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Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC)): Welcome, everyone. Thank you so much for being here, committee members and, most of all, families and special guests. We are honoured and pleased to have you here, and I think I speak on behalf of the committee.

To begin, I'd like to say that we, as a committee that was struck unanimously by the House of Commons, are in a unique position to look at this issue of violence against aboriginal women, and in particular the missing and murdered women, that tragic situation that we are here to discuss today.

This meeting is also unique so I'd just like to tell you that, by way of a vote, this committee decided to do things a little bit differently. Instead of having our usual very formal meeting with just a couple of witnesses, we wanted to do it this way and allow for a more informal conversation with you, whose lives have been affected so drastically and tragically by these events. We want to hear from you today.

I also want to open the meeting by saying that this will be very informal. We won't have the question and answer period we usually have, because we want to hear from you.

I'd like to start the meeting off with a prayer from our elder Robert Pictou from Cape Breton, and then we'll hear a few remarks from a couple of committee members who have messages from families who couldn't be here. Then I'm going to open up the floor and allow you to speak. I know that it will all work out. Please do be respectful of the fact that we have a number of people in the room who would like to talk as well. We have two hours and hopefully that will give everyone enough time to tell their stories. Finally, we're here to listen, and we want to hear from you. We are absolutely honoured and privileged that you would come here. We know that many of you have come from very far away and we're very pleased to have you here.

If there are no questions about that, we will begin with you, Robert.

Mr. Robert Pictou (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

We ask the Creator to forgive us, to have pity on us, and to help us, especially the ladies here today who have lost their daughters, lost their mothers, lost their sisters, and lost the fair sex as all we men say. The women are the fair sex. I ask the Creator to help us with what's going on here today.

[*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Niki would like to bring a message from a family who wanted to be here today but couldn't make it.

Go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you, Madame Chair.

I'd like to share a message about the Nepinak family. Gail Nepinak and Joyce Nepinak had been invited to this committee and, unfortunately, were denied their ability to get here.

This committee was struck to recognize a national tragedy—the missing and murdered indigenous women. We all know that one of the recurring themes is the way in which missing and murdered women haven't been counted, that statistics haven't reflected them, that reports haven't reflected them, where their voices have been ignored or silenced.

I have to say that as a member of Parliament, I was absolutely ashamed that systemic racism and discrimination once again reared its ugly head; in this case, to prevent a family from being heard.

Gail Nepinak is the sister of Tanya Nepinak, who is one of the women presumed to have been killed by a serial killer in Winnipeg about a year and a half ago. Gail is a spokesperson of great strength that I, and many people and the women here from Manitoba, know. She was personally invited to attend this committee, and, unfortunately, when she and her mom came to the airport with posters of her sister, ready to go to tell the story, they were told by Air Canada that they didn't have all the ID needed. They were told that, despite having copies of the formal House of Commons invitation, despite having e-tickets that came up in the computer system, and despite having a member of Parliament to vouch for them. It's not that they didn't have ID; they were told that they didn't have all the right ID.

What I would say to this committee and to people tuning in is, the way families and people are being re-victimized has to stop. It's as though Canada sees even the families as invisible people. The Nepinaks assured me that they will not stop speaking. I'm frankly horrified and ashamed that they weren't given the opportunity to speak at the national level at this committee. I hope this committee will find a way to bring them here, to speak to them. I hope this committee will come up with recommendations that will seek to break down the barriers that keep the Nepinaks in pain, and keep so many families across this country on the sidelines, and that try to silence them.

They will not be silenced. And with our help, their voices must be heard.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thanks, Niki.

Jean, you have a letter you'd like to refer to.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I'm not going to read the whole letter because I want to make sure that the family members who are here.... I will circulate the letter to the clerk for all committee members. It's from Gladys Radek. She wanted to say that her involvement with missing and murdered women began when her niece, Tamara Lynn Chipman, disappeared from the northernmost tip of the Highway of Tears, Prince Rupert, B.C., on September 21, 2005.

In her closing, she said that "at this time I would like to offer my prayers and condolences to all the families who have lost loved ones through this system. A special thank-you to my brother Tom Chipman for allowing me to carry the torch for Tamara and all the others who have gone missing and been murdered along the Highway of Tears and across the nation. Although Tamara remains missing today, the search will never stop, and Tamara will never be forgotten."

I will circulate that to the committee members.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll ask for a person to be brave enough to get us started, and then I'll let you take it from there.

Oh good, we've got a feather. Is that from you, Carolyn?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): No, Sharon is going to share her feather with the committee.

The Chair: Thank you for bringing that, Sharon. Please go ahead.

Ms. Sharon Johnson (As an Individual): *Bonjour.*

[Witness speaks in Ojibwa]

Hello, everyone. My name is Sharon Johnson. I come from Thunder Bay, Ontario. I'm from the Seine River First Nation. I'm Ojibwa from the Treaty 3 area.

I was invited to attend by NWAC this past weekend. It was my first time attending their dialogue for families. I found it very helpful to attend the event, although I didn't really know what to expect.

In doing this, I'm speaking on behalf of my family for the loss of my younger sister, Sandra Johnson. It doesn't.... It gets somewhat easier, I guess. It gets somewhat easier, and I think that through just continuing to sit with families at gatherings like this, I'm finding that it's what I can do to make sure my little sister is not forgotten. This flag I have here is from a memorial walk that I started with an elder in Thunder Bay. We started the memorial walk in 2005. My sister was murdered on February 13, 1992, so it's been 21 years now, pretty close to 22 years in February.

Since starting the memorial walk, I've had a lot.... It's been growing. In a way, it's good to see the families coming forward with their stories, but at the same time, it's sad, because we shouldn't have

to be doing this. We shouldn't have to be walking to make sure that people don't forget that a sister, a mother, a daughter, or a granddaughter was murdered or has gone missing.

For me to sit here today for my little sister Sandra, I just hope that it brings healing to the people, to other people like me and to other families like mine, and that some day we'll know, and we'll put closure to our grief.

• (1115)

We don't know if that's ever going to happen, but in the meantime waking up every day to remember that we don't know the answers, it's hard to get up and walk every day and do what I need to do. So many times throughout the years since I started doing this memorial walk, every time we finish a walk, I tell myself, "That's it. I'm not doing another one," because the work is too hard, organizing the walk and just everything else I'm invited to do. I always say, "That's it. I'm not doing another one. It's too hard," and then I get a phone call or an e-mail saying, "Sharon, do you want to come and help out? Do you want to come and join us?" I just say, "Yes, sure, I'll come. I'll come and do it," and I'm doing it again.

I think that's because it's in here, it's in my heart. I carry my little sister in my heart, and I know that every time I agree to do something, she is right here beside me and she's telling me that it's okay.

I'm going to leave it at that now. I'm just going to share a little story here about this eagle feather, this white feather. This was given to me to do the work for our missing and murdered women. It's the same feather you see there on the flag for our memorial walk. I carry it with me everywhere I go and I hold it when I pray. This one here was given to me by my brother so I carry that, too. I'm just going to pass it along for other family members to use.

Thank you, *meegwetch.*

• (1120)

Ms. Bernadette Smith (As an Individual): Good morning, everyone.

My name is Bernadette Smith. I'm from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

My sister is Claudette Osborne. She's on this poster here. I was going to bring a picture, but I didn't know if they would let me in with the glass or not. This is my sister here on the end, and we actually know every single one of these families. We've connected in Manitoba in the same way that Sharon is talking about, doing the work supporting these families, because there's not enough support out there for these families, and it shouldn't have to always be on us to do that.

My sister went missing July 24, 2008. When my sister went missing, she was reported missing, but it was 10 days before her case was even looked at. My other sister, Tina, was told that she was probably out there somewhere; that's what the police told us, that they weren't going to do anything right now, that she'd turn up, she always did. My sister was exploited at a very young age. She used drugs to cope.

Claudette wasn't a person who wouldn't keep in contact with her family. She always phoned someone. She was really close with my sister Tina and stayed with her a lot of the time, but Tina hadn't heard from her.

A report was made, and 10 days later.... Only because we started putting pressure on the police did they start looking into her case. We found out a few days later that my sister Claudette was at a hotel on McPhillips and that she had been with a long-distance truck driver. At that point, my sister had just given birth to her youngest daughter, Patience, who was two weeks old when her mother went missing.

My sister was not well. She was hemorrhaging from giving birth. Her baby was apprehended at the hospital, even though she had gone into treatment for 10 months and had been working toward changing her life and making it better for her kids. But after spending eight months in treatment and giving birth to her child, our system didn't feel that was enough. They took her child.

My sister's partner moved to Emerson, Manitoba, just to get her away from the pressure of what goes on in the city and the drugs. They had a son together. She had been living in the home with her son as well. They had visits back and forth from the treatment centre my sister was in.

When they apprehended her daughter from the hospital, they gave her partner a choice: either Claudette would go home with him or Patience would go home with him. They talked about it. Matt wanted Claudette to come home because he knew that together they could work to get Patience back home with them, and that she needed to be home for their son, Iziah. So Claudette went home.

But the pressure of the guilt was too much for her. She left Emerson and went back to the city. She went back to the street and to drugs.

That night she called my sister Tina. She said that she was with this truck driver and that he was trying to push himself on her, and that she felt unsafe and wanted to be picked up.

●(1125)

But my sister had a pay-as-you-go phone and she didn't have minutes on it so she didn't get that message until a couple of days later when she put minutes on it. That's how I knew my sister was at this hotel. At this hotel they had video surveillance so when the police went to investigate my sister's case, and finally went and visited this hotel, it had been written over. The evidence was gone.

