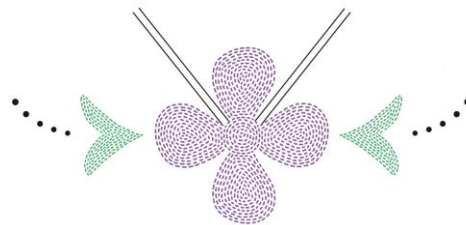


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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



PUBLIC

April 8, 2018

Statement - Volume 386

Donna Dickison

Statement gathered by Kate Langham

Coast Reporting Services

II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement Volume 386

April 8, 2018

Witness: Donna Dickison

PAGE

Statement by Donna Dickison 1

Reporter's certification 35

Statement Gatherer: Kate Langham

Documents submitted with testimony: none.

III

NOTE

Redactions to this public transcript have been made pursuant to Rule 55 of the Commission's *Legal Path: Rules of Respectful Practice*, which provides for "the discretion to redact private information of a sensitive nature where it is not material to the evidence to be given before distributing the information to the Parties. The National Inquiry will consider the public interest in releasing this type of information against the potential harmful impact on the individual whose personal information is at issue."

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 *APRIL 8, 2018, 9:42 a.m.*

2 KATE LANGHAM: This is Kate Langham, statement gatherer for
3 the National Inquiry. It's Sunday, April 8th, and we
4 are here at the Richmond Sheraton Airport Hotel.

5 The time is 9:42. And I'm here with...

6 DONNA DICKISON: My name is Jenny Donna Dickison. I am at
7 the conference of health support worker.

8 KATE LANGHAM: And supporting her as a health support here
9 is?

10 SADIE MCPHEE: I'm Sadie McPhee and I'm working with the
11 Indian Residential School Survivors Society and I'm
12 here for support.

13 KATE LANGHAM: Thank you.

14 So we can begin however you would like to begin.
15 Perhaps telling us about yourself, or definitely start
16 off by telling us what you would like the
17 Commissioners to know.

18 DONNA DICKISON: Okay. I came to Vancouver in 1960, right
19 out of residential school. I was -- well, not
20 directly. I moved to Lillooet first and then I came
21 here and I was pregnant. And I had my -- February
22 19th, I had the baby February 20th, 1960. And it
23 was -- I didn't even know where babies came from or,
24 you know, how they were -- I went to the doctor on, on
25 Denman Street, and I said I had to go to the bathroom.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 And I was in the bathroom and this foot came out. And
2 it was, it was, I was a scary thing for me. And I had
3 to go to the hospital in the ambulance. I was only 16
4 years old. A child having a child.

5 So I never even got to hold my baby because he
6 was put in the incubator right away. And the nuns
7 came and they got me to sign papers that I would turn
8 him over to them and the Catholic Children's Aid
9 Society.

10 So I never got to hold him. I would just look at
11 him through the window when I was in the hospital. I
12 would go up there every day and look at him. And then
13 when it was time to leave I just left, not holding
14 him.

15 And I would go back, and then one day I went back
16 and he was gone. And, and the Catholic Children's Aid
17 had put him somewhere and I never knew where.

18 And I finally phoned them and found out what I --
19 but not very long after I had a daughter and I thought
20 -- this is at the General -- and then I had a daughter
21 and I never told anybody that I was pregnant or
22 anything. And I was, I was quite tiny and I, I walked
23 to the St. Paul's hospital. I thought I would go to a
24 different hospital, but not realizing that is run by
25 the nuns, eh. So they did the same thing to me.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 And she was about two pounds, a little over two
2 pounds. Both of them were. And same thing -- I went
3 through the same thing.

4 And I did finally get to see them together but
5 they were, my son was talking French and I, I couldn't
6 talk to him. And, and he just wanted out of there.
7 He didn't know who I was. And, and she was just a
8 baby.

9 And I never got to see them until they were quite
10 old. And we never really connected. It's because, my
11 son told me, that his aunt was a nun and, and my
12 daughter went to visit her in Ontario and she was
13 always going to church, eh. And I had just come out
14 of the Catholic Church and I had been sexually abused
15 by a nun my first day at school, and that was my
16 introduction to residential school. And, and I was
17 sexually abused by two priests afterwards. And that
18 continued, you know, for a long time.

19 And my parents both went to the same school.
20 And, you know, and we never really knew love. Like my
21 dad just told me that I was going away and just to be
22 good and do as I was told. So that is what I did. I
23 was just doing as I was being told.

24 We travelled by train and we travelled by boat
25 and then we travelled on the back of a truck that they

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 use for the cows and all of that, eh.

2 So all through, all through school I was, I was
3 really ashamed of who I was. I didn't want to be an
4 Indian because we were called savages just about every
5 day, you know, and be glad you are getting an
6 education, and you are not going to be like your
7 parents. And I think, well, my parents went to the
8 same school. Why are they calling them savages? You
9 know.

