

Bowdoin College

Bowdoin Digital Commons

Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and
Reconciliation Commission: Statements

Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth &
Reconciliation Commission Archive

5-1-2014

Statement by Sarah Mary (Anne) McCarron collected by Rachel George on May 1, 2014

Sarah Mary McCarron

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc-statements>

Recommended Citation

McCarron, Sarah Mary, "Statement by Sarah Mary (Anne) McCarron collected by Rachel George on May 1, 2014" (2014). *Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Statements*. 122.

<https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc-statements/122>

This Statement is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission Archive at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Statements by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mdoyle@bowdoin.edu.

General Information

Private or Public Statement: Private

Statement Provider: Sarah Mary (Anne) McCarron

Date: May 1, 2014

Location: Bangor, Maine

Previous Statement: None

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: Juanita Grant

Additional Individuals Present: Adam Mazo, Ben Pender-Cudlip

Recording Format: Audio

Length of Recording: 29:47

Recording

RG: Okay, so today is May 1, 2014. My name is Rachel George, and I am here with:

AM: Anne McCarron.

RG: Perfect. And we are also here with:

AM: Adam Mazo.

BP-C: Ben Pender-Cudlip.

JG: And Juanita Grant.

RG: Wonderful. Um, the file number is W-201405-00042. We are in Bangor, Maine. Anne, have you been informed, understood, and signed the consent form?

AM: Yes.

RG: Perfect. And I have to let you know that, if at any point during your Statement today, you indicate there is a child or an elder in need of protection or that there is an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that is in imminent risk of serious bodily harm, including death,

that that information may not be protected as confidential. Do you understand?

AM: Um, hm. Yes, I understand.

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

AM: Um. probably with my mother. Her father was in World War I, and he came home. They lived just off the reserve, from what I understand from other relatives. And he came home and told his family that they were going to put away their Indian ways and adopt white ways and, my mother, (*pause*) ah, was placed in a, what they called a convent school.

From what she told me, she didn't — I believe she learned a lot about, you know, white man's ways, but she was, she held onto a lot of her own ways. Her, her grandfather was a practicing medicine man, so she told us a lot about, ah, herbs and grasses and healing things. And she didn't, she really didn't do well at the convent school, and I think she was thrown out. She, she told us that she threw a sewing machine at one of the nuns. And, I never got that verified. Um, so I don't think they did the job they thought they wanted to do with her being an Indian girl. And, like I said, all I have is what she told us, and no verification from other, other family members of hers.

And, uh, she left Canada. She had had four children there, and her oldest was a boy. And I believe and then a girl, then another boy, and then a girl. And the youngest girl, ah, died really young. But she left those children with her mother and father, and I believe they were put in a convent school, because the mother — my grandmother — and my grandfather couldn't care for them.

And she came to the United States and met my father and had three more children. I'm the oldest. And by the time I was 12, she hadn't taught us any of the language, any, any of her culture. And she stuck to wanting us to be, adopt the ways around us, the people around us. And, when I was 12, I started skipping school because, I didn't have many clothes to wear, and I got mixed up with some kids that also skipped school. And back then, if you were a truant, by the child laws, you got sent to, ah, what do you call it, reform school. And, I did get caught. I got caught in my friend's shower, hiding. And I got caught by the truant officer, and I was taken to court, as (*pause*) I guess it was truancy. And I was given a choice of, being placed in foster care, or going to the girls' reform school. So I chose foster care.

And (*pause*) they, (*sigh*) I became a ward of the State. They put me, I lived in Bangor at the time, but I was placed with a family in Dexter. They had a big farm and, um. The first thing they did, the mother, she cleaned my face with a common pin, picking blackheads out of my face. And they cut my hair. Mama never cut our hair. We just always had long hair. The first thing they, that's what the mother, the first thing she did to me. And I wasn't there very long. She had me do a few chores. You know, they weren't mean to me, they just — I wasn't accepted, really. (*clears throat*)



And I was placed with a French family after that. And (*pause*) I didn't fit in there, either. She didn't, they didn't keep me long.

In the meantime, I was going to Dexter High School. They had 7th and 8th grade right in the high school. And I did good. I did really good. I was a good student. I was a smart kid. So, I wasn't, I just had a lot of friends. 'Cause the smart kids were with the smart kids. Back then, it was kind of like Grease, you know. And (*pause*) I can't remember what they called us. But we weren't snobs, we were just smart. We weren't greasers, but we did have that, that type in school, but I wasn't drawn to those kids. I was drawn to the ones, you know, the ones that, you know. We were just top of the class as far as grade point went. So, I wasn't long at the second family either.

And then I went to a third family. And they were (*clears throat*) heavily involved in their Church. And they were just wonderful. And the, the lady, the mother, she had been, uh, Mrs. Maine, I believe it was. And for, her, the things she could do, like cooking and sewing. And, and so, she proceeded to teach me that kind of stuff. But, her mother-in-law did not like me, and was always trying to get Mrs. Neal — that was her name — to get rid of me. And, finally she gave in and did as, as, you know. And these were white families in a rural town in Dexter.

