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Statement by Tyneshia Wright collected by Rachel George on August 28, 2014

Tyneshia Wright

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General Information

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Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

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Length: 01:23:57

Recording

RG: Alright. It is August 28, 2014. We're here in Bangor, Maine. My name is Rachel George and I'm here today with—

TW: Tyneshia Wright.

RG: Fantastic. The file number is W 201408-00048. Tyneshia, have you been informed, understood, and signed the consent form?

TW: Yes I have.

RG: Fantastic. And I have to let you know that if at any point during this recording 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. Do you understand?

TW: I do.

RG: Do you feel okay going forward?

TW: I do.

RG: Alright. You can start wherever you feel most comfortable. You can tell me things chronologically, you can tell me things not chronologically. However you want to go. Why don't you tell me about the time—what it was like growing up in your home with your biological family?

TW: Growing up with my biological family was pretty—for me it was okay. We all kind of took care of each other because our parents worked a lot. I am one of eleven kids, so there was a lot of older boys who kind of took care of us, who were younger. All I really remember from living with them was the water fights we used to have, just because it was so hot. Like that's really all I remember and just like sitting around, like, the dinner table, and like how we had to have like four tables because there's so many of us (*laughing*). But yeah that's really all I ever remember about being with them. And like, going to Powwows and stuff, and being a family.

RG: Do you remember when you were taken away from your home?

TW: Very much so.

RG: Can you tell me about that experience?

TW: It was—I remember we—I got on the bus to school. I was going to kindergarten and at that time the kindergarten was connected to the elementary school. And my older brother, who also lived with us—'cause not all our brothers lived with us—all I remember is the government coming in and being like, "We need to take her." And it was like twenty minutes left of school. And my teacher's like, "Okay." And I went, and I really didn't know what was going on until I saw my brother come out of the school too, crying and screaming. And there was three cars 'cause there was three of us at that school. And each one of us all went to a different car and my brother was like, freaking out. And they put me in one car and the other two in two different cars. And they drove away, and all I really remember is my mother telling me that day before we went to school, "I'll have snacks ready for you guys when you guys get home."

And usually that meant fry bread when we got home, and milk. And it was kind of—I think at that moment, "So, am I not getting to see my mom and not have snack? What's going on?" 'Cause I was really young, I was five, so I really didn't know what was going on. Or who these people were. So—I think it freaked me out a little more because I saw my older brother freaking out. So I knew that something was not right. And yeah, that's pretty much all I remember of that day.

RG: When you say government workers, who do you mean?

TW: Uh, Canada.

RG: So where were you living at this time?

TW: I was living in Saskatchewan.

RG: Did they say anything to you about where you were going?

TW: Not really. All I knew was me and my two brothers were gonna be put on planes with a chaperone to Maine. Because there was a family there—there was three different families that wanted kids. And we were eligible for the age.

RG: And who told you that you were going on a plane?

TW: Some stranger (*laughs*). I didn't know—at that point I was just like, "I don't even know what's going on." And I think it was just my older brother who was really like, against it. And I was like, oh, if he's against it, I'm against it, since I was just like—didn't really understand anything. All I remember is the plane ride was so long. And so scary.

RG: Can you tell me more about that?

TW: I think it was just the fact that I was leaving home and everything I knew. And just the people who were surrounding us, and it was really weird because you grow up with your family and everyone looking like you. And where we lived we had so many people that spoke the same language as we did. Because English is actually my third language, it's kind of—out there. But it was really really hard because on the plane it was like, so many different people. So many faces I didn't know. And I think it was the longest time in my life that I've ever had to like, sit still. And I think it terrified me because, A. that was the only time I was ever on a plane (*laughing*) and—it was also the fact that that was the moment I realized I wasn't going to see my family again, and my brothers were no longer going to be there to protect me from anyone at school or whatever. And that's the moment I realized that I was truly alone at that time.

RG: Did anyone ever tell you why you were taken away from your mom? What happened when you got off the plane?

TW: When I got off the plane there was a person from the state there to pick me up. And again it was three different cars, going three different ways. And so that was the last time I saw my brothers until I was sixteen. And it was—she was actually really nice (*laughing*). She kind of explained what was going on and kind of really didn't. She just said that there was a family who was going to take care of me, who was going to be my new family. I barely understood that, because again, English is my third language, so it was kind of like—I got the whole gist of the family kind of thing but that was about it. It kind of went over my head, it was like, "Okay." But yeah, that was really hard. All I remember was like the drive was so long, because it was like in the middle of nowhere. And to this day I still don't know where it was. It's just like, I remember things around us, but that was it.

RG: What happened when you got to that house?

TW: It was strange. It was really big—it was kind of like in the woods, like it was a long drive down a driveway. The house was huge. Of course, I was a five year-old so everything was big, but. It was so huge, I remember walking up into the kitchen and the kitchen being huge. It had this island, and when you walked into the kitchen by the island you could up to this deck/dining area that just had this long giant table with a bunch of chairs. And it was just weird, ‘cause there was like a giant bathroom, and their living room was huge, like I think the Christmas tree that they had was like seven feet tall, it was huge. And I never actually got to see the upstairs, so I don’t know how big that was. Because my room was downstairs. But it was just—it was kind of hard because, I mean the two parents were there, the kids were there. It was just all hard to take in at once.

