Mothers and Child Welfare: Stories of Women’s Everyday Lives and Service Experiences (Story Volume)

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Mothers and Child Welfare:

Stories of Women’s Everyday Lives and Service Experiences

By

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June 2009
Table of Contents

Foreword ............................................................................................................................. 3
Story Abstracts ................................................................................................................... 4
Jennifer .............................................................................................................................. 10
Janet .................................................................................................................................. 27
Chen .................................................................................................................................. 42
Julie ................................................................................................................................... 54
Kaitlyn ............................................................................................................................... 59
Karen ................................................................................................................................. 76
Pamela ............................................................................................................................... 91
Sandy ............................................................................................................................... 109
Donna .............................................................................................................................. 127
Marie ............................................................................................................................... 144
Amber ............................................................................................................................. 160
Annette ............................................................................................................................ 177
Amy ................................................................................................................................. 195
Susan ............................................................................................................................... 215
Rebecca .......................................................................................................................... 232
Elizabeth ......................................................................................................................... 247
Foreword

This volume of stories from mothers involved with child welfare services acts as both a stand-alone document and a companion document to the research report on mothers’ experiences of child welfare services entitled *Stories of Mothers and Child Welfare*. This volume is intended for multiple audiences including child welfare service providers, community organizations working with women, students and instructors interested in women’s issues, and mothers. This volume of stories may be useful for teaching purposes, service provision decisions, and general interest.

All names have been changed to protect the identities of mothers who participated in this research as well as their family members.
Story Abstracts

The following compilation of abstracts provides an overview of each mothers’ story, highlighting key aspects of their life stories in relation to their involvement with child welfare services. This compilation provides readers with a quick summary of each story to guide them to stories that peek their interest.

Story One: Jennifer

Jennifer’s experiences include becoming a mother at the age of 17 and how her low birth weight baby lead to her ongoing involvement with the Children’s Aid Society. Jennifer’s daughter, now a toddler, was removed from her care for allegations of neglect and spousal arguing reported by a mystery caller on numerous occasions. Allegations of neglect began the first week Jennifer brought her daughter home from the hospital. Jennifer’s story uncovers her every day reality of caring for her disabled grandmother (her own mother figure), her toddler, and the challenges of managing extended family relations living both next door and under the same roof. Through talking about her family relations, Jennifer reveals the role her own family has played with her involvement with the Children’s Aid Society’s. Jennifer reflects on the commonalities between her own birth mothers history with the Children’s Aid Society and her experience giving birth to a low birth weight baby, Jennifer confronts her family history and forges on.

Story Two: Janet

As Janet recalls her childhood memories of her own sister’s involvement living in foster homes, Janet describes her own blended family’s involvement with the Children’s Aid Society and how her views of the agency have changed since the days when she drove a cab for the agency. Janet speaks of her own requests for assistance from the Children’s Aid Society when she and her former boyfriend were having difficulties with his 14 year old adopted nephew who has fetal alcohol syndrome. Janet’s many frames of reference provide readers with an interesting perspective on how the Children’s Aid Society could revamp their services. This story also reflects Janet’s daughter’s present day difficulties and how they mirror some of her own childhood experiences. Janet explores on her own difficulty with two failed relationships and some of the difficulties she has experienced as both a mother and step-mother. As Janet trains to become a personal support worker, she envisions a future with her and her daughter settling down in Illinois with her Internet companion.
Story Three: Chen

Chen is a single mother of a seven and four year old boys. Chen describes her experiences as a mother diagnosed with schizophrenia, post-partum depression and learning disabilities. Chen captures her love for being a mother in her story and how her family and community mental health services help her manage as the Children’s Aid Society keep a close watch. Chen and her family immigrated to Canada from Laos when Chen was only five. To support their daughter, Chen’s mother has moved in with Chen, leaving her own husband at home, in order to help Chen manage her medications and reduce the Children’s Aid Society’s concerns of Chen’s well-being. Living in fear of losing her children, Chen reveals to readers how she faces each day living her life as a mother to the fullest despite her personal challenges.

Story Four: Julie

Julie, a 23 year old mother of 4, offers recounts her abusive childhood and abusive relationship with her two eldest sons’ father. Julie speaks of a growing alcohol problem in her late teens that lead to the apprehension of her first son when he was 8 months old. To prevent herself from following in her mother’s footsteps, Julie briefly comments on how she came to give custody of her two eldest children to her aunt. As Julie seeks counseling and attempts to provide a stable home for her two youngest children, she continues to uncover secrets of her past and reunite with biological relations she has recently discovered.

Story Five: Kaitlyn

Twenty years ago Kaitlyn gave up her university education to marry and begin a family. Today Kaitlyn relies on her widows and orphan pensions to support her son and daughter. As a single mother, and grieving widow, Kaitlyn has difficulties managing her home and keeping it clean while raising her two children. Kaitlyn talks about her difficulties parenting her daughter and her son, who has ADHD, without the help from her late husband. The Children’s Aid Society became involved with Kaitlyn’s family when a neighbour reported that her son had left her daughter alone in the home when he was supposed to be babysitting her. Kaitlyn speaks of her brief involvement with the Children’s Aid Society and how their services have helped her manage her home life. Kaitlyn is working toward finishing her RN diploma with hopes of supporting her children on a steady income.
Story Six: Karen

Karen recounts her childhood from when she was adopted by a family off of her Native reserve and how reconnecting with her Native roots supports her and her family today. Karen shares her experiences with incest in her adoptive home and how the Children’s Aid Society came to her aid when she was a teenager. Rejected by her adoptive family, Karen speaks of her youth and experiences living in foster homes. Now a young mother of two, Karen shares her experiences in an abusive relationship and the Children’s Aid Society’s involvement with her own children and their abusive father. Karen explains how through reclaiming her Native heritage, she is now able to support her family today through her Native community and identity.

Story Seven: Pamela

Pamela was raised in an abusive childhood family home. At the age of 23, Pamela married into an abusive marriage. Leaving her husband, who was charged with abducting his children from another marriage and stalking their own daughter, Pamela shares her challenges in raising her delinquent teenage daughter as a single mother. Pamela sought from the Children’s Aid Society to help manage her ten year old daughter. The Children’s Aid Society placed Pamela’s daughter in numerous foster homes. After years of her daughter living in different homes, and getting into trouble with the law, Pamela’s daughter is now placed at a Children’s Mental Health Centre. Pamela speaks of experiences with having her daughter now living in a Children’s Mental Health Centre. Pamela also speaks of her own depression and need for mental health supports.

Story Eight: Sandy

Sandy speaks of her childhood experiences involving abuse and incest as she was raised by her eldest brother while her mother earned a living through prostitution and spent her money on alcohol. After loosing a close brother, due to her step-father’s drinking and driving, Sandy finished high school at the age of 17. Finding employment as a secretary, Sandy was able to move out of her childhood home and find a place of her own. Although Sandy sought justice by taking her eldest brother to court for incest, nothing came of the trial. At the age of 40, Sandy then finds herself contacting the Children’s Aid Society with fears her brother is molesting his daughter. Although the Children’s Aid Society conducted an investigation, nothing came of the case. Sandy speaks of her severed family ties and how she and her mother have come to develop a close relationship. Managing her own health issues, Sandy strives to improve her life while finding joy in her relationships with her husband and daughter; Sandy claims “Without them, I have nothing . . .”
Story Nine: Donna

Donna left school in grade nine and then moved away from her abusive family home where she had been molested at the age of 18. Leaving home at 18, Donna moved in with her abusive boyfriend who she eventually married. Despite Donna’s cervical displacia, she surprisingly conceived a child. With multiple debilitating health problems and having suffered trauma, Donna left her marriage at the age of 20 with her child to go back to school and completing her grade twelve certificate. Raising an active child, Donna comes to learn her child has ADHD. Donna’s son, now a teenager, is suicidal and in need of treatment. Dissatisfied with children mental health services, Donna contacts the Children’s Aid Society for advice and support. Struggling to find adequate services to support her son, Donna remains in her second unhappy married for the sake of her son’s well-being and his need for a father. Donna shares her own personal sacrifices as she struggles to access services to help her son from the Children’s Aid Society.

Story Ten: Marie

Marie was raised as a French-Canadian. Marie shares her experiences being married and what motherhood and being a wife means to her. Marie reflects back on her decision to divorce her first husband to move in with a man and his daughter she barely knew to become a step mother, leaving her own two children to live with their father in another province. Taking on the role of a step mother, Marie looks back on the challenges she has faced in parenting a delinquent step daughter who has not taken well to her own parents divorce. Marie recounts the Children’s Aid Society’s involvement with her step daughter when her step daughter disclosed to peers that her father had taken a strap to her. Marie speaks of the services she utilizes, the Children’s Aid Involvement, and friends that have supported her in her difficult times.

Story Eleven: Amber

Amber, 41, recounts her unstable childhood growing up in a Native community where she and her siblings were raised in close living quarters until separated by foster homes placements. At the age of 14 Amber was raped and left bearing a child she left behind in the hospital after giving birth. After living on park benches, Amber moved to Alberta as a young adult where she settled down and had two children. Unfortunately, Amber found herself leaving the only stable relationship she had known when her sister had an affair with her partner. After years of unsuccessful relationships, Amber finds herself in a new relationship. It was Amber’s eldest sons’ experimentation with pot that led to her involvement with the Children’s Aid Society and fight for custody of her youngest child. Amber comments on the role her Native blood plays in her life and the joy her family brings her. Amber expresses that her current life situation is the life she has always wanted.
Story Twelve: Annette

Annette shares her experiences of motherhood and the Children’s Aid Society when they apprehended her children after her boyfriend’s violent outbreak that left him covered in blood and Annette smelling like beer. Annette recounts her experiences with her children living in a shelter for abused women and the Children’s Aid Society’s role in advocating for her to have sole custody of her children. Exploring past relationships, Annette speaks of her pattern for entering into abusive relationships and her abusive childhood marked by a violent alcoholic father and an incestuous uncle. Annette attributes her current successes as a person to lessons learned through coping with her childhood trauma, the meaning of her brother’s suicide, and her mother’s advice to hit the road and not to look back when Annette finished high school. Annette expresses that the movie of her life, although it had a rough start, has a beautiful end.

Story Thirteen: Amy

Amy reminisces about her childhood, her memories of being taken away from her mother who is bipolar, and her estranged relationship with her father who spent her childhood years in and out of jail. Amy speaks of her experiences forming a blended family. Amy recounts her insecurities in forming a blended family she did not feel ready for with her one year old child. Amy speaks of giving birth to two children against the odds of her medical condition. Amy also shares how she came to believe in an afterlife when her daughter, conceived a week after her second husband’s mother death, began speaking of her husbands childhood in detail when she was old enough to talk. Amy’s involvement with the Children’s Aid Society encompasses her second husband’s ex-wife making allegations of neglect. Despite unwarranted allegations of neglect, in the end Amy calls the Children’s Aid Society on her own, fearing her husband will become physically violent with one of the children. Amy ends her story fighting for her child who was placed in foster care and her dissatisfaction dealing with the Children’s Aid Society.

Story Fourteen: Susan

Susan, a 26 year old mother of 4, was raised by born again Christians in a blended family. Susan speaks of her rebellious years that lead to her first pregnancy at the age of 19. Leaving home at the request of her father with her three month old baby, Susan finds herself in short term relationships among male friends willing to support her until she becomes pregnant with their child. Now engaged, Susan speaks of how her fiancé was eager to have a child with her regardless of their financial strains. After giving birth to her fourth child, Susan’s neighbour phones the Children’s Aid Society who apprehends Susan’s children suspecting neglect. Susan recounts her efforts in taking parenting courses, going to women’s groups and counseling to get her children back. Susan recalls her frustration with supervised visits, the lack of privacy she felt when involved with the CAS and the problems her children faced when they returned home four months later. Today Susan attributes her daughter’s fear of abandonment, her children’s expectations
for luxurious toys, and arguments between children to their removal from the family home and experiences in foster homes. Today, Susan is adamant that her children will not go anywhere ever again.

Story Fifteen: Rebecca

Rebecca, the youngest of seven kids, recalls her experience growing up in a Mennonite family whose behaviors contradicted their community’s religious values. Married at the age of 18, Rebecca speaks of her marriage to a man who had a different outlook on life and did not belong to her family’s church. After years of managing six children, Rebecca shares her frustration with her husband’s work schedule and drinking; she shares with readers how she wanted a reason to leave her marriage without a divorce condoned by her church. Rebecca phoned the Children’s Aid Society one Boxing Day when her husband accidentally scarred one of their sons cheeks with a piece of wire. The police and Children’s Aid Society remove her husband from the family. Rebecca recounts her children’s reactions when their father reunited with the family 11 months later. Rebecca speaks about her experiences with marital counseling and difficulties she faces with her husband’s continual drinking despite AA meetings. Looking back over her life, Rebecca surprises herself when she realizes her own personal strength as a mother and how she has handled her challenges as well as she has.

Story Sixteen: Elizabeth

Elizabeth openly claims motherhood is not a big part of her life, but drugs and alcohol are despite having two daughters. Elizabeth, 26, lives on workers’ compensation and survivor’s and orphan benefits. Elizabeth reflects back on her life with her deceased husband and her former abusive ex-common law partner. Elizabeth has been involved with the Children’s Aid Society for six years in need of help for her situation with her abusive ex-partner. In childhood, Elizabeth was abandoned by her father at a young age, recalls multiple moves, and her mother’s life style involving many men and drugs. Elizabeth’s own drug addiction developed when she went to live with her former step-father in her teen years due to problems at home. After recently discovering her eldest daughter is smoking and was caught shoplifting, Elizabeth looks back on her mothers’ life and recognizes how her children’s lives mirror her own childhood.
Jennifer

Well, like my daughter, Children’s Services took her in, I think it was in, October and they had her for two months, almost three months. They took her and all I got to see her was for… two hours but an hour each time, twice a week at the agency and that and most of the things they said weren’t true. (So, you’d like to start by talking about what happened at the agency then?) Yeah. That day I was upstairs cleaning my room. I had a whole bunch, all my laundry. I had it on the landing… So, I was going downstairs and then I was just about to leave and Children’s Services came to the door. And the one lady I had already known because she was coming over before. And she comes in with this other girl, like this other social worker I’ve never met before. There was toys in front of the door mat well, obviously because she was playing like with her toys. They said that they were just here because someone had called in and said that they were at our house and that every time I go to bingo, my grandmother, she watches Rachael [Jennifer’s daughter] and my grandmother, like she can’t because she doesn’t have no legs. But they said that she was being left with her. And that’s impossible. And then they said that that day that my room upstairs smelled like urine, which wasn’t true. I had been cleaning and I had just sprayed, you know, the flower scent stuff. So, I just had sprayed that in the hall and two rooms upstairs and they said that. They said that she had on dirty clothes and I just had put clean clothes on her. And her diaper was turned around, it was backwards. But I put it backwards because she takes them off. So, if I put them backwards and the sticky stuff is back here then she can’t take them off. So, they said that I didn’t know anything about children because I didn’t know how to put on a diaper right. But once I explained that then they’re like that’s actually a good idea. So, then they removed her from my house…

… Okay, why she was tooken was because they got too many from the police, too many domestic disputes. Me and my boyfriend [Tony], like we’ve been together for four years and at that time we were at the point where we weren’t trusting each other so everything we said to each other was just like arguing. So, we would fight all the time. But we never fought like around Rachael. Like if we were fighting upstairs we would take her downstairs and that but I guess she would I guess still would hear the yelling and that. Like me and my boyfriend, we were at this store and his [car] battery was broken so his dad had came and his dad and me don’t get along and there his dad was outside of the store. I was in the car and we were like yelling at each other, me and Tony’s dad and he started banging on the window. So, I had to lock the door. Well this guy outside his dad yelled at because he was watching. The guy went in and called the cops. The cops came
and like we had already left before the cops came so the cops didn’t stop us but they were behind us until we got home. They said that the guy called in and said there was me and a baby in the car and there wasn’t. And when the cops came to the house we had just gotten back too and the cops said ‘well, where’s the baby?’ and I’m like, ‘she’s right there, she’s sleeping. She was at home with my grandparents. She’s asleep.’ This was at like 11:00. And so the cops said oh, well, we’ve seen the car seat. Well, yeah, because I never took it out of the car…

Interviewer: So, that happened last October then?

Yeah. But the thing is though, they had done all this phone calls from the police and there’s this one person that keeps calling [the CAS], like it’s been happening since I had Rachael. So, like when I first brought her home, they said that someone called in and said that I wasn’t feeding Rachael, that she was losing weight. So, then Children’s Services came and made me take her to the doctor to get her weighed and she was gaining. (So, someone had contacted Children’s Services?) Like a lot of times. But now they brought up my records from when I was younger and I didn’t have any charges or anything but they said like that I had an anger problem and that but … Like the cops said that when they were at our house there was bugs all over the counter and things like that. And half of the things aren’t even true. Like me and Tony fighting is true but not things like that. I would have moved… We’ve had the nurses and the bath ladies come into our house for a long time and they come all every week. And all her bath ladies, like my grandma’s bath women, all them and all the nurses did not understand why Children Services had took Rachael. Now, they’ve seen the house every week and they said there was nothing wrong with this house, that they know for a fact that Rachael was getting the best love and the best attention that any child could possibly get, you know? And they said if something was wrong, we would definitely have called because that’s their job, you know. They would have did that.

… I’m going to go back to court [in July], they’re going to close my case. I got back custody of Rachael but I had to be on a six month like term thing with Children’s Services, where [a CAS worker] had to come visit once every two weeks and I have Healthy Babies coming to my house every two weeks and that and most of the workers I don’t like at Children’s Services. They don’t listen or nothing. I had this Sandra woman [first CAS worker], every time she came to my house she’d be like, she wouldn’t talk to you, she’d like tell you… She doesn’t ask you or anything like that… I didn’t like it and then things that she would say aren’t true, I would get upset about it and that and then she’d say ‘oh, well, you’re yelling’ and all that. Well, my voice is being raised because it’s not true and you’re not listening. I said well, maybe I have to raise my voice for her to listen. The worker I have now I like. I like her…Betty… and she’s been on my case since like November. I think she’s nice. She’s more like me. She has her eyebrow pierced but she’s older. And I don’t know, she’s friendly and she’s like way nicer. She listens to what I have to say. She like looks at my crafts and things like that… She’s really, really nice. She’s like the only one I do like. It’s nice to have her [Betty] coming over and talking to me… Then someone called when I got Rachael home, someone called again and like even Betty says this has been a reoccurrence of this same person calling.
So, I thought they were going to take Rachael again but she just like she had to call because someone called.

… Rachael was in foster care. She was with this [foster mom] woman. I didn’t like her. I had to go to the agency for visits and I only get to see Rachael for an hour and like she would freak. Rachael would freak when I left… I never seen that before in my life and Rachael’s never ever threw a temper tantrum. She started doing that and throwing temper tantrums and the woman had two, a five and a three year old boys and she started doing that and now I can’t take Rachael anywhere… she’s out of control. She’s throwing herself on the ground, kicking. Like I took her to a banquet the other day for her dancing. There’s was no way I could sit in there. I had to go outside the whole time, me and my dad and Tony.

Interviewer: So Rachael was taken from you last October and then she was returned to you when?

January… I went to counselling. Individual counselling at two different places. I went to [women’s selfhelp] Group. I went to couples counselling, me and my boyfriend. I went to a parenting group, a parenting course and I already completed that. I’m going back to school at [an] Adult Learning Centre. And so everything that I did has been completed and I’ve been doing a lot of things… That was my choice, like the Children’s Services never told me to… Like in the court papers, I want to be able to change that because I already did. I don’t know, I still got the court paper back the other day and it’s still the same stuff they have. Like I don’t have bugs on my counter and my room didn’t smell like pee… Like the fighting and that, that was true but it wasn’t around Rachael and things like that like they were saying. But a lot of the other things, they weren’t true. I think that they should listen to you more and try to believe your story more…

…I think that they should like know from one week to the next week, what they’re doing. First of all, like Betty, she was supposed to come well, every two weeks and she was coming every two weeks but I wouldn’t know the time until she called to visit. At that time I had a lot of appointments and I would be missing appointments because Betty would call and say I’m coming tomorrow. I’d be like okay, well I have an appointment. So, then I had to keep cancelling appointments… And this guy from Healthy Babies, he was supposed to be coming to my house every week on Thursdays. The guy came once. Every Thursday I’m normally busy. I would have something directly right after. I’d have enough time to go there and that. So, the first appointment was good. The second time he was 15 minutes late, so I had to call and cancel my other appointment. Then the rest of the time he never showed up. He said he was going to drop off things for the lead program, things like that in the mailbox and he didn’t and he never showed up. And finally I told Betty and she wasn’t happy with him at all and he said that we’d all meet at Healthy Babies and he’s quitting his job or something and he said that he doesn’t like Children’s Services, he used to work for them. He was saying all this stuff and so Betty got us a new worker and she’s nice. She comes every two weeks… She gave me a video to watch this week and she gave Rachael a magazine. (So, what kind of things does the Healthy Babies worker do?) I’m not really sure because every time they come they don’t
do nothing… all they do is they give you like papers. I like stuff on cooking and that, recipes and they’d bring that or things about temper tantrums. They bring like just videos to watch and things like that and they just say like talk to you how your week was. *(So, they do that every week?)* Every two weeks. *(What kind of recipes do they give you?)* Well, one was French toast that you make in the oven with brown sugar and everything and cinnamon and all that. I made that already. Another one was this thing with bacon and that with like a small meal so I fed that to Rachael…. I like to cook.

…When they [CAS] took Rachael, it really hurt my grandparents because we [Jennifer and Rachael] live with them… But they were really hurt though because they knew that that stuff wasn’t true and they obviously knew that and so all they did was cry every day… I’ve lived with them 19 years, all my life. *(So, what was that like for you?)* Well, sad because I didn’t want to even look at them or anything because they knew those things weren’t true and there was nothing they could do. So, Rachael was coming home for like hour visits and that, and she’d freak totally when we’d try to get her to leave. At first, I had an hour, then they had to go back to court and ask the judge if I could start having unsupervised visits and then she got to come to the house for an hour, like to visit and that. Then I got to go to this church. They had this thing with Children Services to go to the church and you and your child like spend two hours instead of an hour. And then after that I started getting her unsupervised. Or no, I had her unsupervised before that church stuff. I got her unsupervised on weekends. I got her on Christmas for overnight. Like the foster mom would drop her off and pick her up and Christmas started with one night and then I had her for two nights and that and then I went to the church for the two hours thing and then I went back to court and I brought Rachael home, that was right after Christmas.

… And then Tony had been at work when this was happening. And then when my grandma called to tell him, he thought it was a joke so he never even came home… Then he lost his job because the only time he could go see Rachael would be whenever they [CAS] decided our visits were. So, he’d have to take off work. And then he - then they fired him because of that. So it was horrible… Tony lost his job. He wasn’t too happy because he liked the job… He wasn’t too happy but now he has two years of electricity or something in college and he has to have four years so he needs to go back for two more years for electricity or something like that and he wants to go back and get those two years.

…I did a lot of work to the house too [before daughter came back]. I spent a lot of money on it. I got a new kitchen floor I bought, a hallway, three carpets, one for the living room and two upstairs because I have the whole upstairs. I have the two bedrooms. One I made into a playroom for Rachael and then I have one. At Christmas time I bought Rachael a brand new bed. It’s a fire engine bed and I got her a kitchen set for Christmas and this tool set with buttons that make sounds. I had a chalkboard I bought her. So, she has like a lot of things. And I wall papered the upstairs, I painted the whole house. I did it on my own too… They [CAS] said the house looks great.
…Betty, when we go to court, she’s going to close my case with the courts. But she said she’s going to keep my case open just on her half really. She’s not like going to come visit or anything, but she’s going to keep it open for a couple months because this person keeps calling Children’s Services on me. If they close my case, and she wants to close it on her side, then if someone called on me I would have a different worker and the worker wouldn’t know me like she knows me. And then they’d have to start a full investigation and so on. As where if she’s still my worker, then she can just let me know she called and check it out and then, you know. So, she’s going to wait for a couple months to make sure no one calls and if no one calls then she’s just going to close it. But she said she’s doing me a favour because that way because if someone does call and she knows me and that… I think that’s a good idea because I guarantee you as soon as they close my case someone is going to call again. I know it. And I know it’s in my family. It’s someone in my family too… And I don’t know why, it’s just someone doing it… I wish I knew who it was because I wish that people could be charged with false statements. Because the things they’re saying aren’t true and it’s making everyone see me for someone I’m not. Because like Children Services, they see me and they’re probably thinking oh, yeah, you’re the one that, you know, does this and this and this and this to your child and it’s not even true…

…The day that Rachael was taken the cops were there that morning but because Louise [Jennifer’s cousin], she called the cops on us a lot. She lives right beside me, she calls the cops a lot on us for fighting and that morning in October that they had came and Children’s Services took Rachael, the cops had been there that morning because Tony’s car, his battery has broken. So, me and my grandpa were pushing the car, we were out in the driveway and this is like at eight o’clock in the morning. We were yelling at each other and not meanly but there was me, my grandpa and Tony, we were all yelling because Tony was in the car, me and grandpa were pushing the car so there was a whole bunch of noise and Louise yells out the window, “I’m calling the cops if you guys don’t shut up! It’s eight o’clock in the morning. Me and my kids are trying to sleep!” And then my grandpa said “well, you guys should be up in the first place.” So, she called the cops and said that me and Tony were fighting. When the cops came, Tony was gone. And the cops, they said to Children’s Services because when they called the cops to get Rachael, it was the same officer that was there and he even said he was there this morning and nothing was even happening, everything was fine.

…[CAS] take something small and they make it like huge. They don’t sit and find out what’s really happening, because they don’t even come over long enough to hear your story. They come over and then they’re gone… They went and they had opened my Young Offender’s Act… they’re not allowed. No one can open your record if you’re over the age of 18. It’s like gone. But you can open it if you get a judge’s permission and they got it opened but … I had no charges or anything, things like that. But it said things like the times that the cops were at my house when I was younger because of like arguments or things like that. Like I wouldn’t go to school… Like that was how many years ago? Like I’ve definitely changed since then… I agree that they [CAS] should be, you know, helping people that really, really, really need it. I don’t think they can just walk in your house and like, ‘see you later’. I think they should have to go to court like
first before they take the child out of the house unless like the child has been like abused. Like they should like help and that, like come over and visit. I don’t really mind that. Like go ahead, I have like nothing to hide. You can come over any time, so I don’t really care about that. It’s just don’t come over and like take her again. Like that I’m really nervous about… I got to try and do everything like perfect as possible so that doesn’t happen again. So, like if I take her anywhere, I make sure I do everything right so no one can call on me. Because now I know someone can just call on you and, you know, it might not even be true and they can come and do that… [The night the CAS removed daughter], a woman cop, she whispered to me that I better agree and do what the Children Services said or I’ll never see my kid again. *(The woman police officer said that to you?)* Yeah. She whispered to me that like I was just to do everything the Children Services say or I’ll never see my kid again until like 20 years and that. And she said that goes for a lot of people. You just have to agree and do everything they say and then they’ll work easier for you.

…I think that when you go to visit - like visit your child and that, I don’t think [the visits] should be supervised. Like maybe not right away go and take the child out for lunch and things like that. I mean like when you go to the agency, there’s someone that sits in the other room and it’s a mirror thing and they sit there and they watch everything in there. *(How does that make you feel?)* Uncomfortable, because I didn’t know if I did one thing, like I didn’t know if I said anything wrong or like I didn’t know how to act because I’d be all nervous and that so I’d be like hoping like ‘oh, I hope I don’t hug her wrong’ or something because then they’re going to write this down and say oh, she does this and you know? But the visits, the people that did the visits all wrote nice things and said that I was very good with Rachael, that my even talking to her was very good.

…Children Services, as soon as I had Rachael were pretty much involved then. I think because I was so young… 16 [years old]. But I was turning 17 and that so ever since then they pretty much bothered me. As soon as I had Rachael they were at the hospital. And Rachael, she was only three pounds, five ounces. And I had a C-section and that. So, she had to stay at the hospital for like two months in special care. My aunt had called and said that oh, I was too young to have a baby and a whole bunch of stuff and I shouldn’t have her and all this stuff and then they [CAS] kept coming and coming. Then when I took her home again, they came and said that someone said that she was losing weight… that I wasn’t feeding her. And then I had to we had to go to the doctors with Children Services, get her weighed and she was gaining weight. *(So when Rachael was in the hospital for those two months, what was your life like?)* I stayed [at the hospital] too. I stayed in another room. And each time Rachael needed feeding they’d phone the room and then I’d go down… I took her home and everything was fine and that and then that call came that I wasn’t feeding her … *(How long was that after you went home from the hospital?)* About two weeks. And then like four other times people had called and said I’m nuts and I shouldn’t have a kid and all this stuff and they come and they never seen nothing wrong so they’d leave again. Like they’ve been called constant. Like say like every three or four months.
I know that someone is going to keep calling on me throughout my whole entire life, that’s what they’re going to do because they already called again when it went like after this. They called Betty and told Betty that me and Tony were fighting again after Rachael was taken, after I got her back. But it’s funny because whoever this was heard that I got Rachael because not even a week later after I got Rachael back, not even a week later someone called and said me and Tony were fighting again. Not even a week later because they knew I got Rachael back... I don’t like it because what happens if next time someone calls they come and take her again and I don’t get her back. Right? Because I’ve heard that the second time is even worse in trying to get your child back. It’s a lot tougher, even Betty said... She [Betty] knows that I’m a good mother and she knows I’m doing really good and that Rachael is lucky to have me and that I do a lot of work... I went to my lawyer the other day. And my lawyer said that Children Services was talking to him and said they’re really impressed and really happy. They heard a lot of good news. They’re [CAS] closing it... because it’s been six months. But now I’m going to be even more paranoid without them coming around because if someone calls and all this stuff, then they’re going to start all this stuff over again because I know for a fact someone is going to call on me. It’s been happening for two years and now all of the sudden they’re going to stop now?

**Relationship with Boyfriend**

I’ve been going out with Tony for four years and all of the sudden, I don’t know what happened, but a year ago we started... I wouldn’t trust him going places and he wouldn’t trust me. Like he took my phone books and threw them out because I’m a tomboy... Yeah, he’s jealous. He thinks girls shouldn’t be hanging around with the opposite sex... He took my phone books and threw all three of them out, that’s when I said ‘well, if I can’t have my friends, you can’t have your friends’. So that’s when our fighting started because I couldn’t do anything. He couldn’t do anything... so we just did nothing. We just spent all our time together. We didn’t go anywhere or nothing so... I didn’t like it but if he wasn’t doing it, I didn’t care. But then we got to the point where finally I said I wanted to go back out and talk to my friends so then he would go out and then we started fighting about ‘oh, what did you do when you were out?’ So, like arguing and that’s when we really started arguing. And then we were arguing for like two months like almost constantly. If we even said hi to each other, like we’d be arguing. That’s when the cops started coming and things like that and ...

*Interviewer: So, when you fight, what is that like?*

Oh, well, he just basically says nothing. He nags at me. Like he doesn’t yell or throw things or anything but he’ll call me names and that will just make me mad, madder and madder. Like at first I’ll be totally fine and just will ignore him, but then he keeps calling me names and I’ll get madder and madder and madder and then I would like break the wall or throw his stuff...
But I went to counselling and that and I don’t do that. I haven’t broken anything for a long time.
Interviewer: When was this happening? (October.) Was that around the same time then as your baby was taken?

Yeah. That was like for two months before that, we were nothing but fighting… I would get really upset, but I never ever did anything to her. I like never, ever hit her or anything like that. I’d take Rachael downstairs, to make sure she wasn’t around and basically I would like scream and yell and he would like… The thing with me is I would be fine but he would push it. Like he would say something and then I would say something and then he would say something and it would be back and forth so I won’t stop and he doesn’t stop… Well, now we’re getting along way better. Like we talk better to each other, doing more family things like swimming, Rachael is in dancing. So, we’re doing a lot more things. We go for like walks or things like that… We’ve both went to couples counselling together and it’s way better now because we listen to each other more and if I want to go some place, he’ll let me.

Interviewer: So, what are the things that you and Tony do together?

Go to the movies or go to bingo. We’ll just watch movies at home, like me, Rachael and Tony. Like her movies that she has, things like that or listen to music or sometimes we go camping… we went twice this year but the thing is we haven’t took Rachael yet… I have to get another one that’s bigger so I can bring her with us for like a day and that so she can like play there… (So, where would you go camping?) [Local campground]. But we only go for one night because we have Rachael at home and she’d probably be driving my grandfather nuts.

I had a lot of boyfriends… ever since I went to high school but I normally broke up with all of them… I had a lot because I didn’t like them. I would go out with boys because I’d feel sorry for them. They’d keep bugging me and bugging me and I’d say I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know. And then they keep bugging me and I’d go, ‘Fine. I’ll go out with you to the movies and things like that’ but I didn’t like them and I’d end up dumping them. But I’d feel sorry for them because they like had no friends and all that and so I’d hang out with them (So, what’s different about your relationship with Tony?) I don’t know. I think we get along better. Well, we hang out more, we do more things together, have more in common…. We like to like talk. That’s one thing that we have never, ever like had trouble with, talking. We’re always talking about something like new or whatever and like movies we have in common… Like he’s driving me nuts because it seems like he wants me to get my driver’s license more than I want to even get it… like he encourages me, but I need someone to constantly encourage me to do something or I won’t do it. (How old is Tony?) He’ll be 27 this month. He’s really older. (So, you’re 19, he’s 27 so he’s eight years older than you?) Umhm.

Interviewer: So, Tony lives close by or does he live with you?

He lives with his parents but he’s constantly at my house. And he sleeps over like on weekends. And he spends the night but he does live there. He’s here every day though until pretty late and then he goes home because he works with his dad in the mornings, at
six in the morning. *(What kind of work does he do?)* [Delivers] papers, but they go up north. It’s only until 11 o’clock though. That’s not many hours. Sometimes I go too. They pick up the papers, put them in the truck, then they take them up north and like he has a few papers that he throws at houses and then others that he just like delivers like a whole bunch to different places.

*Interviewer: So tell me about Tony’s friends...*

Tony used to hang out with [friend] all the time and this guy, he steals, breaks into cars, he steals people’s things. I would not ever let him in my house, ever. Because you don’t know what he’ll take. That’s how bad he is... He’s a drug dealer. That’s always around his child and his child is Rachael’s age. There’s been fighting there where he got thrown off the balcony and his kid’s in there. People are coming in there beating him up because of all this stuff because he steals and all this. And both of the parents do that right in front of their kid and all that so we do not talk to them. And he used to come constantly banging on my door for Tony and swearing and cursing and everything. And he would call and curse my grandma. So, we called the cops several times on him and they don’t do nothing either... Like I heard the other day now that his child got tooken away by Children Services for one day and then he lied and got the boy back. *(Now, has Tony ever been in trouble himself?)* They [CAS] brought up his court records too and they were like driving stuff, like tickets and all that. Just driving tickets so he didn’t get no charges or anything.

**Family**

My mom’s only 39. And my dad’s 39 too. I think my mom had me when she was same age as me. And I think she got married when she was 20 or something like that. And she had four kids. I’m the oldest. Someone would call [the CAS] and the same thing happened with my mom. Someone was constantly calling on my mom. And my mom, she’s like a spotless freak. And they kept bothering her too. Someone was calling on her and that. And so my mom moved to B.C. She was sick of it. She was totally sick and tired of Children Services coming over to her house. I didn’t live with her, I lived at my grandparents’. She lived like not too far away, only like a couple blocks, Children Services kept coming over there. *(You are living with your grandparents. Are they your mom’s parents?)* No, my dad’s. I lived with my grandparents all my life because I just didn’t ever want to live with mom. I would hold onto my grandma around the neck like this and no, I didn’t want to and because my mom would drink. So, I didn’t want to be there but now she doesn’t [drink]. When I was firstborn my mom lived with them [grandparents]. And then when she moved, I didn’t want to move with her.

*Interviewer: How old were you when she moved?*

Oh, probably around like three or four. So, I was back and forth. Like I lived with her again when I was 12 and then moved back. I didn’t like it there but after she stopped drinking, that’s when Children Services started coming. She hasn’t drank for years. Well, my mom lived in B.C. for like six yeas now and she wasn’t drinking for a couple
years before she moved there... I got a sister, she’s 16. And I got a brother that just
turned 13 on Saturday. And I have a brother that’s I think 11. I see them well, my mom
was there when I had Rachael. Like three days later she was down. My sister came down
and stayed with us last summer for a couple months. Me and Rachael and Tony went to
B.C., not last summer, but the summer before. Rachael was like three months when we
went on the airplane. And then my mom, she’s coming out in July. She says she wants to
take Rachael shopping and she hasn’t seen her since she’s been well, three months. She
asked if we had a vehicle because that way we can get around. (Now, your mom doesn’t
drive?) No one on my mom’s side drives at all, only her sister. My mom doesn’t drive,
her two brothers doesn’t drive, her other sister doesn’t drive, her mom doesn’t drive, no
one. They don’t drive.

...My brother Jack, he’s really jealous of Rachael though. Because when I went out there
[to visit them] before it was always him. He was like glue to me. He even took me to
show and tell for school. He was really jealous because I was paying more attention kind
of to Rachael because she was only three months so I like had to. (How old was your
brother then?) About nine. But now he calls me constantly and that. And my brother
Brock, his 11th birthday, when me and Rachael went down there, it was his birthday we
came on and it was funny. He never knew we were coming. And Brock walked by and I
was standing at the door holding Rachael and I go happy birthday and he stopped and
looked and he started crying because he was really happy.

Interviewer: So you’re pretty close to your mom, to your brothers and sisters then?

Umhm... [Mom]’s been calling like almost every day because she has this thing now
with her phone bill. My mom, she stopped drinking, she used to smoke cigarettes. She
quit smoking too. She was a mean drunk. Like not to us kids but to everybody else. My
mom said that like when before dad and her divorced, my mother was terrified of bars.
She wouldn’t like drink at all but then when they had a divorce then my mom started
drinking and she said the only reason that she drank was that’s the only time she could be
mean. She said she was hurting inside so much that the only time that she could get her
anger out or even be the slightest bit mean is when she drank. Otherwise she’d be like the
nicest person you ever met but she wouldn’t feel nice inside. The only way she could get
it out and be mean and that would be if she was drinking. (How old were you when your
parents were divorced?) I don’t know when they divorced, a long time ago. Way before
I was 12 because I knew that when I was 12, that was the first time I went to B.C. and
they were divorced way before they moved to B.C. (Was it before the other children were
born?) I know my brother Jack, I think they were still seeing each other because that’s
the same dad but they were I think divorced by then or just getting divorced when Jack
came or something... I wanted to live with my dad. When my mom moved to B.C., it
was on my birthday that she told me but she wanted me to move with her to B.C. I said
no way. No way. I do not want to go there. I still don’t like it in B.C. when I went there.

Interviewer: So, you decided to stay with your dad at your grandma and grandpa’s and
your younger brothers and sisters stayed with your mom. Did they get the choice too?
No. They didn’t get a choice because they weren’t old enough. I was. I don’t like [mom’s] boyfriend [Luke] at all. All my brothers call him dad. Because well my mom lied and didn’t tell the two boys about my dad. He’s really strict with them, he smacks them and throws them in their room when they don’t barely do nothing. I guess my mom’s not really getting along either. He comes home and he goes straight to their room and he doesn’t even talk to her. And when they do talk he doesn’t even look at her or anything and things like that. But he’s nice to me when I talk to him on the phone. When I was in B.C. he kicked me out and I was staying in a motel, me and Tony and Rachael. Because he was at work or something and me and Tony had an argument, not a big one. We were just arguing like back and forth and when he came home, he wanted it to be quiet and we were still sort of arguing and then he just kicked us out. He called the cops and then told the cops he didn’t want us there, to put us in a motel and he paid for it. So, what happened was he just wasted his money because I like that he gave us a motel because that’s the first time me, Rachael and Tony have ever stayed alone anywhere, right because we’re at my grandparents right? And we were there so they gave us money for a motel room. They gave us a nice motel room with a TV and everything. They gave us money to go spend like to buy like chips and whatever at the store and all that. The very next day I was talking to my mom and then she tells us to come back and then we went back there.

My sister hates him [Luke]. My sister, she’s 16 and now she’s not even living there. She’s living with her boyfriend and she is into drinking and everything. Because she doesn’t like my mom’s boyfriend because she says he can’t tell you what to do, he’s not her dad. (So, what do you think of that?) I don’t know what she’s doing. She’s into drugs and drinking and she just got her tongue pierced and I think she had her nose pierced or something… Well, I’ve had my eyebrow pierced three times. I had my nose pierced, it’s still pierced I just don’t wear an earring. I had one not too long ago but I lost it, it’s so small. I have my belly button pierced. I had two in there now I only have one. And now I got my tongue pierced. Well, I had my whole ear pierced…

Julia’s [Jennifer’s sister] not going to school or anything. I’m telling her go to school because I know I wish I would have now. I wish I would have stayed in because now I find that like I could have like an awesome job right now. I could be done my schooling instead of having to go back… You might as well just live through it because when you’re 19 or when you’re 20 or whatever you’re going to want to go back. (Does she listen to you?) Well, then she started going back to school and she did finish her year… she’s out of control. Well, she’s into drugs and everything. I never ever did drugs, I never ever would. I’ve drank but I’ve never, ever did that. I drank before I had Rachael. Before I was pregnant … Probably like 13 [years old]. Not at home, they wouldn’t let me. Friend’s houses or like places like that. I don’t know why, it was pointless. So now I barely drink at all. My 19th birthday, it was on a Friday and on the Saturday my dad and Tony and my dad’s friend, this woman, they took me to [a bar] and I only had I think two drinks there. With Rachael I’ve never, ever, ever drank in front of Rachael. So she wouldn’t even know what alcohol looked like because no one in my house drinks.
Interviewer: So, you’ve been living with your grandma. Can you tell me a little bit about what life is like at your grandma’s from the time you were little?

Well, my grandma, she’s in a wheel chair… she has no legs. She has diabetes. So, she had a sore on her leg and it just I guess like started swelling and then went to the other leg and then she got them amputated but that was only a couple years ago. Before she had legs. But even before she never had legs, she could barely walk on them because they were swollen all the time. (When did her legs start bothering her and getting swollen?) I must have been, I don’t know, 13 or 14. Now she doesn’t go anywhere. Like she used to go to bingo. I took her a couple months ago but that was like for a while she never went. She says she doesn’t even like bingo no more or anything. She doesn’t like going outside… Like she’s a heavier woman so it’s hard to even get her around. She has an air mattress bed, one of those ones with machines. It’s good for her bed sores, because she got them from being in bed and the wheel chair and not moving. So he [grandpa] has to take her and put her from the wheel chair to the bed and from the bed to the wheel chair… I want to move out but I stay there to help her because I like make her toast or things like that.

… My grandpa’s good. My grandpa is the one that tells me go, do it. Like you should do this and you know, like go to school and things like that. And my grandma is saying no, don’t. But Tony and my grandpa are always telling me to go get my driver’s license and I’m going to.

Interviewer: What was it like living with them when you were younger?

I didn’t go to school but that was when I was way younger. I never liked school. I never ever wanted to go because I barely had any friends and when I did have friends, they were boys because I was a tomboy. And none of the girls would play with me so I played cops and robbers and things like that. But I went from one school to another school to another school like I went from [list of schools]. (How many schools did you go to?) Four, but I went back to two of them. (How far did you go in school?) Grade nine. That was it. But like I failed grade two… I wasn’t bad in school work or nothing like that. I was just not going because like I would be done everything before the other like people would be done and all that… so I didn’t want to go.

My dad lived at my grandparents. So, I was living with him. But now he doesn’t live there. He comes over to help out with grandma and that too. As soon as he comes off work, his boss drops him at our house. And then he goes from there. He stays a couple hours or he’ll call and like he’ll be downtown or something and he’ll say can you drive me back home and then he’ll give us gas.

Interviewer: You mentioned the Young Offender’s Act, that you were involved when you were a teenager. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

I never got charges. Just that the cops would always be at my house because like not going to school and like arguing with my grandma basically because she’d say that I can
go to my friend’s house and then I’d get ready, then she’d say I couldn’t, things like that. So, that would make me mad so we would just yell at each other and then one of us would call the cops. If I didn’t end up calling the cops, she would. But then once I started going to [different school] everything was fine. Like there was no arguing for like two or three years because I could go places and I had a lot more friends than I did before. So I was basically never home. And when I was home there would be no arguing or anything. I wasn’t even in a bad mood really for like a couple years and then all of the sudden I started going out with Tony and then two years after that, that’s when it started happening again…Like someone telling me what I can and cannot do. That’s what I didn’t like because I think I should be able to choose about if I feel like going here or not going there, like …

Interviewer: Can you tell me what a fight would be like with your grandma? (Just like screaming, like that’s it. Like yelling.) So you and your grandma had some up and down times?

Yeah but more up times than down. Like if I needed anything she’d like get me it. Or like playing games, she’d play games with me or things like that, I don’t know. Or if like even with Rachael like helping out wise. She’ll be like ‘here’s some money, like go take her shopping’ and things like that. So, my grandpa helps out a lot because if like me and Tony want to go for a movie or something like a weekend, then he’ll watch Rachael and things like that… he’s retired. I think 70 or sixty-something. When he gets out he’s happy to get out because he doesn’t really get out because someone has to always be there with grandma… So, it’s like my dad and my grandpa. But I’m the one like I do all the cooking and I do the housecleaning. I wash the floors, I vacuum, all that.

Interviewer: Your uncle lives next door, is that your grandma’s brother?

Yeah. Well, my grandma’s brother lives there and his daughter, which is my cousin Louise and then she has three boys and then her husband’s brother lives there and her husband and then her friend lives there with his girlfriend. And then they have two dogs, two cats. (Is it a big house?) Not really, smaller than ours. Her house only has three bedrooms but the one ain’t really a bedroom but they made it to be a bedroom. It was in the basement. And then her dad sleeps on the floor. He made the couch go up this high. So, then he made like this mattress that can fit under there during the day and at night he can pull it onto the floor. That’s where he sleeps… I don’t go over there. They have too many of their dogs and that and their dogs have like hair everywhere. I go over there and I come home and I’m full of hair.

Daughter

Well, it’s cute. Rachael helps me. I’ll be cleaning and she’ll grab the broom and she’ll want to sweep… she’s funny. I’ve been lately going through like her body parts with her, like where’s your nose, your ears and all that. She knows perfectly. I didn’t even think that she would know like from when you say feet and then when you say like hand and then you go to say toes and fingers she knew like them all. She knew everything. It’s
funny… And right now she’s so cute. The woman that came over today, she was just laughing, like really funny, she was like really laughing because Rachael she had the video on of her dancing and she was watching like the whole video tape of even of other people dancing and all that and all the music, she’s just dancing up a storm at home right now. She’s on the floor, she’s running, she has her arms all up this way and it’s funny. (So, you really enjoy watching her?) Yeah… I always take pictures. I have like four things full. And right beside my bed I have all the pictures she’s coloured and drew. This week she’s been really drawing, like her pictures are getting way better. Like the things she draws like they’re interesting. I don’t know what they are but they’re really interesting. She’s smart. She’s really smart.

… This summer I want to get her a swing set, a sandbox and one of those small blow-up pools. But the thing we have my cousins living next door in a house and their backyard isn’t so big and they have three kids. So, their kids are always in our backyard and their dogs and everything. And my grandfather ain’t too happy. He wants to get a fence, so he’s going to fence in the backyard so that way I can get a swing set and that so it’s not ruined by the other children…. Rachael was also in dancing lessons. I had her in that for almost a year and then they went to the recital and Rachael got like an award that goes around her neck for outstanding performance. And now that’s over so I’m going to start putting her in swimming lessons but I take her Fridays.

Interviewer: What was it like for you to have Rachael come home again after she was in care?

When I first brought her home, I couldn’t do anything. Like I couldn’t go anywhere. It was hard for me to cook or do the dishes or anything because she’d be holding my leg. She’d be like really clingy like I could like walk with her sticking to my leg. She was like clinging to that for like a long time. Like if I leave or anything or come back, automatically she wants up. I don’t mind that, but like for an hour, constant mom, mom, mom. Like constantly and she doesn’t want nothing, just wants me… And everywhere I go she had to go and things like that. But all of the sudden she started throwing temper tantrums. Like if I don’t give her something she wants then she’s on the floor like kicking and screaming and all that… It’s hard but I won’t give in because that’s just teaching her that when I give in that ‘oh, if I do this, I’ll get what I want’.

Interviewer: What are your hopes and dreams for you and for Rachael?

Well, like that Rachael would grow up happy and live in a nice place. Like learn respect and morals and things like that. She has a good life and she’s happy… and has children and all that, goes to school. I hope she goes to school. She will be going to school… I want to teach her math.

I would like to move out and that… It’s hard too because I’m saying Rachael you can’t have that and I’m turning around and my grandma’s giving it to her. So, I find that it’s hard for me to like discipline and things like that. And tell her like no and mean no and things like that. So, if I move out then I can like draw a better routine and, you know,
when I say no, I can actually like mean it… I would like to have [another] baby right now but I’m not going to because of Children Services. I don’t know, then they’d be on my back even more. So, I’m not going to bother. Not right now. I’m going to wait until I’m like moved out, settled down, I have a job, and Rachael is in school and that.

**Everyday Life**

*Interviewer: Can you tell me what a typical week might look like?*

Me and Rachael wake up. Normally I wake her up. We’d be up around eight o’clock. And if I don’t wake her up, she’ll wake me up. Our beds are side by side and she’ll get up out of her bed and she’ll come and kiss me. Automatically, the first thing she’ll do is she’ll come right away and she’ll give me like two kisses on the cheek and she’ll be up on my bed so that’s good. I usually like wash her face and that, and after I do that then she’s still in her pyjamas and that because I like to change her after she eats, and then I feed her and get her stuff ready while she plays in like the living room and watches cartoons. After that then I wash her up again and then I usually put her clothes on her because I usually don’t give her a bath when she first wakes up. I give it to her in the afternoon because I figure, you know, let her play for a while. She’ll probably end up getting dirty somehow. So then she just plays or I’ll take her outside like after she’s dressed and that. I’ll get her shoes on and we’ll go outside. She likes to swing in the swing in the backyard and then play ball and things like that or with her riding toys like her plastic bike and things like that or we’ll go upstairs. She has a play room… I like playing games with (daughter) and that. Dancing. She makes me dance, she’ll grab my hand… I have her CD’s. Like she has CD’s with like How Much is that Doggy in the Window and stuff. She has a few CD’s like that. And like Mickey Mouse CD’s. And so she’ll listen to that on my stereo and that… Rachael likes [music artist]. She dances to it.

Then Tony comes by and we still play outside for a couple hours. But then we’ll like go to the park or swimming or then we’ll like decide what we’re going to do for the day. And then most of the time she has naps but sometimes she doesn’t. So, I give her a nap around then and I figure out what I’m going to cook for supper and I do. *(What do you do in the evening?)* Well, Rachael likes to watch Caillou so I put on her movies and that. She watches that or plays in her toy room and but I’ll sit down with her and play like play-doh with her or like with her blocks and try to teach her colours and things like that. Or we go for walks or things like that. So, not every day is the same.

*Interviewer: And are the weekends the same?*

When Rachael’s sleeping, I go to the movies or like on a Friday I might go to bingo with Tony. So, the other day I won a thousand. But with bingo, I’ve been pretty lucky. I know my dad, he goes to bingo, he never wins, ever. Like never wins. Some people, things like that, you can be like I guess really in debt from, if you don’t have the luck. Like me and Tony have been really, really lucky at bingo. The first time I went to bingo, my 18th birthday, we won $1500 and that was only like a year ago and so far we’ve won $1500 three times, we’ve won the thousand and we won the seven hundred I don’t know
how many times, like over ten times. We won the seven hundred a lot of times or half the jackpot or two hundred. We’ve been really lucky at bingo… I go on the weekends like maybe once every three weeks on like Friday. I like that place. I know like a lot of people there…

_Interviewer: Do you have any other hobbies?_

I like cross-stitching… and crocheting. I just made my very first blanket. It’s pink and it has hearts. Yeah. I didn’t think I’d ever get that done. I didn’t think I would learn how to do that but I finally did. But now I’m making, it’s cross-stitching, it says the alphabet, like the border. In the middle there’s a teddy bear and then there’s an angel at the bottom. Then you put your child’s name there and the year she was born and you put it in a frame that comes with ribbon and beads and everything. I like to work with my hands. I got a kit for to learn how to knit but I haven’t did that yet. And I made stuffed animals for Rachael out of crocheting… I made a turtle and a giraffe… And I put stars that glow in the dark all around her bed and that. And her bed has a night-light that automatically goes off in five minutes and it’s red, like a fire engine. She really likes it.

_Hopes and Dreams_

Well, I’m doing school courses at the learning centre. So, I’ve been doing that a lot at home. I like it. I do math and English. I really like math because I want to be an accountant… Right now I’m doing grade 10 math. And then after I’m done that I’m going to grade 11 math. And then after that I’m going to do grade 11 accounting because it starts in grade 11. And then grade 12 is the next one for accounting…. I want to go back to school but I’m too shy to, I don’t know. I just go there [to the learning centre] and I take my work and I put it in the box and I get my other work and it’s already marked and I leave. It’s like home schooling. But you can go there, you get a tutor, it’s for three hours. I do four [courses]. I do two math and two English… when Rachael is having a nap or at night. [It’s through] the Adult Learning Centre. But you can go to school there too. You have to pay for your books and that. It’s 30 dollars for each course but you have to pay and I believe it’s 40 dollars just to register. But if you pay that registry, any time you want to go there, you can just go. So, I can just go if I want but I seen someone there I knew though so that was more comfortable… I take my work in, on Wednesdays, and I pick up my other work, my marked work and that. In math I got 99 percent on one. And the other ones are 95 and they’re pretty high. The lowest I got in math was 75. In English the lowest I got was 67.

… This summer right now my goal is to get my driver’s license. That’s my goal because I don’t know, I’ve been wanting my driver’s license for so long and I just get too shy and that and I don’t go. I want to go to driving school this summer. I can drive automatic but my boyfriend, he has a standard car and like if we go camping or something he’ll let me drive it on like the campsite roads and that but I’m pretty good at driving standard. The only thing I can’t do is reverse so that’s why I want to go to driving school… I’d like to get my license and do things by myself instead of always relying on other people. Like I could drive myself somewhere and like things like that.
… Like I want to move out because I want to pay rent, like I already do, but I want to pay rent to someone else like, you know what I mean? Like if I’m 50 dollars short on rent, my grandparents wouldn’t care. And where if I move out, you know, I have to be good with money. I have to make sure like my phone bill is paid, you know, my rent is paid, there’s food in the house, you know. There’s not anyone else there to, you know, rely on. It’s myself… I think I would be good at like decorating my house, things like that. I want to do that because I want to work with money with like paying rent and so on… I want to move out on my own but I don’t want to move out right now. It’s weird… If I move out, I want to move out to my own house, like a house… I’m going to continue doing accounting. Like I’m going to try and be an accountant and then I’m going to start saving money and then hopefully get a job doing accounting and start putting money away and then I can eventually save up enough to get a mortgage and have my own place. It shouldn’t take that long.

We’d like to own [grandparents’] house. Own the house and fix it up but … They [grandparents] own it. They’ve owned it for years. It’s like an older home. I think they’ve lived in it for like 40 something years. My grandma says that if she gives it to anybody that I’d probably be the first to get the house because no one else takes care of it. Like I’m the one that cleans it and if there’s something wrong with it, I fix it. Like me and Tony… [Or] I want to build my own house. Victorian style. Like my dollhouse. I made a Victorian style dollhouse and I want the same thing but obviously higher. I want to build a house and I want it blue. I love blue lately. Light blue…
Janet

Janet – Mother Interviewed Max – Janet’s Ex-Husband and Father of Jenny
Jenny – Daughter of Janet and Max Sam – Janet’s Ex-Boyfriend
John – Oldest Son of Sam Bobby – Youngest Son of Sam (Biological Son of
Ted – Janet’s Current Boyfriend Sam’s brother)

Children’s Aid Society and other Professional Helpers

I guess maybe my first involvement with [Children’s Aid] was with my oldest sister. I can’t even really remember how it happened, but she ended up in a foster home and we as a family – my parents were divorced at the time – and my mum and my sisters and myself ended up going for family counselling at [Children’s Aid] and then my oldest sister eventually ended up coming back home. I was pretty young then so I don’t really remember a whole lot just knowing that we had been involved with them… Six or 7 [years old] maybe. Not very old… then there was really no other contact with [Children’s Aid] I don’t think, until I started working with them back in 1992… I applied for a position for a driver so I went through the training process which was OK. [I] met quite a few different people… I did it for 5 years and it opened my eyes up a lot to know what a lot of kids are going through you know it’s so hush-hush. Back then I really thought that [Children’s Aid] was there for the families and the kids but my opinion of that today has changed.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what happened to change your opinion?

My boyfriend and I ended up being involved with [Children’s Aid]. His youngest son was living with us at the time and we went to [Children’s Aid] asking for their help for some relief. His son had grown up with his mother on a Native reservation. The child had fetal alcohol syndrome, has learning disabilities, problems etc., etc. and we got him when he was like 14 so all these problems came with him and we were having a lot of problems dealing with his problems. So we went to [Children’s Aid] and asked for their help and didn’t get it. So it got to the point where my boyfriend got very angry and upset one day and hit him and in turn we had [Children’s Aid] at our door interviewing us thinking that Bobby was being abused. I understand they have to investigate the allegations etc., etc., but just the runarround and the lack of consideration for anybody involved was just unreal. (Was that the last time that you were involved with [Children’s Aid], a couple of years ago?) Yep.

Interviewer: So can you tell me a bit about that involvement?

The intake worker for that particular incident in my opinion was a moron. I don’t understand how somebody with such lack of intelligence could be in a position you know to be dealing with those issues. Like trying to get answers out of some of the people at the [Children’s Aid] office is like pulling teeth because you can just get the run around, get the run around, get the run around. You know and when you ask for help as a parent
and you’re denied that help you know what can you do? Like your patience can only go so far you know and when you’re not accustomed to dealing with children with those types of problems, which we weren’t because I’ve had my daughter since day one and she doesn’t have any of those learning disabilities or problems. Then a child comes into your life that has all those problems and you’ve never had to deal with them and you ask for assistance and they don’t want to give it to you, what do you do? It was just very, very frustrating. Very frustrating. [Bobby] ended up being placed in a foster home for a couple of months and then he came back and that was the end of that involvement with them. But it was just a very bad experience… I would never go back to ask them for help again and I certainly would never work for them again knowing the way they treated me and my ex-boyfriend and the kids. [The CAS] just didn’t even attempt to want to hear our pleas for help. Like with even temporary relief type of thing and just everything... Their model is supposed to be for the family and the kids, to keep the family and the kids together. Well if that’s the case, then why not help the people that are reaching out for help and admitting that they have a problem before it gets to the point where you know you’re lashing out at your kids in anger. It ends up getting to that point because the agency doesn’t want to get at it before it gets to that point.

Interviewer: So when you first called them you called them on the phone. Did you get to see any one?

I actually think Sam and I went for an initial interview with an intake worker and it just he got very upset because they’re just idiots up there and it ended up that [Bobby] ended up having to go into care… Sam hit him once, not forceful or anything, just you know a little tap and you know I’m thinking to myself you know this all could have been avoided had somebody have listened to our pleas. You know like we had all kinds of support from the school, from the school that he was attending you know. Always talking to the principals and the teacher and you know keeping on top of that stuff but then when it came to that, no support at all. It just really upset me.

Interviewer: When the child was placed was this with your agreement or against?

Yes. No with our agreement. (And he was in care for a few months?) Yeah I think July, August and part of September. (So, if this is the story of your life, why are we beginning with the CAS? Why is that important?) Because I feel they need to revamp their system and try to help families. Hit it before it gets to that. Where they end up having to take these kids out of the home. Like that’s the worst thing you can do is take a child from it’s parents. Like if these parents are so abusive, get them some help. Obviously they have a problem and they need some help in order to you know control their anger or need parenting classes or something.

Interviewer: What was the impact on you personally and your family of having the child go into care?

Honestly it was a relief. We had Sam’s oldest son live with us a few years before that and that was a nightmare all over again to begin with. But it put a strain on this household.
like you wouldn’t believe. We’ve since split up after that and it affected my daughter. It affected my relationship with Bobby. It affected Sam’s relationship with Bobby. Bobby has since moved back with his mother to Manitoba and I haven’t talked to him probably in 6 or 7 months.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about the impacts that happened?

I ended up having to seek counselling. So did my daughter. The breakup with Sam and I. That was just more or less the icing on the cake. And I think if I ever got involved with another man that had kids that hadn’t been in the picture for a longer time I would never, ever, and this is horrible to say, take those kids in after what I went through for 2 years in my life. Because I almost feel as if I wasted 2 years of my life, put everything I had into it, and basically got nothing out of it except a lot of heartache. Like it’s a sin when you try to do all you can for these kids and they just… you know they’re so emotionally scarred from what has happened in their past that they can’t accept love and they take so much for granted. It’s a sin, it really is… I guess it made me kind of wake up and realize that not everybody has the family relationships that I do with my family because they don’t, not at all. Like I’m close to both my parents. Both my parents have remarried, but close to my mum and her husband, close to my dad and his wife and my sisters. Now we all talk all the time you know and have pretty good relationships and you see these kids that have been torn away from their father and raised by their mother and knowing what they’ve gone through in the relatively short period that they’ve been alive…

My oldest sister and her husband have been foster parents for let’s say probably 10 years and a lot has happened in those 10 years. They’ve fostered teens. Teen girls and there’s been a lot of kids in and out of their home. And let’s see, 4 or 5 years ago they adopted one of their foster kids and it kind of has been a nightmare. Another thing that I think [Children’s Aid] needs to do is in the case of kids that are Crown Wards... the adopting parents should have full access to all information regarding that child. Every last piece of it, which my sister and her husband didn’t and that has caused a lot of problems. My niece has been in and out of jail. She is probably one of the reasons that my sister and her husband are going to be getting separated shortly and [Children’s Aid] has not been too kind to them in the last I’d say 2 years. Since they started having problems with my niece they have cut them off to having any more foster kids, saying that they more or less have enough on their plate with my niece. That they don’t think that my sister and her husband could competently care for foster kids. And I don’t think that’s right because they gave them 10 years of fostering all these kids and you know when nobody else would take them… (So why do you want that in your story?) Because it’s just another reflection of [Children’s Aid] and how they keep wanting people to be foster parents and you know I tend to think when they have their information sessions, they mislead or misrepresent themselves as to what the goal is supposed to be with fostering and any other related things that go with it.

Interviewer: Did you get anything positive out of your involvement with them?

29
Not really because they obviously don’t care about the family or the kids for that matter. It’s apparent this recent events that have happened. It’s supposed to be you’re innocent you know until proven guilty. Well you’re guilty until you prove yourself innocent. And yeah OK, I did hit my kid or whatever. I’m not beating him you know. We live in a society today where you can’t even discipline your kids without being accused of abusing them, which is ridiculous.

Interviewer: Have you been involved with any other service professionals?

A psychiatrist. While I was with Sam… 2 years ago… Just the issues with Bobby and we actually took him, he was in counselling and we actually did the family thing. (Bobby was the son with fetal alcohol syndrome?) Yep. And from there, I sought my own therapist just outside of that because I wasn’t too happy with the therapist… I didn’t want myself seeing this one person. (Now were you involved with the family counsellor for a while?) As long as Bobby was here, for a year… it was through [doctor’s office]. (How would you describe that?) Good… they kind of make you step outside of yourself and then look at yourself and see what you can do to get things straightened out in your life and that is why I’m where I am now. That I shouldn’t allow myself to be walked on, which I was for 10 years…. Through testing and surveys and whatever they pegged me as, what was the word now, something dependent… Just that I kept going back to things that were safe, like Sam… He was always there no matter what, you know? And he always was, always is, always will be. (So you said you were walked on for 10 years. What was that like?) Taken for granted… Certain things like he didn’t actually realize the amount of effort that I put into our relationship and the amount that he didn’t. The things I sacrificed for him …

Relationships with Men

I’ve been involved with Sam over the last twenty some odd years. (So the relationship ended how long ago?) It was hard, but I knew I had to do it because it wasn’t going anywhere. Like we just kept running into the same road blocks all the time and it didn’t matter who did what, those road blocks weren’t going to get out of the way. I guess in the back of my mind there’s always that possibility that his kids may come back and I’m not willing to sacrifice any more. You know the whole year Bobby was here we centred everything on him and kind of put Jenny on the shelf because she was a well balanced kid, didn’t have any problems, blah, blah, blah and then you have Bobby you know who needs your constant attention… I don’t think I’d do it again.

I met him when I was 12 or 13 and we started dating on and off. He’s 5 years older than I am. That lasted up until the time that I moved to my dad’s. (That was around when you were 14?) Yeah around there. And then he went his way and obviously I went mine and then when I came back, I think I was about 17 when I came back and he wasn’t around. I think he had moved out west so there was no contact with him. And then I moved to [another Ontario city] to live with my ex-husband [Max] and we were together for about 6 years. When I left [city] in 1986, I came back and I’d heard through the grapevine that Sam was back in town, so I contacted him and we started seeing one another again on and
off for about a year. Then we broke up and then I dated somebody else for 5 years. Broke it off with him and got back in contact with Sam and we started dating again. I can’t remember what year it was, but we eventually moved in together. We lived together for on and off for 10 years. There was major separation in that 10 years for a whole year and now since last July 1st, he’s gone his way and I’ve gone mine. Mind you like we still talk all the time. We’ve remained friends, it’s just that we can’t live together. And as far as a relationship of man and wife or whatever that’s just not happening it’s not there anymore. Too much has happened. (So why is Sam important to you in your story?) I guess because he’s been a major part of my life, my adult life. He’s always been there. Even though we’ve gone through an awful lot together. Because we have gone through a lot and I guess I feel I need him and he needs me, whether if just as close friends you know. Because I vowed and it’s from my heart that from now until the day I die he will be a part of my life. Because we’re good friends. Like I still love him, but not in a boyfriend sense… If I end up running into a problem with Jenny or whatever you know, I can talk to him about it. Or if I need a hand doing something he’ll do it or if I need to borrow his car, he’ll let me borrow his car. He’s always has been very good to my parents because my step dad has a bad heart, if they need something done around the house he’s more than willing to go and help, he always has been. Mind you I’d do the same for his family too.

… Getting back to [Children’s Aid], had they of only helped us when we needed it. Like he himself as a child was put into foster care and knows the routine

Interviewer: Is your marriage in your story?

I’d like to forget that… I don’t know if I’d say that my marriage was important to me. I met him when I lived at my Dad’s. We lived together for 2 years before we got married. I got married when I was 19, so I was about 17 started living with him. It wasn’t a bad marriage, it just it kind of just fell apart… (So how long were you married?) Three years and one week. I left a week after my third wedding anniversary. The first year of our marriage was you know like any other, was you know he went to work, I went to work and whatever, we did whatever you know. Things were fine and then we decided we were going to try to have a baby. Well we tried for almost 2 years, finally got pregnant and it just sort went downwards after she was born. I found out afterwards that he was unfaithful with a mutual friend of ours and I left. And the rest is kind of history… I knew I had to do it because there was just no sense in staying. He had it in his mind, he said he didn’t love me any more and whatever else and so I said ‘fine, see you’ and I left. Life goes on… It was heartbreaking knowing that I was carrying his child, that we had tried so hard to have this baby and he did that. That just ripped my heart out and I probably still hate him to this day for it. He hasn’t really been involved in Jenny’s life.

Interviewer: Was that a tough time?

Yeah, in one sense it was but in another sense, I think I’m strong enough to pull myself through it. Obviously I did. When I got married it was in my eyes for the rest of my life
and I was angry that he did what he did. Like there was no need for him to be unfaithful at all. I guess I felt he was selfish not completely understanding that what he did but also what he did to our daughter. What he was taking away from us and his daughter by doing what he did. Once I moved back here, I kind of got a grip on things you know. I could sit back and think to myself ‘it’s over now’ you know, he can do what he wants… I had to focus on me and Jenny and not worry about him anymore because he wasn’t really good to be involved in it anyways, as far as I was concerned. (So you were about 22 years old when this happened?) Yep. I stayed with my mum for a couple of months ‘til I you know got on my feet and got myself an apartment. Jenny and I spent lots of time together. Lots of time. We had fun when she was little.

Interviewer: Do you think there is a pattern in your relationships?

Yeah, going back to Sam. Relying on Sam all the time… it’s broken though now. Well I’ve really had 3 serious relationships in my life. I don’t consider that a lot. (You were 18 years old when you started living with your ex-husband. Do you consider that to be young?) No. Like I’m grown up then. (How would you characterize the men that you’ve had serious relationships with?) My ex-husband’s an idiot. Still is. Selfish, immature, needs to think about the things that he’s done to his daughter and to quit blaming everybody but himself.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the relationship that happened between your marriage with Max and moving in with Sam?

It started out all right. It got really rotten at the end. He liked to drink a little too much… Only on the weekends. But I just got fed up with it and told him to get out. That was enough. He was all right. Like we got along really well. I don’t know just the drinking… because he got violent when he drank. He hit me once. Well not hit me, he grabbed me once and that was the end of that… If he would have not been an idiot when he drank we would probably be married and have more kids, but he chose to drink. It wasn’t hard [to end the relationship] because it got to the point near the end where I couldn’t stand being around him. Probably for about 6 months. Like it intensified near the end and I just said enough is enough.

When I moved out of my mum’s house, Sam and I moved in together. We moved up to [different neighbourhood] and we lived here for 2 years. (You were in a relationship with him before that?) Dating, just dating… I don’t know a couple of years. (So you moved in together…) It was fine, we got along. Jenny was still pretty young, seven years old, so there wasn’t you know kid problems. And his kids weren’t in the picture at the time. And from there we moved on the west side in the apartment and then his kids came in the picture. It would have been almost 4 years [later]… Stupid me talked his sister-in-law into getting a phone number of where the kids were. She knew where they were. So we got this phone number and he called out there [Alberta] and started taking to them and then it was arranged that they’d come. (And they were Native children?) Yes. (Were they on a reserve or do you know?) Actually, I think they were at the time… with their mother and then it was arranged that we flew them here. All 3 of them here for 3 weeks. [They
were] 14, 13 and 12, and Jenny would have been like 12 by then. What a nightmare… For kids that have never ever met their father, they expect an awful lot. We went into a lot of debt while they were here. Like a lot. Probably about $7,000. Well probably close to $2,500 just to fly them here and then you know they all needed stuff to go back to school and food while they were here, entertainment while they were here. Didn’t take long. And then they went back and 2 weeks later the oldest one decided that he was coming to live with us. (How did you make that decision?) Well more or less ‘John wants to come and live with us, what do you think?’ What am I going to say? (What were you thinking at the time when you heard that?) Oh God! What am I getting myself into? I didn’t know the half of it. If I would have known the half of it, it would never happened, but anyways. So he came and we had to move. So we moved out of an apartment that we could afford into a house that we couldn’t… we had to get a boarder and there was an apartment in the basement of the house. Well, John had a lot of learning disabilities. He had a double hearing problem. Always running him to the doctor, always being at the school and he was in a special ed class and it was a nightmare because I basically was the one who did it all.

Interviewer: Were you working at the time?

Yeah part time. I think I was driving for CAS and part for cab as well. (What was Sam doing?) Driving [a cab]…. Twelve hour shifts. (So you’d work how many days a week?) Five or 6. I ended up in a full time position driving the handicap van. Well I got hurt at work, which left me with basically no money. I went on workers compensation and then they ended up cutting me off of workers compensation and when you don’t have any money coming in it kind of leads to disaster… And then John decided that he didn’t like the way things were going, so he decided to go back home. It crushed Sam, but it was a relief for me. (How were things going between you and Sam then?) Horrible. Yelling and screaming at each other all the time. (OK and what were you fighting about?) Him [John]. (So now we’re about 5 years into the relationship? So then what?) We split up for a year. I just said get out. I needed a break…. Then we got back together. Well we always talked and just thought we’d try it again… Stupidity I guess… We moved here. We moved out of the house because we couldn’t afford it anymore. And things were fine. You know we kind of got back on our feet money wise. Then Bobby showed up. He phoned here one day and said, ‘Dad I’m in Winnipeg can you send me an airplane ticket?’ I didn’t realize… I guess I should have realized from the first one that the third one wouldn’t have been any different but said yeah OK let’s do it, why not. It wasn’t too bad the first couple of months he was here. But then we started having problems with him at school… School problems, a lot of health problems and then getting into the counselling thing. I said to Sam like you’re going to be part of it this time. And I made Sam take Bobby to most of his therapy appointments and stuff. Things [between Sam and I] became very heated all the time… Problems with [Bobby’s] school work, discipline, medical problems and just it was putting a lot of stress, like Bobby and Jenny were sharing a bedroom and like I refused to move again. I was not putting myself in that position again.
Interviewer: So then Bobby went into care for a short period of time? (Uhmm.) Then did he go back home?

He went to his biological father, Sam’s brother. (So Sam was not his biological father?) No… Sam said from day one that he would treat Bobby as his own and his brother denied paternity anyways. (OK. So then what happened after Bobby went into care, like for you?) Sam was gone when Bobby went into care… before he went into care. I had Bobby with me for about 3 weeks before he went into care. Sam stayed in a motel. Just so he was out of the home while Bobby was here. (And the CAS was already involved at that point?) Yes it was just a matter of finding somewhere for [Bobby] to go… He came back in September. Sam had moved back in and Bobby came back and he… wanted to spend the weekend with his stepbrother and Sam said no so Bobby said, ‘f@#% you I’m going to live with my dad’… And things just went down hill after that. Things just never got any better [with Sam]. (Still fighting? So how long did that go on?) ’Til July the next year. (So was it at this time that you were seeing your own counsellor?) Yep. (And it was that that helped you to make the decision to move out and so you asked him to leave?) Yep. (Was that tough?) No… Don’t look back.

Interviewer: Are you in a relationship now?

I have a new man in my life [Ted] and I’m going to meet him for the first time. [I met him] on the internet of all places. (Where does he live?) Illinois… we either talk on the computer or on the phone. (So how did you meet him?) In a card game actually. There’s sites on the internet where you can actually play card games like euchre and crib and I was in playing euchre and he was in playing euchre and we just started talking and the rest is history. June 1st he’s coming up here. (How long have you been talking on the internet?) Seven weeks. (Are you nervous about meeting him in person?) Nope. Excited. Like it would be like writing to somebody for years and years and finally meeting them I guess. (Have you exchanged photographs already?) Yep. [It’s difficult] with Ted being in Illinois and me being here. Because we want to be with each other and it’s not possible right at the moment. You know the phone bills are outrageous. Time just doesn’t stand still like you know, we’re on the phone and it seems like 10 minutes and it’s 3 hours you know. Oh yeah it’s crazy.

Interviewer: What’s it been like to be sometimes a single parent and sometimes not?

I’d rather be a single parent. Not always that constant trying to negotiate discipline and all the rest of it. One method and only one method.

Interviewer: Would you say that generally as an adult, your life has went better when you were living with just your daughter than when you were living with men? (Uhmm.) So would you get into another serious relationship right now?

Not right at this moment no. I mean I’m hoping to make it stretch out until Jenny’s done school and she can kind of be on her own.
**Children**

Max hasn’t really been involved in Jenny’s life. She’s almost 16. For 7 years of her life he chose basically not to have anything to do with her and the last probably 8 years she’s lucky if she sees him once a year. That’s really just lately in the last year has affected her greatly. She’s still on therapy over all of this and I think that’s a lot of the problems that I’ve been having with her stemming from his neglect and rejection. Since Sam and I split up she has just kind of… she’s always been a good kid, good grades, since Sam and I split up she’s been absent from school, I can’t tell you the amount of days, just sick, sick all the time feeling awful. I’ve had her to the doctor a million times. I’ve had tests done, she’s going to therapy, she’s been on anti depressants, she’s been on this, she’s been on that and they still can’t figure out what’s wrong with her. She sat here this morning with an attitude that ‘I don’t give a shit if I pass school or not’. And that is not like her at all. She has done excellent from day one and it just is very frustrating to see her have an attitude like that that she doesn’t care about her marks because she’s a very intelligent kid and she could do whatever she wanted to do if she would only pull up her socks and apply herself at school. And I tend to think it all centres around what happened in the last couple of years that Sam and I were together and then all of a sudden I don’t know a light bulb must have went off in her head or something about her dad and his lack of involvement in her life. Last year her father’s girlfriend had a baby which this man’s not even supposed to be producing any kids because his sperm count was so low that Jenny was supposed to be a miracle baby and I think that really made her upset knowing that she umm.. I guess is going replaced again.

... Well when Max moved in with his girlfriend, his girlfriend has 2 kids. He chose her 2 kids over his own flesh and blood. He can’t and refuses to take the time and the effort to come and see her. I understand he lives 3 hours away who cares you know. If he wanted to see her bad enough he’d make the time and take the effort to do it. And he doesn’t. So I get to deal with that and sometimes I’d just like to choke him and say you know like look at what you’re doing to her. Can’t you understand she needs you and wants you? Like we’ve had this conversation a million times and he just doesn’t get it or chooses just to ignore it. The last time we had a conversation, he decided to get on the phone and cry to me why don’t I have a relationship with my daughter? Well let’s see you know maybe it’s lack of communication. The fact that you never see her or talk to her too much... I said, you should have thought about that years ago when you chose to centre your life around [new girlfriend] and her kids and now this new baby. Like Jenny hasn’t even seen a picture of her step sister. [Jenny’s] birthday’s in December, her father never sent her, her birthday present or her Christmas present ‘til April. Not that you know it means nothing here nor there but to a kid it does...[new girlfriend’s] kids had a Christmas with him and she didn’t and her birthday and whatever other days you know. Any milestone that she’s had I’ve been there he hasn’t. And I just can’t understand nor can Sam for that matter how somebody that is supposed to be your father and your flesh and blood can just walk away from it. You know he was very doting when we were together when she was first born like you know, ‘Oh look here’s my baby blah, blah, blah’. And then just walk away from it. Like discard it like a piece of garbage.
Interviewer: How are you coping with all this fall out?

All right I guess. Like Sam has been a major part of Jenny’s life. You know they still do lots of stuff together and not that he will ever replace her biological father because that’ll never happen. But I guess I’m kind of grateful for Sam that he’s been there for her for that. I just wish Jenny could accept the fact that her father is the way he is and just kind of, not forget about it, but put it in the back of her mind and not let it play on her so much… I know how she feels and I think it’s better things left unsaid more or less because it just upsets us both because I get angry at him for not being what he should have been but it’s senseless now to get angry because there’s you know there’s no changing the facts.

Interviewer: So was having Jenny a big part of your story?

