

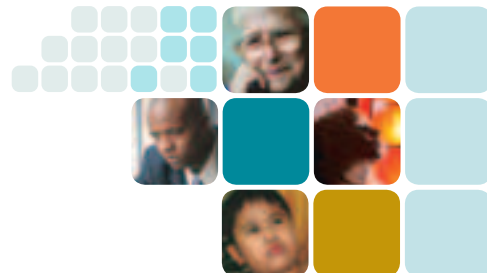
Gaining Insight from Real-life Experiences

Personal stories give us the opportunity to understand the thoughts and emotions experienced by victims of crime and their family members. This section of the Guide contains seven stories told by the people who lived them. These stories are moving and written to assist people in understanding the reality faced by the authors.

These testimonials can be used during National Victims of Crime Awareness Week or throughout the year:

- To provide victims' experiences for articles, letters to the editor, and other media events.
- To include in stories for your organization's newsletters, bulletins, or other publications.
- As anecdotes for speeches or presentations on victim issues.
- To support efforts for volunteer victim services recruitment.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice Canada.



WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL VICTIMS OF CRIME

by Connie Gould

Preamble

In 2008, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice received funding from the federal Department of Justice Victims Fund to undertake a four-year project to better meet the needs of Aboriginal victims of crime. The goal of the project was to strive to reduce the risk of Aboriginal victims being re-traumatized by the court process and to facilitate the healing process for the victim and the community. As part of the project, culturally-sensitive promotional materials were developed for distribution: medals, posters and pamphlets.

The following testimonial was written by Connie Gould, who was responsible for delivering services and distributing promotional material to the Eskasoni First Nation. Eskasoni is the largest Mi'kmaq Community East of Montreal, with a population of over 3,800 residents.

When working with Aboriginal victims of crime as an Aboriginal Victim Services Officer, I have the honour and privilege to give the medal to my clients who are testifying or going through court. I believe the medal represents our Aboriginal way of life, our Native spirituality and belief system, and who we are as Aboriginal people. When I present this medal to a victim of crime that I am working with, I feel excited to share the story and history of the medal. I tell my clients that I believe this medal has a special purpose in their journey, as they move through the court process. I tell them the medal hold special powers, if one believes in it. The medal gives strength, courage, honour and healing. It holds the teachings of our ancestors, our world view and leaves you with a sense of tranquility in your soul.

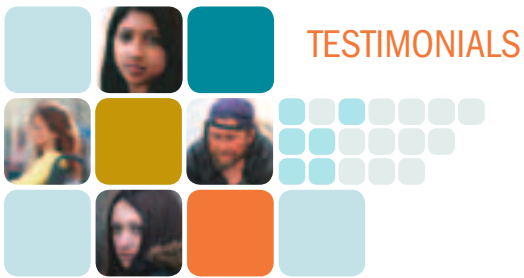
The design of the medal is two-fold. On one side, the following words are inscribed:

TRUTH
(KETLOWOQN)
COURAGE
(MELKITA'MK)
HONOUR
(KEPMITETAQN)
HEALING
(NEPISIMK)



The medal was designed by Kathy Denny, a well-known Mi'kmaq artist from Eskasoni. After consultations with several victims of crime in the community, they requested that these words be inscribed on the medal. She then thought about animals that would represent these words and went back to the victims who liked the idea of animals representing the words. Kathy felt it was part of being Mi'kmaq and how we view the world.

And so, the other side of the medal has faces of animals that represent the four sacred colors, the four directions, the four races, the four stages of life and the four seasons. In the East, where the sun rises, a promise of a new beginning, new life emerges and spring has sprung. The spirit guide is the Eagle and the color is white. In the South, the second stage of life is early adulthood/ teenager. Summer is here and the color is yellow. The spirit guide is the cougar. In the West, the season is autumn and the color is red. It is the life stage of the older adult and the spirit guide is the buffalo. In the North, the season is winter and the life stage is the elder. The color is blue and the spirit guide is the bear. The images of the



