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10-30-2014

### Statement by Blue LaBeet-LaBillois collected by Rachel George on October 30, 2014

Blue LaBeet-LaBillois

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## General Information

**Private or Public Statement?** Private

**Statement Provider:** Blue LaBeet-LaBillois

**Date:** October 30, 2014

**Location:** Presque Isle, Maine

**Previous Statement?** No

**Statement Gatherer:** Rachel George

**Support Person:** N/A

**Additional Individuals Present:** N/A

**Recording Format:** Video

**Length of Recording:** 29:13

## Recording

**RG:** All right, it is October 30, 2014. We are here at the Aroostook Band of Micmacs in Presque Isle, Maine. My name is Rachel George, and I'm here today with:

**BLL:** Blue Annette LaBeet-LaBillois.

**RG:** Fantastic. The file number is A-201410-00109. Blue, have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

**BLL:** Yes, I have. And yes, I do.

**RG:** Okay. And I have to let you know, if at any point during this recording you indicate that there's a child or an elder currently in need of protection, or there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm or death to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information may not be protected as confidential.

**BLL:** And you know what, that's A-okay in my books.

**RG:** Okay. That's excellent.

**BLL:** Too many people have kept secrets, and that's where our problems have lied.

**RG:** Absolutely. Absolutely. So, I will open this up to you, whenever you feel most comfortable starting.

**BLL:** OK, um, as I indicated, I'm a Caribe Indian. Um, although I myself was never removed from my home, um, I went to a parochial school, and private parochial schools were \*just as\* detrimental, hideous, abusive, um, sexually, physically, um, sexually, physically, mentally, spiritually as any residential school. In fact, I kinda think that they were worse, because they always used (*finger-quote gesture*) 'God' as their reasons for doing what they did to us.

My sister was in a convent, was placed in a convent, where she was, um, they were abused, beaten, put into broom closets. Um, they were also made to go, like, to stores and beg for food for the convent to, you know, to bring back, um. (*clears her throat*) And my sister's in her late 70s, going into her 80s now. She doesn't really like talkin' about the convent, but it was, it was pretty bad.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** Um, my experience was that, um — it was in New York City — and, um, the school that I went to was for blacks and Indians only. And, I was the only Indian in the school. The school was run by a bunch of white nuns, um, and there were three white children that went there; um, a couple of Spanish kids that went there; I was the only Native kid there; and the rest was all black. This was in Harlem, during the '60s — \*not\* a good place to be if you weren't black (*short laugh*) — that's the beginning and the end of it.

Um, my life there was very lonely, very isolated, um. The white teachers didn't like me because I wasn't one of the black chi-, black students that went there, because that was during this time of the civil rights, (*raising fist*) and everyone was into black power. That wasn't my family's thing. That wasn't my thing. So, we didn't go around wearing Black Power buttons, and we didn't go around, um, you know, participating the way others did.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** My mom and dad \*were\* involved with the civil rights. Um, they, um, were friends with Bishop Desmond Tutu, who's a very, um... (*smiling, nodding, responding to recognition of the name*) ... Yeah! We have — In fact, I have a picture at home with my mom and myself and my brother and, yeah ... (*smiling*)

Um, my family raised me not to be anything, not Native, not anything. They raised me to accept people just for who they are, not because of what they were. But the schools didn't feel that way.

The teachers would — I would be beaten. I was beaten with, um, metal rulers. Um, I had — There was 30 kids in our class and, actively, they were \*encouraged\* to abuse me: um, tripping me when I'm walking down the aisles, um, throwing things at me. Um, I was made to stand in

front of the classroom and wet myself, um. I was ... *(voice breaking)* It was very lonely when, you see all these kids around and ... everybody's being loved by the teachers and everybody's talked to, and, and, and, you can see, you can see love being passed to everybody.

And you know, that one kid — Now, let me not stop with just being the only Native. I'm of mixed blood, *(gesturing to her face)* obviously. Um, and I'm \*proud\* of who I am. Um, I'm \*proud\* that I have the world in my body. *(voice breaking)* My father was French and Indian. My mom was Cape Verdean. I don't know if too many people know what Cape Verdeans are, but Cape Verdeans are a group of people — Actually, we're a mixture of every culture on the planet, every race on the planet, we're a mixture of, because, um, the Cape Verde Islands wasn't a group of people. It was an island, it was an uninhabited group of islands where people, sailors from all over the world — from North America, South America, Africa, Asia, everywhere — where they all met, traded, and then went on their other ways.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** So, Cape Verdeans are a mixture — When you test a Cape Verdean's blood, you will find \*every\* \*race\* \*on the planet\* \*in us.\* So, I consider myself a rather unique person. *(smiling)* They didn't. They HATED me, because I didn't, I wasn't one of them: I wasn't white; I wasn't black; and I wasn't Spanish. So, as far as they were concerned, I was nothing.