After that we had to continually...it was very one-sided. We were always calling to find out if there were any updates on Claudette's case. We weren't asking for information on the case because we know that they can't give that out. What we were asking for was some accountability to us, to say that they were working on it and that they were actively out there searching for her. Communication broke down and we had to get the chief of Claudette's first nation to come out and facilitate dialogue with the police and us.

It was ten months before.... My sister had a phone card, not a physical phone card but she knew the number of it. We had told the police that she'd had this number and that perhaps she used it when she had left the hotel and that would provide some answers. Because of our laws and the Freedom of Information Act and whatever else,

they weren't able to get a warrant to access those records. Ten months later they were...after diligent work and our family constantly putting pressure on. And there were numbers on there that were disconnected. My sister was addicted to drugs, she was on crack cocaine. There were numbers on there that were tied to alias names, so it would be "Jack Frost" for instance. By the time they accessed those records those phones had been thrown away, they were no longer in service. Again, valuable information had been lost because of policies that are in place.

My sister is now a part of a project called Project Devote in Winnipeg. This project came out of families feeling like there wasn't enough being done in our city. What happens in Winnipeg is there are four missing persons investigators and on any given day they have more than 80 cases that they are investigating. How do four officers investigate 80 cases and give each one of those cases the attention they deserve?

It's so frustrating because it's not that they are not doing their job; we know that there are officers out there who do care and who do the best they can, but there are limited resources.

Claudette has been gone now for five years. We don't know where she is and we don't know what happened to her. We don't have any answers.

●(1130)

It's just really hard not knowing day-to-day where she is. I think we lose ourselves in doing for others, because it's all we know. It's really hard for us, because we get so wrapped up in doing, doing, doing, and sometimes we don't take care of ourselves and we need somebody else to do it. We need more resources out there for our police, for our women who are in domestic relationships. We need more resources for our women to get off the streets. My sister waited a year to get into treatment. She tried continually to get into treatment. It took a whole year. Now you tell me.

I just want to say thank you for listening and inviting us here. I really hope that you take what we're saying, what we're sharing, and you put it into something, but not into a report. I'm tired of reports. I'm sorry. It's report after report that sits on a shelf somewhere. I want tangible action. I want something to come out of this that you're going to take and you're going to actually put into place so that we're not increasing these numbers.

I have an 11-year-old daughter, and she's five times more likely to walk out the door and be murdered or not come home. That's not fair. Somewhere, and I always go back to that reconciliation.... Our people have been pushed and pushed and pushed, and we're still being pushed. We're peaceful people.

Thanks for listening.

•(1135)

Ms. Brenda Osborne (As an Individual): My name is Brenda Osborne. I'm here on behalf of my daughter who has been missing for the last five years. Her name is Claudette Osborne. I have numbers on who was murdered. Too many, I guess I could say. I don't know whether any of you sitting with us together today have daughters who have been missing or murdered.

Helen Betty Osborne was murdered at the park or in the school. My uncle was shot by a woman who never went to jail. My cousin was murdered. The guy did five years. Felicia Osborne went missing going to school in Winnipeg trying to be a teacher to try to help young people because she loved kids. She went missing going home for lunch. She never made it home. Six months later we found her leg and her arm. That's all we found and buried.

My daughter's missing, and we don't have any answers. We don't have any leads or tips at all. I try to go out and do my own investigations. I go late at night. I ask questions about who she knew out there. The police stopped me from doing it because they told me I was going to be charged for prostituting the girls because I was feeding them something because some of those girls are on the street. They are hungry, so that's what I did. I made sandwiches and I brought juice for them just to have that gift. At the same time I was asking questions about my daughter, who she knew, and the police told me I was going to be charged for prostituting the girls out there. They chased me away. I couldn't do it anymore because I didn't want to get thrown in jail for that.

I'd rather do something else. We do vigils and have gatherings. We get together with other families and support each other because there is no support for our family.

Every year I do a walk from Norway House to Winnipeg. A couple of years ago I was here in this same room. Two years ago I walked from Norway House to Winnipeg, and from Winnipeg to Ottawa here. That time they told us what kind of help they could offer us. We're still waiting for that help. There is nothing.

There are families like the Nepinaks. They are suffering with their loss because they don't know whether her sister has been....She's one of the ladies we get together with once a week just to hang on to each other. The only thing we have in life.... For myself, I only have hope. That's all I have because I can't say my daughter was murdered. I don't know.

Today I'm honoured to be here because I wanted to state that we need to be heard, and we need help. We do these walks every year. It doesn't matter who it is. We do it for all missing and murdered. I guess that's my life. I dedicate that to them every day. It didn't matter how hot it was; it didn't matter if it was raining. We walked all day long, sixteen hours a day. Who's going to do that for us? Nobody.

•(1140)

We come here today for her. It seems like the murderers get away with murder. Roberta McIvor was murdered, and the girl only did two years.

This guy who's going to jail now supposedly killed two women, but see, what I didn't understand is that they never brought up that one woman was pregnant. This guy was given 20 years. He did two

years and he's going to get out in eight. Is that fair for us? We're the ones suffering every day, and he's going to get out.

The justice system has to change.

We live with this pain every day. We carry our hurt and suffering with other people, and nobody is there.... I get mad when somebody says, "How are you today?" How am I supposed to feel? I can't say, "I'm good."

The murderers are getting away with murder and they laugh about it. You kill somebody.... You drag somebody out from their car, you cut their throat first, you drag them out, and then you run them over, and you call that an accident? That's no accident. That's murder, and she was in jail for two years for that.

I don't wish that.... You go for trial for murder, you know...judges and the police making deals. What about the families, the ones who suffer? They're the ones suffering today. We're the ones suffering today. We carry that every day. We go to bed with it at night, and we get up with it in the morning.

Thank you very much for listening.

•(1145)

Ms. Brenda Bignell (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Ojibwa*]

Thank you for inviting me. I really appreciate being here, and I look forward to sharing my story with all of you. I had to write down my story because I'm way too emotional to be able to just speak from my heart. Life is hard, life has been hard.

The first thing I want to talk about is mothers. I want to talk about women as parents. As women, we give birth to men and women and children—boys, girls—you know, that's our role; that's what we do; it's our life. I want to talk about how my mother felt when her son went missing and was found murdered seven months later. That's really difficult to have to go through. He died on my birthday, 40 years ago.

It's like yesterday when someone goes missing. It's like yesterday when you watch your mom and dad suffer, and you see the pain on their faces. How does the family function? How does the family function when the parents are lost? How does that happen? You know, as a child you go deep inside yourself, and you look at your mom and dad, and you think, and you wonder: "How do you keep on going, Mom and Dad? How can you look after the rest of us when one is missing?"

I'm not here only to talk about women. I have men to talk about because as women, we give birth to men. My brother Clark was the first one murdered. The police have the nerve to tell me, 35 years later, after I discover—after I get a phone call from a man telling me, “We know who killed your brother.” What does the RCMP do? They phone and tell me, “Shut up. Don't talk to anybody about this.” I know who killed my brother, and people know who killed my brother. Will those two men ever be on trial? Not likely, not freaking likely, because who cares? Who cares about us brown people? Does anybody care? I'd like to know. Because that's a death, that's a murder. And those two men are still walking around today to torture other people.

Where is justice for our people? It just doesn't exist, does it?

That's just one man, and that's just two parents, my mom and my dad, but we all suffered, my brothers and sisters. We all suffered, suffered so much. My brothers can't even walk across the river because my brother was thrown into that river. That's how he died; he took a beating and they threw him over the bridge. Seven months' later, his body washed up, all swollen. There was my brother. But the people who knew he was missing knew where he was, right? The family knew where my brother was, but they never told anybody. Why would they want to? They committed a crime; they killed a human being. But it's shameful that the RCMP would tell me to keep quiet. That is the most sinful part of our existence as Canadian citizens—when the RCMP tell you, “Keep quiet. Don't talk about this anymore.”

Now, we all know that we the native people are the bread and butter of this land. I know that. We know that. We've been kind, we've been generous. I'd like to see some of that generosity come back to us.

My niece Daleen went missing. Just so you know what it takes to find one missing person; for four years, my sister put out a quarter of a million dollars.

• (1150)

If my sister was not the superintendent of schools, if her husband was not an educator, a teacher, both making lots of money.... Both saved all their money all of their lives thinking that when they get old, they're going to retire. Where did their retirement dollars go? To finding their daughter, who was dismembered, burnt. That's how we found my niece, how my sister found our niece.

But on that quarter of a million dollars that she spent, would the provincial or federal government ever invest a quarter of a million dollars per family? It took my sister four years, and it took the heart and the compassion of my white brothers and sisters across this land to help my sister.

I don't walk here alone; I don't live here alone. We live here together as brown and white people and all colours of people. We live together. We need to show each other the conscientious minds and hearts that we have by taking care of one another.

When my sister's daughter went missing that first night, we were there the very next day. I went from The Pas to Saskatoon. I had to hike there. That's a 350-mile trip, one way. I walked there. I drove there. I've been to Saskatoon many times to go and help my sister, but that night, the second night that she went missing, my sister said,

“My daughter is not the kind of person to go out and prostitute herself, get drunk, and be rowdy and disappear—not my daughter.” Her daughter was going to university.

Nobody believed my sister. The RCMP said, oh no, she's doing her own thing—the audacity.

If one of your children was missing, you would know your daughter or your son so well that you would know that they would come home or not come home. You'd know. All of us know our children and what they're capable of. My sister knew her daughter was not the kind of girl to go out all night long. Sure enough, four years later, the RCMP made a statement and they found out who killed my niece. They found out who killed her because he had told on himself. He was bragging about how much he despises native people.

