

SOCIETY

SEARCHING FOR MACKIE

Seven years ago, a young woman from Tache, BC, went to a party and never came back. Her family won't stop looking for her

BY ANNIE HYLTON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN



THE WEEK leading up to Father's Day, in June 2013, began like any other, as Peter Basil remembers it; he's since replayed the events in his mind like a recurring bad dream. Peter recalls standing in the kitchen of his modest split-level home in Tache, a First Nations village that lies deep in the wilderness of northern interior British Columbia. His younger sister Mackie, then in her late twenties, followed him around as he made a pot of coffee.

"Promise me you'll take care of my baby," Mackie asked Peter, referring to her five-year-old son.

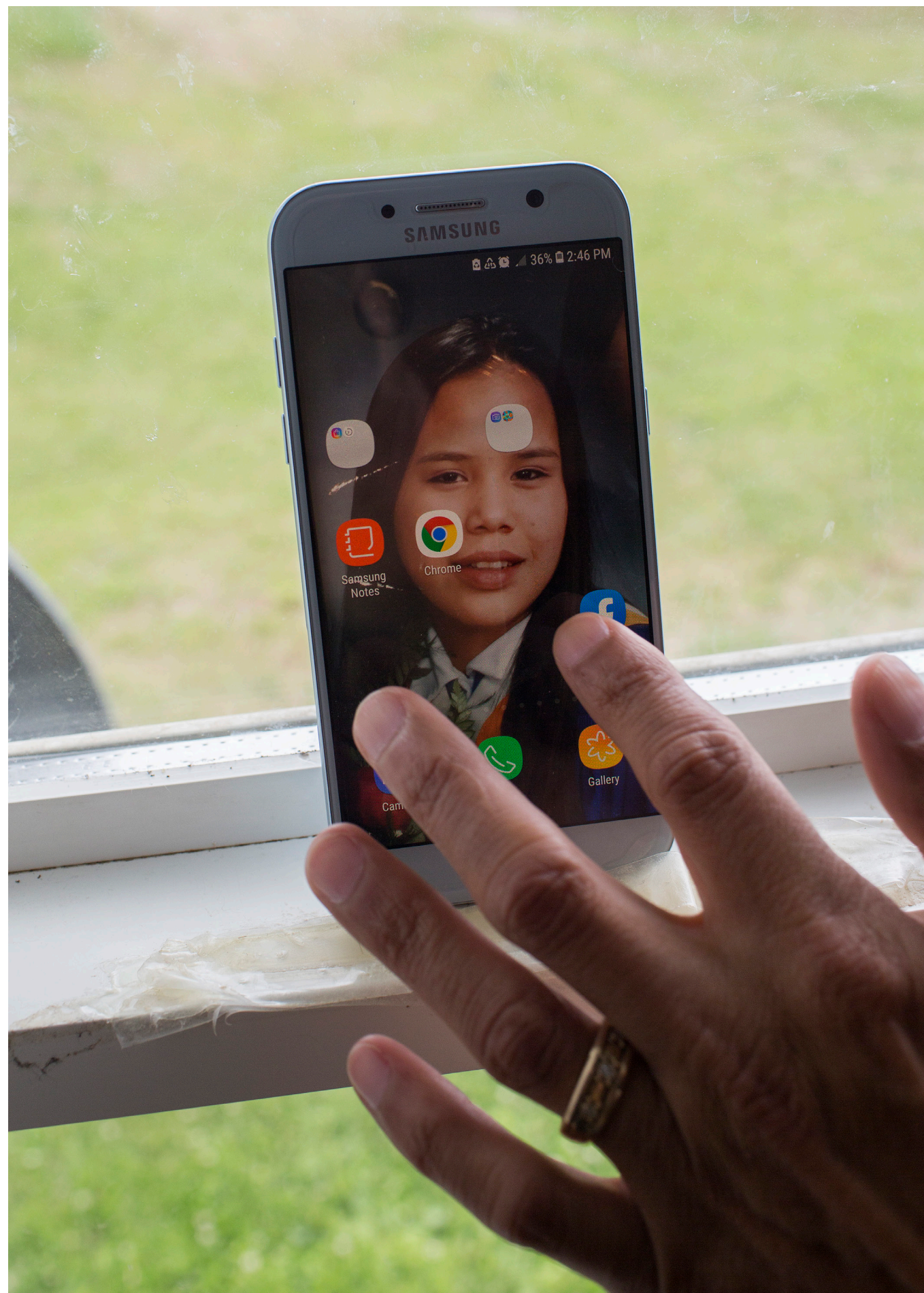
"Yup," he replied.

Mackie trailed Peter to the living room and sat next to him on the L-shaped couch, under high school graduation photos of her and her sisters.

"Promise me you'll take care of my baby," Mackie repeated to Peter.

"Yeah, geez," he responded. "Should I be worried? Are you coming back?"

"I'll be back," Mackie promised.



Although Mackie seemed troubled, Peter didn't think much of the exchange at the time. A few days later, Mackie, Peter, and Peter's wife, Vivian, went to a nearby community to buy a cake. "Thank You Dads," it read, next to the image of an eagle. They picked up a few groceries and stopped to check for mail. Because she had lost her ID, Mackie asked Peter to purchase two bottles of vodka for a party later that night, and then they went home. Mackie showered and sat next to Vivian. She rolled on her grey "stretchies," Vivian said of Mackie's leggings, and pulled on a blue T-shirt and a black hoodie with a little maple leaf logo. In photos from the time, she has black hair that fell neatly below her shoulders, a youthful face, and a playful smile.

