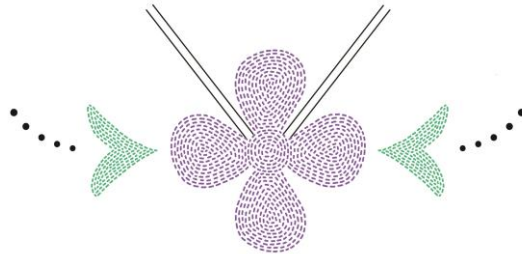


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Statement Gathering
Edmonton Inn & Conference Centre
Edmonton, Alberta**



PUBLIC

November 8, 2017

Statement - Volume 90

**Ellen Brighteyes,
In relation to her daughter Alannah Cardinal**

Statement gathered by Kerry Reay

Coast Reporting Services Inc.

II

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Documents submitted with testimony: none.

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NOTES

The use of square brackets [] in this transcript indicates that amendments have been made to the certified transcript in order to replace information deemed inaudible or indecipherable by the original transcriptionist. Amendments were completed by listening to the source audio recording of the proceeding and were made by Bryana Bouchir, Public Inquiry Clerk with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQ, May 3rd 2018 at Vancouver, BC

Statement - Public
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

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[NOVEMBER 8, 2017 12:23 P.M.]

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KERRIE REAY: Okay. This is Kerrie Reay. I'm a statement taker with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We are in Edmonton Alberta and it is November the 8th at 2017 and the time is 12:23. Today I am speaking with Ellen Brighteyes of the Saddle Lake and Goodfish First Nation, and we are speaking in regards to the death of her Donna -- of her daughter Alannah Cardinal, who passed away on July 25th of 2016. So, Ellen, you are here voluntarily to give your truth?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: And you understand that we are videotaping and we are audiotaping your story today?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: And also present in the room is Gordon Burnstick, who is a health support; Sheila Cardinal, who is a cousin; and [Granddaughter], who is your granddaughter who you are raising.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um-hmm.

[CHILD SPEAKING UNINTELLIGIBLE]

KERRIE REAY: And also, for the record, two additional people may arrive during the telling of the story, and we will stop to bring them into the room and identify them when they are here.

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2

1 Okay, Ellen.

2 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Okay. My name is Ellen Brighteyes. I
3 don't know why I'm having a hard time. I'm from -- I
4 am originally from Goodfish out there in Saddle Lake.
5 They are unique in like to -- in being one reserve,
6 looked at as one reserve under Indian Affairs, but
7 it's two different places. It's two different
8 communities. And I was raised in Goodfish by my
9 grandparents. Um, there's a lot of, ah -- they are
10 right next door but there's a highway in between. And
11 my biological father is from Saddle Lake. So I always
12 felt a connection there.

13 And, um, I'm the oldest of three kids. My -- I
14 have two younger brothers. My mom -- ah, I didn't
15 have no relationship with my dad. So, um, my kuuhkum
16 mostly raised me. I feel like, um, the damage that
17 the residential school did on our family was there's
18 no like showing of love. I knew she loved me, in my
19 heart. She didn't have to say it. But, for my mom, I
20 didn't know she loved me because she didn't raise me
21 and she didn't show me what she did for my brothers.
22 So that's -- that's there. Um, how I know residential
23 school affected us was -- was just that: like just not
24 showing love, no hugs, no I love yous. So growing up,
25 um, that's what I wanted.

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1 And I didn't know what I was doing, having kids
2 at a young age and then not staying with the father.
3 I had -- I had these kids. I had my first one when I
4 was 18, and it didn't work out with her dad. But, you
5 know, I have this little girl, though. Then I got
6 pregnant again by somebody else and then I had a
7 little boy. Then I had another little girl. And
8 these relationships weren't working out. I don't -- I
9 don't know why. I wanted love. That's why. I know I
10 wanted love and I know I wanted kids. And so I had a
11 girl and boy and a girl. And then in that, that was
12 Alannah. And then I had another one, and I didn't
13 want -- already then it was getting hard to do it by
14 myself. And, ah, when I got pregnant I decided to
15 give up this baby because I wanted a better life for
16 him, for the baby. So he went to my aunty, and that's
17 the only one I didn't raise. And I have nine kids.

18 Then I went on and I found my -- and I went. I
19 did healing. I -- I quit drinking. I did healing,
20 and I had my three kids. And then -- and I kept them
21 with me. Um, I kept them with me when I was drinking
22 and then when I stopped they came with me. They came
23 with me to rehab even. And I changed my life and I
24 met my husband and I went on. Like, um, we had kids
25 together. We got married and we had kids. And I have

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1 five boys with him and then all while trying to get
2 myself together.

3 Um, I don't ever feel like I was ever, you know,
4 happy or done or satisfied. Like there's always
5 something missing. But my kuuhkum, she -- she did the
6 best she could by us. For her -- for her kids she
7 stayed in an abusive relationship. And my nimushum
8 drank his whole life. And my kuuhkum never drank.
9 She stayed with him because she wanted a father for
10 her kids. Like there was always that solidness of our
11 family like...

12 But she's gone now. She died in 2012 and --
13 yeah, I don't have that anymore, that -- that person
14 that's always been there for me no matter what. I
15 don't have that anymore. But I promised her that I
16 would do my best to live a good life with what she
17 taught me. She gave up everything like so we could --
18 you know, so we could have. I don't know. You know,
19 she -- she wasn't materialistic. But like she worked
20 hard and she never gave up.

21 Um, for her, for the last month of her life, I
22 knew she wouldn't want to die in the hospital. By the
23 time she was sick enough to go they only gave her two
24 weeks to live. And I knew she wouldn't want to die in
25 the hospital. So I left my family. I left my husband

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1 and my kids, you know, so I could go take care of her,
2 and because of that she was able to die at home. And
3 she -- and she -- like she deserved that. She
4 deserved whatever she wanted. She had -- she never
5 lost her dignity, you know. And she loved me. She
6 loved my kids. And it's like no matter what, no
7 matter what, she didn't have to like tell us. She
8 didn't have to tell us because I knew. I knew in my
9 heart.

10 But a big part of like of the loss of -- I
11 don't -- like, for me, I didn't know who I was as an
12 Indian, and that's what I was searching for too. Like
13 I wanted to know myself. And I don't know how to talk
14 Cree. I don't know nothing about having a ceremony or
15 anything, but I can take part. You know, I feel
16 comfortable in myself that I can smudge, that I can
17 pray that there's one God that we all share. So I --
18 ah, I don't even know what to say. I feel scattered,
19 like I kind have to explain where we came from.

20 KERRIE REAY: This is your space.

21 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

22 KERRIE REAY: You take your time. [Whatever you need] (~~unintelligible~~).

23 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: So when my kids hit teenage years I have
24 a hard time with them. I have a hard time. Ah, I
25 don't know what it is. It's -- it's -- I have a hard

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1 time with it. Alannah was her own. She had -- she
2 had a voice. She wasn't scared to like talk and ask
3 for stuff or talk and go do stuff. And me? I was
4 like more inward and I do what I have to do. But I
5 wouldn't like go out and, you know, the way she would
6 go. You know, if she found out you could do something
7 she'd go do it. But she'd try, try until she could
8 get it. And she wasn't scared to go out there and ask
9 and try and...

10 Um, Alannah was -- she was real witty. Like she
11 was quick. She was funny. She was independent. Um,
12 I could never tell her what to do. I could never make
13 her do what she didn't want to do or -- you know? But
14 we -- I worked on our relationship enough that we
15 understood each other.

