

### General Information

**Private or Public Statement?** - Private

**Statement Provider:** Anonymous

**Date:** 5/7/14

**Location:** Bangor, ME

**Previous Statement?** No

**Statement Gatherer:** Rachel George

**Support Person:** Valerie Cartonio

**Additional Individuals Present:** N/A

**Recording Format:** Audio

**Recording Length:** 28:05

### Recording

**RG:** Okay, It is May 7th 2014. We're here in Bangor Maine. The file number is W-201405-00047. My name is Rachel George. Have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

**A:** Yes.

**RG:** And I have to let you know if at any point today during your statement you indicate that there is a child or an elder in need of protection or that there is serious bodily... ok... or that there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm or injury including death to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information may not be protected as confidential. Do you understand?

**A:** Mmhmm. Yes.

**RG:** Do you feel Ok going forward?

**A:** Yes.

**RG:** Perfect. You can start wherever you feel the most comfortable.

**A:** Well I don't want to share stories that aren't my own but I want to share the impact of some

things that have happened, how they've impacted me. So my mom was taken from my gram ... and placed in a white foster family. And the story I gather from that is that she was sexually violated and her sisters were also violated and physically abused and just not treated well and not placed within the reservation but in a white home.

And I've been studying in social work and one of the things that I've learned about as a community organizer is intergenerational trauma. And one of the things that I've learned throughout this process is that it's difficult for parents to parent... And I hated my mom... hated her. She beat the living tar out of me. Punch on my tiny little back and she just wasn't (and sometimes still isn't) nice. And so I guess through this process I'm growing to understand and love her, because she suffered trauma. Anyway, what I was getting at is that her experience has made it near impossible for her to parent. And the other part of that is my sister who also struggles with parenting, not with her behavior necessarily but... with her parenting behavior... but she struggles with addiction and she always needs a break. And I'm raising three of the children that she ... three of her five children that she gave birth to. And initially she'd asked me to take them, and I think part of it was because she knew the state was going to come for her, come and take her kids. And it was supposed to be temporary, just until she got on her feet, and that was supposed to be a week, and then a month and then January, and then at the end of the summer. I said "If they're in my care for more than a year, I'm not going to advocate for you to get them back." Um... And I guess that's probably not fair on my part, but I also felt like her choices were impacting me and my biological daughter.

Anyway, so she signed custody over to me in October of 2007. And the day that I got my custody papers, I came home and the police and DHS were at my house to remove the kids. And I said "No, I have permanent custody, you can't take them from me, you're here to take them from my sister, they're not in her care." And they disregarded my court order and took my kids. I said, "but I am their aunt, and I am native. I am their native aunt." And they disregarded that. And it was Halloween actually, that day. I had had them prior to that, the court order came a couple days after I actually took them. Maybe a week later, I don't know.

And so I had to go to court and fight to get them back. And they were never in state care. And I don't like how that whole episode went down I guess. And so I guess I don't need to make it more personal than that. I've just lost my mind.

**RG:** Can you tell me more about what they said when they came to take your kids?

**A:** "It doesn't matter. We have a court order to remove the kids." And I had my court order in my hand and I was waving it around. And they told me I was lucky enough that they didn't take them right then and there, that they were waiting for workers to come and so the police sat in my driveway. And we weren't allowed to leave or go trick or treating. And my kids were so sad. And my land-lady lived in the bottom half of the house and so she allowed them to keep comin' to her to trick or treat. But anyway... So they were gone from me for a week. Not very long but it was already traumatic that they weren't living with my sister anymore.

And, I guess the foster mom, who was also not native, was not nice to them while they were gone. And so when we went to court and I got them back the state worker was very angry. She



was mad that she lost I guess. The judge was annoyed that they disregarded my court order but the only reason my court order held any ground was because mine went through before theirs. So if my court order had come after their order was approved by the judge in this county, um, then I would have lost my kids and stood no ground. So I feel like it's a game – it's a trick, it's a game and you have to figure out to play it. And possibly that's what my sister did. I don't know. Because I thought that I was doing this to help her. And I don't know...

**RG:** What did they say when they came, like what was the reasoning behind why they were taking them?

**A:** Because they had court order to take them from her. They took them from me because they had a court order to "take those kids."

**RG:** And what was the process like, getting them back?

**A:** I had to pay a thousand dollars for a lawyer. And he met with me, and in that week I got a house, so we were living in my apartment which was very temporary, and I knew it was temporary. So I wasn't trying to keep them shoved in the apartment. That's not why they took them as far as I know. And so within that week I got a house, and a lawyer and I got them back the day we went to court. I don't... I could say way more, that's way not my story. Or, a part of my story.

**RG:** Do your kids have a relationship with their biological mother?

**A:** Not really. I mean, um I avoided her because it was painful for me. Because she was using, and she was in jail, and making poor choices and I couldn't understand why her life was not positively altered from being a mother. I didn't understand that the impact of things that have happened in our life... I didn't understand how we could come from the same upbringing and not have different changes in our lives. Which wasn't fair of me, but I did feel that way.