Mackie, who went nowhere without her music, grabbed her iPod and a bottle of vodka. She promised Vivian she would be back by the next day; she planned to take her son and nephew to the park. She left before dusk and later walked to where locals were having a party. When Mackie came home a few hours later, she took the second bottle of vodka and headed up a trail, next to the house, that led out of town. Peter cracked the front door open and looked out.

"Goodbye, bro. I love you," Mackie called back to him.

In that moment, now frozen in his memory, Peter watched Mackie walk away, lingering at the door as she climbed the path. He spotted a man waiting for her farther up the trail. Something was not quite right, though. Why, Peter asked himself, would Mackie have said goodbye in such a way if she were coming home? Then he wondered if, perhaps, this would be the last time he'd see her.

THE VILLAGE of Tache, belonging to Mackie's people of the Tl'azt'en Nation, has one road in and one road out. To get there, you can drive or hitchhike along a seemingly endless tree-lined road, past wild roses, bald eagles, and black bears. You'll then descend into a community that lies at the rim of a pristine, glass-like lake called Nak'alBun, where, on a sunny day, the clouds reflect off the

water. The roughly 400 people who live there refer to themselves as Dakelh, people who travel upon water. In winter, most of them warm their houses with wood stoves while waiting for summer. When summer comes, they fish salmon, pick soapberries up in the mountains, and preserve food for the cold months. But, year after year, the Basil family mostly searches for Mackie.

The truth of what happened to Immaculate Mary Basil, or Mackie, that night Peter last saw her nearly seven years ago is elusive. Did she hitchhike with a logger who abducted her? Was she killed by someone she knew, who disposed of her body in the hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of wilderness?

Down the road toward Old Tache, where Mackie attended the party before she came home, Sharon Joseph lives a few houses past the rustic old church. Her sister, Bonnie, went missing in 2007; like Peter, she has been unable to ascertain her sister's fate. "What I heard is that she was trying to hitchhike to Prince George, and I'm not sure what really happened," Sharon explained. Sharon said the RCMP have no answers on Bonnie's whereabouts. "I pray to her every night and day," she told me. When I asked if she thought Bonnie heard her, she said, "Yes, I feel she's with me, I just don't know where. I just miss her so much—I'm the only one left, and I don't want to be alone." She began to cry. "I just wish that she can just come home."

British Columbia's Highway 16 is a remote belt that stretches across the province to Haida Gwaii. Part of that protracted highway—724 kilometres of it—is often called the Highway of Tears for the countless women, mostly Indigenous, who have disappeared or been murdered near it. Dozens of families who live around Highway 16 have been left to grapple with the pain of loved ones vanishing with no trace, several of them in recent years.

In December 2018, fifty-year-old Cynthia (Cindy) Martin went missing near the Gitanmaax reserve, northwest of Tache along Highway 16. The car she was driving was found locked with her belongings inside in the dead

of winter, and footprints could be seen tracking away from the vehicle and back, said Cindy's sister, Faye. No sign of Cindy, though. To find answers, the family began looking for clues on their territory. Time has seemed to stand still since Cindy disappeared, Faye told me from her mother's home in Gitanmaax, roughly six months after she'd last seen her sister. "One night, I dreamt of this little bird just sitting on a branch, and I could actually feel and smell the snow," Faye said. "I just felt then that Cindy had passed." When I asked Faye what she wanted people to understand about her family's grief, she said, "The whole population of Canada needs to be brought to justice—they need to be brought to their knees to understand what we're dealing with."

For decades, the Canadian government has appeared indifferent to murdered and missing Indigenous women like Mackie, Bonnie, and Cynthia. (In 2014, on the question of a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, then prime minister Stephen Harper said, "It isn't really high on our radar, to be honest.") Even the numbers are hard to quantify. The most comprehensive toll, which accounts for all police jurisdictions in Canada, was published in 2014 by the RCMP and identified nearly 1,200 "police-recorded incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females" between 1980 and 2012.

Activists, however, suspect higher numbers. Several factors could contribute to this discrepancy: the RCMP, which controls the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, does not systematically collect race-based data, including data on missing Indigenous women across the country; police have also failed to investigate deaths that occurred under suspicious circumstances. An enduring mistrust of law enforcement means Indigenous communities do not always report crimes. "Most of the time, when people get victimized, they don't want to call [the RCMP]," Peter said. In the Dakelh language, often called Carrier in English, the word *police* translates to "those who take us away."

Meggie Cywink, from Whitefish River First Nation, in Ontario, has been compiling a database of missing and murdered Indigenous women that stretches back to the 1800s and contains over 1,500 cases. Cywink, whose sister Sonya was murdered while pregnant more than twenty-five years ago, said, "There's a number of women and young girls who were with child when they were murdered, and nowhere does it statistically take into account that, in Indigenous ways and being, those are two souls that have been lost and taken."

In 2015, decades of advocacy by families and survivors culminated in the Canadian government announcing the creation of a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The inquiry was mandated to examine the underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional, and historical causes of systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls. The commissioners held hearings and gathered statements across the country and could also issue subpoenas for testimonies and documents. But, from its inception, the inquiry was marred with controversy. High-level staff quit because of internal dysfunction, and family members and survivors called it a colonial-led process instead of an Indigenous-led one. In 2017, Cywink, along with a group of families, had discussions with the leadership of the inquiry, but she later told me that they felt their concerns had not been taken seriously. It was "a huge disrespect to families, to the voices of families," Cywink said. "They are perpetuating, in my opinion, this very thing that they're trying to stop, which is violence."

