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4-23-2015

### Statement by Betty Joseph collected by Rachel George on April 23, 2015

Betty Joseph

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## General Information

**Private or Public Statement?** - Private

**Statement Provider:** Betty Joseph

**Date:** April 23, 2015

**Location:** Houlton, Maine

**Previous Statement?** N/A

**Statement Gatherer:** Rachel George

**Support Person:** N/A

**Additional Individuals Present:** N/A

**Recording Format:** Audio

**Length of Recording:** 1:27:39

## Recording

**RG:** All right. It is April 23, 2015. We are here in Houlton, Maine. My name is Rachel George and I'm here today with?

**BJ:** Betty Joseph.

**RG:** Excellent. And the file number is H-201503-00163. Betty, have you been informed, understood, and signed the consent form? have you been informed understood and signed the consent form?

**BJ:** Yes.

**RG:** Great. And I have to let you know that if at any point during this recording you indicate that there is 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. Do you understand?

**BJ:** Yes.

**RG:** Okay, great. Could you tell me a little bit about your experience growing up as a child?

**BJ:** Well, as a child we—I grew up what they called Hungry Hill or Packard Avenue with my parents. We lived in a house that had no running water, no electricity. We had to go down through the woods to this pipe that they let us get water from. And we lived there up until my mother passed away. And at that time there was still—the only ones that were married were three of my older siblings and there was eight of us still living with my father, who I can say was an alcoholic, but he—we were poor but we never thought we were poor. We just never had to—we lived on the road they called the Dump Road and they always said we ate off the dump; we didn't eat off the dump. My dad worked as a mechanic, a self-made mechanic for a person in town. We had to cross the bridge to go to school and walk to school if we missed the bus, which was like two miles. And then, well, when my mom died from alcoholic poisoning, which they called the Pink Lady at the time, my dad had gone down to, I'm thinking Togas because he had something wrong with his lungs. And when he left my mom had gone to a friend's and they end up drinking what they called Pink Lady and she ended up dying and my gram died and then it seemed like our whole world was just turned upside down. And then my dad come back, we stayed with my sister, who was in the housing as we lived at. No electricity, no running water, cooked on cook stoves, and little heaters to heat the house and stuff. And then we came back from school and I guess—from what I heard from my older sister was how we came to be into the state custody was they talked to my dad while we were at school and told him that if he didn't sign consent to get us to put in foster care they were going to take us anyway. And that's how we all became foster kids.

**RG:** How old were you at the time?

**BJ:** Me and my sister were teenagers and my youngest sister—brother (*correcting*) was I'd say three and I had four younger sisters younger than me. And me and my sister, my older sister, kept my brother, which was younger than me because at the time they had a hard time placing older kids. But they came, we came home and the state came after my four sisters—for my brother first, my little brother, and we were just crying to my—my Dad wasn't around. I don't remember seeing my dad around when that happened. But they came to my sister's house because she lived up the road from where we lived and they took my little brother, Paul, he was three. And we were crying to our older sister, you know, why—you know, asking her if she could do something and she was just—she couldn't do anything because they had come in, they talked to her and to my dad, I guess, and my dad wasn't around when they took us. They took my brother, and then it came down, they came after my four sisters, and we was just devastated, crying. And they took them, took them to the hospital and did what they had to do, I guess, and they got shipped down to St. Michael's. And my brother was put in a foster home in town who he stayed with the family, the Bradley's. And then it came down to me and my sister. They put us into a foster home in town until school got done. And from there they moved us to up in St. Agatha, which was like us out of this world, because we'd never been out of Houlton and we didn't know where we were going. They more or less lied to the foster parents, saying that we were younger and we weren't. We got up there and my foster mother kind of looked at us like these aren't little girls (*laughing*). I was 13, I think 13-14. And I



stayed there for five years. But my sister did not like it, she would fight with my foster mom saying, “You're not my mother,” and she finally eventually went to Job Corps (?) [00:06:32] and I lost track of her. And then she had called me one time when we were there, she didn't tell me where she was, and my foster mother didn't know where she was. I wasn't going to leave because I was quite comfortable there. I didn't feel like I was threatened by anything and I had a good foster home. I stayed there for five years. I graduated from high school. But after I got out of high school I worked one summer up there and I was like wanted to come home.

I didn't have any home because by that time they had tore down the houses that we lived in; every time somebody came out of a house they would burn it down. My sister had moved down to the Flats, which was another part of what they called the reservation because it's where all the natives lived. And I came down and stayed with her until I got married. But then after hearing stories of my brother, that he cried at the door trying to get out from this house, he fell asleep at the door crying trying to get out to get back home (*voice breaking*). And my sisters were taken down to St. Michael's and for the longest time we didn't get to see them. And I think why now, today—I just think about my brother because he told me that after he got older and came back home (*crying*). For a while he said that he liked the family that he was with but they didn't know anymore than what we did, you know. And my sisters were treated not really good. I thought they were doing better living at St. Michael's because it was run by nuns and stuff but they had a harder time down there, I guess; my older sister did anyway.

**RG:** Do you know why your sisters were taken to St. Michael's instead of placed in a foster home?

**BJ:** Because that was where they could put all the girls together. My dad, I guess, told them that if they moved—they wanted the girls to stay together, the four girls. But that's the only place that they could find them to stay is to put them in the St. Michael's. And with me and my sister they wanted us in town but then they wanted us out of town because of everything that was going on with the Canned Heat stuff and there was like seven people that died from it; my mother, my grandmother. My sister's husband, his sister died from it—there was like so many people that died from it.

**RG:** Can you tell me a little bit more about that? It was called Canned Heat?

**BJ:** It was Canned Heat. It's a thing that they used to heat stuff up with but at the time they could squeeze alcohol out of it, it was called the Pink Lady. And in the store at Currier's Market—down by the Flats they had a little store called Currier's Market, they would sell this stuff to the Natives or whoever would go in and buy it because they knew they could bring the

alcohol out of it, mix it with water and drink it as alcohol. But I guess he had gotten a bad batch, which was poisonous and this was what my mother, my grandmother, my kids' aunt, and other people that died from it. At the time it was just—it wasn't—it was really a dark, dark, dark part of my life that I, you know, people kind of look at you. I mean, we never knew we were poor.

