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Statement by Bert Polchies collected by Rachel George and Joan Uranek on March 28, 2014

Bert Polchies

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Bert Polchies

Date: March 28, 2014.

Location: Indian Island, Maine

Previous Statement? N/A

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George, Joan Ura-neck

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

Recording Format: Video

Length of Recording: 02:36:58

Recording

RG: Uh, so I'm here today, my name is Rachel George— um, and I'm here with... would you mind saying your name?

RP: Bert Polchies.

RG: And...

JU: Joan Ura-neck.

RG: Fantastic. It is March 28th, 2014. We're here at Indian Island, Maine. The file number is P-201403-00032. Bert, have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

RP: Yes.

RG: Fantastic. And I have to let you know that if at any point during this statement you indicate that there is a child or an elver in need of—(*corrects herself*) elder, not elver, my lapse entirely—

RP: (*Laughs*).

RG: (*Laughs*) A child or an elder in need of protection, or that there is an identifiable person or

group, including yourself, that's in imminent risk of serious bodily harm, including death, that that information may not be protected as confidential. Do you understand?

RP: Yes.

RG: And are you okay going forward with that?

RP: Yes.

RG: Perfect. So I will open this up to you. You can start wherever you feel the most comfortable.

RP: Well, the logical place to really start is when I was born.

RG: Okay.

RP: I was born uh, September 12th, 1959. At the Newport Naval hospital in Newport, Rhode Island. My father was in the Navy at the time, of course. My mom—my father is of Filipino descent. And uh, was born in the Philippines. My mother is Penobscot and Maliseet. Um, I remember, you know, things about my childhood. You know, a lot of times in great detail. Um, you know— however there is—through time and injuries there's things that I cannot quite get right all the time— I mean as far as details. But the chronological order is there.

And uh, you know. My father and mother were married. I have uh, you know, four siblings that I grew up with. My older brother Dominic, my sisters Sissy and Erlinda. But at the time that my father, I guess that my father and mother decided that they were going to divorce. I don't know so much on my mother's side but my father was going to divorce my mother. And um—he stole us away from her (*pause*). Um, basically took us while she was—wasn't looking. Packed us up in the car and um, packed a few of our belongings and we drove.

It was shortly after my brother, my younger brother Terry was born. He—and from my understanding, he didn't take him because he was just an infant and still nursing. And that's something my father couldn't do, of course. So I was two years old at that time. Um, and since my brother was just born. I'm assuming that uh, you know, that—well I know I was two years old. And I'm assuming it was around uh (*pauses, looking up*). Well I remember it was raining. You know, as a child I remember rain. A lot of rain. So I don't know if it would have been in the spring. I'm not clear on that.

Um, I do remember going through a tunnel that was being—was getting flooded, and I just—the water coming up and looking out, you know, standing up and looking out the window and seeing water almost to the window of the car. And um, we traveled. I remember my sister Sissy



would change my diaper, while my dad was driving. And um, [00:05:21.01] then I remember going to a convent. I remember being in a convent. I don't know where it was. Um, my brother—my siblings and I, we've discussed that a little bit, trying to get an idea as to where that might possibly be. And the only thing we could think of is um—it might have been down in, uh, South Carolina. But I know where the tunnel was in Virginia, in the tidewater area. And I remember that because next time I went through that tunnel, it just came all—it all came back exactly. Seeing that tunnel—that place. And so um...

But at the convent—I remember being put in a crib. Um, and my—you know, they separated us, my siblings and I. And I remember it was just a—um, how would you describe that room? It's kind of just a place, a room, no decor to it or anything, just cribs. And I remember my crib was closer to the corner. And um, my sisters, my brother would sneak in there, because they weren't allowed to. You know, but they had to check on me. They felt the need to check on me. And they would come and play (*pause*), try to calm me down, because I would cry (*pause, looking down*).

Even at two years old I understood what was going on. All I knew was, uh—I don't know why we were in the convent. I don't know why to this day why my father brought us there. Um, maybe just to watch us for a time. Cause he wasn't—maybe—just maybe until he can get things settled as to what our next move was gonna be. But I remember my sisters and my brother— mostly my sister Sissy, actually. I remember she would show up a lot. They would sometimes pull her out of there, and uh, I remember screaming and crying. And not understanding why I couldn't be with them. I don't know—I don't know if they were able to be close. I know in the convents they kept the boys and the girls separate. So I'm assuming my sisters got to stay pretty close to each other. My brother was probably just by himself too.

(*Breathes in*) Then I remember um, being there and... I remember the nuns as they would come in. For me—I don't remember them really being all that mean to me. Though I've heard from my siblings that what they experienced was a little bit different. But I think maybe because I was just an infant. You know—I was a toddler. Um, I know there were times where um—like I said, I did a lot of crying, and you know, they would just basically try to tell me to be quiet. You know? Telling me everything is going to be okay. But yeah, then they'd turn around and leave me in there alone, and I didn't know why I was the only one in that room, when there were so many cribs and I was by myself. [00:10:09.29]

(*Scratches neck, looks up, thinking*) Oh, let's see. Then I remember my father came and got us and loaded us back in the car. And we traveled, and we went a long way. Driving, driving. I remember looking around and just seeing, you know—I can remember mountains, and trees, and then all of the sudden there were no mountains or trees (*laughs*). There was just, there was like nothing. You know? Just, like, just tall grass. I don't know all these places that we were going, however later on, my father told me that there's a—it was that—once we got to it, went



through the mountains of Virginia and all that, and wound up traveling that Route 66. Not what they—yeah, nowadays they call it historic Route 66, but back then, that was the highway to get to the West coast. Um.

I remember traveling out there. And um, when we got to California, we went to my aunt's house. My aunt's place. They lived in Navy housing, because my uncle was in the Navy. My aunt is um, my father's sister. And I remember, you know, she—treating me very well. And she was really happy—I can still to this day see her smile. But I can hear my aunt and my father talking. And um, I remember hearing even my aunt saying you know, I mean in that Filipino accent, you know, "You should have never married Injuns. Injuns." You know? And um, she would—you know, I can remember her asking my father what he's going to do.

And I never remembered—I cannot to this day what he answered her. You know—I know we stayed there, living with them, my aunt and my uncle had a—I mean, I think at the time they had uh, four children at the time, already. It was my cousins Isabelle, Maria, Eddie, and Marilyn. I think she was pregnant again (*laughs*). But um, I mean they had—eventually had ten kids. But we spent—I remembered going again. My father was gone and we were, I guess we were placed in foster homes. At the time my, uh (*scratches face*)—I remember it was just my brother and I. I don't know where my sisters went. [00:14:31.18]

(*Pause, looking down*) I remember my brother Dominic back then. 'Cause I was—(*shakes head, smiling a little*) I was still—I think at that time maybe three? By then. Um. And then you know, the—I remember my brother was holding me. And he wouldn't let people around me. If someone picked me up, he was standing right there. But its like he would not let me out of his sight. And I kind of understand it (*smiling*). But then, um, we were there just for a little while. And the next thing I know we're back in my aunt's house, back in Navy housing. And um, I don't know exactly how old I was. I mean, you know, it might have been during later on that year. I can't remember exactly how long we were in that place, but um, all I know is we were separate. Just me and my brother by ourselves, and my sisters were somewhere else. And, um, I know I would cry, but I would always cling to my brother (*sniffs*).

But then we wound up at my aunt's. And then, I remember there—I didn't like it. But I did—I did remember my father was sitting there one time, 'cause he bought me—that's when I got my first guitar. Little woody—"Woody Woodpecker" guitar, you know? (*Laughing in background*). It had a little crank thing that you know, had that little (*makes musical sound "Woody the Woodpecker" laugh noise and cranking hand motion*), you know. And um, but the thing is about those little old toy guitars, they were able to be tuned like a regular guitar (*wipes eyes*). And my father would bring out his guitar and he would tune mine (*mimes tuning*) and we'd sit there and he'd—I'd mimic his guitar playing as best I could. And of course I had songs that I liked 'cause I hear them on the radio, and um, you know—Elvis Presley, Hank Williams, um, Johnny Rivers, and then, um, Johnny Cash and Roy Orbison.



