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Truth-Gathering Process
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Anni Phillips & Kim Russel,
In relation to Stella Ballantyne

Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller
Commission Counsel: Meredith Porter

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APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations                Julie McGregor (Legal counsel)
Government of British Columbia           Jean Walters (Legal counsel)
Government of Canada                    Anne Turley (Legal counsel)
Heiltsuk First Nation                   No Appearance
Northwest Indigenous Council Society    No Appearance
Our Place - Ray Cam Co-operative Centre No Appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada         No Appearance
Vancouver Sex Workers’ Rights Collective No Appearance
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak / Women of the Métis Nation No Appearance
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Upon commencing on Wednesday, April 4, 2018 at 14:50

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Anni and Kim are here to speak about Anni’s mother, Stella Ballantyne. Stella Ballantyne was found dead in December of 1978, and Kim and Anni are going to be sharing a bit more detail with respect to Stella Ballantyne and her death. But, prior to that, I’ll ask that they introduce themselves, and following that, be promised in by the Registrar.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Is this on? Okay. Thank you. I’ll just introduce my name, I’ll start with that, my name is Anni Margaret Louise Phillips, and I am the daughter of the most beautiful Cree woman, Stella Angeline Ballantyne, from Little Red River reserve in Saskatchewan. Did you want to introduce yourself?

MS. KIM RUSSEL: Yes. Okay. I am Kim Russel, I am Anni’s partner, and with us is my mom, Darlene Jones, and my stepfather, Dick Jones.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you very much. And, I’ll ask the Registrar to promise in the witnesses.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Good afternoon. Anni, do you promise to tell the truth in a good way today?

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Yes, I do.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Okay. Thank you, Anni. Kim, do you promise to tell the truth in a good way this
afternoon? Okay. Thank you.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you very much.

Anni, I’ll start by asking you if you could just tell us a little bit about your mom, Stella, and what you remember about her ---

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Sure.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: --- growing up.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Can I hold an eagle feather; would that be all right?

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Absolutely.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Thank you so much.

Thank you. Okay. Thank you. It’s my hope today that I can give justice to my mother and her story, and that I can speak from my heart. I’m here because I want her name to be known and our family to be known.

So, as I said before, my mother is Stella Angeline Ballantyne. And, the other day when I was looking at her name and I was looking at her middle name, and it’s Angeline, and the thought came to me, she came from a line of angels, and it meant so much to me because I feel that she has been with me for a very long time.

I’ve been with people who can see the spirit world and they have said to me, Anni, your mother is here; Anni, your mother is here. And, all along, when I think about the unfoldment of how I got here today, my mother has
been with me, these little steps, these little feathers, these little things along the way that brought me here, so I know she’s here today also.

  My father, his name is Charles Phillips, and he’s Scottish, and it’s -- I hear it’s quite common for Scottish men to love Cree women. I have five brothers; Edward is the oldest, Brian, Noah, Steve, and then me, and then my little brother, Lou. I also want to extend -- I want to acknowledge my aunties and my uncles, my nieces and nephews, and my mom’s grandchildren and great grandchildren.

  I’m sorry, there’s just so much that I’ve been -- I’ve been carrying this story. I was 14 when I first heard about my -- when my mom died. I’m probably going to jump all over the place, I hope you can stay with me. Me and my brothers have been carrying this story a long, long time, and the thing I’ve learned through all of this, how this all happened, how I got here today is because I read the TRC summary. I read it three years ago and I was astounded that I did not know our Indian history. I didn’t hear any of it. There was little whispers about residential school. But, when I read that, I couldn’t believe it. And, it took me a week to read that and I cried. I just cried and cried. But, I also healed.

  Now, I’ve been on my healing journey about
25, 26 years, but when I read that, it was a big piece that I needed to hear. It made so much sense to me. I could not believe why -- why didn’t I know that, why didn’t our family know that? I was just astounded by that. So, that was step number one. And, also, that document, I call it a healing document, also helped me to start finding my voice because I never -- I never spoke very much about my life, my story. Kim knew my whole story growing up, she’s the only one that knew the whole story. So, I’ve shared a little bit, but that -- that summary was a pivotal moment in my life in reading that and I’ve started to reclaim more of my Indigenous self because of that.

So, I’ll just backtrack a little bit. My four older brothers -- so me and my little brother, Lou, we have the same father and mother, and my four older brothers have different -- there’s my family up there. They have different fathers. So, me and Lou lived with my dad and mom, and I figure I was about maybe 3 or 4 when I remember there being a fight. This is my earliest memory. There was a fight between my mom and dad, and I remember the door slamming, and I remember my mom going through that door, and that’s the only memory I have of her. And, that would be the last time I would see her.

And, I’m so thankful that I had three or four years with her, because my previous brothers didn’t.
There is many different -- I’m sorry, my older brothers didn’t have time with her. Two of my brothers, Edward and Noah, were raised by my mom’s mom, Grandma Rosie. And, the story -- so I’ve been collecting information before coming here and getting the blessing of my brothers to tell our story. So, it’s interesting, all of this wonderful story is coming out and I’m so glad to be carrying it with me here today and telling.

