



# The Brief

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## Collective grieving, calls to action mark vigil for Tina Fontaine along the Wolastəq

By JARED DURELLE



Melissa Beek, a Mi'kmaq poet from Metepenagiag, read her poem, My Stolen Sisters, at the Blankets for Tina Fontaine Vigil on Feb. 26, 2018 in Fredericton. Photo by Jared Durelle.

“Here we are in the so-called free and great country of Canada that just let a criminal go for murdering an Indigenous girl of the age of 15,” said Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay at a Fredericton vigil for Tina Fontaine on Feb. 26.

Just two weeks after Fredericton residents gathered at a vigil in solidarity with the family of Colten Boushie, who was killed by a farmer in Saskatchewan, 50 people stood in solidarity with the family of Tina Fontaine. They gathered in front of Fredericton City Hall, along the banks of the Wolastoq, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, to hear elders, victims, parents, a poet and Chief Tremblay speak.

“The rally is showing our support for the Fontaine family and showing our love and respect from the east coast here through the Wolastoqey and Wabanaki nations,” said Chief Tremblay to the people wrapped in blankets for Fontaine.

Fontaine was added to Canada’s list of missing and murdered Indigenous women in August 2014. In February 2018, Raymond Cormier was acquitted of her murder in Manitoba by a jury of his peers. Some commentators have called the trial suspect because the Crown moved too quickly to prosecute without evidence. Others are outraged to know that Fontaine was in care at the time she went missing and was later found murdered. Along with Cormier’s admitted abusive sexual relationship with Fontaine, a minor, another shocking fact emerged at the trial: he was born in New Brunswick.

Addressing the youth in the crowd, Alma Brooks, a Wolastoq elder, stated, “Your responsibility is to speak out! We need your voice. We need allies because clearly there is no justice for Aboriginal people in Canada.”

“There are huge changes that are coming. Everything in our lives is going to be changing, but we pray that they are for the better. We have 8,000 missing and murdered women and girls. What does that say to you?” said Brooks.

“It’s colonialism still unfolding, and as a white person, I’m here to give some solidarity,” stated Norm Knight, “I think a person in a society has a responsibility to not just look out for themselves but to take care of the society they’re in and attending events like these is a part of that.”

When asked about the lack of reaction from municipal and provincial governments to the jury verdict, Erin Morton, who identifies as a white settler, said: “I think it is important to focus on alternative systems of governance. As we learned from the Fontaine and Boushie murders, we aren’t going to find justice in colonial works.”

“Your very first Prime Minister set forward a policy: ‘We need to get rid of the Indian problem’ and those words are still relevant today... This country was built on racism. Genocide occurred and genocide is still occurring when we have young people from our nations being murdered and their perpetrators being found not guilty,” stated Tremblay.

“We have to take action by not performing for the federal and provincial government. They use that to say that they have a nation-to-nation relationship with our people. We’re just pawns. We’re being used. They’re not here for the betterment of our people. They are here to promote corporations,” continued Tremblay.

Tremblay shared a teaching left to him by the late Sagatay (Gwen Bear): “We cannot have one foot in our canoe and the other foot in their boat.”

The meaning of wearing blankets at the vigil for Fontaine was explained by Tremblay: “We gift our people in blankets and thank them for what they have done. Tina was wrapped in canvas and thrown into a river. We stand here today wrapped in our blankets sending the Fontaine family all our respect, love and prayers but more than my prayers, I send my words and actions that I perform.”

“Tina Fontaine was wrapped in a canvas, and her assailant admitted that he raped her. She was underage. I thought that was a crime but he was never charged for that. Why?” Brooks asked the crowd.

Tremblay observed that more women were in attendance than men. He called on men to stand up and work with children and women: “Prayers and ceremonies are great, but without the actions behind them, they are just kind thoughts. Our men need to stand up with our women and children.”

Melissa Beek, a Mi'kmaq poet whose family is from Metepenagiag, read a poem that she wrote for Fontaine and all missing and murdered women.

