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12-18-2014

### Statement by Elizabeth Mitchell collected by Marcie Lister on December 18, 2014

Elizabeth Mitchell

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### General Information

**Private or Public Statement?** - Private

**Statement Provider:** Elizabeth Mitchell

**Date:** December 18, 2014

**Location:** Portland, ME

**Previous Statement?** No

**Statement Gatherer:** Marcie Lister

**Support Person:** N/A

**Additional Individuals Present:** Rachel George

**Recording Format:** Audio

**Length of Recording:** 00:43:49

### Recording

**RG:** Okay. So it is December 18, 2014. We are here in Portland, Maine. My name is Rachel George and I'm here today with—

**EM:** Elizabeth Mitchell.

**ML:** And Marcie Lister

**RG:** Great. And the file number is P 201412-00157. Elizabeth, have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

**EM:** Yes.

**RG:** And I have to let you know that if at any point during this recording you indicate that there is 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. Does that make sense?

**EM:** Yes.

**RG:** Okay—is there anywhere in particular you want to start or do you just want me to kind of ask questions.

**EM:** I don't really know where to start, so...

**RG:** Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like coming into the child welfare system? Whatever you remember.

**EM:** Well, I've been in and out of the foster care system for my whole life. And um, I remember stories of when I was like around three or so. Um, I was taken away from my mom on the Island, and I was put in custody with two women, I can't remember their name. But that was for like six months, and then she got us back. And um, it wasn't until I turned fourteen that I went back in but we were continuously involved with the state, like as far as, um, you know—I don't know how to describe it. But like, they're always knocking on our door or checking up on us. Like, having visitations and stuff like, coming into the house and doing check ups to see if you know the house is clean and if we were being fed and all that stuff. And I don't ever remember a time where the state really wasn't involved with our lives, because we were always on welfare and food stamps and so—it was just a part of my life pretty much.

**ML:** Do you have a number of different state workers, or were there one or two people who were more consistent?

**EM:** I can only remember like two. I cannot remember their names 'cause, you know, it was... She always—my mom she always called it “the state.” So, “The state's coming,” or, “If you don't be good the states gonna come take you away.” And it was just like we saw many different people, but it was just normal. So you don't really—you only recognize them because they dress really nice and they brought you know suite cases and all that stuff. And they come interview you and ask you questions and you know try to like get information out of you. But I mean I don't remember a time when like we were free (*laughs*) from the state. Until I turned 18. Cause then I aged out and I could finally get rid of, you know—like weight of having to be like pinned under someone's like, judgment, almost. Because it was just like—I felt that weight of still being like attached to something, always like hanging over my head. So, yeah.

**RG:** When you say “we,” does that mean...

**EM:** I always say that (*laughing*). I always say that. I have six siblings. I have a sister and five brothers and um, whenever I say we I'm always talking about them. And I never say “I” because that just seems right cause it was all of us together.

**ML:** Were you the oldest? The youngest? Somewhere in the middle?



**EM:** I am the second oldest. And um, my older brother, he's in prison right now, so. And it—I mean he was always getting into trouble, so I had to be the mature one pretty much and keep everyone safe and in line. So, when I say we, I mean all of my siblings and I, 'cause, you know, we went through the same thing together.

**RG:** Were you placed with your siblings? The first time you were in care, and when you were...

**EM:** Um, the first time, um, it was just me, my older brother Alex and my younger brother Eric. And we're like all a year apart, and we were the only ones born at the time. So it was all of us taken out at that point. But I can—I barely remember the people we were with. And um, the second time we were taken out when I was fourteen, we got split up, And um, we were taken to, um, a family friend's house, and it was all of us. And then after that, everyone realized that we weren't going to go back this time. We weren't going to go back to our mom. And the court had started petitioning for us to have, like, our parental rights from our parents cut, and have us placed in, like, permanent homes at that time. So, we pretty much got split up based on age and like our relationship to the people that were going to take us. So, um, it was my brother Eric, and then the two youngest kids got split up from the two middle children, and they went in separate homes. And then um (*sighs, laughing*) uh this is like so much, but... the family I went with, Dustin and Rebecca Anne Whitney, they were Jehovah's Witnesses. And at the time, like, I was so sheltered, when I was living with my mom, that I didn't know anything about the world. I didn't have any idea what, like, friendship or anything was, because I was just school, home, and then during the summer it was just home, so I didn't really know anything else besides that. So I was finally figuring out that, you know, abuse wasn't normal. Like, other kids in school didn't get hit all the time and, like, they didn't go through the stuff that we went through, so (*pauses, crying*). (00:07:06)

