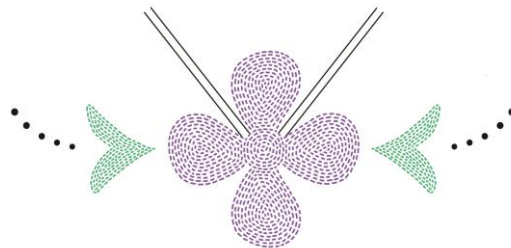


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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 1 Statement Gathering
Courtyard Marriott
Prince George, British Columbia**



PUBLIC

Wednesday November 28, 2018

**Statement - Volume 602
Brenda Wilson,
In relation to Ramona Lisa Wilson**

Statement gathered by Bonnie George

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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Documents submitted with testimony: none.

1 Prince George, British Columbia
2 --- Upon commencing on Wednesday, November 28, 2018 at 1:05 p.m.

3 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Okay. This is Bonnie
4 George. I'm a statement taker for the National Inquiry
5 into the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.
6 And we're in Prince George, B.C., on November 28th. We are
7 at the Courtyard Marriott, and it's 1:21. And I'm speaking
8 with Brenda Wilson and her husband --

9 **MR. CLARENCE JOHN:** Clarence John.

10 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Clarence John, with the
11 Gitksan and **Lheidli T'enneh** Nation. And we're here to hear
12 Brenda's truth of her sister, Ramona Wilson.

13 [Note: off-the-record informed consent
14 discussion omitted]

15 And, Brenda, this is your time to share your
16 truth about your sister, Ramona.

17 **MS. BRENDA WILSON:** I'd just like to thank
18 everybody that came out to support me, and I really
19 appreciate it. Since I ended up not even knowing if I was
20 going to be able to do a statement because I'm a support
21 worker in the job that I do and the job that I've done for
22 the last 25 years, and I've never put myself ahead of any
23 of the other families. I've always put them first and made
24 sure that they got what they needed and ensured that their
25 stories were heard first. And I didn't even think about

1 myself to do my story. But as the time came down to it,
2 and it's pretty much the last minute, the last hour, the
3 last day before the deadline for statement-taking, and I
4 decided that I needed to do it. Unconsciously, it bothered
5 me, I guess, because I couldn't concentrate on a lot of
6 things as I was more and more other families' stories and
7 helping the families, you know, with -- with their needs.
8 And I -- and I just -- I guess it was always there, asking
9 myself why am I not doing this.

10 So that's the reason why it's today, and
11 it's the very last day.

12 So all this started in 1994 on June the
13 11th. My sister went missing in Smithers. I was 28 years
14 old. And I was a young mother of an 11-year-old son and an
15 8-year-old daughter. Some of you know my daughter,
16 [Daughter 1]. So for her, that's, like -- that happened
17 ten years ago or not -- I can't even calculate. She's 32
18 now, so -- so about -- and at the time, I had an older son
19 that was probably 14, and he was adopted.

20 And I was working at the Friendship Centre
21 in Smithers as a program director. It was about four
22 years. I was doing very well in the program. It was well
23 received with the work that I was doing. I was, you know,
24 very -- just moving forward in life at 28 years old. And I
25 had my driver's license for the first time four years

1 prior. And I -- I had just completed a human service
2 worker program that got me into this job. And, actually,
3 Bonnie and I ended up doing that program together, so it's
4 really -- yeah.

5 My career was just -- it was just beginning.
6 My life was just starting to happen. And everything was
7 starting to fall into place, and my children were doing
8 well in school. And I had a job. I had a car. I had a
9 roof over our heads. I was in the process of buying my
10 house.

11 And although I was young and the partying
12 and stuff was there, it was kept to a minimum to ensure my
13 children were taken care of, and that I kept my job and
14 kept bills intact. I was quite responsible with everything
15 that I did with my work and -- but at the same time, I was
16 a shy person. I wasn't somebody that always spoke up
17 or -- or was able to talk in front of people. When I was
18 younger, my dad died when I was seven, so I was quite
19 distant from a lot of people because so many of my
20 relatives and people in our community were -- were not
21 well, and I was always a target for sexual abuse.

22 And so I -- because I didn't have a father
23 to protect me, I ended up being the one that was assaulted
24 or some kind of -- anything that could -- bad that happened
25 would happen to me. I almost lost my life falling off a

1 cliff because I wasn't being cared for. I was probably
2 about five years old. And, you know, and it was due to
3 alcoholism and that's -- was a big part of our life. And
4 it was something that I didn't, you know, want in our
5 family and in my children's life, so I really tried to keep
6 that to a minimum.

7 At the same time, when Ramona did go
8 missing, my mom was on her own. She had just left an
9 abusive relationship, which was Ramona's dad. He -- he was
10 non-Native, and he just seemed to be so racist. And I
11 always wondered, like, why are you with my mom if you're
12 racist and you don't like Natives, and now you've -- you've
13 brought a child into the world that is, you know, part
14 Native? And I couldn't understand that part. And there
15 were times where I -- like I said, I -- I never -- like,
16 I'm not a -- at that time, I wasn't very outspoken.
17 And -- but when he laid a hand on my brothers, that's when
18 I just started swearing and telling him to leave my
19 brothers alone. I was very protective of my brothers and
20 my sister. If anybody touched them, I would be there to,
21 you know, stand up for them.

22 And from that day on, it's always been like
23 that, too. I stand up for my brothers and my sister
24 and -- so we were a very loving family. We celebrated all
25 of our birthdays, even though we had nothing. My mom

1 always made our birthdays very special, and Christmas, very
2 special. All the occasions. She always made it happy, no
3 matter what. You know, she could make a feast out of
4 nothing. Like, we didn't always have a lot of food and
5 stuff like that, but she -- she just made it happen. And
6 that's what -- we always did. We always just tried to keep
7 ourselves happy and -- and just love each other and look
8 after each other.

9 But then June 11th, 1994, my sister Ramona
10 went missing on the Saturday and was not heard from on
11 Sunday, June 12th. My mom called me and asked if I had
12 heard from Ramona. I told her I had not heard from her.
13 But she had talked to my ex-spouse, the father of my
14 children. She had asked them for a ride as she was walking
15 past a friend's home where they were having a barbecue.
16 And no one was driving at the time because we were at a
17 barbecue, and you have drinks and stuff. So we were also
18 having some drinks. So she continued on to -- towards Main
19 Street, which is only, like, about four blocks from my
20 mom's place and our friend's place.

