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# Jasmine Kabatay: We were right about Thunder Bay. Now let's fix what's wrong.

Lives and families have been deeply affected by this for too long. There needs to be accountability for these actions so we can move forward, writes Jasmine Kabatay.

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CARLOS OSORIO / TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Sonny McGinnis, cousin of Stacey DeBungee and Rainy River First Nation Chief James Leonard (right) talk to the Toronto Star about the review of police cases in Thunder Bay.

By: [Jasmine Kabatay](#) Metro Published on Tue Mar 06 2018

When a suspicion turns out to be valid, it's always a relief to know I wasn't imagining it.

But it's bittersweet to know suspicions that racism plays a part in policing in Thunder Bay, Ont., are true.

On Monday, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director **revealed** in a report that the police investigation into the 2015 death of Stacy DeBungee had "substantial" deficiencies, showed a "neglect of duty," and was influenced by racism.

DeBungee was found in the McIntyre River. Within three hours of finding his body, and before he was identified, police said his death wasn't suspicious. A day later they said it was "non-criminal."

But it was too soon to say so, the report concluded. "It can also be reasonably inferred that this premature conclusion may have been drawn because the deceased was Indigenous," it read.

We're taught our whole lives that police are supposed to help us. But this shows how much of a problem racism still is in this country. It has corrupted a police force to the point where Indigenous Peoples don't get the same help as others.

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I fear this is just part of a long story of mishandled cases and Indigenous deaths ruled accidental or non-suspicious. A common theme arose in the cases of the seven Indigenous youth who died in Thunder Bay between 2000 and 2011, the subject of a 2016 [coroner's inquest](#) and the [award-winning book](#) Seven Fallen Feathers.

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Still, I'm not saying that Thunder Bay is a bad place. I've been near this city my whole life. My sister and her family live there. I've made wonderful memories there and still enjoy visiting.

It's a place that has taught me a lot and has given me opportunities. It's a place where I have lived and worked, and it's a place that is important for us to get things we couldn't get in the towns closer to us.

But that doesn't change the fact there is a racism problem there that needs to be addressed.

A local newspaper recently ran a jokey headline about a recent string of racist attacks. "Egg-toss incident has police scrambling," it read.

This came just months after the death of [Barbara Kentner](#), an Indigenous woman who was struck by a trailer hitch thrown at her from a moving vehicle.

Hopefully with the release of this report there can be no more pretending this isn't a problem. Lives and families have been deeply affected by this for too long. There needs to be accountability for these actions so we can move forward.

Let's take this chance to make some substantial changes — starting with the police, whose job is to help every citizen no matter what.



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