10 And then I would see kids that spoke their
11 language and, you know, my mom and dad spoke the
12 language, but they spoke it in private, you know. And
13 I, I would sometimes hear them and I would say, I
14 asked my dad, Why do you guys talk different than us?
15 And he says I would never teach you guys the language
16 he says, because you would be getting the strap all of
17 the time in school, you know. And I just says, Oh,
18 you know.

19 And, and, you know, he never ever told me what
20 went on for him at the school and, you know. And he
21 committed suicide when I was 12 years old. He shot
22 himself right in the head. I wasn't there but I was
23 in Seattle with my aunt and we came up to go to the
24 funeral. So I never really believed that he was dead
25 because I never saw him, you know.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 And I just -- when I moved to Vancouver I used to
2 walk around and look and see if I could see him
3 because he used to leave home quite often to work.

4 And then my mom moved down to Vancouver, not very
5 long after that. She moved to Seattle first and then
6 she moved up here. And then I, I would go and visit
7 her and she would be in the East End somewhere. And I
8 would just go and talk to her and that, and meet her.

9 Because when I -- I was quite young and I got
10 into trouble and I ended up in the Girls' Industrial
11 School, another institution. So I was there for a
12 while. And I, I came out and then I started working
13 in a restaurant. And when I turned 18 I got -- I knew
14 this lady and she came in, a big fur coat and
15 everything she had on. And she was talking to me and
16 she asked me would I like to come and work for her and
17 I would make good money.

18 So I ended up in prostitution. I worked in the
19 house and she had customers coming there. And there
20 was -- that was after my two kids.

21 And I guess they told me that I couldn't get my
22 kids back unless I had a house and that, and so I
23 thought, you know, I could never get a house working
24 in a restaurant.

25 But when I went in there, I never saved any

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 money. I was quite angry with myself. And then that
2 is when I started drinking really heavy. I would
3 carry a bottle around in my purse. But I stayed right
4 in the house all of the time. But any time I wanted
5 to get out I would go down to the East End and just
6 drink with my brothers and sisters there. And then I
7 would go back and, and I guess I started to hate
8 myself for what I was doing.

9 When I got out, when I finally left, you know, I
10 just left on my own and I just went back and would
11 start waitressing again. And, and I was always
12 ashamed of what I did and I never told anybody.

13 And I started having kids. And I was over the
14 age of 18 so they couldn't take them away. And the
15 son that I wanted to come here today, he was the first
16 one that I had. So that is why I wanted him to talk
17 because I, I never knew his father and, you know, and
18 what it must have felt like for him going through
19 school and that, not knowing his father. I never
20 started talking to them until I was in my 40s.

21 Because he asked me why I drank and all of that, you
22 know, and I saw them and they were starting to drink
23 themselves and it was hurting me. And I thought, you
24 know, I need to quit drinking, I need to do something.

25 So I asked my brother to put me in a -- they put

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 me in the Poundmaker's Lodge in Edmonton, so I was
2 there for a while.

3 And I never really dealt with my issues. I just,
4 you know, I was there just for my sobriety and then I
5 came out and I never did drink again. But I, I still
6 felt a lot of things. And I worked, I worked in a
7 locked unit and that is when all of my memories
8 started coming up of residential school. I had seen
9 them knocking on the elevator, they wanted out, and
10 you know, that really made me feel sad and that
11 brought back a lot of memories.

12 And I know one night I went home and I, I woke up
13 really cold and that and I looked around and my room,
14 it was really dark and I just got out of bed and I
15 went and had a shower because I felt like I was back
16 in residential school. So my memories started coming
17 up there. At work, if they would come up, I would
18 just go in a corner and just cry and then come right
19 out, like there is nothing happening for me at all.
20 And I realized that I need to do something, you know.

21 So I was into counselling and I said I think I
22 need to go through it so I can deal with a lot of
23 stuff. And so I ended up going to Tsow-Tun Le Lum in
24 Nanaimo and they were really good and it just brought
25 me right back to my childhood. And I was, I was

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 sittin' on the floor and then everything started
2 comin' back and then somebody came and sat beside me.
3 And I felt so good after I left there.

4 But it was -- so I have been going to
5 counselling, but not lately, but I just went back to
6 the residential school not too long ago and it was
7 just before Christmas. And I went to the new school
8 and that didn't bother me, because I didn't go to the
9 new school. But then when I went to the old school,
10 it's a park now, but when you look up the hill you can
11 see the grotto. And I'm back -- it brought back a lot
12 of memories and I just started cryin' just like a
13 baby, you know. And I says, you know, I says they had
14 -- my son was there. I said, They knew, they knew.
15 And he said What? And I said, The nuns knew what was
16 happening. We were going up the grotto just to have a
17 service. And one of the priests pulled me out of line
18 and they just told a nun that he was just taking me
19 just for a little walk. And he took me over to the
20 pond and that's -- he sexually abused me, you know.

