Ellen Brighteyes,
In relation to her daughter Alannah Cardinal

Statement gathered by Kerry Reay

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement - Volume 90</th>
<th>November 8, 2017</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Witness: Ellen Brighteyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Testimony of Ellen Brighteyes | 1 |
| Reporter’s certification     | 57 |

**Statement gatherer: Kerrie Reay**

Documents submitted with testimony: none.
III

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
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.
Okay, Ellen.

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

And, um, I'm the oldest of three kids. My -- I have two younger brothers. My mom -- ah, I didn't have no relationship with my dad. So, um, my kuuuhkum mostly raised me. I feel like, um, the damage that the residential school did on our family was there's no like showing of love. I knew she loved me, in my heart. She didn't have to say it. But, for my mom, I didn't know she loved me because she didn't raise me and she didn't show me what she did for my brothers. So that's -- that's there. Um, how I know residential school affected us was -- was just that: like just not showing love, no hugs, no I love yous. So growing up, um, that's what I wanted.
And I didn't know what I was doing, having kids at a young age and then not staying with the father. I had -- I had these kids. I had my first one when I was 18, and it didn't work out with her dad. But, you know, I have this little girl, though. Then I got pregnant again by somebody else and then I had a little boy. Then I had another little girl. And these relationships weren't working out. I don't -- I don't know why. I wanted love. That's why. I know I wanted love and I know I wanted kids. And so I had a girl and boy and a girl. And then in that, that was Alannah. And then I had another one, and I didn't want -- already then it was getting hard to do it by myself. And, ah, when I got pregnant I decided to give up this baby because I wanted a better life for him, for the baby. So he went to my aunty, and that's the only one I didn't raise. And I have nine kids.

Then I went on and I found my -- and I went. I did healing. I -- I quit drinking. I did healing, and I had my three kids. And then -- and I kept them with me. Um, I kept them with me when I was drinking and then when I stopped they came with me. They came with me to rehab even. And I changed my life and I met my husband and I went on. Like, um, we had kids together. We got married and we had kids. And I have
five boys with him and then all while trying to get myself together.

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

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

Um, for her, for the last month of her life, I knew she wouldn't want to die in the hospital. By the time she was sick enough to go they only gave her two weeks to live. And I knew she wouldn't want to die in the hospital. So I left my family. I left my husband
and my kids, you know, so I could go take care of her, and because of that she was able to die at home. And she -- and she -- like she deserved that. She deserved whatever she wanted. She had -- she never lost her dignity, you know. And she loved me. She loved my kids. And it's like no matter what, no matter what, she didn't have to like tell us. She didn't have to tell us because I knew. I knew in my heart.

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

KERRIE REAY: This is your space.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: So when my kids hit teenage years I have a hard time with them. I have a hard time. Ah, I don't know what it is. It's -- it's -- I have a hard
time with it. Alannah was her own. She had -- she
had a voice. She wasn't scared to like talk and ask
for stuff or talk and go do stuff. And me? I was
like more inward and I do what I have to do. But I
wouldn't like go out and, you know, the way she would
go. You know, if she found out you could do something
she'd go do it. But she'd try, try until she could
get it. And she wasn't scared to go out there and ask
and try and...

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

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

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

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

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

And then when I met Mike we -- we settled down. I stayed in one place. Um, we kind of moved around at first, but when our boys when to school they went to
school in the same school for all of elementary. And
I am kind of proud of that, that like I didn't move
around for them.

KERRIE REAY: And where was that?

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: No.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Mostly with my kuuhkum.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

KERRIE REAY: And why do you think that was?

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Like I'm not comfortable with her old
man. So, yeah, like he makes it hard to be there.
And, as a kid, you know, they just let me live where I
wanted to live, like kind of put it on me. But, you know, I wanted my mom but there was no love there. Like no showing, you know.

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

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Okay.
KERRIE REAY: So we'll take a break.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Okay.

[PROCEEDINGS RESUMED PURSUANT TO A SHORT BREAK]

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: But it's still not comfortable?

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

And as -- like as I changed, as I did healing, you know, I would bring that home to my kids and practice it on them. And it was my husband's mom that taught me how to hug. Because she'd hug us when we'd get there and she'd hug us when we would leave. And I wasn't nice to her and she'd still hug us. She taught
me how to hug. Because like, I don't know, it feels
good anyways to be welcomed and then to be missed, I
guess. I don't know. But I'm grateful like she
taught me that. And she's gone now too.