For sure. I don’t ever regret having her. I regret getting married mind you for 3 years, but I would never ever regret having Jenny. I’d do it again. I was 21 when I found out I was pregnant. We’d been trying for 2 years. Rather excited that I was pregnant. And then she came and I think it was kind of like a tailspin thing because everything kind of went down so quick after she was born. Because within 4 or 5 months I was like gone. Like with all the crap that happened. But once we got back here and we got settled everything you know… she was a really good baby. She was a really good toddler… Jenny and I spent lots of time together. Lots of time. We had fun when she was little… [We] did lots of stuff you know like going to the park and my girlfriend lived in the same building I did, so she had little kids too and take them out, let them play you know. I was fortunate enough to be able to stay home up until Jenny went to school so I got her well prepared for school. When she entered junior kindergarten she could print her name and knew her alphabet and her numbers and everything else and you know she wasn’t shoved in front of a TV by any means. Unlike now. But smart kid. (Sounds like you’re proud of her.) I am… When kids are at that age, you’re just kind of molding them you know and they’re so innocent and I guess you can sway their decision a little easier than you can as a teenager. Because when they reached 12 your brains drop out and you know nothing. But there wasn’t a lot of yucky stuff in those days.

…Right at the moment my main focus is to try to get [Jenny] back to where she was with school and feeling healthy and feeling good about herself. I have her therapist and the family doctor and my sister and my mom, Sam. [It will be] good will be when Jenny’s done school and moved out… For her and for me. There’s a few things that she’s talked about that she’d like to do and I just hope that she can get her grades up enough to be able to do those things. She just needs to get herself out of this rut. Like, I don’t know what else to do for her so. You know I guess until she sees where she’s at and where she needs to go… Well it concerns me because it’s so not like her to be like that you know. In all the time she’s been in school she’s never had an attitude like this but I tend to think part of the reason too is the high school she’s going to. We’re transferring her to a new school next year… The beginning of the year she had a gang of girls threaten to kill her and just.. it’s just been a nightmare since she’s been at that school. She’s been there for 2 years and the teachers are very lax in wanting to help. I spent like 5 months trying to get hold of a
guidance counsellor to ask them to take her out of advanced and put her in general. ‘Oh don’t worry about it, don’t worry about it, don’t worry about it’. Oh yeah well when her marks are only 50, you know where she’s not even passing I have a right to be concerned. *(Her marks have dropped recently?)* Oh yeah big time. But the lack of attending doesn’t help either but with her being sick all the time. So we’re trying to get a handle on that and get her feeling better. *(What does she say about school?)* She hates it. The teachers are stupid. All typical teen stuff… *(So there’s tension between you and Jenny right now?)* A little at the moment. But that’s just typical teen. We have our tense moments where it’s like, ‘well you’re moving to Illinois anyway, so you go and I’ll do what I’m doing’. And I’m saying to myself, ‘yeah you’re only 15, I don’t think so’. *(What’s Jenny been saying about your relationship with Ted?)* She talks to Ted on the phone all the time too. She just wants me to be happy and if that’s what makes me happy then so be it you know. She’s seen a lot of crap over the years and she knows when I’m not happy, she’s not happy.

**Family of Origin**

I had a relatively normal childhood. My parents split up and divorced when I was 7. Still stayed in contact with my father and left home when I was 14, moved in with my dad, stayed with him for a couple of years moved back here and then from there I left my mom and I moved in with what is now my ex-husband for 3 years.

*Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your relations with your family?*

I’m fairly close with my oldest sister. Not so much my second oldest sister. She’s kind of got a life of her own, but close with my mom and close with my dad. I can sit and talk to my dad about anything, well I can my mum too. I guess we were kind of raised that way to you know if you need to talk, talk type thing. I do now anyways with my parents. I guess not your natural parents… some conversations I have with my father. Just you wouldn’t think that you’d have. Just stuff that I don’t think really normal people talk about. I love talking to my dad. I guess earlier in my teen years and I never really had the opportunity to do it. Like we’ve become a lot closer. He lives near [city]. [We talk] on the phone, on the internet, the computer. When he comes down. He comes down maybe once every couple of months. *(You weren’t that close when you were in your teens?)* Well not such that I wasn’t that close. The woman that he was living with then kind of made it a little hard to sit and have a personal conversation with him without her being there. But she’s out of the picture now. *(What about your relationship with your mom?)* It’s good… [My family] have bailed me out a million times money-wise. You know if they need help I’m more than willing to go and help them and you know. Well [mom’s] there morally for me and you know supports whatever decisions I make. Whether they’re good choices or not. She was a really big part of Jenny’s life when she was younger. She used to spend a lot of time with Jenny. Not so much now because her and her husband do lots of stuff together. He’s retired but she isn’t but when she has the time she’s gone. They have a cottage up at [beach] so they’re up there almost every weekend and they travel.
Interviewer: Tell me a bit about when you were growing up.

I can remember stuff from, like it’s kind of trivial things from when I was little, little, little. Like we lived in a house that had a verandah with a roof on it and you know kids were supposed to be in bed and we’d climb out the window and sit on the roof. Yeah. I was always in lots of trouble. I liked cats and dogs and turtles and fish. I had a relatively normal childhood you know, other than my parents splitting up but you know. [I was] seven. Didn’t quite understand it like most kids don’t at that age but so be it. Like you know I still got to see my dad and we lived with my mom… [I had] a happy, happy childhood. I can’t say that I had a crappy childhood because I didn’t. You know my mom did what she could for us when she was raising and you know she did the best she could and you know we’re not axe murderers or anything you know… I can’t really remember school, like I did OK. I wasn’t Einstein or anything by any means. I got half decent grades. My eldest sister is the brain in the family so. Like I’m not stupid by any means either. (Do you remember why she went into foster care?) I have no recollection of that at all. (Does she ever talk about it?) Not to me. Her and my mum have some issues that they need to deal with but you know that’s between them… Both my parents have a resentment against one another over you know stuff having a million years ago. I don’t know, it’s like stupid like you know you’re remarried, you’re remarried, like who cares you know? It fell apart that’s it, that’s all. You know get over it. It’s done. That’s 30 years ago. Who cares?… According to my father, my mother wanted to become more independent, which meant she didn’t want him anymore or didn’t need him anymore. I heard a bunch of different stories. I heard that my mother was having an affair which wasn’t the truth and I think it’s just that they grew apart and my mum just didn’t want to be married any more… Which more power to her you know. If you’re not happy where you’re at then move on.

Interviewer: What about when you were younger?

I don’t think I belonged to any clubs or anything like that. Only Brownies. Didn’t interest me too much. I don’t know. I guess I just hung out with my friends. (Do you remember if you went to church or not?) Yes. I started from the time I probably could walk until I was 11 or 12 and then when I moved to my dad’s, I started going again. So from the time I was 15 ‘til 17. As a kid I felt I had to go. My grand parents were very religious and we went. We went every Sunday. [We were] Protestant. When I was a teenager my best friend at the time, her dad was the minister so I kind of got close with the family and a few other people within the church…Going to church is not an important thing. I believe in God and I guess that’s all that matters… When I wanted to go and get Jenny baptized her father kind of more or less said no. I just got away from it and never did get her baptized. I haven’t been baptized either.

Interviewer: What about friends and stuff when you were a kid?

All kinds of them… I was never home. [We got] caught smoking and hooking off school and all them wicked things. (What age would that have been?) 12 or 13… Drinking, well may be not 12 and 13, but definitely 14. I guess we were just kids wanting to do grownup
things. Stupid as they are. 

Interviewer: Were there social workers and those types of people involved in your life when you were younger? Do you remember at all?

When I was 7, when my parents split up, I ended up going to a psychologist or just a social worker for some time. I liked going to her. I didn’t quite understand the concept of why I was there and it was kind of fun to me because I’d go and we’d do crafts and stuff and I guess she’d do her magic. (You mentioned your sister’s involvement with CAS...) I personally can’t even remember it happening but I know it did. Like she makes reference to it so. I think it could have been just for a very short period of time or I don’t know. I can’t remember… I can vaguely remember going to CAS for like a family kind of group session thing. (Now would that have been around the same time?) Yeah during that time but that’s all I can really remember about that.

**Finances, Work, and Education**

[Sam and I] both made good money. I guess we just liked to live beyond our means and whatnot a lot of people do. I ended up filing bankruptcy, back in ’98… personal bankruptcy. It’s horrible. Still dealing with it. I’m not even discharged yet… Knowing that I’ve screwed up my credit… I can’t go and get credit now for 7 years. It kind of wasn’t my fault though. I just like with the workers compensation thing you know just things got out of hand and couldn’t pay, couldn’t go back to work and just didn’t have the money to pay the things that I bought. When you’re used to living one way and all of a sudden that changes, you find it hard to adjust… [I’m] trying to think of what all I ended up claiming. Part of that was the $7,000 that was accumulated while those kids were here. (So this was you accumulated it not Sam?) Well more or less. Well I put it on my bankruptcy. (So you and Sam were still together?) Uhmm.

Interviewer: So what is your source of income now?

Pension from workers compensation and support and baby bonus. (Are finances tight?) We get by. Like it’s just we don’t live extravagantly by any means. (So over your life like if you look back how would you describe finances?) OK. (Were you ever living on social assistance?) Yes, probably the first 5 years of Jenny’s life.

Interviewer: At what point did you go back to school?

I went back to school when [Jenny] did. I went to hair dressing school. Finished that and went and got my license and started to work and she was in school. That’s back in 1988. I got bored with that and went to work with [Children’s Aid] and then from there I got a full time job driving a disabled van, for disabled for people. So I got injured at work and then from there I drove taxi for 7 years. And now I went back to school… I’m going through for personal support worker. A nurse’s aid basically. I’m almost completed. (So how important is work in your story?) Well obviously I need to work to support Jenny.
and I. I enjoyed doing most of the jobs that I’ve done. Everybody’s got to work… When I’m at work I give it my all. And if I don’t have to be at work well that’s a bonus. I’m dedicated to whatever I do. [Work]’s not an important issue. Everybody has to do it… just to live and survive.

*Interviewer: What are some of the good things going on in your life right now?

Getting done school. I’ve got my placement to do yet and then I’m done. When I’m done I’m hoping to seek employment at the hospital. So where it’s a different variety of patients all the time, not just the same people. It’s actually through [adult learning centre] and it’s the exact same program that [community college] offers. Like at a quarter of the cost. I think at [college] it’s $2,000 and through [adult learning centre] it’s like $285. And you end up with the same certification. [The program] is 28 weeks. *(How many days a week do you go to class?)* Every day, half days. They use 2 nursing homes here in town so [the placement] will be one of the 2 and then there are weeks of community placement and it’s through para-med or Red Cross or the VON I believe. Independent Living as well. I should be done by September. Because there’s 7 weeks in between community and facility. If I can get into the hospital full time I will. Yeah, because you don’t need your certification to get into the hospital with that particular work. *(Why is this a good thing for you?)* Because I like doing it. Should have done it years ago… It was kind of neat going back because I haven’t been in school in years but the people that were in the class were interesting. We had lots of fun. I impressed myself with my marks. I had an overall average of 90. Yeah. Like I know I can do it. [Job prospects are] very good because they’re dying for personal support workers everywhere. Hospitals, nursing homes. I could have a job tomorrow full time.

**Social Supports**

*Interviewer: Do you spend a lot time on the internet? (Yep.) Is that one of your pleasures?

Uhmm. I’ve made a lot of friends, chat with a lot of friends like all over the place. Down in the States, over in Australia, out West. It’s kind of neat to think that you can talk to somebody like in Australia you know… There are certain programs that you can install on your computer and then other people have them on their computers and it’s like a random kind of thing where you just log into it and it puts you in touch with whoever. And then like in a chat room you’d strike up a conversation and from there you add them on to this program and then they’re always there. When they’re online and if you’re online then you just talk. *(So do you do a lot of emailing back and forth?)* Uhmm. I think I might actually have 30 people but I don’t talk to them all the time. It all depends when they are online. *(So do you consider those people friends?)* A majority of them I’ve met, I’ve actually physically met… The very first one that I met I flew out West to meet her. I went out for 12 days last year. It was really interesting… Back in October I met a woman, started playing cards with her. She actually was introduced from a mutual friend of ours and we started playing cards every day, we talked every day, sometimes for like 5, 6 hours a day. *(So the internet is a big part of your life?)* It was at one point in time.
Not so much now. Like Jenny spends more time on it than I do now. I usually talk to Ted for I don’t know 2 or 3 hours before he goes to work. He’s an hour behind… And then maybe like Jenny usually goes on from the time she comes home from school which is like 3 until I boot her off at 8 o’clock at night. *(So is this your network of friends?)* Oh no, I have real life friends too not just the people on the computer.

*Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about your friends?*

They’re there. Like everybody you know gets caught up in their own lives and whatnot but I stay in touch with quite a few of my friends. You know like if I have time and they have time you know we’ll get together for coffee or for whatever… *(Do you have a sense of how often you might get together with a friend or neighbour?)* 2 or 3 times a week maybe [with] different people. I like spending time with my friends. For instance, Saturday 4 of us had dinner together. Had social drinks and sat around shooting the shit. *(Is this something that you’d do regularly?)* Sometimes. Or do a barbecue or whatever… [I have] a few close friends, like I don’t have millions of friends by any means. Over the years I’ve had friends, but not like real close friends and the few close friends that I do have I stay in contact with. Like my one friend, my one girl friend she lives out West so either by phone or on the computer but the ones that live here like you know we’ll get on the phone and gab or they’ll come here or I’ll go there for coffee or you know whatever… We all need friends. Support systems.

*Interviewer: Who do you get the most support from when you have something tough to deal with?*

Probably my mom… she’s been there through it all. Maybe my oldest sister. *(What kinds of things have you found the most helpful?)* Just talking about it and just getting their views on an issue or the issue or you know. Their experiences, if they’ve had any, with what’s going on and you know how they dealt with it.

*Interviewer: Are you involved in any activities in the community?*

I volunteer at home support but other than that nothing. I help pack the noon time meals for meals on wheels. I sometimes do the frozen meals. Volunteer at the bingo. I like to, I guess. My sister’s the head of it and if she needs help she’ll call and I’ll go… just knowing that there’s a service out there that’s provided for seniors that otherwise if it wasn’t there then they probably wouldn’t eat. At one point in time I was going every day to help them pack - a couple of years ago. I actually was over there yesterday helping her but I just stopped in and it was time to pack, so I helped her. *(So you went every day for a while?)* Uhmm. I don’t know a couple of months I guess.
Mental Health and Involvement with Services

I was diagnosed with post-partum depression in 1993 with my first child. Nobody, my family didn’t know about it, like they didn’t know about the illness I had so they took me to the hospital and the doctor said I had [depression]. When they first found out I had it, they were all upset. They don’t know that it will get well because they say… I always have to be on medication for life, forever. *(Who were you living with at that time?)* My parents… I was hearing voices, I thought, like my mom gave medicine to my baby and I thought it was going to kill her. I was so scared… It was Chinese medicine, but I didn’t understand. I thought she was going to kill the baby. I was having thoughts that were not true… I heard voices, I thought people were talking to me on the TV, I don’t want to go out, I don’t want anything to do, I just want to be in the house because I’m afraid. And I look around and I feel strange. *(So you went to the doctor and they diagnosed you with schizophrenia – how long ago was that?)* For eight years now… *(And after you had your baby you started having symptoms again?)* I have back and forth because of quitting my medication and it wouldn’t cure it and it would happen again.

*Interviewer: So you stopped taking your medication?*

… My mom is living here now because I… mix up the medication because the kids would [be taken] from me because I wasn’t on medication… Children’s Aid took them away to a foster care, so my mom was living here to make sure I was taking medication [and it would be] okay for them to come home. *(How long were they in foster care?)* Two months. The summer of July to September of 2001. *(And how long have you been involved with the Children’s Aid Society?)* Almost a year now because last Christmas they were taken away from me [for the] first time and it was about two months too, in November to January… I was at the doctor’s office and the cops came and brought me to the hospital and Children’s Aid came and took the kids. I was scared and thinking ‘why are they taking the kids?’ [I had] brought the kids to the doctor and I was not talking, I was just staring and the doctor knew that I was having symptoms again, so she called Children’s Aid and the police to take me to the hospital. *(Did you stop taking the medication at that time?)* Yeah.

*Interviewer: You were living alone for four years before the babies were taken away. What was that like?*

… I said why is this happening? I had them all myself all those years, how can they take the kids away? I didn’t tell them that. I was just thinking in my mind. *(Did anybody ask you about how you managed to take care of them for all that time before things happened?)* No. I feel sad. I know that I can take care of them even though I have
schizophrenia. …because they don’t know when I have schizophrenia, like it could just happen like that, so they don’t want to take chances with the children’s safety. So I hear voices...

*Interviewer: How old were your children when they went into care that first time? (Seven and four.) Were you part of that decision to place the children? Did you agree to it?*

No, I don’t think I agreed because I got depressed before, but I [was] still taking care of them really good. I don’t harm them and I feed them and stuff but I hear voices also, I start doing things. Like [the CAS thought] I would probably harm them… and you don’t want to take chances… Because before I still took good care of [the kids]… I get sick at home and my sister called the hospital and my mom just looked after them while I was in hospital, but nobody was there, so they tried to call my sister and my parents and nobody was there, so they had to take it to Children’s Aid. Children’s Aid had to take them into care. *(So usually your family would help you with the kids and that’s how you kept them out of foster care, because of your mom and sister?)* Yeah. *(Do they live nearby?)* Umhmm.

*Interviewer: Tell me about the first time the CAS placed your kids*

The first time it was at the doctor’s office. They came and took the kids. *(What was your reaction?)* Scared. *(Did anyone explain to you why this was happening?)* Yeah, they talked to me. *(So you understood why they were making the decision?)* Yeah… I knew it was temporary, because they need to be with somebody that first time. Nobody was there to take them, so they had to bring them to the hospital… I thought when I got out of the hospital they would give them back, but they didn’t. *(So you were out of the hospital about a week later?)* Yeah, but they wouldn’t give them back right away because I would be on my pill, but it’s not that easy. They had to go to court. *(Did you see the kids during those two months?)* Yeah, I’d get to visit them… I talked to them and found out what they do and what they ate.

*Interviewer: You have talked a bit about how it felt to have your kids taken away that first time. How did you feel the second time?*

I feel okay because I knew they’d come home soon. The first time I didn’t know when they were going to come home. I was wondering when. The second time, I knew they’d come home soon. Just make a good plan with the lawyer, how I was going to take the medication and stuff… [The kids] like foster care because they have a lot of friends to play with, but they also miss me. But they kind of forget about me a bit because they have friends to play with. The foster mom will take them to movies, they get entertainment… I wish [CAS] asked me how I feel. I don’t like it that they don’t do that. They just take the kids…

*Interviewer: How were the first few days when they came back from foster care? What was that adjustment like for you?*
My mom was here already, so I feel okay because my mom helped me a lot… Charlie didn’t really want to come back that much because he’s going to miss his friends and he has games like Gameboy to play. They have a lot of stuff for the kids to do. Because usually in here if they sit with me, they usually don’t go anywhere that much.

…I meant it when I told them [CAS] like, because they say that if it happens again, the kids might have to be given up for adoption. So that scares me so I told them I won’t stop taking the medication from now on. I think they might have believed me because I said that so many times and I looked serious… They’d say uh, if the kids are taken again you’ll give them up for adoption. That’s really scary. *(Does your mom come over everyday to make sure you take your medication?)* No she lives here… She moved in since the kids were given back in September. *(Did she move in because of the kids?)* Yeah that’s the plan because they want me to take the medication. If we didn’t make a good plan like that, maybe I won’t have the kids back. It’s tough for them to trust me because I’ve been off the medicine so many times… it’s working good. And next court date is a couple weeks. I don’t know when, I probably go back and I wonder what it’s about. Maybe it’s about Children’s Aid don’t have to be involved anymore. I hope so... It’ll take another six months of supervised visits. They can’t close the case until six more months… I want them to be off my back. I don’t like them asking questions. I don’t like them being involved.

**Interviewer:** So you have a court date and you’re not quite sure why you’re going. Do you have someone that you can ask or talk to?

Yeah, my worker hasn’t called me yet, so she’ll probably call when she knows the date. *(Have you been to court a lot?)* Just two times when the kids were in foster homes. We went to court about twice… I don’t really like going there because…they know that I have stopped taking medication so many times that how come I’m so stubborn? Why does it happen? But I still do that, and I told them that when I was gaining weight… a lot of people say that too and they all think that I’m pregnant. They say are you pregnant or gaining weight. I get embarrassed and I kept saying no. It’s from the medication… I stopped taking medication and then I’d go back on it for a while after that. But they don’t want that. They want me to take it all the time

**Interviewer:** Who decided that your mom should move in to help you with the kids?

I asked Children’s Aid if it was a good idea if my mom lived here to see that I’m taking the medication and they said it was good. [My mom] thinks it’s a good idea. She wants the kids home as much as I do.

**Interviewer:** Did you have the same worker the first time as the second time?

Yeah. She’s nice, but I wish they wouldn’t be in my case anymore. Like I hope they don’t have to be involved anymore and let me get on with my life… I don’t really like… anyone to know about my life. They have to get all the information and that’s what I don’t like. Private stuff… [The CAS worker] hasn’t called since after Christmas. She
hasn’t called yet to come and see me. *(Has anybody come to visit and see how the kids are doing?)* Yeah, Canadian Mental Health is involved. She set up that…like maybe my doctor, in case it happened again, they could call her [mental health nurse] instead of Children’s Aid and they wouldn’t take the kids again then. Because her role is not to take the kids away, it’s just to help me. *(How often does she visit?)* Every two weeks… We don’t stay here all the time, we go out and talk. She knows I don’t want Children’s Aid to be involved and I want to get on with my life. She can help with that too. Maybe after court if the judge agrees… Children’s Aid doesn’t have to be involved. *(So what would that mean for you if it was just community mental health that was involved?)* It makes me feel better because I don’t have the fear that my kids will be taken away again… [The community mental health nurse] were involved the second time the kids were taken away… Children’s Aid phoned them. It was just to get my life on track… it’s helpful because they give me good advice… The community health worker, she doesn’t take the kids away, and Children’s Aid does. She doesn’t talk about my pills…Children’s Aid does. *(What kinds of things do you and the community mental health nurse talk about?)* What I want to do with my life to get it on track. *(What are your plans?)* I don’t know yet… Community mental health [nurse], we go out for lunch and talk. We talk like friends, it’s not like business. And the Children’s Aid lady do it like business, professional.

*Interviewer:* *What does the Children’s Aid worker do when she comes to visit?*

She would take notes, write down what I say, how much medication I’m taking, how much, she saw me, she saw the kids and she writes notes. *(How does it make you feel when she’s here in the house?)* …It seems very long. *(Does it make you feel uncomfortable when she’s taking all those notes?)* Umhm *(Do you think that she’s helping in any way?)* Yeah… She asks if I need anything for the kids… She’ll get clothes [for the kids].

*Interviewer:* *Was that your first time being involved with Children’s Aid, when they first placed the kids?*

They were involved before when I had Charlie [youngest son]. I was on my own and they come over and check how things were. They were involved when Charlie was born [for about a year]… they were trying to take Isaac [oldest son] into daycare… They just wanted Isaac to go in daycare so I don’t have two small kids alone. *(Did you like having them involved at that time?)* Yeah, the first year it was okay. They were helpful. *(And you said your family physician had arranged that?)* Yeah.

**Growing up**

… I grew up here. I came here since I was five and I don’t know much about my country… Laos… It’s near Thailand, Vietnam. *(So your parents immigrated to Canada when you were five? And you don’t remember much about it?)* Yeah. *(Do you speak Laos?)* [English] and Laos. *(Do your children know how to speak Laos?)* They know a
little bit, but they usually speak English... I lived in [city] before. About eight or nine years and then moved here because the housing over there is too expensive... Both my parents, they have their first husband and wife before they met each other. (In Laos?) Yeah. My dad was married to my stepmom and my mom was married to my stepdad. So they’re my parents right now. The two of them that are together.

Interviewer: Your mom has moved in with you to help you out. Where is your dad staying?

My father’s at home. (How is that for him to be separated from your mom for a while?) I think it’s okay because like my mom gets mad at my dad and she leaves him for a while and comes back, so I think he’s used to it. (Does she go home to visit?) Yeah... [and] my dad usually picks me up to go to the doctor or whatever... [my mother] goes to visit [my father] but she doesn’t sleep there though because she sleeps here to make sure I’m taking the medication.

Interviewer: So you grew up in Canada. What was that like for you?

I played with friends after school and when it was Halloween I would go trick or treating. I could do all those things. It’s not like some people who came here when they were sixteen or seventeen. I get to do everything and I started from Kindergarten all the way up. I didn’t miss anything. (What was your favourite part?) Playing with my sister. Because I’m really older and we don’t play with each other anymore. I miss that. Playing with her and her friends. She’s older than me...

Interviewer: Do you remember going to school or learning to speak English?

Yeah. I don’t remember if it was hard. I think I just learned it gradually. (And did your parents speak English when they came?) No... I didn’t pick up school easily. Like in [grade] four or five I started struggling with it. I don’t know if the teacher knows that I have special needs and learning disability but I think I do because I have to go to another school that is much easier. The teacher is much easier. Like in high school I had to go to another school too. They passed me, but when I came down to [school] it was hard for me, but they passed me to go to high school. It was an easier school. I’m a bit slower and struggling with things at my level. (What grade was it when you went to the special school?) It was grade five. (But they didn’t tell you that you had a special or learning disability?) But I wish they’d tell me what I have, because I want to know. Like when I go to the high school, it’s easier. I do really well in it. But when I go to a regular school, I have difficulty. And the teacher would say how come you do so well over there but not here and I just don’t know how to answer to her. (So it was grade five when you went to a special school and you did well and you were in special classes through high school.) And I did really well, but I go to a regular school and I do really poorly...The course was so hard. Like math and geography, history, I’m not good at it. All the courses I do really bad, like if I do a test I get one or two right. That’s why I think I have special needs... I don’t know how to study, I just copy the notes and try to memorize. I didn’t know how you’re really supposed to study. (Did you like it once you switched to the different
Yeah… I’m happy. I do well, and I’m not lazy to do my homework, because I know I have to do it. At the other school, when I have work or have a project, I don’t know how to do it and I get upset. I can’t do it.

Interviewer: What grade did you go to?

When I moved to [town] I was in grade seven or grade eight. But I was in a regular school though, because I just go to the school nearby my house. They passed me to grade nine but they had to send me to a special school. (So all through high school you were in a special school for special needs?) And grade 12… (Did you have lots of friends at school?) Yeah. (Did you like school back then?) Yeah. (And did your friends like school as well?) No, they all wanted to have fun, they don’t want to study… They just kind of make fun of me. They say you study too hard, Goody Two Shoes or something. They all see me have a book, my nose in the book… It kind of got me upset because they called me Goody Two Shoes… I just ignored them…

Interviewer: Did you graduate high school?

Yeah, grade 12. (And what did you do after high school?) I stayed home. I didn’t do much… I wanted to be a medical secretary, but I went to college, um, I went to college and they could test me and they say I have a [grade] 3 or 4 level. That’s what I mean. My English or anything. That’s why when I go to a regular school, I have trouble with it. I take a computer course [at local college], I have trouble with it too. I have a hard time when they’re explaining how to do the work.

Interviewer: When did you go to college? When did they test you?

After I [had] my first child after high school, a couple months… I don’t like it, because I feel I’m not smart. Like I’m so far, I’m so slow in my grades… I didn’t go to upgrade because every time I applied, I got post-partum depression and I got sick and I cancelled it so many times. About three times. And then about two years ago, I went to college for computers. (So you didn’t go back to school at all with your first son. You waited, you had another son.) Yeah, he was three… I just wanted to um, I just wanted to work in an office, so I needed to take computer courses. My employment advisors say I need to take a computer course and I wanted to do like office work, because you need computer skills. (So how did you manage two children working full time and going back to school?) Well my mom helped with the kids. (Were you going to school at night?) Yeah, it was at night… I didn’t get a diploma because I’m not done yet, but I’m have some difficulties, I think I’m not going to go to school anymore because it’s a waste of money. One course is almost $200, and I took about eight, nine, ten courses…

Becoming a Mother

After high school, I had my first child. (How was your pregnancy? Did it go well?) Yeah, everything went well, the labour went well, no complications. The second child, I born him even faster than the first child. I born him right away. (What’s their age
difference? ) Three years. ( Did you stay at home those first three years with your mom and dad? ) Yes. ( And when did you move out on your own in the apartment you said you were living in? ) When I had my second child. ( What was that like? ) It felt okay because… my mom doesn’t have to be there. I don’t want her to do everything for me. I want to take responsibility… My mom helped me take care of my first child and she took care of most everything. The second child I did for myself. But she usually would feed it, take a bath with him. My first child, she… I was living with her, but she was kind of like wasting it, because she’s out doing most of the stuff.

Interviewer: Are your children her only grandchildren?

My sister has two kids. [ My mother ] has other daughters, but we have other stepsisters and stuff because she was married twice and my dad was married twice. So she had like seven children in total with her other husband. So her daughters, one has five kids and one has four and my other sister has two and I have two. ( Are you close to your mom? ) Yeah. ( Does your sister visit a lot? ) Yeah, every day because she drops the kids off… They play well [ together ]. I don’t like the kids running because I’m scared [ of the neighbours ]. They might be upset and complain. The kids running around… Because they haven’t complained yet, but I’m afraid they might later on. It’s hard though for the kids not to run. If they complain I don’t know what to tell them. ( Are your kids about the same age as your sister’s kids? ) Yeah. ( And what does your sister have? ) Two girls. It’s funny, she has two girls I have two boys.

Children

… I always liked kids. Ever since I was little, I liked babysitting them and holding them and stuff. I thought maybe when I grew up I can’t have kids on my own because I like kids so much that I won’t be able to conceive. It happens a lot to people who like kids so much, they can’t conceive. ( Did you have other friends your age with babies? ) Yeah, at school, some of my friends were pregnant. Even younger… I miss my kids when they were babies. I wish I could turn back the clock. I miss that so much. And I miss being pregnant too, I liked the movement inside of me. Some people don’t like it, maybe they have problems during pregnancy.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you first found out you were going to be a mom?

… [ my parents ] were shocked. They said “you’re pregnant? You’re too young!” ( How old were you? ) 17. No, it was 18. ( Were you ready to have a baby? ) Not really, I was scared… my family doesn’t believe in abortion. Adoption is worse than that. I wouldn’t want to give it up. When I see the baby, I’m going to want to keep it. So I knew I was going to keep the baby… [ he ] felt so precious and so cute and I can’t believe I have a baby. It’s so cute. It’s so small, he was a really tiny baby. Only five pounds… He was about three weeks early… When I born him he didn’t want to eat, so I had to bring him back to the hospital. That’s what made me have depression in the first place too because I was worried about him being in the hospital, if he was going to die, if they would be
able to feed him. He wouldn’t eat anything at all. And he was having jaundice, his face was so yellow. *(And how long did your depression go on?)* I have it then until now. *(Is part of the medications you take for depression?)* Yeah… the medication helps.

*Interviewer: How did you handle having a baby and dealing with the depression?*

I didn’t know I could get help from public health nurse and stuff… I was good after having my first child and I don’t know what to do, if I’d be able to raise it on my own but eventually when I came home the public health nurse came over and they helped me. They helped me how to prepare the bottles before feeding and how to make the formula. They helped me for about a year and that helped…

*Interviewer: So your second baby, was that a surprise? Was that planned?*

The second baby I wasn’t scared. It was planned… I went to find out if it was a girl, but he was a boy. I was still happy, I wanted a girl though. I had the name already for the girl. *(Did you suffer any depression after Charlie was born?)* Yeah, for a couple months… I was exhausted, so tired, I didn’t have enough sleep.

*Interviewer: What are your kids like?*

My older son, he’s quieter than the second one and he’s shy. Like my second son is more outgoing. He’s not shy, he’s not as quiet and that’s a difference… *(And your older son is very good at school right?)* My oldest son, like I don’t know…he wants to do times table already. *(And what about your younger son?)* I’m concerned though about whether he’s going to have learning disabilities because his alphabet is all mixed up yet… Because all of a sudden he has problems. *(Do you work with him at home?)* Yeah, and he still gets it mixed up and I get frustrated. I did that a couple times already. I take four or five alphabet out and he doesn’t know them still… He can’t concentrate. Maybe he doesn’t recognize how it looks… I’m really worried about it. *(Does your mom work with them too, help them with school?)* No, she doesn’t know English that well. *(So does she speak to them in English?)* No, my parents can speak Vietnamese as well. *(Do the children understand her when she’s speaking it?)* Yeah.

… Isaac, he’s really good at drawing. He draws really good dinosaurs with animals. He gets a book and copies and he’s really good. Since kindergarten he’s really good. Maybe he’ll be an artist… I think drawing is not really important. I want him to learn math and geometry. I want him to become a professional, like a doctor or lawyer… I just um, want him to have something that he wants to do, but really I want him to become a doctor. *(Do you have any idea what your younger son’s talents are?)* No… Like the other boy, when he was in Kindergarten he liked to draw already. But Charlie, he hasn’t shown any signs. He just makes lines and scribbles, so I don’t know where he stands.

*Interviewer: So Isaac does well in school, he’s really a natural at school. Where does he get that from? Like were your parents good in school?*
Yeah, my dad, he’s smart… I tell him all the time, do your homework, do good in school, concentrate. Don’t talk when the teacher’s talking. If the teacher sees that he talks while she’s talking, he talks with his friend, so he should um, he shouldn’t do that. (Do you read a lot?) To the kids? …I read to the kids most of the while.

Interviewer: What’s it like being a mom?

It’s hard work… I like doing things with them. Play games. (What’s the hardest part about being a mom?) Waking up early and you can’t sleep in like you used to. You have to wake up early and get them breakfast and stuff. And [when the kids] was small, you had to wake up in the night to feed them and I don’t like that. When they’re newborn you have to feed them every three hours.

Typical Days

Interviewer: What is a typical week like for you?

Just get up at 7:30, give my son breakfast, and then my older son goes to school and I play with my younger son until 11:50. (Your younger son, does he go to school half a day, Monday to Friday?) Yeah. (And do you take care of your sister’s kids every afternoon?) Except on Friday… I walk [Charlie] to school and then I come home and I watch TV, I do some dishes, and I watch my soaps… I like Days. Now I like Passions too now, because I want Sharon and Louis to find each other. It’s after Days. I’ve been watching Days of our Lives since I was in grade six or five… [My mom] told me don’t watch that. You’re thinking too much. They’re always fighting and you’re always liking two people… [After the shows] I clean up the dishes and cook and get ready for the kids to come home. I clean up a little because the house is always a mess with kids… [then] pick up my kids and get them something to eat and my older son, he turns on his favourite program and then his dinner and then watch TV. [We sometimes] play some games like monopoly and then watch TV and brush teeth and go to sleep… they like to see Pokemon and Dragonball Z and I help with the homework if they have any. And I read them a story sometimes. (What time do you get them into bed at night?) 8:30… they want to stay up until 9… so I say okay, half an hour more. Yeah, I stay up until ten. (So you have about an hour to yourself before you go to bed. What do you do?) I still watch TV. I like watching TV. I like movies. (What does your mom do during the day?) She cleans up and she helps with the kids and she goes to work at the chicken place… She goes really early, about four or five in the morning, to six o’clock at night.

Interviewer: What do you and your kids do for fun?

I have birthdays for my kids. A small party, just family… Last week [Isaac] slept at one of his friend’s house and his friend’s dad brought him home. (How does it feel that Isaac is old enough that he’s going over to friend’s houses for sleepovers?) I get scared, like I see later on him having girls over… [he is] eight. So ten years [from] now he’s 18 and he’ll be doing stuff…
… I [like to] rent movies and watch. *(Are they movies the kids can watch?)* Yeah. *[The kids]* like Disney movies. The boys still like Snow White… But I also watch horror movies when the kids are in bed. *(How often a week do you rent movies?)* Once a week. *(On weekends?)* Yeah… I like taking the kids to the library. *(Do you like to read?)* Yeah, and pick out books.

*Interviewer: What’s a typical weekend like for you?*

Go out, see a movie, go party…dancing… *(at a club?)* Yeah… I [also] go to the casino and have fun. It’s kind of like entertaining. *(So your mom stays with the boys when you go out?)* Umhm. *(Your girlfriends that you go out with on the weekend, do they know about your medication and your involvement with community mental health?)* No… I know them from work… They have kids too. *(Do you talk about the kids when you go out?)* No. *(Any boyfriend? Dating?)* No.

**Religion and Ethnicity**

*Interviewer: I was recalling that you have some beautiful decorations of Laosian artwork. I was wondering if you could tell me, is your ethnic background very important to you, is that something you want the kids to know about?*

I never thought about it because I don’t really remember. I was so young. *(And these decorations?)* I just like them and I got it as a gift… I’m just going to tell [my kids] where I’m from and that they all are kind of Canadian and have a part of Laos. *[My older son can speak] Vietnamese, and he understands a bit of Laosian. And I speak Laosian but no Vietnamese…the older son takes French courses at school. *(Do you speak Laosian a lot at home?)* Usually English, because I struggle with Laosian a little bit. *(Do your parents stay in touch with their roots?)* Yeah. *[mom’s] a Buddhist, she takes that really seriously. She really believes in Buddhist. *(Is that your faith as well?)* Umhm *(And the kids then, are you teaching them about Buddhism?)* Yeah. *(Do your mom and dad attend temple and practice Buddhism on a regular basis?)* Not regularly… They usually like…they like to gamble, so they don’t have time to go to the temple and stuff. They like gambling. *(Is it important to you that the kids to learn about Buddhism?)* Yeah. *[But] I don’t practice anything with them… Just tell them about it, go to temple, we pray, we do it…like, it’s an idol, the Buddha. *(Do you eat traditional foods?)* Yeah… Noodle soup, rice with some soup and um…chicken with the ginger…fried vegetables. *(And how about music?)* My parents, they listen to Laosian music or Vietnamese.

**Work and Finances**

*Interviewer: How are finances?*

It’s okay, I’m on disability and he helps me a lot because I’m a single mom. It’s like a month allowance… [it’s] tight, but disability gives me more… I used to be like a data clerk, about a year ago. Like a…typing…uh, I don’t know how to say it…data entry?
(Putting numbers in a computer?) Yeah. (And how long did you do that?) About a year. (Did you like it?) Yeah. I miss the people I work with.

Interviewer: So how long were you working at the data entry job?

About a year. (And how long does it take you to complete a computer course?) I take two courses at a time. Like the course…it goes for three months, each course, so I take two courses at a time… It was hard…I didn’t do really well… Most of the courses I go 70 or 58 or something. Like I just passed. It’s not really good, like I don’t get 80s and 90s. except for Word. Word 97, I got a hundred exactly. But the typing or data processing, I do really good in it. I take Word and I do really well or keyboarding, I get 100 too. Typing speed. But simply accounting or Windows 98 or Windows 95…other courses like that, I don’t get good grades.

Interviewer: Do you still hope to work in an office?

I want to, but I don’t think they’re going to hire me. I’m not good enough…I applied for Sears, working there at the cosmetics counter, but they haven’t called me. I gave them my resume…last summer. Like the Bay, I wanted to work at the cosmetics counter, they didn’t call me. I gave them my resume. (So is that what you’d ideally like to be doing, working at a cosmetic counter at a big department store?) Yeah. (What about office work?) Yeah, I would love that job, answering phones or um, having data entry and filing. I would like that job if they would hire me… I like typing. Yeah. Looking at the paper and then typing it down…I work at, like you know for co-op in high school, I work at clinic, and I do really well in that filing and calling out patients to go the room. And um, my office manager said on the resume that I would make an excellent data typist…data clerk, typist…

… I sell Mary Kay at home… It’s okay… I ask people if they want facials. I’ve been doing it for a year or two years now. My sister knew about it. She went to [college] work fair and she thought I would be interested, like make-up and stuff. It’s your own business, so you can go out and do it whenever you want. But if I feel lazy I don’t do it for a while. (Is it something you spend a lot of time on or just do it when you feel like it?) When I feel like it.

Interviewer: What do you like about selling cosmetics?

I just like makeup. I like learning about makeup and um, just like to work with colours, what shades would look good with that type of clothing. It goes with what colour clothing you wear. Like cool, warm, neutral colour. (And does Mary Kay train you in those things?) Yeah. It’s free. You go once a week, you go to a Mary Kay meeting, and they kind of train you on the products. You get a little training.

Interviewer: And where do you see yourself in five years?

52
I want to still sell Mary Kay. *(What else would you like to do?)* I just want to work in an office. My dream would come true.
Note about Julie’s Story: In conversation before the interview began, the interviewer found out that Julie’s boyfriend, who is the father of her youngest child, does not live with her, but he apparently visits every day after work. Both Julie and her boyfriend work full time. The interview only lasted about 30 minutes; Julie took part in this one meeting only, which was cut short, and she failed to keep subsequent appointments. Therefore, we have only a small amount of information about her life. However, we include this story because it may offer information that is different from that of the other stories.

Children

My life went downhill since I had my kids. I had Scott when I had just turned 17. I was doing all right with my family and Scott’s father. We were together and we were doing all right, as best can be at that age. Actually his father is a little older than me - he was 24 at the time. I’d say Scott was about, maybe three, four months old when I started being abused. I was spending too much time with my son is what I was always told. When Scott was about six months old, I ended up in the hospital because I was thrown across the room, with a miscarriage… I had lost my best friend at the same time, which was my aunt, she died of cancer. I had found out I was pregnant once again, that would be with Blake. (So, Scott, then the miscarriage and …) Yeah, and then Blake. And then I was abused too many times, too long. I was always told, you know, I was good for nothing, nobody would ever want me. The only one that would ever think of me was because I had a son and I was easy. I started to fight him back. I left. I didn’t even tell him I was pregnant with Blake. Well, he eventually found out anyway because he had visitations with Scott at the time, we were going through court then and I had interim custody and I moved into an apartment above my mom. And everything was great at that point, you know, family was there for me, supporting me. I had good friends at the time, that’s what everybody says. It then changed. But anyway I don’t really know how it happened but I guess it was the post-partum depressing is what they call it. I started going downhill where I didn’t have energy for cleaning or basically anything at the time and I had a friend move in with me and we were giving my mom the rent. My mom was spending it on other things so I lost my apartment.

Interviewer: So, you gave your mom the rent and she didn’t pay it? Is that what you’re saying?

No, because my brother was living with my mom at the time and she said she paid it. The landlord was banging on my door for the money and my brother said she was
All of the sudden she didn’t like my friends. Children’s Aid was called on me. Actually that was the day that the aunt that has the boys now, she had taken the boys and she was only supposed to have them for the weekend while we packed up the stuff and I got a Children’s Aid worker at my door telling me I’m not getting the boys back. I definitely went downhill from there. I don’t remember it all clearly. I moved in with my friend and her mom. Well basically her whole family, like her brother and sister and everybody was there. I started drinking. I was at the bar Thursday nights, Friday nights, Sunday nights, Monday nights. *(How old would you have been?)* Blake was eight months old when they took him from me, 20 [years old]. I don’t know, that’s basically all I did was drink and I hung around with the wrong crowd for a while. I was hanging around downtown [city] and I actually got the sense smacked into me a couple months later. My friend’s mom actually smacked me. It got to the point where I went to go visit the boys for Christmas and I sat by myself at the dinner table while everybody else sat downstairs. None of the family would talk to me. I wanted to leave but I didn’t want to leave because the boys. I never got to see them much anyway. I had dirty looks, I had the hmms, and nods and sighs and stuff. I guess I was living with my friend’s family for three months, four months. Yeah, I think it was February when I moved into the group home.

*Interviewer: So, you moved into a group home?*

Yes. A women’s shelter for young mothers… The hell house they called it. It was the only place I had at the time. From Children’s Aid I had to go to a parenting group and I met a couple girls that lived there. So, I went and seen what it was like and I thought it was a nice place at the time. So I went back and told my friend’s mom that I was moving and within that month I ended up moving in a couple days anyway. Like I left my stuff at their house, but whatever I needed I had there. From there I started talking to my mom again. I started getting regular visits with the boys. I got two days a week to visit with them for two hours and then it went up to four hours. Then I eventually had them four hours for one day and then the other day was actually Saturday and I had one sleep over night and then alternate on weekends. *(So, the sleeping overnight was at the women’s shelter?)* Yes, but I had problems there with one of the board members there. She’s the director… We never really liked each other to begin with and I was in counselling with [counselling agency]. My friend’s mom works there and I was going through counselling through there and the lady from [the shelter] called Children’s Aid saying that I was spending all hours of the night downtown and blah, blah, blah which … *(Were you?)* No, I’d go from my counselling, because I knew everybody there. Sure after counselling I’d sit and have a pop, have a smoke and then I’d leave from there and go back to the house. Curfew at [the shelter] is 11 o’clock weekdays, one o’clock weekends. I ended up being the only one in the house most of the time because my curfew was eight o’clock. I had four hours out a day. If I had to go out anywhere after my four hours was up … *(So, who set the curfew?)* Children’s Aid, my lovely worker. I didn’t find it fair because I wasn’t hanging downtown. I got banned from [counselling agency], only to go see my counsellor. Because that’s downtown so that’s considered hanging downtown. I went to counselling. I went for drug and alcohol assessments… They said that I had a slight problem in the past, which would have been my downfall after losing the boys. I didn’t
have a problem at the time and they didn’t see a problem for the future. *(When did all this happen?)* Michelle is now three. My assessment was actually done a couple weeks before she was born actually. I quit drinking totally when I moved, about a month after I moved in with my friend’s family. *(Okay, so has that problem ever resurfaced for you?)* No, I’ve had occasional drinks, like for somebody’s birthday or Christmas or whatever. Or maybe at home and the kids are sleeping, you know, somebody comes over to visit, haven’t seen them in a while.

**Family of Origin**

My mom’s an alcoholic. We grew up with it. Well, she’s not as bad as she used to be. Like my mom well, I call him daddy, when my step dad came when I was 11 or 12. They’d drink with friends and they’d drink until they were beating the crap out of each other. My brother and I had seen it all. Then all the sudden, my brother and I got to a certain age… I would have been 13 so my brother would have been 11, when we started getting involved in the fights where we’d jump in, you know, you’re hitting my mom or whatever. Or if we saw mom hit dad first and the other way around. So, that’s why basically Children’s Aid was called on me because my family didn’t want to see me become like my mom… Actually if you look back in the [local newspaper] you’ll see my dad-dad. *(Your dad-dad? Which one is your dad-dad?)* It’s kind of confusing because we have my biological father I’ve never met, my dad-dad, which I’m just talking about, is my brother’s dad. He’s the one who’s raised me and then there’s our step-dad that is around now.

*Interviewer: Okay. So, when you were talking about the fighting and stuff, that was your dad-dad?*

No, that would be my step-dad. *(Why do you call him your dad-dad?)* Well, actually I’ve got lots of other words for him… He is actually not part of my life anymore. He’s shit to me. I could care less for him. The kids will never know him. But anyway, if you go back in years, I was born in ’78, my brother was born in ’80, ‘81, ’82, he [dad-dad] was picketing the Children’s Aid building… That was when my mom and him broke up and I don’t know what the real story is, I haven’t been able to find these newspaper clippings, like because I don’t know exactly when it happened. My dad would say that we came to his house dirty or we had marks on us, like hand marks, bruises, stuff like that. My mom would say that we would come back from dad’s like that.

*Interviewer: How old would you have been?*

My brother would have been just a baby and I would have been two. I don’t know nothing, but I was informed that the one day my dad came home from work and he had asked where I was and my mom said ‘the little bitch is in her bed’. When my dad came in the room I was covered from head to toe in pooh and it was all over the walls I guess. Like any normal little kid, my kids have done it to me, you know, play with the diaper, write on the wall, type of thing. I don’t find that I don’t get mad, I don’t call them names, I don’t beat them, whatever because of it but if I find it funnier when it’s somebody else’s
(So, did you go into care at that age or do you know?) I don’t know who went into care but if we did anything bad we were really threatened that we were going to be dropped off at Children’s Aid. I know my mom dropped me off a couple times, I don’t know what age I was, but she just left me there and came back a couple hours later. She said that she couldn’t handle me… She said she couldn’t handle me now, she’d be back later and she’d be back later. (Do you know if you were ever in care?) Not that I know of, no. I remember her taking my brother and moving out west. I lived with my grandparents. (How old would you have been?) Six. I was in kindergarten. I lived with my grandparents about a year and then she came back and got me. We lived out in B.C., then we came back here, then we moved back to [B.C.], we came back here, we moved to [Quebec city], we came back here and we’ve been in one, two, three, four, five places.

Interviewer: So, you remember moving a lot?

Oh, yeah. It was a trademark. My biological father was looking for me and every time he got closer we’d move… I’ve heard stories. I’ve met him once that I know of. I met my great grandmother before she passed away and I have a good relationship with my one uncle and I’ve met two other uncles, two aunts. I’ve never met my grandparents well, my grandmother has passed away and my grandfather remarried. I’ve never met them but I’ve even talked to one of my sisters and then she disappeared again. I talked to a brother and he lives around here somewhere in [city]. Other than that I know there’s others. Like I thought that I only had my sister is a year older than me, I have a brother two years younger than me. Pete, my biological father, he had two kids and I just found out actually two, three days ago that he now has two more and he’s in jail…

Children’s Aid Society

Interviewer: So, it’s Michelle and Hailey who live with you? (Yes.) And where is Scott and Blake?

They live with my aunt. She lives on [in the same city]. (And you’re involved with [Children’s Aid] of [city]?) Off and on, yeah. I had a case with them for the boys and I gave my aunt custody almost a year ago. (Were they made Crown wards or…) They were and then I thought because of having the girls that it would be best for them to stay with my aunt until I got a good job, place where I can support all of them and … (So, is there still a possibility that the boys will come back?) Eventually, yes… We were in court and their father came back and wanted custody and I thought the best thing to do was to give them to her [aunt] right now and she’s got full custody and I get them every second weekend. Well, I see them every weekend and weekdays anyway, so … They haven’t been adopted, no.

Interviewer: So… when was approximately the last time C.A.S. came around to open your case again with the girls? Do you know?

They were here in January to visit. (And did you have an open case all the time or did it close?) I’m not quite sure. They never told me. They just came to visit again. There is
actually a girl that lives across the hall from me that knows people that I used to hang around with and she calls Children’s Aid when she feels like it.

*Interviewer:* So in January an intake worker came?

My old worker was here, yeah. And she was here last night too. And she told me that they’ll be coming to see me once a week, once every two weeks until November. *(And have you had, I take it, have you had to go back to court again?)* No.
Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn – Mother Interviewed
Dan – Kaitlyn’s Husband
John – Kaitlyn’s Son
Erin – Kaitlyn’s Daughter

Relationship with Husband

Well, I’ll start with Dan (Kaitlyn’s husband)... We got married January 27th, 1984 in the United church in [small community]. A little ceremony, just us. And maid of honour and best man stood up for us, yeah. And then we had a party afterwards at his parents’ house where the aunts, uncles, grandparents, things like that came. Had a little reception and that, it was nice. My mother was drunk during my wedding, but she was an alcoholic so that was fine. Well, it wasn’t fine but you know what I mean. And she slept through the reception and then her parents took her home afterwards... I went to University for a few months in general science and then left there. The reason I left I guess is because Dan only had a grade nine education and was kind of jealous of my being up there at the time and stuff and kind of helped pressure me into leaving and then I eventually married him so that was okay. (How old were you when you got married?) 20... So, we were married in January, ’84. John [son] came in September of ’85, Erin [daughter] was August of ’90.

My husband was a truck driver. He drove a dump truck... We had really good, I mean everyone has their fights and stuff like that. You know, it wasn’t a perfect marriage, no, nothing is. We had fun, we owned boats and dirt bikes and seadoos and trailers. We’ve always been camping. You know, his family and us did stuff. You know, pit falls up and down, normal stuff, you know. He got cancer, testicle cancer in ’94. He had a testicle removed in June of ’94 because if it and it was perfectly cleared, never showed up... December of ’96 he started having problems with his abdominals and that but his boss was in the hospital being operated on at that time so he couldn’t... he was still driving. He worked with them for 12 years so what else did he do? So, he went back to the doctors in January. They found a tumour and did a biopsy on it and it came back cancerous. The oncologist booked him and he saw the surgeon on Monday and he was operated on the next week. So, once we found out it was cancerous and we went back to the oncologist it was like two weeks and he was operated on in two weeks. Because the tumour was so low down in his rectum he had a colostomy. We were told he’d be done if it grew back. And that was February, just after his birthday, February of ’97.

He never really recovered fully from it... just before Thanksgiving of that year, ’97 he went back to the doctor again and he still was not feeling right. Anyway we found out on November the 17th that it turned out to be cancer from the lungs from the rectal cancer, that that had spread. And he was given two months to two years at that point in time to live. He did not want to go through chemo. I mean the most it could do was slow it down or maybe shrink it a tiny bit... He died September 16th of ’98 from it... He didn’t have the look of being really, really sick or anything like that and the final was really quick
which was nice for him. You know? And I was there. He didn’t want anyone else there. He wanted to die in the hospital. I was there and a nurse came in and was with me when he died. And that was it… For myself, I don’t know, you go through all the stages of grief but a lot of it I could deal with while Dan was there because we knew he was going to die. So, the anger, the blaming, the guilt part, like ‘what did I do to bring this onto me?’ like the whole bit, we dealt with a lot of it together. Making plans for the future we dealt with. He was the one that suggested I go back to school. He was the one, you know, we looked around and he said well, you should go into nursing…

Coping

Interviewer: So, how long has it been now since your husband passed away?

3 years… I think I was working on autopilot and because it’s a great loss. And then the disciplining of the children and I kind of let them get away with lots of things because I felt guilty that they had lost their dad. And so they kind of took advantage of that too, as children tend to do. And so now I’m putting the foot back down and saying okay, now, you have to clean up the house, you have to clean up your bedroom, you have to help out with chores, get them back to where we used to be with routines but it took me about two and a half years to get myself to be back into life. That happened about June of this year. I bottomed out… gave up on doing a lot of things. I just slept a lot and slept a lot and I gained weight considerably. I went to the doctor. He diagnosed depression after he took the usual tests and that to make sure it wasn’t thyroid and all of that. He put me on antidepressants. They helped me… Because it’s a clinic they also had a therapist. So, I went over there and also talked to them for a while. I also went to grieving in [city] at the coping centre. I went up there and took some classes. My children both had grieving classes with the [city] Educational Board. [At the] coping centre, I think it was a ten-week session once a week for ten weeks. It was helpful in a way to hear different people’s points of views on things that have happened and how they cope with different things. And I still bottomed out, still didn’t want to do anything, still didn’t clean up the house. The only thing I had to do were things I had to do. Like when I ran out of clothes you had to do laundry, you know. No dishes left to eat off of, you had to do dishes type deal. And I was also going through CPR and going back to school. I didn’t have any biology, like my OAC biology so I took a preparatory biology course and then started school in February right after he died because that was the next intake to go into it.

School was like an automatic pilot type deal. I went there, I did the stuff. I still did not put a hundred percent of what I could into it but then I just couldn’t feel like it, I didn’t feel like it. My marks were okay. I passed along. You know, I mean they were in the 80’s, 90’s, 70’s so they weren’t bad marks. I mean we have to have a 65 to pass. So, they stayed up there but still, you know, you come home and you have the kids and worry about them and doing your homework, it got tiring… antidepressants helped but they kind of left you dead-feeling which is what they’re supposed to do I guess, but it was hard to feel emotion one way or the other. (Are you still on them?) No, I’m not on them anymore. I did go off them and then had to go back on them and then I went off them again and you know it’s okay now… Like all of 2001 I’ve been off them… The first
week after he died… I can understand you know how they say other people’s spouses have died over a broken heart. I could see that from the feelings I was going through but again because he didn’t die suddenly we had some time to talk about it, like you have to keep going for the children and things like that. And then I started back to school and I’d sit there and eat and I didn’t feel like doing anything but sleeping all the time and that’s when I had antidepressants too but then I gained all this weight back. So, then it was hard going through some of the classes in school like when we talked about grief and watched a video talking about when their spouse had died. That was kind of tough and different things like that. As I said, the antidepressants helped get you out of wanting to sleep. They let you carry on with daily life but they still kept you dead feeling. You still had times like if I passed and saw his dump truck that he used to drive, you know, or certain song would make you want to cry… It’s taken me quite a while to get out of it.

*Interviewer:* It sounds like that was sort of a big change for you in your life. How would you describe your life living before your husband got sick and after he died?

Well, before as I said, we were half organized. We knew where things were, the house was clean and tidy. The kids had their chores. I vacuumed every day, you know, dishes were done every night things like that. After he died I couldn’t be bothered, I didn’t have the energy and then when I slid, the kids let it slide and then, you know, it got to a really bad point. As I got back into life I’m starting to get things done, dishes are done, you can see floor, which is … It is progress, believe me, you should see the pictures of it. Family and Children Services took pictures of it before, but you can actually see floor now, which is better than it was. And I mean it’s not bad.

For me it was hard because you go to work, you come home, you have supper, you get, you know, do things, watch T.V., get the kids to bed and then you would talk about the day’s events, like what happened or who did this or this is a silly thing your nephew did, you know. So, I would have nobody to talk to at night so that was tough that way not having, you know, somebody to say well, this happened or that happened… I had like support systems. Not so much his parents and in-laws and stuff because they were going through their own grieving process too, but my mother was pretty good. You know, I had a few friends. Like I made friends in school too and they were really good at supporting me and I have two really good friends who I’m going to school with. One is up in [northern town] right now and the other one lives just a few blocks away from me and I had a friend from where I used to work, she actually works here in [town] and she has been really good. Like she would come over and talk to me if I needed her in the middle of the night or, you know, the first night he died she took me for a drive at two o’clock in the morning because I had to go out and go to my trailer and so, you know, she was good. It’s good to have supports like that, you know, because you have to be supportive for your own children. By the time you deal with yourself, you can’t.

*Interviewer:* So, tell me about being a mother through all of that.

It’s tough. You try to listen to them, you know, but you’re going through your own pain and they’re going through their pain. Meals were more easy like let’s go out here to eat
or let’s go to Burger King or something like that because I couldn’t be bothered to cook so and that also wasted a lot of the money too. So, that part was tough and having a house was tough and I couldn’t make them sit down and do stuff because I wasn’t doing it. It was very hard.

Interviewer: *So, how have things changed for you since you’ve been off the antidepressants?*

I met a gentleman friend, which was nice. I went off about last April and I met him the first of July. So, it’s pretty good. I still haven’t lost any weight. I actually gained a little bit since the last little while, thanksgiving and all I guess… It’s just better. I feel things, which is nice… I don’t get as mad at the kids as easily as I did back then. Just because of changes in life you learn to appreciate a little bit more.

Interviewer: *What if you compare how you are feeling today with how you were five or six years ago?*

Five or six years ago I had a husband and somebody to share things with and talk things out… Now I’ve sort of become adjusted to not having anyone there at night to say ‘look what happened’… But I do have a good friend who I can share a lot with and she’s the one that does the driving for me when I’m not here and my mother and I tell some things. I mean you can’t tell your mother everything, but a lot of things. So, I do have a lot of support systems around which is good. I can go out and actually enjoy myself… I wouldn’t say I’m completely back but I’m most of the way there. I can look at things that usually remind me of my husband without any of the heart lurch type of deal and I look forward to carrying on and things like that.

**Family of Origin**

A brief overall of life, I was born in [city]. I had one brother, who is two years older than I am. I was about eight when we moved into [small community] where I spent the rest of my life and I graduated from high school OAC, went to University for a few months in general science and then left there. [My mother] was divorced from my dad since I was 19… My dad has been remarried.

When Dan’s parents [lived] close, we’d sneak up there on a Saturday morning type deal and have coffee with them before the kids got up, when we lived in the same apartment building. *(He was close to his family?)* Oh, yeah. He’s got three sisters. Yeah, he was close to all of them and one nephew in particularly he did a lot with for the whole time, we always did. We both had trailers, us and his parents and they were in the same trailer park for a while and, you know, so we were right close and yeah, we saw his sisters not as often as we saw his parents but yeah, he had close contact with them and …

We saw my dad on occasion, not as often as we saw Dan’s parents but we did go out and talk to him and that… [Dan’s] family and my family are two totally different types of family. Well, his is more a relaxed type of family. You go over to his mother’s house,
it’s like you’ve been here more than once, you help yourself to stuff. Like you don’t wait to be offered and things like that. His family, like a lot of them were just normal truck drivers, general working people, you know that didn’t have a lot of money and you can goof around and talk about anything… Like we went to my uncle’s and aunt’s house for Thanksgiving and it’s like you have out the good dishes, you have out the silver. Their house is full of really nice things. He’s on an eight month paid holiday because he saved up enough vacation time until he turns 55 when he’s retiring, you know. They own a 44-foot sailboat…

Interviewer: Tell me about when you were younger. What was it like with your family then?

We lived in a crescent… a new subdivision at that time, it was nice. Good kids in the neighbourhood. The school was down the road a little bit. We all walked to school together. My dad was a feed salesman, he sold feed. My mother taught high school. We went on family vacations together. I can’t tell you too much about them but we had a tent trailer that we pulled behind and we went down east or out west or, you know, different places like that. My dad’s parents lived in Florida at the time, so I made many trips down to Florida and we even took my mother’s parents and my aunt went down one time with us. We rented a mobile home and stayed there and stuff like that and I remember that and getting so burnt. So, we did things like that… I went to summer camp, two years in a row. (So in your childhood finances weren’t a big issue?) Not at all… Then we moved into [small community]… It was nice. I don’t have any recollection of any problems. You know? Mom did some substitute teaching for a little while and then she got a job at the housing authority and worked with them for quite a while. I had my sports.

Interviewer: So, how would you describe your time at high school?

Because of my skating, I didn’t get involved so much in the sports of the school because you can’t do everything. I quit skating when I was 16 and then I started playing ringette for the next few years. I played slow pitch when the slow pitch league started up. I wasn’t a very studier person. A lot of it was done really rushed or quick or not at all. I still ended up with good marks so that wasn’t a problem.

Interviewer: How old were you when you became aware of your mom’s drinking problem?

I can’t say for sure. I really don’t know. She drank. She was an alcoholic. I don’t know why. She blamed it on work, but the truth is I still don’t know why. (How often would she drink?) Oh, every night, every day. She’d come home, have a beer until suppertime, hit the rye, conk out by eight o’clock… She’d be fine. Like she wasn’t abusive or verbal or loud or anything like that. She’d just go to bed. She did do some things at nights. Like she was on a few committees and things herself. Those nights I gather weren’t too bad. (What were relations like between your parents at that time?) I imagine they were strained. Dad had his stuff and he’d be doing his stuff and there’d be a few fights
between them obviously about her drinking and she would deny it. She did go to [psychiatric hospital] once. She went to [the hospital] for her drinking… She still drinks. Not as much anymore but she still drinks. She still denies she’s an alcoholic or has been an alcoholic. *(You’re convinced that she was an alcoholic?)* Oh, yeah. She still is. Well, you’re always an alcoholic. She got drunk at my wedding.

*[When my parents separated] it was a hard time because [my brother] was away at university and rented a house up there with a bunch of other guys and had a place to be. Mom moved into this apartment… above part of a house. Dad moved to a little tiny house out in the country that only had one bedroom and here I was stuck with nowhere to live type of deal. I mean I could have gone with dad, but I mean there was only one bedroom in a little cottage he rented. I didn’t want to particularly live with my mother in that place. I actually moved in with my husband’s parents for a while. Rented a room off them so … My parents’ break-up didn’t bother me so much. My mother getting drunk at my wedding bothered me. My mother did not see Erin for a couple years of her life because of the way she was. I just was sick of her drinking… I was mad at her and stuff but I kept a lot of stuff inside me but my dad on occasion, he really ticked me off but I was kind of a coward to stand up for myself but Dan, he was around still and he helped me… told me to stand up for myself and I did feel better when I finally tell people, you know, say go away or get lost or …

I don’t want to turn out the way she [mother] is. She has a lot of problems now. I a lot of them I would attribute to her lifestyle, her smoking, her drinking, the whole bit in her younger life… This is something that I can control even though it can be a hereditary factor, whereas mom also has breast cancer and that’s a hereditary factor that I cannot control so … She had a lump removed last Christmas. And she has osteo-arthritis, she has fibromialgia, she has nerve damage, she only has a total of one functioning kidney… scarlet fever when she was little, that did that to her. She smokes so I can imagine what her lungs look like. She gets anti-histamines all the time but I think that’s just because she doesn’t drink as much anymore or when she did she used to drink at night and take anti-histamines in the morning. I figured that was just enough to put her back on a high for the rest of the day until she can drink again, but that was my opinion.

*Interviewer: What was your mom’s childhood like?*

She’s the oldest of five. I presume it was nice. I like my grandparents. She went to a private school for a little while. *(Were there other people on your mom’s side of the family that you know that had drinking problems?)* As far as I know it still is just my mom. My grandfather liked the occasional glass of sherry, but no.

*Children*

My son came along September 25th in 1985. He’s been my problem child. He had croup three times, diagnosed with ADHD, stitches a few times when he’s out playing, sliding down the railing. He’s punched windows, broken glasses. You’ll see a broken banister, a few holes in the wall, that’s from him and his temper and that and he’s had problems, well his dad died just before he turned 13 and then … Well, he’s also been ADHD and
very impulsive and reacts quick without thinking and that but he’s also one to keep his feelings inside of him so when his dad died, he doesn’t open up and he doesn’t talk about it and you can’t joke about it. He’s getting better as time goes on but still… He’s a very smart child but he didn’t have the motivation, you know, ADHD doesn’t have the attention span to sit and he’s been on Ritalin… and then his grandfather, my dad wanted him to go away to a special school a few years ago and I kind of hummed and hawed about it and he never got there.

So, it was finally planned out and he’s at [military school] this year for the first time, which is a military school. It’s based on the English military style and he went on August 20th this year and he had two weeks of basic training and then, you know, he had to do things and then they started in on actual school work on September the 10th. And it’s very structured, you get up at this time, you clean up, get dressed, you have breakfast, you know the whole bit. You have mandatory study halls, you go to bed at 9:30 at night. He’s written a couple of letters home, he’s doing well and he’s been made warden of the barracks because he’s doing very well with the other kids. It’s expensive, but behavioural kids, some kids are on probation or going to court, kids with ADHD, which my son has. Things like that, that they need structure and the school is rated 17 out of the 586 high schools and Ontario is rated by the Fraser Institute of British Columbia… This is [John’s] first weekend [home] so it’s a monitored leave. You keep track of what they’re doing. They have a set schedule that they have to adhere to. They have to get up here to get breakfast and clean up. They have to do chores, they have to do two hours of homework and you have to write down how they did, what their attitude was like, things like that. And then they are allowed some free time here and there.

*Interviewer: Was he looking forward to going to this school?*

No but he had no choice and he knew it because of everything that was going on… John’s been like a follower child whereas he’ll follow kids and do stuff and that’s how he tends to get into trouble. Well, him and friend borrowed my car one day last year and took it for a ride. The friend happened to be driving it at the time and hit a curb… They weren’t going fast, they did 300 dollars worth of damage and bent the frame of the car, you know… I know he has tried drugs and I know he has tried alcohol. Hopefully the drugs were like the soft drugs but I don’t follow him around 24 hours a day so I don’t know for sure, this is what he tells me. He’s also been in this house at one time, which will be documented on Family and Children Services, and apparently a friend was here and made advances towards one of my daughter’s friends, who is ten. So, now we had like a 14 or 15 year old kid doing things to a ten year old.

*Interviewer: Can you give me some other examples of John’s behaviour?*

Well, besides taking my car, the other thing that happened in the house, being too lazy to go downstairs, he actually stood at the top of the stairs once and urinated to the bottom of the stairs in the basement, which did not impress me much. Just starting to hang out with the wrong group and, you know, a lot of people were not allowed in the house because of the things John was doing, like Erin’s friends weren’t allowed in the house because of
things he was doing… He called the neighbour an idiot bitch one day or something and some altercation was happening and the police came and talked to him about it. But, he was a nice, pleasant child when we first arrived here because he was brought up he had to be and then he started getting involved with the wrong people and got out of control a little bit. Very much in trouble at school. I made him go to school, put him into home schooling, that lasted for a little while and then he gave up doing that, which is why he’s at this private school right now and he’s enjoying it and he’s having fun. He’s been given responsibility

…Then Erin started to repeat words because he was saying them and an 11 year old shouldn’t say some of those words… and then the guy [John’s friend] that was creating [many of the problems], John finally realized he was no good and stopped hanging around with him. Then the boy eventually moved away last July so it was a little bit better… So, John is doing well and hopefully this place [military school] will give him the structure and self discipline he needs and the self confidence and they are going to do some counselling down there about it. His grandfather wanted him to go and you know, he was doing it and working with his grandfather for a little bit of extra money and his grandfather passed away suddenly July 27th of this year. So, to this date he’s finishing paying for him to go to school there and things like that. My brother is now involved in his care, you know, so he has some males, a male role which is what we’re trying to get going so …

Interviewer: When did you first become aware of the ADHD diagnosis? How old was John?

He was three years old and he had his first test of food allergies because food allergies can cause hyperness. When he hit five years of age and hit kindergarten we got into a little more testing because now being in school and having to have attention and he had a couple cat scans done, he had where they hook you up to the electrical brain waves… He was very active, like more so and had a hard time, he wouldn’t even sit in front of the T.V. very long and concentrate. Like he wasn’t like that. He would literally bounce off the walls almost… He was put on Ritalin at five. He was on Ritalin until he was about 12 then he switched to another drug and I can’t remember the name of it and he was on it until he was 13. He saw a neurologist, he saw a psychologist to see if it was behaviour problems. Like we went through the whole run through of testing. Like I’m not just going to put him on medicine just for the hell of it. We had at one point, we had a lady from [local mental health agency] come down and she came down once a week or something and just talked to him and dealt with him… he was still he would be about seven about that time. You know, like when you talk to him make sure he’s looking at you type of deal so you know that he’s actually focussing on you and hearing what you’re saying and, you know, working with him privately and ways to deal with his impulsiveness and his anger type of deal and that so we had her down for a while. It helped a little bit for a while. I mean like everything they suggested and said was good ideas and made sense and it did help for a while… Then I think in grade two he got suspended or grade one he got suspended. Probably pushing a kid or, you know,
something. He says the kid always does something to him but when he retaliates which he does that’s always when the teacher is looking and he gets in trouble.

Interviewer: So, how long was he on Ritalin?

The first time he went through grade nine and then [the ADHD drugs] started to cause psycho-social personality changes in him, really bad. And that kind of blew his whole year for him because he was passing everything up until that point. Then he went off the drug and he changed back and has never been on medication since … (So, did he repeat grade nine?) He’s still repeating grade nine… He’s in it for the third time… I mean what do you do with a boy that has ADHD and is hitting puberty and plus his dad dying on him. I mean that’s three big things to throw at a kid so, you know.

John knew a little more extent [about Dan dying] then Erin because there’s a five-year age difference. She was seven going on eight and he was like 12, so he could obviously understand a little bit better. Erin was always scared that if he went in the hospital he wouldn’t come back one time which obviously would happen and but she is more of an open child. She talks more easily, more readily. So, afterwards it was still hard on her but she talked about it more which was easier for her. John keeps everything inside of him and bottled up, you know, until it reaches the breaking point and then all of the sudden something gets broken.

When I look ahead for him? [I see] a nice young gentleman who will pass his high school, grade 12 and hopefully … some sort of trade profession like tool and die … ADHD doesn’t get softer just with the maturity of the child, they learn how to control it more and better and learn how to apply themselves better.

Interviewer: Tell me a bit about Erin and how things are going for her.

Going pretty good. She’s getting better marks in school this year. She actually sits down and does homework. Everybody, like my mother and myself or whoever is here we help her out and get her doing it. She’s getting much more politer again and things like that. She’s a pretty outgoing kid so she always had her friends and out doing stuff. You know. Both kids did have activities growing up at some point. Like they both took swimming lessons for a while and John was in karate once for a little bit and he played basketball. So, they all had things they were doing. Erin was involved in school sports, intramural sports and stuff. But Erin was more of an outgoing kid. She was more with her friends and did things. They lived around the same place we did so we were out playing or she’d go over to her friends or they’d come over. Yeah. She was always a pretty good kid.

Erin talks, she carries on, she’s into skating. She has her friends here. She’s shy at first but she makes friends. She tends to be a little pushy. She likes to do things her way a lot of the time so that creates a few conflicts with her friends but you know, they go out and have fun. Being on a crescent it’s not too hard. Being in this neighbourhood is a pain in the butt because of some of the other kids that were in this neighbourhood and still are, you know. You have to worry about them. Some kids were here at one time, they took
John out of the house and they came in the back door and robbed me. But Erin’s pretty good. She talks a lot. She’s more open. She’s having problems at this moment, a little bit of abandonment feelings because John is away at school all the time, I’m working these weird shifts… She’s gone through counselling through the school board a couple times, through music and art and whatever they do. She was involved with the Big Brother’s Association last year through the school, you know, where they pair up and they do things like that.

*Interviewer:* Well, what do you think your children’s aspirations are?

They vary from year to year. Erin, at one time, wanted to marry a doctor… The last time we were discussing it, John found out how much tool and die makers make and he actually talked to somebody about it who is apprenticing and you get paid so much to apprentice and that so hopefully if he gets done high school he can go into a trade like that. I think that’s where he’s sitting. But Erin, she’ll probably go onto university of some sort. I’m not sure what she will become.

**Involvement with the Children’s Aid Society**

I became involved with them last year. My son was babysitting my daughter and we lived in an apartment building at that time and he had left the apartment that we had lived with and went down to a different apartment where his friend was and left her by herself. And she would have been ten at the time. Just before her tenth birthday and someone phoned the Children’s Aid saying that John had abandoned her. So, that’s when they came out to check us out and due to my being the way I was, the house was a mess… I went into some depression and everything else, I just didn’t have the energy and I didn’t feel like getting up and cleaning and doing stuff so the house was a mess. So, they visited me for that reason… even when I moved here I still hadn’t come out of it yet type of deal. So, this house got to be a mess so they came out and were checking it out. It’s still cluttered right now, but it’s not like it was. Actually I cleaned it, I worked on it a few days but I don’t have a lot of time lately. I’m with them on a volunteer basis, to be with them. They came out here, checked me out, you know, said the house was a mess, there were a few things that had to be cleaned up that was hazardous. One being there were some telephone cords across the top of the stairs as the phone got moved from place to place and that could be dangerous, kids could fall and trip type of deal. But it is mainly on a volunteer basis and then we renewed the volunteer basis for another six months just recently… I don’t have to be with them. We sign a little contract of things they can help me out with and to get back into so things don’t keep going wrong.

…I can’t remember if they called first to say they were coming. I think they phoned first and said they were coming and then I talked to them and then they talked to Erin by herself and they talked to John by himself. *(What was your reaction when you heard they were coming?)* I had to wonder what for, because they don’t give you much information over the phone and what was going on… and then they came and they explained it all. And as I said, some of it was made up stuff from whatever and then they wanted to see the house cleaned up, like the safety hazard parts. It’s voluntary that they come back now
once every two or three weeks depending on my schedule and her schedule… to see how I’m making out, if there’s any other problems. They’re helping arrange like more counselling with Erin through the school board and you know. John didn’t want to talk to them but he doesn’t talk to many people anyway… It was their idea [to continue the involvement]. I could either agree or disagree. So, I said well, that’s fine, you know, I don’t want to get on their bad sides and have something else happen and have them come back… The lady that comes is helpful. She has some good ideas on how to get things back to being organized in my life and I was just at that turnaround point where I was starting to come out of my own grief and starting to see things and started to get everything organized again and so she was very nice. She had lots of like suggestions on how to do this and how to do that and like to help out. She even offered to clean one day. She said well, I’ll help you clean no problem…

And just to make sure everything is staying on track and helping out that way, giving me some suggestions. Like for skating, there’s a thing in [town]… that if you’re short on money but you want your child involved you can apply for that, or she’s arranging like some counselling through the school board again for Erin for this year just to you know, help out a little bit more.

Interviewer: So, has it been a good that you became involved with CAS?

I think it is a good thing. (In the beginning it was mandatory?) Well, just for the safety issues. I signed on and then … It’s agreed to, it’s voluntary. I probably won’t do it the next time around because by that time I’ll be working and with John at the school, things are changing that way and with Erin she’s starting to do her work now, her homework and her chore work, you know, things like that. Every day I do a little bit more… I’m sure there’s a lot of other families out there worse off where there’s actual child abuse and other cases and you always hear about them so again, short of money and not having the time or the resources, so I felt I was taking away from more the major, important cases. But yeah, they’ve been helpful that way.

Interviewer: When was the last time that the worker was out?

Probably about a month ago… When I went to the hospital for an ultrasound, which was a couple weeks ago I did see her briefly in the hospital. She was visiting somebody else. We had a good little quick talk and she actually phoned today to arrange for our next meeting… She was very pleased with the way things are progressing and she’s going to still see if Erin wants to get some grief counselling through school or the Big Brother’s Association she was involved with last year where they send high school kids out to their school and they spend a couple hours with them once a week or something. So, that was about it. But she was going to check with the school board about that.

**Work, Education, and Finances**

I’m back in school now. I’m at College. I’m in my sixth and final semester of the RN nursing program. It’s a diploma program… Well, as I said when I went to University it
was for general science because I wanted to be a doctor and that at one time… [But] I figured nursing was you know, I still deal with all the people and all the problems and that so I knew it’ll take three years. Everyone suggested I take my degree program but I didn’t want to because I didn’t want to move the kids, I didn’t want to uproot them. [The college] was closer, it was still here, it was less time and I figured it was easier for all of us and then I can get my degree afterwards…

*Interviewer: How long until you’re finished your school?*

December the 14th… Nurses are quite in demand. I’m working on a resume right here. It’s been proofread. I need to take it in and somebody who reads a lot of resumes is going to look at it and give me a few suggestions. I like the emergency department, which is where I’m planning on doing the last half of my consolidation at [local] Hospital. And the hospitals in Toronto are hiring grads directly in the emergency department now because they’re so short and they’ll train you and everything. But these hospitals are more towards Toronto that do this. I thought about going that way, my brother doesn’t think I should because he says you have to make at least 50 thousand dollars a year to live in Toronto because of expenses. New nurses make just 39 thousand and something a year full-time… and then you add CPP on top of it, I’m still making an extra ten thousand on top of that.

*Interviewer: Any sense of what enabled or motivated you to go back to school or do things differently or made you want to do it or made you able to do it?*

Well, my husband and I were talking about it. Where I was working before I was making say 21 thousand a year maybe. Working with 21 thousand dollars a year with my widows and orphans money I could have survived. Now I’m going into nursing, it’s three years of my life to do it, I have a little bit of life insurance which ties me by plus the widows and orphans money until just recently until it ran out to enable me to go to school… So, it’ll enable me to have a better life, my children to have a better life. It’s not as much as Dan and I made combined but it was getting up there. You know? So it was for everybody’s benefit to, you know, sacrifice the three years. Dan and I talked about it before he died, my going back to school, nothing specific or anything like that. The children and I did talk about it before I went back to school and a few times as John says I wanted to quit and he says no, you’re not going to, you know, there’s no sense in quitting now especially now I’m almost there, you know.

