Sophie Merasty, In relation to Rose Lena Merasty

Statement gathered by Sheila Mazhari

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**Documents submitted with testimony:**

1. Color photocopy of photograph (1 page)
SHEILA MAZHARI: How about we start with your introduction?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Sure. My name is Sophie Merasty. I'm of the Dene and Woodlands Cree Nations of Northern Manitoba, a community called Lac Brochet.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. And what -- when were you born?

SOPHIE MERASTY: I was born February 16, 1964.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. And what would you like to start with? Do you want to start with your own childhood?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Sure, yes. My father is part Cree and part Dene and my mother was Dene. Theirs was an arranged marriage. My father's mother went to residential school. And so, you know, I have -- had five sisters and seven brothers -- or there's five of us girls and seven boys in the family. We were non-status so we, we didn't go to residential school, but my grandmother did. We grew up in the small community of Brochet, which is on the northwest tip of Reindeer Lake in northern Manitoba, very isolated. The only way you can get in is by plane or skidoo or over the winter road -- the ice road, in the winter by truck.

I -- my -- my sister who was -- I wanna talk about my sister, Rose Merasty who was killed in the Downtown Eastside in 1991. Left home probably as a teenager because we didn't have high school there. You could only do grade nine and then you had to go somewhere else like Winnipeg or you know, Cranberry Portage and there you were put in a home. So, you know, I was much younger than my sister Rose when she left. I -- I know that she lived in Winnipeg for a while and she had a -- got married, had a daughter. Her husband pulled an armed robbery at a bank and went to prison and her daughter was apprehended. And -- and -- and I don't believe that my sister ever saw her again. We have had -- found each other though, our family found this -- this daughter. And you know, she was raised in a non-Aboriginal home, but she knows about her mother.
So, Rose moved to Vancouver sometime in her late or mid 20s perhaps and -- and while she lived here she had four more children. And she had two daughters who I have contact with. They live in Toronto, they were -- this -- she had these children from a different relationship.

Anyhow, this is kind of hard for me to talk about, but my sister had you know, issues with addictions. I know that when she was younger there were -- there was abuse. She had been abused sexually, physically. Anyhow, I -- I believe that because of what happened to her when she was younger, it affected her ability to be a mother. At some point -- and, of course the father was also a drug dealer -- of the two daughters that she had with him. These are the nieces I have contact with in Toronto. And he -- he went to jail too. Her daughters were -- you know, there was a threat that they could be apprehended, but they actioned it -- his mother, the grandmother came from Ontario and took the girls. And so, they were raised by their grandmother and of course, the father was out there. And -- and then she had two more boys. The first one was apprehended. I don’t -- we don’t know where he is today. The -- the second one was also apprehended, and he was raised in Burns Lake with a family, a First Nations family. We have had contact with him as well, the family.

And you know, the relationships that she had the children with -- the men that she had relationships with, they were all abusive. She -- when I think of how she died, you know, yes there was a man involved. Somebody I think she just met and she had been partying with, but she was already hurting as a result of having lost her children. And so, out -- I would say, you know, this man killed her, but it wasn’t just him, it was everybody. It was the whole system that killed her. It was the social service system, it was the justice system because she kept getting picked up and put in -- in jail for petty crimes. So, you know, the accumulation of all those systems killed her. In August -- on August the 21st of 1991, like a few days after -- a day after I got a call and -- but that was the day that she was killed. She was in
the Downtown Eastside in Blood Alley, Gastown and
I guess because they didn’t know that there was a
family member here, they contacted my family back
east and they called me and told me what
happened, that she was dead. She was found in a
back alley, had been pushed out the third-floor
window and was like naked from the waist down.
Her arm was broken, and she died on the way to
the hospital.

At the time I was working, and the Crown
prosecutor didn’t contact me for -- you know,
they -- they did arrest the person involved in
her death. They -- they didn’t contact me to let
know when he was going up on trial, so I didn’t
find all this information out 'til later. I -- I
didn’t see who he was, all I have is a name. I
-- I know that when I went to see her body, the
coroner had put a lot of makeup on her face and
it didn’t look like her because Rose is very
beautiful and didn’t use that much makeup. So, I
smudged some of the makeup off and they were
hiding big bruises on her face, like just huge.
And you know, normally, you know when a body's in
the coffin they fold the arms or the hands over
like this. Well, hers were -- couldn’t be folded
because her arm was broke -- had been -- was
broken.

