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Statement by Robert Polchies collected by Rachel George on May 30, 2014

Robert Polchies

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Robert Polchies

Date: May 30, 2014

Location: Indian Island, ME

Previous Statement? Yes

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: NA

Additional Individuals Present: NA

Recording Format: Video

Length of Recording: 2:03:20 (Two Parts – Part 1: 1:22:04. Part 2: 41:16)

Recording

RG: Ok, today is May 30th, 2014. My name is Rachel George. I am here at Indian Island, of Penobscot Nation. Would you mind stating your name?

RP: Robert Polchies, but just call me Burt.

RG: (*Chuckles*) Okay. The file number is P, as in Paul, -201405-00049. Uh, Burt, 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 your statement today you indicate that there is a child or an elder in need of protection, or that there is an identifiable... serious risk... to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, of serious bodily harm or injury, that that information may not be protected as confidential.

RP: Okay.

RG: Do you understand?

RP: Yep.

RG: Do you feel okay going forward?

RP: Yes.

RG: Ok. You can start wherever you feel most comfortable.

RP: Alright. So if I say I'm going to hurt myself if I eat too much, are you going to report that?

RG: Yeah.

RP: There's some good food out there (*laughs*).

RG: There is.

RP: Alright, anyhow. So I guess here we're picking up to where I left off on my last attempt to do this statement. And I believe we were in—we got to San Diego. And I believe what I was getting ready to talk about there was um. You know, there were times, you know, when I managed to run away and stuff like that, and how um, the way we were treated. Um. Being told that our mother had passed away. We used to run away a lot, and uh, the closest bureau of Indian Affairs was, I was—someone had mentioned that place to me and said if I wanted to find my mother, and um, get back to the Penobscot, my Penobscot people, Penobscot Nation, they would be able to help me.

So the closest Bureau of Indian Affairs was in Riverside, California, which um, actually hitchhiking only took me a few hours to get there. Um, and sometimes it, you know, it even involved walking. So, and we were talking about me being still a pretty young child. I had gone to the Bureau of Indian Affairs looking for help. And each time I wound up there, pretty much was before they opened their offices. So whenever they get there, before they opened the doors I was there on the doorstep. And eventually we would go inside, and I would tell them I want to go back to my mom.

And they asked me what tribe I was. I said well, I'm Penobscot. And when—they would leave, and they would look like they were doing, trying to do something. They would come back each time telling me the Penobscot Nation no longer exists. So as a child, that's really, really hard to take. You know? Its not understandable, because I was always told I was Penobscot. Okay? Um, and I was always very proud of that.

[00:04:29.09] So for me to be told that my people no longer exist... I'm thinking about my



brother and my sisters and myself. Thinking that, you know, where do I go? Where do we go? We spent all this time with one... our mom. Whether we went back with her, if that was possible or not, I don't know. The thought was just, we want our mom. We want her in our lives. We want our people in our lives (*smiles*). And we wanted to be a part.

So all I had were the friends that I would come across that were native. From the local areas, you know, whether it was the [native tribe name, can't make out] or whatever, you know, the... they were—or the Pawnee. You know... [native tribe name], Verona [?], Indio [?], Samuo [?], [another tribe name]. I had friends and I would run a way and I would be a part of the things that they would do. My friend's grandparents would pretty much take me in, and treat me as one of their own. Um, so if one of their kids or grandkids got in trouble and got spanked, well I was one of those too. I got smacked if I did something wrong (*laughs*). Um, but it was learning. They were showing me ways of connecting.

And it was, uh, different. I had to keep it hidden, because the way my father's side of the family was, and their thoughts against Natives. Or like I said before, "Injuns," um... I would be in trouble. So a lot of times I had to keep it away from my brother and sisters, thinking that if they knew and it slipped out they would also be in trouble. Because that's how our family was. If—I was the youngest of the four. So me being the youngest, my older siblings had a responsibility to keep me in line. And if I got in trouble, they would get beaten. For not keeping me out of those things. So I thought it was more of protecting them as well, and protecting me too (*laughing*).

The um, a lot of the people in the area, we had friends that as we grew up there in San Diego area, were in areas of course with a lot of the gangs. So we grew up associating with a lot of the gangs, you know. Even as kids. As we got older, becoming more and more of a part of a lot of those gangs. Um, which eventually also lead into other things. You know... trying pot. Trying you know, different things like that. And um... I don't know if I can honestly say it was an escape. But sometimes it seems that way. To relieve that—that feeling of loneliness. We had each other, but sometimes you wanted something more.

So, um, of course my brother and sisters being older than me, a lot of times they would go on their own and do their thing because... they would leave me behind, because I was too young. Granted we're only a year apart from each other, and me being the youngest (*laughing*). Sometimes I didn't heed that. I'd chase after them. Or I'd find them. I knew where they would normally go, so sometimes I'd just wind up there and they'd chase me off or they'd let me just stick around for a while. But (*pauses*).

[00:10:07.16] Yeah, I watched my brother, there were times of course when we, we did spend time in juvenile hall. Mostly for running away, or being considered incorrigible. Eventually even though we... when my father had gotten remarried, um... for the second time, we... she was a schoolteacher in East Los Angeles at the time. And they bought a house in Hacienda



Heights. Um, of course by that time, you know my brother was pretty much at odds with my father. None of us wanted to leave where we were. You know, because we had a lot of our friends, and you know, that's everything we knew. You know, LA would have been just another place that we had to learn. And um... I think we were getting tired of being moved around.

I don't think that I really believed anything as far as my mom being— having passed away. I think in my mind, I kept that alive... that I maybe I think that um, I might have been able to see through that they were just saying that to keep us from asking. So that kind of kept in my mind. They, my brother and my sisters might have accepted that. At some point. But I don't know what it was inside of me that I just wouldn't believe it.

So it still created some problems. When we moved, of course my brother wound up in his vacation home (*laughs*). If you want to call it that. You know, he was in detention and of course my sisters wound up.... one of my sisters wound up in another foster home, and my other sister... well they wound up being away. And that kind of left me at home by myself with my father and my stepmother and by that time, my youngest brother Conrad, who was born with cerebral palsy. My stepmother, his mother, who I did call grandma, I loved the heck out of that lady. Um, she—they brought her in from the Philippines to take care of my baby brother, and um. But nonetheless they left me there by myself.