**ML:** If you—whatever tissues you use we are going to save for ceremonial burning, so please just use the basket.

**EM:** Okay (*voice breaking*). Oh, um. So I was making new friends and figuring out that what I was going through at home wasn't supposed to be happening. So, um, I decided to tell someone about it. And um, my mom found out that I was you know having, like, a boyfriend in school, and um—learning that I was figuring out what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to go to college and I wanted to like have a higher education. And she always told me, “No, you're not going to college, like that's not for you. You're going to be living with me and taking care of the kids with me,” and so. Um. So when I finally figured out everything, I figured out I that I didn't want to be a part of the religion. Because I grew up a part of that, and it was so skewed because the religion teaches you know, you're supposed to be like peaceful and kind and considerate, and then on the other hand, when you go home you get hurt and abused and everything. So I was just like having mixed feelings. So I wasn't allowed to stay with the Whitneys anymore. Because of my beliefs were changing. So they said, “Well either you stay



here and you, you know, go to the meetings, go out in service, do what you're supposed to do in the religion, or you can leave." And so, I had to leave. And so I had to leave. And then after that....

**ML:** How long were you with them?

**EM:** I was only with them for—I think it was like a month or a month and a half. But everything was happening. Like everything at once was happening. Um. So we all got split up and I made sure that the kids didn't get split up alone. So I wanted them to stay together. So—and I was, totally did not want to leave them. But, I had to. So. That was probably the hardest thing to do (*crying*). 'Cause, I practically raised my little brother. And he was only two. And I had to leave him (*pause*). (00:10:00)

**RG:** Do you remember if tribal child welfare was involved?

**EM:** Yeah. They were involved. Like—when the permanency guardianship was signed, they—the tribe had tried to get involved, and tried to make sure that we were placed in the place that we wanted to be in. So they wanted to actually have us be with other Native families. But the thing was that our mother, she lived up on Indian Island, and we did not want to be anywhere near her. So—and we loved the people that we were with anyway. So we were totally fine with it. Like, I was actually pretty scared that they were going to make us go up there. 'Cause we didn't want to have anything to do with our mother anymore. And we had all talked—all of us kids talked, and we said that like, "When they come make sure they don't take us back there." So. It was um, it was like a week or so—they had visited with me and all the other families and all the rest of my siblings, and then they decided to just leave us where we were. So they had to come to court when the permanency guardianship was signed; because they had to like approve it and make sure everything was like going, you know, well and everything. So that was a relief (*laughing*). I didn't have to go back up there.

**RG:** Are your siblings still in the home where you were before?

**EM:** Yep, um right now, my brother Eric, he just turned 18, and the Whitneys done the same thing to him that they did with me, because you know eventually people grow up and they figure out what they want to do in life. And if they don't want to be in the religion, then that's just—I guess that's just what their belief system is. So, they had given Eric a choice, of the same thing. But he was 18, so he had all the control—like what his mind was made up already. So he had all the control of just leaving, he didn't have to be kicked out or anything. So—we went through like a two-week period of Eric and I talking to each other and seeing what we can do to, like, help. Um, we figured out that, you know, we've been through the system, we know like everything pretty much. We've been there; we've done it. We know the rules, we know the laws and everything. So um, I had moved Eric out, and there was a woman that teaches at a school and she had offered to take him in. And that totally like, fell through the floor. Like it



was horrible. Um, she'd agreed to take him in as long as he was going to go to school and do everything that he, you know, had planned out for his life, and then she had gone back, and said, "No sorry, I can't do it anymore," so now he's staying with me at my house, with my foster family. And we're going to try to go from there, but it sucks (*laughing*). Yeah.

