

*Trevor Jang*

*Telkwa, BC*

*Moricetown*

*17 years old*

### **Highway of Tears**

The evening wind danced the crispy fallen leaves. A stray dog whimpers along the stretch of highway between Moricetown reserve and the town of Smithers. The mutt's ears perk up as he rushes to the side of the road while a rusty car makes its way into town.

Travis is surprised at how eerie-quiet it is for a Friday night. He looks over to Jen. She smiles. The eeriness evaporates. "Oh I love her." He pulls into the driveway.

"Travis, wait." Jen touches his hand. "I'm really proud of you. You're not an alcoholic or screw up. Not like the guys at this party, or reserve or your family. You're different. And I love you for it." There was that smile again.

He gets the butterflies. The kind that makes him so happy his stomach hurts. "I love you too."

For Travis the party is a blast a group of kids who start some poker and Travis is eager to take their money. Jen is done now.

"Just a bit longer baby."

A bit longer passes by and Jen's irritated. Drunks are passing out everywhere and her few friends had left hours ago. "Can we go, now?"

Travis waves her off as he waves a winning hand. Jen grabs her coat and leaves without Travis even noticing. Without her license, she heads towards the highway and sticks out her thumb for anybody heading to the reserve. Shortly after an old Chevy truck pulls over. She climbs into an immediate feeling of uncertainty. She thinks about going back to Travis, but goes against her better instinct. She looks the man in the face, looks down at her sweaty hands, and puts on her seat belt. Click.

Click. An alarm goes off in Travis's head. He gets a sudden rush of anxiety. He looks around for that smile to put him at ease. It isn't there. "Where's Jen?"

"Everyday we make choices. And every night we must sleep with the consequences of those choices..."

Travis stares at the ceiling, each brush of blue paint showing his blue soul. Each crack representing a hole in his heart, each bright yellow star sticker alluding to a wish. Wishing to go back and leave that party with her. Wishing to drive her home, kiss her good night, and see her the next day. He sees her in the "Missing" poster, tears rolling down his face, tears just thinking about her, and the highway. He also sees the bottle of whisky sitting on his desk that his brother left. "I just want to let you know how proud I am." Her voice trickles through his guilt, through his regrets. He takes a glance at his ceiling, and back to the bottle. He chugs it down.

Winter..

Spring..

Summer..

Fall..

Ben gets out of his car and takes out his camera. He quickly polishes the lens and tests the lights. All systems go. He directs his view onto the 7-11, catching people as they move in and out of the doors, a one stop convenience in their busy lives. Ben slowly turns his attention to a disgruntled figure on the side of the store. Through his lens alone, Ben could tell this young man had not showered in ages, his raggedy clothes hang off his skinny body. His grease-ball hair growing in whichever direction it pleased. Moving in for a better look, the smell of liquor shot into his nose like a self conscious person holding in a sneeze. Ben gets real close to the figure, only to be fingered as he staggers off to the side of the road.

“Hey douche.” Travis wakes up to a CD bouncing off his head. “Someone left it on the porch for you, lame ass.” His brother calls over his shoulder.

Travis scrambled to the TV, his heart in his throat, “maybe it’s about Jen” he pleaded as he put it in. Instead he saw himself. Intoxicated and disrespected in public. “I don’t even remember this,” He muttered. A man’s voice begins to talk over the action. All he says is “this is you...this is you.” Travis sits there and cries. The self loathing runs down his cheeks dropping on the ground, joining his dignity. Travis looks into an envelope that came with it. It was from a man named Ben. All it read was “I can help put things back together,” along with his number. Travis took a good hard look at himself, finally noticing the wrinkles on his face, the droops under his eyes, his greasy hair. He picks up the phone.

Travis knocks on the door. A young man greets him with his nice smile, neat hair and sweater. “Hi Travis, I’m Ben.”

“Why am I here?” Travis asks as he takes a seat on a couch.

“I’m here to help you, I remember you from before I moved. I remember how you always had your act together. You were polite and a good guy. I always thought that you and I were a lot alike. We were both different than the other kids from the reserve. And here I come back and you’re like this? I had to know what happened. I had to set you back on your course. I just had to reveal you to yourself first.”

“No one can set me back on my course.”

“Look, I did some researching on my own and I found out what happened to you. That is a terrible situation. But I can help make it better for you, and for the coming generations. But I need your help.”

“How?”

“I just graduated from film school and have been looking for a documentary idea. I wanted to come back to the reserve and bring notice to topics in need. Then there you were. I want us to make a film on the Highway of Tears.

This got Travis’s eyes locked onto Bens.

“Most of the work will be done myself. I can collect information and interviews and all the editing myself. When it’s finished I want to bring it to the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival next month. We can win it Travis. All I need from you is to share your story on the film.”

This was followed by a long, painful pause. “I...I can’t do that.”

“Travis please, there are many young women out here that will benefit from your story.”

“I CAN’T!” Travis got off the couch and slammed the door as he left.

Travis came home to a message on the answering machine. “I’m still making the film.”

Two days before Ben is all set to leave for Winnipeg Travis appears at his door step.

“Hey um,” He hesitates. “Can I come with you?”

Ben takes a good hard look at him. “Well it’s short notice but I can probably scheme you in as my assistant or something. Got a bag?”

Travis didn’t know what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t a festival filled with aboriginals from around the country sharing their story, each one as touching as the next. Finally it was Ben’s turn. He set up his equipment and did a short introductory and pushed play.

The film began with slides of the many young native women who have gone missing along the Highway of Tears, Highway 16, stretching from Prince George to Prince Rupert. Travis flinched as Jen’s beautiful smile appeared on the screen. It continued with the history, explaining that this monstrosity has been occurring since the 70’s. The film then showed campaigns throughout the ages, like “Take back the Highway”, held in 2005 to create awareness. It showed police helicopters and search teams combing throughout the 700km spread, all the no avail. The film ended with Ben pleading for people to be aware to help, and the credits.

“It’s not over,” Travis whispered.

Ben opened his mouth to question but his film stopped him. It was Travis on Ben’s couch, tears pouring down his face. “Hi, my name is Travis, I’m 19 years old and last year my beautiful girlfriend Jen was taken away from me by...by..” His voice began to crack. “By this monster. Please help us find who’s out there. Help us put a stop to the Highway of Tears.” The film went to black.

Everyone stood up and applauded once more, this time for Travis. He shied away behind Ben, who was trying to spit out words. He finally smiled when Travis spoke for him. “She would’ve been proud of me, wouldn’t she?” Ben nodded, tears rolling down his cheek.”

### *Author's Statement*

Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert has been dubbed “The Highway of Tears” for decades. Dozens of mother’s have lost their daughters, several young men have lost their sisters, friend, on in my stories case, girlfriend. People are often seen hitchhiking along this highway, young and old, male and female. Yet it is only the young women who have gone missing. For an unknown reason they have been almost all aboriginal. This has led to suspicions that all the abductions are connected, and that this is a serial killer. But no one has found any clues as to who is out there, or where any of these young ladies are (besides of course the bodies that have come up). I decided to write my story to show the struggle of someone from a reserve, or anyone really, having to lose the most important person in their life. I wrote my story to try and help bring awareness to an issue that is in desperate need of help.