And I guess the way I was impacted was I was
-- well, from shock to disbelief to great
sadness, grief. I mean, she was my only sister
here so I -- I didn’t -- I didn’t have the
supports around me at the time to process, you
know, the grief and I -- I -- I became very
angry. I was very angry for years, but it was an
evolving type of anger because when I finally
found out what happened to, like the charge --
there was initially a charge of aggravated
assault, but the person was held in the holding
cells in the downtown -- at the downtown police
holding cells and he was there for one month.
And when his trial came up they -- the judge
ruled that that one month that he served was dead
time and ruled it as time served and they
released him. And he went back east or somewhere
is what I heard. So, I never saw him. All I
have is his name. I -- I guess if anything I
would have liked was to have a call to have some
kind of justice served, because I felt that the police didn’t do a thorough investigation. That -- it was obvious to me that there was some kind of sexual assault, that she was found with out her pants or underwear and bruises all over her, her face and her body. And that they just disregarded it because she was Indigenous, a Native woman and they had been partying or she had been drinking or using. And you know, more than likely been labeled a prostitute. So, I felt angry about how -- how the courts treated her, how the legal system treated her death. Like, it was irrelevant, that her -- her death you know, felt disregarded. I felt angry that they released this man after a month in a holding cell and he took the life of my sister, who was a mother, an auntie, who -- who didn't have a voice. You know, whose voice had been over the years silenced.

Her children, her daughters that were impacted -- I can see how they were impacted even though they were really small when their mom died. Both of them struggle with addictions now. One of them's -- her children -- my sister is a grandmother now. One of them -- her -- has children in foster care as well so I can see the cycle and the patterns. I can feel when I see them, when I go to Toronto, I feel that when I do see them I can feel a sense of their -- this -- this hole in their lives, this huge gap. They don't have a connection with you know, the one person in their life who they needed, which is their mother. I can sense a -- I can -- I get a feeling or a sense that they're at a loss somehow and I -- and they are, you know. And -- and my own family, my -- my brother and sisters -- there's been just a sense of helplessness when talking about her. Like a sense of it happened, but there's no words -- there's no words to describe that. It's just like, what do you say? And what do you do? Because, obviously we all know that there's been no -- no justice in her death. They are at a loss and I've only begun to find my own voice. I'm the only one who has spoken for her in my family, in my huge family. Although, many of my family members have also died as well since.
The impact of her death has affected all of our lives, you know, all of us. Myself, I, you know, like I said I was very angry, I had my own addiction issues. I ended up relapsing at that point after working on healing my own life and being clean for three years. When I -- when I -- well, after she died, after I went -- before I went to see her body I -- I drank -- I had a drink after three years. Alcohol was not my addiction of choice, but I -- I did that until I eventually relapsed into my drug of choice. And then almost like ended up dying myself. I -- in -- in retrospect, I realize it was because I didn't know where to find support. I -- I didn't know what to do with the anger. I didn't know what to do with the pain. Thankfully, I -- I got help again. I also felt vulnerable, you know, but that was an ongoing feeling for much of my life because I grew up dealing with, or being -- experiencing male violence, sexual violence myself, racism, misogyny. It goes on and on. I probably experienced all the same things my sister did, you know? And I think it was hard -- really hard for her because I can't imagine -- I can -- I -- I know the pain of being separated from your child and so you know, her issues kept her in her addiction, not having the resources, not having the support systems in place. I think if they had been there she -- maybe she would still be alive today. Maybe she wouldn't have gone down those paths and ended up in rooms, you know, with strangers.

I did get a police report, but I didn't get all the information. They blocked out all the names of the person and age and where he was from, so -- because I was the only person trying to get this information, I -- I didn't -- and again, not knowing where the supports were, I -- I didn't pursue it further than that. But I wanted to get a coroner's report so just earlier today, one of the staff people was able to direct me to somebody to help me get that process started. Because I think that it's important that her children and my family will wanna know what happened. I don't think they do. I probably have the most information about that. I
Sophie Merasty (Rose Merasty)

just haven’t shared it with my nieces yet or my nephews, her children because I wanna be sure. Like, I want them to be ready, I want them to have support.

