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Statement gathered in Bangor, Maine, July 30, 2014

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Focus Groups – General Information

Community: Wabanaki Health and Wellness (Bangor)

Date: July 30, 2014

Moderator: Rachel George

Commissioner: N/A

Topic: Background History

Participants

1. Francis Joseph Jr. (FJ)
2. Juanita Grant (JG)
3. Terri Elder (TE)
4. Tonisha Bassett (TB)
5. Allan Sockabasin (AS)

Recording

RG: All right. It is July 30, 2014. We are here in Bangor, Maine. The file number for this focus group is FG-W-201407-0005. Juanita have you been informed and understood and signed the consent form?

JG: Yes.

RG: Fantastic. Francis, have you been informed and understood and signed the consent form?

FJ: Yes I have.

RG: Alan, have you been informed and understood and signed the consent form?

AS: Yes.

RG: Terri, have you been informed and understood and signed the consent form?

TE: Yes.

RG: Tonisha, have you been informed and understood and signed the consent form?

TB: Yes.

RG: Fantastic. All of you know that at any point during this recording that you indicate there is a child or an elder currently in need of protection or that there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm or death to identify the person or group including yourselves, that information may not be protected as confidential. Does everyone understand?

ALL: Yes.

RG: Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

ALL: No.

RG: So the purpose of this focus group is to help the TRC gather some information on background history so we can set our findings into context because we knew that or we know that 1978 was this magical year where the Indian Child Welfare Act appeared out of nowhere. So the questions today are surrounding the purpose of the Indian Child Welfare Act as well as some background history on tribal history relations. So the first question is in 1978 the federal government passed a law called the Indian Child Welfare Act to protect the high numbers of Indian children that were being taken away from their homes and communities. Have you ever heard of this law?

FJ: No.

RG: No? Anybody else?

TE: No.

RG: No either?

JG: I have because of the TRC, I don't want to be the only one discussing it.

AS: I can help you with that.

TE: I don't remember it.

RG: I should just just sit in the middle here.

TE: Can I clarify?

RG: Mhm.

TE: I heard of it, but I didn't understand what it was. I had a different impression of it.

RG: What was your context of hearing about the act?



TE: Just general conversations on the street or in the news. You just hear about it, but I thought it wasn't clear -- it wasn't made clear what it was for and why.

AS: My interpretation is that I was hired under this act to implement the act. Back in the 80's I was hired as a child welfare director at Indian Township. The purpose of the act was not to continue remove Native children from Native homes. But the intent was to keep the children in the communities and extended family situations, if you had to remove a child. So I know that act pretty well. But it was very difficult to -- it was very difficult to implement in the community -- in the community and small villages because of I was just starting to tell her. I worked on (*inaudible*) for five years and as soon as I got into child abuse and child sexual abuse, I realized soon after that -- after five years I burned out because I was daily confronting perpetrators in different settings in the village and also the victims. They were all my relatives, so I soon left after that. But I know the act well and I know what it is doing to the community. It is still in existence and it has a lot of work to do. But I think what it does is that it by in large it protects our kids now. So that is what I know about the act.

RG: Are there any more comments about that question. (**JG:** Can I? [reaches for the questions] Sorry, I forgot mine.) Has this law helped your community? If so, how so?

JG: I don't think it helped. I don't think that it has helped, because there is not a lot of people that are in a good place to take kids. And by take, I mean foster them. And...I think we are following a model that is just as corrupt as the state's -- we are following the same model and it is not a working model. It is not very effective, so no; I don't think it is helpful. I think the idea of keeping native children in their homes or in their community is wise and good, but it doesn't always happen. So that's all.

AS: I have to agree with her by in large. It brings more awareness about the abuses that our children go through, but there is no mechanism set in place to keep them safe, to keep them into an environment where get a cleaner and better education and also role modeling in our community. Because there are a lot of negative role models in our community that we, as adults, still have to deal with, you know. It is harder for children when you have to place those children in those environments. As far as placement, like the old system -- the old system where women who have a lot of child come under the auspices of Department of Health and Welfare, you know. Many of them live -- they use that as a base of economics. Now people that take kids that are from different families that are within their family unit do the same thing. Except with this -- with this act it provides more money for those families versus the state welfare system. And I am not sure if there is a good model anywhere in the country, but I know the models that exist in our communities.

