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5-1-2014

### Statement by Joshua Gagnon collected by Rachel George on May 1, 2014

Joshua Gagnon

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### General Information

**Private or Public Statement?** - Private

**Statement Provider:** Joshua Gagnon

**Date:** May 1, 2014

**Location:** Bangor, Maine

**Previous Statement?** No

**Statement Gatherer:** Rachel George

**Support Person:** Juanita Grant

**Additional Individuals Present:** Adam Mazo and Ben Pender-Cudlip

**Recording Format:** Video

**Length of Recording:** 00:34:43

#### Transcriber's Note:

While this is non an anonymous statement, redactions and alternations to the video have been completed at the request of the statement provider in an effort to protect the identities of certain individuals mentioned.

### Recording

**RG:** Okay. My name is Rachel George. It is May 1, 2014 and we are here in Bangor, Maine. I'm here with—could you please state your name?

**JG:** Joshua David Gagnon.

**RG:** And the other individuals in the room are...

**Ms. Grant:** Juanita Grant.

**AM:** Adam Mazo.

**BP:** Ben Pender-Cudlip.

**RG:** Awesome. And the file number is W 201405-00043. Josh, have you been informed, understood, and signed the consent form?

**JG:** I have.

**RG:** Great. And I have to let you know that if at any point today during this statement you indicate that there is a child or elder currently in need of protection, or that there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm or death to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information may not be protected as confidential.

**JG:** Mmmhmm. Yes.

**RG:** Perfect. Can you tell me about what it was like as a child growing up at home, when you were still living with your parents?

**JG:** It was very, very, very structured. I'd wake up, you know, get ready for school. There was no room to mess around in the house. No fun, it was, do what you're told and that's it. School was my get-away. I enjoyed school. It kept me out of my home life. I didn't ever want to go back home. It needs to be a more detailed question, because that one's kind of like, really wide open.

**RG:** What's your favorite childhood memory from when you were still at home?

**JG:** The last day, getting taken (*laughing*). It was probably while I was more with my real family back then, my mom's side. My cousins, I got close to them. But I got taken away I never saw them again. So it was spending time with my family, the good family members, I guess.

**RG:** Where were you living?

**JG:** Fort Kent, its near Allagash, St. John, Frenchville, Madawaska...

**RG:** What were the circumstances surrounding you being removed from your family?

**JG:** Well, it was actually over a long period of time. The school started observing and noticing a drastic change in my behavior. I was violent, mouthy, non-conforming. Um, and the more and more that I non-conformed, the more I would have to pay for it when I got home. So that went on for a good six months of my school year, and then eventually, I don't really know how it happened, but I ended up going into the school nurse and they gave me a random physical, and they found a bunch of marks on my body. My stepdad did it. They ended up kind of not—they didn't really expose it right away. They kind of actually, knew something bigger was going on there. I didn't know what it was.

So they sent a—I don't know if she was a—she was gonna be my foster mom, but I didn't know it at the time. She worked for DHS in Fort Kent, or did some sort of outreach/respite program. She came and took me out of school three or four times a week, and in her own way kind of interrogated me about my home life, manipulated me into spilling it all. And manipulating me like, buying me whatever I wanted for lunch. Good food was always a plus to get me to talk back then (*smiling*). And then I just remember one day I went to school and I don't really remember this, I remember reading it in one of my files. 'Cause I go back every



now and then, and think, “Oh, that doesn't seem right,” or, “I don't remember it that way.” Well [00:04:38.27] the school had a bunch of reports of cut marks on my back, and I was grabbing my groin. And that night I went home and I thought it was just a normal night, and ten, eleven o'clock at night, I had just about six or seven cops come to the house and raid my house and scoop me and my brother [NAME REDACTED] and my sister [NAME REDACTED.]

[REDACTED]

They ended up coming in, taking us all out. I haven't heard from my oldest sister, Amber, she got placed somewhere else. But this lady that came to my school, Rita, she ended up taking me and my older brother, my younger brother, my younger sister, and me. We ended up going to her house out in St. Francis where she did temporary foster care. Me, my schedule picked right back up there. I was like one of those kids you would see in a horror film trying to adjust to a new life, you know, like crazy, a little wild, uncontrollable. At that time, a month went by and I was violent towards her. I was really aggressive. I didn't let anyone touch me. If they did, I would attack them. And that continued on for a month. She was fostering two other teenage girls at the time. I don't remember their names. And they would start to—they were aggressive towards me too, and one day I flipped, and did about \$1500 of property damage. So they ended up calling the cops on a five-year-old kid, and getting me out of an abusive household.