'You should be proud to be black.' Okay, I would be ... if I was. And, there's nothing worse than being an outsider amongst outsiders.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** Like I said, it was \*extremely\* lonely. I'm still affected today, because I put on really, really ... *(pauses, bows head, voice shaking)* ... I put on a really, really strong front for people, because I feel I have to. I can't let people see this side. They eat you up and they spit you up, when they see this side. *(looks down, takes a deep breath)*

I feel because of the way that they made me feel so unimportant, so insignificant, so non-essential — And basically, that's what they told me. 'You're nothing.' They gave the other kids more inspiration and aspiration than I ever saw. *(takes tissue and covers her eyes)*

They ... I really have a hard time with people who are religious because of it. *(wipes eyes)* Catholics — I go, I, I really, I see a nun — Even up to this day, and I'm almost 60 — I see a nun today, and I have to cross the street. I have to get away. My heart starts pounding. Two things runs through me: fright and \*so\* much anger, I want to \*hurt\* this person. *(softly)* They're not the ones who did it to me.

So, it's hard to, right now, up to, even at this ti-, stage of my life, it's hard for me to see people like this and teach my grandchildren and my children to respect people because of what I've had in my head here, and I have to keep reminding myself ... it's not, it's not a person as a whole, it's not people as a whole group, it, we're individuals. But it just seems to leak into ...

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** (*deep breath, pause*) They don't realize how little they make you think of yourself. No self-esteem at all, which leads you to get into abusive relationships, which leads you ... (*voice breaking up, bows head*) to not be the proper parent (*crying*) ... that you feel you should've been, because you didn't have the tools. And it doesn't just stop there, because when you go back to your people, they don't treat you the same way either. (*shaking head, wiping away tears, sniffs*)

Once you leave your folks, once you leave your people, even if it's like me, it was a day-to-day thing, but that day-to-day thing still makes a difference.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** You feel just as lonely. You feel just as ... (*softly*) you shouldn't be here. There are times, in my past, I didn't want to be here anymore. (*wipes tears away*) I couldn't find the love and support in my family. I couldn't find the love and support with my people. (*waves open palm*) 'You're not, you're not a part of us. You're just not a part of us.' (*holds tissue to face, crying*)

In my case, I just went away from all of my people. I went away from everybody, anything that had to do with my past. I don't want nothing to do with them. I don't \*want\* anything to do with them, which is not right. I come up here to run away from — (*takes two tissues, holds over eyes, wipes eyes, crying*) Always fighting, trying to prove who you are.

**BLL:** (*softly*) Then I come up here, and I find my new family — No judgment, no ... just accept me. (*hand to heart*) (*sniffs*) So, when I heard about the TRC, it felt like this, \*this\* was the release — these \*58 years,\* I've been trying to release ... (*voice breaking, softly*) Now I have it.

(*wiping eyes*) That's why I try so hard, any time you guys come up or do any-, (*wiping face*) \*anything\* — If I feel like this, and, but I still had access to my family, (*voice breaking*) how in the world do these other people, they were \*taken away,\* and for \*years\* didn't see their families. My heart, (*hand on heart, shakes head*) I wish there was something I could do. I so wish there was something I could do. So, if making a statement like this will help, then I'll do it. That's why I said I had no problems with being out in the public to let the public know. (*voice breaking*) People \*need\* to know. There's, there's some really bad things going on to us out there. And people need to realized. And it's not just in residential schools — It's in Catholic schools, it's in private schools, it's, it's ... Oh, my goodness. (*wipes both eyes, holds hand to face, pausing*)

Until I was 14 years old, I never had \*a friend.\* ... I was that kid that, you know, you, the one that you thought would've been that sociopath that went around killing everybody. (*wiping eyes, laughing*) You know, that's the one that they talk about: Oh, yeah, that was the quiet one that always sat in the corner by themselves, reading a book, and people would throw things at 'em and do things, and they would just do this (*drops head down to the side*) and just continue reading and such, hoping just to melt \*into the floor.\* (*begins crying harder*) Wishing the earth would just open up and swallow you! And at times, wishing you were never who you were. Why?! Why couldn't I be white?! Why couldn't I be black?! (*shaking head, no*) (*pause*) So, thank you, TRC. (*nods head, crying, bows head*)

**RG:** (*softly*) Thank you so much for sharing.

**BLL:** (*holds tissue over her face, wiping eyes*) And like I said, (*sniffs*) if it wasn't for you coming up here, I don't know if I'd ever be able to get this off my chest, so it makes me feel a \*whole\* lot better (*nodding*) ... and, so thank you.

