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3-17-2014

Statement by Donna (Dawn Neptune) Adams on March 17, 2014

Donna Adams

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Public

Statement Provider: Donna (Dawn Neptune) Adams

Date: 3/17/2014

Location: Bangor, Maine

Previous Statement? N/A

Statement Gatherer: Public Circle

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: Public Circle

Recording Format: Video

Length of Recording: 10:26

Recording

DA: My adopted name is Donna May Adams. My friends call me Dawn. Before I was adopted my name was Neptune, my last name. I don't have a big elaborate statement written. I figured I would just... after discarding so many attempts that I would just talk. And I'm going to ignore the camera and just talk to the people who are here who have been through this and who have heard the stories so many times.

My mother was Pammy Neptune, and she got pregnant with me when she was 13. She had me when she was 14. (*Baby cooing*) This was in 1974. After she had me she started drinking and two years later my brother was born. All in all she had five of us and all of them, all of my brothers and sisters, were taken from her.

I have a hard time speaking unless I'm behind a computer screen *[01:00]*. And I think some of that stems from one of my earliest memories. I had my mouth washed out with soap for speaking Penobscot. To this day I don't know what I said and I only barely remember, you know, the tooth brush and the soap. But I've heard my foster mother talk about it over the years. I think sometimes maybe that's why I'm just afraid to let words out.

[02:00] So between age two and age four, my brother and I went from foster home to foster home. We were... we stayed with my grandmother for a little while. And she was also an alcoholic. And I know this whole commission, none of it is about blame and I try to speak of it

without laying blame on anyone; without blaming my mother for being an alcoholic, without blaming my grandmother for being an alcoholic, without blaming my foster mother for being abusive, without blaming the state for putting me someplace where I wasn't safe. That's hard to do, so forgive me if I slip up.

We were put in a very racist home [03:00]. A home where the foster mother was very much part of that whole 50's push to kill the Indian to save the man. I think she thought that what she was doing was what was best for us. But the end result was... I didn't know who I was. And I really still don't.

So my birth mother, she visited us until I was 9. My grandmother came to visit too. She would win dolls at Bingo and bring them over to the foster home. I think she did the best she could, too. To my knowledge she never escaped alcoholism, nor my mother.

By the time I was 6, I knew that my mother had been raped when she was 11 years old by her father. I knew that there was incest going on in my biological family. I should never have been told these things. I did need to be taken away from there. But, I was taken away from my culture as well. There was abuse of all types at the foster home. But the biggest thing is that I was not allowed to grow up with my culture and I was made to feel ashamed of my culture. I was told very early on that my skin was light enough so that I could pass for white. And that I was really lucky because I never ever had to admit again that I was Penobscot. When my mother moved to Portland, we never saw the reservation again. I keep saying "we." I'm including my brother in this because he's such a huge part of my life. I can't speak for him so I'll try to keep it to the "I."

[06:00] I met my mother again when I was 18. I think it was Ted Mitchell who helped me find her. He was my academic adviser up at the University of Maine. Anyway she came up to Brewer and visited and we had lunch together and it was great... and I could really see that she loved me and that separation had been really painful for her. But I was detached from her. I didn't... and angry with her. My foster mother told me when I was really young that if my biological mother would just quit drinking that I could go back, that I could go back to Indian Island. And so I tried to quit drinking just to see what that would be like. So when nobody was looking I'd dump my drink. Dump my milk in the sink. Dump my water in the sink. I didn't know how long I went without drinking before I finally started fainting.

She never did quit drinking. I went to the university of Maine for my freshman year and her sister Cecilia called me from Portland and said "is your mom still up there with you? Because she should be home by now." I thought she had left without saying goodbye because she wasn't with me anymore. She had disappeared from the motel where she was staying a few days before that. Couple days later I got a call from Cecelia again who said that Pam had been found. She had been pushed out of a moving car. She rolled down an embankment and broke her neck. And she lived the rest of her life as a quadriplegic.

About that... hmm, a little bit earlier than that I went to a Tekakwitha conference up in Old Town. This was 1992. And I, you know after being in my foster home for so long and not

being able to even admit to being Penobscot or talk about it or be curious about it or anything. I was like "yes, I'm finally Penobscot again!" [09:00] And I was going to my first powwow. And I did nothing but hide, because I didn't know how to dance.

So I think that's the biggest thing for me is the loss of identity. How people going from one world to another... they don't belong in either. They don't feel like they belong in either. My foster mother told me that I was at her house because nobody on the reservation wanted me and that I was there on the goodness of her heart. And that she would save me from being Penobscot. So, I think the only one who is going to save me is myself. I think that's all I have to say.

(Murmurs of thanks)

[END OF RECORDING]