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Statement by Sarah DeWitt collected by Rachel George on October 16, 2014

Sarah DeWitt

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Sarah DeWitt

Date: October 16, 2014

Location: Presque Isle, Maine

Previous Statement? N/A

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: gkisedtanamoogk

Recording Format: Audio

Length of Recording: 3:06:11

Recording

RG: All right. It is October 16, 2014, and we're here in Presque Isle, Maine, at the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. My name is Rachel George. I'm here today with:

SD: Sarah DeWitt.

GK: And Commissioner gkisedtanamoogk.

RG: Great. And the file number is A-201410-00111. Sarah, have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

SD: Yes.

RG: Great. And I have to let you know, if at any point during this recording, you indicate that there's a child or an elder currently in need of protection, or that 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?

SD: Understood. Yes.

RG: Is there anywhere that you want to start in particular, or do you want me to just go

through the questions?

SD: No, I'll let you start, and we'll see where we end up. (*laughs*)

RG: Could you tell me about your employment with the Band, working as the ICWA worker?

SD: Um. Oh gosh. I've been working with the Tribe for several years now and, (*sighs*) I want to say, maybe in 1996 or '97, I started working, um, beginning with the Child Protection team, working with them, being part of that committee, um, discussing Child Welfare issues. And I'd worked under the Social Services Department. And, so, I'd been able to sit at that table for quite some time, and as far as being the ICWA director or coordinator, um, hmm, I think it was in 2007, the Tribe was, uh, was in a place. And we had lost some staff members and, 'cause, Rosella Silliboy, she would have been the lady in front of me and, uh, just kind of assumed the role until we were able to hire Tanya on. Oh gosh, it's been a few years for that, too, so, 'cause now we have Luke in place. He's been there maybe about five years ago, I mean, I didn't even keep track of the years. So, I think for the majority of my employment here, I've been tied to our Child Welfare table in one form or another. So, it's been a while.

RG: Can you tell me generally, what your experiences were like, working with Child Welfare?

SD: Hmm. I think, um. In early onset, um, I always want to say angry, but I don't know if it was more anger or confusion. The differences between what I understood as family dynamics and what their standards implied as family dynamics, and trying to wrap my mind around their system, the way, I always joke and tease, calling them the stiff. (*laughs*) And it's gotten me in trouble a few times. 'What do you mean I'm a stiff?' Well, just. uh, you don't know that you're different until you come across it. If that makes any sense, so, uh, I think that was probably the hardest thing to wrap my mind around in the beginning was, the difference in how I understood families took care of each other and then having that outside State influence. 'Cause sometimes, their rules just didn't make sense. I'm trying to be specific on something, but that's just, uh, the impression of memory I have; it's just — What did they say? Comparing apples to oranges? So.

What would you say are some of the standout moments in those early years, for you?

SD: [00:04:46.14] Um. Oh gosh. I think when I had to sit at their table — 'Cause before, I was just uh, part of the Child Family Team. And that was largely support, trying to support the family and the Tribe with what they wanted against the man. But when I remember first sitting at their table with a family, and uh, just that they were, hmm — What's the word I want? They were very passive about their stance — They weren't really putting it out on the table. And I, uh, I could feel myself getting aggravated again, and the impression came across- misgivings or not, this is their family. And they may not feel and breathe the same way as you guys do, but they are an awesome family unit. They stick close to each other; I mean there was, crikey, there was a whole slew of them there. And, you know, they might not be what the stiff was looking for, but they got it. They knew how to take care of their family. And, I think that's when — And then through that, having a better understanding of what the Tribe's position was and could be. You know, 'cause they weren't saying, 'Oh, we have to share this opinion



with you,' No, they were, they weren't really forthcoming with that information. But understanding that we did have rights, and being able to have that stance while all this is, having our opinion valued, I guess. Having that understanding — Power is not the right word I want to use, but what we were able to do with that, at that table with those decisions regarding *our* family members, that was pretty significant. So, that was huge, um, for me.

We had another individual, um, a dad, and he had, uh, two of his boys were, uh, were lost to the system and one of them, their parental rights were terminated and the other son was not. See, I want to go off on a side tangent, but I won't. I'm going to stay on task. 'Cause, when this little fella got in to the system, again dealing with other people's standards of living — He had a lot of residential treatment. He had a lot of trouble settling into the foster home, and we didn't have any Tribal homes at the time. I think, you know, we've got a few now, but still even that's a struggle. Uh, so, and the department did not hold a high opinion of this gentleman. Um, so years had passed, and his son was, uh, getting involved, you know, I kept asking, "where's the family participation? Have you notified dad?" And come to find out, blessed be, that they did not terminate this little feller's rights. So, dad was able to take part in that. Again, making it clear to the department, you hear just for a minute, you know, regardless of if you think he is a cool guy or not, his son is gonna come back to find him, so why not help dad and give him those — 'Cause, geez, they haven't seen each other in years. So, it's almost, he would have been five when he went in to the system. We're talking 13 now, so him and dad wouldn't have had much of a relationship. I said, 'So, why don't you start building on that, now?' And, it was cool, they listened. Or, I don't know if they wanted to listen, but that was the position we were taking at the time is, 'Oh God, you guys are here just for a minute and when you go home, you know, we're still left with the aftermath.' And that's been hard on some of our peeps here.

[00:09:19.08] Hmm. I just, just thinking of some other things, you know. Oh gosh. 'Cause, when I first started doing the ICWA stuff, it was definitely the us against them. I remember — again this was early in my years — We, I saw we, I was just a witness to, but they had done a little training down in the North Eastland Hotel. A lot of the, I think, if not at all of the ICWA workers at the time, there was a beautiful lady there, she was an attorney. I'm not sure which Tribe she was at, but, they had, um, hmmm, it was an ICWA training, I guess? 'Cause we had a lot of the caseworkers there. I don't know if I can go so far as to say even judges, but I wanna think that they had to have had some legal representation there. And we did prayer ties for everyone. Everyone there received a prayer tie. Midway through the conference — uh, these guys, one of the — he would have been one of the higher ups in the food chain as far as the local DHS — stood up in the crowd and he goes, 'When did this happen? Is this new information?' 'No. No, they were kind enough to share —' 'No, this has been around since 1970s,' so. (*sighs*) Even at the end, I remember a lot of them guys grabbing their bags: 'What the hell am I supposed to do with this?' 'Ooh, I can just put it in my pipe when I get home.' Ah. Ooh. So, I was angry, yes.

I think it was just getting an understanding of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ playing field. And, I think those ladies — At the time, Caroline, she would have been Maple, but she’s Morrison, was our ICWA director and we, I, for us — I know I can't speak for the other Tribes — but with her, her efforts and Rosella's, we started, I guess, building a relationship with the department. I was kind of going, ‘Well, if had gotten a report,’ ‘Hey, will you go to talk to so and so?’ ‘Do y'all want to be part of ...’ Those conversations were going, and I think we realized, once again, we realized what rights and what positions we could take. We started taking that stance: ‘Well no, this is how we think it should go.’

So, they’re getting a — I don't want to use the word hostile, but we're changing things. One of the things that I'm nervously excited about is that — ’cause we can never say never — is that we will, it will be hard pressed for us to agree to the termination of parental rights. ’Cause not only does that terminate the parent, that terminates the Tribe, as well. And again, I felt myself getting a little hostile sharing this. You know, it's, it's, it's well, no, it's not about the system. It's not about DHHS. They're choosing to come in and take our children; it's their responsibility to work with what we have. Trying to get our kids to events, our Mawiomi, our Christmas party, the little social pieces that we have, I don't know how far it will go, but I think they should have the understanding when you take one of our babies, it is your responsibility to make sure that they are attending our events. And, so, what if it’s a Halloween party? There might not be anything hugely culturally significant happening there, um, but these children are starting to build relationships. But, this little young feller I talked about with his dad, he was so removed from us. (*sighs*) So, when he became of age, aged 18, when he aged out of the system, trying to get back in here with what his age group should have been, he was a stranger. And, it was hard for him to, I don't even want to use the word click, but that’s it. When you’re, you're growing up living and breathing and hating and loving with each other, we have that bond. And that’s what, when it comes time for us to really get at the, at these sort of tables — our Child and Family tables, our Council tables — We need those connections.

[00:14:41.26] Our little feller, last year, um, had passed away. A drowning accident. So, he was able to make some connections with us, workers. Again, this is a pretty significant family unit so, they come out when times are tough. It was a nice showing. A lot of the State workers were there, too, because he was one of, can I say five siblings total? Two of them were ours, and mom had other babies with another gentleman. And all of her babies were in the system. Two of them were ours, so we were able to keep track of two. The young fellow that drowned, I became very, he would have been my, gosh! My first technical case, I guess. ’Cause even when I met him, I was still a stra-. I knew who he was. I remember the Davis removal. I was part of that removal. So I knew more about him than what he knew about me, so we had a chance to get to know each other. It was fabulous — Trying to support the parents’ rights, the Tribe’s — It’s, it's nuts! For what they ask the Tribe’s ICWA workers to do. You've got one staff member more often than not, if you're lucky, you'll get a part time assistant or something. It's, it's, anyways, it's another tangent.

But, so, we went to, um, his funeral services, and it was awesome. You know, you could see the Tribal connection, whether or not we were intimately related or friends across the street. So, his younger brother — Who would have known, who knows his dad less, ’cause if he was five, our other little fella was probably three or four. And his rights, his parental rights were terminated on both parents. So he was, okay, we realized mom was not, and dad was not going



to be able to take care of him, let's move him down the concession stand line. And he was adopted out. He, *(clears throat)* he was put back into the system for almost a year before we knew he was back in. You know, where's the Tribe's responsibility in this? The adoption happened — You know, we should have made sure — Oh, the parents can say, 'Oh, yes! Oh, we'll attend, we'll make sure he honors his culture.' But once that termination happens, we have no legal rights to our babies anymore. I say babies whether they're two or 18.

So, again, this little feller, little feller? If he was 18 he should be 16, 17... So, he's almost ready to age out of the system now. And, he'll go to his mom and what, and see what Tribal family he has, but there's such a distaste — He doesn't want to know his dad. We've got another baby that is not going to be a part of this community. *(laughs)* Selfishly, he's not going to be there to take care of me! And, uh, so, we're all we're getting ready for services, we're outside having a power puff and one of the workers comes and says, 'Sarah, he's-' er, 'the mom is asking for you.' All right, so now I'm really in trouble. So, I go in and I set down and now again, this young feller does not know me as well as I know him. So, asking this complete stranger questions is sometimes weird ... *[00:19:10.18]*

SD: But it, 'cause he is growing up in a non-Native, between foster homes and treatment centers. He says, 'I know where I'm going when I die. Where is my brother? Will I see him again?' And, I almost puddled right there. It was like, 'Oh no, you just did not say that.' And so, I just, I scrambled, 'cause he's growing up in a Christian-based home, which is, that's perfectly fine. Except, he doesn't ... like I said, the Tribe's representation is there. Our men's drum group was there. They drummed him. They drummed for his family. So our little feller was able to see the Tribe's presence there, and how much they were supportive of his brother, even after his passing. And then I simply told him, I said, 'Even the Bible will call him, he is of but many names. [REDACTED] *[00:20:24]* is going — Ooh. Well, he's dead. And, sorry. *(about saying a name, to Rachel)*

RG: I can make sure that is taken out.

SD: 'He's going to be there *[00:20:39.12]* waiting for you.' I said, 'It's not a different place.' I wanted to go so much into it, but again, we're at a funeral service. He's barely knowing me, and I just think that just helped me, you know, how important it is, to have that those kids connected when they, when DHS pulls out our kids, why it's so important not to just terminate parent rights without really... is looking at every option that we have. So them two boys are going to stick out in my mind for the longest time. *[00:21:29.29]*

SD: One, because he was so far into the system, and we have nothing here. Our group homes keep pushing them back, pushing them back, and they were getting ready to ship him out of state and we're like, 'Aw, hell no, you cannot!' We have a hard enough time to get him to our local events as it is. And, 'Well, it's just a Christmas party.' No! It's not. They still need to play

and fight with their kids, their peers. And *(pause)* the department should get themselves ready to make sure they bring all of our kids to our events. We don't want them gone anyway, but I understand sometimes it happens. But that he had no sense of who he was. No sense of his community. How is he going to keep us together if they don't understand? Even now, some of our younger kids, they don't understand why it's cool, why is it important to know about your Tribe, your history, where you're from. Yeah. I'm not even sure if I remember the question anymore. *(laughs)* [00:22:56.06]

RG: It's okay. It's all very important stuff.

