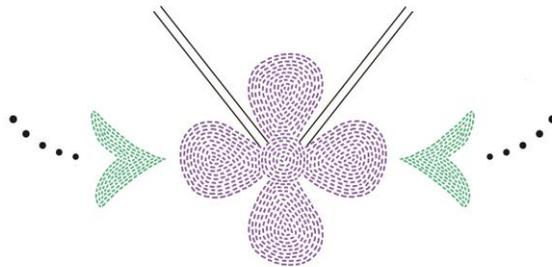


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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**



PUBLIC

Friday April 6, 2018

**Statement - Volume 359
Maura Gowans, Jenna Breuer & Janice Abbott,
In relation to Lisa Marie Graveline**

Statement gathered by Sheila Mazhari

II

NOTE

The use of square brackets [] in this transcript indicates that amendments have been made to the certified transcript in order to replace information deemed inaudible or indecipherable by the original transcriptionist. Amendments were completed by listening to the source audio recording of the proceeding and were made by Bryana Bouchir, Public Inquiry Clerk with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQ, May 29th 2018 at Vancouver, BC.

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Documents submitted with testimony:

Item 1: Written statement of Maura Gowans
(2 pages double-sided)

Item 2: Poem authored by Maura Gowans (1 page)

1 Richmond, British Columbia

2 --- Upon commencing on Friday, April 6, 2018

3 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Good afternoon. My
4 name is Sheila Mazhari here statement gathering for the
5 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
6 and Girls. Today is April 6, 2018. We're at the Hilton
7 Hotel in Room 209 in Richmond, B.C. here to receive the
8 testimony of Maura Gowans.

9 Also joined in the rooms are three ladies,
10 and I'll let them introduce themselves.

11 MS. JENNA BREUER: Jenna Breuer (ph),
12 Algonquin Nation, Bear Clan, Kitigan Zibi.

13 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: My name is Janice
14 Abbott, my grandmother was Catherine Ross, her grandmother
15 was (inaudible) from Neskonlith Nation, and I'm a lover and
16 believer in (inaudible).

17 MS. MICHELLE LABOUCANE: My name's
18 Michelle LaBoucane, I'm from the Métis Nation, and I'm here
19 to support.

20 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: I'm just going to
21 read the consent about public statements. So the
22 information you share will normally be shared firstly with
23 the governments and other parties withstanding at the
24 Inquiry. The parties with standing include such
25 organizations as the Native Women's Association of Canada,

1 Police Services, Assembly of First Nations, and many others
2 including some individuals First Nations.

3 If your statement is considered public or
4 is given in a public forum your full name and transcript of
5 everything you have said on audio and videotape will be
6 transcribed into a statement which is legally required to
7 be provided to the government and the parties withstanding.

8 A public statement can also be used to
9 write public reports, prepare educational material, support
10 research, or question witnesses such as police witnesses.

11 So, Maura, what have you chosen for your
12 statement, how you want it to be shared? Your consent you
13 gave?

14 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I'm publicly.

15 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay, perfect. All
16 right now that's out of the way, so let's go into your
17 introduction.

18 MS. MAURA GOWANS: So I start now?

19 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Yeah. How about you
20 start with introducing yourself?

21 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Okay. So my name's
22 Maura Gowans, I was born [birthdate]. I was given up for
23 adoption, was given up when I was born. My adopted mother
24 worked in a nursing home, and so when I was five weeks old
25 she adopted me.

1 I'm from Tulita Band from the Northwest
2 Territories. I've never been home. I have five beautiful
3 boys, ages 1 to 17. [Son 1] is 17, [Son 2] is 10, [Son 3]
4 is 9, [Son 4] is 3 and [Son 5] is 1. Everything I do in my
5 life is for them so that they have a chance at a better
6 future than I had.

7 I prepared a statement, so I'm going to
8 read that. So I was raised in a family that made many
9 sacrifices in order for me and my siblings to have the best
10 life possible. I just want to say this is not about my
11 family, although they lived through the heartache of it by
12 loving me. I was adopted, I was loved.

13 I consider my family my family, my parents
14 my parents, and even though they loved me I grew up feeling
15 like I was unlovable and that I didn't belong. Even though
16 I had that, it was my perception and that's how I felt.

17 So up until I was 15 I had a pretty normal
18 life. I dropped out of school at the age of 15. I was a
19 great student until this time. I took education sports very
20 seriously and was a competitive runner, skier and swimmer.
21 I also was in the senior band in grade 9, which was like
22 (inaudible/off microphone).

23 My parents were always at my competitions.
24 We moved from the Northwest Territories to Toronto to Nova
25 Scotia, back to the Northwest Territories, to California,

1 to Alaska, to Saskatoon, to White Rock, B.C., to Smithers
2 and then back to B.C.

3 When we moved to Saskatoon I was 14 years
4 old, I was in grade 9, and I experienced racism for the
5 first time, at least that I'm aware of. So I was adopted
6 by Caucasian parents and when I went to school people, you
7 know, would say what are you doing here, you belong on the
8 left side, you don't belong here. I was very alienated, I
9 didn't have a lot of friends, and I ended up drinking to
10 fit in.

11 Within the first six months of drinking I
12 ran away from home, I was fired as a swim coach and
13 expelled from school. My life spiralled downwards very
14 fast.

15 From the moment I drank I lost control,
16 yet I loved the feeling because I did not want to follow my
17 parents' rules and I rebelled. I ended up being signed
18 into care at the Ministry. From there I went from group
19 home to group home. I was introduced to crime, I was
20 introduced to the sex trade. I was introduced to -- I
21 won't even say I was introduced, I was put out. That's not
22 something I've really shared before.

23 So I came from like a normal family to
24 being on the street, to being involved in the sex trade at
25 15. I had friends that would beat me up with sharp objects

1 and rock me. I've had guns pulled on me as a result.