I -- I guess if anything, I would like to see changes made to the Canadian legal system. You know, I -- I struggled trying to get information and I'm her blood sister. If anybody was -- should get information, it's me. I was basically told that I had to go through a process. How that process worked, to get the police report or the coroners was that I would have to through Freedom of Information and Privacy Act or go through the police, you know -- the police said, or I was told that I had to either have like my parents, who are both deceased now, write a letter asking for this. They have first priority. So, that's not an option because they're both deceased. The other one was her children and they're not in a position to do this right now. They are -- they're young people, but they have their own issues. They have children in care or they're estranged and been estranged from their mother. I would have -- somebody would have to help guide them through that. And then it's the brothers and sisters. Oh, before the children would be the spouse, but she didn’t have a spouse. And then the children and then the siblings. I'm like what kind of system is that? What kind of bullshit is that to get, you know, the information? So, when I was told that of course I was like exasperated. I didn’t know what to do. I would like to see changes to that because I think family members should have that information irregardless of, you know -- like immediate family members. Why should they withhold that kind of information?

I also, you know, felt that the police, like I said, didn’t do a very thorough investigation. You know, like did they even do a vaginal swab you know, to collect DNA to -- to find out whether she had been raped, sexually assaulted before? Shouldn’t a person have been charged with something like that as well? You know? I mean -- I would have liked to see him. You know, I would have liked to go to court when he went
up. I think Crown prosecutors should be more mindful of, you know, family members that way. You know, I never really felt a sense of closure with my sister -- my sister's death. And -- and you know they -- the -- the thought of her laying in this back alley dying in -- in an undignified way -- and the -- the guy apparently went for a walk. Like, what kind of person does that when somebody has fallen from the third-floor window? You call an ambulance right away. Like, I don't know how long she was there.

How they caught him was they waited for him after somebody found her and called an ambulance, you know. The police waited and then he came back. Like, there's something wrong with this right? I know that the legal system is full of technicalities that can get people off on, you know -- let people off, get away with murder, but in this case, it doesn't seem like -- you know, I mean I'm sure there was all kinds of evidence. She had a denture. Her teeth were found in that room so obviously like he assaulted her in there. I guess because I've had my own experience of male violence against myself when I was younger and because I've done some work, I've done some healing around it, I no longer feel like a victim around, you know -- but I -- you know, I -- I know the -- the -- how it feels to be vulnerable. I remember how it feels prior to my healing, being afraid of men and not knowing how to ward off unwanted advances. I would like to see, like -- you know, I have granddaughters now, two beautiful granddaughters. I don't want to see them suffer. Like, I don't want them to go through what I went through. So, I -- you know, I -- I pray for change. I pray, you know, like that the laws against sexual violence or any kind of violence, the murder of our women, our sisters, our -- our daughters, our granddaughters, whatever, our aunties and mothers will change so that there are harsher penalties. You know, if anything, that's what I would like to see out of this Inquiry. You know, as a recommendation like some -- as a work that the Inquiry is doing because there's too many. There's too many already and it just seems endless and it continues, and it seems so easy to
kill an Indian woman or an Indian person in this society and get away with it. You know, like our lives don’t mean anything, but I know that’s not true. Because my -- my sister was a beautiful person. I know she was hurt, but you know, she was a very vibrant woman, you know, talented. She played guitar, she sang, she had an infectious laugh, but she was hurt, very hurt. And all that accumulated her -- resulted in her death.

So, we also need places, safe places for women like her to go to, housing, shelter, support systems. It's been many years, but I still miss her and I'm her only voice right now. So, I thought it was important for me to make this statement today.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you mind if I ask a few details about Rose? So, let's spell her name for the record. So...

SOPHIE MERASTY: Rose, as in rose. R-O-S-E.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Yeah.

SOPHIE MERASTY: Her second name was Lena. L-E-N-A.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And Merasty. M-E-R-A-S-T-Y.

SOPHIE MERASTY: Her birthday was May 13th, 19 -- I think it was '58, but I have to double check on that.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And when she passed away in 1991 she was how old?