And they ended up calling a guardian ad litem. Her name is Sarah Leclair, she's awesome, and a representative from Micmacs, her name was Rosella Silliboy. They ended up taking me one day. They didn't let me go to school. My brothers and sisters went to school. I didn't know I wouldn't be seeing them again for another three or four years after that. Sarah ended up bringing me in her car, she had her daughter in the backseat and some other guy I don't remember up from, and now that I reflect he was probably a security measure for them. But they ended up, they brought me right to Bangor and placed me in Acadia. And I went back and looked at my discharge paperwork from all those years ago, and they had me in there for 8.5 months, and on trial—I was on 22 different trial medications at that time. After they [00:07:29.24] deemed me steady, they shipped me to a group home, Spurwink, down in Portland where they—it was uh, it was a step up. There was structure, and I was used to that but not a positive kind of structure. And there was other kids my age who I started to relate to. They'd kind of been through similar situation. And progressively—I was there for four years. I had three sets of foster parents, therapeutic foster parents, residential. Paid by the state. I am actually still in contact with one of them. They wanted to adopt me. [00:08:07.10] Further down the line, 5, 6 years later down the line, but that never went through, but I'm still in contact with them. Where else? Do you want me to keep going? I didn't even take a dent in the story yet.

**RG:** If you feel comfortable still talking, you can absolutely, or I can ask another question.

**JG:** You can ask another one, I kind of rambled on with that (*smiling*).

**RG:** Did anyone ask when you went into care if you were Native?

**JG:** I didn't know what Native was. I didn't find out till I was twelve. Actually in that group home. I was in Acadia, when they shipped me to Acadia for the first time, I had my birthday and Christmas and the holidays in there. And I got out sometime that summer, and I spend 4.5 years, 5 birthdays. I was just getting ready to graduate the Spurwink program. Towards the end of it—I just lost my train of thought. I didn't know I was Native, I actually found out that my stepdad who did a lot of the bad stuff to me—he got arrested during the four years that I was at Spurwink. It came as a relief to me. But I also was scared, because I thought he was going to get revenge. But he went to jail, like, 2.5 years later than he was supposed to.

Anyway, that was taken care of, and I was told that he wasn't my real father—and that was with a visit with Rosella [00:09:48.28] because she knew all along, and it was kind of a stab in the back because she knew it, but didn't tell me the whole time. She worked with all of my brothers and sisters. Actually, off topic, it was really funny because my father has a lot of kids. And last night when I was on Facebook last night with you and you (looks at Juanita Grant) were wondering where I went because I was working at Bar Harbor Inn last year, it was the day I quit. And I walked into this woman's car to smoke a cigarette, my coworker, and this other girl pops out of nowhere, and her name was Stephanie, and then I left, and you know, that was it. Last night, it turns out, she's my sister, my half sister, my dad's daughter. So I just found out yesterday that I have family really close by, so I'm trying to connect with her, I'm going to connect with her. But I thought I would share that news with you, I forgot. Another sister (*laughing*). Shift me back please? [00:10:52.23]

**RG:** What were you told—who told you—what did your foster parents say to you when you first arrived?

**JG:** What, like when I got first taken out by the state? I wasn't in my foster parents', I was at my stepfather's.

**RG:** No, when you were removed from your stepfathers?

**JG:** Well I was placed in Acadia, then I went to Spurwink.

**RG:** Oh yes.

**JG:** And then from Spurwink, actually towards the end of it I graduated from their program, they were going to put me, during that four years, that four or five years. My brothers and sisters ended up getting adopted by the woman that took us. But she didn't adopt me, but she decided she would give me another trial run at being her foster kid so I could start bonding with my brothers and sisters again. Needless to say, that lasted about 4.5 months, and I kind of mentally regressed. [00:11:39.05] They ended up moving me to a foster home right in Fort Kent like fifteen miles away. It wasn't that big of a deal, I could see them on weekends, you know. But that place, they starved me a lot of the times. A lot of these foster homes that the state put up—yeah, there was more abuse there (*laughs*) than a lot of other places. They

refused to feed me. I remember one time, someone pushed me on the bus, getting off the bus. It was my foster brother, my foster parent's son, and he busted up my face and I was all bloody and stuff, and they ended up calling the cops on me because they said I started it first and I didn't even leave a mark on him, so there was a lot, they didn't like me. I was a money-maker for them, and the less they had to spend on me and the more they could spend on themselves, the happier they were.