SD: I'm not gonna use your tissues!

GK: You know, just as a, as an observation, it's the community relationships that's really important. It doesn't even have to be cultural anything. It's the bonding of community that's really at stake here.

SD: Yeah.

GK: It sounds that the, uh, that the State is really uh, negligent in the mandate by ICWA to maintain cultural links. So, what, uh, what you're providing to us is the calamities that come from not being compliant in that loss of connection to community.

SD: It's scary.

GK: Is that safe to say?

SD: Yes, no, absolutely terrifies me.

GK: Yeah.

SD: 'Cause when, when, our kids, we have a good handful of kids and our cases are picking up — I say our cases, Luke's cases —

GK: Yeah.

SD: — are picking up, you know, with the, especially with the, and the State as well, from my understanding, with the meth, the bath salts being a huge, um, so we're having a lot more kids getting picked up. [00:24:37.15]

SD: But, boy, is our kids have a hard time being placed. And, we're finding a lot of them are ending up in residential treatment centers. And there's none local here for us, I don't really believe. Um. *(pause)* And I, I even asked the team there a few weeks ago. I says, 'Is this, this is a silly question I know, but you know, would these kids, these babies be having such a hard time, had they not been removed?' If, that radical thinking, before we say, 'Okay. Take.' Or, 'Yes, we'll terminate.' We have to try everything we can first.

GK: Mm, hmm.



SD: And you know, if mom or dad is not in a position — ‘I can't take care of my baby anymore.’ Let's look at your family. Do you have, um — When we set up our domestic violence shelter, this was a question that was coming up and it was like, wait a minute, huh, because we have an awesome hope and justice project, the battered women's project. They've been here for years. They have an excellent standing with the local — Well, whether or not the local law enforcements; I guess it varies per town. But they have an active program here, and it's a good program. So, when we go to say, ‘Hey, this is who we are,’ to the outside sector, one of the first questions we'll get it is, ‘Why? You already have said program,’ or, ‘We already do — What do you do that's different?’ And that would be the same way with the department. You know, we are, are unique, but boy, sometimes that's hard to articulate to them.

GK: Mm, hmm.

SD: Well, when something happens to me, my family comes together, but you might just be talking about your mom or your dad. If something happens to one of community members, you're getting your mom, your dad, the cousin twice removed. I mean the connection is huge here. And then we're taking — When we take said kids and put them in these homes, the rules are different, the air is almost different. And we want them, they want them to sit polite at the table. It doesn't work, so our kids are ending up in either group homes or the residential treatment centers, and those are awful.

GK: Mm.

SD: I say they're awful. I understand why they're necessary. But, why are so many of our kids ending up there? So, does the Tribe have a lot of work to do? Absolutely. And having that Tribal connection, that is so huge. There is another little young feller — and you can scratch his name if you have to — but he's given a statement to you guys, Josh Grenier, I think is his last name. 'Cause I remember having this little doohickey on one of his statements, it was on the web, and so he would have been one of ours.

But, he's been gone, I don't know all the specifics of his story, but I want to think, you know, I'm talking under the age of five maybe, um. *[00:28:54.28]* To the point where I don't think he, I think residential treatment became his norm. And I think he was there until he aged out of the program, but I've never seen him back. If I did, I'd probably walk over him before I knew who he was. I tell the kids, you know, this is your birthright. They don't always understand what that means. You know, just because you're Tribal, doesn't mean you have your fishing/hunting license for free. It is so much more than that. And so, that's what we're trying — part of the piece — what we're trying to here, not to get a selfless plug going here, but to start to rebuild those connections, even with my age group. My generation. My understanding of my culture and community. I'm holding onto, my children underneath me, yeah, they kind of ... Yeah, it's important to be Tribal. But y'know, I remember my mother's stories. I remember my

grandmother's stories, of what they would share, and having that close connection. We need to have it. My gram, um, she would have come to the United States when she was very young. She would have had one or two, possibly — No, my mom would have been just a baby — But she had her brothers and sisters as well. They came. Of course, I'm, very dramatic in my mind! You know, I picture my Nana smuggling her babies and her siblings to the United States. And it would have probably been at the end of the residential school in Canada, collecting children. So, because of those rules and standards, my grandmother felt it was important enough for her to leave her community behind.

[00:31:23.03] And I'm sure she's but one of many that have come here to hide, I guess. My mom was fluent in her language and her culture, but being removed from their community and being scattered all over, um, she struggles now to speak. She'll understand it and speak, and then you look at me, I can ask for, uh, milk and potatoes. And I knew when my Nana was mad! All of us kids knew when she was mad, but we barely understand our language. And then, my daughter behind me knows even less, and, you know, it's draining us. We'll say, 'We lost our language, we lost our language.' No. Our language was stolen from us.

GK: Absolutely.

SD: 'Cause those are the pieces that help connect us uniquely. You know, and this is why we hammer on domestic violence program. Could you walk in to their offices, and this some nasty sand, but it's fun, kinetic sand — But, well, so we'll have some stuff to play with, but are they gonna find the smudge bowl and understand what that is? When we give them tobacco, do they understand what that is, or why it's ...? No, you don't put it in your pipe when you get home after work. 'Cause, when I started learning more about my culture and who I was, it was kinda, 'Oh! Yes! That makes perfect sense.'

Oh gosh. Drumming is huge for me. When I was a child, they said, 'Sarah, don't. You cannot carry a tune to save your life.' But when I understood what the music was about, wasn't just sounding good, you know, that it's, oh gosh. It's wonderful. And when us girls get connected and put that energy out there, it's absolutely fabulous.

[00:33:59.05] Now that you said that, I guess it is huge, the connection piece. If we don't have that connection piece, we might as well be DHS or Walmart or someplace that doesn't have any sense of ... (*loud ring tone*) Yeah, I don't know. So.

RG: Do you want me to go on?

SD: Yes, go ahead.

RG: This might seem a little bit redundant —

SD: Okay.

RG: — but, I'm going to ask anyways. When did you first learn about Maine's policies related to Indian Tribal Affairs with the Indian Child Welfare Act?



SD: Ooh, officially or unofficially?

RG: Both.

SD: So, um. 'Cause I, I've even seen it played out, now with our 20-year-old generation, was that they came and got you in the middle of the night. That's what I understood, as a small person. I understood very clearly that you didn't talk to 'the man,' if you will. You couldn't trust systems, couldn't trust police officers. So, that was my — I don't even know if I want to call it unofficial, because I think it was very much real.

You know, dating myself here a little bit, but so what? In the early '70s, remembering some of my elders' stories, is that when they would go down to visit family in Boston, certain places of town, you hid from the police officers as a woman. It wasn't safe to be there. So, I understood there was the 'us'es' and the 'them's.' You didn't trust the them's. So, when I started working with the Indian Tribal Welfare stuff, having that understanding of what legally they can and can't do, legally what the Tribe can and can't do. That is not an easy place to sit. And I don't know if it would make a difference if we had our own Tribal courts, but we are subject to the State of Maine. We don't have our own Tribal police, so again we're reliant on, um, a white privilege system. And I think that's part of the problem, is like, 'Why are you so different from me?' I remember coming across a training or something, when they were talking about white privilege. 'Ah, that does make sense,' you know. Again, that you are different than, than, than the rest, and I'm understanding that being different is very cool, I think. (sighs)

GK: I understand where you're coming from, you know, because sometimes it's really hard to articulate the difference —

SD: Yes.

GK: You know, but it's, it's a huge gap. It's a huge difference.

SD: Absolutely. [00:37:45.04] And, sitting, being the ICWA person, whew. Because even as Tribal members, not understanding DHS' position, that person, especially if you're working for your own community, my God! You're almost instantly 'Grrrr.'

'I don't want to be real with you.' 'I don't want my children associating with you.' And whispering to their children, 'Don't talk to her, because she is with the them's.' And trying to explain that system, you know. So, my conversations with families involved in ICWA now, it's like — (sigh) I often will joke and tease, 'They can't afford to take your kids.' 'They don't want to take your kids.' You know, having to unravel some of that. You know, they can't just snag your children in the middle of the night anymore. So, trying to share that information, but even now, I said, some of our young moms, in their mid 20s, they still have that understanding, you

know. They will run in the middle of the night, thinking that, 'I'm gonna lose my kids, and there's nothing I can do to get them back.' As much as I appreciate what Luke is doing right now, it's like, you have got some, you're in a hard position. Um.

GK: And Luke is?

SD: Uh, Luke Joseph. He is our, interim director? 'Cause Tanya, again had a win, kind of a win for us. We just got awarded a youth grant, uh, where it's going to be more, opposed to table games and going out to the movies, it's supposed to be more, uh, cultural behavioral-based, uh, youth program. And she is now going to be our youth director. And, Luke Joseph, who was working underneath her, he's kind of filling the gap right now. They haven't officially —

GK: As the Child Director? Of Child Services?

SD: Yes. So, you know, I give him kudos for him to stand there. Because if you don't have the right person there, the State can and will walk all over us. It's happened in the past, obviously, clearly, um, some ignorant neglect from State. And I say ignorant, especially with the lack of knowledge, you know.

GK: Um, could I ask you a question?

SD: Mm hmm.

GK: What ... piggybacking on, just on that statement, you know, I have this sense that the State is seizing the opportunity to fill in the gaps, so, communities, we don't have our own police services yet, we don't have our Tribal courts, so they fill in those gaps by assuming the jurisdiction.

SD: Yes.

GK: And what ICWA does, is it removes their jurisdiction from the community, theoretically.

SD: Right.

GK: If we look at, if we look at, uh, the nuance of the Act, right? Uh, there are certain steps before the State can assume jurisdiction that have to be met, and they're usually not met. The State will just assume a jurisdiction that they haven't been given or acknowledged. Would that be fair? **[00:41:57.08]**

SD: Yes. I think it would be. Um. 'Cause something else I'll share with families is, *(sighs)* sometimes it makes me nervous to say this. But, I say, 'You don't have to engage with the Department of Human Services. Just because they're showing up at your doorstep, does not mean they get to come in and total, have control over your life. I said, 'Reach out to the ICWA department, or another community program here that you support. You don't have to do these challenges by yourself.' And because they'll, they could be on a roll, and they're so standard with their paperwork, 'Well, this is what we're going to see here, here and here.' And you

know ‘We’ll keep the case open for 30 days, so sign it, and we’ll leave you alone.’ So they, unbeknownst to them, could very well be signing, um —

GK: Permission.

SD: — Whatever rights they did have, gone. Um. Mmmm. So yeah, giving them information; they gotta have the information. Because that’s what happens, y’know, just a standard thing that parents will agree to a drug screening test. That might not even have been part of their problem! But all of a sudden, what if?

GK: Mm, hmm.

SD: They’ll just, not slip in there, but. Um.

GK: Well, that’s a useful analogy. They’ll just slip it in there.

SD: But.

GK: It’s, it’s, it’s almost like, legal by deceit.

SD: Yes! No, I, because I think their opinion is, or was, I ha- — I don’t think they’re as vocal with it now. We all just don’t know any better.

GK: Yeah.

SD: How could we understand how to take care of children? You know, they’ll see kids running around all over the place. ‘Oh my God, they’re unattended!’ ‘No, they’re not!’

GK: Absolutely not.

SD: My sister’s right over there, keeping an eye out, and my (*inaudible*) across the street, who my children will call Auntie! So many kids around here call me Aunt Sarah. My kids, are they? It’s informal relationship that we have.

GK: And that’s custom.

SD: Yes.

GK: That’s community dynamics. We’re like, even if we’re not related to each other —

SD: Yes!

GK: — we're related to each other.

SD: Mm hmm.

GK: It's like, our community is a family. And historically, that's how we worked together. We don't even have to be related by blood.

SD: No. And I love that piece about us, I really do.

GK: Yeah.

SD: *(laughs)* Little side story. We were, um, as I mentioned, part of a local drum group and we'll get invited to places sometimes. The weirdest place I think we've gone to is probably the Caribou weather station. Not really connecting the dots there! We've drummed school tours that will come here to the office. Presque Isle, SAD 1, will not let any culture into that school system. That's, uh, I know! And there have been times, I remember one year, Rosella brought us down to see one of our little fellers who was in residential care. And she shared with us some time after — And I think it also came from some of the workers that were there, that this young feller, who was in the system, was just kind of ho-humming, with the crowd. And, when we showed up, again, I knew who the little feller was, but Tanya has been removed; we were kind of strangers to him. And Rosella and the other workers said what a difference they seen in that boy, that day.

