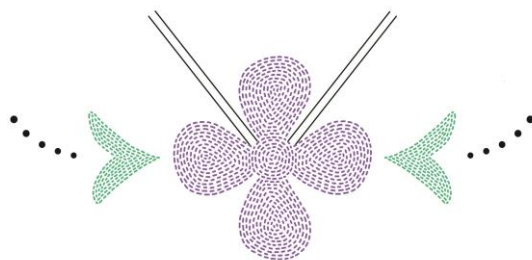


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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
Hilton Vancouver Airport Hotel
Metro Vancouver (Richmond), British Columbia**



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Thursday April 5, 2018

Statement - Volume 352

Sophie Merasty, In relation to Rose Lena Merasty

Statement gathered by Sheila Mazhari

Verbatim Words West Ltd.

II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement - Volume 352	
April 5, 2018	Page
Witness: Sophie Merasty	
Statement gatherer: Sheila Mazhari	
Testimony of Sophie Merasty	1
Reporter's certification.	18

Documents submitted with testimony:

1. Color photocopy of photograph (1 page)

Statement - Public 1
Sophie Merasty
(Rose Merasty)

Richmond, British Columbia
April 5, 2018

1
2
3
4 SHEILA MAZHARI: How about we start with your
5 introduction?

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

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

12 SOPHIE MERASTY: I was born February 16, 1964.

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

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

30 I -- my -- my sister who was -- I wanna talk
31 about my sister, Rose Merasty who was killed in
32 the Downtown Eastside in 1991. Left home
33 probably as a teenager because we didn't have
34 high school there. You could only do grade nine
35 and then you had to go somewhere else like
36 Winnipeg or you know, Cranberry Portage and there
37 you were put in a home. So, you know, I was much
38 younger than my sister Rose when she left. I --
39 I know that she lived in Winnipeg for a while and
40 she had a -- got married, had a daughter. Her
41 husband pulled an armed robbery at a bank and
42 went to prison and her daughter was apprehended.
43 And -- and -- and I don't believe that my sister
44 ever saw her again. We have had -- found each
45 other though, our family found this -- this
46 daughter. And you know, she was raised in a non-
47 Aboriginal home, but she knows about her mother.

1 So, Rose moved to Vancouver sometime in her late
2 or mid 20s perhaps and -- and while she lived
3 here she had four more children. And she had two
4 daughters who I have contact with. They live in
5 Toronto, they were -- this -- she had these
6 children from a different relationship.

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

30 And you know, the relationships that she had
31 the children with -- the men that she had
32 relationships with, they were all abusive. She
33 -- when I think of how she died, you know, yes
34 there was a man involved. Somebody I think she
35 just met and she had been partying with, but she
36 was already hurting as a result of having lost
37 her children. And so, out -- I would say, you
38 know, this man killed her, but it wasn't just
39 him, it was everybody. It was the whole system
40 that killed her. It was the social service
41 system, it was the justice system because she
42 kept getting picked up and put in -- in -- in
43 jail for petty crimes. So, you know, the
44 accumulation of all those systems killed her. In
45 August -- on August the 21st of 1991, like a few
46 days after -- a day after I got a call and -- but
47 that was the day that she was killed. She was in

1 the Downtown Eastside in Blood Alley, Gastown and
2 I guess because they didn't know that there was a
3 family member here, they contacted my family back
4 east and they called me and told me what
5 happened, that she was dead. She was found in a
6 back alley, had been pushed out the third-floor
7 window and was like naked from the waist down.
8 Her arm was broken, and she died on the way to
9 the hospital.

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

28 And I guess the way I was impacted was I was
29 -- well, from shock to disbelief to great
30 sadness, grief. I mean, she was my only sister
31 here so I -- I didn't -- I didn't have the
32 supports around me at the time to process, you
33 know, the grief and I -- I -- I became very
34 angry. I was very angry for years, but it was an
35 evolving type of anger because when I finally
36 found out what happened to, like the charge --
37 there was initially a charge of aggravated
38 assault, but the person was held in the holding
39 cells in the downtown -- at the downtown police
40 holding cells and he was there for one month.
41 And when his trial came up they -- the judge
42 ruled that that one month that he served was dead
43 time and ruled it as time served and they
44 released him. And he went back east or somewhere
45 is what I heard. So, I never saw him. All I
46 have is his name. I -- I guess if anything I
47 would have liked was to have a call to have some

