National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part I: Statement Gathering

Hilton Vancouver Airport Hotel
Metro Vancouver (Richmond)
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Saturday April 7, 2018

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

Statement gathered by Daria Boyarchuk

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Documents submitted with oral statement: none
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Sonia Brown
(Mother)

--- Upon commencing Saturday, April 7, 2018 at 4:16 p.m.

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

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

MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Thank you.

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

MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Thank you.

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

MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Thank you. Thank you, everyone, for being here. And, of course, I extend my gratitude to you, Sonia, for being here. And you were here
yesterday for your friend, but I also extend gratitude to you now, Corinna, for being here to support Sonia, especially because now it is her turn to share her truth. And before we begin, Sonia, I would like to ask for your consent to sign a consent form, which either gives the permission the Inquiry to either disclose your name, face, voice, or any other identifying information about you, your family, and your statement, your photographs, visual, audio, and any other documents.

MS. SONIA BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK: Or it will not -- or you will not give permission disclosing face, voice, or any other identifying information. So if you can make either a check or put initials next to the box that is most appropriate and then sign your name underneath. Thank you. And then if you can also print and sign as a witness. Thank you very much.

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

MS. SONIA BROWN: Because I'm an alcoholic. I started drinking when I was ten, smoking. I had my first son when I was 16, and I was on the street from when I was ten until I was 15. I had my first son and ended up on the street with him, and made my way back to
Masset and had my -- carried on drinking and got pregnant again. Had my second son. Managed to stay off the street after that.

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

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

"What's a treatment centre?"

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

So she did what she could to get me in. She said it's a six-month to a year waiting list, and I was kind of sad about that because I was just tired of
drinking. I wanted to end it yesterday. That was February 13, 1991.

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

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

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

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

Because of the way I was raised, it made
so much sense for me to be numb, for me to be hateful, for me to be angry. I didn't understand what anger was. I thought it was just a natural -- I thought that was normal to be that way.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I did the best I could with them as an
alcoholic. It happened again about four or five years
later. I was dead. But this time, they were calling it --
I was on the ceiling. And this time, they were calling my
grandmother and I could hear her, the nurse. She said,
"She just hung up on me."
And it hurt so bad, but I knew, really
knew that nobody would love my children. I came back. The
same thing, it was heavy, but I felt a little lighter
because that decision I consciously made to stay.

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

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

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

I was a bit back and forth a lot since
then. That was a few months ago, back and forth, but my
struggle to live is different than the struggle to die. I
feel like I'm struggling to live now. That loneliness that
I felt in the earlier years of my sobriety is not as
harmful as it was then. It's not as harmful as it is now, because it still comes. I'm tired.

--- 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