21 This will haunt me probably for the rest of
22 my life, because I wished I could have given her a ride.
23 And maybe she would still be here, because I'd always give
24 her a ride everywhere she wanted to go. Of my mom and my
25 brothers, I was the only one that had a vehicle in our

1 family. Out of the three brothers and my little sister and
2 my mom. I keep trying to forgive myself for that, but it
3 doesn't go away.

4 My mom and I started to call all her friends
5 on the land line, because we didn't have cell phones or
6 anything back then. We called as many friends and family
7 that we knew to ask if they had seen her, and she hadn't
8 been seen. When we didn't receive a response from anyone
9 that we contacted, panic started to set in. My body
10 started to shake, and it felt like I couldn't touch the
11 ground. I kept asking myself, "Where is she?"

12 Then, like, it kind of breaks. It just
13 dawned on me. It hit me that, oh, my God, she was one of
14 the many missing and murdered on Highway 16. It was just,
15 like, no, this can't be happening. I can't -- I can't deal
16 with that if that's the case. I just can't. I don't know
17 what to do. I don't know where to start. And I could
18 understand how the Nikal family felt, Delphine Nikal's
19 family, because Delphine went missing four years prior, and
20 her family still hasn't -- haven't found her, nor do they
21 know where she is. She's still missing. It's been 29
22 years. So from a report that I was given, my mom contacted
23 the police on the Sunday, stating that Ramona was missing.

24 At the time, because I wasn't the one
25 who -- who reported it, nor was I receiving any of the

1 information from the RCMP, I have no timeline of what was
2 given -- given to my mom, only a report that was given to
3 me 25 years later, of what was -- of the timeline
4 that -- of the duties that the RCMP provided for -- for my
5 mom. Because myself and my siblings left it up to her, and
6 we never questioned her in the first few months. We
7 felt -- but I felt I needed to know what was happening with
8 the police, because I felt that we weren't being informed,
9 and that my mom was not in her right state of mind to
10 receive the information by herself. I felt really helpless
11 because I didn't know who to reach out to. There was no
12 specialized help for us in this situation. We were -- we
13 were pretty much the ones who -- who started off the whole
14 process of what needs to be done when somebody goes missing
15 or murdered, because nobody in that community, nobody
16 across the country, knew what to do, how to deal with
17 missing and murdered, when somebody goes missing in your
18 community.

19 The first thing we did was we reached out to
20 the local radio station and the local television station.
21 And it was -- it was them who helped us bring out the
22 information to the community, and pretty much, it started
23 spreading across the province. And then now it's pretty
24 much worldwide with people wanting to know the story and
25 how they can help and everything. But at that time, we

1 only had the Smithers area where this information just
2 stayed put. Global or anything like that wouldn't even
3 touch the story because it was northern B.C.

4 Because I worked in a -- at a Friendship
5 Centre, I was able to receive assistance from the
6 organization, so from their staff, to provide some -- you
7 know, through -- be able to do vigils and to put out
8 posters, to photocopy posters were that black and white
9 because, at that time, there wasn't really colour
10 photocopiers. It seems so ancient in 1994 where technology
11 was just beginning, and we don't have the communication.
12 We didn't have it back then as to what we have today. And
13 there's just nothing -- like, nothing in place to deal with
14 this in any of the programs in the community. There
15 was -- there was a Victims Services, but it didn't even
16 know about them, it didn't really understand, and all they
17 did was deal with my mom, like, only my mom. They never
18 dealt with the family, the brothers, the sisters. And we
19 were adults. It's, like, how are we supposed to deal with
20 this?

21 My mother and I kept Ramona's name in the
22 news and media as much as we could, tirelessly doing
23 awareness campaigns, vigils, walks, fund-raisers to raise
24 awareness for a billboard which never did come to light.
25 Every little bit of funds we could afford from our -- or

1 from our own pockets, we'd put it -- we'd put -- we'd put
2 all these funds into these events to bring awareness to my
3 sister's disappearance. We kept hoping that she would show
4 up, phone us, and tell us she was okay.

5 For me, it was so very difficult to work
6 because I couldn't concentrate. I started to consume more
7 alcohol than usual. Although I was providing for my
8 family, I was not fully present. My temper started to
9 increase. And I was very nervous every day. I don't know
10 if that has changed much since 1994, but I -- I think it's
11 still there, but I'm -- I'm able to, I think, manage it a
12 little bit more.

13 I didn't know what to expect from day to
14 day. I heard so many rumors that gave some hope, only to
15 find out later it was a lie or information was investigated
16 and no leads came from it. Our family started to distance
17 each other because we didn't want to talk about the fact
18 that Ramona could be gone forever. We started arguing with
19 each other. We couldn't have calm conversations. We were
20 a loving, close family. What is happening to our family?

21 At that time that Ramona went missing, the
22 family should have been gathered together to be given the
23 report of what had -- what has been done and what will be
24 done in the future to find Ramona. The family should have
25 been given ideas on how they could assist. The family

1 should have been provided group counselling to ensure the
2 well-being of each of the family members, what to expect
3 from the anxiety that was going to occur. My mother should
4 not have been the only one that was provided with
5 information, as she was not in a good state of mind to
6 comprehend all the information that was given to her about
7 her missing child, her baby.

8 In 1995, April 10th, Ramona's remains were
9 found near the tree line on Yelich Road, which is about 10
10 kilometres west of Smithers, at the end of the airport
11 runway. A few days before she was found, I had recurring
12 dreams, and she kept saying, "They found me."

13 When I received the news, I went into total
14 shock. I don't remember the funeral, and I barely remember
15 the rest of the year. I know from news releases and
16 hearsay, from family and friends, that we drove down Main
17 Street to bury her remains at the cemetery. During that
18 whole time I was there, I vaguely remember having to
19 identify Ramona's belongings: A faded black acid-wash
20 jacket, a white fleece top, and a purple pair of pants.