I was talking to a group of women last night because we were all at a meeting and they were telling me that they ran a discussion group last night or the other night. They were saying that most of the kids that they talk to, and a question that was asked to them was are they hungry. The majority of the kids were hungry. So we still have that hunger that we had growing up,

growing up as a child. I went to work at eleven years old. There are kids today that are still in that same environment. I was fortunate enough to be able to work through all of that.

TE: So I just think -- I think someone used the word idea, I think it is a good idea. It gave us a good start. But it is like a lot of things in this country or in this world, they have passed non-discrimination laws and it is a good idea, but it doesn't change the thinking, the way of life that people were taught how to behave or believe about other people. I mean a person isn't born liking or disliking or abusing or -- they are not born with those traits, they learn it. So I think it was a good start. But again, it doesn't change the deep seeded belief systems that create the conditions in which children were exposed to. So, for me, that what I keep thinking this type of law will help to protect a child whether it is in the community or out of the community from abuse or hunger or abandonment or lack of education, whatever it might be. But these things, it is just a start. The question is how do we get down in and start teaching people that sexually abusing a child is not appropriate. I mean... so it is start. It didn't change the way of thinking or the behaving.

When I...I lived with my abusive foster mother for many years. And the stories that you have heard, you have to remember, that I reminded myself the other day, the stories that are told in this room it may be a real quick snapshot of maybe four hours or two hours or one day, but I have to remember it was one day, it was done person's one day of life times 365 days a year times maybe 18 years. So when I left her, finally got the courage to run away in my early teens thinking I was going to die if she hit me one more time, I went into more foster homes and I saw how the Native American children I lived with were treated. I look white, I am a half blood, but I look -- most of me looks white. So I lived in a home, a foster home, and this woman had one, two, three, four, five foster girls in there and two of them were Native American, 100 percent Native American blood. I shared the room with them. And she would make them go outside and take showers outside, baths outside and then looked at me and said but you take one inside. Of course, I couldn't tolerate that so I went outside and took a bath with them. But it just, it makes me -- just back to the fact my point is, I think we have these laws and it is a good start, but the education piece and sensitivity training and the awareness changes in people's thought processes and behaviors. It is a lot of work. It doesn't change overnight. So it continues. Sometimes it gets worse. I didn't see how it helped me or any of the others people that I knew.

RG: Any comments about whether the Indian Child Welfare Act was helpful to you? (*baby cries in background*) (*long pause*)

RG: Francis do you have any comments about the Indian Child Welfare Act and whether it has helped the community?

FJ: What's that?

RG: About the Indian Child Welfare Act has helped the community?

FJ: Back in the day when we had the Land Claims Settlement and they started laying down the rules as to why, you know why are you taking our Native children and there was a lot to do



with it. You just signed a piece of paper and it was good enough. There had to be a lot of legislation on why and human rights, and a lot of stuff that I can't imagine. But, they did it... *(inaudible)... (pause)*

RG: What, in your opinion, if the act is not effective and it's not working to protect Native children, what is needed?

AS: Well, I believe... I really believe that, like... we were talking this morning about Wallace, the guy, the governor that blocked black people from entering the university to get an education. And, that still exists today. But what happens in Indian country is that we went beyond. We still have a heart, but we are not totally intact because our language is not intact. And that makes a lot of difference. People call me the champion of language. I wish I was the champion of language. But I really believe that language gives a sense of independence and a sense of pride. If you look at -- and I have debated with different professors. They say we came here 11,000 years ago and now they are finding remnants of Native people that have lived here 15,000 years ago. And my language it dictates more than that.

We have become fishes out of water. That is why it is so hard to implement any act, even though they have input by Native people. But it is still the dominant society that introduces this legislation. They had good intents to set up your Bureau of Indian Affairs, they had good intents, but they call cost Native America, we have an issue with the Bureau of Indian Police. It has been consistent everywhere.

Last night a lady told me that in Indian country is the only place where you can go and be chief and administer multimillion dollar projects. That's why we have so many problems with corruption because a long time ago when the elders told you to speak from your heart, act from your heart, you know, we know what that meant. But today, it doesn't exist because of all these conflicts we have. The life expectancy is 47 in our country. We have the highest rate of alcoholism; we have the highest rate of drug addiction, more so now. We had the highest rate of child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and spousal abuse. You know, and we are supposed to implement this act.

TE: Suicide.