I am looking to go to university for the post-diploma RN degree. I’d rather have a BSc compared to a RN and then [University] looks pretty interesting with its 19 month fast-track program… I don’t know, maybe I’ll get my masters and maybe I’ll get my PHD and maybe I’ll get my teaching certificate and go teach everybody but I doubt it. I’m too old to keep going forever so…

*Interviewer: How have finances been while you’ve been in school?*
I have my widow’s pension, I had life insurance money from Dan. It wasn’t a whole lot. Like he said well 50 thousand, we can always raise it later but then he got cancer, then you can’t do a thing for it. So, I had that. I could take care of finances but I tend to blow money a little more easier than he does. So, that 50 thousand didn’t last long. By the time I paid off the bills we had to pay anyway and the funeral and that and it’s gone now. My dad has helped out here and there whenever he could… Right now it’s strictly widow’s and orphan’s money and child tax credit. It’s not much, but we get by.

*Interviewer: So, you’re not trying to work and go to school at the same time?*

I was. I had a part-time job and it was in the home healthcare business, but… actually they just sent me notice laying me off because they had to lay off a bunch of people because, you know, their budget is frozen and that. So, I did work part-time in the other semesters and during the summer but this semester, because I’m working such odd hours it’s hard to have a regular job that brings in some here and there.

[It’s been] a big change in financial because I used to work, now I’m not working because I’m going to school. I had money in my RRSP and I’ve taken money out of that for the lifelong learning plan so I will have to put it back… I’ve actually inherited some money from my dad’s estate. I do not have it. I do not wish to see it at this moment until I’m done school and that because I’ll probably just blow it again. My brother is a banker. He has invested it for me and he gives me - we made out a budget and every other week I get 150 dollars in from this money to make up for my budget amount and I had planned for extras in there and that… I have to pay hydro and this, this and this and not have any money for occasionally going out for supper with people, you know, clothes that you need and things like that. So, I’m pretty good that way. And that way I know I won’t blow it until I totally get back to where I was before. And I start working and then you’re making money… This is public housing. So, I haven’t done too much. I have to make some repairs obviously. As I said, John has just put holes in the walls. I haven’t done too much decorating, you know, around it. So, that will be one of my major expenses and I’m going to enjoy doing it when I get my own place to stay in, to decorate it and things like that… I will probably buy a house at some point in time but I don’t know when. Once I know where I want to work and plan on staying there, then I’ll look around and invest in a house.

*Interviewer: If you go back to that period five or six years ago, where were you living?*

I was living in a two-bedroom apartment in [town]. My husband did not believe in buying houses. We were planning on looking at bigger apartments obviously because I mean the kids are getting older, they can’t share the same room anymore… Spent the weekends, every weekend at the trailer and we went boating or seadoooing. After Dan died, I lived over there still. Emotionally at that time I couldn’t have left there because I still felt connected to Dan there, but my mother used to work for [the local Housing Authority] and they had offered at that time if I wanted any help like with housing and things like that to apply which I did, and I’m pretty sure because of the connection that way that I got in quicker than a lot of people so I did go in subsidized housing over there
first of all… They had apartments in that building already that were subsidized. When one came empty they just switched apartments, so my apartment then became a subsidized apartment. So, I stayed there for a little while until a year ago and I was on a waiting list for a bigger place. This place came up as a three bedroom and they offered it to me and I came over and looked at it and said I would take it because at that time it was a year ago so that would be just two years after my husband died roughly and I felt I was ready to move on from that place at that time. Bigger place, it seems that way… then the kids each had their own room and I had my room and it was better that way… I’m sure thanks to my mom’s connections with these people that we actually moved along a little faster than say other people who are on a three year waiting list and stuff.

…My dad is paying for John to go to school. That was arranged even before my dad died and it is his money that is still paying for John to go to school… [It costs] a few dollars short of 30 thousand [a year]. There’s no way I could do that by myself. This year is totally paid for by my dad and his money. We discussed him going again next year… John will get a job and work part-time. I’ll put some money in towards it and John’s money going towards it and then my dad’s wife would chip in for the rest of it… because they say it takes about two years to totally condition. I guess that’s what they’re doing is conditioning them to be back to good citizens and installing the right values and everything into him

… I have in my budget a hundred dollars a month for extra things, you know, that come up like school stuff. So, I do have it in my budget… I have a very clear budget set out. As I said sometimes it’s hard to stick to it, you know, we tend to go over it a little bit or you dig into your miscellaneous money more so. But you know, so much is set aside for insurance, so much is set aside for gas, so much is set aside for groceries, for rent… I have used [foodbanks]… Not too often, but occasionally I have had to go down there and use it. If I really get desperate and have no money at one time I could ask dad and he would go and buy me some groceries or my mother-in-law. Say look, I’m totally out of groceries, I have nothing left in this house could you pick me up a few essential things and she’ll say well, meet me here at Sobey’s and then she’d try and put more in my cart than I want. Because of my pride I used to not be able to do that but I’ve learned to ask for help when I need it now.

**Family Times and Social Supports**

I got Erin involved in figure skating. Actually we both figure skate now. We go twice a week and skate for the time being… we take figure skating lessons. And it’s very good. I’m also on the board of directors there for the Skating Club, which is just a new thing. I figure skated until I was about 16 years old and because it is an exercise I like to do I figured even though figure skating is very, very expensive I knew I would stick at it because as I said I gained a lot of weight, I couldn’t even go up a flight of stairs without being winded because my cardio, everything just dropped on me from not doing anything. And it’s also good for Erin, to raise her self esteem, her self confidence, you know, get her involved in a sport... We’re passing tests. Erin is just starting, she’s going to try her first dance test, her first test. I have my old tests which I don’t have to do
because I’ve already done them so I’m starting my senior silver dances. I’m working on my senior bronze free skate and I’m working on my junior silver skill level. And doing the jumps, flying into the air … And I went in the carnival last year. That’s where we go and put on a show for the public to see… It’s just over a thousand dollars for me to skate from now for both of us until the end of April, from now until April. And then it costs me eight dollars for a 15 minute lesson. I get two lessons a day roughly, two or three. Erin gets the same. [The instructor] is also a student and she’s very good. She knows I’m short on money and that and I will graduate and I will be able to pay her so she doesn’t demand the money from me as quickly as others. And I have a different payment arrangement made with the skating club to budget it out over the month, so it helps that way but it is an expensive sport too.

My family is very supportive. I get comments from them about how proud they are of what I’m doing, how proud they are of John and what he’s doing. My dad was always a hard one to talk to. We are alike some ways that way and we would just have conflicts more than good discussions at times but I mean we did get along okay. My brother tends to be a little overbearing at times and we talk more now because of John being in school and he’s looking after that for my dad type of deal…. Now, my mother is pretty good. She’s here and she helps out, which I really need like when I’m working days and nights and things like that. She comes because she’s able to and helps out. My [aunt] actually sent me five hundred dollars once to help me. An aunt on my dad’s side of the family has given me money a couple times, like a hundred dollars or whatever because I mean they don’t have as much money as my [aunt] but you know to help out and they’re proud of what I’m doing and carrying on and things like that. So, you get a lot of support, you know. Dan’s side of the family, before it was hard to talk to them about what you’re going through and the grief and that because they’re all going through their own grieving process. So, it was easier to turn back to my relatives who are a little more distant from it then, you know, his brothers or his sisters and parents and things like that. They’re very helpful and giving me support.

Interviewer: Do you have a lot of friends?

Yeah, not bad. Some days it seems like nobody is around when you need them but yeah, they’re there. I have a few. Most of them are new ones. Not most of them. Like I met them through school, a couple of them since I started school. I met another one through where I work recently. I still have some older friends that I talk to like from pre-my-husband-dying. The ones I had growing up are getting very, very slim, but close friends I still have a few. I have another one from school that I can walk to her house faster than I can drive. We talk quite a bit. And then I have another friend where I used to work. And then another friend, an older one that she’s the one I talk to if I have problems with my other friends. She’s my friend resource one, you know.

Typical Days

Right now I’m working 12-hour shifts at [Hospital]. I do two days days, two days nights, five days off. I don’t want to leave Erin here by herself, my mother is in [town] so I drive
to [town] which is an hour drive one way, pick [mom] up, bring her here and then I go in for a 12 hour day, seven to seven. You get home at eight o’clock at night and then you quickly grab something to eat, see how everybody has been, then you get to bed because you get up at five to leave at six to go back to the hospital for seven the next day. *(So, you drive to [town] every day?)* No, just once in the four days. Like I pick her up and she stays for four days… The final day catches up to me and I sleep for about four hours and then I take my mother back to [town], come home, work the next night and then the next day as soon as Erin goes back to school I go back to bed for a while to catch up.

**Interviewer: So how are you feeling by the time you get off work?**

It depends on how the day went. If it’s been a real good day and everything went well and no major mess-ups then I’m usually feeling pretty good. If I felt like the day was just totally a screw-up then usually I’m pretty down. So, it just depends on the day… My feet are sore

**Interviewer: How is sleep for you?**

I do not sleep very well when I’m on night shift… so I only get about a three to four hours of sleep. I’m pretty tired because as I said I don’t sleep right, I don’t get enough sleep. I only sleep three to four hours after each shift and then usually after the fourth one I take my mother back home and I have to pick her up before the first one. And I do that so that messes up your first day of your five days off and then you have to get back in the routine of sleeping at night and being awake for your daughter.

Some days it’s very hectic. I have to do the shifts to graduate from school. Not all hospitals work on the 12-hour shifts, some are eight-hour shifts. Skating, I believe it’s good for a child to be involved in sports. It helps build their self-esteem, their self-confidence the whole bit and that. So, Erin skates Wednesdays and Saturdays and if I’m not here, I make arrangements for her to go anyway. I skate, supposed to skate Monday and Wednesdays but if I’m working those shifts it can be arranged that I skate a Tuesday partly or a Saturday or, you know whenever. So, that’s something I have to do. John, the next time he comes home is the end of November roughly. So, I’ll probably have a parent-teacher conference before that or another parent meeting so around that it gets a little hectic. Trailer season, because we have a trailer, is actually done now so this week I have to go up there, tidy it up, clean it up, pack my car, bring stuff home from the trailer. My father in-law will go up there Sunday and winterize it and take it out of the trailer park.

… I just look forward to when it’s going to change, when I graduate school and things get better and I can set my schedule a little bit better. Like I go to school next week and I don’t know what shifts I’m working after that until December 14th because I’m changing areas so I don’t have the foggiest idea. I hate that. I need to know more what’s going on so I can arrange my schedule a bit better because I mean with skating I have to tell my coach and, you know, with different people involved… It’s nice that my mother is here. She makes the suppers. She does all that stuff. She puts stuff in the freezer for later use
and things like that, whereas before like my husband and I got done work at the same
time and then we’d take turns or each make supper together or whatever and then do up the
dishes and then the night was more relaxing. I don’t watch as much TV now as I did then. I just don’t have it in my schedule… But next week being in school and my daughter is also going with her school camping from Monday to Wednesday. Like I’ll be in school from 8:30 to 3:30 everyday so I’ll have regular sleeps at night and a regular schedule… For me that’s vacation.

**Hopes and Dreams**

*Interviewer: What do you see for yourself and your family over the next five or ten years?*

Truthfully? I don’t know. I haven’t looked that far ahead. I mean when my husband died, you lose all your dreams of old age and stuff and I haven’t even planned again. I’m not planning that far ahead… The closest I’m looking for at the moment is getting a job, writing my RN exam. So that takes me to roughly March of next year. That’s it. So, right now they’re just short time frames. And maybe once I get a job, get settled, and get into a routine and things get partially back to normal and I’ll start going further ahead… I mean it’s a major accomplishment to go through grief, to go back to school fulltime, to put up with my children and get John settled into this school which seems to be helping him. I made lots of really good friends in that time period, just everything… I’m proud of myself and so I should be. Give myself a pat on the back.
Karen

Karen – Mother Interviewed
The Smiths - Adopted Family
Andrew - Karen’s Step-brother
Browns - Karen’s Second Foster Home
Judy - Children’s Aid Society Worker
Tyler - Karen’s Current Common
Law Partner

Jeremy - Karen’s Oldest Son
Trevor - Karen’s Youngest Son
Bill - Karen’s ex boyfriend (Trevor’s Dad)
Debbie - Children’s Aid Society Worker

Growing Up

I would probably start, like, when I was first adopted. I’ll just start at the beginning. Um…my mother, I guess, she was really young when she had me. She was only about fifteen years old, when she had me. I was born up in [Northern Ontario Town]. (Are you First Nations?) Native American, that’s fine. And ah, I guess, she gave me up for adoption, when I was about two or three, I can’t really remember the year, but I was around that age, and I was adopted into um, the Smith family…. up near [southern Ontario Town]… Before, it was like, there’s…a foster home…like, there’s a actual foster home, where my mother had given me up, and so I stayed in the foster home. I just remember a couple of things, about ah…the last, I remember the last visit, um, my mom made to me, before she…that was the last time I’ve ever seen her… (So, you have no contact with her?) No. (Do you know if she’s alive, or anything?) I have no idea. I have no idea, I don’t know …I guess, with that foster home, when the last time, when I seen her, she ah…I guess it was a pretty hard thing, back then, when…cause I just remember the car pulling away, and her looking out the back of the window, and the workers…there was two workers that were there, and those kind of memories.

Interviewer: Have you ever tried to find her?

Uh, yeah, actually I have. I’ve tried that…my ah, I guess, it would be my reserve. To see if I can…if they even know where she is or anything. But they don’t know. So...

Interviewer: Okay. So you’ve been adopted into the Smith family, and you’ve moved to [southern Ontario Town] So, tell me about some of your memories of that.

Um…well, they were Christian people. Very Christian …I’d say I was about three years old when I started living with them, with my adopted family. And ah… I had two brothers that were adopted, and they were both native too, as well. And ah, I had one brother who was biological to my adoptive parents, and my sister is biological to my adoptive parents as well, so…yeah. There’s three of us that were adopted. Yeah… when I lived on a farm, it’s quite isolating …I know I had always questioned my mom, like, I used to get upset with her, because I was adopted, and I wanted to know about my mom, and…you know, she was trying to be my mom. Um, I never really, like, had a closeness
with my adoptive mother. It was never really there. Cause I know, with my older sister, she...she was like, somewhat of a favourite.... And then, which I can understand, it’s because it was her own child... I guess what I’m trying to say, is that I wasn’t too close with my family. Like, they’re not really a priority in my life right now, for that...

Sometimes, I’ll talk to my mom, maybe…four times a year. Not a lot.

*Interviewer: What is the emotion that you that you feel now, towards your adoptive parents?*

I don’t know. Sometimes it’s almost like I have to. In some sense, cause I guess um...cause I’ve had some experiences there. With my adoptive family. That’s a reason why I don’t really feel like I want that right now. Like, I’d rather feel...just ah, kinda like on my own, I guess, in some sense... Maybe just a little bit of hurt, and anger. But um...I do respect them, and ah...I just...I never, like, there’s no fighting, or anything, that’s there. I just try to...like, and I know it sounds pretty harsh, but I just don’t...I try to avoid all that. So I don’t really try to bother. Because it’s...right now, it’s not something in my life, that’s um...that I need. *(So, is that a place that you would turn to, if you needed some help?)* I’ve tried to, a couple of times, but the support’s not always there. And ah, when I was having problems with my ex, I did turn to them for...a couple of times. Because ah...like, I tried to get some support from them. Sometimes, I don’t think they believed me. Like, the first time when I told them I was having problems with my ex, they didn’t believe me. They just...were in denial, in some sense. It’s hard to explain my mother and father. Like, they’re brought up a certain way. And any problems, like they...they try not to have the problems... Like I’d say ah...they have their own standards. Like, this is the way it is of...this is the way they were taught, and that’s...that’s it. And when you have...you know, problems in a relationship or anything like that, like, any kind of problems, it’s always kept underneath the table. They never...it’s not out in the surface, where you can talk about it, or anything. Like, they’re not open in that sense. And that’s another thing too. That’s why there was never...I guess ah...that closeness there when I was younger, either. Because nothing was ever brought up to the surface. Like, they never would bring something out, and try to like...talk about it, or...try to work something out. Like, it was just...you know...hush hush, you know, kind of thing.

... Um, when I was younger, it was good. I had good experiences. You know, I done well in school. And I had no problems, but I did have a problem with my brother when I was a little bit older. My adoptive brother.... Um, he was ah...well, he was doing stuff to me. And ah, he did for about...quite a few years. And ah...when I had spoken to it, to my mom and dad about this, and I had no other choice, because I guess, I went to the doctor’s...I remember this, what happened. I went to the doctor’s, and I thought there was something wrong with me. And when I told them what happened, they called the police and what not. And they went to my parents, and they talked to my parents about it, and they were in denial about it. *(Was the Children’s Aid society brought in?)* Yeah. Cause I refused to stay at home. *(Would that have been around when you were getting to be fourteen?)* About fourteen, yeah.... Andrew [brother] was about...I don’t know, about four years older than me. But um...I’m not, like I’m...trying not to ah...place blame on
my parents, but I’m angry and upset that they weren’t open to us, and explain to us, about those things that they needed to... We just went to church every Sunday. We had to do our chores, and...you know. We had a cattle farm... and so we did the work, and so and so on. And I think a lot of things too, cause they never ah...wanted any problems to come to them, cause they just...I think it’s...like, an image, or something they have, of their family. Everybody sees the family the way it is, and that’s how they want it. Any problems, it’s...they don’t want people to know about it, and...those things too. So...

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about the CAS becoming involved when you were fourteen?

Um, I guess partly because I refused to go home... I was staying at a friend’s house. After what...after the incident. It was about a week after it happened. Um, my parents knew about it. They actually agreed with ah...her parents, and said that was fine. But when it was time for me to come back, I didn’t want to go back..( Did they know about...the CAS came in, and they investigated the event?) Yes. Because the police had to be called. And they actually arrested my brother. And um...when my parents found out, they were...like, so angry at me, for...for that... They thought I was lying about it.... that’s how I got involved with Children’s Aid, and starting putting me in foster homes. And some of the experiences with the foster homes wasn’t good. The first one I went to, wasn’t that great... Cause they weren’t very nice people.

... the second foster home I went into ...I was ah, going to counselling at the time. I think I was seeing a psychiatrist for about...maybe about a year or so. But um...at that time, I don’t think, feel I was ready to open up, and talk to people about my problems. I was so closed in. And ah...until, I guess ah...until I met somebody. There was one psychiatrist, and ah, she was really nice. And I felt I could open up to her. I guess, with my experience with ah...Children’s Aid at that time... I feel, I guess in some ways, they helped me the best they could. I had a really good worker though. Judy... she was a really good worker. She was there, till I was fourteen, till about seventeen, when I was done with Children’s Aid. (That was a good relationship?) Yeah. Oh, it was kind of rocky in the beginning ...cause I was mean, cause I was stubborn, and because I...I didn’t want to open up... And after a while, you know, I was able to get better closeness with her too... I was um...I wasn’t perfect either. I’ve done...I had done things that I wasn’t supposed to. Like, I ran away from my foster homes. And...got in trouble with the law, and... (How many foster had you been in over that three years do you think?) Um, about three.

Interviewer: Why did move from the Browns’?

Actually, that was one of the good foster...like ah, the better foster homes that I was in. And ah...they seemed more relaxed than the first one I was in... There’s one incident that happened when I was younger. I guess, when I was...when I was about fifteen or sixteen, I had an incident where...I ran away from my foster home... I took off with one of my friends, and we got in trouble with the law. We did something...I don’t know. The police were trying to look for us, and hunt us down. We just kinda stole something that
we weren’t supposed to..., and ah... I... because I ran away, I needed a place to stay, so... I stayed at a place, for... this person I knew, and he wasn’t a good person. But it was the only place I knew, without sleeping on the streets. I... so I stayed there... but um, I was raped there. And um, I had to... there’s a big thing about that. Because I had to ah... go to court for that. ...he was gonna be charged, but see... when I was younger too, like I... was doing drugs, and drinking, and all that stuff. But um... um, the only reason I can explain to you about this, is that when it did happen, and I had to go on the stand... I didn’t want to... I was um... at the time, I was on this... like, um, I know I was drinking and that... when I was drinking that night, and um... it happened that night. But, when I had to give my report to the police, about what happened, I was afraid about telling them that... you know, I was drinking and that, because I thought well... they would think I was lying about this. But I wasn’t. And that’s the only reason why he wasn’t charged. Is because ah... when I was on the stand. They um... they were asking questions, if I was ah... drinking or on drugs, and that’s the only reason why he didn’t get charged. (So was it because of that incident, that you changed homes, or...) Um, well, just... well, it was shortly after that, that um... my... I was really... I got really depressed. And ah... I tried to hurt myself, because of it. And um... the people. I guess, the Browns, she wasn’t prepared to have like, that happen. Because she had like, children in her home. And ah, which is understandable, so I left that home, and I moved to um... one of the foster homes, closer to where I was from.

Interviewer: You described acting out... using drugs... you had run away a few times... Tell me a bit about that time.

Um... just hanging out with my friends... drinking, stuff like that. And... it’s kind of like, normal, kid stuff... You did stuff that you thought was cool, and just kinda... hang out with your friends. And stuff like that. (At what age, did that start at, do you think?) Um... probably not until I was fifteen or so. It all stopped like... I would say... like, eight years ago. About eight years ago. Cause then... that stuff happens when you’re a kid. Like, I’ve grown up since then. It’s not part of my life anymore. It’s not a lifestyle. Like, that’s the way I look at it, it’s not a lifestyle.

Interviewer: How many times did you run away?

Okay, the first time I guess, when I ran away from there, it wasn’t... I came like, maybe two or one in the morning. But the second time I ran away, I ran away for a whole month. And um... I stayed with a friend who lived... just, like downtown area. And he had some apartments. And ah... I guess, everybody, I guess the police were looking for me, and... (How old would you have been?) About fourteen. (So you were actually living with a friend. How old was he?) Um... maybe about seventeen or so. And ah... I guess that... after a while, I called up my worker and told her... And ah... they placed me... (Do you remember why you called?) Um, probably because I just didn’t feel like I... I didn’t feel right anymore, about... like, living out there. I felt it was time. I called Judy. And I told her too, I didn’t want to go back to that foster home. And ah... so that’s when she placed me with the Browns, and that’s when I stayed with them for... a couple of years. And then um... that’s... then I went to the third foster home. (Did you run away
when you were at the Browns’?) Um, that was just ah…kind of rebellion. Maybe it was just a need for attention, or something like that. I had no reasons. Like, I guess, in some sense, it was an important reason to me. I just…I felt I wanted to be independent. I wanted to be on my own. And…I didn’t want nobody to tell me what to do. Kind of thing. And so I left

Interviewer: So you ran away, and that’s when the rape happened, and then… (Yeah.) …afterwards, it was when you made the suicide attempt.

Yeah. And then I was placed into the other foster home. And then ah…I guess ah…after that, I only stayed in the third foster home for about half a year. And then I was ah…I moved in with a lady, that Judy, my worker, had set me up with. (And this is not the foster home.) No, this is after. So…probably when I was about seventeen. And ah…she was taking on boarders, like, student boarders and stuff like that. So I was going back to school, and staying at like…staying in this boarder home. I can’t remember her name though, cause I didn’t stay there too long. Um, but then shortly after I moved in there, I had um…I didn’t go back to school. Like, I had a really hard time going to school. Um…a lot of it was from my peers. And I just…I couldn’t really…I didn’t feel um… (So did you quit school at sixteen?) Um…seventeen was the last time. I just didn’t go back…. Grade ten or eleven. I’d like to go back to school. Um…maybe. I….right now, I’m working, so I’m… I’m trying to figure out a time to kind of fit it into my schedule, and try to…work it out. Cause ah…I have to juggle like ah…both work and school, it’s gonna be…it’s gonna be hard. But um…I’m sure I could probably do it though. It would take a while, actually, to ah…to finish my school, cause I’d only be able to take it part time anyway.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were moving out on your own, around seventeen?

... And it was around the time where um… I was gonna be moving out on my own. And I had an apartment ready for myself, to move out on my own. That was pretty scary, yeah. Pretty scary. I was just by myself, taking care of myself. And um…and ah, that’s when I met Jeremy’s [Karen’s son] father, and that’s when I became pregnant …we were together for a couple of months, and ah…I guess, when I became pregnant, I had told him, I confronted him about it…Like, he told me himself, he didn’t want anything to do with it. So I took responsibility for myself, to raise Jeremy… Um, it was just around the time when Judy closing up my file. And then I had to go up and ah…to social services and had to be supported for a single person, from them. (So, you’re pregnant. Your own place…) I was going on nineteen. Yeah. Cause I was just ah…back when I was around nineteen that Jeremy was born. Yeah. So um…and after I had Jeremy, I just shortly met Trevor’s [Karen’s youngest son] father. I was with him for about six years.

Motherhood and Relationships

Interviewer: Now tell me about having Jeremy. You would have been still on your own. What was that like?
Um...well, I had lots of support, a lot of my friends were there to help me... But like, it was hard in a sense that...um, it was a new experience for me. (So who was there to help you?) Um, actually my friends. I had um...my friend Jessy, and ah...just, a lot of people I knew, like, the native community too. And apart from them...not so much my parents, because at that time, I wasn’t even on talking terms with my parents... Like, I started getting in contact with them, maybe...ah...about five years ago, I started talking to them again. It was just when I um...oh...before I was pregnant with Trevor. My second son. And I started contact with them... they weren’t too supportive, because they wanted me to be married. And they wanted me to...make sure everything like...you know, the house, the marriage, the everything. It was kind of a change in their lifestyle, I guess they felt like it wasn’t...to their approval.

...both Jeremy and Trevor, they were the best experience. Like, they were the best thing in my life. Cause ah, it changed me, from what I was before. (Do you remember that as a happy time?) Yeah. Well...it’s not really much of a happy time, it’s just like ah...it’s um...I feel, it’s just part of my life, as...as part of my life... About a year after [Trevor was born], almost...I guess... Bill [Trevor’s dad] wasn’t into sort of that family life. Like, he didn’t like that lifestyle. Maybe it wasn’t him that wanted to settle down, but I couldn’t understand...you know, like after...cause we both agreed...to have Trevor. And ah...of course, we weren’t married, but...that was a priority in our life too. Is to get married. I never started to notice like, a change in how he was, until about a year or two after Trevor was born. I started finding he was ah...he didn’t want to be involved anymore... Cause, the way he was, he was getting ah...more withdrawn from us... He started getting a lot more aggressive... there was nothing to worry about with the kids. Like, with anything had happened with the boys, or...any abuse or anything like that. It was always myself, right? (So you said he had a different lifestyle. What kind of lifestyle?) Well he went into drinking, and doing drugs, hanging out with his friends. He’d never come home...that kind of...like, things like that... the relationship started getting off; like, really bad, it’s cause he started to get violent with me. Like he’d do this, when he was drinking. Like, he’d come home at four in the morning, and...just kind of start a fight with me, and like, there was violence with that. Every weekend, he’d be drinking. Sometimes during the week too... it’s kind of hard to explain why his feelings changed. Like I...sometimes I can’t figure out why he wouldn’t just say he didn’t want to be with me. And could have stopped it all there. But he never did.

Interviewer: Was he always drinking fairly heavily when you met him?

No, actually, he wasn’t. He was actually like a pretty decent guy to me. And that’s the reason why I was with him. In the beginning. But then after the years...like, it just changed. I don’t know. Maybe...like, when you think of it... we were young too. Um...about twenty...twenty one. Around there. (So, what happened in your relationship?) With me, I wanted the family... This was my life. I wanted to settle down ...and I feel he wasn’t ready for that lifestyle. So...I feel that’s why he was getting withdrawn, and he didn’t want anything to do with that life. And ah...I guess ah...maybe during his...his like...when he’d be drinking and stuff. Like, he was very...like, he’d be depressed. And um...maybe insecure about...who he was or something. Like, in some
sense, he wasn’t strong enough to like, cope with things. Which was really hard for him. Um, to me, it felt like I was just a mother to him. Like I had to be a mother figure to him. And, which was not fair. Because, um, I had my own…like, the boys. Like, I was mother to them. I didn’t need to be mother to him. But, through the years, when all those things were just happening, that’s how I felt… And someone that he could…push around too, at the same time... but he did…like, become abusive...

It was just…um, probably about a year or so…like, [after] we started living in our house, that I moved…and I had started staying in the shelter. Um, because of what was going on. Like, I had to leave. I made a decision, and um…I called them, and I told them what was going on at the house, and that I had to leave. And…I couldn’t stay there anymore. And I stayed [at the shelter] for about a couple of months. In the shelter… it was tough. Because it’s crowded, and ah…some of the workers I found, were pretty weird. I mean like um…they’re not too um…how do you say…confidential? Like they…whatever you spoke to them, they would…like, when they’re supposed to… (They didn’t keep it private?) Yeah. Yeah, they’d joke among themselves about it. Like, I stayed there for the two months. But ah…cause I had a hard time trying to find a place. Cause I had left the house, and I came here. And I was had to go back. It was almost like being on my own again... It was tough for Jeremy and Trevor too… Like, to me, it wasn’t a stable environment for them at the time. And then I managed to make it back to [town] again, and I stayed with my friend. I stayed with her, for about half a year. And then I… I went back to my…my ex again... At the time, he was going to counselling. He was getting help for what was going on. And um…I felt like it was okay. Like I could go back. And this is how he had reassured me. (Where was he going to counselling?) Um, it was anger management...

*Interviewer: So you came out of the shelter, got back together, and you were together for another couple of years? (Yeah.) Okay. How were those years?*

Um, they were going back to the same…like, it was a cycle? The same cycle as it was before. When I left to go to the shelter, and I stayed in the shelter again the second time... And um, I stayed there, and that’s when I had made up my mind, that was it. That this was final. This was the last time that I’d be doing this. And um…but he had still…like, he would still come back to the house, and harass me. Um…like ah…before, when I moved down here, um, he’d come up to the door, and…he’d stay here once in a while, and…you know. And then after a while, it was hard for me actually…to get him out of my life. (He would actually stay in your house?) Yeah… I had a hard time letting go as well. In some sense too. Ah, at the very last bit, when I was ah…because I was in the shelter…um…at that time, he was having an affair on me, stuff like that. And we had split up.

*Interviewer: Okay, so you were in the shelter [the second time]. How long were you there?*

In the shelter? Um…only about a week. I didn’t stay too long. Because I…I didn’t want…I didn’t feel like I wanted to leave my home. Like I…was so tired of staying at the
shelters. But I knew that they were...like, the only place I could go to get away from it. *(And then you went back to your home?)* MmHmm. *(And was he in the home, when you went back to it?)* Um, well he was living there off and on. But ah...um...we weren’t really together.

*Interviewer: What was that time like, when he was sleeping around and stuff. Did you know about it?*

... That was hard to deal with. Like, you go through so many...like, emotions. You know, like um...how does he feel about the family? Doesn’t he care...you know, like...doesn’t he care about me, or the kids? And, how we feel, and stuff like that... The abuse on the other hand, was... it really brought down my self confidence. It brought down a lot of my pride, of who I was... He was more of ah...like a...verbally abusive too, as well as physical. Not so much physical, but just verbally he was... And ah...last time, there was an instance, where he was actually arrested. And ah...for assaulting me. And that’s when the Children’s Aid had come into my life. It was actually about the same day. Cause I had to go down to the police station, and get a statement of what he did. *(Who called the police?)* Ah, my friend did. Because I guess I wasn’t...cause ah...um...he’s always threatened me. If I ever call the police on him, for any-like, ah...him hitting me, or you know, stuff like that, he’d get really mad at me, and stuff. So I was always scared to. *(Are you glad your friend called?)* In some sense, yeah. Cause like, you know, I never had the nerve to do it myself. And ah...I can’t really, like, when I look back at it, I can’t really explain why like...I stuck it out so long. And ah...in some ways, I wish I never had. Because ah...it was not good for the boys.

**Children’s Aid Society**

*Interviewer: How long ago did you Bill split up?*

Um...last year...um...it was when Children’s Aid started getting involved. About September. Or August. *(So the boys would have been five or four?)* Yeah. Around then. Yeah. But um... yeah, they had arrested him. And um, that’s when the Children’s Aid had come into my life. And um...it was a good experience for me too. Cause they helped me out with ah...a lot of...how to go about getting a lawyer, and stuff like that. And um...they set me up with the mutual program for women. It’s like a community health program. But it’s good to talk to people, and...talk about things. How your kids are like, and...stuff like that. It’s just um...like ah...like mother stuff. Parent stuff.

*Interviewer: So Bill was arrested. Can you give me an idea of what happened? Like, how that unfolded?*

Well he...[the police] put a ban on him, that he [Bill] was not to come around anymore. So he was banned from the whole property here. And um...I made an agreement with him, that um...he could see the kids, every other weekend. And things have been going okay... No conflict, or nothing has happened. Cause ah...I guess when they did arrest
him, they must have scared him or something. Cause…he won’t…he hasn’t started any
problems with me, whatsoever.

…. He was arrested that day, and I guess that same day, [the CAS] had come to the door,
and …they wanted to know if I needed some help, or…they said that somebody told them
that I might need some help. I was pretty….really defensive with them. Cause I said
well….there’s no reason for you to come here, if you’re worried about any neglect or
abuse with the kids, cause there isn’t. And this is what I told them. They said well,
we’re just worried because of your ex, and we just don’t’ want any confrontation. I can
understand their point of view... And ah…they reassured me, more or less, they’re not
here to get involved with the kids. ‘Cause I’ve heard so many horror stories about
Children’s Aid. Like…how they come in, and in some way…like ah…twine your story,
or whatever is happening in your life, and find some reason to have something against
you, and how you are with the children, and…then all of the sudden, just poof, there goes
your kids. (Does it make you angry?) Um, a little bit. But um…I don’t know. I still feel
a little bit uncomfortable, because I really feel like there’s no need for it.

Interviewer: They came in... And did you feel, at that time, that you could have said, no,
go away?

Yeah. I could have said no to them, and said no, I don’t need any help. (Do you think they
would have gone away?) I don’t know. That’s why I was worried about…cause I
thought, they’re in your house, and they’re gonna have some sort of like, a warrant, and
say, we have to come in your house, and… I felt like I had to. That’s what I felt like.
And it just…I felt like I had no other choice. (So, how long ago was that?) Um, August,
or September. (So, almost a year? Um, and you’re still involved with them?) MmHmm.
Yeah. Well, I was talking to my worker. She…had mentioned something about…closing
the file. Soon. So...

Interviewer: So over a year, how many times would you have seen Debbie [the CAS
worker]? (About twice a month. Um…not seeing them. Like, she’ll call.) I’m curious,
as to why you think they’re still...

Why I feel like they’re involved? I don’t know. Maybe to see if I’m more or less…off on
my feet again. I guess right now, I do feel like I’m off on my feet. That’s probably why I
was asking her when…my file was going to be closed. But I, in some ways too, like ah,
with ah, Debbie, my worker, she’s been really nice. She’s been super nice. And she’s
been great. Beginning when I first started seeing them, they did provide like, a lot of
programs and that. They introduced me to a lot of things. So, and…that was really
helpful. Maybe it’s one thing I do have to be thankful for. Why they’re keeping it open?
Well, I guess, I don’t know. I’m just trying to…subconsciously trying to figure out why
they would still have it open. Maybe they were finding something with myself,
and…they feel like it’s ah…. there’s a big need or something. But there’s not, like, to me,
I don’t feel there is a big need right now. Because I’m….like, I feel fine. And…I guess,
maybe that’s not good enough for them. But… um… everything’s like…I don’t have
anything that’s negative around me, or anything that’s happening, that’s really…upsetting or wrong. It’s almost like I don’t feel, like I don’t understand why it’s been kept open.

Interviewer: Would you be afraid to ask?

Yeah. Because…then I’d feel like I’m pushing my luck. That’s why I’m afraid to…more or less confront them, and ask them…why is this, why is that. Cause I don’t want them feel like I’m being pushy, or being negative towards them, or…or feel like um…you know, like I don’t want them…I guess, I don’t want them to have a bad outlook on me. Cause what they see now, is how I am. Okay, this is my life, this is what I’m doing now. And…my worker, she knows everything that’s happening with my life. So she knows everything that’s happening. And like, what’s happened with the situation before… Some people…this is what I’ve heard, and sometimes I wonder about this too. But ah…I guess, if you’re brought up in the Children’s Aid…you’ve been in foster homes, and…maybe…you know, you’re a ward with the crown, or what not. And you decide to have children when you’re older. But they often think, oh…they have your file, they’ll go back in your history…take your history, and judge you for how…or whatever… judge, and um…take that upon themselves, as some sort of ah…a thing. Like, this is how she was when she was younger, this is how she’s gonna be with her children, or…you know. This will affect her children when they’re older, er…when she has her children now. And, sometimes I wonder, myself too, if that’s…something. Like, if it’s true or not… Like, people change. We’re not…like, how we used to be. Like, how is that going to have an effect on us, when we’re older?

Interviewer: Do you miss, that kind of life…. the connection that you have with Bill?

With Bill? Um…well, not really. Like, I’m not trying to… I guess I can be thankful. Like, grateful and thankful that [CAS] are there to help me. I guess I don’t know if I need help anymore.

Interviewer: What was the CAS’ role in [having a restraining order placed on Bill]?

Um, well, I had already spoken to my worker about that. Like, Debbie. I spoke to her about it, and she ah…she said that was fine. You know. As long as there’s no confrontation. Or anything about it. So they know about it. Well, she’s [worker] been really good. She’s been really good to me. Um, really supportive. And um…any questions, like, she always is…she’s always helped ah… answer what she can, help me with what I need to be answered. I don’t feel like I’m sure a priority for them to be concerned. Cause my kids are looked after, and there’s nothing for anyone to be concerned with… But I don’t feel like there was such a need…priority for them, to come into my life. Because everything was fine. It just…maybe I needed that step to actually get my…ex out of my life. Maybe that was it, maybe that’s why… (Were they helpful in that?) Well, a lot of it too, was because of the police. Like, the police had put on that…like, the restraining order against him. So, it kept him away. And um…then…they were very like ah…supportive. And ah…I guess, with helping me through the mutual
group, and that...I felt like...like ah...it helped me get over most of the...feelings that I was going through at the time.

**Typical Week**

*Interviewer: Um, what kind of work do you do? (I work at a coffee shop at night.) So, let’s say we started...like, you work on Sundays, right? So let’s say we start, and your shift starts at 9:30[pm]? (MmHmm.) When would you leave for work?*

Um...around 9:00. And then from then until one... My boyfriend [Tyler] takes me to work. And he looks after the kids as well. Then I come home I guess... I take a cab home... It takes me a while to wind down, and relax, and get to sleep, which is by 2:30. *(So, typically then, you would sleep through until about when?)* Um, until the boys wake up.. Well, usually I’m up around seven... Um, wake up the boys, get them ready for school. And then I’d take them off to school... and come back here, and I usually clean up. And then ah...usually I’d just try to get a couple hours of sleep... And then...um, if I’m not cleaning, then I’m usually just kind of relaxing, and waiting until...for the time to go pick up the boys from school. Well, they’re out of school at 3:00.

*Interviewer: Okay, so the boys come home around three o’clock? And then what?*

Uh, sometimes, they like to go and play outside. So I let them play out there... [Sons] play and they watch cartoons, or...just kind of like things that...um, they do. And...we would just have supper [around] 5:00, or 5:30. Tyler works pretty late... he has to be at work at 8:30 [am]. Sometimes he doesn’t get home until almost 7:00 [pm]. He works like a full day. After the kids have supper and that, and...another thing we do, like, they have any...usually Trevor, cause he’s in kindergarten, he doesn’t have much homework. But Jeremy will have some homework. He has some assignments that he has to do. And um, if they need to have a bath, or whatever. They have a bath. And ah...ah...I guess that would be it, for the day. And then I would get ready for work. Their bath time is usually after supper. So it would be around...seven or six thirty, or seven. And ah...they’d be ah...have their bath, and in their P.J.’s, or what not, and I would start getting ready for work, and then that’s when I would start my night...

*Interviewer: And Tyler would get home around seven? (Yeah, around seven or so.) So you’d have...maybe an hour, hour and a half of overlap before you left?*

Yeah. About an hour or so, we’d spend time together, talk about anything that’s...anything that happened in our day...kind of review what happened that day. If anything happened...anything you want to talk about. Anything um...you know, just...it’s kind of hard to explain. Um...just kind of follow up, on what you did, both did that day. And ah...um...just, kind of ah...have spending time together, and that’s how I...that’s kind of like, how we spend time... Tyler would drop me off at work, and then...he’d come back here, and put Jeremy and Trevor to bed, and...Yeah. That would be the day.
Current Relationship

*Interviewer: How long have you been in your current relationship?*

From the beginning of this year. Like um…I knew him way before then. Like, he’s been sort of a friend to me. So…I guess, especially from knowing him, would be from…almost two years ago. I’ve known him. *(What’s it like to be back in a relationship?)* Um…it feels good. Because he’s a really good person. Like, he’s super. And, he’s totally the opposite of how my ex was. He’s a very responsible person. And he’s good to me. *(Are you nervous?)* Um, a little bit. In some ways, yes. It took me a while to open up. But see, I’ve um…I’ve known him for a while. So…I’ve kind of been open to him, for a bit. You know, just kind of told him like…what was going on with my ex, and…and he kind of knew what was going on.

*Interviewer: So what is like for the two of you, when you both work [different schedules]?*

Um, not enough time. Well, there’s really not enough time to spend together. Um, usually on the weekends, is when we can. Um…cause ah…I don’t see him the whole day. And when he does come home, I’m off to work. It only gives me a couple of hours. Depending on when he gets home from work…sometimes it’s earlier, than seven or so. *(What do you talk about?)* Financial stuff, and anything else that’s happening. We talk about everything, so…anything to do with the kids, or…anything happens with them at school. I don’t know, anything, financially, or, anything happens to him at his work. Like, it’s not usually bad things. *(Do you have a sense of what it’s like for him to…)* Come into our lives? *(Yeah).* I’d say like…that’s something he wanted. ‘Cause he loves my sons, my kids. And he doesn’t mind taking on the responsibility, of doing like…he knew that I had children. He knew what kind of situation we were in before. So he knew all about that. So ah…it’s something that ah…I guess, he didn’t mind, like… I guess ‘cause, he loves us, and I love him, and the kids love him. And um, cause we get along so well…and ah…and he’s great with the kids. And ah…I don’t know, like ah…it’s been a really positive effect on me and the kids. *(Where do you see your relationship going over the next…)* It’s going good. No break-up, or anything like that. Um…I guess ah…marriage, I don’t know. I think I’m gonna wait. Because I was already in a relationship for… I feel like it’s probably better just to wait for marriage. For rushing into it right away. I guess um…um…I know we’d both like to own a house someday, or…get…save up to buy a house. That’s one of the goals, I guess, for us… is to eventually own a house.

Native Identity

*Interviewer: What if I asked you about your native heritage, and the meaning that has for you? What would you say?*

Well, it’s important in my life …’Cause I know, I have a lot of native friends. Most of my friends. Like, most of them are around [town], but um…yeah. They have a community in… *(Like a community centre?)* Yeah. And ah…just…like, a lot of events,
and stuff like that. Like, I became involved with them, because there’s a lady… she um… because I was in the Children’s Aid, I guess she was looking for ah… native youth, to kind of put them in a program, like a… like a youth group, or something. (So would this have been about when you were fourteen?) About sixteen years old. ‘Cause, before then, I had… I was never involved. And I never knew anything about my native background. But until I met her, and she helped me get involved with the community, and that’s how I started to meet a lot of people, and get more involved… I was in, um… like a native start program… I started in the summertime. Like, a placement, summer job placement thing. Um… but my experiences with that was really good. What they do, is they have all the youth. Native youth. And they… wherever job that you prefer, like, if you’d like to work in a clothing store or something along the line of that, they’d help try to put you into that kind of placement. And ah… I wanted to work with horses. So they had helped me… they put me on a horse farm. To work with horses and that… Uh, it was a lot of work. Same as at my mom and dad’s. You have like ah… a, the chores, like, it’s a lot of um… a lot of labour, and stuff, kind of the farmer things you do. Um… [Native Start Program] was a really good experience for me. Cause I met a lot of people. I made a lot of new friends… Um, we did a lot of activities. …We were, some of us were like, taught our like, language, and how to speak. (What language is that for you?) Um, for me, it would be Cree. We went to some pow-wow’s. Like, the pow-wow’s, where they have like, all the traditional drums, and dancers and that.

Interviewer: Did you like that?

Yeah. Those are really good experiences. And ah… it’s really nice to go to those. Because ah, you see all the dancers. Like, they, how they do their traditional outfits, and um… it’s really interesting. Cause a lot of the bead work and stuff takes a long time to do… But it’s been good for me too though. Because I needed like… just to kind of know who I am, and where, like, how, like, my native’s life. Cause I’m only like, half native. To me, I feel like I’m full. (Are you a status?) Yes. So are the boys. My boys, like, [sons], as well. (Your boys too?) Yeah. Now, um, were their fathers first nations? No, just myself. I was born on the reserve. So, when you get your status, you’re um… they give you a number. It’s either a one or a two. There’s something in the number, that’s or two, and… like, I guess, the two would give you… the right for your children to have status. And one would mean that just yourself. So I was able to have my children under status too. And it’s good, because it’s full coverage. Like, for medical, or dental, or stuff like that. Anything that they need, and especially if you want to go back to school. And it’s good for the boys too, when they’re older, if they want to go back to school or something… I don’t really get too much involved [in the community] anymore like I used to. But, I’d like to someday. Like, I’d like to go back to school. And ah… get some upgrading… I’d like to work in the native community. So I’m helping others, as well.

Finances

Interviewer: What would be the highest sources of your stress, pressure, in your life these days?
Like, sometimes if…my hours are being cut back at work or something like that. That’s a little bit stressing. I know right now, I need the six days a week, because it’s just making everything…like, the bills…(Financially)…yeah. Groceries, and everything else. I take care of. So…uh, that’s a little bit stressing there. (So are finances tight?) A little bit, yeah. I guess, cause with the rent sometimes. It’s supposed to be rent geared income. But they go by, how much you bring in. Like right now, we’re paying maximum rent. Which is the highest… almost a grand a month, it includes everything. (So, how have, sort of financial struggles, been for you, say, over the last ten years or so?) Um…borderline. Never been like, too poor, or whatever, how would you say it. But ah…the kids have always had what they’ve needed. Anything, like, you know. Like, we’re not rich… Either way, I’d find my way to get…make sure that they have what they need. Things like that

Interviewer: So when you were on your own, how did you [make ends meet]?

Well you had to…like, I was budgeting, the same as I do now. Is budgeting. So, whatever you get from social assistance, you have to budget that for the month. And ah…just work it out, every week, what you need to buy groceries, or…what not. And if I was, um…to a point, where I didn’t have, like ah…any money for that week to buy groceries, I would have to go out, and like…there’s the food bank, or something like that... I guess, like, social assistance, they don’t give you too much. And um…I wasn’t on it for too long. (So how long were you on social assistance?) Um, altogether, maybe about a year. So, that’s a long time. Yeah, about a year or two. I’ve been either working, or trying to take care of myself.

Interviewer: And, what were finances like for the last couple of years of your relationship with Bill?

Well, he worked. My ex worked. Um, but he wasn’t too generous though. Cause he…before like, my money would be going for the groceries, and whatever the kids needed. He would make it hard for me, because he would never…sometimes he’d pay the rent, sometimes it…you know, he was late, and…um…because he had to have his drinking, that’s where most of his money went to. It was pretty hard, when I was living with him financially. Because he wasn’t, very generous, I guess… he just kind of…used his money for his money, and that was it.

The Big Picture

What makes my life worthwhile? Well, I guess, um…that I’m working now, and looking after my kids, and that…for the last while, like I’m moving on with my life, after something that has happened to me that’s…kind of disrupted my life a little bit. But um…right now, how I feel, is um…I’m actually accomplishing what I needed to do. With my life. And that was to get away from my ex. Because that was a big problem. And um…and then, anything else that I wanted to do, I am doing. Which makes me happy. And ah…I’m actually ah…just um, accomplishing my goals, day by day. Ah…stable home. That’s what I want. I guess that’s what it adds up to be. Is like, have a
stable environment, for myself, and my kids, and...all that. So it’s kind of going smoothly right now. So, it’s good actually, to... feel like I’m able to do things that I couldn’t before.

*Interviewer: Let’s say...your whole life, what is it that pulled you through?*

Well it’s kinda like ah...my friend, she mentioned something to me before that...kinda stuck in my head. Whatever happens in your life is a learning experience. And you learn from it. You can’t dwell on it, but you just use it as a learning experience, and try to deal with it that way. And um...that’s one strength I used... Like I can’t help whatever happened in my life. You know, whatever happened, kind of situations I got myself into. But ah...that’s...I guess, people have their own ways of trying to deal with certain problems. I didn’t take it all like, totally to heart, but that was just something that helped me a step up, and just to go through whatever I was going through.

*Interviewer: How do you see your life unfolding over the next, say, five years?*

Um, well, both kids being in school. Just ah...with my kids. That’s how I see things, whatever happens with them, is happening with me.... But it’s all for the better. That’s what I’m trying... this is how I’m trying to keep positive here. I’d probably like to go back to school eventually... I wanted to work in the native community, doing something, um...as a career, it’s something I’d like to do.

*Interviewer: If you were going to briefly describe your life right now, as if you were trying to say, “this is how my life is right now...”, how would you describe that?*

...Things are going good. But there is always a bunch of problems... Just basically, things... that’s how I describe everything now... Well I guess overall, it’s good. Cause I’m doing the things that I want to do.
Pamela

Pamela – Mother Interviewed
Jake – Pamela’s Current Partner
Sherry – Pamela’s Sister
Mary – Pamela’s Former Neighbour

Megan – Pamela’s Daughter
Brian – Pamela’s Ex-husband
Trent – Pamela’s Brother

Relationships with Partners

… I was working two jobs and then I quit the one, and that’s when I met my husband [Brian]. I was just getting on my feet and… I met him at the end of February… and I married him April… I showed up on a Monday one time at [parents’] house… and I told them oh by the way, this is my new boyfriend and we’re getting married on Friday… *(So what were you hoping the marriage would bring?)* I wanted a part-time job. I wanted that independence to bring some money into the home… he choked me when I was pregnant, he beat me when I was pregnant. When I got gestational diabetes when I was pregnant… he was very controlling and I was not allowed to eat certain things… *(You stayed in the marriage even after he hit you because you believed that it was possible he would stop.)* I believed it was. He hit me once every three months or something … when I was single and this girl came in and she was with a guy and she was black and blue and I said that would be the day. I would be out so fast. And then I got married… and I sat in the car and I’m going oh my god… where am I going to go?… My dad’s going to say I told you so… my daughter was a year [old]… I left him. And I went to my parents… *(What went into your decision to leave your husband?)* When my daughter was 8 months old she was in the walker and he assaulted me in front of her… And I’m like crawling up the stairs begging him not to come after me… I got the baby in the crib and I came down and talked to him and I can’t remember if he hit me anymore that day… it was not the life that I wanted my child to live and I tried to go to counselling with him. Matter of fact I went to the crisis clinic with my child … and I had her assessed… she was just yakkng away and they said, you know she’s really talking… mommy talks, daddy hits, kids shut up… And I was not about to let him influence her in any negative way… he loved her and he never hurt her… you know, I was just afraid for her…

… I was in the battered women’s group for two years but um, that sent me out in my life being a single parent… That was May. I went back to him in June for a couple weeks, then I left again. When I went to counselling and they said there’s a dynamic here… you have to realise there’s mental abuse… So I went back to him for two weeks and I saw the mental abuse that was going on and I thought no I don’t want my daughter to live through that… he said to me, I’ll never hit you again, but by god will you need a spanking … that was it… I went back to my parents’ place. And then in June is when I put in for Ontario housing… We were still talking about our marriage and stuff and… I said look it sweety, it’s up to you. This is your problem… if you want to change your life to get our marriage back together, I’m giving you the opportunity to. Otherwise, I’m moving on… I was working… so… my mother took care of my daughter for that summer. And later on that year I got her into… daycare…
Interviewer: Do you want to talk more about what was going on with your husband…

… I was staying in touch with him, we were kind of dating off and on… He showed up twice a month… he’d be saying let’s get our marriage together, bla bla bla, and all of a sudden he’d blow up, we’d fight and he wouldn’t talk to me for two weeks… (So how long did you stay and work on it?) That was at Christmas time… March of…87 I was in here. Because March of 88 he wanted to see my daughter and… I had gone to court and he had gotten reasonable access with reasonable notice, and he meant to pay 300 dollars a month support… To this day he hasn’t paid a penny … after I left him he got charged with impaired driving and he picked my daughter up one time at my mom’s while I was working and my mom says… he was driving and he smelled like beer… (How old was your daughter at that time?) She wasn’t even 2 years old yet… he said I want to see her. And I said no, absolutely not… you… are unsafe with her… he threatened to kill me. So I got the cops involved… And September of 88 I went to court… the rein of terror really started then. I had to change my phone number… I kept getting hang up calls. I knew it was him… I had to unplug the phone. And then it’s like I can’t do that, what if he shows up here and I want to call 911… my grandmother gave me one of those new fangled cordless ones… I could shut off so I wouldn’t hear it ring… And we didn’t sleep upstairs… We slept here… I was on guard… I slept down there for over two years… That way if he came in the back door I’d go out the front door. And my tires were slashed, I was robbed, all sorts of things in that time. (And do you think he was responsible?)… I know he was… I was at work… and I looked outside and I thought I saw my brother in law walk by. I go to the door and sure enough it was… he got away with it…

… In 1989… [Brian] got a message to me through people and he wanted a divorce… he had got a girlfriend and wanted to get married. So I went and got the divorce… in the divorce I demanded that he sign [Megan] off… And he did… Everything was quiet up until she was six… She said where’s my daddy and I said we’re divorced … I did tell her that when I lived with your father he was unsafe with you. He loved you, but he was unsafe… (What happened then when she was six?)… I had told her if your dad shows up, he’s not safe, so you need to go to your room and stay there… So she was outside, and all of a sudden she comes in and she says mommy there’s a man out there and he came up and said he’s my dad. And I said go to your room and I went to the door and said go away. He says come on, I just want to see my kid… He supplemented his income by selling drugs… He says well I don’t know why you put in the divorce… that I sold drugs… I … found out by all the kids in the parking lot that somebody had been around asking if they’d seen Megan. So I called the cops… everything was quiet for a little while, then he showed up again and he came up and talked to her and… she ran in the house… and in August he got caught at the [United States] border. He had kidnapped two children. Everybody who knew him knew that if I hadn’t taught her to run… he would’ve had her. (What two children did he have?) He had been married, Children’s Aid had taken his kids away because his wife was schizophrenic… he was on his way to BC through the States… he was going to go to BC with his children and his wife… If… my daughter… had been anywhere close to him, he would have grabbed her… (What
I called the cops right away and... he got put away for 11 months and when he got out of jail he started stalking my daughter, so now she’s seven... And he put a note in the mailbox... he put a cheque of his and said call me sometime with his telephone number on it. (How were you feeling when you came home and there's something like that in your mailbox?) Oh, disturbed. And strategizing... boom I’m at the court house getting a restraining order. I’m going to a lawyer... I’m on the phone, I’m getting educated and finding out who can help me...

... I met [boyfriend Jake] last summer and I was just not into it... I had been dating men off and on and when you’re not looking for one, got a teenager, this is nuts. And then he came back into my life when she wasn’t here and we started seeing more of each other, and now we’re together ... (Is that your first serious relationship since your marriage?)... I dated a few guys but... the one was three years and... I found with getting to know him after a while... what... he wanted wasn’t what I wanted. I wanted to get married again, have a sibling for my daughter... And he didn’t want it and we’re still friends today... ya he cheated on me and I broke up with him, but now, the man bought a house down the street from where I live... He wanted a child without marriage and my basic value is you don’t have children without marriage... (What’s your dream now? Is it still marriage?) I can’t have any right now... ya, I’d like to get married in the future... Jake’s a big part of my life now... it was an inopportune time to get involved, but he’s part of taking care of me because he treats me good and not abusive... So he’s kind of there for me. I don’t know, it’s a hard thing to say, but I don’t know if I’d be alive. I think the higher power did it, put him in my life. I have support people, but I don’t like being alone. I made that mistake before, just grabbing on to a man kind of thing. I’m not willing to settle for abuse just to not be alone... (So if Jake wasn’t a great guy, you wouldn’t be making room for him?) No I wouldn’t. I’d run... with Jake... I was attracted to him and stuff... And I fell in love with him and his sense of humour and everything else... we talk about stuff... There were two things I wanted to do in my life. One was own a home... (what was the other dream?) I can’t remember. I remember the home one because Jake and I just talked about it. I said I want a home, I’ve never owned a home, but then again, I do know that a home is like a car. Oh god, the muffler falls off and the brake lines go and holy shit. I gotta pay for this... Then we talked about it, he says I’m not saying we can’t a condo or something like that, and I went cool! I could bend my dream a bit maybe... Ya, it’s one thing to have a dream, but can you back it up? I’d like to go to the Mediterranean too... Well I am thinking of eventually someday I might get there. I doubt it though. I’m willing to wait. I’ll take a senior’s tour ...

Growing Up

Interviewer: I wanted to find out about your childhood...

My dad was a truck driver... I was four years old and I can remember the truck broke down outside of [Manitoba city]. We had to hitchhike. It was cool. (You travelled with your dad?)... Ya... Mom stayed home with the other two... I was 4 years old. And then there was a 3 year old and a two year old... We were in [city 2] at that time. Then my dad became a taxi driver... And I was in kindergarten... and... he worked for a taxi
company until I was in grade 4. Then he became a truck driver again and he’s been a truck driver ever since… after grade 4 when he became a truck driver he was with a [United States] company. We moved down to [United States] for a year in grade 5… I ended up going to court because I got in a fight in school… we didn’t talk like them and they’d pick on my brother and sister… grade 6 we moved to [Ontario city 3]. Grade 7 we moved to [city 1] and stayed there until I moved here [city 2] as a young adult and then my parents moved back here too to take my grandmother… She even moved out on them…

Interviewer: How did you get along with [father]?

didn’t have to. He wasn’t there and when he came home he strapped us with the belt… because we were bad while he was gone and… the next two, three days when he was home we were good… Up until I was about 11 and he said to my mom, I’m tired of coming home and hitting these kids. I failed grade 4… I was in grade 4 twice… last belt I got… must’ve been grade 8… because I can remember being in school in the 70’s when you had your shorts shorts on… and I had marks on my butt from where the belt had cut into me and I was sitting there like this trying to make sure no one saw…(How about how you got along with your mom?)… we had two different lifestyles… with my mom… My sister cooked, my mom cooked. Kraft dinner was okay we’d have for supper, or buttered noodles, but when dad was home, it was 2 vegetables, potatoes and meat. And shut up, don’t talk at the table because I have to hear the news and supper must be at 6… When we were teenagers… daddy would come home and he’d say I never see my family, where are they? We all leave the friggin house you nutbar… dad would start coming on to mom so she’d say but Pamela did this… [to] get the focus off of her… so now we know why we got hit all those years ago…

…Mom… worked… when I was little. She was housecleaner or office cleaner… and then she was ill and in the hospital for 2 months. Her parents took us in, but we were there for 4 days and my grandmother died. So then we were to my other grandmother… until Christmas. This was October… and my grandfather had died when I was younger. (When was that?) Grade 4 I think. And my other grandpa had died when I was about six… my mom came out of the hospital. Apparently she had something wrong with her pancreas. Now they’re saying at this point that she has cancer of the pancreas again… I think she’s just a hypochondriac… with knowing what I know now … I think she’s battled depression… and I know it can show up on you physically and I’m not saying she’s totally got nothing wrong with her but I do believe she’s manipulative … (How was money when you were young?) My mom’s a chronic poor person… don’t drink all the milk! You know how expensive milk is… she used to get powdered milk and mix it with 2 percent… to this day I can’t drink milk, and if I do, it’s straight cream and it’s in my coffee… And I’d seen my father and mother for the money thing. What was my dad saying? Yours is mine, and mine’s my own? And mom… she’s stashing money in every cubby hole…When we were teenagers, we robbed her. We’d leave her a note, we owe you mom… she couldn’t bitch at us because we’d tell dad…

94
Interviewer: Were your parents happily married?

No. I don’t know, my dad was never home. When he was home he was bossy. I mean they’re still married, they just had their anniversary… 39 years… My mom comes to us since I’ve been an adult and says stuff like can I come and live at your house if I leave your dad? I used to say ya… The last time she asked me, I told her to stop it, I don’t want to hear it anymore about leaving my father… When I was in grade 6… my mother was telling me about an affair my father was having… Well I’m 12 years old, what do you want me to do?… (What message or idea did you have about a good marriage when you entered into… marriage?)… Um, fighting and arguing and giving up some control and living with another person… all that happens and uh, actually when he hit me, I knew that my dad hit my mom when I was younger, so I was hoping that he’d stop… (Was a husband hitting his wife sort of legitimized for you?…) No, because my dad wouldn’t let my brother hit us. We grew up with no man hits a woman. See my dad grew up to that. He had a sister and two younger brothers, and… he was not allowed to pick on the little ones, not allowed to hit his older sister and so when he hit my mom… my grandfather… said you don’t hit a woman… Dad was the only one allowed to hit. Mom got the belt out once in a while, but because dad said to her I’m tired of hitting the kids, you hit them…

Interviewer: Any drinking?

Oh dad… used to have poker parties. I could remember we were all going to church on Sunday and dad was laying on the couch with a bucket beside him… We went to church every Sunday… and I was also a kid with buck teeth. They took 2 teeth out of here and pulled my teeth back. I had a head brace for a couple years, 16-18 hours a day. So my dad, I appreciate that. He went to work and got that kind of money to be able to put on my face. And I did my part, I wore it and straightened out my bottom teeth, so I guess I was picked on a lot… I became a really fast runner because I would be the last one out of the neighbourhood to go to school… And I’d run all the way there and get there by the time the bell rang. (Because you were teased?) Oh ya… I don’t know how my mom handled it. I remember getting on a city bus and these kids going like this, showing their teeth at my mom and me and… I just felt like belting them because they were making fun of my mom, but and I don’t know if I told her, I don’t think I did, because she was like me, I didn’t want her to feel bad ever.

Interviewer: Who were role models for you when you were growing up?

… the Brady Bunch! I wanted 13 kids… until I became a teenager and then I said no kids…When I was five years old I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to be that up until high school… My dad bought me a nurses’ watch… my dad didn’t finish grade 8 which I didn’t know … uncles and aunts of mine never finished, even went to high school, my mother finished grade 4, she was in the opportunity class and she learned how to sew or something… There was like 13 in her family. One uncle went to high school and he made it… My dad says you’re not getting out of school until you’re done high school… My dad bought me a lot of things. Bought me a car when I was 16, paid for the payments for a year and then I got a job and he paid the insurance …And then when I was done
high school, I was working full-time while in grade 12 … and I thought I’m going to take a year off before I go to college or anything and… dad says your mother’s giving you the money to go to college so you’re going… So I went to college and in October he comes home, you gotta pay it back you know… I dropped out in December. (because you were worried about the debt?) I don’t know. It took me years to pay off 1000 bucks as it was… I was bored in school. I got an honourable mention in grade 10 typing. My dad bought me a portable typewriter while I was in grade 6, so I learned to type at 10 years of age… by the time the contest came in high school, I wasn’t trying very hard… I came in fourth place out of the whole city, but by the time I got out of college they said the average typing skills in college is 65 words a minute. I was doing more than that… (what were you studying?) Dictatyping… and I realise it was partly my problem, it had first year accounting in it, and I had had two years of accounting and I was like I know this stuff already, I should be exempt… They were giving me a hard time in college so I said screw you, see ya… I got an incomplete in accounting… January, they said you can’t continue in the course because you don’t have 15 hours of in class study, and… I sat there in the Dean’s office saying why didn’t he tell me this?… I was hanging out with my buddies at college. I just wasn’t going to class…

Interviewer: Did you have… people that might have served as role models for you?

… My grandmother on my dad’s side. My grandpa had died, so she was a working woman… She worked at [insurance company]… When she retired, they gave her the party and… she took care of us for two months and she was very orderly. And it wasn’t like dad. She did things differently. The church thing, my mom’s family never… my mom’s dad… had three jobs; worked for the city, did taxidermy, and he had a bootlegging shed out the back… My parents made my life better than theirs… (How did you get along with your siblings?) My sister was mommy’s girl and mom was always around so me and my brother were daddy’s… I’ve talked to my siblings and stuff about our life when we were little and their idea is totally different. We lived in a Brady Bunch family according to them… I was a good mother to my mother, sister and brother… Sherry went to my mom quite a bit and if mom had a problem, she’d come to me. And Trent, my mom couldn’t get him to take out the garbage… She’d say to me, tell your brother to take out the garbage. I’d go to his room and say why didn’t you take out the garbage?… You don’t want to get in shit by dad right?… My dad… he tries to control big-time… Neglect? Oh yeah… He took off… My mom there was neglect too… depression, retreating into herself in her bedroom… I was… doing the phone calls for my mom… You can’t understand my mom on the phone… I had people tell me your mother’s got an accent. And I’m going what? She’s Canadian and she sounds like you and me. And she’s got a hearing problem… grade one… They took me for speech… therapy… because I spoke like she did… My brother and sister didn’t have to do that. I was six, five, and they were 4 and 3, and I’m teaching them how to speak properly… I learned to read really well with the speech class and it really helped me. And the phonics class, and being able to sound out my words and that. To this day I read… And um, I taught my mom. And my brother and my sister…
Interviewer: Is there any long-term impact involvements in your childhood?

… I ain’t moving… (Was it hard to make friends?) I think that’s it… in between kindergarten and grade one we moved um, for the first time, halfway through the year. I think that was part of what led to me losing grade 4… then in grade 5 and then 6 and then 7 mom and dad bought a house and didn’t move again until I was 21… I like to stay put. Do not want a partner who’s gone all the time. No truck driver. Don’t want to move, just want to stay with my friends, community, my house with the picket fence and that’s it.

… when I was a little kid, we got a quarter for an allowance, and I remember I saved three bucks and my dad bought me a wallet and I put it in my wallet and the next door neighbour’s kid stole it… and whenever we were bad, which seemed to be all the time, we would lose our allowance and get the strap. Finally we didn’t get allowance anymore… So when I got to be a teen and I started working, mom went alright, you get to pay me. And my dad said what are you talking about? She’s sixteen. And mom says so? I guess when my mom was growing up she got 20 bucks out of her paycheck… they took the rest of her cash. My dad said oh no, you’re not charging this kid room and board until she’s 18, out of school and going to work. So that’s what happened… When I was 18 I was working full-time … they charged me 25 dollars a week?…

Child

… [Megan] was the greatest kid up until… 13… I took a course… up here at school and it was called those challenging teen years and these people are talking about their kids… being really bad and this and that and I’m going I shouldn’t be here… my kid’s great, she’s super. You know where I’m going to find her when I come home? She’s going to be on the couch where I left her… And I come home and say don’t you do that. You know there’s 25 STDs… And she’s going oh mother. (Why did you decide to take the course?) Because my best friend, she’s got two teenagers. One’s pregnant by 16… I’m getting educated… (What happened?)… Well apparently the hormones kicked in and she’s bi-polar… my daughter’s also dyslexic, and usually children find out they’re dyslexic by the third grade. We knew in grade one… I volunteered so much at her school… that they hired me as lunchroom supervisor. So I was aware, and trying not to be controlling in my daughter’s life, but just looking over her…

… My troubles with my daughter started… a couple years ago… she started playing with knives … I think she used that wall as knife practice… (Any idea why she was?) I think she was scared of her father. She was scared to be here alone… and I said Megan, you can go over to Mary’s… You don’t have to be here alone. I have to work that is a fact of life… I went and worked for my aunt’s restaurant, but it was flexible, I could be home at night and Mary and her husband were right next door. And she did take Megan after school a couple times and then she said I’m right next door… and I come home and she’s right where she’s supposed to be. She’s watching TV with the jug of milk beside her and there’s a knife under the chair… it got to the point like I say, I need a knife, and it was nothing for me to go looking for one and it just became common… and… I’m telling
[Children’s Mental Health Centre]…she hid knives… and they’re going there’s something wrong with that…

… Now I hear that she used to get beat up on the way home from school… it’s a tough neighbourhood… she used to get picked on… because she’s dyslexic, she was in special ed… she’d cry and say they were teasing her and calling her names and I’d just hold her and I’d try to talk to her and tell her… Don’t give them that much power over you to hurt your feelings… I think you’re special and you know you’re special. I had art work all over the house that was hers … she sculpted a dog in playdough and I’d pull it out and say look it, no one else in your class can do this… They were going to put her in an enrichment program in grade 2 for plays… She’s got a flair for drama… But they didn’t put her in enrichment because she couldn’t read or write, and they had to write their own plays. I’m saying put her in. She’ll tell me, I’ll write it… So she takes it as I’m too stupid… and I’d get mad at them and say why do you even come to us and build her hopes up… I was going to pull her out of that school in grade six when the teacher… gave her a bad report card… I went for the interview and he says well she doesn’t seem to read. I said she doesn’t read, she goes to special ed because she’s dyslexic. Oh I didn’t know that. I’m saying my daughter’s in your class since September, it’s Christmas now and you didn’t know she was dyslexic?… I was calling up this [learning centre]… I’m too poor. Even the dyslexic people couldn’t help me get my daughter out of that school… 1000 dollars just for testing. No help, support. My daughter needed that…

*Interviewer: So when did your daughter start getting into trouble outside the home?*

… she went to school here and… she was not allowed to come home at lunch because of [her dad’s] stalking her and the restraining order… She’s only on the street twice a day… going there once and coming back… And she knew if she didn’t come home, call me. We had certain rules. She’d go over to her best friend’s house and not call me. I’d just go over there, end up on the door, knock knock, and if she was there, get in the car. You’re not allowed to stay now because you didn’t call me… when she was 12… [she] started hanging out with a girl that was older than her… started going to the… [roller skating rink]… and my daughter started getting an attitude, got lippy, threatened things. I couldn’t have this, that clock or any of these things here when she was here after 13… she’d say if you don’t let me stay up I’m going to break it and you come home, and that clock does have a big crack in it, I don’t know if she did it on purpose… and finally when she was 14 for a couple months I went and got a lock on my bedroom door because I’d come home and find her… and a guy in my room. She was lying… and… I just know right? And uh, I just walked into her room, looked and said get out. And he’s like ahhhh!… No big scene, just get out. So she was trying some stinkers on me… She really got bad…

… She’s got allergies. She got suspended from school in grade three for being violent… I grounded her because she got in trouble at school. She said fine… I’m going to my oma’s… And she just left… walked up to the payphone and called her grandma… And my mother phones saying your 8 year old’s leaving home. I said… let her get mad at me, she’ll come back… this beautiful child, she’d get grouchy it’s like September, October
every year… so I took her… for allergy testing, May and September… she’s all clogged up, she can’t sleep, she gets downright bitchy. Oh, bad news. Gotta get her on shots. So I got her on shots for a couple years up until grade 8… she wouldn’t go get her shots, so I got her Claritin and she’d take that, but I don’t think it helps much. So she’s acting out all over the place… the end of grade 8 I kicked her out in May. *(What happened to lead to that decision?)* She trashed the place… the coffee table… she just took it and threw the coffee table… She ripped things off the wall… I was saying you need to calm down, get in the car… She wouldn’t get in the car, she ran away to her friends’ house… she came back a couple days later and I was saying no this is unacceptable… And I called my mom and… I said I don’t know what to do with this kid. And she said… It’s all your fault… I freaked… and we packed my kid up and took her to my mother. Lock stock and barrel, and a rabbit as well. I said you think I’m such a bad mother… then you friggin raise her…

*Interviewer: How long did she live with your [parents] then?*

A month… *(and were you ready to have her back?)* No. *(What did you do then?)* Worked. Saw my friends, went to counselling… I’d worn down a little bit… My dad hit her. The cops got called… I think that’s what did it. I just packed her up and moved her back. Because I didn’t hit her and when I asked her to leave in September, is when I hit her. And… like him, he’s a short fuse… *(How was it when she first moved back?)*… we were getting along okay because I did stuff… she had met a boy in [nearby city] during a church function that my uncle took her to. So anyways, she’s dating this boy who’s going to church. I’m thinking bonus… I drove her to [nearby city] every Saturday night… You treat me respectfully, I’ll treat you respectfully… I think out of her allowance I made her pay for gas sometimes… It seemed to be working for a little while, but Megan… got in with a bad… group… we’d be sitting here watching TV at 10 or 11, I’d say I’m going to bed now, I’m tired… and I’m leaving the door open and something just doesn’t sit right. I come downstairs and boom, she’s gone… *[The police]* charged her for breaking into this house one time… I just needed some help to keep her curfewed in the house. I talked to the cops and they said we’ll charge her… and then she got a 9 o’clock curfew… She doesn’t care what I say, there’s no compassion, there’s nothing… in May before my parents got her, she wouldn’t move back in because I had a list of rules I wanted her to follow with consequences and I asked her to sign it. When I asked her to sign it, she said see my lawyer…

… she wanted to be a cop… And in school when she got in trouble, she’d say please don’t put it on my record, I want to be a cop! And then in grade 8, all of a sudden, boom. All of it went out the window… there [was] stuff that was coming into my house and I said if you’re not stealing, then your friends are. Get away from them because you are going to get in trouble… she’d have a bit of makeup or whatever, I thought where did you get that?… and basically that’s what I said. If you get caught shoplifting, not my friggin problem. I’ll keep you in jail… She got caught shoplifting… she took her bus tickets for school and she got on a bus … to [shopping mall] with these two young lads… and she started stealing Tommy Hilfiger… cops didn’t want to charge her. I said I’m at work… I’m not leaving work… You just keep her. Oh no, we want to release her.
Fine… Called up my brother, go get my daughter, take her to my mother’s, I’ll get her after work… [store] sent me a letter saying they were suing me. But I called up [social service]… they said we’re not advising you to disregard, but we are saying that some people that have disregarded have not been followed up… I… haven’t heard from them since…

Interviewer: So how did you get to the point of…?

Grounded her for shoplifting… I was vacating the house… Went to a party August 26th and I heard some blonde bitch in my neighbourhood… threw a kid in front of a van. My best friend said the blonde bitch? That’s your daughter… then I said you can’t have the phone, I locked it up in my room… I said to her look it, I am so frustrated with you. I can’t take much more… and the next day she didn’t come home that night because she stayed at a friend’s. She didn’t tell me or call me. She comes home the next day says oh I left so and so at so and so’s house… I said look it, give me their number, I will phone them I will go get it. You are not getting the phone. And she went out the door with the steak knife. I had collected the knives and put them in the top drawer on my dresser so she had a knife in her room that I didn’t know about… She tried to push her way in, I pushed her out, we struggled over the door and then I’m hearing this g-g-g-g-g-g-g-… I open the door, there was a hole in it because she had thrown something at the door once before… she threw the dresser and even then I didn’t ask her to leave… And I whacked her and then we were fighting, and she’s a pretty good scrapper. So I said I don’t like this, this is ridiculous. This is not who I am and if this is who you are, get the fuck out of my house… I left the house, when I came back she was gone with a note… I’m at my friend’s with a phone number. She couldn’t do that the night before?…

Interviewer: So how have things been since the fight? What’s been going on?

… I charged her… she’d been doing her own thing for a long time, so anyways, the night she ended up at [youth shelter] I got a call from them. They said your daughter’s here… So I sent the cop over. He put her in custody… to this day she’s mad… for that… I said look it, I didn’t know where you were for 3 weeks, I had no idea if you were alive or dead except that you called up one time. When you were in custody… I knew where you were, I knew you were safe. Well how safe was I? I got in with a bunch of criminals, learned how to hotwire a car… She wouldn’t talk to me for weeks. Then when she did talk to me she’d say you owe me 200 dollars… for some reason I owe her money because she lived on the street for 3 weeks. I guess she owes those people money… She’s talking to me now…

… they tell me… that Megan needs male attention… and they’re saying she’s very sexually oriented and it’s just male attention…And I said I knew that… when Megan was little, I applied to Big Sisters… and I said can she get a Big Brother and they said no… you can’t have a big brother… And I said… she’s got a grandma that makes her cookies and sewing and that and there’s me and my sister. My brother, I was 23 when she was born and my brother was like 21… he was trying to find a job and he wasn’t too active in my daughter’s life… There’s no positive male role model in her life, her grandfather is
the only male in her life and he’s gone half the time… The other day she said she really likes Jake… she said there was guys you dated that treated me like I was your suitcase or purse… She says and Jake treats me as a person…He gave her some shirts the other day… She thought that was great…

… she used to throw her pictures from school in the garbage. And I’d say why are you doing that? Well we’re too poor, you always tell me how poor we are… I didn’t tell her the finances… well I told her the other day… I never wanted to send you a message that we were poor… I was trying to teach her to shop, to budget, to be conservative with her money, or to realise hey you get to be a millionaire, you can go and blow it all… she would throw school trips in the garbage. I would retrieve one one time and said come on… you deserve a break… So there was this trip for 360 dollars… for the end of grade 8. We saved our money, and I told her papa would help us…

… I’ve always been confident that with my daughter I’m a good mother… I’ve not been abusive, and that’s my, I guess somewhere along the way I learned the line. Everybody’s a good parent unless you’re abusive, and that’s what makes you not a good parent. As long as you try to learn and give and do your best… (what is a good mom to you?) Like I said, no abuse, no neglect either. I don’t, no control okay? I really do want to work myself out of my job as a mother. I want to teach my child how to be resourceful and confident and make decisions… (So would you say you’re a good mom?) ya… I’m not giving my kid up… I’m doing everything to see that my daughter gets the best care and that she can deal with her problem… My mom was dyslexic, depressed, sick all the time, she at least copes. My mom made someone take care of her too, but Megan’s going to have to let me get close enough. I can take care of her for the rest of my life without controlling her and I’m prepared to do that… I am doing everything I can…

**Adult Relationships with Family of Origin**

… I was walking down the aisle and I knew I shouldn’t have married Brian and I knew if I looked at my dad and he was crying, I was going to turn around and walk out of the church. So I didn’t look at him… my dad wrote me a letter when I got married and it said open this in five years… if you’re still married, this guy is a mistake. (How did it feel to read that line?) Uh… hurtful. I can remember, and I was mad too… but I didn’t blame dad… He couldn’t tell me, I wasn’t listening. I was mad at myself going you idiot, you went through all that crap, meanwhile all you had to do was look at your dad going down the aisle and you would’ve been out of there. But then you wouldn’t have Megan… (So what did [parents] say when you showed up on their doorstep with the baby?)… I said he is an idiot and we have no food. So I’m here until he gets paid… They didn’t know what was going on so I went back. But then… I showed up at their house and he had hurt me and I just said look. He’s hurt me… (And they were supportive of your decision?) That’s right. Especially with a little child… my mom babysat… They had my daughter every weekend too. They’d… take her to Sunday school…

… And when I was an adult… I disagreed with my father… He raised his fist at me… And I wasn’t back talking, I wasn’t sassing, and yet he raised his fist to me. And I
screamed… and I’m thinking… I’m out of here. And I retreated… So that’s control… (do you think he’s influenced your parenting?) Yeah. (Who’s accused you of being like your father?) Everybody. (Do you see it?) Maybe… I’m more like my father than my mother. Because my mother is the behind the scenes manipulator, whereas I’m the out front, in your face, and my dad’s like that. He’s like that and he doesn’t manipulate from behind… and he’s got more of a sense of humour than my mom. But my mom I think is dark humour like Megan and I. Like we think some things are funny… But I think we get our, my dad’s sense of humour too…

… Last fall… I charged my daughter with break and entry… to get her off the street. And my dad phoned and said you need to get your daughter a lawyer and I said I can’t, I’m the one that charged her… He said you’re the one who took her out of jail, so you take care of her… So by the end of the conversation I said I can’t do this… Can’t my mother do this?… what about my sister?… Alright, I’ll call around tomorrow and see what I can find. So my cousin and aunt are sitting there, and by the end of the conversation they’re saying how much control does this man have over you? You’re calling a lawyer tomorrow for your daughter after you sat there 10 minutes ago there’s no way in hell you can do that? (So because he suggested?) Suggested? (Insisted?) Yeah… (Are you avoiding that by not communicating with them?) oh yeah… And I haven’t talked to him since that, except for once…

**Experiences with Children’s Aid and Social Services**

… Now I know the battered wife syndrome… I volunteered in [women’s shelter] for two years… And I’m actively… out there learning, even though I dropped out of college… When she was little I went to a self esteem course. I figured I needed all the help I could get… And because of being a single mother and poor, most courses are available to me at little or no money… so that those kind of things in the last 15 years have been very helpful… I went for two years, and then I didn’t… and then about a couple years ago I was feeling, needing some help. So I went back to the counsellor… my daughter acted up last year… I… had her down to the counsellor’s… and my counsellor said…You wanted a strong independent woman, that’s what you got. I said ya I know, but will you just make her obey the laws or something? …

…I’m involved with the [Children’s Aid] right? So a little background about how I got involved with them and stuff. And it goes back a while ago… She was ten… I called them up and I asked them for the information… my daughter wants to be alone, she’s in the house… I come home at 5, she comes home at 3:30… I called up and said what’s the rule on this?… And they said it depends on the kid… before she ever got caught for shoplifting… I was on the phone with [Children’s Mental Health Centre], finding out what kind of help I could get my daughter… I was calling up Children’s Aid saying what can I do with this kid? What are my rights? They said lock the door on her. Lock her out. And I said uh, is that allowed? Well as long as she’s got somewhere to go and you know she does. And she’s 14… That’s when it started…
Interviewer: I want to talk about [Megan’s first] placement [group home 3] for a moment

... She was put in jail. My dad got her out ... she called Children’s Aid, Megan got them involved... She was living with her grandparents... She ended up at [group home 1], my parents’, [group home 2], [youth shelter], my parents’. (What is [group home 3]) Children’s Aid group home... (And she’s in care of Children’s Aid?)... Right... her probation officer called me and said... instead of throwing her in jail, I would like to see her get therapy. What’s your position on this... My position has been that before she even ended up at [group home 3]... He said okay, and by the way tell your daughter I want to talk to her... So my daughter came on Sunday and I said by the way, the probation officer wants to see you... So she saw him... She said he wanted to tell me that he could’ve breached me, but he didn’t because I’m going to go to [Children’s Mental Health Centre], and... I am not going... because in [group home 3], she’s made friends... And what did she do?... the staff [at group home 3] said she was acting funny... and they smelled marijuana... and she says no, there’s nothing... she yelled and screamed at them and they called the cops on her. The cops found a trace amount of marijuana in her cigarette package. They searched her room and found a razor blade...