SHEILA MAZHARI: She was only about 30 -- I think she was either 34 or 35.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. And have you -- what's the process been like when you've tried to get -- have you tried to reopen the case or anything like that or...?

SOPHIE MERASTY: No, because like I said I -- I didn’t have supports, I didn’t know where to go. It was just over a year ago that I finally got the police report and again, I didn’t have all the details of that report. To me it seems like they're protecting him by blotting out his name and age and details about him. So, I'd be open to whatever supports there are in place to continue to get all the information so that I can, you know, share it with her children and my family.

SHEILA MAZHARI: So, you're more interested, are you,
in -- in getting the full report of what the case had been done or did you want it --

SOPHIE MERASTY: All of it.
SHEILA MAZHARI: -- reinvestigated and reopened and to see if they could charge him?
SOPHIE MERASTY: Yes, I would like that. I would, you know -- I would like it to be reopened.
SHEILA MAZHARI: Did you wanna share any information about him?
SOPHIE MERASTY: His name is [J.R.].
SHEILA MAZHARI: How do you spell that?
SOPHIE MERASTY: [J.]
SHEILA MAZHARI: Just for the record.
SOPHIE MERASTY: [Spells name].
SHEILA MAZHARI: Mm-hm.
SOPHIE MERASTY: I think is how it's spelled. And I'm not sure if his last name is an [spells variant of last name] or [spells variant of last name]. I don't know much else except that he's from back east somewhere, maybe Nova Scotia. I don't know.
SHEILA MAZHARI: And do you know anything about his background?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I think he's actually maybe First Nations, but I don't know for sure. You know, he might be part Native and part white from the sounds of -- but I don't know much else and he was a younger man. That's all I know.
SHEILA MAZHARI: And you know he's still alive or...?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I -- I don't know anything more. I don't even know his birthday or what town he's from. I googled his name, I've tried to, you know -- I mean, like I always -- in the back of my mind I think, you know, I don't know if he feels like he just got away with something, like with murder. But if he had an conscience whatsoever, any soul, any spirit, any you know, kind of awareness of the magnitude of what it is to take a life, you know, who was loved by -- by others, needed by others, and the impact it's had then, you know -- I always think why didn't he -- why couldn't he -- like maybe he could just come forward and say like, I understand, I realize what I've done and I'm sorry. At least some kind of acknowledgement instead of just disappearing off and not trying to like -- 'cause I, you know -- make any, you know kind of acknowledgement because if he did, that could provide healing for
me, for my family, for my sister's children, you
know? But I don't know where he went or where he
is or whether he cares about what he's done.
SHEILA MAZHARI: And when you said you received some
direction today on how to get more of a -- was it
FILU downstairs that helped you?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I think so, yeah.
SHEILA MAZHARI: And when you said --
SOPHIE MERASTY: Well, a guy gave her the -- the
information and got the process started.
SHEILA MAZHARI: That's good.
SOPHIE MERASTY: In my statement, in a written
statement I gave the wrong date. It was 1991
when she was killed.
SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay.
SOPHIE MERASTY: I put down 1980 -- I gave --
SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you mean this one here?
SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay.
SOPHIE MERASTY: In the original. It was 1991.
SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. I don't see a date. Oh, it
says 1981.
SOPHIE MERASTY: Yeah, it's --
SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay, so yeah -- that's -- I'll
change that for us. So, downstairs where they
have FILU they also have BC Family Services and
they -- they can help connect you with what you
would need for -- kind of like to be an advocate
for this police process and things like that.
So, we'll make sure to check that out too.
SOPHIE MERASTY: Okay.
SHEILA MAZHARI: When you said Rose was abused as a
child, did you say -- was she -- was she sexually
and -- and physically?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I believe so. I -- I -- she tried to
tell me, but she couldn't finish what -- she just
broke down crying and she couldn't bring the
words up.
SHEILA MAZHARI: So, you don't know who did that to
her?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I don't. It could be anybody from a
local to a family member to the priest, a
teacher. You know, there's so many -- we -- we
were an isolated community. Roman Catholicism
was the ruling religion and they controlled
everybody, and they were paedophiles and you
know, abusers. It could have been anybody.
SHEILA MAZHARI: Is there anything else you want to share about Rose or...?