So, Edward and Noah were raised by Grandma Rosie, and she was a medicine woman, and -- I’ll get more to that other stuff. And, I was told that Grandma Rosie got TB and then that’s when they were sent to residential school because she couldn’t look after them, and then there was no other family around at that time. Brian was raised by his grandparents on his dad’s side. So, they didn’t -- you know, mom was not in their life at the early part of their life. Now, Steve on the other hand, Steve found us three years ago. We didn’t know we had another brother and he’s a Sixties Scoop baby we find out. So, it was so great, you know, to find another brother. I was hoping there would be another sister. So, that’s a little bit about my brothers.

So, I was saying that I was about 4 when mom left or when there was a fight, and I don’t know the details around that. My father sent me and Lou to live
with the white side of our family, so I lived in three
different homes. And, that’s when I started to hear racist
comments from my white side of the family about how bad
Indians were. And then my father, he found another Cree
woman, partner -- as I say, he like Cree women. And so, I
went to go live with him and his partner -- and I’ll call
her Eve, I won’t say her name. And, I was about 9 when I
went to go live with dad and her family, and I -- that
would be the most traumatic part of my life.

Eve, I’m not sure if she went to residential
school, but I know that some of her children did because
that’s when I heard whisperings of residential school, and
so I know some of them went. And, they were about five
years older than me and up, so Eve had a very extended,
large family and people would come and go out of that
house.

So, I experienced a lot of abuse living with
that stepfamily. Emotional, physical, sexual abuse. Eve
shut down any affection that my father showed me. The last
time I remember -- when I shortly went to go live with that
family, and dad was actually holding me, and Eve -- they
were drinking -- sorry, there was lots of alcohol and
violence and fighting also, in that home. And so, I
remember dad holding me and Eve just shutting that down,
like she was, yelling and screaming at him and putting me
down, and that was the last time he ever showed me any affection. That was the last time he stopped protecting me with all of the abuse that was happening in that house.

Eve hated me. My brothers tell me stories, do you remember when Eve threw a stereo at you? And, I can’t remember that. She would humiliate me in front of everyone. And, when her sons were sexually abusing me, everyone turned a blind eye to that, and we all knew it was happening in the house. And, I remember a memory and one of Eve’s sons -- I tell you, I must have been so protected because it could have been so much worse.

And, one of Eve’s sons, I’ll call him Joe, knew I was home alone. I was getting ready to go to high school. And, I can hear him running in the house, running straight to my bedroom. It was early morning. Everyone was out drinking the night before, I was the only one home. And, I remember him coming up the stairs, and I could feel what was about to happen. I was changing, quickly trying to get my clothes on, and -- and I won’t go into detail, but he threw me on the bed and I remember -- I just remembered to scream. And, I screamed at the top of my lungs for my father, and by some miracle, he got off me. I cannot -- I don’t know. I had help and protection. He got off me and I got ready for school. My friends came and pick me up, and I shut down my emotion. And, already my
emotion was -- all my emotions and feelings were shut down because I had experienced so much trauma and violence. So, I put my clothes on and I went to school, my friends came and picked me up and asked me how I was doing, and I just put on a face and went to school.

So, the reason why I tell you that story about Joe -- I will come back to Joe. So, things were getting pretty bad. The older I got, the more I felt like I was being hunted in my house. There were lots of men. Eve had many sons in that house, and so I felt like I was just trying to fight everyone off.

So, after that incident with Joe, I don’t know how it happened, but I remember telling one of Eve’s daughters that this is what had happened -- they were living in a separate house -- and they said to me, oh, yes, he tried that on me too, and I just kicked him. And, there was just no -- oh, yes, you know, common -- whatever. Just deal with it. And, I remember I couldn’t go back to that house because we all lived there. Joe lived there.

So, I stayed with my stepsisters. I felt so unsafe. And, I remember sleeping in the front closet because I needed a small place where I -- all the -- there were protection around me. And, I remember staying there for four days and waiting for my father to come -- come and save me, come and protect me. And so, the day that he came
-- he wanted to know where I was, him and Eve came, and he opened up the closet door and I pretended I was sleeping. I thought, oh, good, he’s going to come and he’s going to hug me, and he’s going to hold me and tell me, I’ll protect you, let’s go home, my girl. And, all he did was, he just opened up the closet and Eve said, oh, she’s sleeping, and then they closed the door. I never got any protection. And, I knew at that time that I had to do this all on my own. There was nobody there for me.

After that incident, dad took me and my brother -- and we actually got a separate place away from that family, so something must have been talked about. But, then slowly, that family, those members started to come to that house. Joe was allowed in that house. After what he just tried to do to me, dad let him in. It made no sense to me. I had locks in my doors, butter knives in the door jam to sleep at night.

And, my dad was angry. I think he blamed me because he loved Eve. I would see them holding each other in bed, so I knew they loved each other. And, he was mad at me. I think he blamed me, that we had to live separately from this family. And, one night in an argument, he was yelling at me and he -- my dad never hit me, but this one night, he tried to hit me. And, I stopped him with my hand and -- he’s over top of me and I stopped
him, and he -- it’s like he snapped out of it and he stopped. And, that was the night that I ran away, I was 14 or 15, and I never went back. I got a social work -- the guidance counsellor at school helped me. I got a social worker who came with me to tell my dad I would not be going back home. My best friend, her father became my guardian. My best friend also became my partner, my lover, so I was also discovering I was a two-spirit person on top of all of the other stuff that was going on.

