.

23 Oh, for a while there I kinda slipped and I
24 was, like, poor me. Life is so bad. And I just
25 went into a pity trip, and I actually gained a lot
26 of weight. And I was, like, okay, this is it.
27 I'm done. So I hired a nutritionist/trainer and I
28 seen her for a year and a half, and she helped me
29 to learn how eat healthy. And she said the best
30 meat to eat is wild meat. And I was, like,
31 "Really?" And she goes, "Really."

32 So then that's when we -- we started really
33 hunting. And I had to wait for my treaty card.
34 It's a passport treaty card.

35 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

36 SONIA VAJNA: And it was mailed to my old address,
37 like, with my ex-husband, so I never had it. So
38 then I had to phone them and it took, like, six
39 months to get it.

40 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

41 SONIA VAJNA: To finally a year later I think I
42 finally got it. So then I was able to -- to hunt
43 with my card.

44 And we -- we do that. And we horse ride
45 together. Like we all -- we'll saddle up, we'll
46 ride horses. Me and my youngest actually have
47 rode horses together the most. And it was --

1 like, first we got to just be led around with my
2 boyfriend, and then when we felt confident enough
3 to let go he would let go and we would just put
4 the rope up, the halter up, and we would just
5 ride. And that's one thing where all of us can
6 just ...

7 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm. So that kind of leads
8 into how has your relationship changed with your
9 daughters, and how has it affected you as a
10 parent?

11 SONIA VAJNA: Okay, honestly? Me and my youngest have
12 been like this since everything happened. Since
13 the separation. Because my youngest daughter,
14 that is her real dad.

15 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

16 SONIA VAJNA: So she really ripped her dad. Like
17 literally ripped him. Told him that he was messed
18 up in the head. My ex-husband left me for a woman
19 that's the same age as our son. I have to laugh
20 about things, because if I don't, I -- I -- that's
21 one way I get through things, is I just giggle.
22 And probably it's not funny, but I -- I just think
23 it's funny.

24 But she -- she told her dad, "I don't know
25 what's wrong with you. You did not even give mom
26 time. You didn't even give us time as a family to
27 cope and grieve for Jarrett. Like, you threw me
28 out."

29 [Daughter 1] had to quit school at grade 9.
30 She doesn't even have a grade 12 diploma. She had
31 to quit school. She -- she -- when Jarrett died,
32 that was in July. September, I couldn't get
33 [Daughter 1] to go to school. *[Two lines redacted*
34 *- personal information]*.

35 So, like, for me I lost one kid and I'm
36 losing another one, right? So I'm, like, oh, my
37 God. And I'm, like, "Help me. Help me with her."
38 And he's like, "Help her? Why help her?" He was
39 not even supportive in any way. He was, like --
40 he was an ass.

41 So then November I worked at a gas station,
42 and I needed help. So I became assistant manager
43 in the store and I asked my boss, "I need help on
44 7:00 to 3:00." Because I started work at 5:00 in
45 the morning, 5:00 to -- 5:00 to 1:00, and I was,
46 like, "I need help. Can I hire my daughter?" And
47 he said, "Okay."

1 So that night, at one o'clock, or whatever,
2 I went home, and I was like, "Okay, you know what?
3 You're done with this. You've got to move on.
4 We've got to get going. We got to do things. You
5 know, you won't go to therapy, you won't go to
6 school. I don't know what to do for you and I'm
7 not going to lose you. You're going to start
8 working with me. I got you a job."

9 And she got up. And I said, "Really, do you
10 think your brother would like to see you like
11 this? Do you think he would like to see you just
12 laying there and doing nothing and crying, and
13 crying, and not knowing what you're going to do?"
14 [*One line redacted - personal information*].

15 And my oldest daughter, she was just
16 bolivient (phonetic). Like, I don't even know if
17 that was the right word to use, but she was out to
18 lunch. Like she just -- [*two lines redacted -*
19 *personal information*] and was really good friends
20 with her dad. Like really, really good friends
21 with her dad. She had nothing to do with me. She
22 actually kicked me to the curb. Like, I don't
23 want to be a part of your life. I don't want to
24 talk to you.

25 So she let [Daughter 1] live with her, yes,
26 but then she moved out and she had to pay the rent
27 all by herself. So you got a 17-year-old girl
28 that still won't let me live with her. She's
29 living on her own, she's working at the gas
30 station, she's paying her rent and doing what she
31 had to do to survive. She did very good for
32 herself.

33 And then she met some guy and all hell broke
34 loose, but she didn't get pregnant, so that's -
35 that's really good. She's 22 years old right now
36 and she's not pregnant. She doesn't -- she
37 doesn't want to have a baby at this time. She has
38 too much to live for, like riding horses, and
39 hunting, 'cause she's crazy. She's crazy. Crazy
40 meaning in a good way, right? Like she -- she is
41 all for it. Like, she loves that.

