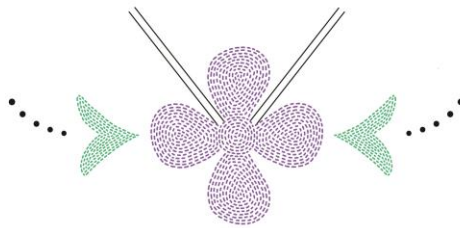


National Inquiry into  
Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls



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 I: Statement Gathering  
Hilton Vancouver Airport Hotel  
Metro Vancouver (Richmond)  
British Columbia**



**PUBLIC**

**Saturday April 7, 2018**

**Statement - Volume 371  
Sonia Brown, In relation to her Mother**

**Statement gathered by Daria Boyarchuk**

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Statement Gatherer: Daria Boyarchuk

Documents submitted with oral statement: none

1 Richmond, British Columbia

2 --- Upon commencing Saturday, April 7, 2018

3 at 4:16 p.m.

4 MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Hi. My name is  
5 Daria Boyarchuk and I am the statement gatherer for the  
6 National Inquiry for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous  
7 Women and Girls. We are here in Vancouver on April 7,  
8 2018. It is 4:16 in the afternoon, and I am here in the  
9 presence of Sonia Brown, who has come to share her story,  
10 to share her truth. And also here with us is our health  
11 support. Would you please introduce yourselves?

12 MS. JORDAN PICKELL: Jordan Pickell, and  
13 I'm here as a support worker.

14 MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Thank you.

15 MS. CORINNA RUSS: My name is Corinna  
16 Russ. I'm here to support Sonia.

17 MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Thank you.

18 MS. SONIA BROWN: I'm Sonia Brown. I'm  
19 the mother of two sons and grandmother to eight. I've been  
20 on this healing journey for 27 years, and it's a passion of  
21 mine to get past all of the heartache and the hurt and  
22 anger, yeah.

23 MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Thank you. Thank  
24 you, everyone, for being here. And, of course, I extend my  
25 gratitude to you, Sonia, for being here. And you were here

1 yesterday for your friend, but I also extend gratitude to  
2 you now, Corinna, for being here to support Sonia,  
3 especially because now it is her turn to share her truth.

4                   And before we begin, Sonia, I would like  
5 to ask for your consent to sign a consent form, which  
6 either gives the permission the Inquiry to either disclose  
7 your name, face, voice, or any other identifying  
8 information about you, your family, and your statement,  
9 your photographs, visual, audio, and any other documents.

10                   MS. SONIA BROWN: Mm-hmm.

11                   MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Or it will not -- or  
12 you will not give permission disclosing face, voice, or any  
13 other identifying information. So if you can make either a  
14 check or put initials next to the box that is most  
15 appropriate and then sign your name underneath. Thank you.

16                   And then if you can also print and sign as  
17 a witness. Thank you very much.

18                   So what can you tell us about your healing  
19 journey? How did you start? Why did you end up on this  
20 journey?

21                   MS. SONIA BROWN: Because I'm an  
22 alcoholic. I started drinking when I was ten, smoking. I  
23 had my first son when I was 16, and I was on the street  
24 from when I was ten until I was 15. I had my first son and  
25 ended up on the street with him, and made my way back to

1 Masset and had my -- carried on drinking and got pregnant  
2 again. Had my second son. Managed to stay off the street  
3 after that.

4                   But the drinking wasn't daily. It was,  
5 like, sporadic, maybe once a month, once every couple of  
6 months. These days, they call it binge drinking. Later on  
7 in the years, I started drinking every day and drinking  
8 wine, and I didn't like it, so I -- I didn't know how to  
9 stop and didn't know what -- didn't know there was a  
10 different life than drinking and drugging. I was drunk for  
11 about six months and little lapses of being sober.

12                   I managed to attend an upgrading class in  
13 my hometown. In that class, I had a life skills course.  
14 And in the life skills course, they brought in a lady who  
15 did a fire ceremony. I had no idea what that was, but I  
16 did it. And they were talking about treatment centers, and  
17 I was like,

18                   "What's a treatment centre?"

19                   After the ceremony, we all did a burning  
20 of what we wanted be. When it was done, I went and asked  
21 the lady what she was talking about a "treatment centre,"  
22 and she explained it to me. I was interested.

23                   So she did what she could to get me in.  
24 She said it's a six-month to a year waiting list, and I was  
25 kind of sad about that because I was just tired of

1 drinking. I wanted to end it yesterday. That was February  
2 13, 1991.

3 On February 14, she came to my school and  
4 asked me to come outside. They had a date for me March 10.  
5 I went to the treatment centre and pretty much didn't look  
6 back.