**RG:** What happened for you, after you weren't allowed to stay with the Whitneys any more?

**EM:** It was um, probably the, like... most uncertain time of my life. Because there wasn't anywhere for me to go. And my social worker, she was frantically calling around, trying to find just like a temporary place for me to stay and no one had anything. And so I was pretty much packing my stuff to go somewhere that I didn't know. So it was really scary. And we sat in her car, we drove down to the causeway in Naples, and we sat there and we waited for hours for a phone call to see if I could go somewhere. And she was so heartbroken, because she was with us for so long—like with our family and trying to get us out because her hands were tied, she couldn't really do much because my mother was so experienced on how to get around the system. You know? Make sure that you know the house is clean, and everyone is fed and bathed and everything, so nothing's wrong. And Lisa my social worker, she knew. And we talked, and she was like, "I know that you were not on a good spot, but there's nothing I can do." And after my case she quit. She quit. And she—but she stayed long enough so she could help us get through and get placed, and stuff. And so...that...

**ML:** She was the state child welfare worker or the Tribal?

**EM:** The state. And she was with us since I don't know. I think she got involved when there was the domestic abuse case with, um, my mother Charlotte and her husband Aaron. They had a horrible, like, domestic abuse case against both of them and then the state got involved again. And they sent her in and she was with us, two years before we were taken out, and she was with us two years after. So she was (*laughing*) the longest time period we've ever had with someone, so she got to know us really well. (00:16:22) Um, but that was—when I had to leave, that was the hardest thing ever. Because, like, I knew I had to, and I was going to you know do anything I could to make sure that you know, I could help my siblings get through it. So even if they couldn't find a place for me, I would probably do... I don't know what I was going to do. So, I was just like uncertain. And the most horrible thing was they put all my stuff in a trash bag. And so, like, I had like, um, nothing but what was in like a bag. And like that was like—I just didn't feel like anything. You know, I felt like empty and like worthless pretty much. Because I trusted them to, you know, help us. And they like, totally went back and like betrayed me pretty much, but there was nothing I could do. So, but, um, Kelly, my foster mom, she actually heard about it through someone Lisa called, and that day she got the phone call from Kelly, telling her to bring me over, and then that was it (*laughing*). And it was only supposed to be like for a two week, temporary period of time. And then two weeks turned into three weeks, and then a month and then two months, and then they signed the permanency guardianship papers for me. So I think I was like really, really lucky to have someone like that.

‘Cause, it was—I feel like I would probably be in a much worse place in my life if it wasn't for Kelly. Yeah.

**ML:** How close were you geographically to your siblings?

**EM:** Um, they put me in Raymond, where I am now. And the Whitneys lived in Naples. And then the Labrecks who took the two middle children, Johnny and David, they lived in Bridgton, so it was just like this triangle.

**ML:** And you got to see them?

**EM:** Yeah, so after about a month, we got everything settled down and then I finally started, you know, visiting them and seeing them. Like, I worked really hard so I could get money to pay for gas or something. And Kelly and Wayne had owned their own business, so I like immediately went to work for them, you know, trying to earn my keep, and trying to do what I can to be able to see them. So that was nice (*laughing*).

**RG:** Did you have any visits back on the Island? Either with your mom, or with family members on the Island?

**EM:** Um, no. Um—something about that place makes me, like, angry and sad. Because everyone knew. Everyone knew like what was happening, I think. ‘Cause we always visited people with my mother, back up there. And, there were her old foster family, ‘cause my mom was through the system as well, and they took her in as their foster child, and that was her last foster home that she was able to grow up in and stuff so. But, I mean, I'm sure they knew what was happening but they wouldn't say anything. And I don't know why they wouldn't say anything, and you know. I used to visit up there when I was young and we had lots of friends and family and stuff up there—but like, it just blows my mind that you could know that someone is going through something and you don't say anything. Like, that just blows me away. But—so I don't really go up there because I don't really see anyone up there as family anymore. Because all the people that you know took care of me when I was little, we had friends and cousins and all that, but they moved away from the Island, so they weren't there anymore. So, and, one of our really close family friends, she had passed away, so there was nobody else left up there that I could trust. So, I don't really trust going up there anymore.