2 I've been on the outskirts of Saskatoon
3 and my friend I were going to most likely be killed, and
4 I'm trying -- I have a vague recollection on how we got
5 away. But I'm pretty sure we stole a car and got away.

6 At that time I remember I was on Gravol,
7 like I took a lot of Gravol. This man took me to his house
8 in downtown Saskatoon. He went in the fridge to get me a
9 drink and I remember looking, it was like a coatroom like
10 that, and on the back wall were newspaper clippings all
11 over about missing girls. I remember just having that
12 feeling that I was going to die.

13 I said,

14 "I hear someone calling my name."

15 Like, I pretended I was crazy so that I
16 could scoot closer to the door, and then I just ran. I
17 ended up -- yeah, I ended up with a lot of older men that
18 just took advantage of us.

19 I remember -- sorry, the woman I thought
20 was my friend took me to her hometown outside of Saskatoon,
21 we drank, and she left me with her uncle, and I was
22 brutally raped. This is at 15 years old. Somehow I
23 believed I deserved it. Looking back at it, I think she
24 sold me for a bottle of alcohol. In the sickness in my
25 mind, for some reason I thought I deserved that. I was

1 taught I deserved that, I was taught I was worthless.

2 During this timeframe I was charged with
3 my first offence. I was with someone that stole Oreo
4 cookies. So I was like, whoa, I didn't do it, so I'm not
5 going to court. As a result, I don't know how many charges
6 I have from that charge, but quite a few. I ended up just
7 in and out of group homes, foster homes.

8 I finally ended up in a treatment centre
9 called White Spruce. My parents, who had moved from
10 Saskatoon to White Rock, came back for family day. I
11 remember just wanting to be cool and lying and saying that
12 I'd done all these drugs, and I said that -- instead of
13 saying I was a sex trade worker I said I had girls working
14 for me, which is not at all true, at all true. But I was
15 trying to make myself not be so ashamed. I don't know if
16 that makes sense.

17 So they told me, if I finished treatment,
18 I could come back to White Rock, where I'd never been. I
19 didn't complete treatment. I was asked to leave treatment.
20 The one thing I did learn in treatment was how to cut
21 myself. When I completed treatment my parents let me go
22 home to White Rock even though I shouldn't have been
23 allowed, because I didn't complete it.

24 When I got to White Rock I ended up going
25 to high school and doing really well for a short period of

1 time. Then I started smoking marijuana. So up until this
2 time I had only ever drank and smoked marijuana, I never
3 had done hard drugs. I had lived with women that used
4 cocaine in Saskatoon, but I had never used it. I'm not
5 saying that I'm better than or anything, I just had never
6 done that.

7 I remember I would go to 12-Step meetings
8 and there was a young boy, and I thought he was really cute
9 and I wanted to be in a recovery house because he was in a
10 recovery house. So I asked my parents if they could let me
11 live there, because I needed it to be -- to get treatment.

12 You know -- yeah, I love my parents very
13 much, but it was hard to live with them, especially after
14 you've been free, right? Even though the freedom wasn't
15 like a good thing.

16 I want to say one thing. So I grew-up
17 non-Native. In Saskatoon I was at the Indigenous games and
18 I heard the drumming for the first... That's the moment I
19 knew that I was a First Nations person. They say that I
20 have a mother -- that drum beat is a heartbeat of mother
21 earth.

22 So anyways, I lived in White Rock and I'd
23 always see -- like, I'd go running, we lived right next to
24 a ravine. I'd always see coyotes. Even -- I'd be sitting
25 at my desk writing in my journal and I'd see like a coyote

1 watching me from the driveway. So that's always been
2 something that's watched over me.

3 So I ended up living in this recovery
4 house. One of the women took me down to Hastings and left
5 me there. I met this guy and he was a drug dealer and he
6 was very good looking, and so I started seeing him. I
7 think I started holding money for him. Like, he'd pay me -
8 - first, he'd just pay me for nothing, then it was for
9 holding money, and then it was for...

10 Then he -- a woman injected me that worked
11 for him, so I think it was all planned. A week later I was
12 found in the bottom of the Washington Hotel and I couldn't
13 move. Some older men had given me baking soda or something
14 and I didn't really know what I was doing and I injected
15 it. I remember he carried me to (inaudible) and they sent
16 me in a taxi to St. Paul's, then I was there for 10 days
17 with blood poisoning.

18 But I couldn't feed myself, I couldn't --
19 you know. I was very lucky, because my dad worked downtown
20 at the time, so he would come and feed me and visit me.
21 Then they wanted to take me home. But when they came I was
22 gone after 10 days, like I was -- always just pulled back.

23 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: That was when you
24 were 15 or 16?

25 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I think I was 16.

1 So I started hanging out downtown and this
2 is when I met my friend Lisa Graveline. I want them to
3 look up her name and I want them to see what was written
4 about her.

5 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Can you spell her
6 name?

7 MS. MAURA GOWANS: L-I-S-A, last name G-R-
8 A-V-E-L-I-N-E.

9 At 16 years old I started going downtown.
10 I was in the care of the government at this time. At
11 first, he wanted me to help by holding money, and pretty
12 soon after I was using intravenously.

13 During this time I met someone that looked
14 after me and they actually really loved me. I don't know
15 why people loved me, because I was a mess, but I didn't let
16 anyone love me. So they loved me and took care of me --
17 and I'm just saying this part because my life wasn't so bad
18 at that time, but it was bad.

19 So I'm pretty sure I was still 16. I was
20 charged with my first offence for possession for the
21 purpose of trafficking. I'm pretty sure my mom -- my
22 parents' friend's name was [Lawyer] and she was a
23 prosecutor. So they worked behind the scenes to make this
24 plan where I had 48 hours to go to Smithers, B.C. So I was
25 given 48 hours to move to Smithers, B.C.

