National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part I Statement Gathering
Edmonton, Alberta

Monday November 19, 2018
Statement - Volume 592

Statement of Natasha Saddleback
In relation to Roberta Okeymow

Statement gathered by Marie-Audrey Girard
II

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November 19, 2018
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Documents submitted with testimony: none.
Statement - Public
Natasha Saddleback
(Roberta Okeymow)

Edmonton, Alberta

--- Upon commencing on Monday, November 19, 2018 at 11:10

a.m.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Okay. So [inaudible
response] so as I said, my first question for you this
morning is if you agree that we're recording -- camera
recording and audio recording this statement today?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I agree, yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Okay. Thank you very
much. Well, my name is Marie-Audrey; I'm from the National
Inquiry and I will be with you today.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Okay.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: We are in Edmonton.
It's November 19 and the time is 11:10. So I would like --
I would like to ask you to introduce yourself, please.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Okay. My name is
Natasha Saddleback. I'm from Maskwacis Samson First
Nation. I live here in Edmonton though.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And, Natasha, what
would you like to share with us today?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I want to share the
story of my mom, Roberta Yvette Okeymow, I guess, is her
married name.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Yes. What would you
like to share about your mother?
NATASHA SADDLEBACK: So in -- I guess in 1998, I would have been in -- I'm pretty sure I was in grade one, my mom was murdered. I believe she was stabbed about 26 times in Millet, Alberta. So I don't know if you want me to just go, like ---

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: What -- whatever ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: --- right into, like, what happened, or ---

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- will make you feel ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Okay.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: I can ask questions if you prefer. Or if you want to continue to talk about what happened, that's okay too. So ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Okay.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- really how you prefer.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: So, like, I only know because -- I only know what I know based off of what I found online because after her murder I was raised in care. And I wasn't that close to my -- her family. So I -- I really -- and, like, every time I had asked them questions, anyways, they were super uncomfortable and didn't want to talk about it. So any of the information that I know about it was on -- was what I found and researched online. So
what I know about it is that she had went to Millet to a pub, a local pub there. And she was with her friend Andy Brackenberg -- Andy Brackenberg -- berry -- I'm not sure. And so I guess they -- they were drinking at his trailer in Millet and then they had went to a pub and had drinks there.

They went out for a cigarette and a couple guys were out there having a cigarette as well. And don't know if they were -- they were talking, or, like, or what -- what happened but my mom and this -- this Andy gentleman ended up in the vehicle with -- with these two guys. I'm actually not even sure of the -- I should have read that thing before we started but -- so I think how it was, was that they went to his trailer first and they were bullying them and told them that they wanted some liquor. And Andy said, "Well, all I have is -- is mouthwash."

And they had, like, there was some sort of shuffle in the bathroom and my mom started freaking out, and becoming hysterical and, you know, saying, like, she's going to tell the cops, like, you know, like, what they're doing isn't right and she's going to tell the cops. And they ended up murdering Andy and I think he was found in the bathtub. And they took my mom out into a rural area, and there was some struggle and she -- she was begging, you know, like, saying that she was epileptic and that she
needed her medicine. And, anyways, they had ended up
stabbing her, like I said, 26, 27 times.

And that's what I know about -- about what
happened. I don't know if they had found her out in the
field, or if they returned her back into the trailer. The
-- the -- the name of the man that -- who -- the name of
the man who had done it, his name is Matthew Collin (Ph.).
I can't remember the name of the other -- Douglas Parento
(Ph.) I believe.

I used to work for the government a few
years ago for human services and I was able to have some
access to some of the -- like, the government, you know,
library or whatever, the Alberta government library. And I
had did some research while I was working there. And I had
found out that one of the gentleman that had killed her --
I guess, she was -- because the -- the article was about
gangs. And I guess she was affiliated with gang and they
had ended up -- somebody from the gang that she was
affiliated with had outsourced somebody inside the jail to
murder this man because of -- because he murdered her. So
he ended up dying in jail, he was -- ended up murdered in
jail. And I think the other gentleman -- I'm not sure how
he passed away but he passed away as well. So they both
did end up passing away after she was murdered.

I -- I know that, you know, drugs and
alcohol were a factor in -- in the -- the case. You know, they -- I don't know if they really -- I think one of the arguments was that she was intoxicated as well. But the murders were definitely on a something. I don't know what so ---

**MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD:** And -- and how did you get to know about it? Who told you that your mother was -- was dead and has been murdered? If someone told you.