So after that, I got displaced out of that and got sent to the Caribou Crisis unit [00:12:42.05] September 10, 2011, the day before the world trade centers. And after that happened, I kind of had a meltdown, like I don't know, I went a little nuts, and they ended up shipping me to Acadia again. This time for like a three-month period, and you know, it's a timeline between 5 and 18 years old. It's been group-home, group-home, foster-parent, hospital, crisis-unit, [00:13:08.23] group-home, group-home, foster parent, hospital, group home. Up until I was 18 when I said, "I'm doing it anymore." They tried to get me to sign a B-9, to take my adult rights away because they didn't think that I could handle it (*laughs*). Look how wrong they were.

**RG:** How long were you with that first foster family for?

**JG:** Nine months, a school year. One school year. Then they took me out about two-weeks before I was supposed to get done with that grade.

**RG:** Who told you about that?

**JG:** They kind of already had my stuff packed when I got home from school one day. They told me I was going to the Grand Isle Bridge Home which is a little bit out of Frenchville, Madawaska. It's not too far from Fort Kent. But regardless they had all my stuff packed up, and they made me wait at the DHS office and the DHS worker moved me.

**RG:** How involved was your DHHS worker?

**JG:** How many of them?

**RG:** How many did you have?

**JG:** Charley (*listing names, inaudible*) Theresa. I had a lot of them. Like I've had at least four or five of them in a couple of years. They got tired of dealing with me. I didn't conform at all.

**RG:** That's really awful.

**JG:** It is what it is.

**RG:** What were—how many foster homes were you in?

**JG:** That's uh—does that include therapeutic foster homes? Because they also had residential foster homes and therapeutic, and one's more monitored by the state than actually the parents.

**RG:** Residential foster homes?

**JG:** Five, six. I guess it all depends what you call foster homes. I've been to more residential homes than I did foster homes. Stensen Ranch, Spurwink, Goodwill-Hinckley, Grand Isle Bridge Home. Then there was the Oakland Bridge Home, Crisis Unit in Caribou, New Day Program in Calais, the Transition Program in Calais. A couple real homes in between but I never lasted. I never kept it together.

**RG:** Can you tell me what moved you from each place?

**JG:** Yes, actually I was kind of hoping you would. I ended up realizing as a kid that it was easier to keep moving, to keep on traveling, moving, moving. Don't get comfortable in one spot, because it won't be what I expect. So it was when things started to look bad, and I made them look bad to the point where they wouldn't deal with me anymore, they'd ship me off to a place where I knew I could have a fresh start. Because nobody was giving me a fresh start. So I kept beating myself up, I purposefully misbehaved, I'd purposefully make them send me someplace else.

**RG:** How long were in each of your placements?

**JG:** Well I guess it depends. One of them it was as little as a week (*laughs*). Some place in Rumford, some rinky-dink place in Rumford. I was there like a week.

**RG:** How come you were there only for a week?

**JG:** I want to say that a lot of my actions was because I didn't have a lot of therapy, and the different medications that they put me on kind of made me not who I am if I wasn't on them. I just didn't behave (*laughing*).

**RG:** How many times did you see your caseworkers? *[00:17:14.25]*

**JG:** Once a year. They had to come see me once a year, mandatory. And then I was lucky if they took me out to lunch on top of it. Usually, they'd come and most of them they would meet with the head of the group home and they would have their own team meeting about me, to talk all about me, and they would leave. Well and I needed permission for everything for a hair cut, new clothes, new shoes, permission slips, all had to be contacted by DHS. And believe me, trying to get a hold of them whenever you want is not easy.

**RG:** I know you wrote this down on the form, but I'm going to ask you this next question just so it's on the recorder as well. How many times were you moved?

**JG:** Oh, between twenty and twenty-six times. I counted twenty-six just by memory but I'm sure like, there's gaps in my memory definitely. There were different places and every now and



again, I go to a certain town and I'll be like, "Oh, wow, I used to live here. I totally forgot about that!" You know. So it's quite a few. The number's quite more than it should be.

**RG:** Yeah. Can you tell me about what contact you had with your biological family?

**JG:** None, none with my father until I was sixteen and the first time I met him, I got really high with him and drank a lot. And then my mom, I was having contact with my mom 'cause she was living up in Caribou, well Presque Isle, where my dad was, and she ended up calling the cops on me, this and that, blah blah blah, called them on my dad. My dad didn't want to see me anymore because the cops were involved. He's a substance abuse user, and my mom is just a raging [00:19:12.29] drunk, control freak, so I was gonna get caught up in their web. I actually saw him again this past November. I've seen him like three times in my whole life, but I talk a lot with him. And then every now and then, I find out that I have a new brother and a new sister here and there, like last night. It's cool though because she seems nice but it's weird because I thought I'd be able to recognize her just or something by even being with her in the car for that sixty seconds, I didn't even know she was my sister. It was weird.