21 And, and my son says, of course they knew what
22 was going on, you know. And that was -- well, maybe
23 it was just, you know, the priest and that, and maybe
24 it was just them that knew, you know.

25 And, and I, I went -- one time we were playing on

Statement - Public**Donna Dickison**

1 the Merry-Go-Round and I hurt my leg and I had to go
2 to the infirmary for a while. And that is when
3 another priest came in and he sexually abused me. And
4 that was weird. Because I, I, I sort of went on top
5 of myself and I was, like, looking down at that little
6 girl. And it just -- when I think about it, I still
7 remember that, looking down, you know?

8 And, you know, and when I said this at my hearing
9 in the residential school, I says this is -- but I
10 don't think he meant it, you know. You know -- you
11 know, just, they took away my innocence.

12 And when I look at it, I guess that is why I went
13 into prostitution, you know. I never thought very
14 much of myself. And I, I said I didn't start talking
15 to my kids until I was 48, or something like that and
16 I, I had been working at that place for a while. And
17 then I -- that is when we met my son, my son that was
18 adopted out, and my daughter. And so they asked me
19 questions and I really couldn't tell them then. So we
20 sort of severed off our relationship because they said
21 I didn't want to talk. I didn't want to talk because
22 their families were all, you know, went to church all
23 of the time and his aunt was a nun and so on. So I
24 could never disclose it to them.

25 And, but my son that lives here, he talks a lot

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 to me and, you know, I would tell him little by
2 little. And I would say, you know, I could have
3 stopped it. I always felt bad that I never stopped
4 it, you know. He says, Mom, look at my daughters. Do
5 you think she can stop it? And I said No. He says,
6 So how could you? You know. And that is what made me
7 start realizing that, well, maybe I couldn't. But I
8 said when I got older I should have stopped, you know.
9 And thinking back, yeah, I was a young prostitute
10 because they would buy me things and that, you know,
11 and keep my silence.

12 So I, I wasn't a very good parent and, you know,
13 because I would yell at my kids and I would drink and
14 I, I had people over there and they were all drinking
15 and, you know, so I realized that, you know, I could
16 have been a better parent.

17 And my son doesn't even know his dad and, and I
18 wish he was able to tell how he felt about that. He
19 has never told me. He just -- maybe he has gone
20 online to see what his percentage is and all of that
21 but I don't know.

22 So, and I have talked to my daughters, and one of
23 my daughters came with me in the hearing and she was
24 pretty upset about what she heard. But now I'm really
25 close to her and, you know, I think because she heard.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 And my other two, they never came. And I, I asked
2 them but they, they both had their job and they
3 couldn't come down. And then I think if I did tell
4 them, they would be different. Because one of them
5 was still into the drugs and drinking and all. And
6 the other one is still drinking, but not like I used
7 to drink anyhow.

8 And I had a grandson that died and he died of
9 crib death. And I was -- I sort of blame my son and
10 that is when I went into treatment. I said, Oh, if he
11 had been home with him, maybe he could have lived.
12 But it was crib death. And I thought maybe he would
13 have heard his breathing or something like that.

14 And that is -- I went out to Poundmaker's Lodge
15 and I stayed there and I went into the sweat. And I
16 had weird feelings there and I probably -- something
17 had tapped me on the shoulder and I asked, What did
18 you guys have in there, when we got out. I said,
19 Something kept on tapping me on the shoulder. And he
20 said, What were you thinking about? And I said I was
21 thinking of my grandson, and he died and that, and he
22 died of crib death. And he says, that is what they
23 are telling you, you know, you need to pay attention.
24 I'm all right, he says, you know. And that made me
25 feel better. And, you know, then I, I said if I had

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 known that was going to happen I would have let him
2 come in. But it was -- but they reassured me that,
3 you know, he was all right.

4 Because I used to think about him so much. And
5 he was a smart little guy. He was only six months and
6 I looked after him. And I remember talking to him. I
7 hadn't seen him for a while. And there were dogs all
8 over. And then you would take his mouth away from the
9 bottle, and no, no no, he would started talking to me.
10 You know, it was so cute. And I just adored him. And
11 I thought that he is going to be a really smart kid,
12 you know.

13 So I, I have, I have got a lot of grandchildren
14 and I have got two great grandchildren. And I hope
15 one day, somebody told me that they want me to write
16 my story and, you know, just to get it down on paper
17 and she said she would be willing to and that. And I
18 have been off for a long time, you know, a long time
19 ago. But I was just never really ready to sit down
20 and talk about what went on with me.

21 And I'm quite active in the -- I was quite active
22 when I was working and that. I was in the union for
23 27 years. And I was usually the First Nation's rep
24 and, you know, and I did a lot of talking and that.