My brother and I did have a room together. We shared a room. My sisters had their own room for when they were there. Erlinda was there. Sissy was in a foster home I think by that time. Again, and um...

RG: Can I ask why some of you stayed with your dad and some of your siblings were placed into foster care? *[00:14:23.12]*

RP: Well, my father... like I said earlier on in the last one... my father stole from my mom. At the time, there were... we had three older siblings, older than my brother Dominic. Which I didn't know about. Um, I don't think any of us knew about at the time. But my brother Terry was just born. He was born two years after me. Um, and that was around when I was two years old was when my father took us all, the four of us. Dominic, Sissy, Erlinda, myself. And I believe he wouldn't take Terry because he was just an infant. He was just born.

And um, and of course my mom later on had another child, which is my brother Ray, we call him Little Ray. Not very little (*laughs*). Um... And then there was ten of us all together. My youngest brother of course is my father's child with my stepmother. But my mom had nine of us. That's not counting the couple I believe she said she lost. But those of us that stayed with my father, we wound up, uh, going through foster homes.

And I think, you know—I don't know why. I always thought maybe just because he was a



single parent in the military. Um. And how we wound up in the... I know, I I think I mentioned before we wound up in convents. Um... And then bouncing around through foster homes. Um, and I think in order to get us out of the foster homes, my father got remarried. And that's the woman that wound up tying me up and beating me. And um, you know... But the uh... as far as foster homes after that, along with the boarding schools—I guess the Child Welfare decided you know, and the courts decided that that was the better option for us. Um, which I don't know. I have... I know one was okay, to a certain extent. But it still... being... I think I wound up at that one and I was okay with it because my brother was there, for a short time. Until he wound up running away from there. And I kind of uh... He had told me that he was going to go. When we were there. And um, he told me to stay right there. That I'd be okay right there. But he had to do what he needed to do. But there were, you know. I did, I did stick it out for about a year or so. I wound up running away from there too. It was too long. You know? I needed my brother. I need my sisters.

There was... I did learn some things there. [00:18:53.00] I experienced some things that had helped me. Um, they brought in a guy that had had, was involved in that outward bound... back in... back around times when it pretty much started, and they would take us out and um... we would fast. We would go walking through the woods and through, and be gone for several days. We learned to survive... just kind of... I don't know what the full intention behind it was. I gather that it was basically to help ourselves find ourselves. You know? Connect. And to me, I liked it because some of the things I had been learning already. You know, with my friends and their families, the natives, their native families. That helped me gain some connection to ceremonies. Um, even though they weren't Penobscot ceremonies. A lot—what I learned was there was a lot of connection. There was a lot of similarities, and I think they helped me to appreciate who I am. [00:20:26.19] As a Native person.

And so, you know, in that one boarding school there, um, when they brought this guy in from the Outward Bound program, working with us and teaching us rock climbing, and rappelling, and taking us out on fasts, and uh, you know, learning to forage, you know, for berries, you know, things you can eat out there in the wilderness. Creating, you know giving us a little chance to build a relationship with ourselves spiritually. I think that made a big difference for me.

Um, going back a little further though. One thing I think I had mentioned the things that had... well, I didn't go into details, and I don't want to in regard to what with the church, the Catholic church, but I still was forced to go to church by my father and my stepmother. And um, that's when we moved to Hacienda, we had lived in Hacienda Heights. Um, and I was pretty much there by myself. Off and on my sister and my brother were there. Um, I was in eighth grade at the time, you know then I became a freshman in high school.

During that time, I kind of involved myself in... and this was a satanic church at that. Kind of following my brother (*laughs*). Um, because of my issues that I had against the Catholic



church, which eventually spread across, you know spread out toward Christianity as a whole. Um, basically my rebellion against Christianity, because of what had happened to me earlier. Of course, I learned some things in the satanic church. I watched, I've seen, experienced several things. Eventually it scared the heck out of me. (*Chuckles*) I got out of it. I got away from it. But I learned enough, you know, to help me make some decisions in my life. But there was some things that were happening, even with me, and what was taking place there, was transpiring, um... you know how anyone views some of the things that have happened, in regards to the satanic church, the occult—I know certain things to be real. And that scared the heck out of me, to the point where I had—put it this way: An archbishop at the time in the area, was in the area, and they called him to do an exorcism on me. And I basically told him, “You don't—you don't—there's nothing you can do to help me. But I know where to go.” I said, “Nothing you can do.”

And the ones that helped me was my girlfriend at the time.

RG: [00:25:02.01] How old were you?

RP: I was a freshman, so I think I was what? (*Correcting himself*) fourteen. And um, they had a relative that had come down. They are [tribal name] and [tribal name] from Northern California. And they lived in, you know, in the Hacienda Heights area. Um, they had one of their relatives whose now older, who did ceremony with me. And that actually helped me, at least for a while because there was a point where—it was the things that were going on with me, and the fact that the way my memory worked um. I wanted it to stop. I had um—my father had a gun. I knew where he kept it. I knew where all the ammunition was. And I remember one day sitting in my room, my brother I couldn't get ahold, I couldn't contact my brother. I didn't know how to get ahold of my sisters. I had run away already, you know, several times, and I was got back and I was sitting there, and you know, I just wanted things to end. I figured there, at this point there's no way I'm going to find my mom. I'm not going to get back to where I need to be.