1 A paediatrician, like a family friend, he
2 actually delivered me at birth, took me in. So my life was
3 normal again. Like, a week after being on skid row I was
4 living with a family. They let me work in his doctor's
5 office and I was like in high school and judo, and things
6 were really good. Then I ended up coming back to B.C.,
7 like to Vancouver to go to Peak House, a treatment centre.

8 I ended up leaving and going downtown and
9 relapsing. The person that used to take care of me was
10 intoxicated and defended themselves and ended up in prison.
11 So I'm just sharing that, because that was somebody
12 significant to me.

13 Somehow I made it back to Smithers, but
14 ever since I went back it wasn't the same. I couldn't stop
15 drinking, I couldn't keep on track, there was so much
16 racism there. You know, people would say that they didn't
17 like me because I was First Nations.

18 The nearest reservation was Moricetown. I
19 remember being picked up by the RCMP and left on the
20 outskirts of town and told to get back to my reserve. I
21 was so confused, because I wasn't from Moricetown.

22 After one year I came back to White Rock
23 for Christmas and left in the middle of the night to return
24 to the Downtown East Side. When I came back I had no one
25 that looked after me and my life was much harder.

1 So I carried drugs for dealers, like as a
2 way to support myself. This led me to being in and out of
3 jail. I was physically assaulted in the Vancouver City
4 cells by the guards. I was jumped by eight prison guards.
5 I had a miscarriage, was left in my [blood] (~~inaudible~~)
6 with no medical attention. I have seen things that should
7 have never had to witness. I've seen people stabbed in
8 front of me and left there to die.

9 My close friend was murdered with an ice
10 pick. People were hot-capped(ph); so many people were
11 given heroin instead of cocaine so that it was never
12 identified as a murder.

13 I cannot even tell you how many times I
14 was assaulted by the VPD; grabbed by the neck, by the hair,
15 thrown against walls. This is all at the age of 16, 17.
16 Put in handcuffs and marched up and down alleyways. You
17 did not talk to them. You did not go to them for help. I
18 saw what they would do to people in back alleys.

19 The times they would take my money, even
20 on cheque issue day, and tell me I could claim it at their
21 office, which I never was able to receive anything.

22 Also the number of times that they would
23 search me in the middle of the street, men, officers
24 searching me physically to see what I had on me.

25 No one helped me. I was in foster homes

1 and labelled high risk because I would not stay. Yet, it
2 was okay to leave me living there. Like, I'm in the care
3 of the Ministry and it's okay for me to live on Hastings,
4 but no group home will take me because I'm high risk
5 because I won't stay there.

6 I remember one night I went to a man's
7 apartment and stayed in. He said I could have a shower,
8 and gave me clean clothes. When I got out of the shower
9 and put on the shirt it said,
10 "Murder King" instead of "Burger King." Again, I ran.

11 I did not have a safe place to go. I did
12 not have a home. I would pay people to sleep in the room
13 because a lot of people at like Portland Hotel and
14 different -- I'd give them \$10 to sleep, and the amount of
15 times I'd wake up to being sexually assaulted, I can't even
16 tell you how many times. Somehow in my head I thought that
17 that's all I was, that that's what I deserved.

18 I finally did find a place when I was 17
19 at the Regal Hotel. I witnessed a man shot in front of me.
20 I witnessed women stabbed. I'd been physically assaulted
21 for being in front of the Regal, as it was turf that did
22 not belong to the people I associated with.

23 I was a teenager in 1994 and women were
24 going missing all around me. My friend's body, Lisa
25 Graveline, was found in a dumpster after she was murdered

1 and left there like garbage in a duffle bag. The newspaper
2 clipping said something like prostitute and drug addict
3 found. Like, why? Like, why did they have to say that?

4 I was taken in and cared for one of the
5 women that was found on Picton's farm. She just loved me
6 and took care of me and we had nothing, yet we had each
7 other. I've known numerous women on the murdered and
8 missing list that are just gone. I think I've said this,
9 but I've witnessed too many violent acts to mention.

10 It was acceptable, as it is now, and has
11 been throughout our history to be subjected to harm,
12 violence and abuse, rather than confront and put an end to
13 the systemic and pervasive racism resulting in violence.
14 Society made it acceptable by dehumanizing and labelling
15 us, making it easy to violate and murder individuals with
16 multiple barriers.

17 As the judge said in the case of Betty
18 Osborne,

19 "This would have never happened if
20 she was not First Nation."

21 I was arrested and put in a halfway house
22 when I was 20. I was allowed to go home and attend
23 treatment again at [Peardonville] (~~inaudible~~). I completed
24 the program. I met a man and became pregnant and married
25 him shortly after. I did not know he was abusive until I

1 started working for [Atira Women's Resource Society]
2 (~~inaudible~~) society. I would tell women they deserved
3 better, but went home to an abusive man.

4 He would always hold me down, confine me,
5 call me crazy, a savage, put me down, but somehow I thought
6 this was normal. I remember the police coming, and I had
7 bruises from him grabbing me, and they asked me. Of
8 course, I said no. They needed me to make a statement.

9 I remember one night leaving with my son
10 in tow, and this was what finally did it. Through a window
11 while we were on the phone with a friend, telling them if
12 they can't hear me, to call 911. I finally had the courage
13 the leave, but as a result paid the price with everything
14 else, including my son.

15 After I left, his dad came to me with a
16 relapse. He was always drinking, he never helped with [Son
17 1]. Even when we were married I was basically a single
18 mom. When I came home everything...

19 So when we separated we owned this like
20 townhouse together. I wouldn't even call it a townhouse, I
21 think it was \$90,000. But when I came home everything of
22 value in the home was gone. When I phoned the police they
23 said there's nothing they could do because both of our
24 names are on the home. His father was an ex-RCMP officer.