And he's, you know—I really liked—you know, Elvis Presley and Hank Williams. Those were my heroes then, and you know. And all these Elvis Presley Songs I learned to sing. Right? But anyway, my father would sit there, and he was sitting there with me with our guitars and you know, both of us. And I—I can't remember right off the bat what it was that triggered my question, or what the question—I don't even remember how the question was—but something triggered it and I asked them a question, and I can't remember. But he told me, “You're Penobscot Indian. Your mom is Penobscot Indian.”

And so I was excited. I was really excited. See, we hadn't been gone from my mom for that long, so far, but—I remembered shortly after—of course I was, like I said I was really excited. I was Penobscot Indian—that stuck in my head all my life. But, shortly after that day, that actually was in the evening—um (*pause*), somehow all of the sudden there was this big commotion. It was during the day. My dad was gone. Um, you know—gone to work on the ship or wherever he was at the time, I can't remember if it was on the ship or not. But he was gone to work. So we were left home, my aunt and her kids and my brother and sisters. But there was a big commotion (*shaking head*). All I can hear is screaming. [00:20:06.19]

(*Sigh, long pause, looking down*) And when I went to the kitchen, I recognized a voice (*pause*). It was my mom (*tears, reaches for tissue*). Excuse me. My mom's voice. And I could hear her yelling (*voice breaking*) through the door. Um, saying she wanted her kids (*takes sip of water, breathes out*). I wanted my mom. And I know that my siblings did too. And my brother (*laughing*), he was big enough to get there, but uh—he started climbing out the window to get to my mom. She's grabbing—holding (*lifts hands over heads, mimes pulling*), trying to hold him, pulling him out the window. And then uh—my aunt is pulling him back in, and my cousins were trying to help her pull him back in (*pause*).

With all the screaming going on, all I could do was (*shakes head*) curl up in a corner. My sisters held me (*sniffs*). Trying to comfort me. They were crying too. I was screaming and crying. (*Long pause, wipes tears, exhales deeply*). My brother made it out the window (*nodding*). But I still had my sisters. My mom took off with my brother. A shore patrol came, and uh—I remember uh, my father came home. And I can hear him and my aunt yelling, and um, they're speaking in Tagalog, you know, at the time I did understand them (*laughs*). Um... but my father pretty much was uh—yelling at my aunt, angry that she couldn't keep all of us from her, from my mom.

And I think I had—I think it was only maybe a day or two that um, my father came and got my brother (*correcting himself*)—oh, my sisters and my—and took us—I can't remember if it was an apartment, or I think it was an apartment, or maybe it was a motel room, I can't remember. But I know—I believe it was in the Wilmington area, Wilmington California.

And uh, we—my mom was there. And I guess, I don't know—all I can base it on is little bit of



what I heard from my mom later on. That when my father—my father found them, exactly where they were and went to retrieve my brother. Um, but legally they weren't—he couldn't because they were not divorced, and they um—they weren't divorced yet. And that she—being he was in her custody at the time, physically, that there's nothing he can really do to just pull, take him away from my mother. I guess they had made some kind of an agreement that we would stay there until—with both of them. So they both actually stayed in the same place (*laughs*) with the four of us. And she would keep an eye on us while, um—while he was working, you know at work. Until the divorce thing was taken care of. But—then she had actually—I said four, there were actually five of us because she brought my brother Terry with her, you know, when she came up to find us. **[00:27:24.09]**

And uh, so—and I remember her—I still remember watching her iron his uniforms. So you know, when all the sudden, when everything, when she was gone again I didn't understand it. Because, you know, just the recollection of that time remembering she could cook meals and (*sniffs*) take care of us. She'd clean us up, and even iron my father's uniform, and I didn't know at the time that they were getting a divorce. But, you know, I was okay. Because I had my mom and dad. I just remembered hearing little arguments here and there. And then all the sudden, I remember my brother Terry was very ill, very sick. And then, my mom and Terry were gone. And what I found out later, um, was that Terry got very sick, and the doctors had told my mother that it was because of um, I guess some environmental issues in that area, that if she didn't get him out of that area that he would die.

But yet my mom was told, I guess—I'm led to believe, that she was told by the legal authorities that she was not allowed to take us away from there. So she made a decision to get Terry out of there so that he had a chance to live. And I didn't know that then, though. All I know is that my mom was gone. **[00:30:01.14]**

And uh—of course they were back over my aunt's. And you know, kids—you know? You don't (*shaking head*)—sometimes we can be you know, as children be distracted a little bit, you know with the things going on. Away from some of the things that are—that we may be feeling. Um, and I remember there was, you know, things going on there, and the family would get together and they used to have me go out there and play my guitar in front of the family and, you know, sit all in a circle and have me sing all these Elvis songs with my guitar and perform for them (*wiping eyes*). Excuse me.

And um, then again—you know my father would always sit there with my guitar, with our guitars—and I started asking more about the Indian thing. “What about... what do Indians do? What do Indians like to do? You know, uh—the foods?” You know? “They like deer?” “They like deer, yeah. They like deer.” I said—and I remember asking him, “Can I go see the Indians, my Indians?” (*Pause*) I think the only words that came from him at that point was, “I don't know.” And he gave me a hug.



I think it was the next day my aunt had—you know back then you had black and white TVs to—well this was in Wilmington. You know, in LA county, so I think we actually had three TV stations. Of course black and white. But (*wipes eyes*), I remember, um that while uh—I think my brother was in school, and my cousins were all—except for Marilyn, and I think by that time my— one of my other cousins was born. Anyway, I was watching the TV and there was a movie that came on. And it was Indians! I was—you couldn't peel me away from the TV. And of— they were Mohawks. Okay? Um, and so—I said, “I'm Indian, I'm Indian!” And I remember my auntie heard me talking, “I'm Indian, I'm Indian!” And I'm running around, and I remember her saying (*angry voice*), “You stop! You don't want to be Injun!” You know? I said, “My dad said I'm Indian. My dad said I'm Penobscot Indian.” “Ah, you don't want to be Injun! They're no good. No.” You know?

And of course, I just thought, you know, my aunt being my aunt, you know, um. It didn't hurt. I don't realize—I don't believe it hurt at that moment. Because my dad got home and I told him I said, “I watched the Indians on TV,” and he kind of smiled. I said and um, I said, “I want that haircut like them. I'm Indian, they're Indian. And I want a haircut like that.” So he got clippers out and gave me a haircut. Gave me the haircut like those, like the Mohawks had, and we know nowadays those weren't real Mohawks, but—you know, depicting Mohawks. And so he did give me that haircut. And I was so proud of that thing. You know? “I'm Indian.” And my aunt, I didn't know why but she always scowled at me while my hair was like that.

I can hear under her breath, “Injuns no good.” You know. And I always wondered why she would say that. You know? I—I don't know if I really took it personally. I can't honestly say that I did. I think (*laughs*) I was just having too much fun, because I can play cowboys and Injuns, and I can be an Indian. You know? Of course, back then, you know in those movies the Indians always lost, always got killed. But, I was going to be a winner. **[00:35:52.28]**

Um, but then next thing I know, there was these people that came with my father. There was a man and a woman, both white. And they were just talking and talking, you know. And they kept, you know—they were just looking at us. And I'm sitting there, you know, not really understanding what they were saying, but yet, and then um—they would go. And next thing I know, another day or two went by and my father had packed up our stuff. And uh—we're driving and I remember we went—he said something about, we are going to stay somewhere for a while.

And I think the first one that—we went to one place, and there was a couple there who were talking with my dad and you know, and I'm thinking that okay, we're all going to stay here for a while. And, you know—until dad gets back. Then next thing I know, my dad is loading my brother and I up in the car. And my sisters weren't coming (*tears, long pause*). And then he took us to another, you know—he drove and I'm already crying. Because I want my sisters. Of course I'm in the back seat by myself at that time, and my brother was sitting in the front seat.



And so all I could do was just kind of cry. Dad telling me, you know, “Stop crying. Big boys, we don't... you're not supposed to cry.”