**RG:** What are things like for you now? How is everything going?

**EM:** I—it's going good. But—now we're going through uh, difficult transitions with all of our families that have taken all of us in. (00:21:33) With Eric being kicked out when he turns 18, there's like a lot of uncertainty about the other children that are staying there. And the other foster family, the Labrecks—she remarried to a Mitchell. And they both have, like problems going on with their relationship, so they're not really doing really well. And the woman Kathy,





she had just kicked David out, my—he's younger than Eric; he's the next down so he's the fourth child. And they just kicked him out for some reason. It was—everyone thinks it's the dumbest reason ever. And no one really knows what it was. It was just like, all the sudden she was just like, “K—I don't want you here anymore.” And so, he had just gotten um, put with someone else, and so she's like going through a hard time, and now my brother Johnny there, and I'm just like worried about everyone at this point. Because its all like falling apart. Because everything, I fought really hard for us to get out of a bad situation, we're now back in a bad situation, so. Like, its really difficult, I'm trying to figure out what I can do like, with my life. Maybe, you know, moving out so I can take them in, or, something (*laughs*). It's really hard right now. And um...

**ML:** What is your living situation now? Are you still living with Kelly?

**EM:** I'm still with Kelly and Wayne, and also with Eric now because of everything that happened with him. So now he's there. And now I have lost complete trust with the Whitneys. I do not trust them. They're—I mean they did it to me, now they're doing it to Eric and I'm just fretting because I don't know what they're going to be doing to the other kids now. It's not anything violent, but its like once they turn 18, like are they just gonna kick them out too because they finally figured out that they don't want to be a part of the religion or they want different things like in their life, so. And with Johnny, there's like an ongoing—there's an ongoing investigation because Kathy had filed a complaint on herself. With the state. (*Laughs*) Yeah, she had filed a complaint on herself, and they had called me to see if Johnny had, you know, talked to me about anything, and I had just told them that, you know, they're having relationship issues and I don't know what's going on because of what happened with David. So I don't really know where they're at right now with the investigation. But, like I'm just like, worried about the future. And that's like, the near future too. Its not just like, you know, my goals in life. It's like right now. So. I'm going to try to do the best I can but I feel like I'm not doing enough for them. I feel like I should be doing more but there's not really much more I can do. So. It's really hard. (00:25:03) So I'm just going to, you know, try to get through school and see what the summer brings (*laughing*). So...

**ML:** Do they all have the same state worker, or are there several people involved?

**EM:** Well, when they assigned permanency guardianship their case was closed. And now with Kathy filing the complaint on herself, our birth mother has gotten back involved with everyone, trying to get info and everything on us. Like she—what she does is she plays mind games with people. And she'll act like she is repentant for what she's done and saying, “I'm sorry for this, sorry for that.” And then, you know, “Hey, do you know where this person is, do you know where my daughter lives,” or, “Hey do you know where my son lives,” and she'll try to get info and phone numbers and addresses. And try to like get people involved that we've known through our childhood—involved, like, seeing if they can find out info on us. So—and I think I have a feeling that Kathy reached out to her. Because she's going through whatever





she's going through and she had reached out to Charlotte and um, that's how she found out all this info. So, I mean, I'm really scared that she's going to try to get back involved with our lives now that she's found a loophole. You know how everything is crumbling, and now she's finally found her way back into our lives. So, its like, a lot of uncertainty right now.

**ML:** It sounds very hard.

**EM:** It's really hard. I'm breaking out really bad, stress acne (*laughs*). But um, my fiancé Tim, he's really supportive, and he's always been really supportive, and he'll pretty much do anything he can to help. So, I mean, we even talked about buying a house and filing for custody and you know, getting married and stuff so that we can, like, save everyone. 'Cause I feel like we got out for a little while but now we're just back in trouble, and I feel like I need to stop the cycle of, you know—I can't trust anyone with my family. Like, the only people I can trust are my family right now. So. I mean, I hope I can at least get, you know, some people involved with trying to help me do that. But, I mean, we'll see where it goes. 'Cause, um, our old caseworker, his name is Jamal, and he had just called me last week about Johnny, so now he's back involved with everyone and trying to see what he can do. And he's trying to fight to reopen the case for David and Johnny. And I told him what happened with Eric and I don't know what's going to happen, but I think, like I've been pretty much silent when we had the permanency guardianship signed for us, I thought we were good, and that everything was going to be okay, so I just stood in the background and you know, focused on myself. But now it's like—I think I need to do more to try to get people involved instead of it just being, like this struggle between everyone. Like, I think it's just this big struggle that we're going through, and you know, I don't want Charlotte involved with any of us. She doesn't deserve it.