RG: How many kids were there?

TW: They had three kids of their own.

RG: What was it like living with them? Or before I ask that—did either of the parents ever say anything to you when you got there?

TW: Not that I can remember, I mean they probably did. But at that time I understood very little English so it was kind of bits and pieces.

RG: And what was it like living there?

TW: It wasn’t fun. I mean the first few weeks were pretty okay, I got a lot of new things. Just because I came with nothing. I remember my favorite toy out of everything I had was a “Lite Brite,” I think it was just because the colors were something I could look at, and it kind of reminded me of home with all the colors. But other than that it wasn’t very fun.

RG: Was it a Native family or non-Native family?

TW: They weren’t. You got bottle blonds and redheads (*laughing*).

RG: Do you want to tell me more about what it was like living there? You can say no if you don’t want to talk about it.

TW: It was—stressful. Especially for a little girl. Because I didn’t understand why I left home in the first place. And to be told that I would have a family that would take care of me when to me my family did take care of me. It was again very hard, because the first few weeks were great, and then after that it slowly became harder and harder. It was—like when I was getting ready for school I would have to eat a bowl of cottage cheese before I went to school. And I have a texture disorder where I can’t have certain foods just because it makes me gag and I can’t do it because of the texture. But I would have to eat it or I couldn’t leave the table. And of course I’d do it. But there was also times when I wouldn’t bring home the mail from down the road on our way back from school and I would just be sent down to the basement and there was just nothing down there, just a dark hole.



And I would have to sit down there for hours at the bottom of the stairs, just waiting. And it was cold and gross down there. And it was hard—I don't even remember what I did but I ended up betting locked into my bedroom. And they tied the door shut from the outside, and I just remember staying there for like the whole weekend, and I couldn't do anything. There was nothing in my room to begin with. So it was really lonely. Just really, really lonely.

RG: Was this the family that you talked about before with the animal? I'm not going to make you talk about that again. How long were you with this family for?

TW: Four months.

RG: And what happened after that four month period?

TW: I'm not even sure how I ended up leaving. Because I know a couple of times the state came to the house to see, just to check in, for an international child apparently they do that. But I remember I confided a lot in my teacher. She just seemed really nice and it was really hard learning English so she was really nice about it. All I know is they ended up coming and taking me. And the reason is because they didn't feel like I fit in or belonged. And that's not even a reason, a legit reason (*laughs*).

RG: The family had said that?

TW: No, DHS had wrote that in the documents of why I left. yeah. But I left there, I remember spending the night in the DHS office because they didn't have an emergency placement at hand.

RG: And which DHS office was it?

TW: They all blend in—I've been in so many (*laughs*). I think it was Augusta, I have no idea. Like I have no idea where I even lived, it felt like in the middle of nowhere.

RG: That's okay. So what happened after you spent that night in the DHS office?

TW: After that night I got a teddy bear (*laughs*). That I've since lost. But I also got a duffel bag for the stuff that I did have there. Because again I didn't come with anything. So I got this large duffel bag that was like three times the size of me. I still have it. It's funny what I write on things—when I was a kid—just reading what I wrote, half of it I can't understand anymore. But all I remember is them saying, they finally found another foster family for me, that would be willing to take me in temporarily. And of course I said okay because where else was I going to stay, underneath the desk? And so I said okay. And they put me to a van and hopped me to another family.

They weren't too bad. Obviously they weren't as bad as the first one. But then again it wasn't great either. He was a security guard at night so during the day he would just sleep and watch T.V. (*laughs*). They had a couple other foster kids with them. And it was hard because of course misbehaving as I did always, just in rambunctious five year-old things. I would always be sent to bed without dinner, just because that was a punishment they had. So it was really—eat my breakfast in the morning and then—because I was always really hungry.

RG: Do you remember what the family said when you got there?

TW: All I remember is them saying their names. And that they've only ever fostered boys. And I was their first girl. I was like, "Okay." They didn't think much of it. But they had two other boys there and I remember, because I have to go to the bathroom a lot at night, so when I got up out of bed and opened my door the alarm would go off. And I'd go to the bathroom, but when I came out of the bathroom the parents were standing there and the kids were standing at their door, so I was like, "What's going on?" And apparently all the doors had alarms on them so they could make sure, like, no one was just leaving or running away or whatever, going into somebody else's room. But it scared me because I didn't know—I thought something really bad had happened. And I've had several families that did that and there's no clever way to get around it. There really isn't (*laughs*). It'll go off no matter what. And it always weirded me out. Scared me.

RG: How long were you with that family?

TW: It was supposed to be temporarily, then it ended up being six months. And then they decided they didn't want to foster kids anymore, so I had to leave. It was really hard because I was always the kind of kid who took care of everyone else. And they had a grandson who was probably about a year old. And his sister forgot that he was in the pool in like his little floaty and all of a sudden I looked over and he had flipped over and all of a sudden I just pulled on my foster mom's leg and she turned around and like, I like ran to the pool, jumped over the side sometime and just flipped him over before she could get to the pool to flip him over herself. And it was—I guess it was a shocker to everybody else because I was so quiet. But I think that's when everyone realized I was, I took care of everybody else other than myself. Yeah, I remember that day very well (*laughing*). I also got splinters from my heel to my toe.

