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Statement by Edward Peter Paul collected by Rachel George on October 16, 2014

Edward Peter Paul

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Edward Peter Paul

Date: October 30, 2014

Location: Presque Isle, Maine

Previous Statement? N/A

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

Recording Format: Audio

Length of Recording: 17:06

Recording

RG: So, I'm going to ask you, um, Charlie, if you've been informed, understood, and signed the consent form?

EP: Yes.

RG: Okay. Excellent.

EP: So Brendan came in, and I told him — he speaks for USET — and he said, 'Is there anything you want me to bring back?' And I told him, 'Yes.' [00:00:21.11] I said, uh, 'Can you —?' 'Cause we're doing budgets now, and we have, like separate all our money out. Who's getting paid. How it's all done. And I said, 'One problem we're having is with ICWA. There's no money for ICWA.' And it's like, so we have to decide between like, a new roof, and giving Luke more money, and it's like, you know, the new roof really affects more people. Well, it's a hard choice. You know. They're both important, but it's like, for me it's, I don't want to make those decisions. 'Cause if I make them, then people look at me and say, you know, 'Hey, he's the one that didn't fund ICWA.' When actually, it's not me, it's the Federal government. 'Cause ICWA used to be funded by the Federal government. And now it's not. And I think it's causing hardships right now. So we could go back to ICWA being all gone, and all the Native children going out again if it's not funded again. That's one huge thing that I see.

RG: Yeah. What's your perspective on what the relationship is like with the State right now? That Luke is trying to navigate working with them in terms of the Child Welfare system?
[00:01:37.22]

EP: I don't think the State really recognizes, uh, the Tribes the way they should. You know, as sovereign governments. So he kind of has an uphill battle when he goes against them in court. Because they don't think he has any, like, pull or clout or whatever you want to call it.
[00:02:01.23]

RG: Can you describe to me really quickly how your Child Welfare system is set up here?

EP: We only have one person. Luke Joseph. And he's — I think, I don't know how many cases he has. But from what I get from him, he's almost doubled his caseload in a year, you know, because of the drug problem, I would say. I don't know if you know — If you're familiar with that in the county at all.

RG: No I'm not. Well, because I'm not from here, yeah.

EP: (*simultaneously*) The State of Maine. Yeah. Well, the State of Maine, it's bad. The bath salts and the meth. You know, they're going into these homes, busting these people for drugs and taking their kids. You know, it's happening more and more. Every day, you see something in the paper. [00:02:48.22] You know, and how many of those families are Native or affiliated with Native kids? So, I see that as a huge problem.

RG: What would you like to see change in terms of things that could be offered for your community surrounding Child Welfare?

EP: I think if they had money in the budget, if they had better laws to protect the children, I mean, maybe that's how you could do it is, go, you know, do it through legislation to protect the children.

RG: Absolutely. Can you tell me a little bit about — One of the major things that's come up quite a bit in our work is this concept of intergenerational trauma. Can you tell me a little bit about that and your perspectives on that?

EP: Oh how it affects one to the next? [00:03:42.10] Yeah, that's crazy. Ah, geez, I don't know how to start with that. I just know that it affects, you know, how your mother was brought up affects how you're brought up. 'Cause I can see it in my girlfriend. I can see the things that she's missing, because her mother was younger when, like, her mother was 16 when she had her. So I can see the problems with that, because I was brought up, my mother was probably 22 or 23 when she had me. So there's a huge difference. So, I couldn't imagine if my parents were brought up in a home that didn't value 'em or didn't love them or nurture 'em. [00:04:29.13] 'Cause my mom was very nurturing, and I know she loved me. But what about those kids that don't grow up with that? What does that do? And I'm sure it does something. We see it every day. We just don't know who they are. 'Cause we have employees here that I know, and they're



— I don't want to say they're different but, you know, it's the kids. What I see is the kids and how they get involved in drugs and alcohol. I think that plays a bigger role in it. [00:05:07.08]

RG: What are some of the things that you would like to see for your community?

EP: What I would like to see for my community? I would like for all the kids to be with their families. You know, ultimately. Hey, even if it's their extended family, you know, because, ah. I guess we — Like, Andrea and I took her brother's child in, because she was going to get taken away to another family. And thank God, Tanya was there, and Tanya stepped in, so we got to keep Lily. But it's like, I couldn't imagine her going to another family. [00:05:50.26] It's just hard to imagine, because, um, you don't get that love. You don't get that nurturing from somebody, from a stranger. Not typically. I mean, there's people that do it, but it's really hard, you know, especially if they're just there temporarily. Like, I have a stepson, Hayden. I love him to death. But he's there every day. He's part of who I am now. But I know that if, it would be, I wouldn't be able to get to that point if it was just temporary. [00:06:34.10]

RG: Are there — For the kids that are placed out of the community, do you see a lot of involvement of those kids back in community events?

EP: No. No.

RG: (*simultaneously*) Can you tell me about why?

EP: Like, even if the, tell you what?

RG: About what that impact is like for them and for the community.

EP: Well it's not — Them not learning about their culture, who they are. Like to me, I think it's special to be Native. And you can't explain that to somebody, you know? It's, it's that kinship that you have with somebody. You know where you come from, and even though, like, the child might not know where he comes from, the people still know. So, they bring him into the community. [00:07:24.29] So he'd be missing that whole, the community part of it.

RG: Are you seeing many of those kids coming back to the community after, for example, they've aged out of the system?

EP: Yes. Yes. Exactly. There's a — People contact me on Facebook. Like, you know, for this reason. I don't know how they find out I'm the chief. (*laughs*) I don't know, I must have it on there. But they do. And they tell me, they say they were adopted. This happened, probably four or five times, and they want to become members here. But then, they have to retrace all their roots and ... So, I do see 'em coming back, even though I don't know who they are.