So I loaded that gun (*long pause*). I couldn't pull the trigger (*shaking head*). At the time, I figured I just couldn't gather the courage to pull the trigger. Of course I started hearing um, (*phone vibrates on the table, RP glances at it*), my stepmother coming in. And um, so I put it away quick. And. I got in trouble also even there with the (*wipes tears from eyes*)—I think later on maybe about a couple weeks later (*smiling*), no actually that happened before. I think that was one of the things that was... kind of lead up to that point. There was actually a couple weeks before— maybe about a week or two before, that um. I had gotten suspended from school. Um, because I used to have long hair. Really long hair (*laughs, wipes eyes with tissue*). And it used to be pretty straight. It used to be down below my um, my backside. And um, in the history class I got in, I called it a ‘debate,’ with my history teacher. And it was regarding, you know I guess you can kind of guess what it might have been... what I had been studying at the moment. But even there, you know, I had learned some things even from my friend's



families and the way they always told me about the way the history books are. The things they talk about and how wrong, and how the lies and stuff. And I found no reason why they would lie to me. And it made sense. You know? And I felt a lot of what they said was true. So I of course, I got in a debate with my history teacher, and because he said the information was true because it was in their schoolbook, the text book. Of course I kept on adding to my argument that it was false. Um, and I guess he decided he was going to send me to the dean's office.

And I was suspended and of course my father got home that weekend. **[00:31:05.19]** From, you know, his ship pulled into port. He came home and um, he said, "That's it." So he took my hair and held it and grabbed this big pair of scissors and chopped it off. You know, and my belief is I was... that as I had learned, which is one of the reasons I kept my hair. Um, it's a symbol of freedom. And of connection. And I really believed in that. So when he chopped my hair off that kind of added to all the stuff that was building up inside of me anyways. And eventually a couple weeks later that's when I... I don't know if I'd say I attempted to because, you know like I said, I couldn't find it to pull the trigger. But that was a time when I contemplated it, and had the means to do so.

So later on I um, I wound up at that boarding school. I ran away again several—you know, a couple times. And one of the times I ran away, I mentioned you know, I think I mentioned, you know, I was involved in martial arts pretty much all my life. And um, I never struck my father. I remember my brother you know, getting into physical altercations. That's when we lived in San Diego, which lead my brother to take off again. But anyway, so here when I was in the Heights, um... of course I was on my way home from school. And I stopped at the library. And um, I got home, my father happened to be home. He got in a day early. And he happened to be home. And he had asked me where I was. I told him I was at the library (*smiles*). And of course he didn't believe me. So he kept insisting that I would give him the truth. And no matter how many times I tried to tell him, he didn't believe me. And he had grabbed a stick that he had... while he was sitting there yelling at me and trying to get me to change my story, he swung it. And not meaning to, I did block it, and in blocking it I hit him. And he was stunned. I was too. It was pure reaction, but just the look on his face (*shakes head*). Um... I had to leave. So I ran away again. While he walked out of the room, I closed my door um, pretty much barricaded the door. Gathered a few things and climbed out the window headed for San Diego.
[00:35:30.08]

And then that's what actually... I think when I got back, when eventually when I got back home is when they actually sent me to—I had a, what do you call it... a probation officer. Um, which actually she was a probation officer, not just of myself but both of my sisters and my brother (*laughs*). Um, so she knew our family. She knew a lot of the things that was going on. She knew a lot about what was driving us. And it seemed, you know, she understood, and that's what wound... you know she talked to me about... she asked me where I was staying. I told her, I said I don't care where you put me. I will leave. I'm not going to be—I want my brother and sisters. And me and my brother... my sister was in the foster—Sissy was in a foster home. Um,



I can't recall at the moment where Erlinda was. My brother was in a boarding school. And I told her, I said... you know, she asked me, I said I would leave anywhere she placed me. Where would I stay? I told her I told her you put me where my brother is at and I'll stay there. As long as I have my brother. Um, so she worked it out. Hm (*laughs*). I became 15 there.

And of course then my brother took off. Left me there (*laughs*). And um, like I said... it wasn't... I can't say it was all bad. I missed my brother and sisters, I wanted to be out, I wanted to be gone. And eventually I did leave. And I did learn some things there. But when eventually I did run away from there, I think um, there was another point where they took me back to my father's. I was pretty much just, at that point, just fed up again. Feeling, you know, this whole system wasn't going to work. You know, couldn't be around my brother, couldn't be around my sisters, what the heck, you know. I can't find my mom. Everyone still tells me the Penobscots don't exist (*wipes eyes*). But what gave me hope was later on. But before I got out there, my um—I was at my father's again and um, and at that time, um. I says, “You know, I couldn't do it then, I could do it now.”

So of course I looked and he still had his gun in the same place that he always kept it. Again I loaded it up. Sat out there, you know, pulled my guitar out, have my gun, have my father's gun sitting there. Thinking, I'm just going to play my music, eventually I'll just reach down and just grab it and it will be done. When the time came I grabbed it again, and I just, I don't know what it was. My finger would not pull that trigger. (*Laughs*) I was getting angry. I don't know what it was, because I had every intention, and I was trying, but that finger just would not pull it. [00:40:54.26] So, yeah I wound up putting it away, figuring okay, I'll just have to wait.

In the meantime, my probation officer wound up getting there a couple days later. I told her, I said, “I can't stay here.” She said, well what do you... she offered a... an alternative. My sister was um, of age by then. She was already considered an adult. And um, she said you know if you won't stay with your father, we can ask the courts to give your sister um, what do you call it... custody. I said, “If you do that, that will work.” I said, “If you can get my sister custody of me.” She said well in the meantime you have to go to this other boarding school (*shakes head, sighs*).

I agreed to. While that process was taking place and I... I don't know. There was some good things that had transpired, but yet...it was really, really hard for me that particular boarding school was run by the brothers of the (*pause*) Brothers of the Holy Cross. And I recognized that name (*wipes tears*). And I think the good thing was—I eventually was able to go to school off that property, which—going to Chatsworth [?] High. I was able to walk to school from... after I earned enough brownie points I guess. They felt that I would be safe, be—they could let me go out on my own, safely, without—and I'd come back.

But I admit, I... I mean, performing arts for me was a big tool. A big thing for me. And at that time, you know, I did that I played my music, I was into performing arts before I was in



school... in the other high school, and kept on... you know I didn't mention any of that. But that's one of the things that kind of kept me together. [00:45:09.06] But it was more like I was just biding time.