RG: Did your caseworker visit you at that place, your second placement?

TW: No, not really. They did their once in a while check. But again it wasn't horrible, but it wasn't great. And I always made up excuses the best I could for everything. I made up—I want to say it was kind of my fault, I was like, "Everything's okay, just go away." But then again I know it's not. But they didn't really, I mean they had foster kids productively their whole life, so they were well trusted.

RG: What do you mean by it wasn't that great?

TW: Um, I tried my first alcoholic drink there. Yeah, I'd just turned six. It was on my birthday, and my foster dad thought it would be really funny. And they also gave my foster brother a pack of cigarettes when he was like ten. And he gave one to me and they just sat there

laughing, because I was chocking. So I was like, “Okay.” So it wasn’t great, it wasn’t horrible either.

RG: And what happened when you left that placement, that family?

TW: I went to another one. And she was a single mom who was—actually she had adopted her foster child. And again she was in the middle of nowhere. A lot of what I think about when I think of her is just—all of the things that went wrong. I mean I remember one good thing that happened, was that I sat at the computer and played this game. It was the Little Mermaid video game for like, ancient computers (*laughing*). And I’d sit there for hours playing it. And it was just—that’s all I remember that I ever did fun. But everything else went wrong fast. I was only there for probably three weeks. I used to take a lot of walks to the nurse at school because on my lower back there’s cigarette marks across my back, because I was a bad kid (*laughs*). Um, I’d just turned six, so it was hard. I was always complaining of something hurting but never was like, “This is what hurts.” So it was kind of like a guessing game for my nurse. And one of my teachers had noticed it and I was—I didn’t even go back. I mean I’m pretty sure that they got some of my stuff. I lost a lot of stuff that day, a lot of stuff that I didn’t get back.

RG: So DHHS came and got you. Did they pick you up from the school that time?

TW: Yes

RG: And what did the—what did your caseworker say to you?

TW: At this point I had like four caseworkers (*laughs*) so this was a new caseworker actually, picked me up. She was basically like, “I’m your new caseworker, we’re going back to the office to fill out some paperwork, also we’re looking for another family.” Which also at that time meant, “We’re also looking for a new school.” At this point I had already gone to three elementary schools just because my last foster family moved with me and my foster brothers into another town, because they didn’t realize his biological mother lived there. So it was either give up the kid, all of the kids, or move. So they ended up moving across town with all of us. But that also meant I was in a new school, too. So each time I moved I had a new school. But it was kind of like, here we go again. At this point I had learned that I could be anything I wanted to be because I never stayed in one place long enough. So I was always a new character whenever I moved. Which also I think made it hard, I want to say made hard for the foster parents, but then again it really didn’t. They were who they were anyway.

It was just—it felt like another day. Okay, here we go. By this time I looked at her and I just nodded my head because I knew all the protocols, I knew everything we had to do, and it was like, “Do I have to keep doing this over and over again? Can we just skip to the end where I go to the family?” But I wasn’t much for (*inaudible*).

RG: So this was your third family? Your fourth family?

TW: Fourth.

RG: And what happened after that?

TW: After that I went down to Rockland. I stayed with a family down there. And it was—it wasn't at all great. It was probably the second worst family I'd ever stayed with. I ended up being adopted by them, and that was my first adoption. It was horrific. I can't even—really think of how to describe it. I mean I just remember being locked in the closet all day in the stairwell, just sitting there all day. Everybody went to school, my foster parents went to work, and I'd just sit there in the dark. And just wait and wait and wait. And it was just—it was horrible, I mean, I didn't even know what time it was. Usually when they got back it was five, so I knew from that point what day it was. But I stayed with them for about a year and by the time DHS got there and took me to another family because no one had heard from me. I mean, they saw me for the first two weeks and then no one really knew where I went.

RG: Did you get processed as an adoption right away?

TW: Uh, it did, I stayed with them—what they do for actually each of my adoptions—I lived with them for a few weeks as it was being processed. So I was like their foster child until the adoption went through, and then I was their child. For those three weeks I would go to school, I would do everything with them, and after that I dropped off the face of the earth.

RG: Did they have any other kids in the home?

TW: They had four.

RG: All biological or adopted?

TW: Actually I don't even really know (*laughing*).

RG: That's okay.

TW: I don't even remember who they were. I can't picture them.

RG: And so for the first few weeks while the adoption was pending, things were okay and your caseworker was checking in on you? I just want to make sure I'm understanding you correctly.

TW: She wasn't so much checking in on me—I mean, they're only required to do it once a month at that time. So it was like, you're here, you're good, okay bye. And I saw her the day the adoption was finalized, and she was like, "Is everything okay?" I'm like, "Yeah," she says, "Oh really?" "Yeah." We had went to the movies the night before and I remember being blindfolded because I had done something wrong at school. So I wasn't allowed to watch the movie but instead of making everybody not be able to go, I went and sat in the movie but they blindfolded me so I couldn't watch the movie while everybody else could.