So, I finished high school -- there is this -- there must have been these angels, my grandmother and my mother, helpers with me, because how I escaped this, I have no idea. I finished school, I got a job, I bought a truck. Like, where did this strength come from? So, that’s how my high school was.

I want to go back and weave in how my mother tied into all of this, and my brothers. So, 14, I’m -- one of Eve’s daughters actually told me that -- she came to me and she said in such a matter of fact, no empathy and no compassion, just said, your mother is dead. And, I was shocked and also numb. Like, looking for a sense of -- how do I deal with this? But, I understand now, why it was done that way and I’ll explain that.

And then when I was either 17 or 18, I had met a couple of my brothers. So, I met Brian previously at
a powwow at Mistawasis, my first powwow. And, I didn’t
even know I had other brothers, and he said, yes, we -- you
have two more brothers. And so, when I was 17 or 18, Brian
brought another brother to me, and I believe it was Noah at
the time. And, that’s when I first found out how my mother
died.

And, they had said to me that she was found
in a hotel room and she was -- she looked pretty beat up.
And, again, there was no emotion from me or my brothers, we
were void of emotion. And, I’ve come to understand -- I’ve
been angry for a long, long time. Like, if my brothers and
my family knew this, and I find out later that it was my
Uncle Wilson that had to go and claim the body.

And, as time went on, I’m finding out more
details, more details about this. And, I remember feeling
really angry. Like, why didn’t anyone do anything? Why
didn’t they go and find out, get a -- like, what happened
to her? This is all we knew. I was so young. Like, I
just -- I had already knew to be afraid of the police by
living with Eve’s family. The police would come to the
door and everyone would scatter and hide.

So, as I became older, I began to understand
that now I know, after -- you know, that’s why they
couldn’t go and find out more, because the police do not
serve and protect Indians. They only re-traumatize us and
look at us like we’re sub-human. And, I had a -- so I’ll come back to Joe.

After I ran away, I would still go and visit my father, but I stay away from Eve’s family. Even though they called me “little sister” -- you know, that’s the Indigenous way; right? Stepfamilies, they’re your brothers and sisters. Yet I couldn’t understand that, they would call me “little sister” and yet they would abuse me, and so I became afraid of them. And, as a result of that, I became afraid of Indigenous people in general because that was my experience.

So, back to my father. I would still go visit him and I was trying to keep a relationship with him and -- come and see me, he would say. And, I would say, stop drinking and I will come and see you, because I don’t want to see you when you’re drunk. He said, yes, if you come home -- come home, I’ll stop drinking, and I wanted to believe him, but I’ve heard so many promises before. I would still go visit him.

And, we had a Tuesday -- I remember the day, it was a Tuesday visit schedule at 11:00, something like that. So, I went to go see him, he knew I was coming, and he was drinking, and I felt so betrayed by him. He wanted me to come home, but you keep drinking. And, I remember leaving him. I was so mad at him and I slammed the door.
And, that was the last time I saw him. Joe went to go visit my dad, he heard that dad was drinking and there was alcohol there. So, Joe broke into the house, they got into a fight, and Joe -- Joe choked my father to death. I was 18.

I was already afraid of the police. There was -- I can’t -- I was in shock, I was terrified -- I was already terrified of that family. I was afraid they were going to come after me. I couldn’t go and find out what happened to my father. To this day, I don’t know. I know who was in that house at that time. No one went to jail for that.

And, I want to say that because I’ve read the TRC and I know what has been done to Indigenous people in this country, and that I know that Eve and her family -- and I know the effects of colonialism, and residential school, and Sixties Scoop would have destroyed that family also, because I lived with them, I lived with that family.

I protected their names here today because I don’t want to hurt them. I know why those things happened. And, I have forgiven them. I love them. Because I know how they got there, I know what had happened to them. So, I don’t know if they’ll hear this and if they’ll recognize my name, but I want them to know it’s okay, I love you and I forgive you, and I wish you great healing. Thank you.
So, with my mother -- you know, after reading the TRC and having this huge piece of the puzzle come together for me, and starting to find my voice, I wanted to find out more about my mom. I wanted to start putting pieces together, who was she. From one little piece of this too, because it’s all a part of it, it’s like from the age of 18, after my father died, I left Saskatoon and I moved to Edmonton because -- you know, finding my two-spiritedness, I needed to find more two-spirited people and I knew there were some in Edmonton. So, I went to Edmonton to find another part of my tribe. You know, I was just searching for pieces of me and -- but during that time -- this is a sad part, you know? I go back, and I think about it and -- I was 18, I didn’t start my healing journey until I was 25. I started the year before Kim and I met, and we have been together for 27 years. Thank you.