SOPHIE MERASTY: She had beautiful children. She's very beautiful. Like physically, but her spirit was -- very bubbly type of personality, very much a charmer. And left-handed so when she played guitar she had to change all the strings upside down so she could play it. Yeah, and classy.

She was really a beautiful person. I remember she came out to Winnipeg when I was in high school there and I don’t know how she got all this money, but she had a gold tooth filling. Anyways, she had all this money. I think she and her lawyer got money somehow for I don’t know what, but she took me out shopping. And, you know just like -- I was just amazed by her.

Like, you know we come from a very poor -- like we came from a very poor upbringing, but you know she would just lavish with all this money she had, and she took me out for dinner and shopping and stuff. So, that was new to me. She introduced me to something that's, you know good and possible.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Did she have any other names or...?

SOPHIE MERASTY: No.

SHEILA MAZHARI: No? [Indiscernible]

SOPHIE MERASTY: No, just Rose. Yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And did you want to give any names? Do you remember any of the -- the judges that -- or...?

SOPHIE MERASTY: I don’t have any of that information, you know? I would like to know. Like, I would like all of this information. You know, I -- I mean, of course in order to pursue it, like I said I need the support. I need, you know people who will help me, who know how to get this information. Yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And you can always submit -- when -- when you do receive them, of the police report and things -- you can -- you can submit it to the Inquiry.

SOPHIE MERASTY: Yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: I'll give you a card and an e-mail just to -- it helps. We can attach it to your statement in the future --

SOPHIE MERASTY: Sure, yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: -- so, things like that.
SOPHIE MERASTY: Yeah. You know, the one thing that I would like to also mention is that her children could use help too, like psychologically or emotionally. They've -- like, they grew up without their mom and they don't have much information. All they know is she died, right?

SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you think there are resources where they are or is it just accessing?

SOPHIE MERASTY: I -- I don't know what the resources are in Toronto. One's in Toronto, one's in Victoria, one's in Winnipeg, or just outside of Winnipeg in Brandon I think, or Portage la Prairie. Yeah, you know like once they know, once I get all this information and tell them -- well of course I'll ask them if they want to know first and if they do, I know it's gonna impact them, right? So, I hope like there will be resources available for them.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And how about for yourself with counselling or supports in that sense?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Well, I could use some support too, yeah. Always, I mean -- I mean like you know, I'm -- I've experienced a lot of death. I've had, you know loved ones die, both tragically and naturally. But with the tragic ones what happens, I think, is my -- the grief accumulates inside me and it gets compounded and -- and then I just shut down because it's too much to feel that all the time. But certain things trigger me, like you know if I hear a story or if I see somebody who looks like her or, you know like sometimes I'll see somebody who look -- you know, just vaguely like her and -- and then I'll feel it. I'll feel that again even after all these years, I'll feel the loss. So, yeah, it's like -- you know, I could use some support myself. I think it's -- it's these kind of deaths that are hardest to process because there's no real closure, no -- no justice. Like, where do you go? Where do you go with all these feelings and they're mixed, like anger and frustration and you know, a sense of like it didn't matter because she was Native, you know? Like it just makes me feel enraged sometimes still, but I'm not turning that rage in on myself anymore. I just want to see her -- her children like break those cycles.

SHEILA MAZHARI: When you'd said about you've
experienced racism, misogyny, other forms of
systemic violence, can you paint me a picture of
some of those experiences, what they look like?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Oh my god, like --

SHEILA MAZHARI: I know, it's a big thing.

SOPHIE MERASTY: -- there's so many.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Mm-hm. Like in the workplace, does it -- do you remember certain things? Or in a -- anything that stands out?

SOPHIE MERASTY: It's everywhere. You know, when I was in my addiction and I was homeless, I -- you know, and I was sick, I experienced it in the hospitals by medical staff. You know, they look at me as a dirty Indian junkie and they treat me like with disdain or like they're just disgusted for having to treat me. Or they're disrespectful or they mock you or they think you're just there for drugs, more drugs. You know, like I've had an experience of that because I had to get my right ovary removed. There was a cyst that grew round it and it cut off the blood supply and I was so sick, and I had to go the -- St. Paul's Hospital by ambulance.