When I got to Chatsworth High I met... I had so much more going. As long as I could get off that damp property, pardon my language (*chuckles*). But, um... Brothers of the Holy Cross... I wasn't a very big fan of theirs. And to be in a boarding school run by them, um, which where people that... You know I watched them very closely, because of what—in San Francisco, the things I think I mentioned. I don't know I can't remember exactly what I said, but there were people there that were involved in abuses that I went through there. The nuns and the priests and the brothers of the holy cross. So to be incarcerated in one of their own establishments was really hard. And I tried to explain that, but at the same time my alternative that I had to wait for, you know, the courts to um, give my sister custody.

I had to go through that process. It was really hard (*laughs, sighs*). I met up with, you know, with a girlfriend there. Native again. Um, had some friends. We would play our guitars and you know, I had some freedoms by that time. I could... as long as I checked out and I had to check in by a certain time. And um, the um... And I think they gave me that freedom basically because my probation officer was able to talk with them, and letting them know that this proceeding for my sister to gain custody was getting closer to being done. And that it would look like it was going to be going through, they just had to finalize paperwork. And so um, they put me in this one—transferred me to another building which allowed me to go. And I could check out and go to go for walks or go for rides or whatever and do things. So...anything to get away from there.

And eventually my sister got custody of me. And so I had to travel... (*laughs*) go from that... Van Nuys, she lived in Van Nuys. We lived in Van Nuys, and Chatsworth was across the valley, the San Fernando Valley. That was much better for me. Um, for the most part. But then I wound up in another place. Um, a friend of mine happened to stash some pot into my guitar case, and—because he wanted to go somewhere else. Well he put several ounces of pot into my guitar case, and I guess when I opened up my guitar case— cause everywhere I used to go, people wanted me to play my guitar, and sing and stuff like that. Well I went to go open it one time, and left my school and headed to Conolo Park High [?], and when I was there I went to go open my guitar case and a bag falls out. Well I threw it back in there and closed it back up (*laughing*). Evidently somebody saw it and the cops came and arrested us. [00:50:01.17] And um, of course that kind of jeopardized my sister's custody over me.

In the meantime they put me in another um, place called um, Boy's Republic [?]. And um, of course my father wound up getting my stuff, and um. Well. He allowed my guitar, of all things that was my pride and joy. It never got it, picked it up for me. But there too. I mean, still my sister technically had custody of me. But there they put me... they didn't put me in the main system, because it was determined that... eventually they got my friend you know, owned up to



the fact that I knew nothing about that pot, and that he put it in there thinking it was easier to transport it. And um, at first he kept denying. Left me with the wrap until... and when they were getting ready to release me, they put me in the place, another one of those homes where I could just check out and do what I'm going to do— and then they let me go back to my sister.

But, by then, more damage was done. You know? And my (*sighs*) Eventually, I wound up, you know, we all wound up back in San Diego area, um. And the struggles kept on. I um... my brother became a pipe fitter, and was working on a shipyard. We'd drink a lot together, and um... my sisters were living down there. Sissy wound up getting married to a guy in the Navy. And uh, my other sister had a boyfriend who just... and I was kind of trying to find a way to do something. Worked for the Coast Guard for a little while. And then I wound up being able to get um, a job in another shipyard. And they trained me as a pipe fitter, and all. And I did pretty good there. You know?

I did a lot of drinking. I didn't, I didn't—I never actually got to the point where I was addicted and I had to have it. I just did it basically if I wanted it, or whatever. A lot of times I just was staying around, and I would be there when everyone else was. But then eventually I wound up, you know, wound up going into the Navy. Um, there I was uh, at least I had something to do (*smiling*). And um...

RG: How old were you? [00:54:44.25]

RP: Mmm. How old? Nineteen? Yeah, because I had been working. Yeah, I was working for Southwest Marine as a pipe fitter. And um, I wound up uh—I went in as an aviation electrician. Which I thought was pretty cool, and I had pretty good scores so I kind of had a choice of whatever job I wanted in the mil... in the Navy. Um, and they didn't have my choices (*smiling*). Um, so they kind of had to... they were looking around trying to figure out how to get me to sign the papers, and you know, I said, “Well, you don't have what I want.” So they came up with this thing of the aviation electrician in the TAR program. I go what the heck is the TAR program? And it means Training Administration of Reserves. It's active duty. But you kind of also have to deal with training the reserves.

Um, but you know, so I didn't understand a lot of what they were trying to tell me. They really didn't tell me anything. So I had to have a couple people come down and explain to me— that I trusted, you know, “What is this?” You know? I know what they're telling me, but I want to hear from you what is it? You know? And they explained it to me. And basically they guaranteed me my duty preference for my first command (*laughs*). Um, and you know while I was in the military I still um, practiced my martial arts, was still always involved with so many things: rock climbing, rappelling, I was always at the beach, anything in the water. You can't keep me out of the water.

So I've got... went to my schools, and I came back and went to some more schools and came



back. I got in a motorcycle accident in Hawaii and I wasn't riding motorcycles anymore after that. But. Friends of mine told me they kinda wanted to hang out with me. So we spent a four-day weekend, we had a long weekend, and they stuck with me and I told them you have to do everything I do. And they tried. And um, when we got back, they said you ought to try out for uh... for special warfare. So I did. And part of that decision there was um... still in my, you know, based off of an idea I had before, that—and I couldn't pull the trigger. I figured if I did something like that someone else could.

