**Kirsten Milun**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

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**Plymouth, Minnesota**

Kirsten Milun -**KM**

Amy Sullivan -**AS**

AS - This is Amy Sullivan and I'm with Kirsten Milun in Plymouth at the Lunds & Byerlys at the second floor at the seating cafe area. It is June 20th, 2017. Thanks for coming Kirsten.

KM - I'm Kirsten Milun and I give my permission for you to record me.

AS - Can you start by talking about your childhood and where you grew up?

KM - Well let's see how far back I can go. I was born in Minneapolis at Swedish Hospital. I'm going to try to condense this and give a Cliffs Notes version. At eight years old my parents divorced and I lived with my dad for a long time. And then I went to live with my mom in Illinois then finally lived back with my dad in Sixth Grade. About at that time he married a woman eight years older than I was, and they are still married actually. So that was like four years older than my brother. So they've been married, what, forty years.

AS - What year were you born?

KM - '63. So I have two younger brothers, Adam and Christopher. Christopher will be forty and Adam is somewhere in his upper thirties. I have older siblings Steve and Heidi. So I would say growing up that way, gave me a sense of wanting to have a real stable childhood for my kids. My parents are good people but things were complicated. You know, my mom, when I lived with my mom, my stepdad had abused her quite a bit and beat her.

AS - Your dad did?

KM - My step dad.

AS - Your stepdad. Oh.

KM - Yeah, not my dad. She actually went from a gentle human being, my dad; an artist, a free spirit, to someone like that because of course that's what she grew up with. Her dad was that way. So all of us, three children, the oldest ones, we really wanted a stable childhood for our kids and we didn't want to show my mom, is an alcoholic. Mmm, I would call her more of a problem drinker. Her sister, my aunt, died of alcoholism. Literally her liver failed. And my cousin, Michael, thirty-six, who would be my age now otherwise, his liver actually split open. I mean everyone in our family dies of alcoholism and so we really wanted to keep things to be stable. I always wanted to show good like, you know, if you drink, you whisper it when they were young, and you didn't do it too excess. (4:10). And just, really I kind of wanted a father who knows best...well, not really, but you know what I mean, [Jokingly]

AS - [Laughs]

KM - because it was always mother knows best. I'm trying to skip ahead here because my kind of focus is I didn't have any dictionaries or anything like that because we had kind of a childhood that was mostly because of divorce and alcohol [sentence unclear]. Divorce isn't a problem it was how they handled the divorce. Mom and dad were really nice to each other but it was just weird. And then dad marrying someone.

AS - So it got really complicated?

KM - It got really complicated.

AS - How was it for you getting along with your new stepmother who could've been your big sister?

KM - I was kind of the head of the household because my older sister wasn't quite into that. I was more into care-taking because I was taking care of my dad and making sure the place was always nice. It's just complicated. So she [stepmother] comes in, she would have been twenty-one.

AS - You were living with your dad before he had this relationship? You were kind of in charge of the house?

KM - Yes. You know our specialties of hamburger helper and tombstone pizza [Jokingly]

AS - Yes [Laughs]

KM - And then she came in and just as is her personality just blasted over everything. She really hasn't changed that personality at all.

AS - So she was twenty one when you meet her.

KM - My gosh, I can't even believe that she was ever that young. I mean that's really young. I just think, my gosh, that's Noah's age, my youngest child. So dad was nineteen, twenty years older. I probably got along best with her. My brother, four years older, not so much, but we learned to live with it. Of course, now it's been many, many years. I mean now I don't even remember hardly my parents getting married. So then I got married in '86, I'm just going to jump ahead, and I'm still married. [Laughs]. And we've been married thirty years, thirty, thirty one years, so I've been married a long time. The kids had a very stable upbringing. I mean Dick is just like his side of the family, everything is very stable.

AS - So you did get that? You did find that person?

KM - Oh, yeah. Yeah. I should have looked for other things too, but, just saying [Jokingly]

AS - [Laughs] But you found stability

KM - Yeah, he was stable, and I wanted to be stable, and he was just one of those guys. So the kids' upbringing was very... I mean we built a house in 1991 out in the country and everything was hunky-dory. So the kids were really raised, they were very lucky.

AS - How many kids did you have?

KM - Three. Amanda will be twenty nine in October. Alex was twenty five last September if he was still alive. [Unclear]. Noah just turned twenty one in November. So I really kind of got a thrill out of being able to raise children. I mean, I didn't realize it would turn out to be really sucky, I mean, it does. It's not easy, you know. It started out and Halloween I would make this special meal for them and their milk was orange and I mean, I just tried to make everything perfect. I really did.

[Long pause - silence]

KM - The silence means Kirsten's crying. I don't mean to just randomly, it seems they just, in waves of grief, they do this.

AS - Yeah, well this is hard to tell this story so.

KM - Usually I speak a lot in crisis too so I'm kind of used to speaking, you know, but, you know. So kids went to Wayzata schools. Everything went really well and you know the story of Alex.

AS - Well I'd like for you to tell the story of Alex. How did that all start? What happened? What was it like when your kids started their teenage years? What were their personalities like?

KM - Alex, right out of the shoot, was inquisitive, constantly making waves, you know, pushing the envelope.

AS - He's the middle?

KM - Yes, like he always used to tell me, "I'm the middle child, I'm the middle child," and he was always, always had this shiny, like that top picture you see in the obituary.

AS - The leather. Yeah.

KM - [Unclear] He was very forgetful all the time. Brilliant. Spoke early. Did everything early. He's just a brilliant young kid, but, man, was he a lot of work. He was a lot a lot of work. He never slept much, he never took naps, whereas his older sister, at noon, she was three hours with that.

AS - [Laughs]

KM - Everything was predictable and all that and then came Alex and he was so forgetful that at school I talked to his first grade teachers, team teaching, and I said, you know there has to be, please work with me, this child doesn't need to but he can't remember anything. You know, to bring home anything. And they said, well you know we think the problem is he's so cute. They said because he was adorable, he was gorgeous, and he just had these big long eyelashes and this big white mouth and this shock of white hair. He was so charming and he was never naughty, but man, he just. So I'd give him a ride to school in the morning and I'd take his backpack and I'd get it ready and I'd set it in the garage and I'd say, Alexander, honey, are you forgetting anything? He'd say, no, let's go mommy. I said, honey, think about it, look around you, what do you have everyday?

AS - [Laughs]

KM - Sure enough I'd have to drive to school leave his backpack. Then I'd watch him run into school, because I knew, because I'd worked it up with his teachers that we'd have to have some consequence of action. Like, oh honey, I'm sorry you don't have your homework in your backpack, but now you're going to have to do it inside. We didn't really know what to do. It just broke my heart you know to see him running him with no fricken backpack

AS - [Laughs]

KM - See everyone else has a little backpack. But he was that way his whole life until the day he died. He was always like that. But he was very charming, entrepreneurial. He went to the, he said I want to sell [unclear]. How old are your children?

AS - Nineteen and twenty three.

KM - Twenty three. Okay. Well at that time Shinders was a big deal for boys. They'd go to Shinders and get baseball cards or Pokemon cards or these weird little toys that had spikes all over them. So, Alex decided he could get them in bulk. I mean, this is a little kid, and Plymouth Creek, which is just this way a block, buy them in bulk and then sell them to kids for a profit.

AS - Oh my gosh [Laughs]

KM - And to neighbors

AS - How old is he?

KM - Grade school, so he was about third grade then, fourth grade. I said, you can't do that. So he asked the principal. The principal said I don't know, I think free market I would've allowed that. So he did it and he would do it to neighbors. He would buy baulk and he would say mommy, drive me to Shinders again. He was just a force of nature all the time. Just absolutely brilliant. [unclear - 13:13]. Sometimes kids like that are a challenge in a lot of ways. And he never stopped talking. He was a great communicator. In Junior High he became star student at West Junior High in Wayzata and then I don't know what happened. Something happened. At the time he got to high school, 4,000 kids, and I don't what that thing was.

AS - 4,000 [unclear]?

KM - Well, in total.

AS - Wow, wow. Yeah, yeah.