That summer, Cywink and more than 100 family members sent an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asking for a "hard reset" of the inquiry. The commissioners, they said in the letter,

"have maintained a deeply misguided approach that imposes a harmful, colonial process on us." "There was never a response," Cywink told me. The group sent another letter, in October of that year, this time with more than 180 family members signing on. No response then either, Cywink said.

Marilyn Poitras, a Métis constitutional and Aboriginal law expert, who stepped down as a commissioner of the inquiry less than a year into the role, told me she, too, was troubled by the process. "Why was this left as an [Indigenous] issue? If thousands or hundreds of Indigenous women, girls, transgender, and two-spirit people are going missing, either to human trafficking, murder, or domestic violence, isn't that a public safety issue? Why is that an Indian issue?" she said. "That blows me away because, if it was white women, where would you put it? ... I was seeing we were headed in a direction I couldn't live with. Throwing millions of dollars at it and getting people to study us is a well-worn path."

Last June, after hearing from more than 2,300 people across the country, the four commissioners presented their final report to the Trudeau government. They found that persistent violence and human rights violations against Indigenous peoples, "which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people," amounted to a race-based genocide.

For Poitras, the framing of it is the issue: If Canada is responsible for genocide against Indigenous people, which Trudeau admitted soon after the final report, why do Indigenous people continue to be examined and probed? "What needs to happen to say this comes from somewhere? Who is Mr. Pickton?" Poitras said, referring to Canada's most prolific serial killer, Robert Pickton, many of whose victims were Indigenous women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

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"This is not an Indian problem in terms of we do this to ourselves. We're merely the side effect," she added. "What are the roots of white supremacy? Because that's where colonization and domination and violence and all of this disenfranchisement comes from. ... This is a white supremacy issue."

While some welcomed the outcome of the inquiry, others were concerned that nothing would change. "What do we get?" Cywink asked. "We get a bunch of paper ... but there's no fucking action on any of this." Suzan Fraser, a lawyer who represented twenty families, including Cywink's, before the federal court in a petition to get them standing at the inquiry's hearings, told me that the families she worked with are left wondering, "What was that for? What happens next?" Those still waiting for their loved ones to come home want to know "what happened," she said. "The key thing they want is to make sure that this was not in vain, that something must be different, and that they get answers." The assaults on Indigenous women's identity are "constant and pervasive," Fraser said. "We have a lot of work to do. All Canadians have to look at the way in which they've benefited, either directly or indirectly, from the destruction of Indigenous populations."

Following the report's release, I reached out to Trudeau's office to set up an interview to discuss the government's plan to implement the inquiry's recommendations. His team responded that he wouldn't be available in the coming months due to his "packed schedule" and put me in touch with the office of Carolyn Bennett, the minister of Crown-Indigenous relations. Her office responded with an email statement and, after months of attempts to set up an interview, was unable to provide any additional comments. The statement read, in part, that the "government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people" and that it has "accepted" the report and respects its conclusions and is "taking the time to fully review the report."

In June, the same month the inquiry held its closing ceremony, which also happened to mark the six-year anniversary of Mackie's disappearance, I, along with photographer Andrew Lichtenstein, visited Tache. The use of the word "genocide" to describe the situation seemed to hold little significance to Mackie's family. Peter thought maybe the finding could help them convince the RCMP not to let Mackie's case go cold. "That word that they're saying now—the RCMP and investigators can't just put the missing people's files on the shelf and forget about them," he said. Now, at least, Peter said, "the government has to pass things and recognize things that weren't getting recognized before." The question remains, though, whether this \$92.3 million process will help them "get proper justice," as Peter says, for their loved one. "The only thing I would like to honour my sister is for the people who did it to come forward and give her back to us," Peter said. "It's tearing my family apart."

VIOLENCE against women is rooted in Canada's founding. While First Nations across Canada differ significantly, historians generally agree that, prior to European contact in the sixteenth century, Indigenous women played powerful roles and were the backbones of their communities and families. Some peoples, like the Gitksan, Haida, and Tsimshian, were also matrilineal—the mother passed on wealth, power, and inheritance to new generations.

The way that colonization has affected Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, and LGBTQ people over the course of centuries cannot be divorced from broader patterns of gender-based violence, the national inquiry concluded in its final report. Practices that denied women legal and property rights in Europe were

replicated in Canada. Furthermore, colonialism imposed gender binaries onto Indigenous societies that had been mostly fluid and had revered multiple gender identities. US-based researcher

noted, "How do you infuse a society with the heteropatriarchy necessary in order to carry out your capitalist dreams when Indigenous men aren't actively engaged in upholding a system designed to exploit

in 1876, regulates many areas of Indigenous life, including whether one qualifies as a "status Indian" and is therefore registered as a ward of the Canadian government, a paternalistic relationship

homes. This legacy has affected thousands of women and their children, who continue to suffer the consequences. "Sex discrimination in the Act has been cited as one of the root causes of murdered and

Sandra Lockhart, an Indigenous activist, told the Yellowknife-based magazine *EdgeYK* in 2016. (Lockhart died last year.) Until 1985, provisions in the act legislated that Indigenous women lost their status if they married non-Indigenous men; the same was not true for Indigenous men who married non-Indigenous women.

