Ellen’s Introduction

This is Ellen. I will started Yaabaa Teeshaay story. My Indian name’s Naliit. That’s Indian name. You gotta have you Indian name. And I tell little story for my friend.¹

Little bit of story, ’bout how we gotta be survive out there. It just like he taught us what to do, what we can do. Maybe we could run into out there, something hard. But if we know what to do, that’s what he did. He run into something real bad. He got it out safely.

He must have a special Dendi’. Dendi’ hon tchaan,

¹ What follows is Ellen’s understanding of the traditional values taught by Yaabaa Teeshaay based upon her long life on the land and in relation to her people.
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this mean that young man pretty smart person. He got it out.
He never gets killed. I understand, no one took his life away.
I hear he die with old age. So that this is man, real special man.
We talk about it. And he could do anything.
Smart. He know what to do, not to be hungry.
Take care not to be hungry. Take care of herself.\(^2\)
Raise the children up, the good way, hard way.

This is story. The people tell story to us. It gets into\(^3\)
and when we’re old it’s there for us to pass on to our grandkids or our great grandkids.

That’s what I’m doing,

\(^2\) Ellen’s primary language is the Healy Lake dialect of Tanacross Athabascan. Her language doesn’t differentiate between masculine and feminine pronouns, so the reader will encounter these pronouns being used interchangeably in English throughout the book.

\(^3\) Traditional storytelling was used as a method of instilling cultural values, which by the skill of the storyteller became a living part of the psyche of the audience and the teachings were expected to manifest throughout one’s life.

I don’t do for myself. Connie help me and I really appreciate it. When I be lonely, it’s something to be talk about.
Ishdoninegiishiit. That means to be lonely, something to talk about it. This far I gonna talk about \textit{Yaabaa Teeshay},

and other part, I gonna tell story little bit, or whatever in my mind.

Today I have two daughter left. Today I don’t know when I goin’ close my eye.
It’s very painful.\(^4\)

I got try best I can for this little bit story. Leave it behind.

\(^4\) Ellen lived with leukemia and severe arthritis for several years until her death in 2009. Although she was frequently in severe pain, she was nearly always cheerful, generally saying, “I’m okay,” and refocusing on your visit. She never failed to thank you for a visit or a phone call and to offer some little treat or tea in the traditional way. If you brought her a gift, she always reciprocated. These stories are her gift to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren as well as to anyone else who might find meaning and enjoyment in them. For Ellen there was no “other.” She viewed everyone and everything as part of God’s creation.
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Along the Tanana River

Photo courtesy of Lee Saylor