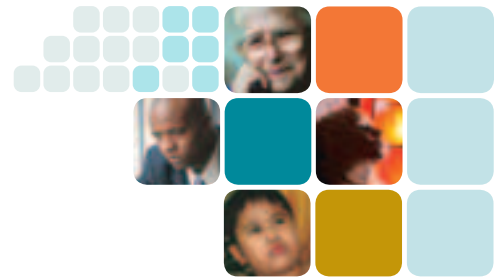
animals represent our connection to Mother Earth and her creations that help guide us in our journey as we go through life. The Eight Pointed Star is a symbol of the sun and our connection to our spirituality. The sun gives us light and rises in the East and sets in the West. The Eight Pointed Star on this medal is purple and represents the color for victims of crime.

The words Truth, Courage, Honour and Healing were chosen as a way to express our recognition of the courage of victims, letting them know that people have heard the truth of their words, a way to let them know that someone recognizes that they have conducted themselves with honour and also our hope that they find healing from what they have gone through. However, the main reason for the medal is simply the idea that each and every victim who testifies deserves a medal for the courage it takes to come forward and go through the court process.

What some clients have said about the medal:

“ This medal showed me that I was cared about, it gave me courage to stand up and say something, it felt like a friend to me. When I looked at it, I knew it made me happy, not sad and I felt at peace. I knew it wasn't my fault and it made me focus on what I had to say and think about during the trial. It was there for me and it helped me a lot. If I didn't have this medal, I don't think I could have said anything.”

“I was holding on to the medal the entire time I was up there (testifying) and it really helped me. I carry it in my pocket for protection and to remind me of the strength that I have because of it. Thank you very much.”



TESTIMONIAL

by Aileen Joseph

This is the story of my life since 2004. I would never have dreamed that I would be where I am today. I am a wife, mother, grand-mother and great grand-mother. I have always been at home, taking care of my family. My education is Grade 11, but, not having the means to continue in school, I went in one door and out the other. I was married at 19 and have been married for 49 years to James, who is my best friend. We have been through a lot together.

Our youngest daughter Shelley was murdered in July of 2004. Her story starts in 1973 – the year our oldest son Jimmy died. She always felt Jimmy was the only person who cared for her and remembered him and everything about him. After a day of remembering Jimmy and drinking all day, she found herself home, lonesome, crying, and worrying about her youngest son who had gotten hurt that day. She was afraid he would die on Jimmy's birthday, July 1st. After many calls to me, pouring her heart out about this man who she thought was her friend, Shelley left on her journey to the other side. He stabbed her. One wound to the heart. We were told that, if it had been a half inch in any other direction, she would not have died. He was charged with second degree murder on July 2nd, her youngest daughter Amanda's 16th birthday. He ended up pleading guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to nine years.

As I write this, I wonder. I think it should be known just what some victims go through. First – learning of the murder – exactly what happened. Then, the waiting for the justice system to do its work. That in itself is an eye opener. I had no idea at all what was to take place. The talks with the Crown. Then, the hearing where all kinds of stories about the murderer take place and the fact that none of it can be used! I heard about blood staining. How the specialist can determine when and how; how far she walked, where she died, how long it took and then...

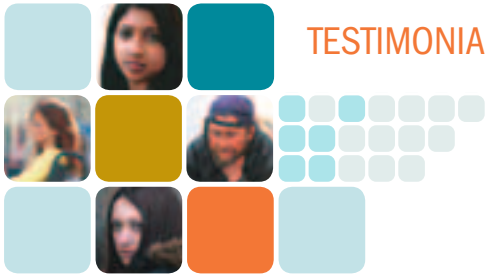
The effect this all has on family members. My grandson Ivan committed suicide 15 months after his mom died. He was so tormented by Shelley's death. His weeks after

the funeral, I couldn't even describe to anyone – the crying, the drinking to forget, the depression. And through it all, he worked every day. He never accepted her leaving. His journey in those 15 months was total torment. He is at peace now, beside his mom. My oldest daughter had been working in a casino. She had panic attacks and had to quit for counselling. She has not gone back. My great-grandson Gavin started junior kindergarten. He panicked when the teacher left the room. She always had to explain to him where she was going and why. He was fearful when cars came in our driveway and would run around the house screaming: "Lock the door! Lock the door!". I am amazed that, at this moment in time, Gavin is a very loving, well-adjusted young man of six who is his grampa's sidekick and tells us he loves us 20 times a day.