21 I wish I didn't have to see that. I didn't
22 want that to be the last thing that I remember about her.
23 The smell was awful, something I will never forget. It was
24 a blood -- a blooded earthy smell. Her clothes are laid
25 out on three pieces of brown paper, and my mom had

1 to -- and myself -- walk into the small interview room. As
2 soon as we noticed the clothing, we all just broke down and
3 started wailing. My sister. Why did they have to do this?
4 Oh.

5 **MR. CLARENCE JOHN:** It's okay.

6 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Brenda, did you want to
7 take a break or we can carry on?

8 **MS. BRENDA WILSON:** (Indiscernible).

9 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Do you want to take a
10 break? No?

11 **MS. BRENDA WILSON:** It took us what seemed
12 like an eternity to regain our composure. We had to walk
13 back outside and let the rest of our family know that it
14 definitely was Ramona. Oh, my God. It was so terrible.
15 We didn't even have to say anything. Everyone knew by
16 our -- our reactions that it was Ramona, because we were
17 all trying to hold each other up as we walked out to meet
18 them.

19 It took a long time for Ramona's remains to
20 be returned so that we could have the funeral. And it's
21 such a -- it's so difficult because you want to start the
22 grieving process, but they're holding everything back,
23 coroners and all the things that need to be done. So we
24 had to wait for that.

25 In the meantime, we were bombarded by media,

1 and there were talks about -- about a serial killer and all
2 that in our community. We didn't know if we were next or
3 if our -- our children were going to be next. We were
4 just -- for myself, I was just full of emotions and anxiety
5 and anger, and I just didn't know how to deal with myself
6 at the time.

7 The only thing I could do was talk to the
8 media to make sure Ramona's name stayed out there, because
9 I -- I see what happened to Delphine and her family, where
10 they just forgot about -- forgot about them. We had to be
11 really vigilant in keeping Ramona's name in the media
12 through documentaries, magazines, books, newspapers, and
13 through the television. So I ended up becoming an advocate
14 and a spokesperson for our family, along with my mom.

15 That's something that I was prepared to do,
16 but I did what I had to do because they started calling my
17 sister a prostitute and a -- and a careless person. And
18 it's, like, no, you got the story wrong. That's not who
19 she is. My little sister, she was very vibrant, very
20 beautiful. She had a lot going for her. She was working
21 in a restaurant. She was going to school. She was a peer
22 counsellor. She had hopes and dreams of becoming a
23 psychologist. She was an auntie. She had four nieces and
24 nephews at the time. She had friends.

25 My little baby sister wasn't a street

1 person. So I had to fight for her. I had to make people
2 see who she really was, that she didn't belong in the same
3 basket as everybody else was trying to put her. I had to
4 stand up for her and really fight for her, just as I've
5 always done for my brothers and -- and my sister, my
6 family, because I'm the oldest in my family. So that's my
7 duty, to do that. When my dad passed away, it was my duty
8 to be a parent with my mom.

9 It was so difficult when they tried to
10 include us in the Downtown Eastside missing and murdered
11 women. I'm, like, no, that's not us. We have a different
12 situation happening in the north. We were totally
13 separate. You can't put us in the same basket as the
14 people in Vancouver. We are people in -- in northern
15 British Columbia that you've forgotten about. But you are
16 not going to forget about us anymore because we are going
17 to keep fighting for our loved ones that are missing here.

18 And that's what became the story of northern
19 B.C. and the Highway of Tears is our fight to tell the
20 truth about our loved ones, especially my sister, Ramona.
21 If it wasn't for Ramona, I would never have been a part of
22 this whole national public inquiry.

23 But it gets the best -- it gets the best of
24 you, your life, when you have to do this over and over.
25 And when anniversaries come up, when my son turned 16 years

1 old, I couldn't handle it. I just was so afraid for his
2 life. The same with my daughter, when she turned 16. I
3 just was afraid for them, because that's when Ramona went
4 missing. You just don't know how to comprehend. Like, do
5 I walk my child to school? They're 16 years old, but I
6 feel I need to walk them to school because I'm afraid that
7 they're going to be targeted. They're going to be next.

8 My life has always just been chaos. I
9 haven't -- the only thing that really made me forget for a
10 while I was using alcohol to help the pain. But the -- the
11 downside to that is carelessness and anger. The anger just
12 increased more. I'd be doing things to people that I
13 wouldn't even remember, and that scared me. So -- and I
14 lost my driver's license for a year from a DUI trying to go
15 to a friend's funeral while I was drunk and bringing a
16 whole bunch of my other friends with me, just carelessness,
17 not even thinking that I could have killed all of us.

18 It's really important when families are
19 going through this that they be surrounded by family to
20 lead them in the right directions because we're so lost.
21 We just don't even know where to go, don't even know what
22 to do. As an advocate, I'm supposed to be strong. But I
23 don't feel that way.

24 Throughout the years, I've got fired from
25 many jobs, my job from the Friendship Centre, because of my

1 drinking. I couldn't focus on anything. I started working
2 in a child program, a child care referral. I was a
3 receptionist. I figured as a receptionist, I don't have to
4 deal with -- with anybody, just take calls. I don't have
5 to be a people person, well, sort of just over the phone.
6 I lost my house that I lived in for about ten years. I
7 ended up moving into a basement suite.

8 I was just starting to lose everything in my
9 life, and my children -- once [Daughter] turned 16, that
10 scared the hell out of me, because this is when Ramona went
11 missing (indiscernible). What am I supposed to do? How do
12 I prevent this from happening to my daughter? She's going
13 out with her friends, smoking and drinking. This is when
14 it dawned to me. It's, like, I've forgotten my children
15 through this whole process. What am I supposed to do for
16 them? How am I supposed to deal with their feeling?
17 They're grieving, too. They miss their auntie. She used
18 to babysit them. She used to live with us. It's, like,
19 what the hell am I doing? I need to do something for my
20 children and for my sister.

21 So in 2003, I started training in early
22 childhood, and I did that for about a year, and I realized
23 that I can't do this. A lot of the children I'm -- and I
24 was doing my practicum at an early childhood development
25 program, and I could see the destruction of the families

1 that were coming in there. They were called high-risk
2 families, which meant nobody else wanted to deal with their
3 situations in the community. So they sent them our way
4 because we were an Aboriginal organization, just a part of
5 the systemic racism within the -- in our systems that we
6 have today. Oh, just send them over there. They'll deal
7 with them.