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

KERRIE REAY: And what year did you meet him?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Ah, 2002.

KERRIE REAY: So Alannah was six?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, Alannah was six.

KERRIE REAY: In 2002.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. And one of the things that she
said to me, because like I worked on myself all this
time, right? I -- I'd talk and talk and like I'd go
to therapy. And I worked on our relationship. And,
um, I had apologized to her. I said: I'm sorry,
Alannah. I'm sorry I didn't stay with your dad. I'm
sorry I didn't give you a better life than what she
deserved. And she's like: Why, Mom? Why are you
sorry? You don't have to be sorry. You were -- she
said, Mike has been here since I was six. She said, I
had a good childhood. She's like, you don't have to
be sorry. She didn't want me to feel bad. Because
she -- like she feels like she did have a good -- you know? And she -- she did tell everybody that was her dad, but that wasn't her dad. But that's how she like introduced herself and got herself known: Chewie (phonetic) is my dad. You know, everyone knows him as Chewie.

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

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

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

KERRIE REAY: How did she do at school?

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHT EYES: Yes.

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

ELLEN BRIGHT EYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHT EYES: Yeah. She was like applying to go to school. Yeah, she -- she....

KERRIE REAY: And did she --

ELLEN BRIGHT EYES: She always had a plan, you know. She had -- she always was working on something, on getting
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

KERRIE REAY: And did she talk about what she hoped to do when she went to school, Portage College, what her interests were?

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: Ah, no. No.

KERRIE REAY: Just looking to go back?

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: Yeah. So....

KERRIE REAY: So you were saying that Alannah lived with you and your husband?

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: Sometimes. But mostly she was on her own.

KERRIE REAY: So about what age do you think she struck out on her own?

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: Sixteen.

KERRIE REAY: Sixteen.

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: Sixteen, 15.

KERRIE REAY: Okay. And did she -- did she stay in Saddle Fish [sic]? Goodfish or Saddle Lake?

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: She -- um, she got her own place in St. Paul.

KERRIE REAY: In St. Paul?

ELLEN BRIGHTTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

And, um, yeah, she just did it herself. She was --
that's what I mean. She was her own woman.

KERRIE REAY: Very strong.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I wasn't -- I wasn't like her boss or I couldn't boss her around or tell her what to do.

She -- she'd figure out what to do and she'd get it done herself.

KERRIE REAY: Was she working in St. Paul?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, yeah, she worked.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: She worked as a cashier at Extra Foods.

Um, she worked at camp. I went to camp in 2014 and she -- she came. She got herself a job. She got herself put at the camp where I was at.

KERRIE REAY: Okay. And what camp was that?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: At Henday.

KERRIE REAY: Henday?

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Housekeeping. Yeah, she -- she got herself there, and then it was like the best three months for me and her. She was just 18. And, ah, my husband watched her while -- while she came. And we just worked and made money, and we got along better at
Statement – Public
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

1 camp than at home.

2 KERRIE REAY: And you have a smile.

3 ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yeah.

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

5 ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yeah, it was. Yeah.

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

7 ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Um, [Birth Date]. So, yeah,

8 she -- ah, she did a lot. Like she was only 20 and she did a lot. And that's how like I can notice what kind of teachings I gave her was like by what she did, right? She went to go get her Indian name. She --

10 the thing about church, like she embraced that too. She was a Catholic and an Indian, and that's just how I am. And, um, yeah, like about knowing herself as a woman.

12 She had lots of different boyfriends. And she was looking. She was looking for love too, and -- but it seemed like she knew more than me, you know. Like I didn't have as much boyfriends as she did. But like she would, um -- she would never kill herself over a guy. She would never kill herself. Like even when she was young and getting into relationships young she could, you know, finish what happened, or if it went bad she'd end it and then she'd be okay. She wouldn't
like fall apart or anything over a guy.

KERRIE REAY: Did she ever talk about violence in her relationships?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. She had one relationship like that, and she just tried to stay with him because she really wanted the relationship to work.

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: She wanted to be with this guy. Yeah. But she ended up like, um, ending it. And it was for the better because he did go and beat up another girl, you know. Like....

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- to leave.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. So, um, yeah, like she just -- she knew so much and she had so many friends, you know. Like she understood so much of reality, you know, and....

KERRIE REAY: So you were mentioning that you were both working in camp?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: We got laid off.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: It was that Christmas. Just before
Christmas, that's when the oil prices went down and they just shut down our camp first. So we all got laid off.