1 kind of justice served, because I felt that the
2 police didn't do a thorough investigation. That
3 -- it was obvious to me that there was some kind
4 of sexual assault, that she was found with out
5 her pants or underwear and bruises all over her,
6 her face and her body. And that they just
7 disregarded it because she was Indigenous, a
8 Native woman and they had been partying or she
9 had been drinking or using. And you know, more
10 than likely been labeled a prostitute. So, I
11 felt angry about how -- how the courts treated
12 her, how the legal system treated her death.
13 Like, it was irrelevant, that her -- her death
14 you know, felt disregarded. I felt angry that
15 they released this man after a month in a holding
16 cell and he took the life of my sister, who was a
17 mother, an auntie, who -- who didn't have a
18 voice. You know, whose voice had been over the
19 years silenced.

20 Her children, her daughters that were
21 impacted -- I can see how they were impacted even
22 though they were really small when their mom
23 died. Both of them struggle with addictions now.
24 One of them's -- her children -- my sister is a
25 grandmother now. One of them -- her -- has
26 children in foster care as well so I can see the
27 cycle and the patterns. I can feel when I see
28 them, when I go to Toronto, I feel that when I do
29 see them I can feel a sense of their -- this --
30 this hole in their lives, this huge gap. They
31 don't have a connection with you know, the one
32 person in their life who they needed, which is
33 their mother. I can sense a -- I can -- I get a
34 feeling or a sense that they're at a loss somehow
35 and I -- and they are, you know. And -- and my
36 own family, my -- my brother and sisters --
37 there's been just a sense of helplessness when
38 talking about her. Like a sense of it happened,
39 but there's no words -- there's no words to
40 describe that. It's just like, what do you say?
41 And what do you do? Because, obviously we all
42 know that there's been no -- no justice in her
43 death. They are at a loss and I've only begun to
44 find my own voice. I'm the only one who has
45 spoken for her in my family, in my huge family.
46 Although, many of my family members have also
47 died as well since.

1 The impact of her death has affected all of
2 our lives, you know, all of us. Myself, I, you
3 know, like I said I was very angry, I had my own
4 addiction issues. I ended up relapsing at that
5 point after working on healing my own life and
6 being clean for three years. When I -- when I --
7 well, after she died, after I went -- before I
8 went to see her body I -- I drank -- I had a
9 drink after three years. Alcohol was not my
10 addiction of choice, but I -- I did that until I
11 eventually relapsed into my drug of choice. And
12 then almost like ended up dying myself. I -- in
13 -- in retrospect, I realize it was because I
14 didn't know where to go. I didn't know where to
15 find support. I -- I didn't know what to do with
16 the anger. I didn't know what to do with the
17 pain. Thankfully, I -- I got help again. I also
18 felt vulnerable, you know, but that was an
19 ongoing feeling for much of my life because I
20 grew up dealing with, or being -- experiencing
21 male violence, sexual violence myself, racism,
22 misogyny. It goes on and on. I probably
23 experienced all the same things my sister did,
24 you know? And I think it was hard -- really hard
25 for her because I can't imagine -- I can -- I --
26 I know the pain of being separated from your
27 child and so you know, her issues kept her in her
28 addiction, not having the resources, not having
29 the support systems in place. I think if they
30 had been there she -- maybe she would still be
31 alive today. Maybe she wouldn't have gone down
32 those paths and ended up in rooms, you know, with
33 strangers.

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

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

5 I -- I guess if anything, I would like to
6 see changes made to the Canadian legal system.
7 You know, I -- I struggled trying to get
8 information and I'm her blood sister. If anybody
9 was -- should get information, it's me. I was
10 basically told that I had to go through a
11 process. How that process worked, to get the --
12 the police report or the coroners was that I
13 would have to through *Freedom of Information and*
14 *Privacy Act* or go through the police, you know --
15 the police said, or I was told that I had to
16 either have like my parents, who are both
17 deceased now, write a letter asking for this.
18 They have first priority. So, that's not an
19 option because they're both deceased. The other
20 one was her children and they're not in a
21 position to do this right now. They are --
22 they're young people, but they have their own
23 issues. They have children in care or they're
24 estranged and been estranged from their mother.
25 I would have -- somebody would have to help guide
26 them through that. And then it's the brothers
27 and sisters. Oh, before the children would be
28 the spouse, but she didn't have a spouse. And
29 then the children and then the siblings. I'm
30 like what kind of system is that? What kind of
31 bullshit is that to get, you know, the
32 information? So, when I was told that of course
33 I was like exasperated. I didn't know what to
34 do. I would like to see changes to that because
35 I think family members should have that
36 information irregardless of, you know -- like
37 immediate family members. Why should they
38 withhold that kind of information?

