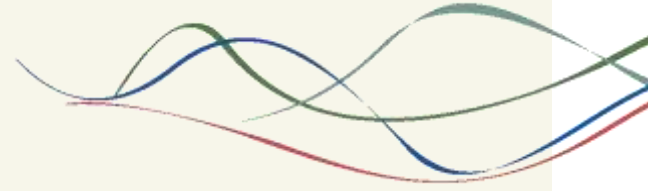




NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



Storytelling: Lisa's Story



For years, communities have pointed to the high numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has been honoured to work with families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls to share the story of their loved one. As part of the storytelling process, families' are also invited to share their experiences with the justice system, media, victim services and other institutional and community supports.

Storytelling is a way of teaching and learning. The stories shared by family members are intended to raise awareness, educate, and promote change. They have been told to honour the daughters, sisters, mothers and grandmothers that have been lost to violence and remember those still missing. This is what their stories tell us.

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Lisa Marie Young's Story

Lisa Marie Young was 21 years old when she disappeared on June 30, 2002 in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Lisa is the daughter of Don and Joanne Young, the granddaughter of Cecilia Arnet and sister to younger brothers Brian and Robbie. She is loved by her large extended family and many close friends. In the years since Lisa disappeared, family members have covered Vancouver Island with missing person posters. They have followed leads, consulted psychics, held vigils, and talked to countless members of the media. They want us to know that Lisa Marie is beautiful and fiery, talented and caring. They remember her. They love her. Not a single day goes by that they do not think about Lisa Marie or what could have happened to her.

Lisa Marie Young was born on May 5, 1981 in Nanaimo, a healthy and beautiful baby with long eyelashes. Her hair was dark and kind of curly, like her father's. "She was just awesome," says Lisa's mother, Joanne. Lisa Marie was the first child for Joanne and Don and the second grandchild for Joanne's mother, Cecilia. Joanne was 18 years old when Lisa was born. "The pregnancy was really nice," she remembers. "I knew the baby was going to be a girl because she hardly ever kicked." Lisa was a tiny baby and Joanne barely showed at all. Family members joked that Joanne would be able to wear her old jeans right away. While pregnant with Lisa Marie, Joanne walked a lot and enjoyed healthy food. Her diet was mainly vegetarian. Cecilia fell in love with her new granddaughter immediately. "She was a beautiful little angel. She looked just like her mother," she says. Cecilia can still picture Lisa as an infant, can still smell her "baby smell." Remembering her own childhood, Cecilia made sure her grandchildren were loved and cared for. Both Cecilia and Joanne's father attended Kakawis Residential School on Meares Island. Cecilia was nine years old when the Indian Agent took her to the school. "It was really bad. Scary. Lonely," she says simply. She attended the school for seven years. Thankfully, Cecilia's time at residential school did not affect her experience as a mother. Cecilia loved being a mother, loved every minute of it. She treasured her children and, later, her grandchildren.

Lisa grew up in Nanaimo. Don and Joanne had a two bedroom apartment with a crib in the second bedroom, but Lisa always slept with Joanne and Don in their king size bed, nestled against Joanne's chest. The two would often nap together. Cecilia remembers Lisa as a quiet baby, but Joanne says her daughter was actually quite vocal. Lisa Marie started crawling when she was five months old. Two months later, she was walking. "When I told people that Lisa was walking at seven months, everybody thought I was lying," Joanne remarks. "But she was always a really determined girl. Ever since she was a baby."

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Lisa was a sweet toddler and very, very gentle. Cecilia remembers watching Lisa open gifts at Christmas time. Most kids just tear their presents open, but not Lisa. “We were all saying, ‘Hurry up, just open it!’” remembers Cecilia, laughing. “But no. She was always so gentle when she opened up her present. She was so good.” Cecilia moved up island when Lisa was about two, but came back to Nanaimo every summer to visit. She would take Lisa out for lunch or shopping, just the two of them. Recalling those outings, Cecilia says her granddaughter never demanded anything. Instead, it was Cecilia who had to coax and say, “Well, Lisa get something for yourself.”

Lisa adored her younger brothers, Brian and Robbie, and was very protective. When the family had photos taken, the photographer never had to say, “Put your arm around your brothers”; she was already doing it. Lisa was like a little mother to her brothers and a big help to Joanne. On nearby Gabriola Island, Lisa would take her brothers to pick wild blueberries for pancakes. They often had picnic lunches together on the deck. Lisa liked to play dress-up with her brothers. “She used to dress them up like little girls!” giggles Joanne. “They didn’t really like it. But they did it. It was cute.” Still, Lisa’s tenacious nature led a family friend to nickname her ‘Bossy Lisa.’ Thinking back, Joanne cannot help but laugh. “She was kind of bossy,” she admits.