GK: Yeah.

SD: Standing up taller, prouder. 'They're here for me!'

GK: Mm, hmm.

SD: So you know, that was kind of cool. See, I shouldn't have gone off on a side tangent. Now I've lost myself again. Um. Hmmm.

GK: Well, first of all, take whatever time you need. *(laughs)*

SD: *(laughs)* Right? Well, [00:46:31.06] It was just, now, see! I totally lost my train of thought 'cause I got caught up in that moment, that emotion again. It's that, um.

GK: But that really, that really articulates the point about community relations, you know.

SD: Yes.

GK: It's that simple example. It's not so simple, it's really deep. It's very deep.

SD: It is, you know. That's, I'm a firm believer, you know, energy isn't. *(sighs)* It's real. You know, and it feels good to revisit that, I guess, how proud that little feller was.

GK: I mean, that's, in a sense, what this is about, what the, the, the, the emphasis about

community dynamics is what it's about. So, you can have somebody who's been removed for X amount of time —

SD: Yeah.

GK: — that's in a different space, different locale and immediately reconnects. It's almost like it's in our DNA.

SD: Yes. No, 'cause it'll just make sense. All that feels right, that fits, that's, aw. *(sigh)*

GK: You know, not to put any words in your, uh, Statement, but it seems to me at this point, um, there's an absence of protocol, with the State DHS services and the community. Would you say that that's fair?

SD: Yes.

GK: So, they come in, they get people, they go directly to homes, or wherever they think. They don't check in with the community. They have this sense of jurisdiction.

SD: *(sighs)* Yes. And something that's happening recently is, if DHS receives a referral, or a call, it's shuffled off to said office. And if it's not high enough on their caseworkers' scale, they'll just refer them out to Families United. And, if I understood the complaint correctly from Luke, we're not getting notice on that. They're not showing up with — They're giving the pamphlet about, 'Hey, I'm Families United and this is what I can do to make your life fabulous!' But they're not showing, they're not giving them their rights. You know, 'You don't have to engage my services. You don't have to open up the door.' I want to have those conversations with families. You don't have to understand your behavior if you don't correct it. You know, if you're hoorah-ing all night, leaving your child unsafe, that's an issue, so how can we work on that?

GK: Yeah.

SD: But the State doesn't let them know that. They don't let them know that I'll have to sit in the dooryard until an ICWA worker arrives. And, if they really want to get technical with us — 'Cause it's almost been threatened already, not in, like I said, they're being clever as far as how they're sharing information, is that ICWA only applies when threat of removal is going to happen. So, they don't have to tell us that they're just going and doing a review or something. So, there's a lot of the dots that are not being connected. So when we show up to a case, they might have already had months of caseworkers come through their home. You know, and if we would have been brought in at the beginning, we could have saved a lot of people a lot of

time and aggravation. You know, we understand our families better than they ever will.

GK: Absolutely!

SD: We know what their strengths are. We know what they're going to bullshit us and be honest with us. Uh, and I think it's more honest work when we're dealing with their own family. Um. That's what it boils down to. We are a family, regardless if you like so and so or not, they're ours to take care of.

GK: Right. You know, and that seems to be, um, globally — indigenous peoples globally — it's something like five hundred million indigenous peoples throughout the world. And what you're describing, is how it operates everywhere else. You know?

SD: That's actually — God, that's a lot of people.

GK: And, and, I think it was Gandhi that said, um, to the British, when they were occupying India, that a common human precept is that, um, 'Any culture would prefer their own bad government to the good government of a foreign nation.' [00:51:52.11]

SD: That is ... Yeah! That's it.

GK: And so, even, even if you don't have, you know, whatever social structures that exist or not exist, it does not validate State intrusions into the community. [00:52:12.24]

SD: Right.

GK: So, we might have a situation where, um, um, you know, have a Tribal court, for instance. And what ICWA is saying is, and it's clearly that, and this is kind of another question, maybe it's a segue to this question but, a Tribal court doesn't have to resemble a court system out there. It could be a community of elders. It could be a community of well-respected, everybody has, holds high esteem in certain people. And you can have this group of people come and sit in a, in a talking circle. That could be a court. That's a community dynamic. This is how we take care of our own affairs.

SD: That would be phenomenal.

GK: The lack of a structure is not an invitation of the State to come in and assume a jurisdiction they don't have. They haven't been given by the community.

SD: And I think that some of the stress-, not stressors for me, but the stuff that kind of makes me feel sad on the inside, is. We were — we — When my grandmother and her generation came over here, we were all scattered and started losing that connection. We pulled together as a unit, because we wanted our rights under the Federal government. So, our families got together. We started getting that community awareness.

(sighs) It's not just as simple as this, but the almighty dollar came in. So now, we're fighting over the scraps that are coming off the man's table. We've got to start rebuilding those



connections. Whether it's — for anything that we do. 'Cause in two generation from now, there are going to be unconnected Tribal members pushing a non-Micmac agenda. We've got to tighten those connections. 'Cause, I think if we tighten those connections, our mom that's struggling with her baby is not going to be isolated anymore. She's going to know that she can trust the mother or the grandmother down the street, her BFF from childhood. She'll know that she's got that support out there to take care of her. Um. I don't know what we do first, but I think that's a piece of it, um, is keeping those connections. If we're losing kids to the system at a higher rate than we were ten years ago, um, we've got to find a way to heal all this. Put all the pieces back together before we completely lose it.

My partner in crime, Julie, and I, um, we're trying to pull something together. We're not sure how it's going to work out, but we're going to try to hold a — for lack of a better word — a grandmothers' gathering. We're going to bring in, we've asked some key old ladies to come in. And this is not, we do not want a political agenda. We just want to share the understanding of what life was like before. Where our strengths were, where we are sitting right now. And can we pull ourselves together so they we're stronger in the days that are ahead? I'm at the point now, where I'm looking at who is going to be taking care of me. And it's a little scary. I know we're an off-reserve Tribe, and it's so easy for us to get lost, or slipped into that mainstream where (*sigh*) I say it's easier because if you can, a lot of our kids, if they can, when they're ragging on the Indians in the room, they can be quiet and not be picked out by that.

GK: 'Cause that's a really hard place for young people to be in. *[00:57:16.18]*

SD: Um, hmm. So we've got to — I know I've said this over and over again, but to build those connections. And more so with the kids that are getting lost into the system. And going back to my young fella that passed away, and his brother — They were even held apart through their services and parental rights terminated, and not for this one. When he asked me 'I know where I'm going when I die. Where is my brother going to be?' And that is a huge neglect on keeping those ties with their community. Our community. It shouldn't be about money, 'cause I can only cry to our Chief and Council, 'You need to put more support in this program!'

Um, I know the State of Maine gets money on our behalf to service our programs for us, but they are, somebody is dropping the ball somewhere. Because, if they were really pushing through and keeping that connection, he would not have asked me that. He wouldn't see there is a difference between the Christian god and the creator. Who are these people? They are one in the same person.

GK: *[00:58:43.19]* The State is receiving monies from the Federal government on your behalf. Did I get that right?

SD: Yes. I wish I could have a better way of understanding it. I used to work in the LIHEAP

program. That I get. Maine gets X amount of money to service all of the field population. The Tribes, we get our little chunk of that funding, but if I understood it in the Child Welfare system, I don't remember us getting that little chunk to operate our own Indian Child Welfare Department.

GK: It is by way of State DHHS? Under the guise of providing services.

SD: Yes, and we had another little family person come through where, I think Luke and the peeps were going out to visit said person and, 'Oh! No! He's been moved to a residential unit because of X crisis that happened.' We should have been there, especially if he's gonna go through a peak moment, let us be there during that peak moment. Um. We shouldn't be the afterthought. That's what I said, we should be on that same signature line. You know? If they want to move said kid to said place, yes, a caseworker has to sign it, and a Tribe has to sign it. I know some of my wants and needs are policy change, like that signature line. If you take our kids, have your workers prepared to work on the weekends. Make sure they're attending our events. Um. Hmm.

GK: *[01:00:40.10]* This is what's troubling for me. I mean, the community and all the programs are under enormous challenges. I think the, if I can project a kind of a scenario, whether it is real or not, but this is the scenario I'm projecting. Uh, the community here, uh, Presque Isle community, looks at the Aroostook Band as an ethnic segment of the Presque Isle community. Doesn't see, and I'm offering this as the behavior, rather than the theory, that here's the Aroostook Band Micmac people.

SD: Right.

GK: The treatment and the behavior are coming from Presque Isle municipality, right? So, you're sort of an ethnic neighborhood, kind of thing, right? If that's remotely has any kind of merit to it, then you have the State receiving Federal dollars on behalf of the community to service the Child Welfare needs of the community. Right? And, I would suggest that that's in violation of ICWA. Because, the State isn't employing ICWA, the monies are going to fuel the State's Child Welfare practices against community members. Is that a reasonable scenario?

SD: I see that. Within DHS, you have your assessment worker, you'll have — Okay, there is a problem, let's give it to the caseworker. The caseworker has a bigger dude behind them, giving them, 'It's okay to say this or that.' And then, there's another department that's going to handle the finances, the paperwork requests. We have one body. I think that would be true for all the Tribes here. One, two, if we're lucky, that are supposed to be assuming all of those responsibilities? It's not fair.

GK: So, all of these decision makings are happening outside of the community? There is absolutely no partnering with the community?

SD: No.

GK: The community has no ultimate say over what happens in the community? With their children?



SD: *[01:03:08.27]* No, I don't ... Before I say no, I just want to think about that.

GK: And again, I don't want to put words in your mouth.

SD: No. You're right, though. If they have the individual person going through the system, they'll ask, 'Who can we call for your support?' Or if they've removed the child, they look at the grandparents or the sister, but it gets hard for them to go beyond that. Has the Tribe itself said, 'This is what we want?' On a large scale? I don't think that that has happened. And I'm not sure if we understood we had the right to say that.

GK: That's the challenge. Right? I would submit to you that the State understands the presence of ICWA. Maybe they don't appreciate it. Maybe they don't understand it fully. Absolutely no training under ICWA, from what we're hearing from the testimony of DHS officials. Right? So, in your opinion, the State Indian Child Welfare practices is really State practices that they assume over any child. We heard this previously, that the State's concern is for permanency, of all the children. Whether they are Native or not, this is what we're hearing. Right?

SD: Yes.

GK: So, there's an application in violation of the ICWA mandate, right? And from what I can understand, the State is assuming the jurisdiction and using their policies, what they know best, because they have the jurisdiction and they have the control and they have the police power to back it up. Right? So.

SD: Yes! That is exactly how it's happening. They don't see — It's that white privilege thing that plays in to it. 'Well, why are you so different?' We are. We can't explain it; you're not going to get it. Just accept the fact that, you know, we are different.

GK: I'm wondering, um, — I think the initial — First of all, let me just back up and offer this idea, this thought. Part of the challenge of the Aroostook Band, is that, um, we're not confident enough to state this is the format that we're using. It's not an asking, or a request of the State. It's a demand that the State has to uphold our jurisdiction, which clearly they're not. I think the reason why the Band has a hard way of pressing that, is that we don't have confidence in enough that we're right. We feel it. But, we don't feel we're right.

SD: I would feel very comfortable, at least, owning that to myself. You know, maybe had I gone through the law school, I would understand those laws and stuff, but we need to get to the point where we gotta understand why we're demanding our rights. That way, we can back up our demands. *[01:07:24.29]*

GK: So, um, maybe as, and again, you know, not to, when you call in the grandmothers, when

you have this gathering, not to politicize that gathering, but that's what the community needs. More of that kind of gathering together. Maybe we need an in-depth training on ICWA. And, I'm suggesting, part of my dilemma is that we're working with the Federal law to begin with. And ICWA is coming as a result of a much bigger scenario, kind of thing. But what seems to be, um, needed here, one, is understanding our own inherent sovereignty and the depths of what that means, the ramifications of that sovereignty. Because, believe it or not, the State understands that sovereignty. They don't like it; they're not going to say anything to you about that you're a sovereign Nation, kind of thing. People are not looking at treaties as the already previously established protocol. So, maybe, some time in the future, the community might consider having a really in-depth training about ICWA, about treaties, about sovereignty, about self determination, all that. Those are the sort of the in-house missing pieces.