Holding an eagle feather close to her heart, she read: “My stolen sisters I think of you, I think of you when my mother says ‘be careful’/ I think of you when with five Mi'kmaq daughters I know she can’t keep them all safe from violence/ My stolen sisters I thought of you as he yelled ‘hey ponytail what’s the rush’/ I thought of you as his hand latched onto my waist length ponytail and suddenly that hair didn’t feel like my own/ My stolen sisters I thought of you while I struggled to untangle this body from trespassing hands that wished it harm.”

Brooks said she knew what it was like to lose a child.

“You don’t have our permission”: Crowd opposes Sisson’s plan to use brooks with fish for mine waste

By TRACY GLYNN

Stanley – About 250 people filled the Upper Nashwaak Lion’s Club on March 15th to hear from federal government representatives and the Sisson Partnership on the mining company’s plan to use and destroy fish-bearing brooks for disposal of waste from a mine they plan to build on the headwaters of the Nashwaak. All of the nearly two dozen members of the public who spoke at a microphone expressed their disapproval of the plan.

The proponent, having already secured conditional approval from the federal and provincial governments to proceed with the mine, is seeking approval to have Sisson Brook, McBean Brook, Bird Brook, Lower Napadogan Brook and an unnamed tributary to the West Branch of Napadogan Brook exempted from the Metal Mines Effluent Regulations (MMER) of the Federal Fisheries Act, through the addition of these brooks to Schedule 2 of the regulation.

The MMER prohibits disposal of metal mining effluent into fish bearing habitat. Schedule 2 is a controversial amendment to the MMER that allows mining companies to dispose of its waste in designated freshwater bodies inhabited by fish.

Northcliff Resources, a Hunter Dickinson company, and Todd Minerals are behind the Sisson Partnership that aims to develop one of the world’s largest open-pit tungsten and molybdenum mines on public land near the communities of Napadogan, Juniper and Stanley.

Alma Brooks, Wolastoq Clan grandmother, was first to respond from the audience. She read a statement on behalf of Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay who could not be there. “You do not have permission from the Wolastoq Grand Council and our citizens to damage, alter or molest Wolastoqiyik Maliseet homeland and waterways,” stated Brooks who added that if the mine is approved, the mining company and the Canadian government would be in violation of Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution that recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal treaty rights of indigenous people.

Wolastoqiyik grandmothers are currently occupying and protecting the Bird Brook area, the location of the mine’s planned tailings dam site and tailings disposal area. The Grandmothers, with the help of allied organizations have built two tiny homes and are busy hosting visitors interested in learning about the land and the treaties signed between the indigenous people and the Crown.

Maggie Connell, a retired teacher from Taymouth passionately asked, “How many of us here have kids and grandkids who swim in the Nashwaak and eat fiddleheads?” A room full of hands went up.

“Many of us have come here by choice. Others are from



Over 250 people filled the Upper Nashwaak Lion’s Club on March 15, 2018 to hear from federal government representatives and the Sisson Partnership on the mining proponent’s plan to use fish-bearing brooks for mine waste. Photo by Marilyn Merritt-Gray.



# Angee Acquin has built her career improving the lives of at-risk kids. Now she needs her community’s help to save her own

By OSCAR BAKER



**Angee Acquin who needs a kidney is raising awareness about organ donation in the indigenous population.** Photo by Oscar Baker.

Angee Acquin dreams one day of being a little old woman with traditional regalia and shawls hanging over head in her tent, her grandchildren running around and laughing in her home in St. Mary’s. But the 41-year-old youth support worker now worries that may not be the case because her kidney is only functioning at 12 per cent after 15 years living with Type 1 diabetes.

Diabetes is a blood sugar disease that has ravaged First Nation communities. Diabetes Canada says First Nation people are three to five times more like to suffer from the glucose level disease.

Enter her mom, who has started an awareness campaign on Angee’s behalf by selling hoodies that dare people to “Be a Superhero Donate a Kidney.” There are already 50 in circulation.