39 I also, you know, felt that the police, like
40 I said, didn't do a very thorough investigation.
41 You know, like did they even do a vaginal swab
42 you know, to collect DNA to -- to find out
43 whether she had been raped, sexually assaulted
44 before? Shouldn't a person have been charged
45 with something like that as well? You know? I
46 mean -- I would have liked to see him. You know,
47 I would have liked to go to court when he went

1 up. I think Crown prosecutors should be more
2 mindful of, you know, family members that way.
3 You know, I never really felt a sense of closure
4 with my sister -- my sister's death. And -- and
5 you know they -- the -- the thought of her laying
6 in this back alley dying in -- in an undignified
7 way -- and the -- the guy apparently went for a
8 walk. Like, what kind of person does that when
9 somebody has fallen from the third-floor window?
10 You call an ambulance right away. Like, I don't
11 know how long she was there.

12 How they caught him was they waited for him
13 after somebody found her and called an ambulance,
14 you know. The police waited and then he came
15 back. Like, there's something wrong with this
16 right? I know that the legal system is full of
17 technicalities that can get people off on, you
18 know -- let people off, get away with murder, but
19 in this case, it doesn't seem like -- you know, I
20 mean I'm sure there was all kinds of evidence.
21 She had a denture. Her teeth were found in that
22 room so obviously like he assaulted her in there.
23 I guess because I've had my own experience of
24 male violence against myself when I was younger
25 and because I've done some work, I've done some
26 healing around it, I no longer feel like a victim
27 around, you know -- but I -- you know, I -- I
28 know the -- the -- how it feels to be vulnerable.
29 I remember how it feels prior to my healing,
30 being afraid of men and not knowing how to ward
31 off unwanted advances. I would like to see, like
32 -- you know, I have granddaughters now, two
33 beautiful granddaughters. I don't want to see
34 them suffer. Like, I don't want them to go
35 through what I went through. So, I -- you know,
36 I -- I pray for change. I pray, you know, like
37 that the laws against sexual violence or any kind
38 of violence, the murder of our women, our
39 sisters, our -- our daughters, our
40 granddaughters, whatever, our aunties and mothers
41 will change so that there are harsher penalties.
42 You know, if anything, that's what I would like
43 to see out of this Inquiry. You know, as a
44 recommendation like some -- as a work that the
45 Inquiry is doing because there's too many.
46 There's too many already and it just seems
47 endless and it continues, and it seems so easy to

Statement - Public
Sophie Merasty
(Rose Merasty)

8

1 kill an Indian woman or an Indian person in this
2 society and get away with it. You know, like our
3 lives don't mean anything, but I know that's not
4 true. Because my -- my sister was a beautiful
5 person. I know she was hurt, but you know, she
6 was a very vibrant woman, you know, talented.
7 She played guitar, she sang, she had an
8 infectious laugh, but she was hurt, very hurt.
9 And all that accumulated her -- resulted in her
10 death.