So then I went to, I came back to Bangor. They put me in a, in a Catholic home. And, uh, the father was uh, a major in the Air Force, and his wife was, uh, a very, very good woman. And, I acted up. I was 15, and I had a boyfriend. And I really didn't like him. I just wanted a boyfriend because everyone had a boyfriend. And (*pause*) I acted up, and she, I had to leave there.

And I was placed in another home in Corinna. It was a farm family. And I knew them from the church that I had gone to. (*pause*) And I was really happy there. I helped them hay and we did farm chores and I really got along with, ah, their kids. But I was, I turned 16, and, I had to have my tonsils out. So I was brought to Bangor to the hospital to have my tonsils out. And all my stuff was sent — I don't know where it was sent. My, my caseworker had it, I guess. I didn't have a home to go to. They, they got rid of me, too.

And (*pause*) I think that's, I ran away. I found my mother. That's when I found, I found her. It is, because I remember her giving me ginger ale and ice cream. But then my, the social worker found me another home in Old Town. And it was with, ah, an older man, an older woman. They already had a little foster child named Victor. And they had a daughter living at home. But, one day I was washing the floor in the kitchen, and the man came up behind me. And I knew, I just got a feeling that he wasn't (*pause*) a nice person. And I had made friends with a girl named Sue Nicola, from the island. And I think, I called her and I gathered up all the bottles I could to cash in to get a bus ticket, to go find my mother in Bangor, and I ran away from there. I just didn't dare stay there any more. And that was my last foster home experience.

And I, I never saw my mother, my brother, or my sister. No one ever asked me if I would like to see them. But I do know that after I went into foster care, I don't know who it was that got new clothes for my brother and sister. But they should have given me new clothes and sent me back home. I mean, if I had gone to reform school, it would have been a lot shorter than those years spent in foster care. It didn't make sense to me. But, you know, I just accepted it.

(pause) And that's my, what I can remember of my story of foster care. My mother told me about what happened to her, being in the convent school. And she, you might as well say she ran away, too, because she never went back to Canada. And she only saw *(pause)* the oldest son a couple of more times after that. She never saw her, her daughter, who ended up in a convent school. And she never saw the second son. He died of leukemia in New Jersey. He was 15. I have no idea how he got there, why he was there. But, I remember the oldest brother coming down, and they were supposed to go see her second son, but they didn't. And that's our story, as much as I can remember. I'm sure there's a lot more.

RG: Was your caseworker ever available to you while you were in foster care?

AM: I —

RG: Did someone come at each new foster home that you were in? Did someone come and check in on you and see how you were doing?

AM: No. Not that I can remember. Not that I can remember. No. I had a very good social worker. Her name was, I think, Pauline Stewart. Mrs. Stewart. She was, she was great. She'd take me out to lunch. So, maybe sporadically, or maybe with each move. But she, she *was* good to me.

RG: And who, who told you when you were moving between homes? Who was the one that let you know that that was happening?

AM: She did. She did, Mrs. Stewart did. And that last home, I ran away. And I found my mother. *(sighs)* I think — I do know one thing. My sister always resented me. She thought, she thought that I was living a better life than she had, because we were so poor. But, she, she was more outgoing than I am. I'm passive, she's aggressive. She wouldn't have been in a foster home for as long as I. She'd been gone. I was passive. I wanted to fit in. And being a smart girl and having those kinds of friends held me there. And, you know, one of them friended me on Facebook. So, *(pause)* that's the only way I have would fit in, though, and they knew I was a foster child, you know. But that was my peers; it wasn't their parents. So, they didn't look at me, my peers didn't look at me the way the parents, the grownups did. And my teachers were good to me. I don't remember that school being a bad part of it.

Just, I didn't have a lot of feeling, for, for these adults. I did Mrs. Neal, I really, you know, I really wanted her to be my mother. And I would have to say that she's the only one. But she spent time with me cooking and teaching me, things like that. And I know she and her husband really liked me. *(long pause)* I don't why I'm *(voice trembles)* weepy over it.

RG: No, that's okay.

AM: That was over 50 years ago. *(pause)* 55 years ago. And I never, it's just something I put behind me. *(pause)*

(sighs) But my children. Ah. I was 20 when I had my first child. Twenty-one when I had my second child. Twenty-three when I had my third child. And *(pause)* those are the ages my children went into foster care. I had, I had lost my apartment. We were living in Massachusetts and I had lost my apartment. And we were staying with my mother and sister, at the time. I had come back to visit them. And, I went back to try and get my apartment, things straightened out, so that we could go back to Massachusetts, and, I sent all the money I had to my mother and sister for the kids. And, this was in late May, and, I had lost everything, my apartment, my stuff was in storage. I had to go to court, get a lawyer and try to get it. Meantime, my children are here with my mother and sister. And *(pause)* the State charged me with abandonment.

And this is something I carry, guilt and shame for years. Years and years, over the fact that in July I received a phone call that the State had taken my children and put them in foster care. And they had separated them, put them in different homes. And at the time, I was told I could not see them for a year, that they had to stay in foster care for a year. So, maybe it was after, I can't remember. I've blocked out so much of that. But I did start seeing them, *(pause)* the following December, I think it was. And, they had my children already adopted out. And I don't know what happened, if there was a new law, or a change in policy, or what. But by then, I didn't have a place to stay. I was on the skids, you might as well say. I was homeless.