16 She was young. I don't blame her for being out
17 there. Because she was young. She wasn't done. But
18 I -- I would watch [Granddaughter] and so she could go and do
19 her thing and then come back. Because like she loved
20 [Granddaughter] and that's what she hung on to with being a
21 mom; being that she took it so serious, but she was
22 still young, right? She had -- but I -- I took -- we
23 understood each other where I would watch [Granddaughter]
24 while she went out, and it could be could be for days.
25 Like three, four days she would be out and then she'd

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1 come back and come get [Granddaughter] and pick up what she
2 was doing.

3 We didn't get along sometimes. We'd argue but
4 we'd make up the same day, same day or the next day.
5 It wasn't ever like long, long periods of not talking.
6 Um, I just -- I just feel like tried to survive with
7 them enough to get them on their own. Ah....

8 KERRIE REAY: Would you like to -- would you like to talk a
9 little bit about raising your children and where you
10 were raising them?

11 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Ah, well, when I first had kids I didn't
12 have nowhere to live. I kind of lived between my
13 kuuhkum's and my aunties. I never lived with my mom
14 since I was 19. And like I -- it's not comfortable to
15 live with her. And that's -- that's what she chooses,
16 right? Like the man she's with is not a dad to me and
17 I'm not comfortable going to her house. Ah, I don't
18 even -- we moved. I moved. I was going to school. I
19 moved from Goodfish to Lac La Biche to Edmonton and
20 then back to Goodfish. And like my son, he's 24 now
21 and he -- like how -- he can count how many different
22 schools he went to. Like too many different schools.

23 And then when I met Mike we -- we settled down.
24 I stayed in one place. Um, we kind of moved around at
25 first, but when our boys when to school they went to

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1 school in the same school for all of elementary. And
2 I am kind of proud of that, that like I didn't move
3 around for them.

4 KERRIE REAY: And where was that?

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: In Ashmont, and it's kind of in between
6 Saddle Lake and Goodfish. It's not... And, ah, yeah,
7 for our boys like I think I was more stable. And
8 right now they are 14 -- 14, 13, 10, 8 and 6. We have
9 five boys that he's at home with. I left. I left him
10 since then. I left our home. Um, but they had --
11 like that's a big part of like, ah, like what went
12 wrong, that I think that I moved around my kids too
13 much. I didn't have no stable home.

14 KERRIE REAY: Did you live at home with your mom, though,
15 until you were 19 --

16 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: No.

17 KERRIE REAY: -- or did you live mostly with your --

18 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Mostly with my kuuhkum.

19 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

20 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I tried to live with my mom but it would
21 never last more than a few months.

22 KERRIE REAY: And why do you think that was?

23 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Like I'm not comfortable with her old
24 man. So, yeah, like he makes it hard to be there.
25 And, as a kid, you know, they just let me live where I

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9

1 wanted to live, like kind of put it on me. But, you
2 know, I wanted my mom but there was no love there.
3 Like no showing, you know.

4 So, yeah, I choose to go live with my kuuhkum
5 instead of my mom because like I got love there even
6 though I got abused. And there's that too. Like I
7 got abused at home by an older cousin. Even though
8 that, but I -- I still chose to live there because of
9 my -- I got love from my kuuhkum. I broke down that;
10 I have forgiven him. You know, it's -- I can hug him
11 today and tell him I love him because like we shared.
12 My kuuhkum, she loved him no matter what he did. No
13 matter what he did. And that's how she loved us no
14 matter what we did.

15 And I'm still working on it with my mom. But
16 even that, like now I have nobody, you know, to go
17 home to Christmas or go spend time, go home to
18 Goodfish. I can't go to her house. Like it's not
19 comfortable. And it's -- it's not how it should be
20 but it's the way it is, you know. And I have -- I
21 have said stuff to her since then that -- stuff I'm
22 mad about. Is somebody knocking?

23 KERRIE REAY: This may be -- this may be part of your
24 family.

25 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Okay.

1 KERRIE REAY: So we'll take a break.

2 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Okay.

3 [PROCEEDINGS RESUMED PURSUANT TO A SHORT BREAK]

4 KERRIE REAY: Okay. We are recording again and, for the
5 record, no family. No family joined. So you were
6 talking about trying to have a conversation and trying
7 to talk with your mom?

8 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

9 KERRIE REAY: But it's still not comfortable?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah. So I guess like I'm trying to
11 explain how I grew up. Because like even though there
12 was love and that, like my kuuhkum was there, there
13 was no like I love you and hugs and all that. I
14 didn't -- I didn't -- I don't even know how to hug.
15 Well, now I do. You know, all the healing I have
16 done, but I had to go out and get healing and then...
17 And I can't go back to live there. Like it's too --
18 it's too much toxic for me. I can't even go. I don't
19 even want to go live in Goodfish.

20 And as -- like as I changed, as I did healing,
21 you know, I would bring that home to my kids and
22 practice it on them. And it was my husband's mom that
23 taught me how to hug. Because she'd hug us when we'd
24 get there and she'd hug us when we would leave. And I
25 wasn't nice to her and she'd still hug us. She taught

1 me how to hug. Because like, I don't know, it feels
2 good anyways to be welcomed and then to be missed, I
3 guess. I don't know. But I'm grateful like she
4 taught me that. And she's gone now too.

5 So like with my three older ones and then getting
6 married and then starting a new family, I had all this
7 going on. And then Alannah grew up in that. Alannah
8 was six when I met Mike and got with him.

9 KERRIE REAY: And what year did you meet him?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Ah, 2002.

11 KERRIE REAY: So Alannah was six?

12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, Alannah was six.

13 KERRIE REAY: In 2002.

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. And one of the things that she
15 said to me, because like I worked on myself all this
16 time, right? I -- I'd talk and talk and like I'd go
17 to therapy. And I worked on our relationship. And,
18 um, I had apologized to her. I said: I'm sorry,
19 Alannah. I'm sorry I didn't stay with your dad. I'm
20 sorry I didn't give you a better life than what she
21 deserved. And she's like: Why, Mom? Why are you
22 sorry? You don't have to be sorry. You were -- she
23 said, Mike has been here since I was six. She said, I
24 had a good childhood. She's like, you don't have to
25 be sorry. She didn't want me to feel bad. Because

1 she -- like she feels like she did have a good -- you
2 know? And she -- she did tell everybody that was her
3 dad, but that wasn't her dad. But that's how she like
4 introduced herself and got herself known: Chewie
5 (phonetic) is my dad. You know, everyone knows him as
6 Chewie.

7 I think she -- she could take the best out of
8 everything and just go with that and make it good, you
9 know. She'd make good memories, tell good stories,
10 you know. She'd look at the brighter side, I guess.
11 And me, I'm like kind of the downer, you know. Like
12 I'm just always focused on the bad and -- you know.
13 I -- I, ah -- how I understand, how I could see the
14 good that I have done is through her. Look at what I
15 raised. She was beautiful. She knew herself as a
16 woman, as an Indian. She would go get her Indian
17 name. She would go. She would go do that without me,
18 you know. I don't have my Indian name. She did that.
19 You know what I mean? Like she did things.

20 Um, we did things together. Learning how to be a
21 Catholic, um, we both got confirmed. We both sat
22 there and went through all the saints and all their
23 stories and chose a saint. She chose Saint Philomena
24 as her patron saint.

25 She got her Indian name. I don't remember it,

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13

1 though. Like she told it to me but I don't remember
2 it. But I know Thunderbird is in there, and it's --
3 it's a long name. There's a beginning and an end, but
4 I know Thunderbird is in there. And, ah, yeah, like
5 she just knew herself so well. She was confident and
6 she could go out there and do things, get things done,
7 you know. She -- she had that, that drive.