SD: Yes!

GK: *[01:09:11.19]* Your program, your love for the community, your description of the community dynamics, you know, our customary way of how we treat one another, kind of thing. I think you would find that kind of vocabulary in this kind of a more in-depth training. You would find the words, kind of thing.

SD: Yes. That would be awesome. You've probably already come across the name Isabelle Knockwood?

GK: Oh, yeah.

SD: We tried to get her here. I've had the pleasure of meeting her last year. Or, just this past Mawiami. My grandmother knew her. Everybody knew her. I knew who she was; I had a chance to read her book. So, getting the chance to meet this woman was fabulous. I, kind of, *(sigh)* what's the word? I kind of romanticized about her, listening to the other people talk about her. Reading her book, my God! Where she's been. What she's heard and witnessed. What a phenomenal lady. This lady pulls no punches. She is a very serious woman. Um. I don't know if she started this idea, but she was most certainly part of the heart of this grandmothers' gathering. To have that understanding, again, of where we were. *(sigh)* Maybe that's how it should be reworded. This is how we live, this is how our disconnection started, and this is what our disconnection is going to lead us if we don't ...

GK: ... find a way.

SD: Right. 'Cause when we told her we have a day, um, and she was, like I said, she pulls no punches: 'I think that's great.' She goes, 'For what, everything I have to offer, we're not talking a few hours — We need some time to do this.'

And it's like, I've got to get a hold of — I call them the REACH people — Dena and Krista. My God! Them ladies are — Our Tribal Council gave them a very nice acknowledgement. It was, I know both of these ladies since they were kids. Krista would be in the room; you would not know it. *(very softly)* Very quiet. Little Dena, she came in the room and we all knew it. She was very loud. She probably wouldn't appreciate the word clumsy, but when she came into the room, she made a moment. So you've got one girl that's over here, one you don't hear a boo



from! And to see them now. I even had to bring it up when Council acknowledged their work — that quietness of Krista, the craziness of Dena — And they gave them that acknowledgement. It's not often that I can say cool things about Council, 'cause sometimes they're kind of frustrating. *(laughs)* But, to have them take that moment, they were doing a presentation, just a, 'Hey, we're in the community, this is what we're doing.' And short from a standing ovation, the girls got that acknowledgement. And I reiterated that to them, it's like,

'You guys do give each other a very nice balance, and I'm going to be anxious to see where all of this lands when you guys are done.' I said, 'It's going to be something to look forward to.'

(knock on door; brief interruption)

SD: When I first started working for the Tribe it was in '93, part-time mail room clerk. So, over the course of the years, I've been able to advance. Now I'm permanent full-time and that is, just you know, we are so worried about this little stuff. What our government has, whether it be out LIHEAP, our emergency assistance or *(inaudible)* winter hats. If we can — It is with my hopes, um, from what I've seen and experienced, is if we can start building those connections again, we can get to the point where our discussions are gonna be, 'What are our legal rights with ICWA?' Not, 'How much of, of the tank fund am I gonna to get?' This is what we want when we go to our voting place. This is who we want to represent us. If we're not taking care of these little guys behind us, I think our future is going to be very uncertain. Loss of identity. I really think the residential schools did a number on us. When I would do little speeches I'd say, 'Can you fathom an entire generation, in a blink of an eye, was ripped out of their community?' You know, how do you learn to become a mom? Well, you're with your mom.

GK: Yep, and with her mom, and with her mom —

SD: And nana is right behind her. But, you've taken this whole generation of people, taken those rights away from them, was horrific to them while they were there. And then, when they aged out of the system, if you will, poof! Go! Do! They lost their language, there was — Oh, gosh, I can't remember — Bernard Jerome had sent out an email, the Holocaust of Canada. And through that reading, I was able to understand how censored *Out of the Depths* was. And one of the quotes that was on there — it's one of my favorite quotes — and it says, you know, 'They taught us to hate each other, molest one another, and that's ...' Sorry! I'm going to have to be a nerd, just for a second ... *(stands up, walks, retrieves paper)*

GK: I think it might be time to get back to your questions ...

SD: This was testimony of Harriet Nahanee — I wouldn't even know how to pronounce her last name, but she says, 'They were always pitting us against each other. Getting us to fight and molest one another. It was all designed to split us up and brainwash us, that we would forget

that we were the keepers of the land. The Creator gave our people the job of protecting the land, the fish, and the forest. And that was our purpose for being alive. But, the whiteys wanted it all, and the residential school was the way that they got it. And it worked. We have forgotten our sacred task, and now the whiteys have most of the land and have taken the fish and trees. And most of us are in poverty, addictions and family violence. It all started in those schools, where we were brainwashed to hate our own culture and to hate ourselves so that we would lose everything. That is why I say the genocide is still going on.' [01:18:16.06]

SD: That was huge for me! I've, every time I'm moved to a different office ... *(sound of paper)* I did my own border, but that speaks a lot to me.

GK: I'm wondering if, um, you would be willing to make a photocopy of that and offer that to, for our work.

SD: Absolutely. I mean, there were some pretty horrible things that we read in there, and you know, I think calling it the Holocaust of Canada was a good title because, when you say 'Holocaust,' we immediately think of the Jew community and the horrible things that they went through. Reading that document while listening to the stories of my family — But it's true! *(sound of photocopying)*

GK: You know, you might, a little bit of trivia?

SD: Yes!

GK: [01:19:34.21] Hitler, when he was imprisoned at the time between World War I and World War II, when he came to power. He was imprisoned, I think in part because of his anarchy and his perspectives. So, he was in prison. He wrote a book called *Mein Kampf*. *Mein Kampf* translated is My Struggles. He wrote a book. And, in that book, he cites US Indian policy is where he got the concept of concentration camps in the Holocaust.

SD: No! Oh. That just gave me chills.

GK: And US Indian policy has influenced the treatment in South Africa, against the blacks. The apartheid system. They are responsible for that. [01:20:30.26]

SD: That's awful. I'm sure, like you say, we're still doing it today. Enforcing our elitist, our religious rights and beliefs to a community that's not ours. Who said we had that right to do that? Another little bitch that I had: um, Native American Museum in Washington, DC. I was, finally! We get our name out there, and I was so excited. I had, one of our trainings brought us right to DC, so, after shop was done, I immediately went to our Museum. Because, now we are sitting on the left hand of Congress, I think, was one of the big to do's about it. I was so disappointed when I went into that building, and they showcase a lot of Indian people, but gave no story, no, nothing! I understand that the Aroostook Band is a small Tribe, but I found our name in little small print.

GK: Well, at least you're there! *(laughs)*



SD: Yes! I'm in! *(laughs)* And I think I remember, over a little speaker, I could hear our music coming through. So, I took my five minutes of fame and was excited about that piece, but they, all the Tribes from Alaska to South America, um. This is so and so. No history on them. This is so and so. I left that place angry, hostile. Because, to me, that says the government is still not going to acknowledge. I don't want to be one of those people that jumps on the soapbox and say that well, 'You stole our land from us.' But, I think to some level, that does need to happen. **[01:22:50.12]** On a larger scale, yes, the US government is responsible for this.

GK: And they're still responsible until such time as they reconcile with the people. And they'll continue to be responsible because they're maintaining the occupation, if you will.

SD: Yes! So again, when I read that thing on the Holocaust, 'cause there were some horrible stories in there of what was said. And I can only but fathom what didn't get said. Even as a young girl, I remember my mom and nana telling stories about that place and, I just — How could these young women, who were supposed to be in a Christian school, why are they getting pregnant? I remember that being a huge question in my mind. How could the priests and nuns do that? They're not supposed to do that! Um.

And then they burnt that building down, the Shubenacadie school down. It had been closed for years, but I remember the stories that my elders would have shared. Um. Haunted, you could hear screams, cries. I can't remember if it was that school, but I just have this, envision as a kid, um, babies' bones. Little girls' bones. I know the shoulda, coulda, woulda; we can't go back and fix it. But you need to at least say you're sorry. I know that simplifies what I'm asking, but that would be the gist of what the, to have that acknowledgement, 'cause, you know, I'm not crazy. I'm feeling these things, and they were real and they happened to me and when you ask me, 'Why is your shelter so different from somebody else's? We've already got a shelter done, why do you need one?' Because I do. It is that important that we have our own services in place.

GK: Right. For the simple reality that you're a people. Nobody out there in municipal Presque Isle has treaties with the United States and Canada. We do.

SD: And gosh, I know, I forget that too quickly, too simply. I'm not just here with another agency, another program. When they come to my table, they're coming to the table of the Federal government. We're not a State agency getting hostile all of a sudden. *(laughs)* But again, I think it is just getting that information out there about what our inherent rights are. **[01:26:06.14]** And being able to ... and demand isn't the right word, too ... but, this is our rights and we're not going to take anything less. It would be lovely to get to a place where, as opposed to somebody calling the State on a Child Welfare issue, they call our Child Welfare Department. We can go in and say, 'There are some concerns, how do we keep it to ourselves?' And if we can reconnect our community and our families, I think it's gonna be a

lot easier for someone to ask for help before it gets to the point where they want to remove your kids. We need to sit and all hold hands because we are one family. I really, really believe that. There's going to be community members I might not personally appreciate, but that makes them just as valued.

GK: And I would say that *[01:27:31.23]* the end objective is not that we all agree, the end objective is that we all are.

SD: Yes! That is huge. *(sighs)* I know we'll never sit down and have dinner together, but that's my family nonetheless.

GK: I think that the way of earth is that it allows each of us the time to grow, each of us, grow. So, you and I might be at a certain place, and others may not quite be there yet, but given the time, and given the space where they can grow, that somewhere down the line, they might find their way to where we're at. And that's the wonderful thing about community.

SD: Yeah. That's actually very nice to think about.

GK: I think Rachel has some questions that sort of absconded. *(laughs)*

SD: I know and I'm kind of, oh, yes! Hi! Did you have another question? *(laughs)*

RG: I have many questions. Um, I'm wondering how you're doing?

SD: Very good. Very good. *[01:29:09.23]* Um, I gotta try not to get so easily distracted on little tangents.

RG: No, all the information that you've shared has been incredibly important.

SD: And this is awesome. I don't know how many times it's been handed around, but this is going to go back with you. Um, Again, it's those little differences, you know? Hmm. It's good. I'm good.

RG: Would you like me to go through the technical questions? And by technical I mean they are very policy oriented. So, I'm hoping that we can, um, I feel like I have a good understanding of the general part, and so I want to have a quicker understanding — Not that it was long! But some of these are pretty, they're quicker to answer because they are very specific! And if you don't have experience with any of them, just let me know. And we'll move on.

Um, so, there's a number of different areas, as I'm sure you know, to ICWA and I'm going to ask you about your experiences and the challenges you've found in working with the State in these areas.

SD: Okay.

RG: Does that make sense? So the first one is in initial identification of a child as being Native



American and specifically from the Micmac community. Any challenges that you've found in working with the State in that area? Or general experiences, they could be positive.

SD: *[01:30:46.02]* I want to have some vague memories of — and it might have just been my place in the ICWA field — I remember when I first started being acting director, being called into a meeting and I had the impression that I — the Tribe was the afterthought, because either one wasn't identified or closely looked at. When they identified that this was a Tribal member, I think they were quick to come in. When the workers up here in our Caribou office, when they're getting ready to work with a family — if it's someone they've already kind of have a suspicion that yes, this might be, they will go ahead and call. Um. 'Is this child yours?' So, in those moments it's been good.

But then, when we lost that little feller for a year — The little fellow that was adopted out. Tragedy had fell on his adopted family, and the reasons why the adoptive mother and family gave him up. But he was put back into the system for a year. So yes, they're good sometimes, but then there are some times we've fallen through the cracks. But, I'm going to say, from my short experience, they were very good at calling me that they were going to do an assessment on so and so. Especially if they wanted in to the doors. Because there were some families — But again, it's pitting us against each other. If we don't walk that line carefully, 'Well, I know they're not going to let me in unless I have Sarah there.' So, Sarah needs to be careful not to completely agree with the man. *[01:33:06.19]* But find that middle ground to work with the families and what's going to best serve the child's needs. So, back to the question. I do believe that they were very good at getting hold of me. Luke might have a different opinion now, but! *(laughs)*

RG: And how about with — And I'm going to ask you to speak a little bit to this one because it is different with the fact that you don't have your own Tribal court — So, in determining jurisdiction or residence of Native kids, how is that worked with the Tribe and the State in this case?