42 But during the divorce, my oldest daughter
43 came to court to make sure that my ex-husband
44 didn't have to pay child support. So for my
45 youngest daughter, she has no choice but to work
46 for the rest of her life and not get that grade 12
47 diploma. She never got that opportunity like

1 everybody else would to graduate because of stuff
2 that happened.

3 And when we were in the courtroom I had
4 asked the judge for her to get child support
5 because she was 17. And he goes, "Well, she works
6 anyways so she doesn't need it." And I -- I
7 didn't even get to say, excuse me, this is all --
8 this is my story. Can you just listen to my
9 story?

10 So for me, I kinda feel I failed her because
11 she didn't get that opportunity to go back to
12 school. And I couldn't force her to go to school
13 when everything happened, but I can force her to
14 go to work.

15 So maybe she might go back to school, but
16 chances are she won't be able to because she's 22
17 and she has to work. And my boyfriend said "Your
18 kids can never live with us." So that's okay.

19 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Well, you know what, I hope she
20 finds opportunities, because there are lots out
21 there for working and going to school, and getting
22 your education. There's stuff out there.

23 MICHELLE McISAAC: Mm'hm.

24 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: You just -- you have to look for
25 it.

26 SONIA VAJNA: Well, I told her. I said, [*One line*
27 *redacted - personal information*].

28 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

29 SONIA VAJNA: I said, "You know what, you can go right
30 down to the college and you can apply for school.
31 EI will pay you."

32 MICHELLE McISAAC: There's bursaries for her, too,
33 'cause she's still -- she's probably Métis.

34 SONIA VAJNA: No, she's Treaty Indian.

35 MICHELLE McISAAC: She's Treaty now 'cause --

36 SONIA VAJNA: All my kids are Treaty.

37 MICHELLE McISAAC: But they're just not members of --

38 SONIA VAJNA: They're not band members. Because when
39 --

40 MICHELLE McISAAC: Walter?

41 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. Like Sawridge is self-government.

42 So in 1992, when I met my ex-husband -- '92, '93 -
43 - I got married [wedding date].

44 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

45 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. [Wedding date]. So my chief told
46 me I could either do two things. He could kick me
47 off the reserve and give me no money, or he could

1 -- I could sell my rights and get -- so I sold my
2 rights so I could get married. 'Cause like I
3 said, I wanted -- I wanted to give my children
4 what I never had.

5 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

6 SONIA VAJNA: And that's a dad. A home. The whole
7 nine yards. And I -- I did do that for my kids.

8 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm. So the last thing I -- I
9 would really like to ask you about, and if it's
10 okay, is you kinda shined a light on your own
11 story of -- of losing your mom at 18 months, and I
12 was wondering if you would tell me a little bit
13 about your childhood from living with your
14 grandma.

15 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. It was horrible. I guess it was
16 better than a foster home, because I know there's
17 -- well, I can't say that because I was a foster
18 parent. I wasn't mean. Well, I could be strict,
19 but ...

20 Okay. So my mom -- I was born in 1970, and
21 my mom got killed in 1971 in a car accident by a
22 drunk driver. And to this day we still have drunk
23 drivers. And to this day I don't think they're
24 held accountable. Accountable, like they don't go
25 to jail for a long period of time. That's going
26 back to the justice system again, but --

27 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

28 SONIA VAJNA: -- you know, it still hasn't changed
29 from -- I'm - I'm 47 years old, right? So my mom
30 has been gone for 46 years.

31 Living at my grandma's house, she was like a
32 foster home also. She took in all of us -- all of
33 us cousins. So when I refer to my sister, my
34 sister's actually my cousin. There was -- there
35 was four of us. Two were biological brother and
36 sister, and then two of us were cousins. Yeah,
37 did I say four?

38 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

39 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah, there were four of us.

40 And we kinda took away from her children,
41 because her children probably needed their mom,
42 right? Now I see that. Being an adult I see --
43 see that. But kids -- we would have other kids
44 come into the home, like other foster children,
45 and I guess it - it was okay. I really didn't get
46 a good licking all the time, but when I did -- I
47 knew I did something wrong.

1 I remember my auntie phoning child welfare
2 on us.

3 MICHELLE McISAAC: Mm-hm.

4 SONIA VAJNA: On my grandmother. So I never knew why
5 every time a vehicle would pull up, but you'd see
6 four little Indians running off to the bush
7 because we thought we were going to get taken
8 again, because we got taken and put into a foster
9 home. Or we would jump in the attic.

10 My auntie, she would be my auntie, she would
11 stand at the bottom of the attic and kind of crawl
12 up the wall, and she would start throwing us kids
13 up there.