**RG:** How about with your—what was your relationship like while you were in state custody? In state care?

**JG:** With my brothers and sisters? Actually really good on the phone. A lot of phone calls. Phone, phone, phone. Visits maybe twice a year. They would pay for hotels and I would spend like a weekend at a hotel with them, and that would be it—it was minimum communication. I had to earn my communication with my family. It wasn't just given. They left the food out of a lot of them. They wouldn't even feed you if you weren't good (*laughs*). That's kind of messed up. Actually, the way the state system works is all messed up. [00:20:42.07] I can't really get going on that. It's a whole other documentary (*laughs*).

**RG:** Is there anything else you want--I have a whole bunch of other questions to ask—or anything else you want me to know, the TRC to know about your time moving repeatedly?

**JG:** No, the only thing I noticed is that the state system does not work with the Native American—like DHHS did not work good with Wabanaki whatsoever. When they first got me. Actually, it was Sharon took charge of me when I was 13, and she would be calling state attorneys, people in Augusta, trying to take control of my life and my treatment because the—according to the DHS—Danny Pinnette was his name. He didn't want any Native American welfare office providing their input. Was his—he was from Fort Kent. He did not work well with Sharon at all. I actually remember a lot of times, Sharon— they would get into arguments about what was best for my treatment. And he would Danny would say that he was working with me longer. Not true, he visited me once a year, you don't know anything, you sign papers,

you pick up the phone if I need a haircut. You don't But, I don't know like tides turned once I started coming here to Wabanaki.

**RG:** How long have you been coming to Wabanaki?

**JG:** Eleven years, since I was 14, and I'm 25.

**RG:** Can you tell me what your experience has been with Wabanaki? *[00:22:38.23]*

**JG:** Okay, I won't lie. But it's been mostly good. But when I was using substances, I got myself clean a few years ago. But I had to have a pay from here, and I was always throwing a fit because I wasn't getting my money. It was just like petty stuff that I wasn't really mature enough to deal with, but other than that. Like the little things like, this place has been great, nothing but supportive and helpful. It's more of a—not so—it's very professional, but it's like they know you, too. It's not just, you're not just a piece of paper and a paycheck. Does that answer your question?

**RG:** Yeah, it does. The next one is a really big question, so take as long as you need to answer it. How has living in foster care impacted or changed your life?

**JG:** In a positive way, or a negative way?

**RG:** Whatever you want.

**JG:** Because I try to think more along the positive line now. If I didn't get to meet all those people, I'd be naïve to the people in the world and how people act, how people are. First, I actually thought I was quite sheltered but, going through what I went through, I have a lot of knowledge. I know that you can only teach so much to some person over and over, and they have no choice but to absorb it. Like, I don't [00:24:29.01] know the word I'm thinking of right now. Sorry, I got lost for a minute. Um...

**RG:** What supports were available to you while you were in care that helped you connect to your culture, or at least were respectful of that aspect? I know that you had said that you didn't know.

**JG:** Well the group homes weren't respectful of my cultural needs. They didn't allow me tobacco, obviously, or any other, like my eagle feather, anything. They didn't allow smudging tools, didn't allow me to practice. Every group home was always at a battle with Wabanaki. This place was trying to find foster homes for me. The group homes were always trying to find foster for me. I don't really know how to answer that. I'm losing it, you guys. I'm getting side-tracked.

**Ms. Grant:** What is it that you want to say that you're not saying? What did you drive here today to say?

**JG:** I wanted to do this because I knew I would regret it if I didn't. I wasn't going to do it at all, and then I kept thinking, "Well I'm going to regret it." I don't really know what I expect to



happen from this, other than the fact that well, we do know where it goes on now.

**[00:26:08.05]** To me, it's basically hoping that people understand me better. So using it more on a personal line than a bigger picture, which I know it sounds kind of selfish. But I'm using it for myself. I know that sounds kind of rotten, doesn't it? Does that make sense?

**RG:** We're here for you.

**JG:** And it's really hard because like all the therapists I've had, like, we've never talked about it in therapy, I played video games, and made little personal pizzas in therapy, and drew pictures, and all that and then bam! "Here Josh this is TRC." (*Laughing*) One big major therapy session. But I have mentally regressed, I haven't been doing too good. I actually relapsed a couple weeks ago. And trying to pick myself up from that, and it's really hard because I am making money now, so it's not like I can't afford to go out and be crazy, but I'm trying to keep my head on. But it's hard, hard. I haven't been sleeping good. I'm like a wreck now.