25 And, and I have even gone down the Fraser River.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 I started from Prince George. We rafted down in
2 Violence Against Women. And we started -- we started
3 up in -- we had talks down in Vancouver and then we
4 just went up to, to Prince George and started from
5 there.

6 And there was another girl and I that, that we
7 were, both came down all of the way. And so -- and we
8 stopped every here and there and gave workshops and
9 that, and then we camped, and we had to set up camp
10 every night. And it was -- I really enjoyed that trip
11 and I really felt -- especially going over Hells Gate
12 and I sat right in the front and, you know, just, it
13 was really exhilarating.

14 And, and my union had me get up and talk about
15 it, because all of the unions were there to greet us,
16 and Musqueam -- and Musqueam sang out to us and we had
17 to sing back. And they welcomed us to the territory
18 and that. And it was quite the thing and, you know.

19 So I have done a lot of things positive. In '98,
20 I think it was, I went to Ottawa and I spoke in
21 Ottawa. And Jane Stewart was the Minister of
22 Aboriginal Affairs then. Paul Martin was minister --
23 was the prime minister. And I told them that they
24 need to apologize to us. And Jane sort of asked me,
25 For what? And I said, Well, for the residential

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 schools, you guys put them in place. And I proceeded
2 to tell her what I went through. And she said -- she
3 asked me to leave her my number and she would like to
4 get in touch with me. And that is what I did.

5 And she phoned me in Vancouver. And it was -- I
6 was just on my way to work and it was six o'clock in
7 the morning and I was just on my way out to catch the
8 bus and I told her I didn't have time to talk to her.
9 I said I'm sorry. And she asked me when she can call.
10 And I said well, try tonight at ten o'clock, so she
11 did. And I don't know what time it would have been
12 there. But she talked to me and then I thought about
13 it and I thought, well, gee, that was bold of me. I
14 could have been late, you know, but. And so it was,
15 it was really good that we had somebody listening and,
16 and, you know.

17 And then when they gave a partial apology she
18 invited me and I went, I went there First Class and
19 they had me in a hotel room and everything and that
20 was really something. And Elijah Harper was there,
21 Phil Fontaine, and yeah, it was really something.

22 So yeah, I have done a few things, you know. And
23 in Ottawa my picture was on the front page and I saw
24 myself when I was at the airport and it was like, Oh,
25 and I was crying. Because when she says, It should

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 not have happened to you and, you know, it was not
2 your fault, and I just started -- the tears just
3 started. And she asked me to sit somewhere where she
4 can see me. So I sat right there and they zoomed in
5 on me, you know. So yeah, I have done a few things
6 that have been exciting.

7 And, and I have always been an activist. And
8 even in my old age. I'm 75 now. But I had a lot of
9 health problems, too. You know, I have got a heart --
10 it's like a pacemaker, but it's different. It's
11 bigger than a pacemaker. And I just went and had my
12 check-up not too long ago and they told me the battery
13 is good for another seven-and-a-half years because I
14 just got it changed not too long ago. So I looked at
15 them, and there was a lot of them there, and I said
16 oh, so you can guarantee that I will live
17 seven-and-a-half years? And they all looked at each
18 other and said, It's the battery.

19 But it has really helped me a lot and it's helped
20 me walk. And I could hardly walk. So I felt really
21 good about my heart. I have just got to control my
22 diabetes, and I'm sure a lot of First Nations have
23 problems with diabetes and, and that is my one thing
24 that I really have to look after.

25 And other than that, you know, I have had a good

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 life. I am retired now and I have got my little dog,
2 my dog Maggie, and I love her and she loves me and so
3 I'm happy now. And I continue talking to my kids.
4 And I'm going to try and make conscious with -- my
5 kids, the one lives in Ontario and one on the Sunshine
6 Coast and, you know, and sit down and have a real talk
7 to them and clear things up before I pass on. Because
8 I love my kids. I have twin daughters and -- yeah.
9 And they are not little kids, they are 40 something.

10 KATE LANGHAM: When you were a young person going through
11 all that you did after coming out of the residential
12 schools, what do you think might have helped at that
13 point?

14 DONNA DICKISON: You know, I felt like a stranger in my own
15 land. I felt that I -- there was nothing. And then
16 I, I got connected up with NAC, National Action
17 Committee on the Status of Women, and I said, you
18 know, I wish they had a program like that for
19 Aboriginal people when they come into the city because
20 we feel so lost and we feel like there is nothing
21 there for us. And, you know, and we, we face a lot of
22 racism, eh.

23 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

24 DONNA DICKISON: And NAC, I thought it was so good, you
25 know, how they brought everybody together. And I was

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 actually the Aboriginal vice-president at one time of
2 NAC. So I worked a lot with them, you know, through
3 the union and that. But that is -- we need something
4 like that.