**RG:** Thank you.

**BLL:** (*crying, wiping eyes with tissue, places tissue down, sighs*) Okay. I'm done. (*laughs through tears*)

**RG:** Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?

**BLL:** Go right ahead.

**RG:** Why ... ? Hmm.

**BLL:** (*laughs softly*)

**RG:** What do you want people to know about your experience?

**BLL:** (*sniffs, pauses*) That it is life-long. People have to understand ... being, being, being Native ... my kids' father's Narragansett. Because I don't have access to my people here, I raised them as Narragansetts. A lot of times, people'll say, 'Oh, she's Narragansett.' No, I'm not Narragansett. I was married to a Narragansett. My kids was raised Narragansetts. My kids goes Narragansett. I'm not. (*sniffs*)

Um, my Tribes, um, come, we have our reservation on an island called Dominica, but we still have the same problems that the Natives do here. We have the exact same problems. (*shaking head*) ... Um ... (*looks down, pauses*)

I forgot the question. (*laughs, covers face*) Sorry.

**RG:** That's okay.

**BLL:** I stepped, I went back. Sorry. (*wipes eyes*)

**RG:** No, that's okay. What do you want people to know and take away from your experience? What do you want people to learn?

**BLL:** I want people ... to stop being afraid, and I want people to come out of their homes and out of their comfort zones. And I want them to educate themselves about the people that originated here. I want them to know what a *\*proud,\* \*strong,\* \*intelligent,\* \*gifted,\* (tearing up) \*spiritual\** people that came from this land. I want them to understand what it's like to be a prisoner within your own home — And America's the home. And held prisoner within your own home is really sad.

Everybody here that came here was not invited, but they were accepted, and they were helped. *\*Everybody\** who came here. And the return thanks was, 'We're going to kill you. We're going to degrade you. We're going to rape you. We're going to take everything that was, that means anything to you. We're going to cut your hair, change your language, change your beliefs.'

**BLL:** If we had done that to people when they came here, maybe we'd all be better off. Maybe these people that are making the *\*big thing\** about *\*putting borders up,* maybe if they thought, if *\*we\** had put borders up when *\*they\** wanted to come here to escape *\*their\** religious persecution, and all the bad things that were happening to them — the *\*reason\** why they came here — umm, things would be looked at differently. But these people, these Ameri-, these, these Europeans that have come here, and have totally bastardized *\*ever-ry-thing\** that people lived for, is just ridiculous. The exact same thing you left your country for, to come here to get the freedom for, you have turned around and imprisoned the people that were here that *\*allowed\** you to come here to have your freedom! WHAT in the hell is wrong with you people!

**RG:** (*softly*) Yeah.

**BLL:** So I want them to learn. Put yourself in other peoples' shoes. Walk a mile in that moccasin. Come down. *\*Native Americans — We're all over the place!\** You can find us, if you want to. (*laughs*) There's no, there's no doubt about that!

Come. Sit down. Meet. Go to a Pow Wow. Talk to people. PLEASE don't be that ignorant person and do the, (*hand to her mouth*) 'Woo. Woo. Woo. Woo.' Not one of us — That's a turkey call. (*smiles*) Um, we're really great people, and we really like to share, and we really like to educate, so come and ask a question —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — and we'll give you an answer.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** Don't assume AN-Y-THING, 'cause assuming makes an ass out of you and me. Don't assume anything. Um, but I guess the most I want: Get outta your comfort zone. Introduce yourself. And let's talk. (*nodding, rocking in back and forth in her chair*) That's probably what I want. (*smiles*)

**RG:** That's excellent. Can I ask you a little bit about what you do here?

**BLL:** Sure. Um, recently, I just, um, resigned from my position here.

**RG:** Mmm.

**BLL:** But, um, T.R.A.I.L. coordinator, which is, um, um, ... oh, my gosh, (*covers her face with her hands*) I just drew a blank. I \*totally\* drew a blank. I'm so embarrassed right now.