We always went to school, came back. And I'm thinking back then it's like I had friends in school, I got invited to parties. My friend was Al Burley, he lived down past the tree line that we always walked to school and played with him in the summer. We never had running water but we'd always, you know. My grandmother—to me that was a good life we had. But the darkest times was when they would drink and we'd have different people there and I felt like I had to shelter my, watch out for my younger sisters when they would drink, stuff like that. But then I don't know what caused my mother to go that day. Like I said, they were both alcoholics. And they left, and she left when my dad left. I mean, my older sister tried to keep her from going anywheres but she was determined to go and left me to watch the other kids and my brother. And then when they came—she came back that night or that morning --

**RG:** Your mom or your sister?

**BJ:** My mother. My mother came back that morning after she had left. She came in, she went upstairs, and she said she was tired and she woke up and we all—all we had was lamps for lights, and she came in and she went upstairs and she hollered for us downstairs and we went upstairs and she said, "I've got to go to the hospital and I," she said, "Don't shine that light in my eyes." She was—at this time she was going blind. And then my brother had gone to get my sister, my older sister 'cause they lived up the road, and they had gotten the police guy, the policeman came to get her and they—he looked at her, because they knew my family, and he said, "Frances, not you too." She said, "Yep," and she left. And the last thing she said when she went out the door was, "Watch the kids until I come back." That's all I remember her saying. And then after they took her we was just—didn't know what was going on.

And then my grandmother came and my grandmother helped raise me even though we lived with my mother. She took care of me, I guess, since I was nine months old and she lived with a white person, which, he stayed with her up until the time she died, you know. Since I was nine months old he was with her and they took care of me. And when my grandmother came and I just told her, "Mom, not you too." She said, "No, babe, I'll be okay." But she died too. So it was like I lost two mothers and my whole family in that one time. It was hard. The hardest part was when I heard the stories of my brother being—trying to climb out that door trying to get away to get back home (*crying*). That was the hardest. My sisters crying, holding on, "June, don't let them take us," you know, it was so devastating. And I think that's why some of my sisters are so—I don't think—we never got any kind of counseling after that either, you know, for us, our devastation of losing my mother and my grandmother and for them taking us away from the only place we knew was Houlton. And we had gone to the funeral home and I just remember seeing my grandmother. She was my whole life, because she took care of me and I felt more hurt seeing my grandmother than I did to see my mother (*crying*). But then I felt guilty about it after thinking, you know, why didn't I feel this much



pain with my—seeing my mom than I did with my gram. I still don't understand but I think it's because my gram took care of me.

And when they had the funeral the only ones that was allowed to go was our older brothers and sisters and they had all these caskets, gray caskets in the funeral home and I'm looking to see, saying I don't even know which one of those is my mother and my gram. And that's the last I seen and I don't remember going to the cemetery until after I was older to see where they were buried. But it was a hard time. I know, I'm pretty sure it was for my sister, my older sister because she had kids of her own and she said, "I couldn't take care of you guys." She said, "I had this house, no running water; they wouldn't let me keep you guys." It was just a four-room house; kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms and she had three girls of her own. And she said, "I just couldn't take you guys." And it just hurt her so bad to do that and then having us go, seeing the kids taken away, I can't—the pain that she had, it's so hard (*voice breaks, pause*).

Just hearing my brother crying when they were taking him and hearing my sisters crying, "June, don't let them take us." It was hard. That was my oldest sister. That was the hardest. But when we went we would come back, walk back to our house 'cause we weren't very far from where we lived to back home and they didn't like that, they wanted us to stay right there. But we went back to visit with my sister at our old house but they didn't want us doing that so that's why they moved us out of town, way out of town (*laughs*). We didn't even know where we were going. And I never forgot the social worker that took us, Ms. Madigan. She says, "I don't know why they're sending you girls so far away." She was just so heartbroken over that. And to this day when she sees me she still remembers, even though she's kind of getting—losing her eyesight, I talk to her and she'll say yes, I do remember you dear, she says. And I never forgot her, you know, because she didn't want to—she kept telling us that she didn't know why they were doing that. And I think back to myself thinking it's—maybe it was a blessing for us, I don't know.

**RG:** Do you know why the state became involved?

**BJ:** Because my dad—there was me, my sister, my brother, my four sisters, and my baby brother. There was still like eight of us that they felt that he couldn't take care of in this house with no running water, no electricity, nobody to cook our meals, and my dad was an alcoholic. I mean, it's because he was—the house didn't have anybody there to take care of us and I'm thinking that's why they took us because of all those, you know, factors. We didn't have any, you know, nothing. But it was just like—it was alcohol that caused all our—but then I think about myself, thinking maybe it was a blessing in disguise, I don't know. Because I think I would not have graduated from school. I wouldn't have—I probably would've been married and had more kids and I don't know I just thought, trying to think of the better things that happened to me in my life. And then when I went to foster care different kids would come in

our house and they would leave and I've seen little Native kids come in and they didn't stay. It was just like a respite thing until they found other foster homes. And I said to myself, "Someday if I'm able to do foster care I would do foster care." And I did that for a while until the state was like—the social worker would come in my house, go upstairs, look through my cupboards, through everything, and it's like I couldn't say anything because I was doing this for the state, you know.

**RG:** You were doing foster care through the state and not through the tribe?

**BJ:** No, it was through the state.

**RG:** Can I ask why you decided to go through the state instead of the tribe?

**BJ:** Because at that time that's the only ones that I knew that was doing, the state foster care.

**RG:** When—do you recall what year you started doing foster care?

**BJ:** It was back in the—well, back in—I'm not good at times.

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

**BJ:** But it was—I've been out here 10 years, it must have been almost 20 years ago that I did foster care here. And the social worker, he was—I told him that when I did foster care I wanted Native kids. And the little girl, the girl that stayed with me at the foster home was one of the first kids that I had taken in. And I had taken in another family when their parents would go into rehab, I would take them in, that's how I actually started. And then when I did licensing, I did—this girl that lived with me in foster care, her kids, and they came to live with me and I just didn't do any other kids, other than—I just did Native kids. But then they started pulling all this stuff, the social worker would come into my house and go upstairs and it's like I had no—I felt like I had no say as to what boundaries that they had.