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

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

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

21 SHEILA MAZHARI: Yeah.

22 SOPHIE MERASTY: Her second name was Lena. L-E-N-A.
23 And Merasty. M-E-R-A-S-T-Y.

24 SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay, and what's her birthdate?

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

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

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

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

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

47 SHEILA MAZHARI: So, you're more interested, are you,

1 in -- in getting the full report of what the case
2 had been done or did you want it --
3 SOPHIE MERASTY: All of it.
4 SHEILA MAZHARI: -- reinvestigated and reopened and to
5 see if they could charge him?
6 SOPHIE MERASTY: Yes, I would like that. I would, you
7 know -- I would like it to be reopened.
8 SHEILA MAZHARI: Did you wanna share any information
9 about him?
10 SOPHIE MERASTY: His name is [J.R.].
11 SHEILA MAZHARI: How do you spell that?
12 SOPHIE MERASTY: [J.]
13 SHEILA MAZHARI: Just for the record.
14 SOPHIE MERASTY: [*Spells name*].
15 SHEILA MAZHARI: Mm-hm.
16 SOPHIE MERASTY: I think is how it's spelled. And I'm
17 not sure if his last name is an [*spells variant*
18 of last name] or [*spells variant of last name*].
19 I don't know much else except that he's from back
20 east somewhere, maybe Nova Scotia. I don't know.
21 SHEILA MAZHARI: And do you know anything about his
22 background?
23 SOPHIE MERASTY: I think he's actually maybe First
24 Nations, but I don't know for sure. You know, he
25 might be part Native and part white from the
26 sounds of -- but I don't know much else and he
27 was a younger man. That's all I know.
28 SHEILA MAZHARI: And you know he's still alive or...?
29 SOPHIE MERASTY: I -- I don't know anything more. I
30 don't even know his birthday or what town he's
31 from. I googled his name, I've tried to, you
32 know -- I mean, like I always -- in the back of
33 my mind I think, you know, I don't know if he
34 feels like he just got away with something, like
35 with murder. But if he had an conscience
36 whatsoever, any soul, any spirit, any you know,
37 kind of awareness of the magnitude of what it is
38 to take a life, you know, who was loved by -- by
39 others, needed by others, and the impact it's had
40 then, you know -- I always think why didn't he --
41 why couldn't he -- like maybe he could just come
42 forward and say like, I understand, I realize
43 what I've done and I'm sorry. At least some kind
44 of acknowledgement instead of just disappearing
45 off and not trying to like -- 'cause I, you know
46 -- make any, you know kind of acknowledgement
47 because if he did, that could provide healing for

1 me, for my family, for my sister's children, you
2 know? But I don't know where he went or where he
3 is or whether he cares about what he's done.
4 SHEILA MAZHARI: And when you said you received some
5 direction today on how to get more of a -- was it
6 FILU downstairs that helped you?
7 SOPHIE MERASTY: I think so, yeah.
8 SHEILA MAZHARI: And when you said --
9 SOPHIE MERASTY: Well, a guy gave her the -- the
10 information and got the process started.
11 SHEILA MAZHARI: That's good.
12 SOPHIE MERASTY: In my statement, in a written
13 statement I gave the wrong date. It was 1991
14 when she was killed.
15 SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay.
16 SOPHIE MERASTY: I put down 1980 -- I gave --
17 SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you mean this one here?
18 SOPHIE MERASTY: -- I say 1981. Mm-hm.
19 SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay.
20 SOPHIE MERASTY: In the original. It was 1991.
21 SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. I don't see a date. Oh, it
22 says 1981.
23 SOPHIE MERASTY: Yeah, it's --
24 SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay, so yeah -- that's -- I'll
25 change that for us. So, downstairs where they
26 have FILU they also have BC Family Services and
27 they -- they can help connect you with what you
28 would need for -- kind of like to be an advocate
29 for this police process and things like that.
30 So, we'll make sure to check that out too.
31 SOPHIE MERASTY: Okay.
32 SHEILA MAZHARI: When you said Rose was abused as a
33 child, did you say -- was she -- was she sexually
34 and -- and physically?
35 SOPHIE MERASTY: I believe so. I -- I -- she tried to
36 tell me, but she couldn't finish what -- she just
37 broke down crying and she couldn't bring the
38 words up.
39 SHEILA MAZHARI: So, you don't know who did that to
40 her?
41 SOPHIE MERASTY: I don't. It could be anybody from a
42 local to a family member to the priest, a
43 teacher. You know, there's so many -- we -- we
44 were an isolated community. Roman Catholicism
45 was the ruling religion and they controlled
46 everybody, and they were paedophiles and you
47 know, abusers. It could have been anybody.

1 SHEILA MAZHARI: Is there anything else you want to
2 share about Rose or...?
3 SOPHIE MERASTY: She had beautiful children. She's
4 very beautiful. Like physically, but her spirit
5 was -- very bubbly type of personality, very much
6 a charmer. And lefthanded so when she played
7 guitar she had to change all the strings upside
8 down so she could play it. Yeah, and classy.
9 She was really a beautiful person. I remember
10 she came out to Winnipeg when I was in high
11 school there and I don't know how she got all
12 this money, but she had a gold tooth filling.
13 Anyways, she had all this money. I think she and
14 her lawyer got money somehow for I don't know
15 what, but she took me out shopping. And, you
16 know just like -- I was just amazed by her.
17 Like, you know we come from a very poor -- like
18 we came from a very poor upbringing, but you know
19 she would just lavish with all this money she
20 had, and she took me out for dinner and shopping
21 and stuff. So, that was new to me. She
22 introduced me to something that's, you know good
23 and possible.
24 SHEILA MAZHARI: Did she have any other names or...?
25 SOPHIE MERASTY: No.
26 SHEILA MAZHARI: No? [Indiscernible]
27 SOPHIE MERASTY: No, just Rose. Yeah.
28 SHEILA MAZHARI: And did you want to give any names?
29 Do you remember any of the -- the judges that --
30 or...?
31 SOPHIE MERASTY: I don't have any of that information,
32 you know? I would like to know. Like, I would
33 like all of this information. You know, I -- I
34 mean, of course in order to pursue it, like I
35 said I need the support. I need, you know people
36 who will help me, who know how to get this
37 information. Yeah.
38 SHEILA MAZHARI: And you can always submit -- when --
39 when you do receive them, of the police report
40 and things -- you can -- you can submit it to the
41 Inquiry.
42 SOPHIE MERASTY: Yeah.
43 SHEILA MAZHARI: I'll give you a card and an e-mail
44 just to -- it helps. We can attach it to your
45 statement in the future --
46 SOPHIE MERASTY: Sure, yeah.
47 SHEILA MAZHARI: -- so, things like that.