25 He would go through my phone messages.

1 This was all proven in court. He would go through my phone
2 messages and show up at places that I was because he could
3 find out where I was. He would go through my mail. Why I
4 am saying he would go through my mail, because when we were
5 in Family Court I never received court documents. I ended
6 up so tired.

7 For every weekend his dad wasn't there he
8 was drinking, partying, and I was staying sober and trying
9 to learn how to be a single mom. I ended up relapsing.

10 My son was in a safe place. My friend
11 worked for Shewee, she was babysitting him. The next day
12 his dad and sister videotaped me in the Downtown East Side
13 and said,

14 "Good luck ever seeing your son
15 again."

16 That just made me spiral down. I remember
17 like being there and just wanting to die.

18 I could hear kids, but I couldn't hear
19 them. Like, I couldn't hear anyone say mommy, I couldn't
20 hear kids playing, I couldn't. Anytime I did, I just had
21 to use again. I was like in a wheelchair. Like, when I
22 use I use to die. Like, there's no in between for me.

23 My son was four years old and I had always
24 been his primary caregiver. I gave up hope. I was not
25 allowed to see him for the five months I was out there.

1 Then after, I wasn't allowed to see him for another four
2 months. This is after I was seven years clean.

3 During this time there's a couple that
4 tried to traffic. When it did not work I was brutally
5 raped in the Motel Hollywood in Surrey, and I just remember
6 screaming, screaming screaming. I felt like I was being
7 videotaped, and they'd given me like, I don't know if it's
8 called a roffie or what where you are froze. But nobody
9 helped me. Like, the people in the hotel could have heard
10 me. Nobody helped me. This led to more trauma, the trauma
11 that almost completely froze me.

12 I also owed money to a drug debt and did
13 not know he was the one that tortured people. So this
14 person I owed money to actually went around with the
15 torture kit and worked out of the Regent Hotel. I am very
16 lucky, even though I'm not lucky, that I had a boyfriend
17 that wasn't -- well, we were breaking up, but he still paid
18 my drug debt right before I'd probably be killed.

19 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: What year was that
20 in?

21 MS. MAURA GOWANS: That was in -- [Son 1]
22 would have been four, 13 years ago.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah 2002, 2003.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Three, 2003.

25 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah.

1 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you know this
2 man's name?

3 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I do know his name.

4 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: You don't have to say
5 it if --

6 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah, I'm not going to
7 say.

8 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. Is he still
9 out there and...?

10 MS. MAURA GOWANS: He's doing 13 years.

11 Just like -- I can't even tell you how
12 many times I've been threatened or -- yeah.

13 So this led to more trauma, but trauma
14 that almost completely froze me. Like, I couldn't be
15 anywhere near a man. I learned to -- well, I was put into
16 drug treatment court and so they helped me learn how to
17 count clocks and how to pick out different colours in a
18 room and to unfreeze me, like from the...

19 I couldn't be on buses. When I was on
20 buses I had to have space. I've never been that
21 traumatized.

22 So my parents did not live in Canada at
23 this time, but they helped me get into a private treatment
24 centre.

25 It's funny, I have to share this story. I

1 went to Bowen Island to the orchard and I got on the ferry,
2 I was dropped off at a ferry, had no idea where I was
3 going, someone was supposed to pick me up on the other
4 side. Like, the whole VPD was on the ferry. I just
5 remember thinking, they are following me to make sure I get
6 there.

7 Then I found out it was the cancer tour,
8 the bike tour. Like, I'm so important, right?

9 So [Son 1], who I was not allowed to see
10 while I was in my addiction -- it took another four months
11 of me going to treatment and before I was allowed to see
12 him, so nine months. So how do you explain to a four-year-
13 old who's [only ever had their mom] (~~inaudible~~) that you
14 can't just see them? Like, I don't understand.

15 You know, like had they not videotaped me,
16 had they not -- you know, like his dad has relapsed I can't
17 even tell you how many times throughout the years on crack
18 cocaine on different things. But he's Caucasian, he owns a
19 house, he has a job, he drives his truck, has property in
20 the States. So he gets away with it, you know. I would
21 never do that to him because I love my son too much.

22 So I wasn't allowed to see him and I
23 worked for Atira and was off during this relapse. Atira
24 offered to supervise me because I was not allowed to see
25 [Son 1] unless I was supervised. But they refused and said

1 I had to pay an outside agency, knowing I had no money. So
2 I was able to afford to see him once a week.

3 After a period of time, I was allowed to
4 be supervised by my friend, Jenna, who's a nurse, and we
5 became roommates. So I was able to have more access to
6 him. His father was remarried, and I remember in court his
7 mother saying to me,

8 "Why don't you just go away and let
9 them be a family?"

10 His new wife called me a whore, a crack
11 head. Told me in front of [Son 1], I chose cocaine over
12 him.

13 She would always yell at me,

14 "You should be ashamed of yourself."

15 She told my ex-husband I looked at her
16 funny, I was not allowed to see [Son 1] until I apologized.
17 One day he was crying when I dropped him off, so I reached
18 out my hands, because his dad was holding him and he had
19 his hands out to me. He was crying because she was
20 screaming at me that I was a crack whore and all these
21 things. I reached my arms out to him and they said that I
22 pushed him. I didn't know this until after, that I pushed
23 him.

24 So I was working at the time as a stopping
25 of violence counsellor, and I found out I had a warrant out

1 for my arrest for assault. I've never been charged with
2 assault before.

3 So after doing group on stopping the
4 violence, I had to turn myself in for a warrant to Langley
5 Police. Like, they just made me crazy, want to use. That
6 was their intention, for me to just go away. It was just a
7 lot of mental abuse.