8 KERRIE REAY: How did she do at school?

9 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, she did good but she wasn't like
10 super smart. But she was more for people. She was
11 more like she liked to be around people. She did try.
12 She didn't finish but she -- she was applying to go
13 back. That's one of the letters I have in here that
14 she was like accepted into -- into Portage.

15 KERRIE REAY: And so what you have there is her letter of
16 acceptance?

17 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

18 KERRIE REAY: Okay. And it's from Portage College?

19 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

20 KERRIE REAY: And she was looking to go back to college?

21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. She was like applying to go to
22 school. Yeah, she -- she....

23 KERRIE REAY: And did she --

24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: She always had a plan, you know. She
25 had -- she always was working on something, on getting

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14

1 something done.

2 KERRIE REAY: And did she talk about what she hoped to do

3 when she went to school, Portage College, what her

4 interests were?

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Ah, no. No.

6 KERRIE REAY: Just looking to go back?

7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. So....

8 KERRIE REAY: So you were saying that Alannah lived with

9 you and your husband?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Sometimes. But mostly she was on her

11 own.

12 KERRIE REAY: So about what age do you think she struck out

13 on her own?

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Sixteen.

15 KERRIE REAY: Sixteen.

16 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Sixteen, 15.

17 KERRIE REAY: Okay. And did she -- did she stay in Saddle

18 Fish [sic]? Goodfish or Saddle Lake?

19 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: She -- um, she got her own place in

20 St. Paul.

21 KERRIE REAY: In St. Paul?

22 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

23 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: So she had her own place for a while.

25 And, um, yeah, she just did it herself. She was --

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15

1 that's what I mean. She was her own woman.

2 KERRIE REAY: Very strong.

3 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: I wasn't -- I wasn't like her boss or I
4 couldn't boss her around or tell her what to do.
5 She -- she'd figure out what to do and she'd get it
6 done herself.

7 KERRIE REAY: Was she working in St. Paul?

8 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Um, yeah, she worked.

9 KERRIE REAY: And what kind of work did she do?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: She worked as a cashier at Extra Foods.
11 Um, she worked at camp. I went to camp in 2014 and
12 she -- she came. She got herself a job. She got
13 herself put at the camp where I was at.

14 KERRIE REAY: Okay. And what camp was that?

15 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: At Henday.

16 KERRIE REAY: Henday?

17 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: It's like two hours north. Or it's by
18 (unintelligible). So it's like two hours north of
19 Fort Mac.

20 KERRIE REAY: And so what kind of work did you do?

21 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Housekeeping. Yeah, she -- she got
22 herself there, and then it was like the best three
23 months for me and her. She was just 18. And, ah, my
24 husband watched her while -- while she came. And we
25 just worked and made money, and we got along better at

1 camp than at home.

2 KERRIE REAY: And you have a smile.

3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

4 KERRIE REAY: So it must bring some really good memories

5 for you?

6 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, it was. Yeah.

7 KERRIE REAY: Good. And when was [Granddaughter] born?

8 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, [Birth Date]. So, yeah,

9 she -- ah, she did a lot. Like she was only 20 and

10 she did a lot. And that's how like I can notice what

11 kind of teachings I gave her was like by what she did,

12 right? She went to go get her Indian name. She --

13 the thing about church, like she embraced that too.

14 She was a Catholic and an Indian, and that's just how

15 I am. And, um, yeah, like about knowing herself as a

16 woman.

17 She had lots of different boyfriends. And she

18 was looking. She was looking for love too, and -- but

19 it seemed like she knew more than me, you know. Like

20 I didn't have as much boyfriends as she did. But like

21 she would, um -- she would never kill herself over a

22 guy. She would never kill herself. Like even when

23 she was young and getting into relationships young she

24 could, you know, finish what happened, or if it went

25 bad she'd end it and then she'd be okay. She wouldn't

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1 like fall apart or anything over a guy.

2 KERRIE REAY: Did she ever talk about violence in her

3 relationships?

4 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah. She had one relationship like

5 that, and she just tried to stay with him because she

6 really wanted the relationship to work.

7 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

8 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: She wanted to be with this guy. Yeah.

9 But she ended up like, um, ending it. And it was for

10 the better because he did go and beat up another girl,

11 you know. Like....

12 KERRIE REAY: Well, that takes a lot of strength --

13 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

14 KERRIE REAY: -- to leave.

15 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah. So, um, yeah, like she just --

16 she knew so much and she had so many friends, you

17 know. Like she understood so much of reality, you

18 know, and....

19 KERRIE REAY: So you were mentioning that you were both

20 working in camp?

21 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

22 KERRIE REAY: And so did you leave camp? What took you --

23 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: We got laid off.

24 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

25 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: It was that Christmas. Just before

1 Christmas, that's when the oil prices went down and
2 they just shut down our camp first. So we all got
3 laid off.

4 KERRIE REAY: So was that Christmas of 2015?

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Of 2014.

6 KERRIE REAY: Of 2014?

7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

8 KERRIE REAY: And so did -- did she go back then to --

9 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: St. Paul's?

10 KERRIE REAY: -- St. Paul's? Sorry.

11 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, yeah, I can't remember where she
12 lived after that. She might have lived in Goodfish
13 for a while after that with her boyfriend and [Granddaughter].
14 Um, yeah, she'd always like try to impress me with
15 these guys. And I felt, you know, like who am I to
16 like try to impress? She felt it was important for me
17 to like these guys that she was seeing. And, ah, she
18 had to have hope -- right? -- to bring this guy to me.

19 KERRIE REAY: And so was she working after she -- the camp
20 job ended? I'm just sort of trying to see how things
21 went for her after the camp.

22 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Um, I don't remember.

23 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I know she worked at Paradise Cove but I
25 don't even remember the dates. It's a store just

1 outside of Goodfish.

2 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, she worked there. Um, this was my

4 kuuhkum.

5 KERRIE REAY: So just -- just for the commissioners and the

6 inquiry, the book that you have there are pictures?

7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Pictures and paperwork. Any kind of

8 paperwork that we found of hers. I don't know. We're

9 going to make it into a scrapbook.

10 KERRIE REAY: And that's one of the things maybe, you know,

11 that the inquiry is also looking at is to hear from

12 you how you would like to commemorate Alannah's life,

13 how to honour her.

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

15 KERRIE REAY: So that's something we can talk about as

16 well.

17 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

18 KERRIE REAY: Would you like to share with the inquiry what

19 happened?

20 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Okay. Ah, Alannah was at Goodfish for

21 about a month, about a month before she went missing.

22 She left Saddle Lake. Um, she left Saddle Lake

23 because of this threat of child welfare. There was no

24 involvement but just somebody threatened her. She

25 didn't want to lose [Granddaughter]. So she went to Goodfish.

1 Ah, she was there for like a month. And I was missing
2 her. Everywhere she stayed, because she'd stay at
3 different homes, she stayed with different people, I
4 would go find her and I'd go visit her wherever she
5 was.

6 Um, for the last year it was the ghetto. There's
7 a townsite at Saddle Lake; it's the ghetto. [Granddaughter]'s
8 dad lived there. And he died nine months before
9 Alannah in a car accident. He died Halloween of 2015.
10 After he died Alannah stayed there more because, ah,
11 his sister was left with her three kids and the dad
12 died too. Like James died. [Granddaughter]'s dad, James, and
13 his brother-in-law Keefer, and two other guys from the
14 ghetto, they all died in a car accident. So Alannah
15 spent more time there with Lindsay and I'd go visit
16 her.