Interviewer: what services are you involved in?...

I was put with a worker, a family case worker [CAS worker 1] last November or so and I met with her once... and we had a smoke out the back and I didn’t hear from her again until January... she says, I’m not being able to give you the time you need, so I got this student working with me... [CAS worker 2]’s been coming every two weeks... (So she was a student...) Yes. (And how did that work?)... She gave me time, or I could call up her answering machine...I went to counselling up until March. My counsellor left the agency after 10 years... (How are you feeling with your counsellor... leaving the agency?) I was okay... he gave me the name of someone else and he does stuff like he asks me why I’m there... and then I got to evaluate him and all this stuff right? And I realised why I was there, somewhere along the line I lost confidence. I guess I had confidence as a teen or whatever, and I hooked up with my ex, lost it, gained it back, and then dealing with my teen I lost it again. So by the time... he was moving on and that, I felt we had worked out that I had gotten it back... (Any other services?) not really. I was being supplemented by mother’s allowance up until January and because my daughter doesn’t live here I don’t get that anymore... I’m poor now. Not only that [Children’s Aid] was charging me 221 dollars a month to take care of her. Meanwhile I’m not receiving welfare and my hours got lowered... Now they’re only charging me 30 a month. Which I haven’t paid because I’m used to getting 800 to 1000 a month, now I’m getting six...

... She’s at [Children’s Mental Health Centre] to get counselling and I’ve been talking to her about family counselling and bringing her home... And she’s talking about if I have to do six months at [Children’s Mental Health Centre], I might as well take the... course on how to live by myself because I’ll be 16 in March and I’m going to get student welfare and live on my own... But I’ll come visit, she says... (What do you want for her?) I told
her she has to come home until she’s thirty-five... But we gotta get the family counselling first... *(When did she move in there?)* Two weeks ago... *(How’s she doing there?)* Hating it... she keeps running away... *(How many times does she run away?)* Daily. Now not so much, because the probation officer put his foot down and said to her... if you run away and breach probation, we will get you arrested and thrown into [Children’s Mental Health Centre] 7 day program. So you’ve got way more freedom at 5 day program... *(So she’s out and you have her on Sundays)* Ya, and I did talk to her about being able to pick her up during the week... get her away, give her a break. *(Did you have any trouble organizing what would happen with her on Saturdays?)*... [Children’s Aid] was thinking of her going to my parents every Friday night and my house every Saturday night... And they said if we make this happen, you’re going to have to talk to your parents... I said no, I’m not talking to them and you can’t make me. And on top of that they have a trailer... You’re telling them if they go to their trailer on a Friday night they gotta be back on Saturday at 8... I said this is not feasible for anybody. And my worker was really good... She said... there’s no sense in implementing the plan if we know it’s not going to work... but she says I’ll need to think of an alternative plan... I called [Children’s Mental Health Centre]... and I said okay I have a problem. My daughter cannot be unsupervised and she’s going to be in a 5 day program. I said I’ll bring her home, but who do I sue when she slices her arms up?... My daughter’s now staying at [Children’s Mental Health Centre]. Children’s Aid has been pushing for this for 10 years... they’re paying [Children’s Mental Health Centre] staff to stay there on the weekends... all I know is it’s working for me... Megan still has a worker through [Children’s Aid] and has a worker through [Children’s Mental Health Centre], and we have a family counsellor through [Children’s Mental Health Centre] and I have no worker through [Children’s Aid] now...

... you should see the list I got of what they’re going to teach her... anger triggers... they’re going to teach her that, more positive self thoughts... a whole list. *(So you're happy.)* yeah... They got real in-depth goals. *(Can you think of any other examples?)* Well they talked about communication in between Megan and me... there were a whole bunch of those goal setting things. *(So it sounds like you’re going to be really involved in goals)* ya... I think she needs an adjustment in her meds... *(So she is also being seen by a psychiatrist who’s working with her medications?)*... Yeah... *(Okay, you said that you wanted [Children’s Mental Health Centre] to teach her to be a functional person in society... Are you optimistic?)* Yes I am because of what I see that they work on... they’re going to do what they can and I see them as doing quite a bit with kids, but a lot of it depends on her too... whatever’s going on, so she needs to be there to get more input from them... *(what is your role in counselling? You’re in family counselling?)* Start today... [children’s mental health worker] said... as she gets older... she’s pushing the boundaries even more... and she says a lot of parents find that that’s exactly what’s happened... And I said when Megan was little, we were friends. I didn’t have to say no, or if I said no, she knew. And she also, when I took that course on parenting teenagers, I’d come home with a piece of paper, she knew me better than I knew me. We had to write down what I know about myself, and what I know about her. And she did the same thing to me. I was reading hers... What’s the thing that your mom hates the worst? And
I was writing down I really hate laundry or something stupid, and she’d write down, my mom hates lies…

**Daily Living and Work**

… When I ran my aunt’s restaurant she said I can’t believe this is you. I’m very organised at work. Everything had a place… I was going to be a very professional career lady and I blew that somewhere. I work at [deli], that’s my career… for three years now and I work every Saturday. I work less than 30 hours a week, but one third of my pay is that Saturday… Someone comes in, I notice things. Like hey, got your hair done. And people come in and talk to me. I tell people to just come in and visit… *(You like your job?)* I love my job. I worked in a factory, there was two people in the room. I quit that job in six months. I’m not on the telephone telling them to buy stuff either. I know what kinds of jobs I can’t do.

*Interviewer: describe a typical week for you… from Monday morning to Sunday night.*

Okay. Mondays I work… Monday night I come home and do nothing. I’m tired. Tuesdays lately have been my day off and I have appointments… there’s like 3 meetings a week that I have. Whether it’s [Children’s Mental Health Centre] or talking to the social workers or the probation officer… I might work on Wednesday 1-6:30 and then I may have a neighbourhood association meeting… I was treasurer. I had to reduce that. I’m still on the committee… I gotta work this Thursday so Friday I have no appointments so I’m off. And I work every Saturday. So then that’s when I’m getting to the cleaning… You know, laundry, grocery shopping… Sunday I get off now to visit my daughter all day. And we try to do different things. Two weeks ago we went to the show… Last week we went, they asked me to get her some more appropriate clothes. She has these short little belly shirts, so I paid her ten bucks to go to Value Village and take your time… So she went through and got like three shirts and two pairs of pants and she’s happy with it… it cost me forty bucks. And then we went out for Chinese food and I came here and I didn’t take her home until ten at night. And that’s Monday through Sunday. And on top of that I might go out on a Friday or Saturday night. Like this week we went out both nights. We went out with our friends… they called us up and said come on over. And we ended up playing pool for a while and then they said come over tomorrow for a barbecue… And then we came home at about 11:30, which was good because I had to get up the next morning and get my daughter. Not to mention it was my aunt’s birthday on Sunday, so I had to call her… I’m busy…

**Mental and Physical Health**

… My parents never taught us how to drink and stuff… I could’ve had lots of money… I drank it, whatever… I moved from [city 1]… I was here for like a week and got three job offers because I had experience… They all wanted me as sous-chef. So I picked one and went to work for them and I was staying at my aunt’s… and paying them board… I would drive to work and work from 8 am until whenever… and then the gang of us would all go out and… We’d steal beer from [restaurant] and we’d go out to the bush…
and we’d drink it… Then I got another job at [restaurant]. Girls my age who were 21 or so… and we used to all go out… get loaded and be silly. It was fun. That was Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Thursday, Friday, Saturday … I was getting drunk… with the girls I worked with… and this was my life from April until October… September I got a new job and moved into a new place and now I’m too poor to go out. 

(How would you characterize alcohol’s role in your life?) Now, I’ve learned… I started playing pool on Sundays, got to pool at 2 in the afternoon, and I would play pool, and I’ve had a few drinks, and it’s 8 at night and I still want to sit there and visit… but not all the time. (Is alcohol a part of being social, going out with friends?) Not always… I bought the occasional bottle of wine home when Megan was little… last year when she was here, I bought some coolers… she was 14… I was teaching her how to drink… I have to teach her all sorts of stuff, not just leave it and say don’t drink or don’t have sex, you know what I mean?…

Interviewer: How were you feeling, you said you went on Prozac…

I was going to kill myself. I was contemplating it. What the hell does [Megan] need me for? This was after she moved in with my parents. But my aunt, my support group kept me focussed. And I went to the doctor… my doctor said don’t take the whole bottle, it ain’t going to kill you. So I said rats… I quit trying to hurt myself. I quit pulling out in front of traffic… it’s like that’s not good for my daughter, that’s not good for me… what if I end up maimed in the hospital, what good is that?… I’m only on 20 milligrams a day… I don’t feel like drugs are controlling my life or I need them to get through the day… I said to her I’m not going to be on these the rest of my life and she said you haven’t been on them for most of your life either so just relax. If they’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing then fine. To be able to take a step back and look instead of being so caught up in my life… The Prozac allows me to do that. (Are you concerned about being on them for the rest of your life?) No, it’s just a thought… if I forget to take a pill, I take it tomorrow and no major thing happens, so I don’t find them controlling…

…I did go and get surgery two weeks ago. I got spaded… tubal ligation… and they said it was going to be a piece of cake. Took me a week before I could get back to work. I saw my doctor this morning, I said they lied. It’s not that easy… you get to the hospital and they pump you full of gas and on your way out they hand you a prescription for Tylenol 3… but I did pretty good… (How did you make that decision?) Well with dating and stuff again… I wasn’t on the pill since I was thirty because I smoke and well… I was thinking especially with my daughter and that, geez the last thing I want to do is to get pregnant. I absolutely don’t want that to happen…

**Personal Strengths and Supports**

*Interviewer: How are you doing living on your own?*

I have a support group. My aunt, my cousin, my sister-in-law… and my friend. And then having Jake come into my life, he’s over a lot. I’m not alone a lot. If I am alone I find things to do… (it sounds like lots of people in your life.) Ya. Well, because I have
lots of people, I meet them… You get a standard, people with like standards and values around you, so I know I can trust my friend to talk to my daughter, or she can trust me to talk to her daughter… Standards and values…

*Interviewer: Is religion important in your life?*

Not religion. But the higher power… I think some religion is just ah, a form of abuse. People take your vulnerable, emotional, spiritual side and abuse you with it… I can usually find abuse in any church you go to, that’s why I don’t go to them. At Pentecostal, the father of the house thing and the dominance over women and children, I think religion has kept people down for a lot of years and I’m not specifically saying like Roman Catholics and the inquisitions and Henry the 8th switching back and forth… I think the higher power is a lot more accepting than what people think they are and a lot less judgmental. *(What role does that play in your life?)* Well, I try to be that way. If anything they say to be Christian is to be Christ like…

*Interviewer: What is joyful for you? What brings you pleasure?*

Lots of stuff… lots of people make me laugh. I was teasing people at the salon today… They make me laugh because they think I’m funny… My daughter and I, even though with the depression and everything else, we have humour. I’ve had people tell me when she was nine years old, they were talking to her and looked at me and said like mother like daughter… I talk a lot too… I don’t talk all the time, it’s gotta present itself, that’s what makes me such a good salesperson… *(Darts and pool? You said you like?)* I do, because you’re with people. You don’t have to be good, just part of a team. I was a volleyball player when I was a kid… I took on City Hall twice and won both times… for the Bingo hall. There was free bingo in the mornings and what you’d win is chips and chocolate bars and stuff… City hall said to do that you need a license and they were closing down the whole Bingo. And we protested, and… I made phone calls. *(That comes through in a lot of your stories. You’re very good at using the resources.)* Networking… But anyways, we met with the city and compromised and… they tried to close us down twice. Something about the second time, I was on [local television station], the first year I was interviewed by the paper… *(That’s an interesting story… that you had that commitment.)*… I protested the sale of Ontario housing, I was on [local TV station] news…

… a friend of a friend of a friend told me about this course… one of those self-help books… I borrowed the book, my friend had the instruction guide and this is the workbook. You have to do three pages every morning. You just sit down and write… It was a bit of a self-discovery thing… my cousin and I… we’d be on the phone and discuss this week’s lesson. There was different things to go back and highlight… *(So what did you learn?)* … I guess I realised there was more to me than I thought there was. *(In what areas?)* Just reading this one, “my life is still going on as before but I’m dreaming and still think that the dream is possible”. *(What’s the dream?)* Okay, when I was married and I said that my marriage is like a dream… That dream’s gone, but then in this place, like I said, there is no other dream… except for raising that child, being the best mother that I
could be… I have a better sense of humour than I thought I did… Ya, what I discovered in that self-help book is maybe I realised, I always thought that other girl was so funny, and then I’m thinking what the hell is she hanging out with me for?… I don’t know, I discovered it and accepted it at the same time. (Anything else other than the sense of humour?) Oh I don’t know. Strength, confidence.
Sandy

Sandy – Mother interviewed
Macy – Sandy and Derrick’s daughter
Jerry – Sandy’s stepfather

Derrick – Sandy’s husband
Ron – Sandy’s oldest brother
Robbie – Sandy’s half-brother (son of Sandy’s mother and stepfather)

Growing Up

… I’d like to start with my life… In the summer of ’69… When I was nine years old I was sexually abused by my brother. That happened on several occasions… I don’t remember a lot… I just remember… I had talked to this friend in the apartment building about it where we had lived and she went around telling these other people… there were gangs… that hung around the park and every day I went to school they yelled out that this girl is being, you know, by her brother… It was… very, very traumatic and I grew up not thinking any one ever cared about me… my mom was never around… I have a feeling that she was a prostitute… we had read in the papers, my sister and I… something to do with this guy that we always had to go see in the apartment building… He was providing my mom with food and stuff for us kids… we saw he was arrested in the paper two years later… he was a pimp… (So, you suspect during that time your mom was working as a prostitute)? I’m assuming. She could have been a cocktail waitress. She could have been out cleaning all night but… my brother had taken us outside when my mom was in the park, our eldest… he pulled my sister and I out of bed and dragged us out to the back park of the apartment building… he said this is what your mother is, this is what she’s doing… My mom was with another man naked in the park…when you’re nine, what do you think of something like that?… my mom was very poor until she married my stepfather and then…he had a school teaching job so things were lightened after that…

Interviewer: Who was in your home?

… it started with my brother being the eldest… Then I had another one that was about 15 months [younger]… he was the second eldest… Then myself… I was the oldest girl… then there was my youngest sister, she’s four years younger than I am… (These are all your … mother’s children and… same father as you?) Yes… [he] wasn’t our stepfather at the time but his family moved in which consisted of three more people… (Then you had a step-brother…) I have a [step] brother that’s the same age as my eldest brother… And a stepsister… the same age as I am… So, there was eight of us in total and we had to move out of a two bedroom apartment… to [city] into a house… and my brother was born in ’70 which was the one between them… He’s my half-brother… He’s the youngest. (So, one who was born from the union of your mother and [stepfather]) … Yes…
Interviewer: So, tell me more about what [it] was like when you were in the home?

It was dreadful. My brother would pick out my clothes for me… my oldest brother, Ron (Is that the brother who)...Who did abuse? Yes… he would be there to feed all of us, serve us breakfast, get our clothes ready, put them on the bed… I remember my teacher in grade five thinking I was kind of a slut of wearing the clothes I was wearing…Whenever we had a problem at the school… I remembered my brother handling everything. I remember waking up in the morning and the smell of his hands were so awful… I couldn’t stand it… my mom was never, ever there. We could never discuss anything with her… I’d go to bed without a mother. I’d wake up without a mother. (Was your dad home? Your stepdad?) No… they would go to, I’m assuming bars… That’s where she met him… But my brother, he was not a sympathetic person at all. He was like 16 years old, quit school, [and] had to baby-sit us… He worked in a parking lot… to help my mom to do the financial end of raising us… he became very, very bitter… (Do you think your elder brother was a victim too?) Yeah, no. I have a feeling that he had suffered some abuse when he was a child, just knowing how my father was because my mom had always said that he abused her…we never felt that we were loved as a family and still to this day I still don’t feel that I’m quote loved. I don’t really feel that my mom knows the meaning of the word… She keeps telling us that life is very difficult which I realize when you walk out on somebody and you have a baby and your eldest is what, six or seven years old… I wouldn’t want to do it myself. (She walked out on your dad?) Yes… she couldn’t handle the beatings or anything anymore from him and I always had this vision in my head at one time. I don’t know if it’s a real thing… but I remember my mom being taken away in an ambulance and covered…

…When my brother was born in ’70, this stepbrother that’s between the two parents but they weren’t married, we used to have to look after him constantly… He had cholic, he had to be walked up the floors at night and then I remember one day I passed out in school. I had fainted on the floor and my sister thought I had died, my stepsister… When they tried to contact my mother there was nobody home… I just got to stay at home by myself and my sister came home with me from the school… I often say to myself and my stepsister’s often said it, that when… we were in that lady’s class that realized there was no one home… I often wish at that time that she had reported it to Children’s Aid… But then… we would have ended up in foster homes… you don’t know what would happen then…

Interviewer: …did your mother have a drinking problem that you know…

Yes… She was an alcoholic. My father was an alcoholic… (And about your stepdad?) Yes, (what was the drinking like in your home?) I never saw it until… after my stepfather and my mom actually got together… Then I saw a lot of abuse… one night I went up into my mom’s room. She had been yelling and he was ready to strangle her. I had pulled… Jerry off of her and of course I got whipped down the stairs… any conflicts was always me to get thrown against the wall or punched out… every time he drank he became very violent… (What drinking occurred? … Like all the time? Some of the times?)… It never stopped… Jerry actually lost his teaching job because of drinking…
He was forced to take early retirement... He had went to a psychiatrist and just tried to always fool everybody to say that he didn’t have a problem, that he was burning [out] from teaching... He taught in the public schools... he was the principal... And we all knew ... it was due to drinking...

**Interviewer:** *the first time period I thought I would draw on, that is your preteen years.*

... I never thought I ever had a life... I felt like I was totally worthless... *(what were the main things that were going on in your life?)* Basically the sexual abuse, the families moving in together, my mom never being home, drinking... *(Did you have any refuges? Places you could go...)* No, nowhere. The only thing my sister and I did was... we stayed out very late at night... *(How late would you stay out?)* Probably ten o’clock... We never wanted to come home... my mom would take in boarders... you never had any privacy, you never had any life, never had your own room... they also made us go to church and we didn’t want to go... *(Do you have any good memories of that time?)* Just when we were all together and we used to go out and pick cherries ... Those are the only good memories that I have. That was basically during the summer ... we’d stay at a place called [town]... *(And so how old would you have been when you were out picking cherries?)* Probably about 12. *(You’d work for a full day?)* Yes... We’d all do it together *(Your mother?)* Yeah, and the stepchildren... *(And the step dad?)* Yeah... the... younger ones wouldn’t do so much as what we did but we were made to work pretty steady... to pay for the place that we stayed at...and to help out with food and clothing... We always had to help out but I mean then when you consider how many children there were... it must have been very difficult ... It was like all of us living in a little wee cottage... the boys would be out in the tent outside and we would make bon fires by the lake and we would go swimming... That was a good time in my life...we all got along... but... my stepsister and I always felt that life wasn’t fair for us because we got stuck raising my brother so... it would be either one of us or whoever to look after him and then miss work...

**Interviewer:** *What was school like during your preteen years?*

Terrible... we were always put down in school by the teachers... We were very popular in school but the teachers didn’t really think that we were. *(Did you have a lot of friends?)* I wouldn’t say a lot of friends... my stepsister and I... we hung around together but then of course we didn’t have our other friends... but we were very popular with boys... which I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing... *(were you a good student?)*... in public school no... I had a real problem with talking... I had to sort of calm myself down I guess before I went to high school... I was quite disturbing in some of the classes. *(How were your grades?)*... Most of my grades were basically... late 60’s... early 70 marks but... I had to really struggle. I spent all my time at night studying. I spent my noon hours in the library studying... *(Why?)*... to feel that I could accomplish something in life because I was always told that I’ll never make it anywhere... and... one of the struggles I had was to be able to accomplish my schooling...
Interviewer: Okay. So, let’s talk about your teen years … Let’s say 13 to 20 …

… Dreadful… Temper tantrums, breaking windows, smashing everything, totally frustrated having to raise my brother and mop the floors with him every night and attend school the next day… We still were people upon people in the house and boarders… and it was just terrible… We went to dances and my sister and I were probably considered to be popular people, her and I both because we associated with a lot of people, particularly her. She was involved in drugs, which I wasn’t… (Are you talking high school now?) Yeah… I would always come to high school two weeks late. I would have a lot of catching up to do because I worked my summers in tobacco to be able to put myself through school. I worked 12 hours a day every day of the week … I went up to [city] area… from probably when the end of school was out… probably when I was about 13 as part-time and then I worked into full time every summer after that… to be able to get my supplies and stuff for school… we used to have to pay half for everything because our parents couldn’t afford to support us all… my stepsister… didn’t really like it so she didn’t go as much as I did… but I kept it up even when I was in high school… And then when I came back to school I would have all that catching up to do…

Interviewer: And where was your biological father?

He was a truck driver… He was out of our life for quite a few years, from the time I was four years old… I had remembered seeing him on a couple of occasions… I looked for him on the streets with my brother when I was 13 years old… I think it took over… a year to find him… (What was that like?) The impressions were just incredible. My brother knocked at the door and said I’m your son. And the first words that came out of my dad’s mouth were you’re no son of mine, you’re a hypocrite because my brother had long hair… all I ever heard from him… through my teen years [was] being called stupid and fat… I was seeing him approximately once a week… [and then at] about 13, 14… I didn’t like it at home so I went to my dad’s and things didn’t work out there… my stepmother abused me. She hit me across the nose and I went running to my other brother’s place and stayed there… so I was off school for a while because my face had been totally swollen… that was my in between brother… (How long would you have been with your dad?) Not long, probably a couple months. (And with… your in-between brother?) Probably a couple years… he had his own apartment, he had a son and he had a wife… but they didn’t get married until later on… (You lived with them for a couple of years?) Yeah, probably about two or three years… (And you were going to school during this time?) Yeah… then I moved in with my eldest brother which didn’t last very long either because I had thought he had changed but he was just whatever… (So, between 13 and 20, how many years of that were you with your parents?)… probably two, three years. (So, you lived during that time in three or four different living arrangements?) Yes … I was… constantly moving … (So, what was that like?)… Terrible to never feel that you’re secure…
Interviewer: And tell me about your brothers and sisters…

I had a brother at 21 that died… he was my life… He was my protection all through my life and then I lost him at 17… it was through a truck accident with my stepfather driving and a train came in… It was so heartbreaking. I couldn’t believe he was dead… I still find it hard today. He was the best in the family… a very good friend of mine that was in the truck… said actually my stepfather was laughing and thought it was really funny because my brother said he hated my mom and he was out to get him and my stepfather had drove the truck… at 80 miles an hour and flipped out over a bend and said he was going to kill him. Whether that’s true or not, I don’t know… (Was your stepdad charged?) Yes. He had been charged several times with drinking and driving. He crippled a man…paralysed him through drinking and driving… As far as we were concerned he took my brother’s life. My mom always denies it and says you can’t really blame him because they were all drinking…

… I didn’t attend the last two weeks of my grade 12 and I didn’t attend my graduation because… my brother had died… two weeks before my graduation… (So you graduated?) Yes… my sister and I are the only ones that ever graduated from school, the real sister and I… (In your family?) Yes. So, we are very, very proud of that. (That would include your mom too?) Yes… when I… graduated at 17, I got my own job working in a lawyer’s office and then I was able to get my own place closer to my work… I had to do the whole run of the office, real estate. I did all that and secretarial and doing up mortgages, typing, answering phones and having to work totally on my own. It was a lot of responsibility. (And you liked that?) Yes, I did… [then] when I had finally finished up my job at the lawyer’s office to go work in a factory so I could get ahead and get myself a car, [dad] condoned me… and told me I was absolutely no good for quitting that job and going to work in a [factory]…

**Adult Relationships with Family of Origin**

… I was sexually abused by my brother… I told my mother and she was very, very shocked… I wasn’t sure if I had been abused by more than one person… I had gone under hypnosis at [mental health agency]… and I had found out that what was happening was true… I pressed charges against my brother [and] I received phone calls constantly that he had a gun and he was going to shoot me… I had decided to take my brother to court about ten years ago and never got anywhere with it because of the fact that they took the time frame, they took my memory type of thing that I couldn’t remember, different events, just certain things that I sort of blanked out at and nothing really became of it… I had expressed concerns [to father] that… I had heard through counselling … if it’s in the family, it sometimes comes from a sibling in the family to continue through the family and then I had learned about my stepbrother also having an occurrence with him and… I couldn’t believe all these people that came forward… I had also known of other people that he had abused. I had my stepsister come to court with me. They wouldn’t even hear her testimony. I had had a sister here in [city] that had also been abused by him and… my sister-in-law, her daughter was also abused by him to the point where she had welts on her body… the day of the trial… he had… so called fallen off a truck… and
he was limping and in pain and stuff like this so none of it really went over. He had subpoenaed everybody from my past into the courtroom which were old boyfriends, old people from my past, even family members, friends. He had subpoenaed my stepbrother and I just totally broke down… as the court proceeded, I had become stunned and stunned… I couldn’t really express what I had to say… today… I would be able to totally talk about it… because that part of my past is gone and I’m looking forward…

… I was involved with C.A.S. at the time to tell them that I really felt for my niece being in danger because of my brother… They had actually taken the girl away from him for I think it was approximately three or four months. (So, you called the C.A.S…) Yes… I really felt that… there was something wrong with him… and nothing really became of the whole situation… I knew facts that my niece had been sleeping with my brother for up until she was probably about ten years old and I really felt there was abuse but nobody would believe me… (They did remove your niece for a while?) They did, yes. And then they told me that they had to put her back because they had no actual proof… he is still abusing… And I’ve reported it to Children’s Aid again but there doesn’t seem to be anything that is done about it… I still have a hard time looking at him today. I still have visions of me walking down the street ready to stab him because I couldn’t handle my anger anymore…

Interviewer: What are your relations like with your family today?

… My stepsister moved away… There’s very little contact with her. My other stepbrother moved to Germany. There’s no contact with him… My real father is out of the question… (When was the last time you had any connection with him?) Just after I got married… (14 years ago? He’s alive?)…Yes, he is… My eldest brother [Ron]… went around bragging… that the girl that he had been living with, her daughter would send him love notes… She was 18 and he’s in his 40’s… he just thinks he’s one of these real hot items… (So, you still see him?) Not by my choice… He walks into my mom’s every now and then to pick up mail and stuff. He has no basic address… he lives driving on the road… he lost his first wife when she was 23. She left behind two little boys. She died in the bathtub… (Suicide?) We have a hunch that it probably was but nobody will ever give us that confirmation. She had asthma very badly and never ever bathed without my brother being with her and this night he didn’t show up and apparently he was with some other woman…

… My sister… since I brought out the court case, I brought out all of this whatever from my past I was no good anymore… (So… you don’t have a relationship with your sister?) No, I don’t… my half-brother [Robbie] and I, the youngest, we are very, very close… we practically raised him since he’s been a baby and… [Robbie has] just gotten out of a treatment centre for… depression, drugs and alcohol… He helps me out… last week he came twice a week… My mom often said… she had a family of five children because she is an only child but we would all be close… For everything that we’ve all been through, you would think that your family would become closer together but it hasn’t and it’s just sort of driven us farther apart… (does your family ever… get together?)… We do have a family get together… we try every week… but there’s only my mom, there’s my
stepfather, there’s us of course and then there’s my half-brother… Robbie has become gay, he’s got a gay partner… and that’s basically all of us… I have my mom come here. I’ve asked her… to come here and I know it’s very hard for her. She walks in the walker and she has to get up the big flight of stairs… she’ll be 66 in July… she has diabetes… we were going to her place quite often which is an apartment and… there’s just not enough space… she told me… in the summer, that I could have them and she would do it in the winter…

Interviewer: What’s your relationship like with your mom?

My mom and I are very close… My stepfather actually is very good with my child… You couldn’t ask for a better quote grandparent then what he is… (What’s your relationship like with…?) My stepfather now? (Yeah) Good… Jerry had a severe drinking problem for many, many years. Up until recently he has levelled out to the fact where he’s not really drinking a lot. He’s become a totally different person when he isn’t drinking… he used to drink every day… Now [it’s] maybe once a week, maybe two or three beers… (So… where did the closeness…) After I was married and my daughter was born. They became very close to my daughter and would do anything for her… (I notice in your story that… in both of the births, I think your mother was there?) Yes, she was. (Did you ask her to be there?) No, she came on her own… It… gave me a sense of everybody that could… feel for me at the time of what I was going through, to be able to share the sad times as well has the happy times… (Why do you think your mom did that?)… Maybe because she isn’t close to any of her other grandchildren… Maybe she felt she could be a part of Macy’s life.

Interviewer: Is she estranged from her other children?

Yes, she is… There’s one grandchild that’s been coming back to her… he’s probably 27… He belongs to my eldest brother… The stepchildren have all moved away… (What about your mother’s relationship…) the real children?… there isn’t… just with the one grandchild. (So, just with you?). Yes… sorry… with Robbie too, my half-brother…(why was the connection made with you?) I have no idea. I guess I basically… always realized that I needed to have my mother … I don’t believe that any one should ever break relationships with their parents… I want to have a sense of closeness to people in my family… before my brother went to the treatment centre, I had wondered if I had done something wrong… He totally disabled himself from the whole world… When he came out of the treatment centre I had said I’ve done something to you, haven’t I?… No, he said… It was just the way I was… When my brother went through all that transition at the centre… I couldn’t stop bawling my eyes out… I don’t know what it was, whether it was what I had went through in my own life or my feelings for him… I need… to feel closeness with people. I have basically lacked that all my life… relationships are important, they are very important because if I don’t feel close to a person, I feel like I’m worthless…
Interviewer: You haven’t talked about your grandparents or anything like that.

… My grandmother and I were very close on my father’s side. She never, ever took sides with anybody… She was very, very wonderful. They put her in [hospital] in homecare… she… was losing her mind… she often said to me it just feels so good to be able to see you finally happy after so many years of what I went through with my father… This was probably within the last five years… Nobody told me that she had went into the home… I found out through my relatives, like the grandchildren, my nephews that she had went in and right away I was there. I had always been there for my grandmother. I even have pictures of her with Macy when she was born… she used to say to her, oh, I just love to see this great grandchild… and I have so many pictures of them together and then my grandmother passed on…

Interviewer: What would be… the patterns that you would see carried forward…

… my mom still isn’t a very loving or affection person … she must have had an awful childhood too because she said her father was very, very strict with her… She told me that she used to go to church all the time… I assume she got the belt several times… I’m assuming that she did come from some abuse… she doesn’t have that affection that children look for in a parent, that you can actually come to them and give them a big hug and… a kiss… I could never show affection… [and] within the last probably 10, 15 years… I’ve learnt… through the counselling and everything I’ve been through … to be a lot more affectionate… (when I talk about things sort of continuing across generations… what does that bring up for you?) In terms of my father, he’s probably very abusive. My brother is very abusive. I feel that the only ones that came out of it any good… are basically my sister and myself. We don’t, quote, abuse people. I mean, we try not to abuse people. I can’t honestly say I never have… my husband before we were married, he took a lot of punishment from me… I would throw things at him. I would just go in fits of rage… I couldn’t control my temper and I suppose that comes down the line too from generations and my [youngest] brother has a depression problem, of course I have a depression problem… (How do you see [alcoholism] in your broader family…) My father used to drink probably a 26-er a day… My stepfather would think nothing of one day, 24 beers. My mother… drank like a fish… Like my brother said to me, my youngest, we don’t have a whole lot going for us, do we?… (Well, what about if you go down into you siblings?) They’re into drugs and they’re into booze as well… (All of them?) Yeah, the nephews and yes, pretty well. (What about your brothers and stepbrothers and sisters and stepsisters?) No, they’re not into it, no. (Well, your younger brother had a problem.) Yes. The half-brother. (Was he the only one?) Yeah, yeah, that was addicted to antidepressants and drinking, yes. (So, none of your other brothers and sisters?)… No, no. They would drink but within moderation…

Relationships with Partners

… I started dating at 15 and took that very, very serious… I thought I would have been married at 18… I was probably looking for a way to get out of the situation. (Tell me about relations with men from say teens.) Like my sister and I were always really popular
with men… (at what age would that have started…) Being very popular? Probably around 19. (So, when you say popular, what do you mean?) Well, I mean like well, I go into the hotel and drink and then people would want to take you home to bed… every time I lost a relationship, there was somebody else there that would say, well, I’m here to help you out… They were very abusive relationships… (So, many of the relationships you got into weren’t good?) Yes… The first one I met… when I was 15… He was my first love, blah, blah, blah because we were together probably for about two years… I… found this guy that I’m supposed to be with in a restaurant with this other woman… that was the end of that… When I was 21… Until I was 24… I had been engaged… I lived with him… He drank constantly. He would go away on the weekends, he would smoke marijuana… It just got to the point where he would… be very, very abusive… threatening to throw me down probably a flight of 14, 15 steps. It almost happened… I would baby-sit, I would take out jobs… I did everything I could to financially provide for the home then I just said… I can’t take this anymore… I… went back to my mom’s… then shortly after that I… got mixed up with this guy at [factory]… I had… said… I’m moving in with him and it only lasted one night because I almost got stabbed. (By him?) Yes… every relationship I was in was a nightmare… 

… how old was I when I met Derrick?… I don’t know, 23, 24… I… was at my mom’s. He boarded down at the bottom of the house and I boarded at the top of the house but I could never, ever see us fitting together… [and then] after Derrick and I had gotten together… I had finally realized that my life was worth, you know, sort of going on for… he was a very sincere friend… He wouldn’t ever have sex with me until he realized that he loved me and I mean that to me was respect… I had never experienced that… I thought… I’m going to better myself and I did… I couldn’t believe that he would hook up with somebody like me. There was always that factor that oh, I’m not good enough for him. I’m not the perfect person that he is looking for and I often call my husband a perfectionist. He wants everything done… to a certain T… We got married when I was almost 26. We lived together for probably a little over a year and my dad phones me up out of the blue and heard I was engaged and said that he had to pay for my wedding and I’d better hurry up and get married because he was going to keel over if I didn’t… because he had had two previous heart attacks in his life. So, we set the date… and we got married… (How long have you been married?) 14 years, believe it or not… 

… We had to go through marriage counselling… before we got married… a six week course. The guy that married us couldn’t believe that we came from similar backgrounds, my husband and I… We have been through mega stuff together… He was there through the whole court case. He has seen me through the very hard times that I had drinking… I helped him through what he went through. He was going through a court case with his ex-wife when I met him… He had a son that died. His wife had stabbed the baby when he was six months old… (so, he had a lot of similar experiences?)… Yes… His father would drink constantly and… Derrick… would get punched in the nose. He’s had his nose broken a few times. He’s had all kinds of things happen to him… his mother would drink too… I think he said he was 16 when his mom… died of bone marrow cancer. So, it was a very hard thing for my husband… to deal with losing his mother at 16 and of course being in the house alone with his father was not so great… (did [Derrick] have a
drinking problem?) Oh, yes. He was at a centre in [city]… Probably about the same time as myself… (So, how many years did his drinking problem go on?) … Probably three to five years… (do you talk at all about not wanting to repeat what you’ve been through?)… oh, yes… like I said to him, just the other night we were sitting around having a few drinks, what if we ever went back to like really, really drinking. That won’t happen, you know, he says… so it’s like set in his mind that there’s no way he’s going back… I feel that we shouldn’t be having a lot to drink…

… the first two years [of marriage] it was dreadful… I had a hard time all through my life thinking any one would want to marry me… (how did you get through that?) We went to a marriage counsellor… Even though I was married and I was so happy… I couldn’t cope… with being married… I’ve had something taken away from me… I have never, ever been able to regain back any of my sexuality until after I married Derrick and when we had problems, it was basically due to sexual… stuff … We had [also] done a superintending job which was very, very stressful… we had taken on 33 apartments… plus I would work my full-time job… we gave up the superintending and ever since that my husband’s and my life was a breeze…

… if I didn’t have a husband like Derrick or anything, I’m sure that my life … wouldn’t be good at all. I mean I would probably be rock bottom… it uplifts you in life when you can sit down and chat about things… I have a husband who is very dedicated and when we took our vows it was like he married me forever or forget it. I don’t ever want to back out of my marriage… I feel that I have a very stable marriage… Sometimes I feel it’s up and down because sometimes I feel that I’ve taken on more with babysitting that we are losing more communication because I’m tired at night, he’s going to work, I don’t feel like talking, he doesn’t feel like talking… Sometimes I’m very, very envious because… He sleeps with a machine… He has to have a mask thing that he wears because he had a problem with his heart that stopped beating one time… (So, like an oxygen mask or something?) Yeah. It’s really romantic… (So, your husband plays organized ball?) Yes, he does. And he was the president, then he got transferred to a different shift…so now he’s playing but he is a late player…This is like just recreational… but he enjoys it…

… the first week in May for our anniversary …Derrick and I went away… and it was… wonderful… we got rid of my child, she went over to my mom’s for the weekend and we were able to go to a heart shaped Jacuzzi for the weekend and just be able to relax and do what we wanted… we had a really good time and I checked out the casino… we only lost 20 dollars… I love to be able to get out with my husband just sort of one on one… it was lovely… if we had won that money that night… I think we would have stayed an extra week…

**Children**

… Derrick had discussed with me that he really wanted to have a child … I was very, very opposed to wanting to have a child… and he said to me I really think that we kind of need this in our life… I was surprised he wanted any more children because he had lost his first one and… being together for the seven years… by ourselves… it was a very hard
decision … Coming from the upbringing that I had, I figured I would treat my child the way I had been treated throughout my life. I had heard a whole different scenario where people, because they’re involved with alcoholic parents, with parents that abuse them or parents that abandoned them, that this could be the life for my child and I was very, very scared … then when we decided and I did become pregnant, it was the best thing that happened to me. I felt great and then at 38 weeks I lost her and it was so traumatic… The cord strangled her… I felt like running… I did spend one night away by myself because I didn’t think I could handle my marriage… (What was the time like when you came home…?) So empty… Derrick and I hardly ever spoke… I would just always say … how sorry I was and… he would try to tell me it wasn’t my fault. And I just thought everything had been taken away from me… then his sister had asked us to fly down to [city]. She paid for our trip… And we went to grieving classes together … through the church… there was this pastor there and they helped us through a lot of it…

…[After that,] I still didn’t really want to get pregnant but… [Derrick] was… saying that… you will feel so much better because you’re feeling empty… And then I had became pregnant… Macy was born [in] October… (Tell me about that.) It was wonderful, I couldn’t believe it. Everybody was in the room… this woman was with me that helped me through losing my other child and she stuck by me… and it was great… So, I’m on the toilet and… no sooner I’m off the toilet and the child comes flying out… I’m up on the bed and the nurse said I’m sorry but everybody will have to leave the room. Well, nobody had to leave the room because the child came flying out and my brother was there and Derrick was there and my mother was there and that woman was there… it was so wonderful… then I was holding Macy and she had stopped breathing. It was like she had been choking on mucus… so I’m like freaking out and I’m calling the nurse and they come running in and they said well, you can’t have the baby… So, then I phoned my mom … and I said they won’t let me have the baby… so mom talked to the nurse and then she talked to me and said it was just because the baby had had mucus… she was fine the next day… and we were discharged like the doctor said within 24 hours… It was great…

… She never slept through the night until she was two. We had a problem with her ongoing with ear infections ever since she was very little. Every time I laid her down she would cry… I would be lucky if I got four hours of sleep and I was working 60 hours a week… I have practically raised Macy at nights all alone… I finally had to give up my job on the second year… I’m really, really depressed and everything is starting to get to me… So, I quit my job… And then I went to computer classes and I upgraded myself and it was great… Macy at six months old was put on hydro chlorate which is a drug… to make her sleep. And it never worked. We went through ten bottles of that and she barely slept … and… well, she was just recently diagnosed with ADHD so we figured she’s had that since she’s been very young…

Interviewer: Just recently? How recently?

January of last year… she’s been on Ritalin and she only takes it during school times. Any other time she doesn’t get it. (So, not in the summer?) No. And not on holidays and
not on weekends … (Is this what they recommended or what you decided?) No. We went through a trial period of tests with her… I think it was three weeks of placebo and then three weeks of Ritalin and then we compared notes with the teacher… We each filled one out, we would hand it in to the doctor and each week we would have to discover which was sort of the better behaviour, which was worse behaviour and then we turned it all in and the reports from both the teacher and us were very agreeable. So, it was that second week that she was on Ritalin that they had decided that she needs to be put on Ritalin… She was basically diagnosed with ADHD but she hasn’t been professionally diagnosed with it. She still has to go through testing at school, a psychological. (So, she was diagnosed by the…) By the family doctor… We wanted to be sent to a specialist but he wouldn’t send us…

… it’s been a big struggle with her… just behaviour and everything… the book I’m reading, “The Explosive Child” is very, very descriptive of what I do go through with her… There are different cases with different children. There are some which get very violent, which I have had from my daughter. I actually had a baseball thrown down at me… it’s a very hard thing to… cope with… I’ve done a lot of the disciplinary that they’ve asked me to do and still I’m finding it very, very difficult… It’s not that I believe I have an evil child… It’s just I’m having a hard time controlling my child at times. She can be very, very loving, she can be very affectionate, she can be very quiet but there are those exploding moments that she does have that are very, very traumatic… she probably doesn’t realize what she’s putting me through … but I can certainly understand how some people feel in the book when they say this has almost caused my marriage to split up, this has almost caused me to run away… (give me a sense of what an explosion would be like)… she would stand there and… she would stomp her feet. Then she would go and grab something and just come at me with it, like a screwdriver. This morning it was a knife… (Are you getting any help with this?) I do have a counsellor… she does counsel us as parents and observes Macy as well. I don’t know if she’s going to set us up with somebody else to do individual counselling with Macy… but we did have that previously… I know she’s a very intelligent child but she doesn’t always want to show her intelligence. She’s a very beautiful child. I feel that I’m very blessed to have her… I lost my first one and you don’t realize how lucky you are until that happens to you… Just to be able to have her… is a blessing… I have a child I love very much…

…she has lots of friends… but there are some situations where she does get herself into… the other day I caught her outside with a stick and she was hitting somebody with it… Recently… the next-door neighbour, [who] has a little boy… said that [Macy] had pulled his pants down during a family get together… I was so embarrassed… she was very nice about it and said I’m sure that they’re just exploring… but then she got her time out and told that we really didn’t think it was proper behaviour… Like you can’t pull down other people’s pants… I said to the counsellor… there are people that probably think what kind of parents does she have to go around doing that… She can be so well behaved at some point and then the next point she’s not well behaved…We’ve always… tried to teach her right from wrong because I certainly don’t ever want to steer her in the wrong direction…
… [Macy] had an interview with [the police] in March of this year… My step niece… apparently was rubbing Macy down below… My daughter had finally told me… just after a year and she had come to me and she kept telling me she hated me … She’d tell me I was no good. I went through a lot of stress with thinking that my child hated me… So, my husband had said to me there’s something wrong with her, Sandy, you’ve got to talk to her... And I figured the perfect time would be my husband’s gone to work… we’ll read and I’ll ask her is something wrong. Well, then she told me. I was stunned. I mean I couldn’t believe it… When she had pronounced to me that this had happened… she went into the bathroom and she locked the door and I had the bathtub running for her bath and I couldn’t get the door unlocked… I was very frantic. I really thought she was going to hurt herself but she finally let me in… I said to her you sure it wasn’t bouncing on her knee… she said no. She said mommy, it really happened. I tried to phone you and because I wasn’t home, I’m the culprit. I’m the person that she’s lashing out at and I totally understand that…

… I had to report it from [mental health agency] to the Children’s Aid because they felt that it was a Children’s Aid case… I was really kind of scared because I didn’t want to make a big issue out of it… Children’s Aid had asked us if we had seeked any counselling… And I said well, I don’t really want to because I really don’t want to humiliate my daughter at seven years old. I said I know how I felt when I was around 30, that this humiliated me terribly and I said I wouldn’t want to put my daughter through it. I said thank goodness she didn’t actually sexually whatever … but they still consider that a form of sexual abuse… But I had said I won’t subject her to that because I know what I went through and it would be her word against the girl’s word… (how old is your niece?)… She would have been just around 16 the time that it happened… [after] I reported it to the Children’s Aid and I got a phone call and they asked me a bunch of questions and then… the woman came to our home here to talk to Macy and myself. And every story to me, to the counsellor to the Children’s Aid and to the police officer was all the same… Then they called in my niece to have her interviewed… and she denied it… So, then I got a phone call from Children’s Aid… that said we have finally wrapped up the case or whatever, blah, blah, blah but she’s admitted that she hasn’t done it so therefore we’ve closed the investigation…

Mental and Physical Health

Interviewer: So, about 19 you started to become involved in [mental health agency]? …

… yeah… I was still attending counselling… Up until I was probably about 31 and then… I felt… they really couldn’t do anything else with me… I took different things… to better myself, to make me feel that I was going forward with my life rather than backwards and when I felt I was on the right track I felt I didn’t need them anymore. (So, were you ever like hospitalized during that time?) Just from injuries from car accidents… I would drive my car home… I’d have to look out the door… the next morning and make sure my car was in the driveway because half of the time I didn’t know how I got home… (Because you were drunk?) I was… I’d go after work… with the so-called people that we got together with on the shift… including our boss… I’d just get loaded… I had had
probably three car accidents with drinking… the police were never called but the last one… really smartened me up… I had severely hurt myself… I had severely smashed up my car that I had bought out of my own pocket and worked so hard for… I couldn’t move for probably three months…

… when I was 19… I had been diagnosed with jaundice… I was taking diet pills and drinking and I would never eat… I had lost 60 pounds in three months… one day I looked at myself and … my eyes, my face, my arms were turning yellow and I went into the doctor and that’s when he diagnosed me with jaundice and said you have a choice here. Either you smarten up your life or you’re finished… I remember taking some sort of medication from him… And I had smartened myself up just because at that point when I kept having car accidents, I had realized that I can’t do this anymore. I’m harming myself… I eventually found out I had an allergy to yeast in the beer so this was causing me to tense up and not be able to breathe… and… [with] the accidents, the blank outs, everything I was going through, I had realized it wasn’t worth that at 19, 20 years old… (So, how did you smarten yourself up)? I just stopped… I couldn’t tell any one… I didn’t have any one to support me… I just wanted to die.

Interviewer: Okay. And… you had any support, help, anything?

… I had spent almost 11 years in [mental health agency] with several counsellors… just being able to talk to somebody about the situation was good for me… (you started drinking again…) after I was married we used to drink with my neighbours… I used to get so plastered. My husband used to put the cold shower on me in the bathtub… (how long did that go on?) Probably about two years… Every weekend I’d just be totalled… (And how did you stop?) I just stopped… I had started realizing about the blackouts again… I think that had really smartened me up because a lot of things… I wouldn’t remember… I was 27 at the time. (And do you still touch alcohol…) Derrick and I have limited ourselves … we basically tried to make Saturday night our night type of thing so that we have our few drinks together, watch our movies … I kind of got carried away last weekend, I had three drinks but normally it’s him and I will come on a Saturday night and… maybe have two or three. (And what kind of impact would that have on you?) Just makes me sleep… By the end of my week I’m totally exhausted and I can’t sleep… but if you continuously do it, it’s not going to help make you sleep… People use alcohol… to escape their problems. It numbs the problems temporarily but the next day they’re back again. You still have to face reality. (Are you afraid of it?) Yes, sometimes for the sake of my daughter … I would never… want… her to ever see me drink and be abusive or anything like that. I wouldn’t want to subject her to that because I know what I went through growing up… (Do you think if you had a shock you’d go back to it?) Hard to say. If I lost my husband I might. If something happened to my daughter I might. You know, like that’s a very hard thing to say but I would hope that I would move on with my life. I would hope that with all the therapy and everything I’ve received through my life that I can now differentiate between what is right and what is wrong…

… I live on thyroid pills every day and I live on Prozac just to function… when I look at some people… I think of Elvis Presley… He used to have to wake up to take pills to
function and he used to have to go to sleep with pills. Well, I used to have to go to sleep with pills and I used to constantly think about that and this man died… I find it very terrible to have to live on drugs… I’ve had a thyroid condition since I’ve probably been about 27 years old and had to live on these pills every single day and if I don’t take them I’m so tired and exhausted I just can’t function… It’s just amazing what they can do to you… Prozac… I’ll probably have to be on it for the rest of my life because I’ve tried to take myself off it and it hasn’t worked… I’ve been on antidepressants since… just before my first child was born… I have a depression problem… it’s not like I enjoy taking Prozac but I know it’s helping me through the hard times… and when I discussed it with the counsellor, she had said to me that oh, look, there’s people that have diabetes, they have to be on insulin right? Yeah. So, what’s wrong with you being… on Prozac … It’s making me feel better about myself. It’s making me feel better about the whole world…

… I find my energy levels get very, very low. I had been to the doctor and … She had to take my blood pressure three times because it had dropped way down to 65 and she was getting very, very concerned and so they decided to take blood tests and found out that my thyroid had dysfunctioned again… So, I had to go through that as well and I was very exhausted… I was feeling very dizzy… I do my exercises on the floor every morning because I have to do them because… Back in February I had a fall in the basement. I had a concussion and I couldn’t move… they had to lift me out of the basement by one of these things that we use… for people at the rescue for mountains… I had damaged all my nerves in my back… (Does it still cause you pain?) Once in a while it will and it’s also caused part of my leg to numb but as I exercise and strengthen myself, they claim I’ll be okay. I went through three months of therapy this year for that. (Physiotherapy?) Yes, yes. (Yeah. So, how long do your exercises take you?) Probably about five or ten minutes…

**Finances and Work**

… four years ago things were really bad for us. Derrick… used to get laid off constantly… We lost practically everything… (Did you have to declare bankruptcy?) Yes, we did… We had had credit cards, we’ve had finance companies, we had people that we owed money to… We got into debt basically over our head. Our car we had paid cash for. I went to bingo one night, won money to be able to buy a car… We lost the car, we lost our whole bedroom outfit… We had lost practically everything and had to start over again. At the same time my parents had moved out from the house… we were renting and they were in the basement and we were upstairs… We were splitting the rent, heat and hydro… and we lost all that too because they… didn’t want to live there anymore… I was doing my business and just couldn’t make ends meet and he would take on paper route jobs… just to be able to sort of survive but it wasn’t enough… It was terrible … I felt we had lost our whole life losing everything like that…

… We were like always watching our pennies, always trying to conserve, asking my mom if she could buy things for Macy… and my mom did help us out… with buying her some clothes and snow suits and stuff… (Were you using things like food banks…?) No… (What about Value Village…?) Yes we did do some shopping like that for
Macy… and then when we finally got back on our feet, when Derrick started working full time and started saving money through bonds at work… and we started building RRSPs… We also set up a mutual fund for Macy so that when she gets older she’s going to have something there… and we financed this car probably about three years ago and we’re paying an arm and leg for it. *(Do you have to pay like a super high interest rate…?)* Yes… 24 percent or something… we’ve… tried to re-establish our credit. We’ve tried to get back on our feet and Derrick wants to try and buy a house within two years. Whether it works out or not I don’t know… *(how tight are your finances now?)…* we do have savings but I mean there’s the odd weeks where things are a struggle with the rent… It’s not that it’s expensive, it’s just basically that… we’re paying market rent. We never paid subsidy in here since we moved in October… We paid full rent… It just went up July the first to 753…

… I now have two children that I’m babysitting so I’m up at 5:30… *(how old are the kids?)* Seven and the other one will be four in August… and mine… is seven… We watch T.V. until eight and then they’re anxious to get Macy up but I don’t allow them to get her up because she’s waken up… I get their breakfast at eight o’clock… We have different things that we do during the day. I also have a business that I run so… we start our day with going to deliver books, going to visit my mom… Most days I go to visit my mom for a little bit but when they children start acting up I have to leave because my mom is elderly… *(So, say on a typical day, what would [your delivery] stuff be like?)…* it would consist of delivering books, delivering orders, collecting money… I sometimes do 20, 25 deliveries a day… Anywhere from nine o’clock in the morning until five at night and sometimes I’m out up until eight o’clock at night. *(So, you’re hauling the children around with you?)* Yes… In the daytime…

*Interviewer: So, what is it like with taking care of three kids?*

… It is so hectic… I never realized… what a toll it would be for me… and today has been a really, really difficult day. I took them swimming and we went to a park and we did different things… it was just a nightmare… they’re yelling and screaming at each other in the car and they’re battling on. I had to stop the car like twice… So, I came home and they both got time outs… *(These are the two seven year olds?)* yes… I just told them I can’t deal with this and if you’re going to continue I can’t be taking you places because I can’t… concentrate on driving… I try to have a bit of quiet time in the afternoon… I say to them I would like you go to down in the basement and play… from about after lunch until probably three or four… and that’s sort of the extent of our day and then I call them up for their snack… and they go back downstairs… because Derrick is sleeping… and I don’t want him to be disturbed…

…We have two paper routes and they’re for Macy so she’s helping us… it’s like a big rush… *(you are delivering papers on most days between three and five or something?)* Well, three and five and sometimes we got to get them done in the morning… I like to have them done before noon but that doesn’t always work. Last Friday we didn’t get them done until almost seven o’clock at night, all of us… *(So, getting close to supper time, how does that work?)…* I don’t feel like cooking because I’m exhausted… I haven’t
been cooking big meals because I don’t feel like having big meals… we since got a
barbecue so my brother’s been over and he’s been doing some barbecuing and my
husband’s been doing some barbecuing and we’ve all been sort of taking turns at doing
it… Derrick does most of the cooking. He doesn’t mind doing it but… I’d like to be like
this person that here you go, here’s your big meal for supper… like roast beef and
mashed potatoes but… I don’t anymore because I’m just too tired…

Interviewer: Okay. So, it’s 9:30 and ten o’clock. So, then what happens?

Well, then I get ready to take my bath, Derrick’s getting ready to go to work… and I
don’t usually go to bed until he’s gone which is anywhere between ten and 10:30… I
don’t sleep the greatest most of the time… without Derrick being here it’s just sometimes
very hard for me. It’s not that I’m worried about anybody coming in… I just wake up
and I’m wide awake… he gets ready for work just around 9:30… and [he] usually comes
home just after seven… He does welder fitter… So, he comes home and he’s basically
physically exhausted… It is very hard work and they had a meeting saying that they want
them to work harder now and longer hours so Derrick could work seven nights a week if
he wanted to. (How many nights does he work?) He’s working six… nights a week plus
he goes in early on Fridays. So, he’s giving himself an extra two hours which is… a 50-
hour week… (How long has he been doing the six day a week thing?) … Almost a year…

Sense of Self

… I often am curious about other people. For instance, the counsellor that I had that has
been through somewhat the same thing I have, I had said to her I’d love to hear your
story sometime… I’d really love to sit down and chat with you… I would love to sit and
just find out what has happened to other people. (What are you searching for?) Probably
their coping strategies. Probably to see if they have come to an outcome out of it… if
they’ve let it go, if they’re still living in the past… I’d want to see what has become of it,
how they’ve coped and if they’ve moved on with their life… I’ve done some volunteer
work, I’ve been able to hear people’s stories … I basically feel that listening to all of that
and being able to attend what I’ve attended in the years of counselling… I have bettered
myself so much. I feel I’m very, very strong… I feel that when you go through a tough
time in your life, you better yourself in the end for it… I feel I can face a lot of things in
life where as before I couldn’t … I would just sort of break down but now I feel I can
handle a lot…

Interviewer: what kind of things make you feel good about yourself?

I feel good because now I can express myself where I never ever used to be able to… I’m
not very happy with my weight but I have a thyroid condition. Just basically that I feel
that I am very intelligent. I know about life… I can relate to a lot of things and I have a
lot of customers of mine that say, you know, you’re the most caring person I’ve ever
met… that makes me feel good to be recognized in my life… I’ve learnt determination.
I’ve learnt how to… I wouldn’t say totally control myself but I do try to gain more
control than what I had in previous years. I look at people now. I can look at my brother
and laugh at him because of what he has done to me. I think you are such a jerk, if you only knew… I’m not exactly angry with him anymore. I understand… that he is not a very intelligent person but I mean it doesn’t mean that it takes brains to know right from wrong. It’s basically the frustration probably of his growing up. I can basically say that in my heart I have not probably totally forgiven him but I am trying to forgive what has happened… I don’t want to ever back out of anything. I’m a very determined person… I say what’s on my mind now and if people don’t like it that’s too bad… If I don’t like a situation… then I’ll tell you… And if I’m deprived of my sleep I get really angry… I feel so much better about myself than I’ve ever felt… I’ve had a lot of people say that I’m a very caring person… I’m very independent and very strong-willed… and I have felt I have regained my whole life back by just being here and going through the counselling I went through…

… I’ve always enjoyed to have challenges in my life. I need to have something challenging in my life… just because I’m that way… when I set my mind to do something, I want to do it and I want to do a good job of doing it. It’s like in sales my first year, I had made the president’s club and I had gotten plate and I had gotten… a special [recognition]. Every year I have strived for that. Every year I have set myself to say I’m going to do it again and I have… for four years… I’m pretty pleased even to know where I am and knowing that there are so many people out there that I’m competing with. But I always strive to be better. (How does that make you feel about yourself?)… Really good … it’s that challenge again… I’m always striving to better myself...

*Interviewer: Is this the best time in your story?*

Right now?… I would say yes… definitely. I would say that once like close to 40… it’s sort of coming together. It’s just basically because I chose to do a babysitting job to get us ahead… that things are really kind of a bit hectic but in September things are going to pan out again for me so things won’t be quite as hectic. Not quite as hectic this week and two weeks of holidays so that’s a bonus. (So, your story is getting better)? Yes, it is… I just wish sometimes at 40 I could slow down but then that’s what I take on and that’s my doing…

*Interviewer: Well, what are the best things in life?*

My husband and my child. They are my life. Without them, I have nothing…
Donna

Donna – interview participant
Mark – Donna’s second and current husband
Luke – son of Donna and Arnold
Arnold – Donna’s ex-boyfriend, biological father of Luke

Physical Health and Mental Health

… my personal life history is what’s affecting… my whole life now and it’s a constant battle within the community and the government regarding healthcare, the education and any services that are available to us to help us out are nonexistent… (So, where would you like to begin telling that story?)… Well, right now my… whole family… is so dysfunctional… it’s not… that we aren’t… good together it’s just we’ve had such like my whole life has been one trauma after another after another after another after another that it just… seems so discouraging and so gloomy for me that it has now affected my son since he’s been born practically… and my husband… I had attention deficiency hyper activity disorder but way back then I guess… they didn’t have a name for it and they just kind of struggled through with it so with that I was, you know, had trouble in school, had trouble with my peers, had trouble, you know, with my home life. I was constantly picked on and beat up all the time…

… Like with all that I always knew there was something different about me. Why? I just never felt normal so from that point on I kept making … bad judgements or getting mixed up in the wrong thing and… always going from one doctor to the next trying to find out what it is that was wrong with me. Like I wasn’t diagnosed with attention deficit disorder until just within the last five or so years… every time I tried to better my life I seem to always screw it up more…

… The last two years have been the worst years of my life besides all of the other crap I’ve gone through in my life… (Tell me about the last two years of your life.) Well, a mixture… between my health – one other thing I forgot to mention is I [had] a bad car accident when I was seventeen. I was driving and from that time on I’ve been suffering from chronic neck and back problems and it was just the last three to four years that I have noticed a considerable increase in problems with pain that and was two years no, this coming November I was diagnosed with fibro mialgia. Now, one doctor says that and another doctor says I was misdiagnosed and it’s mio-facial pain syndrome. So, with dealing with that on a daily basis by the time Luke had started grade seven I was extremely ill… Mio-facial pain syndrome… It’s… ruining my life, it’s ruining my son’s life… it’s just wreaking havoc on my entire family… I went through hell trying to find a doctor…that would diagnose me correctly. I more or less… diagnosed myself with the mio-facial pain syndrome. This is … what it’s like because when I was diagnosed with fibro it was after that that I started getting worse. The pain was just starting to increase and get so severe and intense on a daily basis. It started with my feet and my legs. The
more I was on them the more pain I would get to the point where it was so severe I couldn’t stand. I couldn’t walk…

… I’ve had chronic pain since I was 17 and I’m 39 so… they say that’s what started it… So, it just kept progressing year after year after year and it just escalated so fast and so drastically in the last two years because of all the chronic stress that I’ve been under that it just… (So, it would have been mostly in the last two years where it’s been debilitating?) Actually three years… Being in chronic pain 24 hours a day takes a toll on a person… and I don’t complain about it. I don’t say anything about it but it doesn’t mean I don’t feel it. Like right now I’m in a lot of pain but there’s no sense complaining about it. It gets every one else down and gets me down just listening to myself… I can’t do normal things like everybody else. My energy level is extremely low….

Growing Up

… I had a really rough childhood… I also was sexually molested and I have… a lot of issues over that because back in those days… everything was kept hush, hush so I have problems with – I have one brother and I have one sister. There’s a lot of resentment there with them towards me so… my whole childhood… was not good and I’ve been suffering with clinical depression my entire life mostly and anxiety and it’s just escalated over the years because of so many different things…

… One thing that concerns me about that is I don’t have a whole lot of memories of preteens. I don’t know why. There’s just bits and pieces here and there that I remember… but one thing I do remember and I’m not quite sure how old I was but I was molested as a child. (By who?)… A babysitter’s husband… My mother sold cosmetics way back then part-time and it wasn’t on a regular basis and I’m not even sure how many times I went there but I do remember specific visions of… his wife, if she would leave the room then he would… call me over and start fondling me and that. Now, I can’t remember many more details than that but I did spend many years counselling over that and I still am not able to have any closure on that. I’m even considering… pursuing that avenue too as far as… whether or not I can still go after the man for it because I was told there’s no statute of limitations… in this country… but I know if I do it right now that it would… affect my parents really bad and I was crazy and just making these things up… And then one day she finally did remember it so… her acknowledgement certainly helped me deal with it on that level as far as my relationship with my mother…

… There was no compassion or love in this family. My dad worked seven days a week. Well, actually six days a week and every other Sunday… He owned his own business… It was a service station… he was never home when I was growing up, hardly at all. He’s a very quiet man…. he feels a lot but he doesn’t verbally show it or physically show it… I always… knew I was loved by my father in other ways but as far as my mother and I go we hated each other when I was growing up… she just figured I was a problem child and
any problems I had I brought on myself so there was a lot of yelling all the time and when I did something really bad or whatever she would take the fly swatter to me… there was one time I remember I was real bad, it was in the summer time and I had shorts on and I had welts on my legs…

… During my childhood I was… the typical kid that was the one that the bullies always picked on and always beat up and… I never really had any real good friends and so I spent a lot of time alone. When I was… at home I would spend all my time in my room alone. I’d just stay away from my mom as much as I could. My older brother and sister had moved out of the house when I was very young… My sister was 13 years [older] than me and my brother is nine years older than me… my brother got married when he was 16… And my sister was the only smart one. She moved out… before my brother did… but I can’t remember exactly how old I was but she didn’t move out to get married. She moved out, got her own apartment and she had a good… solid job and that… but I felt like an only child because they were never around as I was growing up. Even though my mother said my sister was like a little mother to me because she would take me everywhere when I was younger I don’t remember that…

*Interviewer:* How… did your parents get along when you were younger?

Oh, okay. Like I said my dad was working all the time. My mom stayed home, she didn’t work and… I remember when… I had to have been preteens they did curl… So, they did curl together and had a lot of friends through curling and they did socialize quite a bit… when my dad was able to and if he was working she would… go out by herself with friends and that so I don’t know, there were a few times that I remember some whopping arguments but… never anything physical or anything like that but they just celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at the beginning of the month…

*Interviewer:* What was school like for you?

… I was terrified to go to school every day… because I never knew when I was going to get beat up… *(Now, was this in public school…?)* No mostly this was in junior high… *(What do you remember about elementary school?)*… I don’t have a whole lot of memories of elementary school except… I remember one time it was my birthday and I was having a party and was walking home with the kids and the bullies… followed us home… they were tripping me all the way home and punching me and throwing snow at me… and it was… humiliating… In fact now that I remember… it affected my nerves back then. I would wake up in the middle of the night every night for I don’t know how long feeling sick to my stomach and I was terrified of throwing up. I hated throwing up. That was a really bad phobia for me for a really long time and I’d wake up every night having to go and get my mom to come and sleep with me and… I just wanted to die. *(How old would you have been?)*… nine or ten give or take.
Interviewer: Tell me about high school.

It started getting better. Not a whole lot… The group that I hung out with… One day yeah, they’d want to hang out with me and the next, no… And then grade ten felt a little better. By grade 11 things started changing. I started getting more popular then and didn’t seem to be like such an outcast… I struggled really hard just to get passing grades all the way through. No matter how hard I tried studying… my mind just couldn’t process the information. I got by by memorizing mostly… So, grade nine I got all my credits. Grade ten I got the majority of them. Grade 11 I flunked. I hardly got any credits at all. It just wasn’t working… I went the first week of grade 12 and then I quit and that’s only because my parents wouldn’t let me until then even though I was 17 and I could do it on my own I felt that I [had]… no freedom to make any choices of my own even though I was considered a legal adult when it comes to quitting school. As long as I lived here I had to do what they said no matter what. (So, you left home quite young, right)? Yeah, yeah. I did. They finally let me quit because I was just miserable. I hated it…

Adult Relationships with Family of Origin

Interviewer: What about your extended family…?

… we only get together on weddings or funerals but I get along better with my cousins than I do my own family but… (You had mentioned… I think that your mom came from an abusive family.) Yes, my grandfather was actually and we were just talking about that… I was under the impression that he was abusive to the kids but [mom] said no, that he never hit the kids, he only was abusive to my grandmother… but he was an alcoholic… (What about your dad’s side of the family?) Very seldom do we see them, very. We see less of them than my mom’s side… My dad’s not close with them at all…

Interviewer: How are your sister and brother doing?

I don’t see them hardly at all. My brother’s a loner. He’s been married twice and divorced twice and he lives alone and… he doesn’t even come around hardly at all except for, you know, special occasions. We all get together Christmas day and that’s pretty well it unless there’s something else that comes up. (… And what about your sister?) Same thing. In fact I get along better with my brother than I do my sister… (So, how is she doing?) Oh, well she’s married and she has a child the same age as my son… she couldn’t have children… and tried adoption but my brother-in-law is 11 years older than her I think or no, seven years older, sorry than her and he was married previously with a couple kids but when they got married and tried adopting they felt he was too old so that didn’t work out. Their only option left was private adoption and when I got pregnant I happened to know a girl who was 16 at the time and also got pregnant and was planning on giving it up and so I told her well, if you’re serious about it I know someone who would take it in a heartbeat so they did…
Interviewer: So, this is your parent’s home?

Yeah. (...so you and your husband and your son are staying here now?) Just my son and I and actually this wasn’t a planned thing. The first week of summer holidays my son was invited away for the week with some friends and their son on a... camping trip and at that particular time I was so extremely ill I couldn’t even take care of myself. I couldn’t even get to the washroom, I couldn’t feed myself, nothing let alone take care of him. The Thursday of that week... my mom begged me to come up for the day, you know, just to get out of the house and I just never went back...

... My mother has become very dependent on me... [she] went into the hospital for the third time. She was extremely sick... She was having anxiety attacks at the time, crying all the time so I was focussing a lot on her... Her family physician dropped her and my father as patients four days after she came home from the hospital... (Did he give a reason?) Yeah, me... We had some very big conflicts with each other during her time where she was really sick... they’ve got her on so many medications now that... she doesn’t know if she’s coming or going but, you know, I confronted him about some things and he didn’t like it... I’m trying to find her a new doctor. It’s like he’s given her until January 25th. After that he’s not seeing them at all anymore... She also doesn’t like me going out very much, she hates being alone... Like I’m lucky if I can get out for an hour... Other than that, forget it. It’s doctor’s appointments, counsellors or, you know... I don’t even go shopping or anything. My life deals with 95 percent medical every day from the time I get up to the time I go to sleep...

Relationships with Partners

Interviewer: So, you started dating around what age?

Well, I had a boyfriend in grade 11. Actually now that I think of it I think that’s what started changing things because he was from out of town. He was from [city]... roller-skating was my passion... I went for years up in [town] at the arena here during the summer... around the same time I got my license... there were a lot of kids from town here that would go down to [a larger roller skating rink] and... I gained a lot of friends... which helped my self esteem and confidence so started hanging out a lot there... and that’s how I met my first real boyfriend there. (And you would have been about 17 then?) 16... (Would this have been the boyfriend that you moved in with?) No, no, actually... the boyfriend I moved in with I met through him...

... I hated living at home so bad that when I was 18 I moved out... just to get out of the house... I couldn’t wait. I was so excited. The first chance I got I packed up everything and... I moved out of my house and in with my boyfriend... and his parents... and his brother... which I thought would be a lot better than living here but it turned out to be worse... his brother was a drug addict and very ignorant and... he felt he could do whatever he wanted so he would always come in our room whenever he felt like it... He’d always been getting into trouble with the police and there were many nights that
we’d have to go looking for him… and actually his brother is a pedophile too… which also made it difficult for me wanting to have children in that marriage…

… We got legally married approximately five years later and it didn’t even last a year.  
(So, you moved in when you were…) 18… (18 and you married him about five years after that when you were about 22 or so?) Yeah … (So, tell me about that relationship.)  
It was… a bad relationship … we lived with his parents for about a year and a half then we had enough money to get our own apartment but even when we were living with his parents the fighting started.  
I remember sitting there and him whipping the phone at me shortly after I moved in and… a slap here and a slap there… I knew I was in a bad relationship but… I wasn’t working, couldn’t get a decent job, had no education and… I wasn’t really as responsible or independent as I am now… I always thought there’s no way I could leave because I wouldn’t be able to support myself and I had never lived on my own and was too scared to live on my own… but then finally… we just decided that we’d go ahead with the wedding…

… After a few years he seemed to like his beer a little more than in the beginning and as the years went by the more angrier he seemed to get… to the point where in the end it got really, really bad… I didn’t have enough courage to actually leave him until about six months before I did it slowly, very slowly… In the March prior to that I got a job out at [shopping mall] out at [clothing store] and when I got that job my life changed because I started having my own life, meeting people and making my own money and starting to have a life whereas before that I had no life, only with him and his friends.  
So, when I started making new friends I ended up getting very close… with one girl that worked there… and instead of going home at night I would always go there and stay [at her apartment] as long as I could and… it ended up I got to the point where I just wouldn’t go home at all, wouldn’t call or anything and then finally I had enough guts to tell him I just needed a break and that was a couple weeks before our first anniversary and then when our first anniversary came I felt so guilty about it and thought oh, maybe I’d better go home.  
So, I went home and it lasted about a week or two and I told him I just couldn’t do this.  I just was miserable…

…Well, we were going to a stag and doe that night and he said I suppose you don’t even want to go to the dance and I said yes, I will go with you.  
I don’t want to be enemies, I don’t hate you, I just want to be friends.  
Well, he got into his beer, we went to the stag and doe and the whole time I was there he just cut me up in front of all our friends calling me names… So, finally then when I found a chance to get away… I took the car home, got my other car and went over to my girlfriend’s and I picked her up and we went out for a while and on our way back I was going through the parking lot of the mall and he’d come right up behind us and was squealing his tires and I stopped and got out.  
He got out and he started yelling and screaming and during that time he blurted out that he had had an affair with the girl I was with one night while I was at work.  
I just went nuts but before he told me that he had grabbed me by the neck, threw me over the car, that type of thing but then when he told me about… what he did with my girlfriend… I just couldn’t believe it and… I just started running and running, screaming and crying… there was a car full of people that heard me and drove up to me to find out what was going on.  
My
husband comes squealing around the building and I’m just crying oh, my god, help me, help me, he’s going to kill me because he was driving right towards me…

… So, the police showed up within minutes, threw him in the car, arrested him – well they were going to arrest him. They couldn’t press charges unless I, you know, wanted to press charges but I couldn’t but that was an example. There was another night I had to work late… I got home it was around 11:30 or so… He come in at three o’clock in the morning… expecting to talk and needless to say I wasn’t going to. He got mad and he started throwing everything he could find at me in the bed. Stupid me got up out of the bed to clean everything up and he grabbed me, whipped me down on the ground and started banging my head against the floor and screaming at me and finally he said I should just take my last piece of ass right here and now and I thought oh, my god, he’s going to rape me… but luckily he didn’t. He just let me go and he said just go if you’re going to leave, go.

… I got enough courage to leave that relationship and told my mother what really happened and then her… attitude towards me changed… she just thought… I wasn’t taking my… marriage responsibilities serious but when I told her then she felt bad because her father was an alcoholic and… abusive and… she swore she’d never let any of her kids go through that… (how long were you living on your own after that?) Well, I had roommates come in and out like wild flies… until finally there was one girl I met that we get along great. She was a really nice girl and we connected real well and I lived with her oh, for, oh about six months and then she ended up finding a guy that she settled down with and then that’s when I met my son’s father Arnold and started a relationship with him… (How long after your break-up was that?) A year and a half … (So, was this… a quick sort of romance and moving in together…) Yeah, yeah. (How quick?) A month… Met him… he was still living with his parents so he took advantage of coming over to the apartment every night and just flaking out there and… I got pregnant very quick which was very unusual because I wasn’t supposed to be able to get pregnant… I stopped ovulating when I was 19 actually and they were able to get that going again but it was never on a regular basis or anything and then I developed cervical displacia a year before I got pregnant and that doctor told me to not ever count on getting pregnant… but I had laser surgery done and a year later boom. It was fast. I couldn’t believe it…

… even though I was not in a secure relationship or didn’t know where my life was headed, you know, I had a full-time job but wasn’t making much more than minimum wage at the time and, you know, didn’t really know… what type of guy this was… I didn’t even care… I wanted to have children so bad and the thought of never being able to… have one just was blinding everything else out and I was just happier than any one else could ever be and unfortunately his father [was] a dink, a very big irresponsible boy. He was not ready for kids… he didn’t want to be tied down with me and a baby because once I got pregnant that was it, partying time was over… I wanted to be a good mother and I wanted to provide a life for my son and I had very high expectations for that and… even before that I was still very responsible with my money and bills and everything always came first before any toys or social life… He didn’t want to be responsible for,
you know, bills and what not… And he wanted to spend a lot more time with his buddies [rather] than be home with a wife and kid.

