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Statement by Sandra Pictou collected by Marcie Lister on October 16, 2014

Sandra Pictou

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? Private

Statement Provider: Sandra Pictou

Date: October 16, 2014

Location: Presque Isle, Maine

Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Marcie Lister

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

Recording Format: Audio

Length of Recording: 20:22

Recording

ML: Today is October 16, 2014. Um, I am Marcie Lister, and I am a Statement Gatherer, gathering the Statement from Sandra. And, file number is A-201410-00113. Sandra, have we gone over all of the consent forms, and do you understand them?

SP: Yes.

ML: Have you signed them?

SP: Yes.

ML: Thank you. And, uh, I need to repeat that, uh, if, in the course of this Statement, any information should be offered that indicates that a child is in, a child or any other person is in danger of being harmed, we are not able to keep that confidential. That would, does need to be disclosed. Okay, well, whenever you're ready to start, um, please begin.

SP: All right, um. Well, I've worked with ICWA through, um, my employment and, um, I was a youth coordinator for the Tribe, ah, back in '93. And, um, working with youth and, under ICWA, I started doing home visits with our Native children in foster care and respite homes just to bring some of the cultural activities to them that we were doing for the kids in the community. Um, that meant —

ML: Exc-, excuse me, so, these were children who were, so some of these children were placed in non-Native homes?

SP: Right.

ML: Okay.

SP: Right. And, um, if they weren't in our areas of our youth programs, then, we would travel and take it to them. And I went as far as Bangor, um, and, and some areas down there, couple places. Um, and I would just take the, whatever cultural activity we did, crafts, or — I would take it to them, so they would know their culture. And, it was welcomed, for the majority of 'em, um, and, and they loved having the, ah, contact with their Tribe and know that they were remembered, and they were still part of the Tribe.

ML: *(softly)* Mm-hm.

SP: Um, some of the kids did eventually get adopted with these families. They never went back, or couldn't go back. Um, and, we, you know, at the time, I kept contact with them, with the home visits. And some of 'em actually started coming to our group, if they were close enough, um, where we could pick 'em up.

Um, then, I went from there to doing, um, transporting kids to DHS for the supervised visits with their parents. And, um, and then, I even did some of the supervised visits. They had me sit in —

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: — on the visits.

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: Um, 'cause it made the families comfortable.

ML: Sure.

SP: And, that part was good, because, um, you know, they did, they, they had part of the Tribe there; they could trust it; it was no stranger, you know —

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: — We got to know each and, and, um, they knew they had that support still, so that was a good connection.

While doing some of those, when it, when some of the courses went to court, and I was actually summoned to at least one of them, um, that, ah — One particular family with the kids,



it seemed like they were playing a game. I don't know. It was frustrating, and I was involved for a long time with them, many years. And, um, they were put through hoops. And it seemed like, after a while, they kept changing, um, the State kept changing the social worker.

ML: Um. Mm-hm.

SP: And every time a worker was changed, they made the family re-do everything — Start from scratch. And, that went on for a long time —

ML: Which meant what, 're-do everything' expecting? What would the, what would the family have to re-do?

SP: Whether they had to, whatever counseling, whatever, you know, they wouldn't take on what the family had already gone through?

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: They said, 'Well, okay, I, I'm the new worker. You're going to have to starting doing this.' So they had to start the process all over again.

ML: Huh.

SP: And I thought that that was not good, and I would report that back. (*soft laugh*) You know, and, and the families would tell me things, and our coordinator at the time, um, going to court and, with the lawyers, they would mention that.

And, uh, and that, that went on, like I said, many years, and it was frustrating for the family — It was heart-breaking, and, and they were trying and trying, and, and really *doing well.*

And, um, I had left after a while. I went and did other things, but I, I found out through, still in contact with them, or that, whether I'd run into them and they'd tell me and share things with me that, um, when they finally did get their kids back, it, it took 'em having to go to court. They took the State to court basically —

ML: Hmm.

SP: — because of their puttin' 'em, playing their games, I kind of investigated, I guess, and looked and saw that — Yeah, you know, they put these families through hoops. And, and they did change the worker several times, and ... But they did get their kids back, and, then they did pretty well. So that was good to, to see, you know that, you know, that they held their ground —

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: — and they still did it, no matter what, you know, but that was, to me, was a type of abuse, just from the State —

ML: Mmm.

SP: — with this family.

ML: Did you work much, ah, or did you have much direct contact with DHS, or DHHS, whenever it became that?

SP: Um, with the people there, I did a couple of times, um, then, after a while, it was just me and the family. When I first started, they, they were, they were there, you know, a worker would be there with there *with me,* and then, after a while, it kind of faded out, and it was just me. Um, but, even some of the things that the worker would say — what couldn't be done, what could be done during a visit — I, I kind of understood that, but it was kind of (*deep breath*) I don't know, I thought that was a little, a little bit ...