17 And then this trouble happened where she wanted
18 to take off from child welfare. You know what? I --
19 I really hate the threat of child welfare because you
20 scare people. Like there wasn't much that scared
21 Alannah, but somebody scared her. And like losing
22 your kid, that's -- that's -- you know, it put fear in
23 her enough to leave.

24 So she was over there for like a month, and I
25 was -- I was -- we were missing [Granddaughter] and her. So

1 we were texting and I told her: Like can I go get
2 [Granddaughter]? Can I go get [Granddaughter] for like a visit?
3 And she said, yeah. And she said: Can you bring
4 Lindsay's boys? Like I want to see them. I said,
5 yeah, I can do that, you know. Because I loved those
6 boys too. There's three little boys that Lindsay has.
7 So she's like, yeah, then we can go over here and we
8 can pack supper and all this. And it's like okay,
9 okay, like just try to jump ahead and make plans.

10 But I went to go find Lindsay and her boys and
11 they came with me, not Lindsay but just her boys. And
12 those are like [Granddaughter]'s first cousins. Her dad and
13 the boys' mom are brother and sister. So I took those
14 boys and we were going to get [Granddaughter], and that was
15 the last time I saw my daughter. And like the boys
16 too; it's the last time they saw Alannah -- Lindsay's
17 boys. And, ah, yeah, just we visited outside. She
18 was staying at my mom's. And --

19 KERRIE REAY: Alannah was staying with her grandmother?

20 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah, with my mom. And then, um, that
21 was a Thursday. So like looking back, it was the
22 14th, July 14th, that was the last time I seen her.
23 And then, um, I had [Granddaughter] in Saddle Lake and I was
24 supposed to only keep her for the weekend. So Monday
25 I was texting Alannah. And we -- she didn't text me.

1 Like I think she only texted me on that Friday. And,
2 ah, sometimes I don't look at my phone for a long time
3 because I have lots of kids and sometimes I don't text
4 back right away. I didn't text her back right away
5 until Saturday, but then I never got a text back after
6 that.

7 So, for me, I was in Saddle Lake that weekend.
8 Well, that was where I lived -- I was living. I had
9 [Granddaughter]. Um, I -- I texted her on Monday that I would
10 keep [Granddaughter] for the week. And then my mom was
11 texting me. She was worried about Alannah. But I was
12 used to this. I was used to Alannah being gone for a
13 couple days. She was always okay. She always could
14 take care of herself. And then she'd come back. Then
15 she'd come back and she'd come get [Granddaughter]. My mom
16 wasn't used to that. My mom was worried. My mom had
17 a bad feeling. I was like just pray for her, Mom,
18 she'll be okay. You know, like it was always going to
19 be okay, like nothing. Like I never thought nothing
20 like this would happen.

21 So Monday. Tuesday already they were searching.
22 My mom, my uncle, they were getting like family to
23 start searching. My mom was like scared. Me, I went
24 on. I was going to a women's wellness conference in
25 Saddle Lake at the healing lodge and, ah, that's where

1 I was going every day. And I was working. I just
2 started working too at the sewing. But like at the
3 sewing they let us go to these workshops as part of
4 work, right? And I was going to those workshops, and,
5 um, yeah, a lot of stuff happened. I met people.

6 I think I met the mom of one of the guys who was
7 with -- last with Alannah. Because I don't know what
8 happened. But that was Saturday. July 16th was the
9 last time anyone seen her alive at the beach. I don't
10 know what happened, but she went missing, right? And
11 then my mom -- my mom ended up starting looking. I
12 don't know what happened that put her there that day,
13 you know. But the last people that were with her was
14 [Person 1]; his first cousin, [Person 2], they are
15 both from Goodfish; then a boy from Saddle Lake named
16 [Person 3], and I met his mom in one of those workshops.
17 Already she was telling me stuff. I didn't know nothing.

18 KERRIE REAY: Telling you stuff about?

19 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: About her son, that he got beat up. She
20 said he got beat up. He got put in the hospital. She
21 asked me if I knew who this person was. Well, I
22 didn't. I don't know who they were. And she said
23 like she goes after the other parents, you know. Like
24 she's ready to fight whoever hurt her son. But he was
25 involved and I think he knows. He knows what

1 happened. He was there. But they beat him up. They
2 hospitalized him. He went to go hide in Edmonton.
3 Like I never seen him. I didn't even know how this
4 guy looks.

5 But the other two I do know. I know how -- I
6 know how [Person 1] looks, and I know he's
7 not a good person. I never trusted him. I never
8 wanted him to be with my daughter. You know how I
9 said she'd bring these guys to me or she'd talk about
10 them?

11 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

12 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: When she talked about [Person 1] I never
13 wanted her to be with him. I -- I said you are
14 related. I lied. She's like, I know we're not. And
15 she's... Anyways, they were the last ones with her.
16 There's different people that seen them at the beach.
17 They were the last ones with her, and they said they
18 left her there. They gave the cops a story that
19 they -- they were leaving and she said: Go ahead,
20 leave me. I don't live far. I'll walk home. She
21 would never say that. She would never do that. She
22 would never walk. She'd never walk on the road. I
23 used to try and make her walk. She wouldn't. She

1 would get a ride. And, yeah, she -- she would always
2 get a ride. She would never say it. She would never
3 be okay with her them leaving her. Like she'd want to
4 be part of the party.

5 KERRIE REAY: So you were saying that your mom and family
6 started looking for her on the Tuesday?

7 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: On the Tuesday.

8 KERRIE REAY: And you mentioned the police became involved.
9 Do you know when they became involved?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: I called the cops on Thursday. So that
11 was already five days since she was seen.

12 KERRIE REAY: On the Thursday?

13 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

14 KERRIE REAY: And what happened when you call the police?

15 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Nothing.

16 KERRIE REAY: And what was their response back to you?

17 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Nothing. Well, they just took my
18 information. They didn't come out. They didn't do
19 nothing.

20 KERRIE REAY: And what detachment did you call?

21 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: St. Paul.

22 KERRIE REAY: St. Paul. Is that the RCMP?

23 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

24 KERRIE REAY: So you called them on the Thursday?

25 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: On Thursday.

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1 KERRIE REAY: And --

2 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Because -- okay. And I was in Saddle
3 Lake still going to work, still going to these
4 workshops --

5 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

6 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- and calling my mom.

7 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

8 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: And she said, okay, they are going to
9 bring dogs.

10 KERRIE REAY: So was that the family that was --

11 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: The family, the search.

12 KERRIE REAY: Do you know if your mom called the police?

13 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: No, she didn't. She didn't.

14 KERRIE REAY: So --

15 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: But she told me they are going to bring
16 dogs. And then I -- I called the cops -- right? --
17 and I told them they are going to bring dogs. Well,
18 who is? On whose authority? You know.

19 KERRIE REAY: And when they heard that did they come out?

20 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: No.

21 KERRIE REAY: So when -- can I ask you, when did the police
22 become involved?

23 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: They came out when something was found
24 like bloody clothes. They'd come and collect the
25 evidence. They weren't involved in any of the search.

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1 By Thursday, ah, Ken Dion was there. Ken Dion, he's
2 an ex-RCMP. He does these searches in the reserves
3 when people goes missing. He goes and helps find
4 them. He knows how to --

5 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

6 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- conduct a search. And he was part of
7 it. And he -- he knew what to do. He knew we were
8 supposed to call the cops and ask them, and he did and
9 they just said go ahead. They didn't even come out.

10 KERRIE REAY: So this is one of the pieces that the
11 commission is very interested in --

12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

13 KERRIE REAY: -- and that is what happens for families --

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

15 KERRIE REAY: -- when they make that call.

16 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

17 KERRIE REAY: And so you make that call on Thursday?

18 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

19 KERRIE REAY: Did they take any more information? Did they
20 give you a file number?

21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I didn't get a file number but, um, they
22 took the information. And, like I said, I didn't see
23 them, only if something was found. So there was
24 clothing found.