So I stopped doing the foster care because -- but then I did it when I came out here, I had one little girl, the same family, the brothers with me and they had moved the little girl and the brother to another foster home, which was in Blaine. Well, the little girl was not surviving there, because we got her when she was three. And how this all transpired for her was the mother was in rehab and I watched her kids. Well, when she came back home her older daughter—I had her three kids, her older daughter wasn't the father—the father of her two kids weren't the father of her. And she confided to my daughter that the stepfather was molesting her. So when she came back to my house the girl said, "Mom, you know, she has something to tell you," and I went upstairs and listened to what she had to say. And she didn't want to go back to her mother's house because of what was happening with her when she was with her husband. So I in turn told the woman I was doing foster care for, and she—I told her, "Well, your best thing to do is get to a safe place with the kids." And I felt like I was responsible for her losing all her kids because she was sort of like not—they said she wasn't capable of taking care of her kids. She never abused her kids, she never did anything for her kids—she always did something, she was good to her kids. But when they were put in foster care, the two of her



daughters were molested by foster parents and they were, you know, it's like why take these kids away, put them away from somewhere else when the kids were better taken care of with their mother. But like I said I stopped doing foster care when they were coming in my house doing stuff that I didn't think was right. So I stopped doing foster care.

**RG:** So did you—I know you said you weren't very great at dates, but my understanding is you started doing foster care would you say about in the '80s?

**BJ:** Yep.

**RG:** Okay. And you weren't living here—

**BJ:** No, I had my house—

**RG:** -- in Houlton? Oh.

**BJ:** --in town. No, I had—I've always lived in Houlton.

**RG:** Oh, okay. But you moved back over here?

**BJ:** Yeah, I was in town. I had a house in town and I did foster care in town.

**RG:** Okay.

**BJ:** And they came in to inspect my house and let me—say I could have the three children I was doing. And—no, I did foster care when I lived—had a house in town.

**RG:** How long were you doing foster care for the state?

**BJ:** Let's see, how long did we live in town? I had that house for five years in town and then I did out here I'd say about six years because I was out here when I let me house go in town -- we moved in town and they came and inspected the house in the Res because I lived over the other side before I moved here. And I did foster care in there. And I did take in one of my niece's boys and he was very, he was little when I got him, but as he grew bigger he had really a lot of mental problems and stuff. So he started hurting the little girl I had. So I decided that I couldn't put her in danger anymore so I asked them that they move her. Well, they moved her but they brought her back to me because she wasn't thriving in this other place and I had to make a decision to let the little fellow I had go because he was starting to hurt the foster child, hurt my grandchildren in ways that wasn't acceptable, you know. So I stopped doing foster care after that.



**RG:** While you were doing foster care, did the state ever connect you with the ICWA worker for the tribe here?

**BJ:** Uh-huh. No.

**RG:** That's very interesting.

**BJ:** No, they never—never got involved with the tribal ICWA people.

**RG:** Can you tell me what that was like for you?

**BJ:** For?

**RG:** Not being involved with the tribe's ICWA worker.

**BJ:** Well, I didn't even know they had to work with anybody, because I didn't know they had any, you know, workers that was working with them. Like I said, when they started doing stuff, coming in my house, and we—I would tell the social worker too, I says, "Every summer on my vacation we go rake blueberries and the kids would come with me." He says, "What did you do when they kids would come with you?" I said they had a summer program down there that they ran for the kids in the summer, they'd go to like a school where they'd come and pick them up, take them and bring them back when we get done work. Well, it happened that the social worker decided he wanted to come down to where we rake blueberries to see how we lived. I said we live in camps. I said they all have, we have bunk beds, we have little cots they sleep in, we have showers that they take, and we have gas stoves where we cook our meals, and, you know, we did a lot of stuff down there in summer that we'd always go out and do with the kids.

My older daughter never liked it, she went one year and that was it. But the kids enjoyed going down there 'cause this made extra money for them 'cause at the time they could rake, but when they stopped the kids from going in the field, they had to go to the summer school thing, and that's where all the tribal kids would end up meeting each other and stuff. But it was a time when we just would get away from Houlton. And it was vacation, you know. No—it was like going back to where we used to live like we never had any—no outside people coming in, it was like just a big family that came every year into this camps. Our farmer would live in a house right above and all us campers were like here. It was like one big happy family every year. We did that for 20 years.

**RG:** That's fantastic.

**BJ:** And it was fun and then we just stopped doing it because they backed—they started going back to machines so the farmer ended up getting, you know—he got older, but we didn't go down after that. But it's like...we didn't have a lot of, I don't know, I didn't think I had any support from anybody as far as any kids.

**RG:** That was my next question. What support did the state provide for you?



**BJ:** I didn't have any kind of support. I dealt with the kids my way. And like my kids would say themselves it's like they never got treated any special than the foster kids and that's what I always felt like when I was in foster care. I want to be treated the same way as the other kids that we had there and my foster parents actually didn't have any kids of their own. They adopted a boy, which was around my age, but he had moved on and I stayed there. And I said someday if I ever had foster kids I would not treat them any different than anybody else. They went where we went and they did what I did and my kids weren't treated any different, any special than they were. And they kind of felt the same way. I mean, they could say today, "We were never treated any different than the other kids."

And my brother, one of my brothers were falsely accused and he would come home from prison and I would go meet with my brother at my elder brother's house and I would leave my little girl that we had in foster care with somebody while I went to visit so they couldn't say I took her and put her in danger of anybody. And I never did that, I always made sure I was always out looking for the best, you know, for her so I wouldn't lose her. When she came to us she was really not speaking and her mother has a speech problem and she kind of did but we worked with her every day and by the time she was big enough to go she was speaking really well.

**RG:** That's fantastic.

**BJ:** Yeah, and I didn't get to see her because she was put into another home and after she got bigger and when I did see her I felt like this was my little girl that I lost, you know. I felt so happy to see her. My granddaughter said, "Why is Grammy crying?" And my daughter said, "Well, because she had that little girl when she was little and she was a foster child and now she's grown up." So I was able to see her.

**RG:** Over the time that you were providing foster care for kids, how many kids did you have come into your home?

**BJ:** I had seven.

**RG:** Wow, that's amazing.

**BJ:** The first time I did it was from a Native lady that I knew the family and they—when I lived in town, they come to ask me if I would keep an eye on her kids while she went into rehab up to Fort Fairfield and I said yeah. And when she came back the kids went back home. And today the daughter is our tribal secretary and her son—her mother still lives here. But it was funny, when he came back—when she came back home he'd come over to my house,

because they lived behind us in an apartment, and he says, “Can I show my friend my bedroom that I had?” and I said, “Sure, go up and see.” Yeah, so he was pretty happy. And when they see me they always know who I am. And now the kids at school, I'm the bus driver, I'm Miss Betty. To everybody it's Miss Betty.