8 And sure enough, we developed a program.
9 After a couple years, I realized what needed to be done
10 because our families weren't receiving services from our
11 community. For myself, I had to, you know, start the
12 training, but most of all, what needed to be done for me
13 was to go to a treatment centre, so that I could deal with
14 the issue of alcoholism and to let my sister go, to let her
15 know that I was going to do this in a different way, that I
16 was going to be stronger by letting go of the alcohol, and
17 to be somebody that people could look up to, because we've
18 been through it, and we know what needs to be done. I
19 didn't know at the time how we were going to do it. I just
20 knew it had to be done somehow.

21 So when I was in the treatment centre, I
22 went there a year later after I started my practicum at the
23 early childhood development program, and after I started
24 training. And a lot of the participants within that
25 treatment centre were attracted to my character. And I had

1 to find out who I was. Like, I'd ask myself, what the hell
2 is my character? Why -- you know, why are some of these
3 people, like, they're pushing it a little too far with
4 wanting to be intimate with me? And me almost falling for
5 it because I'm so vulnerable being in that program, needing
6 something, but I don't know what it is. But it
7 wasn't -- it wasn't the intimacy. It was to build myself
8 up as a strong person.

9 So I just felt -- I learned things there
10 about myself, and I learned about -- I didn't want to
11 drink. It gave me time to think about what I wanted to do
12 and how I was going to do it. I didn't learn anything from
13 the actual information, the 12 steps, all those things.
14 It's just, like, you guys -- you know, this -- I need
15 something else, and this isn't it. Like, I could teach
16 this -- I could teach this program, and I can see why many
17 of these people were coming to me because I was there to
18 listen, and I could give them some advice, and, you
19 know -- but the intimacy part of it was the other hand.
20 And many of them were doing that thing there. And it's
21 just, like, whoa, this is crazy.

22 So I really wanted to get out there -- get
23 out of there. It was, like, a five weeks co-ed program,
24 and it made me feel very uncomfortable. So I was looking
25 for something where I could deal with the -- with the

1 trauma that I was going through. And still, to this day,
2 there's still nothing out there that I know of for many of
3 us that are going -- that are dealing with missing and
4 murdered loved ones, there is nothing. We need something
5 where we don't have to worry about people trying to be
6 intimate with you. You're only dealing with what
7 is -- what the cause is. In a treatment centre, everybody
8 is dealing with different things. If there's a -- if
9 there's a healing centre, just to deal with missing and
10 murdered loved ones, and that's the only focus, then that's
11 what we need. That's what we need today, to help our
12 families. Because by -- when I did this treatment centre,
13 it's not what I -- it helped with my alcoholism, to address
14 it, but it didn't help with my loss or my grief. It didn't
15 help with the pain. The pain was still there. It's still
16 there today.

17 In 2005, I graduated from the early
18 childhood development program with a diploma. I passed all
19 three sections of my early childhood development, and my
20 infant-toddler, and my special needs. It was really
21 something that I was very proud of because I actually
22 accomplished all of this through everything that I had gone
23 through -- through the alcoholism, through the grief.

24 And I have to say, I can't say the treatment
25 centre was all that bad because after 14 years, I'm still

1 clean and sober. So I'm very happy that I was able to go
2 there and learn, even though there's some negativity in it.

3 In 2006, they had the symposium here in
4 Prince George, and I attended with my mom. And there was a
5 walk from -- she joined the walk. It actually started in
6 Prince Rupert, but she -- she joined the walk in Smithers.
7 And I was sad that I couldn't be a part of this walk due to
8 work commitments. My mom and cousin walked with some
9 people who were from the Downtown Eastside and some of our
10 families from the Highway of Tears. I met them along the
11 way on weekends to see how they were doing and to assist
12 wherever I could.

13 I was able to take some time off work to do
14 the walk -- to do the walk-in with the families that had
15 walked into the meeting place. It was a horrible feeling.
16 It felt like we were part of a huge funeral procession as
17 we -- all the families walked into the CN Centre. And if
18 there was a heads-up given as to what the process was, I
19 wasn't made aware of it, because later on we were -- we
20 were brought to -- into a room with some investigators,
21 thinking that we were going to be given information about
22 our loved ones. Instead it was, like, what do you want
23 from us? Just, like, what? It's, like, we want you to
24 find our loved ones. What do you think we want from you?
25 My anger was still harsh back then.

1 But there was -- there was never really a
2 good relationship with the RCMP. We just always stayed
3 clear of them because in our small town, my mom, being a
4 single mom, she had to deal with my brothers and raising
5 them. And they -- you know, they had records with
6 the -- with the police and going to court and stuff like
7 that. So there wasn't always that good relationship. I
8 never did -- she didn't have to go to court for me because
9 I was sort of the parent along with her, trying to look
10 after them.

11 It took a long time to understand the 33
12 recommendations that came out of the symposium. I didn't
13 really know what that -- what they meant, what they always
14 talked about. And it wasn't until a few -- a few years
15 later that I ended up being a part of the -- of the
16 governing body for the Highway of Tears Initiative. And at
17 that time, there was only one family member per loved one
18 allowed on that governing body. And a lot of the
19 information that my mom was receiving, she wasn't passing
20 it along to our family, so we had no idea what was going on
21 with this governing body or the 33 recommendations. And so
22 it wasn't until I finally started attending the meetings of
23 the governing body did I understand what the 33
24 recommendations were.

25 And those were -- the 33 recommendations are

1 what -- what many organizations have been using to bring
2 forward to the government regarding missing and murdered
3 women, such as the transit system that is in place today
4 that runs from Prince George to Prince Rupert. That was
5 the number one recommendation, along with better cell
6 service and viewing for cameras on Highway 16, so that we
7 could see if people were hitchhiking on the highway or at
8 this different spots along Highway 16.

9 During the -- during the symposium, we also
10 had a young lady who was -- or not even a young lady. She
11 was, like, a child. She was 14, Aielah Saric-Auger, whose
12 body was found out by Taber Mountain. I got to meet her
13 mother, Audrey. I tried to console her and be there for
14 her. I felt so helpless because I just didn't know what to
15 do. She just cried in our arms. And it just seemed like
16 there was nobody there for us, even at the symposium, like
17 the support workers or anything. It's just like, what do
18 we do for her? How can we help her? It's so hard to know
19 what -- how to help families except for what you know,
20 because there's just nothing in place.