25 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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1 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: There was pants found in the house and
2 it had blood on it, and they came and they took
3 pictures and....

4 KERRIE REAY: So when you said -- because, for what you
5 have said so far, um, the last anybody saw of Alannah
6 was at the beach?

7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

8 KERRIE REAY: So now you are talking about, um, items found
9 in a home?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

11 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. No. Well, it's our house but
13 nobody was living in there.

14 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

15 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: My brother was renovating it for himself
16 to move in, and he noticed the pants; that wasn't
17 there before.

18 KERRIE REAY: And in which community was this?

19 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: In Goodfish. This is Goodfish.

20 KERRIE REAY: In Goodfish.

21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: All in Goodfish. Like she was there the
22 last month.

23 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um....

25 KERRIE REAY: So then what happened?

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1 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Then we called the cops and they came
2 and took pictures and took the evidence and that was
3 it. For the search there was different parts. Well,
4 ah, Ken -- Ken organized it. And then it was around
5 the house first, our house, and then, um -- so that
6 was like Friday. And Saturday it was at the beach.
7 And the cops weren't there. They weren't there like
8 the whole time. So this was like already the
9 community, my family, a lot of people on horses,
10 quads, walking with dogs, you know, and no cops. No
11 cops. Like they didn't -- they didn't help with the
12 search. They didn't. It wasn't important to them.
13 And I really feel -- I really feel like cops don't
14 care when an Indian dies. Cops don't care. It
15 doesn't matter to them -- to them. And I -- and I
16 seen it there. Because they didn't help search. They
17 didn't help search.

18 KERRIE REAY: And so you said they found her on the 25th of
19 July?

20 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. So that was -- okay, Saturday and
21 Sunday at the beach searching. And Sunday it started
22 raining later in the evening. So they called it off.
23 Monday morning was when she was found.

24 KERRIE REAY: And what did they find?

25 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: At the beach, um, like there's a roadway

1 and then the bush and the lake is here. It's not the
2 main road. It's just the road along the beach. Just
3 a few feet from the main road, but she was covered
4 under a tree. She was found hanging, sitting up
5 hanging from a branch this big. And she's as big as
6 me. Like maybe even bigger now. Because I'm losing
7 weight. But she was as big as me, about 200 pounds.
8 And it didn't make sense like for -- for -- even for
9 that, to be found like that. And that's what they
10 said right away.

11 Like I got -- they came to get me. It was my
12 brother that found her. My brother. And the cops
13 were there. They were there as part of the search
14 now. This is Monday. But they weren't looking. They
15 were in their car. It was my brother that found her.
16 Um, they called. They came get me. And my -- my
17 oldest was coming from the city. My oldest daughter,
18 [Daughter 1]. [C.] was with me. [L.] was with me;
19 the one that gave up. And then I don't know where all
20 my other kids were.

21 They came get me, and there's the crowd and, um,
22 I was just kind of like I don't -- I don't know. I
23 was there but not really. And where she was found,
24 um, and my daughter got there and like we were going
25 to see something. And we were just right at the hot

1 sun. So I said, let's go over here. So we crossed
2 the road and went under that tree, and I was looking,
3 see the van parked there. I seen a body bag they
4 carried to the van. And I'm trying to like hold up my
5 daughter because she was -- she was the one losing it,
6 not me. And then I started saying, no, no, that's --
7 that's not her. But all I seen was the body bag. And
8 then I -- yeah, I lost it. I just started screaming
9 no, no. And like I don't know what happened. My
10 glasses broke. And I screamed at my friend, that's
11 not her, that's not her. She said, yeah, Ellen,
12 that's her. And that's the only -- that's the only
13 time I got to see anything.

14 Because she was missing for nine days it was
15 closed casket. I get didn't get to see her, touch
16 her, nothing. Nothing to know that she's gone or
17 where -- you know, nothing. A piece of me -- like
18 when I knew she was gone a piece of me was gone too.
19 A piece of me is gone. That's -- I loved my daughter
20 so much, you know, and she's gone.

21 Now the cops came: apparent suicide. I said why?
22 Why? Just because she's an Indian? I knew it wasn't
23 right right from the start. I knew she didn't do this
24 to herself. I got so many signs that she's okay.
25 She's -- she's -- Alannah is good. Alannah is with

1 God. Alannah is golden. Alannah is free. She's
2 free. She's free to be anything. And I can see her
3 in the sky. I can see her in dreams. I can see her
4 in the butterflies. I can see her in so many signs,
5 so many signs. Even on her car, there's an orb there.
6 I took pictures of that. She's okay. She's okay.
7 And you can't do this to yourself and be okay. We're
8 not supposed to take anybody's life, even our own.

9 But I knew she was okay right from the start,
10 right from the start. And the cops said she did that
11 to herself. She did that over this guy? No. She
12 wouldn't. She wouldn't. No, she had too much to live
13 for. She was going to go to school. She had [Granddaughter].
14 She wouldn't do this over a guy. Like I -- she
15 wouldn't. And for them to put -- to try to put it
16 like on her... And, you know, it's just because they
17 don't want to look. You know, they don't want to.
18 They don't want to spend time figuring out why this
19 Indian died. You know, it's not important to them.

20 KERRIE REAY: So that sounds, to me, that they have closed
21 the file?

22 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: They have, yeah. But we -- they kept it
23 open for a while. We did have meetings. We did tell
24 them there's these people acting suspicious. This
25 girl, the one I said, [Person 2], she put on

1 her Facebook: LOL, having the time of my life, didn't
2 even need a body bag. That night on the 16th she put
3 that on her Facebook. Acting weird. Um, yeah, so
4 those are the three people that were last with her.
5 He lied to my family that he didn't see her since the
6 week before.

7 KERRIE REAY: Do you know if the police interviewed those
8 people?

9 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah. And -- yeah, they -- that's the
10 stuff they won't give up. She said that that post
11 about a body bag, she said it was an expression, that
12 she just meant she got so drunk that she didn't die.
13 I don't hear anybody talk like that, like that:
14 I didn't need a body bag, that's how drunk she was.

15 KERRIE REAY: I just want to go back to a comment that you
16 made earlier, and that was that one of the boys that
17 night that was there was beaten up badly?

18 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah, after.

19 KERRIE REAY: And that was the same night?

20 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: I don't know what night. But it -- you
21 know, the following week --

22 KERRIE REAY: All at the same time?

23 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: -- his mom told me. Because I met his
24 mom at that women's thing. And she's since passed.
25 That woman has since passed. But she was telling me

1 about her son, that he got beat up and that she wanted
2 to go after their parents or whatever.

3 KERRIE REAY: So in -- so, for yourself, from what you are
4 saying, you believe the police [have it wrong] ~~haven't~~
5 (unintelligible)?

6 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah. I believe they didn't use all the
7 resources that they could have to figure out what
8 happened. That, um, even for her autopsy they didn't
9 do everything test that they could have to figure out
10 if something happened to her.

11 KERRIE REAY: So one of the questions I have is about the
12 police report, about their inaction when you reported
13 it. Would you like the commission to have those
14 records produced --

15 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yes.

16 KERRIE REAY: -- to take a look at why, um, a family was
17 looking for her on Tuesday and it took another, at
18 least, six days before they arrived to help?