SHEILA MAZHARI: That's in Vancouver?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Mm-hm. And they were terrible to me, it was awful. It wasn't the only time, there was other times. I know had I not been in my addiction at the time that I -- I would have been able to maybe verbalize and stand my own ground so that they didn't treat me this way, but because I was so sick at those times I couldn't defend myself and they were just nasty. So, we have a stigma, right, and it's in -- in the -- in the health system. I've also been brutalized by two female cops and put in the overnight cell for, you know a stupid call where somebody and I had an argument. They called the police saying that I was suicidal. They barged into my room without my permission, the manager let them in and then I was trying to get dressed 'cause they wanted to -- they said where would you rather go, the hospital or to jail? And I didn't want to be committed into a psych ward 'cause then I would have no rights. So, I -- I said well, I'll go to jail, right? And -- and so because I wasn't putting on my shoes fast enough they were pulling my hair and -- and then when I
got there, there was this big huge guard when they were releasing me the next day and he was just intimidating. You know it was awful, like -- that was one of my experiences with them.

SHEILA MAZHARI: When -- when did that take place, do you remember?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Oh, this was years ago. Maybe about 15, 20 years ago maybe.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Mm-hm. Same with the hospital?

SOPHIE MERASTY: That was about 10 years ago maybe. Yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And you don’t remember any of their names or anything like that?

SOPHIE MERASTY: No. I tried to make a police complaint. They wouldn’t give me any information, you know about these two female cops that were pulling my hair and yeah, it was...

SHEILA MAZHARI: And that was here in Vancouver?

SOPHIE MERASTY: It was, yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Was it in a specific area in the city?

SOPHIE MERASTY: Downtown Eastside. And so, you know maybe I've just been around like a lot of white male aggression too, different times, where you know they've all been -- they're coming out of a hockey game or a pub. You know, I'm walking alone, and they notice, and they start making comments or you know, making like -- making derogatory statements or whatever. You know, so that's another form of violence that I've experienced. In Winnipeg when I was growing up, the racist comments directed at us were very blunt. Squaws and whatnot, right? Yeah, so justice -- well, I don’t like calling it the justice system because it's not, it's a legal system -- the discrimination there. When I was on income assistance, discrimination there from the workers.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you think they were treating you... SOPHIE MERASTY: Yes. Yeah. And government officials. You know, even shelters for women. You know, I've noticed attitudes and behaviours that are kind, you know, of oppressive towards women, including myself. I was kicked out of a shelter because my time ran out. It was with Atira. I already talked to the press about this. This was years ago, and it was in the Downtown
Eastside and it was about the Women's Centre, and there's a time limit but I was waiting for calls that day and had all my stuff packed, ready to go, and waiting for callback to see if I could get into another place. I was homeless. And they called the police to escort me, they wouldn't let me wait for a phone call. I couldn't believe it. With all my bags and that I was on the street with the police escorting me and there was no need for it. So, that was one of the ways that I was treated, right? Like, you know I wasn't a violent, aggressive person that way like towards -- you know -- but you know, they -- one of the workers just -- because I wasn't, you know able to get out at the time that she wanted me out, like physically out of -- while I was waiting for a call. And I explained it to her that I was waiting for a call. Anyways, so you know the systems that are supposed to be there helping women also, are flawed.

SHEILA MAZHARI: How do you think they can change for the better? What do you think needs to change?

SOPHIE MERASTY: I think there's gotta be -- there should be an inclusive -- just like, for Aboriginal women only that -- maybe a centre or something that has everything in place for them, where they can get medical help. Like nurses' staff, medical staff, elders, counsellors, advocates, food, beds, legal support, legal aid or whatever, you know. Those kind of supports in place and also stronger advocacy for women who have lost their children because if anything kills or hurts a woman deeply, is the loss of children. I know that. So, yeah just more support systems in place for women. You know, housing is a big one? Like what can a woman do when she's -- I couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t. I just -- when I was homeless it was hard for me to even, like -- never mind getting a job, you know like the things that I needed. It was just survival on a day to day basis. And then, you know if you're looking for a place, you know like you get discriminated against by you know, landlords and rental agencies because you're Aboriginal or if you don't have -- you know like there's all these things that are
Sophie Merasty
(Rose Merasty)

needed, credit history, on and on. Like there --
just seems like there are so many things against
us sometimes, you know like it's crazy. You know
any other women, white women can walk and get
anything she wants. That's the privilege of you
know white women, white people. Most -- in most
cases. you know, for us as Indigenous women it
seems so much harder to even just like find a
safe place, the resources and the help that we need. So, it's a lot you know. We
deal with a lot everyday.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And why do you think Aboriginal women
are such targets for this kind of violence and...