**RG:** Can you tell me what your experience was like after you turned 18?

**JG:** They threw me to the street in Bangor. They kicked me out of Goodwill-Hinckley. After I turned 18, they put me in The Arc up there and told me that would be the best place for me. Blah, blah, blah. At first, they tried the Shaw house but I just turned 18 so that was a no-go. But eventually, I didn't even go to the Arc. I had a meltdown. I went to the emergency room, getting a psych eval. I didn't know what the hell was going on. You're going to throw this person who's been in structure, with no idea about the real world and Bam, here, go stay at a homeless shelter with a bunch of crazy drunks and drug addicts, you'll fit right in. I don't know. But I ended up meeting with a person, and they ended up taking me in, thank god. That didn't last long. **[00:28:23.05]** I did end up going to a homeless shelter, and I got my own apartment but that's kind of when I went downhill. I started drinking a lot, using, back in 2007. Am I missing part of the question?

**RG:** No.

**Ms. Grant:** That's her love and compassion face.

**JG:** Oh.

**RG:** I'm impressed that you know me well enough to know what that face looks like. Is there anything else you want to say that you haven't yet?

**JG:** No, I just feel kind of scattered, and feel like an idiot when I'm talking right now. I just feel like I'm rambling, actually. I don't feel intelligent at all right now.

**RG:** You are not rambling.

**JG:** Well, I'm not feeling intelligent. I'm actually probably going to go home and probably have a really bad day because of this. *[00:29:18.29]*

**Ms. Grant:** Can I interject a little? So, you're not rambling and probably it sounds that way.

**JG:** It's just too much. It's trying to cover my entire life story. And it's too much to explain.

**RG:** You don't have to do it all right now.

**JG:** I feel good for today. I feel pretty much done. A little bit scattered.

**Ms. Grant:** Do you want me to get you a drink of water?

**JG:** Yeah, I'm really hot.

**RG:** You're doing really, really well. I know this is really hard, actually if I'm being honest I can't imagine how hard this is. *(Juanita goes to get water, Rachel opens window)*

**JG:** *[00:30:24.09]* It doesn't seem like a big deal to me right now, but I know like as soon as I start going home, I'm going home, on my way home—I'm going to avoid, I'm going to just catch myself right now by just saying it that I'll try to avoid any spiraling, snowballing moves on my part. I'm not going to...like even the social is rough, like I don't like being in with a bunch of my family members and be like "Okay, see you guys next year at the next social. Have a good year, catch up then." When I went to the social, but it was great and I felt like on a connection with everyone, and then I have to go back to Bar Harbor and deal with all these stupid people and their unkindness and their judgmental behavior. It's like, why can't everyone just be kind, and I don't know.

**RG:** I wish I had an answer for that. I wish I knew why people have to be assholes *(laughing)*.

**JG:** It's something for real, how people act, worse and worse every day. Me, I try to act better and better everyday. I know—it's just simple stuff, like a smile *[00:32:10.28]* for someone that looks grumpy. You don't know what that could do to them, it could have the biggest effect on their day. Or even talking to someone, "Hi, how are you?" or doing little things like holding the door open. Everyone's so rotten. Chivalry is dead *(laughing)*.

**RG:** Who do you have that you can call tonight?

**JG:** I'll be in good company tonight. I have my aunt Gail, she's out in the car. I didn't want her to come in. Because it's—there are just some things that—I knew if I talked about with her, and we went back to Bar Harbor—I knew she'd be wanting to talk about it and I don't want to talk about it. After I leave here I'll probably go to Hollywood Slots, and letting the ringing of the machines straighten me out. Hopefully, they'll win me big money. No, actually I do really gotta get home *(laughing)*.

**RG:** Can I ask you one more question? What would you have needed or wanted to be there to support you when you were in state custody or in state care?

**JG:** When I found out that I was Native, I wanted a Native home. That's it, plain and simple. Be with my own people. I didn't even care about my bloodline, like my brothers and sisters. I ended up just detaching from them. As a matter of fact, my younger brother, as a matter of fact, wants to kill me. And my older brother **[00:33:38.20]** tried to kill me so it's like, they're all under the rug now. I'll make my own family, make my own happiness.

**RG:** I'm asking, because we're—not because we're trying to look for a specific answer.

**JG:** There's a lot of things I would have wanted, to not be a guinea pig for DHS, because I bet they actually get money for consenting to do trial medications on people. What's a better way than to do a trial on a Native American kid no one cares about? So yeah, that's my—I don't like DHS, I don't like the State of Maine. It's very corrupted, not good people. Natives stick together. Is that it?

**RG:** Yeah, we can stop the recording.

**JG:** I'm good, guys. I'm good. Sorry.

**[END OF RECORDING]**