19 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

20 KERRIE REAY: Okay. So I will record that as a request
21 from you --

22 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

23 KERRIE REAY: -- to have the commission look at the lack of
24 a response from the police.

25 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

1 KERRIE REAY: So is there anything else that, in terms of
2 the police investigation, you would like the
3 commission to know? Because that is one of the areas
4 the commission --

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

6 KERRIE REAY: -- have concerns.

7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Um, this is how I feel the cops
8 don't care. And they show it by like, you know, like
9 what they don't do or what they do to us. They don't
10 care either way. And it's -- it's not something you
11 are just told, right? It's something you grow up
12 with --

13 KERRIE REAY: Can you --

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- and you are actually scared of -- you
15 are scared of the (unintelligible). You have got to
16 hide. You have got to hide.

17 KERRIE REAY: So would you like to share with the
18 commission your experience? Because it sounds, to me,
19 there is a history there --

20 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

21 KERRIE REAY: -- of being scared of the police. Is there
22 anything in terms of your personal experiences before?

23 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I believe it's how we're brought up. We
24 are brought up not to trust them. We are brought up
25 to be scared of them. Like, ah, it's not a good thing

1 to call the cops. It's not a good thing to get the
2 cops brought, you know. They are not going to come
3 and help and make things like....

4 KERRIE REAY: And do you have -- for yourself, before
5 Alannah's passing, have you had to call the police?

6 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, probably, but not unless I really
7 had to.

8 KERRIE REAY: And what was their response?

9 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I don't remember what.

10 KERRIE REAY: So is there -- um, is that Alannah?

11 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: This one? No, that's just something.

12 KERRIE REAY: Have you had -- is there a way you would like
13 to have Alannah remembered, commemorated, or honoured?

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

15 KERRIE REAY: What would you like to happen?

16 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Well, I regret burying her there in
17 Whitefish, Goodfish. I buried her there. And I want
18 to have her in exhumed and cremated. Like I still
19 can't see her. They didn't allow me to see her. I'm
20 not trying to do that. But to get her cremated and
21 get -- put her ashes in rosaries for me and my kids
22 and anybody else who is like -- who will say their
23 rosary for her that's close to us like my mom and...
24 But they all don't want me to do this. But I want to
25 do this. And, ah, I want to put the rest of her ashes

1 with her dad's headstone. So she can visit her mom
2 and dad together. Like we're having a problem going
3 to her grave. You know, it's way in Whitefish. I
4 don't know.

5 KERRIE REAY: So is there anything that -- that is a
6 barrier for you to do that?

7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: The money.

8 KERRIE REAY: Yeah.

9 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, its costs \$3,000 to do what I want
10 to do. Ah, another thing is the spot where she was
11 found, I want to put a cross there and like mark it
12 with a cross and put her Indian name on there, and I
13 can't remember her Indian name.

14 KERRIE REAY: Would there be a way, um, to find her name
15 like whether she registered it or --

16 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: No. It's a name that is given to you
17 like in a sweat and --

18 KERRIE REAY: Oh, okay.

19 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- it's then you are supposed to --

20 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: That's your name. That's your way to
22 connect.

23 KERRIE REAY: Okay. I understand.

24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: She told it to me. Like I have it in my
25 head, but I have such a poor -- poor memory. But I

1 want to find some way. Like to get myself hypnotized
2 or something, you know? I don't even know. I tried
3 to -- I talked to the woman who did it, the woman who
4 gave her an Indian name.

5 KERRIE REAY: You don't recall?

6 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah. Like to ask somebody that too,
7 like how can they remember when they do this? You
8 know what I mean?

9 KERRIE REAY: Right. And I know -- I know that, um -- I
10 know that the police file is closed.

11 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

12 KERRIE REAY: But if it were possible, if it were possible
13 would you want them to take another look?

14 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yes.

15 KERRIE REAY: Because you don't believe --

16 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: I don't believe that they exhausted
17 every resource or even put in their -- their -- um,
18 to find out what really happened, you know. They kept
19 it open for four months and we had meetings, and they
20 told me you don't have -- we don't have to close this
21 ever.

22 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

23 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: And then the minute -- well, I didn't go
24 to that one meeting.

25 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

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1 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: They had it with the coroner --
2 KERRIE REAY: Okay.
3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- on the phone, and they closed it
4 after that. They sent me all of the stuff. Well, the
5 evidence.
6 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm. Yeah.
7 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: And they went ahead without me agreeing
8 to close it. It's because I wasn't there at that
9 meeting. I was over here. I came to a grief -- grief
10 workshop. I do do things to heal. Like I do want to
11 heal.
12 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm. Okay.
13 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I'll never forget. I will never forget
14 her or even -- it's not something you get closure.
15 It's every day I miss her all the time, and I'm like I
16 can't do anything else.
17 KERRIE REAY: Is there anything you would like somebody
18 else to do, like the commission to do?
19 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um....
20 KERRIE REAY: Anything?
21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, there is. I just -- I don't know.
22 KERRIE REAY: Would you like to break?
23 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
24 [PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 1:28 P.M.]
25 [PROCEEDINGS RESUMED AT 1:34 P.M.]

1 KERRIE REAY: Okay. So we are back on the record and it is
2 now 1:34.

3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Is there a time limit?

4 KERRIE REAY: No.

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: So I could -- yeah. I still -- I feel
6 like I want to be understood.

7 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

8 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Like it's real important.

9 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm. Absolutely.

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Because even though this has, um,
11 affected me so deeply and -- and just my whole life,
12 this is not only me. This is happening across Canada.
13 And I want, um -- I want like any help to be for all
14 of us, like to make things better for all of us, and
15 all of our kids are going to grow up into this. We
16 want our girls to be safe.

17 KERRIE REAY: Yes.

18 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: We want them to be protected. We want
19 them to be able to call the cops and get
20 protection, --

21 KERRIE REAY: Yes.

22 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- you know. I want them to do their
23 job. It's just what I feel is that they don't.
24 That -- and what I see is that they don't. But I
25 do -- I want -- I want things to be better for all of

1 us. Even though this has torn me up, it's not just
2 me. It's -- it's all of us that this is happening to,
3 that our girls aren't safe out there.

4 Um, one of the reasons why I know that she's --
5 that she's okay is, okay, I said Saturday was the last
6 time she was seen, and Saturday I was doing what I was
7 doing. I was taking care of my kids over here at
8 Saddle Lake, and me and my oldest daughter, [Daughter 1],
9 um, we were on our way back -- [Granddaughter].

10 KERRIE REAY: (unintelligible).

11 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Ah, we were on our way back from town,
12 and I can't remember what day it was but I know it was
13 in that time when I had [Granddaughter] and Alannah was
14 over there. Like it was before I knew anything was wrong.
15 And I looked in the sky and seen a heart, a perfect
16 heart with a piece missing, and I said, look, [Daughter 1],
17 look. And she seen it too. And that's -- that's what
18 I got sewed here. Like I made this lady sew this for
19 me. It's a heart with a piece missing. And that's
20 like how it shows. You know, it was a sign she was
21 already gone. She was already gone. And that -- and
22 the bears mean -- well, her sister, my cousin, had a
23 dream she's a bear. And, like I said, Thunderbird is
24 in her name. These are all signs that are in the west
25 and I seen that heart in the west.

1 So I know like -- I know it was meant to be. I
2 know she was meant to go. I know she was meant to
3 live. Like God lent her to me and she -- she was here
4 for 20 years, and then he called her home. And out of
5 this, out of her life and death, I have to learn
6 something. I have to change. I have to -- well, I
7 have another chance right here with [Granddaughter].
8 [Granddaughter] is exactly like Alannah, exactly the same
9 thing. I have to do something different in how I brought
10 her up.