In my struggle to find a purpose to something in my life and after having been asked to be a part of the Sisters in Spirit family by the Native Women's Association of Canada, my grand-daughter Sheena and I started talking about abuse to women's shelters and anyone who asked. We also did a video for McMaster University. At the preview, I was approached by a lady who congratulated me on the video. She said she can't explain, but what we had to say helped her get out of a relationship she was in. It was such an uplifting moment, after my many thoughts about whether I was doing the right thing by keeping my daughter's name in focus.

I am so thankful for the Sisters in Spirit team. Had it not been for them and the bringing of everyone together, I don't know where I would have been. We had no means of support here. Knowing we are not alone in our sorrow certainly helps so very much.

I think for victims, it is a feeling of loneliness, hopelessness and helplessness. To find a place to share and feel loved is the best therapy we can find. Victims do matter. Every Victim Matters. Somebody does care.



HEALING BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

by *Bridget Tolley*

On October 5, 2001 my mother, Gladys Tolley, was struck and killed by a police cruiser on the highway on the Reserve where she lived. Since that fateful night, I feel like I have been living in a bad dream, one I cannot wake up from.

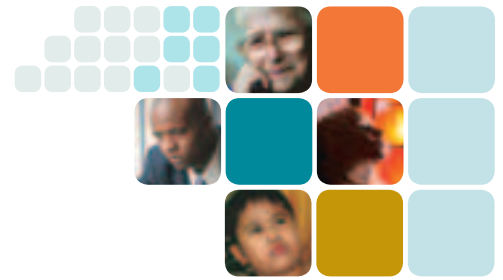
On the night of my mother's death, the police force did not call the Band police which has jurisdiction for reserve justice matters. Instead, they summoned a doctor from the hospital who pronounced her dead at the scene and her body was sent directly to a funeral home. Then, the police force called in their own team of investigators. Shockingly this "investigation" was conducted by the brother of the officer who struck and killed my mother. In addition, the Coroner made his report without ever seeing my Mom and the case was closed without ever notifying my family of this change in status. These swift, secretive, self-serving actions have taken away what little faith I had in the police and justice system, leaving me with an ongoing mistrust of systems which have failed First Nations communities for generations.

In the days, months, and years following my Mom's death I felt lost and alone, with no one to turn to for help. The police who are supposed to be there to serve and protect, were confrontational, refused to share information about the case with my family or communicate with us in English, and



treated me as a troublemaker because I wanted the officers involved to be held responsible for my mother's death. This experience has had a lasting and detrimental impact, as I have not been able to find justice or closure to help me through my healing journey.

It was not until the fall of 2009 that I began to understand the programs and services that are supposed to be available through victim services. In looking back, the police did not offer kind words or access to supports, and there was no one to help my family navigate the system or even take time to explain the processes of the investigation. My one sense of hope came through the Sisters In Spirit (SIS) Initiative with the Native Women's Association of Canada. Since 2005, Sisters In Spirit has provided support, understanding, and connections to other families, while giving voice and recognition to the discrimination and inequality experienced by Aboriginal women across Canada. Through SIS, I know that there are more than 520 missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls whose families are also searching for justice and finding any way they can to cope with the pain and trauma of losing their loved ones. My experiences with SIS have shown me that victims' families never give up. We may come together with heavy hearts, but in each other we find a renewed sense of courage, strength, determination, and hope.

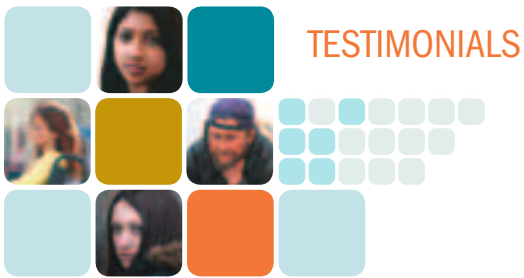


I have continued on my crusade for action because I do not want my mother's death to become just another Indian woman's misfortune. However, it has been a long and arduous battle for justice. Today, I am still searching for justice, but, on my journey, I have found dear friends, allies, and supporters to help make my days easier and remind me that I am not alone. While I began my journey in isolation, I have found strength because of those around me.