[00:08:13.05] But what I see is, even the kids that come from, like, separated homes. If their father was Micmac and their mother wasn't, the kids never come ba-, rarely come back, you know, to participate in our programs. That's even hard for me. 'Cause some of them are, some are my family. And I just see the other kids 'cause I recognize them around town. And they kind of look at me 'cause I've had kids in Little Feathers for probably ten years, I think. Eight or ten years. So I've been to Little Feathers quite a bit. So I know all the kids. **[00:08:58.24]**

RG: Um. Can you tell me a little bit more about the Micmac relationship with the State and what that's been like?

EP: We don't really have a relationship with the State of Maine, you know.

RG: Not at all?

EP: No. We don't participate in anything that they do. You know, they, uh, they don't respect our sovereignty. They don't respect any of the Tribes' sovereignty. So it's really hard to deal with somebody when they don't respect you. That's the hardest part.

RG: Absolutely. Um, what has it been like for your community, not having a Tribal court? **[00:09:42.27]**

EP: It has hurt us in many ways, and, uh, ICWA is one of them, for sure. If we had rules we could follow, then it'd be easier for us to go in and take the kid and bring him back to the community verses not having that option.

RG: Can you tell me a little bit more about why this community doesn't have a Tribal court?

EP: It goes back to the State of Maine and, uh, not recognizing our rights. Right now, we're trying to go through MITSC to, um, figure out a way for us to have a court. **[00:10:23.08]** What they wanted us — what we thought we could do — We thought we could go amend the Micmac Settlement Act with the State. Since that wasn't ratified, they suggested that we go back and renegotiate, because what they said, how did somebody put it? They said — We asked 'em if we could use our existing one and do the similar thing that Houlton did with theirs. Just modify it. And they said, 'No, you have to build something totally different.' And they want us to do it. They want us to renegotiate the Settlement Act. Because once we do, it would benefit all the other Tribes in the State. Because then they'd have, you know, there would be that, there'd be that case law that would support it. And right now, there's nothing to support what we're trying to do. We're trying to change a lot. So. And ICWA's going to be part of it, for sure. **[00:11:36.28]**

RG: How is that process going so far?

EP: Uh, we're just in the beginning of it right now. So we just, uh, two months ago we met with MITSC and so we came back to regroup. Now we're starting to make those phone calls again. **[00:11:52.12]** We have to wait for the right time, 'cause there's times when we're really busy here, and, even though it's important, we, you know, there's more pressing issues. So it's



like, now is a time we're starting to work on it again. We're starting to make those contacts. We have a phone call scheduled for next week to talk about the court system.

RG: That's exciting.

EP: Yeah. Yeah.

RG: That's very exciting. Um, can you tell me a little bit about your perspectives on the TRC process and why it's important, or not important?

EP: Why it's important? *[00:12:34.06]* Well, I think it's important if there's trauma. I mean, people need to — You can't keep things inside. That's the thing. And if they're — It's like, when people talk about their problem, it's like a huge weight lifted off their shoulders. So I think, people having that, the group to go to — What do you, you guys call it a group? What do you call it?

RG: The TRC.

EP: The TRC.

RG: Or REACH. Depending on ... ah, REACH offers a number of community-based events. So Krista and Dena do healing circles and things like that. The TRC offers a forum to officially document and record your experiences that will be put onto a record, and that will be available for people to access and continue learning about what's happened here. *[00:13:34.28]*

EP: Yeah. But I think it's important for people to talk about their feelings in order to heal. You know that — I don't know if you know. But I know that, for me, when I talk about my feelings, it helps me out a lot. Or if you get, you can pray or go for a walk in the woods, it's you know — They have that avenue to tell somebody, and tell somebody how they felt. How they were treated. Yeah. *[00:14:03.03]* Some people don't like to talk about it. I've had people in here, and it's like they start to talk about it and then they stop. You know. I couldn't imagine some of the traumas.

RG: Yeah it's hard. Um, can you tell me a little bit about — in terms of the Child Welfare system — what, aside from funding, what are the major changes you would like to see happen? *[00:14:30.09]*

EP: The major changes? I would like to have all the kids come back to the Native communities. *[00:14:35.20]* If they're taken out, they need to be put back. You know, if — I don't know. It's really tough, Rachel. It's, you want 'em to come back home to teach them their traditional values. 'Cause I couldn't imagine growing up without my family. You know.

RG: Absolutely. In your mind, what's the best way to work having the kids come back?

EP: The best way, like with ICWA, or?

RG: Yeah, so some of the things that have come up is that there's not enough foster homes within the community because, I don't know, times are hard for everyone. So thinking about that, what would be the best way to bring kids back to the community when there might be a lack of resources at this moment?

EP: I think there's enough communities that would bring 'em back, and I think what keeps 'em out are the State regulations. *[00:15:44.22]* If the Tribe could make their own regulations to bring 'em back, and they say, 'Hey, you know what? This guy might have done this five years ago, ten years ago, but guess what? He's a different person today.' The State doesn't recognize that. So, if somebody did something ten or five years ago, they still have that black mark. Whereas, the Native communities are a lot more forgiving. So if somebody did it — People change. Year-to-year, day-to-day, month-to — However you want to look at it, people change. *[00:16:17.26]* So I think that if we did have that, then there would be more families that would qualify. 'Cause, we have some really good families that have made mistakes in the past, and that have totally changed their life around.

RG: Absolutely. Is there anything else that you would like to add, that you think is important for the TRC Commissioners to know?

EP: No, I don't have anything else.

RG: Okay. I'm just going to say the file number and the date.

EP: Okay.

RG: Uh, the file number is A-201410-00115. It's October 30, 2014, and we are here at the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, in Presque Isle, Maine.

END OF RECORDING