So anyway I had moved to Calais. And started seeing more of her and she was trying to be clean but still struggling. I would see her, I would let the kids see her, or we would just go see her together. They didn't have overnights. We talked on the phone. She just has a lot going on in her own life. And now she's comfortable with me adopting them.

**RG:** Have you gone through that process?

**A:** No, I'm intimidated. I'm afraid that the judge will tell me that because I've received food stamps or my kids are on MaineCare that I'm not worthy to adopt them. And I'm also intimidated by the home study. And I'm intimidated by the process, the process that feels like I would be scrutinized by the state. Because I'm assuming the state is who does the home study,

I don't really know.

**RG:** Do you know if it's possible to go through the tribe?

**A:** Oh. Well since I'm not in the service area, probably not. I would prefer to do that. But... and they're not on the census. I am, but they're not. Which is a whole other TRC we could have... TRC on blood quantum...

**RG:** Yea.

**A:** Um, yea. I guess I don't want to share anything that's too emotionally triggering. So that's how I directly relate, can relate with the TRC. And that's... it wasn't acceptable. And I didn't get reimbursed my thousand dollars. And I don't know. My kids didn't have to leave. They didn't have to go through that. And they'd already been taken from her prior to that. And then she got them back and I don't know. Do you have any more questions for me?

**RG:** Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was like growing up? Or is that something you don't want to talk about right now?

**A:** Um... well, I don't know. I'll just tell you some things I suppose. I guess I was as typical as any other kid in my head. I was pretty typical. And snotty (*laughs*). And I would get beat up a lot by my mom for stupid things like peeing the bed. Or one time she told me to go upstairs and get dressed and I was very excited to go get dressed on my own... so I couldn't have been very old that I had such an honor to dress myself and pick out my own clothes. And she said "and make sure you match." And I thought "well I know what get dressed means but what the heck does match mean?" And so I put on red corduroy pants and a pink shirt and I got the living tar beat out of me. I was a scrawny little kid, not as fluffy as I am now. And I remember being hunched over and she just was punching on my tiny little back. And she blacked my eye in the bathtub before. There was another time that I didn't understand what she was saying. We were out of shampoo and she had some in a cap and she told me not to play with it. Or... that was all we had. But I was excited to be in the bath and there was something there to play with. I didn't connect. And she smashed my head up against the side of the tub. And we had a ceramic tub and it blacked my eye. And I did wonder why so many times nobody helped me. I've gone to school with black eyes. Nobody said anything. And my dad was a trucker and he wasn't always home. And he was kind of mean. But I don't really feel the desire to speak to too ill of him, since he mostly raised us. So him and my mom got divorced.

So anyway... hey you didn't give me my tobacco.

**RG:** Oh my god you're right.

**A:** Anyway,

**RG:** I'm so sorry.

**A:** It's ok. I had peed the bed and I didn't want to get in trouble so I changed my own clothes in



the middle of the night and I put books on my bed so I didn't have to sleep in the pee. And she discovered like days later that I'd peed the bed cause there was a mark on my bed, but the next morning she'd discovered I'd changed my pajamas and I got the tar beat out of me again. And she was punching on my tiny back. I don't know what more you want to know. She wasn't good... And I don't know why she wasn't good. She has mental illness and a lot of trauma in her own life and she couldn't be good for me. Do you have any more questions?

**RG:** I don't want to push you to answer anything.

**A:** I'm Ok. I'm Ok. If I'm not Ok I know who to call (*laughs*).

**RG:** Ghostbusters?

**A:** I was thinking that. I was thinking Ghostbusters.

**RG:** I'm really sorry that I did not offer this to you before we started.

**A:** Its Ok. I only wanted it so you could burn it.

**RG:** We offer this as a sign of gratitude. For you sharing with us today. Or with me, I use the royal us, the royal we. But with me. Thank you. And please accept my deepest apology for not giving this to you earlier. (*Tobacco offering is given to the Statement Provider*)

**A:** I forgive you, you goofball.

**RG:** Do you want to tell me some more about your kids?

**A:** Um... Well I don't know where to begin with that and what specifically. I have my biological daughter, who I changed my whole life for. I quit doing drugs and drinking and started to get an education that seems like it will never end. Um, and her, I like to call sperm donor, doesn't have any involvement. And he tried to take me to court for shared custody and I fought back and he quit. Um, so I have I feel like a similarly typical "I grew up on a Res" story, where I've done drugs and dropped out of school and got pregnant by a very much, much older man who I feel like is a pedophile. But she's fantastic and funny and...worth changing my life for. As I have learned, so am I. And then my three other kids are amazing. I feel grateful to be their mom, even though they're not biologically my kids. My son has special needs but is probably the happiest, most dynamic individual that I've ever met in my life. And my other son is, he's like a little engineer. He doesn't remember being with my sister, but that was the bond hardest for him because he was her king. He could do no wrong, and she would neglect the baby and [NAME REDACTED] ... but he was like King Tut. And it was a little different when he moved into my home. One because there were four of them and he demanded more