KERRIE REAY: So was that Christmas of 2015?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Of 2014.
KERRIE REAY: Of 2014?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: And so did -- did she go back then to --
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: St. Paul's?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, yeah, I can't remember where she lived after that. She might have lived in Goodfish for a while after that with her boyfriend and [Granddaughter]. Um, yeah, she'd always like try to impress me with these guys. And I felt, you know, like who am I to like try to impress? She felt it was important for me to like these guys that she was seeing. And, ah, she had to have hope -- right? -- to bring this guy to me.
KERRIE REAY: And so was she working after she -- the camp job ended? I'm just sort of trying to see how things went for her after the camp.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Um, I don't remember.
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I know she worked at Paradise Cove but I don't even remember the dates. It's a store just
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

outside of Goodfish.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

KERRIE REAY: So just -- just for the commissioners and the inquiry, the book that you have there are pictures?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Pictures and paperwork. Any kind of paperwork that we found of hers. I don't know. We're going to make it into a scrapbook.

KERRIE REAY: And that's one of the things maybe, you know, that the inquiry is also looking at is to hear from you how you would like to commemorate Alannah's life, how to honour her.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Okay. Ah, Alannah was at Goodfish for about a month, about a month before she went missing. She left Saddle Lake. Um, she left Saddle Lake because of this threat of child welfare. There was no involvement but just somebody threatened her. She didn't want to lose [Granddaughter]. So she went to Goodfish.
Ah, she was there for like a month. And I was missing her. Everywhere she stayed, because she'd stay at different homes, she stayed with different people, I would go find her and I'd go visit her wherever she was.

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

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

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

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

KERRIE REAY: Alannah was staying with her grandmother?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, with my mom. And then, um, that was a Thursday. So like looking back, it was the 14th, July 14th, that was the last time I seen her. And then, um, I had [Granddaughter] in Saddle Lake and I was supposed to only keep her for the weekend. So Monday I was texting Alannah. And we -- she didn't text me.
Like I think she only texted me on that Friday. And, ah, sometimes I don't look at my phone for a long time because I have lots of kids and sometimes I don't text back right away. I didn't text her back right away until Saturday, but then I never got a text back after that.

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

So Monday. Tuesday already they were searching. My mom, my uncle, they were getting like family to start searching. My mom was like scared. Me, I went on. I was going to a women's wellness conference in Saddle Lake at the healing lodge and, ah, that's where
I was going every day. And I was working. I just started working too at the sewing. But like at the sewing they let us go to these workshops as part of work, right? And I was going to those workshops, and, um, yeah, a lot of stuff happened. I met people.

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

KERRIE REAY: Telling you stuff about?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: About her son, that he got beat up. She said he got beat up. He got put in the hospital. She asked me if I knew who this person was. Well, I didn't. I don't know who they were. And she said like she goes after the other parents, you know. Like she's ready to fight whoever hurt her son. But he was involved and I think he knows. He knows what
happened. He was there. But they beat him up. They
hospitalized him. He went to go hide in Edmonton.
Like I never seen him. I didn't even know how this
guy looks.

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

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: When she talked about [Person 1] I never
wanted her to be with him. I -- I said you are
related. I lied. She's like, I know we're not. And
she's... Anyways, they were the last ones with her.
There's different people that seen them at the beach.
They were the last ones with her, and they said they
left her there. They gave the cops a story that
they -- they were leaving and she said: Go ahead,
leave me. I don't live far. I'll walk home. She
would never say that. She would never do that. She
would never walk. She'd never walk on the road. I
used to try and make her walk. She wouldn't. She
would get a ride. And, yeah, she -- she would always
get a ride. She would never say it. She would never
be okay with her them leaving her. Like she'd want to
be part of the party.

KERRIE REAY: So you were saying that your mom and family
started looking for her on the Tuesday?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: On the Tuesday.
KERRIE REAY: And you mentioned the police became involved.
Do you know when they became involved?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I called the cops on Thursday. So that
was already five days since she was seen.
KERRIE REAY: On the Thursday?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: And what happened when you call the police?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Nothing.
KERRIE REAY: And what was their response back to you?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Nothing. Well, they just took my
information. They didn't come out. They didn't do
nothing.
KERRIE REAY: And what detachment did you call?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: St. Paul.
KERRIE REAY: St. Paul. Is that the RCMP?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: So you called them on the Thursday?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: On Thursday.
KERREY REAY: And--

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

KERREY REAY: Um-hmm.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- and calling my mom.