If I were to achieve one thing with respect to victim services, it would be to see *communities of support*, particularly for families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Our experiences and our paths to healing are very different because, as Aboriginal Peoples, we have been faced with trauma and hardship for generations. So, as we think about victim's services today, these services must reflect this past, our unique histories and traditions, and

the important recognition that it does not take a single individual to counsel through grief, but rather it requires *an entire community* to rebuild following traumatic loss.

As I work to keep the memory of my mother alive, I think of the many other mothers, sisters, daughters, aunties, and grandmothers who have been lost or stolen. Each year, on October 4, people come together to honour these women and girls and their families through the Sisters In Spirit vigils. Since 2006, these vigils have grown from 11 to 72 communities from coast to coast. These vigils are part of my healing journey and I am moved to see so many individuals, families, communities and Nations standing together to remember all the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada and to acknowledge the injustice too many of us face. But my fight is not over. And so, I journey forward...



THE DREAM

by Gary E. Martin

“Honouring the Spirit of Wisdom and Guidance”

In August 2008, the Ontario Victim Services Secretariat launched the Aboriginal Victims Support Grant Program, which provides funding for community-based projects that help First Nations, Inuit and Métis victims of crime.

The program supports victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, historical abuse and hate crimes in ways that respect Aboriginal cultures and languages. The following Testimonial was written by Gary Martin of Timmins, Ontario, whose community received an Aboriginal Victims Support Grant.

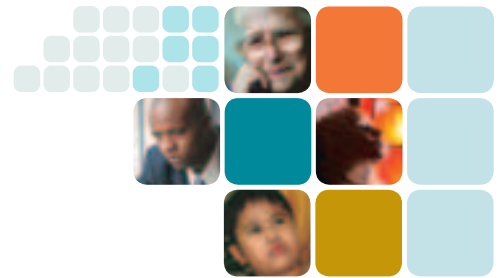
I was born in Cochrane, Ontario and I am a member of the Moose Cree First Nation. In the early part of my life, I was raised in a small village along the Ontario Northland Railway, Moose River Crossing, which is approximately an hour south of Moosonee. My father worked on the railroad and my mother was a stay-at-home mom raising 14 children. I have seven sisters and six brothers. Moose River had a population of approximately 100 people. I had much pleasure growing up in the north, with plenty of things to do like fishing, hunting and swimming, which are still an important part of my life, as they give me a sense of identity.

Most of the people residing in Moose River either worked for the railway or lived off the land, as hunters and trappers, to support their families. My grandparents were dependent on the land for their food and livelihood. They hunted, fished and trapped animals such as beaver, moose and geese. My mother also contributed to the household by sewing moccasins, mitts and other types of clothing from moose

hide. Beaver pelts and other furs were sold to Northern Stores, formerly known as the Hudson’s Bay Company. Moose River was a summer gathering place for a lot of our people. This is where freight, carrying food and supplies, were dropped off and where some children attended a one-room school.

Moose River was a very happy place to live during this time. Unfortunately, at times, there were traumatic events that affected young people, such as me, like when the community was introduced to alcohol. During this time of my life, I didn’t understand what alcohol was. I did not understand what it did to a person’s mind or the things it made them do. I never could understand why individuals had children, if they were going to raise them in an alcohol filled environment. All I knew was that I didn’t like it, nor did I enjoy the level of violence my parents and extended family exhibited. At that time, I never knew anything about residential school and its impact on our people and, most importantly, the impact it had on my father. I later found out, after my father had taken his own life, that he had experienced all forms of abuse while attending the residential school in Pelican Falls, Ontario.