Interviewer: _Was there drinking in that relationship too?_

Some but not a lot. He wasn’t a heavy drinker… But we argued all the time… He was five years younger than me, which… I didn’t know… when I met him he was very convincing that he was a mature and responsible person… *(So, how old would you have been at that time?)* 25. *(So, he would have been around 20?)* Just turned 20. *(Was this an abusive relationship?)* Yeah… in fact there was one time when I was holding the baby and he slapped me right across the face. I will never forget it because that came up in the custody hearing because I went to court trial to prove him an unfit father because I didn’t want him having overnight access at all… he was so immature that that came up in court and he come out and said well, I didn’t hit her with a closed fist, it was an open hand and… That judge was just so disgusted with him but he still granted him overnight access but under the conditions it would have to be in his parents’ home… He exercised his visitation on a sporadic period…

… After my son’s father and I split up though I didn’t want to sit at home on welfare so I did go back and get my grade 12, went to [adult education centre] and I actually graduated with honours which was quite nice. It finally felt like I accomplished something… Arnold and I split up two weeks before Luke’s first birthday and I met Mark… when Luke was two and a half years old and he’s been his dad ever since… *(How long has that been?)* 11 years… we’re still married… *(with Mark was it a short courtship or a long one…?)* I don’t remember how long it was before we moved in together. A year… I think…

Interviewer: _And how has that relationship been in contrast with the others?_

Certainly better in some aspects and certainly worse in others… *[Mark’s] certainly not abusive, by no means. He seldom drinks. You know, he drinks sociably but not much at all. I’ve never seen him drunk, never. He doesn’t like getting drunk. He doesn’t even see the sense of getting drunk… He works at [a robotics company]. Right now he’s… in his second year apprenticing for a general machinist… so he’s a mill operator and whatnot so that’s a lot of stress now because he’s just started his second year of that… his boss is so tight he won’t pay him for going to school Friday’s… *[and] he has no medical benefits… so he’s got to make up the hours that he goes to school and then try and get all the overtime he can to help out… he’s been at this company now I guess it’ll be five years this coming winter… and the company before that he was there 20… some years…”

… He’s very hard working and responsible as far as work ethic goes but when it comes to common sense and responsibility with money forget it… his philosophy is… I know we have no money but I’m not going to live my life without having fun either… So, even though he may be overdrawn on his bank account… he might still take out another 50 dollars or something like that and go to play golf or something… even though, you know, some bills aren’t paid… And I don’t agree with that… I don’t see us making our, you
know, sixty year anniversary. One I won’t live that long… Two… he makes a lot of promises but never follows through on them. (So, are you split up or not…) No. Actually I can’t leave him and we just… (What does that mean?) There’d be no way I could live on my own, support myself and my son if I left him… I get 700 dollars a month disability. My medical expenses are more than that… and I can’t get any government assistance…

… he’s not living here. He’s still at our house in [city]… We’ve already got it up on the market and we’ve actually put a firm offer on a house up here, closing day February the first. I’m not looking forward to it. I’m not looking forward to living with him at all but I’ve got no choice and my son’s going through a really rough time… and he really needs his father… (Does he see Mark as his father?) Oh, yeah, he always has ever since the beginning… they’ve had some rough times over the years and in fact last year I felt was really bad and I didn’t think there was any hope for them at all but the last few weeks I’ve been sending Luke down to [city] to spend with him because it’s been getting so bad between him and I up here… (what is the relationship like between the two of them?) Apparently they’ve been doing some bonding the last few weekends and get along really well down there…

… when we sell our house, 20 thousand dollars out of our equity will be going to pay bills first… and that’s not even enough to pay all of them. But to be able to leave or keep enough back to be able to buy another one and that’s only putting the minimum five percent down, five thousand and the legal fees and all that, you know, it’s gone… and we still have other bills… we are in the process of selling off half our personal belongings, half all our… furnishings and anything we can come up with to sell we’re selling. I’ve sold all my jewellery and we’ve… had garage sales over and over… The only thing that’s giving me a little bit of hope is the fact that my husband is in his second year of apprenticeship… so when he’s done that he will be able to get a good job with good benefits but as far as our personal relationship… that’s done for… He’s 45 years old. He’s never going to change… he promised me when I first left and decided to try to stay together and make it work, he promised me back then and this is like August that he was going to smarten up, become more responsible, you know, go to… money budgeting counselling… He never has. In fact I was sorting through the bills this morning… He never paid the phone bill for four months. The cable bill hasn’t been paid for several months, you know. And when they did a credit check on us for our mortgage I just barely pulled through under the wire…

**Life with Luke**

… When I was carrying my son right from the start I knew there was something different about him because he just was… active beyond words… He was moving around just kicking and I couldn’t sleep at night… from the time I brought him home I knew there was something different about him, he… hated being in a car seat, he hated sitting still. He always had to be on the go… and if he couldn’t go by himself he would cry and cry… within the first few years I just I knew there was something wrong. I couldn’t take him shopping, he hated being in the car… normal kids you take him for a car ride they go to
sleep. Not him… he would cry… By the time he turned five or six or so… [we] were involved with [children’s mental health centre]…

…Worked with them for a while, behavioural strategies… and things seemed to… settle down a little bit but he was still very active… I think it was ’95 when they first put him in Ritalin and… they diagnosed him with attention deficit disorder. Once he was on the Ritalin you couldn’t ask for a different kid. He was just amazing, just like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde… As soon as he got his medication into him he was polite and calm and happy and extremely bright kid. Smart as a whip. All through public school… he had very good grades, never had to study for a test or anything. You know, the typical comments like distracted easily, little troubles settling down and getting to work but nothing major out of that at all. And then… he switched from [public school to senior public school] and from then on all hell broke loose…

… when Luke started at school the first thing I did was I set up a meeting with the vice principal at that time… Luke’s guidance counsellor and his homeroom teacher. I explained to them that Luke had severe attention deficit disorder, hyper activity. At that point in time his medications … needed adjusting quite often. Every few months it had to be increased and sometimes that’s normal… I had a meeting with the three of them and I told them my situation. (… the three at the school, okay.) Yeah… And I… told [them]… that I was chronically ill… So, for me to be involved with the school on a regular basis was next to impossible, you know, and as far as being a good support system at home as far as school work and homework and that it wasn’t possible. My husband where he works has no health coverage so he has to work all the overtime he possibly can because between my medications and my son’s medications we spend between four and five thousand dollars a year on just prescription drugs… he’s constantly working himself into the ground just to try and keep us above water… so Luke had no support at home as far as any help with his homework…

… I told them the instant that you see any change in him, I’m to be notified right away. That means his medication will be needing adjustment. No problem, no problem they kept saying… So, the first term went by, got his report card, his marks were a little lower… I thought well, it’s grade seven now, it’s a little harder, he’s not used to it … Second term went by and I started seeing the signs of medication needing adjustment but I wasn’t getting any feedback from the school. And I’m thinking well, maybe this is just him and me like a problem you know, teenager mother issue kind of thing. But second report card his marks dropped dramatically…. and it wasn’t like a complete failure but they were not what Luke could do… a couple weeks after that I get a phone call from the school [that] Luke was suspended for fighting. And I said okay, what happened and first thing I asked was did he start the fight and he said no… So, I didn’t… worry too much about it, sat down and had a chat with him… And it wasn’t even two weeks after that got a call again he was suspended again and this time he started the fight so I knew something was wrong… So, I took Luke right down to that school, walked in and went into the principal’s office and I said what is going on here?… And that principal was the most arrogant person that ever walked this earth… and he flat out said that…Luke has
been down to the office practically every day for several weeks… I says why in hell wasn’t I notified?…

… As far as [the principal] was concerned the problems all were over the lunch period and yeah they would be because his medication would wear off. He would take it around seven to 7:30 and it would be wore off by 11, 11:30. So, by the time he took his second dose and it got into him there would be a lot of problems and… he always stayed for lunch, one, it was because he’d be able to play with his friends more and two it was… a big help for me because… when he was at school that was the time I was able to rest… He’s a wonderful kid, he’s caring, got the biggest heart in the world but he’s a lot of work and it wears me down… as far as the principal was concerned, the only way to… solve the problem is to send him home for lunch… So, he had to start coming home for lunch and that just destroyed him… he felt like a bad kid… everybody didn’t like him because not only did that happen but the teachers started even calling him names… And as the days went on he lost more self-esteem, more confidence… He was always having to take medication and… the kids would call him a freak… He was always the one that always got picked on or used…

… We finally got through grade seven but about seven weeks before the end of the year my doctor finally… got Luke into [psychiatrist]… Well, that was the beginning of the whole disaster because the first thing he had him pegged for was bipolar mood disorder and put him on these drugs… but Luke didn’t feel good on these drugs… And when I found this out I said fine, then you don’t have to take it…. when we went to [psychiatrist] and told him that he said fine then don’t take them because if you don’t feel good on them then you obviously don’t have bipolar mood disorder and I thought that’s how you… diagnose someone with bipolar?… over the summer Luke was fine again… I also see… a psychologist… and he told me… when [Luke] starts grade eight it’ll you know, be all behind us… [but] right from the beginning it started all over again. He… spent more time either out in the hall or down at the office or at home than he did in class because he was labelled and teachers just any little thing that he did wrong… he was punished for… Luke kept telling me that he didn’t want me to go down there because… he’s got to learn to fight his own battles, he could deal with it… But as the days went on on all I could see was that kid getting more and more isolated, more depressed, more angry, more hurt and … when December came around… I can’t remember the specific thing that happened but I told Luke… you’re not going back to that school… So, he didn’t go the next day and the Friday was a P.A. day so he didn’t go back but by the time Monday came around he really wanted to go back to school… I said all right, fine. You can go but on one condition, if anything happens when you’re there no matter what it is, who it is, whatever, I said you get up, you walk out and you call me…

So, Monday came and… He had [the same teacher] fourth period and … fifth period… during… the first… class he was maybe in there five minutes and was just talking to his friend while they were… going into class, settling down and [the]… teacher sent him out in the hall and made him sit out in the hall the whole period and so he did and went for lunch and then he went back. For the first ten minutes after lunch period they have time with their homeroom teacher… [and] during this time he was called down to the [fourth
period teacher’s] room. When he went down there the… teacher had pointed out that someone had scribbled blue ink on the wall outside his door. [He] automatically blamed Luke because he was sitting there. Luke tried to tell him it wasn’t him, he didn’t have a blue pen, he had a black pen… Luke went down to the office and told… the principal the same thing but [he]… didn’t believe him. Made him go down and spend the whole next period scrubbing down the wall while all the kids were laughing at him, making fun of it, it was humiliating to him. So, he was blamed for something that they couldn’t even prove that he did and when he told me this I said you’re not going back to that school again…

…about a week leading up to this day [psychiatrist] had put him on antidepressants. We went in for our check-up and Luke was frustrated and angry because he felt no one was listening to him. Even me… I have to admit that a lot of times I wouldn’t believe him… I’ve never said that my kid… does no wrong. In fact I’m always the first one to question whether or not he’s at fault at things or not. So… he was getting frustrated that he felt no one was listening to him… the kid was just going through hell so the doctor put him on antidepressants even though… he wasn’t depressed… but no, [psychiatrist] insisted on putting him on these antidepressants. Well, he had an adverse reaction to them, I saw it within 24 hours of taking them. It was like he was on crack or speed or something or some kind of drug. He was just climbing the walls… And they put him on Zoloft and I had taken Zoloft for years… it never affected me that way… Luke told them I don’t feel good on these pills… instead of taking them off he doubled the dose… The very next day he was at home and… I couldn’t even let him out of my sight because he was just being very destructive. Not on purpose but he just was not coherent…

… He wanted to go down in the basement to play with his Lego… I said fine… stay where I can see you… All of the sudden it went quiet and I looked down and I couldn’t find him anywhere and I called Luke… and he was in the laundry room. I said what are you doing in there. I said get out of there right now. He came out and he sat on the couch. He was sitting there you know and I said what is wrong with you? He said nothing… So, he came, walked up the stairs and as he passed me I all of the sudden got this feeling through me that… I know what he was doing in there, he was just trying to hurt myself. I said to him wait a minute, you weren’t in there trying to find something to hurt yourself with, [were] you? No.

… Well, both Luke and I were under the impression that okay, you put him in the hospital… where you have, you know, like the big lounge room, you know, games room or whatever and you’re with other kids and… you’re trying different medications and you’re being observed on how well it works and tests on your cognitive functions and whatnot and so we thought that was a good idea. So, for several weeks leading up to this every time we’d see [psychiatrist] Luke would say I want to go in the hospital… because he was getting to the point where he would cry himself to sleep at night thinking… when are we going to find a doctor to help us, mom? I want to be normal and this and that and going on and it was killing me… he kept talking about wanting to die. He kept saying I just want to die. I want to die…
… So, I called Luke down and I said we’ve got one more option… all we have to do is
take you down to the crisis clinic and tell [them] you want to die and they’ll admit you
right away and he says that’s what I want to do because that’s what I did. And I said
what do you mean? He says that’s what I was doing in the laundry room… all of the
sudden my heart starts pounding… he said he was trying to figure out how he could kill
himself or hang himself… I have a bungee cord thing that I’ve got hooked up for my
laundry and he said he… got a chair and was up on a chair and took all the hangers and
that off and was testing to see how strong it was, if he could hang himself. Right there
and then that was it. I called my husband. I said you get home right away… because I
had to take him down to the hospital… I was just devastated. So, he come home. We
took him down into the crisis clinic office and told them our story… Went through
everything and they said yeah, definitely need to be in but there wasn’t any beds and sent
us home. .

… Anyway the next day the [psychologist] from [children’s mental health centre]… got
him a bed by Thursday night and Luke was all excited. He was raring to go thinking
okay, you know, I’m going to get some help now and took him out shopping, got him
some new pyjamas and whatnot and got down there and walked down to the ward where
he was going to be and my heart just sunk… No curtains on the window, nothing, just
plexi-glass over the window… There was a TV lounge, there was a TV in it and that was
it and… one room that had a gurney in it with restraints that they put the kids in there that
are out of control… They gave me a schedule what went on throughout the day and on
there it said visiting hours 5:30 to 7:30 only. Luke called me I don’t know how many
times [the next] day crying mommy, get me out of here… I said I’ll be out there 5:30 on
the dot, I promise and he kept saying that all the other kids got to go home on weekend
passes, that he was going to be there by himself… It was breaking my heart and here I
didn’t know but I could have been up there all day with him. They didn’t tell me. They
just gave me this stupid schedule…

…I finally get up there at 5:30 and the kid is just flying higher than a kite. He still hasn’t
had no medication. They never gave him anything at night to sleep… I noticed he had
bandages on his hand. I asked him what happened. He said one of the other kids
attacked him… Attacked you with what? He said scissors. I says what do you mean
scissors?… And Luke didn’t want to tell me. He was too afraid to come out and say what
happened because the nurse was sitting there and every once in a while I would look over
at the nurse to see if she was going to give me an explanation… And I said to Luke well
it must have been an accident and Luke said no, it wasn’t. He came right after me and I
said are you sure and I looked at the nurse again and… I said what’s he talking about.
And she said oh, yeah, it was an accident. It was nothing serious… and Luke was telling
me about this other boy that was in there that was so tough that he put his fists through
the nurse’s station window and almost hit the nurse in the face and… I’m just getting
more terrified as the moments go on…

… I decided I was going to pull Luke out… during the night so first thing Saturday
morning when my husband got up I told him… I said that place is going to do him more
harm than good… And I had called [Children’s Aid] emergency number at the time and I
spoke with someone there about my legal rights as far as you know and what the consequences were… They told me since I voluntarily… admitted Luke… I had every right to take him out. So, I did. I went up there and I told them I’m taking him home… And they kept trying to talk me out of it… I said you’re not talking me out of it… There’s nothing you can say to convince me to leave my boy in this place in this environment… when he’s at risk of being physically harmed… And then they said well, at least talk to the psychiatrist… I said fine and they so they called her. We had to wait two hours… Luke is just waiting… so terrified. He said… They’re not going to let me go home… I said Luke, with god as my witness and I promise you, I will get you out of here. I’m taking you home today and that’s all there is to it… We’re just going to do it the right way so this does not come back on me. We waited and waited and waited… Finally she came up. I talked to her and told her the story and then she said well, I’d like to speak with Luke first alone… She talked to him for over an hour and finally after she said she had no problems with letting him go home but what she wanted to do was just sign him out on a weekend pass so if there was any problems the bed would be there Monday morning for him… I said no, you don’t need to do that. There’s other children that need this bed more than Luke does. She left it open and I never took him back…

Interviewer: And that would have been last December?

Yeah… at that time I was adamant about, you know, not even putting him back in that school… I kept saying there was no way I was putting him back in that school but I needed someone to help me… I thought maybe Luke would be out of school two weeks, two to three weeks at the most. I waited and I waited and waited… February 23rd I think it was I was introduced to… my worker through [Children’s Aid]… (So, Luke was out of school all that time?) Yeah… (Why didn’t he just go to another school?)… I couldn’t get any one to do… it for me…

Interviewer: So, is he in school now?

Yeah, he is. (What school?) [Secondary School in nearby town]. (And so how did he get over to that school?) Well, for the last two years… I had planned on moving up here… (Oh, so you just moved and then he went into a different school?) … When he registered for high school I registered him (Did he lose a grade?) No, they pushed him on anyway…. (And are things going better at this school than the other one?) [At first,] yes, definitely… (And he’s feeling happier there?)… [At first,] yeah, definitely… [but] it turned out to be the worst idea ever. I just can’t win for losing… when he first came here… a gang of kids that hang out in the streets… initiated him to the point where we’re trying to lay charges… They made him push a penny down the sidewalk downtown and while he was doing that they were kicking him and hitting him with a skateboard and whatnot. (He wanted to join the gang?) Oh, no… he had to do this or they were going to beat him up… (So, they were initiating him into the school?) Yeah… even though… they’ve been kicked out of the school… It not only happened once, it happened twice…

… Well, since then and this happened in September… I just couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe it because I didn’t think he was the type of person to do this because he
always told me his entire life I’d never have to worry about this because as far as he was concerned drugs and alcohol were stupid… He come home one Friday at lunchtime pissed to the eyeballs… He was [13] at the time. He just turned 14… He could have killed himself. He has no clue, anything about alcohol… little did I know that these kids that he ended up hanging out with were drinkers and… drug doers… At lunchtime, they get out for lunch at quarter to 11, they went over to [park], he took the bottle and just guzzled it back straight. Yeah. Drank about a quarter of it… came home, was home by 11:30… He was… staggering… and he was slurring and he was… really anxious to get out. And I looked at him and I said what’s the matter with you?… I said Luke you’re drunk. Don’t tell me you’re not. He said no. I’m not. I said fine then we’re going up to the police station and you’re going to have a breathalyser… [we] drove up to the police station… I got out of the car, walked into the police station… said to the officer at the desk… I want you to give my son a breathalyser, please… So, they took him in to the breathalyser and he failed it, yeah, he was drunk.… I found out a couple days later there were also drugs involved… and he did try smoking pot… I think it was pot, I don’t know but he said he was so drunk by then he wasn’t even… *(He’s been drunk more than once?)* No, no. That was the only time… *(he got suspended from school, is that correct?)* Yeah, he got suspended for drinking…

… I’m not sure what his marks are right now. I know he’s doing well in science but that’s about it. He skipped classes twice now that I know of… because I check up on him all the time now because he’s not allowed to be out in the smoking area hanging out with those kids because… a couple weeks ago he was assaulted over there by a couple of kids… he’s making very bad choices… He is so insecure… you know, and had a hard time with having friends the last few years that he’s just obsessed with being popular… He’s obsessed with having friends and he… finally admitted to me last week it was so humiliating what he went through with this pushing the penny incident that he felt that the only way he’s going to be accepted now is in the bad group… it’s got him nothing but problems because the last week or two I go out every lunch hour after school and I look for him in the smoking area and I catch him there every time…

**Children’s Aid Society and other Social Services**

… I was contacted by Child and Family Services. *(…who initiated that)?* The hospital… it’s required by law that any child that ends up in the crisis clinic with suicide attempt or whatever… I panicked at first when I found out… and they said… not to worry, we’re just here to help … [intake worker] came to visit us… two days before Christmas… and he was a real nice guy and I told him a bit what was going on… everybody I’d talked to up until then did not want to deal with the issues that the teachers were abusing my kid psychologically and verbally. They all wanted to sweep it under the carpet… I even called the superintendent of the school board. He flat out said I’ll meet with you, the principal had to be there… but we will not discuss anything that happened in the past, only how we can move forward… I said what the hell are you talking about? This is why we’re here in the first place… and you’re not going to discuss it with me?… He flat out refused… I knew I’m wasting my time… I need someone to back me up, to go in there and fight for me and say this child… is not to be in this school… I kept saying there was
no way I was putting him back in that school but I needed someone to help me. I was so sick, you know, with my illness and that and stress escalates it… and I told [intake worker] that and he was such a compassionate man. He was very concerned about my health and the well-being of Luke and he said that, you know, they were going to help all that we needed to do was to wait to be assigned a worker… I thought great. Finally somebody is on our side… I talked to him several times over the next several weeks and I waited and… I thought maybe Luke would be out of school two weeks, two to three weeks at the most. I waited and I waited and waited…

Interviewer: can you tell me a bit about what the Children's Aid Society did …

Nothing… finally when I was assigned a worker I met her, [intake worker] brought her over, introduced her to me and… I even signed a proposed plan and that they were going to put in force. I was supposed to get a copy of it, never did… The only thing they put in place for me was … family counselling… [for] eight weeks to come into your home and try to work with you and the family… after the eight weeks I never saw her again… I talked to [worker] a couple of times on the phone. (Your worker at the C.A.S.?). Yeah… (So you saw her a couple of times) Yeah… the last time I talked to her was she called there the middle of July just to… see how things were going and I told her they’re not going good and I was in a really bad way and I needed some help… But I was… in a rush and I told her… I’m on my way out the door to a doctor’s appointment and she said okay, maybe I’ll give you a call back on Monday then and we can discuss this further and I said okay and I haven’t heard from her since.

Interviewer: And you think the case has been closed but you don’t know?

Well… not too long ago I e-mailed her. I had e-mailed one other time as well because I can never [seem] to get her on the phone… I was so angry about her, you know, never returning my call after that… I thought she’s not going to return my call because she did say on the phone that… their main priority is to help out the child that’s in need… not so much me and I said well, if I remember correctly… when I signed my name to that contract it said, you know, help for family and child. And I said [intake worker] specifically said that there’d be, you know, help for the family… she said as long as Luke seems to be doing well then there’s nothing more she can do and I said oh, boy, you know, it’s funny how that’s not what I was told in the beginning…

Interviewer: Is he getting any help?

I am trying desperately. I’ve had my application in for [program] since before the end of the school year last year… I always get the run around from them. She’s told me to call [children’s mental health centre] again, try and get my name reactivated there… she told me while I was there to try and talk to [psychologist] personally. Well, she didn’t have time for me that day and I left a message for her to call me immediately, ASAP. I still haven’t got a call back… Luke’s a very smart kid. Unfortunately he’s got, you know, troubles learning, he could learn if he had the right resources but nobody seems to want to help me out. Either… make us a priority to make sure he doesn’t get as bad as these
other kids or, you know, they just can’t be bothered and in the meantime my son and I are ending up hating each other and it’s coming to the point now where I’m even considering foster care because I’m terrified to see him coming home from school every day because from the time he gets home from school until the time he goes to sleep at night it’s just a disaster…

… I never used to be so negative and down but up until the last couple years no matter how hard it got I always felt that one of these days things would change and get better. I have always had hope, always positive but trying to get any help in this country is impossible and it just has changed my life so drastically that I’ve given up hope of ever having a normal life. I’ve given up hope. The doctors are useless. I found that out with my mother, with me, with my son, three different people in my family. Getting any type of social service, forget it, you know? Government assistance? Forget it. Forget it … and… I pay out more money in healthcare in a year than I do on groceries or buying clothes or socializing or anything… the majority of our money goes for healthcare expenses… it’s just not right…
Marie

Marie – Mother interviewed
Kelly – daughter of Marie and Jim
Dave – Marie’s second and current husband
Laura – daughter of Dave and Beth
Patty – one of Marie’s sisters

Jim – Marie’s first husband
Mike – son of Marie and Jim
Beth – ex-wife of Dave
Dan – Marie’s oldest brother

Growing Up

… I was born in [city]… [in] 1957… My parents were French-based… we never lived in town, it was more on the outskirts so… there was maybe a dozen homes there… At that time when I grew up I didn’t have any girlfriends to play with… I have six – well, five brothers and sisters, two brothers and three sisters. I am the second youngest… I spent a lot of time playing with my brother because he was about a year and a half older than I am and I basically was his shirtdtail… I grew up in a very good home… the friends that I had in school, they had problem families… like my best girlfriend that I even went to high school with, her mother was an alcoholic and I never, never knew until I got married… and it really blew me away… I felt when I was growing up I was very rich compared to all my friends… we didn’t have a whole lot of money really but I felt rich because… my clothes were always clean and… my mother made great meals… compared to my friends and a lot of them, like I think their parents spent most of their time in bars or they didn’t have good jobs and really, now… that I’m older, my father didn’t have a great job. He was a trucker… and he used to take… bread to [other cities]… we went with him numerous times just for fun when we were a little older. (Did you have a good relationship with your dad?)… when I was a child I thought it was a normal relationship… he never did any disciplining, very, very little, I only remember the one time my father actually didn’t even discipline me because… my brother and [I]… were making noise and – and he did slap my – my older brother in the leg to be quiet… but he literally pushed me away and hit him… because the year I was in grade two, I – my brother and I… were wrestling… and my brother happened to grab a hold of my leg and like I was pinned so I kind of turned and he broke my leg… I never drank a whole lot of milk so therefore my bones are not as good as most kids, I guess… and ever since then, everybody was kind of more terrified of… hurting me or – or thinking, you know, like I might break something again…

Interviewer: Was your dad gone away a lot or did he do that run…

… all the time in my life that I can remember and he did it at night time… he would get up for suppertime, it was always a family dinner… at the table, everybody had their own individual seating. (And then he’d go do the run overnight?) At night and he slept most of the day… of all places, I’d remember he’d always sleep on the couch and… you couldn’t have the T.V. on too loud or sometimes you couldn’t even have the T.V. on … my father never did anything… because there was more girls than there were boys, the girls were the ones that were always behind cleaning up… and still when we grew up, the boys
were… top dog… we were still pretty young when my parents bought a cottage… up north… we spent most of our time… making roads to get to – to the cottage and building the cottage. My dad built it all… from scratch… my mother used to tell me… my father… could have been a licensed mechanic, he could have been a licensed carpenter or an electrician, he did it all… He was a trucker and basically that’s all he did… he couldn’t I guess take orders. He was the one who decided and so therefore when he got himself in his truck, there was nobody to tell him what to do…

… I basically hated school… I was going [to] French school with a French background but hated speaking French… I was your basic major average child. I didn’t work too hard… I was your basic 50’s and if I passed that was good… my ideal growing up was being just like my mom… I wanted a family and a marriage and to have my own home and I just basically just followed in my mother’s footsteps. *(What grade did you get to?)*… I went all the way to grade 12… didn’t get my diploma though… I have one credit missing… I went back for another year to get my diploma… I think I took four courses and I still failed one… I’ve gone back a few times to continue education and because they say oh, they’ll give you all these free credits… but not the last four so I need one credit and they won’t give it to me so as far as I’m concerned, I have my grade 12…The year I got out of high school I worked with my sister… in an office doing… bookwork. Prior to that, when I was still in high school, I was switchboard operator at the – the sanatorium… My sister worked there too. So, I happened to be lucky. I had a big family so it got me all these jobs… and I think still today if you don’t know somebody that’s – you know, you’re not going to get a very good job or you’re very lucky…

*Interviewer: You said I wanted to be like my mom… with a family and kids. How long had you had that aspiration? Was it something ever since you were a little girl?*

Yeah… And my sister - one of my older sisters, Patty got married, I was still in high school and of course… when she got pregnant and had her first child I used to go over and baby-sit and I thought, you know, that was the life, to be able to have your own… house or your own apartment, home, whatever… and a husband and a child, that to me was my key goal in life… *(Do you think your parents were some sort of role model for relationships?)* They were very loving… They often showed their affection… I don’t remember them sitting together very much because see my dad worked nights… the only time we saw them actually together a lot was when my dad was on holidays… And still he was a workaholic. He never stayed put very long. He was always raking or doing something…

… *[Mom]* didn’t get her driver’s licence until my dad passed away… dad died when he was only in his 50’s. I think 53 and… when that happened I wasn’t living at home, I was I think… around 19, 20… living with my – my first husband… I think what bothered me the most when my dad passed away, we knew he was – he was dying of cancer… but he didn’t know and mom wouldn’t… let the doctors tell him he was dying of cancer because my father was the type of person that lived for the future and she figured… it would be difficult for him… he had two cancers. He had lung cancer because he was coughing up blood and he also had in – in the glands… my father smoked cigarettes like there was no
tomorrow… when my oldest brother… got old enough to drive to go get him cigarettes, he’d always forget and buy him the – the ones with… the filters because my father always smoked the non-filters… So, we knew at least giving him a filter would protect him a little bit…

Relationships with Partners

Interviewer: Was your first husband a high school sweetheart?

No… he was my sister-in-law’s brother’s best friend… (So, how old was he and how old were you when you first met?) I would have been like 13… my ex now was the first boy I went out on a real date… he’s in high school and… I was well, I guess at the end of grade eight… (So, you hated him and he – he really liked you?) Yeah, infatuated with me… (So, how did he win over your heart?) I hadn’t seen him for a few years, and I started going out with my sister-in-law’s brother, Ted… he was a very cute guy. He lived in [large city] so he had all kinds of nasty habits and… I was your basic very straight kind of going girl, never did anything bad… like the drugs… We all went out and had a lot of fun, never got into trouble but there was a lot of drinking, a lot of drugs going around but I – I just did the drinking… I did have… my fair share of marijuana but I never smoked so when you smoke marijuana it burns the back of your throat… I said I don’t need it… Ted… when I saw him I just fell deeply in love with him and he was older… and… he asked me if he – I would be his girlfriend and I felt like, you know, like there is a god… he dropped me like a dead potato… all the relationships that I had, I made that decision that I didn’t want to be with them… basically that was my first, you know, major… (Devastation?) Yeah… of course Jim was Ted’s friend so… we started going out…

… Jim… lost his father… His father had committed suicide… because he had had a stroke and obviously he’s… your typical father, you know, like he can’t provide for his family then he’s got to do something about it so obviously he felt he’d be helping his family by ending it all… because he was paralysed… (How long did you and Jim date before you decided to get married?) Oh, about a year… maybe two… I did move in with him… a good year before… getting married… (And so how was that relationship?)… Good… we got married …1979. Two weeks prior to that [fuel company] had called because Jim did not like his job… Jim… used to work for… [electronics company]… and he did go to college so he was… an instrumentation technician which is anything electronically controlled that he fixed… so he had been looking for other employment and [fuel company] had given him a phone call and wanted him to come out and work in Alberta… Jim said he wanted the job but he said he was in the process of getting married and… and they told him not to worry but to go ahead and get married and so needless to say we drove to… [Alberta city]… [fuel company] paid for everything… (how was the wedding?)… Not too bad… lots of family was all there… we paid for our – our wedding… my dad was gone… my mom didn’t have a whole lot of money and Jim’s father was passed away so – so it was just mothers… Jim’s mother… always worked as a bookkeeper… she used to have numerous jobs. She’s a real workaholic…
Interviewer: How long were you in [Alberta city]?

Ten years… one of the jobs that I had… was working at bakery supplies… I worked there for a couple years and [then] the apartment complex that we were living in… were looking for someone to take over the… 500 suites. So, I did that for a couple years… then… we bought ourselves an acreage… I didn’t work anymore… It was in a farm area… (So, how were the first two years of your marriage?)… Everything was going well… until we moved to the acreage and Kelly was born… in way I blame it [on] when Kelly was born but maybe it might have started earlier than that but I didn’t really see it because when you’re working and… you come home and you’re tired so you don’t really expect a whole lot from your husband… he used to come home and expect dinner… I was a cheap cook and bottle washer basically… (And so you moved?) We moved from there to … A very small town… (And how was that?)… A little bit better because at least I had neighbours. I started making more friends… it wasn’t my dream home but it… was nice and big and you know, the house had a lot of potential… and I still wasn’t working, never really did work a whole lot…

… Jim used to have a friend… and they used to have the odd letters and as time progressed… he would call her a little more often… He spoke to her like I would have liked him to speak to me… (Do you know if anything happened between the friend?) Well, he would never tell me… there was numerous hotel bills, you know, that he had taken her out for dinner… and there was all kinds of pictures of her and him together… I used to tell Jim whenever we used to have conversations, you know, all I need is a little bit of tender loving care… there was always sex there and that’s all there was, was sex… Like when you talk to other people and they have problems, well, he’s an alcoholic, he beats on me, you know, we have no food in the house, you know, like you hear all these horror stories. And – and I’m looking at the husband that I can’t stand anymore. He doesn’t give a shit about me, whether I live or die but… he gives me his paycheque. I have all the money in the world. Like he’s a very good provider, you know, and so why can’t I live with this?… I made up my mind that I wasn’t going to be moving out and I wasn’t going to go – I’m the type of person that can’t live alone… and I wasn’t going to raise my kids by – by themselves… or be on welfare or work… So, about two years later we had gone on a – a motorcycle party get together… (You and Jim?) Yeah… like it’s every year… Jim… used to go to bed, it was like nine o’clock… and I used to be up all night partying… I was by myself most of the time but… the second year, it was a little more than that… this is ’89… (so it’s 1989… You’ve just celebrated that anniversary in May?) Yeah… it’s just another day. So, I forget when it was, I went out and I bought myself a nice emerald diamond ring… and I said happy anniversary to me…

Interviewer: So, now is Jim in bed by 9:00 p.m. and you’re out…

… when I met Dave, I was running away from… [another man]… So, this [man]… wants to take me basically in the bush here and I’m going I don’t think so… obviously we’ve all had too many drinks… my husband is no where to be found. I’m having to fend by myself… that’s when I kind of went around over to Dave and grabbed his arm and put his arm around his neck and I said help… Dave just said all the perfect words… and…
Dave told me that… he was divorced also that he had a daughter and he was in the process of trying to get her back… he told me all the problems that I had, he just said he would never do that to me… (And he lived in [Marie’s city]?) In [different city]… And he said he would call me… of course every day when the phone rang I jumped and… it was him… And… you know, the old heart throb… Like it’s been 11 years now with Dave and I still love him like I did that weekend… I called numerous people from the – from the motorcycle club and all I heard was… that he was a very, very nice guy… he just always said the right words, the right things, I don’t know… the compassion… which my ex never, never had… we decided to get together. So, he came up to [Marie’s city]… to see me… I told my ex that… I was going out partying with a girlfriend… That was the most terrifying weekend I ever had my whole entire life… to put myself into a hotel room with – it may as well have been a strange man…

… when I got home that weekend, I told Jim that I wanted to basically go away… for two weeks and I asked him if it was okay after the two weeks that if I found that if I didn’t like where I was going if I could come back… and he said where the hell are you going?… I said I’m going to [city where Dave lived]… he eventually I guess made a few phones calls… I think he found out where I was… (what were you thinking when you said I’m going away for two weeks and can I come back if I don’t like it?… did you want to come back?)… I didn’t really want to come back but… when… you… live with a complete stranger for two weeks, you don’t know what’s going to happen. (Would it be fair to say you were ready to be in another relationship but not ready to be alone?…) Yeah… I knew for a fact I did not want to move out and be alone… I felt very vulnerable…

Interviewer: So, end of two weeks, you went back to Jim. Did you tell him right away?

… I came back the long weekend of September… and I gave him a month… Dave, when I moved in with him, we made arrangements and he bought me a brand new home… he was providing for me and his daughter… He had his daughter [Laura] at that time, fulltime… She was only two and a half… my ex, he hated Dave so much to say well, what kind of a man would rip a family apart and what my point is well, he didn’t technically rip the family apart because it was never really together… we were just living together… He wanted a divorce and… he had all the locks changed in the house… he went through some – some problems… the ten years of our marriage I remember whenever we had any big discussions I used to cry my eyes out… and he used to sit there, never had a tear in his eye… And… he begged me and he pleaded, you know, to come back and he would take care of me and he would be a changed man and he was crying like a baby and I just sat there and I didn’t have a tear… I wasn’t going to be going back to him… (So, you were very confident about your decision?) Yeah, because Dave had done so much for me… (If you hadn’t have met Dave…) I’d probably still be with [Jim]… Yeah, kind of scary… because I really wouldn’t want to be there … There were some tough days I guess living with Dave and more of the tough days living with Dave is dealing with the child custody and the divorce… Dave would get very angry at me if – if for some reason Jim was getting his way and I wasn’t standing up for myself… (Now, Dave was divorced?) Yes… He was already divorced…
Interviewer: And then how long did you live [in city Dave lived in]?

… we were there… in 90 – I’d say about ’93 we moved to… another small town… Dave decided to go on his own, work for himself… the contract that he had was in a small town… so we decided to move… We bought another really nice house there and it had one, two, three, four, five rooms – five and it was fully finished… If you were to know Dave, you would never, ever give him an… only grade ten education… but then he went to college and… he is a certified mechanic… Dave did very well, never had any problems finding a job… [then] he came home one day and he said he had quit and I just about died. Of course, the first thing is how am I going to pay these bills… he’s got his truck with all his tools and everything… and we got a hefty mortgage for this house… and the kids… cost a lot of money… the company that Dave used to work for… his bosses knew what kind of a mechanic he was and there was an opening at the head office… in [Ontario city]… for a trainer and so his old boss recommended Dave… he knew that Dave had a bad back… we handed in his resume and we kind of talked about it… we’d have to move to Ontario… he got the job… [so] ’95 we moved here… His back wasn’t getting any better and he wasn’t going to be able to do the work… that he did on a regular basis… we were making well over the hundred thousand a year in Alberta and we came out here which was I’d say three times more expensive… this home was so much more expensive than the home in [Alberta] and [it]… was three times better than this one… (How do you like this neighbourhood?)… I like it… it’s nice, nice and quiet… I always did like the smaller towns… I didn’t like the big cities, refused to live in [large city] because I didn’t want to subject my children to that…

Interviewer: And have you worked since you’ve come here?

… just this year I started working… I decided to go and find myself a job… to get myself out of this house… So, I’m a cashier at [grocery store]… part-time… I get my housework done more so now that I have a job… (So, you’ve been part-time working since your marriage with Dave)… A little bit here and there… Dave is in the process of rebuilding his truck… he’s spending a lot of time on that. We also sell computers in our home… And I’ve gotten to the point that I really want to get rid of that… (How many hours a week are you working on that in home business of selling computers?)… it gets busy when school starts… until after Christmas… (is Dave a workaholic?) Pretty much, yeah… (What do you and Dave do for fun?)… We go to… computer shows, you know, things that are going on. We go out for supper. We don’t go to a show because what we decided last year is we bought a big screen T.V. and the whole stereo thing… we decided – we’d do for each other is that that would be our quality time together… and… we vegge in front of the T.V. with the popcorn and – and the drinks…

Children

… Kelly was born in 1981… Mike was born… Exactly 11 months later… I got involved a lot with the kids… well, my kids were my life basically. I got involved with the school. I was the vice president of kindergarten. At that time kindergarten… was a private
organization… because I was a stay at home mom, I needed certain things from [Jim] and I was getting zip… I remember there was one day that got me so angry. He had come home and… the kids… are maybe just in kindergarten and maybe grade one and… I fed the kids and everything… but I left everything sitting in the kitchen and I went to do groceries because I found doing groceries without the kids a little easier… I got back and… what was he doing? Snoring on the couch… that’s his life… (Was he a good father?)… he was good dad. He was the fun dad…

Interviewer: how did it go telling… Jim this is over, I’m moving on…

It mustn’t have been too bad because I don’t remember it too much… (Was there a discussion of who’s going to keep the kids, were you planning on taking them?) I made all the arrangements… (Did you take the kids?) No… Jim wanted me to take the kids. I felt at that time I couldn’t subject my kids to a question mark because they were still pretty young… Kelly was [in] grade two… At that time Kelly was very close to her father… I just didn’t feel right in my head to take my kids away from their father… another reason was because I didn’t know Dave that well… He could have been, you know, a child molester, he could have been anything… I did not know him well enough… I can handle anything but I didn’t want to subject my children to anything… (how was it in the first little while?)… the hardest thing… was adapting, not having my children around… every day at 3:30 I’d kind of look at the door and say well, the kids aren’t coming home… Every second weekend I drove back and forth to go pick up the kids… It’s a four hour drive… back and forth… the kids used to ask me why I was taking dad’s money away… and of course there was a lot of affection there and the kids had never seen affection… I was the fun parent now, which used to be completely different… There was still some – some tough times because whenever I’d pick up the kids I’d see certain things that if I was at home, you know, they’d be better dressed or their hair would be combed. Like just looking at their school pictures, you know, they’re not neat and tidy like I would have liked them to be because… he didn’t have the time… I found things quite difficult and that’s when I had gone… for some counselling [on]… how to deal with certain issues with the kids… I guess it was somebody to talk to… a neutral person to – to you know, tell her what I’m doing and… whether I’m doing it right or wrong… (How long were you in counselling?) I’d say a year, maybe two… I’ve gone to numerous counsellings…

… as time progressed, the kids… didn’t want to live with their dad anymore. (How long before they made that decision that they wanted to live with you?) Oh, by Christmas. (So, within months?) Yeah. (And did they move in with you then?) No, there was a big battle… (How did that go?) Lousy. It cost me big dollars… there was about maybe a year, year and a half of a lot of fighting between going – child custody, going in for counselling… (Lots of arguing was going on?) Oh, horror stories… (And counselling for the kids, for you?)… Yeah. (And what was the final …) That we’d have joint custody… and the children were going to live with me and… the kids would go back and forth every second weekend… every second holiday. Like he’d have one holiday, I’d have the next holiday… and that was okay and because I didn’t have a job, I was the one that did all the driving… (And what year… did they come and move in with you?) Kelly was in
grade four, I think… *(Was Jim involved in any relationships…?)* He put an ad out in the single newspaper and I don’t know where he found this… lady… a year later or something… She was an odd one. And she had a daughter and I know Kelly said that I guess the little girl was pretty much the same age as Kelly and she said that one evening they had a bath and the little girl kept her underwear on in the bath…

*Introducer: And how did you have any adjustment to suddenly being a parent again to such a young child?*

Laura was very easy going at that age… She loved the kids to death… They’d sit, all three of them and you know… Laura I found needing – needing a mom real bad… because she hadn’t seen her mother for quite a few months (*Were you willing to – to be the mom?*) I didn’t have a problem with that… she did everything you told her to… We went to the – the full court for – for Dave and Laura… Dave went in the courtroom… and he goes you’ll never guess who’s in there… your ex… our ex’s had been seeing each other and getting dirt from each other… the actual court set precedent in – in the law books… because at that time it was very odd for a man to get full custody of a little girl and he did get full custody… with a lot of stipulations… that because she was a struggling mother, that we had to drive her back and forth to [Alberta city] and … every second holiday she went to – to her mothers and we had to bear all the expenses… she ruled the roost. Like I want her here, I want her there… there were some rough times… Dave… wasn’t used to having grown children… It was just bang, here you go, you’ve got some grown children now and he was still learning the issues with Laura only being three… Dave grew up without having brothers and sisters… and he couldn’t understand how they could be so mean to each other because… he would kill to have a brother or sister… there was many times that [Dave] used to come home late at night and the kids were in bed already and – and he got up really early so there was the odd weekend that we got together and had some fun but… most of it, the discipline and everything was on my… shoulders…

… The kids have gone through quite a few schools… not that we did it on purpose or anything… *(how did Jim feel about the kids moving to Ontario?)* He didn’t like it… because at that time Mike was living with him again… So, when I found – we found out we were moving to Ontario… Mike wanted to come with me… because I was moving so far away… So, Mike did come along… *(How did you work out visitation then with Jim?)* he was paying the kids child support, the money was going to the kids… and… every Christmastime and summertime they’d fly up to… [Alberta] … the first year we were here the kids went to the Roman Catholic School… all three of them, except for Kelly because she was in high school… The kids did quite well… Mike thrived quite well, had an excellent teacher… the next year… we started having problems with Mike… Mike was 14 at that time. *(And what kinds of things was he doing?)* he was taking piano lessons and didn’t practice… He didn’t want to do the chores, didn’t want to do anything… there was a lot of times that Dave and Mike didn’t see too much eye to eye and the one day Dave had told Mike to… take a lot of stuff of the computer, off the hard drive because it was too much stuff and he needed the room for another things… of course one thing led up to the other, a big argument went on and basically Mike started
yelling and screaming at Dave saying, well, you are not my father, I don’t have to listen to you… Dave says… You either listen to me or you leave… there weren’t hard things we were expecting for the kids… you have your daily chores, you keep your room clean… there’s no drugs coming to the house…

Interviewer: did Mike move away?

Yeah… (He moved in with Jim?) Yes… when Mike started… giving us problems… Dave didn’t want to deal with the issues… He wanted him out and… at that time I basically looked at it well, this is my marriage and you know, I promised to – to live with him for the rest of my life and my kids aren’t going to live with my the rest of my life, my husband is… And I want to keep this one and you know – and I have a major bond with my husband… I knew by sending Mike to his father, he would not let him, I don’t know, rule the roost. He would deal with his issues… (And how is that working?)… Mike definitely had some difficulties with it… he understands now where we were coming from. Like we’ve had numerous conversations now that… he’s going to be 19 as to why we did what we did… We told him a year later that he could come back if he wanted to… but at that time he was, you know, starting high school out there and he wanted to finish his high school in [Alberta]… he’s still having a lot of difficulties in regards to just growing up… he’s always been very much of a straight A student… Never had any problems in school… and he went back and did high school and there was a couple of courses he had a difficult time with. He’s got a problem with math and I find students will either excel in Math and are poor in English … He excels in English… and language arts…

… because we moved away then of course [Laura’s mother Beth] wanted full custody… we went through the lawyers all over again…we had another home assessment done by another psychologist… and that… wasn’t good for one, wasn’t good for the other. At that time there was… a lot of changes in Beth’s life… She was getting married… we felt of course, that Laura would be better off here… But… Beth was determined to get her daughter… we said you know what, we’re tired of fighting, we don’t have any more money… so we sent her back the same year Mike went back… it was supposed to be only a one year trial… (How old was Laura…?) Ten… She had never lived with her mother… so of course her mother was Disneyland… her mother gave her so many misinformation, like things like oh, I will do this for you and I will do that and she told her for so many years that she would walk her to school every morning… like all these things that, you know, like we tried to explain to Laura, she can’t do things like that. She has to go to work…

Interviewer: Was it just Beth, her new husband and Laura or did they have a family?

… It just so happened at the time that Laura did go back, that summer, in August, Beth was having a baby… we tried to explain that to her too that… you’re going to go over there and you’re the one that’s going to be taking care of that… (So, how long was Laura out there?) She came back last year or this year really… she was there for three years. (And what prompted the decision to move back?) She got into numerous problems…
school, attitude, fighting, going out at night, not coming back, sneaking out… (So, it was supposed to be for a one year period and she didn’t come back… were you struggling to get her back…) No… we basically said whatever Laura wants. (And Laura wanted to stay there for three years?) Well… even the psychologist said… whoever she’s living with, that’s who she wants to be with… (So, how did you feel about getting Laura back three years later with this trouble?)… I had a difficult time with it… we knew that the type of person that Beth was and… because I raised Laura for quite a few years before, I – I couldn’t say no… she came up on the March break before we decided that she was going to move out here… we sat down with her and explained to her what our expectations of her were… do your homework, do the little bit of chores that are going on around here, keep your room clean… she informed us of all these things that were going on and…that her mother had given her the strap twice and her stepfather had given her the strap twice and we didn’t feel that was appropriate… but of course you know, when she informed us of the issues that were going on over there, we didn’t hear Beth’s side of the story… So, we just figured, you know, take her out of the big city… and bring her over here. She can’t really get into too – too much trouble… there are no malls here…

… Laura has a way of… manipulating certain issues to show how – how good of a person she is… But when she comes home, she’s a completely different little – little monster… I expect certain things from her and basically she – she’s never said that to me to my face but I feel that I’m not her mother… I get that vibe from Laura… I’m the one that deals with the issues all the time… until I’d say half way into the year Dave stepped in quite a bit more because I… told him I’ve had enough… Her lack of cleanliness… blew me away… You know, like flushing the toilet… or using Kelly’s things that are her own things… Like using her towel… we seemed to have a major problem with Laura… we thought that if we had some – went for counselling… we made a couple of appointments. I think we saw him maybe four or five times… And basically Laura said nothing… she said that he keeps asking the same stupid questions… there was numerous issues so we decided… that we were going to deal with Laura’s issues the old fashion method… like we were raised. If we didn’t do things the right way, we got disciplined… So, we decided one day - there was numerous reasons as to why we decided to give Laura the – the strap… Dave asked me to take her to school to help her get to her classes on a day to day basis. So, I took her to each one of her classes so she’d get there on time. Of course she treated me like I was dirt, you know, she obviously didn’t want me there… but I went into… each one of her classes and I did have a little chat with every one of… her teachers and every one of her teachers didn’t have rave reviews for her… Laura… can get so far in life if she’d just want to, you know, buckle down and decide to – to start working…

Interviewer: where is she right now?

She’s in [Alberta] with her mother… I need some – some holiday time away from her… she went as soon as school was finished… (So, do you have any idea how things are going …?) No, she hasn’t called once… Mind you, we haven’t called either because Dave doesn’t want to deal with the issues… I really don’t want to deal with her issues anymore. She can stay there… I have given her a whole year of my life… And there is no
difference… her father has given her an ultimatum. Basically if she doesn’t clean up her act… she’s gone Christmas… two days previous to Laura leaving, Laura had to write an exam… at one o’clock… and I didn’t make Laura get up… I had to go to work for noon… About 12 o’clock… I have a phone call… and my neighbour across the street is telling me that Laura has taken the van. *(Laura is 15?)* 14 still… So, needless to say I call the police… So, Laura [spent] numerous hours in jail that day… we couldn’t charge her with anything because she couldn’t be here for a court date… the policeman was… very knowledgeable as to what I had been going through and… the policeman took her to another room and had another little chat with her and informed her that it wasn’t me that called the police, it was someone else that saw them driving down the road… to try and take all … her being angry at us type of thing… *(was it a – a learning experience for her to be in jail?)*… Laura did not shed a tear. Didn’t even say boo to me… then the policeman said I know that you have not a whole lot of remorse for what you’ve just done because you haven’t even apologized to your mother then she says well, I am sorry… So, I honestly don’t think this is fixed…

… I honestly feel as we’ve been going through counselling and stuff, her issues are not with me… She’s got problems with her mother and… that she’s not given her time that she said she would. All those broken promises… *(And how does that leave you feeling?)*… Frustrated… I don’t want to deal with the issues for the next six months… If she was going to change, we would have seen some changes in this year… The counsellor… informed us her last session that Laura is traumatized with all the issues that have happened between the divorces… and the back and forth. *(And what do you think of that?)* It’s a bunch of hogwash… we are all traumatized. I’ve got issues in my life that I’ve been traumatized with… but… we have to set it back and go on… If anybody’s being traumatized, it’s me here… of course every second weekend; she had a different home… just like people that… moved a lot. Yeah, you ended up with pretty near new friends not every year but close to it… when we moved a lot but you make new friends. Like people who have military lives have new friends on a regular basis. You don’t see the people in military going crazy… You know, they’re not traumatized… Her point of view, because of the counsellor, I had asked her… what do you remember in all the times that she was living with me is basically I was just a nagging person… I could hear that this was not Laura talking here, this is her mother telling Laura all the issues that went on when she was younger… I guess sometimes… I feel that I’m a failure as a parent as to what Laura has been doing … but I can’t seem to get it through her thick skull as to what should be done… I’m disappointed in Laura, disappointed in myself that I’m not able to – to find her niche to – to get her motivated…

… [Laura’s] mother called her that day that she got out of jail and [Laura] commented to me how much her father and her mother were alike… And I looked at her and I said Laura do you want to know why?… you’re going on a path that your mother was on and so was your father… and they see the path that you’re on and they’ve been there and they don’t want to see you go there because they know what happens… *(And what’s that path… ?)* Well, the path of destruction, basically, of missing out on so many things. Like Dave missed out on a full education. He doesn’t have his G.E.D. because he lost his father when he was 13 and at that time when you’re 14 years old, when he was growing
up, he wanted things, he wanted cars… he needed money… so he quit school and went to work… as far as where Beth has come from… all I can say is what I've heard and it wasn’t great reviews… *(What do you hope for Laura?)* Well, she does straighten up… and buckle down and want to get an education and want to get better in school… she’s going to school but she’s not getting to any of her classes on time… the teachers are constantly calling saying you know, can you help me out, Laura is behind two weeks on a lot of her reports that she needs to hand in and what does she do? Watches T.V. … we’ve showed Laura how well Kelly does in school… And like we’ve never pushed Kelly to – to thrive in school or even push her to do homework or anything like that. And you know, Kelly brings home A’s all the time so… I don’t think that helped any…

*Interviewer: How are things with Kelly and Mike?*

Good… they’re both working together at the same place, working with their father in [Alberta] … for the summer. Kelly comes back on August 25th… She’s… doing her second year in college… *(how does she feel about Laura?)*… She’s gotten to the point I think you know, she obviously hates Laura because she sees me going through hell… Mike still lives with his dad… Mike has tried to – to talk to [Laura] a little bit… he says I understand where she’s coming from in certain areas… Mike never put us through anything… like what she has put us through… I’m having a big difficulty right now with my daughter because she has a boyfriend and I see her treating her boyfriend like a piece of shit… I think a lot of it is how she cares about that man and I honestly don’t think she cares that much because if you really care about that person, if you really want to be together, you will cooperate… I’ve had numerous conversations with her and I said that’s not fair… and she flies off the handle. She’s got a temper like her father… She blames a lot of her problems and as nasty as she is… with the divorce and stuff… I don’t know how she can blame all her problems on that… she’s gone through… a lot of crap but not to make a person feel so you know, meaningless… I guess you’d have to listen to [Kelly’s] point of view of how she felt about the divorce… with the counselling she went to, I know there was one of the counsellors that we have went to and they had a graph on the wall on how angry they were and their anger was past the graph and I’m going what are they so angry about… Like okay, you’re allowed to be angry, I guess angry about the divorce but…

*Children’s Aid Society*

*Interviewer: So… how did Children Services get involved?*

… We’ve had numerous conversations… at this dinner table, you know, Laura, you know, these are the things that we, you know, expect from you… And of course, you know, she turns everything around so basically and that was it so Dave gave her the strap… the next day obviously when she… went to school, she – she mentioned it to one of her friends… one of her friends had to mention it to the – the school and that’s how Children Services called. *(So, the school called Children Services because of the discipline?)* Yeah. *(And how did that go? Did C.A.S. show up on your doorstep?)* Basically she first contacted Laura… she mentioned to me that Laura didn’t want
anybody involved but the first thing would be that – I’m not sure if she – she had said that she’d get into trouble… I forget… her name – I think her card is upstairs… after she finished talking to Laura, then she called me and… made an appointment… and I spoke to her a little bit on the phone as to basically I said no problem. She said did Laura mention to you that she had – we had had a conversation and had a meeting? No, Laura never tells me anything… (How did you feel just initially when Children’s Aid called you?) Well, I found it quite odd that her mother in [Alberta] was able to give her the strap four times and we only gave it to her just the one time and… Children Services… was never called on her mother… Not saying that you know one was better than the other… and we warned her, like all the psychologists say, if you’re going to tell a child you’re going to do something, you have to go – follow through… And basically that’s what we did…okay, so that backfired and now – the one thing that I find very odd, you know, with Children Services, you know, what you hear on T.V., you know, sometimes they step in, sometimes they don’t… obviously they don’t step in when there should be stepping in and they step in in this situation that I don’t feel should have been stepped in…

Interviewer: Were you able to speak to C.A.S. and let them know the whole history?

…Yeah, she came for the – I don’t know, a two or three hour conversation… what I don’t understand is why did they give this file to this woman that has no children. She doesn’t have a clue as to the issues that I’m dealing with at all… as to raising a 14 year old… I’m sorry but what it says in the textbook is not anything that goes on… And of course she’s saying that we definitely have to go for some counselling, you know we have to deal with these issues and I have to stop spending so much time and energy on Laura. Well, I’m sorry but when she’s right here in your face, you have to deal with these issues… (And so how long was C.A.S. involved in your life?) Very little… she came for that – that initial meeting… and of course because I told her I had made another appointment to see another psychologist – not psychologist, another counsellor… And I asked Laura, do you want to go and see a different one. We’ll check this one out and see if you’re going to talk to this one or not… and she said yes and so she’s gone to him a few times… (So, your case was closed quite quickly?)…Yeah…

Interviewer: And so how has things been since then with Laura?

… She’s still up to her lovely little schemes… (what’s your impressions of Children’s Aid from that experience)… Well, with that experience it was – like I – I even called her back up – when did I call her?… I guess I was feeling, I don’t know, pretty low. I don’t know. I felt that she should go to jail but I felt… (From the van?) Yeah… But I felt that if it was mine… I wouldn’t have put her through it… But then my kids would have never done that… They would have never disappointed me the way she has… I felt like I needed to talk to somebody… I’m always looking for someone to give me an idea as what am I doing wrong, what can I do to fix this problem. (… So, you called the Children’s Aid worker?) Yeah. (Was she helpful…?) No… You know, you have to spend more time on yourself. (What does that mean?) That I spend too much time on Laura’s problems and I’m going I don’t know… (So, was that the last time you phoned her?) Oh, yeah. (The last time you used her as a resource to help out?) Yeah… I didn’t
feel that they needed to – to come into the home and – and find out what was going on… had they been able to do a little more for me then I would have said well, yeah it was a good experience… but I found she really didn’t do anything…

**Adult Relationships with Family of Origin**

… I don’t understand, the day before my father passed away, I happened to be at home discussing… my marriage plans and I couldn’t include my father in my marriage plans because we knew he wasn’t going to make it… So, we were just talking about it, like my mother and I and I think my sisters… I knew my father didn’t like [Jim]. He got to see him a few times when he was pretty drunk at… parties… and of course my parents, their views of socializing is not getting drunk… that evening my father happened to I guess come into the room… and he told me that I would never be happy with him and he didn’t understand why I would want to marry him… and that day – that evening he passed away… The first couple of years that I was married to Jim… I always told myself my father was wrong… and then things slowly deteriorated…

*Interviewer: How was it? You moved to Alberta, what was …*

Pretty tough… I had always been at home… I always had family. I think the worst time… that bothered me the most being away from my family was the holidays… I used to call them on Christmas and of course New Year’s Day and everybody’s having a big party and the only one that’s not there is me… The very first year I had moved away I came home for Christmas and I surprised my mom and I didn’t tell anybody… my family was so far away and I remember there were times when the kids were put to bed I used to sit and talk to my sister on the phone for hours. My husband used to be out… making the money and I used to spend it on the phone talking to my sister… in the ten years we – we’ve come back to visit, you know, a few times… and my sister used to always take care of my – my kids because they’re – they’re only 11 months apart so they’re – they’re like twins basically… And she had a little girl the same age as Kelly…

… my brother married a Jehovah Witness… He knew I was very close to him and I guess he used to talk to his wife … about the things we used to do and so she thought when they got married that she would want me as a maid of honour and it just blew me away… I didn’t feel that I was the person to be her maid of honour because I really didn’t care for her… I didn’t feel that it was… for me to be her maid of honour because your maid of honour is supposed to be your best friend, your confident… And I said no, I really didn’t want to be her maid of honour… I felt very disappointed in myself that I didn’t do that… for my brother but it wasn’t for my brother, you know. It was maid of honour, it was for – for her… he always said that he wouldn’t go knocking on doors but he does it all now… everybody’s got their own way of living and if that’s the way he wants to – to live, that’s fine…
Interviewer: Do you see continuity or similarities between your life and your mother’s life?

… similarities in a way and not in another… I feel we have a very passive temper… she was very easy going with her husband and you know – and so mine, I feel like instead of arguing and screaming and confronting a problem, I just say fine… my mom was the same way… she’s 75 – now that she’s older she’s – we find she’s turned into grandma and grandma was very selfish when – when you know, older on, like you know. Whenever my mom wanted to go out, you know, you’re going to leave me alone again… we all have our lives and sitting at home isn’t one of the things… because my grandma did live with my mom (… And is your mom now doing that to you guys?)… see because I’ve never really lived here that much and whenever I do go up, the first person that I go to visit is my sister Patty. My sister Patty and I are very, very close… I’m sure that if I didn’t have my sister Patty I would not be able to go on dealing with a lot of issues… pretty much all of my life since I’ve been married, like I’ve always called my sister… (She means a lot to you?) Yeah… I don’t go to my mom because… I don’t hear what I want to hear from my mom… a couple years ago… I spent two weeks with my sister… up in [city] and my mom had come up to me and she says… how does Dave feel about you being away for so long?… I said he’s gone for two weeks all the time. It’s my turn… Even if he’s not there, you should be still at home… like be a good wife, stay at home, wait for your husband and I’m going no thank you, been there, done that…

Interviewer: Was that very disruptive to the family that one of the siblings was doing this…?

That I got a divorce?… No, every one of them all said yea… my siblings [were]… very much on my side… and what was really funny…the year everybody met Jim… I went to my older brother and I said well, what do you think of this one? Because Dan knew [Jim] very well because he was his brother-in-law’s best friend… most of my family… didn’t understand what I found in [Jim]… but it was my decision and… mind you there was a few people in my family that we don’t understand why they’re married to them either but it’s their decision, right?… when they met Dave… my mom’s brother met him because he came up for the wedding and he found him… very nice and to the point that he said there – there was something definitely wrong with that man because he was too good to be true…

Friends and Interests

Interviewer: How about girlfriends and …

I have a girlfriend that is going through… a lot of personal problems… I met her, she is Kelly’s best friend, which is a boy… his mom… we often get together and play games and cards and stuff… and she was very overweight and of course her and I got together quite often shopping and everything because we were both stay at home moms… And so she decided one day she was going to go out and get this operation and have her stomach stapled and so she did lose 150 pounds… But now because… she’s been overweight so
much of her life, it’s as if she’s a teenager again and she wants to do all these teenaged things that she never got to do… So, she’s a little odd right now… I’d love to be able to find my girlfriend that I had in school… she’s in Ontario here somewhere… the last time I was able to talk to her on the phone, she was in the process of getting married… I’d like to renew that friendship… But I don’t know what she’s doing. We used to keep in touch lots but she hasn’t… I lost my best friend that I had when I lived in Alberta when the kids were quite small… She was killed in a car accident and it just so happened to be the day of my wedding anniversary…

*Interviewer: And T.V., renovating the bathroom, working…do you feel busy?…*

No, I’m going crazy… Just not enough… *(And what do you do to relax?  Is it television watching?  Do you like to read?*)  I used to do a lot of crafts but I don’t tend to do a whole lot anymore… Basically watch T.V…. Shopping… I have to have someone – I can’t live alone. Like this week has really been bothering me because I’m so much alone and Dave has been downstairs a lot fixing those computers… and I’m like upstairs by myself going crazy. *(Do your girlfriend relationships fill that void…) In the evening it’s time to be with your family… and I don’t tend to call my girlfriend that much in the evenings… because she’s probably with her husband because her husband doesn’t do too much at night either…

**Sense of Self**

… there’s a few things that I had written down that I wanted to make sure to tell you. I have a major problem with self esteem… I don’t know where that came into effect… I feel very low about myself… this week, like I felt like I should be doing so much more and… there’s nobody here to do something for… Like cooking only for my husband is so boring… I don’t know what I’m going to do when the kids are gone… I don’t know if I’m going to have to get more career oriented or something … I feel like it’s my fault… that you know, my kids are where they are and like I should have never divorced… I blame myself. You know, my kids would have maybe had a better life… I wish I… hadn’t put my kids through that because my parents never put me through that… when my kids fail or even Laura, when she fails, I feel it’s – it’s my fault… Or if my husband doesn’t do certain things for me, well, you know, I have done something wrong… I’ve always had major problems with self esteem… I see my daughter and I find her… so much smarter than I am and I’m going I’m happy she took those genes of her father…
Growing Up

I come from a very dysfunctional family, rough background. Growing up it was pretty tough, a lot of fights in the family, a lot of abuse. *(Who was in your family?)* My mom and my dad. And I had three sisters and I had a stepbrother and that was after my mom remarried. On my dad’s side there’s two other boys. I’ve never met them. He [biological father] went to jail because of drug trafficking and I found out that years later through the newspaper clippings I’ve come across and that, he was a pretty abusive man. I go to counselling for it and my head’s still screwed up…He hit me in the face and I went through most of my life I guess just hiding behind it with drugs, alcohol, just blocking it out. I bounced around a lot when I was a kid. After they broke up I was in foster homes, grandmother, aunts, uncles. *(How was that?)* Rough. You bounced all over and there’s no… stability. In the beginning, it was me and my sisters. I always looked after my sisters. I’m the oldest so I always looked after them and protected them and took the blame, you know. I took the blame if there was a beating to be done. I’d say I did it and take the beating and whatever just to protect them…When I went to live with my grandmother, that’s where it really kicked in of looking after everybody because we were alone and we were given up. I looked after my sisters; actually there was 17 of us under that roof, all the cousins dumped on her. Native community thing so…I couldn’t believe that. I don’t know where we all slept. There were kids everywhere, bodies everywhere and some of us were doubled up in beds. From there I learned how to just be a little mother hen and look after things…I’ve always thought if I ever had children and got married, my children weren’t going to be raised like that…*(Was that an unusual circumstance or…)* No. Not in a Native community.

*Interviewer: How did all 17 kids end up at grandma’s house, what was the story behind that?*

Well, with my mom when my mom and dad broke up, my dad went to jail and he did like 13 years or whatever…Like all my aunts, I remember, you know, every time we turned around there was a new kid in the house. I missed a lot of school, having to stay at home and looking after, helping my grandma. My grandmother was in her 50’s and 60’s; she couldn’t do it all. *(Could she have said no to the kids?)* That’s not the Native way of doing things…I used to think about why didn’t she say no and then I thought, no, that’s family. You look after family. I do remember our mom trying to give us up for
adoption. I hated my mom for years for that. It’s like, why give us up. We’re supposed to be your babies…I still hurt from it…Well, there was no room for us anywhere and there was no families able to take all four of us on unless we were separated so we ended up going to my grandmothers’. Like I’m 41 now and I’m still thinking why? There’s always a way, there’s always a way, you know. I’ve always thought to try and make it better for my children. There’s a few times where I could have given my kids up, but I learnt it from my grandmother that love will pull you through. But you’re the one who has to make it work, you know, you just don’t give up. You have to find a way to work. If the government doesn’t help you well then get off your butt and get a job. Sacrifice. You know, you’ve got to do that and that’s what I did. To me I feel my mom didn’t try hard enough…

And then I had enough of that and I ran away from home, couldn’t take it. My mom was bringing home men all the time when we did live with my mom so…I was 11 when that happened…We lived outside of [large city], out in the country so I walked the highway. I was picked up by the police and they brought me to a foster home, temporary foster home until they found me a permanent one. And from there they moved me to another foster home and these were excellent, excellent people that they moved me to. Out in the country, on a farm, you know, and they took time out for you. You know, if you had a problem, the foster mother was always there…They gave you chores and when you were reprimanded for doing something wrong, it was extra barn chores. They didn’t raise their voice, they didn’t lift your hand at you and I wasn’t used to that. I was used to always getting scolded or beaten. I liked it out there. Well, actually we’ve kept in touch over the years…I was there for a few years until I was raped and got pregnant from it and they sent me here to an unwed mother home. (How old were you when that happened?) 13…I don’t know who did it and plus I kept my mouth shut. I was too scared to open my mouth. The reason why I did that is because I had been sexually abused as a child, you learn not to tell anybody…When they found out I was pregnant because I went for my annual check-up with Children’s Aid and that and I didn’t tell anybody about it. So, when they found out I was pregnant I was beyond the point of having an abortion and I don’t believe in them anyway. So, my mom ended up having custody of me and she shipped me off to my aunt and I stayed there for about a month and I guess they got me into [unwed mothers’ home] here. And I was there until, you know, until the baby was born and that and then I went back.

Interviewer: Did you have a boy or a girl?

A boy…I’m hoping some day that he’ll be on the doorstep. (What happened after you had the baby?) Oh, went back to [aunt’s house]. [The baby] stayed behind in the hospital but I refused to sign the papers. I was confused as to what to do. I didn’t know where I was going, I didn’t even know where I lived as far as I was concerned. I’m tossed around all over the place so…But no, my mom and my aunt ended up taking me back. I didn’t sign the papers and they took me to court and, you know, had the baby given up…I wanted to keep him. You know? It would have been somebody to love. Even though I couldn’t provide for him, I was only 14, you don’t get help when you’re 14, you know, but to me, it was somebody to love and somebody can love me
back…That was pretty rough because when we got back to my aunt’s and we went to
court and that and I just locked myself in the bedroom and I said I couldn’t handle it and
they were all partying and joking and laughing you know, like I was trying to talk to my
mom, let her know how I felt and nobody seemed to have cared so I went and walked out
the door. And my uncle caught up to me and he started slapping me around and that.
They ended up taking me to the hospital…the hospital wouldn’t even acknowledge that I
was being slapped around…they were believing my mom and my uncle and aunt. So, I
stayed there at home for about a week and then I was thrown out the door. (You’re 14?)
Yeah. [Living under] park benches, under trees. My girlfriend, she used to sneak food
out of her house when her mom would go to work and if she knew the house was empty
for an hour or two, she’d let me sneak in and take a shower, she’d lend me her clothes
and…I remember I was starving, just starving and mom left the back door open and I
knew she went to work. I thought she went to work and she walked in the door and when
she caught me, we got into a big huge argument. It’s like she didn’t care and I was
telling her like ‘I haven’t eaten in four days. I’m starving, feed me. You know, I am
your daughter and we are having problems’ but she didn’t want to hear it. It’s taken me a
lot of years to understand my parents and the reasons why they were the way they were.

Interviewer: Do you think you understand that now?

Yeah. You know, with the counselling that I’ve got through… I refuse to talk to my
dad….And my mom, we’re starting to rebuild our relationship and she’s starting to tell me
about her past and where she came from, growing up in foster homes herself. You know?
And then my dad growing up in foster homes and detention centres and I guess that kind
of helps after I get over my stuff and counselling and I try to look at all viewpoints. (So,
you got in a fight with your mom and you’re 14 and starving…) I left. I was back out on
the street again and this time I moved from the residential living in the street to
downtown. It wasn’t pleasant. I learnt to sneak in the bars really young and drink and do
my thing, drugs, alcohol and you know, close to the prostitution world but it never
happened. I couldn’t bring myself to do it, you know at that age… That went on for two
years…My mom had a relationship with this guy when I was ten and they were together
for quite a few years too. He’s the father of my step-brother, and him and I have always
been close, we still are close…They broke up when I was 11, 12 years old, something
like that. That was one of the periods after living with my grandmother and going to live
with my mom. That was the last man that she was with, that she made a permanent
relationship and had a child with and that. And in between all this I was raising my
brother. My brother [stepbrother] was actually placed in a home too at a young age.

But I went back home, I found my mom, we talked. She let me back in the house in the
promise I would make good and I went back to school. And I was doing very well. I was
enjoying school and made a very good effort at keeping my grades up and coming home
every night and I got a part-time job as a chamber-maid and had my own money and
started saving and that. But my mom started dating again and went out with this guy and
he was… I don’t know where these men come from. You know, he was starting to push
me around and making sexual advances at me when he was drunk and stuff like that and I
just blew up, I couldn’t handle it. You know, I just went through my whole childhood of
somebody doing that to me and I just blew up and my mom threw me out of the house again. *(How old were you then?)* 16. And my stepfather found out and he was moving out west so he made an offer I couldn’t refuse. You come out west with me, I’ll provide you food, home, clothing, schooling, all you have to do is keep the house clean and raise your brother - because my brother and I were always close, my step brother. So, I went out there [to Alberta]. Actually, that was probably one of the best times where I felt comfortable living at home. But my stepfather has always treated me well. We had a falling out and I ended up moving out and he came back down east and I stayed out west…He was being overprotective and being a father and he was trying too hard being a father figure because I never had a father. Like my [biological] father was in and out of my life, in and out of jail and it wasn’t very pleasant when my dad was around anyway. He’s very authoritative, very abusive, if it wasn’t physically it was sexually, you know. *(So you made the decision to stay in Alberta by yourself. How old were you then?)* 17 going on 18.

**Relationships with Men and Parenthood**

I met this guy Andrew [in Alberta] and I ended up getting pregnant, my first daughter [Kathleen] and we stuck it out that I was still living with friends and their parents and we built our money up. Like Andrew, he dropped out of school and went out and got a job, an apprenticeship job… Because he was raised, you know, where you get a girl pregnant, you stick it out. You know, they come from a Catholic background too, like me and it’s like you don’t give the baby up, you don’t have an abortion or anything. And we stuck it out. So, that gave me some sort of stability in my life. *(Did you get married?)* No *(Live together?)* Yeah. We had two kids together. A boy and a girl… In total I have four kids. I always include my first one, the one that was given up… Yeah, but we had two kids together, we lived together. Andrew did all the working and then let me stay at home and be a mom. Well, back then it was easier too, you know… We were just starting out, putting the money away and get along with our life saving and you know, raising the kids and buying a house and everything. And then my mom and my younger sister had a falling out, she was out on the street so being kind-hearted as I was I took her in. I paid for her plane ticket to come out west… So, I took her in and that did not go over well at all… Now I was pregnant with Chris, my second one in the relationship. I went down to Saskatchewan to visit my stepfather. I was only gone for a week and when I came back I found out she [sister] had slept with Andrew. I tried to stick it out, tried to work it out and it didn’t work. It didn’t feel right. On his part it was an accident because him and I never drank. After we had the kids we never drank, partied, nothing. So, I guess she got into a bottle of wine, she talked him into going to the liquor store and got a bottle of wine and it went from there… To this day I won’t even go near my sister. I’m still very angry, very hurt… and it just got worse and worse and… Arguing with Andrew.

*Interviewer: So, you had your son and you were working on your relationship with Andrew?*

Yeah. And Chris was about three months old when I finally left. I said it’s no way to raise the children fighting. I don’t believe in fighting in front of children. I’ve seen
enough of it when I was young. And so we ended up breaking up and I met another guy and we ended up getting married. (So you met somebody new. You were still in the same community with Andrew?) Yeah. And we broke up and he kept Kathleen, the oldest daughter and I kept the baby because he was only three months old and I was breastfeeding and whatnot. (How old was Kathleen at that time?) Two. Like Andrew and I even to this day still talk and get along and we’re great, the only thing that broke us up was that incident. And we’ve always made sure that we had a good relationship between us for communication with the children. Never spoke out of term or we never put each other down, even to this day. Like I know I can phone him right now and say ‘hey, I’m in a bind, you know, is there any possible way you can help me or talk to me or something’ and the next thing you know I’ll have five or six hundred dollars in my bank account. Christmas time it took me a while to figure out where the money was coming from but he knew my bank account because of my kids, eh. And he would slip the money in to help me out. I never had a problem with child support, never went to court over it. You know? Like he’d phone me and say I’ve got so much money for you, it’s in the account. Never had to deal with lawyers. So, when we split up, I met this guy Wayne and we got married.

Interviewer: What was the time line from the break-up to the marriage?

About a year, and I was married for 11 years after that. But Andrew had met this girl, Liz, and he was going out with her. And so seeing he had Kathleen, she took on the role of Kathleen’s stepmother. And she didn’t like the fact that him and I had a good communication about the kids and, you know, visiting and doing things together with the children. Like, you know, if a family function came up, he’d come over and get Chris and take him because he was part of the family. Liz was jealous and that. And she figured she’d get back at me so she started chasing my husband and she ended up sleeping with him and she ended up getting pregnant. I’ve always believed in vows. When you get married, you’re married for life. So, I stuck it out for about seven years. (Did she have the baby?) Yeah. She lied through her teeth, you know, she didn’t tell whose baby it was… She was trying to say it was Andrew’s baby. (But really it was your husband’s?) Yeah, we knew all along, yeah.

I ended up having a baby with Wayne. Erin, my last one. I was 28. (How long had you been together?) Seven years. I was five months [pregnant] when [Erin] came along. Yeah, we had to get flown to [Alberta city]… They kept me in the hospital over night and couldn’t find my husband anywhere. The hospital got a hold of the police to go on a search for him because he wasn’t at home… We went through my whole phone book of numbers of people we knew where he might be and then it clued in… here he is up the hall fooling around with that woman again and my son’s in bed alone and he’s seven years old and I didn’t know. (Did the CAS talk about taking your son away because of the circumstances?) Yeah, but it never did happen… I just made sure his father Andrew came along and took Chris, that way they were protected. (How long were you in the hospital for?) Four months… they put me in the Ronald McDonald House because of the situation, you know, with Erin with her heart and it wasn’t properly developed. Her stomach wasn’t developed, you know, she had no nails, no hair. Her eyelids were like...
paper thin, you could see her eyes and everything. Oh, yeah, nothing was developed. We went through a rough time… Wayne came down and see me and I ended up tossing him out of the hospital. Get away from me, you know? He showed up, he was drunk, you know, he had just come from the strip joint and he comes to see his newborn and it’s like go away. I’d go back up to [town], if I knew Kathleen was having a big week or something, I’d go up for a day or two, you know, make sure my son was okay and clean the house, clean clothes, you know, make sure bills were looked after and that because my ex-husband, he was pretty bad. He’d steal my pay cheques and blow it on women and drugs and stuff like that. I went through hell with him. I don’t know, I stuck it out because of the vows, you know. Erin was shipped back to the hospital in [town]. Like the counsellors and all that and social workers, they were excellent. You know, Children’s Aid was involved. When that happens they’re involved to more or less support and if you need anything. Like the Ronald McDonald House, they got me in there, food vouchers to help me survive. They provided counsellors for me so it was pretty rough, you know. There’s nothing you can do and you’re lying there watching your baby and it was pretty rough. So, they had some pretty good counsellors and organizations to help you, support groups and stuff, yeah. They’re really good out west.

[After coming back to town with Erin] I up and left. I had enough because like our relationship started getting very abusive. Wayne started slapping me around and… (Was that the first time?) No, on our wedding night he slapped me around, you know. It’s all I’ve ever known is men slapping me around up until about a year ago or so… Actually we stuck it out for another year - a year and a half after Erin came home… Like I slept on the couch for months with her on my chest and I wouldn’t let her go. Erin and I are very, very close… I just couldn’t handle the abuse anymore. I couldn’t handle him stealing my pay cheques and not coming home and fooling around all over the place. The last time with him slapping me around and being abusive, that was the last straw. And my girlfriends came along that I worked with and said enough is enough. And they came over, they waited for him. I didn’t even know. They were waiting for him to leave the house at eight o’clock in the morning and then they’re up the street and the cart the boxes and they come marching in the house… ‘we’ve come to look after you’. In the door they came with the boxes, started throwing things in boxes and my best friend ended up pinning me down on the couch, took my bank card and my bank book and went down there and withdrew every penny I had out of the bank account plus the overdraft out of my husband’s account. She says hey, he’s taking all your money, he’s banking all this money. You deserve it, we’re getting you out of town. I’m like whoa, they made arrangements to send me on the bus and they sent me to another city. I was terrified, terrified for my life. What a horrible feeling that is… I stayed in [city] for a week at relatives. And then stayed down there for a week just to hide out and whatever. You know? Let things cool down because I know when he came in the door and the house is empty, what a thing to do, I didn’t leave him anything. I didn’t want to stick around or, you know. He didn’t have a clue where I was for a whole week and then when I got down to [Ontario] here [to stay with his mom] I think it was about a month after that when he was talking to his mom because I asked his mom, don’t say anything, don’t get involved. You know? I just need a place to stay until I get on my feet.
I found a part-time job and I ended up for the first time ever in my life going on assistance. That was a treat. I was living out west, the money was so good, you know, like with my relationship, we broke up and I had my apartments and raising kids and back and forth like that and I’ve never been on assistance. You know, I always had the money, made good money. You know, paid for the bills and that. Down here I had to go on assistance. I just started rebuilding my money and that and I finally got my first apartment… I got here in January and July first was my first apartment. (So you moved here January of 1990 and got your apartment July of 1990?) And a week later Wayne ended up in Ontario. I was on the other side of town so nobody knew where I lived. Like when I moved, I met a group of friends in that time period and they helped me move and nobody gave up. I made sure I didn’t have a phone.