SD: *[01:33:52.10]* Um. Gosh. I can't speak to the years before 1998, 'cause I think that was close to the time where they did that training where they were talking about the ICWA law requirements and the role of DHS.

RG: Is that the one you mentioned?

SD: Yes. I think we were at the North Eastland Hotel, and I bet you Denise would remember said event. But, our jurisdiction — Again, to cry, 'Poor us!' We have the entire United States. I remember getting notices from Oklahoma and California and some places where I'm like, 'I am not going to make that meeting!' But they would do that, that notice: 'Hey, said child is potentially, they're claiming Indian blood, so is this a welfare case?' Um.

What state? There was one state, I don't think they even have Tribes in the state; maybe that's why it was so foreign to them, but, 'What do you mean, you guys have rights? We've stumbled across, and ...'

Ooh! A success story. And Tanya may be better able to talk about this than I would. But we had a Native girl being lost into the system. The grandfather has contacted us, saying that, 'My rights are not being —' We were able to get in, we had the Tribe's ICWA attorney be part of that. And, happy news was, yes, parental rights were terminated but she went with her, the Tribal family adopted her. I think it was her grandfather that got this little girl. So, I mean, to me, I view that as a success. The State had come in, was going on their own agenda, the Tribe was notified, and we were able to keep that family connection together.

We had, even, I know out-of-state and down state, Portland — We had one of our community members move down there with some kids that were put into the system. And we got word that they were not doing well there. So Tanya and I took off, late in the afternoon. We met up with them guys down in, hmmm, I almost want to say Waterville, um, to bring our babies home. And that little girl got car sick! (*laughs*) You know, it's like two or three o'clock in the morning, and we're driving home! The little boy, he was fine — He had his popsicle, he was doing good, and his chips. The little girl, she was not having the car ride. So we're pulling over. Tanya, bless her heart, was trying to clean her up because she had puked all over herself, and what I refer to as the scenic route, so it took us a little longer to get to where we needed to be. But, the caseworkers for this fun story, um, they were from the Portland area and they were very easy to work with, I guess. So, I said, prior 1998 I'm not sure, but through that training and the blood sweat and tears of the ICWA directors before me, I think helped make it easier for me to engage in the State. Houlton was a little weird.

RG: Can you tell me more about that?

SD: [01:38:24.12] Um. When I first started working with them ladies, it was almost like I was working with another state. I'm like, wait, we only live 50 miles apart but the difference between the Caribou office and the Houlton office was easy to pick up on that. Again, I'm just kind of getting aware of my rights and my roles in this particular case. A mom had come to the system. She'd already lost two boys to family relatives through the State removal and they had two more that they had just picked up. And mom, again, was having a hard time, and once I realized that: 'Hey! We do have a voice here. We can say where they go, we can approve our homes and granted DHS, you might not like it, but this home is okay for us and our standards.' So that was happening.

Again, it was the work that the ladies did before us that made it easier. Um. Boy! So, when we weren't going to agree with the Houlton office — 'You know, I think we've gotta give mom ...,' — Terminating parental rights is not okay. We need to work through this and work with her, give her the benefit of the doubt or whatever. Holy. That lady come out of the courtroom, pissed! I was leaning up against, in Presque Isle, one of the columns, so she didn't quite see me. And she went to the foster family and, 'I am so sorry this has turned in to such a circus.' So, I stepped out from the column, 'I will bring the popcorn next time y'all want to go around!' She looked at me and didn't say ... , 'Oh, that is not what I meant!' Well, no, that's what I heard. So, I'm glad I didn't have to interact with her too, too much. And, I don't even



know if it is her fault entirely. Again, that white privilege piece comes in. It's almost like we have to defend what they're doing, or explain what they are doing. 'We're just here for the betterment of the children.' Well, so are we. We have a better understanding of their needs. 'We can give them a roof over their heads and food and clean clothes.' What is the difference? And that's where it becomes difficult for me to articulate. Um. It's like, 'Why do you need your own program? We've got it covered.' No. You don't have it covered. I think that's kind of their position. It's like, 'We don't need the Tribe's involvement. We had it covered.' But we made sure, we, our presence was known.

(sighs) Damnit! These kids are still having a hard time. They're still lost into the system, um, but to this point, we are not going to agree to termination of parental rights. If y'all want to cease reunification, because parents are clearly not in a good way, I can understand that, but we will not terminate parental rights. And I, 'Tee-hee, maybe you won't be so quick to take our kids next time. Because these are the demands that I'm going to put on you guys if you take one of our kids.' So.

Again, there was a difference between the Presque Isle and the Houlton office. Caribou, we get to work with more so, a lot of our population is, especially since we've got half of the housing complex, so we have a large portion of our population up here. Of course, I don't know how much has changed. Like I said, I've been out of it for a few years, and now I'm just part of the Child and Family team. I just hear little bits and pieces of what their relationship is like now. I don't know if you have, or if you plan on talking to our current ICWA department. And that's something else that we've been pushing on him. Well, not pushing on him, but understanding where we need to go is one. It is asking for change of policy and position. You know, we can never say never. I understand that, but we're not going to terminate parental rights. And when you take our children into your legal custody, um, you need to make sure that they're attending our events, getting our newsletters, or whatever we want to put out there: our silly t-shirts, our pins, whatever! You need to make sure that Tribal connection is tended to. You're getting paid for it. You're receiving money for it. So it's gonna to be your responsibility, and we just get to make sure that you're doing it.

SD: So, we've asked Luke to — I don't know if there's still an ICWA Coalition. And this is where you pull into those people. We also, I think, would not be a bad idea if you tapped into USET. 'Cause this isn't more than just the lonely worker table. This has got to be a government to government discussion. 'Cause us lonely caseworkers can talk all day long but, when I die and fall off the face of the earth, or I've switched positions and gone to my dream job at Tim Hortons! I want whoever is going to sit here not to have to fight those battles again, I guess. And the turnaround with the State workers is huge anyway. I guess maybe it pushes more importance of what you're doing because our face is turned so much — It needs to be written down. And policy change, that's what ...

GK: And that is one of the surprising things for me, is the huge turnover rate, even in DHS. And they don't seem to follow through or there doesn't seem to be a consistency, so what one worker has established in the community doesn't get transferred to the next one coming in. Then, they've got to start over or just leave it hanging.

SD: You're right. We've had a few workers *[01:45:52.09]* that today, they would still be like, 'Come sit at my dinner table. We're gonna have a great time.' But when they change positions or get moved in to the adoption unit and not the whatever unit, we get stuck with a new caseworker. A new attitude. I'm finding the younger ones aren't as difficult to work with. Granted, there's one caseworker and if you get her, DHS has given up. That's no discredit to her, but she seems to get the cases that the children have either aged out of the system, or they're too difficult to work with. So we'll just give those cases to her. And then there are a few who come through and, 'That's what you get? Aw, shit.' Because of their attitudes about what is appropriate child care comes into play.

GK: It's called biases.

SD: Yes! Yes. We had, my two favorite little fellers, I keep talking about — They were taken in, it was either three and four or four and five. I mean, these were, if we were in kindergarten and if not, we were definitely in Head Start. And this woman was just so appalled by their behavior. Like if they wanted something in the cupboards, them little fellers, they ran for it! They could get their bottom up on the countertop so they could reach the cupboards! To her, that was totally unacceptable behavior. And I'm like, 'That kid knows what he's doing! He knows how to get his needs met!' Granted, that speaks about other things, you know. But she couldn't handle his behavior. So what happens? Poof! Off to a new home. Poof! Off to a new home. Poof. Oh look, 'Let's put one in the residential unit,' where he was pretty much until he aged out. Um. That was the one that just passed away. And his brother, who was terminated, adopted out, was kicked back to the system. Now I think he is bouncing between Christian homes and the crisis units. All because somebody's parenting standards were different. *[01:48:30.05]* Hmm. What was your question? *(laughs)*

RG: What are your experiences in, or challenges you found, in working with the State in child custody hearings?

SD: Intimidation is huge. Wow. I can picture a family that has no connections, especially non-Natives, because non-Natives — At least with Tribal children, someone will show up at table to sit with you. But even as an ICWA worker, here you are with a table filled with the DHS spectrum. One little ICWA worker. If you don't know your footing in that room, forget it. The judges and the lawyers ... It was kind of neat watching lawyers between their court breaks or what have you. It's like, they're up on the opposing table, but after they're waiting for the judge or break, they're all kicking back, taking it easy. Um. I've been able to see some of them, 'It's a standard thing. We're just going to do it this way.' Not even talking with said peeps about, 'This is what's best for your case,' or 'What do you want for your case?' Ohhh. *(pause)*

They've got a happy system, and when we want to change that, that's when the ripples come in the water. They're not overly gonna be ignorant to me; they might just be less engaged with me. There are a few judges in our area that seem to have the understanding of the Tribe and our



rights, so that's actually been kind of cool. Again, I'm just referencing our Presque Isle and Caribou courts. But, I remember Luke sharing one story not too long ago, about this is what's going to happen. The judge says, 'Well, where is the Tribe's position? Ummm, come back to me when you have the Tribe's two cents.' So, that was actually nice. Um. That he understood that. I wish I knew which one it was, because I would brag about his name. But, I don't know.

RG: How about in family team meetings? Challenges you've experienced? Strengths that you've seen?

SD: Challenges and irritations would be the lack of knowledge or information that they give. They seem to be a little bit *[01:51:35.27]* better, again, about saying, 'You do not have to do my services.' But, you know, is it that deer in headlights? 'Oh my God. DHS called me. They want to threaten to take my kids. They're going to send somebody.' And these are strangers that are coming into the home. Whether it be Families United or some other said agency, these aren't consistent people? And even with you coming in and with your paperwork. Hey, this is normally what happens. These are your rights, your confidentiality. What do we do? We just flip to the back and sign. They're not taking time, and I think they take advantage of that. Consciously or subconsciously. You know, 'If I can hurry up and get this in there — I can get these people to agree, um, with said services, programs, and when they don't show up for said groups ...' And, you know, is a group setting going to work with our people? Hmm. Probably not what they want. 'We'll tell them it was a no-show, and get them in more trouble with the department. So that's been kind of a buggy piece. When they do the safety plan, they're talking, as they're doing the safety plan, 'Okay, this is what we've agreed to and talked to. Sign here, and then I can go and report to my supervisor that it's okay to leave the baby with you.' 'My God, yes, I'm going to sign that!' And if our families are not paying attention, if our ICWA worker is not being mindful or invited to said meeting ...

SD: We've got a young girl right now. I said, 'What did your safety plan say?' (*whispers*) 'I don't know. I don't know what it said.' Well, let's call up. This caseworker happens to have the same name as me, but let's call her up and get a copy of your safety plan. And like I said, 'You're going to be — A good parent stays away from drugs and alcohol. You're going to abstain ...?' 'Yes, absolutely.' And so they sign it and — Was substance abuse really their problem? Maybe not! Maybe they just like to sit down and have a wine cooler with the girlfriends Friday night at poker. Um. I don't know. *[01:54:01.25]* Crikey. Caffeine is sometimes a lethal drug to some folks. I won't even talk to my boss until she's had her coffee in the morning. 'Have you had your coffee yet? Okay, I can come in!' (*laughs*)

GK: Pre-coffee conditions! (*laughs*) It's not healthy.

SD: Yes! Aw, shit. So, gosh. I've seen some people have some pretty good conversations with their caseworker or service provider and again, it's got to go through so many levels of

management to the right table. How much is lost in translation? Just like texting. If someone texts you no, is that a sad no? Is it an angry no? You lose a lot of that, that ...

GK: Nuance.

SD: Yes. And, um. They breeze in, breeze out. It just puts everybody on, especially the families they're working with on TANF. 'I don't dare blow my nose in case they want to come snag my kids!' But like, on the flip side of that, they sometimes can get, well, more information? From my personal experience, (*sighs*) I'm not sure if they would engage in said services if they weren't told they had to. It doesn't mean that they won't get said help, but are they gonna go to — Gosh, Hope and Justice would be mad if they heard me saying this, but are they going to go to the battered woman's support group meeting or do they want to come to a Tribally-run talking circle? This is gonna to be more familiar. We always tell them that this option is out there in case they're not ready or, but more often than not, the non-Native services, don't quite plug in right.