“My mom wants to see her baby better,” said Acquin, who has been overwhelmed by the amount of people who are willing to go through the screening process to see if they are a match.

Acquin’s father died from complications related to Type 1 diabetes.

“I want to feel better, she says. “I was scared because Dad was walking and talking one Saturday and by the end day he had total organ failure.

She said her resilience comes out because she doesn’t let it get her down. She’d rather make people laugh and feel comfortable, but it comes off too casual at times and so people don’t think she’s that sick. But now the gravity of the situation is starting to set in.

Acquin, who will soon start dialysis, is hoping a new kidney will help get her way of life go back to normal. She’s extremely fatigued because diabetes affects the blood flow and sometimes can damage internal organs. Three years ago Acquin had a massive heart attack.

Acquin is a Wolastoq woman born and raised in Fredericton but now owns a home in St. Mary’s First Nation. She’s an activist, a traditional singer and works as a support worker at Devon middle school with at-risk First Nations youth.

“If you sit them down and talk them through it they can get through most problems,” said Acquin.

She said the job is both heartbreaking and fulfilling. Acquin says some students have to deal with parents struggling with substance and alcohol abuse problems and some don’t have running water. But the reward is watching them grow into young adults and learn how to deal with issues on their own.

“I wish I could take them all in forever,” said Acquin.

She wants to be healthy again to continue in her activism and helping the kids. Acquin said she worked for years educating people about diabetes and healthcare but now she’s dealing with it.

“I never really had problems with anything else. My body was like go big or go home, have a massive heart attack, need a kidney,” said Acquin with a smile.

*This article was first published by Wicked Ideas.*

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## Collective grieving, calls to action mark vigil for Tina Fontaine

She had a son who was murdered seventeen years ago and she prays for the youth who need the support that was absent for him.

“Tina was in care of the child and family service agency. I just returned from Ottawa, where I was at a meeting about child welfare. I saw an empty chair that said New Brunswick. Other provinces had their regional chiefs there but nobody spoke for New Brunswick,” said Brooks.

“Fifty-nine per cent of children in foster care in Canada are indigenous. We have become an industry for the province. Our children just fodder for somebody to make a living... We need to be a part of these changes and we need to pay attention. They have to change the laws in Canada to accommodate our rights, our cultures, and our languages but to do that we need to be a part of it,” continued Brooks.

Matthew Comeau, a young man from Elsipogtog, was the last to speak at the vigil. Two nights before, his community had suffered the loss of 22-year-old Brady Francis in a tragic hit-and-run.

“Our children are murdered, slaughtered like animals and their killers walk free with no charges. Before we get to the

courts, we have the child welfare system that failed her. We have the effects of colonization, we have systematic racism, and intergenerational trauma and I still get people telling me to get over it,” said Comeau.

Comeau expressed his fears for his son and how ready he was for the backlash against indigenous people for voicing their outrage: “We are a nation that sticks together and if we didn’t we’d be dead. This blanket was my mother’s. She’s gone now and she taught me to be an activist, and now I’m teaching my son to be an activist. The Premier says my reserve will have clean drinking water in 5 years. I’ve been waiting for 27.”

After the crowd chanted “Shame on Canada,” members of Pokuhulakon Witsehkehsu (Sisters of Drums) sang the Warrior Women’s Song and other traditional songs for Fontaine.

The office of Premier Brian Gallant and Aboriginal Affairs did not respond to a request for a statement regarding the court verdict on Fontaine’s murder.

*Jared Durelle is a journalism student at St. Thomas University.*

# Community Calendar

To list your community event, email [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org). For an updated listing of events, check [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org).

## Mayworks 2018 in Fredericton

Mayworks, an annual festival that celebrates working people and the arts, returns to Fredericton, April 27 to May 5. Featuring the play, Marx in Soho, poetry by El Jones, films, labour history and skill-building workshops. Learn about the issues facing today’s workers including campaigns for a \$15/hour minimum wage, workplace safety and compensation, pay equity, migrant justice & more! Organized by unions, artists and social justice groups in Fredericton. Facebook: Mayworks Fredericton 2018. For the program, contact: [mayworksfredericton@gmail.com](mailto:mayworksfredericton@gmail.com).