Then I started dating this guy Adam and I was with him for about five years… I met him at the end of July [1990]. By the end of August he was living with me. I don’t even know how to describe it because his mother gave him an ultimatum, either stay at home and be a mommy’s boy or get the hell out. She was very, very prejudice and discriminative towards me because I’ve been married, divorced, have children, and I’m Native… But we broke up. I couldn’t handle his drinking any more. You know, it’s not that he hung out in the bars, but he drank all the time at home and he would get authoritative with the kids and like I ended up losing two children moving back to their father because they couldn’t handle him. I couldn’t handle it. Enough was enough. So I had to leave and he even pursued it after we broke up. (It was your place and you moved out?) Yeah, I moved out. (So, was it Chris and Kathleen that moved back with their dad because of this man?) Yeah. (And Erin was already with her father?) Yeah. So, I had a little bit of time by myself there but in a way it helped not having the kids around because it gave me time to straighten out a little more and review things. You know and then get it out of my system about being single because that’s something I’ve never known. I’ve always had children from a very young age… it was scary because I wasn’t used to being alone. And didn’t know what to do with myself and you know and I wasn’t - I don’t know, I guess because I’m so used to having somebody with me in my life I didn’t even know what to do with myself half the time… Just being alone and having my own space and I can do my own thing and nobody can say no to me you know? I became more stubborn. (When you were on your own?) Yeah, I wouldn’t let people walk all over me.

All I did was work, work, work. I didn’t have time and I didn’t want to date… I went out with a few guys and they’re like oh, she’s good and she’s got money, she’ll help me out and you know. I wasn’t into that. Like I dated one guy and I was stuck in a situation so I ended up living over at his apartment for a while and it just went to pot because he didn’t pay his bills, he knew I would pay them because it would drive me nuts, you know, why have your power cut off and the cable. Well, he noticed that some of the bills weren’t being paid, I just up and left him. I said no way, you know, like get it together. I’m not going to be paying for you all the time, I’ve got no money. You know, he always wanted to go out drinking and I’m not into that. (So, the three kids were living with their fathers for the four or five years?) Yeah. (And you were just dating on and off, nothing serious until your current boyfriend came along?) Yeah.
Current Relationship

I met Alex last year, through work. Last year, all I did was work, work, work, work, work and the boss asked me to work this park music festival at the beer tent and I would be working the night shift. Well, a girlfriend of mind kept telling me about Alex and wanted me to meet him and I said whatever, yeah, I don’t want nothing to do with men and whatever. She dragged him down. Well, I guess she told him about me, you know, like deep down inside yes, I wanted to meet somebody, settle down, be happy, you know, have my dreams, you know, fulfill them. He wanted the same thing. He’s gone through his things with his relationships with the women always fooling around on him and he’s a hard worker and he wanted to meet somebody, you know, settle down with to cook and clean and stand by his side and give him support and whatever. We’re at the beer tent and I’m pouring a glass… and my girlfriend is standing and she says oh, this is Alex. I looked at him and I thought wow, what an attractive man. But I said my luck he’s probably a jerk so I won’t bother with him… A couple hours later, he snuck up behind me and he whispered in my ear and he says ‘hi, pretty young girl’ and I’m like whoa, where’s that coming from. And that was it. I’m not used to being complimented either. You know, you never have that in your life, you’re not used to it… [Friend] was trying to do matchmaker with me too… she goes ‘oh, the hell with it. Here’s his phone number, give him a phone call’… so, I phoned him. (Were you nervous?) Yeah, because I don’t phone men. I said who I was and asked him if he wanted to go for coffee, I was done early, you know, at eight o’clock early shift at work and we have not left each other’s side since. I think I found my needle in the haystack with him. (So, is this your house?) It’s Alex’s. I just moved in December.

Alex and I both believe that we’re meant for each other. It’s like we’d sit down and talk sometimes and he’d go ‘do you believe in fate?’ Yeah, destiny and soul mates. It’s like we can read each other you know, even though we can fight like cats and dogs at the best of times, we always end up sitting down and talking about it in the end anyway… It’s the build-up of stress of every day life, finances, the way we have to live… Plus I fight against him. Like he loves me so much and he’s constantly trying to prove to me like ‘I’m not like the rest of the people in your life, I’m not going to hurt you.’ (What does he need to do to prove that to you?) I don’t know. He’s always got his arms around me. Well, I know one thing is like if he’s drinking or something… it scares me. You know? I get pretty feisty when he does his drinking, which isn’t very often because he’s not a big drinker… He always wants me around him all the time. It’s like sometimes I feel like I’m cramped and I have no freedom…You know, it’s like you can’t have me out of his sight and … I’ve pointed out a few times. That’s where my feistiness comes in too. It’s like ‘give me some freedom’. It’s like he’s gone through his part in life where the women that he has been with have all fooled around on him… I’m constantly proving to him ‘hey, I’m not going to be like them. I’m not like them’. You know, like he’d married his women and gone out with them or whatever but because it only lasted a while and then they stopped caring, no cooking and fooling around and if he’s at work, they’re partying and stuff like that. And it’s a constant thing for me to prove to him I don’t do these things… We have a good relationship. You know, even though we had a big fight on Friday and I was going to pack my bags and get out of here. You know, but we both get
very stubborn and I don’t back down. I let him know that I don’t back down. *(How did he keep you here?)* My daughter. I don’t want them to break up… I pushed it right to the limit, you know, walked out the door with the bags and everything and he just kept coming after me.

I know he bought me a diamond ring… When we were arguing and that he threw it in my face and I looked at him and laughed and said I already knew anyways. *(Is that going to be a first anniversary thing?)* I don’t know. I’m in no hurry for it. He knows my goal and my dream is to be married. I’ve never walked down the aisle. You know. He knows that’s a dream for me. It’s one of my goal is in life is to be married, have a home, finish my education and then from there who cares… ride away in the sunset on the bike.

**Children**

[Around 1990] my son was starting to get rebellious. Like I had my rough times with him too because we found out he had ADHD. *(When did that get diagnosed?)* When he was 12, 13. And my son, his behaviour started about when he was ten years old, and he took a knife to my furniture. I thought, okay, maybe he’s rebelling because I yanked him out of Alberta. Well, I’m down here and he’s mad because I took him away from his life and he’s got no father around him. You know? He’s mad at me. Well, I found out in the end it was ADHD and he was frustrated and his brain’s reasoning. He’d always been an excellent child. Chris and I are very, very close and so I didn’t know what was going on and at that point I was just starting dating Adam… he ended up moving in with me and Chris’s problems got worse… [At] counselling and that, we were getting into the part with the children and how things were going and I mentioned how my son was acting, his behaviour and stuff like that and they asked if I minded if he came in for a little bit of counselling and I said well, maybe it will help. Then they figured out, well, hey, let’s check him out for ADHD and they had just started a program at the hospital about it, investigating it more and that so I agreed to sign Chris up for it. He was diagnosed with it and they put him on the Ritalin and I’m not too keen on that stuff… you don’t just stick a kid on a pill. You’ve got to work with the kid you know and I only had him on that medication not even a year and I took him off and I says enough is enough, I can’t handle this. We’ll work on it on our own, no way. You know? And he’s fine now. *(What strategy did you use on your son?)* When I could tell that he was losing his attention span and he started getting hyper or something, I’d find something new to get him back into finishing his schoolwork. You know, take his attention to a certain height and limit or whatever and then snap him back into it… I figured it out on my own.

Doctors weren’t doing anything. They were follow this, follow that, follow this and it doesn’t work that way. You have to be in the home to know what’s going on. We went to counselling. Like they helped with the videos, step one, two, three and stuff like that. And coping mechanisms for you so when it does happen, you learn to bite your tongue and, you know, because it does stress you out… I mean you had to change their diet you know because certain foods can set that off, red dyes and lunchmeats and sugars and stuff like that. But mind you, we never really had all that in the house because I don’t buy junk food and I don’t buy pop. Everything is homemade with me.
Interviewer: How old are your kids now?

Kathleen is 22, Chris is 20. Kathleen lives out west. She’s been engaged five years, second pregnancy. I’m a grandma. I love it. (And how is Chris doing?) Excellent. He bounces all over the place. He’s a gypsy. Yeah, I call him my little gypsy man. He’s in [town]. He’s getting ready to hitch hike back out west. That’s how he got down here in the first place, hitch hiked and then he’s going back out west. He’s young, needs to explore. (So, how old is Erin now?) 13. I’ve been fighting a battle of getting custody of her for 11 years… When I first moved down here [to Ontario] and he Wayne came down… We ended up going to court and stuff like that but I was down here by myself, nobody to back me up, no family, no nothing, no money for a lawyer. So, I lost that battle in court. He had his whole entire family and they didn’t even know me and they were faxing information to the lawyers, you know, I’m this and I’m that, I do this and I do that and I was like holy mackerel…

[A few years later] when I first moved to [small city], her father let me have her. He agreed to a joint custody… Our child would not leave the house, she wouldn’t go anywhere. She wouldn’t go out and meet friends or nothing. It’s like I finally have my mom and I’m staying by her side. (How old was she when this happened?) Eight, nine years old, something like that. (So, what was she doing that Wayne couldn’t handle?) Fighting, rebelling. Erin has had her own problems, you know, because of her father. She was bounced between her father, her grandmother, her aunt and then like he remarried about three years after the divorce. He met a woman [Bonnie] and they’ve been married. This woman is very assertive and mouthy and Erin didn’t like her you know, and it started to the point where their relationship is very rocky. [Bonnie] won’t go back with him unless Erin is out of his life. So, it doesn’t make Erin feel very human. And it’s very hard when she’s over there and I can’t protect her from all of this. But I know one time I got so angry, very angry and I found out this woman was slapping my daughter around. When I found that out, I went right at my ex-husband and I said if I ever, ever see this woman or hear of this woman laying a hand on her again, I will go after her… Erin started to rebel in her own way. She was finding herself, she was stuck in between adolescence and puberty and becoming a woman. (And she was living with you at this time?) Yeah. She was coming home late and she started stealing from me, stuff she’s never done. You know, my children have always known how I felt about lying, cheating, stealing. I’ve taught them all that, you know, and it was just the wrong crowd. That’s why we’re going to counselling because we do have our problems here and we’ve never had them. Alex’s a good man because he supports by me and he sticks by and he’s even going to counselling with us so we can learn to cope with it when she does have a behavioural fit or whatever

Interviewer: Has Erin ever lived here with Alex or is this new?

No, this is all new to her. She likes it here. Like Alex has two daughters the same age too, eh and they live with their mother but Erin is a little bit more mature woman-wise, physically-wise than the other two so Erin gets her own room… Erin is very happy here and everybody’s fighting against her. (What do you mean by that?) Well, in the beginning
there her father didn’t want her around and here and … *(How long has she lived away?)* From me? Well, since the incident [with the CAS] it’s been a year. Yeah, but it’s only been maybe the past three years off and on where her father gets all mad and frustrated or whatever, oh, you can have her. And then he’ll get mad and frustrated at me and take her back… She’s going to get all screwed up in the head from it… Since we’ve been to court [visitation] is every second weekend… You know, I’d phone up and say hey, there’s a good movie on, you know, could I pick her up and take her out for dinner and a movie because we do that a lot, I take her out a lot and do things. She doesn’t get that from her father, she doesn’t get it from her stepmother. You know, they don’t take the time out and do crafts and bake and all that stuff.

*Interviewer: What about concerns about a drug or alcohol use with Erin?*

She knows I’m against it. I quit drinking because I can’t handle her to be around me when I have a beer. It’s like it doesn’t seem right to me because I’ve never drank in front of my kids. And well, the drug scene, no, I didn’t do it anyways and you know. And she wasn’t even born then you know, with that, when I was doing the drugs and that so I don’t worry about that because I don’t do it now so she doesn’t see it. As for the drug and alcohol part, she’s going to learn it out on the street anyways. How do you shelter her? You know? I talk to her about it, the effects.

*Children’s Aid Society*

*Interviewer: How did the Children’s Aid Society become involved?*

I was somewhat stressed out because my son had come back home from out west and stuff like that and I was the captain of the pool league and I had to go and run the team and I was just up the street… I don’t do drugs, I’ve been clean for 12 years now of any substance and I come home that night and there’s my son smoking pot in front of Erin because he was watching her for me. And I just hit the roof and I was already stressed out as it was from her getting in from the wrong crowd and then trying to get things organized in the home with an extra person there so yeah, there was a lot of stress. I drank more than what I normally drink because I don’t drink. My son started getting angry and throwing things in my face and that and I flipped out on him about smoking and that and he just started, you know, yammering at me something to the effect that I don’t care, he doesn’t care, this and that anymore. And I said fine, if it doesn’t matter anymore, I said I can do myself in, you know, like I’ve gone through periods in my life where I was suicidal because I couldn’t handle what I’ve gone through in my life. And he ran out the door, I didn’t have a phone so he ran down to the pay phone to dial 911, my mom’s trying to kill herself… I paid dearly for it from my actions. In a way I deserve it but not to this extent. You know? They could have given me a little bit better of a chance… Erin was across the street at a girlfriend’s. She stayed there for a couple of days.
Interviewer: Is that the same evening that you had the argument with Erin? (Yeah.) So, she chose to go stay with a friend just for a little while?

No, actually in a way she wanted to stay with me but the police were involved and they said if I didn’t go with the paramedic they would charge me for self-endangerment… They took me to the hospital, they kept me overnight and I met with a psychiatrist and I told them the whole situation and I kept going to him. And it was about three weeks, almost a month when he asked me how I was doing and I said now I’m starting to get angry. You know, Children’s Aid won’t tell me a darn thing about my daughter, not a thing. I was not impressed. You know, three weeks I got no phone call, wasn’t allowed to talk to her on the phone, not allowed to see her, they won’t give me information where she is. You know? Like what am I going to do? Go and harm her? Yeah, I did not like the worker I was dealing with and then seeing because they went with the joint custody order, she lives with her father. Well, at that time she was at her grandmother’s, so the whole case had to be switched over to [another] region. Well, that took another week so this psychiatrist, I told him about it and he got on the phone and he said that is not right. You do not take a child away like that from a mother. Oh, I was hurting big time. I did not like this guy that I dealt with at all. He would not give me any information, nothing. I would phone and I want to talk to him. Oh, no, you’ve got to leave a voicemail and he wasn’t returning my calls. So, I wasn’t impressed and I was like I’ve got to know what’s going on. What are my rights here as a parent? You know? So what, I screwed up, I’m paying dearly for it. I will follow the rules, you know, go to the counselling and stuff but…

Interviewer: So, her father was trying to get full custody?

No, actually he wants to give her back to me. We had a meeting last week. Like the worker we have now she’s okay, could be better but … If I continue with the counselling and we’ve got Erin in counselling, she can come back to live with me when school is over. We’ve all agreed when school is done, why up and leave now. You know? Finish the school year and then come home. [Wayne and the CAS] are agreeing but I’ve got to follow their guidelines… It’s very, very hard when you struggle all your life to keep people around you, you know, like I’m by myself in the world when it comes to that before I met Alex. Now, he’s willing to support me, back me up. He knows how close we are. He knows how much I value and respect my children and I treat his children the same way. It’s all family. Now, it’s just very frustrating when you have to prove to the government the kind of person you are. To me it’s almost like invading my privacy. I’ve got tell them absolutely everything I do, you know where I’m going to go, how I’m going to live, what changes I make just so I can prove to them that I’m a good person. It makes me so angry.

The woman I’m dealing with now, she’s nice and everything but I’m still upset with her… We’re dealing with a social worker that doesn’t even know what it’s like to have children… they have to have social workers who know what it’s like to be living with children, problems with children, being around them. They’re learning from schoolbooks as far as I’m concerned… You know, like sometimes I feel like phoning her, screaming at
her and saying why don’t you take my daughter and live with her for a month or two and then come back and tell me how you deal with the problem because all I’m getting from them is ‘go to counselling. Go to counselling, you’ve got to learn how to cope with your stress’. And it’s like oh, yeah, come and sit here for a night and listen to a 13 year old mouthing you off, with a behaviour problem and you can’t raise your voice or your hand because you’ve got it in your head that if you do anything like that, you are going to be charged with child abuse. So, you can’t even be a normal parent or human being to reprimand your child. Not that I’ve ever hit my kids. I think only once I’ve laid my hand on my daughter but if you heard what she called me [the night the CAS became involved] you would have slapped her too.

…We’re on edge all the time. You know, like when we have Erin it’s like what are we allowed to do? What are our limits? Even Alex said that to the worker one time, what are our limits? We can’t even live a normal life. You know, if we go out and there’s a function, because we do get invited out to company barbecues, family barbecues… And it’s very embarrassing when you have to sit there and go no, we’re not allowed to drink… I’ve been following the rules by the book. I’ve been following them like beyond what they ask for. Like we walk around and we don’t even know like sometimes when we have Erin, it’s like we’re walking on eggshells because if we turn the wrong way I won’t get her.

Interviewer: How long do you think the CAS will be involved when Erin moves back? When do you see it ending?

Probably another year putting up with them and then maybe I can live a normal life. It almost makes me feel like I can’t really take any jobs that require a night shift or an afternoon shift because she’s got to be under constant care… She’s 13 so she’s going through that. I’m trying to explain to the social worker like I went through two other children through the same thing. I know how to handle that. The other two are fine. It’s like yeah, okay, my son may do a little drugs here and there. He knows better now around me. But my oldest daughter doesn’t even touch drugs, she doesn’t even drink, she doesn’t even smoke cigarettes. I think I did pretty good.

Interviewer: Is there a sense that you and Erin’s father could work this out a little bit better if Children’s Aid wasn’t involved?

Well, to be honest with you, we’ve been doing certain things behind their backs. We just said to heck with them. Why follow the rules? We don’t even see the social worker half of the time. You phone the social worker and you leave a message and you hear from them two weeks later? Well, sorry, the event was a week ago. (You just call the father and make the plans?) Yeah. (What do you think that’s going to be like when Erin moves back in with you?) I think what Erin and I are looking forward is almost the same thing that we had before. Because what happened with the Children’s Aid taking her away from me, it kind of ruined our relationship. We’re not as close as we used to be. It’s like I lost my daughter, you know. It’s going to be a long haul but I want my daughter back… Granted I know there are some people out there who do need Children’s Aid in their life,
but those are the most abusive ones and they’re not even looked at. Me, I have one incident, one huge big fight with my children. The police, the ambulance, fire truck, Children’s Aid, everybody there… Children’s Aid invaded Alex’s privacy too. It makes me feel very bad because with his past, he was a single father and he gave up his children for adoption and that was brought up and that was something I didn’t even know. That’s pretty sad to the point to make a family life with this man that Children’s Aid dug up his file and read about him. It just hurts me to know that not only did they invade me. They invaded him.

**Native Identity**

I’m full-blooded. I’ve always looked highly on it [Native Identity]. I’ve always kept my culture or try to keep it going. I teach my children our values. The way we look at things in life. It’s different. Well, like Erin is 13 and she’s very, very proud of her heritage… I feel we’re stronger you know in certain things and ways of life and if we can keep that in the children you know, they can be a stronger person inside… Some days because I get so wrapped up in everyday problems and my stresses and stuff like that and then I’ve got to snap out of it, hey, you’re just dragging yourself down, think the old way. That’s the way my grandmother used to say it, think the old way. I phoned the resource centre there three days ago so I want to try and get back into my culture and you know, you get up every day and you get into a routine where if you smudge yourself you can cleanse your spirit and it helps you think clearly for the day. You know, that was my belief.

…Like in two weeks Alex and I are going on holidays [to a northern Island]. Yeah and it’s all Natives up there you know, and I’m hoping that there’s a pow wow going on when we’re up there because I’d like to take Alex and show him what it’s all about, teach him what it’s all about, a pow wow and the Native way of living. The feeling is unbelievable when you get into the Native circle and you dance around with the Natives. I would like to go because I want Alex to learn more about our culture. I’m trying to explain to him how we are you know and I’ve been in turmoil inside myself. You know, here I’m living this way and meanwhile in my heart I know how the Native people are. We’re not fighters, we’re more passive.

… I’ve got to go through all kinds of red tape to get my status card back. That’s horrible what we have to go through to prove that we’re Native people. I was born a Native. You know, give it back to me. You know, I shouldn’t have to go through all the red tape, all the paperwork to prove who I am. I know who I am. It’s not that, I just want it back for the sake of it or anything. I am a Native; I would like to have it back. I want my identity back. And I have a lot of times where I have problems with an identity crisis over it… I’m getting it for my children. My children, if I get it, they’re registered. Maybe it’ll help them go through college. They’re still young and they can still go to school. It will give them something to look forward in the future because there’s nothing out there anymore. And for them to go to school, it’s going to cost them thousands of dollars to get an education and I don’t want to see them go downhill because of something they can’t have. I don’t care about me, I’ve gone this far in life of living and working and paying
taxes and struggling but my children have a future ahead of them. I would like to see
them have something better than what I’ve gone through in life.

**Work and Education**

… I put myself back in school because I only made it to grade eight and I figured I’m not
going to get anywhere in life with a grade eight education so I went. And it took me
almost six years, you know, to get my grade 12 and I have a learning disability to begin
with. So, it was very tough. Like, you know, when it comes to exams and that they let
me write it in a separate room with a dictionary and a tutor. It was great, it was excellent
and yeah, that was I think the biggest achievement I made in my life because when we
went up to the graduation and you had your program book. I didn’t even notice my name
was in there on the honour role to receive a certificate for honours. It just flipped me right
out. I broke down and cried, didn’t know what to do. It was a surprise, yeah. You know,
that was the greatest achievement in my life getting that grade 12.

… [since then] I’ve always kept up like going through [continuing education]… [a] home
study program. Right now I’m taking nutrition and old age… And then the next unit,
there are about four or five units that are combined as personal life management and
entrepreneurship and law and stuff like that… It takes a little bit of time for me but the
teachers understand that. But these home study courses you can take as long as you want
and hand them in. And so far I’m doing so good. Every unit I’ve handed it I’ve been 100
percent except for one, one has been 98 percent…
I love school. I hated it when I was teenager. I think it’s just because of what I was going
through as a child. I had no interest, drugs and partying were a little bit more important
and now, I mean, every time I turn around at yard sales I see a book, I buy it… If I was
given the chance to go back to college, I would go. I would like to go to [college] and get
my Native counselling degree… I would like to work with the teenagers and I want to
work with the unwed teenagers, the pregnant ones, teaching nutrition and proper care
during pregnancy and stuff like that, counselling to get away from drugs, because I know
what it does to you, I’ve been down that road. Maybe give them a better outlook on
life… If that doesn’t pan out for me, Alex and I have been talking, because he knows I’d
love to open up my own business, restaurant. You know, be my own boss, because I love
cooking.

*Interviewer: You had mentioned that you've made the decision to leave your job and I
just want to talk to you about that, how you made that decision and what you're doing.*

Alex kind of helped me make that decision. He’s tolerated me working in the bar for the
past year that I’ve known him. He’s not too keen on women working in the bars and
being around all the men. Because part of the job is you have to be friendly, sometimes
overfriendly, you know. A lot of people would think of it as flirting, you know, you’ve
got to do a certain amount with that kind of a job… For a while it’s been in the back of
my head about leaving but I was scared to leave. I don’t have any other experience at
anything. It's scary. You know, all I know is waitressing, bartending, cooking, I don’t
have no factory experience, no nothing. So it’s scary to take that step. Plus I’m so used to
that routine of going to work every day and it started off where he didn’t like me working
the nights because I was there by myself. Alex and I started doing a lot of arguing, major
arguing and then we realized well, I snapped out of it and I said it has to be the bar. It
must be the tension that’s causing it between us two and I think I better just let it… We
talked it out and he always talked about if you ever quit the bar, even take week or two
off just to relax and de-stress and then start looking for a job. I signed up with… a temp
service so you can go down everyday, see if they have work and you’re paid at the end of
the day…

Interviewer: How are finances going to be with leaving your job? Are you worried about
that?

Yeah, very much so. I’m so scared. I’m so used to the past 10 years of being on my own
where I’ve always had money in my pocket, and it was my money. I didn’t have to pay
for anybody, bills are always paid, you know, and not having the worry… I get frustrated
because I don’t have my own money and I’m not used to where I go to the man and ask
him for money. I’ve been trying to figure this out because with this situation and being
independent for so many years that’s been brought upon me and I’ve learnt to be
accustomed to it. But I’ve always had a belief that the woman should be in the home and
you do the pink collared jobs. But yeah, I feel a loss of my independence in that not
having my own money and helping with the bills because I’ve got no choice these days.
But he even agrees with me that he’d rather see me sit at home. If he made more money
he said I’d rather see you at home. Plus he’s a little possessive like that. He’d rather have
me around him 24 hours a day. (So, how has it been for you to not be working?) It sucks.
I’m missing being away from the house, you know? And being productive, you know,
going out and working for what I want. I’m not used to depending on anybody for
money or anything that I need.

Family and Social Times

Interviewer: What’s family to you? What’s it like here?

It’s the best I’ve ever had. Actually it kind of reminds me in a way of the foster home, the
last one I was in, a family unit and you do things together and if you have a problem you
go, you don’t close up, you talk about it, like we don’t yell and scream. Alex and I don’t
argue in front of the kids, never have, never will… Barbecues and swimming and Alex’s
parents come over ever second weekend and visit with all the kids and yeah, everybody
feels wanted and needed.

Interviewer: Do you guys get out to socialize?

No. We like to stay at home. I’m not into hanging out at the bars but if there’s a function
going on, we’ll try and go to it or if we can afford it. Like the park musical festival was
on this weekend. And we went down there… We putter in the backyard. We hang out in
the garage. We’ve got the garage made up and there’s a wood stove out there and we put
a little love seat and a coffee table and we’re trying to find a little kitchen table to go out
there so we can sit in there. We’ve got everything in there, VCR, TV, microwave… And
that way the kids can sit in here and watch their movies and listen to their music or
whatever they do. You know, that’s our space… We do have a social life and we’re
trying to gear it to being with other couples so you can do things with other couples.
Like last night when we were invited out for a barbecue over at a friends’ farm and
everybody was running through the fields and it was a family thing. You know… Like
this is what I’ve always wanted was to be settled down and you know, you have your
friends come over and you play cards all night and you know, you’re not out partying
and…

_Interviewer: What brings you joy?_

My kids. Alex. Alex and the kids and helping people. I like helping people. If
somebody needs my help I’m there. That gives me joy…
Annette

Annette – Interview Participant         Jerry – Annette’s Ex-boyfriend
Brock – Annette’s Oldest Son (Ken’s Son)   Ken – Annette’s Ex-Boyfriend
Curtis – Annette’s Youngest Son (Jerry’s Son)
Michael – Annette’s Neighbour

Children’s Aid Society

… when I first got involved with Children’s Aid Society. The day in question, my boyfriend at the time [Jerry] came to my apartment… he saw me sitting at my kitchen table with my neighbour, and approached me and started being violent. And I got to the phone and called the police. Before I knew it, the police were at the door… the next thing you know my children are at the police station, they’re questioning me… The next thing you know they call Children’s Aid, and the guy never let me explain what happened, because I smelled like beer. My ex had thrown a whole bottle of beer on me. So I looked like a drunk, traumatized and distressed and everything else, and that’s the first day that I was involved with Children’s Aid. They took my children away… And from that day on… I fought for everything to get my children back.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about what happened that day?

[Jerry] had a violent behaviour, but never showed it like that… he yelled and called me stupid and stuff like that, but it was never around the children. My baby was just a newborn. He didn’t want me to have the baby… (Was he the father of the baby?) Yes. I had a lot of problems having that baby, my health reasons. And I think that’s where the anger stemmed from… the day in question, me and my neighbour, [Michael], were sitting there. He decided we were going to have a drink, just one beer… we came back here, I had my kids at the babysitter already because I needed a break; there was a lot of stuff happened in my life… I think Jerry finally saw me sit down and relax with my neighbour, which is a single father… I don’t think he even had two or three sips of beer when Jerry came in my house and I got up to see what was going on, because nobody ever walks in my house… And that was it. I was being thrown around my house and… (What was he angry about?) I don’t know. To this day I still don’t know. But there were things I think that were leading up because of what I was going through and by me having my child that he didn’t want.

Interviewer: So tell me about what happened when the police showed up?

That was very upsetting. Jerry had taken off; I had called the cops… As I’m getting on the phone to call the police, he’s running out the door. My neighbour’s laying on the floor all full of blood. There’s blood everywhere… As soon as Jerry started pushing me around, Michael got up… and he just went out to tell him don’t be doing this, this is not right, and the next thing you know, Jerry is all over him, like he’s smacking him, kicking him, doing everything, and I’m trying to get to the phone. Everything was coming at me,
it was just too fast, and... I got the fire extinguisher in the head... Because I’m trying to get him off of Michael. After I called the cops, Jerry started to go... I just know Michael’s still on the floor, Jerry is out the door, the [police] show up, there’s blood everywhere so... it was just, I’m trying to talk to them and tell them what happened... Michael had a slit under his eye, bumps and bruises, he had a cut on his leg. He was covered in blood... And the police showed up, and it was like I was automatically guilty. The look on everybody’s face, I was guilty.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. What do you mean you were automatically guilty?

Because they asked me where my children were and I said of course, my children aren’t here, they’re down the hallway, they’re being babysat... And the next thing you know, the police officer wanted in. When she came in and saw all the blood totally in my kitchen, she wanted in. She came in first and then the gentleman [police officer] came in. They looked at Michael and he was bleeding all over, so all of a sudden the questions start coming. Where was my children, I told them down the hallway. So they smelled the booze on me, which I didn’t even know that there was beer on me at the time... I wanted to know what was going on, did you catch that guy. That’s more or less what I was worried about...And I just kept saying did you catch him? There’s something wrong with him. So the lady cop says to me you’ve got to get your children, we’re going to get them out of the building to a safe place. And I’m like, ‘no, they’re safe where they’re at. I pay this lady money, she’s got children, they’re down there, they’re having a grand old time’... when we got to the police station, everything changed again for the worse. I was talked to like ‘how dare I put up with that kind of treatment?’... I don’t think she was mad at me, I guess she’s seen a lot of this in her time, and just more or less questioning me, like there was something I could have done to stop it from escalating.

Interviewer: What was that conversation like?

‘Why didn’t you leave him earlier, how long has this been going on, do you put up with this every day?’ Just comments like that, which made me feel totally alone, like I didn’t feel like anything I said would justify...telling the truth, because it seemed like everything I was going to say, they were going to blame me. I just more or less answered her questions and left it at that. Yes mam, no mam... I was a hurting person. I was traumatized, I didn’t like the fact that this had happened, I am so happy my children weren’t here, but what if they were here in my house? What kind of treatment would I have gotten then?... It’s like once someone gets in trauma, like going to the hospital, oh I’m here because of domestic violence, they kind of put you in your own little pile, they don’t have no sympathy, they don’t have compassion...

They wanted to take pictures of my bruises, like show off everything, and I’m like, can’t you just believe me that they’re there? ... The bruises were in certain spots that not too many women would like photographed and they didn’t understand why I wanted to cover myself up and she was like it will only take a minute. (So did they end up taking pictures?) Yes. [It was] very embarrassing. Made me feel very cheap... it was just having to take my clothes off in front of these people and let them take pictures of me and
I’m thinking about my children the whole time, so I did it… [It was] a police officer and a lady… but that didn’t matter to me, I’m worried about my children. So this is going to speed it up and get home to my children, so I’m going to do it. Then I found out that they had called Children’s Aid because I smelled so bad [like beer].

Interviewer: What was your feeling when you heard that they had called the Children’s Aid Society?

I felt so hopeless… but I didn’t know that they were going to take my children. Like I knew they were there to help the children, that’s what they were all about. But they were taking them from the person that could only protect them… I’m outside [the police station] sitting down and [the CAS worker] came outside and approached me… He started asking me questions, and I know I wasn’t answering what he wanted me to say, and then he goes, ‘you smell like alcohol’. And I said ‘excuse me sir’, and he goes ‘no I’m talking to you, you have to listen.’ He wanted total control. I wasn’t allowed to talk. He kept telling me to listen, and I kept trying to ask him to understand why I was trembling, I was crying, I wasn’t making any sense, because my baby’s in there behind the desk of the police officer. I can’t see him at any time since I got there, my other little guy, they’re feeding him chips and everything else, sitting there all by himself and I’m outside and I can’t… believe my whole world was just gone. (Did they let you have contact with your children?) Not the baby, no.

…He asked me if I had a safe place for my children and I said yes, my apartment. …They said I couldn’t come back [to the apartment] because they said Jerry said he lived here. Jerry’s never lived here, so they believed him. So now me and my children have to go find somewhere to go… ‘Well do you have anywhere else the kids can go?’ I said yeah, my best friend… and he just looked at me and said no, the children aren’t safe with you. He said ‘you smell like booze and we have to take your children’… I don’t think they gave me any chance to be upset. (Did they suggest that you could go to a shelter?) …No. I think he just said you… won’t calm down, I was just trembling, I was upset, all I kept talking about me and my children gotta get home, like I just didn’t want this carrying on. My baby’s only a couple months old, he needs to be home in his crib… They wanted me to just calm down and everything’s okay, and it wasn’t.

…I was asked to go back in [because] the police had something else to ask me and then the Children’s Aid Society guy goes, ‘we’re leaving right now’. That was all that was said. I turned around, and there he was walking out with both my children, and I lost it. I went down on my knees, I screamed, I yelled, I done everything… This happened on a Wednesday… And I called the next day, I had to meet up with somebody to talk to me [at] Children’s Aid… different person, very much nicer person… He asked me to come in for a visit, sign papers, I get to see my children for one hour and uh, that was more or less, what was I willing to do to get my children back. This guy treated me with respect, he didn’t raise his voice… He was very low-key, he didn’t question any of my answers, let me speak, helped me find solutions to the problem that just arose. And it wasn’t rushed on me, I did break down quite a few times, he handed me a tissue, which I thought was very nice, and just more or less told me not to give up hope, that things were going to
work out if I did things that they wanted me to do… I actually was put in a shelter. In order for me to get my children back, I had to live in a shelter so that my children would be safe from Jerry… For a minimum of a month, and then I’m going well whatever it takes, I’m getting my children back. These are my life. And he goes, well, it’s not safe for you to go back to your apartment, and I said yes it is. And then that’s when we kind of got off on a wrong start, because they’re believing that I’m living with this man. I have no proof except my lease. I didn’t have that at the time. They believed what it looked like and the next thing you know, I’m signing papers of going to court and this and that… I was signing to let them know that I’m going to do whatever it takes to get my children back… If Jerry tried to make contact with me and leave messages and stuff like that, for me to get him in jail. Like once Jerry was in jail, then things would have been a lot easier on me and my kids, that’s what they said. (Did they want you to press charges?) Yes. Umhm. And fortunately, he called here and told me right where he was on the phone. I picked up the phone, got a police officer to come here and listen to the message, and they arrested him.

Five days later my children were dropped off at the shelter. Right after court, I went right to the shelter and I met my children there. And it was a big transition for my seven year old, but at least I could talk to him… The so-called intake worker gave me an actual worker and we got to sit down and chat and they talked to my seven year old. (Tell me about being in the shelter.) I didn’t enjoy it at all. It wasn’t my house, it wasn’t my kids’ stuff… It was more uncomfortable for my children than it was me. I can adapt, because I’m an adult. But my seven year old felt everything, he couldn’t touch it, it wasn’t ours, it wasn’t his toys, we actually slept in the same bed for most of the time we were in there and he just blamed Jerry so much during all this because we’ve lived there for so long in our apartment with no outsiders… and the next thing you know, we’re living in a place where you can’t sleep, you don’t feel comfortable eating there. He started to act out because there was a lot of children there at the time and then the baby was sleeping and he wasn’t comfortable in that tiny roll away playpen, which I didn’t put him in there because it stunk. But anyways, they did their best, but all along I knew I belonged home. And so did my children.

My first contacts [with the current worker] I was very nervous, because I’m still thinking that nobody believes a thing I’m saying and I felt like all my rights as a mother were out the window… I felt judged the whole time… But once I started talking to my worker, things started to roll. He knew that I was easy to get along with, that I would do… whatever it takes to get me and my children back to the way life was. (What did the Children’s Aid Society want you to do to get your children back?) …counselling, go to deal with my brother’s committing suicide, trying to deal with living in the shelter and going to these meetings and I’m handling all that… They wanted me to go to two meetings a week in the shelter, they wanted me to look up a number to try to go deal with my brother committing suicide. They figured that was going to help me… I had to go for alcohol testing… I had to start seeing a counsellor one on one, and I had to continue doing all these things while I was in the shelter… So that was their way of saying you do all this and then we’ll let you take your kids out of here. That’s the understanding I had, and I told them I’d do whatever it takes… I had to keep talking about the incident… and
I’m trying to tell these people the more you make me talk about it, the more that I’m frightened it’s going to happen again to whoever… And I just think that you should only have to talk about it a couple times and understand is there something you could have done about it to prevent it, like ways of prevention, and then leave it at that instead of having the person keep talking and talking.

*Interviewer: Did you find any of the things they suggested helpful?*

I found one of the mom to mom groups at the shelter. It’s women in the shelter that have been abused and you get your emotions and your feelings out. I liked that I wasn’t alone, that a lot of women were judged by the police and the hospitals. The same kind of story. Almost exact. It just made me realise that I wasn’t the only one… I was going twice a week while I was in [the shelter] and I was trying to go twice a week while I was out at home, but it was too much with the other counselling and trying to deal with grief and trying to get the seven year old back in a routine… It was probably one to two times a week with the other counselling too, because I was seeing counselling outside… That was excellent. It was a good thing. She was very non-judgmental, it was like going to see my family member. She was there, she listened, she understood a lot of what I was saying, and just knowing that she didn’t judge me in any way shape or form, I opened up to her. My own feelings didn’t matter to anyone else, but to her they did.

*Interviewer: So you’ve been involved with [Children’s Aid] about eleven months and you’ve had the same worker the whole time? (Umhm.) How often do you see the worker?*

Once a month. I demanded that actually. Because he was letting me go more… I said what’s the sense of you guys being involved if you’re not coming around? I’m supposed to be this this and this, I want you to know that I’m nothing near it… The more they got to know me, they know that this is totally off beat or whatever. I’m nothing like what was started and now I’m more or less proud to say come on over, I’ve got nothing to hide… We’re going to court November 25th… and we’re going to terminate… I had to go to court every month. I wasn’t even brought into the court. I would go and sit outside while my lawyer went and did all the talking for me. I was going every month… just to show them I was in [counselling], that I was doing everything that was asked of me… [Court] was very nerve-racking because it was long. You’d go there at nine o’clock in the morning, you wouldn’t get out until 12 or one o’clock and you had no idea what was going on. Your lawyer would come and say ‘hi I’m here’ and that would be about it. You had other people talking for you…

*Interviewer: Overall, is it a good thing or a bad thing that Children’s Aid was involved in your life?*

Well for the most part I think they’re a good organization… It was good because they protected my children when this person did something to me, which they thought maybe my children were in danger… But they shouldn’t have been taken from me. I should have been with my children, that’s the only thing that I’m upset about. I know they’re just here for the children, but without the mother, where are the children going to be? And I just wish that they had more patience with me to let me go to my friend’s house.
that night with my children… There was no need for me to stay at the shelter… What happened to me was a misunderstanding… Um, but I wouldn’t change anything you know? I got my children back, we’re safe, it was all a big nightmare… But then I found that they tried to teach me how to be a parent and the ones I was talking to never even had children so I took it with a grain of salt… So me and my worker get along… I can’t believe we get along so well. Because he knows I’m not rejecting anything, I’ll do what is the best of my ability to raise my children properly… I think he’s so cool because he listens to me. And he knows that what I was saying about Jerry all along, was true.

**Relationships with Men**

*Interviewer: When you arrived in Ontario, you were around sixteen?*

Umhm. Men was the last thing on my mind, I didn’t know nothing about them. *(You hadn’t dated before that?)* No… The men that I seem to attract are controlling, possessive, and they need a mother figure. Looking at it now, that’s what I see, but at the time, I thought that’s how men were… So that’s why I didn’t date a lot, because once I got out of a relationship like that, I blamed myself for a lot of it… I used to write down things on paper and I came to the realization that it wasn’t my fault, that I am human and have feelings as well. That just because supper’s five minutes late and I had someone over and that if I wasn’t there at five minutes and supper wasn’t ready, I’d end up wearing the supper. *(So you had been assaulted before by men?)* Yes. But never around anybody. It was always, I got hit where the bruises wouldn’t show in public. … I never wanted to live with a man ever again… because of my experience… My dad was very violent when he drank, and it seemed like everybody I dated when I left home, seemed to evolve into that person. It was nothing I ever did, I’ve questioned it over and over, and it was just like I guess when you want something so hard, you try to forget that that person is quite like that.

*Interviewer: So what was your first serious relationship like?*

Oh, I just wanted to do everything possible to make that person happy. And if it took me missing a day of work to look after him when he was sick, I would have done it… *[I was]* going on nineteen… Like I dated, but it was nothing serious. *(So you have never had a live-in relationship?)* No, I’ve avoided that. Because at least being on my own, they can leave. But I found in my heart of hearts, if I ever moved in with somebody, that they would kick me to the curb. You know what I mean? And then I’d be out homeless. If I put 50% in to that house, I’d probably end up with nothing. So I prefer never doing that…

Brock [the first child], his father was very unpredictable… But when Brock came along, I just got the heck out of there. Ken [Brock’s father] was young, immature, wasn’t ready to be a father. *(How old was he?)* Early 20’s… I was 26 when I had my son… When my pregnancy got further along, I realised that this wasn’t going to work… I didn’t know the first thing about going and looking for help. I didn’t know there was shelters, I didn’t know there was anything like that. So I sold all my jewellery and I went looking for an
apartment. Ken started to hang around with his friends after work and come home and God only knows what shape he would be in and if the house wasn’t perfectly clean, there would be an argument… I think he knew I was leaving, but he didn’t think I had enough guts to do it… We split up as soon as I found out I was pregnant. *(Before that, how long were you in a relationship?)* About three and a half, four years. Off and on… When I found out I was pregnant, I was scared to tell him. Brock’s father started doing drugs and started going to jail. And the doctor said I couldn’t have children, so when I got pregnant it was like ‘oh you trapped me now. You’re having this kid, you just want child support’… And I’m just as much in shock as anyone else. My doctor said I could never get pregnant, because I had so many miscarriages and stuff. So this was my new beginning, I’m going to finally have a baby, there’s no way it’s going to be brought up in a place like this. *(You wanted the baby?)* Oh yeah. I have a lot of love to give, and life’s too short to be all by yourself… I wanted someone to grow up and be proud that I was the parent. Hey, this is my mom!!!

… Ken was in jail, he was in children’s homes… He was in a lot of trouble because his dad walked out on him. And he swore that he would never do it, but we didn’t get along. He was too strict and just demanded too much from me. And I’m only one person and I tried to keep telling him that… I was living with my aunt and trying to help her. She kept telling me to stay away from him, his mother kept telling me to stay away from him, but I didn’t… [He was] very violent. Mostly verbal at the beginning. Like stupid, retarded, stuff like that. Then it was pushing me. Like he pushed me down the stairs when I was pregnant…

*Interviewer: Does Brock see his dad?*

No. But they’re allowing that. After my case is closed, I’m allowed to let Brock go see his dad… Brock’s very unsure… If he wants to go, I would not say no… if it’s going to help my child grow up and love himself more, to be around good people, I’m all for it. *(Do you ever see or talk to Brock’s dad?)* No.

*Interviewer: Tell me about Jerry, how long were you in a relationship with him?*

Three and a half years. First two years were great. He was so good to my son… never ever violent. And when he used to talk to me like that too it was always when my son was asleep or when he was calling me on the phone. *(What was that like for you when he was talking to you like that?)* I’d start decorating. I’d get out the paintbrush or get my son involved somehow in something that we would make something productive. Because when someone is going around being negative all their life, they’re not going to get very far. And I think Jerry was jealous of that too, because I didn’t like to sit down, I liked to see the beautiful things in life… [if] things would bother me I would get outside, walk, go to the park, do something. And he would just sit around and call me and say life’s terrible. *(Did he have a drinking problem?)* No. He had an anger problem and when he used to have a few drinks actually, he was mellow. But if something went wrong, he just flew out of the cuckoo’s nest or something.
… Three or four nights a week Jerry used to stay here when I was pregnant because I needed somebody here in case this baby decided to come. But that’s as much as it’s gotten. (How long was he doing that for?) When the doctor said at three and a half month’s pregnant she can have this baby anywhere, anytime. If she coughs the wrong way, she could sneeze, so he took it upon himself, even though he didn’t want the baby, that my health could go too. So when this all, it was like a big bombshell. Like it was bad enough when I found out I was pregnant, he thought, because he didn’t want the baby. But then to find out I could die, the baby could die, and then my little son, I don’t know how old Brock was, six or seven years old at the time, Jerry more or less wanted to be here for Brock. Because he wasn’t getting all the attention, I couldn’t go out walking for miles, I couldn’t do this, I couldn’t do that. So I more or less asked him, can you spend some good quality time with Brock until this baby’s born… And that’s when him and Brock got really close… And him and Brock would go out on the bike and be gone for hours… and I felt comfortable knowing my child was being stimulated… He was just overwhelmed. Like, but Jerry, I don’t think he was ever close with his mother, and I think me having this baby, he wasn’t prepared at all. Not at all. And I think he was scared to let his emotion show. Because you know, being a big tough guy, you don’t want to cry, you don’t want anybody to think you’re a wimp, that’s his favourite word… Looking back at it now, there’s animals in this world treated better than [Jerry treated me].

Interviewer: Do you still have any contact with Jerry?

Oh no. Last November was the last time. (Did he go to jail?) For twenty-two days… He hasn’t seen his baby since last November, which I think is sad because the baby is innocent, and when they said that now they’re going after me to take all Jerry’s rights. Children’s Aid wants me to go for sole custody, child support of Curtis [youngest son]. The last meeting we had, they want me to revoke his rights so that he can’t even see his son after all this is over. And I think that’s going to put a lot of anger into that man, and he’s going to come right back, and he’s going to think it’s all my fault. (Why do they want you to have sole custody?) The day after the bombing. September 12… my girlfriend, I called her up, she says I’m having a barbecue, bring the kids over. I come back at 8:30 or so, last time I looked on the clock on the truck, which I think was about ten minutes fast, and I got out of the truck to get the children and I was pushed so hard that I flew almost to the end of the pavement. (Jerry pushed you?) So the cops, four cop cruisers showed up, because they know he’s not allowed on the property… The person on the third floor, called the person on the second floor. Two people from the building in the back of us heard me scream “what the heck are you doing here”? like he scared me. (So what did he want?) He wanted his truck. (And why did he push you?) I haven’t a clue. Why did he do any of the stuff he’s already done to me? I can’t answer that.

Interviewer: So it’s on the basis of that that the Children’s Aid wants you to go for sole custody?

Yeah, because it seems like this man is never going to listen… (Are they insisting on that or suggesting that?) Um, I’d say 80% [insisting]. The feeling I’m getting is they don’t
want him to take off with Curtis and start violence towards Curtis. And I said he’d never hurt the baby. Even though he said things when I got pregnant and stuff…. He didn’t pay [child support] last month, [a friend] told me he’s not going to pay me until I take him to court. And that’s something that’s foreign to me because… he has always made sure that the money was in the account. And I think now he’s trying to get back at me because of that night. And what he doesn’t realize is he’s hurting the baby, not me. But then the Children’s Aid Society said ‘he is 41 years old. He’s never going to change. He’s set in his ways’… Last time [CAS worker] was here, was for me to go for sole custody of Curtis, which I told him I didn’t want to do that. Not that I loved the man or anything, but I preferred if I live another couple years. He is a very violent man, I’ve heard stories in the last year. He’s already attacked two people at work… since the last incident, he threatened my life in front of the policemen. He beat the windows out of the vehicle and Children’s Aid found out about that, so they’re thinking he’s not safe enough to be around the baby… I think every man who’s a father should have rights to their child. If there was violence in his past about beating up children or whatever, I’d be dead against it. But um, I personally, I don’t like the man, but he still has rights. He is that baby’s father.

Interviewer: Were there any other relationships you were in that were violent?

Yes, but ah…I don’t know. I got used to it so I used to take it with a grain of salt. I tried to change myself. If he said I’d look better with red hair, I’d dye it red. I tried everything to try to make it not go there. And then I realised I’m not even me anymore… (So how many abusive relationships would you say you’ve been in?) Four. (Have you been in one that’s not?) No… I went out with a guy for two weeks. When I saw it coming I just left… it’s like I was never good enough. That’s the thing I had on my head, that I’m not good enough so I have to put up with it. Maybe that’s what attracted me to these people, they seen that I was vulnerable and they knew they could get away with it, because they knew I had little self-esteem, and when a guy sees that, he can just do what he’s doing, because she’s not going to do nothing… And that’s why I’m single right now. It’s been a whole year today.

Interviewer: What do you think about relationships with men now?

I know eventually I’ll get into one. I’ll never live with a man, and I gotta keep that, because I can’t put my guard down, because my children come first. I know a lot of single moms, they can’t live without a man. I don’t want my guys seeing four or five guys in a month, because I’ve seen what it does to children. (What would be the motivation for getting into a relationship for you?) … you gotta love children. I really don’t care what he looks like, how much money he makes, as long as he can take my children into his life… I’m a package deal. I know a lot of men out there won’t even think of dating a woman with children because that’s baggage, or whatever they call it. And just knowing that that person would light up when they see my children as much as when they see me. That is a long ways away I think. (Are you afraid the abuse would happen all over again?) Yeah. Because everything’s fine for the first little while until they realise I have my own brain. I like to do my own things.
Family of Origin

Well growing up was very tough on me. My dad wanted a boy, he got a girl. So I couldn’t be myself until I left home, at sixteen… He was strict on me because he didn’t want me taking life for granted… so when I got old enough to leave home, I wanted to come up to Ontario to figure it all out for myself. I wanted to see if what they taught me growing up was real. I realized they were right about a lot of things, about working hard and trying to be your best in life and um, I didn’t agree with the way they wanted me to judge people… When I hit Ontario and I was only sixteen, my life was so beautiful at the time. I was open to hear anything, I was willing to talk to anybody if they were willing to talk to me, and then people couldn’t understand me because I talked too fast and my language or slang, and I would take the time to slow down and next thing you know, I had friends all over. And that’s the beautiful part, because I started to believe in myself. And that was a big step for me.

… I was born in [Maritime Province] and my family was pretty, I don’t know how to say it, um, my mom and dad should have never been together. They were two opposites. My dad was a drinker, happy-go-lucky, and violent. And my mom was very quiet, shy, and put up with everything. She did not say a word, she didn’t speak back, she didn’t have a life. She still don’t. My dad was a…like Jekyll and Hyde. There would be good days and there would be bad days… my dad would freak out on [my mom]. Throw things, smash things, sit down and drink about ten beers and get in the vehicle and go… My mom would send me out to where he was at to make sure he got home okay. Whether it took me out of school, whether I had to miss a whole day of school, I had to look after my dad when he got on these binges. And they would last from anywhere from a day to a week. Sometimes they went overboard until he was hospitalized… I just kept saying to [mom], ‘why did you have more children with my dad? You saw the way I was getting raised, why did you have more?’ ‘That’s what your dad wanted.’ And I said ‘if my dad wanted you to jump over that bridge right now, would you?’ She said ‘if it would make him happy, I would’. And that’s when I said to myself, God forbid if I ever get in a situation like that. (Did you have just the one brother?) No I had two. A boy was born five years after me and I think eight or nine years after me, there was another boy born. And then ten years after I was born, my sister was born.

Interviewer: What was it like living with your dad?

Oh my God, where do I start? Um, it first started out hammering me with a belt with studs and he said that wasn’t working. (How old were you when he started hitting you?) I think 8 or 9. If I couldn’t do the job to perfection, he’s a welder. If he gave me the welder to do something and I messed it all up, I’d get a swat upside the head, or I’d get something thrown at me… and then it progressed. I wasn’t allowed to touch the stove when I was 12. They were gone all day, almost all night, and I was craving for French fries, so I put some French fries, like the fat on the stove, I was just about to put the French fries in, my dad walks in the house, picks up the fat and starts chasing me with it. I ran through the snow, knee-deep snow, running away from this man… Twelve [years
old]. That’s when it all really got bad. I had to get out of there. The cops got involved, nobody would do nothing, they were scared of my father. This very nice family took me to their house because I was shaking like a leaf, I couldn’t deal with this and my dad showed up at their house with a shotgun and demanded me to come back home and everything was fine for another week or so and then he started drinking really heavily again and that’s when he uh, just I was scared to go home from school, I was scared to do anything. I wouldn’t even talk in school. I kept to myself and people started to realise there’s something wrong with her. She was so bubbly and now all of a sudden she’s quiet. So I started seeing counsellors when I was 13… They wanted me to just confront my father, and I said that was so silly for you to say that.

… My grades just went totally to the ground, like 18% when I was a 95% [before]... [The teachers and principal] had this thing that I should just get out of the house and no, I got two other brothers and a sister. I cannot just pack up and leave. My mom just had another baby a couple years ago, I need to be there for her and they said well your mom’s a big person, you know… And then it got too overwhelming for me, everyone telling me what to do...

But I had three other children in the house that I used to love playing with and spending time with and uh, I wasn’t allowed to half the time… When [dad] got drinking, he turned into very demanding. (Why do you think he did it?) Because he was jealous of me, because he knew I had a good life, because I worked hard at anything that anybody asked me to do. I was right there and I think when he was growing up, which I know when he was growing up his father died and left his mom with nine children and he had to get out of school and just take care of the family. So he thinks his life was robbed from him, so he wanted me to work twice as hard to get something to pay him back. Because he said I owe him for raising me. He says when you win any money or get a job, you have to send me money, so I did that. I sent them money every year… I felt like I owed them. They did bring me up and stuff and I figured if it would make my mom’s life easier I would send home money. And back then I was making some pretty good money, so it wasn’t really that I missed the money, I was just hoping my dad would be a little bit easier on my mother.

Interviewer: Was there any sexual abuse when you were younger?

When I was a child, yeah, my uncle. And um, he was going to teach me how to drive. I was 13 or 14, we were down on the sand bar and my friend was in the back and I was in the driver’s seat and next thing you know, there’s hands where they shouldn’t be and stuff like that and I told him stop… He shouldn’t be doing this. And I went home that night, I was very distraught, I was crying, I told my mom, I need to talk to you. [She said] “I don’t want to hear it. It didn’t happen, you’re making all this stuff up”. Well it took him to rape two other girls, actually go and rape them, in order for him to get put in jail… Everybody saw how my father was treating me, and I guess they figured he doesn’t care about her, he’s not going to do anything about this. So I’d say that there’s about five times in total. And like I said, there’s some things I can’t remember because I just don’t want to…
[When] I was 18 or 19, I wanted to go back and show off my new car and the money I was making. I was making over 20 dollars an hour at that age, so I was overwhelmed that you know, that I was becoming something. I took home everybody Christmas presents and they never even got to see them open them… My dad’s running around the front yard, not a stitch on, he didn’t know who he was, and he thought I was somebody from another world, like I was an alien or something, and he picked up the gun and tried to shoot me… The gun actually went into the wall, put holes in the wall and then he lifted it up and put holes in the ceiling. And if he was sober, he would have got me. He was drunk… [Mom] called half his family members and the ambulance came, the cops came, and I got in my car and said I love you mom, I gotta go. And I came all the way back [to Ontario]… My suitcase wasn’t even out of the car, I wasn’t even in the house ten minutes when this happened. And I had no sleep, nothing, and I drove all the way back. I didn’t even pull over… And then when he did that to me, my sister and brothers were never the same. They used to call everyday and say are you okay?… But I forgave him. Isn’t that something?

[My dad’s] never hit another child besides myself that I know of. Besides my brother who killed himself. And he couldn’t take it anymore. (What about your mom?) Oh yes. He’s done enough to her oh yeah. And I used to get in front of him so he couldn’t hit her. I didn’t mind them smacks because I knew my mom wasn’t going to get them, but when he’d start coming at her with objects, like he’d smash an ashtray on the table and he’d go after her with that and I’d get in the middle. He went after her with brooms, mops, anything he could get his hands on. Frying pans, pots, if his supper wasn’t on the table when he walked in, and my mom would say I’ll go to the store and get you a six-pack. Because when he was sober, he was so strict, you couldn’t even walk across the floor and make noise. But when he was just starting to drink without being drunk, he was happy… He’d have three, four beers and be fine, and once that six, seven, eighth beer goes in, he’d get up and throw a chair across the floor… personally I think alcohol should be illegal just like drugs. In my eyes, because of what I’ve seen. (Was he ever in jail?) No I don’t think so.

… For my mom to leave my dad would never happen, because she just didn’t have the backup. Her family was all alcoholic, my mom’s dad was an alcoholic, my mom’s mom was an alcoholic. They raised eight children, but there was no abuse… But then that’s what made me the good person I am today. (You think the abuse made you a good person today?) Not necessarily the abuse, but knowing that there’s something finally going to happen good for me. That’s the way I look at life. This is happening to me now because when I get older, I’m not ever going to take anyone for granted…

My family is starting to fall apart again… And they demanded too much out of me last year when my brother [committed suicide]… The second one, the baby brother. Him and my dad used to fight all the time. It was war… they used to beat each other up, and I don’t know what they got out of it. And I used to tell my brother, I used to pray to God like would he come to his senses, pack his bags, come up here, I’ll take him in, I’ll call somebody, I’ll have him a job, he can start over. But he had a lot of anger, because he
started finding out how my dad treated me growing up, and how none of the other children got treated like that and people would get drunk and talk too much and he started to find out some really nasty things my dad did to me… My brother had committed suicide the week after Curtis was born… My sister’s having a rough time right now and just knowing that me and the children are safe and I’m doing what I can, I’m happy. I have a happy feeling inside but yet I’m lonely because I have no one to share all the love. I can’t take my children home for a couple days and then come back… I can’t do it, can’t afford it… I haven’t seen my family for 13 years.

Interviewer: Do you still talk to your dad?

Yep, now I do. He actually apologized to me about two years ago. He was sober when I called home and he answered the phone and he couldn’t believe it was me, and I was having a really rough time, like I was just very emotional…I don’t know, I was having nightmares about my childhood and stuff and I said, dad, I just called to tell you that I love you. Because he’s never ever told me that, and he goes, I love you too. Well then I started to cry, because I couldn’t believe it was my father, I kept asking, are you my dad? And he said to me, I didn’t mean those things I did to you…

Interviewer: What helped you to carry on through all of these experiences?

My main thing that helped me was my mom. Knowing my mom couldn’t do anything, she was under lock and key. At a young age, I said I was going to start living for her, because my hope was starting to disappear… [The] first time I got on a slide at a kids’ park, I was 24 years old. My mom’s never done that, and I didn’t want to do it. And I got on the slide and went down for the both of us… Everybody was lying to me for all these years and saying [dad has] slowing down on his booze. Well my sister, after my brother committed suicide, finally told me that dad drinks every couple days. So the town where I’m from gave him a chance after all this happened. The school board came to my dad and offered him a job driving a school bus. So now he’s so busy so he doesn’t have time. I think if he was busy while I was growing up, he wouldn’t have drunk. He was a construction worker and you can only work so many nights a year and the other months he would drink. And there was always more money every month spent on booze than on groceries. He used to charge beer and my mom would go to these people and beg them. Don’t give him the beer because we need the money for groceries. But no, they’d go behind her back and then he’d have to sell this or make this in order to pay for his booze.

When I left home, it was the happiest day of my life. I knew I had no boundaries… I figured, hey, this is a big world, I can go out and be whoever I want. I work hard, I should be able to get there… Everybody knew I was going a couple months before I graduated. Nobody thought I could do it, that’s one of the reasons why I continued to go… I graduated in June and I hitchhiked up here [to Ontario] in October. And that was an experience in itself. The best thing I ever done. Because my mom says, you get on that highway, and you don’t look back. You look back, you’re going to come back. And I didn’t look back once, only to see if there was more traffic coming, but that’s about it.
And I’ve been a survivor since… *(You hitchhiked all the way to Ontario?)* Yep, took me less time to get here if I would’ve drove by myself. *(You were by yourself?)* Yep… It was wonderful. Scared, but wonderful… I was so shy, but ah…just had to go. Just had to. Because I wanted to live. I wanted to live so much that I couldn’t stand being told that I was never going to be anything. And you’re stupid, why the heck were you ever born… I met up with some of the most unusual people [on the trip], like all different walks of life, and every one of them treated me with respect. They were very worried, wondered what I was doing, and all I said was I have to leave home. They said, you’re not running away? I said no no. I got my grade 12 certificate in my backpack, and I want a new life. And most of the gentlemen were truck drivers that picked me up… And then [one of] the truck drivers took out fifty dollars and said look, I want you to buy a meal or a hotel room when you get there, because he knew I didn’t have any family… So what he did was he radioed ahead to the people who were ahead of him and said whereabouts are you heading… so I had a ride waiting. And we did that until we got to [city].

So I’ve got a hotel room, I slept a couple hours, got up, and I walked [Street], from one end to the other. Put applications in, even though they weren’t hiring, and the next day I got a call to start work [at a factory]. And I was so happy. Nobody could ever understand why I was so happy to go to work every morning. I was on top of the world. I worked, and it was piece-work and I went from 5.69 an hour to almost 18 dollars an hour my first two weeks, and then I stayed at 22 bucks an hour for almost three and a half years… until I was told by my doctors I had to leave. I was getting high off the contact cement and the cleaners. They had no fans, no ventilation. I started getting nosebleeds, I started losing a lot of weight. Women were having miscarriages in there, like almost everyday you were hearing about somebody losing a baby. And I was telling my doctor all this and he said you have to quit… [I worked at a few other jobs and then] I got pregnant with [son], and I promised him I was going to be with him until he was old enough to talk to people in case something went wrong. I didn’t want him with a babysitter and they’re not looking after him properly… My unemployment ran out and I started getting depressed because I wasn’t working and I couldn’t go out and buy this for Brock and then I just said you know, I’ll go back to school gradually and go to college… nobody wants to work and have a job as bad as I do, but my job right now is to raise my children to the best of my ability. And once he gets old enough where he can communicate with people, then I’m going back full-time, even if it’s factory again.

**Children**

Brock’s a little Einstein I’m telling you. He knows it all and I do my best by being the mother, the father, everybody… even though I’m only one person, I can do a lot. And I found the Ritalin, he’s thinking more and he’s not acting out. He’ll come up with ideas that I tell ya, 30 year olds haven’t thought of yet. And when he’s not on the Ritalin, he’s all over the place. You can’t get him centered on nothing and the teacher, she just actually phoned me a couple days ago and wants Brock to go back to the behavioural specialist… I work with the school and that’s been a very good part of this… *(So was Brock seeing a behavioural specialist before Children’s Aid became involved?)* Yes. Um, Brock’s a very hyperactive child and I thought it would be in his best interests if I
could take him to the doctor’s and see if something was wrong because this is not normal. He’s hurting himself. *(Has he had any kind of diagnosis?)* Yes, ADHD finally. *(And he is taking Ritalin?)* Umhm, like I just didn’t want to do it and I put it off for years. I did everything else but. I changed his meals, I didn’t give him certain things, I read a lot of books. I changed his whole… eating habits, just everything to see if that was allergies. And it finally turned out that there was nothing that I was doing or he was doing, that’s just the way it was and finally when the doctor said we have to put him on medication because he’s not listening and he’s going to miss out on all the things at school and everything and I said he’s not like that all the time around here. So we worked out that when he’s around children he just can’t sit down. So they figured put him on medication and just try it, because I was dead against it. I didn’t want my child on medication, but if it’s going to help him, it’s going to help. We’ll see…about six or seven months now, and it’s okay.

… It started way back in daycare, I knew that my son not having a father was doing something to him. So I asked for him to be checked out… and it progressed. In kindergarten, he wasn’t sitting still, he wanted to be the life of the party… And that’s when I called the school and said is there anyway you can set me up to talk to someone? Behavioural specialists, some kind of support… Brock’s very bright, they think he’s a very very, like too smart for himself sometimes… Last year, his teacher, I asked her, can we have a journal? Brock’s going off to school today, he’s very rough feeling, he doesn’t want to go, bla bla bla, so she’s ready for him when he gets there. And she would tell me all the things that happened during the day. I loved that, because… we knew the problem areas to deal with… Now this year, it’s a totally different child… he’s the teacher’s little helper… At home, my child is very well behaved. Sure he gets out of hand, like any other child … There’s times though, like I’ll say honey, we need to get this done. “I’m not listening to you”. I says, well you see that hallway, you know where that leads. He’ll go in and lay on his bed and come back and say he’s sorry. And that is more joy than anything because you give them time to think. Brock’s had a lot of things to deal with. That I gotta take in consideration you know? Because comparing my life to his life, there’s no comparison. There will never be any, you know what I mean? He won’t be sitting here in twenty years going ‘you wouldn’t believe the things I went through’. If anything he’ll be sitting here saying ‘I had the best mommy in the world’…

He cries for Jerry a lot, he doesn’t think it’s right how they did that. It’s a seven year old, telling me it’s not right that he can’t see Jerry, because Jerry never did anything to him. And he doesn’t agree with what Jerry did to mommy, but that’s hearsay, because he wasn’t here the night it happened… He’s the man of the house, and here’s the man of the house wanting another man in the house, which to me, most single moms I’ve ever talked to say that’s usually the opposite in the situation. It’s usually they don’t want the mommy to have anybody else. Well Brock wants mom to have somebody else. And it’s almost pressured me in the last couple months to get out and be active and see if there’s somebody out there for me, but I’m not completely feeling safe.
Annette’s Home

The whole scenario to my apartment is love. You gotta be able to walk in here and feel comfortable. My children should be proud of where they’re going to live, not like how dirty it is and what not, because that will never be in my home. And I get my seven year old, I’ve gotten him involved since he was I think four and a half, five, I gave him a paint brush and feather duster, and I asked him what he thought was beautiful. Gave him a piece of paper and cardboard, and he actually gave me more ideas, I thought I was going to help him, but he was actually giving me more ideas and he helped me do the hallway, and hearing him say ‘mommy, did you ever do a good job’, makes me want to continue what I’m doing. I take old glass bottles and make vases and donate them and everything has a purpose in life. I don’t throw much away, but I’m not a packrat. You know what I mean? But knowing that my children love being in my home, like my little guy brags at school about what mommy’s doing today. Mommy’s going to paint, or mommy’s doing wallpaper... [Brock will] come back from his friends and he’ll say ‘their mom was throwing this out mom, but I want you to have it’. And I’m like ‘that is so sweet’. Instead of him going this is all junk, because I don’t want him looking at life like that. Everything is beautiful... Brock brags more about his room than he does about his toys, because of how much fun we had doing that room.  I let him put the stickers where he wanted, and he gave me ideas, and he elaborated on those ideas, and it really didn’t cost us nothing, because it was leftovers from doing other people’s houses. So I just more or less tell him you don’t have to pay for happiness...

Work and Finances

…I graduated grade 12 in 1985… that was one of the happiest days of life, to get that diploma in my hands. I carried that everywhere. I didn’t care how wrinkly it got, but that was my ticket to freedom… I moved up here and got a job right away. I was working my second day here in [city]. I went to college in 97/98. I did my ‘Focus for Change’, it’s a government program, they put single moms through, because nobody would hire me, I wasn’t qualified enough, and my grade 12 was so old. And a lady called up and asked me if I would do this and I was like ‘yes, I’ll do it, when do I start?’ So I went in for my interview and I was in [college] in a couple days. I did my Focus for Change, got highest marks, went through the upgrading so I could get my grade 11 and 12 all over again. I was about to jump into the college program, but I got in a very bad accident two months before it was going to start, so I couldn’t go … So I kind of put it on hold… but as soon as my 14 month old gets a little older, I’m definitely planning on going back and getting my course… I haven’t even started the personal support worker because my accident happened December 30 and the course was starting February 4th and I was in no shape to start it… I decorate part-time for people. Elderlies can’t do this, so I hear somebody saying they’d like their place painted, I volunteer, I don’t even charge them nothing. So that’s been keeping me going, because I can’t wake up in a day and know that I’m not going to do something productive. Like playing with my children are productive and stuff… So every day I gotta plan. Before I get out of bed I know what I’m doing. Unless somebody’s sick and needs my attention. Like when my baby’s sleeping, I got a project on the go.
Interviewer: So where does your money come from?

Family benefits. Which is very slim… I don’t have much, so I try to spread it out. I’m an excellent budgeter. If I have to walk two miles to get something on sale I will. And then I’ll go and get the rest at another place that’s on sale. A lot of people don’t agree with my pulling a wagon and pushing a stroller with a knapsack on my back, but that’s pride. Knowing that I saved 25 dollars to go out and buy him a new pair of shoes or a new jacket… That’s why when my son comes home with something that no one else wants, I don’t tell him that it’s not worth anything, take it out or whatever. I tell him that was beautiful. You know? Show him that everything that he does is appreciated, and it doesn’t take money to be happy. He’s going on 8 years old and doesn’t ask me for money because we’ve already had our chats and uh, if he needs something for school, it’s there. But if he wants a two hundred dollar remote control truck, mommy can’t pay the rent. What should we do about that? No, we pay the rent mommy… I got money for things that are important… I can wear the same pair of jeans for 17 years and still feel that they’re worth wearing, where someone else would go why don’t you buy a new pair? Why spend money when you don’t have to? There’s more important things like groceries. Have money there instead of spending it all and not having it for anything else.

Interviewer: Do you use things like food banks and stuff?

The odd time yeah. And that’s only because sometimes we do have expensive things, like he needs this and he needs that and it all catches me in one month. I was using the church up here, but I didn’t go there to get everything. I went to get a few odds and ends… when Jerry was giving me child support, and I was getting my family benefits, it was okay. Now that I’m not getting his money, it’s really hard. Because my rent is $700 and they were giving me $840. So that leaves me $140 to do me twenty days. By the time I come out of the grocery store, I maybe got $50 left. That’s gotta buy his diapers. Then I’ve gotta spend $4 on milk a day. And sure, I smoke cigarettes, but that’s a whole different issue. I’m trying to quit, but I squeeze it. Like we eat very well, I’m never without food… I don’t have any debts. I owe Bell Canada $26, that’s it. I don’t owe anybody nothing. I owe my children lots of love, and that’s the only debt I owe.

The Future

Next year the baby’s going to be in a really good daycare. I’m going to do a lot of research and get a good daycare. I’m either going to start back at factory, go back to college, and I’m hoping to have my own business one day. I wanted to be a personal support worker, because there’s a lot of people out there that need support. There’s elderly that should be cared for more, and mentally handicapped people that need more support than just talking, and that was my gift. I was put in this world to love people, to help them, to let them be themselves. So if I can’t get there, I’ll start off factory, save enough money to go to college. Because I can’t be in debt. No more than a hundred
dollars. Once that personal support worker working there will pay for me getting my business.

…I’m going to connect with anybody, because I think everybody’s going to have something that can help me along the lines. Whether it’s just one sentence they said, but everybody I meet in my journey – because I call life a journey – not everything I’m going to agree with, but there’s going to be some things that they’re going to say that’s gonna make my life feel a lot better and um, I don’t get out much… Life’s short, I wasted a lot of my life to make someone else happy… Every day is a new beginning for me… I used to dwell on my past a lot… So at night when I start letting my mind wander and I start wondering why the world is the way it is, why I got brought up the way I did, I pick up a pen and paper, I write down the negatives and positives of everything. And then I’ll think of a project, something that’s been neglected by someone else and how am I going to make that beautiful, and that’s how come I don’t feel depressed a lot, because I have all these things to put time into to make it look beautiful. And I can look at certain things in my house right now and know how I was feeling before I started it and I usually get up from the table, walk around the apartment, kiss both my children, and sit back down and think how wonderful life is.

I’m a never-giver-upper. I’m determined that everybody around me is going to be happy, including myself, and um, happiness awaits me… My children gotta come first… They say you should never call yourself a determined person, because that means either angry or something, but in my definition of determined means someone who’s not going to quit, somebody who does not give up and wants the best and will do their best. And hopefully the best comes out of it and if not, if it’s wrong, you try again until you get it right… [I] know how lucky I am, I survived that, to know all the love I have to give. I’ve got two little boys, and they’re going to grow up and treat women the way they’re supposed to. They’re going to love everybody actually.

…I’t all worth what happened. Everything in my life happened for a reason. It toughened me up I guess. I don’t know how to explain… sometimes you gotta go through rough times in order to see what it’s actually like to have what you’ve worked for. And sometimes you might be misunderstood, but when someone actually takes the time to listen to what’s going on, it’s worth it… And the movie of my life would be how rough it was at the start and how beautiful it is in the end.
Growing Up

… I grew up in [small city]… I have a stepbrother but there’s 13 years between us and he only lived with us until he was five so I’m an only child… My mom was a single parent… until I was 11 so it was pretty tough. My mom had a lot of… substance abuse problems… (was it drinking?) Prescriptions… we didn’t know she had bipolar and she would get very, very angry and physically abusive… (So, what was it like with her two different faces?)…Well, it was either so great, you know, you didn’t know what was going on or it was so horrible… There was no grey, you know, it was always one extreme or the other… when I was first born they took me away from my mom for two years because she was an unfit mother… But she did fight and you know, she made some changes and got me back… (Have they ever talked about the circumstances around the decision to put you in foster… care?) Yeah… Just that my mom wasn’t living a stable life, you know. She was letting people party at her house all the time… (How old was she when she gave birth to you?) 18… So, she wasn’t so young that she couldn’t pull it together and… I have no memory of being in foster care…

… by the time I turned three my mom had married another man and we moved out west and I do have memories at that age… and most of them were good… my stepfather and her fought continually but she was very good to me… and this sort of meanness never happened until I turned six and we moved back here. (Did she split with… your step-dad at that time?) Yeah… and she got back with all her friends it was like a strange person… She just acted totally different, you know, and she would tell me that my real father was dead and then all of the sudden he shows up at the door one day (…did you have a relationship?)… We did but not a father-daughter relationship… He was in and out of prison most of his life. The first time that he got put in prison they… robbed a… truck… and when they went to get away, they ran into a train and he ended up paralysed from the waist down… And back then they used to feed them pharmaceutical speed to try and get the nerve endings. So, he ended up being very addicted to speed… my mom decided to take a trip to the Yukon one time and left me with him. (… How old were you?) Seven…
And I remember my grandmother showed up at lunchtime and he was so fried. He was trying to cook me eggs on top of the burner without no pan there and my grandma just laughed. Of course she took me with her… he never did nothing wrong to me, he just… didn’t know how to care for a child. (Was… your mother gone for long)… I think about six weeks. They took a bus there and back…

*Interviewer:* how did that relationship go then with your father?

He went back to jail a little while after that. He had robbed a [restaurant]… He tried to get away with a taxicab… like his mentality wasn’t there. I had a little bit of a relationship with his mother, sometimes I would get to go visit her but it didn’t last after he went back in prison… and then when he got out again I was probably 11… every now and then I would drop in on my way to school or something and visit but you know, I don’t think he knew how to be a dad… *(have you missed anything by not having a relationship with a biological father?)* Well, now I don’t feel like that because I had a wonderful stepfather… at 11 but… for years I felt very ripped off… other kids would talk about their dads and… who wanted to mention this man who had been in and out of prison… and I had seen things that other kids probably wouldn’t even understand… I remember having to sneak into the kitchen and unbend the spoons because my grandma wanted to eat. I didn’t want her to see the bent spoons because she’d get mad at my mom and know that they were cooking speed on the stove… other kids at seven and eight wouldn’t even have… had a clue… You know, and I just saw a lot and heard a lot…

*Interviewer:* What was life like… when things were really, really good…?

… [mother] would do everything you wanted and give you everything you wanted… that usually followed a really bad spat… you know, if there was like a fair, she would just take me to the fair for the day and have a wonderful day… she would pile gifts on me to make up for… the things that she did… but then like in three days she could be flipping out again and you couldn’t figure out what she was flipping out about… *(What was it like when she was in a downstage again?)* Well, for example I didn’t clean my room on time so when I came home she had my whole room emptied out and she left a – a sleeping bag and a pillow on the floor and she said there, if you can’t keep your room clean you can just sleep on that… Like I don’t think you take… everything away from… an 11 year old… And she would give me bloody noses and black eyes… one time… a gym teacher walked in and she saw bruises all up and down my leg when mom had beat on me and so I made some stupid excuse about falling down the stairs… when they confronted my mom, she just had this show that she was able to put on. Everybody thought she was just the most perfect person and the perfect mother and… I knew at a very young age that it was no good to tell anybody because it usually just made me look bad… The only person that really knew was my grandmother… I really think that my mom had poor parenting skills and I really think that she did do the best that she knew to do… I don’t think any parent, unless you’re a very mean-hearted person intentionally sets out… to abuse their children… my mom’s dad died when she was five and so she grew up with a single mom in those days who worked fulltime, which was very unusual… It wasn’t that [grandma]
wasn’t a good parent to my mom, it’s that she wasn’t there… she had eight kids… My mom was the baby…

*Interviewer: And then at 11 your mom married your current stepfather?*

She didn’t marry him then, that’s just when they moved in together and I think they were together probably 13 or 14 years before they got married… *(And how were things when he came into the picture?)* A little bit chaotic. He partied too so… my mom would be popping beans and going at 600 miles an hour in one direction and Larry, my dad, he’d be smoking pot and be going at negative five… it went on for a couple years and then the place where my dad was working here, 500 pounds of lead fell on his back and he was really badly injured… and he had to go away to a [rehabilitation center] and then they retrained him so he went to college and then my parents changed. They started to grow up… and that was a really hard situation for me. By then I was 15, 16 and my mom decided then that she wanted to be my mom instead of my friend… They moved me to [larger city]… So mom and I had a real rough few years… *(How was your mom different when she went from wanting to be a friend to wanting to be a mom?)*… she just wanted to tell me what to do all the time… instead of sharing to me and talking to me… All of the sudden she was this responsible person. Her and dad were both going to school and they weren’t doing drugs… she was like well, where are you going and who are you going with and what are you doing and all of the sudden I had curfews which I’d never had… so I was like what are you talking about… and I ran to my grandmother and I probably spent probably the next three years with her… I was scared of my mom by that age… I knew she could hurt me… and I knew that her anger was escalating and I think it was good that I went to my grandmother… Another thing my parents did that really made it hard for me… was when I was 11, they started getting me high with them… so when they straightened out I was like, you know, like give me a break… *(Did you want to continue to experiment with drugs and party?)* Yeah. I did until… I went to live with my grandma again and then I just – I lost interest… *(your parents were living in [large city] and where was your grandmother?)* She was in [small city] but in the meantime they have moved here to [small city]…

*Interviewer: Did it interfere with your school to be going back and forth?*

Yes… I quit school because I was culture shocked in [large city]… I had never seen more than five black people in my whole life and never in the same room at the same time… I went to a school of 700 kids to a school of seven thousand, five hundred kids, you know, where they were pulling knives on each other… I felt like an alien from another planet… I was wearing jeans and a sweatshirt and they were all in funky get ups and saris and everything and… I just felt like I didn’t fit… and so going back to [small city] was a more comfortable… feeling for me. But I didn’t go back to school. I didn’t until after I got married then I started doing courses and… my grandma never had to put curfews on me… she said to me one time, it’s decent to be in by ten o’clock. *(So, you were willing to listen to her…)* Yeah… And I knew if I came in at ten after ten, my grandma wasn’t going to flip out… she goes okay, that was pretty close to ten o’clock…
Interviewer: What did your step-dad... contribute to your life?