RG: Do you find that [01:56:26.08] the department is viewing Native-based services equally to non-Native-based services? So, if a woman was choosing to opt for a service that's in a talking circle as opposed to one that's outside the community, does the department view that as meeting the service requirement the same way?

SD: [01:56:52.11] Um. Without saying no, certainly, I think — Again, they've already got a flowing system. They already have AMHC engaged in their business. Hope and Justice has been longstanding, so they're familiar with their business, and what they're capable of. I don't think they know enough about us, and when they walk in to a room filled with sage, 'Oh, I'm (*coughs*) allergic. Can't be having that.' No, we have to go to their buildings. 'Is it okay if I light my smudge?' To ask those things, it's weird. To find cedar hanging above your door, that's an everyday thing. Having sweetgrass or basket weaves ... I'm trying to... Well I knew company was coming so I put a lot of stuff away... But, um, (*laughs*) I'll actually let you look at my office before you leave. But it's just things that are familiar to us. It has nothing to do with the State. But, I think it is a good example of the system.

My son had gotten into, in their opinion, mischief. There was another young feller, um, picking on his little sister. I say picking on, you know: 'Hey, I'd tap that,' or something to that crudeness. And so, my son said, 'I just want to take scissors and ...! Argh!' Out of frustration. I had to take time out: 'That is not how we deal with things. Yes, it's frustrating, but you cannot say I'd like to kill you, because this day and age — the school shootings and all that business — You can't. It's not a joke anymore. People have to take it seriously.' So, when said school calls me, 'We're kind of concerned. We want your son to go through this therapist.' And I said, 'Aw hell, no. I've gone round with this gentleman before. I do not feel comfortable with him. My son will not be seeing him. I'm going to get a ...' We had somebody working through the clinic at the time. And I had to go and say, 'Can I have your credentials so I can give this to the school system, 'cause I'm not letting them pick apart my son. You can. I know you. I trust you. Have at him. Um. And to develop a service plan that's going to fit him, not their standard.

Even when we get the, um, when the Guardian ad Litem statements come out, not to pick on them guys either, but, I think a lot of it is filling in the blanks. Because some of the, like the



meats of it, was very similar. The statements were similar, the attitude, the format was similar. So, and that's what — I didn't want to happen to Presque Isle. So, I had to go find and prove that my Tribal counselor was just, if not better than what you all have, and they still — They said, 'Okay, but he still needs to read and agree with it.' And I said, 'He can read it and I don't give a toot if he agrees with it or not.' So yes. I do believe the State either chooses not, or doesn't ask enough about the services we provide, and should we take some responsibility in that? And to push ourselves out there more? No. We shouldn't have to. We are here to service our community and, you know, my shoes are just as important as yours. So no, the State should be asking more about what we do. Not us having to shove it down their throats, because it never works that way. When you're forcing someone to use Families United, yes, they'll go through the formalities, but are they really getting the education? Probably not. They just need to get DHS out of their door. So. That's one way to answer your question. What else you got? *(laughs)*

RG: What are your experiences in, or challenges that you've found, in working with the State for kinship care?

SD: *[02:01:48.29]* That would have been the statement, misgivings or not, this is his family. You don't like that she wears low-cut shirts? Not your issue. So she has a piercing here, where there's no ears? So what. That is their family. This is who they know. This is not abnormal behavior for them. It's hard for them to look past their standards of care, I think sometimes. But, I have seen it with the Tribe coming in, saying, 'This person, regardless of what you've heard, is perfectly fine to be with said child. You'll put them there.' Unless they can grossly say, 'No, this is someone with child sex allegations against them,' they can't balk that. So, I guess we do have some strength there in saying that, 'No, this person is okay,' or saying, 'No, this person is not okay.' For this office up here, in the Caribou office, they seem to *(sighs)* use that or value that opinion. I'm a little nervous 'cause, as of the past few weeks, or the past month, we're beginning to find our legs, I guess. We're not going to agree to termination of parental rights. So, interview me in six months, and see if I'm still saying, 'Yeah, DHS is all right!' *(laughs)* Anyways, okay. So, what's your next question?

RG: To the best of your knowledge, if your Tribe declines to intervene in a child custody proceeding covered by ICWA, what are the reasons for this decision?

SD: Distance. When we're getting those California ones. If we can get to said family, it's far and few between — But we had a mom and child that we were working here with and so maybe that helped. That connection piece. Oh my God, it probably did. When she moved to Vermont, whether it was education or her family, she got into mischief again. Mom knew to tell the worker that this was an Indian child. They contacted us; and through phone conference and, I think, one physical visit, we were able to assist in keeping the family together. So that was spot on. But when we get a name from California that no one's intimately involved with,

like if they haven't had any family connection here in years, (*sighs*) we say, 'At this time we cannot, um, intervene.'

RG: What would shift that decision?

SD: I was gonna say, I wonder if it would be different if we had funding to go out there and bring them kids home? And then, where do we bring them to? We need to find homes that'll take care of these babies, and we need to connect these homes to a community foundation so our babies aren't leaving to begin with. Kind of one big circle. That's gotta be addressed here, but that would be huge. If we could go and get our babies from California or wherever they may be and bring them home, I think that would be awesome. But we need money and a space to put them. And, I'm not sure where this falls in the questioning — somewhere — but Canada is an issue. One, there is a border issue. And. Hmm. 'Cause if they are not federally recognized by the government, nobody's getting involved.

RG: Can you elaborate on that a little bit more?

SD: [02:06:32.20] I'm going to give you two stories. 'Cause, one, which it worked out in our favor. We had a mom and dad. Dad's Tribal, mom is not. Dad, to his luck, was on our rolls as a Tribal member. More or less came in in the middle of the night. They had gotten into mischief in Canada; to what level, I can't remember, but baby was born here in the States. So, I think they were getting ready to — not our business — ship everybody back and we're like, 'Wait a minute! This one's ours.' So, ICWA got involved and, oh, gosh. He was in the car seat so much when he was a baby that he couldn't — His arms and legs didn't work right. The back of his head was just as flat as this here. (*rubs table*) So, mom and dad weren't doing, they were having a hard time. Struggling. Mom was getting deported. Dad was, I don't know if he went back to Canada or not, but anywho, end result was, we took the baby because the Department of Human Services was called. And he is now been adopted by one of our community members. He is, how old is he now? Fifteen maybe? I keep picking on my friends, saying, 'He stinks now, doesn't he? The boy stink is happening right now.' So, I think that was — We got lucky there. We were able to intervene. We were able to find a Tribal home. At first, he didn't have a Tribal home, but the father was caught outside Wizard's one night, it was a local bar here, running off at his drunk. And, 'I'm gonna get them! I'm gonna get 'em!' Again, we gotta quit saying that. People take it too literally now. So, as soon as the foster family got wind of that, 'Hell, no! Do not want this kid. Take it!' And we were going to lose him to the system, or the bigger system, and a Tribal member came through and says, 'Why? I have a home for him.' Um. So, that one worked out well. But if dad was not registered, um, we couldn't put ICWA laws down. To my understanding we wouldn't have been able to. Because, yes, he might be Tribal, but he's not Federally recognized. Um. So.

RG: Has that come up a lot? Individuals who, um, are from Canada and are Tribal and are not on your census rolls, and thus ICWA cannot be applied to them?

SD: Right, 'cause I know that why? Why? I gotta remember. 'Cause I think I was out and I would have heard it more on the Child and Family table, but there was a young feller. I think we had a little feller getting involved into the system. There may have been tug of wars over the parents' substance abuse. DV was present. Um. Did mom take said children into Canada?



Back to her reserve? There was — We couldn't say, 'Well, no, we have a plan. We're gonna help dad get established.' We had no rights, I guess. Um. I think it (*sighs*) I don't know how often it happens. 'Cause we're so close to the Canadian border. When them cases come up, everybody goes (*sighs*). The State and us, because it's so confusing. And I'm trying to think, has their caseworkers ever come and got one of their kids? Gosh. (*pause*) I'm gonna ask Tanya and Luke, 'cause they may have been paying attention a little bit more than what I have. It does happen. I'm not sure if it's a lot. But, it's being on a list that makes a difference. Amongst other areas, struggle with that because we didn't draw that line. It was drawn for us. And with some people and places it's almost night and day and it's just a few miles from one spot to the next. So.

GK: I'd have to go into the ICWA scenario a little clearer, but there are some, uh, communities where people are not, are not currently on a registry, not currently enrolled but they're eligible to be enrolled, they just haven't gone through the process. So, I wonder if that plays into any of this. They're currently not on, but they are eligible to be.

SD: I think that's helped us a few times. Especially if it's a new, new, new baby; either they never got a chance to register, or they thought when they registered with IHS that it was an automatic registration with the Tribal clerk's office. So, there's been a few times where we have been able to say, 'No, baby is not registered, but mom is clearly on our list and her baby being added is not an issue.' [02:13:14.19] Um. Maybe it was a different Tribe. But I can't remember. I'm going to ask Tanya and Luke to see if they can remember that story. And maybe it was, um, a different Tribe? That's why I'm having a hard time remembering the kid specifically. But, um.

So yes, we'll use that quite a bit actually. It'll happen in our newborns quite a bit. 'Cause they just didn't think or, my God! Some of them have actually been scared to. Non-Native mothers will not register their kids 'cause they're afraid we're going to take them. And we're like, 'Nooo.' And then I'll talk about their inherent rights and they need to be on this list. It is their right to be on that list. And again, it's the lack of information. They thought that just because the baby was signed up, we could take him and put him with the father who wasn't appropriate, or the grandmother who wasn't appropriate. Said, 'No, that is not what we're doing.' But, it is so important to get that child registered now. Waiting until they're 18 or 38, and it's so much harder to get them recognized. Paperwork gets lost. If you lose that Tribal connection, it is harder to get reconnected. 'Who are you?' and 'Who is your grandmother?' That's usually one of the first questions I'll ask people. 'Hi, I'm so and so. Who's your mum? Who's your gram?' So we can build those connections. So, um. (*pause*) But yeah, I'll have to come back to you on the Canadian one. But I know that is a problem. We wanted to get involved and I feel like I remember we weren't able to, to the extent that we wanted to, I think it was surrounding that if they were Federally recognized or not.

RG: Yep.

GK: You know, just as a, the whole cross-border mobility and so forth, that's still an ongoing issue to some extent. Our own people born on the other side of the line have certain rights here in the US, and I'm kind of curious why ICWA wouldn't apply to them if they are recognized by the Federal government of the United States?

SD: As long as they are recognized, and that's why I'm having a hard time pulling this memory out. I wonder if it was, um. *(sighs)* See, shows you how well I know my history. Is it New York is one of the Tribes? And I don't know if I can say Mohawk. Their Tribe is on both sides.

GK: It can be both, yeah.

SD: I think I remember that.

GK: It's the Akwesasne.

SD: Yes! I'm trying to remember some of their stories about it, 'cause we were very curious about it. There've been times when it has helped or hindered what we've wanted to do. 'Cause, one, if she has the baby in Canada, I'm never going to be involved. I remember some of those conversations coming up. Gosh! I wish I could remember more specifically. But, anyway. Okay. Tangent! No! *(laughs)*

RG: To the best of your knowledge, does your Tribe ever use its own expert witness in child custody proceedings under ICWA that remain in State court?

SD: Hmm. No. And I don't. Okay. I have to do a memory again. Now, I think, I'll speak specifically for the Micmacs because I don't know if they Maliseets — if the other Tribes have the same issues or not. But, for me, I think we are fortunate that the department has chosen Betsy Tannian largely as the Indian child expert witness. It is my understanding they choose and pay for who the Indian child expert witness is. If they so wanted to, they could choose someone who is not Tribal to be your Indian child welfare expert witness. Um. If Carolyn — She was no longer our ICWA director. She had moved on to something else, and we were having a case and they asked, 'Who do you know?' Oh! I think they wanted me. Did they want me? 'No, I do not want to be the expert witness. I'm the LIHEAP worker, I'm the ICWA caseworker. and I'm taking them to and from their appointments, I do not need to be the expert as well. *[02:19:08.09]* I remember one case they did use Rosella Silliboy as an expert witness, and they've used Carolyn. But, was Carolyn's ideas too radical for them? So, they've come to Betsy. She's been longstanding now, and I say longstanding because over a year is longstanding. Because things turn around so quickly.