14 There wasn't really alcohol because my
15 grandmother never drank.

16 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Sorry, were you ever removed
17 from your grandma's home and put in a foster home?

18 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah.

19 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Okay.

20 SONIA VAJNA: For a little while.

21 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Yeah.

22 SONIA VAJNA: And then we got -- then she came -- then
23 we got to go back. But after that, like whenever
24 a vehicle would pull up to the house, we would
25 run.

26 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: You'd flee?

27 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. We would all run. You'd see
28 Indians flying.

29 My -- my grandmother spoiled me rotten. I
30 was, honestly, a kid that everybody hated. Like
31 really hated. Because I'm an only child from my
32 mom, and my mom was so young when she died, and I
33 don't know if my grandmother felt sorry for me or
34 why -- why she did what she did, but anything I
35 wanted I got. So I was a little brat. And if I
36 didn't get my way I'd cry and she would just give
37 it to me.

38 And there was a man in -- her husband got
39 taken down by a stroke. So he had three strokes.
40 The third stroke left him paralyzed from -- I
41 think it would be one side. He had movement on
42 one arm.

43 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

44 SONIA VAJNA: I can't remember if it was the right or
45 the left. I think -- I think it would be the
46 right arm. He was -- he -- and then he went to a
47 home, and then my grandmother kinda seen --

1 started going out with a man. And this man, his
2 name was Walter Chops (phonetic), and he took very
3 good care of me. Like, he showed me right from
4 wrong, and he was always there for me right up
5 until he died in 1992. He died of cancer.

6 And he was, like, the most loving -- loving
7 and nurturing man that anybody could ask for. He
8 was almost like a step-dad. Like, my grandmother,
9 I always referred to her as "mom," but her -- her
10 children would say, "That's not your mom. That's
11 your grandma." So they would get very angry at me
12 because I would call her "mom."

13 She recently passed, in 2015, I think. 2015
14 she passed away. But we always lived on the
15 reserve because she was a sarge band member also,
16 and she helped take care of -- she helped me rear
17 my kids because I was a single parent.

18 I guess she was really good to me, but I
19 don't think she should have spoiled me as much as
20 she did because I got away with a lot.

21 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Yeah. Those little things that
22 we [indiscernible] and look back on.

23 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah. I could see that I got away with
24 a lot. Anything I wanted I got. I would just
25 have to point.

26 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Would you be okay with letting
27 us know what your mother's name was?

28 SONIA VAJNA: Violet.

29 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: And her last name?

30 SONIA VAJNA: Potskin (phonetic).

31 So she died -- this is really weird. Okay.

32 My son was born December 7th, 1988.

33 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.

34 SONIA VAJNA: My mother died December 7th, 1971. My
35 mom's birthday's [Mother's birthdate], 1953. My
36 daughter's birthday's [Mother's birthdate], 1989.

37 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Wow.

38 SONIA VAJNA: That's what I said. Wow.

39 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: So little bits of your mom are
40 getting in there.

41 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah.

42 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: So I guess I'm kind of coming to
43 a close here, but I do have a few more questions.

44 Do you have any recommendations for the
45 commissioners about what you would like to see
46 come of this inquiry aside from the
47 recommendations you already gave about the justice

1 system?
2 SONIA VAJNA: I think children need to be spanked.
3 Honestly, I don't know. I just -- I just know the
4 justice system has to change.
5 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
6 SONIA VAJNA: And I don't -- I don't really know what
7 else to add to that. I think Aboriginal people,
8 like Indigenous people, something has to change
9 with our people. Because it's our people that are
10 hurting our people. And how to change that, I
11 don't know how to change that.
12 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Do you -- do you have any ways
13 that you - you honour your son? Do you have any
14 recommendations about how you feel our -- our
15 missing and murdered should be honoured?
16 SONIA VAJNA: I know for my -- my son's birthday, like
17 December 7th, we always go to the graveyard and we
18 take a cake up there. July 29th is a day that we
19 always go up there, too, and we sit. We sit on
20 his grave.
21 I think really -- I always wanted to go to
22 where Jarrett was shot, but I -- I haven't been
23 able to do that yet.
24 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
25 SONIA VAJNA: And I know this is really wrong, but we
26 do release balloons, and it's not very good,
27 because I guess we're killing birds and stuff like
28 that, but we do do that.
29 MICHELLE McISAAC: There's butterflies you can
30 release. I was just thinking about the
31 butterflies.
32 SONIA VAJNA: Oh, my God, can you?
33 MICHELLE McISAAC: The elder, Lorraine, that you can
34 met downstairs, she did that. But what did he say
35 about the butterflies?
36 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: He wanted to be a butterfly.
37 SONIA VAJNA: So he could just fly away.
38 MICHELLE McISAAC: There's a butterfly ceremony that
39 I've done as well, so we'll talk.
40 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: I think that's beautiful.
41 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah, there is a butterfly
42 ceremony, and Lorraine knows, the elder
43 downstairs.
44 SONIA VAJNA: Okay. That --
45 MICHELLE McISAAC: Wow. Yeah, I just thought it.
46 It's spring.
47 SONIA VAJNA: The butterflies.