But I found out that that wasn't going to work. I found out something more. If I didn't—if I was to allow that to happen then other people's lives were at stake. So that went out the door. But I learned a lot more too. I learned that to see lives taken gives you a whole different perspective on life. I had my daughter around that—when I was twenty one. 1981. I was already... I was 21. Actually I think I just turned 22 when she was born. She was born three days after my birthday, on September 15th. And I remember she was—'cause she was there, she was already born, and I don't know what got into my head, but when I was thinking about it. I think that—because even there, while I was you know doing all the swimming and preparing for um, just for blood screening, you have to try to go for special warfare, she was right there. She had learned how to swim. I had taught her to swim when she was an infant. You know. And it was... I think some things flashed around in my head, you know, and her most of the time... thinking if I'm gone she's got nobody. She had her mom. Which was okay, but. But I was so proud of her. You know? I was so proud to be a dad. So I kind of—all these things kind of added to me coming out of that mindset, to—to not be here anymore. Now I did have a reason.
[01:01:23.14]

And so all the guys in my unit basically treated you know, to her—she always referred to them as uncle. They always treated her as their own niece, if not their own child. And I found people that were as much family as anyone could be, aside from my own siblings. My brother and my sisters that I grew up with, um... people I can trust. And that felt good. To know that I had more than just my brother and my sisters. And it was a good thing, because like I said, the things we wound up.... that I wound up seeing... um... I don't... I won't go into some of the stuff because (laughing) I might get in trouble. But I will say, I went through a lot of things, I saw a lot of things. And I think there's a saying, "You've not experienced life until you've watched it... watched someone die. Watched and heard someone die."

RG: Were you overseas?

RP: Yeah. Different times, and different places. Um, I did a lot of stuff right here in the country. Um, and the thing is about that is, you know I did kinda, 'cause I had my daughter. And of course when her mother and I divorced I had to keep custody of my daughter for her own safety. And I thought at that time, "What am I doing?" I was feeling like I was doing the same thing my dad did. Tearing my daughter away from her mother. But at that time it had to be. And I don't like to talk bad about her mom, I never would. You know? I wouldn't allow her



to. Even though... her mother had ample opportunities. I tried to make sure that she stayed in contact with my daughter. But... she decided not to a lot of times, but. I guess probably anger for me because you know, I had custody of her. But, I mean there were reasons why the court allowed me to have custody over her. And uh... but I won't go into that.

So here I am, a single parent in the military. I got remarried and of course that was not a good idea. It was more of a *(pauses to find the word)*... I hate that term too.... Like a rebound. Um, **[01:05:10.07]** and I don't like using that because, you know, it sounds too disrespectful. But it was pretty much the closest word I could think of. Um, that didn't work out. I got trans... but in the meantime what happened was while I was remarried to her um... that would have been my second wife, right? Yeah *(laughs)*. Yeah. Anyhow. I got home from, from the base one day. I had gotten a call— my brother Dominic's wife had called at the time. And she said um, “You'll never guess who called.” I said, “Who's that?” She said, “Your mom.” I thought, okay. “Gertrude?” Which is my stepmom— her name. I called her mom. I did have respect for her. You know. She said, “No, your real mom.”

(Pause, tears) Same thing happened *(gestures at the tears. Laughs)*. She says, “Yeah, she says, “She called here looking for Dominic, and Dominic's at work. And uh, she's going to be calling you. I gave her your number. And um, she had asked about you. And your sisters. I gave her your number,” she said. “And she said she would call you.” *(Sighs)* And um, my wife at the time, she kind of looked over and saw. Couldn't help the tears coming down. Anyhow. A few minutes later... a few minutes later the phone rang. And all I heard on the other end was, “Berto.” Which is what my mom always called me *(wipes eyes)*. That's what she called me way back. That's what my brother and sisters used to call me, till we got older.

So, we got to talking. I told her, I said, “I didn't believe them.” *(Long pause)* We talked for quite some time. **[01:10:03.15]** She kept... she was crying on the other end. She kept—trying to explain some of the things that happened. And of course she held resentment against my dad. But she kept on telling me how she tried. Tried to keep track of where we were, and um, lost track. She had come out a couple times after she had left. Uh, she left because my baby— my younger brother at the time Terry had gotten very sick. I think I mentioned that in the previous episode *(laughs)*. Um, but she had to make a choice between his life and trying to... you know... have us. And uh, she was going on about that too.

In the meantime, there was um, you know. We did talk a while, and you know, I can't recall at the moment all the things because there was so much, you know, that was being said. And I remember— I mean as grateful as I was I think another form of anger set in at that time. Not at her. But I think the anger was more geared towards the lies that for whatever reason I didn't believe. I had just had this feeling about it. I think I mentioned that just a while ago. I just think I for some reason saw beyond what they were trying to tell me. Just to get us to quit looking.

But the anger I think also was because I knew my brother and sisters pretty much gave up on



that. And I didn't... I just figured I had to keep on living. By that time I had my daughter, so I had to, you know, I'm living for her. And just doing my thing. I don't think for an instant I ever thought that my mom was gone. But I never expected that I was going to find her. You know? Even in—even and it brought back all that anger again, with the, you know, the thoughts of the Bureau of Indian Affairs telling me that the Penobscots no longer exist. My mom... my mom exists (*laughing*). You know? It's just um... it was a big change.

And then to know, you know, she still had my brother Terry there. And to know that I had another younger brother, Little Ray (*smiling*). Well, we got done talking, and she did talk—she did get ahold of my brother. I don't know exactly how that went. I know that um... because I was up in, up in uh... living in Fort Wayne in California at the time, and my brother was still down in San Diego city area. Lemon Grove? I don't know—he was still in the San Diego area. And uh, I can't recall how my brother, you know, might have told me how he reacted. I can't remember. I—it's really weird. 'Cause usually I remember something like that, but...

Sissy was in Louisiana, in New Orleans, living there at the time. Erlinda was living in Burbank. And we still stayed close. [01:16:04.06] But we spread the word quick (*laughing*). And I remember mentioning something to one of my cousins. Um, and I mentioned it to her because she was the oldest of that part of that family. And I don't know what it was... I had a lot of respect for her. I still pretty much do. But as I got—as time went on, I remember that—just the reaction when I told her that my real mom had got ahold of me. It was like, “Oh.” That little thing. That little word. Just, the reaction. It seemed like—it was one of those reactions. It wasn't a good thing. They weren't happy for me. You know? So I don't know how to take that. But I know that word got around to my aunt, of course my aunt... who is my dad's sister, so it got to my dad too.

So, I did wind up getting time to go out and see my mom. And to come home. And uh, of course, I got a military hop to DC. And my mom and my younger brother Little Ray came and picked me up from there, and headed down to Norfolk, where her house was. It was kind of strange because it was not, um. There was... there was talk about me transferring anyway. And the talk was um... the stations that we were discussing was in Virginia. And not too far from there, at all. Before— this was even, this was even before my mom had contacted me.