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### “You don’t have our permission”

here, and have stayed here by choice. There is a perception that New Brunswickers are easy to manage. We are not,” said Connell who was there with her granddaughter. Connell spoke of the need to protect the land and water for future generations.

“It would be nice to have the jobs that the mine would bring, but we don’t want it if it means the destruction of our rivers with fish in them,” said Blaine Merrill, a resident of Stanley.

According to the Sisson Partnership, the company scored and weighted alternatives in their assessment of the best option for mine waste disposal. The crowd was informed that three tailings disposal technologies and five tailings storage facility locations were considered.

Don McDonald, a resident of Stanley, criticized the evaluation method. “You can tinker with the weights of any indicator to get the result you want.”

Peter Toner, President of the Nashwaak Watershed Association, told the government panel that the waste disposal technology is not best available technology: “There is a term in the industry, best available technology (BAT). I argue that this is not BAT but rather a CAT: the cheapest available technology.”

### “New Brunswickers love their salmon and trout”

The Sisson mine’s waste storage plans are a key concern of residents, namely an 8 kilometre-long and 90 metre-high tailings dam, and the use of fish-bearing brooks.

The mining proponent plans to build a centre-line dam, which is similar to British Columbia’s Mount Polley dam. The Mount Polley tailings dam breached in 2014, contaminating Hazeltine Creek and salmon-bearing waterways downstream with a slurry of mine waste.

The Mount Polley Mining Corporation, owned by Imperial Metals, has never been charged or fined by Environment Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans or the British Columbia government for violating regulations on fish habitat and water quality. In January, the province of British Columbia stopped private charges that Bev Sellars, former Chief of Xat’sull First Nation, had filed.

Mining companies are required by law to compensate for loss of fish habitat. The Sisson Partnership plans to offset the loss of Atlantic salmon and trout habitat by removing a dam and culvert that would allow permanent fish passage into Nashwaak Lake, potential spawning and rearing habitat for gaspereau.

Nathan Wilbur, a biologist with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, said the plan was inadequate and does not have his approval.

“New Brunswickers love their salmon and trout. We are not known for our gaspereau,” shouted one audience member whose comment was followed by applause.

### Poor public consultation

Lawrence Wuest, who has been following the mine project’s plan for almost a decade since the project’s announcement, argued that the public is once again being asked to comment on the Sisson project with inadequate information.

Wuest asked about the whereabouts of the mine’s financial security plans and other documents that the proponent is supposed to have provided to meet the conditions of its environmental assessment approval by both the federal and provincial governments.

“With economic instability will come increased likelihood of contamination of the watershed and fish-bearing habitat. We have to be assured that during economic downturns that the mine has adequate financing to ensure the integrity of fish-bearing habitat,” said Wuest.

A young woman from the audience denounced the timing and location of the meeting that she said made it difficult for working people to attend.

“If it wasn’t for groups like the Conservation Council, we would not have known about this meeting,” said Amanda Wildeman, the Green Party’s candidate for Fredericton-York in the upcoming provincial election.

Wildeman, a native of Alberta, is a newcomer to Taymouth, recently settling on a farm on the banks of the Nashwaak River that she described as one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Patricia Saulis from the Maliseet Conservation Council said her organization was not consulted.

The almost four-hour meeting ended with a sobering call from Saulis. She asked for a moment of silence for the loss of life that will happen if the mine goes ahead.

The public has until May 3rd to submit comments on the plan to Environment and Climate Change Canada at [ec.mmer-remm.ec@canada.ca](mailto:ec.mmer-remm.ec@canada.ca). Governor in Council, which is the Cabinet, will decide whether to approve Sisson Partnership’s plan.

*Tracy Glynn writes for the NB Media Co-op and works with communities affected by mining around the globe.*