Though examples of reserves exist from as early as the seventeenth century, the federal government officially established the reserve system through the Indian Act and treaty agreements, imposing borders and displacing communities to areas that were, in many cases, away from ceremonial sites and traditional territories used for generations. Lands were divided, houses were built, resources were extracted, and poverty rose. Today, reserves can be isolated and can segregate Indigenous people from educational and economic opportunities. "We've been put into a corner on a postage-stamp reserve," Ron Winser, Mackie's cousin and the Indigenous Justice Program coordinator of Tl'azt'en Nation, said of Tache. Often, Winser explained, there's one

..... road connecting communities to urban centres or main highways, and "that little string to town, well, people can target that." Despite signs dotted along Highway

16 warning women not to hitchhike and that a killer may be on the loose, for many there's no choice. "You

have a lot of Indigenous women trying to hitchhike to urban centres to try to create a life for themselves, and on the way there, they're targeted."

Chrystal, Mackie's younger sister, does "odd jobs here and there," she said, and hitchhikes when she has no alternative. Her resemblance to Mackie in photos is



and scholar Will Roscoe identified "alternative gender roles for males in over 150 tribes in North America. About a third had comparable roles for females," he notes on his website. In an article for Indigenous Nationhood Movement, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and academic,

women? Well, the introduction of gender violence is one answer. Destroying and then reconstructing sexuality and gender identity is another."

The patriarchal system through which Canada was created was later written into policies and legislation. The Indian Act, first enacted by the federal government

through which rights are conferred. Those with status are granted access to lands and provided government benefits. For over a century, various iterations of the act legislated that women were unequal to men: if husbands abandoned them, women and their children were stripped of their status and forced to leave their

missing Indigenous women and girls in Canada," Pamela Palmater, a Mi'kmaq lawyer and chair in Indigenous governance at Ryerson University, wrote in *Maclean's*. "Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are connected to this act. If you want people to disappear, don't give them full membership,"

uncanny. She described her sister, simply, as “a good person,” and said, “Talking about [what happened] every day helps us process it.” Because of Mackie, whose presence is at once permeating and no longer perceptible, Chrystal has observed a gendered shift in her community. “Over the years, I noticed since Mackie’s been missing, the women have been taking power,” she said. “They don’t let men control them no more.”

One day, we drove the forty-five minutes from Tache to Fort St. James, a former fur-trade post. The family doesn’t have a car, and a private transportation service costs them \$60 that they could put toward food for the four-person household. Sometimes, they travel by community bus to the neighbouring reserve, Binche, to the gas-station shop where they can get coffee, chips, and beef jerky. On this day, though, they wanted to stock up at Save-On-Foods and order takeout from the Chinese restaurant that also serves fries and hamburgers. Chrystal had recently broken up with her boyfriend and needed a ride to town. She planned to meet up with some friends for the night. On the drive, we got to talking about her relationship. “Is he a nice guy?” I asked. “No.”

Chrystal wasn’t sure how she’d be getting back to Tache later that night and said she would likely hitchhike. I suggested she call us if she got stuck, but she didn’t have a phone plan. Plus, even if she did need to contact someone, most of the route from Fort St. James to Tache doesn’t have cell service. She would be fine, she urged. Before leaving, she described once hitching a ride with two men in a pickup truck after a night out. The drive back to Tache took hours, she said, because they took her along a back road. She heard them saying, “Let’s take her over here.” To which she replied, “I may be drunk, but I know what you’re saying. Are you going to kill me?”

WHEN Immaculate Mary Basil was born, on a cold December day in 1985, her father named her in honour of the Virgin Mary. Mackie was one of eight siblings—Peter, now forty-one years old, is the eldest. Chrystal is

a year younger than Mackie, and Ida, who currently lives in Prince George, is a year older. The family has since lost two siblings. Three if you count Mackie.

Their mother attended the Lejac residential school, in Fraser Lake, where generations of Dakelh children, as well as Gitksan, Wet’suwet’en, and Sekani children, were taken from neighbouring reserves. The school, which was open from 1922 to 1976, was part of the government-mandated and church-run system that stripped children from their cultures, traditions, and families, and whose goal was to “kill the Indian in the child,” a phrase that’s been widely attributed to civil servant and acclaimed literary figure Duncan Campbell Scott. (Whether the provenance of that phrase came

from Scott was called in to question in a 2013 book by Mark Abley; what’s clear, though, is that, during Scott’s tenure as deputy superintendent at the Department of Indian Affairs, from 1913 to 1932, he oversaw the expansion and brutality of the residential school system. In 1920, before a parliamentary committee, Scott said, “Our object is to continue until there is not a single

Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic.”) The last residential school didn’t close until 1996. In 2006, the Canadian government approved a settlement agreement to pay reparations to survivors, and it officially apologized in 2008. Several churches involved in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse offered formal apologies in the 1980s and ’90s, but the Catholic Church, which was responsible for more than half of all residential schools in Canada, including Lejac, has yet to issue a formal apology. During a visit to the Vatican in 2017, Trudeau personally asked Pope Francis to make a gesture, but the pope ultimately declined.

“The available information suggests a devastating link between the large numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the many harmful

background factors in their lives,” the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)’s final report, released in 2015, found, citing the multigenerational trauma of residential schools as one of the main factors. “It should not be surprising that those who were sexually abused in the schools as children sometimes perpetuated sexual violence later in their lives. It should not be surprising that those who were taken from their parents and exposed to harsh and regimented discipline in the schools and disparagement of their culture and families often became poor and sometimes violent parents later in their lives,” the report stated.