21 In 2011, I was a preschool supervisor,
22 teacher, and family support worker. I was starting to
23 build myself up again, like, acquiring my job through the
24 early childhood development program after I graduated. So
25 from 2004, I was training with my EC, early childhood

1 education, and built up a preschool in the process in this
2 early childhood development program. So it wasn't -- and
3 it was all on a volunteer basis, because I was doing my
4 practicum. So I wasn't getting paid to do that. But
5 during that time, it was also taking a toll on me because I
6 was giving a lot to the families with being a teacher and
7 also advocating for the missing and murdered and for my
8 sister.

9 So in 2008, I resigned from the early
10 childhood development program, and I started a -- I went to
11 a job that was only a few years, which was the community
12 futures. And I was an employment advisor. I needed to get
13 away from the everyday stress of the family situations,
14 dysfunctional lives. I just couldn't -- I couldn't do it
15 anymore. I couldn't give myself. I couldn't watch the
16 kids. I couldn't watch them suffer. Some of them
17 were -- were in foster homes, and -- and I'd help with
18 visits, family visits, and stuff like that. And it was
19 just, you know, a terrible time for those kids to deal with
20 the dysfunction that was happening in their lives.

21 I had one little girl. She was only three
22 years, because we dealt in preschool with three to
23 five-year-olds. She was in a -- she was in, like, six
24 foster homes by the time she was three years old. And when
25 her mom wasn't able to visit her because she couldn't get a

1 ride or she just couldn't get there, her child would be
2 very angry and start picking on the children -- other
3 children in the school. And this is a three-year-old.
4 This is where it starts. And year after year, I tell this
5 story so people can understand. You need to be there for
6 our children at that tender age. They understand more than
7 we think.

8 So she -- when her mom didn't come to visit,
9 and then I tried to talk to her, and she -- I told her she
10 couldn't hit the other kids. And so we sat out in
11 the -- in the foyer with the door open so she could still
12 see the kids. And I said, "We need to sit here until you
13 calm down." And I sat with her while the other teachers in
14 the room with the other children. And she'd just scream.
15 Like, she'd just scream, crying, wailing at the top of her
16 lungs. And I was, like -- I was freaked out. I was just,
17 like, oh, my God, what am I going to do, you know? And I
18 just sat there with her. And I tried to hold her, but she
19 was just, like, no, leave me alone. And she kept screaming
20 for about half an hour. And I was just, like, what -- what
21 do you want to do?

22 I said, "Are you -- are you okay now?" I
23 said, "It's okay to cry and to be angry and mad and let it
24 all out." She just looked at me. She's, like, a little
25 baby just looking at me and saying -- with just -- not

1 knowing what to say or do, just tears in her eyes. I said,
2 "We can sit here longer, as long as it takes. Whenever
3 you're ready to go back in," I said, "We'll both go back
4 in."

5 It took another half an hour before she
6 finally calmed down, and she had no more tears and she was
7 just out of breath. And she was, like (indiscernible).
8 Then we walked back into the class, and all the kids
9 started hugging her and playing with her. And she was fine
10 after that. But she needed to let it out. She needed to
11 let go of her anger and cry.

12 That's when things started happening for me.
13 It's just, like, so many of these children of the missing
14 and murdered loved ones' families, the children are being
15 forgotten. They're being left on their own because we
16 think the children have no feelings, and they don't -- you
17 know, they don't need to deal with the grief because they
18 don't understand it. But they do. They really understand
19 it. They understand when somebody is not there. They
20 understand when they're not being looked after.

21 So I just couldn't -- I couldn't deal with
22 that anymore. I couldn't deal with watching the
23 children -- the pain. So I needed to leave that job.

24 In 2010, I resigned from my employment job.
25 I just couldn't -- I couldn't focus on anything. I

1 couldn't -- I didn't know how I was even working every day,
2 how I was even waking up and getting up. By 2010, I was
3 just going to work, going home, sleeping, maybe eating
4 sometimes. It got really bad where I just was blocking
5 out -- started to block everything out. I only worked to
6 keep up the bill payments, to put food on the table. My
7 son was still living with us part-time.

8 So I also left my relationship of 29 years.
9 I couldn't -- I couldn't handle the relationship because it
10 was a relationship that was made up of violence, a
11 relationship that took advantage of me as a woman, that had
12 no respect for me at all. And I -- I couldn't deal with
13 that when I've seen so many families and so many women
14 being murdered around me, the disrespect that so many
15 people have against these women. It's, like, am I going to
16 be next? Am I going to be the next one that will be on the
17 poster? Because if this man doesn't get what he wants, I'm
18 going to be the next victim.

19 So I wasn't going to put up with that. I
20 wasn't going to put up with being disrespected as a woman.
21 So I left the relationship of 29 years. I -- it blows me
22 away to even see that number, but I've been in that
23 relationship since I was a teenager.

24 And I had to move away from Smithers because
25 I had no support from my family or community. For me to be

1 fully supported, I needed to be looked after. I didn't
2 need to worry about finances. I didn't need to worry about
3 my family members' self-destruction. I needed to be in a
4 safe place where I didn't have to look after anyone except
5 myself. I needed to find myself, and I needed to find my
6 spirit. And I couldn't do that in the relationship I was
7 in, nor in the town that I was in, because there was just
8 nothing there for me. I couldn't find anything that could
9 help me deal with what I was going through, through my
10 grief. Just searching, searching all the time for
11 something that's going to make -- make me feel better, make
12 me stronger, make me feel like I am breathe and walk
13 without this wall or this barrier or ...

14 I don't know if you guys want to take a
15 break or ...

16 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** It's up to you. But if
17 you really want to take a break, we could.

18 **MS. BRENDA WILSON:** Yeah. I think so.

19 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Okay. It's 2:38 right
20 now, and I'm turning the equipment off so we can take
21 a -- take a mental break.

22 --- Upon recessing at 2:38 p.m.

23 --- Upon reconvening at 2:56 p.m.

24 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** It's 2:56, and I'm
25 turning the equipment back on again. We've finished our

1 break, and we're re-convening. It's 2:57.

