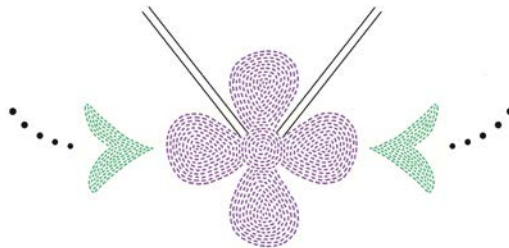


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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
Garden River First Nations Indian Reserve
Ontario**



PUBLIC

Wednesday October 17, 2018

**Statement - Volume 556
Lizz Nootchtai,
In relation to Virginia McKenzie**

Statement gathered by Daria Boyarchuk

International Reporting Inc.

41 - 5450 Canotek Road, Ottawa, Ontario, K1J 9G2
E-mail: info@irri.net - Phone: 613-748-6043 - Fax: 613-748-8246

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NOTE

Where not required by other statute, 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."

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Statement Gatherer: Daria Boyarchuk

Documents submitted with testimony: none.

Lizz Nootchai
(Virginia McKenzie)

1 Garden River First Nations Indian Reserve
2 --- Upon commencing on Wednesday, October 17, 2018

3 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Hi, my name is Daria
4 Boyarchuk, and I'm a statement gatherer for the National
5 Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and
6 Girls. We are here on October 17th, in Garden River Indian
7 Reserve in Ontario, to honour the truth that Lizz is about
8 to share with us, and the public and the Inquiry. I would
9 like to give you an opportunity right now to introduce
10 yourself, to speak about yourself, as much as you want to
11 share. This is your space, this is your home, you have
12 invited us here in this beautiful teepee, to hear your
13 story, to hear your truth. So if you would like to begin,
14 you're more than welcome to.

15 **MS. LIZZ NOOTCHTAI BRIGGS:** [*Drums and*
16 *sings*].

17 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Could you tell us a
18 little bit about the song and what it symbolizes for you?

19 **MS. LIZZ NOOTCHTAI BRIGGS:** Did someone say
20 something? *Boozhoo*, [*speaking in Anishnaabe*]. My
21 government name, I was born Barbara Anne Nootchtai. Then I
22 was taken and sold to a rich white family because my
23 parents were the product of the residential schools. So
24 when I was adopted they called me Lizz Nootchtai Briggs,
25 and that name never sat well with me because that family

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1 abused me. Because again, the government waived the
2 probationary period and didn't do the proper work before
3 placing me. So I'm identified as Lizz Nootchtai, I
4 reclaimed my birth name, my family name.

5 But even that's not my family name because
6 throughout history we changed. We are direct descendants
7 of (indiscernible) of great chiefs in history. My friends
8 here, they asked me to share about that song, but I have to
9 back it up a little bit because the ones who are watching
10 this video and those Commissioners, and anybody else, don't
11 know what happened before that drum was sounded, and they
12 don't know where we are.

13 We're actually in Garden River First Nation,
14 and we're very close to Batchewana First Nation. Both
15 places that have been instrumental in allowing me to be who
16 I am. And that's a spiritual person having a human
17 experience. And that's something that the government can
18 never take away from me, even though they've tried.

19 When my friends first showed up here they
20 heard the drum, they seen the fire, and they had lots of
21 questions. And even though there's some things in our
22 history that I have to protect, there's also a time where
23 we can share things. So we shared with them what we were
24 doing, and that resiliency of being who we are, and having
25 them come meet us here we felt safe and we felt connected.

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1 And one of the women who works for the
2 government saw a pawnee, and that's a pipe. What is that,
3 I've never seen that? Well there's a reason why maybe you
4 haven't seen it, but I'm really glad you got to see it
5 because it's something that helps us. And we still do
6 that.

7 The first song I sung before they got here
8 was a song to help call in our ancestors, including
9 Virginia McKenzie, one of my family members who's over
10 there through that western doorway, and a lot of my other
11 ancestors. It was also a ceremony song for sun dancers.
12 All those sun dancers, you know I called them in to help.
13 Because this isn't easy.

14 Sometimes we make it look easier, sometimes
15 when we have to support other people. You know we do the
16 job that needs to be done. And I used to think I was okay
17 until yesterday. I was going to come support my friend
18 who's also been very supportive of me. His name's Lionel
19 Desmoulin. He lives here in Garden River and he's opened
20 his home up to families of missing and murdered Indigenous
21 women and girls. He has a space here.