The day I visited the Lejac site, the clouds hung low. Few physical signs of the school remained, as if to erase any

remembrance of it; today, it is the site of a pilgrimage, bestrewn with Catholic symbolism. Down the road, a construction site for the 670-kilometre Coastal GasLink pipeline project is underway. The Lejac camp, which will house hundreds of workers, is to be built on reserve land. TransCanada, which owns the pipeline, said it signed agreements with all First Nations along the proposed route, but it

was met in some cases with fierce resistance. Hereditary chiefs of the Wet’suwet’en Nation, west of Fraser Lake, oppose the pipeline crossing their traditional territory. Last year, the Wet’suwet’en Nation and its supporters occupied two camps, asserting its title and rights to that land. Heavily armed RCMP moved into a checkpoint and made arrests, and protests erupted across the nation.

One of the reasons the Wet’suwet’en continue to oppose the pipeline is that it would bring a “man camp,” or industrial work camp, to their territory. These camps are temporary housing facilities that bring in hundreds of men for industrial work near or in Indigenous communities. “There are linear relationships between the highly paid shadow populations at industrial camps, the hyper-masculine culture, and a rise

in crime, sexual violence, and trafficking of Indigenous women,” a 2017 report funded by the BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation stated. The authors cited a 2014 report by scholars at the University of Victoria and University of British Columbia examining the consequences of a local mine’s construction: RCMP data showed a 38 percent increase in sexual assaults and a 37 percent increase in missing people during the first full year. They also found that a rise in sex work coincided with industrial activity.

Near the proposed Lejac camp and former residential school site, a man named Norman Charlie chopped wood with his son. When I asked if he could share more about the Lejac school, he responded that, yes, in fact, he could—he is a residential school survivor. “For a long time, I was trying to get back at the world because of this place,” he said. Many other survivors, he said, “are probably all underground.”

Charlie said his mother had attended the school and was used as a labourer to build the place. Along with the other children, she farmed the land and tended to livestock; the fruits of their work—carrots, corn, turnips—however, were not for the students’ consumption. When Charlie was taken, at the age of six or seven, in the mid-1960s, he remembers entering the school with long, thick black hair. Administrators called him a girl and tried to make him wear a dress until they eventually forced him to cut off his hair. “There’s a big stool—they slammed me on it and shaved my head,” he said. Staff beat him on the ears, hands, and back with a yardstick and hit him with a strap made from a conveyor belt. And, he said, a supervisor molested him. “I went to the front lines,” he said. “I went there to sacrifice my life and body so you don’t have to go through what I went through,” he sometimes tells younger generations. Charlie declined to name the supervisor who had molested him, as he said he’s made peace with the past.

Mary Teegee, the executive director of child and family services of Carrier Sekani Family Services, said the stories she’s heard about Lejac from close

family members and Elders illustrate that it was a violent residential school. Teegee described the amount of sexual abuse as “horrific” and said that, if you magnify what happened in the rest of Canada, “that was Lejac.” (According to TRC chief commissioner Murray Sinclair, more than 6,000 children died because of residential schools. The TRC found that this number includes several from Lejac.) Students were deprived of their cultural identities, and some then went on to continue the cycle of abuse—within the family, the community, or internally, with addiction. “One of the biggest impacts is the loss of human potential—that we’ve had all these people who knew the land and culture who could never get there because of the hurt, the trauma,” Teegee said. “These people should have been leaders of this country.”

Many people of Mackie’s generation have parents or grandparents who attended Lejac and still live in Tache. “When people started opening up about it, they started drinking more,” Chrystal said when I asked about the impact of residential schools on the community.

In February 2018, Peter, Vivian, and Vivian’s father, Daniel Alexis, travelled the roughly two-and-a-half hours from Tache to Prince George. They were given an appointment to share a statement about Mackie’s life with the national inquiry, and the question of residential schools came up. What is common among the families speaking to the commissioners, the questioner said, is the trauma sustained in residential schools, which continues through the generations. Peter, whose unassuming, quiet presence belies his doggedness and abiding devotion to finding closure, shared that his mother was a survivor of Lejac. She passed away when a vehicle struck her in Prince George, in 2006, he said.

“Was there a police investigation around that?” the statement gatherer asked.

“Yeah,” Peter replied.

“And what was the result of it?”

“They were telling me that her head was stuck between the tractor-trailer tires and she was in the ICU for maybe a couple hours and then, after that, they just had to unplug her, I guess,” Peter said.

“I’m so sorry that happened. That is awful.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty hard to deal with things like that... now I’m kind of learning from all the past history of what happened like and trying to fit it all together,” Peter said.

“Was the driver ever charged for hitting her?”

“No. I think he took his own life.”

Later in the statement, Peter shared that his mother had begun to open up about her experience at Lejac and was speaking with lawyers about requesting a settlement from the government. But, he said, “Her history died with her.”

IN HER earliest years, Mackie had a stable life: her parents worked steady jobs and always had food on the table. But, when her father had an affair with another woman and left the family, things deteriorated. “From there, my mom turned to alcohol and kind of just left us behind,” Peter said. In the early ’90s, Peter, a teenager at the time, remembers caring for his siblings, “but, somewhere along the line, the welfare got involved with them, with us, and took them.” Seven of the eight siblings were placed in foster care. The three youngest girls—Chrystal, Mackie, and Ida, who were about four, five, and six, respectively, bounced around to different foster and group homes, mostly with non-Indigenous parents.