1 MICHELLE MCISAAC: You know, it's spring.
2 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: I think that's a beautiful way
3 to honour.
4 SONIA VAJNA: Yeah, 'cause I -- I haven't done the
5 balloons for two years 'cause I seen a post
6 somewheres about --
7 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: It is harmful to the
8 environment.
9 MICHELLE McISAAC: The birds, yeah, and the deer.
10 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Well, also the -- the material
11 that the balloons are made of, they don't
12 biodegrade.
13 SONIA VAJNA: So I -- I stopped doing that because of
14 that. But I've wanted to do -- just to go put
15 flowers down where Jarrett was -- was shot.
16 MICHELLE McISAAC: Mm-hm.
17 SONIA VAJNA: And -- but I -- I haven't been able to
18 do that yet. I love the butterfly idea.
19 MICHELLE McISAAC: Yeah. Well, we can talk about
20 that.
21 SONIA VAJNA: I don't know, more awareness of -- I
22 think -- I think we need to get more into our
23 culture.
24 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
25 SONIA VAJNA: We really do.
26 MICHELLE McISAAC: It's gonna happen to you.
27 SONIA VAJNA: Uh-huh. I think that's the only way.
28 Like, teaching our children how to hunt is way
29 better. Is a -- is a way better -- I think that's
30 why we started hunting was to honour my son.
31 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
32 SONIA VAJNA: It's one way of honouring him. He
33 always wanted to to shoot guns. Always. He
34 always wanted to go hunt. And ex-husband was a
35 woman, but he's not really a woman. But he -- he
36 was like a woman. Like he -- he didn't want to go
37 get his PAL. He didn't want to go hunting. He
38 fished in the lake and stuff like that, but he
39 didn't want to show my son, like, the ways.
40 And my ex-husband's parents, his dad has --
41 his step-dad is a hunter also. But my -- my
42 ex-mother-in-law said, "Well, that's not your
43 grandson, so you really shouldn't have to take him
44 hunting." So, like, my children never were
45 accepted.
46 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
47 SONIA VAJNA: So I think -- we need to show the

1 younger generation how to live, to live off the
2 land.
3 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
4 SONIA VAJNA: To participate more in our culture.
5 Like years ago -- I remember being in school and I
6 used to speak Cree. And in kindergarten I got
7 strapped because I spoke Cree.
8 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm.
9 SONIA VAJNA: Do I speak Cree now?
10 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: I'm guessing not.
11 SONIA VAJNA: No. I don't. But yet we have other
12 cultures coming into Canada and it's, like, they
13 speak their language, they don't want pork in the
14 school. Like that's just an example, right? But
15 we were -- all our stuff was taken away. And how
16 for - how do we get that back? You can't make
17 your children want to practice the Native way
18 either though, because it's kind of an
19 embarrassment, right?
20 Like I know, like, friends of mine, they
21 giggled and chuckled about my jacket. I have a
22 First Nation jacket that was made for me when I
23 was 16 and I still have it. And it has the --
24 it's a really nice jacket. It has beadwork, and
25 it's made out of hide and stuff like that. And I
26 know, like, years ago I used to be made fun out of
27 it when I'd wear it. Some of my friends laughed
28 because I actually still have it.
29 So it's kind of, like, you know, where are
30 you -- you have to be around a bunch of native
31 people to be accepted, I think. I don't think
32 non-status people, or non-Native, I don't even
33 know the political correct way to say, like --
34 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: They say non-Indigenous.
35 SONIA VAJNA: Non-Indigenous people. You have to hang
36 around with our own kind in order to be accepted.
37 Because other than that, we're not. We're not
38 really accepted.
39 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Mm-hm. So is there anything
40 else that you'd like the commissioners to know
41 that I haven't already asked you?
42 SONIA VAJNA: No. I think I'm good.
43 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: Okay. Thank you for sharing
44 today. And I think we've had a good conversation
45 about a lot of things.
46 SONIA VAJNA: Was I all over the place?
47 CAITLIN HENDRICKSON: No. It's 2:16. I'm going to

1 shut off the recording.
2 SONIA VAJNA: Okay.

3
4 (PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED)
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25
26 I hereby certify that this is a true and
27 accurate transcript of these proceedings
28 recorded on sound recording apparatus,
29 transcribed to the best of my skill and
30 ability in accordance with applicable
31 standards.

32 *C. Miller*
33 _____
34 C. Miller
35 Court Transcriber
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