8 So I spent at least four years in Family
9 Court to have the right as a mother. Throughout the years
10 his father's relapsed numerous times and nothing's ever
11 happened to him. I'm lucky though that I had support that
12 never let me give up when there were so many days that I
13 said I couldn't do it anymore.

14 Atira would send staff on their own time
15 to personally support and advocate for me in court. In the
16 end I stopped fighting for [Son 1] to live with me because
17 I loved him so much that I didn't think it was fair to take
18 him out of the home and school he knew. So I settled for
19 joint custody and guardianship, which still only happened
20 when his father felt like it. Everything was to punish me
21 for leaving him.

22 Did I mention that his father worked for
23 Surrey Crown Counsel and the Surrey Provincial Court? So I
24 never stood a chance. Just in that whole thing there's so
25 much racism, so many barriers, so many times that I've been

1 silenced.

2 Many times I was able to leave only to
3 return. I know without a doubt what finally saved me and
4 continues to save me is the values I was taught growing up.
5 My parents believed in me. My dad's like really into
6 seeing is perceiving is believing, so I didn't love me. So
7 many people in my life like Janice and Jenna and my
8 parents, they just believed me into me, loved me into me.
9 Like, I don't know how else to explain it.

10 Like, I'm okay with me today, I'm okay
11 sharing this with you today. This doesn't define me, but
12 it made me who I am today.

13 I was told by broken systems that as a
14 high school dropout I would never be anything.
15 Incarcerated, in and out of foster homes, a file with a
16 meaningless name. Thankfully, I've had family that,
17 although I pushed away, never gave up and fought hard for
18 me. I can honestly say that now, 20 years later, I have
19 lived and loved life to the fullest.

20 Walking with humility, compassion, and
21 empathy for all those that I've lost and all those that
22 still suffer has given an opportunity to use this heartache
23 to make women's lives count. I can now make a difference
24 in many of their lives through the work I do. There's so
25 many memories that have taught me how to work in a system

1 with so many barriers and so many things that are broken,
2 and I take those reminders with me every day I get up and
3 go to work.

4 I encourage you to accept, respect and
5 support individuals regardless of where they are in their
6 lives, to recognize the role colonialism, racism, substance
7 use, struggles with mental wellness, and general patterns
8 of violence intersect. By an understanding of these
9 intersecting impressions, it can inform our daily work with
10 and alongside the individual (inaudible/noise).

11 Working for the past 16 years I see daily
12 the huge need for vulnerable individuals to receive and
13 access services. Many organizations do not accept those
14 that struggle with barriers such as mental illness and
15 substance use, which leads many of them to live in unsafe
16 conditions with no support which increases their risk of
17 being harmed.

18 There's so many young girls getting pushed
19 out of care and into the world with little or no
20 preparation, which again increases their risk. I cannot
21 even tell you the amount of women that I've lost in the
22 last two years.

23 I've worked for the same organization for
24 the last 16 years, and it's pushed me to use my voice,
25 stand in my shoes, honour myself, and has given me a

1 platform to speak out against violence against women and
2 children. It's allowed me to work hard to break cycles of
3 abuse, of addiction, and given me the opportunity to
4 support women and having their inherent right of mothering
5 their children.

6 It has also allowed me to be me, it's also
7 allowed me to be proud of being who I am. It's given me
8 safety in being an Aboriginal woman that I've never ever
9 ever ever had in my life. I can go to work and know that
10 I'm safe. I can't say that when I leave I'm safe. I just
11 told off the guy again for [following me around No Frills]
12 (~~inaudible~~), like two days ago. You know, that's just in
13 everyday life for me, right?

14 I also want to say that my organization,
15 Atira, supported me to go back to school. Because they not
16 only know me as me, they hear my heart and I remember
17 working and seeing all these moms fighting just to see
18 their baby, just to hold their baby. Like, why should they
19 have to beg for that?

20 So I ended up going back to school and I'm
21 a registered social worker. So today I get to do
22 preventative work with those women to try and keep families
23 together. Because I don't ever want a woman, although it
24 happens all the time, to have to feel like their heart's
25 ripped out. I know what that feels like.

1 Living was one of the hardest things I had
2 to do. For a time I could not figure out how to live when
3 I had lost so many women that I loved. My family held onto
4 me and despite their love I could not fathom loving me.
5 Counsellors told me this was survivor's guilt; I lived and
6 they died. For a long time I did not understand why I was
7 still here.

8 I didn't deserve to be here. I didn't
9 want to be here. I wasn't safe here. I'm still here.
10 When I stopped trying to die because I can't even tell you,
11 like come to in a back alley, being brought back to life,
12 and pardon my language, but telling them,

13 "What the fuck did you do that for?"

14 Like, I can't even tell you how many times
15 my life should have been over. I am still here.

16 So when I finally realized that I couldn't
17 die, somebody wasn't letting me, I chose to live for them,
18 for the women I loved, that I lost. I chose to raise my
19 voice for so many of the women whose voices were never
20 heard, and to dedicate my life to the work of ending
21 systemic violence and to ensure my children have a chance
22 to live life though having to face many barriers and broken
23 systems I have had to face.

24 We are not to ever forget that our
25 children will be our leaders.

1 So I have one more poem I'm going to read.
2 But I want you to promise me, to promise me that you will
3 take my words and use them to ensure that my children have
4 a chance. Not just my children, all the children, that
5 they're not going to be incarcerated.

6 Like, they're overrepresented, we're
7 overrepresented, their children grow up to be
8 overrepresented in the institutions. They're taken, we
9 already went through the Sixties Scoop, we went through
10 residential schools, what is this generation going to face?
11 What is the government going to be held accountable for
12 this generation? How many kids are taken? Like, they're
13 just taken.