KM - He changed and I'm not sure what changed him. He began instead of to always be, he was always so happy before that. Hard, hard work, taking care of that kid. But always just happy. I mean, they alway used to say from, if you read his obituary, that he shimmered and he sparkled. And he just did [crying]. He actually had a glow about him. And I'm not just saying that because my kid's dead. Everybody knew that. He still had that but he had a different type of intensity. So instead of getting up in the morning and watching Arthur or whatever, he was studying about what's going on in the world and, you know, what can we do, and I said, Alex, I don't know what we're going to do about \_. And I didn't realize that plantation owners who now are, just, it's crazy. [Unclear - 14:30] Alex was pretty well read. And he goes, listen to this song mom, listen to this song, listen to this song, this is so interesting. It's a new rapper and he talks about the injustice of it's like [snores], I gotta go. You know? And so that intensity. So he was kind of losing touch with people in high school because he was so intense all the time. I thought he was being, now looking back, taken over by [unclear 15:02]. And he wasn't doing drugs. I know it sounds like he was but he wasn't, of any kind. In fact, he didn't believe in smoking, drinking, or anything that would ruin his body, almost to the extreme. And he was always very politically involved.

15:34 (2 hours)

KM - And I'd say well honey why don't you (unclear) and he'd go oh I'm not doing things like that. So we really struggled with him and then he started to get angry. He seemed angry, like he just seemed overwhelmed by things he couldn't change, you know?

And that was a marked difference. So his dad and I, Alex wanted to go off to college. I didn't want him to because he was so out there and he was so intense and I thought we needed to keep him around a little more even though he was way ahead academically

and he could do anything. I don't care how smart he is, he, for one thing, couldn't ever find his lisence, he couldn't ever - I mean, could you imagine a kid like that in college because they're just like [squeals]. Well his aunt is kind of like that. She is, I don't know how she

did it but she pulled it together man. He would too but his immaturity, his being a boy and they don't really, the frontal lobe isn't fully developed. Well, anyway, he went.

AS - Where did he go?

KM - University of South Dakota Vermillion. Political Science. He started to get into drinking a little bit I noticed. In high school he didn't care. He didn't even want to go out with people, he would be home with [unclear] and I. We'd hear so much of "people are idiots."

It's really not like Alex. He was also a very hard worker and all the kids have worked since they were like 14. So Alex, I know as much about what happened when he got there. I mean, lack of access to his grades, them being over 18, he seemed to become even

more intense.

AS - You had a lack of access. You didn't really know what was going on.

KM - Well, I mean, he wasn't being very forward with us.

AS - Yeah.

KM - So he was screwing around a little bit in the beginning, how they do. Drinking and that kind of seemed to stop. But he was always entrepreneurial. He was always doing something to make money in addition to working a lot in school. Then on November 8th, 2000, um. Okay, let me back up a little bit. He was very stubborn. He's also very stubborn and so whenever he would get sick there I'd say, you need to go to the doctor. I'm not a big doctor person but he wouldn't go. I'd say well, Alex, you've had this sore throat forever and every time I talk to you your voice is getting more and more closed up. And he says, no I'm not going to them, they're just all, you know, I don't need them to give me drugs and I can handle this, I'll do the echinacea like we always did as kids and goldenseal and whatever.

AS - [Laughing]

KM - [Laughs] Right, and you wonder why my kid won't go to the doctor. It ended up we got a call at about three in the morning. That was during the recession. So my husband had lost his job and insurance, so health insurance after all those years.

AS - Oh, yeah

KM - So Alex, they were gonna helicopter him to Yankton and he ended up in [unclear] so you know how sick he was, okay? So they yanked out his tonsils and he actually was very close to death because he was so sick because an antibiotic wouldn't take care of it.

And then he [unclear, 19:40]. So he was always very stubborn that way. He didn't want the doctors dealing him drugs like that. Then, he was an advocate for weed. We had always acted like it was no big deal, and I still think it's no big deal. I really don't.

I think medicinally it can be really good and blah, blah, blah, blah. What we didn't know draconian (?), our kid was there. In South Dakota. It's like Mexico. You can see what happened to him. I had a hunch that he might've been selling and I just...

AS - When did you have the hunch?

KM - Well we were visiting his dad, see this is why marriages don't stay together after something like this. So his dad and I were with him in Vermillion and Alex goes we gotta make a stop here. So he makes a stop and he goes behind this gas station that's closed and I was like, "what is he doing?" and he goes, "why don't you let up on that kid," because I'm very much helicopter. It was always in the kids' business. I tried to be. He was just, "leave him alone." I said, "well, what's he doing back there?" Well, sure, he was dropping off weed and whatever to a friend. I remember him coming home from a visit and I took him by the hands and I said, Alex, run away from weed. Just walk away, go the other way. He's just like, he always had the perfect smile, okay mom. I go I mean it Alex, I got a bad feeling. Boy, I didn't know how right I was because it was weed. So then I got a call November 8th, 2012. It was Alex. So often things were Alex. He goes "mom, I'm in jail." I just remember what I was cooking and I remember how I felt. I said, "what do you mean? how are you calling me?" We had a house phone and it was an odd number. He said "well, it's no big deal." It was just so awful. [makes a scream]. You know, what's going on. Then I called the bail bonds and I was going to get him out of there. I don't know why but I did. The bail bonds goes, they got your kid for drugs in the school zone and it's almost all school zone. It's almost all school zone. He goes, this happens all the time mam. I'm a bail bondsman, this is rigged. He's just like, wow, unbelievable. They had gotten his work from Belarus (?), and what they had been doing all that time is bugging kids. Micing (?) kids.

AS - Kids who had other drug offenses?

KM - I mean, it was a huge thing around there. ALex would talk about it all the time. Kids were always going to the pen.

AS - Like the penitentiary?

KM - That's where Alex was. He had a problem with the justice system and yet he's selling pot. He'd come home and he'd say, man, it is a dirty business, and these are privatized institutions. I'm just like, well, I guess you shouldn't go there, I mean, I don't know.

I'd just get tired.

AS - Did he stay in school?

KM - He was staying in school but I mean he would talk about...I was hardly listening in those days because he had so many issues that needed to be addressed; world hunger, I mean, pick a problem, Alex, and then let's focus. But he really had a problem with

the justice system because he saw so many kids going away and they were working for pennies that make Asaba Airlines (?) richer.

AS - And at this point, how old is he when he calls you in jail?

KM - When he called me in jail he had just turned 21. Because they waited until he was 21 so they could get a bigger sentence.

AS - To nab him?

KM - Oh yeah. They knew he was selling to friends, friends were selling to each other. They had been micing kids.

AS - What do you "they" had been micing? The police?

KM -The police and the state, and even there it was going to be a grand jury. The state commissioner, what do you call it?

AS - Like an investigation?

KM - State's attorney, thank you. I mean, but we're finding this out later. At first, I was like, what the heck, ridiculous, right? It turned out that as we get deeper into it, at first I call Alex's other aunt who is a judge under Dayton in St. Paul. She says to me, "Kirsten, he's going to get a slap on the hand. I mean this is not good, this kid, what the hell is he doing?" Then she and her husband who is also an attorney, they read through the statutes and how things work in South Dakota. They called and said you got to get him a lawyer and you got to get him a good one because they got him. It just snowballed. It turns out as they said, they had miced him up, and all the other kids that this had happened to. They caught a friend of his and they said if you turn somebody in, just as they asked Alex, well then we'll let you go. (26:02) So then Alex was a good friend and was buying weed from Alex. So they got him on that. They said to Alex too, if you want to turn someone in we'll let you go too. Of course Alex wouldn't do it. His aunt said, Alex there is no honor among thieves. He's like, Patty, these are just kids like me, people like me, and I'm not gonna do to them what they did to me. He said, besides that, if I did turn someone in, which I wouldn't, then when I got to some type of jail, I'd really be screwed for narcic (narcotic) people. But I'm like, what are you doing? So this guy had to be convoluted when the discovery came out. See now all of this is sealed to him. When this discovery came out,

AS - You can't access this?

KM - No that's all (unclear - 26:59)

AS - Okay, that's another story.

KM - It turned out that they also tried to get him to sell narcotics. Alex was always anti-narcotics because they saw what it did to the kids in the town. See, I didn't know what was going on. I didn't even know about how heroin was everywhere. By the time Alex died, I had no idea that he knew. They have him on record, on mic saying, I don't do that. So they're really trying to set him up and trap him. Some kids might have said, I guess I could do that, because they're just stupid kids. But he wasn't that stupid and he just said no. Just weed. Anyway, they picked him up and hired an attorney, and a really good one. So he got picked up in November and then in April was the in front of the judge one.

AS - That's Glen Eng.

KM - Yes. Before that, we had really been doing our due diligence to have people, everybody that Alex knew, whether it was a professor, people he grew up with at church, all of his jobs, everyone. I mean no one could say a bad word about this guy. He never had a prior, it's in the article, in his life. So we got there and the attorney said, you know, I've worked with Eng a long time and he is a hard ass, but, you know, I think he'll be okay, you guys have written all the letters. My letter was just like [makes fake scribbles while making the sound of a smothered scream] - I had every picture. As a kid he never did anything to hurt, he only wanted to help people. Yeah, he was stupid to do what he did and arrogant.