So, when I went to Edmonton, the sad part of this is, in order to heal, I had to leave my Indigenous family; right? It was too hard. So, I severed ties with Eve’s family. I had to. There was too much pain there. And, my Ballantyne family, my brothers were trying to, you know, make connection, but I was afraid of them. I was afraid of them because I had no trust for Indigenous people. My brothers, if you’re listening to me, I’m sorry. I’m sorry to say this. I don’t want to hurt you with that,
but I was afraid of you. So, you would come around and you would try to get to know me, but I was afraid of you, I had to keep you at arms-length.

So, I met Kim in Edmonton. We were friends for three years before we started dating because we were with other people. And, you know, there’s this saying that, even though I didn’t go to residential school, residential school came to me, it came to our communities. It doesn’t matter if we didn’t go, we all experienced what it was like. It affects all of us.

And so, I had two emotions, depression and anger. I was either dead with depression, with no hope, not wanting to be here, not wanting to be alive, or I had anger. Something would trigger me, and I would just -- I would be in rage. And, that started to show up in my relationship -- my relationships. So, when I met Kim, I wanted her to love me so bad, but I didn’t trust her, and I tested her. I tested her over and over again, and she passed because she’s still here.

I brought violence into our relationship and it’s hard to admit that. There’s a lot of shame. All that violence that happened to me, I had been carrying that and I didn’t know how to deal with it. So, I just started my healing journey just a year before meeting her, and all of this stuff started coming up and it came out, all that
anger, all that rage, all that deep, deep sadness, all that loss. We had a rocky go. We almost separated many times, but we stuck it out because Kim -- in my previous relationship, when that came out, I was shamed. I was told, you’re sick, you need to go get help, and that only made me feel worse about myself. I only buried myself deeper. But, when Kim came to me -- Kim knew my whole life story, so she knew -- I had felt enough trust in her to tell her everything. So, she knew where I had come from. And, I remember the first time I told her, she could not believe that something like that would happen to another human being, all that trauma, all that abuse and violence. And, the sad part is, this is a common story for many, man, many Indigenous people. I’m not the only one. So, when she heard my story and I would burst into rage, she would remember that, and she would give me grace. She would remember, I know this is not who you are. She -- it wasn’t easy for her.

There was a pivotal moment when I wanted to do myself in. She stayed with me, she would not let me leave the house, because if I got out of the house, I would -- that was it. Because she’s bigger and stronger than me, thank God, she didn’t let me out. When I woke up in the morning, Kim was laying in front of the door because she didn’t want to let me out of the bedroom. She was
protecting me like a sentinel waiting, like you’re not getting out of here. And, in that moment, it was pivotal for me, someone loved me with everything they had.

And, Kim also said to me, Anni -- with my anger and my rage, she came to me with the biggest love and the biggest heart. She didn’t say, you’re sick and you need to get help. She said, Anni, with the greatest love in her voice, I love you, but this can’t happen anymore, and that helped me to keep walking on my healing journey and I’m so glad, every step. So, I keep telling Kim I owe a great deal -- her strength and her love have helped me.

So, on the healing journey, I wanted to know more. I’m in Edmonton and I’m a province away from my family and they want to be around me, and I’m still holding them back, but I want to know who are we, who are Cree people, Indigenous people? And, in Edmonton, there were people around that were doing talking circles and there was a Mother Earth Healing Society in Edmonton, and so I started going, and oh, my God, it was like coming home. Talking about the eagle feather and the smudge, and hearing some Cree and -- Eve’s family spoke Cree, you know? And, it was -- it’s just like music to my ears to hear Cree being spoken. It’s so soft and beautiful and gentle.

So, I began to seek out Indigenous people and attended ceremonies. And, my first sweat lodge was
with a powerful Cree woman, her name is Rose Oshe (ph) from Driftpile, Alberta. Oh, was she so powerful. She has since passed on. She gave me a Cree name, and I want to learn it in -- how to say it in Cree, but she gave me Prairie Flower Woman in that sweat lodge. I will never forget her. Man, she’s -- wow. And so, I started seeking out more and more ceremony. I started to go home a little bit more.

So, I brought -- the Ballantyne family reunion, this was another pivotal moment. My brothers organized to have a family reunion and we had a ceremony. I got to meet my Uncle Wilson for the very first time, and many, many, many Ballantyne relatives and cousins. And, to hear the word, “Auntie, auntie”, you know? And, it’s so funny going home and seeing all these people, meeting them for the first time, and looking at you, like their faces light up. I felt like a rock star, like I was somebody famous, you know? Just so welcomed, so loved and -- so that started my, you know, healing, to not be so afraid of my family and my brothers. And then I met another beautiful Cree man just outside of Edmonton, again who took me to ceremony. So, you know, all these helpers along the way, all along the way, just beautiful.

I moved to B.C. and I lost touch with ceremony and I lost touch with those things that meant
something to me, and I just dove into my work and my job, and -- you know what I did? I started on the colonial -- the wheel, you know, the hamster wheel, because I’m hearing -- which you’re supposed to do. You’re supposed to get an education, and then a job, and then a house, and a white picket fence and all that stuff, and so I started doing those things because that’s what you’re supposed to do and I -- thank God, I think it was three, four years ago, I realized the insanity of it. Like, oh, my God, like really, this is what is valued in this world, and stopped.