Around that time, Canadian provinces had been carrying out a decades-long practice that later became known as the Sixties Scoop, during which child welfare authorities “scooped” up Indigenous children, some at birth, from their homes and communities, placed them in foster homes, and adopted them into white families across Canada, the US, and in some cases, Europe and New Zealand. The process dispossessed Indigenous children of their cultures and languages; some never learned of their Indigenous roots, and many suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

In 2017, the Canadian government announced a settlement to compensate some survivors of the Sixties Scoop who were taken between 1951 and 1991, and



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ABOVE
 A private investigator's notebook on murdered and missing women in Canada.

LEFT
 A small memorial on the side of Highway 16 marks the spot where the body of Aielah Saric-Auger was discovered. Saric-Auger is one of countless women who have disappeared along the highway.

payouts for those found eligible are slated to begin this year. Ida and Chrystal have applied for a settlement, as they consider themselves survivors along with Mackie, but they have yet to hear from the government if they qualify.

A public Facebook group set up to share information about the claims process is full of survivors describing immense sadness and loss. Star Naye, with whom I spoke, wrote that, as a newborn, she was wrapped in a blanket and placed in a boot box with ventilation holes, put on a prop plane, and flown to the US to be adopted by a white family that later abused her. She recalled her father, who had been told he was getting a white baby, scrubbing her with a Brillo pad during bath time, repeating that the dirt wouldn't come off. Her skin, she told me, was as dark as tree bark and "was left raw and nearly bleeding from his attempt to wash off my brown skin." For the first eighteen years of her life, she thought she was of German, Scottish, and Irish descent (or, she says, that's what the adoption agency had told her father), until a customer at a restaurant where she'd been working as a teenager told her otherwise. "What's Native American?" she asked. Naye has yet to obtain documentation about her

birth family or place of origin, but she's since been adopted into Anishinaabe tribes. "It all happened for a purpose," she told me. "Part of my spiritual walk is coming to terms with it." (Naye has since withdrawn her application for compensation, as she does not believe the settlement will change the past.)

When Mackie and her sisters were taken into care, at first they were kept together. Their foster parents served them sour milk and would "just treat us wrong" and were "just in it for the money," Chrystal said. After they finished playing outside, if they got wet, "our foster mom made us strip down in public," Chrystal said. At some point, Mackie was placed on her own. But the girls would see one another at school, which is how they remained connected. Mackie's foster parents would dress her in "really tacky clothes, like from the 1970s," Ida recalled. A typical outfit included white stockings, a green turtleneck, and a lime-green plaid pleated skirt. Those outfits, in addition to Mackie talking with a thick Carrier accent, provided fodder for other kids to bully her.

Eventually, as they aged, the three of them were placed together in group homes around Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. "We lived out of hotel rooms as

well because they couldn't find a place for us, and so we'd stay in hotel rooms for weeks at a time," Ida recalled. As Chrystal remembers it, the girls would gather their allowances for the week for bus tickets or hitchhike back to the reserve to see Peter, who, by this point, was too old to be put in foster care, and Vivian. "Because we didn't get to grow up in an Indigenous home, Mackie always said she wanted to go back home and get to know our family and get to know the community," Ida said.

It wasn't until later in life that Chrystal learned Mackie and Ida had sacrificed their bodies to spare her. "All that time, they were getting sexually abused by our foster parents to save me," Chrystal said. As Ida remembers it, Mackie "got most of it," including physical, sexual, and verbal abuse, in different homes. "It happened to both of us, like they'd take turns," Ida said of one of their foster dads who sexually abused them. "We kind of kept quiet about it," she added. "The person would threaten us."

Scholars and activists have described the child welfare system as a pipeline to missing and murdered Indigenous women. Canada continues to have disproportionate rates of Indigenous children in foster care. In Manitoba, of the 11,000 children in care, up to 90 percent are Indigenous. (The province's child welfare service is currently being overhauled as a result.) Cora Morgan, the First Nations family advocate of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, testified as an expert witness before the commissioners of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2018. When the First Nations Family Advocate Office first opened in Winnipeg, in 2015, mothers flooded in, and the office received 1,200 calls per week. These women, Morgan explained in her testimony, sometimes hadn't seen their children for ten years; others had recently given birth, and their newborns were going to be apprehended from the hospital, similar to the practices employed during the Sixties Scoop.

"Our Elders say the most violent act you can commit to a woman is to steal her child," Morgan told me. In Manitoba alone, Morgan estimates, hundreds of

newborn babies are apprehended from their Indigenous mothers every year. (A government spokesperson told the Canadian Press that, in 2017/18, Manitoba child welfare agencies issued 558 birth alerts for high-risk mothers, a label that disproportionately affects Indigenous women.) The reasons for apprehension vary, and a mother's family history is considered in the assessment. This means that, if she has been a ward of family services herself or a victim of domestic violence, her child could be taken away. Once her child is taken, the woman loses her child tax credit, and if she can't pay rent, she could be forced to stay with a violent partner or live in precarious housing. Winnipeg police have estimated that more than 70 percent of missing persons are women and 80 percent of cases involve kids under the protection of Manitoba's Child and Family Services.