5 And for the elderlies, I would like to see them
6 have a nursing home, you know, put in a place for
7 them. Because where I worked we had quite a few
8 residents and there was only about two Aboriginal
9 people that came there and, you know, every time they
10 came in, somebody came in, they would always ask me to
11 go down and meet them and that, you know, because
12 there was not that many Aboriginal people working
13 there. Maybe there was two other people and that was
14 it, you know.

15 KATE LANGHAM: And the field of work that you worked in for
16 years when you were in the union was?

17 DONNA DICKISON: I was a health care worker.

18 KATE LANGHAM: Health care worker.

19 DONNA DICKISON: Yes. I worked directly with the patients.

20 KATE LANGHAM: And so more, like, culturally informed care
21 for elders?

22 DONNA DICKISON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And they sent me for a
23 lot of training, too, so it was really good. And it
24 was -- I was able to talk to the old people and, and
25 if they had a problem with one and there was

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 something, they would ask me to go down to a certain
2 floor to talk to them.

3 The first floor was for mentally challenged --
4 for people with mental problems and all that, and that
5 is when it was locked. And I had to ask them to take
6 me off it because it was bringing back too much. So
7 when I went into treatment, they asked me if I could
8 go back there, because they felt I was really good
9 there. And I says, Okay, I will try. But then I
10 really couldn't take it, and like it just brought back
11 too many memories.

12 And they were very understanding and they were
13 very understanding when I talked to them about it.
14 But, you know. So when I needed the time off, they
15 gave it to me. But I also had a lot of sick time,
16 too, so I was able to use my sick time for that to go
17 into treatment.

18 KATE LANGHAM: Do you think there is anything else that
19 your employer could have done to support you?

20 DONNA DICKISON: I think they should have educated the
21 people. Because one of my union members put up a
22 sign, because he had a disagreement with me. And he
23 put up a sign in the staff room about how Indians are
24 all on welfare, and it was really derogatory, you
25 know. So I brought the top management in and showed

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 it to her and I said you need to educate the people.

2 And I also pointed out to her, I said, look at
3 all of your staff. I said -- because I was the union
4 rep. So I said look at all of your staff and, you
5 know, you look at the colour they are. And, you know,
6 and they are all white. And I says then you look in
7 the basement. Who are the people working there? You
8 know. And they were all dark people working there
9 and, you know.

10 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

11 DONNA DICKISON: Like the Filipinos and that. And, you
12 know, and I says well, all of the office staff, you go
13 up there and they are all white. And, and so she put
14 up a lot of pictures around, you know.

15 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

16 DONNA DICKISON: And then she hired a, kind of a gay person
17 and she hired a Chinese lady for management in the
18 kitchen and that, you know.

19 But it was -- yeah, we had to educate them a lot.
20 By me being active in the union, you know, I was able
21 to do that, so. But I think that, yeah, everybody
22 needs -- and I also talked, my son and I, and we both
23 go to the Justice Institute to the new recruits. So
24 they let us know and we go there maybe every six weeks
25 or something like that. And, and the police were

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 educating them and I find that they asked questions
2 and, and I -- but a lot of them they feel when they
3 hear my story, they -- and I tell them, I say I'm not
4 afraid to answer questions and, you know, ask me
5 questions. I'm willing to listen and that. And I
6 think that is opening their eyes.

7 And my son tells the story of how everything came
8 about, you know, and so we are both very well versed
9 in that and now we have been asked to speak at
10 schools. And I just asked for one of the ladies how
11 we can get a Musqueam person there too. And she gave
12 me a number.

13 KATE LANGHAM: Good.

14 DONNA DICKISON: Yeah. So it's a learning process, right,
15 you know for us.

16 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah. I just want to -- there is a couple
17 of questions here.

18 What school, what residential school was it that
19 you were at and your parents were at?

20 DONNA DICKISON: St. Mary's in Mission, B.C.

21 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

22 DONNA DICKISON: I was there for -- I wasn't there for the
23 full nine years but I was there for nine years and
24 part of it and that is when I left.

25 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 DONNA DICKISON: And then I went to school in Lillooet, but
2 there was a lot of racism there.

3 KATE LANGHAM: And that was after the school in Mission?

4 DONNA DICKISON: Yes, after Mission. And I just went to
5 Lillooet for maybe a month or two.

6 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

7 DONNA DICKISON: And some white guy asked me out and some
8 white girl heard him ask me out and she told me that
9 the only reason he was asking me out is because squaws
10 are for humping, you know. And then I will tell you
11 she ended up marrying an Aboriginal guy, you know.