14 When you try to fight that system you're
15 silenced, there's no voice, you can't fight it. Even
16 lawyers will tell you, well you can fight it, but you have
17 to wait six months. Like, why not just help them heal as a
18 family?

19 So I'm just going to read a couple poems
20 and then I'm done.

21 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Maura, before you
22 read the poem, do you mind if I ask you a few
23 clarifications?

24 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah, sure.

25 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: So Atira, how do we

1 spell Atira?

2 MS. MAURA GOWANS: A-T-I-R-A.

3 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: What kind of
4 organization -- what's their classification as an
5 organization?

6 MS. MAURA GOWANS: So it's to end violence
7 against women and children. They weren't there when I was
8 homeless as a 16-year-old, but now they support everyone
9 from young women in the Downtown East Side to seniors in
10 White Rock, and they do everything to prevent harm. The
11 beautiful thing about them is there are no barriers.

12 The beautiful thing about us is there are
13 no barriers. You can come to me and it doesn't matter if
14 you're homeless, if you have mental wellness issues, if you
15 have addiction issues. If you're fleeing an abusive
16 partner and he's very violent, some people would say, oh,
17 I'm too scared to support you, we support them.

18 You know, my friend last night phoned me.
19 She was coming here today and she was using, and I couldn't
20 bring her home even though I love her with all my heart,
21 because of my children. But, you know, one of the houses in
22 Surrey opened their door and kept her all night and brought
23 her to the [SkyTrain this morning] (~~inaudible~~) and I saw
24 her downstairs before I came up.

25 Like, they -- we treat people as human, as

1 human, and we know that they're people, they're human, they
2 have hearts. We know that many women used to cope with the
3 trauma. We understand that the systems are broken.

4 You know, as a social worker I've been
5 silenced, I've been told I can't advocate for women because
6 I'm a fighter. I've been told, you're not allowed to fight
7 anymore so we can only speak between their lawyer and our
8 lawyer. Didn't stop me.

9 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Their locations, do
10 they have more than one place? Oh, you don't have to if
11 you don't --

12 MS. MAURA GOWANS: So Janice Abbott is the
13 CO of Atira.

14 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: So we're located
15 across the lower mainland. So we have where Maura works,
16 Maxxine Wright Place in Surrey. But in the Downtown East
17 Side, Richmond, Burnaby, across the lower mainland.

18 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Awesome. Is it an
19 Indigenous organization?

20 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: It's a women's
21 organization, probably 50 per cent of our staff are First
22 Nations or First Nations ancestry. Probably more than that
23 of the women we serve, I would say. So we're predominantly
24 or we identify as a women's organization, but we serve
25 mostly First Nations women.

1 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Awesome.

2 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Can I just ask? Jenna,
3 did you want to share anything about [Son 1] when you
4 supervised me?

5 MS. JENNA BREUER: Maura and I have a very
6 similar story. So listening to you sharing that and
7 revisiting that, that's been emotional. I do remember at
8 that time, Maura, when we connected. I mean, we'd always -
9 - we've been connected for over 20 years as friends. But I
10 remember that time when you were, you know, walking --
11 coming back off that relapse. I remember how, when you
12 talk about being frozen and being numb, I remember that. I
13 remember how hard it was being separated from [Son 1].
14 That was pivotal.

15 Because I think what that was is here was
16 a woman who felt unloved and unworthy of love, and to be
17 now a mother in sobriety, in recovery, still living in
18 abuse, that brings on a kind of a shame in a sense that you
19 don't talk about, you don't share.

20 So the resulting relapse was a big one.
21 Regardless though, being separated from her son as a result
22 of her son's family who -- what Maura is not saying is her
23 ex-husband's father is an ex-RCMP officer and this is why
24 she was videotaped in an alley.

25 There was clear power advantage on the

1 father's side. I take pride in often being able to try and
2 see both sides of every coin. There was clear and obvious
3 power advantage and disadvantage on Maura's side. So
4 watching her walk through that was a really phenomenal
5 experience.

6 Knowing Maura for over 20 years now is a
7 gift. We support each other in a lot of ways, we
8 understand both sides of the street. We both came from
9 addiction, we both came from... When we were using, when
10 we were 15 years old downtown there was no youth
11 organizations. There was (inaudible).

12 When we started sobering and cleaning up
13 and doing that, you know, through various means there was
14 no youth recovery. Now there is, but there wasn't 20 years
15 ago, it was rooms full of old white men. There was no
16 Indigenous meetings per se, there was no -- there were some
17 organizations but they, you know...

18 Now, when I look downtown I see nothing
19 but youth. Actually, I see the children of our friends is
20 what we see when we go downtown. It's the children of the
21 people that we used to know.

22 MS. MAURA GOWANS: And the grandchildren.

23 MS. JENNA BREUER: And their grandchildren
24 absolutely, yeah.

25 So it's just been a really -- I'm just

1 really honoured, really honoured, as always. I'm just
2 grateful that we were able to get [Son 1] back in your
3 life. When they asked -- the barriers were -- I remember
4 going to court with her, multiple days in court just
5 sitting there shaking my head.

6 I just couldn't understand why they were
7 not focused on putting the child back with the mother.
8 Saying that well, you know, because she's been using. I
9 remember sitting there thinking, but her father's drunk,
10 he's at home drunk right now, he's drinking. He's not here
11 in the courtroom because he's drinking.

12 So, you know, the barriers, you have to
13 pay to have visits. I said, well, then I'll supervisor
14 your visits and you can say you're paying me. I'm a
15 registered nurse and I'm not afraid to use the title then
16 if I have to, you know.

17 The barriers were phenomenal, but that was
18 pivotal, having her son taken was pivotal.

19 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: For all women -- it's
20 95 probably per cent of the women we have is in the
21 Downtown East Side grew up in the foster care system, and
22 almost as many have children in the foster care system. If
23 we keep stealing women's children, we'll just keep growing
24 up homeless people. There has to be a way to keep mother
25 and kids together.