But, you know, I see those kids and I'm— it's hard. And to see the other kids, what they went through and stuff in their foster homes, I see a dysfunctional but they use that against the mom too. It's like, “You never loved us and you didn't try hard enough to get us back.” And this foster mother, the mother of the kids that I had, did everything the state told her to do and she never got her kids back. And the only one that I see that survived all this stuff was the little girl I had because I think it's because we had her long enough to know that she had more stable than the other kids that were moved from here to here to here and we had her longer so she was more stabilized I think. And today I see her more stable in her relationship with her husband—I think it's her husband, and she—when she sees me we just talk and talk and talk (*laughs*). And her brother that was with me says, “I wanted to come back to your house so bad but they wouldn't let us come back.” I said, “Well, because I didn't—I stopped doing foster care.”

After, like I said, the little boy I took in was getting too violent with the kids so I felt it was in their best interest of not being in my home with him. And eventually he had to go into an institution because he was starting fires and he was my niece's son and he had a lot of problems. And to this day he still is in a home where they have to monitor him and do stuff for him. He's 24 and he's—it's like he just never (*exhales*), I mean, he will tell you stories that was like unbelievable. You talk to him you would believe that what he said was true and it wasn't true so it was sad. But that's how it happens when I think the mothers drink, drug, and take stuff when their babies are inside of them, and they don't know the effects until after. And that was hard. It was hard to let him go but it was for his own safety and for the safety of the kids that I had and my grandkids too. So I just stopped doing foster care. And Luke asked me, “Do you want to do respite?” I said no. Because I think right now I have my grandkids and if I didn't have little ones I probably would.

**RG:** Do you think you will ever do it again?

**BJ:** Oh, I don't know. I'm—I thought about doing, like, respite and they asked me but I said I don't know, I don't think I want to go through this. I think what's turning me off was the state and stuff, what I had to go through with them. It's heartbreaking sometimes when you have the little kids and they have to go and you have to see them go. So I just couldn't do that anymore, I don't think. And losing my oldest sister was my hardest and she was like my second mother. She lived down the road in that house (*pauses, crying*), and she was like our mother when my mom died and gram died. And that's still our—that's why I never keep this window open. If I have to go out and see when I go, but if I have to sit here I don't keep that open because—my grandson was playing football one night and they had won the game in Caribou and I had come home and I seen the light on, because she was always seeing what I'm doing, see who comes through my yard and whatever (*laughs*). And I said no, I'll wait until tomorrow and I'll go down and tell her how the game went. Well, I had just got undressed, my feet undressed and my brother-in-law called. He couldn't get a hold of his kids but he did see my number and he said, “Betty, you're going to have to come down, something happened to June.” And when I



got down there she was on the bed, foaming at the mouth, and I tried to get her up and tried to holler at her trying to get her, call 911 and she died five days after.

**RG:** I'm so sorry.

**BJ:** And I was just—it was like losing my mother all over again. It's so hard. It's been three years and it's still, it still bothers me. Going through all the pain again of losing somebody that you care so much about. And before that August, before August, that Betty Boop clock she bought me, she said, “I got you something for Christmas, you're going to like it.” And then she finally said, “Well, I'm going to give it to you now.” So she gave it to me before my birthday and before Christmas and then she was gone. It's like it was so hard because my grandson, Luke's boy, was born on the same day that she passed and it was like, I didn't know if I wanted to go up and see or not and the girls said, “Mom, you should go up because it will help you.” I couldn't feel happiness because I was so sad. I went up there and I just sat and I waited but it was hard because on the same day as losing my sister (*pauses, crying*).

It's hard to think about it because she was our, I don't know, she was our mother you could say. Because my dad had passed before that and the years before that we lost her daughter Sally, that was hard. It was like Sally, my sister, and then my brother. It's like it's—I had a lot of pain to deal with. I guess that's why I drive school bus, the kids keep me happy and not having to think about all my sadness that I have. I was thinking about retiring this year but I don't know. They said, “You can't retire until you're 90.” I said, “Okay” (*laughing*). I said—but, you know, it's really funny because my foster father was a bus driver at our school and he was a custodian; that's what I was at school a bus driver/custodian, and then they changed the position, now it's just bus driver. But I said I'm thankful that I had good foster parents, they cared enough about me.

I wanted to come home when I turned 16 'cause at that time you could quit school and my mother said, well my foster mother said, “Well, I'll get a hold of the social worker.” And I think we waited—I got over that by the time he came. He said, “Did you want to go back home now?” and I said, “No, I don't think so.” So I just—they helped me with school because when I was younger with my parents we would miss a lot of school so we missed out on the early parts of what you're supposed to be learning in school. It was—I had a hard time. But they helped me through with my homework and stuff that I needed at school. And I had one of the nuns, Sister Victor, was my eighth grade teacher when I first went up there and I seen her that summer 'cause my dad would clean the school and would do the—I didn't like her but she ended up being the best teacher I ever had (*laughing*). And I can say that I had very good foster parents. But the first home that they put us in we didn't like the people because we felt like we weren't part of anything—part of their family. You know, they'd do stuff, they'd talk

about us, you know, and they had this little girl there that would always watch us, what we'd be doing and she'd go tell the foster parent and we just did not like it, either one, my sister and I.

But it's like I said, my sister that left, she died from breast cancer when she was in her 30s. (*Pauses, crying*) That was hard, but she always had, I don't know, she never got over my mom dying and she was always talking about, well, "Probably better if I was, you know, dead," and all this. It's like I said, we never got any type of counseling when they took us away. Nobody talked to us about how we felt or the losses that we had and nothing. And that's I think should be done with foster kids when they're taken away, they should have some type of counseling done for them because it's going to affect them the rest of their life, you know. And it's—I think that's the way it was with my sisters and my brother. My brother felt angry with my older sister because, "You kept Doug and you kept them but how come you couldn't keep me?" and it was hard. But he's in Alaska and he has a family up there. He came down.