KERREY REAY: Um-hmm.

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

KERREY REAY: So was that the family that was--

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: The family, the search.

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

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

KERREY REAY: So--

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

KERREY REAY: And when they heard that did they come out?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: No.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: They came out when something was found like bloody clothes. They'd come and collect the evidence. They weren't involved in any of the search.
By Thursday, ah, Ken Dion was there. Ken Dion, he's an ex-RCMP. He does these searches in the reserves when people goes missing. He goes and helps find them. He knows how to --

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- when they make that call.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: There was pants found in the house and it had blood on it, and they came and they took pictures and....

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

KERRIE REAY: And in which community was this?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: In Goodfish. This is Goodfish.

KERRIE REAY: In Goodfish.

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um....

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

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

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

KERRIE REAY: And what did they find?

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

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

They came get me, and there's the crowd and, um, I was just kind of like I don't -- I don't know. I was there but not really. And where she was found, um, and my daughter got there and like we were going to see something. And we were just right at the hot
sun. So I said, let's go over here. So we crossed
the road and went under that tree, and I was looking,
see the van parked there. I seen a body bag they
carried to the van. And I'm trying to like hold up my
daughter because she was -- she was the one losing it,
not me. And then I started saying, no, no, that's --
that's not her. But all I seen was the body bag. And
then I -- yeah, I lost it. I just started screaming
no, no. And like I don't know what happened. My
glasses broke. And I screamed at my friend, that's
not her, that's not her. She said, yeah, Ellen,
that's her. And that's the only -- that's the only
time I got to see anything.

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

Now the cops came: apparent suicide. I said why?
Why? Just because she's an Indian? I knew it wasn't
right right from the start. I knew she didn't do this
to herself. I got so many signs that she's okay.
She's -- she's -- Alannah is good. Alannah is with
God. Alannah is golden. Alannah is free. She's free. She's free to be anything. And I can see her in the sky. I can see her in dreams. I can see her in the butterflies. I can see her in so many signs, so many signs. Even on her car, there's an orb there. I took pictures of that. She's okay. She's okay. And you can't do this to yourself and be okay. We're not supposed to take anybody's life, even our own.

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: They have, yeah. But we -- they kept it open for a while. We did have meetings. We did tell them there's these people acting suspicious. This girl, the one I said, [Person 2], she put on
her Facebook:  LOL, having the time of my life, didn't
even need a body bag. That night on the 16th she put
that on her Facebook. Acting weird. Um, yeah, so
those are the three people that were last with her.
He lied to my family that he didn't see her since the
week before.

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

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, after.

KERRIE REAY: And that was the same night?

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

KERRIE REAY: All at the same time?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- his mom told me. Because I met his
mom at that women's thing. And she's since passed.
That woman has since passed. But she was telling me
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

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

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

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yes.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yeah.
KERREY REAY: So is there anything else that, in terms of the police investigation, you would like the commission to know? Because that is one of the areas the commission --

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERREY REAY: -- have concerns.

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

KERREY REAY: Can you --

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I believe it's how we're brought up. We are brought up not to trust them. We are brought up to be scared of them. Like, ah, it's not a good thing
to call the cops. It's not a good thing to get the
cops brought, you know. They are not going to come
and help and make things like....

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

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

KERRIE REAY: And what was their response?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I don't remember what.

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

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: What would you like to happen?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Well, I regret burying her there in
Whitefish, Goodfish. I buried her there. And I want
to have her in exhumed and cremated. Like I still
can't see her. They didn't allow me to see her. I'm
not trying to do that. But to get her cremated and
get -- put her ashes in rosaries for me and my kids
and anybody else who is like -- who will say their
rosary for her that's close to us like my mom and...
But they all don't want me to do this. But I want to
do this. And, ah, I want to put the rest of her ashes
with her dad's headstone. So she can visit her mom and dad together. Like we're having a problem going to her grave. You know, it's way in Whitefish. I don't know.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYESTHE money.

KERRIE REAY: Yeah.

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

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

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

KERRIE REAY: Oh, okay.

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay. I understand.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: She told it to me. Like I have it in my head, but I have such a poor -- poor memory. But I
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

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

KERRIE REAY: You don't recall?