[00:39:36.07] And we got to this place and uh—it was uh, an Asian family. I believe they were Japanese. And uh, they were talking, and they had this little dog. And that little dog is a Chihuahua. I didn't like that dog. And he didn't like me (*smiling*). But uh, then he told—my dad says that's where we're staying. We're going to stay with them for a while. And he had to go. ‘Cause—and I didn't understand where he had to go. But um, so Dominic just kind of came over and put his arm around me and—and—while we watched our dad go, leave. Dominic was crying. I was. I think Dominic knew at that time. I think he already had an understanding that I needed someone that was strong. You know, to let me know that he was standing right there with me.

I remember that family. That couple. They weren't a very nice— a nice couple. I remember times where I would hear the lady yelling at my brother. And of course she yelled at me at times, and just—as far as I know, we were kids being kids. I mean I was still young. And yet—and um, I remember she hit my brother (*sighs, smiles briefly*). I remember we were—when she hit my brother, I hit the dog. It's all I could do. I think for me, I that was my only recourse. If you hit my brother, I'm going to hit your dog. I don't know (*shrugs*). It seems kind of funny at times, but from a little boy's view, point of view, it was,, “Yeah, I love my brother, you love your dog.” You know? “And you hurt one that I love, I'm going to hurt what you love.” I remember that.

And then I remember, I don't know how long it was but you know, because they did—they did a lot of complaining and we were not allowed to do a lot of things. Sometimes we had to just sit, sit still. Sometimes sit on our hands, just you know, um, and be quiet. We weren't allowed to talk (*phone vibrates on the table*).

And um, but some time went by, and I don't know how much time lapsed by that point, and my father came. And uh, (*sniffs*) I remembered he brought—he came to only visit. I was so excited. I thought he was taking us away. But he came and he brought me this captain's hat (*mimes putting on hat*). And uh, he brought Dominic and I these um, chocolate seals. And by that time, my favorite song of the day back then was, was uh—I'm trying to remember what year that song came out—but uh, it was “Puff the Magic Dragon.” [00:45:24.14] I used to dance to it. And I'd hear that and I'd dance around, not dance around, but I'd walk around like a march and singing that song, you know whenever I heard it.

And um, but when my dad showed up and he brought me those things—I gave that seal a name, that's what I called it, Puff the Magic Dragon. Dominic of course ate his chocolate seal (*smiling*). Mine I didn't want it, I wouldn't touch it. I wouldn't eat that, it's Puff the Magic Dragon. So I asked that they put it in the freezer, and I uh, and—and I went outside and my dad



uh, you know, came outside with my brother and I and, uh, just spent some time with this. And that dog was—you know I was running around and that dog started chasing me. And um, and my hat blew off my head, and the dog took off with my new hat. So, I'm chasing that dog around trying to get my hat back. Um, I remember being really upset because my brand new hat, that dog put a hole in it (*mimes hole with fingers*). And I cherished what my father brought me. But then he had to leave.

So we were there. My brother and I, watching our father leave again. And leaving us there where we were scared. We didn't want—we wanted to tell him so bad, how we were being treated. I remember but, that couple were standing right there, every move, everywhere we—you know, my father was the, you know—they'd follow us. And uh (*sniffs*), we couldn't tell him. We were scared. Because we knew my father would leave and we couldn't tell him because we were going to get in trouble.

And again, I don't know how much time lapsed, but it was—next thing I know there was some people, those people—people would come and show up and talk with that family, and I know they were talking about us because they sent us outside in the backyard. We were looking through the window, and, you know, they kept on looking at us, talking we'd come in the door and they would be quiet. And they'd tell us to go out. And that was a couple times. And then—then we were taken again.

I thought maybe—you know—we're going to go back, you know, with our sisters. You know, 'cause we miss our sisters. But no. We went to another foster home. And there is a part, where I can't remember, I think there was actually another foster home before this one. But I don't think we stayed long. They bounced us from—you know we were there for just a very short time, and then we wound up going—being taken to this other family. And um, I remember the family's name: Mr. and Mrs. Ortiz. [00:49:39.03]

In Artesia, California. I remember that, cause I kinda thought, well that's—Ortiz and Artesia. Haha (*laughs*). But um—so that's how I thought back then. And that was a very abusive home. Always being yelled at, always—nothing seemed to be (*shakes head*)—whatever we did was not right. Always yelled at. Always hit. Sent to bed without food. You know? Being hungry.

I remember, and then they had their fam—their—the one—I don't know whose father it was, or grandfather, I think it was one of the grandfathers, was ill. And my brother and I had to sleep in the same room with him. I remember the smell. I remember the coughing, gagging—and he had to have a can right there that he used as a spittoon. And you know, it just smelled so bad, and I remember saying how gross it was, you know? He'd be coughing up all this stuff, and just—and we had to sleep in that same room with him.

And I remembered going, you know. Um, one of the times that I was sent to bed, we were sent



to bed without something to eat—I remember Dominic being sent to bed with nothing to eat, and of course uh, you know I remember though—or he would tell them I'm not going to eat and he'd go up. You know? I don't care. I want my dad. I want my mom. He always, I think more the reference really wasn't always I want my dad. It was a lot of times I want my mom. And it was times—I want my mom and dad. And of course, we'd get hit. Or stood in the corner. Or both, actually. And then we were told we couldn't have dinner.

I remember one time it was just something simple. It was something about the mood. Everyone wanted us to sit in the living room, they were going to watch a show. And I can't remember what it was but I know it was nothing major, nothing big. But they got upset at me about something and they told me to go to bed. And I hadn't eaten yet. So then I couldn't—I wasn't going to have any dinner.

So one dinner, when it was dinnertime, you know, I had to sit there with—you know, and watch whatever it was they were watching with them, when dinner time was ready, I remember they told me to go to bed. And I cried. I wanted—I was hungry. I was so hungry. And I looked at Dominic and he (*looking up*)—I can see. I remembered the look in his face. It was like he was enraged. But he stayed quiet. 'Cause they told me, they took me, they dragged me down to the room and told me I better be quiet. If I woke—if I kept their grandfather awake, that they would beat me. [00:54:29.21]

I remember laying there, quiet, you know quietly crying. 'Cause I was, I was just so hungry. I remember the pain. Of being hungry. And after a while Dominic came to bed, and we slept on the same bed. And he told me that he would—he held me. Told me everything's going to be okay. It will be alright. He said, "I'm right here. Nobody's going to hurt you." (*Sniffs*) I remember him holding me. And I know I fell asleep at that time.

And I guess later on that evening, he had um, got—well gotten up out of bed. I felt him getting—I woke up and um, I thought he was just going to use the bathroom, which I think—that's what I thought anyway. But he came back and he had a piece of foil in his hand. And he uh, he opened it up, and it was a couple pieces of chicken. And he had me eat.

And later on he told me what he did. Because he was—well, we were basically like the slaves there, in the foster home. That's one thing I forgot to mention there. We were expected to do all the cleaning. We cleaned, we washed the dishes, we cleaned the bathrooms, we scrubbed the floors. Um, basically we were housekeepers. And—we were just kids. But (*laughs*), what he told me was uh, of course when it was time for him, since I was sent to bed without you know, dinner—he had to do all the cleaning himself so while he was doing the cleaning he took some, a couple pieces of leftover chicken, wrapped them up in the foil and stuffed them down into the trash can. Which they wouldn't think of looking for. Just to feed me.



And I... (*long pause*). There was some more that I remembered there. My father came to visit there (*voice breaking*). And again, they stayed right there. Listening to everything that was discussed between us and our father. And knowing that he was going to be gone, you know, we didn't dare say anything.

The uh—I don't know, whatever, you know, that old man—I don't remember him passing away, which is really odd. I don't remember what happened to him. But I remember that uh, shortly after we were gone—(correcting) I mean shortly before we were gone, he wasn't in that bed anymore. But the room still smelled like that smell. Just—I can still remember that smell. Cause we had to—we were the ones who had to clean it up. His urine bowl or whatever, his can for his—what he's coughed up. We had to clean his bed when he urinated in the bed. And that's what we were there for.

It was something else about that home that I was going to share. For whatever reason it's not coming to mind. But maybe later it will come back. [01:00:56.05] That wasn't (*exhales*) uh, that wasn't a very good place.

