



General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Paula Anonymous

Date: October 5, 2018 and October 9, 2018

Location: Indian Island, Penobscot Nation

Previous Statement? - N/A

Statement Gatherer(s): Erika Bjorum

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

Format: Video

Length of recording: 9:09, 7:14

Recording

EB: My name is Erika Bjorum. It is October 5, 2018. We are here in Penobscot Nation on Indian Island with Paula. And the file number is 20181000001. And Paula, I'll ask you, have you read and understood and signed the informed consent document?

PA: Yes.

EB: And I need to make sure you know I'm a mandated reporter, which means that if a child or an elder is in need of protection, or if there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm, or death, to you or others, that this information may not be protected as confidential. Do you understand?

PA: Yes.

EB: Ok. Would you like me to start with questions or would you like to--

PA: That would help.

EB: Ok. And any of the questions you, you know, don't have to answer. It's not mandatory. What is your relationship to Maine state child welfare, and please feel free to tell as much or as little about your experiences and what you know as a result of your experiences.

PA: Well, I was born here in 1948. My parents... I don't know how to say this. They left me with relatives. They had me for a little while but those years I was too young to remember. What I do remember was living with my great-grandmother, with my little brother, Clem. He was two, I was four when we, we were yanked out of that house, and put into a-- taken off the reservation, and put in the town of Old Town with a white family. And... which was very hard. My grandmother fell sick and my grandpa died.

And, the foster home I was put in, I remained there for seven years. My brother and me, we were very happy. The people were beautiful, very nice, they had three daughters of their own. A very comfortable place. And the first day there, they asked me, "Do you want to call us Elaine and Manny or would you rather call us mom and dad?" We said mom and dad. So it was that way for seven years. Very happy, treated very well. Then, I rarely got any visitors from my family, my mom and dad and an aunt used to come by once in a great, great while. It was always that hope that I'd get out of school and see a strange car in front of my house.

[*To her dog*] I should put her in. They're going to think I'm crying, it's my dog. [*Laughs.*]

But anyway, they grew to love us very much and vice versa. So they-- I just found this out this summer, my foster sister, one of them lives out in Nebraska, she came to visit me, she told me that mom and dad wanted to adopt us. And then, the state yanked us right out of the home. And told us-- they lied to us. They told us that they were splitting up, that we had to go to another foster home. Which was another big heartbreak for us. And, it wasn't the truth.

So I was placed in another foster home when I was eleven. And that's where the sexual abuse came. The so-called father of the family, he... I don't know how to start this. He used to go around the house and tuck everybody in at night. And that's-- he started getting touchy-feely every night. And I used to be so scared every night to go to bed. And this went on for... gosh, let me see. About three years, I kind of think it was like three years.



And I told my state worker about it, and she never believed me. Never reported it. Never reported it.

And my father appeared out of nowhere and wanted us to-- he was living out in New Jersey with a new wife and two kids, and he wanted us to go out for trial visits, so we went. And it was total abuse. My father would beat me, my stepmom would order it, or she would be-- or she would leave. So I got beat every night with a razor strap. And he'd apologize before he did it.

EB: Oh, Paula.

PA: And my brother would be in his own room. He, he used to work in New York City on a jackhammer. So he used to come home at two in the morning. So I used to pile on the pajamas to go to bed so it wouldn't hurt so much.

So I stayed with him for a year. And then I came back here, I stayed with some family here. The family that had my sister. That didn't pan out too good. I wasn't happy, so I just had these-- I would run away. You know to Canada.

EB: Wow.

PA: Fifteen. And um, the day they brought me back, I took off again. It just became my MO. After so many years, I was, I was labeled as a-- a problem child. So they stuck me in a place for two years, until I was seventeen, it was for a-- I don't know what they call it, a state school. And... for bad children. And I had to stay there because I had nobody that would take me. Nobody wanted me.

And in the meantime, my brother, after I left, took the abuse on. They never abused him while I was there, it was just me. So he ended up downeast in Machias with my uncle, lived a happy life, we graduated from high school -- which what we promised to each other, that's what we'd do, and we did. We kept that promise to each other.