2 **MS. BRENDA WILSON:** So in 2010, December, I
3 moved to Prince George and started working with Carrier
4 Sekani Family Services, who held the portfolio for the
5 Highway of Tears Initiative. And I did apply for the
6 position, but I was unsuccessful in -- in acquiring
7 the -- the position.

8 So they offered me another position as a
9 child and youth care worker, and that was a pretty
10 difficult job to do, because it was a lot of young people
11 aging out of the system, out of the foster care system.
12 And it really brought upon a lot of triggers in -- in how
13 we were dealt with in the foster care system. We were in
14 and out of foster homes for about three years, my brothers
15 and myself. And then we were also in a group home, which I
16 was -- which I was, I guess, assaulted by one of the boys
17 living in the foster home. And it just brought a lot of
18 bad memories of being in the foster care system and my mom
19 eventually -- we got to move back with our mom because she
20 jumped through all the hoops of the -- of what Social
21 Services wanted from her to give us back to her care.

22 I also dealt with jealous children of the
23 families in the foster homes that we were in. And so I'd
24 be fighting with -- with some of the kids, some of the
25 girls that were older than me and bigger than me. I was a

1 very frail scrawny little girl when I was young. I was
2 probably about 10 or 11, 12, somewhere around there, and so
3 just always fighting with -- you know, in the foster homes
4 or being assaulted, sexually assaulted. And nobody did
5 anything about it. We were just second-class citizens in
6 the homes.

7 In another home, we were -- we had to work
8 on a farm. And the people there, like, had no children,
9 but, you know, they were into growing their own drugs and
10 stuff like that, marijuana. And it was, like, they thought
11 we didn't know what it was. And just, like, no, we're
12 Natives. We know what that stuff is. Even though we're
13 still young kids, we know what it is. And they tried to
14 tell us that it was just tobacco and all that. It's just,
15 like, yeah, right. But, you know, all these things that we
16 were subjected to in the foster homes, it -- even after all
17 these years of trying to work with -- in a youth care
18 service was just, like, so triggering. There was
19 so -- like, it ended up being something that I just
20 couldn't really handle, either.

21 It was hard to watch the kids go
22 through -- tell me all the stories of what they've been
23 through, and now they're just being dumped out into the
24 streets. And because they have no place to go, they're
25 required to, you know, find their own places. And they're

1 scared to live on their own, and, you know, all
2 these -- all these stories. And -- and I didn't even think
3 about that because we didn't go that far. We didn't age
4 out when we were in foster homes. We got to go home with
5 our -- with our mom. So I didn't really understand that
6 part of it.

7 The system is just, you know, so harsh.
8 There's never enough monitoring of the families, the foster
9 families that these children go through. And they just get
10 to treat the foster kids any way they want. It's, like,
11 they're just tokens. They're a pay cheque, you know.
12 There's not always a lot of love and care when it comes to
13 foster parents, and this is from my own personal
14 experience, and from the experiences that I've heard from
15 many youth within -- that I've worked with. And my
16 own -- and my own nieces and nephews who are still in care
17 today and from, you know, past generations, you know, the
18 60s scoop, where I've heard stories of people in foster
19 homes there, too. And it's really sad that nothing has
20 changed within the foster care system.

21 We're still being treated like secondhand
22 citizens. Where is the love for these children? Why are
23 your children in all these activities and sports, and we,
24 the Native children, our Native children, are still sitting
25 on the sidelines? It's, like, why -- why weren't they

1 offered the same? You know, there's no equal
2 opportunities. Why take the children if you're just going
3 to treat them as second -- secondhand citizens.

4 That's the way I felt my whole life is that
5 I was never good enough for anybody, that I always had to
6 be proving myself to the systems, to the school. There's
7 so much racism in school and throughout -- you know, when I
8 raised my children and I see my nieces and nephews.
9 They're still struggling to get through the school system
10 because of racism. They don't get the same opportunities
11 as the other students in the school. I know that pain of
12 what they're going through and how they're feeling. You
13 don't get to be on the basketball team. Or if you do get
14 on it, they find a reason to kick you off the team, because
15 you're -- you're not good enough because your skin is
16 brown.

17 You get taunted and teased because we don't
18 have the clothes as them and all the fancy toys that they
19 have. And it's still like that. And we wonder why our
20 families are always trying to buy things for our children
21 that they don't need. It's just to keep up with the
22 Joneses so they don't get teased or they don't -- you know,
23 aren't left out in the crowd. Meanwhile, the family can't
24 even afford to buy stuff like that.

25 And I raised my children. I was the only

1 one working most of the time in my family. But every penny
2 that I had went to my children, to their extracurricular
3 activities, to hockey, to dance, to baseball, to bowling.
4 I want my children to have the experiences that I didn't
5 have. And for that to happen, I had to ensure that I gave
6 up my whole pay cheque to do that, because that was the
7 norm, for our kids to fit into the system. It's just still
8 not fair to this day how we are treated, how our children
9 are being treated today.

10 So that's why I do a lot of work. That's
11 why I still do the work today. In 2016, I became the
12 Highway of Tears Coordinator, and I did a cleansing the
13 highway walk from Prince George to -- or from Prince Rupert
14 to Prince George. This was the ten-year anniversary for
15 the Highway of Tears symposium in 2006. I had the
16 opportunity to feel the pain and the pride of many of the
17 families as we walked on the Highway of Tears. I did
18 workshops in each of the communities, and some of the
19 families organized the venues with me. They got national
20 and local attention, which also brought in some tips
21 regarding some of the cases along Highway 16.

22 It was really hard to -- to do this
23 cleansing the highway walk. We would walk 10 to 20
24 kilometres a day, and there was four of us, four women,
25 walking. And sometimes the families would join us. There

1 was no initiative to -- at the beginning of this walk,
2 nobody really knew about it. I sent the fliers out. I
3 sent everything out to bring attention to it. It's, like,
4 this is the 10-year anniversary. Why isn't anybody doing
5 anything about it, you know? So I had to go ahead and just
6 do it on my own. Near the end, it started to build, and
7 more people started to know about it and wanted to be a
8 part of it, and there was more media attention about it.