AS: It is very difficult, and it is very difficult to talk about these issues in our communities because people associate non-tribal politics with what is in our heart. But this is the key that will unlock who we are if we can go back to the language. You know, somebody told me well, Wallace is a nice guy and I said yeah he was a nice guy, but I don't know that he blocked the doorway of those black people to get educated. I says many of our tribal leaders do that today. They block our people from getting higher education either through stipends or help for them to continue to go to college. Many of the master's degrees in our communities are achieved by those individuals themselves. So like me, when I was eleven years old I had to find a way to be able to eat. You know, my mom died when I was eleven and my dad had tuberculosis. My

dad couldn't work, even though he had pride, he just couldn't physically work. So I went to work at eleven years old and I was able and I had it all figured out. If I could earn so much money in a day I could buy a can of beans. A loaf of bread was 33 cents. I could feed my brother and sister, my dad and me. If I earned more than that during the day, I could buy hot dogs or I could buy hamburger. It was constant. I didn't know anything about economics. Little did I know that I was actually dealing with economics back then, you know?

Then at 16 this guy hired me from badgering him. One day I walked in there and he says, get the hell out of here. He says go to school. But I was desperate to find work. You know, after badgering him for two and a half years, I walked in one day he said you son of a bitch, I am going to give you a job. You are not old enough to work here, but I am going to give you a job. But you better show up every day, be on time and that guy did wonders for me. He taught me how to drive, he taught me how to drive truck, he taught me how to operate a bulldozer, he taught me how to operate a crane, he taught me how to saw lumber and eventually the saw mill wouldn't run if I wasn't there. So that is what he taught me and people will see that -- that gumption people have if they want to do something about their life, if they want to stay alive. You know, when people tell me today, my age group, most of my people in my age group are all dead.

JG: Mine too.

AS: Yeah. People I grew up with, two people, one of them, one played for the Pittsburgh Pirates, you know, but he is not dead, but he might as well be dead because he has to get up at three o'clock in the morning to go to those kidney -- what do you call them?

JG: Dialysis.

AS: Everyday, you know, and he is my only buddy that is left. So that is what happens in our country and it is hard to evaluate whether if law is working or not because we just don't foresee.

RG: Do you have any comments Terri on what is needed?

TE: I think what resonated for me and what he just said is change has really got to start from within us and language is a good example. I just don't think and I don't how that -- where that begins, but it has got to start here in our hearts. I work with employees and there are certain laws and standards that employers have to comply with and -- and there are certain behaviors that employees have to demonstrate as a result of those laws. Once they step through those doors, I have learned that what I say to them is, you know, whatever your upbringing has taught you about this other person and how you might perceive them and your judgments about them or your likes or dislikes about them, you need to leave that outside the door, because these are the new ground rules while you are here. I've learned that you can't change it, but that is where it has to start. And, so, I just don't -- I think it is a pretty antiquated law. It needs to be -- if there's going to be a law it needs to be reviewed by people who have lived it and experienced it and very unbiased and balanced group of partial people, native and non-native, maybe from a variety of different cultures who could add to it. But it is an old law and I don't



think it ever really accomplished what it set out to do. It just needs to be -- change has to start from within us. That's how I feel.

RG: Tonisha, do you have any comments about what is needed if the act isn't working?

JG: I don't know about what is needed if the act isn't working but I don't want to say what I am about to say either. I think being educated or getting an education has altered me and I am not sure if that is necessarily good or bad, because I don't necessarily fit off reservation and I don't fit on the reservation either. I think we talked about that last time. But it has changed the way I think about things. The way I think about life, the way I think about my children and the kind of life I want them to have. I think that because are in a different day and age and because we can have education covered in the state of Maine, I think we need to take that opportunity to go for that. The schools on the reservation, they're not that great and then you get to high school and you are not prepared and then many people drop out. I dropped out twice actually and then I dropped out of college three times before I became a mom and then had to get my life together.

So, I remember thinking when I dropped out and I was drunk, I was probably messed up on some drugs and I remember thinking that I wasn't even going to be able to pump gas, because I didn't have an education. I don't know, I don't even know where I am going with that. I just know that my frame of mind prior to becoming a mother and going to school is way different and toxic, toxic to my tribe and toxic to myself. And, I guess education would be on the list on the things, not just doing it, but supporting it, encouraging it, expecting it. Like I don't think when kids go to school they even know what opportunities they have ahead of them and then I went to Washington County Community College because I was going to go to college... and they had a few options for me and I was like I don't want to be any of those. One of them was a medical office assistant and then there was early childhood educator. And, I went with medical office assistant. That is where I dropped out a few times. Then after becoming a mother I was like well nobody is going to tell me that I have to be separated from my child, so I will go into early childhood education blah, blah. So I had to fight my way to get back in because I had dropped out so many times. I went to early childhood education because it was what they had to offer, not that was really what I wanted to do with my life. I think that we don't support that in our community. I mean there are options -- there are options beyond this. I think that we can still gain an education and maintain our heritage. I don't know. I just think there needs to be more awareness. I don't even know if I articulated that well. Did it make sense?