I remember trying to tell my caseworker that but then again, like, I'm just learning English, I mean, I'm probably at like a second grader (*laughter*), maybe a first grader at the most. Um, but, it was, I tried to explain it to her and she's like, "Oh no, it was a 3D movie," and I was like, really confused, but then my caseworker's like, "Oh, oh, okay, I get it now," and it was kind of like, "Can no one hear me?" It was one of those things where like, I want to say something but then again, I don't have the words.

RG: Umm.

TW: It was really hard.

RG: Um hm. How old were you at this point?

TW: Um, I was six.

RG: And I know you already said this, but how long were you with them again?

TW: I was with them for a year.

RG: For a year.

TW: By the time I left there, I looked like I weighed nothing.

RG: I don't want to push you to talk about specifics that happened while you were there if you don't want to tell me. Um, but before I ask you what happened next, is there anything else that you want to tell me about your time with your first adoptive family?

TW: I really did everything wrong. Um, Not me thinking I did everything wrong, but, well then again I did—only because, I was always getting hit for everything, and it was like, it was weird because, all I remember is like, they had like this, it was, it looked—it wasn't a ruler because it was thicker than a ruler and longer, but it was, it was just like everyone could just like grab that, like anyone, the kids could, I mean it was horrible because I'd just be walking and I just like end up on the floor because someone would just hit me for something I did and just start yelling at me. Um, I remember going to a hospital one night and being terrified and, the policeman just standing there and he's like talking to me and it was just like, I didn't even understand him and it was like, "What?" and it was like, "What happened, what happened?" And it's like, I mean, I couldn't even think of anything, it was just, I don't even know. And the doctor was just like, "Oh, she has a concussion, but she should be fine." And I, next thing you know, I went home. And, how people don't notice those things, still baffles me. But, it, it was, it was the way it was, I mean, I'd come home with two bears (*laughs*) and everything would just start over again.

RG: Um, and that was a non-native family?

TW: Yeah, right.

RG: Um, what, what happened surrounding you moving away from that family again? Do you remember what the context was?

TW: The last um, time I went to the hospital um, there was this really nice, police officer—well before that there was this guy standing there who was a police officer and he was like, “Well I have a lot of paperwork I need to do, and I really don't want to sit here.” Um, so this young lady she—um, said she'd switch with him, and she could go back to the office and she'd sit and she was like, “Well I was reading some of things and talking to the doctor and they said you've been here quite a bit.” And I was like, “Yeah.” And she's like, “Well, are you really that accident prone?” And I was like, I just kind of gave her this look like, “What?” And, she was like, “Well, apparently you always fall and playing too rough,” and I kinda just looked at her and was like, “No, like, what is, like, like what does that even entail?” And, she kind of gave me this look, was like, “You really don't know what's going on, do you?” And, I just started crying and she was really the one, um, the doctor had said I could go home and she was like, “She's not going home.”

And I just remember them arguing outside my door which was always the stupidest thing because you can always hear what they're saying. (*Laughter*) So it's like, really? Um, but I remember her putting up a good fight, um, and her boss had came in and was like, “If you 100% fully believe that she should not go home, then we'll do that now, but we need a reason.” And, al - and it's always stuck with me that she'd said this. But it was, can't you just look at her face and say, “Can you tell her right now, she can go home?” And, I remember everybody just stopped and stared at me and I'm like... and they're like, um, “I can't look at her and tell her that she's gonna go home and be fine.” And, I ended up staying the nights there, ‘cause—

RG: In the hospital?

TW: Yeah, cause DHS couldn't find a place and um, so they had agreed that I could stay there. I got my own room.

RG: (*Whispering*) Are you allergic to nuts? (*Laughter, crinkling paper*)

TW: All I remember is that I had eggs every morning. Eggs and bacon (*laughs*).

RG: At the hospital?

TW: Yeah! And I remember I used to throw the bacon and try to stick it to the window (*laughter*).

RG: What happened next?

TW: Um, what happened next, is my favorite part of my whole life (*laughing*). Um, I stayed



in Rockland, um, I stayed at the same school which was, um, the best thing ever to not have to change schools and friends, but, I got this really nice family and I absolutely adored them. I well they were French, they were from Canada, um (*laughing*) they—they were the sweetest people ever. They had two cats and two dogs. Um, and they had one son of their own, and, they had two other foster children who were teenagers, and I was seven at this time, so it was like, all the, everyone's way older than me, so it's like, umm. But, I remember so many things with them. We went swimming in the ocean, we went to the lighthouse we walked out to the lighthouse, we went miniature golfing, we went and got ice cream. I mean, we did everything! Um, there was a little farm next door to us and we'd go see the chicklings, we saw them hatch. It was, it was—it was the best thing ever!

Um, I remember we didn't go to church, but there was a church right across the street. It was kind of like, this little run down thing and the kids would always come out after church and I'd run over and we'd all play Red Rover, even though we didn't go to church there, I just came over to play games, it was, it was really fun! Um, It was, I remember, like taking one of the cats and I somewhat feel bad about this and somewhat don't, but they had this, like this deck, this high up deck, I used to flip the cat over and drop him from the deck and he'd flip over and land on his feet but he'd run back up the stairs to me and I'd just do it for hours (*laughing*) and we'd just do it and I was li – (*coughing*) everybody says, 'don't you feel bad?' And I'm like 'Well no, because if he didn't want me to do it, he wouldn't keep coming back.' (*Laughter*) So like, that's how I always justify it, I was like, he was fine with it!