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: Because you don't believe --

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

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

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

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: They had it with the coroner --
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: -- on the phone, and they closed it
after that. They sent me all of the stuff. Well, the
evidence.
KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm. Yeah.
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: And they went ahead without me agreeing
to close it. It's because I wasn't there at that
meeting. I was over here. I came to a grief -- grief
workshop. I do do things to heal. Like I do want to
heal.
KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm. Okay.
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: I'll never forget. I will never forget
her or even -- it's not something you get closure.
It's every day I miss her all the time, and I'm like I
can't do anything else.
KERRIE REAY: Is there anything you would like somebody
else to do, like the commission to do?
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Um....
KERRIE REAY: Anything?
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Um, there is. I just -- I don't know.
KERRIE REAY: Would you like to break?
ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Yeah.

[PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 1:28 P.M.]
[PROCEEDINGS RESUMED AT 1:34 P.M.]
KERRIE REAY: Okay. So we are back on the record and it is now 1:34.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Is there a time limit?

KERRIE REAY: No.

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Like it's real important.

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm. Absolutely.

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

KERRIE REAY: Yes.

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

KERRIE REAY: Yes.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- you know. I want them to do their job. It's just what I feel is that they don't. That -- and what I see is that they don't. But I do -- I want -- I want things to be better for all of
us. Even though this has torn me up, it's not just me. It's -- it's all of us that this is happening to, that our girls aren't safe out there.

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

KERRIE REAY: (unintelligible).

ELLEN BRIGHTYEYES: Ah, we were on our way back from town, and I can't remember what day it was but I know it was in that time when I had [Granddaughter] and Alannah was over there. Like it was before I knew anything was wrong. And I looked in the sky and seen a heart, a perfect heart with a piece missing, and I said, look, [Daughter 1], look. And she seen it too. And that's -- that's what I got sewed here. Like I made this lady sew this for me. It's a heart with a piece missing. And that's like how it shows. You know, it was a sign she was already gone. She was already gone. And that -- and the bears mean -- well, her sister, my cousin, had a dream she's a bear. And, like I said, Thunderbird is in her name. These are all signs that are in the west and I seen that heart in the west.
So I know like -- I know it was meant to be. I know she was meant to go. I know she was meant to live. Like God lent her to me and she -- she was here for 20 years, and then he called her home. And out of this, out of her life and death, I have to learn something. I have to change. I have to -- well, I have another chance right here with [Granddaughter]. [Granddaughter] is exactly like Alannah, exactly the same thing. I have to do something different in how I brought her up.

And, yeah, I kind of blame myself. I kind of blame myself, but I don't know how to get over that. I don't know. Like I have to change the way I am to be a better mom. But I know like I did the best I could with what I knew at the time. I did the best I could for her. I know she's okay. It's -- it's me down here that's got to -- that's got to figure out how to get through this and to live. You know, to life my -- what I have in my heart, which is like I'm a mom. I'm a mom. And when you stop being a mom... You never stop being a mom and you never stop needing your mom. And that's where like I'm weak with my mom because we don't have a good relationship. And I'm trying to build that with my kids. Like I'm here. I'm here no matter what. I'm here.
After she died I got through. I got through the funeral and everything, making decisions, trying to do it from my heart, trying to like -- you know, to make it meaningful. I did everything like what I thought. Even words came out of me that I never had planned, you know. I said stuff to people. Like I don't know if I impacted anybody.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- is that what I'm hearing you say is that
we need opportunities as First Nations families, as
women to have resources there to help --

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- in times of grief?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Well, to help, yeah, after. And
to help each other. Because that's how I really think
we're going to heal is if we share with each other and
help each other.

KERRIE REAY: And I think that's a really important piece.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: It's about how helping one another --

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: -- is what I am hearing you say, the need to
help one another.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I knew I wanted a woman. I wanted a
woman. My husband was there. It wasn't enough. I
wanted a woman, and there was like nothing. I lost my
kuuhkum. So I don't have that, you know, for an older
woman.

KERRIE REAY: Yes.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I wanted a woman like -- and they came.
They did come. I know like we need it. We need it.
We need to help each other. There's no special thing
out there that's going to come and make us heal. No.
We're going to heal together. Yeah, we are going to
heal together. If we sit together in a circle we'll heal together. And it doesn't happen just like that. I don't know if it ever happens. I don't think I will ever get over losing Alannah, but I can get through it and like by sharing. And even if it's the same thing over and over, so what?

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

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

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

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

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

KERRIE REAY: Do you want to share what happened?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um....