11 And, yeah, I kind of blame myself. I kind of
12 blame myself, but I don't know how to get over that.
13 I don't know. Like I have to change the way I am to
14 be a better mom. But I know like I did the best I
15 could with what I knew at the time. I did the best I
16 could for her. I know she's okay. It's -- it's me
17 down here that's got to -- that's got to figure out
18 how to get through this and to live. You know, to
19 live my -- what I have in my heart, which is like I'm
20 a mom. I'm a mom. And when you stop being a mom...
21 You never stop being a mom and you never stop needing
22 your mom. And that's where like I'm weak with my mom
23 because we don't have a good relationship. And I'm
24 trying to build that with my kids. Like I'm here.
25 I'm here no matter what. I'm here.

1 After she died I got through. I got through the
2 funeral and everything, making decisions, trying to do
3 it from my heart, trying to like -- you know, to make
4 it meaningful. I did everything like what I thought.
5 Even words came out of me that I never had planned,
6 you know. I said stuff to people. Like I don't know
7 if I impacted anybody.

8 But like I want to heal. I want to heal. I want
9 to heal at home. That -- that's what my thought was.
10 I buried her. I went to sweats. I got messages that
11 I'm doing the right thing, I'm healing. But I got --
12 I'm -- I don't think like there's enough there that --
13 like how do you deal with trauma? How do you deal
14 with trauma? This is trauma. That's trauma, you
15 know, me seeing that body bag, and I don't get to see
16 my daughter. It's -- it's all things that like
17 shouldn't happen and how do we deal with it?

18 And there's like lots of stuff happens on
19 reserves that -- like it's a place to die, not a place
20 to live. And it's hard to live. It's hard to live
21 there. And I -- I really wanted to heal at home. I
22 wanted to heal at home. My family wanted to take me
23 to Saskatchewan and go get me fixed. Like I don't
24 want to do that. I want to heal at home. But even
25 that, like there was -- like just like they don't know

1 what to do with me.

2 Like I quit drinking a long time ago. Then I
3 started drinking and then even the drugs. It's --
4 it's all right there. And I -- I took it. Like I
5 took it. I -- and I understand what I'm doing. I'm
6 numbing myself. I'm numbing myself so I don't feel or
7 I, at least, calm down, you know. Like I can't be
8 crying all day. And I didn't. And it's like there's
9 nothing for -- to help for that, for trauma, for
10 trauma.

11 And, okay, they didn't know what to do with me.
12 So like they -- you start getting cut down for what
13 you are trying to do. Because I wanted to help other
14 women. I wanted to help other mothers who lost their
15 kids. There's so many of us. Too many. I didn't
16 even realize like all these women lost their kids.
17 And how do you -- I don't even know. But -- but I
18 went to that grief workshop and I learned. Like I
19 learned ways, good ways, to -- like you go down and
20 out and you have got to bring yourself up. You can go
21 down there but you have got to bring yourself up. And
22 that's what I wanted to share. I wanted to share that
23 with other women, and then like the community started
24 like cutting me down, you know.

25 Well, I -- I'm not the type to prove myself. I

1 just am who I am. I wasn't doing a sobriety circle.
2 I wanted a healing circle. I believe so much in the
3 circle, that when you sit in the circle with women
4 it's powerful and we can -- we can do that. We can
5 heal each other. The words that are said, they go up.
6 And, yeah, you can say them again. But like every
7 time it helps, right? And that's what I wanted to do,
8 and they didn't want me to do it. Well, because I was
9 doing drugs too, but not in the circle. You know what
10 I mean? They knew I was doing it out there and they
11 didn't want me doing the circle. Like it felt like
12 politics. But I -- that was my intention. And I did.
13 I started a circle, but like it got shut down or the
14 help stopped because of me.

15 KERRIE REAY: So you -- it sounds like you are looking for
16 some care in the community, some resources in the
17 community for women like yourself who have lost
18 children?

19 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

20 KERRIE REAY: And have lost children in a violent way?

21 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

22 KERRIE REAY: So that can be something the commissioners
23 could take away from your story --

24 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yeah.

25 KERRIE REAY: -- is that what I'm hearing you say is that

1 we need opportunities as First Nations families, as
2 women to have resources there to help --
3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
4 KERRIE REAY: -- in times of grief?
5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Well, to help, yeah, after. And
6 to help each other. Because that's how I really think
7 we're going to heal is if we share with each other and
8 help each other.
9 KERRIE REAY: And I think that's a really important piece.
10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.
11 KERRIE REAY: It's about how helping one another --
12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.
13 KERRIE REAY: -- is what I am hearing you say, the need to
14 help one another.
15 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I knew I wanted a woman. I wanted a
16 woman. My husband was there. It wasn't enough. I
17 wanted a woman, and there was like nothing. I lost my
18 kuuhkum. So I don't have that, you know, for an older
19 woman.
20 KERRIE REAY: Yes.
21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I wanted a woman like -- and they came.
22 They did come. I know like we need it. We need it.
23 We need to help each other. There's no special thing
24 out there that's going to come and make us heal. No.
25 We're going to heal together. Yeah, we are going to

1 heal together. If we sit together in a circle we'll
2 heal together. And it doesn't happen just like that.
3 I don't know if it ever happens. I don't think I will
4 ever get over losing Alannah, but I can get through it
5 and like by sharing. And even if it's the same thing
6 over and over, so what?

7 But, yeah, for -- for right now I can say that
8 Saddle Lake and Goodfish, they don't work together and
9 they don't -- they aren't there for me as a grieving
10 mother. They pushed me away. Like I'm not there.
11 I'm not there. And I've been trying to live in
12 St. Paul. So now that's not working out. So I'm
13 going to go to Edmonton. That's like I don't really
14 even have a place. I'm trying to rebuild, but I keep
15 like knocking myself down or I don't know if I'm
16 sabotaging myself.

17 But, for me, what I wanted was to have a place
18 that my kids can come to if they need me. They are
19 grown. The older ones are grown, but they are not --
20 like I said, you never stop needing your mom. There
21 might be times when they might need to come to me or
22 just talk or anything or borrow food, borrow money,
23 and I should be able to be there. Like that's how my
24 kuuhkum was. We could go there if we needed bread.
25 You know, anything little thing and she'd provide, you

1 know. And that's what I wanted. And I left my
2 husband because he -- that's not what he wants. He's
3 -- he wants to focus on our boys, and he doesn't want
4 to focus on my older kids; like tough love like they
5 got to do it themselves. And like that's where we
6 clash.

7 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

8 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: And, yeah, a lot of it is our own fault
9 like -- right? -- for using and their own fault. But
10 to deal with life like we have to help each other. I
11 have to help them. I'm their mom. I'm their mom.
12 And it's like I'm just so broken and down and I can't
13 get up like... And it's -- it's going bad. Like
14 look, you know.

15 KERRIE REAY: Do you want to share what happened?

16 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Um....

17 KERRIE REAY: Only if you want.

18 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Well, yeah, I can. My -- my daughter
19 and her boyfriend did this. Um, yeah, we chose to get
20 a place together to try to help each other. That was
21 what I'm trying to do; I'm trying to help them. That
22 guy drinks and he's very very scary when he drinks.
23 And I drank too. I didn't help it either. Because I
24 think if I didn't drink maybe like I wouldn't have got
25 in it. But, yeah, we were all, um -- yeah. She

1 mostly did this to me.

2 KERRIE REAY: Your daughter?

3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. And that hurts but I will forgive

4 her. I'm not, you know, hanging on to any of it. But

5 I can't live with that guy. Like her, she can come

6 back. We lost our place over it. We smashed the

7 window. And I've got to make up with her. I will.