He didn't come down for my sister's funeral because we couldn't afford to bring him back (*sighs*). But then I have another sister that's younger in Connecticut, she had lung cancer, so it's like, "When does this ever end?" But like I said, when I did—when I was in foster care I said, "Some day if I ever am able to do foster care I would." And it would be for the Native kids because some of the kids that I see how they were treated, weren't treated right. I had worked in social services and I took this older lady out to see her kids in this foster home, a non-Native foster home, and the woman wouldn't let her go in the house at first. She wouldn't let—the mother would take toys for her daughters and she would give—she says, "If you start fighting over that I'll throw it away just like I did the other stuff." You know, this foster mother. One time we came there and knocked on the door, went inside, hollered hello, hello. The foster mother never came out until the kids came and then she came out from the other room and I thought—and the mother couldn't take any pictures, the kids would hide and they said, "No, you can't take our picture, mom doesn't want you to take our picture," and I thought to myself, that's not right.

They never treated this mother with any respect at all. And the kids were afraid to show any kind of affection to their mother because the mother was sitting there looking at them, it was like they had to look for her for okay, it's okay if I did this, it's okay if I, you know? I didn't think that was right. And that's like when I did the outreach for social services I had seen this mother, I mean, she—when they took her kids they were little and the only thing they understood was Maliseet. [00:46:35] And when people talked to them they wouldn't respond. And I think they thought they were not, you know, they can't—they're not learning from their mother but they only understood Maliseet language because she spoke to them in Maliseet. And that was something that they, the social worker said well, they're not able to learn, they're not, you know, all this stuff, but they were brought up with Maliseet language and they weren't—taken out of their home and put into non-Indian home and they weren't able to talk. They probably didn't understand until they got a little bit older, but after a while—you know, it's like when I moved up country they spoke French and somebody asked me to babysit next door. Well, the little girl only understood French and I didn't speak French so we couldn't even communicate. I just kind of you want this or hand stuff to her, you know, because I couldn't talk French. So I understood what these little girls were going through when they



were put in a non-Native home. But that was hard. But my hardest, like I said, my hardest time was just seeing how my brothers and sisters were taken away.

**RG:** Thinking back on your experience when you were removed and watching your brothers and sisters get taken away, what would you have wanted or needed to have made that situation better for you and for your family?

**BJ:** I think if they had tried to work with my dad to put us in a better housing thing, you know, to help him keep our family together. To have somebody come in and work with him, like they do nowadays. I don't know how they do it, but I think if they had more involvement with the family instead of just taking them away, these poor Indian kids and, you know, I just—like I said, if they had worked with my dad to get him a better housing for us, I think that would've been something better instead of taking us all, separating us, and taking us away from the only place we knew. I grew up in Houlton. I was born and raised in Houlton, you know, and this is the only home I know. We have a lot of prejudice here but we deal with it our own way. You know? We learned to deal with it. And a lot of people say, "Oh, you don't, we don't." Oh, yeah, you do.

I mean, our first tribal leader was the first Maliseet that graduated from Houlton. And it's like they weren't very, I don't know—we were treated as lower class people all the time, and even now when they talk to us. My daughter went to school one time and she didn't want to go to school anymore. I was trying to figure out what was wrong with her. And what happened was she was the only Native girl in class and the teacher pointed out, "We're so lucky to have a little Indian girl in our class," and this is around Thanksgiving, and she never—I've never told them they were any different than anybody else, you know. You're not white; you're Indian, and all this stuff, that was never told to her. And she didn't want to go to school.

So I had gone trying to find out why she didn't want to go to school so I went to talk to the principal and he was a very understanding man and I had gone in and we went into the class and I said I wanted to know why my daughter doesn't want to come to school. She cried, she didn't want to go to school anymore, she didn't want to go to school anymore. And we talked and talked and talked and this was around the time she says, "Well, the only thing I could think of was that I told the class we're lucky that we have a little Indian girl in our class since it's Thanksgiving," all this stuff. I says, "I've never told my daughter that she was any different than anybody else, that she was Indian, you are white." I said, "I've never done that. I've never told them any different." So she—that's—that was the reasoning and that's what we found out that's why she didn't want to go to school. But it was, I mean, there's things that they had to watch out for. Now even today my daughter went to school and college and graduated as a secretarial thing at the college, and she applied in town for jobs, never got them. She went—you know, they understand she was—her name is not Joseph or whatever, she married a St.

John, but when she'd go to the interview it was a lot different story because she is darker complected.

And my other daughter, Leona -- they've all got non-native names, and when they go to these places they expect somebody else and when they see who it is it's a different story. Of course, my daughter, my younger daughter Leona is lighter complected and they think that she isn't native. Yeah, my mother is Betty Joseph. You know, I've been around this town for 67 years, 66 years so they know who I am, but sometimes—this is how prejudice it is because my daughter was going to get a place out the lake, they thought they were border patrol. They came out to look at the place and they said, “Well, where did you come from,” you know, George Alvarado (phonetic) and Leona said, “No, I live on the reserve,” and the girl said, “Oh, okay.” Never called her back.

**RG:** Wow.

**BJ:** Never called her back. And then the guy said well, you know, this is only for one family. Because the thing in town is—their saying is like if you got one family, native family moved in, you've got a million other people moving in with you. That's their idea. And Leona said “Well, yeah, it's for me and my kids. I have three kids” – well, they had their younger daughter. They never got the place.

**RG:** Wow.

**BJ:** Yep, that's how it is.

**RG:** That's awful. That's really awful.

**BJ:** Yep. My daughter got a place in town and she paid \$600, nothing was included. And the other girl that lives, rents from the same person has the \$600 and everything is included, except the basics, you know, the TV—I mean, your cable and all that stuff. So that's how—they knew who she was, but she didn't think this other girl was native so they—that's, yep, that's how it is.

**RG:** Wow. Still to this day.

**BJ:** Still to this day, yep. This is why it's hard for us to get these houses out here, to get people in them, you know, because in town they get the slumlords. Now she looked at a place in town, they had an apartment upstairs, apartment downstairs. Well, your mother could move up here. I said, “I'm not moving in these places, I got my own house out there.” But she was looking to move out of town because the kids felt like they weren't getting into other activities out there because they live out here. So if you live in town you'd be able to do, you know, that's not the way it goes. And if you're not into sports and your last name is not up there you don't get anything and that's the way it is in town. It's really a prejudiced town.