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

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

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

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

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

47 SHEILA MAZHARI: When you'd said about you've

1 experienced racism, misogyny, other forms of
2 systemic violence, can you paint me a picture of
3 some of those experiences, what they look like?
4 SOPHIE MERASTY: Oh my god, like --
5 SHEILA MAZHARI: I know, it's a big thing.
6 SOPHIE MERASTY: -- there's so many.
7 SHEILA MAZHARI: Mm-hm. Like in the workplace, does
8 it -- do you remember certain things? Or in a --
9 anything that stands out?
10 SOPHIE MERASTY: It's everywhere. You know, when I
11 was in my addiction and I was homeless, I -- you
12 know, and I was sick, I experienced it in the
13 hospitals by medical staff. You know, they look
14 at me as a dirty Indian junkie and they treat me
15 like with disdain or like they're just disgusted
16 for having to treat me. Or they're disrespectful
17 or they mock you or they think you're just there
18 for drugs, more drugs. You know, like I've had
19 an experience of that because I had to get my
20 right ovary removed. There was a cyst that grew
21 round it and it cut off the blood supply and I
22 was so sick, and I had to go the -- St. Paul's
23 Hospital by ambulance.
24 SHEILA MAZHARI: That's in Vancouver?
25 SOPHIE MERASTY: Mm-hm. And they were terrible to me,
26 it was awful. It wasn't the only time, there was
27 other times. I know had I not been in my
28 addiction at the time that I -- I would have been
29 able to maybe verbalize and stand my own ground
30 so that they didn't treat me this way, but
31 because I was so sick at those times I couldn't
32 defend myself and they were just nasty. So, we
33 have a stigma, right, and it's in -- in the -- in
34 -- in the health system. I've also been
35 brutalized by two female cops and put in the
36 overnight cell for, you know a stupid call where
37 somebody and I had an argument. They called the
38 police saying that I was suicidal. They barged
39 into my room without my permission, the manager
40 let them in and then I was trying to get dressed
41 'cause they wanted to -- they said where would
42 you rather go, the hospital or to jail? And I
43 didn't want to be committed into a psych ward
44 'cause then I would have no rights. So, I -- I
45 said well, I'll go to jail, right? And -- and so
46 because I wasn't putting on my shoes fast enough
47 they were pulling my hair and -- and then when I

1 got there, there was this big huge guard when
2 they were releasing me the next day and he was
3 just intimidating. You know it was awful, like
4 -- that was one of my experiences with them.
5 SHEILA MAZHARI: When -- when did that take place, do
6 you remember?
7 SOPHIE MERASTY: Oh, this was years ago. Maybe about
8 15, 20 years ago maybe.
9 SHEILA MAZHARI: Mm-hm. Same with the hospital?
10 SOPHIE MERASTY: That was about 10 years ago maybe.
11 Yeah.
12 SHEILA MAZHARI: And you don't remember any of their
13 names or anything like that?
14 SOPHIE MERASTY: No. I tried to make a police
15 complaint. They wouldn't give me any
16 information, you know about these two female cops
17 that were pulling my hair and yeah, it was...
18 SHEILA MAZHARI: And that was here in Vancouver?
19 SOPHIE MERASTY: It was, yeah.
20 SHEILA MAZHARI: Was it in a specific area in the
21 city?
22 SOPHIE MERASTY: Downtown Eastside. And so, you know
23 maybe I've just been around like a lot of white
24 male aggression too, different times, where you
25 know they've all been -- they're coming out of a
26 hockey game or a pub. You know, I'm walking
27 alone, and they notice, and they start making
28 comments or you know, making like -- making
29 derogatory statements or whatever. You know, so
30 that's another form of violence that I've
31 experienced. In Winnipeg when I was growing up,
32 the racist comments directed at us were very
33 blunt. Squaws and whatnot, right? Yeah, so
34 justice -- well, I don't like calling it the
35 justice system because it's not, it's a legal
36 system -- the discrimination there. When I was
37 on income assistance, discrimination there from
38 the workers.
39 SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you think they were treating you...
40 SOPHIE MERASTY: Yes. Yeah. And government
41 officials. You know, even shelters for women.
42 You know, I've noticed attitudes and behaviours
43 that are kind, you know, of oppressive towards
44 women, including myself. I was kicked out of a
45 shelter because my time ran out. It was with
46 Atira. I already talked to the press about this.
47 This was years ago, and it was in the Downtown