**ML:** Do you feel that Jamal understands and is on your side?

**EM:** Yeah. He totally—he reached out to me, and he knows that I've already aged out of everything, but he knows that I know the system and he knows that I know, like, what to do and who to talk to in order to get people actively listening and involved in our situation. So—and its hard because I'm not in the state but at the same time its easier, because I am. I'm 19, you know—I'm pretty much on my own, aside for living situation. I'm pretty much almost all set with my life so (*laughing*). He asked me if there was anything like I could do to try to help ease everyone's, like, confusion or concern. And I was like, "You know what? Just tell everyone, tell everyone I'm going to reach out to everyone I can." Make phone calls, you know and everything, to try to like have people like, involved with it. Because no one has really been doing much. I feel like this has been happening our whole life where people just don't listen enough. So, you know, now that I'm not a child anymore, I have my own voice so... they can finally understand and like, listen to me now. So I feel more in control. But at the same time I feel helpless at the same time because it's hard to go back in the system again. So. (00:30:52) Yeah.



**ML:** You sound very brave.

**EM:** (*Laughs*) I try. I really do.

**RG:** Um, thinking back on your experiences, what do you wish had been different? What would you have wanted or needed?

**EM:** With what? Like, with anything?

**RG:** Yeah. With anything.

**EM:** I wish I told someone earlier about what was happening.

**RG:** At home with your mom or....

**EM:** Yeah.

**RG:** ...with the foster family?

**EM:** With, um, with my mother. Like I wish that I had just said something way earlier in my life. And I know—I've already gone through this with my counselor, but she's like, "You know what, you were a child, you didn't know." But, you know, you always had that thought like in the back of your mind, like, "I should have done this, should have done that," and its really haunting.

**ML:** Yeah, it's very normal to have those thoughts. But it's extraordinarily rare for a child to be able to speak up and do that.

**EM:** Yep, and they were amazed at me at fourteen saying something. And they, they were like, "Usually kids don't really speak out until they turn 18 and have gotten out of the house." Because its something that you don't really see with younger people anymore. So. I'm just going to have to work on accepting that (*laughing*), so. Yep.

**RG:** Is there anything else you want to add?

**EM:** Um, I don't know. There's a lot (*laughing*). I feel like it just, sitting down for an hour you can't really say much. You know? You really can't. But, um. Like, I've been through a lot in my life. But I don't want it to, like define who I am. So. I'm going to try to move forward and keep people from holding me back. So, um, I think doing this is like the first step in trying to do that. And you know, going to college, and moving forward, and you know, taking steps to try to, like, better myself will hopefully better others and like—I think that justice hasn't really been done. 'Cause Charlotte, she's still out there, and its scary to know that I could run into her



at any moment in my life (*crying*). And it's like really scary so, you know. I'm always like paranoid and looking over my shoulder, but its true.

And we all feel like that, and um—I think that everyone's hands were pretty much tied at that point. You know, once DHS got involved, they had to protect both sides of the, you know, people involved. They had to protect Charlotte and Aaron from prosecution because that's what they're whole thing is about. They can't—anything they said to the investigators was confidential at that point, and so—like, they should be in jail (*laughs*). They should be, you know, rotting in jail, you know, paying for what they've done to us. But, I think that's probably the worst thing, is knowing that they never got punished. And now we're just—I feel like we're just being punished because we have to live, you know with all these feelings and you know—like everything. You know, there's no closure, there's no justice. So, we just have to live with that, and I don't think we should (*crying*). But, I know most—I've done a lot of research and most of, you know, like child abuse cases go unprosecuted because there's not enough proof because its mostly hearsay. And you know, I just—I have to find a way to live with it, but its difficult. I cry all the time. I know that it—you know, shouldn't have happened to us. So (*laughs*), that's just one thing that I'll never be able to get over fully. Is that they get to be free while we're, you know, we're pretty much trapped in our own minds and you know, with our lives, and always, you know, living out our lives trying to avoid them. So. Yeah. That's it.