**RG:** No, that's okay.

**BLL:** But it's, um, it's an education program for diabetes.

**RG:** Mmm.

**BLL:** And, um, and, and it's, um, teaching them about diabetes, and the prevention, and the things that you can do: healthy eating, exercise and everything like that. Um. and it's geared towards the Native, um, kids because, with the Europeans, who come along with their horrible diets, um, which, we never had diabetes, until. (*gestures*) Um, so, it's educating the kids —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — but it's not just educating the kids on their diets and such, we also bring the cultural, a cultural awareness —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — of the past and the foods and such we ate. And, in fact, we have a calendar — And Tanya can show you — Um, there was a 13-moon calendar that we did, and there was a bunch of people that we got together, and we put recipes in there and, you know, the time of the moon, and gave it the Micmac words for 'em, and —



**RG:** Oh, nice.

**BLL:** — We were just \*so proud\* of these calendars. (*smiling*)

**RG:** Yeah.

**BLL:** You know, especially because the, the recipes, and the recipes came from all around here. (*gesturing in a circle*)

**RG:** Mmm. That's amazing.

**BLL:** All the old timers and such.

**RG:** Yeah.

**BLL:** The kids, the kids were assigned: 'Okay, go, talk to your grammie. Go talk to your auntie. Go, talk to whoever, and ask 'em about old-time dishes and such.' Um, and then we also did a, did programs where we would have the elders come together —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — with the kids, and everybody would exchange stories ... excuse me ... we had the kids go over and make a meal for the elders, and then serve the elders and such, and so that's what T.R.A.I.L. was, it was about. It was a lot of fun.

**RG:** That's amazing.

**BLL:** Um, I'm also, I was also a youth worker, um, so I went out and I did things outside, camping —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — and things like that: hikes, walks, Katahdin, all kinds of things, um, with the kids. And ... I tutor. (*laughs*)

**RG:** Oh, wow.

**BLL:** Jack of all trades and a master of none! (*laughs*)

**RG:** Yeah!

**BLL:** (*laughs*) And I like to, I like to think of myself as kind of like ... Um, the, in the Narragansett language, it's [00:21:07] [Na Kasi], which is my mother, which you can also use as your grandmother. And I like to think of myself as the 'Kasi' of the group here, because they all have their, um ... um, I can't remember the word for grandmother. I want to say ... (*puts hand to her mouth*) Begins with an M. And a [00:21:27] [Moosum] is for the gran-, —



Oh, that's the wrong, that's the wrong language. Anyways ... *(laughs)* I like to think of myself as the residential grandmother around here for the kids. There's lots of grandmothers —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** —don't get me wrong —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — lots of grandmothers, but because I'm there with them, all the time.

**RG:** Yeah.

**BLL:** Um, and right now, I'm just volunteering.

**RG:** That's great.

**BLL:** I \*love,\* love these kids. They're just such little sponges, and they're \*so excited to learn\* about their Native — They're just \*so proud\* and \*so excited,\* and they —

**RG:** Yeah!

**BLL:** — You know, I love when they come and: 'Well, Blue! Can we do ... yada, yada, yada,' you know, and *(slaps her leg)* it's just so awesome. They love camping. They love, they love — They love doing all, what they say, 'We like doing the Native stuff.' *(laughs)* It's so cool, kids. *(thumbs up)*

**RG:** That's so sweet.

**BLL:** And you just see them, like, when John Dennis was doing language with them? They were like \*really\* getting into 'em. And I was so amazed at, you know, how they were remembering the words, and they would use them with each other every now and then, and I'm like, "Awww, see?!" *(puts her head back, big exhale)* This is what we need. *(nodding, smiling)*

**RG:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**BLL:** There's a lot of work to be done, but there's a lot of people that are willing to do the work. *(nodding)*

**RG:** What are they things that you would like to see for this community, in particular?

**BLL:** Oh, my gosh. (*long pause*) The \*outside\* community (*knocking on table*) is not necessarily very tolerant of the Native community, and not even because of things that are going on right now. It's \*old\* stuff, from like when their grandparents maybe had a disagreement with (*laughs*) somebody here and then —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — it became the, (*in a deep voice*) 'Oh, those, those Indians over there.' Um ... I would like to see, I would actually like to see a forum where kids, non-Native kids, and the kids come together, um, 'cause kids, it seems like, if you get the kids together, the kids get a, more of a understanding and tolerance of each other?

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** Um, if you keep them away from those ignorant adults. (*laughs*) Um, and some of those kids actually take it \*back\* to the homes, and it's like, (*young voice*) 'You know what? They're not the way that you thought that they were, or you told me that they were. They weren't like that at all!'