But there, one of the things we did, we did get a chance to talk to our sisters. We got to meet that family. You know there was a time when they took uh—someone came and picked us up. I think it was my dad, actually. I think my dad was the first time we were—he came to pick us up and he took us over to visit with our sisters. Man they had it made (*shaking head with a smile*). That's how—that's—Dominic and I think, wow! This is fun. And the family, the couple, they were just awesome. And it was like they came, they were so happy, they hugged us, kissed us, were excited that we were there visiting our sisters, and visiting them, and they could finally meet us, their brothers. And, uh, they really felt welcoming—really nice people. I remember that. And their names were Louis and Teresa Bodahelli [sp?].

And then there was uh, their son Eric. Eric Bodahelli was there too, and he got some cool things going on. (Laughs). He had uh, stock car track, and he was, all this awesome stuff, he—you know—I never even—I was thinking man they must be rich. You know? I'd never seen so much. And to be able to use it. The other places, you didn't touch anything. We were just there to clean. If we touched something, we got hit. We got...

And um, being able to see my sisters, and our dad together? All four of us together with my dad, and you know, while my dad was visiting with the, the Bodahellis, the adults, you know we got a chance to go outside and play with each other and the dog Tiger. He was an awesome dog. But he loved—that dog even loved us. He seemed so excited to be, you know, to be with us. But I remember—I remember—I think it was Sissy that asked, have you heard from mom (*pauses, wipes eyes*)? And that's where it kind of um, went from the laughter that we were having, and I remember there wasn't a lot of laughter directly around that question. You know, Dominic said no (*shaking head*). [01:05:14.26]



And I wanted to ask my dad that. When are we going to go back with mom? But I didn't. Well it was time that, you know, we were there, and my father said we had to go. And we'd be able to visit again. After that visit we were able to have phone calls. Um, and we—they said, you know, that's what we were told. And when we got back to the Ortiz's, you know, after our visit (*loud sounds, children playing in the background*), I remember my dad telling them that you know, we were allowed to call our sisters. Or they'd be calling from time to time. And he says once a week at least.

And I remember after—well of course my dad's gone now and I remember Dominic wanting to call our sisters. Well we both did, but Dominic's the one who asked, cause he was older (*sips water*). And something had happened. You know, and they used that as punishment. Because we didn't do, we got in trouble, so we're not allowed to talk to our sisters. And I remember Dominic specifically saying, “Well I want to talk to my mom. Call my mom!” And of course got sent to the room with no dinner. And a couple of times, uh, people came—people from, I guess the social workers came. And (*loud sound*) having discussions there...

JU: Should I say something to them?

RG: I'm sure it's fine.

RP: And um, there was a few times they came by and um, I said, “No.” We were being picked up. All of our stuff was packed. We were being brought over, over to the Bodahelli's (*long pause*). I remember when we were in the car and they were telling us where we were going, that the Bodahellis had asked, you know, and were asking and fighting for some time. And they were in communication with my dad, that—and they had agreed that they would take my brother and I.

(*Tears*) At the time I didn't understand exactly what was going on, um. But when I looked at my brother, (*laughs*) he had the stupidest grin on his face, with tears in his eyes at the same time. And I think I just started crying (*laughs*). I didn't know why. All I was seeing... my brother had tears in his eyes. So it was confusing to me, cause I'm—he's got this silly grin on his face but he's crying. And usually while we're crying, something's wrong. So I was crying too (*laughs*). I didn't understand that you can cry for happiness. Which is, um—the thought that goes through my mind at this time is the happiness I felt when I fully understood that we were back together, the four of us. I missed my sisters. [01:10:19.11] And I know my brother did.

And we had always felt so vulnerable apart from each other. Its all we had. My father was gone a lot. He was in the Navy. We was overseas a lot. I didn't know what the heck was going on over there. But—and I didn't even understand that there was a day that he might not come back. I didn't understand that. All I wanted, you know, I just wanted my dad back. I wanted my mom back. And if my dad's not here, we should be with my mom. That's what I knew.



But the Bodahellis—granted they didn't have a lot of space in that house. But they had three bedrooms, I think it was. Eric, no I'm sorry, I said Eric—it was Larry. I correct myself. That was Larry Bodahellis. And um, I remember them talking about Gary, their other son, their older son, who was in the Marine Corps. He was overseas. He was in Vietnam. And um, I said, “Oh, that's where my dad's at.” You know? But my dad was on a boat, on a ship. And um, so you know that was exciting. You know, their son's there. I'm thinking that you know, okay, he's watching over my dad and my dad's watching over him. And you know so we, you know, but they always—

The bedroom that my sisters slept in, that's where we slept, we all slept together, and we laid down in bed, I kind of say like sardines. You know how you open the sardine can and you know? The girls slept you know, a head up here, feet down here (*gestures with hands*). The boys slept head down here, and feet up, you know what mean? And the doors always stayed open. And that was okay because we had Tiger watching over us. The dog. And he was an awesome dog. I loved that dog.

And so—and the Bodahellis were just so—it's—even though we were displaced, and we knew. They had a way of making it feel okay. We could cry and they would hold us. It didn't matter. We didn't hear anything from them that boys don't cry. All we had was hugs and kisses and, uh, and then when we're all done, Louis Bodahelli would say, “Okay! Lets—well now that you're all done we got to build up that energy.” He'd stand up, come on. And he'd go grab—my favorite was them sugar frosted flakes. He'd grab that out and we'd have a bowl of cereal. Bodahellis *laughs*). Just to make everything all better, and get up that energy.

But he was—we did so much. I went to school. Um, kindergarten. First grade. Um, second grade. We were there for quite a while. We even moved from that—where that house was in um, in Long Beach. 'Cause I remember we'd go in there and, and Louis had a concession stand. A hotdog stand. With chilidogs and hotdogs, over at the golf course right there, which was, uh, right by the base. And um, so I that was pretty cool.

We weren't that far from my aunt and uncle, and their family cause they lived right there in Wilmington in Navy housing. So there were times when we would, like when my father would come and visit and he'd take us and we'd go and visit our aunt and uncle and cousins. And then he'd bring us back, and it wasn't a big—knowing they're somewhat close by. But we'd go. And of course I would go out and wash the golf balls while—making money. You know, the golfers would pay me to put, you know, I was just infatuated with that little thing where you would wash the golf balls. [01:15:24.22] But then I had all the chilidogs I wanted.

But you know, they always made us feel... and I remember, I remember telling them how much I missed my mom. I remember hearing Dominic tell them. I remember hearing Sissy. I remember hearing Erlinda. All of us had our turn in telling them. And you know? They said,



“Well you know things will be okay. You guys will be okay. You stay together, you work—you know, keep each other strong and you guys will be okay.” They never said that, “You’ll find your mom, you’ll be back with your mom.” They always taught us to stay together. That’s why they fought to get us there. And that was our biggest strength. They told us that.

And Gary (*laughing*)? Oh we would go everywhere. You know? Race cars—I mean, watch the car races. Drag races. Whatever. We went to the beach. But we moved from that house, you know—they bought a house in San Pedro. Which was even closer to the beach. So, you know, we loved the beach. And so. Anyway. I know—you know this is going to be a long story, because we’re only at that age, right? (*Laughter in the background*)

Um, but this is all—you know, I know some might think that this would pertain, you know how does it pertain to it, but these are kids. I mean I was a kid. I know it affected me. These are things that hurt me—and yet, other things—there were—knowing that there was a foster home there that, that was a pair of foster parents that really cared about our wellbeing. They might not understand the cultural thing, but I do look back at that. And I really, I can tell you with all my heart I loved the Bodahelli family.

Um—but, now we got—we moved to this place, and of course uh, we were there for a little while, you know a while longer after they moved you know, bought that house. And then my father came and got us. We were so excited. And I remember him saying you’re going to meet your new mom (*pause, sigh*).

Dominic, I looked at him. He didn’t seem so happy. And I looked at Sissy, and she was crying. I didn’t know what that meant. How do you buy a new mom? You know? What do you mean new mom? There’s no such thing as new moms. You know, that’s my understanding. I want my mom. Though it seemed—and I don’t remember Erlinda, Erlinda’s expression. I can’t—she would have to share that because I don’t remember how she reacted to that. I remember looking—the first two people I looked at was Dominic and Sissy (*points right and left*). If I didn’t look at Dominic first, I looked at Sissy first. I always relied on that, because they were the oldest, and Sissy was like playing mom to us. She was the mom. Even though she was just my older sister. And Dominic, because my dad was gone, well he was the dad. And we’re only a year apart from each other. I was the youngest. And um, **[01:20:24.01]** so I kind of cued off of them.