1 MS. MAURA GOWANS: We can't even speak to
2 the number of children who now have no mother because of
3 that fentanyl.

4 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: So compared with 20
5 years ago, do you think is the same, exactly the same
6 monumental barriers, nothing's changed?

7 MS. JENNA BREUER: Yes and no. Yeah, I'd
8 say yes. The barriers that exist is that we stigmatize
9 addiction, period. Then on top of that we stigmatize
10 women, then we stigmatize women who are addicted. We
11 stigmatize women who do sex work. Those barriers, those
12 systemic social labels.

13 Until we find a way to, I don't know, to
14 change the language, the change the approach, to change the
15 colour that comes with the word drug addict, to change the
16 taste that comes with the word native woman, to change the
17 smell that comes with the word sex work, to change that
18 somehow, it'll be the women that'll do that too. It'll be
19 us that'll do that. Then it doesn't matter how many
20 organizations there are.

21 Atira's a phenomenal organization, BWSS is
22 a phenomenal organization, thank God. Thank God these
23 things exist because it's -- the change is coming, but
24 there's a lot that has to change. I think maybe there has
25 to be some changes in RCMP training for myself as a

1 registered psychiatric nurse who's worked in emergency
2 departments... Who do they bring people to when they
3 can't...? When the police can't control you, who do they
4 bring you to? So I can medicate you.

5 I've seen too many people coming in
6 tasered that shouldn't be. I've seen too many people
7 coming in beaten. I was living in an abusive relationship
8 for the last 11 years, five years out, and I had a partner
9 who was abused by the police continuously. That didn't
10 change anything, other than he would come home and take it
11 out on me.

12 Stop demonizing dealers, they're not
13 dealers, they're addicts who are working for their habit.
14 There's very very few on the street who are actually not
15 using themselves that are selling drugs.

16 MS. MAURA GOWANS: That's the craziest
17 part. Is like, why are they there? We know who they are.
18 Like, we know who they are. Why are they there?

19 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: People who deal the
20 drugs?

21 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah.

22 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: The people who they
23 work for, we know who the people they work for are.

24 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah.

25 MS. JENNA BREUER: M'hmm.

1 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: Instead, they arrest
2 the folks who are using to survive. So it's not --like, we
3 all know, in the Downtown East side we all know who
4 everybody's working for. Those guys never, they don't seem
5 to ever. They're the brunt of what they do.

6 MS. JENNA BREUER: They're cutting the
7 tail of the snake instead of the head.

8 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I could just go --
9 yeah. I just really want -- like, all this money goes into
10 foster homes, all this money goes into taking children,
11 when money could go into restoring families and helping
12 them heal and helping them. Their inherent right as
13 parents. Thank God I healed and was able to be there for
14 my son.

15 Had I not, I can tell you statistically he
16 would have ended up in jail, he would have ended up on
17 foster care, he would have ended up in addiction.
18 Statistically, that's what happens to the children that are
19 removed, and their children. So how's that a system that
20 works? Why can't you take than money that you're paying to
21 have them removed or foster homes and put it into
22 preventative work or providing the family with tools.

23 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: With the amount of
24 poverty.

25 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah.

1 MS. JENNA BREUER: M'hmm.

2 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah. Like, I'm
3 sitting here, no offence, and the money that's spent here,
4 no offence, and there's people that live in homes that are
5 not even homes, with no water, you know. No, I'm not being
6 judgmental, why I'm --

7 MS. JENNA BREUER: No, I was thinking like
8 the minute we walked into the hotel I thought, man, there's
9 a lot of gold in this.

10 MS. MAURA GOWANS: At little bit, right?
11 Just, I could go on and on about the amount of times
12 they're researched and the money that goes into researching
13 us and when there's people that live without water, yeah.

14 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: So what would your
15 recommendations be for the Inquiry, what you'd love to see
16 come out of it for actual change?

17 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I'd love for women to
18 be no longer subjectified. I don't even know if that's a
19 word. But that it's not -- how do I put this? First
20 Nations women, anyone around the world knows that they can
21 murder us and get away with it. That they can sex traffic
22 us and get away with it, that we're easy prey. Doesn't
23 matter if we're in school and we're just walking home,
24 we're prey. That needs to be made that it's not
25 acceptable, it's not acceptable.

1 For the families, you know, that have gone
2 through this and every system that's been broken, you know,
3 from the -- is it the coroner to the police, to the whole
4 legal system? Like, it just -- they just need to let First
5 Nations people have a voice. Because we can help fix
6 everything without money, just listen. You know? Just
7 listen. Just give them power back to help them raise their
8 own children, to heal their own communities.

9 There's cycles of abuse, addition,
10 homelessness, poverty, we know how to break those cycles if
11 we have the tools, but there's no resources.

12 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: No land.

13 MS. MAURA GOWANS: No land.

14 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: Give back the land.

15 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah.

16 MS. JENNA BREUER: It's the women in our
17 culture who are the culture, they are matriarchal, most of
18 us come from matriarchal, not all of us, but matriarchal
19 nations.

20 You know, I worked in HIV for a number of
21 year and we would, with our HIV meds -- years ago, we're
22 not allowed to do it anymore, but we had what we called the
23 Africa box. So when someone stopped one of ARA's(ph) put
24 the pill bottle in the Africa box. Because we know that in
25 Africa, this is years ago mind you, you know, if you keep

1 one woman well in the village with HIV you'll keep 20 other
2 people alive in that village. Because that's how integral
3 the women are.

4 We need to start thinking about First
5 Nations women that way in Canada. That if you keep us
6 alive you help us thrive. We just might need a little bit
7 of a -- little bit of a head start. Don't worry, we got
8 the rest. Then we'll start healing.