**RG:** Yeah.

**BLL:** You know, so, I'd like to see more open forums. So far, we have the Boys and Girls Club here, which is, of course, open to everybody, but we have these people in this town here who, they don't even, (*sits up straight in her chair*) they don't even know there's a Boys and Girls Club here. And I'm talking about the Rotary Club!

We went to the Rotary Club to go and do a presentation of, to help and get funds to help fix the building. They said they didn't even know that there was a Boys and Girls Club here. How can you be a part of a Rotary Club! (*laughs*) And not know? Because you're talking about businesses!

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** How could you not know that there's a Boys and Girls Club here? (*laughs*)

**RG:** Yeah.

**BLL:** So, yeah, they were really surprised when they heard that. Um, so, and we offered them an invitation, you know: 'Bring your kids! Bring 'em!' We had, we've had open houses over at UMPI, over at NMCC, here. We've had open houses to come and, you know, introduce the community to what's going on here.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** We still don't get the, the participation.

**RG:** Yeah.

**BLL:** The only time people ‘seem’ to be semi-interested is Pow Wow time. That’s it. Then, or Thanksgiving time.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** *(laughs)* Those are the two times Natives seem to be popular. *(nods, puts her head to the side)* Yeah. *(laughs)* We open our arms, I even, like, tried to get the chief of police —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — to come and do ongoing things with the kids. Even if it’s just having a squad car come up here, go through the neighborhood. When you see the kids, stop: ‘Hey, kids. How ya doin’ today?’ Introduce yourself: ‘I’m Officer Such-and-Such.’

You complain that kids don’t have respect for police but, you know what? You don’t have respect for yourself or the people you serve, either!

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** So, somebody’s gotta give somewhere, and if we’re tryin’ to teach the kids to respect you, you’ve got to do something to earn that respect as well.

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** I still don’t see police coming up her on the positive. I say, ‘Every time you guys come up here, it’s always on a \*negative\* note. You need to come up here and show a \*positive\* note, so there’s another side to the police, so that these kids \*aren’t\* afraid to see you.’

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** But if they don’t — If the town isn’t willing to make those steps, while we’ve got the doors wide open, *(opens arms)* I don’t know what we can do. ... *(nods)* Hopefully, maybe I’ll be that, that oil, I mean, maybe I’ll be that squeaky wheel —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — and *(laughs)* after I get on them enough times. ‘Oh, well, let’s, let’s just go over there and get this women out of our — *(laughs)* Let’s just go meet!’ *(laughs)*

We had a meeting, um. And they said that they, oh, yeah, they understood what we were talking about and everything else, but like I said, I looked all summer, I looked to see that police car come up here, just to mingle with the kids – Nope! Never came. So ... blowing smoke up peoples' butt —

**RG:** Mm-hm.

**BLL:** — does not solve a problem. And I'm definitely not the one. So, maybe if the adults start acting like adults, maybe things will get better.

**RG:** Mm-hm. ... Is there — ?

**BLL:** — Did I answer your question?

**RG:** Yeah!

**BLL:** Okay.

**RG:** Is there anything else you'd like to add? ... Anything else you think it's important that the TRC knows?

**BLL:** There's a lotta hurt people out there. It's a *\*wonderful\** thing that you guys have come about.

I won't say I think it's too late, but, for like these elders, that's the one that I really hurt for, (*voice breaking*) because they're already at the end of this walk, so they really don't have any ... I don't see how they can possibly get satisfaction over what's happening right now.

The younger ones, like of my age group and such, yeah. There's still hope for us. But the older ones? They've lived with this their *\*whole\** time. (*voice breaking*) So, if anything, I'm going to say ... maybe we should give ... they should do a healing ceremony for the elders who can't. That's what I think I'll ask the TRC — A healing ceremony for the elders who can't. ... Yeah. (*tearing up, nodding*) That would be it. (*looks down at her hands*)

**RG:** Thank you so much for sharing ... and for taking the time to be here with me ... in what I know is a very busy schedule today.

(*BLL takes a tissue and wipes her tears from her eyes and her cheeks*)

**RG:** And I think you were very strong and very courageous for being here, and you still have a *\*tremendous\** amount of fight in you.

**BLL:** (*takes a breath, laughs and looks up*) Yeahhhh. Yeah.

**RG:** So I know you are doing a *\*lot\** of good for the people around you.

**BLL:** Well, I'll be here. Creator sent me here for a reason.

**RG:** Exactly.

**BLL:** So, you know, whatever I can do — \*Whatever\* I can do.

**RG:** Absolutely.

**BLL:** (*nodding*) Yeah.

**RG:** Thank you so much.

**BLL:** You're welcome.

**END OF RECORDING**