At first he didn’t contribute a lot... Mom had brought so many men home by that point I really thought that he was just staying for coffee and leaving and he stayed... my survival instinct was get rid of him... but he didn’t go... I constantly would play little games with the two of them so they would fight... But then after a few years I realized he was giving me something I never had. (What's that?) Being a dad... He was out playing ball with me, coming to my ball games, coaching me and I never had... a dad and he was so mild compared to my mother. He’s very meek and reserved and very controlled. Like he won’t ever hit me, like three times in my life... and the one time I called him a pothead to his face so I deserved it... and him and I came to the point that I used sort of him as my communication to my mom... (where was your father at the time that your mom was being too heavy handed?) He was there but I think he was as afraid of my mom as I was... because she would beat on him too... Sometimes he’d ask her to leave me alone, tell her she was going to hurt me...

...I was raped so I never had sex again until I got married... (do you want to talk at all about that?) That’s really hard. Well, it’s not as hard as it used to be... I worked up north with my aunt and uncle at a camp... And I used to work at the camp and I decided to walk from town into the camp on my own... and one of my cousin’s friends drove and he stopped and asked me if I wanted a ride and it was him who did it... and so I was very afraid of telling anybody... (Did he threaten you if you told?) Yeah, he’d say that... I wanted it and I was all over him and I couldn’t really fight him. I had a broken leg at the time so I couldn’t... (You were walking?) I was walking with my cast. And I could walk good though but... I couldn’t even really... struggle properly. Yeah, I couldn’t run and when he was finished he just threw me out of the car... I went to see the camp doctor... I had a lot of bruises and stuff on my face and arms and I had a couple of cracked ribs and I didn’t tell them what had happened and it took me a long time to even admit it to my mother... and then when I did I felt like she sort of used it against me. She was always like well, why are you going out dressed like that? Look what happened to you before and... I just didn’t deal with it for years...

Relationships with Partners

... In 1986 I was married... to a Portuguese man who is not a landed immigrant. A year later we had our first child [Lisa]. Before the child turned a year old we separated... I really had a hard time with that. I tried to get help from Children’s Aid... I didn’t get any... (What kind of support were you looking for?) Counselling... Emotional support. I was really devastated... We separated because... he was sleeping around and he used the excuse because I paid too much attention to Lisa... He felt that I did too much for her. I didn’t pay enough attention to him which maybe I didn’t... I think we learn things as we get older... it was just one of those things we were too young and for Ed the grass looked greener on the other side... (Was your first husband physically abusive?) Not extremely but did a lot of pushing around. He was very emotionally abusive... He wouldn’t let me go to work; he wouldn’t let me go to school. Very controlling. He wouldn’t give me any money...
… So, for a couple years I went through a really, really hard time in my life… when I first separated with him, this other man [Carl] that I ended up with… said all these things that my husband hadn’t said and after about six months… he had alienated me very slowly from my family and my friends… that’s when the abuse started… when you grow up abused in some way… you think that that is the way that life is normal… it was very severely, severely abusive… He got charged with criminal counts of assault against me… I was hospitalized… He beat me up so bad one time that he broke all the… blood vessels in my eyes and my own daughter, Lisa was afraid of me and she thought I was a monster… (How did you get out of that relationship?)… I called my mom and dad, they were living up in [city] and I had just gotten out of the hospital where I had major surgery done on my stomach and the night that I come home he threw a scalding cup of coffee on me, pushed me down the stairs…and he bit my shoulder… He was a very bad alcoholic and I told mom what was going on… I was living by myself…But Carl would never leave my house… my mom and dad a week later showed up in the middle of the night with a U-Haul truck and I waited until the pulled in the driveway and I woke Carl up and I said you’ve got to go my mom and dad are here and I’m leaving…

…I stayed away for a year, really thought I had it together, really worked on my self esteem and believe it or not he sucked me back in… He just kept showing up everywhere… telling me how sorry he was, he would never do it again… He told me he’d taken an anger management class… I would come home and I’d go to sleep and all of the sudden I’d feel somebody get into bed with me… (Could you lock your doors?) Oh, I did. He would smash out windows… and I would call the police and… every single time they were the ones that charged him… (Were you not charging him yourself?) No, because I was afraid… He wouldn’t just threaten me; he would threaten other people, my family, my friends… I realized, you know, this could be my daughter… He was very good to Lisa… But I just saw the anger getting so bad…And I thought what if Lisa…had already heard so much… [after] I had split up with Carl… my whole house was trashed… My daughter collected … music boxes… They were all smashed… He had chopped up my kitchen table… I called the police. (Did you know it was Carl?) Oh, yeah… He stood out on the street telling me how proud he was. He told the cops how proud he was… He told the cops if they left me alone he was going to try and kill me… (Is he around?) He lives here in [city]… He married the girl [Sue] that used to take me to the hospital to get patched up…I think twice I’ve seen him in nine years and I just get the cold shivers… I’m still terrified… he’s one of those people that you see on talks [shows] that kill their girlfriends… And a couple years after him and Sue were together, Sue said to me you know, I want us to get our friendship back… thank god I had gotten stronger and I said you know what, Sue, I really love you but as long as you have Carl in your life, I cannot have you in my life…

Interviewer: So how long were you own your own before you met Phil?

A couple of years. You know, I saw people and stuff like that. Actually that’s how I met Phil. I was dating his brother [Bob]… [Bob] was a godsend… He just became a best friend, you know, and if it hadn’t of been for him, I don’t think that I would have been
able to go into a relationship with Phil… He taught me that some men were okay… He was just consistent … Consistently nice… Consistently stuck to his word… When we went out he treated me just as nice as he treated me, you know, when we were together… 

(How did you meet Phil – Bob introduced you?) Yeah. (Was it love at first sight?) Yeah, it was… And Bob knew it too… because he was going back to [Maritime province]. He said do me a favour, stay away from my brother Phil while I’m gone… It was probably the most natural relationship that I’ve ever felt. (And Bob didn’t have a problem with it?) He did at first… Bob realized eventually that him and I were more friends than we were anything else… and now we – we’re best friends… That’s the brother that’s living here… I’m best friends with him and his fiancée. I’m her maid of honour… So, things come in full circle … it’s nice because Bob and I can be friends… he’s just wonderful but he’s wonderful for somebody else… And Bob’s [fiancé Diane], she’s just probably one of the kindest people… I’ve ever met… They’re going to be here for a while I think. They had some things go wrong a few months ago financially. So, they could either stay with us or cancel the wedding… (That’s a houseful.) Yeah, because we’ve got their two girls Sally and Jodi…

… [Phil] was a single father of three children… his wife left him for another woman so it’s a really emotional battle already before anything started. It’s hard for the kids… Their mother cares basically nothing for them. She gave birth to them and Phil raised them… (So, she came from [Maritime province]?) Yeah, she came first to be with her lover and after two years of being here she called Phil and said Phil, I’ve changed my mind. I know our marriage is worth it. Sell everything we own and you and the kids come here… So, he did it and they got here and she was still with the other woman… she had no intention of being involved with the kids either… she was very abusive to Phil too… He has scars all over his body. She threw a T.V. at him and collapsed his lung… He’d rather he took the beatings than the kids…

… Phil had a very hard time finding a job because he had been out of the workforce raising his kids… He was really looked down upon in the male workforce… Social services… harassed us… they thought Phil didn’t want to work… we were paying 900 dollars a month rent getting a welfare cheque for 13 hundred dollars and [social services worker] was griping about it… We had five kids to feed… and if it weren’t for my parents, we would not have made it… (How long were you on welfare?)… I was on mother’s allowance… As a single mom and he was on as a single parent and… we were spending a lot of time at each other’s house but we weren’t living together… and they said to me that I no longer had a right to collect a cheque as a single parent when I gave birth to Tiffany… we should have still had the right to remain in separate households because I wasn’t ready for his kids… [but] we had to join. They just totally cut my cheque off the day Tiffany was born. (The mother’s allowance?) Yes… And left me with no choice… (Were you ready to be a family?)… I wasn’t and… I think I did have a nervous breakdown… I couldn’t cope… I wasn’t ready… And I didn’t have the right to not be… (what was your relationship like when you were living in separate households?) Fantastic… (you were … feeling pressured to blend the families…) Yes, very pressured… (How did that go over?) Not very good at first… we ended up separating for a little while… and I went back to live with my mom and dad… (How long had you been
living together when you chose to separate?) Two years… (so what went into the decision to move out to your parents’ home…) My sanity… it was really… more to do with me because I still loved Phil…

*Interviewer: Were you the stay at home mom?*

I was trying to be… things got worse with me home with the kids… I finally decided to be the one to go to work and Phil stayed home… That worked out a lot better. It meant that we lived on a lot less because you know women make lower wages than men… *(Where did you live?)*… we moved closer to my mom and dad… so that they could help us… *(An apartment? House?)* Houses… I started working [at food processing company] and my back got really, really bad… and Phil… worked under the table so we could still get our child tax credits and stuff like that… *(When were you working… You walked in the door and took on your next job or did you get a little reprieve?)* No, I got a little reprieve… Phil has always been great around the house… but … I felt that I had to do it all emotionally… Phil does not deal with anything emotional so he just sweeps it under the carpet and says tomorrow will be a better day, deal with it… *(How does that make you feel?)* I get really angry about it but now I say to him no Phil, we’re dealing with it now… And if we don’t deal with it now, then it’s going to cause a bigger problem… I had to learn to say those words…

*Interviewer: So, how were things with Phil being the primary caregiver for all the kids?…*

That went really good for a few years until I got hurt and then my compensation just wasn’t enough for us both to live on and actually the year I got hurt he got a student loan and went back to school… the money… from that and my comp, that sort of pulled us through that year. He didn’t find work here in his field… he got a job out at… a shipping and receiving company so once again that was enough… and now he’s the one making the more money… and it’s easier now because I only have one kid home half the day, the rest don’t come home until three… So, you know, we’re doing a lot better now… We’ve come a long way…

**Adult Relationships with Family of Origin**

… after I had Lisa, that’s when I think mom and I started getting really close… once I could see and trust her with Lisa I think that’s when I started to get rid of the chip on my shoulder. I wasn’t the only person in the world that had a bad childhood… and I was either going to hate it for the rest of my life or I was going to take what she was going to give now… My mother knew that in order to be able to spend time with Lisa that I did not agree with her losing her temper … I just laid it right on the table… and said that you’re not allowed to hit my child… eventually down the road she did hit Lisa and it was in a situation where Lisa deserved it. She did not go overboard… I believe that… the grandparent has the right … to discipline… I don’t think they should wait, bring it home to me and let me mull it over… there was a couple times that I said to mom, you know, I think you were a little harsh but… She proved to me that she changed and she
apologized… for the abuse that she’s put on me and explained that it was all that she knew… And that made a big difference… Hearing her be able to say I’m sorry…I didn’t do it because I hated you… I did it because I loved you and it was the way I was shown… to discipline…

*Interviewer: you talked about being very, very close to your mom and yet she…*

Yeah… it was a real love-hate relationship… it was hard for my mom to realize that she made me choose her or Phil at one point and she had done it with Ed and I had chose my parents and when she did it to me again I chose Phil… *(Was there ever a moment when you were thinking you might choose your mom?)* No… I knew that I had to choose Phil… he just felt right with me. You know, I think we all at some point in our lives meet somebody that just feels like we’ve always been with them… I remember saying to mom, mom, I love you… I’m not choosing not to have you in my life but I’m not choosing not to have Phil… she was very angry for at least a year… she just wanted all of me… She wasn’t just with, you know, my partner, even with my mom’s own mother, my mom was extremely jealous of her… *(How did you deal with that?)* It was hard sometimes… She was a control fanatic… I wish I could have had… some of her sense of control… My mom was organized… to the tee… even when she came into my house right away she’d quickly do this, do this and yet I had a very hard time with it…

… When mom started to get really sick with the bipolar, she started to become very dependent on me … and you know one minute she would love me, the next minute she’d hate me… and then I told her, you know, like mom… go talk to somebody, it’ll make you feel better and then it was through that… the bipolar came and neither my dad or I were shocked… it made perfect sense… for a long time she was allergic to all the medication so they had a really, really hard time finding meds to help her and that’s when the separation came about because my mom was so sick… My dad was fed up… My mom was fed up. She didn’t know whether she was coming or going so she decided she wanted a divorce but she wanted all his money. It was comical actually. *(And you understood your father’s position through this?)* Yeah… My dad’s a good guy, you know… I just didn’t praise my dad to my mom because that would trigger her… my dad and I have been very close most of my life… *(You had talked about how you were really close with your father until your first marriage)*… I don’t think he knew how to be a part of my married life… I don’t think he’d figured it out yet… that’s the sort of feeling I got… I think he felt intimidated that I was grown up and married…

*Interviewer: Did she ever get to be a mom to you?…*

Yeah, she has, the last five years… she’s nurtured me a lot… as many fights as we’ve had about Phil, she’s been there for me… to talk to about you know and I’ve had problems with the kids or with Phil which is not very often with Phil… I could call her and she really was there for me and that was a new part… of our relationship and when she started having problems with her and dad I became her whole world… I had always been her focal point but now it was… almost overwhelming… to the point of annoyance… and now she wanted to be with me all the time and… *(As a friend or as a*
mother?) As a mother… I needed it… I think that you need to be nurtured at some point in your life, whatever age it ends up being…

… my mom was killed violently in a car crash . . . I was very, very deeply in a grieving process… I’m still grieving… it only happened [in] February… Every night she keeps telling me off in my dreams. I don’t know what it’s about. She’s doing it to Phil too and my dad… They’re all having the same bad dreams… if spirits have any control in the afterlife, I can’t see her still not being here because I was her world… I started seeing the psychic… the first time we went she told us a lot of things that really blew my mind… so then we went shortly after my mom died and we had my mom’s urn on the piano in the living room at the other house and when we emptied mom’s house we had to put all the furniture into that living room… she was sort of closed in to this corner… as soon as I sat down, the psychic said to me your mother is really bothered by something… She said you’ve got her put in a dark corner… (What made you decide to go in the first place?)… there was 20 thousand dollars hidden in my mother’s house. We never found it… (And you were hoping the psychic would be able to know where it was?) Right. By the time she started telling us this other stuff I forgot all about asking her about the money. (How did you know the money was hidden?)… she was hiding it for my dad… my dad had actually had his hands on the money two days before she died… But she didn’t put it back to where she told him to get it from… the psychic did tell us… that there was a special gift left for us in my mom’s red pants. We can’t find the red pants…

… I’m not coping with my mom’s passing very good… Everybody says oh, you’re doing so well but they’re not in the bedroom when I cry… when my grandmother died, see, that’s when I learned to appreciate my mom… and so then when [mom] died, you know, that was just… (Like a double loss?) Yeah… We fought like cats and dogs and we got on like two friends instead of just you know, the mother and daughter… I felt so frustrated by it but now that she’s gone I miss it so bad… I miss being the centre of somebody’s world…

Interviewer: What’s going on with your dad?

Well, he decided to tell me a couple weeks ago that he’s getting married in two years to… this 31 year old and… (Do you like her?) She’s okay… She’s like a hippie or something… I think it’s a good thing. I don’t think he does well alone… So, you know, this is what’s keeping him going right now so be it… He’s doing things that are very out of character… He started smoking pot again and… He’s 54… He went and got his nipple pierced… And then he went and got a tattoo… (Where is he?) He’s at his girlfriend’s… (So, what else is he up to?) Well, he’s working a little bit now so that’s easier, it’s not a financial burden on us… (Did he just move to [city where girlfriend lives]…?) No. He’s supposed to be here… (I wasn’t aware that he lived with you) Yeah… He was living with us because he was still living in the house my mom… they hadn’t never even moved out from each other… and my mom already had the house sold, we couldn’t stop that so dad had to come live with us…
Children

… they had told me that I wasn’t able to have children because all of the scar tissue and damage they had done to my ovaries. So… I told my doctor I thought I was pregnant and he told me there was… no possible way that that could be… and so for the longest time he wouldn’t even listen to me… I was 22 by then… And finally he… sent me for a urine test. Two urine tests came back negative… I said no, I don’t care… I’m pregnant. He basically said okay, I’ll do a blood work on you just so you’ll shut up about it… And he called me back and he said I am so sorry. He said you are and I don’t know how you are… and then he had to take me and my husband into the office and say that… they wanted to do an [amnio]… and I said no. I said I wasn’t supposed to get pregnant… Just let be what’s going to be… So, it was like a T.V. thing when I was in the delivery room. They had all these specialists and it was just crazy and she was perfect… (So, how did both of you feel given the circumstances?) Overjoyed… But then scared… you worry you know, what am I going to give birth to and… are we going to be able to live with the responsibility of not taking that test and just everything and I was so sick through the whole pregnancy. I was in the hospital almost the full eight months. I gave birth to her a month early and… she wasn’t lacking anything… everything just went good and [doctor] just basically said well, you got lucky…be grateful for what you have…

… when my daughter was three… I met Phil [and] I went to [doctor] and told him that I thought about having another child and he told me he didn’t think I could. He really believed that Lisa was a fluke… he called us back to his office and said that he would be able to sponsor us to the fertility clinic…doctors can sponsor so many people a year or so so that you don’t have to put out all that cost yourself… I had to go to [city]… for injections… and so Phil and I went home and we talked about it and we really didn’t think with four kids in the house that was fair. So, we said no… Then Phil’s mom had died and all his brothers and sisters were at our house and I had been basically taking care of everybody and… Phil came from a family of 16… I just felt so run down and tired… and I went to the doctor’s and I was pregnant and… [doctor] gave us only a two percent chance with the fertility program… And Tiffany was a lot different. I was very healthy through my pregnancy with her but she was very tiny… only five pounds… And she was overdue… (What do you make of that?)… I was blessed… (And now you have five children) Yeah… be careful what you wish for…you just might get it…

Interviewer: How old [were] the children… when you created the blended family?

Eight, 11, little Chad was five and my Lisa was three and I was pregnant with Tiffany. The girls were just acting out in every possible way. Liz was running away all the time… to her mom’s… her mom didn’t want her so she would come home and then it would be even worse… I couldn’t handle them… They took out a lot of their anger that they felt towards their mother on me, which is understandable… I decided to go to work… and I said to Phil… they’re your kids and you’re going to look after them…They really didn’t want Phil and I together… they were going to do whatever it took and they went through that for about two and a half years where… I would come into a room and they would pretend I didn’t exist… (Did you talk to Phil about what was going on at home and what
his kids were doing?) He understood and… he really did care and try to understand where I was coming from but on the same hand he had been the sole parent to these kids… He couldn’t choose over his kids… They had nobody, you know?…

… And even with Phil being home with the kids, things were still getting very progressively worse with the… two oldest girls… Liz is now 18 and Keri is 16. And Liz left home when she was 15… She just went from place to place… Finally she settled in with another family so it was okay… (How was it when she left?)… some of the stress disintegrated… Liz was gone that time for about a year and when she came back, the other daughter started… really badly… Chad, who I have yet to talk about… doesn’t remember much of his life with his mom… yet he still has that abandonment issue… My daughter Lisa, she’s the opposite. Ed comes to the door and she says, you’re not a very good dad… Chad’s daddy… does everything with me and until you do the things you’re supposed to do, I’m going to spend my weekends with Phil… Tiffany is the same personality, very strong, she says what she’s got to say and… not in the way Keri does… Keri is walking down the street and there’s a fat lady, she’ll look at the fat lady and say are you ever fat, lady. Like it’s embarrassing to be with her because she’s so verbally assaultive but… their mom was very verbally and physically abusive to them… I think Liz and Keri were nine and 12 when I finally had to explain what a lesbian is and same sex relationship and… Phil disagreed with it because he was very hurt… I tried very hard to teach the kids that any love is good love… whether it’s two women, two men, doesn’t matter… and I can remember when Liz was coming into that age she was so confused about her sexuality… She wanted to be a boy so she didn’t have to worry that she might like girls…

… Lisa, she’s enough to drive you insane… She’s an in your face kid… Everybody hates me, nobody likes me… things got so bad at one point with Phil’s kids, I actually had to allow my daughter to go live with my mother for a year to try and get Phil’s kids under control and that didn’t really help… I didn’t exist to my mother anymore, it was just Lisa, Lisa. And I’d think that sounds stupid, you’re an adult, you know?… Lisa would come home every weekend and spend all summer holidays and all Easter breaks… Lisa was a fairly good student and when we started having troubles with all the kids, her grades started to drop dramatically… and she started… to pull in emotionally so we thought [mother’s] was a good alternative… And of course my mom being bipolar went overboard and totally took control of Lisa so it wasn’t a nice scene. I got Lisa home… (What went in to the decision at the time Lisa was returning?) Things had settled down quite a bit, quite a bit. And what hadn’t settled down, at least we were dealing with it and advertently discussing it among everybody…

Interviewer: How would you characterize your position about the kids and [Phil’s]?…

I want to know every single thing that’s going on in their lives and he wants to know nothing… I think that I should know where they are, who they’re with, what they’re up to… so I’m always letting them have their friends here instead of them going to their friends… I’m getting better though. The last month I’ve been saying you know what, go to your other friends… But sometimes I say to Phil, wait a minute. You have to know
about this… (When did you feel like a mother to Phil’s children?)… I always felt that I was their mother I think because [Phil’s ex-wife] Marg wasn’t a part of the picture… I always felt that I needed to be… Now I want to be… And there’s a big difference… I love them… I told Marg if something was ever to happen to Phil, she would not get her children… Their blood, sweat and tears are mine. I’m the one that’s there every night to kiss them goodnight… I’m the one that makes sure that they’re safe… I can honestly say I love my daughter just as much as I love his kids… I also believe that they’ve had a mom for eight years now… and that’s sort of where I’m at with the girls now… Think about how lucky you were that I came into your life… You had somebody there because there are other children that didn’t have anybody… But like on mother’s day and stuff like that, you know, they go all out for me. They’ve never even so much as bought Marg a card in years… So, I know that they feel the same way I do… I’m not jealous of any kind of relationship they would ever choose to have with their mother… I used to encourage it… I used to always invite Marg to participate in everything in our house but… she would only participate if I put her on the spot… I started saying… I’m already raising her kids. I don’t need to look after her too…

… I believe very much in the afterlife and… I didn’t believe in it so much until I had Tiffany. I conceived Tiffany the week that Phil’s mom died… which meant nothing to me at the time. But Tiffany, she’s five, will sit and tell us about when daddy was little, about the boats in [Maritime province], about things she used to cook when I was big and you were little, dad… And poor Phil, he takes it really bad because she’s talked about outfits that Phil was wearing when he was little and… she told us about the whales…(Do you ever ask her any specific… questions to try and test?) Yeah, Phil has and that’s when she’s answered specifically… and just about everybody that comes around here is recognized, like any of his brothers or sisters and it’s just like… the children that Phil’s mom was drawn to… Tiffany is drawn to those aunts and uncles… She has an uncle Alex who she never met until this year… now this was Phil’s mom’s absolutely favourite son. He was going to be a priest… Tiffany is very shy of men. Alex walked in the door, Tiffany never stopped holding his hand until he left… any other man walks in this house, Tiffany won’t go near them…

Interviewer: Do you have a faith? Are you…

We’re Catholic… you know, we’re raising our kids Catholic, they go to the Catholic school, they go to their communions, they’re not believing in the Orthodox way of the Catholic Church… You know, I find it to be very chauvinistic… squared, you know, greedy… And we’re very open with our kids about god… (Is it a day-to-day thing, your Catholicism?)… No, no. God is a day-to-day thing… right now because of mom passing… at least once a day it’s brought up, you know, nanny is in heaven or nanny is watching over us… So, spiritually, you know, it’s a daily thing but Catholicism just when it’s necessary… (So, you’re not going to church on Sunday?)… No… the kids go to mass with the school and… when they’re old enough they can decide how involved they choose to become… in that religion… They have to come up with those beliefs… on their own…

206
… Keri is not even 16 yet… [and] her lungs are shot. We had to spend 90 dollars on steroids and everything… to clear out her lungs. *(Asthma, allergies?)* Asthma… And we hadn’t really let her smoke, she just wouldn’t give it up but when the doctor said this we said enough is enough… You don’t do it in our house… Keri is overly honest… Keri… had sex. She had to come home and tell me about it right away. And you’re trying to be open minded, happy that she’s come to you… but you’re disgusted that your daughter has now… done this deed you know and that’s what I mean… I think anybody who has kids, you know, they’re 16, 17, 18 [are] fooling themselves to think that those kids aren’t having sex… *(Have you had the conversation about safe sex with them?)* Oh, yeah… probably grade five… is when we started with each of the kids… safe sex, condoms, you know, the whole nine yards… Keri, we paid for her birth control, paid for pregnancy tests when she had pregnancy scares. *(False alarms?)* Yeah… Phil started having sex when he was 14 or 15. *(Okay. So, you were expecting around that age?)* Yeah… And we knew it would be Keri before the oldest…

… I truly believe, especially at 5, 6, 7, 8, a spanking gets their attention but I am unable to do it… *(Does Phil?)* Sometimes… Phil will hit them in the head and then I’ll have to bitch, don’t hit them in the head, you’ll turn them into retards. *(So, you just want him to spank them on the butt?)* Yeah… I decided to stop… the chain because abuse is a chain… It’s learned behaviour and like Phil always said, why can’t you give them one smack and I said you know, Phil, maybe I won’t be able to stop like my mom. *(Do you worry about that?)* Yeah. That’s why I don’t do it… *(And how about Phil, how does he discipline?)* Phil scares me… because he holds it in and holds it in and holds it in and then he loses it to the point that sometimes he… disciplines a little bit inappropriately… and then Phil and I will have words over it… because I don’t like the kids getting hit in the head or the face… I think with 16 and 18 year olds it’s absolutely of no value to hit them… They’re young adults. How would he like it if he went to work and somebody smacked him for not doing his job right?… When they’re younger you do it to get their attention… When they’re older, you’re just inflicting pain… *(Phil)* was raised in a way that physical discipline was very much but not to the point where they overused it so he finds it to be a positive… He had a different experience with it… no two people are raised the same… And the things we say before we have our kids that we’re going to do end up not, you know?… It’s like we all want the white house with the picket fence but it just doesn’t turn out that way…

… I don’t think we can go through anything in our life that doesn’t have an impact on how we parent… I’m very affectionate but so was my mom… *(Do you show affection by doing for people or giving things to people?)*… I’m a doer… I’m always taking on too much, offering too much, overspending myself. I love to do for people… I constantly question myself as a parent so that I can be the best parent that I can be… for our kids… *(What did your grandmother contribute to your parenting skills?)* Everything… My grandma would tell me everything… I grew up very young because of our household so my grandmother knew I needed survival skills I think so she made sure at eight that I could cook, that I could clean in case my mom took off… I could survive until she could get to me… I was like a little old lady, you know, I would rather be with a bunch of adults… my grandma was the one that told me that love… is free. You can give it every
day whether you’re good or bad… It’s not a prize and… that’s what I try and remember… I’m trying to work with my kids with love or say sorry with love, not things…

**Children’s Aid Society**

… Phil was involved with Children’s Aid in [Maritime Province]… Keri used to go to school and the school said that she wasn’t fed and… they ended up coming and see… it was Keri’s way of screaming out for help… Her mom held a pillow over her head. Her mom has beat her in the head. She has smacked her in the back of the head with eggs… So, pretty well from day one when Phil and I decided to reside together we started getting inquiries from Children’s Aid. They would show up at the door saying that we weren’t feeding our kids; we weren’t keeping the house clean… I think that Phil’s ex-wife and her lover were… they’re just the kind of people they’re not happy and I don’t think they want anybody else to be happy either… The first few times Children’s Aid sort of fell for it and they came out to our house and you know, made sure there was food… we had our school support us by the way when Children’s Aid tried to intervene … We had a priest support us. So, we were very lucky and very fortunate that… we had people to stand up for us… I contacted Children’s Aid on several occasions for help with the blended family. There was no help for blended families. *(What were you looking for?)* In-home counselling or out-of-home counselling… I made call after call… *(What was the response…)* They were putting us on lists… we played that game for about three years believing each time that I talked to these people that they were really putting us on a list…Things got progressively worse… we ended up contacting Children’s Aid… and asking them to put [Keri] into foster care… Phil was afraid at that time that he was going to get physical with her… She was very, very verbally abusive to everybody in the house…

*Interviewer:* **What happened when you called Children’s Aid and asked about foster care?**

They did respond that time… They put her in foster care but… It was like a holiday for Keri… It should have been a situation where she learned what goes on at home is the reality. Kids do do chores, kids do have curfews, kids don’t wear, you know, three hundred dollar coats… I liked the foster mom but it wasn’t the real thing… a youth worker took Keri… and bought her 80-dollar bras… So, Keri was starting to like this and… she wanted to stay forever. *(What was the arrangement?)* We signed for three months… Keri is very materialistic… So, the more they bought for her and the more money they gave her, the more she just racked it up… *(Did you speak to anybody about it?)* I did. They told me… that really would be the rules of their household… So, after about a month and a half Phil and I contacted Children’s Aid and said we want her out… So, she came home… *(And that went well?)* It went okay for a few weeks… but then at high school all sorts of things started to happen and… we’ve had contact with Children’s Aid to deal with Keri. She’s taken off several times. She’s been brought home by the police drunk… She’s a very hard child to deal with that way but yet I must say she’s my hardest helper at home… And then Liz came home… And all hell broke loose again…
and then Keri took off and she went to stay with a friend and Children’s Aid couldn’t do anything because she’s going to be 16… the place where she was was not a safe environment… I gave her an ultimatum and the Children’s Aid told me not to do that, that we should leave that door open at all times and have it open for her to come and go as she pleased… I don’t believe… that… At 15 kids know right from wrong and she needed to make up her mind. We have four other children besides her… I said you know you have two weeks to make this decision… I am sorry, I love you… (how are things going [now] with Keri and the C.A.S.?)… C.A.S. isn’t involved, they don’t want no more involvement with her… she’s going to be 16…

… before I had put Keri in foster care, I really believed in our children’s social system. I no longer do… like when Phil and I were trying to get help, we were told flat out if you have a drug problem or an alcohol problem, then we could probably get counselling for you or your family or if we were abusive to our children… There was no help or assistance for us… there needs to be help. There needs to be crisis intervention… (Did you try to find assistance outside Children’s Aid…?) Every source we contacted we had to pay… we just didn’t have the money… The kids are getting older so some of it’s getting easier. But now because they didn’t get the help they needed then, they’re going to carry baggage into their grownup lives and… it’s really sad that children have to grow up and not be able to reach out and get the help that they need to become productive young people…

… my ex-husband… said to Phil and I that he had a very big favour to ask us… he was with a woman and had a child after me and that girl already had a child that was just an infant… so he had sort of raised this infant plus he had his own child. But he left this woman and about a year after he left, Children’s Aid took the children away from her… They declared her unfit… they… should have contacted Ed immediately… before those children ever went in to care… They did not do that… They totally manipulated him because he could not read English… He asked us if we can help him… with Children’s Aid… [He] wants the kids to be here Monday to Friday because he works a foreman’s job… 16 hours a day and we don’t think after a year of foster care daycare is a very wise choice and then he’ll take them on weekends… And then… they have another sibling in this household… [Ed’s daughter Kyla]… spends every weekend with us but because the little boy [Tommy] has a separate father even though Ed raised him, access to him has been much more difficult… Kyla comes… with bruises, marks, scratches, black eyes… I’m told children will play, which they will, and they get hurt. Then she came with lice. Well, lice is nothing new in this house, we have five kids but to be maggoty with lice with welts on your head because you’ve dug so long is not… She starves for attention by the time she gets here… she said the big… man is mean to me, Amy-mama… She said… I want to take him to jail all by myself. I said what are you talking about?… The… man at (foster mother)’s house… [and] Kyla showed up with a black eye again… this is the fifth black eye she’s shown up with. (And what’s being done about this?) Nothing… every time you bring up something against the foster family or against C.A.S. they punish you… They think that they’ve made the decision about what makes a good foster home and we shouldn’t question that… I said to [C.A.S. worker], Kyla needs nurturing and she needs physical affection and she told me well, what do you expect, she’s in a foster
home. *(So, that is allowed to be missing because it’s foster parents?)* Right. But it’s not allowed to be missing in a normal home?… *(What other differences… do you see between parents and foster parents?)* There’s all sorts of them… They provide childcare relief, they, you know, tell them how they need time off. Children’s Aid never walks into a home and says you need a time out, we’re going to find you some childcare… Give me a break…

… Children’s Aid re-nagged on all the promises that they made… they keep saying that it’s in the best interest of the children when… the children they should be with people that love them, know them and where they want to be… They think that the children would be better off in the daycare the 16, 17 hours a day. *(So, they’re basically saying the children would be in better care at daycare than with you and your husband and family?)* Yeah… it’s a confusing thing because they only have good things to say about us in their reports. So, they have nothing negative to say about Ed’s household or our household… *(Are you just trying to provide daycare or are you asking for joint custody?)* No, we’re just trying to provide daycare to help him… Kyla’s sibling is in this household… So it makes more sense for siblings to be together… If they’re made Crown wards, they’re put up for adoption immediately… That means we have no contact until they’re 18. Meanwhile they have a perfectly capable father with a wonderful support system for raising these two children…

*Interviewer: How would you characterize your relationship with Children’s Aid Society?*

Not good… I believe that if you’re going to protect a child, you’ve got to do more than follow a book… C.A.S. needs to learn to communicate more clearly to the people that they’re dealing with so there isn’t no misunderstandings because I don’t think the courtroom is the time to find out there is a misunderstanding… I think that if people are trying their best to help a child, Children’s Aid needs to be honest and they are very, very deceptive people… everything that they told Ed and I to do for care, they used it against us… I told the worker that I was very disgusted… and that she’s not to be trusted… and I think they’re making it hard for parents to be parents… Kids are getting spanked for… thousands of years and now they’re going to take kids away from their parents because they spank them. They should take kids away that are in serious danger, they’re in danger of being abused… and they’re in danger of emotional abuse… And I love it how with unfit parents they make appointments. Well, of course unfit parents are going to clean up their house…Children’s Aid felt that if Kyla was in this home she’d be treated as second-class citizen because she’s not biologically connected. *(… how do you feel that they made that decision?)* I don’t understand that at all and the judge spoke up and said I don’t think that is correct… he says… I commend Amy… I really trusted [C.A.S. worker]… She had her own game plan all along… and I think… there needs to be more men [who are CAS workers]…

**Mental and Physical Health**

…when I was 16 I started having a lot of internal problems… I had cists the size grapefruits all over my ovaries… and there was about eight of them I guess and they removed them all… they weren’t cancerous but they kept me in the hospital and two
weeks later they had to go and remove 15 more that had already grown… [and] there was cancer. So, they removed them all and I didn’t have to go through chemo or anything at that time because they were contained… and then the third episode it was like strings in my uterus and it’s a type of cancer… and that’s when I had to go down to [city] and go through chemo… (And then so what was the last time that you had a cancer scare?)… No, there was two more times that they had to go in and scrape out my uterus and then I had to have laser treatments done twice after that…

… about three years into [relationship with Phil] I thought that I was going to have a breakdown … because of all of the scenarios going on… I just started to hide out in my bedroom…I wasn’t nurturing anybody. Not myself, not Phil, not the kids… I called the [mental health agency] and said if they didn’t help me I was going to commit suicide… I wasn’t going to commit suicide but I knew that I needed to speak to somebody… Within 24 hours I had a counsellor… The counsellor was very good… she recommended… my psychiatrist and she’s been my psychiatrist now for eight years… And thank god, you know, for my psychiatrist… because she pulled me through it… She is just a – a fantabulous person… she’s become a friend… and she does it out of her home so it’s very comfortable…

Interviewer: When you got hurt and had to stay at home, how did that feel for you…?

I was devastated… I’ve been off now for three years on compensation. I totally crushed my fourth and fifth vertebrae… I wasn’t even allowed to lift my three-year-old daughter up… and nobody in the house wanted to understand that mom could no longer do all this stuff and when I first injured myself, they thought that it was only going to be a six to eight week recovery and I’m a… pretty recoverable person. Example, I went in for a hysterectomy just before I went back to work originally and I was out of the hospital within 12 hours and home… but it wasn’t the same… and the more I tried the worse I got… I tried two more attempts to go back to work… … and work of course ran out of things for me to do. And I ended up, you know, back on comp… (How did it feel to get the hysterectomy?) … I’ve had a lot of health problems since I had it… it screwed up my thyroid… and within six months of my hysterectomy I gained 80 pounds… it dramatically changed my lifestyle… because of a huge weight gain I was going through and then I went on to gain another 40 before they finally figured out that I have a thyroid… disorder and even now even though I’m on a thyroid medication it doesn’t make you lose weight… it just helps stop you from putting on… excess weight… I’m having a very hard time taking the weight off…

… I have to go down to [city] and I’m in a chronic pain program… For my injury… and I have OCD, obsessive compulsive disorder… it’s stupid stuff and I’m manic list writer… like I’m not one of those fanatics who has to have a clean house… (What kind of things were you learning?) Everything, just all sorts of different interpersonal skills… Self esteem… I learned about things that I never really realized that I had the power… to do… and you know they would all laugh at me because I would come to the program, it was Christmas time, with lists and lists and lists of things I’m going to do and you know… a list of 36 things to do each day before Christmas… I learned about delegating… it’s
never been difficult to delegate with Phil… since my injury… Phil… has done 90 percent of the housework … but what I learnt in the program was Phil didn’t need to be doing it… The girls were old enough… because he was doing everything… You know, he was working. He was doing the housework… And then he’d come home and … the kids were bad…

**Interviewer:** … *do you feel any control of the obsessive compulsive nature?*

… I would say it’s pretty well been under control probably for eight years now… My psychiatrist pretty well diagnosed it right away … I’m a chronic list writer and that’s what she said to me, do you think it’s normal to write 20 to 30 lists a day, Amy?… *(how do you feel when they take away that opportunity to make a list?)*… sometimes it pisses me off… sometimes I feel like that is what controls my day… [at chronic pain program] they told me they were going to make me write my list on a piece of… poster board and I’d have to carry that around… Well, no, I don’t want to do that… And then they got me down so that instead of having a page of lists, all that I was allowed to have was a recipe card… I had more stuff crammed on those recipe cards but that’s about the only thing, just the lists now… *(I was wondering if you could reflect on… some… new coping skills)*… I had to learn how to relax, step back from the situation and say to myself, you know what, this is really stupid… I am the parent…That was such a huge step for me… It still is… like I don’t know, discovering that I had OCD and getting the medication was another coping skill… Realizing that there was a reason that I get stuck on things… once I had the medication, that was huge, huge… *(Huge difference?)* Yeah, huge. *(What kind of changes did you recognize?)*… I was able to let things go… And instead of cleaning a windowsill for a whole day, I would sit down and talk to the kids…

**Daily Life**

**Interviewer:** Describe a typical week to me…

… Well, right now I’m not working because of my back so… the typical week pretty well revolves around the kids… and household chores and who’s going to help cook supper… Mondays are usually a pretty heavy day because the house is a mess from the weekend… So, I have to get everybody in gear and they have to help me a lot now… every night we try to sit down to dinner… all of us together… Tuesdays and Thursdays are laundry days and we’re getting to the point now that Keri… sometimes she’ll cook us supper to give me a break… but we’ve got chore lists and everything so every day is pretty planned out before it gets here… because there’s so many of us in the house… a couple times a week we’ll rent movies… *(Inteviewer: when do you do groceries?)* Usually on Mondays… or on a Saturday … Phil and I used to go and twice a month we’d spend 500 dollars but now… because the kids are home all day, we’re just going through food like crazy… We’ve just been going and getting what we need a few days… we’re finding it’s a lot more economical… because you know, we spend anywhere from 12 to 14 hundred dollars a month on groceries… fruit is expensive and we like to have lots of fruit and stuff like that in the house… and a lot of healthy snacks… because one of my girls is starting to get really chubby so we’re really… *(Watching her diet?)*Yeah… And
to watch one’s diet, you sort of got to watch them all so that one doesn’t get centred out…

*Interviewer: What’s this neighbourhood like?*

Good. *(Yeah. Lots of small kids?)* Yes… *(And you like it here?)* Yeah… even before we bought the house we lived around the corner so yeah, I really, really like this neighbourhood. We purposely looked for a house in this neighbourhood to come on the market. *(Okay. What do you do for fun?)* We belong to [community centre]… so we do… barbecues, picnics, karaoke… usually we go to the beach and stuff like that but… All the kids are busy so… we haven’t been doing that as much too this year… I like watching movies with the kids and Phil, it’s fun…

**Personal Interests and Friends**

*Interviewer: So… what’s [Amy] like?*

The girl that I am now?… Strong-willed, very creative. I say what I got to say and I don’t care what anybody thinks… To a point, you know… I won’t directly hurt somebody’s feelings… I don’t need somebody else to pay my way, pave my way and make my bed… I’m a read-aholic… anything that I can read that can help with the kids or help with me personally on my own journey… you know, yeah, I’ll read it… I’ve always read to all our kids… On bad days… That’s my coping strategy. I go read… It’s time to go read…

… I paint … I do a lot of life-size murals… and toll painting… And a lot of it I just donate… for prizes and fundraisers… *(Life size murals of?)* Anything… where we lived just before this I had the whole house. *(Oh. So, the canvasses were your walls?)* Yeah… People would bug me to take courses and at that time I didn’t have a lot of money… I bought books and just fiddled away… I was really awful at first. A lot of things just got thrown out or I gave them away as gifts. The people probably hid them in their closets but now it’s the opposite… you know, constantly, will you do this for me?… I just had a shower for my girlfriend and I had a prize table and what you do is you buy an arms-length of tickets for five bucks and all this stuff on the table was stuff I had made and I made 200 dollars… it makes me feel great…*(Is that something that you would consider… as part of a career?)* It probably will always be because I’ve just got so much demand for it now. They’re always people calling. I do these frames too… we just started them at shows and they were just one of the many things… and people just went crazy for them because you can do it for anybody and it’s personalized… *(What else do you do? Is it just painting?)* I’m creative with anything… like right now I’m doing all the hats for the weddings… and… I decorate cakes…

…I’m taking the two courses so I spend a lot of time that I would have normally spent painting or stuff on the computer working on my courses… trying to get myself ready for a new career. *(Tell me about the new courses.)* It’s a medical transcriptionist and legal aid… And what I want to be able to do is be able to do it out of the home so the lawyers
and doctors can just e-mail me their information, like what we’re doing right here and I’ll transcribe their tapes for them… (How did you get interested in doing something like that?) Just going through my capabilities and being honest with myself since this injury… and that’s sort of what we came up with… having a home business would allow me to work around my pain… [psychiatrist is] going to let me do our medical transcription for my placement… for her… (And how are you liking it?) I like it… I’ve got a 90 percent average so far. (Are you finding it difficult to find the time?) Yeah… you really have to use your memory and when you’ve got a bunch of kids… so yeah I found it a little bit harder since the summer started… I’m hoping I’ll be done the… the courses by January… 

… I have loads of acquaintances, female acquaintances but very few female friends… because… they’re bitches… they like to cause each other pain… I choose my female friends very, very, very carefully… I probably only have five that you know I confide in… my very best friend in the whole world… even her and I have been bitches to each other… So I think a man-woman combination is better friends than two women… It’s a more honest relationship… I don’t find women feel comfortable enough to be honest with each other a lot of times… We’re always trying to one up each other… But I find as you get older you get more used to women… you feel connected to certain women in your life… there’s certain things that you get in your female relationships… But I don’t find when you’re younger that you really need it… (Or you can get it in friendships with men?) Yeah… you know, Phil will tell me go shopping or something with the girls but I like home. I prefer to do stuff that Phil can come or the kids can come… I enjoy my time visiting with my friends when they come to the house and I enjoy that very much. I’m more comfortable when I’m at home…
Susan

Growing up

My home? It was pretty easy. We lived in the country for eight years of my life anyway, until I was eight… I liked living there because my dad had horses and the barn and stuff and chickens… My mom had three children when my mom and dad got together. She was married before and she had a boy and then she had twins, a girl and a boy. And then my dad was married before too and has a daughter. Then my mom and dad got together and my mom wasn’t going to have any more kids but my dad wanted some more so they had me and my sister… My brother, the oldest one, is 13 years older than me and then the twins are 11 years older than me… My sister is two years older than me.

My dad was abusive. I don’t remember it, but [it was] when [my parents] first got together… then they became Christians and… he stopped drinking. (Do you know how long the drinking and abuse went on?) I think ten years. (And then they became born again Christians?) Yeah… We went to a Pentecostal church… When we moved here, we lived on a base… It’s not really a boot camp… I can’t even explain it. They had these houses or apartment buildings and then they had these training sessions for learning more about God… And then after that we went to Hawaii for three months. They did a biblical training camp there and they had a base there too… We went to Hawaii in ’86 so it would have been about ’87 [when] we came back here and we were living in an apartment building. And then after that, they bought the house… (So you were in your early teens?) Yeah, maybe about 13.

My mom and dad had me in a Christian school too for about five years… I went from grade five until grade nine or ten. I just didn’t like the dress code. You had to wear dresses every day. It gets kind of boring. (So when you went to high school you switched to the public school?) Yeah. I bugged my parents to let me go to a normal high school… Well, I wasn’t really exposed to too many non-Christian people. So all the people at high school are, you know, that’s when I started doing drugs and, you know, maybe my mom and dad should have left me in the other school when that happened… It was just experimenting because I didn’t really know what it was, you know. (Do you think you were pretty naïve going into high school?) Yeah, I would say because my mom never talked to me about anything. She didn’t talk to me about sex or drugs. She didn’t even really know what drugs were right because even when she was suspicious of me, she didn’t know what to look for… I liked [going to a non-Christian school]. Just being with normal people… In the Christian school they were about two grades above every one… they were more advanced. I was in grade nine and when I got to [public highschool] I
was in grade ten and I had already done the stuff two years ago. So, I flew by it, you know, grade 11 was a little harder because I didn’t know anything but grade ten I had just taken all the stuff that they were teaching so it wasn’t anything new… Math was a very hard class for me. I didn’t like math. So math was always low right but other than that… yeah, I didn’t have any problems.

Interviewer: What role did the church play in your life?

I’d go Sunday morning, Sunday night, Friday night and Wednesday night… It was fun because it was Sunday school and then I was involved with the youth group which they did a lot of activities… I think I was in high school when I stopped going. I think I was about 18. Yeah, I went through a rebellious stage. Like most people go through their rebellious stage when they’re 13 or 14. I was 17. (So, how did you rebel?) Just normal teenaged things, you know. My parents couldn’t tell me what to do. [My dad] still tries to control my life now, tell me what to do. (Was that a struggle at that time?) Not really because I was living under his, so he pretty much was in control, right, his rules, his house. (And were you rebelling against that?) Yeah… There were about seven or eight [people]… in [town] they have a coffee spot… we used to just go down there on Thursday nights [during high school]. There was a club down there that we used to just go to. (Were you using drugs and stuff at this point?) Yeah, just the straight forward weed. Just normal, nothing too hard... And that just kind of well, actually it stopped a little bit before I got pregnant [with Adam] and I haven’t done it since.

Becoming a Parent

I was in school and then I got pregnant with Adam and I did the first semester of school. I mean he was born in March so I didn’t finish the second semester. (Now, you have four children and Nick is the father of the youngest. What’s the story with the other three?) They all have different fathers… None of them stayed. It was almost like you get pregnant and they don’t want the responsibility and only one father pays support, but he only pays every four months. I found this out because when he’s making an effort and he only pays every four months they can’t take his [driver’s] license away for it. Right? So he makes a payment every four months… He owes them about five thousand dollars they told me… I’m not in contact with any of [the fathers]. (So, the children don’t have any contact with them?) No. Like before when the kids were young I tried, you know, having not really limits but persisting on them seeing their children but it never happened… But if they were to call me today and say, you know, I want to see my son or daughter or whatever, I would let them. But they would not be introduced as dad right away until I was sure that they’re going to stay around for the child’s life … I just hope they don’t get mad at me for not knowing them, right because, you know, I have done everything I can. You can only do so much.

Interviewer: So, what were those relationships like?

Not very good. Adam’s dad, we weren’t even together when I was pregnant. I found out I was pregnant after we split up, so I can’t really say too much about him. I was 19 when
I had [Adam]… I was still living at home. I moved out of my house when he was three months old… and ever since then I’ve been out… We were only together a couple months and then I found out I was pregnant. I can’t even remember if I told him right away because I didn’t really have any contact with him. I didn’t know where he was or anything. (So, the relationship was actually over when you found out you were pregnant?) Yeah, it was long over… [the pregnancy] was a surprise… My dad kicked me out when Adam was three months old. I moved in with [Owen’s father] because I needed a place to go… I knew [Owen’s dad] when I was dating Adam’s dad. We all hung out together… I only stayed [with Owen’s dad] for about two months and got my own place, my first apartment. And then we were kind of still seeing each other. But it was just after I moved into my apartment that I got pregnant.

Then I found out that he was kind of with a couple other girls too and we all got pregnant the same year, all had our babies in the same year. All three of us, yeah. There was three. One was born in February, Owen in July and the other in December… We all knew each other but that was pretty much the end of that relationship [with Owen’s dad] when I found that out. (So there was a group of you that hung around together. Was Adam’s dad part of that group?) Yes, that’s where we met. (And Owen’s dad too?) Yeah. (And Sarah’s dad, or was that later?) Well, I knew him back then. I didn’t really hang out with him too much but I knew him.

Interviewer: Were any of these relationships abusive?

No, just with Sarah’s father who was abusive. We were together for almost three years… It was off and on. He was there, he wasn’t there, he was there… It was okay in the beginning. And then, you know, we just fought too much. (And that got to be physically abusive?) Umhm. Just a lot of pushing and shoving and that sort of stuff. One time I did [get seriously hurt]… I had hand marks around my neck… he got charged and he beat the charge. I called the cops but the cops actually laid the charges because I had marks. (And he had a drinking problem?) Umhm. Every weekend or whenever he could. It was mostly just a weekend thing… (What about the first two men?) No, not as heavily. I don’t think I saw Adam’s dad drink really at all and Owen’s dad, he enjoyed to drink but he didn’t go overboard. Like he didn’t get physical or anything, he just went to have a good time, right.

Interviewer: And what about your current relationship with your fiancé?

Nick? No, he doesn’t drink. He likes to drink but he doesn’t. Like if we have the money, he’ll go and get like a 12-pack but it’ll last him like a week or two weeks because he just enjoys it after work or sometimes on the weekend if he’s out at a friend’s house he’ll have some, you know, if he’s offered one. But if we don’t have the money he doesn’t drink. He just enjoys it like with supper or whatever.
Interviewer: Did you plan to get pregnant with your last baby?

Yes. We just didn’t expect to be involved with Children’s Aid when I was pregnant. I was already three months pregnant when they came around. If I had a choice now, if I had known they were going to come around, I probably would have waited... because finances got really rough. *(What was the motivation for having another child?)* Mostly him [Nick]. He doesn’t have any of his own. He doesn’t have any with any previous relationships. So, he wanted - he wanted his own, which a lot of guys do if they’re in a relationship with other kids, right. So we just figured if we waited until we could afford it, we’d probably never have a baby so we might as well just do it… We talked about it because I was kind of like no. Dead set no at first. Just because four kids is a lot to handle right? And I didn’t know if I was ready. And then we talked about it for about six months just kind of like off and on and then I thought about it and thought well, okay, let’s just go ahead, right. So, I went off the pill and two months later I got pregnant [with Melanie].

**Children’s Aid Society**

I’ve been involved with [CAS] since 1997 here and there, nothing concrete… I’d have someone living with me that got mad at me and they’d call, that sort of stuff, you know, revenge. But they would come and they would talk to me and then they’d close the case so it wasn’t anything really. Even now, I still don’t know why they pulled the kids… Well, the last phone call, I don’t know who it was, but someone called and said that my house was an appalling state due to dogs and dirt. So, that was why they came. That was in the beginning of April, I think that was when they came… I think they called. I was at work. I was working at Tim Horton’s. My fiancé [Nick] got home first, he was here and he called them back and he said to them that we have a child’s birthday party to go to so if you’re coming out to look at the house, you’d better come now so we’re not late. So, they came and looked at the house and everything was fine and then we had to get going, so they left and then the next thing you know they were taking us to court for a supervision order.

Well, part of the reason was because our bedroom used to be downstairs and the door has a lock on it which the children don’t go down there so Nick wouldn’t let [the CAS worker] down there. Right? So, I think that’s part of the reason why they took us to court so they could get downstairs… they came concerning the kids and the kids were not allowed down there. The door stayed locked. [Nick] didn’t feel that they should be able to go downstairs. It was about a month later after they came [that CAS removed the children].

Then they had a supervision order with certain standards. One of the standards was that all of our babysitters had to be approved. So, the last time they were at court when they got the supervision order, my fiancé gave a name to the first worker and said how do we get her approved and she said well, I just run her name. And he says okay, you’ve got her name, can you approve her? Then nobody called us back and at the time he wasn’t working and then he got his old job back so I had to get the same babysitter. Then this
was the end of April when they took the kids, they came to the house, they switched workers after we went to court [for the supervision order] so I had a new worker. Then [CAS] came back and the babysitter that [Nick] had asked to get approved was here and they came and she was here. [The babysitter] had called me at work and said that they were here and stuff. And then when I got home they showed up shortly after that and said that that babysitter wasn’t approved and that I had to find someone else. So, I had to take the next day off of work because if I couldn’t have her, you know, short notice, I couldn’t find anybody. And the next day [CAS] came and took [the kids]. (And what did they say?) Breach of probation or breach of a court order.

The understanding was that they were taking them because I had a babysitter here that wasn’t approved. And then another reason was because my two boys had a bunk bed, a metal bunk bed that was kind of doing the wobbly thing. And so Nick took the mattress off the bed and dismantled the bed and put the mattress on the floor for a bed until we could get new beds. And [CAS] said that there was a bare, dirty mattress on the floor, which it wasn’t but that was what they say in their papers, right.

*Interviewer:* So, did you immediately go to court over that too?

We went to court all summer pretty much. They were trying to get a court order but it kept getting remanded and remanded and remanded and finally when it was about to go to trial they decided to give the kids back because, my feeling is that they didn’t have any [evidence]… (How long were the kids in care for?) Four months, yeah. So, my feeling is that when it was about to go to trial they didn’t really have anything to stick in trial so give the kids back and do the process again… I saw my worker I think it was two or three times over the four months. She didn’t really come around or anything… We [Nick and I] did parenting [courses]. Well, actually no we didn’t even do parenting right away. Their main issue was parenting courses and I kept asking them, you know, let’s go, get this parenting over with so that the faster I get it done the faster the children can come home. I think they were just, I don’t know, they’re really slow over there, right? The whole time the kids were gone I never saw my worker. My feeling of the agency is that they’re supposed to help families and I didn’t feel they were helping me…Well, it was towards the end of the four months that we had a case conference at the society and … My worker’s supervisor was there and I brought it up and right after that [we got into parenting courses]…

*Interviewer:* Did you see the children when they were in care?

Yeah. I saw well, my [oldest] son Adam… I was able to go out to their house and visit him as often as I wanted to. And then my worker stopped that for some reason. Yeah, she said that I needed to have visits at the agency so that they could see how I am as a parent. So, I had visits every Wednesday and every weekend … Adam was only at the agency twice I think for a visit. Other than that it was Sarah and Owen. And then every weekend, I had a visit at my mother’s house. She was approved as a supervisor and I was able to spend Friday night and Saturday with them. So, over the whole summer and then for a week and a half in the summer we all went camping so I had them for all of then.
And then in August, just before the children came back, I had weekend visits here. *(So, you must have been talking with someone at the agency to arrange all that stuff.)* Yeah. It was mostly voice messages because every time I called, I’d have to leave a message. Or my mom would call and get it arranged if she wanted to have them an extra day or whatever.

*Interviewer: So, did you do the parenting course?*

Yeah and I’m still doing it. She comes every two weeks. *(So someone comes here?)* Yeah. Before she was coming every week and now it’s every two weeks. She’s from the [CAS] agency. She just comes and talks to me about different things or if I have a problem then she’ll help me with it. I’m not exactly sure when the first time she came …[around the] beginning of August. It’s good. She’s a nice lady. I have no problems with her, just everybody else… Towards parenting it hasn’t really done anything. She’s just very easy to talk to. Or say I have a problem. See, I’m not allowed to do anything to the children other than stick them into a corner or give them a time out or take something away. There’s no form of physical discipline, which doesn’t really bother me but … *(Were you using physical discipline before?)* No, just my open hand if they needed it on the butt. I’ve always done that, I got that when I was a kid… So, if I had a problem or if the kids have done something wrong, I’ll talk to the worker about it that comes here and she’ll help me, give me suggestions on what to do. They’re doing good.

*Interviewer: So, what else has been going on between you and the agency?*

Well, ever since the last supervision order … *(Has there been two supervision orders?)* Yeah. One before the kids were taken. Then they got taken. Then they came back and now we’re on a supervision order again. Since that has been going on, I think we’ve seen our worker twice… actually no, I’ve seen her three times… But other than that I really don’t talk to her. *(What are the expectations of the supervision order?)* Well, I have to keep a clean house, no physical discipline… Make sure the kids get to school on time, make sure all their dental and health [are taken care of] …

*Interviewer: On balance, if you were looking at the involvement with the agency, how would you say it was?*

Bad…Well, some families do need it. I just didn’t feel that I did. I’ve been a mother for seven years and never once have they even threatened to take my children from me. So, I can’t be doing [everything] wrong… [The CAS] were pressing for trial and see the whole thing is going to court all summer they were trying to get it to stick. They wanted six months society wardship on top of however long they were gone for… *(Did you have your own lawyer?)* Yeah. Both me and my fiancé had our own lawyers… Two lawyers and my understanding is that [CAS] didn’t really have anything because everything they wanted done got done… Like I went to counselling for a couple and then I went to a women’s group. And then my fiancé signed up for a men’s group and then right after he told them that he was signing up, it went into the papers that they told him to go do it, but he went on his own free will. Like they just kind of took the credit for it. He’s still going
to the group… I don’t know if it’s helped but he sits and listens… I think he’s going because he wants to. Maybe it’s a little bit of both, because he has to and because he wants to.

Interviewer: Now, you said you went to a women’s group too?

Yeah. It was only like six weeks long and that was… [at] Family Services. It was good. I enjoyed it because women can talk a little bit more freely than guys can. (You said you also went for counselling?) Yeah, I went to one on one counselling. That was pretty much all summer, right from the time they took the kids, I went and got counselling. (Was that part of the supervision order or…) No, I went on my own… I just let them know that I was going to it… I enjoyed it. It was only an hour every week but it helped get some stuff off my chest and talk to someone else, right.

Interviewer: So, what is your understanding of why they’re involved now? What are they concerned about?

They felt that the kids were at risk or something like that… Their views are that we’re really bad parents, right… [The in-home worker] told me that she doesn’t know why the kids are [involved with CAS] because I know parenting and she doesn’t understand why the kids were even taken. And same with the foster parents, pretty much said the same thing, because the kids were very well behaved and there was nothing wrong with them. I was able to talk to the kids every night on the phone.

Interviewer: What was it like for your kids to be in foster care?

They thought it was a holiday. I had a hard time with Adam because when they were taking him, Adam asked how long we’re going to go, how long do we have to go for and the worker … pretty much said just the weekend. So, for about a week and a half after that every night when I talked to them on the phone … he says “I think I’m coming home today”. My son Owen didn’t really say too much because he had everything he’s ever wanted. Nintendo and you know… He cried a few times on the phone to me, that was it. Sarah, well, she’s only three so she didn’t really understand too much. Every night she’d ask me to come pick her up, right. Adam, a few times after spending time with me on the weekend, wouldn’t want to go back… It was hard, very hard but they’re back now. (Did you get any support during that time?) Just the counselling and my family was there… My mom, my dad and my sister… (Tell me a bit about the impact on you of going through all of that.) Well, it was very stressful because I was pregnant when they took them and pregnant when they came back, right. So, it was very stressful. I didn’t eat very much, kind of like a depression stage… that’s when I went and got the counselling and it was more like a booster.

Interviewer: So, when is your supervision order up?

Well, we asked [the worker] how long it would be and she said well, if everything goes well, four months. Like they asked for six, they got six months, but if everything goes
well and she feels one day that she doesn’t really need to be involved with us, she can just take us back to court like that and get it erased… Yeah, she said it could be four months, it could be six months, right. It’s just all depends on how we’re doing and whatnot… They just requested that Nick finish his men’s group and he’s got three more weeks left and then it’s done. So I don’t know when they’ll be out of our lives, right… Like I have no privacy because they can just show up here anytime and say I want to look at their house and you have to let them. You can’t stop them. *Was there anything good that came out of their involvement?* Anything good? No, not really… I guess you could say something good came out of [the in-home worker] because I would think of her more as a counsellor, someone to just talk to right, that understands you. So, I enjoyed every week having her visit. *Did anything change for you as a result of your involvement with CAS?* No, not really. Just our disciplining the kids. You know, they just get put in a corner and whatnot now… like even before they never got a smack very often only when they really did something that was not acceptable. It wasn’t like an everyday kind of thing. I haven’t really done anything differently.

*Interviewer: So, what does Nick think of all of this?*

He doesn’t like Children’s Aid at all. He’s got a very strong feeling. *Was this like his first experience with them?* No… his ex-girlfriend had four kids. They got called on once about supervision or something and that was they just came out, took a look and left and that was it. And then another time he was involved with them but it wasn’t because of him. He was appointed as a supervisor for his girlfriend’s family. Like something about his girlfriend’s son or daughter, he supervised the visit between daughter and father… I know a lot of people that have had involvement with CAS. Some are very legit, and some of them weren’t legit. Right? And I know a couple people that have had their children taken away for good.

*Interviewer: Do you think the CAS is expecting something to go wrong in your family?*

I don’t know. See, I thought once the kids came back, my worker would be more involved in checking up on us because we were supposed to be so neglectful, that’s what it says in the papers, we were neglectful… During the time that [the kids] were gone, the four months we hardly ever saw her, so I thought that when they came back she would just show up every now and then a little bit more and I haven’t see her really that much… Like I thought before, when the kids were gone, that she should have, I don’t know, helped us get our kids back. She kind of just stayed away from us. And she only called me if she needed information or whatever, right.

**Children**

*Interviewer: Have you noticed any impact on your children from being out of the home?*

Well, my daughter Sarah, she was very well behaved before and had perfect speech and now she feels like she has to talk like a baby because well, there was another little girl in her foster home that couldn’t talk very well so she picked up on a lot of just baby talk.
And now she doesn’t listen to anything. She tells me she doesn’t have to listen to me and the same with both boys. They push a lot more because they know I can’t really do anything to them so they push me to see what they can get away with… It’s hard. I put them in the corner and stuff but sometimes that just doesn’t even phase them and I ground them from playing outside, which they don’t like, but I feel like that’s more of a punishment for me if they’re inside all the time.

**Interviewer:** *What’s it like to have four kids in the house?*

Oh, it’s not too bad. [Melanie] can get cranky but it’s not as hard as I thought it would be because I only have the two girls here during the day. The boys are both at school so it’s mostly nights that, you know. *(Do the kids ever talk about when they were out of the home?)* Not very often anymore. They used to a little bit, just little comments… when my son Owen first came back I asked him if he was happy to be back and he said no and now he keeps asking me to buy him a Nintendo, right… They all had a lot more toys. They all got things bought for them and that I normally wouldn’t just go out and buy them a present, right… I just thought they got spoiled and they’re going to expect so much when they come back. Because they weren’t used to it before and now for the four months they got used to it so they just kind of expect it right. And Owen says to me well, when he first came back he said to me that I can just go to the machine and get money out. So, he thinks that just it’s just there and just go get some money out and buy me this, right. Like foster parents make a lot of money even just having children in care so they can afford all these luxuries, right. He just doesn’t understand because he’s only six, right. I explained it the best I could but …

**Interviewer:** *How are your kids doing?*

They’re doing okay. Better now than when they first came back. When they first came back it was a little harder… because they weren’t in the same foster home they had to be reintroduced to each other too. Like they had weekends together but they weren’t around each other all the time. Like they only spent one night together right so they fight a lot more than they used to, right. They’re slowly kind of coming out of that… But I knew it was going to take time and my daughter every now and then she’ll say I have to tell you a secret. So, I’ll lean over and she’ll whisper in my ear. She’ll say I love you so much and don’t leave me. She has to add the don’t leave me, right and every night when she goes to bed, like before she was taken, she wasn’t scared of the dark or anything. I was able to close her door, she’d go to sleep. Now she talks about monsters all the time coming to get her and she has to have her door open. She will not sleep with the door closed, she’ll scream. Right? I don’t know what it is, she’s just insecure I think.

*[Adam and Owen] have always had special needs. Adam, at first, couldn’t talk for a long time so I was able to get them, like because I was on mother’s allowance at the time, subsidy pays for it, like it’s all subsidized and because he was a special needs, I was able to get him into a daycare without having to go to work or school or anything because usually you have to be working or in school for them to pay for it. But because they were both classified as special needs then … *(What are their special needs?)* Just that Adam
couldn’t talk. He was in speech therapy… I think Adam was three when he started… He’s seven. He can talk fine now… He was just partially deaf in his ears because I had tubes put in his ears when he was two and right after I did that he started talking a little bit more, you could understand him. Then the tubes fell out in a year, but when I was at the daycare the speech therapist said his tonsils looked a little too big, right. They were too big for his mouth. So, I got his tonsils taken out and after that he started talking fine… Owen still is in speech therapy now… I don’t know if Owen was just following his brother’s lead with talking. I don’t know because he doesn’t have any hearing problems or anything so … Even now sometimes certain words he can’t pronounce them. He’s got a lisp.

Interviewer: How are they doing in school?

Well Adam is doing better this year. Adam has a lot of attention problems. He doesn’t pay attention in class, right. He’s easily distracted. He has spelling tests and I don’t know, he won’t even try to spell the word, if he just thinks he doesn’t know or he’ll write the first letter of the word right and obviously spelling it wrong. I try and sit down with him but even with spelling I can have him spelling stuff and then I’ll come back to him five minutes later and he’ll forget, won’t know it… Last year he was in special ed. I don’t think they started it up this year. They had a teacher that came because one on one is better for him in a class. (He hasn’t been diagnosed with a learning disorder has he?) No, he’s just a slower learner and I don’t know if that was because the first two years of his life he wasn’t talking. I don’t know, maybe he’s just a couple years behind mentally, right. So, I don’t know.

Interviewer: What about Owen?

Owen is a smart boy. The only thing he’s got is his speech, pronouncing S’s and F’s and that stuff, but like we’ll be sitting down here doing Adam’s homework and Owen is giving him the answers you know and Owen is one grade below, right. Adam can’t do his own homework but his brother can. (And what about Sarah?) Sarah? She’s very smart. She was talking in full sentences at about 18 months. Now she’s gotten into her baby thing. Like before she could carry on a full conversation with you… They came back from care in the end of August and they were in care for four months so four months is a long time to learn something… I think she’ll grow out of it.

Interviewer: What is it like to be a mom?

Being a mom is stressful… Not so much during the day when the boys are at school, but at night around suppertime it’s pretty hectic because you’ve got them, they just don’t know how to play quietly, you know, they’re yelling and screaming and fighting and boys are boys, right. They fight constantly…But it’s a good feeling [to be a mom]… Like when I first had Adam everybody kept saying how does it feel to be a mom and I said well, when he starts calling me mom I’ll let you know because I didn’t feel like a mom, right, because he was only a baby. I was just looking after him, right. When he
started calling me mom, you know … it kind of hit a little bit harder than when he was first born.

**Adult Relationship with Parents**

*Interviewer: Are your parents still Christians?*

Yes, they are… with the business and stuff they work Sundays so they only go to church when they can. But my mom teaches Bible study every Monday and they still believe in the same stuff. They still tell me now that I should go [to church], you know, it’d be good for the boys and I’ve gone a couple times with the kids and they went to Sunday school and stuff. I still believe in the same stuff that I was taught.

*Interviewer: So you still have a lot of contact with your parents?*

I talk to them every night… mostly my mom… They were very upset [when the kids went into care]. My dad at first said well “they can’t pull the kids without reason”…you know, stuff like that and then… after a while he sort of realized how the system worked and he got pretty fed up with it because … we had a meeting with the worker and my mom, I can’t even remember what my mom said. It just didn’t come back the way it was said. It came back looking a little bit worse. So now they really hate the system… [My parents] were concerned a little bit but my mom and dad have always been just there to help me if I need it. Even after four kids. Not many parents would…

**Relationship with her Fiancé**

*Interviewer: Nick is now living here fulltime? (Yeah) And that’s since when?*

July. Maybe the end of May, beginning of July was when he came here… He works in construction. He does a bit of everything. It’s steady but it’s dependable on the weather and whether they have a job to do. Like some weeks he only works, you know, 17 hours and is gone for about 40. *(And how are things going between the two of you?)* For a while there when the kids were gone it was, you know, kind of blame shifting, which is normal… I was approved for legal aid. He [Nick] wasn’t. They said he made too much for a single person. So, I was okay but we’re still paying his lawyer’s bills… Well, at the beginning [our relationship] was kind of up and down because my big concern was just getting the children back. I didn’t care about anything else. Like proving your innocence was a good thing, but I just wanted my children back… he wanted the same thing but he was more concerned about proving them wrong… He kept saying that he wanted to blow the case out of the water. Prove that they really have nothing to go on which they didn’t. He kept saying you know, you can’t just kiss their ass and, you know, whatever. Well, if I have to do a little ass kissing to get the kids back then do it, right. That was my feeling. I just wanted to do whatever I could to get the kids back… He’s a little bit more aggressive than I am and speaks his mind even if it is to a worker, whereas I’m just more laidback and I just, you know, talk to them. *(So you were having a fair bit of arguments?)* Oh, yeah. *(So, did these arguments a lot of yelling?)* Oh yeah, yeah which
wasn’t good but … I’m not exactly sure where [CAS] got the idea that he was abusive with me because he’s never been abusive with me and never will be. He wouldn’t do that. Like he gets mad, he just pretty much leaves to cool off. He has his own little time out. He blows his top pretty easily but when he does he just like, if it’s at the kids he just usually calls me up to deal with it so he doesn’t go overboard or if it’s with me he leaves and goes for a drive or …

*Interviewer*: Does Nick ever yell at the kids?

Everybody yells at their kids. I yell at them a lot, but yelling doesn’t make them do anything any faster. I found it doesn’t. His yelling is a little bit more stern than mine so they kind of just jump and do as they’re told. Whereas my yelling - it doesn’t even phase them when I yell at them… It’s more of a male dominating thing with fathers and mothers. My mother never smacked me. My dad used to, I used to get put over my dad’s knee when I did something wrong. So, I knew when my dad spoke I better listen. *(Was Nick physically disciplining the kids?)* Before? Just a smack, yeah, the same as what I was doing.

*Interviewer*: So, what are things like between you now?

They’re better, much better now that the kids are home and life is back to the way it was before. It’s much better… We have little [arguments] on the way I discipline because he thinks I should be more stricter, which I should be but, you know. But that’s been a standard thing that we pretty much argue about…We’ve been together for almost two years. We were planning on getting married last summer because I wanted to be married before the baby was born… but since the CAS and all this happened, we couldn’t afford it. And he was going to move in right after that like after we got married so it would have happened anyway the moving in, it just happened sooner.

*Interviewer*: How do your kids relate to him since he’s been in the house?

Well, in the beginning of our relationship, they acted out a little bit. Like that was one of the CAS concerns because the kids had punctured holes in the walls. Now, I think it was just jealousy. I don’t know, maybe the kids thought that he was taking me away from them because we were only together for two months and they took apart their head board and they beat like a thousand holes in the walls and I’m pretty positive it had to do with jealousy right, because they haven’t done anything like that since…

*Interviewer*: What do you think about relationships with men?

There’s some good, there’s some bad, you just have to find the right one, right. Like Nick and I have our problems but it’s nothing like my other relationships. It’s nothing that can’t be worked on… I would say it’s a hundred times better, right. Like we still have our fights just like any relationship does but like he would never hit me, you know. Usually he just walks away and even the drinking is not a problem because I know what he’s like and even if he does have too much [to drink] he stops and I tell him if you’re out
somewhere don’t drive home, just call me. You know, he’s got that kind of respect and I know where he is and when he’ll be home. But I kind of like it if he goes out once a week because I don’t mind being by myself.

Interviewer: Are you angry with the CAS?

A little bit… I’m not a very angry person. [Nick] is a very angry person. He holds grudges. Once you piss him off, don’t expect too much from him. (Have all the men in your life been angry?) Sarah’s dad was. You just had to say the wrong thing to him at the wrong time. Well, [Adam’s dad], I wasn’t with him very long so I wasn’t with him long enough to really get to know him. (What about your dad?) My dad? It takes a bit to get him angry. Like my dad and Nick are very much alike. Just their attitudes or the way they think, they’re on the same wavelength. (Do angry men scare you?) Angry men? No. (So, it’s something you’re used to?) Yeah.

Finances

… When the kids were gone… I had absolutely zero source of income because my baby bonus and everything got taken away and when they took the kids my fiancé wasn’t living here. He moved in here afterwards because I couldn’t keep the place if he didn’t. (You were working at Tim Horton’s at the time?) Yeah. That’s only minimum wage. I didn’t get very much and I was pregnant so I couldn’t work. I tried to work fulltime but it was very difficult. I had a lot of dizzy spells and stuff. So Tim Horton’s was very lenient on me. They didn’t push me. So I didn’t work that much. (Did your coworkers know anything about what was going on?) No, just my boss. My boss knew because right after they took them I went to my boss and I told her and I asked for a week off to just collect my thoughts and she gave me a week off and any time I needed to go to court she gave me the day off.

Interviewer: So, finances were really tight?

Oh, they were very tight and slowly they’re starting to pick up. Like I just got my baby bonus back this month… I started [at Tim Horton’s] not last October, the October before. And I was on mother’s allowance and then I went to work. So, then I had the two incomes and then the baby bonus on top of that so I was doing okay… And now since Nick moved in and the kids were taken I don’t have a mother’s allowance and I’m still not on mother’s allowance. Because he’s living with me now, we probably wouldn’t be qualified for it and my unemployment from working just came in a while ago and now I can get back to the way it was… Thinking back on it I don’t even know how we did it… I don’t know how we even managed. Like for a while there, well, during the summer, my baby bonus they were still giving it to me. They shouldn’t have been but they were giving it to me. So, I used most of that, I have to pay it back now but at the time I used it to keep this place so when the children did come back I had a house for them to come home to, right. And then I went out and bought them brand new beds with it too. And now as I said I’m paying it back. Like when they give me my cheque they just take so much out until it, you know, I don’t owe anymore, the child tax credit office. They take,
you know, so much off every month until it’s paid and then I go back to normal again which isn’t a big deal because I needed that money at the time.

Interviewer: So, have you ever had serious debt trouble or anything like that?

Yeah but my mom and dad have always been there if I needed them too… We had problems with hydro… because during the summer we were having a hard time paying the bills and so twice yeah, it was only twice the bill was late and it was up for disconnection when I’d go down and pay it, right. So, that was it, pretty much behind. And then they requested a security deposit of three hundred dollars or they were going to cut the hydro off. So, we had to pay that and now the next bill came in for the next month, which we can’t pay because we had to pay the three hundred dollar deposit… And then the other bills never really got paid because we were too busy worrying about this three hundred dollar deposit, because if we didn’t have hydro we have no food, no nothing, right. We kind of need hydro… Like the phone and the gas are well overdue. I need to pay them.

Interviewer: You said that you’ve gotten in trouble before and your parents have helped you out?

Yeah. I don’t like taking money from them because I owe them a lot of money already. They’re not - you know, they’re not too concerned about it. I’ll pay them when I can… I had a girl living with me once that borrowed money off me, like it was rent money and never did pay it back to me, so I had to borrow pretty much my whole rent money because it was Christmas time and she needed to buy presents so I lent her the money and my parents had to give me the money so I could pay my rent. I needed money once to buy a car. They gave me money. To buy a bed, I was a couple hundred dollars short. (They helped you to buy the new beds?) No, no. I used my baby bonus. I used one baby bonus for it and one of Nick’s paycheques and bought the beds but I’m glad I did because they have new beds with a warranty.

Interviewer: During all that time did you have to use food banks or …

No, I never really did. The group I go to on Thursdays, they give you a ten dollar voucher for Zehrs or Food Basics when you go so I usually use that to buy pretty much the basics like during the summer and stuff… (Like ten dollars a week usually?) But I never really got food in the summer when the kids weren’t here because I wasn’t really here to eat it because I worked at Tim Horton’s and you know how much food they have there. I ate, you know, a bagel every morning and whatnot… You can eat your meals there. You can run up a tab and pay it when you get paid. Because what they do is they cash your pay cheque for you, give you the cash and you sign the cheque and they’ll just take off your tab. So, it was an easy way to do it. You get discount price so it wasn’t full price.
Interviewer: If you look back at the whole time since you became a mom, what were your finances like over that period?

I was just on mother’s allowance and I had my baby bonus. I never worked. Like I talked to Nick one day about getting a job and he said go for it. If you want to work go. But I’ve never had a job, like the last job I had before the Tim Horton’s was at Burger King and that was when I was 16. Other than that, I haven’t worked, right. So, it kind of felt nice to make my own money and not have to depend on the government. But before that I was just on mother’s allowance and then my parents, if I was really hurting for money, my parents don’t like giving me money, they like making me work for it so that they can say well, we’re not you know, we’re not just going to give you the money, you have to earn it. So, I would go and work for them and sell the fudge and they’d pay me to work. Not last year, the year before, my dad got me to cut his grass once a week for 50 bucks, you know. They’d usually give me more than it’s worth but I actually worked for it, right, which was good.

Social Supports

Interviewer: Do you have contact with a lot of friends?

No, I stopped associating with a lot of people because I didn’t think they were extremely in the right direction. I only talk to a couple of people, like I don’t really talk to anybody from high school, right. Just people that I’ve met along the way or a couple people in hair dressing school I just talk to once in a while like hey, how’s it going… Like I have a best friend that I talk to… I’ve known her since I was in grade one and I talk to her maybe once a week. But she lives far away so I can’t really, and then I’ve got another girlfriend that I met in grade three that I still talk to maybe once a month. I don’t talk to her as much but I still keep in contact with them.

Interviewer: Do you get out and do any sort of social activities?

No… I prefer to stay home. Like I enjoy going out and whatnot or, you know, but I know I have to get up with the kids so I don’t like staying out late. Because the kids are going to get up at 7:00 regardless of what time they go to bed, right. And if I go to bed, you know, if I go out for an evening and if I get in at 12 or one or two or whatever I’m going to be pretty tired in the morning so I just, I don’t really go out. Once in a while we do, right…. Sometimes I just like being by myself. When the kids go to bed, you know, I can have a nice leisure bath and watch TV, you know, I don’t have anybody nagging me. That’s my quiet time so I don’t mind it at all.

