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Statement by Anonymous collected by Frank Smith on March 27, 2014

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Anonymous

Date: March 27, 2014

Location: Bangor, Maine

Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Frank Smith

Support Person: Tyneshia Wright

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

Recording Format: Audio

Length of Recording: 00:19:28

Transcriber's Note:

This is an anonymous statement. Any alternations to the recording and redactions in the transcript have been done at the request of the statement provider in an effort to protect his or her identity.

Recording

FS: So, we're going to start now. My name is Frank Smith and I'm a statement gatherer for the Maine Wabanaki TRC. And could you state your name?

A: *[NAME REDACTED]*

FS: Okay.

TW: Tyneshia Wright.

FS: Okay. We are at the Wabanaki Wellness Center in Bangor, Maine and it is March 27, 2014. And you've been notified that we are mandated if a child is in danger or been in danger

or hurt, or if anyone else is, and if there's been a crime committed, we must report that. You're aware of that? Okay, good. Please feel free to begin.

A: My first situation with child welfare was when I was five years old. I was taken out of my mother's home and placed with my grandmother. At a very young age, my grandmother started treating me like I was her slave. I had two brothers and a sister. My oldest brother went to live in another foster home, and me and my younger siblings went to live with my grandmother. My grandmother favored my brother and sister. She did not like me, she would tell me [00:01:46.20] she did not like me because I reminded her of my mother, her own daughter. She would treat me like a slave, make me clean up after everyone. Even if I didn't make the mess. As the years went by, it just got worse...My sister and my brother, they could do no wrong. Everything I did, everything I said, I got punished for. The few times we got to see our mom was for a very brief moment. She was an alcoholic and a drug addict, which was why we were taken.

Now as I am an adult, I learned that my mom tried to get sober but her disease of being an alcoholic and a drug addict took over her life. She couldn't get better. The older we got, my grandmother started playing video games with my younger brother so she would lay in her bedroom all day long just playing video games, and I was in charge of the children. She had other foster children besides me and my two siblings. [00:03:55.02] I was in charge of making sure that they were fed, that they bathed, that they did their homework, that they got ready for bed on time. I was in charge of them getting up and ready for school so that they didn't miss the bus. This all took place when I was around eight years old. So I had to grow up. I didn't have a childhood.

As an adult, I learned that the way she treated me was the exact same way that she treated my mother, her first born, her oldest daughter (*pause*). I started to cut myself when I was younger because of it (*voice breaking, tears*), because I didn't know how else to let that pain out. I would tell my teachers, nobody would listen. The people that did listen to me would ask her about it and she would deny it. So it was me against her, and I was just a child so what did I know (*sniffs*)? [00:05:25.22] My grandmother would always tell me that I was a mistake, that she should have forced my mother to get an abortion. When I was twelve years old, my mother died (*crying*). She was in a car accident. She was high on drugs and she was drunk and she was on her way to get more, and my grandmother woke us up that morning for school and she told us that our mother had passed away, and when I started to show emotion, she slapped me. She told me I wasn't allowed to cry. [00:06:37.09] That only weak people cried. My entire life I've kept everything bottled up.

I started acting up in school. I stopped doing my homework. I stopped participating in activities. I didn't see the point in them (*voice breaking*). I wasn't wanted. The people that were supposed to protect me were the ones abusing me. When I got into my teens, my grandmother's husband started touching me. I tried to tell my grandmother; she wouldn't listen. She said that if it happened, I deserved it. When I was fifteen years old, I ran away. My father lived in Calais so I ran there. I didn't know where else to go. My father was abusive. I came home late from school one day and he was mad. He pushed me up against a wall, held me by the neck and told me that I was worthless, that I was gonna be just like my mother, that if I kept coming home



late it must have been because I was sleeping around. That I was gonna end up pregnant and be a whore like my mom. [00:08:59.01] I spit in his face, and I kicked him. My mom got pregnant with my oldest brother at fifteen, which is also my father's oldest child.

After that happened, I ran to my best friend's house and I was there for a while. The cops showed up and tried to take me back. I told them what happened and they never showed up again (*laughing*). And then I went to school one day and cops showed up, took me out of school and I ended up back at my grandmother's. She still continued to treat me the exact same way that she had always treated me. When I was seventeen, I got pregnant. Seven months pregnant, my grandmother pushed me down a set of stairs. She tried to kill my baby. [00:10:24.20] I was sent to the hospital. I was kept there for about a month or so. The state was called. Nothing happened. My grandmother still has foster children.

I didn't understand why she treated me that way because growing up, she had two loving parents that did everything they could for those kids, their kids. So I couldn't understand why such good people could have gave birth to such a horrible person. I don't talk to my grandma. I don't talk to half of my family because of it (*voice breaking*). Nobody knew what happened behind closed doors. 'Cause out in public, she would act like nothing was wrong. So when those doors closed, I was beaten. I was molested. I was emotionally, physically abused. I have two children of my own now. I made a promise to myself, to my children, that I will never ever let them go through what I had to go through (*crying*), that yes they will know pain but they will not know that pain. I made a promise to myself that no matter what happened, I would be there for them. I would give everything for my children. I don't understand how anybody could do that (*pause, crying*).

FS: Can I ask you a few more questions to get some more details? You said when you were first taken away--did the welfare system come in?

A: It was Tribal Child Welfare.

FS: And they were the ones that took you to your grandmother's and placed you there.

A: Right.

FS: And, did you have what's called a case worker? Did you have someone that followed you? [00:14:15.29]

A: I never met with anybody. I had counselors my entire childhood, but everything I told them, they would go back and tell my grandmother word-for-word what I would say. So when I got home from that, I'd get beaten. I have major trust issues because of it (*laughs*). Like I let somebody in, and I have a tendency of pushing them away when they get too close.

FS: And the couple of times when the police came, what did they say to you when they removed you...you ran away once to a friend's and they came and got you and took you back? Is that right?

A: They came—my dad called the police when I ran from him so they knew where I was. They showed up. I told them what happened and they said they talked to my dad, that my dad wasn't angry with me. My dad used to be a police officer so he knows his way around the system.

FS: You also said that, I think it was when your grandmother pushed you down the stairs and you were in the hospital and the state was called. Did somebody come in and talk to you?

A: Somebody came into the hospital and talked to me but nothing was ever done.
[00:16:08.02] It's always been my word against hers.

FS: And you never saw that person again? They never followed up or checked up on you?

A: No.

FS: Do remember when or if you ever heard about the Indian Child Welfare Act?

A: No. I was just a paycheck for my grandmother, and a slave.

FS: In your mind, what does reconciliation mean? What would you like that to mean for you? You're giving us the truth, and truth and reconciliation. What we're hoping is that something good can come out of it. What would that good be?

A: I want people to start listening to what children in child welfare are saying, not just what the adults are saying. [00:18:05.29] Usually when a child tells you something abusive, it's actually happening. But a lot of people just take the adult's version. They don't want to hear what the children has to say. The children are just lying.

FS: And what would you want the TRC to know most of all? It could be the same or different. It's a slightly different question. What would you want them to know in terms of their mandate to give a report to the state? It may be the same thing.

A: I don't know.

FS: "Listen to the Children."

A: Yeah.

FS: Anything else that you want to say?

A: No.

FS: Okay. Well thank you very much. I know this was really hard. Personally honored that you would trust me and speak of this with me here.

[END OF RECORDING]