As I grew older, I made a promise to myself that, if I ever had children, I would not expose them to violence or alcohol. I decided that I did not want my children to feel what I felt. I was scared, alone, insecure and wanted so much to be anywhere but home. As a single father, I went through my own struggles while raising my children. Alcoholism was one of them. Not realizing that these traumatic events growing up were keeping me from keeping this promise I had made to myself. This promise was difficult most times. However, my need to be able to understand what was going in this situation told me to keep going or seek other means to find myself.



I left Timmins to move away from my family and to find myself. It wasn't until about twenty years ago that I started my healing journey. I discovered my culture and my spirituality. It was then, through teachings, ceremonies, a residential treatment program and counselling, that I gained a lot of insight as to how my identity and childhood were taken from me. During this time, the young boy who was raised in an environment of violence made some life altering changes. There were many good memories. However, as a child who grew up around alcoholism and violence; this was all I could remember: the swearing, the drinking and the physical fights between my parents.

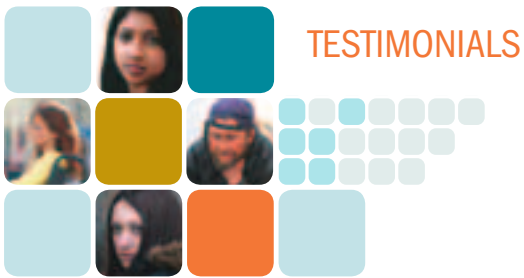
As a man today, I learned from these experiences that I cannot change what has happened and that I can only make the necessary changes to make a good life for myself and my family. As I moved forward, I took these life experiences and made small steps to heal from the pain and anguish I carried for so many years. It was time to let it go. Today, I forgive my parents, as this was the best they could do with the tools that they had.

My personal life experiences have drawn me to help others that are struggling with the same issues. Many of our people suffer from multi-generational impacts of the residential school legacy. As a helper in my community, I continuously advocate for people who suffer from trauma. I have been advocating for a program in our area to address violence. Unfortunately, we still do not have such a program.

It was through the spirit of a young girl and a grandmother that it came to me: a vision that didn't necessarily have all the answers. It gave me a fairly good idea what it was all about and I what I had to do for this to become a reality. I sought spiritual guidance and wisdom from our elders to interpret this dream. The dream was about a young girl walking, holding hands with her grandmother and talking about what was missing in her life and what she needed to develop into a strong, healthy aboriginal woman. The surroundings in this dream were in the bush, with a dwelling that looked much like a teepee. The grandmother spirit was her guide and, through this medium, they came to me with a message.

I shared this dream with community partners and discussed the need to help our women and families. Not long after sharing my dream, a call for proposals from the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General was announced to address violence against women. The same group of individuals who realized the need came together to start the process. The proposal just seemed to come together. It was women who came to me in this dream and it was women who gave me direction – the elders, the children and the spirit helpers.

This initiative became a reality. It was a very moving and spiritual journey, not only for me, but also for those children yet to come. It is our hope to have this in operation by June of this year to make sure they have a place that is safe and free of any type of violence, so they too can begin their healing journey. I realize this isn't going to happen overnight. But, through this dream, people in the spirit world have come back for a short visit to provide our people direction for what is missing and a place where the healing can begin.



TESTIMONIAL

by A.M.

Suddenly it all became clear. The years of frustration, the screaming fear of physical closeness, all the poor choices and the ever present voices in my head telling me to end it all. It came in a flood of images of torture, fragmented, distorted, suppressed, violent and shameful. Try as I might, I could not escape them. How could I escape myself? A life destroyed, a soul left fragmented and adrift in the abyss of nothingness.

Denial of memories stuffed deep in my subconscious, deep in my body.

It all finally made sense. Was there light at the end of the tunnel or was it the headlight of an oncoming train? I could not have imagined the destructive effect that the recovered memories would have on my life. If my life was in pieces before I remembered, it was nothing compared to the devastation that would follow. Left in my wake was every relationship that had ever meant anything to me. Dismantled in the attempt to reconstruct something resembling a whole person. How can you construct a self with such broken pieces? Questions, only questions.