**RG:** What do you see as a way that we can move past that kind of prejudice here?

**BJ:** In town?

**RG:** Yeah, in town.

**BJ:** I don't think we are going to because right now we've got—we heard people saying they needed a road. The road that comes to our building the tribe put in half of it, fixed the bridge. And there was another road in town that needed to be really repaired and they heard somebody saying, “Well, if we had some Maliseets living on this road we'd get our road fixed.” So it's never going to change, I don't think. There's too many, too many people in town still think that way. And even now, I mean, you—I kind of get embarrassed to say, you know, because of my mother dying from the alcoholic poisoning because when she left my sister's to go drinking with this, these people it was down behind the dump that this guy had a shack and that's where they all drank. And this is where they found the first guy that died, was down there. And then they found some laying on the side of the road that died, and some that had gone to the hospital that died.

So it's like we've been—and then there's Natives that came from—the Micmacs that came from Canada to come over here to pick potatoes and cause all the ruckus in town and they'd leave. And of course we lived here and we'd have to put up with whatever was left behind from them. You know, “They just want to come here and buh, buh, buh.” But it's been—it's still hard, you know, even for the younger ones that are here. They never get picked for anything great in school, you know. And that's like I said they have—we still deal with it today. And it's like you just kind of let it go. If you're going to live here you just let it go, I guess.

**RG:** It shouldn't be that way.

**BJ:** It shouldn't be but it is. It's always been that way. My brother-in-law worked for the town, two of my brother-in-laws work for the town, and the person that was in the social service department downtown's thinking those were her token—token Indians.

**RG:** Oh my goodness.

**BJ:** Yeah. And when my daughter had gone down to social services to get something and she said she was pregnant with the baby, she said, “Oh, your baby's kicking like a wild Indian,” you know, things like that.

**RG:** Wow.

**BJ:** Yeah.

**RG:** Oh my goodness.



**BJ:** Yep, there's a lot of stuff that, even though she was married to a non-Native you still get that racist remarks. So it's, like I said, it's been in town, it's still here. That don't make any difference what you do or how much you accomplish, it's always there. Yep. I graduated from Wisdom High School in '69. My daughter graduated from town in '89. I said it's like we both—I said, I'm glad I have grandkids that don't want to come back to Houlton. My grandson, my oldest grandson graduated from Bates. He got an internship over in Washington, DC working in the—

**RG:** Wow, that's amazing.

**BJ:** He's working logging artifacts or whatever at the Smithsonian place, not right in there but—

**RG:** That's fantastic.

**BJ:** He's over there but he doesn't want to come back to Houlton. He's—when he gets done with -- he got an 18-month internship over there. He wants to go—he's going to go to Seattle. He has a friend that he went to college with that works up there that he may get work. And my granddaughter, my oldest daughter's kids, my granddaughter is down in Emerson going to college down there. And my—her other son is going to be going—well, he was a party boy, so he end up flunking out the first year, but she said, “You are not going to stop there, you're going back to school.” He wants to be a lawyer.

**RG:** That's great.

**BJ:** So they're all going to school. And my other daughter's son, they both graduated from Plattsburg and that's how she end up taking her kids—she end up losing her kids to the father under false pretenses because we had nobody here in social service to help fight for her kids. So he ended up keeping the kids, getting the kids, putting restriction on it. I mean, they were—it was like night and day with the kids. The father had custody of them, they lived in Plattsburg, they came down for the summer and they had to go back by a certain day. And those kids were just—by the time we were heading back with them you could see them changing, they had to stop, like they had to stop caring, they had to stop being themselves. When they got back to their father they couldn't tell their mother they loved her, they couldn't—you know, it's like getting out—and my daughter had a hard time with that. But we did have social worker come with us and didn't do nothing. Didn't do nothing in court when we went, and at the time if she knew—'cause he left here the first time and left the kids with my daughter saying, “Well, the kids will be better with their mother, better off with their mother.” But after he went to New York his sisters probably told him well, you're going to have to pay child support, blah, blah, blah. And he told his kids, “Your mother never paid child support for you guys.”

She worked and paid child support to this day down there all the time those kids were with their father, but he told them no, your mother never paid nothing. She worked, she works, she's diabetic, she came back and lost weight and start working and just kind of reinvented herself and got her a job and worked and sent payments down. She'd get the kids, I'd—I mean,



I transported her. Every time we went down, we'd go together, and it was—he was controlling her even after they divorced, he remarried. And even to this day he tries to control his son because his son came back to live with his mom after he graduated. And the daughter's down there still, but she doesn't still have a good relationship with her mother.

But that's so hard because we didn't have anybody helping her to try to get the kids. Excuse me. We went through different lawyers too but nothing. But the lawyer in here I talked to in town was Forrest-Barnes and he says, "If they had come back here, lived six months, then that paper whatever court was down there was null and void." See she didn't know at that time and he did come back and move with her, they did move back here and live with me, but when he left he said I have a court paper here. And they went to court, didn't have anybody there for her so she ended up losing her kids and going through all that heartache all these years. But they're grown now. She's 20—23, Francis is 21, and they—he's staying with his mom right now but the girl isn't. But that was her hard, her heartache right there.

**RG:** When you think about your time as a foster parent, is there anything that you would have wanted or needed to have made that experience better for you or for the kids that were in your care?

**BJ:** (Sighs) Well, I think—I thought about how I would, you know, like I said, I didn't want my foster kids feeling they were different than my own kids. I treated them the same way. I didn't treat them any different because they weren't my kids. They were treated the same, they did the same, and I just wish that they had somebody working—help working with the mother more, so that she wouldn't have lost her kids. And she didn't get her kids back, she never got her kids back. And they were even adopted out, the three—yeah, the three kids were adopted out and (*exhales*) the foster home that the little girl was put in was a tribal foster home and the father had molested that little girl but never got charged, which was just aggravating to me because I don't know how or what happened but that's what happened with them and I thought—to this day when I see that man it just makes me angry that nothing was done. But anyway I—to see, to do—to be in foster care I think you need to have a support system to help with the mother and foster parents, I guess. I think if I had more support I would've not stopped doing it to have somebody help me, you know, because every time I turned around—when I had left, I had gone on a trip. My nephew, my great-nephew had exposed himself to one of the kids and the state was called and they said—I said, "Well, I don't know what happened, I left them with a babysitter." My daughter was there, her and her husband was watching my kids and they had gone across the road and he exposed himself because he didn't—he just had this non-filter, I guess what they called it. And when I came back, they came and met with me and I told them, I said, "I don't know what happened, this is what they told me when I got back home."