Kim and I had a -- we actually had two art businesses together, and that second one, I remember having -- after such a busy Christmas season, I remember sitting in the bathroom and crying, and going, this is insane. Why am I living this way? What kind of life is this? We can’t do this anymore.

So, we sold our house and we stopped our business, and I took that time to heal. I gave myself time to heal, and then that’s when the TRC appeared. I had been divinely guided, I cannot tell you. I read the TRC -- I just want to make sure, before I get into that part of the story, if there’s anything else I want to say about -- I had lost touch with, you know, like -- because I’m two provinces away, I would still keep in touch with my family even not seeing them as much, and still yearning, yearning
for Indigenous connection.

And, I live in the beautiful Syilx territory in the Okanagan, and it was so great because I would -- Indigenous people are a little more visible there. The reserve, it’s just across the channel, and so I -- Joanne (ph) is from that territory and I’m so glad you’re here.

And, it started to warm my heart, look at all these beautiful people, but you know, I’m Cree and, you know, I was hesitant and a little shy to -- like, I didn’t know, can I just go to their reserve and start to make friends, you know, and all that stuff. So, still staying a little in touch with my family, not as much. Longing for connection with Indigenous people. Feeling that gaping hole in my heart where -- back to my mother, gaping hole in my heart. Always thinking of her. Always wondering about her death.

It was only a year ago -- because I read the TRC, because I started hearing about the Missing and Murdered Inquiry, because I was starting to get my voice and my strength, it was only a year ago that I called the Inquiry and said I want -- I want my mother on that. That’s 38 years of carrying that knowledge, that there was something wrong about the way she died. It wasn’t right. I finally got the courage. And, I’ll tell you what happened, my heart was beating when I called that phone
number, I didn’t know what to -- what would I say. I
called that number and spoke to a very kind woman and told
me how things would happen.

And, I remember I burst into tears after I
got off the phone, it was a relief, and I knew I did the
right thing. I was so terrified to do that, to make that
phone call. When I walked outside, and we have gravel on
the outside of the yard, and I walked this trail, how many
years have I walked this trail, and I was walking along it
to go get into my vehicle, and I heard a ping. I go, hm,
that sounds like metal, and I look down, and it was a
copper penny. Now, we haven’t had copper pennies in Canada
for how long? Now, when I looked down, I knew that was
from my mother, and so I picked it up and I put it in this
pouch.

And then I went to go Google what -- I knew
that copper meant something. I Googled, and it stands for
truth and justice, and that’s what my mother was telling
me, Anni, you did the right thing. It was a message from
her. And then today, when I heard -- when copper was given
as a gift, and it’s the highest offering, it just means
that much more to me, so I wanted to share that.

So, I want to talk a little bit about my
mother. And, I only received the coroner’s report, I
think, maybe three weeks ago, four weeks ago, something
like that. It was really hard to read. FILU. I just want
to thank FILU for helping me because they helped me get
that report. There is no police report -- they cannot find
a police report. Yes.

So, on the report, it says that mom had a
high level of alcohol and darvon in her system, and that it
was quite -- a sufficient amount to cause her death.
However, there were bruises all over every part of her
body; there were bruises on either side of her neck; there
were bruises on her chest; there were four little circular
bruises on the inside of her arm, like someone had grabbed
her; bruises all over her arms and her legs. There were
older bruises on her face, and it appeared that her lips
were bruised and a healing laceration on the inside of her
mouth. Huge bruise on the back of her head. But, the
biggest part that stands out to me is that she had a broken
jaw. My mom would have been in extreme pain with that
broken jaw. And, I think she was self medicating that
evening.

And, what makes me -- this coroner’s report
makes me ask more questions than giving me answers, but it
at least gives me a little peace. Why did my mom feel like
she couldn’t have sought medical help? Was she afraid of
-- to go to the doctor, to go get help? Did she feel shame
and unworthiness? I know I have felt great shame and
unworthiness just being an Indigenous woman. Maybe she didn’t feel she was worthy or maybe she wasn’t allowed to go. Maybe the person -- to me, she looks like she was beaten up. I don’t know who did that to her. Maybe she wasn’t allowed to go seek help.

The story I hear is that mom was trying to get home, back to the reserve. It was December 22nd, it’s Christmas time. And, apparently, she was married. On her coroner’s report, it’s Stella Angeline Coup (ph). I don’t know who this Coup person is. Why was it my Uncle Wilson that had to go claim the body? My Uncle Wilson told my brother that when he went to go get the body, the way the police treated him was, come and get this piece of trash. And, that was the same for me when I had to go claim the personal effects of my father at the police station.

I’m 18 years old and I go in, and this officer across from the desk slides over the package, doesn’t say a damn thing to me, and looks at me with such disgust. I felt so dirty. Like, I was sub-human in that moment. No compassion, no nothing, just take this shit out of here. And, I imagine that that’s how my uncle felt.

And, I understand why none of the family could go and investigate further, for fear -- well, what would happen to them if they went? They would probably be re-traumatized again and they would face racism. I
understand now -- for the longest time, I was angry. Why, why did no one go and find out? And, I understand now.

