The Walk4Justice is a nonprofit organization that was created by donation and volunteer since January 2008. Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams co-founded this group to raise awareness about the plight of the far too many Missing and Murdered women across Canada. Our supporters consist of family members who have lost their loved ones across the nation, grassroots women and men from all walks of life have joined us in our efforts to demand justice, closure, equality and accountability.

Gladys’s niece, Tamara Lynn Chipman disappeared off Highway 16 out of Prince Rupert, BC, now dubbed the Highway of Tears in northern British Columbia. She vanished without a trace September 21, 2005. Tamara was a young mother of one and her father’s only natural daughter. When she disappeared our natural instincts were to check the streets in Vancouver, as many young people migrate from the north to Vancouver, or any major hubs throughout the province. Unfortunately, Tamara is still missing and we have no idea where she is.

During my search for her in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver I met Bernie Williams. Bernie is a long time advocate and voice for the women who have been forced to live on the streets of Canada’s poorest postal code, the DTES. She has been a frontline worker in the DTES for 25 years. Her mother and two sisters were also victims of violence who were murdered in the DTES over the years.

Together we started to gather information from the family members who had lost their loved ones whether it is from the Highway of Tears, the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver Island, throughout BC and
eventually right across the nation. Our data surpassed what the RCMP was saying and our numbers increased as more family members came forward. We started out with Tamara, Bernie’s mom and two sisters. Today our data base has taken us to over 3,000 missing or murdered women across the country.

The vision of walking across Canada to raise awareness came to us after we attended the memorial walk my cousin, Florence Naziel, and her family had organized from Prince Rupert, BC to Prince George, BC. The Highway of Tears Symposium was held March 28, 29, and 30, 2006. This symposium consisted of family members, top brass Royal Canadian Mounted Police, government officials, politicians and First Nations leadership. After three days of deliberations we came up with the Highway of Tears Initiative with 33 recommendations to provide safety nets for the vulnerable women and children in the north.

The Highway of Tear gained notoriety in June 2002 when Nicole Hoar disappeared while hitchhiking from Prince George to Smithers, BC. Nicole was the only Caucasian woman of the 9 who went missing, according to the RCMP. The other women were First Nations women and young girls. When she went missing there was a public outcry that women were disappearing from this 734 kilometer stretch of highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George, BC. To date Nicole is still missing. Once the Highway of Tears was recognized and after the symposium, many other families came forward with the names of their loved ones who had disappeared over the past 4 decades. It did not take us long to realize that there is a serious problem of discrimination, racism and lack of political will to find our lost loved ones. The other 8 women on this Highway of Tears list are First Nations. In 2007, the RCMP conveniently added 10 more names to this list and took one name off. RCMP official list now stands at 18. Through our research we are at approximately 44 names, just on the Highway of Tears and family members who live in the north claim there are over 500.

As of today, the Highway of Tears Initiative has fallen to the wayside due to lack of political will to implement the recommendations that were made. Walk4Justice speaks out of this particular issue to all levels of government throughout BC. We fight for the families to seek justice, closure, equality and accountability. At this time we are demanding they reopen this Highway of Tears Initiative to help the families provide a safety net for the most vulnerable women and children of today’s society in the north. Due to the lack of resources available, especially to the First Nations communities, women and young girls are still going missing and being murdered at an alarming rate. We continue to walk through this northern territory to be the voices of the family members who are still suffering after decades of wondering where their loved ones are. We raise their voices to all levels of government to recognize and acknowledge all the issues around the disappearance of these women.

Since 1986, Bernie Williams has advocated for the victims and family members of the Pickton farm in Port Coquitlam, BC. She and many frontline workers tried to raise attention to the first Missing and Murdered Women’s Task Force in Vancouver, BC, the Vancouver Police Department and RCMP that there were far too many women going missing from the Downtown Eastside. According to police data there are 69 women who had gone missing since 1986 to 2002 when Robert Pickton was arrested and charged with the murder of 26 of these women. He was eventually charged with 6 second degree murder charges and the other 20 were stayed. Pending public inquiry into the first 6 victims is underway in January 2011.
In January 2008, Bernie and I were at wits end trying to figure out how we could raise awareness about our accumulating data base. The families we were in contact with inspired us to continue to be their voices. We researched and started to demand answers and strategies to alleviate the now prevalent lack of resources available to stop the ongoing violence against women.