1 Eastside and it was about the Women's Centre, and
2 there's a time limit but I was waiting for calls
3 that day and had all my stuff packed, ready to
4 go, and waiting for callback to see if I could
5 get into another place. I was homeless. And
6 they called the police to escort me, they
7 wouldn't let me wait for a phone call. I
8 couldn't believe it. With all my bags and that I
9 was on the street with the police escorting me
10 and there was no need for it. So, that was one
11 of the ways that I was treated, right? Like, you
12 know I wasn't a violent, aggressive person that
13 way like towards -- you know -- but you know,
14 they -- one of the workers just -- because I
15 wasn't, you know able to get out at the time that
16 she wanted me out, like physically out of --
17 while I was waiting for a call. And I explained
18 it to her that I was waiting for a call.
19 Anyways, so you know the systems that are
20 supposed to be there helping women also, are
21 flawed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

46 SOPHIE MERASTY: I just -- oh my god, like I kept
47 trying and trying treatment. I don't know,

1 something in me I guess, maybe a little bit of
2 hope, a little bit of resolve or a little bit of
3 willpower to continue to walk in this world when
4 I didn't wanna be in it. So -- and then of
5 course having grandchildren -- you know, starting
6 to have grandchildren. And I see them and I'm
7 like oh my god, you know there's -- these are my
8 reasons to stay alive and to -- to do this work,
9 to heal so that you know -- so that they have a
10 chance, right, to have a different life than I
11 did. And they're the reasons why I also need to
12 talk about this stuff 'cause I -- I didn't talk
13 about these things, about myself or my sister for
14 a long time just because there was you know -- I
15 was almost silenced you know. It was too
16 painful, I didn't have the supports around me. I
17 -- I was isolated.

18 SHEILA MAZHARI: And on your healing journey which
19 support systems helped you the most?

20 SOPHIE MERASTY: I would say it -- like a lot of it
21 was ceremony and women support groups you know.
22 But ceremony are very -- is very powerful. I
23 would like to you know, actually I'm probably
24 ready to do more healing. I would like to find
25 new like, support systems. Like people who are
26 trained, like professional people. Not just your
27 lay counsellor, right? And, or like, ceremony
28 you know like for women only. You know, like
29 whatever it would be, sweat lodges, wiping of
30 tears ceremony, those kind of things, workshops,
31 psychologist maybe. Even though you know some
32 aspects of western psychology is okay, I think
33 cultural, you know, practices and ceremony are --
34 are better you know, for -- for me, for many of
35 us probably. Yeah.

36 SHEILA MAZHARI: Is there anything else you'd like to
37 share?

38 SOPHIE MERASTY: I feel like I've shared a lot.

39 SHEILA MAZHARI: Yeah. Thank you so much.

40 SOPHIE MERASTY: I didn't expect to be saying all
41 this. I thought I was gonna say like five things
42 that are on the statement, right? But thank you
43 for listening.

44 SHEILA MAZHARI: Thank you so much.

45 SOPHIE MERASTY: This is going to the commissioners?

46 SHEILA MAZHARI: Yes.

47 SOPHIE MERASTY: Okay, and they'll hear this?

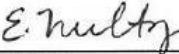
1 SHEILA MAZHARI: Yes.

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

11 SHEILA MAZHARI: Thank you.

12
13 (STATEMENT CONCLUDED)
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18 I hereby certify that this is a true and
19 accurate transcript of these proceedings
20 recorded on sound recording apparatus,
21 transcribed to the best of my skill and
22 ability in accordance with applicable
23 standards.

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26 E. Nulty
27 Court Transcriber
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