So, through the series of reading the TRC, finding my voice, healing, healing, healing, calling the Inquiry, and other many magical things that have happened that brought me here today is truly amazing. I know I was supposed to be here. And, at first, when I was asked if I wanted to testify, I said no, I didn’t want to come. I was afraid. I didn’t know what would happen. I didn’t know how I would feel. But, some other wonderful magical things happened that brought me here, and I knew I was supposed to be here and tell mom’s story.

So, I want to say -- I called all of my brothers, what would you like me to say, when I come, about our mother? She was dearly loved. Dearly loved, dearly missed, thought of all the time. My brother, Brian, tells me that his children and his grandchildren ask about her, who is this woman, and it breaks his heart. We didn’t get a chance to know her. There’s that gaping hole, the matriarch.

My brother, Steve, the Sixties Scoop baby, texted me this morning -- I texted him last night and I said, Steve, is there anything you want me to say? And, he said, same thing, how much she’s loved and that -- but the other really -- thing that he said was, tell them that I
was a Sixties Scoop baby, and then he says, nah, you don’t have to say that. That’s irrelevant. That broke my heart to read that. We’ve all felt irrelevant for so long, like we don’t matter. I said, Steve, it’s so relevant. It’s a part of the big picture.

I think for the longest time I didn’t realize I couldn’t touch that, that part of me that misses my mom so much, and I never got that chance. I didn’t get that chance. And, one of the things, you know, when I -- when I look at Kim and the beautiful relationship she has with her mom, it’s so beautiful to watch. It fills me up, but it also reminds me of what I don’t have. If mom was still alive today, I would know -- like, we would have lots to heal. It took a long time to get to that place because of what has been done to us.

The previous person that told the truth beforehand had said, they came for the matriarch; right? She called it the root, that it was done on purpose. Go for the women and their children.

Now, on the other side, a lot has happened to us. But, it’s interesting, last night, as we were doing the opening ceremony, and I’m looking around the room and seeing all of this happening, and all I could see was beautiful, strong, resilient women, two-spirited -- I forget all the acronyms that go with that. Non-binary,
trans -- all I just saw was our beauty. And, I don’t understand, in this society, when I see our beauty and our strength, how there can be so much hate in the psyche of some people in Canada. The one thing that really stood -- is the young 18-year-old man that threw a trailer hitch at an Indigenous woman. When we’re so beautiful, I don’t understand that, that there’s so much hate in their heart.

So, what I want to say -- there has been so many beautiful recommendations that have been said and what would I recommend? There’s still so much healing that has to be done in our communities. Coming here has been so healing for me, so healing. Being around all these beautiful Indigenous people has filled me up, has given me even more strength.

So, part of my -- when I think about how we can heal, like I just see how we love and support each other here, and within our communities, you know, we’re still dealing with lateral violence and internalized racism, and I think, man, if we could ever just come together and start supporting each other, start lifting each other up like we do here. If we could bring this home to our reserves, we would be even more unstoppable than we are now. This Canada would change real quick. Here is something I wrote. What did I say? Maybe that will be my last point that I will say around that.
So, we’ve all talked about colonialism, and residential school and Sixties Scoop, and how that was designed on purpose to eliminate or assimilate us. And, I love it -- I love it, every time someone says, we’re still here, we are still here, that -- I’ll never get tired of hearing that. We’re still here. We’re still strong. We’re still resilient and getting even stronger. Wow. Like, the things I see and the change, it’s just -- yes, it’s slow, but man, it is happening and that gives me so much hope.

So, what is happening back home in -- I live outside of Penticton, because of the TRC, someone started -- a non-Indigenous person started a TRC reading challenge. And, non-Indigenous people started reading that in our little community. They put it out to our little community. So, it was read over a few months and then, well, let’s get together and talk about how we feel about what we just read. And so, almost 30 people got together. I was the only Indigenous person at that meeting. I was terrified to be there. I’ve never -- as an Indigenous person and hearing all the racism and all that growing up, I’ve never actually talked about -- well, actually, on purpose, I denied for the longest time that I was Indigenous. I hid that from people in order to survive. You know, I was ashamed. I have that shame.
And so, part of -- the TRC and reclaiming myself, and sitting with all those non-Indigenous people -- I was shaking because I wasn’t sure, is this going to break out into an Indigenous bashing again? Am I going to be the only Indigenous person here, sitting and listening to this? And, I was amazed. All these non-Indigenous people were livid with anger. Livid. They couldn’t believe that they didn’t know the real history of Canada and they were damn mad about it, and they wanted to do something about it.

Now, the interesting thing is, they’re going around saying how angry they are. When it came to me to speak, I said, I’ve been angry my whole life and I just want peace. I don’t want to live in anger anymore. I want to live in love. So, you be angry.

So, that started to give me hope. So, that TRC group has been going for a couple of years. So, what’s happening there is non-Indigenous people are learning the truth, and not only are they learning it, they want to know more. They want to know what is racism, what does it look like, what causes racism, how do we interrupt racism, what’s white privilege? What’s -- they’re just looking at everything. And, we’ve had some tough conversations, like I -- when I sit with that group in the first few meetings, I was still shaking, you know, because I still wasn’t sure what would happen. But, they’re learning. They’re really
learning. They’re willing. And, the hope is that as they learn and -- they undo colonialism. Because I think if we look at the truth, colonialism doesn’t serve any of us. Colonialism, to me, is individualism. Colonialism brought sexism, it brought homophobia, it brought a lot of things that aren’t healthy. And, I wonder sometimes, does it serve any of us?