22 And then I got the phone call after saying
23 yeah sure Lionel, I'll come help you. You've become like
24 my brother. Because it's the people that are going to help
25 each other.

1 You know the government can say they're
2 going to take our stories and our statements, they can say
3 we're going to implement changes, they can say they're
4 going to have accountability. But history time and time
5 and time and time and time again, even since before
6 treaties, teaches us that that's not so. It's the people
7 that are going to help each other. I need some Kleenex.

8 So that song I was singing because we had a
9 break in between another family sharing before I started.
10 It was like my friend here, he's here helping, supporting.

11 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Everyone in the room,
12 I will go around and --

13 **MR. LIONEL DESMOULIN:** I thought we did that
14 already.

15 **MR. BILL GEORGE:** [*Speaking in Indigenous*
16 *language*]. I'm Bill George from Oneida.

17 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Thank you. And
18 Lionel?

19 **MR. LIONEL DESMOULIN:** [*Speaking in*
20 *Anishnaabe*]. My name is Lionel Desmoulin.

21 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Thank you.

22 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** And Debbie Bodkin,
23 statement gatherer.

24 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Thank you Debbie.
25 Thank you for everyone being here to support Lizz.

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1 **MS. LIZZ NOOTCHTAI BRIGGS:** Like I was
2 saying, because it's only non-Indigenous people who do
3 that, who interrupt people when they're talking. We don't
4 do that where we're from, and sometimes people will talk
5 for days with no interrupting. But I can understand and
6 respect what you did.

7 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Thank you.

8 **MS. LIZZ NOOTCHTAI BRIGGS:** We lose a
9 connection when people interrupt. And sometimes we have to
10 work hard to get back to where we were. That's why I like
11 to sing, it helps me. Like the tobacco that was given to
12 our people helps.

13 That song I had to sing was because another
14 family member when I first started this recording was
15 sharing, it was because the door was open after we were
16 done. So sometimes some of the ancestors that come and
17 visited, they came for the other family member, and
18 sometimes there's ones that come for me, or for my friend,
19 or for our visitors here. So I wanted to make sure that I
20 used that song.

21 And it's usually sung a little bit
22 different, but I can't share all of it with you. But I
23 sung enough to help bring back my ancestors, those spirits
24 that are going to help me share my truth and my family's
25 truth. And hopefully in a good way because even though I

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1 practice my spirituality, I'm still human. And there's
2 emotions that come out sometimes. But what I share isn't
3 meant for anybody here, and those ancestors that I called
4 in are going to help take care of that.

5 What I'd like to share with you
6 Commissioners, and I'd like to share with the people,
7 because I already have chosen to make this statement. I
8 already do work out there supporting people, and I already
9 do work out there sharing my story, and I'm already in the
10 media for part of it.

11 Because of the history in my family, and the
12 history of the residential schools and the Sixties Scoop,
13 and the sickness that it brought to our people, I have to
14 honour both sides of my family. That is my choice, this is
15 my truth. So if my words offend anybody, I'm sorry. But
16 this is my truth.

17 Virginia McKenzie was my sister. Virginia
18 McKenzie was also my auntie because of who my parents are.
19 I acknowledge both of my parents. So for this purpose I'll
20 be saying sister a lot, a sister who I never even got to
21 meet in this physical world.

22 I was taken from home, I was taken from my
23 mom. My home community had a hard time accepting me when I
24 came back home because of the truth that I carried. And it
25 took me a long time to go home after I knew about this,

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1 because I didn't want to hurt anybody. The newcomers that
2 came over there made sure that (indiscernible).

3 In around 1988, that would be about thirty
4 something years ago, is when my sister started her journey.
5 And I only found out this information when I had to do the
6 work to find out who I was because of the let downs or the
7 failures of residential school, Sixties Scoop, the bad
8 promises that the government made to our people. I had to
9 go and find out who I was in this world, where I belong,
10 who my family was.

11 And I couldn't do it using the western
12 people's tools, I couldn't do it using your government's
13 tools because I tried. Red tape here, consent here, we
14 don't know this, the records are burnt and missing.
15 Convenient. But our way of life, and the way we live and
16 who we are surpasses all of that and it works.

17 And that tobacco that was gifted to our
18 people, I used that tobacco and I went around and I spoke
19 to old people, and I travelled trying to find answers who I
20 was and who my family is. And that's when I found out
21 about my sister.