AS - He was selling pot. That's all they caught him with.

KM - That's all. That's all he ever did. There's no question about that. So we got there and he goes, you know Alex, if I can get the transcript you'll be able to see that. He says, you know Alex, a lot of kids come here and they have nobody with them. You have everybody behind you and you come from a state where they think pot should be legalized. I don't think Minnesota ever said that. He goes, so I'm going to send a message, Alex's aunt grabbed my leg, back to Minnesota, and I'm going to put you in the state max security penitentiary and then people were sobbing because nothing good comes from that. For a period of whatever it was, three months, I think he got a month, and then move you to another place. One day in there is bad enough. He was a good looking kid, he wasn't a very big guy, and he wasn't as tough as he thought he was, and he never really thought he was tough but...And then he said you'll be on probation for five years after that. You can't be in a bar unless they're mostly selling food. I mean, nothing. He never had an alcohol problem except for when he had first gotten to drink, other than that he got home for Easter he'd have like a half of beer and it would sit there and get warm. That was my big thing is that my whole family - there are a lot of

alcoholics - so I was just grateful that none of my children are alcoholics. That's what I was looking for. Alcoholism addiction. Not the other thing. I didn't even know about it. And so he said, if you're so much as even with somebody who has pot or has something (unclear 30:44)...He says we will pick you up wherever you are and send you to the state pen for 17 year, no questions asked. There's not going to be anything before. You'll go from that point to the pen. Alex developed, you know. You can't live like that. Imagine getting out of there and then always worried that, you know.

AS - Within those five years you mean?

KM - Yeah. So he developed shingles. Terribly different. It was so sad to see that little boy, he was a little boy to me, he was so bright, shiny, and loving. He was dressed real nice and he admitted it was wrong, it was stupid. If that's the law, whether you agree with it or not, you follow it. That's where we brought him up. He's sending a message back to Minnesota. So they took him away and I made a big scene because I wanted to see him. They said, well, you can't see him. He'll go to the pen. I went crazy so they let me see him, and he comes out and his eyes,

AS - You went crazy like sobbing? Crying? Yelling? What were you doing?

KM - I just said I'm going to see my kid. I was crying, I'm going to see my kid. There was no way I wasn't going to see my kid. That was not going to happen. So I saw my kid. Not his dad. But anyway, Alex came out, his eyes were just red. He was so scared. I mean imagine, at 21, you're going to go to max security. He knew what happened there because he knew other people who had gone. Yet he continued to sell crack. That's that frontal lobe - I'm stupid and arrogant.

AS - Or, I'm somehow untouchable. It won't happen to me.

KM - It was crazy. The sentence was three months but they gave him one month.

AS - So he got out after one month.

KM - He got out in July actually. No, he had one month at the penn and then they moved him to a place out in Yankton.

AS - For how many more months?

KM - Until July. So three months total. The problem is, where I met him where he was detained it was like a Barney Fife jail, you know, Andy Griffith. They tried to put him in there.

AS - For three months!

KM - Right, which would've screwed up everything. It wouldn't have killed him but it would've messed school up, it would mess his job up, he could not pay his rent. I get it. Or they could put him in there and let him out. Or if they wanted to just put him in that little jail cell and he could just read and do push ups. But no. Not a county thing but it has to be the pen. Then we had to drive home from Vermillion, South Dakota, and we were, all of us, with caravan cars. It's unspeakable, the fear and the anxiety that he must have felt. As a mom, that's what you're worried about. He knew what they could do to him. So then we're going to go to July of '13. That's when he gets out. He was happy to get out. In the meantime, we visited him. We

couldn't visit him at the pen but we could at the other place. He was just decidedly different. He just [silent]... any life that he had was just gone. He stayed there,

AS - He stayed in Vermillion?

KM - Yeah, and so all he could do then, was work. School was fucked, right? No school. So he worked, he worked 70 hours a week. He worked at Valarus (? 35:00), he worked at the lumber yard.

AS - Did he want to come home?

KM - Yeah.

AS - Did he want to come back here?

KM - Yes. They wouldn't let him.

AS - Who wouldn't?

KM - South Dakota.

AS - He couldn't come? Oh because he was on probation?

KM - They do what they want to do. He's going to live there otherwise they'd have to move the whole probation thing here. So Alex had a girlfriend who has never even smoked a cigarette in fact and she was going for juvenile justice. She now works here in the cities in Hopkins with Big Brothers Big Sisters as a counselor. Anyways, they were allowed to move back when she got out of school. Then May 29th, 2015 was when they moved back to Minnesota. Then we could get more of an eye on what was going on. Before that she would call us in December of say '14 and she'd say, gee, Alex had mono. Really, Alex had mono? I said, well go to the doctor because he is under our insurance. You don't know what happens when they go to the doctor. Then he'd just keep saying how tired he was all the time. I'm saying, not before that, but December of '14. No clue. I'd come home on (? 36:30), and I'd say, Alex, how can you still have mono? How can he still be tired? He'd say, mom, lots of people have mono for a long time. Yeah he falls asleep all the time and he's sitting. I'm like that's so weird, I wonder if he has narcolepsy. Remember he was having drug tests too all the time, right?

AS - At Polares? (?)

KM - No, it's part of his probation. So of course he had urine tests. So drugs weren't part of our thought process. Also, he didn't do drugs.

AS - According to your thought process.

KM - Right. And not until prison where there's more drugs than he knew what to do with. We got a call one day saying you got to do something about your son. This is Hillary. I said, what's going on? She said, well, they sent him home from work because he was walking around with his eyes closed and drinking out of people's Coke cans and stuff. They said, Alex, there's something with you. There's something wrong with you. So I set up a doctor's appointment but he wouldn't go for that. He's like, mom, she's making a big deal out of it. It was just one ridiculous shit after another. We kinda got it down to PTSD. That was our focus. Get him home, get him home, get him home, get him home. He was so excited to come home. He had landed a job as the lumber yard manager at the Home Depot in Maple Grove, because he had come down to interview for it and had permission to do that. That was a good paying job. He said, boy, and he had a suspended sentence. So in other words if anything happened, then the sentence would go on his record. If he stayed clean, then it would be suspended. Home Depot, they were glad to have him. He had a lot of experience. He was a brilliant kid. He could look at the plans to a house and figure out exactly almost to the penny. But then, so they get back and he's up and ready to go. I mean, they had rented a house in Medina and he's ready to go and he gets there at 6:30 in the morning or whatever time at the lumber yard in Maple Grove, and they said, well there's a problem with your background check. And Alex just "hoingggggggggg" (? 39:00). That really sent him I think into a tailspin. So, legally, they can't even do that but we didn't even pursue that because all these problems were popping up over the summer. So he got another job at Acme Tools, right away.

Everyone in the family and all parts of the family will say that he would be the one to become this and do that, and he here's like look at me, look at what I do, I'm working for some tool place. I said, Alex, all work is good work. You're only however old and you'll work your up and do everything fast and you can go to school. But he had this probation thing over him all the time and remember, we didn't know it, but he was doing drugs, and that would send him for 17 years. So he was always like this.

AS - Right. Oh, we was doing them so it made him a nervous wreck.

KM - He was doing them. That's why he was falling asleep. We just didn't know it. It's like Alex, you're good to go. It's just, you're in Minnesota now.

AS - Yeah, everything's great honey.

KM - Minnesota's great and they're not as weird as South Dakota. He said, yeah but... And I said, Alex, for God's sake, everything is going to be fine. Yeah, unless you're doing opioids and they catch you. It was the summer of just ups and downs and Hillary called me one day and said, Alex didn't go to work. That's unheard of. Alex never missed work. Ever. She said, I don't know, you better talk to him. He came over, and I said, what's going on? Why are you missing work? He said, mom, I just, I was just so tired. He said I'm really having trouble sleeping. And it's like, oh, well, we're already sending him to a psychologist who couldn't do anything for him. It's like, okay, but you miss work again...That guy, he's like, I know, he goes, I can't believe I didn't go to work. I said, you've never been tired. You wouldn't even sleep when you're alone. And he's just kind of looking at me like you know, I want to tell you but I can't. That kind of look. I know it now. Now I know. One day, I was home in the afternoon and he says, mom, I'm home early

because they're re-doing the floors, can I come over? And I'm like, sure! Then he's just sitting there like this [makes slumping noise with body] [silence]. I'm like dude, do you want to talk to me or do you want to talk to mom? He's just looking at me for a long time and then he looks outside. He said nah, I gotta get going. He was going to tell me. He had a lot of time to work through what he was going to tell us. He asked his dad to go on a boating trip down the river. He couldn't go overnight. Probably because he couldn't do drugs, right? Dick said all day long Alex was just like he wanted to say something but he never did. We heard later from Hillary because Hillary knew before we did. So, anyway, it was just that kind of summer. We tried to do fun family things - let's go to this winery in Delano. Yet then Alex would get going on this spiral of [silence] how bad the world is. Like he did when he was sober and not using, only now it was just really convoluted. We were all just like, oh my God, just want to go home. He gets out of the car and he goes I'm sorry, I ruined everybody's night. We're like, dude, you didn't. I say dude because he did. You didn't ruin everyone's night. He's all teary-eyed, right? In a way I didn't have a whole lot of sympathy because I'm like, can you come on? What are you? You know? Can't you just find something good about the world? He wouldn't just feel this PTSD. We were just getting so...this is not our child.