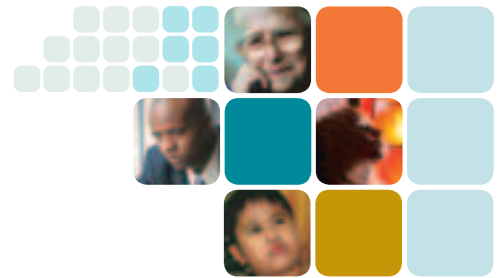
No one, no one can really understand the effects of such abuse on the sense of self that is so fragile in a child. The destruction of my soul felt complete. What I wouldn't have given to have someone sit down beside me and say they understood my pain. The deep suffering of a child damaged by a trusted relative looking ... for what? I'll never really understand what motivates a grown man to rape his 4-year old grandson. I'll never pretend to understand the twisted logic that must have preceded and justified such an act. The destruction felt complete. I was annihilated. My childhood stolen from me.

With the aid of the sweat lodge, and counselling services (paid by the financial resources provided by my job as a physician), I began to rebuild my life. Later, much later, after I had reconstructed some sense of my self, I started to meet other men who had been molested. We met and supported each other and gave each other unconditional acceptance and love. There was light at the end of the tunnel after all. There was a way to transform the pain and suffering into something beautiful. The events which had defined who I was became just a piece of the mosaic of who I am. The work I did enabled me to have a deep understanding of human suffering, and helped access the strength within myself that I never knew I possessed.

Looking back, my recovery has been a difficult and wonderful journey. I would have liked to have come across an organization like The Men's Project here in Ottawa (www.themensproject.ca) at a stage in my healing when I could have taken full advantage of the services they offer. Instead, I floundered in the wilderness by myself, struggling to find a way to make sense of all that had happened and put the pieces of my life together. I didn't know there even existed counselling services for male survivors.

I was appalled to discover that the only available services were for women when, for years, it has been known that one in six men is a survivor of sexual abuse. Why have government funders and sexual assault services avoided the obvious by only serving half of the population? Why have we forsaken the lives of boys and men? This gender bias continues to this day. It violates all the principles of equality and fairness that I thought this country holds dear. Something is wrong, very wrong, in where we are at in 2010. We need to open our eyes and do what is right.

What follows are two poems I wrote. They speak for themselves.



Poison

No better word
To describe what eats away
at my soul
Blackening,
Sickening,
Frightening.

GO AWAY ! GO AWAY !

But I can't escape myself.

I hate you!
You disgusting,
filthy bastard

The war rages on.

But it is really me that I hate,
And me who is disgusting.

Unable to cope,
I turn the poison outwards
And destroy
That which is most precious.
And for a brief moment,
My pain is eased,
As I see reflected in my partners' eyes

Infinite sadness,
Grief,
Betrayal,
Confusion

And inside I am crying out

Stop ! Please stop !

But I don't even know who I am talking to.

Travelling

I have been to that most frightening of places,
And there is peace in the darkness
And in the solitude
and the isolation

What is the fear after all,
But a fear of being alone and vulnerable,
small and helpless.

There is love in the darkness,
Beautiful and strong and warm.

And in the silence and solitude
Of self,
At the core,
Where all is one,
There lies strength of spirit,
Beauty, innocence, balance, simplicity.

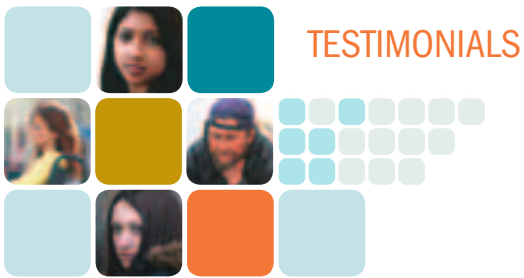
Beyond the fear,
There is peace in the darkness,
And I am not afraid.

I still walk along the edge of the cliff,
With the thick darkness below,
Unafraid of falling.
Able to imagine myself being lifted up
on a warm breeze.
And feeling the sun shining on my body,
And the wind carrying me higher.
I glide and soar.
Suffused with the power and strength
of the universe and self,
Joined and connected.

Travelling in infinite bliss.