So things seemed to be moving in a certain direction, and the way I had learned even up to that point, things are not just coincidences. And so, anyway... I came... I know there were some issues that I had to resolve here. Because what happened was when she contacted me—and it's really weird because I found... someone found out I wasn't even on the census. Yet all my siblings around me are... I'm my mother's seventh child. You know? And everyone else was on census. Somehow my name was left off. You know? Nobody can figure out how that happened. So I had to go through this process. And I, you know... to get either put back on, if somehow I got taken off, I don't know. But, um... yeah I was a little bit [01:20:40.17] set back on that one. You know. Um, 'cause somehow.... someone over... you know, I was feeling



overlooked. You know what I mean? But we got it done. It was a lot of people here that welcomed me home. There were several people that kind of looked at me—not so happy. But yet, you know, when I went in and uh, to the census meeting, I saw them people sitting on that committee meeting. Actually a couple of 'em had said that they, uh, when I walked in, saw my grandfather walking in.

Can we stop this for a moment?

RG: Yep.

RG: This is part two of P-201405-00049.

RP: We're getting started again, after our break.

RG: (*Chuckles*).

RP: (*Laughs*) Anyhow. So I left off with the fact that, you know, dealing with getting back on the census, or if... I don't see how I got off of it. But, you know, at the... at the time I also met up with someone. And uh, had some ceremonies while I was here. And um, I became really good friends with a man that lived here, name was Frank Decante [sp?]. Who is uh, Algonquin. And married to one of our tribal members, and has some beautiful daughters. You know... Um. But he helped me in a lot of ways. You know? Jim Sappier was of course our Tribal Governor at the time. My uh, my auntie Irene—everyone knows her as Aunt Pardilla. Um... she's the one that actually came and picked me up. Her and her husband George, when I flew into Brunswick Naval Air Station. And she was excited. You know? Telling me about all these things.

But you know... going back a little bit, before I actually came here for that first time. When I flew out and my mother, and my brother picked me up and we went to her place, spent a little time there. I was sitting there in her dining room and she was cooking up something and she says something—she had asked me something, and I responded and... in this language, that as I stated, mentioned, this old man used to come and visit me would speak. She just froze. And turned around. She said... asked me, “How did you learn to talk like that? Where did you learn that?” I couldn't learn it from my father. Right? And I started to explain to her about this old man, and she's like (*crosses arms in front of chest and rubs them, as if shivering*). She didn't want to hear it... it was freaking her out for some reason.

So while I was here I talked to someone and it did the same thing. And um, I was explaining how this old man used to visit and stuff and she had asked me to describe him, and so I did. And um, she told me, you know, [*speaking in Penobscot*], “Wait a minute, just stay here.” She came out with a picture, she says, “Is this him?” I said, “Yeah, that's him. And she said uh, “Would you know who that is?” I said, “I always called him Moosums. That's all I ever knew



to call him. And she said, “Yeah.” She said, “Actually, chi Moosums is what you would call him.” I said—and—she said, “That’s your great-grandfather. It’s Gabe Polchies.” I said, “Oh, ok. So calling him that wasn’t bad, right?” And she said, “No.” And she thought about it, and she says, “And how old are you?” Or, “What year were you born again?” I said 1959. And then she did that little thing that my mother did (*shivering, rubbing his arms*). She says, [*Exclamation, sounds like ‘ee-ah-sis’*]. I said, “What? My mom did the same thing. What is it?” And she says, “He passed away in the early ‘50s. Long before you were born.” And I then thought about it... I said, “Well, it must have been someone else then.” But that’s who it was. I mean the pictures.

And um, she said, “Well, maybe it’s not so surprising.” She said, “But now you know who it is.” She didn’t go on too much about him. But you know, in talking with Frank... Frank Decante. We got a chance to talk about it and I explained to him all these things, what everyone, how everyone was reacting, and how this came about, and he kind of laughed. He says, “Well you know sometimes things happen... a lot of times things happen for a reason. And the connection is.... um... that we have with someone—sometimes it’s even somebody that we never met personally. But there’s a reason behind that. And you’ll find out.”

So, I would come back and I would, you know, I’d be there you know, home for ceremonies. And one of those times I came back, actually I think the next time I came back, he introduced me to someone. And um... I referred to him as uh... my uncle. Ervin Polchies. Lives in Woodstock reserve. He shared some things with me. I won’t go into, through a lot of that right now. But he too kind of talked to me about, similar to what Frank had told me. But in the meantime, I wound up being transferred to Virginia, and I bought a house there, and um.... Of course eventually I wound up getting divorced again (*smiling*). Um.

You know, so basically it was just my daughter and I living in that house. And my mother lived—my mother and my younger brother, Little Ray. Um... my brother Terry was incarcerated for a while, and then he eventually got out and I got to spend time with him. I was involved with a lot of Natives in that area. Um... working with ceremonies there. Um, a good friend of mine John Sun Eagle of the Mattaponi tribe in Virginia, we worked a lot together with ceremonies, with dealing with people with abuses. (*Talking in background*) You know, that had been living through abuses, whether substance abuse, physical, sexual, all that stuff. Including suicide prevention. But he... and at the same time, like I said I was back up here, and you know... I’d come up for ceremonies and stuff up North. And um, and on the Island.

And there were some things that had happened. I had injuries. I had injured my spine in three different places through the course of my military career. Um, all in the line of duty. I was, by that time even an instructor and curriculum developer writing courses for the military. Plus doing my job that I actually... was in there for. I had remarried and that one was more of a marriage of convenience. And you know, knowing that the situation... knowing that eventually we were going to walk our different ways.