And um, there was one abuse, I left that out, but at two years old, in my great-grandmother's house, my uncle. He was a drunk. And he was always just-- showing himself, and trying to get me to go over to him. I would just sit in my little rocking chair. But it, it was like [*takes a deep breath*] um, so from there, it just became the norm for me to always get in trouble.

I don't know. I think I want to stop right now.

EB: OK.

END OF RECORDING, PART 1, BEGINNING OF RECORDING PART 2

EB: My name is Erika Bjorum. It's October 9, 2018, here at the Penobscot Nation, Indian Island with Paula. The file number is 20181000001. And Paula, have you read and understood and signed the informed consent documents?

PA: Yes.

EB: And I need to make sure you know I'm a mandated reporter, which means that if there is a child or an elder is in need of protection, or if there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm, or death, that this information may not be protected as confidential. Do you understand that?

PA: Yes I do.

EB: And so this is the second part of two video statements that we're recording.

PA: Well, I can't remember where we left off, but I-- I would like to talk a little bit about where my childhood traumas brought me. In my, beginning ages of my adult life. Began with partying and drinking, which covered up a lot of pain. It made me forget a lot, which was wonderful, so I thought. Then, as time marched on, I started just getting in trouble, or doing crazy things that kids do. Driving cars, like for instance without a license, that really got me in a lot of trouble, but... I also began doing drugs in my late twenties, and it really brought me down. So bad, that I had to give my daughter up to her father. Not knowing where drugs were gonna take me, but it did, it took me really down, it took me to jails, drug rehabs, stipulated by the courts, giving me breaks, which I never took. I would go in one door and out the other. And go back to where I began, before I went to the courts.



And, it was just the norm for me. I just couldn't get my life together. I couldn't understand why everybody was on me all the time, trying to get me to meetings and stuff. Now I can see it, but back then I couldn't. I just thought I felt better, but I didn't. I never did.

And, it took me a long time. It wasn't a drug rehab or any place like that that straightened me out. I learned to straighten myself out. And it was a long haul. I never completely straightened out. I continue to drink. Eventually, late in my life, I did give up the cocaine.

And um, I'm still struggling. And I'm reaching out for help right now. I don't want to die at 70 years old. I don't want to put my family through any more than they've already been through. Or myself.

And I hope that what I have had to say, which has been kind of short and sweet, that it helps other people out too because... [*Takes a deep breath*] I think that's what we all should be doing is helping each other. And I just don't want to die and lonely life or a horrible life. You know? I would like to die a natural life, you know, not put my family through any more grief.

But um, I don't know, just now, I think I'm on the right track. I'm not completely through everything yet, but I am in the process of getting there. I got a new counselor, and trying to stop the drinking, which I haven't yet. But I have cut back, I have to be honest, I am still drinking. But I'm not out of control like it has been in the past. It's just enough to take away that little pain. It's no excuse, but that's what I'm doing.

And I just hope this helps other people, because I know it's gonna help me. And that's all I've got to say for now.

EB: Is there anything you haven't said, that you-- or maybe you have said, you would like to say again, that you would like for people to learn or understand.

PA: Understand me?

EB: About the subject, or...

PA: Everything I've been through. A lot of people don't know what I've been through. A lot of people, I think, would probably be shocked. At what I have been through. I mean, everything,

from the drugs, the abuse. I just think that-- I wanted to help other people to bring it out if they can because I never thought that I could ever sit here and tell my story to anybody. There's a lot more I can say but I can't do it in just--

EB: Yeah.

PA: A day or two. I think that if I hadn't been drinking and drugging, a lot of my older abuses, my sex abuses -- there were two of them, the rape, and the sexual assault -- was caused because of my drinking. Really. And I have nobody to blame but myself. But I don't want to give them any more. And I don't think it's ever too late for anybody, even me at 70 years old, I don't think it's too late. I really don't. So. That being said, I think I'm good for now.

EB: OK.

PA: Thank you.

EB: I'll turn it off.

END OF RECORDING PART 2