And I get a kick out of her! We were commenting on a few of the old ladies around here — My nana for one, her sister and another. They look so sweet and loving, and I said, 'If you had any idea. Did you know my grandmother used to be a bar bouncer?' 'Really?' I said, 'These women have earned their right to sit there, quiet and pleasant. And yes! You better go get them their tea!' Um. 'Cause, these women, they carry quite a bit.



GK: Yeah. A force to be reckoned with.

SD: Yes! Absolutely. I said, ‘Go ahead, piss her off, I dare ya! I’ll be watching, laughing at you!’ *(laughs)* Kind of like Isabelle, absolutely sweet when you see her. You see this frail, little precious human being. You get close to her, and if you’re not behaving yourself, *(snaps fingers)* she’ll let you know! She will. A lot of these sweet, little, innocent old ladies — Be careful! They come with a bite! I can’t wait until I’m there. *(laughs)*

RG: When your Tribe becomes aware of a State ICWA violation, does it have a policy of legally challenging the State’s Child Welfare determination?

SD: No. No, I think that’s what we would identify as late. Maybe that’s where I was going on one of my tangents that I forgot about. That we want to make this position with certain expectations with the State involving our kids and it needs to be that government to government. That’s what we’re talking about. Um. All the ICWA directors need to be, if they’ve already got it, at least support the ones that don’t have it already. Take it to the USET panel. I think, as much as we don’t want the political players involved in the Child and Family team, ’cause that’s — Our council table, as important as it is, is not always safe. But we need to have that right now. Again, once I’ve taken my dream job, whoever’s behind me needs to know what their rights are, not having to stumble along and figure it out. *(sighs)* Being afraid to call — You don’t want to make yourself look like a jerk: ‘Well, I don’t know. I’ll have to get back to you, State! To find out what my rights are.’ No, we want to have all of this in place, and we need our government to do that with us. *[02:22:49.27]* So that’s what we’re, this one you might have to come back a year later.

But that is what we want to do, is start having the understanding and not create our own ICWA department, but have it more than just a caseworker sitting in an office someplace. It needs to have the holistic approach to it. If our government and if our administration is not supporting that, we are going to be wasting our time. Um. *(pause)* Our stressors — I say our stressors, the Child and Family teams’ and Luke’s stressors — so little do they hit the council and administration table. And it’s not like they don’t want to support us. I just don’t think they quite know how much we need them to support us. If that makes sense. Um. Ask me in a year how our policies are doing. But hopefully we can say that we’ve begun. Because right now we’re just thinking about beginning. Starting to figure it out. What we want first, and stuff. So. That’s going to be fun though. *(laughs)*

RG: What do you see as strengths and weaknesses in the State Child Welfare system for insuring ICWA compliance?

SD: Lack of training for the State. One of the, Heidi? I think she’s our AG for this area. Heidi Silver? Gosh, it’s been a while! But anyway, um, part of the ICWA law and requirements is

‘active efforts.’ So, now we don't have any ABM (Aroostook Band of Micmacs) internal policies. We have the ICWA law and the Child and Family Team handbook. So, we need a little bit more strength underneath us. So, when she calls up and says, ‘You haven't done your active efforts.’ Well, what is active efforts? Hmm. So, it's gotta be these top dogs here, um, that need to have the understanding of this training. It's not the lonely caseworker that's gotta be (*inaudible word*) who's pushing, or representing that State's agenda as far as Child Welfare goes. It needs to be him and his superiors. I don't know. If we're going to go as far as our Chief, and the governor of the State of Maine needs to understand and be trained in cultural competency. I guess, should we be — They should be coming and asking, how can we better serve your people? Instead of us saying, ‘You need to serve our people differently.’ Because it's not going to be dealt with in a good way: ‘What do you mean I'm not doing a good job? I know how to do my job! I know how to protect kids!’ Right? (*laughs*) So. Anyway. (*laughs*)

GK: No, you don't! (*laughs*)

SD: Right on! (*laughs*)

RG: What do you see as strengths and weaknesses that Wabanaki Tribes possess in working with the State for ICWA compliance?

SD: [02:26:58.06] What do I see as strengths and weaknesses of the Tribe working with the State? I bet you the State would be more successful, 'cause again it's that, that, I think they call it the 'generational trauma' of what community has against the State, the government the church, is that we were lesser people, and they will come take our babies in the middle of the night. So, I think if people are ready to re-educate themselves, and I mean by the people, the State of Maine. And even the Tribe — If we don't know what our rights are, we can't enforce our rights. But yeah, what would be the benefit of us working together? Right?

RG: Strengths and weaknesses that Wabanaki Tribes possess in working with the State for ICWA compliance.

SD: Our weakness would be the lack of information. You know, if parents — I remember one of our parents saying that she had to take her daughter to the emergency room because something got broke and bent in a way it wasn't supposed to. Child was playing out all day, dirty. Instant DHS report. Really? No. If people were more educated, and when one kid comes in and all of a sudden you have 30 Indians in your waiting room, that's okay. That's appropriate behavior. Do not be alarmed; you don't need to call security. So I think if people were better informed, we'd be less fearful and we would hate less. 'Cause when that car rolls in, to home. Ooh! They're in trouble. People are standoffish; they don't want to be friends anymore, 'cause they don't want whatever traumas they've got going on trickling into my yard. ‘No, I can't be ...’ I think if there was, oh gosh, more educational materials. And that's making it sound, that's not the right words I'm looking for, though. Um. But if we more informed, I think we would have, one, less contact from the department. They wouldn't be up in our business as much. And when they did have to engage with us, maybe it wouldn't be met with hostility. You know? What a difference it would be if one of them caseworkers would just show up at a Native's home with one of these. You know, just that small little gesture. Huge. Cultural competency.

RG: How does State Child Welfare policies, practices and events influence your work with Micmac children and families? In Tribal Child Welfare?

SD: I think I was irritated. Um. Because, in the past when there was a cultural event happening, especially the Mawiomi, and some of these kids need close supervision — It's funny. Because it's the parents who get in trouble to make the kids go in to the system. But by God, the kids suffer the most out of it. They're the ones, all of a sudden, have 20 different alphabet soup diagnosis. What's the one I get a kick out of? Everybody has ADHD, no doubt, welcome to the club for most of us. But, is it ODD? Optional defiance disorder?

RG: Oh, oppositional defiance disorder.

SD: Yeah! Yes! Of course, you're not their mom or their dad, they're going to be defiant! So. See, I'm going off-topic again.

RG: It's not off-topic.

SD: *(laughs)* What was the question again?

RG: How does State Child Welfare policies, practices and events influence your work with Micmac children and families? In Tribal Child Welfare?

SD: *[02:31:54.28]* Okay, yes. That was my point. Because at the very beginning of me interacting with the guys, or having a Mawiomi — 'Oh yes! We'll clear the schedule,' and, 'We're gonna drop said kid off for you.' No, that wasn't what I was asking. And I think that's why I've got this better position. You've taken legal responsibility over this child. You're legally responsible for making sure all of their needs are met — not just their house, not just their clothes, not just their roof — All of their needs need to be supported.

And they don't really have cultural events. That or I've just never been invited to one. Aside from their team meetings, and even that's sometimes weird. For some reason, they started showing up to our Child and Family team meetings, which was odd, because we wanted to have discussion but they were in the room and we didn't want to be rude, so we made them part of our discussion. But when they wanted to have a discussion, short from kicking us out of the room, I realized they couldn't do that — They all picked up their papers and stuff, 'Excuse us, we need to discuss amongst ourselves.' And we're, like, sitting in the room going, 'What just happened here?'

Again, it's that boundary line. The us'es and the them's. I guess that remains to be obvious for me. It's that there's still a distinction; we're not working together like this. But that we're working, I don't even want to say, in a race, because we're the ones that are fighting to keep

up. They're just gone without the thought of looking back! So, their team meetings approaches have been good, I guess. They always, 'Let's talk about the good stuff first before we completely tear you down.' They always say, 'Well, that's not my call. I have to take it to my supervisor.' We need a few more levels of those people for the Tribe's protection. 'Cause we are the frontrunners. Yes, Luke has a Child and Family team to help him support in his matters. But in those knee jerk reactions, or those instant moments, you don't have notice to get your team together. He doesn't have anyone. I don't think the Houlton Band is much different, as far as staff. We don't have the layers of staff that they all get. That's kind of a rip-off! Because we have the expectation to do more than what they are doing. Not only do we have to be caseworkers, we have to keep the Tribal connection, and we train for the Department of Human Services. That is not in my job description, but that's what is expected, you know? So. Grrr. *(laughs)*

So, maybe if they would have more social functions, like we do, maybe we wouldn't see them as — Or maybe I wouldn't see them as stiff anymore? Like I said, there's been some caseworkers that are still welcomed into homes because they understood and respect boundaries and rights. And those who haven't, my God! You don't even want to see them in the grocery store. You hide and dodge from 'em! So. Yeah.

RG: *[02:35:50.10]* Have you seen a shift in State Child Welfare policies and practices throughout your time working with Child Welfare?

SD: Yes, and I know I'm going to be repeating some of it, so I'll try to keep it brief.

RG: No, that's okay.

SD: I was part of the team, very quiet because I didn't quite know the formalities, and then we did that training in the North Eastland Hotel, where the people who are paid to be smarter than the rest of us humble folks couldn't get it, that they would be that ignorant to Federal law — It's not a State law. It's Federal law. Shouldn't they already know that? Those were the kinds of impressions I had when I first started getting involved. And then the work that Carolyn and Rosella ...

RG: Do you mind if I pause this for a minute? *[02:36:59.04]*

(pause)

RG: Have there been changes in Tribal Child Welfare policies and practices during your employment?

SD: *(pause)* Like I said, I don't believe that we have any written ICWA department policy. Have there been changes with the system, or our relationship with the system? Yes. Um, I think our relationship started out as an irritant or a tick, as far as DHS was concerned to the point now where we're getting to, we are a force to be reckoned with. I think, once we get our policies in place, we'll feel more confident in being able to better take care of our own. And, if we need help, we'll let you all know. We got this. That's where I would like to get, anyway. So. Or Luke, I should say. *(laughs)* Forget I'm not there anymore! But still, I gotta support the



team!

RG: What are some of your concerns about Micmac children who are in the State Child Welfare system? I know it's things that have come up throughout our conversation.

SD: [02:38:41.17] I think that's the biggest piece, is that cultural connection. Um. Not being in the same after-school program for years, that impacts the outcome of their adult relationship. If we don't support that — 'Cause these adult relationships are going to take care of us here in a few generations, and I want to know that I'm going to be taken care of. So, it's kind of like investing in ourselves. That's not the State's priority. Is it just ours that are having a hard time once they get into care? They, automatically: 'Let's put them in counseling, let's do play therapy,' or, 'Let's only visit mom one hour out of the week.' You know? They're the ones that are more or less getting punished. Often joke and tease, but I think there are some communities that do do this. 'If mom gets in trouble, let's kick her out of the house. Leave the kids there, send in (*inaudible word*) That way the kids aren't displaced, their system's not displaced, their school is not displaced. The cartoons they watch kids with ... it's that displacement. Now, I wonder if that's why a lot of our kids are ending up in the residential settings, or crisis centers. The cultural connection, I think, is very weak and expressing to these children, this is NOT your fault. But I'm sure they probably do that anyway. But, it just doesn't seem — The kids aren't understanding that it's not their fault. So, something's missing somewhere. You see the little fellers who, hmm, take that blame: 'If I didn't tell my teacher why my arm hurt,' or, 'Why I'm wearing the same whatever' — They don't understand that it's not their fault. Those are my two biggest stressors, I guess, with the removal.

GK: One of the things that come to mind is a, a Cheyenne teaching about mirrors. It's really, really nice. And basically, how it works is that whatever you're experiencing, internally, you walk into a room and you start to notice that people have this response to you, you know, some kind of reaction kind of thing. You don't see what face you bring in or the energy you carry, but the people do.

SD: Yeah!

GK: So you're actually experiencing *you* through the reactions of the people around us, the mirrors. You know?

SD: That is actually very cool.