But trying to make sure that my daughter had, had that connection. You know? Who she is. That was one of my biggest drives was to make sure that she knows and she's exposed um... *(talking and loud crash in background)* to the Native culture. And at that time, I think back in '87 was the time I was telling you about, that I quit drinking. Because of watching her play and doing her thing, and I never really drank as an addict or an alcoholic, however there were times when I got... went a little overboard. But it's, you know, I never really got addicted to it, where I had to have it. And um... but watching her one day, after I got done doing my chores and cleaning the house. And I sat down with a beer. It was one of two that I had left in there. And I was watching some National Geographic thing on TV or whatever. And um, sipping on that beer. I got done with that one and opened up the other one. As I was sipping on that, my daughter goes, you know, across the living room with her Barbie jeep, with her kitten in it, driving her around. And a thought came into my head, that I have—I'm all she has.

'Cause at that point her mother had failed to stay in contact. And um, there were times where you know... I tried, you know, to call her mom and offer to pay her way out to find her place to stay and spend time with her. And uh, you know, my daughter would write things and draw things and send 'em out and they'd be sent back. So I'm thinking, you know, I'm all she has. And the nature of my job, the regular part of my military job... um... my beeper went off and I went out that door, there's a strong chance that I would not come home. A lot of times I would be gone and my family would never know what happened. By that point I had lost a lot of friends due to what are classified as training accidents. And I could easily have been one of those so-called training accidents. And my daughter would have nobody. So I decided at that point she needs me, and she needs me sober. So I quit *(exhales)*.

I would come home, like I said for various things... ceremonies. And I remember you know, there was some other thing that had taken place and I was told that it was in a time when I was going to coming home. There were some things that were going to transpire which would mean its time to go home. Those events took place and shortly after um—and these were all told to me during ceremonies. And when these events transpired, now something came into my possession, and which was one of the big things that they told me when that happens I was going to go home to work with my people, and be here, you know. And I went flying up to my... well, I may as well... I had my fire boot (?) so I flew, up to my friend John Sun Eagle, who is an elder, who is one of the elders that were there when uh, I uh, was told when this thing comes to me, it was time for me to go home.

I uh... when was this? I still have another tour to retire. And um, so maybe after that. He said, "Don't count on it." A week later, I got papers I was being processed out on a medical discharge. My injuries had caught up to me. Um, though I was able to do certain things, there were some things that I couldn't perform physically. I figured I'm still an instructor. I'm still a curriculum developer. You know? If I had a desk I could still do that, but they wouldn't do that. I fought them for a year. And another event took place showing me that I need to come home.



And eventually they put me out. And I did come home. And what happened was um, they put me out on what they call ‘home awaiting orders.’ And I came up and I um... my uncle Ervin was having... like I said he's my cousin but I—his age and my respect for him, I refer to him as my uncle. Um, he had—he always had a spring gathering. And um, I went up there and while I was there, he knew that I was just waiting to go back, whenever they called to go back to Virginia and get my final papers.

And so he told me, he said, “[*Penobscot word*] I need you to here. I need your help here, to work with these kids.” Because he opened his home as a foster home. Um, and were using our healing, our tradition—our culture and traditional hearing methodologies to heal. In working with the youth primarily. Primarily Native youth. They weren't all Native. But primarily Native youth that were pretty much thrown aside by society. You know? Who had been abused physically, sexually, psychologically. A lot of them that were suicidal. And he told me, “I need you here to help me work with them.” And of course, you know, my daughter would go with me. So they set up a room for me and they figured out, you know, a room for my daughter. So...

RG: Was this on the Island?

RP: No this was on Woodstock reserve.

RG: Oh, okay.

RP: And um, so when I first got out I mean I um... I was trying to get housing here. And um, of course when I got here, after I got out... actually officially got out of the military. I came here. It was a woman, one of our tribal members... from what I understand she was kind of spreading word that oh her and I were going to get together and this and that. (*Shaking his head*) Oh, no. I never knew anything about that. Anyhow. I ran across her. You know, I would try to talk around the Island. I wouldn't walk very fast because basically my cane, and I was told I would never walk again when I got out of the military. So I didn't believe them so I kept on walking. You know, a cane, eventually a wheel chair. Um, and a scooter. And then I got rid of it all and kept walking.

But anyhow. So I was on one of my walks. She came across. You know, stopped me and started talking to me, and uh, I can't remember exactly how... what the conversation was fully about. But I remember something that she says, “What do you know about being an Indian? You didn't grow up here.” And that hurt. This is what I came home to. And I told her, I said, “You know, you don't know, you know, what I went through. You don't know what I know about being Native.” And I explained to her, you know, something... I had asked, I said, “You know what culture shock is?” She says, “Yeah, I know what culture shock is.” “Do you know what true culture shock is?” She says, “I don't understand what you mean.”



I said, “All my life I fought to maintain who I am. I knew I was Penobscot. I’m trying to be who I am, to stay—living a lie, to, to gain and maintain that connection with everybody telling me, trying to tell me my people don't exist. And I didn't believe them.” I said, “Trying not to be assimilated into the culture that I didn't believe in. Finding other Natives to, to help me. To be who I am? What I know I am? I said, “And then being out there with people who... because I wasn't one of them, I wasn't Mexican, I wasn't Chicano. I wasn't Japanese, I wasn't Vietnamese, I wasn't black, I wasn't white, and you know, all these gangs. And I literally—not just myself but my brother and sisters had to literally fight physically, spiritually and psychologically to survive. And then thinking, finally, I can come home. And be with my people. And to see who’s truly been assimilated. Wasn't necessarily us that were out there in that world, but more assimilated here.” I said, “That is true culture shock. And to have somebody come up to me and tell me I don't know, you know... questioning what I know as being Native... that's true culture shock. And it hurts. To be approached by one of my own people. When other natives around the continent that I dealt with, that I learned with, and never ever treated me anything other than ative. Knowing full well that my father is Philippino. But they never held that against me. They never held it against me that I was living here and there. You know? In many cases they even showed honor toward me. And then I come home and I'm treated like crap. That's what I'm welcomed home with.

And then of course you know, I did a lot—I've done a lot of work— working with my uncle Ervin, working with people within our medicine society. You know? Throughout Wabanaki territory. Dealing with the pains and suffering, similar to my own. And also... but yet, finding out that the experiences that I had to deal with throughout my life, I had to go through in a sense. As painful as it may have been, I found out there's reasons. Because, I wouldn't know how to deal with a lot of the pain and suffering that I've had to deal with, and being able to sit there and listen to other people without having gone through it myself.