AS: Yeah.

RG: Do you know of any children from your community who were taken away?

JG: Yes.

RG: If you do know of any children that were taken away, can you tell me what it was like when those children came back to the community or your experiences?

JG: What if they didn't come back? Sometimes they didn't come back.

RG: It's good to talk about too.

AS: The kids that were placed in homes that I worked with, every one of them that were placed in, of course, in our homes. When I first went to work for Child Welfare, I spent a lot of time in rehab. I mean Kelly Sureger at Eastern Maine Medical Center, most people thought I was a director because I was there every weekend because of the family members back then in Kelly Sureger, before they could enter rehab they had to have family members to attend their rehab, to be a part of a family. There were families who were wiped out. So I became their family member. Many different family settings, so I was there every weekend. Sometimes during the week to report on the kids, kids wellbeing that were being placed, help moms, make rent payments, doing different things. I was there all of the time and my responsibility was child welfare, because I believed that in order for them to have a stable environment to live in they first had to recover. So I helped out in their recovery. To fast forward, you know, what I do today here, I help Wabanaki Health and Wellness in many different areas and I see a lot of the kids now that are adults. I have a camp for kids that can't afford to go to camp. I see them kids and I see them as adults. So I see two separate children who are now adults, either incarcerated or in rehab or have committed suicide.

JG: Along with what you are saying what you just said a minute ago, I think it would also be unfair to not recognize that when you are struggling through poverty and being safe in your home, education is probably not on your list of to-do. So I don't -- I don't really know what the answer is to your previous question. I think there is a lot of toxicity and I don't know how to address that. I am just saying.

TE: I have not witnessed someone being taken, but I have lived being taken. As 57 years past, I recently learned the impact that had on my community, my family, who one day was swinging me in a swing and protecting me, a big brother, and the next morning woke up and found me gone. And nobody would ever speak of me for the rest of his life, which from what I've learned, just devastated him. On one hand it was good to know that he never forgot me. I don't know what this man looks like or who he is, I just always felt him. But I remember being taken by a stranger and crawling into the back seat of that car. It's devastation. If you look up the word devastation, it is something -- it is... it just influences every decision for the most of your life until you grow wise enough to begin to say so what is going on here, why are your choices the way that they are. You then start learning why you are getting the results you are getting and the underlying causes.

So being taken and crawling into the backseat of a stranger's car for a child, the first thing a child is going to think is that they did something wrong. I'm in trouble. Then they think oh no, no, I will wait for my family to come get me and they never come. So it's complete devastation. You grow up with a -- and after that if it is a good taking that's -- that's nice. But in my case it was the worst taking that could have happened, because the woman who took me who was not well. So you take the abandonment, the uprooting and add on top of that severe



emotional/sexual/physical abuse/poverty, then you just got layers of an onion, layers on this onion just keep growing and growing and as you grow older you peel it back.

Getting back to my point, being taken, I still think to this day even the most sophisticated, Dr. Phil, the most sophisticated therapists, social workers, family, counselors, I don't think they still yet understand yet the impact on our world, on our nation, when a child is taken. Now I know in some parts of the world their culture is that an aunt or an uncle raises your son for the first, when you turn seven until he is 18. That is part of the culture. I think it is in Africa where they hand over children to a grandparent or an aunt or an uncle. But to be taken is just, it's devastation. You fear -- you grow up with always fearing the bottom falling out in every choice or decision. It is that PTSD thing. You got a decision make, okay, I need to freeze for a moment, let me think about this and you grow up questioning every decision that you make because you are always waiting for that bottom to fall out. If I fallen in love with this man...I am not gonna because that bottom is going to fall out. Or if I -- if I commit myself to my education... No, I am not good enough, I am not smart enough because after all something was wrong with me. I did something really bad to be taken and lost my family. So no I can't quite finish school because I will never, the bottom will just fall out again...Having children, oh no, no, not going to do that because I could lose them or whatever is in our blood that make all of that happen. I am going to stop it right now with me. So I won't have children. I mean it just influences everything. You are never a child, you are never free to be a child. I think that is important. You are always in -- you are always on the fringes of relationships of -- you are always on the fringe and your choices are impacted by it for the rest of your life.