So, I’m seeing some hope. And, what’s happening is that, as they’re learning, when they go out into their non-Indigenous communities, they’re learning. What happens if one of my friends says something racist, how am I going to interrupt that? What am I going to do to stop that? And so, there’s going to be this ripple effect that’s going to go out because they need to talk to their people.

And, there’s a second circle I sit in, the circle is for reconciliation that was started in Penticton. And, again, there’s more non-Indigenous people wanting to come and learn. And, there’s a format online, circlesforreconciliation.ca, so we decided to try it. What does this feel like? And, we went through a few weeks of -- so there’s information on there and it talks about residential school and MMIW and -- you know, many, many different things. We were talking about these things. And, I’m one Indigenous person, and then there’s one other
Indigenous person that shows up every once in a while, but it’s mostly, again, non-Indigenous people that are wanting this information.

And so, we were done at the end of our six or eight or ten weeks that we were going to run -- it was just a basic information, just start -- just get them started and looking. And, we were going to have a final meeting, and okay, that’s it, we’ve gone through the thing. And, all of them said, no, we don’t want to end this. Can we keep going? They want to know more. Can we stick together? Can we continue to make change somehow? So, again, I see more hope.

And, the other part of this is -- so I’m building -- it’s all about building relationships, you know? Our family systems have been fractured, so I got to learn how to build relationships again with my family. Healthy relationships. And, I have to learn how to build relationships with non-Indigenous people, so -- I’m sorry. With Indigenous people. So, both sides. Did I get that right? It’s all about building relationships.

And so, we heal in our Indigenous community, and then the non-Indigenous community is learning the truth, and then how do we come together? How can we come together in a healthy and safe way to start to build relationships, to start to heal all those lies that all
sides have been told about each other? We need to heal of that.

So, we need -- I want non-Indigenous people to see how beautiful we are. We are so beautiful and gracious. With all the violence that has been done to us -- the Syilx people in the Okanagan, they have ceremonies and invite all public to come to -- not all ceremonies, but certain ceremonies. Of all the violence that has been done to them, they still have the grace to invite all people to their ceremonies. It’s so beautiful to watch.

And, the other thing I’ve been thinking about, okay, if it was up to Anni, what would my recommendations be. I am so tired of watching movies that perpetuate racism. I’m tired of the -- there was a recent film released in Canada -- I don’t even know the name of it and I don’t even want to know about it. Same damn story about Indians and that the Indians had done something wrong to the white people, and the white people were going to do something about it. It doesn’t tell the whole story or the true story. If this was my Canada, those types of movies would not be allowed to play. I am sick and tired of movies that perpetuate racism.

I’m tired of movies and -- or TV shows, or any media -- I’m tired of watching movies where women are raped and murdered. What kind of society do we have that
Anni Phillips & Kim Russel (Stella Ballantyne)

has violence and rape and murder in them, and this is our entertainment? What does that say? I don’t understand that. So, if it was my Canada, I would ban all those movies. I want to start seeing more things in -- out there, everywhere about how beautiful and strong we are in our -- our cultures.

My God, our cultures. I’m just coming back to learn about my culture. And, every ceremony I come to, everything is done with intention, it’s incredible to me. Every time I lead a ceremony, I just go, God, I love our cultures. Indigenous culture is so beautiful, so thoughtful.

I think I, sort of, covered everything. Maybe the last thing I wanted to say -- because I’m thinking about, like, how -- how can we heal this in Canada? We have to help each other find our way back to our hearts, that means Indigenous and non-Indigenous. All of us; right? When I sit in those circle with those non-Indigenous people, I tell them the truth about what I experienced growing up and it makes it real for them. They’re not reading it in a book.

They helped me find my voice. By me sitting in that circle with them and talking about what happened to me, little bits here and there, speaking up as an Indigenous people in front of all of these non-Indigenous
people, in a way, they helped me find my voice. So, I’m helping them and they’re helping me.

In all of this, I see -- you know, someone had said about -- we have been stripped of our humanity, all of us; right? In order for a non-Indigenous person to hate us, somewhere along the way, they’ve been stripped of their humanity. They’ve been shut down. How can you hate -- how can you throw a trailer hitch at someone if your humanity hasn’t been lost somewhere along the way? What have you been taught? And so, I think how do we all come back to our hearts and back to our humanity. So, whatever -- any programs that can help us do that, can we get funding for that?

I think that’s everything. Thank you. And, besides all the recommendations, those are beautiful, I would say -- and everything she said. Thank you.

**MS. MEREDITH PORTER:** Kim, do you have any comments that you wanted to share?

**MS. KIM RUSSEL:** Hello. I’ll just make it very brief. When I first met Anni, when we were friends, she was very quiet and very meek, and I had to tell her girlfriend at the time to just shut up for a minute so Anni could speak once in a while.