But, I really, that's when I really learned that I loved cats. (*Laughter*) I mean the other cat would always sit on the couch and watch John Wayne, not knowing what John Wayne was. And we'd sit there for hours and I'd just bop his head like a basketball and he'd sit there for hours with me, and I swear these cats were like, angels because I'm pretty sure no other animal would let you flip them over and throw them off balconies or use them as basketballs. (*Laughter*) But it was, pretty good.

I mean other than like, I saw some pictures, one year of my last day there and I started crying and somebody had asked me, they're like, “You look so happy, why would you cry?” And it's like, “I don't remember this day at all. I don't remember these pictures, or who took them or what we were even doing.” And, it was so hard because, how could you be that happy and, that carefree and not remember any of it? And, it, a lot of people tell me it was because, when I left there, I was being adopted again, and I didn't want to be adopted again, I wanted to stay with them. And, that obviously wasn't a choice.

RG: Why couldn't you stay with them?

TW: Um, because they were a short term foster home and I was being adopted and they weren't wanting to adopt or looking to adopt a child so it was like, “You have to go.” Um, I

remember the day I left. I ran upstairs screaming and crying and I hid in my closet. My (*laughing*) foster dad walked up and he's like "Honey, where are you?" And I just started launching teddy bears out of my closet and anything soft and fluffy that I thought could knock a six foot ten dude off his feet. (*Laughing*) And, I remember just running up to him and just punching him like crazy, screaming and crying and all he did was just give me a hug. And just sit on the floor and just let me scream and cry and he was like, "I know you don't want to leave, but we feel this is best for you." And, I always admired them for that but then again, I always hated them for that (*laughs*). Because, the second adoption was worse than the first and I never understood why I had to leave when I was perfectly happy and perfectly safe at this place. But, that's the way it went.

RG: Um, who told you that you were being adopted?

TW: My therapist (*laughing*)!

RG: So you were doing therapy at this time?

TW: Every once in a while, yeah, I think I was supposed to go like every week, but I only ever went whenever my foster families could get me there which was basically never (*laughing*). Um, but I walked into the office and they were like, "You're being adopted!" And I'm like, "No, I'm not" (*laughing*).

RG: Um, I want to know more about that, but I'm wondering, was the therapy covered through DHS? Or was it covered by the foster families?

TW: No, it was covered by DHS.

RG: Great.

TW: It was actually mandated that we I had to go. Um, and, but, with the lack of many foster families and them willing to drive all the way because it was always located in the same place. So it was like, the farther I went the less likely I'd get there. Unless they needed to tell me something like, "Oh you're being adopted," and then it was like, "Yeah, she's going." Um.

RG: So, you got to this session with your therapist and that was the first thing that you're therapist said when you walked through the door?

TW: Yup. They sat me down and she's like, "I have good news." And I was like, "What?" And she's like, "You're being adopted." And, all hell broke loose. (*Laughing*) I was throwing everything in sight. I'm surprised her office was still intact. Um, I ran out the door of her office and it was kind of like, this little like, circle and then like the hallway went back to the lobby. I ran around in circles for 20 minutes, ran down the hallway and started running down the street. I didn't care where I was going, I just wasn't going to be adopted again. And, sure enough, I was.

RG: Um, can you tell me about what that was like? Well, before you answer that, how long were you with your foster family for?

TW: To me, it felt like forever (*laughing*). Because I had so much fun. And it was really only 3 months (*pause*).

RG: Okay (*whispered*). What was it like, with your new family, second adoption?

TW: My second adoption,

RG: Are you still seven at this point?

TW: Uhh, I'm turning eight.

RG: Okay.

TW: Yup. It was (*pause*)—it was, crazy. It was just... I can't even really put it into words. It was just scary and horrific. It was just, to me, it was a horror movie, that just never ended.

RG: Um, when you talked about your first adoption, and that there was a period where things were going well, um, was that the case with this family also?

TW: No. It was, from the very beginning, I could tell that it wasn't gonna be a good thing. Uh, the second I walked through the door, it was, I could just feel that vibe of, "This is not gonna be okay." Um, and right from the minute my DHS worker left, they looked at me and was like, "So this is how it's gonna work, she comes back, you're gonna say everything is fine." And from that moment, I knew, I was just like, "Am I even going to be able to live through this?" And just, some of the things, people come up with, it's scary. It really is.

RG: Um, where was this family located?

TW: (*Whispers*) I have no idea.

RG: It's okay.

TW: For Maine being such a small place, it's like where are these places, like...(*pause*) it's like, even if I wanted to go back and find out places, it's just like, where do I even start?

RG: That's okay. Um, do you want to tell me what it was like, living with that family or do you, we can continue moving forward in time. It's up to you.