That's pretty sad when racism is so thick in this country of ours that this person could actually brag about killing a native person—brag about it. The very nerve of that individual. That guy's in jail right now thanks to my sister and her quarter of a million dollars. The RCMP didn't help. They did in the long run, but it was the detectives who she paid from the get-go...and I was there, sitting with her and negotiating how much she was going to pay that detective. It costs a lot of money. It costs a lot of money to get into the hearts and minds of my white brothers and sisters so that you can think about us as a people.

She put out 89,000 shiny, glossy flyers in Saskatoon. That cost her \$8,000 for 89,000 flyers. Who put out those 89,000 flyers? Her two boys and her two grandchildren. Four people put out 89,000 flyers to help find her daughter.

I couldn't help. It hurts me that I couldn't help, but we all do the best we can when it comes to finding a missing family member. It takes a lot of energy out of us.

There's my niece Daleen.

There's my almost stepmother.

My dad is a World War II veteran, a sniper, and he and mom didn't get along so dad decided that he would have a second wife. The second wife had the most bitter, toughest life that she could ever have.

• (1155)

It's not that my dad induced that life on her. She had one like that before she went to my dad. One winter night she left Pukatawagan, and no one has seen her since. But nobody could care less either as to where she was. Nobody could care. Nobody cared. There wasn't even a search. Nobody walked. Nobody looked. Nobody wants to know, I guess. But that's Elizabeth Dorian. She's out there right now, lost. Nobody has the manpower, the time to go look for her. For all we know, she might have fallen off a bridge. She might be in the river right now. She might have been taken by animals. We don't know. And until there's an investigation on that woman, then we will never know. But I think her children, two of her children—my half-brother and my half-sister—deserve some closure as to what happened to their mother. Even if all we find are bones, it's something to give those two—my half-brother and my half-sister—a future, an optimism that life could be better, that it could get better.

There's Andrew Flett, another one of my cousins. He's male. Again, he was up in northern Manitoba. He's been missing for two years now. My cousin's daughter, Amanda Bartlett, is another family member. I've come to you with seven names today just in my family alone of people I've lost, who are missing. That's what I've come to this table with. It's the pain that our family is living through right now. And they don't have a quarter of a million dollars like my sister Pauline. They don't. They have to depend on the resources of the province, the federal government, women's organizations, our own communities, and anything that we can pull up to help our people find their missing loved ones.

But finding the money: that's the biggest job there for our people. When you go out to start finding someone to speak for you and to help you look, that is hard to find too, because commitment is tough. So I agree with Brenda, that you have to do things yourself. Who else is going to do it? Who else is going to walk those 16 or 20 hours for us? Nobody is going to do that except us. That's the way our system is today. And I guess it's right too. Because that is our family and it is right that we are the ones who come to their defence. It is right. It is good, and I like that. It sure made me proud to be able to do eight years. My sister created an awareness walk for four years. When her daughter was found she did a four-year memorial run after that. But she's tired.

To the lady who said, "I'm tired", we know how that feels—to be tired, to be exhausted. We know how it feels to not be able to sleep for 20 hours at a time. You're lucky to be able to sleep three or four hours in a night—that is a blessing to be able to sleep three or four hours in one night. That's amazing if you can go to sleep and wake up really energized because you had four hours of sleep. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Creator. I've been blessed.

I would really like to see an inquiry into the RCMP and the injustices that have happened to our people and the lack of caring and attention. I really need to see a national inquiry into the loss of our children, our sisters, our mothers, our brothers. We really need that. I would like to see that.

[Witness speaks in Ojibwa] That's all I have to say for now. Thank you.

Mr. Wesley Flett (As an Individual): Hi, my name is Wesley Flett, and I'm from The Pas, Manitoba. I have a sister who has been missing for four years already. It's really hard every day not knowing whether she's alive or gone. Brenda and I came from the same community to speak out on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

Millie was a good-hearted woman. She helped out anybody in the streets who needed help. Just to see her made you smile. She tried to help them to go back to school and get off the streets. One day I came back to the city for medical reasons. I went to see her in the morning at her apartment in the Winnipeg area and nobody answered the door for the whole day I was there. I must have gone back and forth about ten times that day. The next day I did the same thing. So we put in a missing-persons report to the RCMP in the Winnipeg area.

We did all we could, all our family, her siblings. She has four siblings. We put posters up for my sister in Winnipeg and all over. This is what we did just to get some answers for her and our family. We needed to get some answers from somebody.

My wife was phoning the officers in Winnipeg one time. One of the officers on the other line said they were not a babysitting service. She was crying out on the other end saying why couldn't anybody help us out. We didn't think about it for a while—we were just in shock. We started calling the RCMP again in Winnipeg asking could they please help us out, give us a little bit of information. They kept putting us on hold all the time. We got no answer there from anybody. So we just went out on the streets and started putting all these posters up, talking to other people.

We had a conference in The Pas. This one girl lost one of her sisters for five years. By word of mouth, just by talking to others all over Manitoba, we found that lady who was missing for five years. Now they're together again. I don't think you'd be able to split those people apart again. These are the kinds of stories we like to hear. It's so hard to speak. Most people don't have to walk the streets just to get a little information. They'll say they didn't see her. Or sometimes when you walk the streets, you might see another person who looks like her. You call out to them, but it's a different person. It's so hard to sound out "sister".

• (1200)

We're just living on a day-to-day basis right now. It's kind of hard. My sister was really a humble woman. We're not going to give up searching for my sister. We're still out there in the streets putting up posters, talking to other people. We're not going to give up. We have big posters for missing ladies here; we get that word out there too. There are beautiful ladies out there who are missing. They didn't get home. We're still putting information out there to try to get them home, to get the closure done. It's so hard, especially when a loved one is missing or even if your neighbour's friend is missing for just a couple of hours or even a whole day. You want to know where that person is all the time.

Every time my sister used to go out of town, she'd give us a call to tell us where she was going and when she'd be back. That one summer she gave us a call to say she was going there. I told her to take care of herself and to phone when she got home, and she did. Then one day, as I said, we went knocking on her door. The last couple of weeks we were there. My sons were there and my cousins were there knocking on her door. We thought she went to the store and back, but she didn't make it home at all. She's still out there. We don't know where she is.

We're not going to give up finding her, or put closure to the family and all of that. That's one thing I'm never going to do—never give up. We need help from everybody.

We've been talking to people. We did this walk from The Pas to Winnipeg for two straight years. The oldest elder was 78 years old. She walked with us from The Pas to Winnipeg. We had athletes, runners, and even a small child. She was young; she walked with us. Their mothers walked with us. Their brothers walked with us. Anybody who wanted to walk with us was welcome to walk with us. These are the kinds of people we need to keep up our hope, and all that.

Even the chief and council when we were heading to Ottawa here told us to keep up the good work. He wants you to do your best. Even the parliament in Winnipeg told us the same thing. Everybody back home is asking what we're going to do. You have to do this. You have to do it. You have to do another one.

It's a really hard job to do, to get everybody and to organize everything, what needs to be done. But I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to give up searching. I'm not going to give up for anybody, for dismissing our murdered people here—women, brothers. I'm still going to do the hard work ahead of me.

But I just got diagnosed with cancer in February last year. I'm still fighting even though I'm sick. I'm going to get healthy again. I'm never going to stop.

• (1205)

The Creator gave me strength to keep on going, and that's what I'm going to do.

I'd like to thank all of the committee members here.

From The Pas, Manitoba, I'm Wesley Flett. Thank you very much.

• (1210)

Mr. Robert Pictou: My name is Robert Pictou. I'm from Chapel Island First Nation. It's way down in Nova Scotia.

My daughter's picture is here. She's been missing for 20 years and eight months. She left behind seven children. Five of those seven children don't remember what their mother looks like.

She's missing up in Maine. The *Bangor Daily News* put out the news of what happened, and I saw a lot of contradictions in there. I don't have a lot of education, but then I have traditional ways, which to me are better. I know who did it, but I can't prove who did it. To prove who did it, you've got to have the body. The body is not there. The one who did it went around bragging, saying that she never will be found.

When we go on powwows, I go up to Caribou, Maine, and I see my granddaughters. I bring them information and some pictures of what their mom looked like. They sent me pictures the other day on the laptop, and one of them is the spitting image of her mom.

I believe—I'm not asking anybody else to believe, but I believe—it's my dead daughter being reincarnated, with all the physical aspects of her face, the way she was. My daughter had a mark on this tooth. When I looked at the picture of her daughter, which would be my granddaughter, I saw she had a mark on that tooth—just the opposite. Coincidence? Say what you may, but I see all of her actions, as she's growing up now, that my daughter had when she was younger.

Twenty years is a long time to suffer. You have hatred, but you ask the Creator every night, [*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*], Creator, take some of the hate away. You know, he took a lot of it away, but the anger is still there. Native people are very, very, very forgiving, but we don't forget. We don't forget. I know that my daughter is walking in the spirit world.

They say don't do this, don't do that, don't have hate, don't stir up anything. I have many beliefs. I was introduced to a friend who told

me, here, take this and read it and do it. She gave it to me and I looked at it. I said, yes, I have to go and see them. She was a psychic.

• (1215)

What I felt in my heart for 20 years, I kept there. I didn't want to share it with anybody.

I made arrangements to see the psychic. My son came down from Vancouver, and we went there. Sometimes you watch TV and they have this *Long Island Medium*, all dressed up, her hair all curled up, and they have a big fancy house. She's got great big cars. Her son has a motorcycle, and her daughter is finished college. I didn't know what to expect when I went up to see that lady.

She lived in a rundown apartment. I knocked on her door and she let me and Robert in. I looked around. There was a trunk in the corner and on that trunk was where she had her television set.

She said, "I don't have much, but it's mine. I know what you came for."

As she was talking she wasn't even looking at me or my son. She was just writing down. I don't even think she knew what she was writing down. She said the spirit of my daughter was guiding her hand.