From the time she was small, Lisa was a real “girly girl.” She favoured pretty clothing, pink headbands and painted nails. When she got her first bike at four years old, it was a pink one with streamers on the handlebars. She loved beadwork and glitter—anything that sparkled. As a toddler Lisa would walk around with cute little bags of beadwork and sparkly glitter pins. And as she grew, so did her creative nature. She was always making or beading something. Lisa was also very caring. She was just a toddler when she became a vegetarian. Wading in the shallow ocean water of an island park, Lisa saw some tiny little fish. “What are those Dad?” she asked. Don decided to tease her a bit. “They’re little fish, they’re going to bite your bum,” he said seriously. Well! Lisa never ate fish or meat again.

Joanne remembers her daughter’s first day of school clearly. Lisa was not scared at all. Wearing a cute little white jogging outfit, she went running right into the school ground. “She just left me in the dust!” laughs Joanne. Lisa Marie really enjoyed elementary school. It did not matter what the class was doing, she put her all into it. She especially loved field trips. Joanne remembers how excited Lisa was about a class trip to plant cedar and other trees.

As she got older, Lisa became more involved in school activities. Joanne says that Lisa was kind of like an ambassador for the school. On parent’s night she had to meet everyone and show them around. She also volunteered to be a crosswalk guard, which led to something unexpected. As a school volunteer, 12 year old Lisa won a contest to spend a night in Vancouver and fly in a helicopter! A story about the contest appeared in the local paper, along with a cartoon picture of Lisa. Lisa was not yet a teenager, but Joanne could already see her daughter turning into a young woman. She had really long, beautiful hair and was very feminine.

Lisa always loved sports, especially basketball. In grade eight she joined the school basketball team and the family had a great time watching her games. When Lisa decided to try out in high school, Joanne and Don were really excited for her. They were surprised when Lisa came home in tears because she did not make the team. Joanne remembers her daughter feeling quite devastated. But nothing could get Lisa down for long. Joanne says that she and Don are very stubborn, and their daughter is no different. Lisa is a Taurus and very fiery. She would never argue for the sake of arguing, but if she believed she was right she would not back down, not one bit. Joanne really admires the way her daughter always stood up for herself. Lisa had a really strong sense of self and Joanne and Don respected and encouraged her independence.

In her high school years, Lisa volunteered with the department of Parks, Recreation and Culture as a day camp leader. It was great experience and when she applied for her first job at McDonald's she was hired right way. Lisa liked working with people; she was as a definite "people person." She was constantly on the phone with her friends. If they had a problem or needed someone to talk to, they called Lisa. She was always there to say, "It's ok, don't worry about it!" Lisa was forever busy, off meeting friends for coffee on the waterfront, waterskiing or dancing. She also loved to rollerblade and walk at Swy-A-lana Lagoon. It was her favourite place in Nanaimo. But even with so much going on in her life, Lisa always made time for her brothers. She was never too busy to take them out to lunch or bother them about finishing their homework.

As a teenager and later as an adult, Lisa remained a girly girl. She dressed up for everything, whether she was going for a walk in the park, a night on the town or just out for coffee. Taking the bus downtown for work, Lisa would often pass the time applying or reapplying make-up. "People thought she was silly," says Joanne, "But Lisa would just laugh and say 'Well I'm bored!'" Lisa was very athletic, but she also loved music and art. She enjoyed writing and painted using water-colors. She used her face and hair like canvass. In her teenage years, she experimented with short hair, coloured blond and kind of curly. Later, she grew her hair long and dyed it a dramatic black. "It took me forever to get used to!" laughs Joanne.

Lisa Marie Young was last seen in the early morning hours of June 30, 2002. Lisa was downtown with friends to celebrate a birthday when someone in the group struck up a conversation with a young man driving an older model red Jaguar. No one in the group knew him, but he seemed friendly and offered Lisa and her friends a ride to a house party. A few hours later when Lisa said she was hungry, the driver offered to take her to get some food. They left together in his red Jaguar. She has not been seen since.

Lisa Marie was just 21 years old when she disappeared. She was in the process of moving to a new apartment and was set to start a new job two days later. She talked about going back to school to become TV sports announcer. Lisa was a vivacious young woman. She had no reason to disappear.