7 I've been on this journey since and it's  
8 been the good and the bad. Mostly bad, because there was  
9 so much anger and resentment towards family members for the  
10 way I was treated when I was younger. And I finally -- it  
11 took a lot of years for me to realize I was drinking to  
12 numb the pain and to numb the anger and the resentment.

13 I was treated like dirt. Our mom was  
14 killed when I was six years old. And after not drinking  
15 for awhile, I realized some of that pain was because our  
16 mom was dead. And the dysfunctional family dynamics was  
17 pretty -- it was brutal. It was brutal. We weren't  
18 allowed to talk to our dad. We weren't allowed to be  
19 around him.

20 But through the treatment centre and  
21 learning to understand myself, learning to deal with all  
22 the anger, I don't want to say it made life easier, but it  
23 kind of did in a way so that I was able to acknowledge my  
24 defects, my hurt.

25 Because of the way I was raised, it made

1 so much sense for me to be numb, for me to be hateful, for  
2 me to be angry. I didn't understand what anger was. I  
3 thought it was just a natural -- I thought that was normal  
4 to be that way.

5 Our mom was not with us and we weren't  
6 allowed to speak about her. That would be probably the  
7 biggest thing in my life was to not have any answers as to  
8 why she wasn't -- why the things happened the way they did.

9 I was told by her mother that it should  
10 have been me that was dead. She would beat me up in front  
11 of everybody. Everybody would make fun of me. I learned  
12 to cry as soon as she hit me once, so that it wouldn't --  
13 so it would stop sooner rather than later, not  
14 understanding why I was the one that was getting beaten.

15 I don't even know the parts of me -- I  
16 don't even know the parts of me that were so lonely and so  
17 hateful.

18 In my healing journey, I wanted to get  
19 past all this. It never happened fast enough. The  
20 beatings would come back in different ways and memories of  
21 it.

22 Now, I'm wondering why I didn't have  
23 anybody that would be there to protect me. My dad was  
24 still alive. It's been 27 years. I think I already said  
25 that, but it's a lot deeper. It was a lot deeper than I

1 thought it was 27 years ago.

2                   Some days, I feel like I passed this on to  
3 my children. Some days, being sober was the loneliest  
4 place I ever was at -- needed a drink. I wanted to die  
5 more often than not. It felt like nothing could save me.  
6 I can't even say I know what love is. I never could.

7                   I have so much inside I need to say, I  
8 need to put out there. I feel stuck. Sorry.

9                   MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: It's okay.

10                  MS. SONIA BROWN: Just so many things that  
11 need to be acknowledged. So many hard times. So many good  
12 times. I've been beaten by men twice to the death by going  
13 the journey, seeing my body laying there, hearing the  
14 nurses saying that I'm gone, up in the ceiling, watching  
15 them. I wondered who would love my children and I couldn't  
16 go.

17                  It was really heavy coming back into my  
18 body. So heavy. Didn't want to be there, but I didn't  
19 know who would love my children the way I did as a mother.

20                  I did the best I could with them as an  
21 alcoholic. It happened again about four or five years  
22 later. I was dead. But this time, they were calling it --  
23 I was on the ceiling. And this time, they were calling my  
24 grandmother and I could hear her, the nurse. She said,

25                                    "She just hung up on me."



1 And it hurt so bad, but I knew, really  
2 knew that nobody would love my children. I came back. The  
3 same thing, it was heavy, but I felt a little lighter  
4 because that decision I consciously made to stay.

5 Over the years, after stopping drinking,  
6 over the years, I didn't know that in the back of my mind,  
7 I always wanted to die. Always felt -- six or seven months  
8 ago, I met a man, a healer on a reserve. He came to help  
9 residential people and that started this journey now -- to  
10 now. It opened some doors and I chose to walk through it.  
11 I stepped through the door.

12 And there's a team there that was doing  
13 healing work and there was a man doing cedar brushing. I  
14 went to see him. And while he was brushing me, he said  
15 you're not allowed to go yet. I was like, what? He said,

16 "You're not allowed to go yet."

17 All this time, I thought I was fighting to  
18 stay alive and he said I was fighting to die. Holy crap.  
19 That really made sense to me in that moment because I  
20 couldn't figure it out.

21 I was a bit back and forth a lot since  
22 then. That was a few months ago, back and forth, but my  
23 struggle to live is different than the struggle to die. I  
24 feel like I'm struggling to live now. That loneliness that  
25 I felt in the earlier years of my sobriety is not as

Sonia Brown

(Mother)

- 1 harmful as it was then. It's not as harmful as it is now,
- 2 because it still comes. I'm tired.
- 3 --- Whereupon proceedings adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I have, to the best  
of my skill and ability, accurately recorded  
by shorthand and transcribed therefrom, the  
foregoing proceeding using real time computer  
aided transcription.



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Cynthia Yan, Court Reporter