TW: One thing that, was always a pressure there, was, schoolwork. And at this point, I had been to so many schools, it was like, I don't even know what, any of this is. It just, it was a foreign language to me. Um, so I was doing horrible in school and, I would—

every night, the tub would be filled with ice and water and it was just, I'd sit there and my foster dad would just hold me under the water for as long as he could and then just bring me back up and it was like over and over again. And it was just like, when I got out, my, my whole body was like white. It was just, it wasn't even me anymore. And I just remember being so cold. And, I uh, I was sick like three times in that time period just because I was so cold, like my body couldn't get warm again. It was ju - it was, ahh, (*exhales, pause*) it was really, really cold (*whispered*).

RG: How long were you with this family for?

TW: I was with them for eight and a half months.

RG: Um, can you tell me the circumstances around you leaving that family?

TW: Um, I was in 2nd grade and we were in gym class and, I don't even remember what sport we were playing, but I walked in the school that day and they were just like, "she doesn't look Ok," and, I got up from my desk and was heading to gym class and I just passed out. I just fell right there. And, I woke up three days later at the hospital. And the doctor just looked at me and was like, "You're alive," like, "We honestly didn't think that you would even come back." And at that point, DHS was like, "We don't even know what to do." Um, they were limited on foster families and weren't sure if they were going to try and put me through another adoption after the last two. I remember I stayed there for three weeks.

RG: In the hospital?

TW: With heat lamps up the wazoo. Because my body temperature was so out of whack, it was, whenever I got too warm, it thought I was overheating so it would shut down (*long pause*).

RG: Do you want to take a break? Okay.

[RECORDING PAUSES, FILE 2]

RG: Alright, this is part two of file number W-201408-00048.

RG: So we were just talking about your time at the hospital and you were there for three weeks. Want to tell me what happened, after?

TW: We were at the hospital. It was kind of like a limbo, for me. 'Cause um, 'cause a lot of like healing my body, so, really I don't quite remember after, well, for the time period. Um. You know, in between the transition because I was still trying to stay awake for the most part and I was really drained of energy, so it was like, hard for me to listen to people. So. But I do remember going to a family for a month and pretty much just sleeping. That was just, you know and they homeschooled me so, um. You know so, the doctors were afraid that I could get sick easily. Um. And they didn't want to risk anything. So, I was homeschooled and



whenever I could, when I had the strength to just like sit there and try to do school work. It was usually for about a couple of hours. ‘Cause then I just got so tired, and I'd sleep until the next day when I had to get up.

Um, so it was just like, that was kind of like the limbo time where not much ever happened. ‘Cause I slept all the time. Um, I had to go to therapy shortly after about, um a month and a half after being with that family. And, my caseworker just left um, out of nowhere. Um, no one would tell me where she went, what happened, um. But I got another caseworker, and she told me she had some news for me, that she knew that I wasn't going to be happy with. But, it was something that had to happen and that they felt that this time would be the best. Um, thing for me and uh, and they were hoping that everything would be fine this time. It was like hoping a fairy tale would happen, the ending would just be perfect. Um, I was being adopted, for the last time, um, and I just remember, just sitting there, kind of just in shock, like again. And I remember—

RG: How old were you?

TW: I was turning 9. And, I just sat in that office and didn't say a word, didn't hear anything, just sat there staring at the wall. Although I do remember somebody flicking me and saying, “Breathe.” (*Laughs*) Um, cause I had a tendency to like hold my breath and just like, freak out. But, it was, what felt like the longest day of my life. I just sat there and sat there, with no emotion, nothing. I just sat there and stared at the wall. And when I left I still didn't—like I just, I had just completely shut everyone out. And just, was quiet. And I remained quiet, um, until I was probably 10. And that was two years into the adoption, and I still hadn't said a word. Um, I remember the first two years, I would drop something, of spill something, or knock something off and I'd freeze and run upstairs crying, and I'd just hide for hours because I was so terrified of like, “I don't know this person, I don't know what their capable of, but I want nothing to do with it.” And, I literally walked on eggshells for two years.

I would try to run away. I would do whatever I could in my power to just get out of there as fast as I could. Even though like, nothing ever happened. And, it was, it was really hard because I remember sitting on top of the stairs one day and hearing her talk on the phone to a friend, just being like, “I don't know if I can do this anymore, because I don't know what to do with this child.” And, it kind of was like, in a way, I just wanted to throw that at her and I just wanted to—like, “What do you mean you don't know how to han-?” Like, I mean, I just got so mad, because, it's like “How can you not handle a child?” But then again, like, I look at myself and it's like, I never said a word. I was always throwing things. And it's like, how could you, like, what would you do. I mean, um, but I slowly started talking.

Um, and it was probably out of everything, the worst thing I've ever had to go through, because—just opening up. I did, and I did it very well. But it turned out like everything else

my life has ever been through. And, at this point, being an older kid and just being like this is my whole life, you kind of got used to it? But then again, it was like, when is this gonna end? When, when do I get to live? Like, apparently this is what a child's life is like. Um, I just (*sighs*), all the things that have happened, you would never expect from an individual. And even to this day, like, only one other person in my life knows of everything that ever happened in that house from when I was nine till I was twelve. And, that person questions every day how no one would ever notice. And how no one ever said anything. And it was, I kind of shrugged that off, but then again it's like, "Why didn't you notice?" Like, it—(*sigh*) I don't want to blame caseworkers, but then again, it's like, "How'd you not notice this?" And, I don't know, it's just, it's, it's a hard thing to not put blame on people but then again, it's really hard, too.