There is peace in the darkness,
And the silence is strong and warm

So I soar,
Grounded in the knowledge
And strength
And the silence of self.



VICTIM ADVISORY COMMITTEE – PACIFIC REGION

by *Marjean Fichtenberg*

In September of 1993, one year after the death of my father to cancer, I was finally beginning to settle down to my new life in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Life was good. I had a good job and my three children were on their way to promising futures. Then, on Labour Day weekend, I received the phone call that was to change the direction of my life and send the lives of my son and my daughter into turmoil for many years.

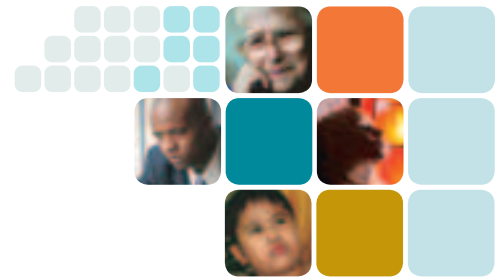
My oldest son, Dennis had been murdered in his home of Prince George, BC by a violent offender on Day Parole. In a state of shock and disbelief, I left Bella Coola for Prince George, a 12-hour drive. In a daze, I made arrangements to have Dennis' body sent to Chilliwack for the funeral and burial. I then returned to Prince George to gather his belongings and returned to Bella Coola.

Two weeks after returning to Bella Coola, I knew I had to find out the circumstances of his murder and make some sense of it. I returned to Prince George. I wanted to speak to the Executive Director of the half-way house where the man who murdered my son had been staying. During my visit with him, he uttered one sentence that sent me on a two and a half year quest to find out the truth about the circumstances surrounding the violent murder of my son. That sentence was: "There was something about him (the man who murdered my son) that I didn't know, if I would have known, he would not have been allowed in this house".

Bella Coola is a very small, isolated coastal community. So from there, I launched a letter writing campaign. I wrote literally hundreds of letters to the Correctional Service of Canada, the National Parole Board and the RCMP. In return, I either received form letters or no response at all. I launched complaints and made numerous requests for information through the *Access to Information Act*.

Eventually, after two years, I convinced some people from the Correctional Service of Canada, the National Parole Board and the RCMP to meet with me in person. I was still not happy with the responses, so I embarked on a campaign to convince the BC Attorney General to re-open the file and call for a public inquest.

Finally, two and a half years after the murder of my son, a public inquest took place in Prince George. Many recommendations came of the inquest, but the most significant one was a recommendation that a "Victims' Ombudsman" office be formed to investigate complaints from victims who feel they have been treated unfairly. The Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board decided to respond to that recommendation by forming a regional CSC-NPB Victim Advisory Committee to advise their respective organizations. The committee was formed in the fall of 1996.



The Victim Advisory Committee in BC was the first committee of its kind in Canada, and as such, there were no models to follow in its creation. The original members were ground-breakers in learning to effectively communicate and share information with the many players in the federal system. The process of meeting to discuss issues and educate one another has been a tremendous learning curve for Corrections Canada, the National Parole Board and the victims involved with the Victim Advisory Committee, but the rewards have been many.

Members of the Victim Advisory Committee have shared their experiences and knowledge about the dynamics of victimization. They have assisted corrections and parole staff to better understand a victim's perspective. They have also recommended ways to improve their communications with and approach to victims of violent crime. All Victim Advisory Committee members would likely agree that many challenges had to be overcome before reaching their full potential as a Committee. The Correctional Service of Canada and the

National Parole Board also had much to learn about how best to tap the resources of the Committee. What once seemed like a chasm that might never be spanned is now flourishing. It has taken much patience and perseverance on the part of everyone, but all have benefited from this unique process.

I have seen many changes in the last 14 years since the inception of the first Victim Advisory Committee. The Committee has made many recommendations to the Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board which have resulted in positive changes and improved services to victims.

The experience has helped me realize my goal of assisting victims by helping the Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board to communicate more effectively with victims. This, in turn, has created a lasting legacy to the memory of my son, Dennis. It has helped move me from the position of "Victim" to "Survivor".