Then she passed me the paper. I showed it to my son, and we paid her and thanked her. A lot of that hatred I had in my heart for 20 years, a whole lot of it went, but not all of it. She told me that all of the time I was there my daughter's spirit was circling her all the way around, back and forth, and kept on talking to her. As she was talking to her, she was telling her what to say. She in turn was telling us, me and my son.

You go there and you don't expect anything, and then something like this comes up. How did she know this? She's living in Truro; that's down in Nova Scotia. This psychic's in Truro and my daughter was murdered in Bangor, Maine, almost 600 miles away. She never knew her, still doesn't know her. The psychic didn't know her.

I carry the paper with me all the time, *The Bangor Daily News*. When the state police was called to a disturbance in a bar and grill in downtown Bangor, Judy's bar and grill, they found my daughter laying there bleeding. She had a cut over her eye, a cut in her lip, and a big bruise on top of her head. They asked her what happened.

She said, "My husband and my brother-in-law beat me up." They asked, "What for?" She said, "They were drunk."

About that time the men showed up. Her husband was put into the police car in the back seat and he tried to kick out the back window. He was taken to the Bangor lock-up. My daughter was taken to the hospital in Bangor, Maine. My daughter was one who wouldn't leave her children for more than two or three hours at a time. She wouldn't leave them overnight alone. While she was in the hospital for observation, it was not known to anybody that the beating had given her a bad concussion. This is what the psychic told me.

•(1220)

She wasn't one to stay in that hospital. She got out of the hospital and started hitchhiking home. That's about an hour-and-a-half drive in a car. At the same time, her husband was let out of jail. For me, I believe that her husband and her brother-in-law had the car, picked her up, put another beating on her—this is what I was told—and with that one concussion that she already had, they killed her. They didn't know. They didn't mean to kill her. There were three men involved: her brother-in-law, her husband, and another person.

They hid her in the building until nightfall. At nightfall, in the dark of the moon, they turned around and put her on a little boat. They took her way out in the ocean. It was at one of those times when the high tides come in. They stripped her and wrapped her up in a bedsheet that had a floral design.

When they were going out to the ocean or out to the bay, one of them was awful sick, sick all the time, just throwing up. When they got out there, they threw her in, just like a bag of potatoes. They came back and burned every stitch of her clothes. Years later, they bragged about it, saying, "They're not going to find her, they're not going to find her."

But I went to the traditional teachings. I went to a man who understands a lot of these things. He told me to sit down on the bed, which was all eagle feathers. I was to sit down there, but he said, "Don't sit on the eagle feathers". I sat down on that bed, and he said, "What's on your mind right now, if you ever start to carry it out, you'll spend the rest of your time in prison". I just looked at him and said that my mind was all right, that there was nothing wrong with my mind. He said, "Yes, you can go outside and you can tell somebody that, but you can't tell me". He said, "I know what's on your mind. You should leave it alone. The Creator will look after it."

Well, I couldn't leave it alone, but I still didn't want to bother those two men, because in my teachings, if you turn around and harm those two people, it's going to come back on you, and it's going to come back on you twice as hard. I left them alone.

I found out later that the one who killed her was her brother-in-law. He suffered for a long while. He contracted AIDS and he died of AIDS. The other one, her husband, can't have a minute's peace because the spirit of my daughter is bothering him so bad. He gets drunk, and when he gets drunk and tries to sleep, he just keeps on hollering her name all the time. That's because she's bothering him all the time. That's what she told the psychic. She told the psychic that he'll never have a minute's peace. She said, "I'll haunt him till the day he dies".

I want to thank everybody here, especially the women who invited me and my friend up here from Nova Scotia, and I thank everybody for sharing their stories.

[*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

•(1225)

Ms. Patricia Isaac (As an Individual): My name is Patricia Isaac and I'm from Membertou first nation.

Virginia Sue Pictou was my cousin. The smile that you're seeing on her in this picture, she gave me that same smile when I first met her. That was in Maine in the 1980s. My *giju'*, my mom, she was

just about to pick blueberries. Virginia came up to me with the same smile, and she said, "I'm Virginia, and I'm your cousin. My mom is your aunt." We chatted a bit. I was surprised, I was overwhelmed. There were so many people in the field and she spotted me. I said, "Wow, I have a cousin." And I'll never forget her smile. I would never forget her smile.

In 2009 I had a Sisters in Spirit vigil for Virginia and there was a good turnout. I turned 48 at the time, and had 40-odd people there—including men and children. It turned out really good.

Then I got invited to NWAC up here in Ottawa and I did a digital story on Virginia.

I spoke to NWAC this weekend. Me and Robert were there, and we asked them if there was any way they could write a letter to the Maine state police or the FBI, to get them to intervene. I'm hoping the district attorney or someone there will get involved in Virginia's case. The case is still open, and they could do another investigation. I hope they can do something. They have to access to her case and everything.

I can't travel from Cape Breton all the way to Maine. I can't do that. I'm in Canada and they're in the United States. There are barriers. I don't know much about laws in the United States. I really don't know. I'm stuck. I'm hoping the letters will go through and we'll get answers. Me and Robert will get answers and the family will get answers. I'll be the voice for Virginia. I'll keep searching for her, asking questions.

I would like to thank the families of NWAC as well as the committee. Thank you for inviting me, and I hope you'll help this story to continue.

Thank you.

Ms. Susan Martin (As an Individual): Good morning.

I would like to acknowledge that we are sitting on unceded Algonquin territory, which is our land.

I would like to thank the committee. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family. This is my family that stands behind me and picks me up when we hit rock bottom, because it is a struggle every day.

A lot of the MPs know who I am. My name is Susan Martin. My daughter Terrie Ann Dauphinais was murdered on April 29, 2002, in Calgary, Alberta, leaving three small children behind.

Before Terrie was murdered, she called the Calgary police department on March 8, 2002, to lay charges for domestic violence against my son-in-law. No one was charged, no one was removed from the home. My daughter told her friend out in Alberta, Theresa Ross, who had my grand-babies for six months after my child was murdered, that she was going to pay for it. Ken told her that she was going to pay for it.

My child was brutally murdered 52 days later. She was naked downstairs in the front door like a display of a piece of garbage, with her three children locked up in the house for 12 to 14 hours. The baby was 10 months old. Another two hours and my grandson would have died.

Gideon and Gabriel were upstairs locked in the bedroom. When the police apprehended the babies, Gabrielle told them that their dad locked them in their room. My two oldest grandchildren were full of pee and poo and were screaming to let them out, let them out. The baby was crying, [*Inaudible—Editor*] away from his mom's dead body.

I've been fighting this fight for 11 years. You guys have known I brought my child up to Parliament Hill, her remains. I've been doing this for eight years. I've asked for change. I've asked for help. Bernadette, Brenda, and I, and my granddaughter Kaden, went to the memorial on Friday night for the murdered women of Montreal. What do I see? A new mom telling her story of how her child was brutally murdered in domestic violence. Her head was barely there, the guy cut her, and she was barely hanging on with her daughter standing there.

Lots of times I want to throw in the towel and say I can't do this any more, Creator, I don't want to do this any more. Like Robert said, we have anger. We can't show it to the public, we have to address it in a proper way. When I see another mother, another child, another brother, another son, gone missing and murdered here in Canada, nobody seems to care about us brown people. Nobody seems to care. We have to do it on our own.

I do vigils here in Ottawa in my child's name. It comes out of my husband's and my pocket. It doesn't come from begging other family members to help me. Or I sell my jerky. Jean knows that, Carolyn knows that. People know that I do it on my own. We have to do it on our own because we've been begging for help.

I have to give, and I will say it, I said it on October 4, Stephen Harper a little bit of credit for actually assisting the families so that families don't lose everything, but the families are still struggling. We still need more help to have a roof over our head, to have food in our stomach, to pay our bills, because it is a process every single day getting out of bed and dealing with the world. It's a very hard issue.

We also need to train our police officers to deal with family members and not say, well, your daughter was a prostitute. I don't care what that person.... No one has a right to take another human being's life and only get five years for that human being's life. A person who's trying to feed their family and writes a rubber cheque gets more time than a child molester, a murderer, or a rapist. What is wrong with this country? What is wrong with this country?

Look at how many...if you filled this room up, there are over 6,000 on the database, 6,000 men, women, and children on that database, and nothing's being done. A life should be worth a life here in Canada. These perpetrators don't change.

Where are my grand-babies? I got to see my grand-babies twice. They're in Saskatoon with the killer. I'm still waiting for justice. My husband's still waiting for justice. The police in Calgary told us that if my husband went there to camp on the doorstep and address the situation they would apprehend him and put him in jail. That's bullshit. Sorry for the language, people. That's bullshit.

• (1230)

That's my child. Not only that, Terrie's my second baby. This family knows this. Yesterday it was 34 years since I put Terrie's sister in the ground out in Calgary—34 years ago. Sherry died due to

health problems. Terrie didn't die due to health problems. Terrie was murdered. Terrie's life was taken away, and these perpetrators need to answer for it. Not five years, not two years, not three years—they don't change people. They don't change, so quit listening to them. Quit listening to them because now it's the children who are left behind who are being targeted.

My grand-babies, Brenda's grand-babies, Bernadette's daughter, Amy and Glen's grand-babies, Lorna's daughter, Connie's family.... Our children are being targeted. Pauline and Herb Muskego's grandchildren are going to be targets. It has to stop. We have to stop it. So I'm asking you. I've been here for a long, long time doing this. I'm asking you, please back us up. Let's make a loud ruckus and change this in Canada.

Our women shouldn't be homeless. There should be no one homeless in Canada. Everybody should have a roof over their heads, food in their tummy, and clothes on their back, but it seems to me—and it's not directed at all of you guys—if you're corrupt, you get rewarded. When you misplace money, and you steal, and you lie to Canadian citizens as a mayor or a politician, yay, let's give you a million.