RG: Can you tell me about what happened?

TW: Um, quite a bit of the time, it was just a lot of emotional and physical and sexual abuse from one individual. It was so hard (*voice breaking*), just because of the person they were to the outside world. Everyone loved them. Everyone. It was—it was hard. Um, no one under- ever understood why I didn't want to go home. No one ever understood why, I started acting out. And, I can remember going to, I remember going to St. Mary's, which is a hospital but they also have a um, a psych ward on um, one side of it. And I remember going there and I was there for three months and, they were just like, "You're ready to go home." And, I remember just standing there and I threw the chair and I said, "No! I'm not going back." And, the clinician looked at me and he was like, "You have to give us a reason, we can't just not send you back." And I just shook my head and said, "I won't go back." (*Cat meow in background*) And he's like, "The only other option would be a group home."

And, I chose that option. Just because, I didn't want to go back and even at the group home, people are like, "Wha- why do you hate, why do you hate her, why like, why are you so rude to her?" and it's just like, you just want to scream it out and just be like, "You wouldn't like her either." But then again, it's like, I had to remember that, everybody else didn't see the person I did (*cellphone buzz*) and it was, it was probably the hardest thing I've ever had to go through. I mean, between everything I went through from when I was nine to twelve, I just, I took in and I turned it towards myself and spent the rest of the time trying to kill myself over it because I didn't want to go back into foster care and I didn't want to be adopted again. I just, I didn't want to deal with tha—all of these people again. And it just, it dragged on forever and ever.

RG: Were there any other kids in the home?

TW: Nope! Six cats (*laughing*).

RG: And, was just the, just the woman?

TW: Huh?

RG: Was it just the woman? Or was she with somebody?

TW: Nope, it was just us. And it was, what I never understood, and I still don't. And I'm still so mad about is that the caseworker that I had before who just left and I never knew why, she

would not allow her to adopt me. She did not think it was a good idea. She would not, she just didn't all around think it was a good idea, she did not approve and she said no. But when she left, the caseworker I got, ended up being her caseworker too. And, she was just, she was like, "I guess it's a great f-f- like, you guys seem like a perfect match. I have both of you guys on my caseload, it'll be easy." And, I still don't know how one person can say no but another one can say yes. I wish, they didn't.

RG: Um, a couple of months ago, when you called me, and we were talking, you told me something that she had said to you, that I'm wondering if you can repeat for this recording about you being Native?

TW: She's told me several times that, one of the reasons she adopted me was because she thought she was—she would be able to help. She would be able to—it was just another person to change and thought she was doing the right thing by taking a Native child that no one wanted. *(Long pause)* And the last day I spent with her, um, she threw a quarter at me, and told me that I should just stay home and never do anything because all I would ever be worth is a quarter. And I've always kept it. More of a way, to just basically say that, I'm not worth more than a quarter? I have everything for me, and, basically just to prove her wrong *(laughing)*.

(Long pause, crying)

RG: What she said is the farthest thing from the truth.

TW: I think so *(crying)*.

RG: I know so *(long pause)*.

RG: Is there anything else you want to tell me about your time with her? *(Long pause)* You don't have to share anything more that you don't want to. *(Pause)* Do you want to keep going? In talking about what happened after?

TW: I went into a group home.

RG: How old were you?

TW: I was fifteen. Um, I—

RG: And how long were you with her for?

TW: Fourteen

RG: So you were there from the time you turned nine until you were fourteen? Okay.

TW: I was with my, well I spent, when I was fourteen, I spent some of the year with her but I was also in and out of um, hospitals throughout that time. Um.

RG: Was the abuse ongoing through—from the time you first arrived?

TW: Um. No. It was mostly when I started talking.

RG: And that was two years into—

TW: Yeah.

RG: So you had just turned eleven? Started at your eleven to fourteen? Is that right? Okay.

TW: And they had moved into a group home when I was fifteen. And I was there for a year, uh my whole freshman year (*laughs*). Um, and they had told me I had to go back because they know—they didn't have a reason. Um, to keep me there that they could justify. Um, and I end up going back Febru- in February. Um, on Valentine's Day. And, I quickly booked my whole summer so I wouldn't have to be home. I, went to Girl Scout camp for two months, I went to space camp the next week after I got back. I went to science camp and, I had the best summer ever. Um, but when I got home from camp, I just could no longer take anything, it wou—

RG: Is this the summer you were fifteen or the summer you were sixteen?

TW: Um, it was the summer when I was fifteen. My birthday falls in January (*laughing*). (*Sniffs*) Um, and nothing had changed. Um, it was the same story over and over again. And, I just wasn't willing to put up with it. But I also wasn't willing to say anything. So I locked myself in the bathroom and just wouldn't come out and she called the police because I wouldn't unlock the door and all I remember is, besides laying there dying was that, the police officer was knocking the door and was like, “Tyneshia, open up, it's me,” and, it, for like, for the first three minutes, it didn't like, register in my head that I like knew the person.