12 KATE LANGHAM: And where, what community were you born
13 into?

14 DONNA DICKISON: I was born in Lytton, BC.

15 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

16 DONNA DICKISON: But I was raised in Lillooet.

17 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

18 DONNA DICKISON: And I really feel sad when I think about
19 it, because I was, I was really close to my grandma.
20 But then when I got out of school, I was ashamed to be
21 seen with her in public because she didn't speak the
22 proper language. And she would -- I would go picking
23 mushrooms with her and she would say something to me
24 and I would say, I don't understand you, grandma. And
25 she would call me Dumb Indian. And when I talked

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 about that in the union and people went, oh. And I
2 says, you think about it, those are the two words she
3 knew in English, so how many times was it said to her
4 that she knew them right out, eh.

5 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

6 DONNA DICKISON: You know. And I, and I, I -- yeah. And I
7 felt sad how I had ignored her in public and, you
8 know, and I loved her in private, but.

9 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah, of course.

10 DONNA DICKISON: I was so ashamed of the colour of my skin.
11 And they made us use scrub brushes. And I remember
12 seeing this one girl, she was a lot darker than me,
13 and had tears coming down. And, you know, so I always
14 knew I was the wrong colour. And I had to speak
15 English and that is what they taught me in the school.
16 I had to get up in public and, and, you know, recite
17 poetry or something like that and, and say it
18 properly.

19 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

20 DONNA DICKISON: And they -- I was a May Queen when I was
21 about 12 and, you know, they told me not to eat
22 lettuce because it's too loud, because we were in the
23 white community and, you know, going down for the
24 parade and everything. And yeah, a lot of things
25 about what they made us do, and so ashamed of

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 ourselves, you know.

2 I guess the, all of the priests and that, I think
3 that they need to hear our story, you know, and the
4 nuns and that. And I remember when I first came out
5 of school and I would see a nun and I crossed the
6 street. I just didn't want to be there anymore. Now
7 we don't even know who is a nun and that.

8 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

9 DONNA DICKISON: Like they don't know that I was a
10 residential school survivor, you know.

11 KATE LANGHAM: And what do you think could help with
12 healing the shame that was put on, on you as a child
13 growing up, and for many residential school survivors?
14 What do you think could help to shift that?

15 DONNA DICKISON: Educating the people. Educating the
16 people.

17 And then I remember when my sister got her period
18 in residential school. I was quite young and I was in
19 the bathroom with her and she was crying and she
20 didn't know what was -- we weren't educated on what
21 was going on. Then I went out and I told a nun, my
22 sister is bleeding, you know. And she came in and she
23 started yelling at her, do you know about sex and
24 everything, and that is, she was yelling at her. And
25 I thought, you know, I don't remember when I got mine.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 It was such a shaming thing, you know.

2 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

3 DONNA DICKISON: And my sister was older than me and she
4 passed on when she was quite young. And I, and I
5 remember the priests and the nuns said they told my
6 dad that she had to stay back at the school because
7 she never behaved herself. And my dad was from, from
8 residential school too, and he, he allowed them to
9 make her stay there. And I just wondered what went on
10 with her, you know. When we left and then when she
11 came back she seemed so sad, you know, and she never
12 talked about what went on for her. Just like I never
13 talked about my abuse, you know. So I am sure that
14 she went through what I went through.

15 Because I remember, I used to have my bed in the
16 very corner of the dormitory. And then when it
17 started, they started, they moved me right up to the
18 stairway end. And I, I -- in bed I would hear the
19 footsteps coming in and, you know, is that for me?
20 You know. And I would have to go, you know.

21 KATE LANGHAM: Yes. How many siblings do you have?

22 DONNA DICKISON: We had ten.

23 KATE LANGHAM: Wow.

24 DONNA DICKISON: Yeah. And I think I was in the middle. I
25 was thinking, you know, how quiet it must have been on

**Statement - Public
Donna Dickison**

1 the reserves, you know, all of us were leaving one at
2 a time.

3 KATE LANGHAM: And probably your siblings went to the same
4 school?

5 DONNA DICKISON: All of us, yeah, yeah.

6 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

7 DONNA DICKISON: And nobody talks.

8 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

9 DONNA DICKISON: When I first started talking about my
10 sexual abuse there, my brother says, Oh, Donna is
11 mentally challenged. And, but I realized that it
12 was -- when I started talking about mine, other stuff
13 started coming up and they didn't want to talk about
14 it. And they haven't so, you know.

15 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

16 DONNA DICKISON: I recognize that so that is, that is all
17 right. When the time comes they will. Because I was
18 around the middle.

19 KATE LANGHAM: Right. And what do you think it was that
20 helped you talk, that helped you come to this place
21 where you can share and you can educate and do all of
22 wonderful activist work that you do do?

23 DONNA DICKISON: Well, what first opened it up for me is in
24 the union, is they all -- we all -- we were all in the
25 hall and then they asked us, I think at UBC, and they

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 asked -- they says all people with colour I would like
2 you to answer today. So they came down and said have
3 you ever been discriminated against? And I says nope,
4 nope, you know. And then they went by me. And then
5 I -- then after that I said, Excuse me, ah, I think I
6 have. I says, I was in residential school. And that
7 is when all of the stuff started coming up.