We created a petition demanding a full public inquiry, and our data base climbed to 2,932 names of Missing and Murdered women. We organized our first walk from Vancouver, BC to Ottawa, Ontario. Our goal was to raise awareness and for the governments to acknowledge the plight of all women in Canada. We walked from June 21, 2008 to our rally at parliament hill in Ottawa September 15, 2008. We delivered to the Prime Minister’s office a petition with 2500 on line and 3000 hard copy signatures demanding a public inquiry and our list of 2,932 names of Missing and Murdered women nation wide. During this time we also realized that discrimination and racism were very prevalent as the numbers for First Nations women were much higher than any other ethnic group.

According to the Native Women’s Association of Canada, a national organization who researched missing and murdered women in Canada since 2004 have 600 First Nations women on their list. We agree with them and according to both our data bases this means that at least 20% of all the missing and murdered women are First Nations. To our First Nations communities this is devastating because our people are only 3% of the total population of Canada. Because of these realizations we believe that genocide is in progress as the majority of these women who are being victimized are in their child bearing years. The average age range from 16 to 25 is being murdered. We do, however, have victims as young as 2 and the oldest is 78 years old.

In 2009, we organized another walk from Vancouver, BC to Prince Rupert to honor those victims from the Highway of Tears. We spoke out for the families who were, at this time, telling us of the failure of the Highway of Tears Initiative. We know that the RCMP, Victim Services and investigators have all been funded by the government during this time, yet nobody seems to be helping any of the family members cope with their losses. The government and judicial system has seriously failed in their lawful duties to protect all members of society.

Our research has also led us to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where at least 17 of the 30 amendments have been violated pertaining to our First Nations women. We are now recognized by Amnesty International and KAIROS and many local, provincial and federal organizations that have either heard or participated in our events, walks, presentations and forums. They support all our actions in whatever way they can.

In 2010 we organized another walk from Kamloops, BC, to Winnipeg, Manitoba to complete the Highway of Tears. Our message was loud and clear that we wanted a National Public Inquiry into the deaths of all our women. We also carried a strong message that there is a need for a National Missing and Murdered Women’s Symposium. Our First Nations leadership and the Squamish Nation has agreed to host this event in Vancouver, BC as soon as possible. We are currently networking with our sponsors and family members to co-ordinate this event for October 2011.
Throughout each and every journey we gained momentum by getting support from all our First Nations leaderships, employee unions, politicians and thousands of family members across the nation who fully support our walks and venues by signing resolutions to implement social changes needed to address these issues are all missing and murdered women. We have elders to watch over our groups as we walk and we encourage our youth to be involved so they are aware of the issues. Communities came together to ensure the walkers were looked after while we passed through their communities throughout Canada. Supporters raised funds throughout virtually every community we reached to ensure the walkers were accommodated, fed and donations of basic life necessities while we traveled. They gathered in solidarity to have their voices heard to the top levels of government. We rally for Issues from poverty, homelessness, addictions, and government interference from the residential schools, the Ministry of Child and Family Services and the judicial system as a whole. We speak out for all the families, hold rallies, vigils and family gatherings for the victim’s families and continue to gather information on a daily basis. We keep in contact with the families who now have a glimmer of hope that one day something will be done to help get justice for their love ones and to prevent their future generations from disappearing.

We want our own Aboriginal Task Force to handle our Missing and Murdered women’s cases. We feel that with our own task force the issues will come to light and be dealt with in a proper manner. At this time, the majority of our cases remains unsolved or is cold cases. We feel the RCMP and police are not investigating these cases to the best of their ability. Again, racism and discrimination play a significant role in our findings. Since our journey has begun violence against all aboriginal people and overall society has been compromised even more by police brutality, particularly in British Columbia in the past 5 years. Throughout our journey’s racism was very prevalent and witnessed by the majority of our walkers as we progressed across the country.