But yet, they have people that will question. Um, and I don't think its really even their curiosity. It's just their way of just being mean. Yeah, we have that in the Native culture too. I found that. Do I hold it against them? I can't. I do pray a lot. And I hope that maybe I was the last one that they ever confronted that way. I doubt that that was the case, but I hope so. Because I look at it this way: I survived it. Maybe the next person wouldn't. You know? I had some things going for me. I don't know exactly all of what was going for me, or what is going for me. But I do know that that, that statement by that individual, because it was repeated again by... at the time... her brother who happened to be sitting on council. This was several years later. The same thing. So, I'm thinking, okay— evidently this is the mentality of some of the people that grew up here. This is how they see us that come home. Maybe they feel that we're here to take away from them. But (*shaking head*), no. Some of our people need to come home. Some of our people, including myself, were away from here. Not by our own free will.

And I did come home when I had the chance. Once I got done with my military service. I came



home. Not to take away from anyone. But because this is where I belong. And I don't believe anyone has a right to tell me that I don't. Whether they grew up here, were born here, or whatever they think is justification, they don't have that right to. The only one that can tell me that is the Creator. The only other one who can tell me that is the land itself.

But that's why, I was willing to give this statement. I left a lot of things out. And I left it out for a reason. Some of it doesn't necessarily pertain, but it is part of the story. Um... but it might confuse some people. I'm sure some of what I've said might still confuse them. As to how it pertains to this truth and reconciliation. But the truth is truth. The pain, regardless of whether it was the State Child Welfare system, or the, you know... from the state or federal. In this case it would be different states. But it's happening all over. It has happened all over, and it still continues. I know that because I deal with people from all different tribes. You know? And there's still that denying that the state, um, is trying to keep a front. You know? Even those that have decided they're going to go through the TRC phase, you know. They still are trying to hide it.

And what—as long as they try to hide it and deny it, that pain and suffering is going to continue and I'm glad we're here. That, you know, we have people that are working forward with it. And not just on the tribal level, but even on the—you know there's actually people, and I've met some of the people from your commission, um, that I truly feel they mean what—the intentions that they're putting out. I know that they're feeling that—in the right reasons. You know, for the right reasons.

But what I've witnessed thus far, you know we also here, the Penobscot Nation. I mean there's a lot of people here think that, you know... there's some that like me, there's some that don't like me. And usually those that don't like me, don't like me for the wrong reasons. If they don't like me, they should not like me for the right reasons. You know? Maybe I did something they don't... you know, whatever. I might have done nothing against them. You know? But I come here, they, you know, might have heard it in our... in some of our meetings, you know that we've had. You know, fingers pointing out at those of us that are coming home—that have come home, and are still coming home. That we're only wanting something. And they're thinking, you know, benefits and all that kind of crap. Sometimes some of us just want to be home. That's what we want. We want to be treated as an equal. You know?

And I think... I've heard these ceremonies of welcoming the people home through this TRC. I look forward to that. Do I see it happening? Honestly? I don't see it happening soon. Some of the people that will be there, if we put something on, will mean it. Will really honestly mean what it's about. But there's some people that will be there just because it will make them look good. I hope that changes. And I will be praying. When I put that pipe together, I'll be praying. Because we need to. We need to welcome our people home. Especially those that were just ripped away from our people, you know, for whatever reason. It was my father that originally took us away. You know, stole us from our mom. How does that play into it? You know? I



can't hate my father. I was angry with him, yeah. He and I had a long talk about it. You know? Before he died. But I know the state... you know, these organizations that the state has out there to deal with us... they could have done, you know, worked it a different way. I think that even then if the state knew that we might have been better off coming home in the first place. If we couldn't be there with my dad. He was a single parent for a lot of the time. I don't know. It's kind of hard to say how things would have been different. But we wanted to be home. I think that should have been—should have mattered the most.

I think that any of these children that want to come home, they need to be here. They need that connection. Nobody should be tearing that away from them. And I mentioned it to people before. You know? And I think that's why I know where I belong. Regardless of what anyone else says. But I have explained before, you know, you can never um... truly separate the Native people and their land. Because we are the land and the land is us. The... you know, my ancestors. Our ancestors, they lived. And when they died, when they passed over, their bodies add to the earth. All kinds of things. The bugs, the vegetation that grew, the animals that eat the vegetation. Um, some of it would be washed into the waters, and of course we have our fish and all the other life in there. Everything is feeding off each other, and even the people eat the fish and the animals that were eating from the vegetation that was fertilized by the blood and the remains of our people, our ancestors.

And so that's a full circle. That constant circle. And I was telling a group one time, "How can you ever expect to separate our people when we're the same? We can't separate our people from the land. When we're a part of the same. It's impossible." And that connection is why we all long to be home. When I take off, this wind calls me. I miss home. Whenever I'm away. I enjoy the beauty of everything else, but I—nothing beats home. Even though I didn't... wasn't born and raised right here. It's still my home.

I don't know what more to share. Like I said, there are some things that I kind of hold back. Only because I don't—maybe in my head I don't see any connection right off. So hopefully my statement will help in the healing of others. You know? Not just, not just amongst the Wabanaki people. But throughout Native country. Maybe even those across, around the world. Because I know there's an international TRC movement going as well. Where people, you know, for the same reasons. So, all of you that are involved in it, I thank you.

RG: Thank you for sharing. You actually—while you were talking a number of questions came into my mind, and you'd continue talking, and you're very eloquent, and very brilliant, and you answered the questions before I had an opportunity to ask them. Um, your experiences are very powerful. And I absolutely think it will help a lot of people. So thank you so much for sharing. Um, if there's anything else you want to add, let me know.

RP: (*Looks at the camera and points*) Love one another (*laughs*).

RG: Thank you so much. Do you want me to stop the recording?

RP: Sure.

RG: Ok.

RP: *(Laughs)*

[END OF RECORDING]