RG: What do you mean laying there dying?

TW: I had, tried to kill myself. I had stabbed myself in the stomach. And I, was just laying there, and, he kept saying, “It's Josh, open up,” and just knocking on the door and like, I was just like, “Who?” like, “I don't, I don't know who you are.” And he's like, “You did great at swim practice tonight,” and it clicked that he was my swim coach, but he's also a police officer so in his free time, he coaches us. (*Sniff*) And, I just used every ounce of strength I had left to open the door and, he just looked at me and smiled and was like, “Everything's going to be fine.” And he went with me to the hospital and just stayed with me all night.

And, it was, it was, it was one of two things. It was the anger I had that he was taking me but then it was also a friendly face that I knew and that I trusted. (*Sniff*) Um, and then shortly after that I went into a um, a youth crisis center, and again, they were like, “We have to send you home, you're fine now.” And at that point, I was crying hysterically, I was like, “I don't want



to go back.” And again, they were like, “You have to give us a reason,” and I just looked at her and I was like, “I don't want to. Why can't that be a reason?” And, it was a family meeting that day so that meant she would have to come in to discuss what happened when I left. Um, and she walked through the door and looked at me and I was just crying and she's like, “What if I don't want her anymore? Is that a reason?” And, (*sniff*) the clinician turned around and was just like, “If you don't want her anymore, that's a justifiable reason. But there also has to be a reason to that.” And, she just looked at me and was like, “I've been taking her meds, isn't that a good enough reason?” And they said, “It is. You need to leave.”

RG: She said that you've been taking her meds?

TW: No, she had been taking mine (*sniff*). And, they had looked at her and they said, “That's a reason, you need to leave.” Uh, so she had left, and they were just like, “There's an opening at the group home again. If you want to go, you can.” And, I had nowhere else to go. Um, so I said, yes. And I went back there (*sniff*). Um, still trying to kill myself as the years went on, just because I never talked to anybody, just because it wasn't something that I was used to. And, it was a lot of going back and forth from hospitals to school to the group home—it was just a giant circle. Um, at seventeen, they were like, you need to start looking for a place because you're no longer able to stay here when you turn eighteen. And, it scared me because I had, I'd never had to be: A, by myself and B, I've never lived in a place for very long so, it was kind of, I spent four years there and it's like, “What do I do?”

And, it was, really, really hard, to go from one thing to another. And of course, I, was—I was actually put in care again. Um, and, my stupid caseworker that he was (*laughing, sniffs*) um, was telling me all the options that I had and, at this point, not being able to have Facebook but having it (*laughs*) had found my biological mother and she had moved down to Maine, southern Maine. And I called her one night and was like, “Can I just move in with you 'cause they're kicking me out?” And, she said, “Sure.” And, I hadn't seen her since the day I left. And, I—my, caseworker told me that I can't go there and that he would not approve me moving there. And, never gave me a reason why, it was just, that was that. Um, but said, “I'm going and I don't care.” He just looked at me and just nodded his head and was like, “I'll write you as a runaway. You're almost eighteen, it's not like I can force you to stay.” And, he marked me down as a runaway on his paperwork and I left. Worst four months of my life, too (*laughing*). Not the best.

RG: What do you mean?

TW: Um, it was just—we didn't know each other. And after all these years, it's really hard to be a daughter, and her wanting a friend. And it's just—it's really hard to be both? Especially if you don't know a person? Um, her husband—was also at the time, not the best person. Um, I've never had luck with families (*tearful*). And actually my younger brother can't stand her either.

He moved out into um, our, my older brother, his half brother, um, he moved in with him, after finding him on Facebook because he couldn't stand her.

RG: Did you ever find out why you were taken away from her?

TW: No. She's like, "I have no idea." She's like, "After you guys left, I had"—she had my brother, and he was fine, he grew up with her, other than the fact that she was controlling, (*laughing*) and annoying and wouldn't let him play x-box all day. Yep, he's fine. So, it's kind of like, "Why?"

RG: Can you describe a time when you felt safe?

TW: It would have to be that foster family that I didn't want to leave (*crying*). They were the best people ever.

RG: Thinking back to all of your experiences, would you have wanted or needed in those years. It can be more than one thing.

TW: (*Laughing*) I don't think it was anything I needed from somebody else. I really think it was for me—that I needed to know that I had a voice. Because I felt all those years that I didn't have a voice and that no one would listen. So I didn't say anything. And, (*sniff*) what I told my, um, the other person who knows, (*sniff*) she just sat there crying, and was like, "With the job I have, I can't help but hate it," because, she doesn't understand how anybody could not notice. And it's, it's—in a way, I don't like to see her cry, A, because she's a good friend of mine but, (*sniff*) it also wasn't her fault. So it's really hard for me to have her apologize for her work when it wasn't her. (*Laughing*) It was the first time I heard her say she hates her job. (*Sniff*) [00:32:06.26] But I really think if I knew I had a voice, it would have helped. (*Long pause*)

RG: Is there anything else that you want the Commission to know?

TW: (*Quietly*) No.

RG: Do you want me to stop the recording? Okay.

[END OF RECORDING]