Some of us get through it. You get through it, but I did live in foster homes where there were other foster kids, I mentioned earlier two really, really cool Native American children that they were definitely treated differently because they looked native. But it is just, it will take a child forever, no matter how old it is, a baby will remember being taken. Somewhere in its psyche it's there. I don't think our society on this continent has yet learned how to really how to -- they don't really understand that impact, especially when it is happening under the worst of conditions.

AS: I have a son that is eleven years old today and there are a couple of others who took responsibility of him and he is so innocent, you know? This is a world and I find myself wanting to be around him more because when I was eleven I lost the greatest thing I ever had in the world and that was my mom. My mom and dad treated me like I was going to go somewhere and they treated me special, but not in front of other children because the other children were jealous of me because I was able to figure out things all of the time even the adult children, I was the first one to learn English in our family group, even though my dad had working English when he came to work, he was able to work in English. My mom never spoke English, but they all loved music and that is what got me through.

But I remember my mom dying and I remember all the children were around her when she was sitting on the bunk to go to the hospital and somebody had volunteered to drive her to the

hospital. She was sitting on the bunk and all of the children were around her and I couldn't penetrate that circle to get to her. That was the last time I saw my mom. So not only was I lost, and unlike her, I couldn't think of education from that point on because I didn't learn how to read and write, I didn't learn how to read and write until I was 27, because I followed in my dad's footsteps to work hard and when you get tired you work hard some more and learn as much as you can from people in order to get ahead. In order to get ahead in our community was to not speak English in front of white people. I didn't know any English.

I learned English when I was 12 or when I was running errands for construction workers and they would give me their change as a tip. But when I went to work in the sawmill my language was very limited in terms of English. They teased me a lot. But the work was too important to me for me to be bothered with that even though I didn't like it. But I got through and I learned language. When I started learning language, I had a hard time. Number one dictionaries were not readily available in our communities. If you were not in tune with the church, if you were not in tune with the priest or the nuns, then you didn't have that help, you know. My mom and dad kept me from the rectories because they know what happened at the rectory. So I didn't have access to learn things. I didn't have access to a dictionary even if I could. I had no way of learning to write.

But we have method in mathematics in our language, so that is why I was able to learn about money. With money, you can get anything. But we never had too much money, you know. Wreath season I was able to make money. During the winter I cut wood. During the spring I worked for the elders in terms of their planting and their teaching me how to garden. That is where I got my education. But to think of me, I did try to go to the university and oh my god that was a different world. Because at the university I had to eat commodity food, you know, and that simply was not my way of life. Because that is how I got away from the community by not eating commodity food.

To me -- having my wife and my daughter eat chop meat again, was so devastating to me. The people that I was involved with in education, tried to encourage me and I still had to eat that food and it drove me back to when I was in my childhood with all of those bad memories, having to eat that food. Seeing my daughter and my new wife have to eat commodity food, you know, and making my own furniture. We had a beautiful apartment, but we didn't have any furniture. I had to make my own furniture, you know. So I stayed maybe a year and I worked at night. I worked 11 to 7 shift and go to school. It was just so overwhelming to me and having to eat commodity food it was just too much. So I never went back. So that education would have helped me. But I think I would have gotten a degree I would be really dangerous to the world.

I still have a difficult time interpreting. I have to read things. Incidentally the Unsettled, we can read... I mean I am computer savvy and many people are computer savvy now, children are computer savvy. But many of our elders like younger than me and older than me can't read that online and they can't afford to read the newspaper. So we are trying to figure out ways to deliver to them.

(Unsettled was a series that was released in the Portland Press Herald around the time of this focus group)



JG: I was copying and pasting it into a word document, I think it is probably illegal because it's copy written, but I wanted my kids to have it because I don't know if they'll have access to how to find it, and know about it. So I was copying and pasting.

AS: Well Stephanie is trying to develop an area, a way where we can deliver it to every household. I have been buying newspapers for elders in the community to go up there with five sets of newspapers every other day is quite a load.

JG: What's the next question?

RG: How would you describe the relationship between the tribe and the State of Maine? Is it different now than it was and if yes, how so?

AS: I have to sneak out for just a second.

JG: I will try to talk the whole time you are gone.

AS: I will try not to talk as much.

JG: Does Tonisha have something to say?

TE: You should say it.

JG: Tonisha's mute.

TE: Please.