AS - Was he diagnosed with PTSD that you know?

KM - No. I mean, we sent him to a psychologist but everything is secret. He was of age. We didn't go to the psychologist with him. But we assumed because Alex would say things like, I wonder if the guy in prison is the guy I am. I said, well what does that mean Alex? I said, did you have sex? Did you have to have sex? Because that's not uncommon. And he goes, no! No, no, no no. He goes, but a lot of people did. Now I don't know how to believe him because he was lying about other things. He goes it's just that I'm smarter than most. I was able to get out of things, but I don't like the way I had to do it. I'm just like, it's a month. A lot can happen in a month, in a day in there. You know what I mean? I mean he's spending one day there. Much less 30 days. It ruined him, of course. It ruined him. For whatever happened there, I don't know and we'll never know, because we never got it out. For as much as I speak in public and can write, for some reason, telling this story is so overwhelming that it's hard to string sentences together properly unless I have, you know, an agenda, notes, and an audience. His behavior would get more bazaar. We had planned a family camping trip in Taylors Falls September 17th through the 19th or something like that. We were all really worried, what's Alex going to be like?

AS - In 2015?

KM - Yeah. A month before he died. But he was great. I mean, he was great. I have pictures from that weekend. He was smiling. Well, smiley-er. We have a lot of great pictures. His sister has a picture from that weekend where Alex is standing on a cliff in Taylor Falls. He's just standing there like this [makes a pose], and he's looking up to the sky and the sun is on him and his shirt. I mean it was a good weekend. We all just went [must make a pose or maybe shrug] because two weeks prior to that was his 24th birthday, and he came to our house. I had all of his favorite foods. He used to be such a great guy but he [begins crying] showed up and he had really weird clothes on. It's like he had these long sleeves on, of course, you know? It was like this weird argyle sweater, these weird pajama pants. I mean this guy was kind of a styling kind of guy normally. He walked in and he just had this look on his face. He looked at me and I'm getting ribs out of the oven, and I said, hey, you didn't have to dress up for us! Then he got furious. He said I told you she'd say something like that. I said, Alex, I was just kidding. He was horrible. He didn't eat his food. He was rude. This is not my son. So we really thought this kid has gone off his....this kid needs Prozac or something, I don't know. It was just a horrible day. So a couple weeks later is when we went to Taylor Falls and that was fine. So, mmm, it turns out though, I will say after the fact that Hillary knew. No I better wait on that. I'm going to mess up my story. So there they are. They live in this house in Medina. He has got a good job and she has a good job but he's often calling us saying he always wants to be with us on the weekends. Probably so he won't use. It's probably mostly opiates at this point. I kept trying to tell his dad, you know, there's something wrong with your child. He only lives a mile and a half away in Medina. Why don't you go and build adirondack chairs for them? He's just like, I'm not doing that, I'm not going to babysit a 23, 23 at the time, 23 year old. He just couldn't understand it. I said clearly

he's traumatized. Clearly, whatever happened to him there is ruining him, you know. I saw Alex all the time. I kept going over his finances with him and like he had this big calendar, which I still have at home put away. Look it Alex, by this date, this will be paid off, because they were doing pretty good financially. By this date, and by November 2nd, you'll have no more, you'll have paid ahead on this. He would just look at me like [silent]. I said, well isn't that exciting? He would just shrug his shoulders. I'm like, listen piss ass [hits table] I'm doing your bills with you. Well what it was was he wanted to say I'm doing drugs and that's where my money is. I kept saying, well, I don't understand. So he's just looking at me. So I did actually have November 2nd circled as that will be the end for you, that will be it. You won't have any school this, school that. November 2nd is actually when his funeral was.

AS - No way.

KM - Yep, and yet I have that circled and written that, you know. That's unbelievable. I mean, it's incredible. That's an aside, but.

AS - Had he asked for help with his bills?

KM - Um. Yeah, I was with them. Groceries and stuff. I was beside myself but it was always some weird story. Well, Donny was really helping us out when this happened. It was just always some weird story.

AS - They were always asking for something until you finally got to the point where you were like, hey, well let's sit down and figure out your bills. I can help you.

KM - Right, right. Yet somehow, things were still weird. I mean, they were coming up short. Yeah, but if you do this. I just couldn't figure out what was happening but it was always, well, you know, Donny... he was getting really good it. So and so, John wanted this. Then I helped him out but he was going to pay me back. He was like, I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today type of thing, you know? So then, [sighs] the final straw for me was October 22nd, I can't be sure of the date, where Alex called and he says, hey, I need to get for a part for work, can I get sixty bucks from you? I'm like, first of all, you should have sixty bucks. Secondly, they don't send a 23 year old or 24 year old out, they would have a company card. You're going to buy

a part?

AS - For the company?

KM - Yeah.

AS - They don't have you ask your mom.

KM - Ha no. Well he goes, they probably just forgot to give me a card. I was just like okay Alex, this money thing. He was adamant though. He goes, mom, are you gonna do this or not because I need to get over to Fleet Farm? I said, well how about this, I'm going to have your dad go with you and Dick's in the back going [gestures], I'm not going to Fleet Farm, I'm sick of this, sick of this crap all the time. He's like no, dad doesn't need to go. Just tell dad to meet me at the Wells Fargo atm. I'm like yeah that's going to happen, right? [Sarcastically] He's just like sixty bucks. I need sixty bucks. So, I hung up the phone and I said Dick, go over to Wells Fargo and get the money and say okay, we're going to go together. Dicks says okay. He's sick of me being paranoid. I'll never forgive Dick for this. So he comes back and I go, what? He goes well of course when I took the money out then he got a text on his phone that said nevermind they got someone else to get it. Alex is really quick, right? But his dad believed it and left.

Well he didn't get the money for Alex.

AS - Oh he didn't give it to him.

KM - No he didn't. He went up there to get the money because I wanted, I said you follow him and you go where he's going.

AS - That's what you wanted him to do is follow him, okay.

KM - As soon as Dick told Alex that when they got there, Alex just oh, got a text, I don't need to go, because he knew the ruse.

AS - Dick told him he was going to follow him?

KM - Well Dick said I'm going to go with you. Dick said if you're going to take my money I'm going to go with you. Then Alex realized he can't do it. All he wanted was sixty bucks to go buy. That's all he wanted and that wasn't going to work. So Dick comes home and I said, well what happened? He said, oh well, he got a text from work, he didn't have to do it. I said, and you believed that? Why would I not believe that? I mean, what could be, remember he's not thinking drugs. I even took him down to the courthouse to get drug tested a lot. Not that the government (unclear 53:00). So, do you understand why we didn't think drugs though?

AS - Yeah, yeah, because they were clean.

KM - Yes, he always passed his tests. Always. Always. Opiates wasn't on our radar. Then I call Alex and DIck's like fine, call him. I'm sick of this. So I get on the phone with Alex and I sit in the car that I have now, in the garage, so people in the house can't hear me and I said, well, what's going on? I said that's bullshit Alex. I pushed him, I pushed him, I pushed him. I had to push him a good twenty two minutes. I said, you know what, I'm going to go to Acme Tools to your boss, Scott, who really, hey everyone likes Alex, and I'm going to say, tell me about that part you needed from Alex. He just sat there and when he just sat there I knew something was coming. He could've said you go do that, everything is fine mom, but he didn't. I go, Alex, tell me. Tell me! He goes, I'm doing opioids. I was relieved because I didn't know. I just didn't want him to be bipolar. So I thought, well opioids... you're doing what?

AS - You just didn't want him to be bipolar?

KM - Yeah.

AS - Yeah you didn't want it to be a mental illness. When you heard that you were...