So we wound up in San Francisco. A long way away from anyone else we knew. I was eight years old. And I know those years because (*sigh*). Those were—those years stand out in a big way. In a devastating way. We got to meet our “new mom” (*with hand quotations*), our stepmother. I don’t know if it would be appropriate to mention her name. I don’t think I should.

She was also Filipino. You know, and they had a daughter that was—my understanding, they



had adopted her together. And I remember thinking, “How did all this happen?” I didn't understand anything like that. I don't—I didn't understand that you can give up a mom and then you're gonna get a new mom, and then you know. I didn't know how that worked. I was a bit confused, and uh—I know Dominic and Sissy were a little bit—they seemed a bit resentful. I didn't understand why. All I—but I was confused as it was.

But I had—I have my brother and sisters with me. And now we have uh, this girl that they say is our sister. And yet, she had—she got everything. We didn't get anything. I mean my father would try to give us stuff. You know, he—but of course back then military pay for enlisted wasn't that much. But we had—they had bought that apartment building in San Francisco on 9th Avenue. And my um, of course—we had a little bit of time to get to know my stepmother and our adopted sister for a very short time before my father had to leave and he was heading back overseas to Vietnam (*sips water*). Again.

And um, when he left, I mean she made—you know, we basically—again we were enslaved. All of the cleaning. Everything. And if we didn't get it just right, she would hit us. But our adopted sister Annette didn't have to do anything. She got to play with her dolls and all her pretty clothes and she got to go everywhere where our stepmother went. We didn't. And pretty much we, you know—she made us go, well we went to school. She enrolled us in school, which was in walking distance. And Golden Gate Park was just a block away. One of the entrances.

And then we had to walk to church. Of course I have to add that you know, when we were born, or since we were little, we were baptized as Catholics. And we were expected to go to Catholic Church. Um, that didn't happen with the Bodahellis. With the Japanese family we didn't either. But when it was the Ortiz's, well we had to be in church with them. But um, but then it was another family...

[01:25:38.25] But anyway, now back in San Francisco. Um. So we had to go to catechism. We had to go to—and catechism back then was um, quite lengthy. And it was okay to a point, but of course you know, like I said my father was gone. My—our stepmother, she used to work for the U.S. mint. And—at that time. And so we were—you know, but she would leave. She would leave us there. No groceries. No food. No—no clothes. We had very, very little clothes. We had a pair of shoes. Of course by “shoes,” you know, we would wear out our shoes because, you know—we couldn't get a ride anywhere. We had to walk everywhere. And everything, you know, it was not like today, all the kids want a ride here. They don't want to walk (*laughs*). We wanted to walk.

But we had to go school. We had to go to church. We had to go to catechism. And we had you know—Catholic classes, and you know, just (*pause*). I remember my mom—my mom (correcting) I'm sorry, my stepmother, had uh, every time my brother— you know, my brother



rebelled a lot. I think at that point, a lot of the anger started surfacing in all four of us. Dominic was the oldest, so he got the worst of it all. He would not—he would—he would stand between us and our stepmother when she would try to hit us (*pause*). He would not—he wouldn't—if he could he would not allow her to.

Sometimes she still got by him. And then we would all get it pretty much. So when she was there it was usually abusive. When she was not there, it was just survival for us. We went to those Catholic Church, the classes, the catechism and whatever else they wanted us to go to. And we took ourselves to school. Got ourselves cleaned up. My sisters washed our clothes. We roamed the streets. We roamed the park. I'm not talking about we roamed part of the park. We roamed every inch of Golden Gate Park. We knew our way around. We taught ourselves how to use the transportation system. There was a five and ten cent store that—up on Irving Avenue. That was between, you know, our route that we would walk to go to school. And um, we found some things out there, 'cause you know. What happened... *[01:30:22.09]*

Let me go back just a little bit. You know my brother thought up something. He was eleven years old. He was the only one old enough to have a paper route at the time. He had to be eleven years old. A friend of his was a newspaper boy and he made money. Since we had no way to do anything, my brother was able to get a—land a newspaper route. And the guy I guess kinda knew, or I don't know—its like he knew something about our situation. And he gave my brother a little bit of a bigger paper route, and gave us some extra papers too, beside from that, knowing that all four of us were going to work this route with him. It was his route.

And so that's what we did. Exactly what we did. We had two of us on each street. You know, one on each side of the road. I mean my brother planned this out. This is how we're going to do it. And, uh, we'd leap frog, you know, you need more papers, well he'd have 'em. And so with the extra papers, what we did was we'd stand on the corner, or, you know, and sell papers, you know ten cents apiece. And—or go into you know, some of the bars, little restaurants, and cafeterias and stuff, asking people, you know, “Would you like to buy a paper?” That was the line. “Would you like to buy a paper, sir? Would you like to buy a paper ma'am?” Exactly. We had to be courteous.

So, okay, now at the time we didn't think of it as stealing. So, I apologize if anyone is offended (*laughs*). But we knew, we'd take a dime, put it in a newspaper machine, there were more papers. So we paid for the papers (*laughs*). We didn't—you know, I mean—I think part of us kind of knew that it wasn't right, but we also knew that we needed food. We needed you know, things to survive. Um, and that's what we did. You know, I do say I'm sorry because knowing that it was considered stealing now, I mean, you know, for sure. Yeah.

So we had that, and that's, you know—what happened was my brother also had a tool kit, a little toy tool box with toy tools, not like toy tools today. Toy tools today are all plastic, you



can't cut nothing with them. But back then toy tools—a tool box consisted of tools that were just smaller for the kids' hands. But they were actual working tools. And my brother had one.

So we used to go sifting through, um, the construction sites. We walked everywhere. Up and down those streets, we—my brother built us skateboards and we skateboarded. Uh, a lot of places. And so, we were, you know, we became very resourceful. But we would go—what happened was we wound up going and getting—we'd sift through the construction sites, gathering up the nails that were under the sawdust, and the dirt and you know, sand. We'd go and get the scrap-wood that they had, you know, that was just laying around. And what happened, my brother built a shoeshine box. Nice, had the little foot thing (*mimes*), everything. How he knew that? I don't know. But he built that. And then with some of the money that we had gotten from the newspapers, he took and he bought everything we needed to shine shoes.

So we were a business. *[01:35:17.25]* We had a newspaper route that we worked together, and we had a shoeshine business that we'd work together. And we were very good, because when my father was home, he had taught us how to shine shoes. He, you know—and he would pay us to shine his shoes. In the military, I mean his shoes had to be mirrors. And that's how we made them. And so we had experience. So my brother built that, and that's what we did. We used what we learned. We never thought we'd (*laughing*) have to do it to literally survive.

But that's what we did. And we got ourselves into some trouble, here and there. Because of course, roaming the streets, roaming the park—the park closes a certain time, and they have curfews, and you know kids—well we didn't have anyone there, except for ourselves. Well we did everything that we were told we were supposed to do too. You know, going to school.

My sisters became um, safety—um, what do you call it? Safety monitors? Um, safety guards. And they were the ones who—they'd march out there, little militant looking, had their little white um (*mimes strap across chest, full outfit*), little things going across (gesturing around his body). And um, and they had their little hat. And their sign. A little stop sign. (*laughing in background*). But they would march down with you know—groups would go this way and that way—in each direction. And for so far, that they were responsible to cover. And then—they were the road guards. You know, make sure that traffic stopped, and none of the kids were allowed to walk across until they were given permission by the safety guard. They did that.

Dominic was the fastest person in the school. No, no, he wasn't. I'm sorry. Dominic was the fastest boy in the school. Sissy was the fastest girl in the school. Sissy was faster than Dominic (*smiling*). Erlinda and Sissy always into sports, all of us were into sports. Always. We—like I said, we did everything. We went to the Catholic—which is a big thing for me. Not in a happy way.

That... (*long pause, looking up and then down*). I never told my brother and sisters. There are



very, very few people I told. Very, very few. There at that place, at the nuns, you had the Reverend Mother, you had the priest (*pause, looking down*). Well, you know it started—when I was, you know, our classes, you know we had to go after church, too. So we had time on a Saturday, then we had Mass Sunday, then we had to go to class after Mass.