Typical Day

Interviewer: Could you describe for me sort of a typical day like when you get up?

When I get up, the kids eat breakfast. I set my alarm for seven. So, it’s usually 7:15-7:30 that I get out. (And are you breastfeeding now?) Yes. (So, you’re up a few times a night?)
The last three nights she’s been really good. She slept pretty much all night. But before that yeah I was up in the middle of the night or up all night with her sometimes. Usually in the afternoons my daughter, she’s three, if I can get her to sit quietly on the couch she usually falls asleep. It’s not too bad, like I’m able to rest a little bit during the day. 

(You get up around seven and then what happens?) I give them breakfast. Well, first they get dressed because I try to get them to dress themselves before they come down and eat. Then they eat, they get ready for school, I make their lunches and we leave. We leave here about quarter after eight because they start school at 8:35. So, we usually leave at quarter after, sometimes twenty after. And then I’m usually back by 8:30. Then my daughter watches her cartoons on TV and colours or does something. And then they walk home and they usually get home about quarter to four.

Interviewer: And what are evenings like?

Supper is a little hectic because they just constantly want your attention when you’re trying to cook or whatever. (So there would be six people eating?) Well five because [Melanie] doesn’t eat yet. (And what are Nick’s shifts like?) They vary. Sometimes he works until nine, sometimes six or five or just whenever the job is done. (Typically five days a week?) Yeah.

Hopes and Dreams

Interviewer: If you were looking ahead, what would you like your life to be like say five years or ten years from now?

Well, I’d like to have my own house, I want to open my own salon when I am licensed because you have to have a license to even work out of your house. So, right now like I’ve got a chair and a station in there but I just do family and friends because you can’t really run a business… I went to hair dressing school in ’97 and same month that I started was the same month I got pregnant with Sarah. And the course is ten months long so I knew I couldn’t finish it, but I stayed until I was six months pregnant and then I went on a maternity leave, like a leave of absence and then just last year I went back and finished. I worked in a salon for a little bit and it wasn’t working out. Well, I was getting paid by commission so if you don’t do anything, you don’t get paid, right. And I never did anything. (You weren’t getting any customers?) No, she wasn’t giving me anything. So I sat there on a chair, really did nothing. I washed hair and that was it, right. So, the one day I worked 16 hours and I made 12 dollars. It wasn’t worth it. And then we decided to have a baby so I thought, well, I was working at the Tim Horton’s so I just stayed there, and when my year’s up, my maternity leave, I’m going to go look for a job in a salon because I’m not licensed yet. I only graduated, like November last year was when I graduated. (What does it take to get a license?) 2000 hours of working under someone. And then you have to go write a big exam and then they’ll give you your license.
Interviewer: *What about your future with Nick?*

… I’m going to get married. We’ve been talking about it a lot lately. I don’t know when it will happen. Early next year maybe once our finances and everything like we’ll save up a little bit of money. *(Will you get married in the church?)* Umhm. I’m hoping so. If not, I might do it at my mom’s house. My sister did that.

Interviewer: *So what are the positive things in your life? What makes life worthwhile?*

My children, right. *(They give you a lot of purpose in your life?)* Oh, yeah. It was very hard when they were taken. I’m very happy that they came back though… they’re not going anywhere ever again. *(You’ve made up your mind about that?)* Yeah.
Rebecca

Growing Up

I was pretty lucky growing up in a family. I’m the youngest of seven kids. My memories of when I was really young was when I was with my friends, or my siblings. My brothers. Um… I just remember mom always being there. I grew up in a Mennonite family. Ah, you don’t dance, you don’t drink, you don’t smoke, right? I couldn’t… as a kid, I didn’t really have a social life. Uh, we were out in the country. I went to Mennonite church, once a month, we got together to do crafts, or whatever, it was like a girl’s club. Other than that…and, taking me to piano lessons, we really didn’t go anywhere.

... I was always rebellious. Very quietly rebellious though, not um… getting into trouble with the law like my older siblings. Just, the sneaky things. Not things that they’d really notice, but… just more of the attitude. They’d say it was black, I’d say it was white.

Interviewer: So how stressful was this struggle?

For about two years, I did not want to live at home. I was about twelve. That age, right there. Between twelve and fourteen, was pretty rough, emotionally. And the three middle siblings, they were the ones that were in trouble. [My family] lived in the same house, but we really didn’t know each other. We played games a lot. You know, there was always games going on during holidays. But we never talked, you know… You knew something was going on in the household, and something was fiddling. But they [parents] would never tell you. Like, this is what’s going on, this is what we’re dealing with. You knew something was going on, and the only way I’d ever find out, was because my oldest sibling would kind of hint at the stuff. But dad and mom would never tell us.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Scary. Like, your imagination runs wild then. And then the one time, um… the night before, we were doing dishes, my sister Laura and I were doing dishes, and I had a knife, a sharp knife in my hand, and we were talking about something, and I was using it to make a point. And, I had it in her face. And I didn’t mean anything by it. It was just one of those stupid things that you do. And she kind of backed up, and you know, it was left at that. You know, I’m not even sure if I ever apologized. But that night, she tried to
commit suicide. Or the next day. And I thought, it’s my fault… she tried to commit suicide a couple of times.

Interviewer: So she was in a home for...

Juvenile detention. I wonder if it was because, she went to the psychiatric hospital. And then, if the next best place was for there, or… I knew she was in trouble with the law, a couple of times, but I don’t remember what it was… I don’t remember ever, dad and mom saying that she went to court. Um, I just remember that she knew all the cops in town… I remember the one time…now this must have been when she was sixteen, cause she was working at a variety store in (town) and…the story I heard now, as an adult was, my older brother… Rob, he’s the third child, ah, he was in a lot more stuff. He made Laura rob the store, take the cash out of the till, and give it to him. (So she would have been working there, and she stole money…) Yeah. He basically made her. He threatened her. To take the money.

…My oldest sister Heather, she’s ten years older than my next brother Stan, he was…the good son. And then Rob, he was the black sheep of the family, always into trouble. Always rebellious. Him and dad would be battling constantly. But he was my big brother. He was my protector. I think he had always been just a difficult child. And they’ve always had a hard time with him. And…once he got into…I mean, living in that restricted life…of all the do’s and don’ts, and then you get out into the…you got into high school, and into the real world, and I think he just, got into drugs. Um…got into the wrong crowd, and started. And I’m not even sure what happened. (Was he arrested, or…) As far as I know, he has a record. It was about ten years I think, with him. Off and on trouble. You know, he gave dad and mom a run for their money. I don’t know how they survived through…you know, the three middle siblings, giving them a hassle. Mom was always crying, you know. Upset. (You were good kids? Stan and yourself?) Yeah, ah, we behaved ourselves, and we graduated from high school. We were the only two.

Interviewer: Do you still have a relationship with members of your family?

Yeah. Heather, my oldest sister and I…we…we see each other once in a while, but it’s always…strained there. Ah, my dad? He’s in London. I have not seen him for two years. My parents were separated and divorced…ah man, sixteen years ago? His [Rebecca’s father] whole attitude had just changed, and I remember thinking that I did not trust him. I never saw dad for a period there. I guess I was really bitter against dad, because I didn’t think too highly of someone having an affair on their spouse…I was hurt. I said forget it. I am not keeping this contact with my dad anymore. I just…I basically, I lost it because I thought, I’m not making any effort anymore to get in contact with my dad. It’s up to him… It hurt. Thinking you grew up in this perfect family, then realizing there as an adult…that it wasn’t. There was a lot of things…a lot of crap going on. I always thought Matt’s [Rebecca’s husband] family were the weird ones. Growing up, yeah. I thought we had a really good family. Until you realize all the underlying currents going on, and you know.
Religion

Okay, um…growing up as a Mennonite. It’s hard to explain to someone, if you haven’t come from it. But it, basically, it feels like a list of do’s and don’ts. You know, you’re not allowed to do this, you’re not allowed to do that. But it’s not really explained why you’re not allowed. Like I said, no drinking, no dancing, no smoking. Those were things that weren’t allowed. And, it was a guilt trip. If you did something out of…that you weren’t supposed to. You were always…felt guilty about it. At least…I did. (So how did the guilt trip work?) Like, your parents would be displeased with you. You know, that I’m just doing it for my family. But ah, I felt that…if I didn’t do something, if I didn’t obey my dad and mom, I wouldn’t have their love. I think that’s what it came down to. I think that’s why I stayed in line, because, I was a people pleaser… There was always a right and wrong way of doing things. Even if it didn’t make a difference, in the long scheme of things… Church was always a big part of my life. Cause that’s who the people you hung around with. Uh, my best friend was from that church. We also went to school together. Um, any social activities were with the church. There really wasn’t any social activities that weren’t part of the church….

Interviewer: You switched churches when you were about fourteen?

Fourteen, yeah. My best friend and I went to different high schools. Um…we still went to the same church, but we ended up at different high schools, and we just started growing in separate ways. So she was hanging around with someone else, and I didn’t really know… I didn’t have close friends at that church. Cause they went to different schools than what we did. So…I mean, I knew them on a Sunday level, but not to hang around with. And, they were just getting in a lot of…gambling, on the retreats. The weekend getaways. I knew I didn’t want to be involved in that.

Interviewer: Now, you went to the church that…was it your eldest sister was going to? (Yeah.) What church was that?

Pentecostal.

Interviewer: So the kids at that church would have been kids that went to the same school?

Yeah, at the high school. We went to the high school together. (So is that the main attraction?) And ah…the attitude. The youth group wanted to do something for good. They were doing service work, volunteer work, and… Well, I was accepted to the group for who I was. There wasn’t the cliques.

Interviewer: Was it more of a centre for you, a centre of your life at that time, than the other church?
Yeah… It was a smaller church. So you knew, you knew everybody on a first name basis. Um…and there’s a lot of young couples at that time. Um…there was a lot of people in the church that I really admired. Business people, and…just on a human level. You know, I admired them and respected them. Um…so we [Rebecca and Matt] got involved…you know, teaching Sunday school, being involved in the nursery, um…really enjoyed the pastor. He was a down to earth type of guy… We still felt like a part of the church… it was the centre of our social life. Yeah, we would have…you know, at Christmas time, have suppers, or…at Halloween, have a night there for the kids, if you didn’t want to go trick or treating. You know, the kids would be involved in programs there. So yeah, it was the centre. Although, we didn’t have much of a social life, as a couple. So…but anything we did, was basically with the church. Um, just realizing that…along with the faith…that there’s other people in the same faith that believe that same way you do, and that they are there to help you out. You know, down on the reality level, you know. Emotionally, physically, spiritually. Financially, if you need help. Um…but I guess what happened was…there was a new pastor that came in, and just…we didn’t have any use for him. We’d just kind of…started leaving.

Interviewer: Now, you switched, when you were around 32, to which church?

Mennonite. (why?) Um, the [Pentecostal] church was changing. We didn’t feel like we were accepted for who you were anymore. It seemed to be…the elite groups. Um…there weren’t many kids, for one thing, anymore, going to that church. And, we just didn’t feel like we wanted our kids in that anymore, they didn’t have any…kids there that they…you know, to have a decent Sunday school, and…so we just…we started looking somewhere else.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the new church?

It’s a huge church. It is such a different feeling from what I grew up in. You can get lost in it, and don’t feel like a part of it. So…for the past five or six years, it hasn’t been a big part of our life. So I think we’ve lost a lot in our family because of that. Not having…a church, or a faith, as the centre of our life. We’ve been trying to attend Saturday night services now. But the kids don’t have Sunday school.

Interviewer: Was it a big loss?

Yes. Well, I mean, we were married in the [Pentecostal] church, and we…you know, we were kids…we grew up there. And it took me a few years just to drive by the church, you know, without those bitter feelings coming back.

Marriage

Interviewer: Okay. How old were you when you got married? (Eighteen) Okay, still to the same person?
Yeah. Like we say, we’ll always love each other, sometimes we just don’t like each other... I was too young. Didn’t realize it at the time, but I was too young. We came from, totally different backgrounds. So that first year of marriage was really tough. Um, a lot of emotional growing up, and maturity. (How’d you meet him?) Um, the very first time, he came into the restaurant where I was working. And he asked me out, and I thought, you creep. I hate it when guys did that. So we avoided each other, and he had actually started going with another girl, for about eight months. And then, during that time, we kind of got to know each other a little bit. And then, at a youth group, ah, camp out. About a year down the road, we started to hang out a lot more, and just started going together. And from the first day we were going together, I knew we’d be married. Intuition, I don’t know.

... Actually, it was good that he went with this other girl, because, I wouldn’t have been able to deal with the things that he was doing at the time. Cause he was still, you know, doing the marijuana, the drinking, and… Well, he was always smoking up, I guess, as a teenager. At the first...he was, just everyday, he was saying that, the first thing he would do when he got up is put a pot of coffee on, and roll a few joints. Um, and he was doing this, up until he was about 20, or 21 I think. About a year before I met him. He’s three and a half years older than me. Yeah, so she basically got him away from that. Away from the drinking. Which he had been doing all through his teen years. He calmed down a little bit. Matt never grew up in the ah...before he started living with his sister and coming to church, I think maybe he had been to church three or four times when he was growing up. So that...you know, we came from such a different background, religious wise, and then also from, how we view life. His family is very relaxed when they want to do something, or whatever. They don’t plan. Whereas my family is very rigid. In the planning. You know, everything is down to the tee.

Interviewer: So what was the attraction of Matt?

I think I knew I needed a guy, that was not brought up in the church, who had a different outlook on life. Um…and he was strong enough to deal with me. He knew I was very naïve too, so he was always very careful. We started going together in July, and were married in August. He accepted it [the church] quite well. I mean…it’s funny. Growing up, reading the Bible, being taught it constantly in Sunday school…and then, here comes Matt, who’s been in church maybe three/four times in his life, and then when he joined up with the church, he actually knew it better than I did. You know, once he started joining the church, he grasped it better than me. I think when you grow up with something, you just start taking it for granted. (Was it important to him?) Yeah it was. Very much. And you know, we made sure our kids were out to Sunday school all the time, and we were involved in the church.

Interviewer: So tell me about being married.

I enjoy it. I like the intimacy, and having a best friend with you. I liked ah...setting up the little home, Cinderella story. Which, and then, you realize that reality sets in. I mean, that’s what happened the first year. You know, not everything is perfect. It was one year
and nine months before Anne [oldest child] came. Matt was working a lot the first year we were married too, so we didn’t really get to spend a lot of time together like we should have. You know, that first year, where you kind of have to go with each other, like, the honeymoon period. So I feel like we missed out, on that. And then the kids, we started having kids. Which I wanted to have, you know, kids right away. Which, looking back, I realize that we should have waited a bit more, but…then they wouldn’t be here today.

**Typical Week**

*Interviewer: Can you just, sort of run me through a typical week?*

Yeah, the weekdays are typically the same. I’m not here in the mornings... I’m at work. I don’t get off work until nine. *(So what shift do you work?)* Eleven at night, until nine o’clock in the morning. *(And that would be at the centre for the mentally challenged?)* Yeah… I enjoy it. It’s personal care for the clients, getting them up in the morning. Whereas before, I stayed up during the night, and stayed awake. And… you know, you just make sure the clients are safe at night, staying in their bed. And then, you know, doing the personal care in the morning, coming home at 7:30 [am]. It was tiring. So, for four years, I was doing the overnight awake. And now, just in the last two months, I went to the sleep position. Now, in the evenings, I can spend time with the kids. Because, before I was going to bed around eight o’clock, just to catch an hour or two sleep, before I went into work. And I’d come home, dead tired.

*Interviewer: So your shift, did you say...was from, 11-9?*

Now. Now it’s from 11-9. Yeah. I get about five hours of sleep. Which is a lot better than it had been, for the last four years, all in one period. It [working the awake shift] was…extremely hard. Um…because when I first started this shift, Mary [youngest child] was not in school yet. …She played, very well by herself. Thank goodness. So I could catch, and hour’s sleep, an hour and a half. And then, get up and feed her lunch, and then go back to sleep. About, an hour, until the kids came home. And then, I’d catch another hour or two in the evening before I went to work. So, you’re constantly tired. Um…and then she went to Kindergarten. And you know, you still do that break up sleep. And then, after she was in school, it got a little easier. I could sleep from nine, until one or two.

*Interviewer: What shift was Matt working?*

He was gone from, about 3 o’clock in the afternoon, until about 2 o’clock in the morning. So the evenings, I’ve been basically a single mother for the last five years.

*Interviewer: So do your shifts still have the same timing, for your work schedules?*

No, just now, in the last month, Matt is now on, eight in the morning, until five in the afternoon. And I find that’s a lot better. Like…Jacob and Jeremy can still give Matt a
hard time, but, usually, they will...behave. So I find that, once he gets home, things are a lot better. I have someone, another adult, to kind of back me up.

Interviewer: So the last five years, at least, in terms of work schedule, and home schedule, has been fairly demanding. (Yeah, they have been.) What was the pull of that on you?

I would see the kid’s behaviour. Whether it’s the age, or...them going into their teen years. Um...but I just felt like I had no control anymore. And...you know, they haven’t gotten into any major trouble, thank goodness. (How were you coping during that period?) One day at a time...Physically, I was exhausted all the time. Emotionally, I was...I don’t think that I felt like I could be there for the kids, emotionally, when they had a problem, cause I was just too tired to deal with anything myself.

Interviewer: So tell me about the overnight awake shift.

About five years ago, I think I was into the job sharing, which was...one week was three nights, the next week was two nights. And it was from 11:30 [pm] until 7:30 the next morning. So I’d be home before the kids got off to school. Kind of chase them down to the bus stop, make sure they have their lunches and everything. And then...come home, and look after a child that still wasn’t going to school. Ah, for the first six months...or a year...it was just job sharing, and then I moved into five nights a week. So it’s been about four years. (And your shift ran from when to when?) 11:30 until 7:30. So, the sleep shift is from 11-9. (Which is the one that you’re in now). That I’m on now, for the last two months. (So prior to that, you were on the awake shift. What time would you get home?) Um...8 or 8:30.

Um...Yeah, I’d come home, and...they’d be up already. And the fighting would already be starting. Yeah, cause, some of them would get up at six o’clock. I’d just...if they still didn’t have their lunches made, sometimes I would help them, other times, I would just sit here, and kind of...supervise. And encourage them to get ready faster and be out the door so I could go to bed. Ah...the last ones had to be out the door by... 25 to 9. (So a pretty hectic half hour?) Yeah, I found that a really hard part of the day. (Then what happens?) Mmm, all depends how tired I was. I’d either head to bed and read for a bit, or play on the computer, or...give it an hour’s worth of housework or something. (Then?) Sleep until...one or two. I’d be getting about three hours of sleep...solid sleep. Ah...I’d wake up around one, usually, after two to three hours, solid sleep, and then sometimes I would stay in bed until three. When they started coming home... Just lay there, kind of drifting in and out of sleep.

Interviewer: Drifting in and out of sleep. So...two to three hours solid sleep. And...then a couple of hours, drifting in and out. And then, when do the kids start to come home?

Um...high school at three, and then kinda...three, three-thirty, and four. Four o’clock. That was...noisy. I found that the highest...I think...one of the highest stress times during the day. Everybody coming in the door. (So what would you do during...3:30-5?)
Make supper. Yeah. Or catching up on the rest of the chores, or…what’s the word…refereeing? Listening to what happened to them at school. From 5-5:30, we try and have supper. And then at six o’clock, they were supposed to be back at the table, and doing their homework. Then ah…by nine o’clock, they’re all in bed. Or supposed to be quiet. And I’m in bed by…eight or eight thirty. So I usually send the little ones… off to bed. Say goodnight to them. They’re supposed to be in their rooms, sleeping quiet, by nine o’clock. (And what time do you need to get out of bed?) Eleven o’clock. To be at work by eleven thirty. I stayed in bed as long as possible. It took me ten minutes to get dressed, and eight minutes to drive to work. (Would you sleep?) Sometimes yes, and then…I went for periods where I couldn’t sleep, couldn’t fall asleep until about ten thirty. I was doing good if I had five [hours of sleep]. (For how many years?) Ten years… Mmm, you really didn’t want to be around me. I’d just be really grouchy, and anything would just kind of…get me. By seven o’clock [pm], I just wanted the kids to be quiet. I could feel myself winding down.

Interviewer: So, on weekdays Matt would get home at 3 or 4 [am]. So he’d be home before you? (Yeah.) And what would he do?

Um…usually have a few beers. And play on the computer, until about six o’clock [am].

(He didn’t rush home.) No. And then, he would have enough to drink that usually, he would be drunk. And then he would fall asleep. (So what was it like for you to come home? You would know that he would be drunk when you got home?)

As soon as I walked into the bedroom, I could always smell it …and then I’d walk into the bedroom, and you could just smell the booze on him. And sometimes, I wouldn’t even bother sleeping in there. I’d just slept in one of the kids’ beds, cause I just… I hated the smell of it. So you know, you think you have this time together, as husband and wife, you know, you’re just sleeping, but…you know, it’s just disappointing.

…When we were living at the trailer park, you know, Matt went to his single friend’s trailer. And he wouldn’t show up for a 24/36 hour period. Cause he kept drinking, playing on the computer. He was never violent. I actually, try to egg him on one time, to hit me. (Why?) Cause I wanted a reason. (You wanted a reason to leave?) MmHmm. Because of the way I grew up that, you know, divorce is not okay. And…but I thought well, if he hits me, I have a reason. Which is… it was stupid, and I even knew it at the point I was trying to do it. I knew it was stupid… (How long ago was this?) Ah…four or five years… I actually left him. I left with the kids… it wasn’t that long ago, it was three years. It was the weekend we were supposed to move into the house. The kids and I stayed here, for about a month, by ourselves. I took off. I actually called the cops that night. And I realize now, I shouldn’t have pushed it that far, calling the cops, cause I wasn’t in danger. But I think I was just…by that time, I was such an emotional wreck, I didn’t know how to deal with anything anymore.
Interviewer: So, tell me about Children’s Aid Society, the first time they became involved.

…I had been in the boys’ bedroom, three or four times, telling them to clean up. And I was basically fed up, so I asked Matt to deal with it, cause he’s downstairs anyways by their bedroom. And then, he went in a couple of times, and the next time he went in, he had been wrapping up some wire. He was cleaning up the shop. And he went to smack it down on the chair, for kind of emphasis, and put a little bit of fear in them, so they’d get moving, and it ended up, ah….the end of it unravelled or something, and it ended up hitting Jacob. A nice big scar. (So, when you saw the mark on Jacob, what did you think?) I thought that, that was such an emotional turmoil…time, I, didn’t really know what to think. Ah, all I could think of, is that my family is coming over, and they’re gonna see this mark on Jacob. How am I gonna explain it? You know, cause… Matt wasn’t drinking that day. And he never did hit the kids when he was drinking. That would never be an issue. (What was Jacob’s reaction to getting hit?) He was scared… I don’t know. Knowing my kid, I know how he looks when he’s scared. … It [the mark] was from the middle of the forehead, all the way to…almost the chin, I think. It’s almost like um…it was basically a cut. Not deep, but...like, it was a red welt, almost. I didn’t see it until an hour or two after, when Jacob came upstairs, or I went down. I didn’t even know it happened at the time. Cause I was busy cleaning upstairs, or getting the Christmas dinner ready… It was Boxing Day. I think he came upstairs, cause Matt wasn’t in the area. And I just kid of looked at him like, what happened? I don’t know if he said dad hit me, or if he explained what happened, the accident. But I went downstairs right away, and I asked Matt what was going on. (Do you consider that an accident?) I do. I don’t think Matt would take a wire to the kids, or anything like that. An accident, but that could have been prevented. Matt even said so himself, that it was really stupid. My one reaction was…a very selfish reaction, cause I knew what the one sister would think, or…you know. And I kind of…just kind of looked at Matt and said, what’s going on? And I just basically didn’t talk to him for the rest of the day. I was furious. And yet, at the same time, I knew how frustrated we both were at Jacob. You know, cause he wouldn’t clean up his room. (Okay. So, C.A.S. showed up…) The kids went back to school, and that day, after Christmas holidays, um…two cops and the intake worker came knocking on the door. And, we sat at the table, and they basically said about, you know, Name’s big mark on his face. And they were wondering what happened. And, Matt said it was an accident. Lori [CAS worker] said they had been at all the schools to talk to the kids.

…But all during the Christmas holidays, I had been considering asking Matt to move out. So this, and the intake worker, said…do you want your husband in the house at this point? And I said no, I want him to move out. And actually, the cops had asked me too. Do I think, did I think it was an accident. And I hesitated in my answer, and at that point, I said I wasn’t sure. But I think it was. Just because of the emotional turmoil. And I couldn’t think straight. Um…which upset Matt. Um…so then, we left him here. The cops left, and the intake worker and I went to all the schools, to pick up the kids together. And then, we went out for supper, and we just kind of talked a bit… The kids and I.
Interviewer: *What was that conversation like?*

Ah, basically, me promising them, that I would never let it happen again. And then I did. But, you know, the drinking’s back again, and he’s like…you know what? I promised them at the same time, you know…does the loyalty go to the kids, or the husband? (So you see that you’ve got probably, some, difficult conversations coming, or…not?) Yeah. Probably, unless, he realizes what he’s doing again.

Interviewer: *It was your oldest sister, Heather, who called the C.A.S., when she saw the mark. Probably at the dinner you were talking about. (Yeah) And then she told you, a little while later, that she had done that?*

Yeah. Now, Anne had been talking to her before that. And Anne just kind of didn’t know what to do anymore either. Cause, I wasn’t dealing with it... I mean, I’m glad to the point that someone called, because I didn’t know where to go from here. And it probably would have gotten worse. A lot worse, who knows what would have happened.

...[the CAS involvement] was more of a policing. It wasn’t really a helping. We really felt like that. And we felt like the kids were just…you know, every time we wanted to discipline them, we felt like we had to be on our toes, and be very careful, because...if we did anything wrong, you know…the Children’s society would be there again, you know, knocking on our door. (Now, for that whole time period, was Matt out of the house?) Yeah, he was. He didn’t move back until November the 1st. (Did you feel that you were under investigation too?) To a point, yeah. Because I mean, I have a temper. And I know that. And I have to be very careful with the kids. I’ve had to walk away. (So was that ever an issue with the C.A.S?) No, because at that point, I wasn’t ready to even hint at that. Because I didn’t want them taken out of the home, thinking that there’s two parents there…No. No, I mean…you hear the horror stories where they just walk in and take the kids.

Interviewer: *What was good and what was bad about the CAS worker?*

Um, good was the fact that it brought us to a turning point. Where, I think, everybody in the family, Matt included, knew that something needed to change. We just...we didn’t know how to do it. Where the bad was that....we have to have an outside agency be involved, and you thinking that you’re not a good parent. And the stigma with it...I think it helped them [the kids] to a point, where they felt like they had someone to turn to then. Cause they weren’t feeling, that I was looking after their best interests. *(Did you and the kids ever talk about it?)* No. Cause I still couldn’t deal with it. The fact that they…thought I wasn’t willing to look after them. That really bothered me... Their big sister, Anne, she left, actually, a couple of days after he Matt came home. Um...what happened the first little while…Matt and I had the understanding that...no unsupervised visits, which...fine. But, since I was here on the weekends, we thought Matt could come here for the weekend. And then, all of the sudden, Lori [CAS worker]phones us up, cause Anne had told her, you know, dad’s home on the weekends. ‘Cause they [the kids] were
upset, that they didn’t think anything had changed. Um, we started going [to marriage counseling] soon after. We’ve been going up to…just about a month ago, when our schedules changed. (So that’s over a year?) Yeah... It was really good. But you see where Matt, where each other is coming from…and ah…not that you’re right and I’m wrong, it’s just a difference of opinion. (You were both willing participants?) Yeah… because Lori wanted us to get into counseling. I can’t remember if she stated that, marriage counseling, or Matt with A.A. He was supposed to get A.A., and ah…anger management. He went…he started going to A.A., but then. He said, ah, the marriage counseling is helping, because...let’s get to the root of the problem, not just deal with the anger. (Did he do the anger management?) No. No, …and Lori was fine with that.

Interviewer: So the marriage counseling started when Matt was out of the house, and continued for a while when he was back in the house? (MmHmm.) So he came back in November. (Yup.) And, as far as you know, that was around when things ended with C.A.S.? (Yeah). But now they’re back?

MmHmm. Um, the first few months, it was hard to get adjusted. Ah, for him, it was very hard, because he wasn’t sure he could discipline, and not discipline. He thought that he was still you know, tip-toeing around the kids... I was angry at Matt, that this had to happen. Yeah. And…I’m upset at Matt but…to some point, I’m bitter that because of his drinking, and me not standing up to him, you know, Anne felt like she had to leave home. (Right. So there’s a resentment there). Yeah.

Interviewer: So Matt is back?

MmHmm. Yeah. I think it’s going better. I mean, you still fall into your old patterns of behaviour, but…And then things started to relax. You know, you get into the old stream of things again. I think it’s a lot better. He’s um…he’s a real yeller at the kids. And, he was getting degrading, sometimes, when he was yelling at them. Sometimes he’d be very degrading with them. And, he stopped a lot of that. Every once in a while, it slips out. And ah, he tries to spend time with them.

Interviewer: So, when did the C.A.S. come back?

About two months ago. I guess what happened was… Lori contacted Family and Children Services, saying that Matt’s still drinking. (When did that start, after he got back?) Um…well the funny thing is, he went to [counseling agency]. And they recommend, ten beers, the most. That’s the maximum for a week... So seeing what it did to Matt, I didn’t want any booze in the house anymore. I didn’t want him drinking at all. But…you know, also realizing that that’s not reality... And Lori was okay with that, as long as he didn’t get too abusive. And I told Matt too, like, please don’t do it, when you’re responsible for the kids. Or when you have to drive them somewhere. But… Lori, never told the kids that was okay. So they just saw it as, their dad was drinking again, it’s not allowed, which really upset us…. It wasn’t going back to the old stuff. Which he stuck to, except the one time I was really upset, um…I was out doing errands the Friday afternoon, and he got up, and started…and had a couple of beers, and was playing on the
computer, and the kids came home. And...at that point, he was...not staggering drunk, but he was...not himself. And I was out of the home. That bothered me. And I told him that... The family meeting was the kids and everybody. And so we brought it up saying, it was a misunderstanding again. Lori said it was okay for, you know, Matt to be drinking. But in moderation. And they had no idea about that.

_Interviewer: So the intake worker comes over and...?_

And, she said, it’s a volunteer thing. And...but if you don’t volunteer, I have to take it back to my supervisor, and he might get a court order. So in other words, is it really volunteer? It’s the attitude thing. And this intake worker also comes from...living with an alcoholic husband. So we knew...you know, she said right there, the first time we met her, she said, I do have a different point of view on life, because I lived with an alcoholic. But she couldn’t see either that, Matt should be drinking at all. So as we got discussing about it, just...discussing it. You know, we changed some things in the voluntary agreement, that we... Matt and I weren’t comfortable about … Lori said, you know, we’re here to help you. We don’t want it to be a policing thing. You know, like, we know the agencies that can help. You know, like...cause we said, one of the things, is just another stress, you know, more meetings. Another financial stress. You know, like, sending the kids to camp. You know, different financial things. And...getting the um...the counselling help, and...being there, and getting the kids and you together, and talking. Getting it out in the open.

_Interviewer: I think you had mentioned that having the CAS involved keeps you on your toes... but I was wondering, what’s your preference? Whether you prefer to have that?_

I’d prefer to have it from the marriage counselling. You know, we were going once a week, and it just kind of keeps you on track. Where, it’s a voluntary thing, with the CAS, it just feels like a real pressure. And then you feel like...I was feeling like the kids were holding it over our head too. And Name, said too, you know, she said, point blank to the kids, that this doesn’t mean you don’t have to listen to dad and mom. Which I was really glad she said that to them.

_Interviewer: So you’ve got kind of a mixed feelings about the CAS involvement?_

Yeah I do. And hey, if they can help us out, like... Matt says, we don’t want to take advantage of it. We’ve never been one to ask for help. But we can’t afford to send the kids to camp, and if they help us out, get funding for that, that’s great. You know, that’s great for our kids... Christmas time, they showed up with some presents, so...that was nice for the kids. Yeah, so. But other than that, I didn’t feel like they were really doing a whole lot. Other than keeping me on my toes, cause you’re scared.

_Interviewer: What do you think is gonna happen, over the next couple of years?_

Looking back on the last couple of Friday’s, when he’s drinking, and he’s supposed to be responsible for the kids, it’s like...(Like he’s over the set limit?) Yeah. (Would you say
anything to Lori?). Yeah, but I want to say it to Matt first, before... Because I can’t bury my head in the sand anymore. And I need to deal with it, before it becomes a really bad problem again. (So who are you gonna say it to?) To Matt first... And then...I’ll probably bring it up with the Children’s services... I don’t know if I want to keep it hidden, I just...I guess, that’s really where I am coming from, yeah. I don’t know, I haven’t thought it through fully yet. (Are you scared?) Yeah.

Interviewer: Is it your impression, that people like the Children’s Aid society really understand your life?

... [they don’t understand] the conflict of loyalty, between the husband and the kids. And I mean, I don’t think I’ve ever brought that up in that conversation though either. Where, they’re looking at it from the safety of the kids, and I can see their point of view. You know, the kids are the innocent bystanders, someone’s got to be an advocate for them. And if we’re not going to be, then someone else has to step in. I would always be on...at least a slight guard with them [the CAS]. Now, this...and it all depends on who you get too. Whether or not they’re going to take a good close look at your family, and really see what’s going on, or...follow the rule book.

Motherhood

Interviewer: So tell me about being a mom.

... I remember when I was 14, what I wanted, how I wanted to parent. It was very strict. You know, our kids should respect their parents, and you know, listen... They do something, they get the consequences. Um...I never...emphasized the fun as much as what Matt did, though. I was just more practical, in taking care of them. Feed them, where he would sit down more, when they were younger, and play with them more than I would. I enjoyed parenting, but some days, it was just too much to handle. Because, the kids came so close together. So you’re tired, and the kids are demanding your attention. Then, I think with the third one, I started maturing, and realizing...this is what you got into, this is what you wanted, so, grow up. That’s when I realized...the work that comes with it, but also the enjoyment... I think our kids have a strong moral sense, set of values. Um, right now, I think, they’re going through the phase where, they’re mean to their siblings. But by talking to other parents, I realize that...that’s normal. But um...they have respect for other people, which I’m really proud of. You know, I talk to other adults. Like, teachers, and the principals, and they say, they get into mischief, but if you tell them to behave, or change, they’ll always respect their wishes and listen to them. So, I’m proud of my kids. I probably don’t show it as much as I should, to them... Yeah. I mean, overall, I think...I’m a fairly good parent. I try and spend time with the kids. I mean, there’s lots of room for improvement. And, I think we’ve done a fairly good job raising our kids. And in these teenage years...what an emotional roller coaster ride. And they know how to push your buttons.
Interviewer: So there’s eight people in the house?

Seven. Yeah, cause my oldest daughter is moved out. Ah, we have five bedrooms. The rec-room downstairs is smaller, because we took part of it for a bedroom. So…we lived in a two bedroom mobile home for fourteen years. So…this is large. (With how many kids?) Six. (For how many years?) Fourteen years. So, when Anne was about three months old, we moved there. And when she was fourteen, we moved into this house. I can’t believe I did it, looking back. I mean…I find when I’m going through things, I’m dealing with it, I can handle it. But when you look back, I just kind of shake my head, and it’s like…I can’t believe I did that. And it was getting stressful, with…the…three girls, and the three boys, shared a room each. And then, Matt and I would be out in the living room, on the pull out couch. I found that hard, because we had no privacy, and I had no room to retreat to.

Interviewer: So that was the time period where you had the automotive business?

Yeah. And actually, we started living at the shop, at one point. Because, we’d built a mesonie above the shop. Because, when the kids were young, I’d work there, and so we had a little play room for them and an area for a nap… I just found it so hard, going back and forth with the kids, and you’re making sure that there’s food at the shop. You know, for the day time. And it would seem, that we just started moving in…and staying there, more and more, which…my mother found very strange. And yes, it was. But it was convenient for us.

Interviewer: I’m wondering if you could just talk a little bit about finances over the last few years, or so.

Um, they’ve been really tough. Cause we had closed a business down in February 1996. But we didn’t go bankrupt. We just phoned, you know, all the people we owed, and just said, you know, we’re closing down, can you just wait for payments, we’ll try and pay you off slowly. Which, they were really good. Um, you know, the one company here in town, the part stores, we paid them off, I think, three years later. And he just, kind of thanked us, and said, most people would have just walked away. So that made me feel good, that we could do that. Um, and then when we bought this house, um, my aunt gave us a down payment, plus, incorporated a bank loan…a business bank loan. But we’re still paying off bills. So finance has been really, really tough. Just in the past, couple of months, actually, you know, been a little easier on the money. (What’s different in the last couple of months?) I think just um…we’ve got two large bills paid off, that we were making payments. And, we also…did a little bit of consolidation…loan at the bank. Um, but now we’ve got to catch up on our water tax bill again. Which is…you shouldn’t let it slide, but I do.

Interviewer: So you’re trying to manage things. Can you just expand a little bit on your aunts helping you out?
Okay. Um, it’s my two aunts. They’ve worked all their lives. My own aunts had a really good job… they’ve never been married. Um, so they actually approached my uncle. Their brother-in-law. And, said, we’d like to see Matt and Rebecca out of their trailer. Can we help them? So my uncle is the one who came to talk to us… Um, he’s a businessman. So he approached us, and said, you know, can we expand on the trailer, and my aunt’s came back to him and said, you know, if Matt and Rebecca want out of the trailer and want a house, let’s help them with that. So we started house hunting. You know, they gave us a price range. And, so what they did, was give us interest free loans, um…I’m not even sure how much money they put in. About fifty thousand. And, paid off our bank loan. Business bank loan. And, gave us the down payment for the house.

The Big Picture

Interviewer: I was wondering, what makes your life good?

The same things that make it bad. The husband and the kids, and I enjoy my job. And, you know, sometimes, I don’t do a lot of volunteer work, but…trying to help out where I can. (In what ways do they make your life worth living?) Well, Matt, for a period there, wasn’t sure if I loved him anymore. But we’ve always had that ah…that love there. And the um…commitment. And a friend said yesterday, I just met up with an old friend. She had just started…you know, being with somebody, and she…and she said, she put it in perfect words. That he completes me. That’s what it feels like. So…to tear that away…(Yeah, it’s hard). Yeah. (How does he complete you?) Emotionally. He’s my realist, where I’m the dreamer… We can talk just about anything. Um, you know, laugh and joke around. He understands my stupid jokes. Groans at them, but you know. We just…a lot of times, we know what the other person is thinking. Which sometimes gets us into trouble too, cause we’re totally off topic, you know. Or, misjudging each other. (What about your kids?) Kids…they’re darling little angels when they’re sleeping. Um…just seeing them, you know, you see the best and the worst of yourself. Your personality. You know. Between the six of them, I think they’ve got…all the worst, and all the best of me. And you know, they’re funny at times. They just…have you cracking up, laughing away. They’re really fun to be with. And then they’re…little annoying, at times. They know how to push your buttons pretty good.

Interviewer: Okay. If you said something like, I am a __________...what would you say?

Mother. I think that’s how I would explain myself the most... Mother and wife… Yeah. Cause I have, I mean…the kids are a real pain some days, but…I guess when I get talking to other people… my life is quite good. You know, I have a husband who loves me. I have kids who love me. I have healthy kids.
Elizabeth

Elizabeth – Mother Interviewed
Tom - Elizabeth’s Stepfather
Steven - 1st Husband (Carrie’s Father)
Ben - Ex-Partner (Kimberly’s Father)

Carrie - Elizabeth’s Oldest Daughter
Kimberly - Elizabeth’s Youngest Daughter
David - Elizabeth’s Stepbrother

Growing Up

Well I was born in [small city] Ontario. And [my father] left when I was two. We went to stay with my grandmother. She died when I was six. When my father had left I haven't seen him ever since then... From the time I was born until I was sixteen we moved 33 times. Ya, I went to umpteen different schools. Um, don't really remember much about my childhood. I remember some things, but not everything because... um, we lived in a lot of different places. It was always hard for me. I was always the new kid at school. I got teased and picked on. School? I didn't do really well at all. I was lucky to get a D. Cause most of my grades were like c's and d's. I wasn't very impressive or anything. Ya like I said, I was always the new one at school and so in each new place I'd have to go to a new school. Sometimes I'd be lucky enough to stay close enough to the same area... it was hard. I didn't like it at all. It was hard... you see other friends who have gone to school everyday and every year they go to the same school and so they have this bond with certain people and they have like a friend that they grow up with, like a best friend that they grow up with... I was always the new one who was left out and there'd be everyone who had their own little groups or whatever and I'd be out on the side kind of trying to fit in but not really fitting in?

Ya, it's always been like that cause it's not like I went to one school and continued on that school over and over where you have, form a bonding relationship with other students and you know you have like, you know, you share your likes and your dislikes and everything. So then you're sitting there and you're going to this new school and you're looking around and you're new and everyone's looking at you to see what you'll do and you get really uh, intimidated um, you know, your self esteem level, unless you have high self esteem in the first place and you know, you're not any better, you just sit in the corner and not talk to nobody kind of thing. And if you do start talking and whatever and it was um, it was hard because you never really knew if they were messin’ with ya kind of thing. Trying to I don't know, pretend to be your friend and just really find out information and then they spread it off to the other ones and then you know, you couldn't really open up and be yourself... it was like, finally after going through so many different schools you just finally you're not saying nothing to nobody... It's really hard to make a forming relationship with anyone anyways because who knows when my mom's going to pick and move and take us too.

Um, my mom worked a lot. She worked long hard hours. Like my mom's always provided... She was with a lot of different male friends, so it was on a continuous basis.
She lived with a man when I was about 8, around that age, I'm not quite sure. And that's when my stepbrother, David was born. And we lived with Tom [stepfather] for quite some time. He was very abusive towards her. There were strippers, bikers, like around the house all the time. Um, drinking, drugs, like done openly, freely. Probably...well my real dad left when I was 2, so probably around 4 and that age and um, you know there was always Harleys in and out of the house and you know bikers constantly you know, and if my mom got pissed off about anything that went on then you know, she got a big cuff in the head and... It was done openly... I remember that our house burnt down and so where we lived in a motel for a while. The baby, with my brother being the baby and myself. Like this was older but cause he wasn't born til I was like 10 but no actually, the baby wasn't there, it was just me and my mom and Tom and so we stayed in this one room motel or whatever and he was always gone and there was always women galore calling for him and my mom's drinking and you know. I understand now why, like you know, you're gonna put up with that shit, she needed something to numb the pain. So and um, then they rebuilt part of the inside of the frame then we all stayed in one of the one bedrooms kind of thing and um, that wasn't... I didn't like that at all. I hated it... Um, well Tom had a friend stay over for a while... and um, he had made um, sexual advances at me and um... And I told Tom and um, no one believed me really. ‘Oh you're just imagining it’... and she [mother] didn't really believe me really. ‘Oh you're just imagining it’... and she [mother] didn't really believe me so... I don't know... Um, then we left after my brother was like a year or two old. We left and we tried to make it on our own.

She's [mother] always worked forever. She's always had at least one job, sometimes more. She did the best she can. She was a heavy drinker, mostly just on weekends... [Great aunt and uncle] used to take me for drives and things like that and it just got me out of the atmosphere of um, my mom and um, my brother's father and that kind of environment. My great aunt, ya, and my great uncle. I liked going there quite a lot... And it's always been she lived in the middle of this nice little town in the middle of nowhere kind of thing and you know, the population might be 100 people so everyone knew everybody but they were very friendly and um, I remember um, out there doing strawberry picking and bean picking and you know, all this stuff. She had this humungous garden in her backyard and it had tons and tons of tomatoes and things... and even though I was there by myself I could always find stuff. She had this basement full of like old crap that I'd just go down there and go through the boxes and check out everything... There's a piano there and I played on the piano even though I didn't know if I was playing anything, any songs or anything, but I was just messing around down there... well they used to come and get me and bring me there and I'd spend a week or two there and then I'd go back home. During the summer mostly, but sometimes on the weekends during school I would go but um... from when I was younger, probably about 4 til I was about 11 maybe? And that's when... we just kind of drifted, me and my mom, kind of drifted away from the family.

...I really resented her [mother] a lot for moving us around a lot. I didn't like that... I remember when I was older, like in my teens, up. You know, she'd go out and party and bring whoever home and then the next night she'd go out and party and bring whoever home. Really wasn't much of her bringing people home during the week, it was mostly on the weekend... I think they were just one night stands... There was a lot of stress and a
lot of ah... drinking. My mom would drink when she got home you know, and she wouldn't be at home and she wouldn't come home til 8 or 9 at night from work and so I'd have, I'd see her with men all the time so I'd have more boyfriends. Not like boyfriend boyfriends, but a lot of boys that would come over and we'd sit and we'd drink my mom's booze and stuff like that and then carry on from there.

When I hit like 15, I rebelled. And was uncontrollable and I continued to move from place to place on my own, never staying in one place for too long. Everything was a big party, did drugs, drank, you know, hung out in the worst places and didn't really give a shit about you know, where I was, what I was doing anything. I had no self-esteem, no care for myself... I was 15 I was running away. I ran away twice and then brought back home and then on my birthday. My 16th birthday, my mom said 'I've had enough of your shit', she goes 'You've either got to settle down or you can go to a foster home' and I said 'a foster home would be better than living with you'... I ended up, [Tom] called to wish me a happy birthday... the biker guy... Anyways, I said well... 'if you need to talk to me you can call mom to find out which foster home I'm gonna be in.' And he said 'what do you mean?' And I said 'well mom's sending me to a foster home'. And he said 'well pack your bags, I'm coming to get ya' so he came and got me and I went and stayed there... that was the worst mistake of my entire life.

... There'd be frequent like drugs anytime we wanted. Cocaine, like there's a silver teapot sitting on the buffet with a big rock of cocaine sitting on there so I could scrape it off and do it whenever... I got like hits of acid like 90. Mushrooms whenever I wanted it, you know... on a daily basis... Um, I left there when I was 17 and then just continued moving, you know, staying in rooming places, or with a guy that I met, I'd stay with them for a while... Um, I don't remember all of it really. It was just like a blur. I remember some things like going to the bars when I was 17 and getting pissed... so I'd like go stay with so and so and do whatever for a week or two and go stay with whoever and I just kind of went from one thing to another. One guy pretty much to another... I wasn't really thinking much of anything um, you know, I lived to party. Out of school. Didn't care about nothing, didn't care, I had no care for me, no care for you, no care for you know, buddy down the road. I stopped talking to my mother totally, I never called her I never did nothing... Um, well I had social assistance that I was getting wherever, I had the money from that and then um, sometimes I'd do favours for people and then I'd get money for that. And then I'd go help in a dope deal or something like that and I'd get money or drugs for that so. And most of the times um, I didn't even need money to go out. If I had five dollars in my pocket I was laughing. Mostly everyone always bought it for me...

...Um, when I was just going here and there I'd go to Buffalo and Hamilton and go back to [home town] again and when I went to [home town] um, some friends of mine, we went to the fair and then I met a man there and then he got me to join the fair so I travelled with [the fair] for a season and um, that's where I met Steven who would soon be my husband... I met him in ‘87 actually, I moved to [small town] to be with him in ‘87, I met him in ‘86, but um, I moved down there to his family and his family took me in and everything... in ‘88 would be probably be the first contact I had with my mom since
leaving at 16. (Interviewer: So what was the gap there, how long?) A few years... That's when I called [mom] up to tell her that I was engaged and going to get married and I went for a visit. I took the bus there, Steven and I, 'cause I didn't want to go alone. I didn't want to go alone to face the music...

... When I moved to um, in ‘87 to [small town], I totally quit smoking drugs. Anything, like I had stopped, like while I was travelling I didn't do the cocaine, for about 2 years before and I stopped doing that. And um, but I was still like, I'd still do acid or mushrooms and drank and smoked dope. But when I went to [small town], I totally quit. Like I was smoking drugs for a while after, but then because it was a new town and all his friends and family... every time I smoked dope I kinda felt paranoid. And so I thought 'oh they're looking at me funny’... or whatever so I'd get myself all psyched out so I decided not to do it anymore because it made me all freaked out.... Like Steven smoked dope, he drank, and you know, whatever, he did his own thing like before I met him and, and I had you know, my past thing... when you don't like the effects, that it's giving you, like if you're paranoid all the time, you don't want to be paranoid you know, it was driving me kinda crazy... like I didn't like the feeling I was getting when every time I smoked dope and so you know, that's never been, then I just stopped... when you consider the effects that it was gonna give me. When I was with him it [alcohol and drug use] slowed down.... like you know, you go out on the weekend one night, and go out and drink, go to the bar or stay at home and have people over and things like that.

Like I got myself um, first a part time job bartending and waitressing and then um, then I got another job on top of that, another part time job in a restaurant as a short order cook, cashier there. And so I had the two part time jobs, then I quit the one because there was this stabbing at the bar I worked at and so I quit because I didn't want – that just freaked me out. So I quit that job but I, then I ended up full time with the short order cook job and um, and then I just got into a regular routine... Then I found another place of employment, like a factory job, so I went on to that one and then I left that factory job for another one which I stayed for about four years, I stayed at that one job and I went on a continuous basis everyday, 40 hours a week you know... I liked it [working at the factory] because um, I come to find out that I'm a very people person. You know um, I like to talk to new people...considering at school I never – I was backed, totally backed away from that. It's just um, I don't know, once in a while I'll stop and say 'hi, how are ya’, and once I got working there and I knew what I was doing and after the 3 months time period was ended then you could you know, pretty much talk to wherever as you're going you know, you meet people and you sit and talk to them in the lunchroom kind of thing and things like that so...

Interviewer: So you were in one town for five or six years and one job for about 4 years?

Ya...um, it was stable... I ended up getting bilateral tendonitis in both my arms from doing the same job over and over and um, I had gone off on workman's comp, and then I got bored and life wasn't so grand anymore. And um, I left my husband and I went back to the drinking and things like that. (So tell me a bit about that... so you were working and...) I was working and we had a child and I had Carrie already and um, you know,
Steven wasn't working anymore and it was just... he wouldn't, he didn't want to get another job. And so I was working, I was paying for a baby sitter whereas if he wasn't working he should've been, I thought, he should've been baby sitting... but you know, men don't do that... I worked like for 2 months past the time they told me to stop working... because of the tendinitis that my hands were so swollen I couldn't even... it was so bad I couldn't even sign my pay cheque barely. So you know, it's no good to anybody then. [When I was off work] I just, I don't know...got really overweight, ate a lot and... I started eating more and doing less and drinking more... About a year of you know, getting bored and I don't know, I was calling it cabin fever I guess. I was just tired of the whole thing... so I went for a visit to Tom's [stepdad] house. (You went back to his house?) Just for a visit and I left Carrie with Steven and I said I'd be back in a week or two and so in that time, in the week or two that I had gone, he moved his stuff out of the house and found a place for her and took her... When I came back there was you know, court papers stating that, he wanted custody of her. When I seen the papers I totally went nutty you know, start drinking more, doing drugs, started using cocaine again and um, basically I signed her over to him and then I moved to [another small town] where Ben [Elizabeth’s ex-common law partner] lived, and I hooked up with him.

Interviewer: So tell me about your relationship with Ben.

I must've been on pretty cheap drugs to be going out with the guy in the first place. At the moment there is nothing but hatred towards him. He's gotten Children's Aid involved in my life so many times when it's not even necessary. You know, he thinks he's the better parent and that he would do better than I ever would because I'm such the bad parent. [He thinks that] I don't do anything but lie on the couch all day and I can't keep a job and things like that and I'm not doing anything healthy for the children and that I'm going to make them turn out the way that I did and things like that. Nothing positive. (How long were you together?) Off and on for 7 years [we] separated in '95 and then I stayed away from him for like I don't know, like a couple years and I went and I ended up staying at the women's shelter and got in the housing... You know when you have so much anger, you just hate the person, and then you get so much hatred that you have to get rid of your hatred and then you forgive him. And then when you forgive him you lose all your hatred and then he sweet talks you and then he sweet talks himself back into my life and then the cycle just started again. (So then you left housing and went back to live with him?) Ya, we moved back here to be together... He sweet talked me into going back with him and that everything was going to be better and it was going to be different this time, that you know, he wasn't going to hit me anymore and things like that and you know, once he got me into the lure then it just started over again. You know, he whacked me in the head with a VCR and dented the top and you know, it just went on from there, yelling and screaming, pushing, punching and things like that... He has control issues, he has to be in control of the whole situation and if he's not in control then he starts falling apart and then he starts creating new things to get me into his grasp again. So this is where I am now... I'm slowly getting out of the grasp. I just wish he would move on and leave me be. But you know, him coming to my house him making threats, he's stole my personal journals that I had and you know, took photocopies of them and put them on disk and threatened to reveal it to everyone, threatening to photocopy it on. And um,
threatening to put it on posters and sending it to my place of employment when I get employment and um, things like that... Ya it's just been a, it's like he's in control and he thinks that he can still pull my strings and he does quite frankly, he does a lot of times, but I'm just trying to get out of that.

*Interviewer: Was your youngest daughter, Kimberly, his child? (Yes) Is she in your custody now and CAS has set sort of rules for them and visits?*

Ya, for visits and if he doesn't bring her back in time then I'm to call the police and uh, if he tries to take her for access that you know, for days that aren't his days then I'm supposed to phone the police and inform them and then call CAS... Just last week I just went through a big thing with the police and bringing her back, and CAS said take his access away... So he's pounding on the doors and the windows here for like half an hour before the police come and he had to be taken away off the property and things like that. This was last week and CAS told me verbally that they were going to remove any access from him, take away his access if he pulled one more stunt and this was supposed to be the one more stunt. Now they're giving him another chance and putting it in writing for him... He calls them [CAS workers] names and is like verbally abusive. (*Were your children in care?*) In with CAS? No. (*So your children were at home during throughout all of this time?*) Yep.

*Interviewer: What would you say about your relationships with men, if you're looking at it across the board?*

I can't keep commitments. I get bored. Um, even now, like I've gone out on dates numerous times and I've had guys call constantly you know. Let's go out, let's do this, let's do that and it's like, you know it's alright or I just can't be bothered. Probably...well when I lived with Ben that was like the worst relationship I've ever had. It was very abusive emotionally, financially he controlled the money. He was a control freak you know and things like that and now it's like I'm in control of my life you know, and nobody else is gonna take that from me and I really like it... I think I'm too independent and overpowering sometimes and some people just don't like it. And that's just the way I am you know? And I'm not gonna change for anybody else. I'm sorry. You know, so I'd rather have no one than someone who can't tolerate the way I am and try to change me. (*Your relationship, living together relationship with Ben ended about a year ago?*) Ya. (*Looking ahead do you see yourself getting into another live-in type of relationship?*) Well, not here for one. Um, you know, that maybe why I've been so standoffish because I know that I'm leaving, so why would I start something up with somebody when I have no plans on staying and no matter what you say it's not gonna make me change my mind. I think probably in the past I couldn't get with anyone because I didn't like myself, so if I didn't like myself then why would anybody else like me? Like really for the real me. I'm thinking that like now... I didn't think that back then. I'm quite comfortable with who I am, what I look like. You know that was a big thing with Ben. I think he wanted me to be like this bean pole thing and that's just not the way I am. This is my size and you know, I'm not gonna starve myself for anybody again. (*When you reflect back on the men in your life, what does that make you feel?*) Men are scum. Most men. I know that there
are some nice men out there. My mom happened to marry one so you know, I'm sure that there are a few out there. A few or a dozen.

**Children’s Aid Society**

[CAS] helped me out at first because I was so afraid of leaving Ben, I put it in their hands that they're ordering this to happen. At first the kids had to stay with him until I got stabilized and I got my apartment... they were at my ex's house, so she would probably been out of my care for six weeks. They [CAS] were called because of the suicide, when I stayed in the hospital for a week... they were called by the police. Like middle of last June is when I went to the hospital... October or November they had taken us to court, my ex and I, to put a society order on because my ex would pull a lot of things like fighting in front of the children and threatening me and things like that. I didn't think it was appropriate for him to be doing this in front of the kids, he shouldn't be doing it at all in the first place, but you know, especially for the mental stability of the children as well so I called them and said isn't there something you can do about it kind of thing. So eventually they got tired of him calling all the time saying this and that. Like things that weren't even true because he figured that the more he told them or whatever, they would take the kids away from me and give them to him, but they wouldn't. You know, I don't think he realised until a couple weeks ago that he wouldn't be able to take them. They wouldn't go to him, they would go to a foster parent. *(So the society order... you were in agreement with that?)* At the time yes. At the time, I was already going to counselling and I was already seeing a psychiatrist, those were two things that were on the order. Also the other one was to refrain from alcohol and illegal drugs. Um, and to go to the woman's shelter for counselling for abused women. Go see an alcohol drug counsellor and get the children into um, children who witnessed abuse. Not only physical abuse, but mental and emotional and all that stuff. I had went for a seminar for the alcohol one. There was like a 3 hour seminar and they said that I didn't need any counselling but CAS is singing a different tune that I have to go... I haven't got the kids in for their counselling because the waiting list is like huge so you know I'm still waiting on that, but I've got my oldest of two one on one personal counselling. She [counsellor] was there for a job placement and she was like young, really young, like right out of school so she clicked really well with her Carrie and she was able to talk a lot about, just about personal things, how she felt because her dad isn't around and how she felt because everyone else, her sister has a dad that she gets to go see... She gets cards and whatever from him but talks on the phone, but my oldest never gets none of that. *(Carrie's dad is deceased right?)* Ya, he's passed away now.

*Interviewer: Are the things that you are involved in just because of the supervision order or are they things that you would like to continue to be involved in anyway?*

Well the psychiatrist, she put me on antidepressants and I've taken myself off and [the psychiatrist] told me that I have to be back on them even though I don't feel that I should be on them, so I have to pretty much take them. *(So the psychiatrist, how often would you see her?)* Every six weeks unless there's a dire need that if I call that and something's going on, something like really horrible she would, they would fit me in to see her... She
checks in and I tell her ‘well this is going on’ or whatever and she has that third person perspective. You know, she's not involved in it so she has a different opinion of the whole thing... I think everyone should have someone like that... Well for one she's really nice and everything and even though if I don't agree with things then you know, it doesn't matter, she'll still say it anyways. If I have a hard time calling someone, like I have a hard time talking to my worker she'll call up and intervene and say ‘well Elizabeth is feeling this way or whatever, can you not lay off her for a while’ you know, because the pressure from the worker and my ex and everything else at one point was very overwhelming.

*Interviewer:* So what about the other stuff on the CAS order?

I haven't actually been on any of those one on one counsellings with alcohol. They told me I hadn't even need it, but CAS is saying I have to. So I'm gonna go to three of them before I leave at the end of this month. I'm gonna put in my 3 and say ‘well there you go’. So you know, they said for my whole life history is that there would've been a problem but now that I've stopped drinking since October you know, they didn't see a problem. *(What do you think?)* What do I think? I think it's a crock of shit. I think that if a person's gonna drink no matter if the order's there or not, they're gonna do it and it doesn't... My problem is that not that I'm not allowed to drink, it's that I don't have a choice whether I can or not. You know and it [alcohol] never was problem. It was like every other weekend I would go out and have a few drinks or whatever. *(So alcoholism was never a problem for you?)* Um, drugs was a big problem. I had a big problem with drugs but I haven't since October of ‘98. *(Is the counselling not for both?)* Um, they mostly deal with um, alcohol. *(If it was around drugs would you be more interested?)* Ya.

*Interviewer:* What are some of the other things that you were involved in with the supervision order?

The shelter thing. I can't get into the group um, I've been to previous groups before but I can't get into this particular group. I've stayed at the woman's shelter before and that was tough. I've done some venting and I don't even feel like talking in there, but they said that if I don't participate then they're gonna have to tell CAS that I'm not participating... Like if I say everything's fine you know, they just leave me alone. So I can't really say what I feel kind of thing... You gonna tell them stuff that's really bothering you or are you gonna tell them what they wanna hear? And I've done it before. I told them what they wanted to hear... I don't know. It's just all just too much. I just hate Children's Aid right now. I didn't mind them before but now that I got this stupid advisor. She's a nasty little woman... My [previous] worker is no longer my worker. He has left the society, so now I get his supervisor and she's a really nasty woman and you know, I have no use for her... Just her total attitude. I was used to my worker and he was pretty easy going. You could talk to him like a normal person. And she doesn't, it's just like boom boom boom... They're [CAS] not even setting any ground rules for Ben. Like he's supposed to do things on his order and he hasn't even attended anything and she still lets him away with it... he's allowed to do whatever he wants to do and I'm doing all kinds of stuff and I see that I'm getting punished for it, for cooperating and doing all this stuff. He's doing nothing
and that's pretty much what he wants. (So is that your beef, that they're not taking a harder line with him?) They don't do anything about it. Why do I think? I don't know. Because they're stupid.

**Interviewer:** So are you gonna do what CAS wants you to do?

I'm going to continue on doing what they want me to do. I just want them out of my face. I'm sick and tired of them. They make me ill. They can't even cooperate, they want me to go to all these appointments, they can't even give me bus tickets anymore or anything like that and it's just like come on now, my ex isn't paying me child support, I only get like $900 a month, what more do you want me to do? And [previous worker] had given me bus tickets before. He like paid for all my bus tickets. (If your previous worker was still around would your relations with CAS would be different?) Um, it still would be a problem with CAS because even if the stuff was still going on, they're not asking Ben for valid address, well they asked for a valid address, but before they go there, I don't know if they'll check out his residence or not and see if it's appropriate. When I came here, they came here to check out my residence, to see if it was appropriate. There's enough space for the children to come and visit and like stay here and live here and their sleeping arrangements and had like everyone checked out and what not. Well, he's gonna go stay at his brother's house like why? You know, the same rules should apply... We're moving to my mom's in [another city] afterwards and we'll be staying there. Of course, CAS will come there to make sure that the housing is appropriate.

**Interviewer:** You were involved with child welfare in other cities too right? Can you tell me about how long ago that would have been? (‘96.) So that's about five or six years ago. What was the first involvement, like how did they first get involved?

I really don't know. I think my ex would call on me, but I'm not quite sure. One of the ones was open because a neighbour had called and said that I had no food for my kids, I'm pretty sure that's why. And when she [the CAS worker] did come, I'm like, okay, fridge number one, I had two fridges. Fridge number one and I had meats and like whatever in the first freezer and then stuff in my fridge and my cupboards were pretty much full. Like this was a surprise visit kind of thing and in the second fridge I had it all full of breads and stuff and pop and juice in the other part of the fridge... One of the times they came up to my house, it's cause I was drinking as well. I left them with a caregiver, with a babysitter and never came back. They were gonna take the kids away but they went to my mom's instead. They went to my mom's for a week.

**Interviewer:** If you look back over all of that from ’96 until then, was it a good thing or a bad thing that you've been involved with the CAS?

No. They come into your house, they expect to, you know, they come in, they want to see what's in your fridge or cupboards and everything else. It's an invasion of privacy. They come and inspect your children. You know, my daughter Kimberly didn't even want to...someone said I beat her or whatever... she had bruises all over. Well I had to literally prove to her as my kid is struggling and screaming in my arms. I had to take her
bottoms off and show her that there were no black and blue marks on her butt, I had to pull up her shirt. She didn't wanna show anybody. Those are her private parts and I told her that. I've always taught them that they don't have to show, they shouldn't, you know, if it felt uncomfortable or anything and all that. I've always said that and so it's just kind of you know, there goes my saying right out the window you know... she didn't even want to look at this lady. They come in here for periodic checks all the time for stuff. To see if there's booze... I just think it's an invasion of privacy and they should investigate things more before they just come storming in your house and this and that. They have no regards to other people, they just wanna get their job done and they don't care, they get paid you know, for regardless. I don't know, they've helped me, this last time they've helped in a sense about, because I put the blame on them to leave Ben, which was a good thing so they helped me to get out, I can say that. And then but, they can help you out in a sense but then they turn around and it's like they change the rules as they go along. They set out these guide rules of things that everyone's supposed to do, and if you don't, you're supposed to be penalized in some way.

*Interviewer: Do you have a lot of social workers in your life?* (Just the last few years with CAS, that's it.) *If you had to assess them overall, what would you say?*

I think it's an intrusion and an invasion of privacy... they give you more stress than anything. Cause you gotta comply with what they want and everything else and you know, it gets stressful, that part. *(What about some of the non CAS people?)* The non CAS people? Um, it probably wouldn't do good to get into like the family violence thing, I'm kind of sick of it right now. I don't want to deal with those issues right now you know. I've dealt with them before.

**Motherhood**

*Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about the experience of becoming a mother?*

Um, it was hard at first. Well when I first came home from the hospital we lived in this one bedroom apartment. It was above a store and it was hot and because our back apartment, the back roof was, and it was all tarred and had their air conditioning thing so the sun would just attract and just fume into our place so it was like so hot and um, it was just like a little tiny one bedroom place. She [my mom] took the train down and she came to stay for the first couple of days because being my first baby and not knowing anything. She was there when I got home from the hospital and she's like taking care of me because I was in so much pain because I had stitches and everything else and could barely walk. She stayed for about 4 days and then my stepdad or like her husband, came in, came to there and you know, spent time with us, and uh...it was interesting. It was kind of like a new bonding thing.

*Interviewer: So is being a mom a big part of your story?*

Being a mom...um, I don't know if it is. I am a mom. Um, and I try to do good, but there's also the fact that um, drugs and alcohol seem to be a big part too because every
time something doesn't go right or I have a hard time with things, that's what I turn to. Like I know that I'm a mom and I try to do my best and try to work things out like where okay um, I don't know, like where my kids come before me... Now I'm a mom. Before I wasn't really... I was to a point interested in being a mom but now I've learned to deal with things in other ways besides turning to alcohol and drugs... but my attentions are more focussed on the children and their well being compared to ‘well they just have to live with it’ kind of thing, because I've done a lot of counselling and self help things... In June when, just before I separated from my ex um, the last incident I tried to commit suicide because I couldn't cope. I couldn't deal with it so had taken an overdose on pills and um, it's just, and while I was there and talking and talking to different counsellors and whatnot, cause I was hospitalized. They kept me there for 7 days. And uh, you know I had someone to come in and talk to me everyday and I realised there was more to this life than just me and I gotta start thinking of the children before me. Not that I was bad before because um, you know I've always been good and I've always tried to teach values into the kids and learn by example and things like that but just, there were different factors and different people involved and um, just this last time I've had enough. You know, I'm gonna change it, I'm going to quit using drugs and I haven't touched any cocaine in over 2 years now and that was done freely. I quit cold turkey and um, so it's just like I don't want to... them to see me doing that and I don't want them to grow up like that.

...I try to get them in to Guides and Sparks and after school programs and volunteering. I volunteer myself once a week for six hour... At the food bank and um, I've actually learned quite a bit of skills there myself. So I work reception there and I really like going there. So and helping out through the community and volunteering at the girls' school and helping with their fundraising and helping go on school trips and things like that. So I've been doing that and also at the food bank I started a craft committee there... I like giving back to the community instead of taking, instead of being selfish and then if you know, I show my girls about volunteering and you know and that, both of them have come in and volunteered. Carrie, the older one, she's been in volunteering and she's probably put in about 50 hours.

I know Carrie has tried cigarettes and that, and she was caught shoplifting and it's just... I found out about it at the beginning of April. And I guess this had been going on for a while and they got caught at [drug store] and they didn't even bother calling home to tell me about it... I called [drug store] and freaked on them for not telling me and I um, went down to [another store] and talked to the store manager and I said ‘listen, my daughter's been stealing in your store, but you haven't caught her yet. What can we do?’ So she wrote an apology letter to them and she had to bring it in and the owner talked to her. (Was that your idea?) Yes it was.

Um, they're good kids.Carrie, she's really tomboyish um, she loves doing sports... She loves singing, she's participating in a talk show that they're having at the school, she's always into rollerskating and things like that. Last summer, I took her and I taught her to fish and she really liked that. She's smart. She has a hard time in school, hard to concentrate on things. She's getting better. She was really worried there like something
would happen to me like it happened to her dad. She was really depressed about it and stuff like that. And she talked to her teacher and her teacher talked to me and then I talked to Carrie and we worked it all out that I was gonna be around forever to torment her butt. (Does she have to do, similar to you, a lot of school changes?) Ya. If we move to a different town, ya. When I lived with my ex and um, she went to the same school, so she's been at the school for two years. That's the longest that they've ever stayed at a school. (So, what about Kimberly?) She's a totally different story. Kimberly is with her friends, um, she'll horse around and stuff like that and it doesn't bother her unless she gets hurt. Um, she's really emotional. If you yell at her she'll cry. She thinks that her dad and I are gonna get back together... you know, that I'm not allowed to have any male friends or anything and he shouldn't have any like female friends and that... But she's good, she's shy at first, she's the shy one, you know she won't talk to someone she doesn't know, which is very good. Um, she's like a happy go lucky kid usually...

Interviewer: So how would you characterize your relationships with your daughters?

Carrie can pretty much say whatever. You know, she'll tell you lately she's been hiding her feelings but now she's getting better since you know, she learned that she can tell me and things like that and um, we get along pretty well together you know. The worst time that I don't get along with Kimberly is when she comes back from her dad's. ‘Daddy says I don't have to do what you tell me to do’. And things like that, and she acts up and I get frustrated... (What's it like to be a mom?) Crazy. It's like you don't get any time for yourself. So... in the day I do, I usually do but that's cause I'm not working. But I go to appointments and then Thursday afternoons I do my volunteer thing. It's a lot of responsibility to make sure there's food on the table and you know, they got snacks for lunch and you know things like that... (So are your kids important to you?) Ya, they are. If I didn't have them I'd be really um, I don't know. I'd probably fall back into that horrible... I need them as much as they need me.

Drugs and Alcohol

Interviewer: If I asked you to just tell me what alcohol and drugs mean for you, what would you say?

... The drugs was a coping mechanism to cope with things that were going on in my life. Um, throughout my childhood and whatnot, and then I started when I was sixteen doing coke and it's just been an ongoing...well things aren't going right, let's go out and whatever or if someone offered it, ya whatever, I'll do it. (Were you conscious when you were younger of why you were doing this?) No. I was just doing it because I was the party girl you know, and things like that. At the time I was just numbing everything. I didn't want to think and I didn't want to deal with reality... So I kind of like comatose my feelings and my emotional being and um, dealt with it that way. If I was high... I wasn't really in reality. (So when did you become aware of all this?) Um, probably not until I started doing a lot of counselling. Um, probably about 25, 26... (What did you think of that lifestyle while you were in it?) Go with the flow. You know, like party! Whoo hoo, I'm there and I had no care, I had no one to care for myself as a person and I didn't
care what happened to myself. You know like ‘oh well I get drunk and I get hit by a car, oh well’... Or I'd do so much drugs that you know I’d O.D. ‘Oh well’. You know, I didn't like me as me and I didn't even like me at all... After a while I just, I didn't care and I just started doing it. It didn't matter if people were here or not. Like with cocaine I could just do it by myself and do what I want, how I want.

Interviewer: So if I could just cycle back a bit, it's been about a year last October... is that right, is that when you said that you said that you got off of drugs?

Not this October that just passed, but the one before that... it's been over 2 years. The cocaine, I just had enough of it. It was tearing me apart as well as those around me. Um it's not easy lying about it all the time... you know hiding out and whatever. It just wasn't a good thing for me. (So did you get any support over the last two years, any ongoing support?) You mean for drug addiction? No... I think it was... ’95 or ’96. I went to a 30 day program at the same time at the psychiatric hospital... I went 2 weeks to the nutty side for detox. And then I went in for the thirty day program and when I went to that I had to go to the AA meetings and we did a lot of self exploratory and everything else and all that crap. But when I got out of there I went to probably 4 AA meetings, stayed clean for like 30 days and started drinking again. You know you have to, just like stop smoking cigarettes, you have to want to quit in order to do so. And so if you don't have you know, you can go there and lie all you want and say I'm not drinking and blablabla and meanwhile you can just you know, came back from a 3 day binge kind of thing. (So are drugs and alcohol still a theme in your story?) I don't know. I think you're gonna have a desire to do it, doesn't mean that you're gonna go out and do it. You sit there and it's a nice hot day out and you go ‘ah today would be a nice day for a nice cold beer’ but it doesn't mean I'm going to go out to the beer store and buy you know, like a case of beer... I see it as um, as soon as this order is done for CAS, I will go out and have a drink. But the, the cocaine problem and all that, that had nothing to do with CAS. (So the reason that you're not drinking is because of the supervision you're in?) Yes, but I don't like it... I don't like the order because it says I have to, these are things I have to. And I hate doing things I have to. I like doing things cause I want to or cause I choose to. Like I wasn't ever a drinking problem. Like I'd go out one day on the weekend, like every 2 weeks and go out with my girlfriend, go out, have a few drinks and come home.

Interviewer: What part would you go out and start again if there wasn't a CAS supervision order in place?

Well, I wouldn't mind going out when I shoot some pool. I like to play pool. And when I shoot pool it would be nice if I had a beer, but I do go out and shoot pool without the beer. Like I don't need it, but it would be nice, or on nice day or a hot day or whatever if I you know, am out with some friends at a barbecue kind of thing, it would be nice. If I had the choice, I wouldn't mind to have one beer or two beers... It doesn't mean that I can't have fun without it, it means that it would be nice if I wanted to I could.
Finances and Housing

Interviewer: You had mentioned you were moving to a trailer... so perhaps you could talk about the trailer and moving there...

...I haven't finished paying for it yet, but I acquired a trailer and I'm making payments on it to pay it off and the girls, my two girls and I are going to move there in the summer after school's out for the entire summer. I'm planning on moving to [city] where my mom lives. I was planning on doing that before, but I decided to wait until the end of school and instead of staying in my mom's hair for the whole summer because the kids are out of school, I decided to do the trailer thing and um, stay there for the summer and it's like a transition into going to [city]. I'm going in September [to live with mother] no matter what, um I'm eleventh on my list for [subsidized] housing... but you know if I'm staying at my mom's I can be closer to bug them all the time constantly about it as well right?

Interviewer: So are you on family assistance?

No. I don't get social assistance at all. I get um a pension for workman's comp and I also get a pension from Canada Pension from survivor's and orphan's benefit because Carrie’s dad passed away. So I get that as well and that's what I get. And Ben is supposed to pay me support and I'm supposed to get that but I haven't received anything from that in the last while... But now cause he quit his job because he didn't want to pay child support and so and being in limbo, he only owes like, I know a lot of other people are still waiting in the thousands of thousands of dollars, but he only owes maybe like $1500 but still that's a huge chunk of change...

Interviewer: Is work something that you want to do?

I wouldn't mind doing regular work, having a full time job would be pleasant but the um, CAS has ordered me to do all these appointments and just can't find a job that is willing to work around my schedule. I was working at one time in October, October of last year, um, I had a full time, 40 hour a week job. I didn't keep it because it was just too stressful for me... I wouldn't mind having a nice, even a part time job would be good, but it's hard to find one that will go around your hours instead of their hours... CAS, well they expect me to go to appointments constantly to get this thing done in the six month or whatever term and it's just like you know, I can barely get myself to that cause I don't want to, but if I had a job... I wouldn't mind getting paid for the job that I do at the food bank... You know I help people fill out forms, work on the computer, dealing with cash, answering telephones, all that kind of stuff.

Adult Connections with Family

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your relationship with your mom now, as an adult?

After I got married we started talking and whatnot and we've been pretty adamant on talking to each other and things like that. Visitations and things like that so... (how often
do you talk?) Every weekend and this week I've talked to her like three times so she's a good. I don't know, we're getting along better. (Is that an important relationship for you?) Ya it is. It's changed now... we can talk to each other more openly on most things. Um, you know and uh I've realised that you know, she really does love me and cause I didn't feel that before. She wouldn't go out of her way to you know, talk to me or make sure everything's alright and if she doesn't hear from me like every weekend then she's like worried you know. And she's very concerned about the Ben thing cause of his history and he's a little nutty and things like that and she's witnessed it all and she's been there through the whole 7 years of this crap that I've dealt with... When my I caught my daughter shoplifting and I said 'mom, remember when I was caught shoplifting? I'm really sorry!'. Now I know what she went through. I was such a rotten child, right?... I want the family connection with my family because my mom's been trying for like 11 years to get me to move closer to her so now I think this is the time to go and start over and try to rebuild with my kids with their family as well. (Do you move a lot? How much?) Lots... the last five years...probably at least 11 times maybe.

Interviewer: Do you see any similarities between how you've been living as a grown up and how your mom was?

Actually I haven't really but... somethings that now come to my attention and then I think, 'oh my mom used to do that'. Before like, when I was partying and stuff, taking the kids to the sitter and going off and doing whatever and that would be something. Another thing was um, frequent men, going through men and that and I was doing that for a while... I don't know, a couple years. But now I have no use for men so... (Did your mom's lifestyle change when she was a bit older?) Um, ya. Well when she met her husband. They've been married for...about nine years now. I think that was a big change. Um, for her. She drinks on the weekends. Like on Monday she'll drink. After 3 o'clock on Saturday, that is her drinking day. Um, she'll sip on coffee and sip on grand marnier throughout the afternoon and part of the evening. (Does she get drunk?) Um, sometimes, sometimes.

The Big Picture

Interviewer: I'd like to hear from your perspective, what you see as making your life worthwhile.

What makes me want to live? Um, the kids... not having my ex in my face. I don't know. I find there's more to live for all the time. Little small things like I don't know... to get by everyday I have, you know, things I look forward to like being with the kids, spending time with them, doing stuff with their school, volunteering, quiet time to myself too.

Interviewer: What are you hoping for, if you look ahead for the next 5 years?

I want to get in for the [subsidized] housing. Like I said, I'm 11th on the list for that. Once I get down there anyways I have an opportunity to work with my stepdad... After that, I really don't know. I know I want to save up, I want a car, I want my own house, up
north somewhere, live by a lake you know. (What do you see for your kids?) School. School school school. Kimberly is in Brownies now, she graduated to Brownies and Carrie is in Guides. She wants to continue her 3rd year in guides and wants to go on to Pathfinders, that's after Girl Guides. So you know, if I can keep them occupied like, active and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: If you look back, over time what kinds of things have helped you survive?

I think the thing that helped me most is that I put a wall in front of anything that came in... I just put it back in my brain and stored for a later date kind of thing. There's a lot of crap back there but it still hasn't come out yet, but it's there, and I still have that wall thing you know... I don't think about things that are happening. Like bad things that have happened... I choose not to think about it and just more like it never even happened. I think there's like this storage spot in the back of your brain and you just stick sort of luggage, and you just keep on throwin' stuff in your luggage and you know, when that one's full get out another bag and start puttin' some stuff in there... I have to pretend that [these bad things] never even happened because if you let it all build up and you're constantly thinking and mulling it over and whatnot, what am I gonna do and this and that, you're gonna lose it. You're gonna go insane... I've survived a lot. Not as much as others, but to me it's a lot.