KM - Right, I'm like well that, now that we can deal with. I mean that's how I thought. I am not kidding. Now this is a person who grew up, I didn't have addiction issues, but I did mushrooms, I did acid, I did all the 1970s things and I lived to tell about it. The only people that did heroin was um, and not opiates, I didn't even think that would be fun, would be Janis Joplin. Remember she died from it and it was just kind of a thing, like ooh, weird, heroin, for street people. I watched the news and I'm an informed individual but I didn't know about that. So, I said, well what do you mean? He goes, you know, pain pills. I go, pain pills? Opiates. He goes well they had them a lot in prison. There's no better place for drugs like the prison. Then he didn't over elaborate because I was drilling him. I said, are you kidding me? I just let him have it that night. I wish have I wouldn't have except I was so mad. I said, Alex, I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired. I was so mad at him. I said you risk seventeen years of your life for that? Now that should've told me right there that's a terrible addiction, right? But he's like, I'm so sorry mom, I'm so sorry. Then I calmed down and I said well. What I should've done was picked him up and brought him to my house. I said well right away in the morning we're going to go to the doctor. I said, well, opiates, how bad could it be? Right away we're going to go to the doctor. The doctor he had been going to through the summer that knew he was a heroin addict and never told us.

AS - What doctor knew?

KM - Doctor Graus

AS - His physician knew?

KM - Well, the plot thickens. Remember he's over 18. He's like so we're going to see Doctor Graus in the morning? I said, yes! We're going to go sit out there and wait. We're not going to get an appointment. He calmed down, he said I feel so much better.

I said you know it takes a village, you know the saying Alex, we're going to make this a village problem. We're going to tell your grandma and grandpa. I mean, it was so hard to tell his grandpa who was so proud of him that he went to prison. His grandpa just couldn't get his mind around it, you know? So proud. Now to tell him this, I said everyone. Aunt Heidi, Uncle Steve and Cathy. I said everyone. That's it. No secrets. Which is what I go on today. There's a no secret policy. That's what I'm trying to preach. He goes, yes. Yes. I really want help. By that time, Dick has sauntered out to the garage and heard me talking and he's like this [poses]. He goes I can't believe this. I mean, I was so mad. Then the next day, we got him into the doctor. Dick went first and stayed with him. Waited for hours. They did a whole thing, you know. What are you doing? This and that.

AS - An evaluation.

KM - Right, an evaluation. Dick said I'm going to work and then I could come and take over. I figured it was all out there so I didn't need to, I didn't know there were any secrets, so I didn't go in with him the second time. It was an all day thing. Now I know why it was an all day thing. He was trying to get not methadone but vivitrol. Alex tried to talk to me about vivitrol and now I know what it is. He goes, mom, on his own he's looking for vivitrol, vivitrol, whereas methadone of course is an opiate as well. I mean everyone has their opinions. Alex felt that vivitrol was a go. Whatever.

AS - So the doctor's trying to find?

KM - Apparently the doctor is trying to find it and he couldn't. Now I know why. There was only ten doctors in Minnesota that could give it out. So he released Alex with Xanax, and Xanax it turns out exacerbates whatever drug you're on. He wasn't educated enough in the drug stuff, nice guy though, to know this. He didn't take the twelve, the fifteen hours certificate to give out methadone. They can push pills, um, vicodin stuff like crazy, but they can't give you methadone. So he didn't ever take us aside all summer long and say, because he also know Alex's grandparents. He could've slipped us a note that said, hey, look into something else than what you're looking into, it's not PTSD. But he kept it to himself. Alex came out of there. He was a little busy on his phone, obviously still looking for it. I just did not know what he wa talking about. So I said well let's get you something to eat.

AS - Is he in withdrawals yet?

KM - Yes, he had withdrawals but he by that time was getting better. I got him a malt. Took him home, got him some epsom salts, for a nice epsom salts soak.

AS - Yeah [laughs] that cures everything.

KM - Yes, it cures everything. He seemed happy. Alex seemed happy. Maybe he thought he had gotten through the worst part of what this would be, this would be the heroin. So I said, Alex, we're going to get you in narcotics anonymous. He's like, no. Mom, there's nothing but druggies there. That'll get you in a worst place. I said, whatever. So the next day was Friday and he went to work. He almost never wanted to miss work. I still have his texts, you know. He said feeling much better. My legs feel stronger and the diarrhea is not so bad. He said I'm doing pretty good. I said, okay, do you want me to bring you lunch? Acme Tools is off of 494 in Rockford Road. He said, sureeeee. So it was raining that day, October 23rd, I mean pouring. So he was forced to run

out of work and get into my car. He looked good. He looked real good and plus he had the weight of the world off of him because no more secrets. Remember part of the secret is going to pen for 17 years because that's a violation of his parole. He knew he was going to get through it with us I thought. He bounded out and got into the car, and he gave me a hug, and he was a very loving person. He goes, thanks mom, I love you. He runs up, last time I ever see him alive, right? Runs up, turns around, you know, that kind of thing. So later that night Dick gave him a ride home because Alex had cracked up his car I forgot to say on October 8th. He died on the 24th. But on October 8th, on 116 in Corcoran, he had a telephone call and he said it because he was leaning down to get Gatorade, probably fell asleep.

AS - Or was nodding off.

KM - Right, right. So his dad picked him up Friday night, October 23rd, from work and they had talked about heroin. And oh oh oh, in my talk with Alex, I had asked him, when we had that big talk about him coming clean, I said have you ever tried heroin? I only say that because a teacher I know in Florida said heroin is really a big thing you might want to ask this kid. Alex was just like no [with emphasis]. I do not mess with that shit. He said that stuff will bring you down fast. I'm like oh okay. So x to heroin, no heroin right? I just believed it even though he lied for months about the other stuff. Then, so his dad said yeah they were talking about heroin and then Alex said, dad, people only die from heroin if they want to die from heroin. That's the only way you die from heroin. Alex was not familiar with fentanyl or (unclear 1:03) and all that. That was new in '15. So when he did die his dad lived with the fact that he...

AS - He had just told him that that day?

KM - That night. Then he died that night. He told him that at 5:30 on Friday night. Alex thought he knew everything in the world. They had talked about opiates and heroin. Dad, nobody dies if they want to die from heroin, that's what happens. He was so clueless because he had been doing pills and switched to heroin, well, when he moved here anyway. So then, I called him at 9 o'clock at night. I called all the family members, oh we are just so relieved it's just these opiates. God, I can't even believe it. So I called him and I was real chatty. His girlfriend was at work and he was distant, busy. He said mom, I got something cooking and I go well, you have a cellphone, they don't have words on them. I went on to say you know how lucky you are, you know what could have happened October 8th. Now you definitely got someone looking out for you. He's like yeah, yeah, yeah, mom, I have to go. So I hung up and then sometime we believe it was about 2 in the morning, because they had a four bedroom house in Medina, and he told Hillary, I'm going to sleep upstairs because I still have the leg shakes from the withdrawal. He didn't, she should know that, but she wasn't very tuned in. She remembers that at 2 o'clock she heard a big boom and she sat up. She heard a big thump upstairs and that's when he fell. So the next day his brother Noah who was nineteen at the time, my youngest, had to go. I was supposed to pick Alex up but I wasn't going to be home. I said you know what, you can pick your brother up. Here's a bunch of sweet rolls for him, and you take him to work. He was like, oh my God, he crashed up his car, what an idiot. You know that kind of thing. Oh I know why I couldn't. I was going to go out with a friend to the general store in Minnetonka and we were just going to have a chick thing you know. Just drink some coffee. So she picked me up at 9:20. Time matters. And Noah was going to pick him up right around that time. So we're driving and at about 9:30, my friend remembered

this. I had a pain that felt like someone was cutting my head off with an axe. I'm like oh my God, oh my God. She said do you want to stop? I said, I don't know, something is just, I don't know if it's a blood clot. She's stopping the car, she pulled over, and then it just went away. She remembered that later. That's exactly the time that Noah called 911. Needless to say, I've gotten much more ethereal and it's actually pretty amazing. But I know now. But Noah, why Noah? So he drove up apparently now we find out, and he's waiting, and he goes Hillary is cooking. She's cooking Trader Joes crescents, Alex's favorite. She says, you know what, why hasn't he come down yet? So Noah sees her run up the stairs, it's like those farmhouse stairs, and she stops. She races back down and the dog's acting funny all morning. She said, I think he's dead. Noah's like, what? Noah runs up stairs. She says all she could hear is Noah say, and it's just the worst voice, oh Alex. Then she went up and she said she could tell the room was vacant. It was just vacant. Like his soul, she said she had never witnessed that. She's never a big believer in souls and she said he was just an empty shell. He had rigor mortis by then and he was curled up, and he had blood out of his nose, and he was purply because all the blood. You know what I mean? So she said that Noah, and I've told this story a lot, picked him up because he didn't move, he was just like a frozen thing and just rocked him and just said I'm so sorry Alex, I'm so sorry, you were a good big brother. I'm so sorry the last words I said to you were fuck you, because they were. Noah was angry at him. Alex had asked him to play video games and Noah just said fuck you. He just rocked him and rocked him. He said they called 911 and everything went to hell then. The drugs squad came. They tore everything apart. Everybody was hysterical.