9 But it's something that was really -- it
10 wouldn't have happened, you know. Nobody -- nobody has
11 that -- those intentions to try to bring awareness to -- to
12 the Highway of Tears or to the families. And some of the
13 families still are not ready, you know, to stand up for
14 their loved ones and talk about them.

15 When I -- when I talk about Ramona and then
16 I talk about my family, to me, after 25 years, it's normal.
17 And I know for families, I still know -- understand how
18 they feel, to take that first step of talking in front of
19 a -- of a group of people and how scary it is and how much
20 courage you need to do it. You don't sleep the night
21 before. You don't eat the night before. You cry. For me,
22 I cry as much as I can so I can let it all out so I don't
23 cry when I'm doing the presentation, so I can get that
24 message across to the people that need to hear what I have
25 to say.

1 Every day, I have pains in my body, on my
2 neck, mostly, and headaches because it becomes so
3 overwhelming with -- with the pain of trying to do this
4 work, trying to make sure the families are getting the help
5 they need, trying to make sure my family is getting the
6 help they need.

7 The 22nd annual Ramona Lisa Wilson Memorial
8 Walk was held for the first time on Main Street in
9 Smithers, on the outside of the music festival. It made me
10 wonder a lot about did this happen because a Non-native
11 woman organized it? Because after all these years, at that
12 time it was 23 years, we'd never been able to have Ramona's
13 memorial on Main Street of Smithers. It took that long for
14 it to actually happen. Or was it just a coincidence where
15 the right people or are the right people in a different
16 state of acceptance for Smithers?

17 We even had some people -- some of the
18 storekeepers refuse to put up my sister's poster for the
19 walk and music festival. So that, you know, left me to
20 think about, you know, racism is still alive in -- in that
21 little town. It hasn't gone away. And, you know, if that
22 one store didn't want the poster up, they also owned other
23 stores in the town. So it was just, like -- so that meant
24 there were more stores that weren't going to have her
25 poster up. So there's a lot of work to be done regarding

1 racism within our communities and how they look at First
2 Nations women and First Nations people in general. Look at
3 our children that have to deal with racism on a daily
4 basis.

5 The 22nd annual Ramona Lisa Wilson Memorial
6 Walk will forever have a special memory, because it's -- it
7 was a time when my brother, Louis, got up on stage and got
8 to sing. My sister -- and he did a song for my sister, and
9 he got to sing on stage, along with my brother -- my other
10 brother, [Brother 1], and my uncle, Frankie. It was a very
11 special time. It was a celebration of Ramona's life. And
12 we were just starting to -- starting to deal with her
13 grief, or so we thought.

14 My brother Louis was in a car accident on
15 September 2nd, and he had passed away. This was so sudden,
16 just as Ramona's death. My mother called me on the phone.
17 And thank God I was with my daughter, because I answered
18 her call, and she could barely talk through her crying.
19 She said that my brother was in an accident and didn't make
20 it. I asked her, "Are you sure?" She said, "They're
21 waiting for the coroner." I was really grateful for some
22 of our family -- for our friends and family that came to
23 comfort me that lived in the Prince George area. Otherwise
24 I would have been alone.

25 But when I went back home, it was major

1 chaos. My family, once again, was falling apart. We had
2 to wait almost two weeks before we could bury our brother,
3 due to the -- the delay in process of the coroner.

4 My brother, Louis, the one in the cowboy
5 hat, he always wore a cowboy hat, was very heartbroken
6 about Ramona, about her -- about her murder. Because as
7 a -- as a man, as a big brother, he felt that he should
8 have protected her, and that he should have been there for
9 her. And he just really -- like, the rest of us just use
10 alcohol to numb the pain, but for him, it was on a daily
11 basis, and it was self-destruction where it brought him to
12 his death. And I always talked about my family, about it's
13 so hard to watch them self-destruct, that even though I
14 knew it was going to happen, I just was not prepared to
15 deal with it. I couldn't stop their pain, and I couldn't
16 stop them from drinking. He had to die with the pain of
17 the loss of our sister.

18 I've since written a letter to the coroner
19 to say when they take almost two weeks to process a report,
20 that also causes a delay in the process of our traditional
21 protocol of burying our loved ones. It causes a delay in
22 our grieving process, and undue financial stress, as I had
23 to take two weeks off work to deal with arrangements,
24 because my family was unable to at that time as they were
25 going through so much grief, they couldn't handle it. If

1 there was a recommendation for the coroner, it would be
2 that they need to add more staff to their ministry to avoid
3 the long delay in processing a coroner's report.

4 Not too long after that, after my brother's
5 death, I was -- dove into the pre-public inquiry. I was
6 one of the support workers for this gathering, and I was
7 also one of the people that assisted in organizing the
8 gathering. So the main purpose was to receive feedback
9 from families on how to proceed with the national public
10 inquiry. This was a very terrible experience for me, as I
11 sat through four sessions of families that were telling
12 their stories and not so much about what they wanted out of
13 the Inquiry. They had to tell their stories before they
14 could really understand what they wanted and needed.

15 We were done around 11:30 PM and required to
16 be up at regular work hours, as everything was starting
17 early the next day. As families arrived, it was chaos.
18 People were stranded at the airport. People were standing
19 in the lobbies of several of the hotels in which they were
20 booked in. They were asking for directions and asking for
21 people whom I didn't know, so I couldn't help them. Once
22 again, I was feeling helpless, not knowing what to do to
23 assist. So I went to the hotel where the main registration
24 was located and told them that there were people stranded
25 at the airport, and they eventually got -- went there, got

1 some people to go there and pick them up.

2 All I could think of was why did they just
3 not contract Carrier Sekani or another local group to
4 organize the gathering? They know the majority of the
5 families, the protocols that are required, and the
6 territory. They know the accommodations and travel.
7 They've been dealing with families and bringing them to the
8 hub of Prince George for so many years. Instead, people
9 from a distant city were trying to organize a gathering
10 from afar. It was so frustrating to see it all unfold. I
11 was so happy when it was over, as I was extremely burnt
12 out.

13 And the same thing with the National Public
14 Inquiry in Smithers. At that same time, my uncle, Charles,
15 my cousin Noah, and my cousin Miranda, all had passed away
16 within the same week. And I just -- everything was getting
17 so heavy. We could just -- year after year, I -- it
18 just -- this is, like, 24 years, and I just -- I'm almost
19 to the point where it's I can't do this. It's, like, am
20 I -- am I in the right job? Am I really going to be able
21 to help people? Because I'm getting to the point where
22 it's -- I can't handle -- handle anything on a daily basis
23 since my brother Louis passed away.