Joanne and Don spent most of June 30, 2002 calling Lisa's cell phone. It was unlike Lisa not to answer, but they knew she was getting ready to move and thought maybe she was just really busy. But late that afternoon, their daughter's former roommate came looking for Lisa. She said that Lisa had not moved any of her things. "That's when we got really worried," says Joanne.

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Joanne went to Lisa's apartment and found her daughter's black book with all her phone numbers. She called every number in the book. No one had seen or talked to Lisa since the night before.

Frantic, Joanne and Don decided to call the police. They knew something was wrong, yet the officer who took the call seemed unconcerned. "He said, 'She's only been missing a short time' and that I'd have to call back in 48 hours," remembers Joanne. But Joanne refused to wait. She contacted her mother and soon a whole group of family members were searching up and down the coast, from Coombs to Tofino. "We didn't know what to do, but we couldn't just sit there. We had to do something," says Joanne. Lisa's friends joined the search as well.

Finally, late that evening, a police officer was sent to Joanne and Don's house. He asked some questions and took a photograph of Lisa. Then he told them that he was off for the next four days and to call him on Friday. Joanne and Don were incredulous. "This was on a Sunday," explains Joanne. "Our daughter was missing. We couldn't wait long!" Joanne and Don were up all night trying to figure out what to do. Eventually, they decided to contact the local news media. A reporter came over right away and the next day Lisa's disappearance was all over the news. A few days later, police told Joanne and Don that the RCMP's Serious Crime Unit was investigating Lisa's case. "That's when we knew it was really bad," says Joanne quietly.

The police conducted their first land search for Lisa in September 2002, two months after she disappeared, and have since identified the driver of the red Jaguar. No charges have been laid, though police have said they consider him a person of interest. Police have also said they believe Lisa met with foul play. There are various theories about what happened to Lisa and her parents still have a lot of questions about the man driving the red Jaguar. "We always have hope," Joanne remarks, "but sometimes you think about what you might have to deal with one day."

Thinking back on the journey since Lisa went missing, Joanne raises several issues about the police. She talks about the officer who came to the house after Lisa disappeared. "He had an attitude of 'What am I doing here?' It was like my daughter wasn't important," she states. Joanne says that in the days and weeks following Lisa's disappearance, police "support" consisted of giving the family advice or making suggestions that were not practical or helpful to the family's situation. Joanne says that the police do not share a lot of information, which is difficult. Feeling as though they were not getting answers from the RCMP, the family had done a lot of searching on their own, contacting Lisa's friends and talking to people in the community and surrounding areas. While Joanne acknowledges that police have shared some information, she also feels as though they have not always been truthful. She says they would hear one thing from the police, only to be told something different from Lisa's friends or other people in the community.

For years, Joanne asked the police to work with Crime Stoppers to film a re-enactment of Lisa's disappearance. They resisted, saying Joanne was "already doing a good job" of keeping Lisa's story out there. Frustrated, she decided to get in touch with a local reporter about the trouble she was having. She says the police told the reporter that they "no longer did Crime Stopper re-enactment videos," something she knew to be untrue. Joanne decided to contact Crime Stoppers directly. She was told, yes, they still did re-enactment videos, but that one of the detectives on

the case had to initiate it. “The police lied right to the reporter,” says Joanne. “I don’t understand it. Why would they lie?” Finally, in May 2009, the Nanaimo RCMP released a Crime Stoppers re-enactment of the night Lisa went missing. After so many years, Joanne hopes the segment will bring about new information that will finally lead them to their daughter.

Joanne also raises concerns around communication with police. “The only time we hear from them is when we call them,” she says. In the summer of 2009, unidentified human remains were found in an area north of Nanaimo. Although police promised to warn the family if something like this were to happen, the family found out through a journalist who called to tell them that a story on the discovery would be airing that night. “The media really speculated...they said it might be Lisa,” says Joanne. The family did not know what to think. They hardly got any sleep that night. Finally, days later, they got a call from the police. They said that it was a “courtesy call” to let them know that the remains were not Lisa.