Well, you know what? I don't care about that. I want justice for our loved ones. I want this to stop, and I want this committee to stand behind the families, the people who are walking and bringing awareness. I want you guys to say, "Enough is enough", because guess what, people? You work for us. You work for Canadian people.

I'm asking, as a Canadian Cree Sioux woman, help us. Help us change it. Help us stop it so that I won't see a new family member here, so I don't have to come back here and address this, so I don't have to stand on Parliament Hill for eight hours telling my child's story. If it saves a woman's life, which I've done, yay. Thank you, Terrie. Thank you, my baby.

How do women and men go missing off the face of the earth without a trace? I did a search when Laura Spence and Nicole—I'm trying to remember the last name—went missing up in Maniwaki. I worked 16 hours. I got a call from a friend telling me what was happening because she knew it would fuel a fire underneath my butt. Guess what? I stopped work, and I put my food away because I came out. I walked until two o'clock in the morning putting up posters. The word "no" would not come in my vocabulary. People couldn't believe me, how fast I walked and how fast I moved.

I'm 53 years old. People were younger than me, and I was beating them. I had only two people say no to me, and I said "Shame on you. What if that was your mom, your auntie, your daughter, or your sister?" "Oh, we can't do that ma'am. Put it out on the post." "No. I want it here because the people see it." People don't look at posts. As soon as there's a woman gone missing we should also have an amber alert. I don't care how old you are, it's like Pauline's sister said. We know our children. There should be an amber alert.

Facebook, media.... It's the families who find our loved ones. It's our families who connect and say, "Okay, we got this and this on missing...." Am I right, families? It's the families who know when one of us is down. We might not know which one it is, but all of a sudden you'll see a text or something on Facebook if you don't have a cell phone or a phone. Are you okay? Each one of us will answer yes, we're okay, but really we're not okay because it is a struggle.

If you look at me....I didn't bring a picture of my child. Jean and Carolyn know what my child looks like. My daughter looks like me. I am a survivor of domestic violence as a child and in my first marriage, and now I question myself. If I had let my first husband take my life like he tried to, would my baby be alive? Those are what-ifs. That's a mother's what-if. What if I had done it differently? What if I had let my first husband kill me? What if I had let my childhood kill me? I came from a very abusive family at a very young age. If I had let my parents kill me....

●(1235)

That always preys on my mind and in my heart, always.

So I don't want to see this anymore. I don't want to be here anymore, but I will as long as there's another person who's gone missing. You will always see my face and I'll always be positive, and I'll always make you feel what we feel on a daily basis. Because trust me, every night I go to bed and I ask the Creator to give me the strength, the eyes to see, the heart to feel, the ears to hear, and the voice to speak the truth—because people don't like the truth. The truth hurts.

Meegwetch.

Thank you.

●(1240)

Ms. Amy Miller (As an Individual): First of all I have to thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Amy Miller and I'm from Kitchener-Waterloo.

My story starts before Denise was murdered. Six months before Denise was murdered, I barely got my younger daughter out of the exact same situation. He had taken a baseball bat to her face. She had to have full facial reconstruction, and she has brain damage. He got three months in jail—that was all, three months. But we did get her life.

Six months later, in a two-year common-law relationship my daughter Denise was bruised and battered and beaten to the point where she had been taken by ambulance to the hospital more than once. The police would go there, they would pick her up, take her and bring her to my house or to her children's house, battered and bloody, traumatizing the five-year-old, or they would take her to a friend's house, because they thought "Oh, they just need a night apart", where this was a two-year, non-stop violence, horrific violence.

Once they took him out. He was put in prison for three months, and he was given six months' probation. In that probation order it stated, "No alcohol, anger management course, stay away from Denise, stay away from the apartment". I found out after the fact that he left the courthouse, he stopped and picked up two 40-ouncers, went back to the apartment, and was let in.

At that time we had a detective—that we didn't know we had for nine and a half months. There was no communication between us and the police. Finally, after two months, I got a family meeting, and he said write down whatever questions you want and I'll answer them, as long as they don't impede the investigation. After the third question, I said, "Why was his probation not revoked when they were called back when she was beaten again?" He was very arrogant. He sat with his hands behind his back and he said, "Well, I honestly haven't read the file."

What detective is given a file and doesn't read it? I don't understand that. These guys are supposed to be working now on her murder case, and they were just letting it slide. They weren't communicating with us. We would go for over a year without communication. There was one night an officer called, and Glen and I had agreed that we would not allow Denise to come back into our home again because all we were doing was putting a band-aid on it, because she would go back. She definitely had battered-wife syndrome, which the police are supposed to be well-trained in. That's a laugh. They didn't care.

Why wouldn't they take him out? In two years, he was taken out once, and his probation was not revoked.

●(1245)

What's wrong with that picture?

One night, this female officer phoned and coerced Glen for close to 45 minutes to allow us to have Denise come to our home. I was in bed. I threw the blankets back, and you couldn't have peeled me off the ceiling. I said, "No fucking way." I went over to the office, pushed star 69, and retrieved the number that she called from.

I was very polite. I said, "Is this an officer?" She said, "Who is this and how did you get this number? This is my private cell number." I said, "Is this an officer?" She said, "Yes, it is. Who is this?" I said, "This is Denise's mother." She said, "Oh, well, we're en route to your house right now."

I said, "No, you're not." She said, "Well, your husband said we could bring Denise over." I said, "Well, let me put it this way. I'm her biological mother. Glen's the stepfather. I have the seniority, and I say that you are not bringing her to our house. You are taking her back to her home and you're taking him out."

She said, "Well, can't we come and talk?" I said, "No." She said, "Can we leave her there until her sister can come up from Niagara to pick her up?" I said, "No, I don't have Jennifer's cell number." She said, "Oh, well, Denise has it." I said, "That's just great. You use your private cell number but remember to block the number, and you call and you keep Denise in safe custody until she can come up and pick her up, or do your job, go back, take him out, lock him up, and let her be in a safe home."

To this day, I don't know what happened to Denise that night. I remember getting many, many phone calls during the night. When he was passed out, she would phone and she'd say, "Mom?" I'd say, "Yeah?" She'd say, "Mom, I'm scared, I'm so scared." I'd say, "Do you want me to come over?" She'd say, "No, that will just make things worse."

Well, little did I know that he had a Yale lock on the inside of the apartment and he held the only key. The police had to know this. They were in and out of that apartment all the time. Nothing was done, absolutely nothing. This went on and on until New Year's Eve of 2006. He phoned me and my two daughters and said, "Is Denise there? I'd like to wish her a happy new year." I said, "Isn't she with you?" He said, "No, but I know she's in town, and I know exactly where she's going to be tonight."

He found her. He hunted her down like an animal and he viciously took her out into a deserted area and he murdered her. This was three days after she had the strength to leave him, never to go back to him again.

And yes, I too contacted a psychic, only my psychic was from Scottsdale, Arizona. When I contacted her, I told her the situation, and she said that he begged her that night. He begged and begged her to come back home, and she looked him straight in the eye and said, "I'd rather be dead." Of course, he flipped out, "If I can't have you, nobody's having you." He murdered her and then he put her body in the Grand River, and we did not find her for three and a half months.

During all this time, I was fed up with having no contact from the police. I phoned the ombudsman and he gave me two organizations, to have the Waterloo police investigated.

● (1250)

One was the Ontario independent police review board. The other was the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. I sent my complaint to them to have Waterloo Regional investigated. No one was investigating the case, and these few companies pass this information, the complaint back and forth and back and forth until finally one came back and said, "Your time limit is up."

Where's the time limit on murder? On an investigation? Where is the time limit? He didn't tell me. Eventually, I heard back from the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. They said that this little chip with my complaint on it, that goes into the computer, had just been misplaced. So who was supposed to investigate the Waterloo Regional Police?

I let it go for a while. Next thing I know, we are granted two new detectives, who dragged their ass too. There was no communication with them. They would not phone, either. Our first detective was excellent. He would come and have coffee with us every three months just to keep contact, just to let us know they were thinking of us. After that, there was no contact. They lied to the newspapers saying that they have liaisons, that they're in touch all the time. Our liaisons only told us when to go to court, when to go to the prelim, and when to go to the pre-trial. That's all they did. There was no one there, no communication.

One day, Glen went down to the cop shop and asked to speak to the chief of homicide.

The girl behind the counter said, "What for?"

Glen said, "Well, why should I tell you? You're just the secretary. You tell him to get out here. I want to talk to him."

He came out, and Glen said, "All you have to do is phone Amy once a month, just once a month to make contact so that she knows

you are still working on the case." Did we get a phone call after that? No. Nothing.

Finally, in July 2011, four and a half months after Denise was murdered, I phoned the cop shop on a Sunday. I phoned the two detectives and left a message. I said, "This is Amy Miller, and there is a day where you are going to regret hearing my name. As of now, you are fired. I do not want any contact from you whatsoever. I do not want you downstairs buzzing to get into my building. I don't want you e-mailing me. I don't want you calling me."

I thought I was pretty safe in saying that because they never had contact with me before. The next day, I got three phone calls from the one detective, and three phone calls from the other saying they wanted to talk to me about the message I left on their machines. I'm standing there in a rage. What fucking part of no contact do you not understand? You've been fired! I don't want anything to do with you. Of course, I didn't pick up the phone.

The next day, there was a write-up in the newspaper how every spring, I go down to decorate Denise's tree. I laminate her pictures, frame them. I laminate poems and I frame them.

● (1255)

I decorate the tree with flowers and ribbons, and I celebrate her life because I honour her. She had the strength to get away from him physically and then she had the strength to get away from him emotionally. "I'd rather be dead."