They called me when I was in Hawaii and I said well, “I really can't, you know, I can't leave here right now and come back home,” because you had to wait for your flight to come back, we was on a workshop. I was in social service at the time. And when I come back, the state came back and they talked to me and they said well, like I told them, I said, “I can't—I don't know what to tell you. This is what they told me, the neighbors across the street, and this is how we kind of dealt with it.” And he was just young then so I don't—I couldn't do anymore than what I did when I got home. But it's like I said, with as far as support system, I think if they had more support system back then I probably would've continued.

But to this—now to do it, I don't think I would. I mean, if somebody asked me to—I had a niece, a great-niece that needed help, I kept her baby for a while. It wasn't through any foster care or anything. It's just that I took care of her and when she felt that she needed the baby back, she went back. It was hard, you know, but I kept her for a couple weeks, the baby. And she got used to me and then she said, “I lived at your house,” you know, when she was little because her mother told her she lived with me. And I said yeah. And when I see her now she comes and hugs me and she says, “I wish I was living with you.” I said, “Well, no, you're living with mommy now, that's all right, mommy's okay, and everything's fine with her and her family and stuff.” But she always, “Well, can I come to your house sometime?” “Well, if mommy lets you, you know, that's up to you, mom.” It's like I said, I—if I had to do over again I probably would but I never took any older kids after that. I always wanted little kids because it was harder to see them go then it is to, you know, because you get attached to them.

**RG:** Absolutely.

**BJ:** It's just—I guess I just had too much hardship after my sister died and my brother, my sister, my father. It's like it was just too much, that I didn't want to do it anymore. Just dealing with my grandkids (*laughing*), that's enough for me now.

**RG:** Well, and you have a lot to be proud of, your grandkids are doing great.

**BJ:** Yes, they are, and I've got one grandson that's graduating this June.

**RG:** Excellent.

**BJ:** I always told him, I said, “You've got to make sure you guys go to school. If you've got the brains you go to school.” I said, “I wanted to go to school but I just felt like I didn't have no backing for it, you know.” I know my mom, my foster mother said if she could adopt me she would've adopted me. But then I thought, no, I don't think I would've stayed. I wanted to come home even though I didn't have a home to come to but I had my big sister here and this was—this was home, you know? As it was, this is where I grew up and this is where I lived and I never lived out of here other than the five years that I was put in foster care. So it's the only time I was away from Houlton. Never moved away, just that time. This was my home. And, I don't know, my daughter talks about moving away and, “You're coming with me, I'm not going to move without you.” It's like, okay (*laughing*). I said that's—it's hard sometimes. I've got family around here. This is the elder units here and my sister lives over there. My



brother lives over there. My daughter lives down the road. And my other daughter lives across the way. My other daughter lives in town. So they're, you know, they're right here.

**RG:** Yeah.

**BJ:** Yeah, my daughter had a hard time. She had a stroke and when she had her stroke, or after her stroke, her husband left her and it's like (sighs) I just—we had to go to Boston a couple of times. The first time she had her stroke I went down there with her. And the second time she had done, that's when her husband left. And she helped raise the little boy that was in Canada. They were going to put the kid in foster care over there I guess, and my daughter talked to her husband, told her you should go get him, get custody of him. He brought him over here. She helped raise that boy up until he was like 15 and then he was gone. He said well, "I can't call you mom anymore," he told Amy, and she says why not. "Well, Dad says." "Well, that's up to you if you don't." But he didn't, he called her Amy.

And that kind of broke her heart because I think that kind of helped her deal with the loss of her two little kids at the time is to help take care of that little boy. But it just never worked out for him. And now he's trying to come back to her. I says, "Don't you even think about it." I said, "If that man loved you he wouldn't have left you, you know, when you were in need of his support." Now he wants to come back, no. But she's got her son and that kind of keeps her strong stuff at home, so that helps. But thinking of all the losses I have and, you know, the hard—I know I—one of my sisters is having a hard time still. And I think it made them more bitter, seeing some of them how they talk and how they act and it's just—they've got this shield up. It's just like my grandkids when they had to go home, it's like this shield that came up. They're not allowed to have any kind of emotions and you could see the difference in them as we got closer to the New Hampshire line and Vermont was even worse because it was closer to New York, you know. You could see the difference where they kind of start going back into themselves.

**RG:** Yeah.

**BJ:** And I think that's what it was with my sisters. They all had each other and they were kind of that close-knit family. And then when I come back home it was like me and my three sisters lived in Houlton and we were kind of like all closer together even though we knew our sisters were down there. I'd go down to visit them when they lived in—when I was in foster care I went down one summer, stayed at St. Michael's with them and I swear to God I almost starved to death (*laughing*) because they were allowed only so much to eat and at my house we ate what we had.

**RG:** Yeah.

**BJ:** Like, oh my God. I couldn't wait for my foster parents to come back and get me. I said—that's why I said they were all so skinny, I guess. They just had this menu that whatever they was allowed to eat was that and they all had just portioned out what they were allowed to eat there, I guess, I don't know. But I would get hungry and they would give me some of their food. It's like, that was funny (*laughing*).

**RG:** Is there anything else that you think is important for the TRC to know? Anything else you want to share about your experiences?

**BJ:** I think the biggest thing is—for them to do is to help work with the families. The—because I—from what I could see, when I had my foster kids, I invited the mother for Thanksgiving and she came to eat. I'd invite her for Christmas dinners and she would come with them to eat with us. You know, to have the parents, part of their kid's family, you know even if they are in foster care, they still should come and be involved with what they do. I don't know how the state allows or what they do now. But I mean they says, “Well, you allowed her to be in...” I says, “No, that was her mother. They came to my house to—as a family.”

To me that was important that they keep connected with their family, with their mother, with their natural mother. You know, I'm not their mother, I'm their foster mother, but to have their families come in and to be a part of their family, that to me would be more important for them to keep that with the foster kids. Because when they were in the other family—this foster mother lost her baby, this little—the foster kid's mother that I had, she had another baby. They were put into this foster home and she took, they took that baby away from her before Christmas. And I said I do not know how this woman survived, that they took her, she was breastfeeding it, they put her in this foster home, which was the foster home—the Native foster home that the guy end up molesting the little girl, and she would take breast milk and they would dump it out, they wouldn't give it to the baby.