And, when we got together and she told me her story, she trusted me enough to tell me her story, I
was completely shocked and -- but there’s -- thank God she did, because when we went through our challenges, I felt in my heart that I didn’t want to be a person who let her down. If she had come through this travesty of a background and -- where nobody showed her love, not even her father, you know, very rarely, and -- I wanted to be that person.

And, in our most challenging time, we actually read a book called Return to Love by Marianne Williamson. And, in that book, it talks about a holy relationship and that being where you both come together to heal, and then when you’ve moved through your healing journey, you go out into the world and you try and help others to heal.

And, that’s, kind of, been our mandate to work through. And, I’ve seen Anni just struggle and work her hardest to undo what she learned about herself and move through her shame. And, one amazing thing to me was, for a person who hadn’t been shown much love, how loving she is. And, you’ll hear so many people, my family, my friends will say like, what a heart -- a huge heart she has and they can feel it in her. And, that’s what I felt.

So, I feel honoured to be here, I feel honoured to have witnessed your journey, to be by your side. And, I also want to acknowledge Stella for bringing
me and my family the greatest gift. That’s it.

And, if I would say, my recommendation is that I think we need -- there is something about having the history in books, but I don’t think that instils empathy. So, if there can somehow be some empathy education, whether that’s showing videos of, you know, people telling their story, if they’re willing to have those presented, or if they would be willing to share their stories personally, because I have seen how it’s changed -- it changed me to know the truth, and it’s changed people once they’ve heard Anni’s story. And, reading the TRC was one thing, but having somebody there really embodying that experience was moving, and life changing and inspiring. So, that’s my two bits. Thank you.

**MS. MEREDITH PORTER:** Thank you, Kim. Well, I do have just a couple of questions with respect to clarifying a couple of details. And, you know, I want to preface my questions with just acknowledging the strength and, really, the beauty that you’ve demonstrated in your evidence today, and how you’ve really articulated, you know, human gifts of kindness and forgiveness in your evidence, and I want to thank you for sharing that.

My questions relate to the -- first of all, you mentioned with respect to the coroner’s report that you got with respect to your mother’s death, and you mentioned
that there were -- that you’re not aware of any
investigation reports from police, RCMP. Do you know if
any efforts were made by the detachment in the area to
investigate the circumstances of her death?

**MS. ANNI PHILLIPS:** I don’t know. Like,
anyone from my family hasn’t said. I’ve kept asking them,
right, and no one has said that, yes, they’re -- no one has
mentioned that any investigation has ever been done.

**MS. MEREDITH PORTER:** Okay.

**MS. ANNI PHILLIPS:** Yes.

**MS. MEREDITH PORTER:** Okay. Thank you. And
then with respect to your father’s death, with Joe, were
there ever any charges or convictions with respect to his
death or the circumstances in his death?

**MS. ANNI PHILLIPS:** I’m not sure if there
were any charges. I know -- I believe that he was taken
down to the station because he was in the house. There
were two other people in the house, but they were in the
basement, they were related to Joe -- or one was related to
Joe. Yes -- no conviction, no jail time, no nothing.

**MS. MEREDITH PORTER:** No charges?

**MS. ANNI PHILLIPS:** I’m not sure. I’d have
to -- yes, I’m not sure about the charges, if he -- yes.

**MS. MEREDITH PORTER:** Okay. Okay. Thank
you. Chief Commissioner Buller, do you have any comments
or questions for the witness?

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: I don’t have any questions because what you’ve said has been remarkable. And, before I forget, I just have to look at my note here.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Sure.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Please tell Steve that he’s very relevant.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: I will, yes.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: What you’ve said today, both of you, is very important to our work and I’m grateful that you shared your stories, your truths with us. Thank you also for your support people for coming as well. It’s, I think, probably one of the most important things for us all to remember, as you’ve said Anni, is we’re still here and I’m so glad you are here. Kim, I’m so glad you’re here. Thank you.

Because what you’ve told us is so important to our work and important to me personally, we have gifts for you. One is an eagle feather. All across Canada, there are slightly different stories and beliefs about eagle feathers, but I think they can be explained fairly simply that eagle feathers lift you up and carry you when you need to be lifted and carried. And, on those days when you think you can reach just a little bit higher, the eagle
feather will take you up that extra notch. We also have seeds for you, because out of this National Inquiry, we’re already seeing new life through healing. So, we’re going to ask you to plant the seeds, and if something grows, will you please take a picture and send it to us for our archives. We want to always remember about the growth that comes from healing, that’s the seeds.

So, I want to thank you, your words, your thoughts, your messages today have been profound, nothing less than that, and I thank you very much for the gifts that you have given us. So, before we take a little bit of a break, I just want to say thank you again. Thanks just doesn’t add up -- it doesn’t seem enough.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Thank you.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Thank you.

MS. ANNI PHILLIPS: Thank you so much.

--- Exhibits (code: P01P15P0103)

Exhibit 1: Folder containing five digital images displayed during the public testimony of Anni Philips and Kim Russell.

--- Upon adjourning at 16:09
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Shirley Chang, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Shirley Chang

April 12, 2018