I think by that time I was already nine years old. But then—the nun that was our teacher then, she was, you know, you hear the stories. They'd use the yard sticks or the rulers, or the pointers to smack you. You know, you had to put your hands out (*holds his hands out, mimes smacking*) and they'd smack and you'd turn them over and they'd smack it, and they'd give you so many smacks. You know, and—yeah. If you did anything. Or if they felt you were in the wrong. **[01:40:39.11]**

The um—one day after Mass, I remember so clearly, I was listening—okay not quite clearly cause I can't remember exactly what it was that the sermon was about now. You would think I would. But I remember the events. And um, I listened to what that priest was reading out of his book, out of the Bible. He read... right directly out of the Bible. And he turned around, you know, he gave sermon over this—he read. And it sounded all good, you know? And then, from my eyes, I thought, when the next thing he did was the totally opposite of what he just got done reading directly out of the Bible. And then giving a sermon explaining to us what that meant.

So it was kind of—it kind of threw me off. So of course, you know, I just went through and finished Mass, and we all went to our classes afterwards. And the nun, the teacher that had my class, was talking about today's Mass, and all the sermon and you know, the passage that it was focused on, and I raised my hand. Out of innocence. I wanted to know, I mean, there was something that just didn't seem clear to me. And so she called me, and I asked, I told her I wanted to know why it was that what he read and then what he talked about, you know, sounded—I mean they were matched up. But then he turned around, and how come—I wanted to know why it was that he did opposite of what he had just shared—told us and read from the book. Almost before I finished my question she was there smacking me with that stick (*mimes hitting, grabbing*), hitting me. Just, I mean, all over. And then grabbed me by my hair, or not by my hair, my ear. And dragged me out of the classroom.

And I'm screaming. She's yelling at me. And there in the, you know, halfway down the hallway is the Reverend Mother, she's come up. And she's wanting to know what happened. But before she even knew, she grabbed my other ear. The Reverend Mother grabbed my other ear, before she even found out what happened. So that nun told her, and she started smacking me on the face (*mimes hitting*). Dragging me by my other ear, now the other one headed back to the class, brought me in to the office there and out comes the priest. Wondering what the heck is going on. They're talking. They didn't give me a chance to say anything. **[01:45:01.03]**

The priest was a little more calm about it. He had me go into those chambers. His office. And



um, he had a paddle that—that—I mean it wasn't a wide one. It was about that wide (*holds up hand in a c-shape, fingers about an inch and a half apart*). It had a nice handle on it, wrapped. About that long (*holds hands apart about a foot and a half*). And about that thick (*holds hands in pinching shape*). And he had me bend over that desk. And he, you know proceeded, just smacking me on the backside (*long pause, sighing*). That wasn't it.

But he got ahold of my stepmother, called my stepmother down. And I don't know what was said there. But she came. And she came when my brother and my sisters weren't home. They were—well they were home but they were out and about. And she yelled at me, telling me that I'm not supposed to question. I'm not supposed to ask questions like that. You know? That the priest or any of them, you know, the nuns or Reverend Mother, any of them. They could never do wrong. Because they are—they are a part of the church.

And she proceeded in smacking me with that— them slippers. It was a hard sole slipper (*holds out hands to show shoe sole*). She wouldn't do it on my face (*puts hands on face*). She smacked me on my head. Smacked me on my back, and my butt. And she kept repeating, you know—telling me that I had to say I'll never question them again, I'll never question them again. I'll never question them again, while she was beating me. And I had no one there. I had no—I know if my brother was there, he would have been fighting with her physically. But nobody was there to protect me. I couldn't fight back.

But still I had to go back there. And this is where I won't go into too much detail, but there was other abuses there. Not just the hitting. By all three. Actually, there was four. That nun, that was my teacher. The Reverend Mother. The priest. And there was a member, a brother of the Holy Cross.

And again, I tried to bring that up. My father was gone. He was still in Vietnam. Who did I have to say anything to? My stepmom. My new mom (*takes tissue*). And yet, I tried to tell her what they were doing. Smacked me in my mouth. Smacked me in my mouth again. Grabbed that slipper, hit me on the head, telling me they'd never do something like that, I was lying. Because they were nuns. They were priests. They were brothers. They would never do something like that. They're not allowed to. They would never do something like that. They're men of God. And women of God. **[01:50:59.22]**

And at that point, I remember, I was nine years old. At that point, I made a promise. I would never be Catholic. No matter how many times they made me go to that church, no matter how often they made me claim to be Catholic, “I'm not a Catholic.” And I said that to myself, I made a promise (*loud background noise-- drumming*). I told God, “I'm not your Catholic.”

We had... the best time that we had was without our stepmother there. Whenever it was there it was torture. It was—but we would do—but you know, I can't—as much as I say about, talking



about these things, and a lot of it is devastating, there's things that, that we did, you know my brothers and sisters, even around that time, we explored. We explored. We—we knew every inch of Golden Gate Park. We knew every inch of Presidio. We knew... you know, we had taught ourselves to use the, the transportation system. I said, you know we found out at the five and ten store.

We figured out okay, we can buy with some of that money that—I didn't get there yet—right now I am. Some of that money we took and figured out, ok, to get our bus card, our transportation card. Okay? Um, I think it cost us a dollar. Or fifty cents. I think it was fifty cents for the card. For each card, you had ten rides. So we had bought each one, each of us had one. It was—the cool thing about it, we learned that you can transfer. You punch that card, and you ask for a transfer. Because you know, whenever you're going to get off, you can transfer onto another, whether its a streetcar, a cable car, the bus, and there are these other things, I can never to this day figure out what they call them, but they were like busses, but they were also they were—put them to the electric thing.

RG: Oh, like a gondola?

RP: Nah, a gondola is a... a boat...

JU: Like a cable car?

RP: Yeah it was like, just the same thing you see what they have on the cable cars and street cars, they have that electric thing—there's the cable up there

RG: Yea, oh we call them—there's—not that this is important to your story but there's a gondola that we call it that goes up the mountain and that's on a cable like that. I just assumed that was...

RP: No, it was like a bus.

RG: Yeah.

RP: This is a bus I mean they travel all over sections of the city, so you were able to use any form of the—whether it was the street car, or the cable car—there is a difference between a street car and cable cars. Um, you know, it's the shape. One looks like—they call that a trolley, the red thingy you see on the “Rice a Roni” commercials. (*JU laughs in background*). That's what—that one is uh, a street car. Cable cars were more enclosed. And then um, they were also on tracks. Okay? They had the—the thing, the electric cable. They you had the busses which were, you know, just regular busses. But then you had those other busses that actually had the electric thing. They were not on railroad ties and everything. Not on tracks, but they still had to



be connected.

So anyway, we did all kinds of things. We fished for food. We would take uh... we would catch you know, the cable car... and we'd wind up down at fisherman's wharf. [01:55:45.25] We'd go down with all our gear. We had our crab nets, we had our fishing bowls, we caught our bait, and um, we'd go out there off the wharf. We'd fish, we'd—whatever fish we caught we kept as long as it was edible. But um, and we knew which ones weren't. And we had our crab nets there because at one point one of us will catch a shark. And so, when we caught that shark, that was our crab bait. And we'd chunk it up and tie it into the nets and we'd lower our crab nets and then we'd have king crab. You know? And yeah. I mean, this is what we did. You know? To survive. We learned about some of the plants in the park that were edible. You know. And medicine. So we were already in that direction (*chuckles*).

We'd go to play-land. You know, the money that we made, we'd take time and we'd go to the play-land, which was all the way down on the cliffs, at the beach, at the very (*pointing off in the distance*) on the coast, part of the—we'd go all the way at the end of Golden Gate Park. You know my brother um, I mean we were out in the ocean. We had learned how to body surf. We learned that when we were at the Bodahelli's, you know cause we were by the beach then, and we were infatuated with the—with the ocean, with the water. I was mostly. My brother too. You know, even a time when my brother got wrapped up with a man-of-war, a Portuguese man-of-war in that ocean. And we dragged him out, dragged him on to the cable car, and he did not stop, he was supposed to make stops. But when he saw, my brother had all these things on him (*moves hands over chest*) and when we told him what it was, he just would not stop until we got to over by Keizer Hospital.