**RG:** Wow.

**BJ:** Yep. She couldn't take—anything that she gave the kids, they wouldn't give to the kids. This was another—this was the mother that I had the kids and I said that's not right. I mean, she would come to me because we were going to foster home together and she'd talk to me about stuff. And I said, “Well you should go talk to whoever,” and she'd talk to them and they acted like almost she's stupid, she can't—she doesn't know what she's doing, blah, blah, blah. I said she's a slow talker, she has a hard time pronouncing her words, but she is not a stupid person. She knows what's going on, she knows what she had to do and she did everything and they didn't do anything with her; they just took her kids, didn't help her. So that was—to me that would be the thing I would see them do is try and help the family, work with the mother, have them involved with, you know. I guess it would depend on the situation that they were taken out of too, I guess. But to me, working with the family is the best thing that they could do (*paper crinkling*).

**RG:** Yeah.

**BJ:** Because I always try to get them involved with their own parents.

**RG:** Yeah, absolutely.

**BJ:** And I see some of these kids—I know of a little girl that was taken from the mother and given to the father and the family is non-Native. “Oh, I want her to get involved with the tribe out there when are they going to have the recognition day,” and you never see him out here. You know, they never bring him out. I mean, they have all these good intentions when they get the kids but they never get involved with it. And that's where they lose their identity, you know. They don't know. And that's sad that they are taken away and not involved with the tribe. That's what I always tell the kids, I say, “Make sure that the kids get involved with stuff.” And sometimes they're embarrassed because of the way they're treated in school, you know, to do stuff with the tribe. And that's sad because when we were younger, when my kids were younger my son Luke and we had the Natives come from Canada (*inaudible*) and taught them how to dance and he was pretty proud of able to do the dancing and stuff. But nowadays you can't get those kids to do it because there's nobody to teach them, I guess. And they love it when they all get together with the tribe and the tribal youth, they have summer camp, their camp. They like getting involved with stuff like that, but other than that, that's nothing.

**RG:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**BJ:** No, that's all I can say, I guess. Hear my sad story (*laughing*). But it's just, like I said, it's a heartache back then when they did take kids that they never got them involved, they never got any kind of counseling, I don't—we never did. And I don't know what they would do with the other kids, did they get counseling for that, I don't know. You know. Because some, like I said, those two little girls that were taken out of their mother, away from their family, was never—they treated them like they were stupid kids, but they just didn't understand English. So that's kind of sad (*crinkling noise*).

**RG:** Well, I want to thank you so much for sitting with me and I want to express, first of all, my deep gratitude to you and to let you know, in case you haven't been told recently, you are incredibly strong, incredibly strong. And I hear the heartache that you have gone through and my heart aches for you too.

**BJ:** It's like I said—

**RG:** You are incredibly strong.

**BJ:** It's still hard every day.

**RG:** I know.

**BJ:** But I always—when I get too upset—I don’t have anybody to go to talk to anymore and when I get too upset I go down and talk to the priest and I’ll talk to him. And come to find out the priest that I talk to went to the same high school I did (*laughing*). He was behind me and I was ahead of him. And he said, “Oh my God, you went to Wisdom High School.” I said, “Yeah, I graduated in '69.” He said, “Well I was, I graduated this year.” I said, “Oh my God.” I then looked through the yearbook that I have and there he was in there.

**RG:** Too funny.

**BJ:** Yeah, it was. And I try to get involved and I told him that I stopped coming to church because, he says why. I said, “Because when they reach out your hand and say peace be with you and nobody—and this person doesn’t even turn around acknowledge you, I felt I was shunned in the church. Why should I go there and act like it's okay.” He says, “Yeah, but you don’t go for them people.” I said, “But still you feel like you're being, you know.”

**RG:** Yeah, absolutely.

**BJ:** Just like when we were younger, you know. It's like these poor little Indians or they're still Indians, it doesn’t make any difference if they come to church or not. But my parents did make us go to church. I know my brother Clare had to walk to church with me. He'd walk ahead of me and I'd have to walk behind him but we had to go to church and it's like those good times, bad times. The good times is when my parents didn’t drink; bad times is when they drank. You know, and that's wasn’t very often. That's just what happened, I guess. And I don’t know any kind of history behind where my mom was or where my grandmother, but I'm going to try and find it, I guess. I've got pictures and stuff of my gram, but just the ones I have on my wall in there. My grandmother and my mother, my Uncle Percy. And he died young too and they think that he was murdered by the town cops.

**RG:** Wow.

**BJ:** Yep, it's like these things now you see when this guy was thrown in the police car and they found out he had a broken neck. Well, when my—when they called us to say my Uncle Percy had passed away, they had gone down there, they could see he had a big bruise on his head and they said he hung himself and that's—we don’t think that happened. So that's stuff that went on in town. But as far as foster care, it's like I said I think it's better that they keep the parents, if it's possible, to keep them in contact with their kids and help work with the families to get them back because that's the hardest thing to take your kids away from you. And they don’t understand. Like we didn’t understand, I didn’t understand until I was older when I come back home and I talked to my sister and that was not just—that was after my dad died that I found out what happened. I talked to—I was talking to my sister and I told her, I says how did we end up in foster care anyway, and then she told me what happened because she was the oldest one, they talked to her and my dad and that's how we knew. We just never know.



And I think that would help the kids too, you know, if they're involved with it. If they're taken away and stuff and to get counseling; like I said, we never got counseling. I think that would've helped but I don't know. But that's the way it was. It was '64 when my mom died. It was like this time of year, almost springtime I guess, I don't know, it was hard. I said first I had, I felt like I had a mother and father, I had two sets, then all of a sudden I had nobody, you know. I had my mother and my grandmother and her boyfriend that helped take care of me. Then I had my mom and dad. Then I didn't have anybody. Last time I seen my mother's—well, Barney that used to help take care of me walking down the road the day after my mother, my grandmother had died. I called her mom because she always took care of me, I called her mom too (*sighs*). That's all I can say.

**RG:** Thank you so much. You are amazing. You are a very, very amazing woman.

**BJ:** Thank you (*laughs*).

**RG:** You're very welcome. Do you want me to stop the recording?

**BJ:** Yes.

**[END OF RECORDING]**