9 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I honestly think that
10 some people grew up in violent homes, they grew up in
11 addictive homes, they grew up in poverty as well, and some
12 people don't know a way out of abuse. So if a woman comes
13 to you she should be able to come to you without being in
14 fear for losing her children. That should not even be a
15 barrier. Yeah, she should be able to come to you.

16 As soon as there are children involved
17 that are red flagged, then it's more serious than I've seen
18 than women with addiction with children.

19 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: I truly believe that
20 if we can support women to parent their children that is
21 the way out, and support women to support other women to
22 parent their children, we can -- yeah.

23 MS. MAURA GOWANS: We have to heal our
24 children. We have to make sure that our children have a
25 chance, that they're not -- it's not okay to murder them.

1 Yeah.

2 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: So you didn't ask me,
3 but I'm going to tell you anyway. If I had one
4 recommendation --

5 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Sure.

6 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: -- it would be support
7 women to raise their children, quit taking women's children
8 away, quit paying other people to raise women's children.
9 I mean, I expect that there are extreme circumstances where
10 that's not possible, but those are the exceptions. Women,
11 we need to support women to raise their children. That's
12 the only way out of this mess that we're in. Whatever it
13 takes.

14 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Thank you so much.
15 Do both of you ladies also consent to having --

16 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: Yeah.

17 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: -- what you've said
18 public? So do you mind saying your own name and that --

19 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: Okay. So my name's
20 Janice Abbott, and I consent to having what I said made
21 public.

22 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay.

23 MS. JENNA BREUER: My name's Jenna Brewer,
24 I consent to having what I said made public.

25 MS. MAURA GOWANS: I have one poem and

1 then I'm done.

2 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. So you know
3 Lisa Graveline's date of birth?

4 MS. MAURA GOWANS: No. She was 20 when
5 she died. I met her when she was 14, I believe.

6 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you know what year
7 that was when she passed away?

8 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Maybe 1997.

9 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay.

10 MS. JENNA BREUER: 1996/1997.

11 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: I'm going to see if I
12 can find out.

13 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: The assaulters in the
14 hotel in Surrey, did anything get done? Did they ever have
15 justice --

16 MS. MAURA GOWANS: You have -- well, I'd
17 tear apart the hotel to make sure --

18 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: Shut it down.

19 MS. MAURA GOWANS: -- it doesn't happen to
20 anyone else. Because for over 10 years women were
21 trafficked out of there. The City knew, the police new,
22 nobody did anything. Even the owners were proud that they
23 got paid hourly.

24 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: The hotel's name
25 was...?

1 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: It was the Motel
2 Hollywood, we're in the process of renovating it and it
3 will be renamed Little's Place.

4 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: What will it be
5 named?

6 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: Little's Place. So
7 Little, that was the nickname of a young woman called
8 [Savannah] ~~Santanna~~ Scott-Huntinghawk, she died alone in a
9 tent in a wooded area in Surrey of a fentanyl overdose when
10 she was 19, just after [aging out of care] (inaudible),
11 about two years ago.

12 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: So are those people
13 that did this to you, are they still out there or are they
14 free?

15 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Honestly, they're free
16 and, honestly, I won't say that on camera, (inaudible) if I
17 remembered who they were. Yeah, no, I don't. I was given
18 a chance, a time to run, and I ran.

19 Even worse than the rape, was I left my
20 book, my album of pictures of [Son 1] there. Because he
21 said,

22 "You can run now while you have a
23 chance,"

24 and I ran. That was -- you know, and
25 that was my -- all I had of [Son 1] at the time. Yeah.

1 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Are there any other
2 details or names or anything you want to share or...

3 MS. JANICE ABBOTT: No.

4 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Okay. Would you like
5 to read your poem?

6 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah. So I was asked
7 to present at the City of Vancouver on Coalition of
8 Indigenous -- Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and
9 Girls, and so I wrote a speech and I was going to write
10 some kind of like Martin Luther King thing. I decided to
11 write my own poem. So when I wrote it I thought of Lisa
12 Graveline, I thought of the woman that took me under her
13 wing, and I just had this -- thoughts of a mixture of the
14 murdered and missing women.

15 So I'm going to -- this is really for
16 them, for their families, for me. It's called Soar:

17 *Death found you, I don't know how*
18 *or why;*

19 *I was the one living on the edge*
20 *ready to die.*

21 *Together for ever, our motto, our*
22 *love song;*

23 *If I could see your smile, touch*
24 *your face;*

25 *Ensure every memory of you they*

1 *children*

2 *That allows them to soar.*

3 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Thank you so much,
4 all of you.

5 MS. MAURA GOWANS: So I can leave these
6 with you.

7 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Do you have copies of
8 them?

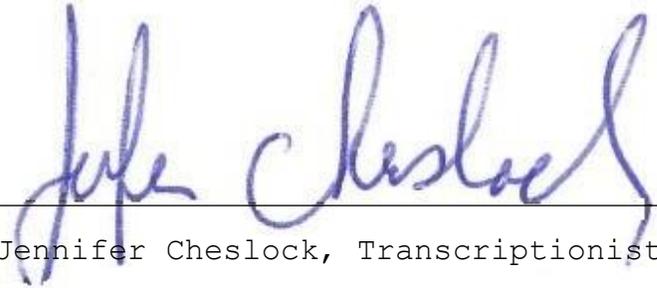
9 MS. MAURA GOWANS: Yeah.

10 MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Yeah? Okay, perfect.
11 Thank you, thank you so much.

12 I'll stop it here.

13 --- Whereupon the statement concluded.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I have, to the best
of my skill and ability,
accurately transcribed from a pre-existing recording
the foregoing proceeding.



Jennifer Cheslock, Transcriptionist