AS - They tore the whole house apart?

KM - Oh yeah. I mean because clearly he had needles and heroin. So they went all nutso about it and they're shaking her down. She's never, seriously she's like the Virgin fricken Mary, and she's about this tall. But Noah took totally over and and he said you are not to call my parents. I wasn't home. He said, until Alex is gone out of here because they'll run over. I couldn't have handled that. I don't know how Noah did. I don't know that he does. He said and I want a chaplain.

AS - And I want what?

KM - A chaplain of some kind.

AS - Where? When?

KM - When they went over to tell. He didn't know where I was but his dad was washing windows while I went out and had fun.

AS - Because this is a Saturday morning?

KM - It's a Saturday morning, October 24th. Now there's Dick's point of view that he sees a big red truck, should have been the chaplain, pull up, and squad cars, and Noah. He says oh my God because Noah is just...

AS - A square

KM - Oh my gosh. There's nobody squarer in the whole world. He said, what happened? Oh my gosh, what happened? Did he hit somebody? He said I was holding the stuff washing the windows and they all walk up and Dick goes, let's have it, and the police chief says you know, do you want to tell your dad something, Noah? And he told him, and apparently now, he said Dick just walked around like this, just all around the yard. Just all around the yard forever. Then he had to call me. They said you have to call your wife. Can you imagine having to call me? I had no idea. I thought I just saved my son. Oh I had taken care of that one, you know. So we're shopping around. I had a basket of early stocking stuffers. I just thought I would pick up some stuff, you know. Her phone rings and she says, oh, okay. No. My phone rings first and it was Dick. But he always butt dials, which is what he actually did. Then when Dave called, her husband, she says they screwed it up. The plan was that they were supposed to say Nick needs help you gotta come home right away. Nick being her son. Then I wouldn't panic. But she just said something bad happened to Alex. My mouth was dry like a desert. It just went [slurps].

AS - Immediately.

KM - Mhmm. So I tried to call Dave and Dave answered, her husband. I go, what happened? He said I don't know but it's not good. I think at first I was thinking drug thing and then he's going away. Then I kept calling Dick and no one would answer which is very typical of him, and immediately, I had immediate diarrhea. So I don't know, somehow we got up to her jeep. I mean and everyone was still shopping. My basket dropped you know? So we're driving, and I'm [makes clicking noises] calling, and calling, and calling. I just wouldn't let up. So we get about to Carlson Parkway in 494 and I hear, hello Kirsten. I mean, that's how he said it, like, hello Newman, you know that kind of thing, you know? I start screaming at him into the phone. Tell me what happened! Tell me what happened! Tell me what happened! And he just says Noah found Alex and he has passed away. Of course by then, I knew, I knew. And so, I mean, but how?

AS - Was Dick waiting for you to get home? Do you think that's why he wasn't answering?

KM - He was scared.

AS - Yeah and he just wanted you to be there?

KM - And the chaplain and everyone would be there. I remember looking up at her sunroof and just screaming a blood curdling. She grabbed me like this and she said, I remember, because she and I always thought what if one of our kids ever died, it's like our worst thing we talked about it all the time. I mean, oh my God, could you imagine? And then that was me. She says that's impossible it's only because we're always talking about it and they're just saying that! It wasn't

rational at all. So we get there and there everybody it. Noah grabbed my hand and I don't even remember what Dick was doing. Everyone is outside. And all my neighbors knew before I did. Before Dick did. They knew in the morning.

AS - How did they know?

KM - Because Hillary had two jobs. One of them was working with the kids. The other was at the CoV in Wayzata. And she called in in the morning and said my boyfriend died I can't come to work. Well, our neighbor's kid cousin worked there and they're like, Alex Milun died? So they called everyone on the block.

AS - Oh my God.

KM - So they see Dick out.

AS - They see him out there washing windows and they already know?

KM - Mhmm. Hours before. They've known Alex since he was born. They were hysterical and yet they knew, they said, don't say anything. So can you imagine for their sake? It was just. So, Noah

AS - What is the Cov?

KM - It's a restaurant on Lake Minnetonka. So Noah grabs my hands and he holds on to them, I think it was like an hour, and he wouldn't let go. I mean, it was like, this is the guy who won't even touch me normally. He just said it's true mom. I said no it's not. I said that for a few days. Because if it was, I would've known it. Because if your kid dies, we've all heard about it, you know when your loved one dies they visit you.

AS - Oh right, you wake up in the middle night.

KM - Not me I was just [hums], getting ready, and all that time my kid's dead in a bed. A mile away and I had no idea. So I kept saying I believe that. The poor chaplain. I feel bad about it. I pushed him out of the way. I remember going like this, I said, excuse me. I know, I mean not pushed him,

AS - You just moved him out of the way

KM - He looked like Father Mulcahy, that kind of chaplain. And then I said it all, and then when Noah said there was needles. It was just a horrible thing. We had to go find his sister Amanda. She wasn't talking to me. She was mad at me because we had gone to something, a night together, and I had fallen asleep. I was so exhausted from Alex. We had to go find her and she wouldn't answer. We had to finally have her work call and say there's an emergency, you need to call your mom back. So we're all driving to her apartment at the time and she's sounding like a kitten got hit, you know. We just can't believe it.

AS - What do you mean she sounded like a kitten?

KM - [high pitched meow] She is after we told her because nobody had any idea. Except, I asked Hillary, I said, you know the conversation I had with Alex a couple nights before he died? Then I called her and I said, how long have you known? And she says,

only a week.

AS - No it wasn't a week.

KM - Lover of my final child. It turns out now that she saw pills in his ashtray in Vermillion. She'd always say pills. She'd say, what do you have those pills for? What are those? He goes, oh a buddy of mine has a back ache. She would accept it. Yeah. She also found syringes once they moved here, next to the bed. And she goes, well somebody had diabetes or, I don't know.

AS - Oh that's what he would say to her.

KM - Syringes? Pills? I love her to death but I think we could have saved him had we known that she was finding pills. Then I would've stayed in Vermillion. I would've driven down there. Now that I know better, you never, never, let an addict...you bring him in and you take him home and you watch him like a hawk until you can get him help. Here he was feeling real good and the last text he sent on his phone which now, remember Alex's cases, the first case was tried federally for the dealer to go to jail.

AS - No, I didn't know that.

KM - The first case ever in the country tried federally. So on December 21st they caught the guy because of Alex. You know Alex was very good at covering his tracks but for some reason, he left everything on his computer and on his phone, when he would normally erase things. It's like he maybe knew he was going to die and his higher self just said, hey you gotta catch this guy. I don't know. They were trying to identify this guy named Red and they were finally able to do it because of Alex. They even had Alex's name all over the TV December 21st, which was two months after Alex died.

AS - Are we in 2015?

KM - Yep. They caught him right away because of Alex. So Alex would've been really proud of that I have to say. His name is Jamie McClellan and it was laced with fentanyl of course, that's why he died, it wasn't the heroin. He [sighs] that was on his grandma's birthday, December 21st. So a lot of things were missed.

AS - Where was his dealer? Here in the Minneapolis area?

KM - Maple Grove, where they have no drug problem [sarcastic]. Try and speak at their high schools and they won't let you because they don't have a drug problem in Maple Grove. Neither does Minnetonka so don't even think about going there to speak.

AS - Yeah, nobody from there has died.

KM - No, no, nobody. And none of the kids there do drugs.

AS - And none of their alumni have. Full of sarcasm. [laughs]

KM - Absolutely, I mean, I never thought you couldn't speak. I spoke at Wayzata and Eden Prairie but, and then they don't want they go, okay we'll let you do this but they don't want to advertise this very much. Then that's when I heard that the superintendent of Minnetonka said that's not gonna happen here, so we're gonna make it happen there. How dare he with kids dropping young people dropping like flies. It's all about money. Everything is about money.

AS - How is it about money?

KM - Well, they can't recruit the kind of athletes they want and people don't maybe want to move into the district, right? So, that's Alex's story in a short version of it.

AS - So is this guy, Jamie McClellan, he's arrested on December 21st?

KM - He was arrested on December 21st and had a hearing and all that. It was such a strange. They could have put him away forever, for life, but believe it or not, you wouldn't think that's possible but even though they couldn't introduce, what was it a trial with peers, and even in front of the judge they couldn't introduce fentanyl.