**RG:** You are incredibly strong. (00:36:40)

**EM:** I don't feel it (*crying*).

**RG:** I know it's hard to see that from the inside. But you are incredibly strong. The fact that you are taking care of your family is huge.

**EM:** Mm-hmm.

**RG:** And I cannot imagine how hard it is.

**ML:** And then for doing all the things your mother said you could never do. But you could and you are.

**EM:** Mm-hmm. I really hope she hears this one day (*crying*). I really do. To know, like, what she's put us through. You know—she still thinks that she's done nothing wrong. She writes us letters all the time, saying that we ruined her life, and, you know, like everything that she's ever done to us is lies and you know. She'll never realize, like, she's done horrible things. And I mean, I hope the Tribe hears this and you know—'cause I feel like something has to be done. But I feel like its never going to happen. But I feel like they should have the power to you know, put her to justice, like do justice. I think they have more power, you know, but. I don't know.

**RG:** Did she ever go through a Tribal court proceeding?

**EM:** I don't think so. The only court hearing we had was for the custody arrangements. And, you know, I went to every single one just so I could look at her in the face and she never looked at me. You know? She never talked. She just sat there with her head down. I think it was more embarrassment than guilt. Like having other people judge you. I think it hurts more than coming to terms with what you've done yourself. So. Yeah (*blows nose*).

**ML:** You mentioned your counselor... you do have a counselor?

**EM:** I stopped going. I went for a year.

**ML:** Was it helpful?

**EM:** Yeah, yeah it was really helpful. I didn't end up going through with the graduation process. But, you know, we were at a point where I could have finished, you know, gone through like, "Oh, you're better. Oh, here you go, have an award, like you went through counseling, whoopee!" (*Laughs*) I had to stop and not go forward with going through all that crap, because it's pretty much just crap. But my siblings, they didn't want to do counseling. I think they were too young at the time. They didn't, you know. I was the oldest. And I knew that I needed at least some help. 'Cause I was really angry and frustrated and was going through a lot.

And so Kelly had brought me to counseling once a week for a whole year. And she you know, she made me go, like she forced me in the car (*laughing*). Drove me all the way to Portland from Raymond. And sat in the waiting room for an hour, and she, you know, knew it was helping. Even though I didn't feel like it was helping—like she could see a difference. And she, you know, after that year, she had seen so much progress with me that she told me that I don't have to make another appointment. And that was like the biggest thing ever because I was like, "Thank god, I don't have to go there anymore." But I'm so glad I did go. It helped so much. And I can see that. My siblings, 'cause they didn't end up finishing their time with counseling, have, you know—they're different. But like, they still have lots of anger left. It's like a lot of left over feelings, and Eric is going through lots of feelings and troubles right now because he never got to release his feelings. So, you know, we talk all the time. He always asks me like how I got through it, and I told him I went to counseling, and he wishes that he had, you know, stayed and gone instead of just refused to go and, I don't know. I think that was one of the most helpful things for me was being able to talk to someone about what happened. Because I felt like no one was listening. No one knew anything. So that was good.

**ML:** I'm glad it was helpful.



**EM:** Mm-hmm.

**ML:** Not easy. But helpful.

**EM:** I didn't really talk the first, you know, the first few sessions. And then after it was, it was so much easier to finally tell someone. And you're like, "Wow someone is actually listening to me. Someone actually knows what happened to me." So.

**RG:** Is there anything else you want to add right now?

**EM:** No, I don't think so.

**RG:** Well I want to thank you so much for sitting with us. And know that we think you're incredibly strong. I get to speak for Marcy (*laughing*).

**ML:** Yes, I say it too. She's speaking accurately for Marcy.

**RG:** You are incredibly strong.

**ML:** You really are. You're a very impressive young woman.

**RG:** Absolutely. And you can add or change any part of this at any time. We're here. Just give me a call.

**EM:** Okay.

**RG:** Okay.

**[END OF RECORDING]**