We also want our own Aboriginal Mothers Center Society to help us protect our vulnerable young mothers and children. This center would offer basic services for young mothers and their children who need to escape from violent situations. In 2008 was the tenth anniversary of the Aboriginal Mothers Center Society in Vancouver, BC. This organization provided approximately 1,700 meals per month, children’s basic needs like diapers, formula, clothing, basic life skills, cultural training, counseling, resources and education options to help them get back into a positive lifestyle. This model was created by Penny Irons and Grace Tait, two First Nations women who truly believed in saving the young women and children lives from violence by providing a positive environment for the children of our future generations. This model also includes a building of emergency housing, affordable housing and transition housing for those who are leaving abusive relationships. We believe that if there were spaces such as this available in all communities; our women would not have to resort to fighting to keep their children with them and many would not resort to prostitution and addictions. The AMCS also help women and children through the court systems which often stereo types First Nations women and end up taking away their children and putting them into government care. At this time the AMCS is barely running due to lack of funding and are fighting to keep it’s door open for the families who have utilized this space for so many years. We would like to see efforts put into providing centers like this across the
nation to keep all women safe in today’s society. Walk4Justice has secured resolutions throughout the First Nations leadership to support this initiative.

We also fight for social justice in regards to the over abundance in homelessness in all major hubs across the nation. Being based in Vancouver, which is considered one of the best places in Canada to be homeless because of the warm climate, we have noticed that of the over 2500 homeless people, 30% are of First Nations. Many are forced out of their communities due to poverty and go to cities and towns in the hopes of building a better future. Due to lack of education, affordable housing and resources many end up on the streets and eventually fall into addictions. We want to provide healing centers with cultural sensitivity to coincide with the Aboriginal Mothers Center model.

We would also like to provide a healing lodge to the families and children of the missing and murdered women in every province to encourage family members that they are not alone. We need a place for the victim’s children to meet other children and the families who have faced the same challenges, a place for them to share their stories and heal their pain together. Our First Nations people have the knowledge and life skills to survive. We know how to look after our own. We want to help our people with our own skills and to teach our children and grandchildren that we are loved and valued. We have survived so many attempts of genocide and yet here we are in 2010 fighting the government to stop killing our much valued life givers of society, the women.

Walk4Justice has intervener status for the pending public inquiry of the Robert Pickton victims of which we played a significant role in demanding this justice for the families. We are also preparing for our fourth walk which will be from Vancouver, BC to Ottawa June 21, 2011 to September 19, 2011. Our message this year will be to promote a National Missing and Murdered Women’s Symposium for October 2011 and a National Missing and Murdered Women’s Public Inquiry. The families will not rest until there are all our requests for programs, education and proper public safety nets put in place to protect our much valued life givers and future generations. The families will not rest until they receive justice, closure, equality and accountability. Our walks will continue until justice is served. Donations can be sent to the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 500-342 Water Street, Vancouver, BC, re Walk4Justice or deposit into our Scotia Bank account number 00271-11, transit number 10140.

As a result of the volunteerism we have displayed, Gladys Radek, the visionary for Walk4Justice has been nominated in CBC TV’s Champion for Change award. In 2010 she was voted into the top ten and the grand finale will be announced January 16, 2011, live on CBC TV. It is a humbling experience because Gladys knows in her heart that it was all the supporters and volunteers who came forward to realize her dream. People like Bernie Williams, Mable Todd, Willie Abraham and Aleck Clifton, (our elders), all the walkers and the hundreds of people who donated money and supplies for the walkers, and the families who encouraged us to continue the journey. Huge thanks to all the friends and family members who came forward and shared their stories and trusting us to speak out for them. Also to all the leaderships who supported us and ensured we succeeded every walk. We couldn’t have done any of this without your dedication, volunteerism and much valued support. As a result of the Champions to Change, Walk4Justice has gained recognition throughout Canada and International waters. Due to circumstance beyond our control like the weather, she missed an opportunity to see the Governor General, David
Lloyd Johnston. CBC and Manulife have spoken to him and he has agreed to meet with me personally in the near future. To us this is an issue that has been resolved and I will keep everyone informed of the meeting.

Thank you everyone for your kind donations, support, love and prayers for the families. Together we are making a difference and one day soon all women will be safe in Canadian society.

Much Respect to all,

Walk4Justice

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