KERRIE REAY: Only if you want.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Well, yeah, I can. My -- my daughter
and her boyfriend did this. Um, yeah, we chose to get
a place together to try to help each other. That was
what I'm trying to do; I'm trying to help them. That
guy drinks and he's very very scary when he drinks.
And I drank too. I didn't help it either. Because I
think if I didn't drink maybe like I wouldn't have got
in it. But, yeah, we were all, um -- yeah. She
Statement – Public
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

mostly did this to me.

KERRIE REAY: Your daughter?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. And that hurts but I will forgive her. I'm not, you know, hanging on to any of it. But I can't live with that guy. Like her, she can come back. We lost our place over it. We smashed the window. And I've got to make up with her. I will.

But, yeah, like she, even her, she stays mad real long. And she wants to be with him. Like how can I help her if she doesn't want my help? And I don't want to help him. Like he's so... You know? But, yeah, it's drugs and alcohol that like make thing goes worse.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- the pain you have.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: And I am going to go to rehab. Like I'm not -- I'm not so broken that I'm not going to. But it's -- it's -- it's hard.

KERRIE REAY: Yes.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: It's hard to hold myself together when I'm falling apart inside. And I will never be the
same. I will never be that same person when she was here. I'm always going to look at it through I lost my daughter. I lost my daughter and I've just got to go on. Like I have to. It's hard.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: The pain, the grief.

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

KERRIE REAY: Um-hmm.

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: And I think -- I hope that coming here and
telling your story with such phenomenal amount of
courage it takes to share, because you have shared
some very deep pain today, --

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- and it's -- it's only one step. Even you
say there's much to do to take care of yourself.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah, to get back on my feet.

KERRIE REAY: And, you know, you shared today that you have
done it before.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: So you can do it again, --

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: -- right? Having some resources to help
support you in this -- in this difficult journey
forward, and I think your story is -- um, your truth
is important today for the commission to hear.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. And especially like my thoughts
for others, --

KERRIE REAY: Yes.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: -- that there's other -- there's other
women in pain, there's other -- well, dads too, hey?

KERRIE REAY: Yes. Yes.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: But it's the mother that is... You
know? She came from my -- she came from my body. I
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

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

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

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

KERRIE REAY: Okay.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: I feel like that is why I'm here is to
help others.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes. Like I need to, you know,
straighten out and all that. There's this -- this
other mother, she lost -- she had five kids, two boys
and three girls. She lost her two boys violently
through alcohol. They were both murdered. Murdered.
And one was -- this was like in 2000. So her -- she
had a good life. She worked. She took care of her
kids. Her son gets murdered -- I think he was only
like 20 -- and then after that drinking, drinking,
drinking. So that's their life: drinking, ghetto,
drugs, and alcohol. Her other son got murdered; like
her other son that got murdered, the one she had left.
And then the year after her daughter died in Calgary.
Ellen Brighteyes
(Alannah Cardinal)

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

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

And like for people like that what do you do? And all they want to do is drink, you know. How do you -- how do you help them up? So her today is -- she's been diagnosed with, um, severe PTSD. And there's help for that but where is it? You know? Show us. I know there's help for that. You know, some kind of treatment. You know? But to bring that on and like how do we know how to help each other? Because like, you know, she just wants to go get a bottle.
KERRIE REAY: So what I'm hearing is one of the recommendations, from your experience, to the commission could be to recognize the need for families of children who died violently,

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: -- to help grieve?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: -- or grandchildren?

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

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

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: You spoke about in the beginning --
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: -- about that need to be loved.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.
KERRIE REAY: And there's that gap of that connection.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.
KERRIE REAY: And to help. Um, to help connect with your families in a way that you didn't have --
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.
KERRIE REAY: -- and that you've been trying to do with your own children.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah. Yes.
KERRIE REAY: Any final comments for the commission?
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Um, just that like I hope -- I hope that they bring lots of help to families that need it. It's something that you don't know how it feels until you have lost your own. And it's something I would never wish on anybody to lose their own, but you can't understand it unless you -- unless you have experienced it. So....
KERRIE REAY: Okay.
ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: That's a lot. But that's -- yeah, ah, that's what I'm going through. That's me and my story, right?
KERRIE REAY: And it look a lot of courage. It really did.
And I want to thank you. Because I can feel your pain.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

KERRIE REAY: I really can.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yeah.

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

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

KERRIE REAY: And some are very young.

ELLEN BRIGHTEYES: Yes.

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

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

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

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Janet Chorney

Official Reporter