Joanne says it has been mainly the same detectives working on Lisa’s case, although there have been some changes. Reassignments are always difficult. You get to know and trust someone, she explains, and suddenly there is someone else involved and they may seem less personable or willing to talk to you. Or they say the same thing over and over: “There are no new developments.” It is very frustrating, particularly because the police rarely contact the family anymore. Still, the RCMP maintains the investigation remains active and, despite everything, Joanne believes that many of the officers have their heart in finding Lisa. One of the detectives in the Serious Crime Unit has her picture by his desk. “I can’t say it’s all bad,” Joanne concludes. Joanne finds talking to strangers difficult. She is never sure what sort of response she is going to get. After Lisa disappeared, the police connected the family with victim services. It was not a good experience. “The worker began the meeting by saying, ‘Most couples don’t survive a marriage after a loss of a child.’ She had a cross on her necklace and kept saying ‘God bless’ and things like that—but that’s not part of our beliefs,” relates Joanne. Joanne and Don were taken aback, then angry. “There wasn’t a lot of support from that,” comments Joanne dryly. Indeed, the family finds the greatest support and strength in each other. Joanne and Cecilia are especially close. They talk every day, sometimes four or five times. Her sons, her husband and her mother—these are people that keep Joanne going.

In contrast to their experience with victim services, the family has had a lot of support from the community; good things and people they never imagined would be on the journey with them. Much of this is due to Joanne’s determination. The family has planned several candle-light vigils for Lisa. Remembering how much her daughter loved beadwork when she was little, Joanne contacted the youth group at the Tillicum Haus Native Friendship Centre to see if they could help by making beaded bracelets to give out at one of the vigils. They made a whole basketful, each one unique. The family also received community support for a billboard with Lisa’s picture on it. The billboard was Joanne’s idea. She contacted lots of business people in Nanaimo, first to find a company that would make the billboard and then to find a place to put it. The billboard was downtown for about a year. It was an amazing display of support.

The media has been another important ally. It was the media, not the police, that first drew attention to Lisa’s disappearance. “They were very supportive,” says Joanne. “They always have

been.” Since Lisa went missing, family members have talked to journalists from all over Vancouver Island. Joanne talks to anyone who will listen, determined to keep her daughter’s story out there. But it has not always been easy. For a long time, Joanne refused to have her picture taken. “I didn’t want anyone to know that I was Native, because of way people judge. That’s how I felt,” she says. It is only in the last couple of years that she has agreed to go in front of a camera. She wants people to know that she is still looking for answers; that she is not going to forget. Somebody knows something, she says. Somebody knows what has happened to her daughter.

Cecilia has been active in the search for Lisa as well. In August of 2008, she joined Walk4Justice, a group of activists and family members that walked from Vancouver, British Columbia to Ottawa, Ontario calling for a public inquiry into the unsolved disappearances and murders of women from across Canada. Cecilia was one of the oldest people on the walk. She wore a t-shirt with Lisa’s picture on it and handed out posters on Parliament Hill. It was quite an experience, she says, and very emotional. Still, Cecilia is glad she did it. She felt a lot better after doing the walk. She just kept telling herself, “I’m doing it for my granddaughter.”

Lisa always felt strongly about her independence. Having grown up in Nanaimo she felt safe in the community, as though she knew everyone. She never thought anyone would harm her. Still, Lisa was practical. If she went downtown at night she was always with a friend. But the night she went missing, Lisa was with friends. That is why *Lisa’s Song* is so important to Joanne. *Lisa’s Song* was written and recorded by artist Allison Crowe, a friend of Lisa’s since high school. It is an amazing song, and very powerful. Joanne says listening to *Lisa’s Song* makes her feel strong. She hopes the song will remind people to keep themselves and their family members safe if they can.

Joanne has been resolute in her efforts to find out what happened to her daughter. Like Lisa, Joanne is a fighter. If she knocked on one door and it was shut, she went to the next door. If one person said ‘no,’ she moved on. Cecilia is very proud of her daughter. It is amazing how strong Joanne is, she says, how she keeps Lisa’s name alive. In June 2009, Joanne held a candle-light vigil for Lisa Marie in Tofino, the west coast community where Joanne was born, “I wanted to bring her back to the place where I come from. My daughter belonged here, she was from here too,” Joanne says. She wanted to bring Lisa home.

Lisa Marie Young is remembered as a beautiful and vibrant woman. She was a good listener to her friends and protector to her brothers, always. And she was a fighter. She believed in herself, was strong-willed and confident enough to stand up and say, ‘I’m right about this.’ Don and Joanne always felt like she was going in the right direction. “My daughter wanted to shine,” Joanne observes. “No matter what she wanted to do, she would have been awesome.” Lisa had a great sense of humour too, says Joanne. All of her kids do and she likes that in them; it is good to laugh sometimes. More than anything, the family wants to keep Lisa in people’s minds. They do not want people to forget about Lisa Marie.

They do not need to worry. We will not forget. Lisa Marie is shining brighter than ever.