**NATASHA SADDLEBACK:** So I was in grade -- I was in grade one and my foster mom at the time had come -- picked me up at school. And she -- she had told -- she -- she took me home and -- and she had told me what had happened. And apparently she had -- was watching the news the night before and this story had come up on -- on the news. And I don't know why she didn't tell me that morning. She was probably just trying to figure out a way to tell me. And so I don't know if at that time she had told me that she was murdered, or because, you know, I was in grade one.

**MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD:** You were young.

**NATASHA SADDLEBACK:** And but I do remember the funeral, I remember the wake. I remember going to the funeral. I remember kind of having forced tears though because -- because I was so young and I wasn't -- like, I -- like, I was apprehended from my mom before she was
murdered and so it was a really -- like, my relationship
with her was already kind of really complicated and I was
already living in care for probably about, like, one or two
years by that point.

So -- so anyways, I don't think my foster
mom knew all the details but once I got older, obviously,
I'd be kind of curious as to what happened. I did go to
the police station in Maskwacis or in Wetaskiwin when I was
16 because I had a youth worker who was trying to help me,
you know, deal with this stuff. And he -- he kind of gave
me a story but, you know, it was such a long time ago at
that point that I don't think that the -- like, everything
was completely accurate. So the only real statement and
facts I have is on the -- on the court case that I found
online.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: I see. You know there
is that what we call FILU and maybe can talk a little bit
more about it after, like, this session. But there is,
like, right now, like, an organization that helps people
accessing those kinds of records.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Oh, yes.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Like, for FILU so
maybe by the end of this session I can give you all this
information.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yes.
MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And they're there to help people like you who are looking for more information from the institutions, to have access to those information.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah, that'd be good.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: So maybe after I can give you -- give -- give them -- their contact ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: M'hm.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- and that's what they're doing right now.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah. Yes.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: So I didn't want to forget about that.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Oh, no, that's okay.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: So that's why I'm telling ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Okay.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- but more information about it after. So do you remember -- I know you were really young so probably you don't remember but how was the court -- the court process? Do you have any, like, do you remember anything about it? Were you ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I don't. I was not really, like, you know, I wasn't told about it, I wasn't, you know, like, a part of it. I do know that because -- basically from, like, me in my instance is that, like, my
family, her family weren't in a position to take me at the
time of her death. Her brothers were in and out of jail as
well, and her mom had passed away, and just nobody was able
to take me. So I was -- I had to be, you know, in care.
So I think maybe if I was, you know, taken from one of my
family members, I would be a lot more aware of, you know,
that case. But I was in care so ---

MARIÉ-AUDREY GIRARD: Yeah. And do you
remember how it affected you when you, like -- when your
foster mom told you about it? Do you remember, like, what
kind of -- how -- what were the impacts it had on you in
your life?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Well, I don't think at
that point, I really, fully understood. It was just -- I,
like, when I look back it kind of just seems like it was
just a dream. Like, I was very, like, I just didn't
understand I don't think. Like, I didn't understand the
capacity of what was going on like I do now.

MARIÉ-AUDREY GIRARD: Of course. You were --

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIÉ-AUDREY GIRARD: --- you were six years
old, right.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIÉ-AUDREY GIRARD: So it's
understandable.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah. And I think it was just, like, a slow process of it building up and me realizing, you know, like, I was never going to go -- or know my mom. So it was just, like, a really slow ---

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And you mentioned when you tried to talk about it with your family members, it's a little bit complicated. Can you give us a little bit more details?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: So they just -- I think, like, it -- it -- it's not even that it has to do with my mom. I think it's just, like, the trauma that, you know, even just residential schools have had on my family -- my biological family. Just having a hard time, in general, talking about anything that's happened. So any time I tried to ask questions, it was not something that the, like -- that my people -- us, like, my family especially, were wanting to talk about or deal with.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: I see. I see.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: And I know a lot of my family right now is, you know, is consumed, you know, in that -- that -- that res lifestyle where they are, like, using and abusing, you know, drugs and alcohol. And just in a really, like, sad, dark place.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: M'hmm. So I
understand that many members of your family have been to residential school.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah. I don't even really know either. Like I said, I was raised in care so I -- I have no idea of my -- of my history of my family. And, like I said, a lot of them don't want to talk about it.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: M'hmm. I see. I see. But you're still in contact with them?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: No.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: No?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I'm not -- I'm not in contact with them. I'm at a point right now where I'm just starting to become more cultural -- like, be more a part of my own culture and I'm learning more about that. But I -- I think that -- I feel like maybe my -- my birth family is too sick to be, you know, how -- to -- for me to be -- make them a part of my life.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: I see. I see. And what would you like to see in the future, for instance? Like, what, for you, will be a good thing? Like, I know you would like to have more information but what, for yourself, do you need? Like, is there -- do you think you need support? Like, would you need some -- because it's such a big -- and even if you were so young -- six years
old is -- but it's still a big trauma, right.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah. I really -- I