8 But, yeah, like she, even her, she stays mad real

9 long. And she wants to be with him. Like how can I

10 help her if she doesn't want my help? And I don't

11 want to help him. Like he's so... You know? But,

12 yeah, it's drugs and alcohol that like make thing goes

13 worse.

14 KERRIE REAY: And, like you said, it also helped to numb

15 you, --

16 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

17 KERRIE REAY: -- the pain that you are feeling, --

18 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

19 KERRIE REAY: -- the pain you have.

20 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: And I am going to go to rehab. Like I'm

21 not -- I'm not so broken that I'm not going to. But

22 it's -- it's -- it's hard.

23 KERRIE REAY: Yes.

24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: It's hard to hold myself together when

25 I'm falling apart inside. And I will never be the

1 same. I will never be that same person when she was
2 here. I'm always going to look at it through I lost
3 my daughter. I lost my daughter and I've just got to
4 go on. Like I have to. It's hard.

5 KERRIE REAY: And I think -- I think your story here today
6 is showing the commission how deep the pain is and how
7 difficult the struggle is to go forward.

8 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

9 KERRIE REAY: The pain, the grief.

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, like all the things I got over, --

11 KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- it's -- it's, ah... Like I got over
13 some stuff, you know, that I carried from my mom and
14 my kuuhkum. I got over some stuff but I'm still so
15 like not -- I don't know how to describe it. I'm not
16 done. I'm not -- not perfect, you know. I don't have
17 a good life that people would want to look up to me,
18 you know. I lost everything. I lost my vehicle and I
19 don't care. I'd still rather go spend my money on
20 drugs than save up for a vehicle. So I got to walk,
21 you know. It just makes my own life not to go
22 anywhere. Like I'm stuck. I'm stuck with it.

23 KERRIE REAY: Yeah, I hear you. I hear the pain. I hear
24 the frustration and I hear the anger.

25 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

1 KERRIE REAY: And I think -- I hope that coming here and
2 telling your story with such phenomenal amount of
3 courage it takes to share, because you have shared
4 some very deep pain today, --
5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
6 KERRIE REAY: -- and it's -- it's only one step. Even you
7 say there's much to do to take care of yourself.
8 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, to get back on my feet.
9 KERRIE REAY: And, you know, you shared today that you have
10 done it before.
11 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
12 KERRIE REAY: So you can do it again, --
13 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
14 KERRIE REAY: -- right? Having some resources to help
15 support you in this -- in this difficult journey
16 forward, and I think your story is -- um, your truth
17 is important today for the commission to hear.
18 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. And especially like my thoughts
19 for others, --
20 KERRIE REAY: Yes.
21 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- that there's other -- there's other
22 women in pain, there's other -- well, dads too, hey?
23 KERRIE REAY: Yes. Yes.
24 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: But it's the mother that is... You
25 know? She came from my -- she came from my body. I

1 brought her here. And it's those ones that like I --
2 I feel like I'm -- I need to do something, that I can
3 help them. You know? I got to do something with
4 myself so I can help them too. Like I feel like
5 that's what I'm here for.

6 KERRIE REAY: So you feel you have the strength to help
7 others?

8 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: But once I'm, you know, okay.

9 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

10 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: I feel like that is why I'm here is to
11 help others.

12 KERRIE REAY: But you need to take care of yourself.

13 ELLEN BRIGHTYES: Yes. Like I need to, you know,
14 straighten out and all that. There's this -- this
15 other mother, she lost -- she had five kids, two boys
16 and three girls. She lost her two boys violently
17 through alcohol. They were both murdered. Murdered.
18 And one was -- this was like in 2000. So her -- she
19 had a good life. She worked. She took care of her
20 kids. Her son gets murdered -- I think he was only
21 like 20 -- and then after that drinking, drinking,
22 drinking. So that's their life: drinking, ghetto,
23 drugs, and alcohol. Her other son got murdered; like
24 her other son that got murdered, the one she had left.
25 And then the year after her daughter died in Calgary.

1 This is, ah -- Alannah died July, I say the 17th. In
2 my heart I know she was gone on the 17th. This one
3 lost her daughter a month later after me, after being
4 there for me.

5 Like and she barely has anything. She has
6 nothing but the life and her love. And she's a [strict]
7 (~~unintelligible~~), but I know there's love there. So
8 she -- she put like this -- she picked wild flowers on
9 the way to the hall and she put them. Alannah's
10 casket was like the best. Like over 4,000. It is the
11 best one. My mom said, don't be cheap. And she puts
12 these wild flowers on this real fancy casket, and that
13 meant more to me than anything of the flowers that
14 were like bought so expensive and brought there. She
15 lost her daughter a month later.

16 And like for people like that what do you do?
17 And all they want to do is drink, you know. How do
18 you -- how do you help them up? So her today is --
19 she's been diagnosed with, um, severe PTSD. And
20 there's help for that but where is it? You know?
21 Show us. I know there's help for that. You know,
22 some kind of treatment. You know? But to bring that
23 on and like how do we know how to help each other?
24 Because like, you know, she just wants to go get a
25 bottle.

1 KERRIE REAY: So what I'm hearing is one of the
2 recommendations, from your experience, to the
3 commission could be to recognize the need for families
4 of children who died violently,

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

6 KERRIE REAY: -- that are there resources there to help
7 cope, --

8 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

9 KERRIE REAY: -- to help grieve?

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

11 KERRIE REAY: And to -- because, for many, there are still
12 children to raise --

13 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

14 KERRIE REAY: -- or grandchildren?

15 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

16 KERRIE REAY: And I think that's another important
17 recommendation.

18 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. That like, okay, if you are not
19 going to, if you don't get that help, yeah, you are
20 going to go drink. Yeah, you are going to go do that.

21 KERRIE REAY: And that's part of that cycle. That's part
22 of that systemic cycle that alcohol and drugs, the
23 residential schools, the sixties scoop, all that
24 emotion.

25 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

1 KERRIE REAY: You spoke about in the beginning --

2 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

3 KERRIE REAY: -- about that need to be loved.

4 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

5 KERRIE REAY: And there's that gap of that connection.

6 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

7 KERRIE REAY: And to help. Um, to help connect with your

8 families in a way that you didn't have --

9 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

10 KERRIE REAY: -- and that you've been trying to do with

11 your own children.

12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Yes.

13 KERRIE REAY: Any final comments for the commission?

14 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, just that like I hope -- I hope that

15 they bring lots of help to families that need it.

16 It's something that you don't know how it feels until

17 you have lost your own. And it's something I would

18 never wish on anybody to lose their own, but you can't

19 understand it unless you -- unless you have

20 experienced it. So....

21 KERRIE REAY: Okay.

22 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: That's a lot. But that's -- yeah, ah,

23 that's what I'm going through. That's me and my

24 story, right?

25 KERRIE REAY: And it look a lot of courage. It really did.

1 And I want to thank you. Because I can feel your
2 pain.

3 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

4 KERRIE REAY: I really can.

5 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

6 KERRIE REAY: And I -- you know, these stories are
7 important for the commission and for people to
8 understand the pain that is happening, um, with the
9 loss of Indigenous women and girls.

10 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

11 KERRIE REAY: And some are very young.

12 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

13 KERRIE REAY: All right. Well, I'm going to thank you, and
14 I am going to turn off the recording if you are okay?

15 ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. I'm okay. Yeah. I feel
16 completely heard.

17 [PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 2:10 P.M.]

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I, Janet Chorney, Official Reporter in the Province of British Columbia, Canada, do hereby certify: That this is a true and accurate transcript of these proceedings recorded on sound-recording apparatus, transcribed to the best of my skill and ability in accordance with applicable standards.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name this 16th day of April, 2018.

Janet Chorney
Official Reporter