GK: And in this case, you know, how our young people wind up in these group homes and kind of thing, is a reflection of how they're being treated, the nuance of prejudice, and biases and racism and anger directed towards them and their respond. You know? And sometimes I think about that. The mirror, the image.

SD: Yes. That's, I like that. That's neat, I'll have to think about that. I'm going to be mindful of that when I walk in to a room! *(laughs)*

GK: You know, sometimes you can't hide it, you know? It just —

SD: But that makes sense, that really does. Oh, gosh. Hmm. That's one of my favorite things, especially about babies. We can have a complete conversation, and I won't even know it. I know that sounds funny, but, um, especially when I see a real little person, one of the first things I do is, one, get down to their eye level, and I'll just look at them. Again, it's that energy response. "I'm telling you, I'm not going to hurt you. You are a lovely human being." And when they lock that connection and I know our spirits are talking, that is phenomenal. I might not be fully aware of the whole conversation that our spirits are having, but they're just absolutely precious.

Not that I'm going to religion-bash, 'cause that's, I love and respect God, the Creator, whomever you want to call him. I have a friend and we bicker a lot. The biggest differences between our beliefs is that you're telling me I'm born with sin. I'm telling you I am born pure. There is nothing more pure than new life. It's the adults in the room that can cripple that. A huge piece of that is yanking them out of everything that they know. If that kid has the understanding: "Oh, dad's been drinking again, I'm going to my friend's house for the night." They see that as not providing good supervision. But mom saying, "I'm going to go to Aunt Cheryl's." "Okay, go to Aunt Cheryl's. I'll talk to you tomorrow." You know, that's, Cheryl's going to be safe; might not even be her real sister. It's that informal relationship. And if we can build on those strengths, get our peeps wanting to love and believe in each other again, I think we can have the department be further and further removed into our everyday lives. I really do believe that. It's gonna take a while to get there.

GK: Maybe not as long as you think.

SD: I've only got, I say two generations. I'm just, just barely touching my 40s, um, so I know I've got a few years underneath me to go. If I don't take care of my foundation, I'm gonna be in trouble. My grandbabies are gonna be in trouble. It's building that connection. It's huge.

GK: It's like the spider's web. We're all connected. What's happening over here is gonna have an impact on what's happening over here. Grandma spider. *(laughs)*

SD: *(laughs)* That's it, too! Even the slightest little hum, you feel it. If you're really connected. **[02:46:53.21]** My co-worker and I, we can have conversations without being verbal about it. We have a lot of our same passions and our commitment to our community. It's kind of exciting, where we can end up sometimes and sometimes very frustrating when you're dealing with people who don't understand the bigger picture. They're so worried about the crumbs in front of their plate, and my God, the crumbs you're dropping. I need to have all those!

(sighs) Someone had described this plant, I wish I could remember the name of it. But, they said they picked out one little piece of this plant just because they had an off leaf — And where everything had those fibrous roots, or whatever, from where they picked off that one little leaf,

all of it started to just wither and die. And, if we don't pull ourselves together here pretty quick, we're going to wither and die. Um.

GK: We should be like tobacco.

SD: Hmm?

GK: We should be like tobacco. I grow tobacco. You remove one leaf and another leaf will grow, and it will grow fuller. We need to be like that. [02:48:16.20]

SD: Yes. Yes. That would be cool. I haven't dared pull any gray hairs out yet. I don't wanna try that theory. *(laughs)*

GK: I wouldn't recommend that. *(laughs)*

SD: This is kind of cool. I like this, I guess. I was thinking, 'What the hell am I going to say to these guys when they show up?' I thought about my two boys. I call them my — They're my boys. I think about them guys a lot. Unfortunate-, fortunately for me, their mishaps have given me some strength, I guess, to try to avoid the next mishaps. Um.

GK: It's a learning. It's all a learning.

SD: When that little boy says, you know, 'Where is my brother going?' *(exhale)* Wow. That is a failure on the adults in the room. That really is. I'm mad at myself because I didn't ensure those connections stayed in place. I'm mad at my government for not allowing the department to keep those connections in place. I'm mad at the department for not finding those connections relevant to their paperwork. We failed him. Um. So, I'm hoping if I keep talking about this little feller enough, repeating myself enough, that he's not going to be forgotten about. And that the State will hear that story, you know? His afterlife didn't see us together. That is a huge problem. That is huge. Um. There was such a disconnection between the Tribe and this little feller. Very few of this enormous family, misgivings or not, weren't able to connect with him. You know, they respected his rights: 'I'm not ready to deal with my family right now.' We respected his rights and didn't say, 'This is your dad, this is your aunt, all your cousins and extended family members.' Um.

So, that one's going to stay with me a long time. I'm gonna share that story probably too much, to the point where people are gonna start sharing it with me. But that would be a good thing. At least, they'll have that to carry. It is so important to keep that Tribal connection. The quicker we can get them out of DHS' custody and into our custody, if it has to be. It's gonna be the

best thing in the long run. Um. It's not saying their system don't work, it just doesn't work for

me. It doesn't work here. You know.

GK: *[02:51:42.28]* You know, I have, in my own evolution as a human being and as a cultural, a Wabanaki man. And, for me to even say a Wabanaki man, means that I've had to be very diligent about how I look at life. You know, that full range of responsibility, you know, kind of thing. And we might be talking about the language of failure right now, um, but the real powerful resolve is first, we have to realize there's a problem in the first place. And once we realize that, then the challenge is which of the resolves are we going to take, because then it comes out of the woodwork. You know? Well, he represents an objective, you know? And sometimes, we don't give ourselves credit enough. So thinking, where were we at that time? Where were we in our development as a community? As a culture? Where were we at any given time? In retrospect, we can look back and say, 'Well we should have done this.' But the reality is, now we're aware. Now as we're looking at where we've come from and where we're heading. We have a much clearer articulation. We have a much clearer picture. What we need to be moving towards. What we need to be accomplishing. You know? So it's not that much of a failure as it is a growth. As I see it.

SD: That feels much easier on the heart and mind. *[02:53:54.01]*

GK: We did the best we could at the time. But, now we know we could do better.

SD: That's a very good way of looking at it. *(pause)* That's awesome.

GK: And the neat thing is, he's still here.

SD: And that's just it. He's not completely lost. But gosh, I don't want to be asked that question again. I shouldn't have to. We should make sure he already knows. Right? We don't let that be taken or stolen away from him. His culture, his identity. That's key to his survival.

(SD calls out to someone)

GK: Moving right along.

SD: Like I said, I've been thinking about this for a while now. I know I missed you guys on the — I remember coming with an armful of papers and Dena says, 'They're doing Statements, do you want to come?' And I'm like, 'Yes! But not today.' I definitely want to — Been hearing folks talk about some of the work that you guys are doing, um, some of the presentations that have hit Council ... So, there is a love and a passion behind this. Um.

GK: That's a really good word. Love. Sometimes we have to honor the profundity of what that is about, but that's, everything that you've shared, everything that this work is about, everything that we are as a people. It's always been about that.

SD: It's not an easy place to be involved because of everything you have to see, witness and be a part of but, I hear why ...

GK: But we do it because of that.

SD: Gosh. It's like I said you have to be in a good place to do this in a good way. If this is just a job for you, you're not gonna survive it.

GK: And it will show! *(laughs)*

SD: Yes! I'm very mindful of my mirror effect now. I've been told I do not have a good poker face. *(laughs)*

GK: Well, that's a testimony to your passion. *(laughs)*

SD: *(laughs)* That's right! I feel bad, I think I threw my tissue away.

GK: That's okay.

SD: [02:57:09.09] That is wonderful.

RG: Is there anything else you would like to add?

SD: No, I don't ... five or six hours from now, oh yes! I'll —

GK: And that's always possible too, if there are papers you want to submit, or there's more thoughts that you want to share. It's always there.

SD: No, and if I do, either I will email, call — Again, the girls are here locally. If there's something I felt I should have added or, — I don't, aside from my name, I slipped out there — I don't think there's anything about my Statement I'm uncomfortable with. It's not something — I'd say the exact same thing at their table. So, I think I'm feeling pretty confident with it. But yeah, it's usually the after thoughts. 'Oh, yeah, that would have been a good story to share!' *(laughs)*

GK: And if, just a reminder, you have access to this Statement at any time, if you want to review it.

SD: Okay, no that'll be ...

RG: With the noted exception that, in an effort to protect confidentiality and make sure that this doesn't end up where it shouldn't end up before the end of the mandate, it would just be a matter of organizing a time when we can get together. I wouldn't send it by email or anything. Because once it's on the internet, it's always on the internet.

SD: Once it's out there, it's gonna be shared. Absolutely. So no, I'm very glad I made it. 'Cause

I think this is awesome. As I told Dena and Krista, I'm anxious to see the end result. Because this is huge! This is huge. Even having the understanding and acceptance of the caseworkers. That was something I had to wrap my mind around. The caseworkers, back in the day, again — It's lack of information. They're all evil, they're all the bad guys. But, someone had shared — either it was a caseworker or a police officer — They thought they were doing the right thing. They honestly believed they were doing the right thing and had no idea what they were doing. So, yes, they have the right to grieve this as well. Had I not heard that, I'd be hating on them all. 'You knew what you were doing!' 'You knew you didn't like us!' *(laughs)* But, you've got to hear it all to understand it all, I think. So.

This, I absolutely loved it. Every time I tear it down I keep tearing a little more of the paper. Pretty soon there's not going to be much left, but.

GK: You'll just have to write another one. *(laughs)*

SD: *[03:00:42.00]* *(laughs)* Yeah! But not the whole statement, just this one. In a very short and to the point way, summed it up. 'Cause they'll say, 'Well it wasn't my parents that stole your land!' But this explains, how can I wrap my mind around the generational effect? Like I said, there are some kids here, they're 20-something now, that were so fearful of the department coming in, and even giving them a call — They didn't want to call them back! So no, that generational trauma is very real. I don't even know if I still have this email. If I do, I will have to forward it your direction.

RG: Yes, please.

SD: 'Cause I know they're talking a lot about Canada, about putting a healthy baby in the bed with two babies that have tuberculosis. Let's see what happens. Let's, you know, do experiments with them so we can send our fighter pilots off in a better suit. Crikey! I think cattle might have had more rights than us back then.

GK: You know, when, when we start to hear more information, I think, between Canada and the United States residential and mission school systems, we get to hear that 100,000 children were killed in the process. In residential and mission schools. And then you think of US, uh, uh, Indian Health Service, for a period of 1972 to 1975, over a possible population of 800,000 Indian people were forcibly sterilized.

SD: Oh my God.

GK: Some of them, without even their knowledge. And this was the brainchild of George Bush, Sr. He created that. Along with ...

SD: Boy, doesn't that get you ugly.

GK: You know, I think that's one of those, that's the birth of ICWA. Because the United States, whole Indian policy was genocide. The international law of genocide has five particular criteria and the United States has violated every one of those criteria.

SD: And will take no ownership of it.

GK: Oh, they are now. I think that's what the appearance of ICWA is trying to address. That's my opinion.

SD: *[03:03:57.11]* Well, no, like I said, I'm going to be excited to see, and I say the end result, because I know once, oh gosh, the grant cycle year or whatever, 'cause what you guys were on, three or five year?

GK: Three.

SD: Three. Are you almost near ... ?

GK: Next June is when we come out, hopefully, with the report.

SD: Then what happens?

GK: Then the real work begins. *(laughs)*

SD: This is just shaking the nest all up.

GK: Yes, we're creating the modus.

SD: Okay. So I'm going to be very, I'm excited about this.

GK: Me, too.

SD: I think this is going to be awesome.

GK: In a very real sense, this is the work of this millennium. This is the work of our time. We might be focused primarily on this particular issue — about how our children were treated in the system — but this issue is connected to everything else.

SD: You're right. It has to start somewhere because if not, it's too big and we won't deal with it. I think that's ...

GK: You know, somebody said, too, I think it might have been Barbara, yesterday, that the common ground in all of this — DHS, State of Maine, our people — the common ground is love for our children. As you're talking about - in their minds, they were doing the right thing. In their mind, it was all about the children. We get kind of off-course a little bit, in maybe overly passionate about how we do it, but it's always about the children. That's the common

thread.

SD: Yeah, that's it, too. So, I don't know. Well, I'll follow your work. (*laughs*)

GK: Really appreciated your time.

RG: Yeah, thank you so much for your time.

SD: Thank you.

[END OF RECORDING]