JG: Ask the question again Rachel?

(Child: Why are you asking my mom?)

RG: So she will hopefully make her comment...

TE: I think you're wise.

RG: Can you tell me what it was like when children came back to the community, if they came back? What were your experiences as a child who was removed or struggles back?

TB: I wasn't taken from the community.

RG: Did you know anyone who was taken from the community?

TB: Not off the top of my head.... Stop it Carson

RG: Do you have any comments about those other questions... All right what was the relationship between the tribe and the state of Maine, is it different now than it was? If so, how so?

JG: I don't know about different, I was just going to share how it is not a very respectful or polite relationship. I wasn't alive at the time when voting for Wabanaki people wasn't committed. So I don't have that to go on, and I wasn't here with all those legal struggles and I am here now. What I see now is that we have a representative that can go into the state house but they don't have a vote. So I don't understand their role completely and my understanding that I made up I guess because they are there essentially to try and lobby for what would be best for the tribe. So, in reality we have no say in the state house. I think a lot of things happen within our state. I don't necessarily support gambling, but many people in the state have rejected it for the tribes but then supported it for the non-Native community. I just see that we are more enemies than allies that's what it feels like to me. And Alan...

TB: It's still all about race. (overlapping with JG)

RG: What was that?

TB: It's still all about race.

RG: How so?

TB: Like you go outside of your community and people, like they see you are a Native American and then they are just like, you are discriminated against automatically just because of where you come from and what your ancestors may or may have not done in the past you get punished for.

JG: I think even if your ancestors may or may have not done something the whole livelihood was imposed upon and forced to live with (*inaudible*) when it wasn't. So I think there is some good reason to do or not do some of those things that may or may not have happened. Is that how you put it? So code that researchers. (*laughs in the room*)

Anyway back to the relationship. I don't know, I don't think it's a good relationship or fair relationship.

TE: I don't know much about that and I have heard talk. I have appeared to be white, but when people learn I have Native blood in me, things change. I even find I feel bad about this. I find myself careful with whom I share that. I ran into a young man about 20, which very much surprised me coming from his generation and his father is a prominent attorney in this area in Bangor. He learned I was Native American and I spent a lot of time with the Lakota in South Dakota and his comment to me was so heart wrenching. He said, 'my father says that all the Indians want are handouts that they have got to do this entitlement thing.' And I became furious and had to watch my own potential racism or judgments. My judgments were coming out about him and I think that is one thing as a side note, we all need to watch that. But I very quickly went to him and grabbed him. He stands about six inches taller than me; grabbed him



and I said 'I love you and do your research. Do your research, go to the books that tell the truth. I am not saying your father is a bad man or he is wrong, but just remember that it was the colonists that came in at gun point forced Native Americans to sign treaties that weren't even authorized to sign treaties. At gun point they said you either go to the reservation or you die and if you go to the reservation we will feed you.' So I said that is where it started. So I just had to really watch my own prejudices about how can a person think that, he must be a very bad person for thinking that and really checked myself. But to me that told me a lot about, his father must be a little younger than me and then here's this young man already thinking it. So and he was an open young man. He had gay friends, he smoke marijuana and, you know, his psyche was open on some levels. But when it came to that it was from his upbringing. So I don't know about the state of tribal relationship. But if that was a reflection of it then -- *Talking stick (moving the recording closer to the next speaker).*

JG: I think it is kind of a reflection. This past semester I had --

AS: We are really having some problems here and I really have to go. I will be back if you guys are still here, how long are you going to be here?

RG: I'll be here until 3:00 so I can catch up with you before I go. No rush. (*AS: Alright, okay.*) (*TE: Good luck*) Thanks Alan.

JG: This past spring, which was 2014, I had to go to the State House for one of my, my policy class and one of my classmates went into the republican caucus and they didn't know she was democrat. I guess because her representative was in there, they invited her in and just assumed she was Republican and felt very comfortable and free to share with her, not only was she republican, but she was also not Native. So, she told me, so this is second hand, that they were joking about how those Indians don't have any sovereignty and they were bad mouthing Wabanaki tribes. I asked her why she didn't say anything or come and get me and I don't understand that or why she felt the need to tell me while not standing up for me, but it's very present, the disconnect and the lack of peace and collaboration, it is not there. I think if somebody said it as there, it is just a facade. It is not real. I don't know. I don't have trust in it. I don't feel comfortable with it.