That day, that second day the newspaper trudged all the way down this huge rugged hill down to the flood bank and they took pictures of me with Denise over my shoulder and the flowers and then they interviewed me. I told the public exactly what I thought about our police force. They are incompetent. They know absolutely nothing about battered-wife syndrome. Why continue to take Denise out? I always thought that the person who was the batterer was to be taken out, not the person who was battered. That doesn't make any sense but then we're dealing with a police office here.

In that interview I told the public what the police were doing, what they weren't doing, why they weren't doing it, and I also told the police that when they were fired I was going to go the *The Fifth Estate* and I was going to take my story right across Canada. The night we reported Denise missing the one officer had the nerve to say to the other officer right in front of Glen and me, "She's probably downtown doing whatever she has to do to get her next fix".

He didn't know her. He had no right to say that. How inappropriately we have been treated by the police. When the woman said, "Denise is more your problem than mine", I said, "How do you figure that?" She said, "Well she's your daughter", when they wanted to bring Denise to our house and I said no. I said, "You have me there, she is my daughter, however, this is your job. Every day, everybody has a bad day on their job and this just happens to be yours, you deal with it." She hung up. I was going to phone back but I thought I'd probably get charged with harassment or something. So I didn't.

People, when you are reporting a missing daughter the police force should be there to do everything and anything they can. I was raised to believe that the police force was there to help, serve, and protect. Did they protect my daughter? After two years of abuse did they protect my daughter? She was a wrongful death. They could have stopped it. The one detective said to me recently, "Amy, when the trial is all over I will sit down and I will tell you everything". There's nothing he can tell me that justifies my daughter's life. I don't care if they were waiting to make a big drug bust on him or what, nothing is going to justify my daughter's life.

When I am finished with the trial next month I am going public with my story because when she offered me money I didn't accept it. That was blood money. That was shut-up money. That was go-away money, and I sent her away and because I didn't sue her they have not heard the last of me.

● (1300)

I am going public with my full story once this trial is over. Someone has to be held accountable for what these police officers are not doing. It's about time that people started listening. It's not just an aboriginal woman/girl issue; this goes along with white women too, and Hispanic women. In Kitchener, we have had murders where there have been white women cut up and dropped in dumpsters. Denise was murdered in 2006. Two years later, a friend of hers had a father who was a high-profile criminal lawyer. They got her murderers jailed in two years. Two years is all it took for a high-profile criminal lawyer. Why is it taking me seven years of fighting?

I'm very upset with these parties who are not wanting to help make justice responsible. I believe they should bring the death penalty back because if it was back, people would think twice before they murdered again.

Thank you very much for listening to me.

The Chair: I want to let everyone in the room know that it is 1:00 p.m. I want to make sure that everyone is able to make their comments, but there are a few members, I know, who have 1:00 p.m. meetings that they weren't able to switch around. Some of them have indicated to me that they will come back and join us, either for the lunch or for the remainder of the meeting, but I just wanted to let you know that's why they're leaving.

Thank you, and please continue.

Ms. Lorna Martin (As an Individual): Hi. My name is Lorna Martin.

I'm here to share my mother's story. Her name is Marie Jean Saint Saveur, and she's a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation in Wabasca-Desmarais, Alberta. I'm also a member of the Bigstone Cree.

My mother went missing in 1987. It's been 26 years. We just spent three days with the Native Women's Association of Canada in a family gathering. This work is exhausting and I'm exhausted today, but I'm honoured, and I will always step up to the plate to share my mom's story. All our family lives in Alberta, in Edmonton. I have a sister in Lillooet, B.C. I usually get to share her story, because I have the biggest mouth sometimes. Sometimes there's one family member who, for whatever reason, can articulate things on behalf of the family.

My mother attended the St. Martin Residential School on Bigstone Cree Nation. She had her Cree language. My big sister Sharon was here on the weekend, sharing some more stories about our mother, because Sharon and my mom were really close in different ways. Sharon is my half-sister, but we grew up together in the same home, and Sharon's first language was Cree, so my mom could speak with her. I think when our people speak the language it always connects them more closely.

Sharon just mentioned something about the women in my mom's side of the family, which really explains how I remember my aunts. They're considered to be good medicine women, healers, and also when they walk into a room, they bring light, positive, good feelings, and good, happy energy that radiates in the room. Growing up, I always had that energy where I could....

Maybe my mom was on her way to the Edmonton mental health hospital after almost taking her life the night before. I heard some of the nightmare stories of her and her siblings being in residential school. She had a daily struggle with her life, because of those nightmares that were inflicted on them by the nuns and the priests and the people who worked at those schools. Her brother was blinded in one eye at the age of eight from being punched down the stairway by a nun at the school, and her sister also mentioned that they were locked in closets, because they maybe didn't want to go to bed, or, you know, they were just being little kids. Those are the things that my mom had to.... She drank because those memories are challenging for people to deal with on a daily basis.

● (1305)

At the time of her disappearance, she'd had a life of alcohol abuse. When she was reported missing, the RCMP came to take a report from my sister Arlene from Edmonton and poor Arlene mentioned the date and time she last saw our mother. One of the first questions the RCMP asked my sister was if she drank. Arlene couldn't deny it. She didn't lie. She said yes. He said, "They go on a drinking binge for two or three days and then they come back". My sister's fiancé at the time—he's not a native, he's Tom Pearson from Athabasca—asked what that meant, what that had to do with Mary being missing.

Tom is not my brother. Tom was my sister's fiancé. So that was the response from the RCMP, in asking for help in finding our mom, we met up with that type of racial weirdness from them. When you're full of anxiety, you're hurting, it feels like a kick in the stomach or in the head when somebody you're asking for help says something like that. Right away, any chance of trust, any line of communication is.... There's a barrier right there. You might as well put your hand up. There's no help there. They said our mom was a drunken Indian.

We didn't know what to do. That was in 1987 and the Native Women's Association of Canada wasn't there. They were there but missing and murdered women weren't being talked about. There were no resources. No one knew how to help. I had just moved to Ontario that year. I followed my husband and was pregnant with our second child. Over that year, I couldn't really help. My second son was born with congenital heart failure, so he had open-heart surgery at two weeks of age. I had to attend to his delicate, precious little life. He's a healthy young man now.

The RCMP poster about missing persons and unidentified remains still has misinformation. Some of that information excludes things like her birthdate, stuff like that. There is some non-factual information because some of that information came from her common-law husband, her boyfriend at the time. We believe, and the RCMP told my sister they believe, he murdered her because he burned her clothes. This man told the police that he burned my mom's clothes and that he also cashed her last paycheque.

● (1310)

He was there at some investigation by the RCMP. They found out that he had been violent towards some of his ex-women, like his ex-wife. He pistol-whipped her. The last woman he was living with in B.C., where he fled to after my mother...he told the RCMP that the last time he saw her she had jumped in a truck with some truckers and was heading to B.C. So he had his children, they were adults and they were living in B.C. The last woman he lived with in B.C. after my mom, she disclosed to the RCMP that she was very scared of him as well. He broke down her door, busted it down, after being told not to come back, to leave the house. So they had evidence on him. Actually, he died in a car accident, a head-on collision, right around the time they started doing more of an investigation on him.

Right away they should have gone on him full force when he said that he burned his clothes. I heard another family mention that the person burned the person's clothes. I don't know what that means, but I'm sure a criminal homicide investigation unit would know what that means.

I know as well that it takes a lot of money to...when people go missing, when people are murdered. I know, because my husband was murdered in 1998, and we had three young boys at the time, so I know what that is. And the murderer as well, we all know who it was; he was the family of Ted Rogers, Ted Rogers of Rogers Communications.... It was his nephew. So we know how much money that family has, and I'm pretty sure that's why he got off and he's walking free. Bringing that up again is the hard thing, because one of my sons was also abused by that same person who murdered his father.

Speaking for myself, the family, you know...the person is murdered...for the family, it takes away a lot of their life force, and the physical pain, to be under that type of duress and stress, works against your immune system. I know that. I am fortunate to have very well-educated people in the family on my husband's side to help me, even when my mother went missing. I have a sister-in-law who has a Ph.D. and a brother-in-law who was very well educated and knowledgeable about the law, and his contacts, and their energy, and the things they knew...what to do to help me when my mom was missing.

But still.... They would always ask about her, like, "What happened to your mom?", and who was helping me...I don't know. There was no one helping me find her. She was one of the first women registered with the Native Women's Association of Canada. From that point on, that was the place where I could talk about my mom after all those years. That was started in 2005, and all of a sudden these people wanted to hear about my mom. That was a new and welcome thing.

● (1315)

For years I wasn't able to share my mom's story on Parliament Hill or even go around all those women at the vigils. It was really scary for me. I didn't know what to say. I was scared to share my loss and all the different feelings, the anger. But over time I listened to them. I got educated about the things I could do and shared that with my family out west.

So I became very organized with my information. It made me feel good and stronger. There's strength in numbers. I feel stronger when I'm around other family members. You get your information organized and polished, and you have the spiritual energy of your loved ones.

My mom frequently comes to me in dreams. That's good; they're very loving dreams.

I miss her so much.

That's all I can say now.

Meegwetch. Hai hai. Thank you.

● (1320)

Ms. Lisa Big John (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Cree*]

First of all, my name is Lisa and I come from a Cree nation in Edmonton, Alberta. My sister was Mona Lee Wilson, who was brutally murdered by Robert Picton. That was his last victim.