SOPHIE MERASTY: Because of those reasons. We are the
most vulnerable because of where we come from --
from -- in the first place, you know. The
inherited traumas, the -- either you know
stemming from residential school and their --
like children being taken away, foster care. On
and on, you know like addictions, abuse,
everywhere. It -- it's come from everywhere, you
know this oppression of women and -- and so you
know, if I can use myself an example, I almost
gave up a few times where I felt so like -- like
every door that I you know knock on is like
closing in my face. Who can believe me? Who --
who can help me? You know, not knowing where to
go anymore, not feeling like my life meant
anything. And so, putting myself in vulnerable
position of having to you know, meet men to get
money, to get drugs, to you know like just
feeling so broken emotionally inside from all
these traumas, from all the losses that you know,
you're just feeling so weak. You're just feeling
stripped of any kind of power. That leaves you
in a place of vulnerability. So, I know what
it's like to have been there. I know you know,
'cause I lived it. That's what you know, exposes
us to violence. It's like you know, you see a
wounded animal in the animal kingdom and then
there's you know these bigger, strong predators
that kill that you know wounded animal off. I
think sometimes the world is very much like that.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And how did you yourself get out of
those situations?

SOPHIE MERASTY: I just -- oh my god, like I kept
trying and trying treatment. I don’t know,
something in me I guess, maybe a little bit of
hope, a little bit of resolve or a little bit of
willpower to continue to walk in this world when
I didn’t wanna be in it. So -- and then of
course having grandchildren -- you know, starting
to have grandchildren. And I see them and I'm
like oh my god, you know there's -- these are my
reasons to stay alive and to -- to do this work,
to heal so that you know -- so that they have a
chance, right, to have a different life than I
did. And they're the reasons why I also need to
talk about this stuff 'cause I -- I didn’t talk
about these things, about myself or my sister for
a long time just because there was you know -- I
was almost silenced you know. It was too
painful, I didn’t have the supports around me. I
-- I was isolated.

SHEILA MAZHARI: And on your healing journey which
support systems helped you the most?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I would say it -- like a lot of it
was ceremony and women support groups you know.
But ceremony are very -- is very powerful. I
would like to you know, actually I'm probably
ready to do more healing. I would like to find
new like, support systems. Like people who are
trained, like professional people. Not just your
lay counsellor, right? And, or like, ceremony
you know like for women only. You know, like
whatever it would be, sweat lodges, wiping of
tears ceremony, those kind of things, workshops,
psychologist maybe. Even though you know some
aspects of western psychology is okay, I think
cultural, you know, practices and ceremony are --
are better you know, for -- for me, for many of
us probably. Yeah.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Is there anything else you'd like to
share?
SOPHIE MERASTY: I feel like I've shared a lot.
SHEILA MAZHARI: Yeah. Thank you so much.
SOPHIE MERASTY: I didn’t expect to be saying all
this. I thought I was gonna say like five things
that are on the statement, right? But thank you
for listening.
SHEILA MAZHARI: Thank you so much.
SOPHIE MERASTY: This is going to the commissioners?
SHEILA MAZHARI: Yes.
SOPHIE MERASTY: Okay, and they'll hear this?
SHEILA MAZHARI: Yes.

SOPHIE MERASTY: I just want to say thank you for listening to my statement and I hope that the work that you do is going to affect changes, especially within the Canadian legal system. Hopefully, through Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice because we can't have any more generations of missing and murdered women. It's gotta stop somewhere and changes have to be made. Thank you for listening.

SHEILA MAZHARI: Thank you.

(STATEMENT CONCLUDED)

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

E. Nulty
Court Transcriber