Somebody said something about, Terri said it, about telling people she is Native and then being cautious with it because of how she is treated. I had an experience where I think I also look white and so I went into the store and I said something in Passamaquoddy to the cashier and I didn't mean to, it just, it fell out and they looked at me like I was nuts. Prior to that my landlady looked at my license plate, she said oh so you're Indian. So there is a disconnect everywhere. It is just everywhere and it is so current. People think that his happened years and years and years ago that it was back when Columbus came. It is just not that way. It is now, it still occurs.

TE: I had a man, a young man, while I was in South Dakota and it is not Native, Indian related, but I over looked their area employee relations program. One of our black employees came in and filed a discrimination complaint or harassment complaint by one of her coworkers. And he was maybe 19 or 20ish and I keep thinking you what were referring to, this should be in the past, you know. In Los Angeles when the blacks were starting riots that is where I lived with the hippies and all of that. It is just, I felt like we should be beyond this. But anyway, in the training room, he drew a picture of a black person being hung and handed it to her.

So she came to me and my job was to be an impartial reviewer and I met with him. I said do you know what we are meeting about today... 'no,' and I said it 's alleged that you drew a picture and he didn't know I had the picture about, which made a racial statement. 'Well, I don't really know what you are talking about.' So I showed him the picture and he turned that around to say it as some form of pterodactyl or a --- it really wasn't what it was. What it was was code, it was a code that was in his mind was a robot, a drawing of a robot, a stick robot, it was a stick figure black person. The code behind it was that it was a black person. It was just one of the most remarkable conversations that I have ever had with anybody regarding a racial comment or discriminatory comment that someone made in the workplace. Really what he was saying is what you see isn't what it is, it's really this. It's really this but it means that. I just, (*JG: it sounded to me like...*) it's like code, it was like a game. A painting/drawing that it has a meaning behind it. So it was just, we had to deal with that.

JG: It sounded like he was trying to trick you.

TE: Trickster, Right, the Lakota have a term for trickster, and they serve a wonderful purpose in our lives. They are painful sometimes and hurtful, but the challenge is to be able to see it when it is happening and it definitely was. But he belonged, apparently belonged to a group of great people. I am not sure they were skinheads. It was just, it would just set me back because this stuff, the Native, the rub between...

JG: I can't tell you why.

TE: It's too quiet, that's why, it's too quiet...kay...(in response to a side conversation)

But I guess getting back to the point of the racial tension especially between the Native American and I think a lot of - a lot of these laws were written before the truth was told. In recent years the various Native American elders or storytellers are telling the truth. It is now all of our responsibility to get to those books, to get to those stories and learn the truth. But what we were taught growing up in high school was nothing like the truth.

RG: What policies have the greatest impact in your community? So state policies --

JG: Positive or negative?

MS. GEORGE: Whatever way you want to interpret that.

JG: I don't know, I think it is a federal policy. But the Land Claim Settlement Act is bad and so is the Blood Quantum in my opinion.



TE: The what?

JG: Blood Quantum, you are a quarter, you are a half, you are three quarters, you are full, oh you are below a quarter so you are not really... (*TE: yeah okay.*) I am not sure how you would gauge that. But I feel like way before the Blood Quantum happened, your kids are your kids and that makes them part of the community. That makes them part of the tribe and that makes them part of you and you are part of it. I don't know, so I don't know how that could be different, but the only purpose for it was to eventually eliminate the Indians. So I think that is a negative policy that is in place. The sad thing is that our tribe supports it. I don't know if it is because more money would be dispersed among more people or I don't know. There is this high and mightiness about how much you are.

TB: The more you are the more money get.

JG: That is not true. Oh you mean that's the idea. Yeah. And so...the same thing with the land claims, the Land Claims Act, I feel like took away our, oh I don't know, our sovereignty, our integrity, I don't know. It took something in that it specifically said, somebody specifically said ha, I made sure to word it in a way that they wouldn't be able to get the casinos or anything that any other tribe would get in the future, because this \$80 million settlement is plenty. They are not going to suck anymore out of the government. And so, unless we are named when other acts go through, we don't qualify for those acts, the Wabanaki in Maine. I just think that it is just not fair and it is just another way before the state or the government to beat us when we are down. I guess that is all I have to say, I can't think right now.

And the sweet soothing snoring of the baby is making me breathe with her...