I'll start off with the painful journey I had to live through for a number of years. I'm very tired. I always wanted to come here and for my voice to be heard. One of my biggest dreams was to come here and to be heard, to speak for my sister and to be her voice. When she was alive, she got pushed out of the way. She was a nobody to society. She lived in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for a number of years. We came from a broken home as well. I came from a violent system in a community I had to leave. I had to run away from there because I wasn't protected there at all. I was brutally raped there when I was eight years old. All that stuff I had to experience in my journey, going through the evil cycle of life.

The worst that I heard here today from the families...a lot of them I have something in common with, with their past violence. I was also in relationships where there was domestic violence and I just about died. Over the years I've tried to overcome my pain. I'm very bitter. I've been fighting the system for these words to be taken seriously. It just about destroyed me, the aftermath of my sister's death and the issues that I had tried to overcome over the years.

I've had my sobriety for 15 years. I quit drinking to honour my sister's memory. There's a lot of things that went on over there that weren't right for those girls in Downtown Eastside. There's a lot of injustice that was done over there.

I was also involved in the inquiry a couple of years ago in Vancouver. It came to nothing. I wasn't too impressed with what I saw. There was a lot of betrayal in that inquiry that I had to experience. A lot of people tried to bring me down. I'm finally starting to come out of that little dark hole where I used to hide. I can't say anything to anybody because I was so used to standing there taking abuse from people, like the RCMP. The RCMP traumatized my life in the past, back in my drinking days. They hurt me. They didn't protect me. Every time I got involved with them the only way that they had to deal with my anger issues was to throw me in jail, or get hit one way or the other.

●(1325)

I've seen a lot of things in my life. I've lived on the street as well. When I started to become strong was when I first became a *kookum*, a grandmother, at the age of 45. The love I have for my grand-kids is what keeps me going strong.

My future doesn't deserve a violent world. This violence continuously goes on, from violent to violent to violent.... I'm worried about my future life.

As these people say about the cops.... I saw their actions back in my drinking days. It is unbelievable, unmanageable, the way they talk to people and the way they disrespect street girls. "Unmanageable" is the word I have to describe what they have done.

I've been failed a lot by the system. I've tried to take action, continuously take action to do what I have to do. The community I come from is not a caring community. It's all about them. It's all about them taking care of their families. Where are we in that circle? We're nowhere. We've been outcast.

I've been shovelling out, taking care of my family and me for many years, fighting just to live on this land. With what the government gives me, I shouldn't be living like that—shovelling on this land, living like that, living on somebody's else's rights—when I have a lot of rights to have a good life with my grand-kids and my future.

There are a lot of things that need to be corrected by the system, especially the law. That's what they're there for, to serve and protect. They do protect a lot of people, but the majority of the serve and protect that I've seen is not there. I've tried so many times, over and over, to try to do something about this corruption of justice that I live with.

I also live in a city that's very racist, Edmonton. There are a lot of racists in Edmonton. I back away from a lot of people because of their attitudes. There's a lot of betrayal, a lot of evilness. People have to start realizing that something needs to be done.

I remember when I was a little girl; I never used to know what was right and what was wrong. When I tried to ask for help, it was never about me. It was always about somebody else. I literally backed away from my community, too, because all they did was betray me, big time. They seriously betrayed me.

When I'm going through this challenge to overcome the issues I have gone through, that I have lived through for so many years, my community should be here. They should be supporting me. They

should be caring about the people. It's their people, too, who are getting killed. But the only ones that they protect are their people.

●(1330)

I had a friend who went missing in Calgary. I've forgotten what year. I asked this person, but he didn't give me any answers. They paid so many thousands of dollars to go to look for that person. This was stolen money that the band members, that they had to.... I know for a fact that my money gets abused by the chief and councils. They may intimidate other people in the community, but I don't live like that anymore. I don't stand there and let people talk to me in any way they want. For how many years I used to take that abuse.... I used to let people with their attitudes....

I've never been to Ottawa before, but I thank the Creator for helping me to come here to raise awareness. We have to stop the violence that's continuously going on. A lot of people don't know it, but it can happen to anybody. I thank the Creator for my still being here because I got to see my grand-kids.

But she wasn't so lucky. She didn't ask to be brutally murdered. She had a boyfriend, who used to rely on her for his addiction, for his happiness.

The government tore my family, broke that circle and destroyed it. As the years went by, I always tried to reach out to my sister, to help her better herself. When she was taken from me, it made me more bitter. I didn't know how to deal with it. I just keep picking my pain again, my trauma, whatever that evil cycle is that's always trying to challenge me.

It took a lot for me to speak to people like this because I never could talk in public. I'm so used to being told to shut up, that I have no right to talk. Even the community talks to me like that when I try to ask for help. They disrespect me, they mock me, they call me names. They should be taking a good look at themselves and what they do behind closed doors, living off my money, and my grand-kids' money, and my kids' money. Yet we're the ones who have to suffer the consequences that we didn't ask for.

Why am I still here? Because the Creator brought me this far. He brought me this far for a reason. You guys have to start realizing that we've been trying to fight for justice for so many years. It goes on and on. When is it going to stop? A lot of people have been destroyed by predators. There are a lot of predators out there. I've lived out there before. In the life I had, I had to fight to survive out there.

●(1335)

It was just unmanageable over the years, what I've seen. The community works against their people. The community doesn't...not every community, but the community that I come from. I gave up on asking them for help. Why? Because they have proven that they're not going to care and they never will. There are elders there. There are supposed to be elders there to guide the youth, show them right and wrong.

There are a lot of suicides in the community. I had a nephew who hung himself because of bitterness. There were elders there. What they're supposed to be doing is helping the future. But when I see a lot of those people and I try to say something, sometimes I back away, because.... There are a lot of bad things that people like to do. In my first nation way, people play around with medicine. They take it for granted, and they use it on other people, and they get mad. Other people have to pay for their evil. Why do I say this? Because I grew up with this thing as a kid. My grandfather was a medicine man.

I had my brother shot right in front of me. I had my little brother brutally murdered, beaten to death on a reserve. That still hasn't been put to justice. Sometimes I feel like there's no hope at all for the future, because of the life that I live here today and what I see. I have to be here. I have to protect my grand-kids. I have to protect my family.

My sister passed away this year in March. She went through so much pain. She withdrew from everybody, shut herself off behind closed doors away from the world, because of how she was murdered. She drank herself to death. Now my two nephews have to try to learn and live with that, and deal with it. It's very painful not having a parent. My mom abandoned me when I was a newborn. I basically brought myself up in a community, starting, I remember, when I was about five years old. There was nothing but predators around me, evil predators.

As long as this goes on, there's going to be no hope for the future. They deserve to live in a better world. They deserve to live a positive life. They deserve to live a peaceful life. Me, I lived in this world, and what I went through.... I went through a very painful life. My sister's death just about destroyed me, just about took me under. I just about withdrew from my family. I pushed them away. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I got sick. I still struggle with that, and I have to start realizing that....

● (1340)

The Creator came into my heart, my sister came into my heart and told me to start fighting back because my family still needs me here. I'm not ready to go. My job here is not done. I'm still waiting for justice to happen. How many years have I been waiting for justice to happen? And it's always failed me.

For these people who have shared their painful life stories, I have a lot of comments on the things they have gone through. It's a very evil cycle to get out of. The only way for me to get rid of that was to start believing in me, start focusing on what I was going to do in the future. Now I'm in this future with *kokum*, with my grand-kids. Grandchildren are very special. They're a very big part of my healing. A lot of people, the communities, the system, they don't think about grand-kids and what they have to live through. What kind of life will it be for them in the future?

At 15 years of age I left the community. I had no hope to know where to go. My grandparents left me. They passed away when I was very young. I didn't know what to do there, so I left. I wasn't going to stay in the community that hurt me a lot. Still today I have no respect for that community because they did a lot of damage to me, not just a little, but they did a lot of damage. I try to speak out to them and they get defensive. When I try to talk to them, they get defensive, they

give me attitude. I try to tell them about the right things they need to start doing. When I go to that community, that's when I feel that evilness, that medicine, that just surrounds that band office. I hardly go there. It's not my life, it's not my culture.

I try to have my voice heard out there as much as I can to the nation. Being in gatherings like this, I really thank NWAC for having this organization for families. It helps a lot to meet other new people and share what they have gone through, because only they know, only they understand.

But people are always trying to speak for us. I had to live with that, too. The law was always trying to speak for me, always trying to speak for my sister, saying, "Maybe she took off for the city. She's probably tired of living here." I was standing there thinking to myself, "How would you know that? You don't think like her. You can't talk for her."

I remember being thrown in jail a couple of times because I had an attitude, I was sticking up for her. I remember them telling me, "Who cares?"

● (1345)

What kind of law would tell a person that they don't care?

You know, we have tribal cops over there, a few of them who.... It's just unbelievable how they work with the white system. They're there to protect those families in the communities and that. It's just unimaginable; cops, they go in there and they shoot anybody they want. That just really gets to me, thinking that, again, another native...natives are destroyed in terms of what they have to see and what they have to learn.

People have to start realizing the reality. We're not living in a dream. This is real, what we have gone through, what I have gone through—a cycle of abuse, a cycle of domestic violence. My girls were sexually abused back in my drinking days, and now, because of that, they're angry. They're bitter. Who has to work with them? I do. The communities' native organizations are paid to do that, to help out the first nations youth, to guide them to a positive life, to a positive road.

I see a lot of stuff in Edmonton that's not right with the system. First nations people are getting thrown in jail, in remand centres. They don't have a voice. They're invisible. The law speaks for them in that courtroom.

I'm sitting there looking at this, thinking, you know, I don't even know why in the hell we have native rights anyway. That's my opinion. I was given rights to have a life. My rights are disrespected. People laugh at me when I try to tell them the reality that we're trying to do something to get justice.

I've heard a few in the law mock these girls on the Vancouver Eastside. Little do they realize that native culture is very powerful. I should know. The gift of the medicine that was given to an elder—that was my [*Witness speaks in Cree*].