For instance, one mother was so upset with me — or, upset with them — and she told me about it — was that, um, she was told by the worker not to cry. And I said, 'What?' And, she was like, 'Yeah,' because she was fighting it, fighting it, fighting it. And that made it even worse for her —

SP: Of course.

SP: — But they were, they were both told not to cry in front of the kids. And, they were told if they did cry, the visit would end right then and there. And I'm like, 'Really?' (*soft laugh*) And, so I reported everything, and took it back and to the ICWA coordinator, and, and, uh, that was the same particular family that went, fought with them for a while.

ML: Mm.

SP: But, um. And, and working with the kids, when I did visits with them, without the parents, you know, whether it was home visits or they came to our youth, they felt —

ML: (*coughs*) Excuse me.

SP: — Um, they felt their mom and dad didn't care.

ML: Mmm.

SP: And, I'm like, 'What do you think that?' 'Cause they never cry.' I'm like, 'Oh!' (*laughs*) Yeah. That. I said, 'They do. They care. They're at your visits, and they care.'

You know, I didn't know how much could tell them. I didn't really say, but I said — I let them know they care. You know. That was tough. I was like —

ML: Mmmm. Mmmm.

SP: But. But that was, that was one family, and they did get 'em back, and, ah, things worked out. And then I worked with some kids that ... didn't go home, and they were adopted, but there were good reasons ... not to. And, ah, one particular case was a mother had passed away and, ah, and she was a Native, and um — Well, we think she passed away, we — Um, she just kind of disappeared, but ...

ML: Mmm.

SP: And the kids went into a foster home because it was abusive ... family, and ... um, now they're grown up and have their own house, and they're doing great. And they're still in contact, they've stayed in contact.

ML: So these were, these were children who were, were in non-Native foster homes?

SP: Yes.

ML: And were they, they were adopted by non-Natives?

SP: Yes.

ML: But stayed in touch, it sounds like.

SP: Yes.

SP: Yes. And, and the family that had them, they were super. Um, they wanted the kids involved in the Tribe. They wanted them to know, so to get families like was great.

ML: Mmm.

SP: And, especially if, if there were more than one child, and they were split, which I had another case where the kids were split and, um, there was only two of them, but they were in different homes.

ML: Mmm.

SP: I don't understand why, but they were! (*breath*) And they were just *little,* very little at the time.

ML: Mmm.

SP: And, um, and the agreement made was that they would be kept in the area so they could grow up together and be part, or at least see each other and know each other and, ah, once adoptions went through, one family took off (*laughs*) – moved away! So that was kind of breached right there, that trust and agreement. But. But he's an adult now, and he's back in the area, and him and his sister are together —

ML: Mmm.

SP: — so they didn't forget each other. (*laughs*) So, that's good to see that. But, um, you know, it's ...

ML: When you were visiting the foster homes, you, you said earlier that, um, in your job was to, sort of, bring the culture to them —

SP: Mm-hm.

ML: — or, ah, and you said most of the, you know, the, most of the homes were pretty open to that —

SP: Yes.

ML: — but that suggests that some of them weren't. Was that, were those the children? Or were those the foster parents? Or —

SP: Um.

ML: — what was the barrier?

SP: I'm not sure which one it was, I just knew, um, you know, I was given names of who, who to go visit, where they were —

ML: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

SP: —and whether or not, I don't know, if it was something with court, I just received it from my (clap) supervisor, (*laughs*) so, if a decision was made of why there was no more contact, I don't know if it was because a child maybe went back home, or they didn't want ... I, I, I'm not sure.

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: But for the majority of 'em, they, they kept contact.

ML: Ah-huh.

SP: Mm-hm. And after I left the program, that kind of didn't exist any more, I don't think. I don't think anyone else ... You know, we've gone through so many different people within different programs, and —

ML: — So you think that position no longer existed?

SP: — Well, what, how I was doing it.

ML: Ah-huh.

SP: You know, every time we get a new director for either ICWA or youth, or whatever, their plans or ideas shift and change, and their focus was somewhere else, maybe, and that, that kind of, didn't exist anymore, I guess. And I don't even think it does today.

ML: Huh.

SP: Yeah. But, I think that's very important to have! And I think, you know, we have our youth program startin' up again and, ah, you know, I think they should continue that but, who am I to say? *(laughs)*

ML: Do you, do you, do you feel that you could have input to the — ?

SP: I probably could.

ML: — folks who are in charge of that now?

SP: Oh, yeah, and, and I have. I've all, I've shared what I thought, and I shared what I used to do and how great it was, and I, I expressed how I, you know, 'We should continue this,' and 'I'd like to see this,' but, again, it depends upon who's there and what their plans are, and who makes who do what. *(laughs)*

ML: And what the resources are. Right.

SP: *(laughs)* Yes.

ML: Right.