TB: I had an old friend and we are not friends anymore because of this. When I got pregnant with Emmy, she made a comment that it is okay that you're pregnant because you are a Native American. If I was to go pregnant again it wouldn't be okay because I am white. But Natives can have all the kids that they want and live off the state because that is what they do. And because of that statement I am no longer friends with her. Because it wasn't, I wasn't trying to live off of the state. I don't get state help right now. Now I have my child support because my oldest daughter's father is in the military. Like that comes from the military that doesn't come from the state. I don't get help for Emmy. I have absolutely no help whatsoever when it comes to Emmy. It is all out of my own pocket.

She -- she was white and when I got pregnant and she found out and she made that statement. It was -- it was like her true colors towards me and where I come from came out. Like Terri said how she has to watch when she says she is Native American. It's kind of how I feel when I go outside of my community. It's like... If like... 'cause like I have the freckles and because my dad is Irish and Scottish, so it's like the freckles take away from that, I don't know, Native American look, I guess. So it is not like I was right next to my cousin who is full blooded.

She looks full-blooded. I was standing right next to her, they would know she was, but they wouldn't think twice about me being...

JG: I think that we have all talked about our idea of what we are supposed to look like and then further perpetuating the stigma of – oh I'm sorry. Anyway we are perpetuating the idea of what an Indian is supposed to look like. Really we are all like sitting here bonded in that common conversation, a common heritage, a common, we are all united here today for the same thing.

TB: Like for a while after Emmy was born, she has blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin. In the government's eyes, she doesn't look Native American. In my eyes, she does. Just because she is not as dark as her sister doesn't mean she is any less than her sister. I am going to raise them the same way. Like doctors, like the papers that you fill out at doctor's office say like their race or whatever. For her, I still put Native American down. She still is Native American, whether she is technically an eighth or not. She is still native American. That blood still runs through her veins.

JG: You are still her mother, so you are still using the Blood Quantum thing and the bottom line is you belong to a tribe, you belong to a community and she is your baby. So there is no Emmy is an eighth, or Emmy is three quarters, Emmy is Passamaquoddy because you are, because you belong to it, it is yours. I just, I really hate that Blood Quantum thing. I won't say anymore.

TE: And to me and I could be wrong and this may not be contributing anything. But she may be whatever you think she is. But she is going to grow up in that culture. She has got to learn the prayers, she has got to learn the songs, the language. You know, the whole, the four direction, the seven colors, everything. That will be her spirituality if that's the path (*TB: You know's what's funny...*) she chooses. It is not going to make her not no matter what color she is.

TB: If I say come here to her she looks at me why? If I say *ckuwy*e to her, she comes to me. When I speak Passamaquoddy to her she listens more to me than when I speak English.

TE: Probably when she hears drumming, she'll dance.

TB: I sing Passamaquoddy songs it will put her to sleep. If I sing Rock A Bye Baby she is like why are you doing this, like I don't want to hear this.

JG: I don't even sing Rock A Bye Baby.

TB: It's a lullaby and a lot of moms will sing it. But like, whatever song in Passamaquoddy pops into my head, I will start singing it to her. She goes to sleep instantly. But like if I was to sing Rock A Bye Baby or whatever, she would stay awake. When I speak Passamaquoddy to my girls they listen more than when I speak English to them.

TE: See do you understand how wonderful it is that you can speak Passamaquoddy. That is just, (*TB: some words*). Even if it is just some words. That is just...



JG: I use all of the words I can on my kids.

TE: That is so fabulous.

TB: Like Carson she'll repeat them. Like a lot of the time when she says I love you, like when we are out in public, she says I love you mom. But when we are at home and we are in the community she says *koselmol*.

TE: Interesting.

TB: It is like a three year old knows.

JG: That is funny that you say that. My kids use it to trick me. At home, they will respond and they know what I am saying and if we get out in public and I say something to them in Passamaquoddy they are like what does that mean mom. I don't know if they just messing with me if they are also like Carson, are like yeah we are out here; we are not going to engage in that.

TB: So it is like when we are out in the public here, she will speak English. When we're at home or we are in township or Tobique, she'll use her Passamaquoddy words that she knows. Like one time we were in the store and I was walking away and she goes, 'no mama, stop' and I stopped and she goes '*ckuwi!*' There was an older woman standing there and she just like gave Carson this weird look and I started walking back to Carson and she goes why did that woman look at me like that? Like she recognized that look.

TE: But she is so cute and beautiful.

JG: She get's it from Tonisha.

TB: She looks like my mom.

TE: She does? I think she looks like you, with a purple face, now orange. Well I need to get going.

JG: I think we all do.

RG: Thank you everyone for participating today. I am going to stop the recording.