And I, I learned that I could have my children back. And right out of the blue. So, I found an apartment, up on York Street, I think it was it was \$10 a month. It was, you know, it was a slum, but the people that lived there were good. They were just poor like us. And, I got all of my children back. But, like I said, what they had done to them was separate them, and put each one with a white family even though I was half Indian. And I don't know if they had that, if they had a policy back then, but their policy was *(pause)* unreasonable, I think. I think it was very unreasonable. Today, they try to reunify families. And when it happened to me, they were separating us. And I, I didn't hurt my children — It wasn't a matter of abuse or neglect, it was a matter of what they call abandonment. Because I did, I did leave my children with my mother and sister. I thought they would take care of them till I got back. Or had a place for us to live down there and then take them back. But it was too late, it was just a matter of two months, but it was too late.

RG: What year was that?

AM: Um. 1970. Because my son hadn't turned one yet. He turned one that month. *(sigh)* I wasn't, I wasn't all with it anyway. In November, I had had surgery. They said I had ovarian

cancer. And they wanted to give me a complete hysterectomy. I had no one to talk to, so I was right in a panic. I just grabbed my kids and went to my friend's in Massachusetts, and I don't know. My son had been born in May, this happened to me in November, and I came back to Maine in April. And they, they charged me with abandonment in May, which is really what I did. I, I abandoned them to my mother and I never did get my head on straight until, maybe I was 25.

So it was hard, (*sighs*) reuniting with my children again. Even though they were so young. Because they had been in different homes, with different values, with different — One in a Protestant home, one in a Catholic home, one in a — It was hard. It was hard. (*pause*) So that, (*pause*) that was a hard, hard time. Hard thing for me to get over. The shame and guilt I carried for many years. (*clears throat*) I, I don't think I live in shame and guilt anymore. My children have turned out to be productive people. And that's all I wanted them to do. They're all doing well. They're all hard workers. They're all good parents. (*pause*) I guess that's ... (*pause*) I do believe that DHHS needs to change their policy on foster care.

RG: What would you have found, or what would you have needed? What would you have found helpful for you?

AM: Um, one-on-one talk. Someone that I could confide in. Talk to. Answer my questions. Um. Let me see my family. Let me know how they were. Let me go home. Why they kept me for four years, I, I don't know. And yet, they helped my brother and they helped my sister. and they remained at home. So I. Policy today is unifying a family, at all costs. (*pause*) Which is, I wish they had done that for me. But there are cases where they let a child go back home, and the child is seriously injured or even killed, and the parents aren't held as accountable as they should be for endangering their children. And a lot of money is spent, on unifying a family that maybe shouldn't be. That's what I'm seeing, that's what I'm seeing today, so many children's parents who, are on drugs or alcohol, and I just see them fixing the parents, so that the child can go back. (*pause*) I don't agree with some of it.

I guess that's it. I don't want to go into other, you know, I just don't want to go into what's going on in my family now, but it has to do with substance abuse and unifying the family. And DHS will go to any extreme (*pause*) to prove that they are unifying a family, because they have to prove it in court, and they have to document their efforts, (*pause*) irregardless of what the family says about the situation. They have that agenda they have to follow. (*pause*) That's all.

RG: I want to thank you for taking the time to sit down with me today.

AM: Pardon?

RG: I said, I want to thank you for taking the time to sit down with me today, and for the courage that it took to share what you just did.

AM: It brings, it, um, brings back some memories that I don't like.

RG: Um, hm.

AM: Especially about my own children. And my mother's story with her first four children. It really makes me sad. *(pause)* But, nothing else could have been done, that's how things were done.

Today, this is, people have more say, people have more say, especially when it comes to Native children. And taking away, uh, their language, their everything. And now there is a turn-around. They're teaching the language; they're teaching the culture. And I wish Mama had us. I really do. Anything I want to know about Micmac people, I, uh, I have to look up, read.

And my great grandfather, being a practicing medicine man. He was a hermit. He lived by himself in a little cabin in the woods. He had a dog and a rifle. I'll never forget the picture I saw of him. And, um, he was murdered, you know and they never found out who did it. And I cannot remember the name of the town that he lived in. But they have a museum where they have his furniture that he made. So I'm very proud of knowing that.

(pause) And there are a lot of good things from what I've learned, that I'm proud to know about my family. Because they were there 500 years ago, the same place they are now. And it makes me feel connected. *(pause)* Yeah, it does. I've only been there a few times, but I know exactly — You know, just knowing exactly where you're from, makes a big difference. You know, you didn't come on a boat, *(laughs)* chasing people off. *(laughs)* Just had the land, you know my family isn't on a lot of land. It isn't a big reserve, it's a very small reserve, but it's something I can call mine. *(pause)*

And that's all I have to say. About that. Forrest Gump.

RG: Would you like me to stop recording now?

AM: Yes.

[END OF RECORDING]