SP: You can only do so much, so.

ML: But that does seem to be ...

SP: But I see those kids today, and they remember it, and ...

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: I, I had one come up to me and, um, just one of the youth, and he come up and said, 'You know what? I wish they would do for the kids today what we did years ago when I was in there as a youth.' Because they have kids of their own now. And, um, they don't do the kinda things we used to do, you know? And, they feel bad that their kids, they feel their kids are missing out on —

ML: Mmm.

SP: — the great things that the programs *can* do ... and they just, for some reason, aren't doing 'em. But anyway, that's, hopefully ... will change. (*deep breath*)

ML: So that's with, even with sort of Native families, wanting their children to be involved in groups that ... Is that the example you just gave?

SP: The Native— Mm-hm, yes, the Native kids.

ML: So, not to mention, perhaps, the children who are in foster homes in the area?

SP: Oh, yeah. Probably.

ML: Who —

SP: Who probably aren't even aware of, because, you know, they probably never had it, or heard of it, or knew it was an option, or —

ML: Mm-hm. Or, some cases, the foster parents, even those who might be very eager to connect —

SP: — Yeah. Right. Mm-hm.

ML: — And don't necessary know what to do or how to do it.

SP: Yes, Right. It's possible. Yep, so, um, you know, I don't know who they have in ICWA today for our Tribe, but, um, yeah, that's ... I'd like to see that come back, but ...

ML: Mmm. It sounds important.

SP: Hmm. (*short laugh*) Yeah, it was. It was, you know, the ... And, and for the transportation, 'cause these people who are in some of these situations don't have the, the means to, you know,

they can't drive, or they don't have a vehicle or, you know, they can't get there and, you know, I would, I, part of my job was I would pick the kids up and *bring them* —

ML: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

SP: — to the visit.

ML: Sure.

SP: And, um, whether it was at DHS office or it was at their home, because I did some at-homes, too. Supervised visits.

ML: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

SP: Yeah. (*deep breath*) Yep.

ML: Is there any, anything else that you want to add at this point or comment on?

SP: Well, there's, there's a ... quite a bit I could ... (*laughs*)

ML: I mean, it's up to you. As I said, it doesn't have to be, you know, specifically — It's really up to you: What do you want the Commission to know?

SP: I'd like to make — I think what you're doing and, um, is great, you know, putting this out there and bringing things out. I've seen some of the (*clears throat*) some of the, ah, clips on the news when they put 'em on, and I thought that was interesting, and I thought, 'Wow, that's wonderful.' Because, for years, this stuff has been going on and ... you know, everyone's head was in the sand. (*laughs*) You know, you know, today, it still goes on, you know, it's just ...

And it's not just Native people, it's everywhere. I mean, when I learned that, uh, doing that job that, um, talking to different social workers and stuff and going to different workshops and, and learning that it's everywhere, just not in the Tribe, it's other, ah, you know, non-Native people.

I thought, 'Wow!' You know, it's, it's a big problem and I thought, 'Well, it's good that somebody's opening the door and sharing and talking and bringing it out and giving people the opportunity to heal and share and know they're not alone.'

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: Yeah, because, you know, growing up, I know, um, you know, I've had that experience myself, so ... And I thought that I was alone, and when I learned ... Um, I went to a training when I first was hired, and it was in Albuquerque and, um ... And it was a, a gathering of Nations, I mean, Tribes from all over. And ... I never knew all of this and, ah, I looked around. I remember looking around, going to all these workshops, and just looking at all the different Tribes and different people. And, um, it was like a door was just opened for me. It was ... everyone was sharing experiences and all these things, and it was just like, almost like an awakening feeling. I mean, I thought, and this is what I've told other people. Uh, and that's where, I felt like, my whole life, I was tunnel-vision, but when I saw this, the world opened up.

ML: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

SP: And I thought: 'Oh, my gosh,' you know, um, 'I'm not the only one,' and 'I'm not alone' and, um, 'it wasn't me,' (*laughs*) I thought.

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: And that changed a lot in my life.

ML: You know personally how important it is.

SP: Yep. Yep. And, you know, I had two girls, and I always fought to make sure that nothing happened to them like that, but ... (*laughs*) you can do so much until they grow up and they go out (*laughs*) But, yes, make sure they, yeah. Hmm. Just wanted to make sure they knew the bad things that were out there.

ML: Mm-hm.

SP: And that it was all right to talk about 'em and let people know. I do that with my grandkids today, and I remind them: 'Not everyone's good.' You know? Because they're so free and open and loving and trusting. And it's like, uhhh, that's good, but you gotta be careful. (*laughs*) Yep.

ML: Well, thank you so much for being willing to share and, as I said before, if you think of anything else that you want to add —

SP: Okay.

ML: — um, please feel free. Um, and, I will stop the recording now.

SP: All right.

[END OF RECORDING]