The extent to which the child welfare system can doom Indigenous women and girls was made particularly clear in the case of Tina Fontaine, who was murdered, in 2014, at the age of fifteen. Fontaine's small body was discovered wrapped in a duvet, weighed down by twenty-five pounds of rocks, in Winnipeg's Red River. She had previously been in and out of contact with health workers, Winnipeg police, and Child and Family Services, whose agency worker had placed her in a Best Western hotel in downtown Winnipeg, under the care of a contracted worker, around the time she was last seen. The systems meant to protect Fontaine ultimately failed to help her, a report released by Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth found last year. "There was sufficient evidence known by each of these groups to warrant a request for involvement by the child abuse unit of Winnipeg Police," yet none had initiated a follow-up, the report noted. In 2018, a jury found Raymond Cormier, the main suspect in Fontaine's case, not guilty.

"You're living in a time when something like residential schools is going on," Morgan said. When I asked why there isn't a national outrage, she replied, "In the days of residential schools, mainstream society wasn't aware of what was happening to children."

Chrystal and Peter echoed the sentiment. "What happened in Lejac school and the residential schools is the same thing that's happening with the ministry," Chrystal said, referring to BC's Ministry of Children and Family Development. "After they did away with Lejac... the white people couldn't take away our kids anymore, so they had to form the ministry to come step in and take kids that way," Peter added.

When Peter, Vivian, and Ida were preparing to share their statements with the national inquiry, they knew they wanted to target their message to the role the ministry had played in their lives and how it shaped where many of them ended up. The questioner asked Peter how his siblings were doing as adults after having spent their childhoods in care. After Mackie went missing, in 2013, he said, "my other sister, Samantha, died [in Prince George] too. She had a large amount of fentanyl in her system, they found." Samantha had three sons, and Peter and Vivian still care for her youngest as if he were their own. Peter's youngest brother, Travis, was shot and killed in Prince George. "I think he was pretty mixed up in life," Peter said.

"I think they just don't know how to deal with the trauma they've been through," Peter said. In 2016, the day of Travis's funeral service, the family gathered to grieve his passing. One of their brothers was absent from the service; people from the ministry had shown up at his home to remove his children, and he missed the funeral.

IN THE EARLY 2000S, when Mackie graduated high school and aged out of foster care, she remained faithful to her dream of reconnecting with her people. Back in Tache, she lived with her partner, and they had a child together. Mackie worked several jobs: at the local school, as a receptionist at the band office, and as a house cleaner in the community. She was a devoted mother who wrote notes to herself about her child's possible autism. She adored kids and became a foster parent to some on the reserve, "so what happened to us doesn't happen to them,"

Chrystal said. Those who knew her describe Mackie as a vibrant and assiduous person—someone who struggled but was loving and optimistic and did her best to overcome the formidable forces that tried to hold her back. "She took a lot in because of her past and held that in and didn't show it, so she was always happy and did stuff for other people," Ida said. She was "just a very loving and caring and bubbly person even though she went through a lot of hard times."

In 2012, after Mackie and her partner split, she stayed with Peter and Vivian off and on. Mackie kept a bag of clothes in the closet. She and Vivian would pick berries in the mountains, and she would help cook moose steak and spaghetti. When Mackie had the house to herself, she would sit on the porch and blare her music on surround sound—Tracy Chapman, "Give Me One Reason"; Rihanna, "We Found Love"; Tom Petty, "I Won't Back Down"—until the family came home, at which point she would swiftly turn the volume down. Her laugh was infectious. She liked to draw and colour, and she decorated for birthdays, Christmas, and family celebrations.

What happened after Mackie said goodbye to Peter that evening in June 2013 is not entirely clear. The RCMP's Sascha Baldinger and Todd Wiebe, who've left "no stone unturned," according to Wiebe, and have been on the case since Mackie was reported missing, told me Mackie got into a pickup truck with a couple of local men to continue the party at a cabin down a remote forest-service road just off Leo Creek Road. At roughly 9:30 the next morning, according to the RCMP, a forestry worker saw a woman with long hair walking over a bridge, away from a truck, which had become stuck. Two men were seen at that time with the vehicle, but the woman was walking alone.

When Mackie hadn't come home by Father's Day, her family started to worry. They began calling people and knocking on doors, but no one had seen her since the night of the party. The two men she had been with told Vivian that Mackie caught a ride with someone else. The family called the police. The next day, the community set up a search camp near the bridge where Mackie had last been seen. Roughly 300 people, including those from neighbouring reserves, came to search for her. A day later, a police search-and-rescue team set out with canines. After a few weeks, when the police hadn't found any credible evidence

of Mackie's whereabouts, they pulled out. The community kept searching. They found threads, socks, ribbons, buttons, old beer bottles, cans, bones. But none of what they found belonged to Mackie.

Meanwhile, rumours circulated about who could be responsible, and during a search, Peter and Vivian woke up to find a hole slashed through their tent. In town, locals told the family they saw the truck the two men had given Mackie a ride in being washed out with bleach, but the RCMP said the police took possession of the

vehicle and found no evidence of such a claim. The police also investigated Mackie's ex-boyfriend, whom she had been dating until some point leading up to the night her family last saw her. The man allegedly later ducked out of town, but the RCMP said he had an alibi.

To the RCMP, who told me they thoroughly investigated every lead on the case, nobody can technically be considered a "suspect" because, to this day, there's no crime scene. The reality is that "pretty much anybody could probably take advantage of a woman who went by herself with two guys... or more guys in the vehicle," Peter said.

In the warmer months, when the family searches for Mackie, they depend

on dreams and animals to guide them. The dreams have led them to the creek, to the meadow, and deep into the wilderness, where they hope to find a clue as to her whereabouts; the animals—eagles and hawks they believe are their ancestors—channel messages about a piece of hair or clothing that might lead them to her. The family regularly gathers to watch crime shows on the Investigation Discovery channel for ideas on leads. They've seen a few psychics over the years, too, and last year, one prophesied that someone would come forward with information. So they keep looking.