So, you know, there's a lot of things we learned, and we saw out in the... But you know, going back to the whole thing, you know the thing now. We also got in some trouble. My brother mostly. Um, and uh, (*children laughing in background*) well he took the blame on a lot of the things that we were doing, and you know because we would go out in Golden Gate Park, we found our way, we figured out how to use some of their equipment. You know, we enjoyed the park day and night. You know? But since things were closed we would actually open them up for ourselves. And um, you know, other things—just. Basically we were told it's wrong, and so we went to juvenile hall. Um, and I was nine years old.

I remember my brother got in a fight in juvenile hall, because I think um, someone... I remember, I remember one point he got in a fight because someone was trying to pick on me. And there was no way he was going to let anybody bother me. And he got in a fight. And also, someone said that he was going, you know—I mean he told his story, a little bit of that. And uh, the uh, the court system basically told him, told our dad, my dad, you know...

We're going back a little bit. The only time we knew that our dad would be coming, that we



would see our dad is when all of the sudden there was some food in the cupboard and in the refrigerator, and we might get an article of clothing. Everything else we took care of ourselves. But that's how we would know that our dad was coming home. All of a sudden there was food. 'Cause I know she, my stepmother, you know, would find out from him. We never knew when he called. And yet she knew. All the sudden, she was around, and there was food and we had an article of clothing. And all of a sudden my dad would show up. And of course we knew he was going to be gone again, and we didn't dare. I mean we learned this from the foster homes. We weren't going to, you know if we said anything, we're going to suffer the ramifications.

[02:01:25.03]

So we kept our mouths shut. So anyway. Which eventually led to getting in a little bit of trouble. And um, the court basically—because Dominic was there a lot more than the rest of us, 'cause like I said he wound up taking the blame for everything. And um, of course, they, you know, told my father that he had to leave San Francisco. So they took my brother to Southern California, where our aunt was. Our aunt's family. And um, that left my sisters and I by ourselves (*sighs*).

We still did the things that we did with the four of us. We knew that one—one way we still had to survive. We still had to take care of one another. You know, we were missing our brother. Now, there—something happened while we were there, I mean, you know, I didn't mention this. We owned that building, that—because supposedly they bought that whole apartment building. There was a store downstairs, store space, and we would rent it out. We stayed in one of the apartments and then of course, um, her sister moved in. So we moved to the top floor (*raises hands*). Third story. And her sister moved into the apartment that we were originally in, which was the second story. And she had her kids, her boys.

Well, and you know, they could do no wrong. You know, their mother wasn't so bad. She was a nurse, and that's who, when Dominic got um, caught up with that man-of-war, that's who we were getting him to. She was the nurse that took care of him on that. Then I, you know—Dominic was still there at the time, but I was climbing up the side of the building, made a makeshift ladder, because you know there's this post that goes all the way up, and I don't know if any of you, if you've ever seen those. What they were meant for was, you know, the clotheslines. So you know, this story how you can still have your clothesline all the way across to the other side of the yard (*demonstrates with hands*), and you know, each level. Well, that post would happen—we had made a ladder. Basically we had just pieces of wood, we hammered them right here, all the way up. **[02:05:13.04]**

And one day I was back there by myself, and Dominic, Sissy and Erlinda were upstairs in the apartment. I figured I gotta get up there so I'm going to climb up. And I started to climb up, and just—I got to the third floor, the rung had let loose. And I fell three stories. And I fell onto a—what broke my fall was those little vegetable crates. You know, that thin board, you know.



They had a bunch of them on the bottom, and I landed face first—well not face first, facedown onto that pile and that broke my fall. I didn't break anything. But I sure was scraped and cut up. And I—the wind got knocked out of me, and I'm out there by myself, crying and in pain. And nobody's coming. So I wound up crawling up, literally crawling, dragging myself up the steps.

And the back door actually led into my sisters' room, that they shared. My brother and I we shared a room, it was a closet, that was our bedroom. It was like a walk-in closet. The wall was from this wall to here (*demonstrates with arms*). And maybe a little bit shorter from here to that door. And there was a little window there. Uh, for lighting. But that's what Dominic and I shared for a bedroom. And uh—but anyway.

So I climbed into the—I come dragging through the back door and that's when my sisters had saw me, and they just freaked out. Um, Dominic comes running out, wondering what was going on and he saw I was all bloody and scraped up, and you know, “What happened?”

Anyway. So they called our aunt up. Our step-aunt. Anyway. Anyway. So, anyway, it had come to a point. Now Dominic's gone. He, you know, away. And it's just my sisters and I now. We had her nephews, you know, my stepmother's nephews, two of them, that were there, and they had gotten these um, smoke bombs. You know they blew out this yellow smoke, and, um, firecrackers and um, stuff like that. And well, the house—the buildings in San Francisco are side by side. And we come out the back door of our apartment, on the top floor, we're looking over, you know, we can step right over onto the roof of the next building over.

Well, my cousins were—my stepmother's nephews—um, they were kind of, they were hanging out up there, and they were laughing and laughing, and they said there's someone taking a shower in there. You know, cause the window, the skylight, the window, you can open it (*mimes lifting a window*) and you can look at someone taking a shower. So I went out and I look and sure enough there's someone taking a shower in there. So what they did is they lit a smoke thing, a smoke bomb, a couple smoke bombs and some fire crackers and threw them down there while he's taking a shower.

And we beat feet, right? Well that night, you know, we never heard anything (*sips water*). And I guess my stepmother decided to come home. And I was sleeping. My sisters were sleeping. I woke up to being uh, my hair being dragged, you know, grabbed, and just slapping and punching and kicking, and pinching and clawing. Her yelling at me. And um, I tried to tell her, 'cause she told me that this man told, you know, told her that I did this. And um, her nephews had told her that I did it. I tried to tell her that they're the ones who did it, and, you know, she told me I was lying. She kept beating me. Um, just everything. Claws (*gesturing at his face*). And punching, and kicking me, and then she dragged me to the room and she grabbed the, the cord off of the lamp and, um, she started whipping me with it (*mimes whipping*). While she's dragging me, and um, then you know, she dragged me into my sisters room. Right between



their two beds, and tied me to uh, my sister Sissy's bedpost. Her headboard. **[02:11:14.05]**

And she, you know yelling at them, “This is what happens,” you know, “this is what he deserves.” You know, “and this is what you'll all have. If you ever do anything wrong.” And she just kept on, you know. The whole time she's talking, she's punching me, kicking me, just whipping me with the cord. And, and my sister, Sissy—and they're watching me. They're watching, screaming and crying. And um, and then she finally untied me. And she—my sisters had to wash me up.

And I went to sleep in my room (*sniffs*). We were woken up early in the morning. Our things uh—we had suitcases packed. And we were brought down to uh, to the bus station. The Greyhound station. Said we were going to our dad. She's sending us to our dad. Which was down where my aunt was, my aunt—you know, my aunt and uncle, where Dominic was (*pause*).

And I remember (*tears in eyes*)...I remember Sissy, while we were waiting for that bus, Sissy whispered, and she whispered to Erlinda. At least I thought... I'm pretty sure what I heard was, “If our mom wasn't here (*correcting*)—if our mom was here, she would kill her.”

We got on a bus. And man, you know I was sitting there, watch—looking at people, and just... I'm all in bandages here and there, and (*sniffs*). And, just I mean, you can't put bandages on—I mean I would look like a mummy. I mean to cover. I mean that didn't have, I mean even my hands were whipped with the wires (*holds out hands, turning them over*), and stomped on with feet. All the way down to my toes. And I know that everything, every part of me stung. People were staring. And Sissy and Erlinda tried to do what they can to kind of, I think they knew I was embarrassed. You know, being stared at, and they tried to huddle closer, and you know (*mimes covering up head*) put things just to keep me covered up.

We got on the bus, and a couple people had... you know, there was a lady that, “What happened to you?” And they said that uh, “Well we were swinging on, on a rope swing, over by Whisky Hill, which is in Golden Gate Park, and he fell off into one of the thorn bushes. Pretty bad.” And they, “Oh, yeah.” But you know, but you can—I don't think they believed, because I think, you know it was very clear the marks were the claw marks were literally made, you know, finger nails make certain you know, marks when you grab. And they were all over my face. Everywhere. Everything. Every part of my skin that was exposed to it, you know...