I don't know. I've -- I've been trying to, like, just, like,
just even finding out information to, like, heal. I have
my own children now and, like, I know from -- from my life
that everything that has -- like, the Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women, you know, and the residential schools
has, like, like, highly affected my life and how I feel and
see myself -- or have felt and seen myself. I -- I just
wish that more people would, like -- I guess more people
would just talk about it and be more open. Like, it's such
a dark thing to talk about though, and nobody wants to hear
about it and nobody wants to, you know -- and, like, for
me, even as a young child, you know, being raised in care,
like, I lived in foster homes, I lived in group homes,
just, like, having people as friends who have mothers and
fathers, you know, in their lives. Just the -- the
normalcy of that and not being able to connect with them
that way, not being able to bring up, you know, many
memories of, like, you know, if I was bottle fed, or, like,
if -- like, how I was -- how I was held, or, like, any --
any nicknames like that. Like, it's, like, I don't have
that -- that to talk -- talk about or relate to anybody
with. Like I do now that I have my own children so I'm,
like, super grateful of that.
But, yeah, it's just, like, I guess, just, like, the -- the Inquiry is just -- is good -- is -- is a step forward.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Talk about it and, yeah.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Because when we see these -- that it happened to many, many people and that's true, nobody talks about it.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: It's really hard to talk about it.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And so I think that is a really step -- like, that we can take and really, like, get it out because it happens to many, many people. And, again, it's really hard to talk about it so I think it's necessary to have those kinds of discussion and conversation.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I did have ice -- because I -- I do some, like, I -- I did some -- I do some modelling or whatever for some Aboriginal designers and I did speak at one event, it's called the Walk to End Violence. And I did a speech -- I did a speech where I spoke about my mom for the first time, three years ago, in
front of a group of people. It -- so that was kind of the first time I've actually, like, really spoke about it. And then I've kind of gone through some trauma since -- since -- in the last couple years with an abusive relationship. So my healing has been always put on hold. I'm just out of that relationship now so this is kind of a step for me also to, like, go back to healing myself, you know, from, like, because like you said it is a big trauma to, you know, deal with it so -- and ---

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: To talk about.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: --- talk about, yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Yeah. And can you tell us a little bit about yourself as well? Like, you said you were -- like, if you want to share about it. You said you were in an abusive relationship but you've been able to get out of that relationship. Do you -- do you want to share some details about it?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I think, you know, the -- the consequences of, you know, not having a mother to -- or my mother being murdered is that I was raised in care. And, you know, like, I don't -- I don't like to bash her much but I did come to a realization that the foster home that I lived with was extremely abusive. And I -- just relationships that I've had since then were -- were abusive. Like, I -- I've let people treat me way -- in
ways that I shouldn't have. So but at the same time, 
there's lots of things because of who I am as a person, 
that I've accomplished, and done really well because at the 
same time, there's people who I've met who -- who saw me 
and believed in me. And that's what's -- has, you know, 
helped me and, you know, had me make good choices at times 
in my life.

So, like I said, like, speaking and then 
walking and, like, I -- like, I used to work for the -- for 
the government human services for a couple years, which 
was, like, a great experience because I got to learn the 
other side of, you know, I was raised in care and so being 
able to learn the other side was very -- it was, like, the 
-- the -- a really good experience for me.

But then, yes it's -- then there's been, you 
know, I -- I was with a man for ten years and he was -- he 
was abusive. He wasn't as abusive as my last relationship 
but my last relationship was very, very abusive. And like 
I said, I'm just out of it now and I'm in a period of 
healing, trying to go back to my culture and just trying to 
deal with everything that has happened to me in my life.

**MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD:** Yeah. And when we're 
doing those kinds of statements, we always try as well to 
remember, like, the -- the Missing or Murdered Indigenous 
Woman for, like, for -- for good memories.
NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: I don't know if you have, like, any good memories that you would like to share about your mother. Or something that you heard that, like, you know, when you're happy, that's something that you think of your mother?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: I went to -- I went on a home visit -- I went on a home visit one time and my -- because I was named after -- my -- my mom had a cousin who also passed away and her name was Iris [inaudible response]. She ended up killing herself, which is kind of really ironic because it was when I had first gone to a home visit and she was talking to me and, like, she was getting to know me. And I -- I went home and then a week after she had killed herself. So I, like, I feel like my visit was her had caused something in her because, like I said, she was my mom's cousin and best friend and I was actually named after her because my middle name is Iris.

But at that time she had told me this story about -- about listening to Ace of Base and dancing -- dancing in, like, these heels and her mom, like, you know, yelling, "Will you guys keep it down." But they were just having so much fun. That's, you know, like, one of the -- like, the -- one of the only good things and whatever that I have heard about her.
I did -- I know that she did go to jail but she had made me some earrings when she was in jail. So I do, you know, I -- I have those still. So I know that, you know, she did -- she -- she thought about me but, you know, yeah, like, trauma and that lifestyle that, you know, intergenerational trauma, whatever, had, you know, caused her to -- to maybe not make some of my decisions but then never, ever, ever meant that she needed to be murdered.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And, you -- you know, you've been talking about intergenerational trauma ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- and the cycle of violence. How do you think ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: M'hum.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- we'll break this cycle?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Like, just be aware, you know. Like, being aware. Like, for me and how I'm wanting to stop it is just, like, I just kind of woke up and realized that, you know, like, who I was, you know, despite, you know -- despite who -- what happened to my mom, despite what happened to my dad, despite how I was raised. Like, I still am who I am. And just having the ability to have that, like, be aware of the, like, just loving yourself. You know, loving yourself. That's the
only thing that can -- can change, you know, anything.

When I -- you know -- because now that I, like, you know, I guess, woke up and saw who I was after this last abusive relationship, I've been making it a focus to show my daughter who's 11, you know, like, "You're beautiful. Like, you're amazing. You know, like, you're nothing that anybody's every told you. You are who you are." So I -- that's -- it, like, you know, I wish that my mom knew that, you know, that, you know, she's not what she was told all of this time in her life, you know. And that, like, us Aboriginal women, like, we're strong, you know. We're strong, we're beautiful. And, like, we -- once we connect to our culture and to that strength, that we are capable of so much -- so much -- so many big things. And know, like, yeah, we're not what society says that we are, you know, like, at all.

And that's, you know, like, I know -- especially on social media now there's, you know, people that -- especially because I have a lot of Aboriginal women on my Facebook but, you know, being targets, you know, being an easy target for people. And, like, I'm small and I look super young, I'm actually 31. But even just, you know, walking down the street, it's -- it's -- you, you're scared.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: M'hmm.
NATASHA SADDLEBACK: And, you know, like, men, whoever, like, of all races, they just look at you and it's, like, you don't know, like ---

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: What will happen.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah. Well, like, and what their intentions are, you know.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Yeah. I understand.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: So -- so, yeah. I -- I'm -- I'm grateful that I don't have to worry about, you know, the -- the men that murdered her. Like, that's -- you know, they -- because they -- they're already dead. But, like, I'm -- I'm grateful that I didn't have to worry about them. I just -- I do wish I knew a little bit more. But at the same time, like, me just talking about it is -- is healing in itself, you know. Leaving, you know, I'm literally, probably the only one because my -- my biological family is so sick to talk about her to, you know, like, remember her. And -- and that's important.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: It is. And I think what you share is really, really true in so many ways that we have to talk about it but our sister and, you know, our mothers are strong woman and we have -- we have to get this out. Because what we hear in the media, what we see in the media is not the truth, yeah. So I think you're, you know, right on every -- on everything that you just said. And
for myself, I don't necessarily have more questions.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: M'hmm.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: What I wanted to ask, I've asked. But I was wondering if there's anything else that you would like to share with us today?

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: No. I don't think so, I think just, you know, having her exist still through this is everything so ---

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Well, thank you very much for sharing with us. We know it's not an easy thing to do. So thank you for trusting, well, us and me, personally, and coming here this morning. Because it's really important for us. So thank you very much. So if it's okay with you I will be turning off the camera and ---

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Yeah.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: --- the audio recorder. So it's 11:35. The time is 11:35 and I'm turning off the camera.

NATASHA SADDLEBACK: Okay.

MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And the other recorder.

--- Upon adjourning at 9:53 a.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Jackie Chernoff, 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.

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Jackie Chernoff

January 9, 2019