attention than I guess I could give. Cause I was divided, and I didn't think there was a King Tut I guess. But he has the amazing mind to create things. And last night we sanded my dresser, because he wants to paint it. And he wants to make a lemonade stand and be a fire fighter. And he wants to help people like I want to help people and he's just a love bug. And then there's [NAME REDACTED] who wants to study everything and know everything and study the world. I don't really know what you want me to tell you about them. They've been taken way too many times.

**RG:** Is there anything you want to add that I didn't ask?

**A:** Why was my childhood, why was that relevant to share?

**RG:** Because its impacted who you've become.

**A:** Hmm. Many things have impacted who I've become. But I don't know how that directly relates to TRC research. And I don't want to waste other people's time.

**RG:** Understanding how your mom raised you is important to understanding the effects...

**A:** Through this process I've been able to see some good things that she did. She used to sing to me. I slept in her bed when I had the chicken pox. She painted my nails and sent me outside to play. There are some good things that she did, but she's done so much damage. And it happened so frequently that that was all I could remember. And then she, when her and my dad divorced, she forgot my birthday. She never paid attention to me. And I see all those same behaviors in my sister. Not the abuse. My sister when she's on as a parent, she's on. She's very loving and fun. She's fun. I'm so not as fun as she is. And she wouldn't want to harm her kids like that. And she wouldn't want to harm them if she knew she was harming them. But she always needs a break. And she always needs space. And its too hard for her and... Um, I think she feels defeated. And I don't know the validity of it. And she is going to share her story, but she had told me that the state gave her an ultimatum, and I've heard that that's common. But my nephew was adopted and he was adopted because they told her "if you don't sign over your rights to him we're taking both of your children." So he was her second child. And she was like, how can I do that? She didn't know what to do. So anyway he ended up being taken and adopted out into a white family. And yea I don't know... I don't know where I was going with that... Oh, the similarities. They're similar but I see my sister as more triumphant in that she keeps trying. Do you have any more questions?

**RG:** What would you have wanted or needed to make the situation better for you and your kids?

**A:** When I adopted, when I got custody?

**RG:** Sure.

**A:** Um... I guess financially I could have used help, but that would have came with strings attached. So they weren't in the state custody, I didn't get the foster care subsidy. And I didn't



need it initially because my brother had passed away that same year and left me his life insurance. And so I used that to live off of to raise them. And I took a year, maybe two off of school because I felt like I couldn't put them in day care after they had already gone through a transition to go through more transitions. So I would take time off and spend it with them. And then there was the little baby. And then come to find out he has disabilities and needed more attention and care than the average baby. I totally didn't get that at first. I was confused... I knew something as going on, but everyone kept saying "he's just a baby..." and I was like, he shouldn't be doing this. And they were like "no, he's just a baby." But then at his Well Child check up at a year she said can he do this, this, this, this, and everything was no. And I was like, uh oh. And I felt like it was my fault that I had done something wrong. And I think my sister felt like it was her fault because she had used while pregnant with him. And anyway... Again I forgot where I was going with that.

**RG:** What would you have needed?

**A:** Oh right... Um... Well, I guess I don't know. I don't know. It doesn't seem like there.... I personally have not had a lot of support. And I don't think sharing this with you or saying what I needed would be helpful because what I probably needed was for my family to be more supportive. And I was the villain by the way, for taking them. I was asked to take them, but I was the villain who stole the children. And even if my family were willing to help me, I wouldn't have trusted leaving my kids in their care. Even still. So, I didn't have a lot of support. I had a new baby. I just newly had four kids overnight. And it took me two years to transition into that. It was a long, hard road. And um, I did have a few friends that helped. I guess I would have needed more support financially. Eventually, financially. And support. And the support that would be offered, I don't think I would have been comfortable with, which would have been somebody coming into my home or helping. And when you're a single parent you always need extra hands, and I don't think this process deals with that sort of thing. But I think there should be more support for kinship care. There's no financial support, unless there's state involvement. That's what I've learned. Oh, and there's a support group for kinship care, but that's two hours away from where I live. In either direction (*laughs*).

Anything else? I think that's all I want to share today. But if you have questions you can ask me. And I don't even care if it's painful.

**RG:** That's all I have for you right now. I might follow up with you a little bit later if something come's into my head.

**A:** OK.

**RG:** Thank you.

**A:** You're welcome.

**RG:** You're an incredible mother. I hope you know that. I hope you can continue to see that.

**A:** We'll see.

**RG:** You are.

**A:** I'll have to pay the therapy bill (*laughs*).

**[END OF RECORDING]**