8 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

9 DONNA DICKISON: And, and I got pretty active and they
10 would send me to places and it was all, you know --
11 and I remember the president said something and -- I,
12 I used to write things in the paper, too, and you
13 know, when I would see something derogatory or
14 something like that, I wrote a letter to [C.], and
15 that was a headline, you know. And then his brother,
16 he said something on the radio or on TV, and I, I
17 wrote in about it and he had to apologize and he sent
18 me a letter of apology. And he said, Spending like
19 wild Indians, you know, and that was a racist remark.
20 And so I started gettin' really active and finding out
21 things and, you know, and started writing in the
22 paper.

23 KATE LANGHAM: Right. So having that space to sort of
24 acknowledge what it was that you went through there,
25 propelled you into activism.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 DONNA DICKISON: Yes. Yeah, yes.

2 KATE LANGHAM: It was empowering, would you say?

3 DONNA DICKISON: It was, it was. But it was scary. It was
4 really scary. Because I remember I went to, to -- the
5 union asked me to go to this meeting and it was on
6 Granville and Robson Street -- or Granville and
7 Georgia. And it was about the 38th floor, or
8 something like that. It was Christmas time and I, I
9 was just went out for dinner with the members of my
10 unit where I worked and, and I was supposed to meet
11 them there. And I said, Well, I will go in but I
12 haven't got that much time. And when I went in there
13 was big tables, bigger than these, all around. And
14 there was -- I looked around and all white faces. And
15 I went right to other side and then they were making
16 so much comments about the Indians and all of that and
17 they says just give them the money and we will get the
18 money, we will get it back through the government, the
19 liquor stores and everything, you know. And, and I
20 later found out that it was the Reform Party.

21 KATE LANGHAM: Oh.

22 DONNA DICKISON: And so, you know, I started to think how
23 am I going to speak, you know. And I just happened to
24 put up my hand. And it just kept on going on and on.
25 And then so I, I kept on looking at my watch and I

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 thought I got to get out of here because everybody is
2 already there at the hotel where we were supposed to
3 have dinner and I had the funding and I was supposed
4 to pay for it after, for everything.

5 So I started going towards the door and the lady
6 came running up to me and said, Are you leaving? And
7 I said, Yes, I have been waiting for a long time to
8 talk. And she said, Well, you are third in line now.
9 So I said, Okay, and I went back.

10 And then, and so I got up and had my say and, and
11 some guy told me to shut up. He was sitting there, a
12 red-haired guy, he said, Shut up. Because they, they
13 were of the mind we were there to take all of the land
14 and everything. And, you know, he says all we want to
15 do is share, and you know, and I says you have had
16 your say, I said, let me have mine, and so I continued
17 to talk. And I just, I just went on and when I was
18 finished I just got up and I said I have had my say,
19 now I'm leaving. And I walked out the door and I felt
20 like running away. I just felt real strange and
21 scared and I made it out.

22 [L.D.], she was from our union, and I told
23 her what happened to me. And she said, Oh, Donna, why
24 didn't you ask me to come with you? And I said I
25 didn't know that it was going to be that. And, and I

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 saw her about a week later and she said, Oh, Donna, I
2 got to talk to you and that. And then she told me, my
3 sister told me about some Aboriginal woman that came
4 to the meeting, and she said I would like to meet her
5 again. And [L.D.] said I know exactly who that is.
6 And they asked me if I would attend and I said no.

7 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

8 DONNA DICKISON: But then I thought, you know, it maybe
9 would have been better if I did attend and, you know,
10 and just speak my voice and that, yeah.

11 And, and then they had a play not too long ago, a
12 David Diamond play that was interactive. And it's,
13 it's, it's so nice that he is educating the people.
14 And he is telling the white people, you need to
15 listen, you know. And in one part there are three of
16 us sitting in the front, and she is behind us and
17 says, Yeah, but what about my house, my land. And my
18 friend turned back and she said, How do you think we
19 felt? You know. And, you know, that, and that --
20 that, it has been really talked about, you know, and
21 we are not there to steal their land. And we just, we
22 want respect in this community. We want the people to
23 ask us, talk to us, you know. And, and we are not
24 after the land. We are just -- you know. We just
25 want acknowledgment that we were the first people

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 here, you know. And that is all that we are, we are
2 requiring of people. Not to steal their land, but to
3 give us respect and talk to us.

4 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.

5 DONNA DICKISON: You know.

6 KATE LANGHAM: Yes. You mentioned a bunch about education.

7 Is there anything else or other ways or other things
8 that you know of that could help to improve?

9 DONNA DICKISON: Come to the community centres. Come to
10 the Aboriginal Centre, you know. They have Tuesday
11 nights and Wednesday nights and family nights. You
12 know, everybody is welcome. And there is always a lot
13 of elders there. You know, we sell foods just to make
14 money to go to [unintelligible] or something, you
15 know.