[02:16:26.13] So. We endured that ride to uh, to Los Angeles. Which is where the Greyhound bus station was. I um—and then we were—there we were met by my, my father. My uncle. My uncle drove cause he had a station wagon.

(*Pause to wipe tears*) The first time I ever saw my father cry (*pause*). And I remembered—I



remembered he was just holding me. Hugging me. And he asked my sisters what they saw. And I think Sissy said something real short, and—and my father decided to wait, you know, “Just tell me later. Tell me when we get to auntie's house.” My dad picked me up and carried me. Dominic was there.

Dominic, he actually, he got there before my dad. And he held me. Crying (*wipes tears*). He didn't—I didn't say nothing to him, except I miss you. But then my—that's when my dad got there, but I looked and Dominic's face and Dominic had a look of rage. I'd seen him angry before, but nothing compared to that day. My father, at first he had a look of just total anger and then it just, like he just let it wipe away (*waves hands away from face*), and just came and hugged me. And I think he knew I didn't need the mad look, you know. Anyway.

[02:20:42.15]

So but while he carried me—he did carry me to the car. And my sisters, my brother carried our luggage. And my uncle. And um, he um. I remember—and I don't know if I meant to or not, well, I was just a kid. I asked him, “Where were you?” I remember though... but I thought back at that moment, that I think at that time I did blame him. I did—I did blame him, I know, but later on when we left, you know later on, he got remarried. He did divorce her. He went to San Francisco and divorced that woman. Um, but that was after, that was after we left. That was, ‘cause he was supposed to leave the next day, the very next—you know, the next couple days. To um, he was going to school in Great Lakes.

So we were there at my aunt's place in Navy housing for a couple days. And he had pictures they took. When they got to my aunt's house they took pictures. Pictures and pictures. Every angle. Um, and they uh—I remember my aunt just...my auntie [?] just kept crying. Even my uncle Ike [?], though he wouldn't allow himself to cry, you could see the tears going down his face. My cousins. But you know what? I was back, you know. We had our brother back now.

Somehow my father worked things out to where I guess—or he got housing out in Great Lakes for us, really quick, we... I think by the time um, we left, within a couple days, early in the morning for Great Lakes. Um, and all that was situated, we had housing waiting for us, for Great Lakes. And when we drove across and um, I recognized some areas from when I was, the first time across there. When I was still in diapers. And you know...

And of course part of that on the way out there we got attacked by seven tornados at one time. My brother saved my life then. He got me to the car. I was actually airborne and he grabbed ahold of me, and started tumbling, and he came running after me and dragged me back to the car, and my dad got us out of there. And we turned around later on after my screaming, and you know, sister's back there trying to calm me down. We got out of there and when we got free of the storm, stopped at a Stucky's turnaround—you know my first time I turned around, and there were seven tornados lined up. [02:25:23.05]



Anyway. Great Lakes wasn't too bad. We spent time there. Um, then when we wound up back in California, this time my father was being stationed there in San Diego. So we drove back. We still had to kind of keep track of ourselves there. At least my father was there pretty much. Out in Great Lakes, he was there for school, so he was home most of the time, 'cause of course he had to stay on duty at times.

Um, we got to San Diego and uh, he was stationed there. We wound up going to school there. Again, we kind of, I mean, by that time we've already started getting settled into this way of life that we had to survive. We had to take care of one another, and we were all we had, was each other. Even with our dad there. Because our dad wasn't there the whole time. We had to endure what—a lot with his absence. We had to rely on, only on each other, when we could.

And so of course we did, we did a lot of things. But you know, one of the things that I forgot to mention. You know, I learned—I—martial arts. Through time I had become, you know, proficient in martial arts. But I had promised myself nobody was ever going to hurt me again. Not the church, not anybody. So I focused, and I focused just on practicing and putting myself, building myself, um, to a point where if at all possible nobody is ever going to hurt me. So I practiced, and I did everything I could to excel. In martial arts, and other forms of sports, just to, I mean I—not to play on the teams, but just to stay in shape. My father taught us that too. He taught us martial arts. He—other avenues of martial arts.

And one of the things I didn't go into: one time we were in San Francisco, there was a person, there was an old man. Actually there was a couple—there was another friend of ours that uh—a friend of mine. And I just happened to know that he was Native. They were cool. You know? They're Indian. I said I'm Indian too. I'm Penobscot Indian.

Well the grandfather, every time I went over there, you know—because I had to keep it quiet because my dad—as far as I knew my dad didn't like Injun... because I know my auntie said Injuns are no good. My stepmother definitely didn't like Indians. And so I had to hide it. I think my brother and sister... 'cause they had to come find me at times, they knew. I said, “Oh they're Indians! They're Indians!” And um, I don't think they thought anything of it. I don't think.

[02:29:45.14] So anyway, now there was—but while there was times where I was left at home by myself, you know cause my sisters, they didn't want their little brother hanging out. You know, they knew I was going to be home, I was okay alone. Dominic had his friends, and you know, of course he was the oldest. Some things he just—you know we didn't always do everything. We did a lot, most things. There were times when I had to stay home.

And so—but there was this old man that I met. I was—when I was home alone I was hanging



out front on the sidewalk, and of course we don't have a front yard. You're literally on the sidewalk of the busy street, you know. Ninth Street was where the cable car—the cable car would come up (*gesturing with hands*), and turn up till it got to Judah and headed toward the ocean. And it was very busy. We had stores. Rexall drug store on the corner and all that kind of stuff.

So anyway, but I met this old man. And we were talking of course. I didn't know this—I never was taught, you know, don't talk to strangers and this and that, right? So I'm talking to this old man, and he seemed to know everything about me. You know? But he talked in this weird language. Weird language. I didn't know. But it's weird because I understood what he was saying at the same time.

And so at the times—and it never dawned on me the times that he would show up, it was always when I was by myself. Never when my brothers or my sisters were there, always when I was by myself. But you know, he—and he knew, you know. He'd ask, “Are you hungry?” And he'd, you know, he'd actually come up, and he'd make me something to eat. Or I'd make him something to eat. Well, you know, this man. And he always—and the name I always called him, what I knew to call him was Moosums. That's what I called him. Moosums.

So I thought that's you know, a strange name (*phone vibrates on the table*). Um, and so, uh—I didn't know what a lot, um, in regards to where he came from or how he knew me, how he knew about me. But he was a friend. He was comforting in so many ways, just—and the things he showed me, we would do. We would go for walks. You know, head down to Golden Gate Park. And he showed me a lot of things. You know, we'd be talking about all these things, and I didn't understand any of it. A lot of, well, any of it—a lot of it I didn't understand. It just sounded cool. I just, as a kid. Okay. *[02:33:20.26]*

So that's where that kind of started. Now we're in San Diego. Well even in Great Lakes, he—I just thought he happened to move out in the area. You know. And I thought that was cool, that, “Shoot, I know somebody out here.” But now in San Diego. Same thing, he was still, you know, as I got older, he seemed like less and less—but, then but he would share a lot of things. And like I said, he spoke in some weird, you know, some strange language, but for some reason I knew exactly what he was saying.

Um, and of course, going on, and on with life there. And got involved in a lot of things. You know, we had to put up with a lot of things. My aunt's house of course, we were—we were treated differently. ‘Cause that side of the family basically, we were considered half-breeds. We weren't all Filipino. So we were looked down upon. We got the, the scraps. Um...

You know, something happened. You know, where our cousins, you know, if we were around our cousins, it was our fault. We're the ones—we're the bad influence. And of course time and

time again, I heard, “You're just like an Injun.” Really? You know? This is what I would hear. “Oh, you're mother's Injun. She was no good.” But they also told us she was dead.

We would run away. I know for me, a lot of times, you know—there were times that we'd talk and we wanted—we ran away. Wanted to get back to our mom. And of course that's when they started telling us our mom was dead. When my brother spent, you know he—we all did go into juvenile hall from time to time for, for running away, for being incorrigible or whatever. And then um. But you know there were times, when like, we would be um (*looking down*) could you pause just a moment?

RG: Absolutely.

[END OF RECORDING]