22 And at that time it didn't bug me because I
23 didn't know her. It's just somebody who's on the other
24 side. And then I found out what happened. And considering
25 all the trauma that happened to me being part of all of

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1 those previous systems, that's when the anger came.

2 Because the way I understood it was -- I'm
3 not going to put the blame, but I'm going to tell you what
4 it looks like, and it doesn't look very good. When I found
5 out that my sister had been murdered in Cabbagetown, a
6 place I frequented as a teenager, and I always felt
7 sadness, and I was scared about a certain area downtown.
8 And as a teenager I was fearless and I did all kinds of
9 weird crazy things. But there was always this one area
10 that I was scared of because it just seemed dark, and I
11 never understood until later when I found out about my
12 sister.

13 My sister was murdered, and not only was she
14 murdered, but her body was [*one sentence redacted - Rule*
15 55]. And [S.C.] was charged with two years less a day for
16 indecentcies to a corpse, even though there was clear
17 evidence and people willing to say that he had also
18 murdered her and was trying to dispose of her so he
19 wouldn't get caught.

20 What angered me is the sentence he received
21 because she was just an Indigenous person who lived a
22 questionable life. But it was still a life and she was
23 still a life giver. The most important thing to our people
24 are those women because they carry life.

25 And you think about the attempted genocide

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1 in the Sixties Scoop and the residential schools that the
2 government tried to hand down to our people. And the only
3 thing that I can say that it looked like, because I'm not
4 lenient, is when those police in Toronto, or when the
5 government or however the structure works for those western
6 people, handed out that sentence of two and a half years,
7 it sent a clear message to the general public that it was
8 okay to murder Indigenous women. You're going to get a
9 slap on the hand for -- and here we are 30 years later.

10 And I just found out I had a niece who's
11 missing and might be caught up in human trafficking, but
12 because she's an adult with mental health, they don't want
13 to put a missing persons out. And the person that's she
14 with is non-Indigenous. What does that look like, what
15 kind of message is still here 30 years later? I'll tell
16 you what kind of message is still here 30 years later.

17 Because in around 2008 Mark Bonokoski of the
18 Toronto Sun interviewed myself and some local people in
19 Toronto in his Red Road series, and after he interviewed us
20 he came back to do a second interview about a wish list.
21 If you had five wishes what would it be? And the first one
22 was I wish to be Prime Minister. I was still kind of angry
23 then, I'll fix it. This government isn't my government and
24 I'll fix it.

25 And then there's a few more there, but the

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1 one that really surprised me, of what it looks like to me,
2 is what fell out of my mouth, that came from my heart,
3 because there was no thought in it, was how [S.C.], I'd
4 tell him I forgive him because I do.

5 I can't move on with my life and do the
6 things that I do, and support the family of Virginia
7 McKenzie, and all of her children who are all -- most of
8 them are lost in addictions, or transient or on the
9 streets, or still suffer with this grief that they can't
10 function, they're still having their children taken away.
11 There's a couple that are of sound mind I think, but even
12 they had to grow up without a mother.

13 I remember reaching out to my nieces and
14 nephews, or my cousins, respectfully if you will, for years
15 to see if they were ready to share their story. And
16 because of the work that I do helping our people, by
17 accident one day is when Virginia's name got added to that
18 list, the registry. I don't know if it was the Creator
19 putting me in the right place at the right time, I don't
20 know if it's just somebody eager to move on it because yay,
21 I have another statistic, let's add it to the list and make
22 ourselves look good. I don't know what it was.

23 But I remember my one nephew being upset
24 with me because he said he had tried for years to get his
25 mother added to that list and nobody was listening. I'm

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1 grateful to the Creator for my grandmothers and my
2 grandfathers, that somehow she was added, to be included.
3 But is that going to change things? Is it going to change
4 how we heal as people? No, your tools don't work for us.
5 I've got a hard time sitting here and trying to talk to a
6 camera because I was told I would be talking to these
7 Commissioners.

8 And I have that right to talk to the
9 Commissioners because when I first met these Commissioners
10 in Six Nations, it was me with the help of Lou Waters, that
11 presented tobacco to these Commissioners who were present,
12 and those grandmother people that were present. And I
13 worked through that tobacco. So (Anishnaabe word) to the
14 two of you that are still honouring that tobacco. We won
15 the final decision and final dot of the pen and everything
16 is taken care of for this Inquiry?