AS - Why?

KM - That wasn't this long ago! Because heroin is in and of itself deadly. Right? So if it was a trial you can't introduce it being fentanyl or carfentanil. But now you can because carfentanil, you're dead when you touch it. So these dealers are, you know, killing off their own because there's always another one around the corner.

AS - Yeah and people who use opioids want stronger stuff. That's what I've heard. They kind of flock to it.

KM - Well, but it almost always kills them now. You don't usually get a second chance with heroin. So like Philip Seymour Hoffman, it finally took fentanyl to kill him. His was fentanyl. So it hit other places before it hit here but Alex was a batch of like, a bad batch, that had come in that weekend. So they were dying [repeatedly hits the table to mimic people dying] they were just dropping all over that October weekend. He was one of them. Red warned him, he goes, be careful it's strong stuff, it's good stuff. Alex's text before he picked up his drugs were, everyone knows now. Even my girlfriend and parents. I got to have one last high and then I'm done, done. The guy wrote back and he said famous last words from a junky dude. All of that is on Alex's phone which the defendent see (?). The attorneys still have it so we had hearings and all of this stuff. It couldn't go to trial because, I won't name his name, but he didn't want to testify and when you're a junky and you don't want to testify, what do you do? You do heroin and revive with narcan because then you can't be a witness.

AS - Oh the go between?

KM - The go between. He would've been the guy to absolutely without any doubt say I saw this transaction. Even though there isn't any doubt, you know what I mean?

AS - But did this guy get convicted?

KM - He did, but he got 15 years instead of life. Also, he wouldn't have. The boy's name is Mike Evgen and he lived near us. He wouldn't have lived on the street because they would have taken him out. This is a cartel thing this isn't like, you know. So he'd rather just go by and lethal injection of his own.

AS - Is he still alive?

KM - He is and it's amazing. I don't think he knows why. So Alex's attorney put him in prison so he could sober up and make him testify. Then, for October 8th. So he got out on the 6th and overdosed on the 7th. So I knew that wasn't going to work. I had told the federal prosecutor, I said I do not, because they say how do you feel about this and that? I said, I do not want him to be brought. They are going to do what they do but I don't want this kid, 23, I don't want him to be a witness. I just don't. I don't. He's an incredible junky and most all of his friends have died, and they think he just wants to die. His parents were junkies too.

AS - You think he wants to die?

KM - Oh yeah. Everybody knows his dad. On the news they kept saying, Alex Milun's good friend and it's just like, uh-uh, this wasn't

AS - Wasn't his good friend

KM - It wasn't his good friend at all. It was just Mike. Yet Mike keeps just not dying but they have a ton of narcan, which I think another problem with this another pharmaceutical boom is narcan and they just keep reviving him and every other junky. It's a bandaid. It's another money maker. Now, he's appealed in that September. Mike's family doesn't know this because Mike had just, you know. I think they're going to call in.

AS - Who has appealed? This Jamie?

KM - I didn't think he could when he plead. I did not think he could do that. I guess federally you can. So he'll do that.

AS - He plead guilty?

KM - Plea deal. So he could have you know gotten 20, but he had a plea deal, 15. Now he is appealing it. I know they'll call in Mike because I was there in January when the judge was (unclear 1:26:48).

AS - What's the county? Anoka?

KM - Hennepin. But he's also got charges in Anoka. Murder charges. I mean, this guy.

AS - Is that because of the dealing?

KM - Mhmm. The thing is, an important thing to know is that now, the people that they're catching, Alex was the first person to be tried federally, but since then there has been others. These guys aren't addicts and that matters. McClullen isn't an addict and

neither was Colleen Ronnei.

AS - Beverly Burrell, I went to one day of her trial.

KM - Okay well Colleen's a friend of mine and she's lost Luke and she is the one that was at the Eden Prairie police. Saw that story? [grunts]

AS - You met her after Alex passed away?

KM - I think it's important to note these dealers are rich. They aren't addicts. I would have a different feeling about them. But they aren't. They're just rich. Otherwise McClullen wouldn't have $400,000 stashed away in Plymouth in a warehouse, in a storage facility. And Beverly she's not an addict. Whatever her name is. So the fact that they're doing this not to feed their... I mean Alex could have sold heroin but he didn't do it. But these people aren't addicts and that's why it makes them extra dangerous. They're doing it and they don't care who dies. Seeing McClullen stand up there and cry, and he's a big ass, tough guy. He actually said this, you know, my kids with food stamps, and we go to the gas station and buy candy there [mocks a crying voice], which I didn't even think you could do with food stamps, we had to get candy with food stamps. At the gas station. He actually said that. I wanted to be like, well how about taking some of your big stash at the time and giving them some lunch. This guy is just an idiot. Then of course

you get the mother in your face screaming at you. His mother.

AS - That happened to you?

KM - In federal court. Mhmm. They allow it. They keep warning her. You're going to have to leave. It's like, no, you get one chance. Then outside the courtroom in my daughter's face, "your son, your brother, nobody told him to put that in his arm," you know that usual stuff. It didn't bother me but it really bothered Amanda and she never went back. So that kind of clammed her up.

AS - How is your family now?

KM - Screwed up. Yeah. I'm constantly doing this.

AS - You're talking about it.

KM - Talking and writing and I even got, you know who Peter Yarrow is? Peter, Paul, and Mary. When Alex died, I put on one of my favorite songs of his is the Great Mandala. Alex also liked Peter, Paul, and Mary because he was like his mom. I've always really liked Peter Yarrow. So I reached out to him and he got back to me. He wrote me a beautiful, beautiful letter and also read about Judge Eng (drugs ruining? 1:28:00) and all that kind of stuff. So I want him to work with me on raising, my mom says he's an old man what's he going to do? I reached out to him because I admired him on so many levels. I grew up harmonizing with him and I just think this song, the Great Mandala, if you tweak the words a little bit. If you don't know the song, look it up with he and Richie Havens. [sings] "take your place on the great mandala." You got to listen to it. So he has been very gracious. Someone asked, well what do you want to happen? Well, what I'd really like to happen is the same thing that has been done with Stand Up to Cancer. I want it televised, not for money. I don't think Stand Up to Cancer is, I don't know. But Stand Up to Cancer, we all know that there's cancer and funding is pretty good for cancer. They might have a problem with doing it but what about this? Stand Up for Awareness. No more shame. So if you get people like Peter Yarrow because nobody knows who he is, but

AS - He knows a lot of people

KM - Sure, and he's a master. His heart is so good. It's always in the right place. I just think if we could get a Katy Perry or Russell Brand. Somebody like that. He's a recovering heroin addict. Just say in the spotlight this is what I know and this is what I've been through. I lost a brother, I lost a friend. Just make it, I hate to say, hip. I'm sorry but that's what Hollywood does. They make it so it's cool to talk about things. No more shame. It's not to drum up money. That's what I want and that's what I'm going to materialize for myself. I mean, why isn't anyone really talking about it? I mean, you might say well I think they are because I just heard this on the Today Show.

AS - Well and there are so many articles in the paper now about the opioid crisis, the opioid crisis. You know you're constantly hearing about it but we're not, nothing is happening around the shame and the stigma around it. We're just hearing about the terrible statistics. It's like HIV. There's really, really, really, incredible parallels around the gay community and the death and trauma that they were dealing with before anyone recognized it.

KM - That's so funny. Exactly. It still has a certain amount, but at that time. I remember.

AS - Yeah we've come so far with the gay community and education around HIV awareness.

KM - Oh yeah. Yet, as I said last August at a talk, I said, you know, Vietnam, this is killing tenfold any of the people than what happened in Vietnam. I know that's not a very current reference but you know what I mean. I think the shame. Also there was shame in Vietnam. This country is founded on shame. I'm kind of I guess what really tuned me into the shame and the first time I realized it was shame was Channel 11, remember I did that piece on Channel 11? When Lindsey Seavert called me and I was happy to talk to her. First she messaged me. First I said, oh I'd be. She says oh well I just can't get anyone to talk because, well I assumed it was you know why, to be on tv, that's not easy to do.

AS - No. This was in 2016?

KM - This aired May of '16.

AS - And she said she couldn't get anyone to talk?