16 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

17 DONNA DICKISON: And what my son and I were doing, talking
18 to the people, you know, and, and, like the, the new
19 recruits, you know. And the only people that won't go
20 there is the RCMP and I think that they really need to
21 be educated, they really need it, because I see in the
22 small communities how they treat the Aboriginal
23 people, eh.

24 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

25 DONNA DICKISON: I went to court with my grandson, because

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 they kicked in his door and it was the wrong place,
2 but they won't admit that. But they hauled him off
3 and took him to jail and everything, kicked him in the
4 head and, you know. And I just went up and spoke and,
5 and the lawyer said I don't think that this judge will
6 let them go, he says, but you can, you know, go and
7 give your talk and that and so I did.

8 And then my son came after me and, and it took
9 him about two months to decide what he is going to do
10 and it was really good, it turned out good. And I
11 think that speaking, you know, and I just said that I
12 wasn't a good parent and I said, but I, what I was --
13 I went to residential school and, you know, what I
14 went through and that, you know, and that we were
15 never taught to be parents. And so it was, it was
16 just -- and I went back and they gave him probation.
17 So I told him you will be watching yourself because
18 they will be watching you all of the time. So one of
19 them moved away to Quesnel and, you know. They are
20 twin brothers.

21 KATE LANGHAM: Oh.

22 DONNA DICKISON: Yeah. So I try to help my family and,
23 and, you know, they don't, they don't really know that
24 much about me. But I try to tell them what it was
25 like. Because, you know, a lot of the young kids

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 don't know what we went through. And I try to tell
2 the elders, you know, we need to start speaking and we
3 need to tell what went on for us and why we hurt and
4 why we are the way we were. And I says, we weren't
5 put on this earth to be drunks. We drank because we
6 were hurting and I drank because I was hurting. And I
7 never talked, you know, because it was my shame and
8 blame and guilt, you know. I thought it was my fault.

9 KATE LANGHAM: Do you have any other recommendations for
10 the Commission?

11 DONNA DICKISON: No. And I just think that we should get
12 the elders out talking, get the elders talking.

13 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

14 DONNA DICKISON: And I, I highly recommend that. And my
15 friend says she is too shy, but I think that, you
16 know, we can start in small groups and talking to
17 people and, and -- yeah.

18 And I guess I am used to talking and it is
19 because I talked in the union and that was, that was a
20 battle. They would come up right to the podium there
21 and talk and tell me that I can't be talking about
22 certain things and that, and you know. In Montreal,
23 we had cameras all around, and the big cameras
24 everywhere you turn, you could see yourself on there.
25 And I was scared and I got up and, and, you know, just

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 you got to keep continue doing it, yeah. And then in
2 Montreal they put me in a magazine.

3 KATE LANGHAM: Wow.

4 DONNA DICKISON: So, you know, when I get up, I got a
5 powerful face and I didn't realize that, you know.

6 But it comes from the heart, it comes from the heart.

7 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah, yeah.

8 DONNA DICKISON: And I just say what I need to say and, and
9 even if I cry, I just keep on, you know. It was
10 really hard for me to start talking, but I will
11 continue.

12 KATE LANGHAM: We are very thankful for that.

13 DONNA DICKISON: Thank you.

14 KATE LANGHAM: And is there anything else -- this is your
15 time and this is your space. Is there anything else
16 that you want to share or you want us to know?

17 DONNA DICKISON: Yes. Well, I would really like to see the
18 young kids learning all about, you know, everything.
19 Because I see the young kids here and I see my friend
20 who I used to know when he was a little kid and now he
21 is up there dancing and he has got his face all, you
22 know, and he is such a powerful man and I just adore
23 him. And, and I says, Oh, you are really good, and he
24 just come over and give me a big hug and everything,
25 you know. And we knew him since he was a little guy.

Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

1 And, you know, he is so powerful. And he has his
2 teachings, and my kids never had that, you know. My
3 son, he is doing his best, too, you know, educating
4 the people.

5 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.

6 DONNA DICKISON: Yes. You know, I have had my say, so
7 thank you.

8 KATE LANGHAM: Okay. Well, thank you very much for sharing
9 with us today.

10 DONNA DICKISON: Okay.

11 KATE LANGHAM: This concludes our interview and it is
12 10:35.

13 [PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 10:35 a.m.]

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Statement - Public
Donna Dickison

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

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I, Kathy Rylandsholm, Official Reporter in the Province of
British Columbia, Canada, BCSRA No. 270, do hereby certify:

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

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name this 21st
day of May, 2018.

Kathy Rylandsholm
Official Reporter
COAST REPORTING SERVICES INC.