17 You're still not done yet. You have left
18 tobacco and you know what it's for. I want to thank you,
19 the two of you who are left to honour that tobacco. It
20 would be nice to speak to you in person, and I have to take
21 to this cannon. I don't know, is it trying to shoot me?
22 Holy.

23 What the Commissioner needs to hear is back
24 in 1988 in the City of Toronto, my Aunt Mabel who's in the
25 spirit world, but she's here today, she's here today

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1 helping me get these words out. She's here today hugging
2 me and telling me it's okay. It's going to hurt but get it
3 out, let it go. Because there might be just one person who
4 benefits from what I share today. And as long as there's
5 one that's good.

6 But my Auntie Donna who is also in the
7 spirit world just recently, so she's also my sister Donna.
8 And Mabel in 1988 went down to the City of Toronto for a
9 protest, to request an inquiry -- or to request an
10 investigation be reopened. Somebody cared enough about
11 Virginia to do that. And newcomers hasn't succeeded. They
12 didn't succeed -- she was somebody important regardless of
13 the life that she chose. And even through the life that
14 she chose when I did my work to go and talk to people, I
15 found out that she was a lot like me. Kind, open,
16 forgiving, the door to the house always open for people to
17 come in, sit down and eat. Or to just share in a house
18 where it's safe to be. Not judging who you were and
19 laughing a lot.

20 That was Virginia. And she always thought
21 about her children. She might not have been able to keep
22 them because of the choices that she made, but she always
23 thought about her children. So when Mabel and Joan went
24 down to get questions -- it reached Parliament level, it
25 was discussed in caucus I think is the word. And there's

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1 evidence in caucus requesting that the investigation be
2 reopened. We want answers. There's people out here that
3 want to say what happened, that were witnesses to this.
4 And of course the caucus said no.

5 There was no justice for the (Anishnaabe
6 word) back then, anybody red. But there's evidence there
7 that they tried. And there's again, evidence again that
8 our government said no.

9 I'm grateful that I've connected with some
10 other friends who have missing women or girls in their
11 life. And I'm grateful for the work that I do, because for
12 whatever reason it put me here in Garden River, Batchewana,
13 where I needed to be when I got that call yesterday. And
14 it was overwhelming.

15 And the reason why it was overwhelming is
16 because I wasn't beside my nephew John, who is the son of
17 Virginia. And everything hit me really, really fast.
18 John's never seen me cry. These people here in this teepee
19 here have never seen me cry, because I always had to be
20 strong. Not just for one generation, but two generations,
21 now three generations. For more generations to come.

22 But at that moment no one was around and I
23 thought I was okay. But when no one was around I realized
24 no, no, I'm not okay. Was it anger, I don't know. Was it
25 sadness, I don't know. Was it feeling this sadness of

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1 other people, I don't know.

2 But what I do know is I'm not going to stop
3 being (indiscernible), I'm not going to stop picking up
4 these things that were left by Creator for me. And I'm not
5 going to stop challenging the government when they phone
6 and say we have a room you can be in. No, take your room.
7 I don't need a room. There's been enough of those balls
8 already. What I need is to be connected to the earth, to
9 the fire, to my people, to my ancestors.

10 And we made it so that they came here to our
11 house. This is our house. All of that outside that door
12 is our house. You guys are guests in our house. This is
13 me reminding you of that.

14 Now while you're here collecting this
15 information, I hope that you honour those agreements of our
16 treaties, that non-interference, that non-harm. I hope
17 that we build relations, I hope we can move forward, and I
18 hope that you can finally accept who we are because we're
19 not going away.

20 Thank you for your time. Thank you for
21 listening to my story.

22 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Do you have any
23 questions that you would like to follow up with?

24 **MS. DEBBIE BODKIN:** I don't think so.

25 **MS. DARIA BOYARCHUK:** Lizz, I am truly

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1 honoured to be the first one to speak after you, because I
2 know it's your story has really -- has had a very
3 empowering effect on me. And it has made me realize many
4 things that you have mentioned in your truth, and it is the
5 truth like you said. It is 12:04 in the afternoon, and we
6 are about to complete this statement. Thank you Lizz very
7 much.

8 --- Upon adjourning at 12:04 p.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Sherry Hobe, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.



Sherry Hobe

January 10, 2019