24 And I question -- question myself every day
25 if I'm able to do this job of helping families. Then just

1 this year in 2018, my brother Tim passed away on July 31st.
2 I'm having a really difficult time dealing with the death
3 of a second brother and a third sibling. I feel like I
4 can't do my job. It is so hard to focus. Every phone call
5 I make to families triggers sadness, and I cry after the
6 call, or I'll hold it in for a long time, and let it go at
7 a later time. I have received no counselling, no
8 self-care, only self-destruction that I do not wish to
9 disclose because it's too embarrassing for me. I feel I'll
10 never get help because of who I am. The person that's
11 supposed to be strong. I'm the one who has to hold
12 everything up. My family, the groups are participating in
13 the vision of hope and strength. I feel guilty and
14 hypocritical because I'm not strong today. I'm struggling
15 to live each day, to see the brightness in the day. Nobody
16 will ever understand what I need because I don't even know
17 what I need.

18 My sister's death has taken everything from
19 me. I have lost many jobs. I've lost my home. I almost
20 lost my children's respect, but they gave it back because I
21 didn't want to lose them. Now I've lost my brothers. I
22 can't lose any more. But I feel like I'm losing myself.
23 They're still nothing that is there to help. And I've
24 tried. And today just feels like it's getting harder, and
25 it's getting worse.

1 I'm supposed to be able to give
2 people -- families hope. How can I give them hope when
3 my -- when I don't believe there is any in my sister's
4 case? It's been 25 years, and it's unsolved. And I know
5 many other cases, many other families, who are feeling the
6 same way. None of our cases in northern B.C. have been
7 solved. I just don't know if I can continue doing the work
8 that needs to be done, even as much as I want to. My mind
9 and my body is no longer able, and that's what's hurting
10 me. That's what really hurts so bad is, like, I can't give
11 anymore.

12 I just hope one day my -- not one day.
13 Today. I just hope today that there's answers, that my
14 sister's murderer will be found. I -- that way, I can give
15 others hope that their cases will be solved. Otherwise I
16 can't -- I can't do it anymore.

17 The last part of my story is such a recent
18 murder was my cousin Jessica Patrick, who was missing and
19 found murdered -- found murdered a week later. She went
20 missing on the same day as -- that my brother passed away.
21 I recognize that there's still work that is to be done in
22 regards to people going missing or are murdered. Why is
23 killer not caught yet? Will this be another repeat of the
24 other cases on Highway 16? So many unsolved cases,
25 including my sister's. Like I said, 25 years, and no

1 resolution to her case. How am I as an advocate able to
2 give the families hope when my sister and many other loved
3 one's cases are not solved? And how am I supposed to stand
4 up for the RCMP and the government that I work for when
5 they can't find answers in my sister's case and the many
6 cases across the country?

7 Although I've lost hope in my sister's case,
8 I -- I will continue trying to do what I can. But I know
9 I'm very weak, and I know that I don't have a lot of -- I
10 don't have a lot left to give. So I just want to thank
11 everyone that was here today and thank everyone for
12 listening. And I appreciate the opportunity to tell my
13 story. And I'll just continue on.

14 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Is there anything
15 further that you would like the Commissioners to hear after
16 hearing what you just shared with us? Any final things
17 that you want the Commissioners to pass forward through
18 this Inquiry?

19 **MS. BRENDA WILSON:** I want to be able to
20 find solutions to the systemic issues that are ongoing
21 throughout our -- throughout our communities, especially in
22 northern B.C. where we are left out of the loop, where we
23 don't always have -- we're not always included in many of
24 the decisions that are made regarding British Columbia.
25 And we really need to look at educating our communities

1 regarding racism and learning about the cultures within
2 each community, on the territories, so that we understand
3 and really bringing forth our cultures, so that our -- our
4 young ones know where they belong and where they come from,
5 so that they don't feel alone, that they always have
6 somebody to turn to, because they know who their family is.
7 Many of us are lost, living in different towns. We don't
8 live close to our families. And we don't know who to reach
9 out to. And there are times when I've had to try to call
10 the help lines, and you can't even get through to them. So
11 those need to be better equipped in each of our -- in each
12 of our communities.

13 And with this -- with this report, we really
14 need to include the communities, because each
15 community -- like, every person has individual needs. And
16 one program, one project, doesn't fit that -- that
17 community as they have recognized with our transit system,
18 they've had to re-adjust a few times already to make it
19 work. And that's what they need to do with the safety
20 plans that need to be implemented in the -- in each of the
21 communities.

22 I really -- in our First Nations
23 communities, really encouraging the chief and councils
24 to -- to look at these -- to implement the safety plan for
25 their communities, so that they know what to do when

1 somebody goes -- is murdered or is missing. And that has
2 to include abductions, you know, because there are many
3 people that have been -- attempted abductions happening in
4 our communities, and they need to be addressed. There's
5 nothing in place for that, either, and that needs to
6 happen, and awareness for -- for our youth, for our
7 children.

8 And last but not least is programs that
9 will -- that will assist grief, the families that are going
10 through grief, wellness camps for families of missing and
11 murdered so they are focussed only on that. They're not
12 going to a treatment centre to try to deal with their
13 missing and murdered loved one. They are dealing with the
14 grief and not other issues such as alcohol or drugs, even
15 though they may be a part of it, but they still need to be
16 able to just focus on -- on the grief and loss of their
17 loved ones that have gone missing or that have been
18 murdered.

19 And it has to be easily accessible. I see
20 ones around that are available, but they're just
21 outrageously expensive that many of us can't afford to go
22 to. So that would be my plea to the Commissioners, to
23 ensure that these wellness camps are -- are available for
24 the families.

25 **MS. BONNIE GEORGE:** Thank you, Brenda.

1 Thank you. It's 3:42 right now, and I'm turning the
2 equipment off. And we are done Brenda Wilson's truth for
3 her sister, Ramona.

4 --- Upon adjourning at 12:42 p.m.

5

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Jessica Caudron, 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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessica Caudron". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Jessica Caudron

January 11, 2019