KM - Well here's why. If this doesn't break your heart, nothing will. Well we found a ton of people but they can't talk to us because we got their names from the coroner's reports on death, but they've told their families that the kid died of an aneurysm, a weird heart problem, the flu. Everything you can think of except for that. I said I will not let him be on the other side of the veil. I've seen that since now. People have died on the block that I live in. Someone's 49 year old friend died. 49. So that's older. Nobody knew he was an addict. He hit a tree out West here. He was a fireman. There was a ton of people at the funeral. Somebody confided in me, his other friend Paul, and said I've known his family my whole life, I feel like they should know. I said I do too. But they didn't do it at the funeral and I don't know. So hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of people and they all said it was a freak accident. So talk about shame but to bury that many kids. I know I shouldn't judge on it but I'm going to. I can't imagine. It would have been easy for me to say except for if Noah hadn't found him dead. If most people, Colleen, Becky, find their kids themselves, or, they could have said, oh he had a heart problem we didn't know about. It would have been very easy to do. I can't believe that. That's heartbreaking.

AS - Are you talking about their ability to speak out about it?

KM - Not their ability, their shame to speak up. Imagine lying.

AS - Oh the other people versus the women that you've met, the moms you've met.

KM - Right. That's changing. That is changing. That's because now they're incorporating it in the obituaries.

AS - There are more people speaking up. And that's a personal choice.

KM - We didn't think to put it in Alex's but we did make it part of the funeral. Addiction. I think that's about the saddest thing I've ever heard. So we continue to say that we're proud of Alex. That article that I wrote, somebody saw it in the East Coast who runs a federal opiate symposium, and they may want me to speak there in the fall. Any mom could do it.

AS - So when you talked about the article are you talking about the article to Judge Eng? Or are you talking about something else?

KM - Yes. The article was the newsletter. I had to pay for that thing to be in the newspaper and I had to change the ending to make it nicer.

AS - [laughs] You can send me your original.

KM - Well, it was just something to the effect of if there is a judge then you're doing great. I'm sure the flames will be licking your ass. So this little South Dakota woman said, she goes, "this is a family paper, could you say licking his behind or backside?" I'm like no I'll just change it. It would ruin it if I said your backside. You need to go after awareness first. Awareness and stigma and shame. Then it is big pharma, because once that's talked about then the large, huge platform, then big pharma, it's so ridiculous.

The common denominator between, oh kids have so many problems now, well they weren't dead in 1979. Now they're dead. And why? Well because it's all about money. Now we have opiate induced constipation pills. Narcan too, can't leave Narcan out.

AS - I have a different opinion about Narcan but we can talk about that more off.

KM - How do you feel about that? Okay. Well, obviously we do need it and we do need it in our high schools and things like that. It can make a lot of people live. What I'm saying is we need it. We need it in gymnasiums, we need it in stores, but we don't need it pedalled. Their foundations, what their foundation is it's hard to say, but they raised like $333,000 for Narcan and I'm saying, this is a bandaid. This is what this country does. So we need Narcan but we don't need it to be a bandaid or an answer. We need reform. You can't legislate your way out of this you have to go to the people. Somewhere Alex got some of this, but they all have their hands and they're naming Amy Klobuchar. So it's like [sighs], why Amy Klobuchar? I mean, please. Wellstone, he wouldn't have. Sanders, you know, he wouldn't have. So you have to go to the people like with everything. You have to go to the people to effectively change.

AS - From the ground up.

KM - Yeah. Then, after that, prison systems. Just knocking them out one at a time. Would I have done this if my kid hadn't died? No. I got to be honest. I just wouldn't. I don't even know if you'd be writing this.

AS - Right, you're right, I wouldn't.

KM - But it's not like we're trying to be selfish because it's not like we got pancreatic cancer and I'm on a crusade to somehow, somebody, quickly, find pancreatic cancer pills for me. It's not like that.

AS - Because it's a larger social crisis and problem.

KM - Yes, of course. I can't stand it. Every time I see a little face. Or on Facebook the other day a grandmother posted a picture from Hibbing. Her 14 year old grandson that had died. He was in the hospital. She said, this is the last picture I'll have ever have. Rock on, grandma.

AS - He died of?

KM - Opiates.

AS - Opiates? 14?

KM - It hit me. Oh yeah, yeah. 14.

AS - Yeah, I've noticed that lately.

KM - The grandma said that he had a small amount of opiates in his system. Okay, that's not going to kill you, but whatever. Without asking her son or anything she put it on Facebook, saying this kid was killed, you know. It was shared a billion times. But this is what we need. This is the face. If I could, when I went to go see Alex in the morgue, and that'll be in that piece. Did you see the piece on Channel 11 at all?

AS - I might have a few years ago.

KM - No this was just a year ago in May. Alex died in '15.

AS - Was that when they did a whole series of stories?

KM - Heroin.

AS - Oh yeah, I did see it. I found you through other, through the letter. I saw the letter.

KM - Okay. But I almost took a picture of him and everyone went, "No!" because obviously I was in shock. To see your child like that, and as I said in the piece, his little eyelashes were the same ones when he was a baby. And that haunts me, [cries], and I don't want that for anybody else because to me they're all Alex. I just, I can't take it anymore. That's why doing this thing is not an option. It often is for men, in a way. I'm sorry to say. There are few represented as [unclear 1:43:29] but most dads are absent. I don't know if it's denial. I don't know what it is. I admire women even more than I did before. They're amazing. It does something about our society. They step back, they step out, and we need more dads. Remember, he's a good dad. He's a decent person.

AS - Right and think of their privilege in our culture, if they stepped forward. White men, middle class to affluent white men, stepping forward about this issue. They have a little more. They don't get accused of being overly emotional. Oh your kid passed away so therefore you're acting emotional. That's why she's on this new campaign. They don't get accused of that.

KM - No. Or maybe it's menopause. It's not your period anymore. Do you still get your period? I'm just like mom. My mom's like I want my old Missy Kissy back because that's my old nickname and I'm just like, "well she's gone, so get over it" Many of our marriages (unclear 1:44:55) doesn't set too well when you're in the forefront. We all understand, us thinking women, that everybody has a different way of grief and not everybody is going to advocate. I understand that, but to be like,

so how did the hearing go?

AS - Oh to not even be supported in that way.

KM - Well, like my women friends are supportive.

AS - But I mean in your marriage.

KM - After Alex died, if there was any hope. Not it's just kind of disdain. I think a lot of women are feeling that when they try to get their boyfriends, husbands, ever involved. Sad commentary. I think, as I said, behind every movement that there has ever been, there has been masses of people behind it. It's not legislation. In this case the masses of people are dead ones.

AS - Right. So who is going to advocate for them?

KM - So we are there for our children and our children's children. The madness of people not even realizing that this is all. You know who you should talk to is, you know who Chris Johnson is right?

AS - Yeah, I've interviewed him.

KM - I love him. He's different. I love his engineered epidemic because it's true whether you want to believe it or not, that's what is going on here. Even when Alex tried to tell me these things, it's like, how could he know more than I did? Maybe I was just too...

AS - Yeah but he wasn't telling you that he was using.

KM - No

AS - He was talking around it.

KM - Around it but also about that he was writing letters about the prisons way before that. Then when he was on probation he wanted to write more letters and I said no, no, no, no. No, no, no. Then he realized that would be dumb. So now I'm his voice. For those who can't speak anymore and yet he speaks. He does speak. So Alex has shown himself so many times. He's there.

AS - That's powerful, Kirsten. That is really powerful.

KM - It's funny how you can shake your religious dogma which is what Alex did before he died. He became more spiritual. I was always like, "well, what do you mean you're not going to go to church on Christmas?" because I just. But I realize now that he was right about all that, that kind of dogma. Who puts more shame? I mean, religion is man made obviously, and that's part of the shame of everything is coming behind these man made religions. That's where a lot of shame comes from. Whether it's gay rights, it's all judgement. So I'm way more spiritually connected to God than I ever was before. Oh yeah. I mean, I get it, you know. Thank you Alex! Although my step mom thinks I'm probably going to hell. Probably was anyway. So in a way that is something I feel on a larger scale here, not to get too esoteric, but a vibration, I'm just going to say it, raising the whole vibration of this country, this kind of thing, this kind of Trump. The Cheeto. He had to get in there, he did, to change, for people to go, "oh my God! Look what happened!" He had to get in there. I'm not going to freak out about that. We're going to make the changes and be the people we need to be to fight fights, this needs to happen because we always have another election. So this is what happens. So I think that the nation, on many, many levels in the next five years is going to wake up in a way we've never seen before. People are waking up. I mean, they're literally waking up to what's really going on. It's ugly, and it's horrible, and I won't

say that I don't wail, and lately, a lot, but when you look at the bigger picture, it's an amazing thing. It's almost beautiful. I mean, to be a part. That's really taking yourself out of the picture and trying to look at it. That's the only way you can really survive. Or, you can go into your little, sit around and watch tv, and drink at night, and go to the bar. You can do that, but I'm not doing that. That's the story in a nutshell.

AS - Thank you.

KM - You're welcome. Good luck editing that everyone.