On the other hand, the system's literally trying to destroy it so that in the future, they can never get anywhere in their lives to live a positive way. I seriously think sometimes, when I'm sitting there in my room thinking—because my [*Witness speaks in Cree*] used to tell me this too—that people are going to destroy us as much as they want, as much as they can. They're going to literally destroy us.

I never used to believe it when he used to say that to me. But I see how they were abused by the system and what they did to them. They got away with that. I can sit here and talk all day—my face could turn blue, whatever—but what is it going to take to get that message across your guys' eyes?

• (1350)

I'm talking about people who are suicidal, because losing their parents, their sisters, whatever...why? I felt like that so many times. A lot of times I feel hopeless. I try to ask for help, but some of those people are phony. I block myself away from people.

There's too much evil in this nation. This is what's destroying the first nations and making them feel hopeless. I'm fully aware of the stuff that I have seen, but what is it going to take for the system to realize that you guys need to start doing something about the system? You need to start telling them that if they can't do the job they are supposed to be doing, then they shouldn't be working there. That's what they're there for.

The Chair: Lisa, I'm just going to ask you to allow Connie to have a few minutes, because we have a hard end time of two o'clock, when question period begins. There will be time to speak a little bit, even more informally, during lunch, but members of Parliament can't stay any longer. I apologize for that.

I want to let Connie have a few moments, and then—

Amy, do you have a question?

Ms. Amy Miller: Yes, I do.

I would like to ask that young gentleman back there why he is smiling and texting on his telephone when this is a very important meeting.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Let's just continue with the meeting and then we can have a conversation afterwards.

Lisa, I hope you don't mind. If there's time afterwards, we'll continue.

Thank you.

Ms. Lisa Big John: I'm easy to get along with.

The Chair: I can see that. Thanks.

Ms. Connie Greyeyes (As an Individual): My name is Connie Greyeyes and I hail from Fort St. John, British Columbia. My first nations community is in Wabasca, Alberta. I'm a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation. I'm the mother of two sons. I have 12 siblings and about 33 nieces and nephews.

I think what you're seeing here in listening to all these stories is the direct result of how this country has treated aboriginal people from the get-go. The rippling effects of residential school, the breakdown of our families, have had a tremendous impact on all of

us. I know that my own experiences, with my mother having gone, and my father, and my aunties, who were sterilized in residential school, have created the person that I am today. I am much different now, 10 years later, than I was prior. I quit drinking and doing drugs 11 years ago.

I've lived quite a painful life. I have been gang-raped, and raped. I have been beaten up. I did go to the police, and was dismissed. I'm standing there at the hospital with my lips cut open, black eye, knowing and telling them who did it, but they're telling me that alcohol was a factor, that we were probably drunk. I can't tell you what that does to a person after hearing it so many times. As I sat here today looking across—because I'm looking at everything—at these things on display in these boxes, it's such a slap in the face that you would show so much respect to those possessions and you can't do that to your aboriginal people in this country. You know, you have to stop thinking with this, and start feeling here.

I'm going to tell you the story of my beautiful cousin Joyce who lived in Edmonton, Alberta. In November of 1993 she was walking through this little condominium apartment and was lost. She knocked on a door and asked for directions. The young man obliged and told her “this is the direction”, and off she went. He decided to follow her and rob her, so he beat her up, rifled through her pockets—I'm assuming—and left her there beaten. He went to the apartment that he happened to be staying in that night. He sat there and decided that she might be able to identify him. He grabbed a can of gasoline and went to where she lay beaten. Then he poured gasoline on her, and lit her on fire. It was such a cold night that when the firemen showed up, they couldn't put her out with water—they would have surely killed her—so they packed her with snow, not realizing that it was a person. When they realized the horrendous scene that they were about to uncover, they couldn't believe it. They said the flames were six feet high off of her. My beautiful cousin didn't die that night. My ancestors covered her and they took care of her. She died 22 days later in the hospital. Thank goodness, you know, my family members were able to go and see her before she passed on, to comfort her and let her know that she was not alone. I often think of my cousin that night, and I made a set of vamps for the Walking with our Sisters exhibit that's going around. It's her keeping me going in this fight.

My Auntie Nora was run down by an MTC. If you don't know what that is, it's called a mobile treatment centre. Three people were in the unit. They backed into her, crushed her between my uncle's vehicle and the MTC. They were 82. Then the medic and the gentleman who was driving and their passenger jumped out, and seeing her laying there, chose not to open up the back of the MTC and transport her to the hospital, they chose to jump into the vehicle and drive away.

• (1355)

What makes it worse was that it was a family friend who had run my auntie down and killed her. He admitted it in court. I did a video plea to him saying that a year ago we were walking up Main Street drumming to end violence to our women and to start respecting our women, and you let my auntie lay there and die. He admitted it. He got two years. He's out, and my family has asked him to live his life in an honourable way, and the forgiveness is there for him.

I don't know the answers, as I know you don't. I know there are suggestions that we can make. I remember giving birth to my sons and thinking, "Please let them be boys." The second thing I prayed for was that their skin would be light because then they'd be given some privilege. They wouldn't be dismissed. I do have two sons. One is light and one is brown. The light-skinned one grows his hair long so that he can braid it. I'm very proud of him.

If we can all start opening our hearts and living by some honourable teachings, it is not hopeless. Nothing can be hopeless.

In closing, I shared this poem on the Hill last year. I shared it yesterday, and I'd like to share it all with you today so that you can maybe close your eyes and really feel what it is like to be an aboriginal woman in this country. My niece, Helen Knott, wrote this. She said, "Auntie, I wrote this poem. It reminded me of all the women who are missing and I want you to read it and let me know what you think." I've read it to many people. She is an amazing young survivor of abuse herself. She is just finishing her bachelor's degree in social work.

The poem is called *Invisible*.

Your eyes, they curve around me.
I watch you try so hard to find your way past me.
Your sight is like rushing waters,
Moving beside me, behind me, pushing over me,
Indirectly consuming me.

They say the path of least resistance makes rivers and men crooked.
I am here. I have resisted. I am resisting.
I did not make you crooked.

What is it about you structural giants?
What is it about your pockmarked protection?
What is it about your false perceptions?
What beliefs have you bound to my body?
What pathologies have you painted the pigment of my skin?
What bad medicine did your forefathers use to make me invisible?

You don't want to see me.
What's worse is that you have the choice whether or not you see me.
I become a casualty of your blindness,
Subjected to your one-sided absent-mindedness because you've been given a
privilege called selective vision.
You weed out the colours that don't match your peripheral preference, and,
I am not part of your rainbow, your twisted-light promises for better tomorrows.

My face can be plastered on posters telling you what I was last seen wearing,
With fitted descriptions, a location to give you bearings, and,
You can choose to look past me, and go on, uncaring.

My raven's hair and heritage does not sound alarm bells.
It does not stir you to look for me.
Because you have never really seen me.
You've seen me all right. You've seen me on street corners,
Lips red like sirens, dreams broken like sidewalk syringes,
Neurotic like Catholic church windows,
Submissive and silent.

You see me in welfare lines, hands open wide, waiting for what's coming to me,
Drinking death-causing concoctions behind dumpsters.
You see me as a standing statistic, a living, breathing, heaving stereotype.
You see me in the bar, another joke for you and your friends.
Just another squaw, but if you want to get laid, I'm your Pocahontas.
You see me as dispensable.
This is how you see me.

Undeserving of stars,
Deserving of starlight rides and pleasurable times.
Funny how you fail to see me when I'm face up,
Lips puffed, body bloated and battered, bruised beyond recognition.
Still not gaining your attention.

Come on, baby, and dance me outside.
I think she was just looking for a good time.
I heard she lived a risky lifestyle.
It was inevitable, some say.
This is how you see me.

● (1400)

Never somebody's daughter, never somebody's mother, never an aunt, a sister, a
friend.
Never am I seen as strong, as proud, as resilient.
Never as I am.
Finally, given the stars,
Laid to gaze at them on back roads and in ditches,
On ghostly stretches of forgotten pebbled pathways.
Your vastness swallows me.
Do I fall in your line of sight? Do you see me now?
Because I get this feeling that your eyes, they curve around me.

In my community a dozen women are missing or have been murdered. I come from a community of 18,000 people. I don't think it's a coincidence that it is the oil and gas industry and the insurgence of oil field workers that come in the winter. Unfortunately, they're trying to build a huge dam there, and we're worried for our women. We're really worried. We're surrounded by four reserves, and I just hope that one day this country will start to respect our women and our people as much as you respect the possessions that hang on these walls.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I really appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you to everyone. Just before we wrap up, I want to say a couple of things.

First of all, a special thanks to NWAC, the Native Women's Association of Canada—without them and their help, we would not have been able to have this meeting, so I appreciate that very much.

Also, thank you to our elder, Robert. I just wanted to give you this token of appreciation on behalf of our committee. Thank you very much for leading our meeting in prayer. I think that was a fitting way to do that and I want to thank you very much on behalf of the committee.

● (1405)

Mr. Robert Pictou: It's just the way it is...you have the prayer, too.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

If I might also, of course, thank most importantly all of you who came here to talk to us today, the families, for your strength, for your courage, and for sharing your stories with us.

Please do stay for lunch.

Robert, if you could close our meeting, we'd appreciate it.

Mr. Robert Pictou: [*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

We asked the Creator...thank us for everything that happened today, thank us for the ladies here who spoke, and the men, too, who are missing their loved ones.

Also, I wished and asked Him to watch each and every one of us as we're going home tonight. Some of us are going by car, some are going by bus, and a few of us are going by plane. I just asked the Creator to watch over each and every one of us.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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