One afternoon, Peter and Vivian drove with us to the remote cabin where Mackie was the night she went missing. We turned onto Leo Creek Road, outside of Tache, and the dust from the logging trucks enveloped our vehicle. We passed a large poster on which Mackie's face and the text MISSING were fixed to two large wooden planks. Next to the poster was a map, on which someone had spray-painted "Murderers Live Here."

We turned up a winding road and drove by clear-cuts, where trees once stood. Eventually, we parked the car. "There's a lot of angry people about this, Mackie missing," Peter said. He grabbed his hunting gun and slung it behind his shoulder. "Maybe the predator of Mackie, they're still around, and they try to take us out or something," he said. "That's why I travel with my gun." It's also convenient if bears approach, Peter explained, to assuage the trepidation in the air.

We walked for roughly twenty minutes, climbing a steep path with overgrown shrubbery, fireweed, medicinal plants, and old trapping trails to meet an abandoned, half-constructed wood cabin. It appeared that nobody had been there for years, and inside it was empty apart from construction material and dust and spiderwebs covering an old couch. Mackie's decision to travel to the cabin was a last-minute calculation, Baldinger and Wiebe, the investigators, told me. There's no cell-phone service in the area, so she couldn't have called for help or notified anyone of her whereabouts. "We don't know what happened to Mackie," they said. "We don't have a crime scene,

♦ ♦ ♦
**Next to
 the poster
 of Mackie
 was a map,
 on which
 someone
 had spray-
 painted
 "Murderers
 Live Here."**

Essential Tremor

BY BARBARA NICKEL

If only it were that: a little
trembling in the hand. If we could tell
your leg be still and still it would. Be it-
self before we heard the news, reeling,
before the shift and the settle into restless
in bed, the shudder as you roll—
here and gone and here momentous
as aurora and nothing I can hold.
Ends always with me spoon-feeding
and push-chairing, the secret life
of drool which maybe isn't half so bad as it looms;
in our room would gather the minuscule
beauties, for instance wind setting off the aspen,
every quaver in your lovely hand.

and we obviously haven't recovered her remains, so if she is, in fact, dead, which I think she likely is, we would have no cause of death," Wiebe said.

Peter admits to wanting to take justice into his own hands. "I told the investigators straight up, I want to hurt those people," he said, but then added, "Our Elders tell us to forgive." So, instead, Peter has restrained himself from doing anything criminal out of respect for traditional law enforcement channels. "Right now, it feels like you're a lost soul yourself, just wandering this world, and deep down in your heart, sometimes you do get to the breaking point, where sometimes you just want to take things into your own hands and deal with it your own way. But you can't," Peter told me. "You just gotta keep on trying to find answers."

As the years go by, "it just gets harder and harder" for the family to go on this way, Vivian said through tears. It has been nearly seven years now, but Peter is in regular contact with the investigators, sharing bones they've found while they're out searching and tips he hears from others. "I just have grade seven and that's about it," Peter said. "It's my way of

getting educated, searching for Mackie." But Peter has suffered health problems, and sometimes he sits at night thinking about Mackie and cries.

One late afternoon, as the sun crept behind the trees, Peter and his cousin Ron Winser took us for a boat ride on the still, placid lake. When I asked how Mackie's disappearance has impacted the community, Winser told me people were in "dire shock." Mackie comes from a society that looks after its people, its families, its members. "We've always found our people," he said. "So to have someone go missing down one of our logging roads, where there was a number of people, where she should have never gone missing, to have no evidence of her, and it's six years later?...It's a major hurt to our people."

When Winser was twelve, his mother, who was Mackie's aunt on her father's side, was stabbed multiple times during a visit to Vancouver from Prince George. After a bingo night, she was killed on her way to buy a Greyhound bus ticket home. Her case remains unsolved, and Winser said he has since spent his life learning about human behaviour. He suspects

the person who murdered her knew or was related to her. "I think it had to have been someone she knew. Anybody could be that person," Winser said. "I've lived through this twice now."

WHEN MACKIE'S family tries to talk about what happened to her, where she might be now, the only thing they can conclude is that somebody knows something, and they think that person lives in their village.

While there's a long list of colonial policies that have harmed this family and this community, they continue to place their trust in the same systems that have perpetually failed them, hoping justice will eventually materialize. Some days, Peter told me, he walks the stretch of Tache. On one end, someone asks him for a cigarette; on the other, someone tells him they want to kill themselves. "They'll throw us welfare checks, and we'll fight like cats and dogs, and then they'll rip in and tear our children away," Peter said. "Sometimes, I just sit and watch. It takes the breath right out of me, the life right out of me."

Now that the national inquiry has concluded, one hopes it wasn't part of yet another empty promise by the Canadian government to repair the damage. As Peter says, it's too soon to tell. "Hopefully, they could get more programs, like I keep saying, for people in need of help—mental health and drug and alcohol counsellors to intervene with people living through this kind of tragedy we live through right now," Peter said. "Pretty much everyone who [went] to that inquiry is looking for an answer."

Until that answer comes, Mackie's family continues to roam their territory, searching for a sign of her. One of the last pieces of potential evidence they found was a bone, but it came back from an analysis as belonging to an animal. "It leads to a dead end all the time," Peter said. "To this day, actually, I kind of expect her to come walking in the door." †

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ANNIE HYLTON's work has been published by *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New Republic*.