

General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Mary Lou Barnes

Date: November 21, 2013

Location: Sipayik, Maine

Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Libbet Cone

Support Person: Molly Newell

Additional Individuals Present: Gail Werrbach

Recording Format: Video

Recording Length: 1:06:46

Recording

LC: Okay. We are now recording. And I think I have to keep paying attention to this to make sure it continues to record 'cause it looks like it kicked off.

GW: It just went to sleep.

LC: Right. So, We had hoped they'd be set up so they wouldn't go to sleep, and I'm wondering whether you would be comfortable sitting so you could also see the camera, [GW: yeah I can do that.] so that you could help me watch that? Sometimes if I'm listening really carefully, I just. . . and Rachel had words to say about if the video stops you're in trouble.... *(laughs)*.

GW: No, it just means touching the screen.

LC: Touching the screen from time to time, which I'll also do, but we could do this together that would be really helpful.

GW: Yeah.

LC: OK

So, we are recording. And my name is Libbet Cone and you are . . .

MN: Molly Newell

LC: And, you are...

GW: Gail Werrbach.

LC: And, your name is...

MLB: Mary Barnes, Mary Lou Barnes.

LC: And the file number is S-201311-00006-001. It is Thursday, November 21, 2001 and we are in Sipayik, Maine.

MN: 2013.

LC: What did I say?

MN: 2001

LC: Thank you. 2013. We are in Sipayik, Maine. (*general laughter*) I got that right.
(*general laughter*)

Ok. And you have been informed, and understand, and have signed the informed consent forms? Is that correct?

MLB: Yes.

LC: And, you have been informed of the exceptions to the confidentiality?

MLB: Yes.

LC: Ok. Okay.
We're good to go?
We're good to go.

MLB: So now it's my turn?

LC: Now it's your turn. And if there's any way I can help you with your story let me know...

MLB: I don't really know where to start other than I was talkin'...Penn and I were talking the other morning at quarter after 5... before I went to my procedure at the hospital, before she went to the sunrise ceremony. Ummm. Thought that I might have something to share about experience working in the child welfare department with the Department of Human Services.



[00:02:54.08] For a minute I thought (*grimaces and shakes her head*) I didn't think that I did, but then all of a sudden this light bulb came on in my head, and I said yeah, there is something I would like to share. So, I told her a little bit about it. 'course I had to leave, so all the way to Machias I was... my head was spinning. But umm...I thought about it a little bit more. And umm (pause) there's probably a lot that I could share, but I'll try to break that down a little bit.

[00:03:31.24] It was funny, that night Penn and I started talking about it again and I said, you know what, when I first started in child welfare, no sense of what I was doing... I was just pushed into that position. We had an ICWA liaison... that I knew her name, I had never met her. The only thing that I got from her I think was the schedule for how much the payments were for foster care, for clothing, etc, for foster kids. We would get that probably once a year, unless there wasn't a raise, then we would get it when there was. When she left that position another lady came in who had a little bit of an affiliation with the tribe, was very interested. Sent me all kinds of information about training and things and was a support to the tribe. Because before I came on board in 1978 when they filed the ICWA law, I think that's when they started the child welfare department to work with state and native children back on the reservation. Um.

[00:05:11.00] So anyway, I went to all kinds of trainings. I went to college courses, so I would better understand what should be going on. I also lived in a community that I felt needed a lot of assistance. So, anyway, that's where I started.

[00:05:44.10] We didn't much work with the state, hardly at all for a lot of years until we formed a Wabanaki coalition to have strength to do some of these tasks. By that time Molly was on board as the Director, so, we had a good sense of, I guess, where we wanted to be and what we wanted for our community. And after we formed the coalition because of Sandra Hodge wanting to build better rapport with the state and the tribes, probably had seeked out Penthea Burns and wanted to have a meeting with the tribes, and, to see what they could do. That was quite an eventful meeting, to say the least.

[00:06:57.24] Looking back at it, there were a lot of people from other tribes in that room, um, I was nervous around. And then I was there with my boss . . .who was very ... (*Laughter from MN*) I don't know the word . . .non-trusting, I guess is the word. It's the best one I can come up with. (*general laughter*). So they gave their spiel. Penthea gave her spiel. Sandi gave her spiel. And we all kind of sat there and my boss told them, 'why should we trust you?'... you know because nothing had ever worked in the past, so why... and umm Penthea thought that was a good question. Umm... She knows how to motivate people and talking about this subject stuff. When we left that meeting she wanted to know if we could meet again. And we said we'd think about it. When we left, Molly said, Do you think I was too strong, Tus? I said, Yeah, just a little. (*laughter*).

[00:08:35.14] But, we went back for the second meeting and it just escalated from there. You know we started doing things . . . Oh, to back up a little bit, We started doing things to umm... when we was in the coalition with Kathy Desalais, she had us build a river with a long sheet of paper on where we used to be and where we were then. You know, it was like Wow... you know, we had come a ways but we needed to do a lot of work with the state.

[00:09:14.08] Um, so that's what we started working on and it wasn't easy...It wasn't easy for any of us and there were a lot of struggles. But to make a long story short, we ended up doing Belonging video and doing training with all the departments... well, 4 or 5 departments in the State of Maine, doing training for state workers and showing the Belonging video that was done. They were difficult, to say the least... especially in Aroostook County and southern Maine. I don't think southern Maine had ever seen a native person or even thought to ask if they were native.

[00:10:13.00] Anyway, we did that. It was grueling. It was exhausting. I don't know how long it took us to do it. A couple years, maybe, or a year and a half. And so things started to pick up. *(pause)*

[00:10:29.24] The departments were more aware but they really didn't do much of anything to change much of anything at the beginning. And umm... so they'd call us and when they had a child who was in State custody and I can tell you this particular one it will always be in my head. Always. We had a little boy that was in custody. He was taken from his home because there was abuse and domestic violence and alcoholism. Well, him and his sister and brother. But he was separated from his sister and brother because he had a behavior problem himself. And he was placed in a foster home that ended up couldn't keep him. But he had, um, a relationship with his tribal grandparents, but he didn't have a relationship with his non-tribal grandparents. When they moved him from one place to another, the grandfather called, and because he was able to visit him there, he called and wanted to know where they moved him. So, I told him and I gave him the number. You know, before you go there would you just call them and tell them you're coming?

[00:12:02.02] So he did that. Well the State was furious. And Molly and I went to the foster home for a meeting. And, they were not very nice umm...wanted to know, they didn't know who had called. They were really angry about it...Wasn't supposed to give out that information. So, I told them I called, I mean, I gave him the information. And because I felt comfortable doing that because he had, they had had a relationship with him in the other foster home. So umm... but the State worker was really angry and didn't really want to do anything with us, I had given out information I shouldn't have given out, and blah blah blah.

[00:12:54.10] So, anyway, it ended up that this little boy went to 2 or 3 other foster placements because he had a behavior problem and people couldn't handle him. In the background was his grandparents that were non-native that lived in Bangor. And they wanted him but the State didn't think they were able to keep him safe so they ended up putting him in a residential treatment facility. Where we didn't think he belonged. His grandparents wanted him. They were non-native but we didn't have a problem with that, they were his grandparents... you know, they both worked and they could provide him a home that was safe as far as we were



concerned. The State wanted no part of that. Umm...But we kept pushing the issue, and pushing the issue. So finally they said, they'll have to go get training. They'll have to go see a psychologist. I don't know whether there was something else he had to do. But, anyway, these grandparents jumped through every hoop that the State put in front of them. And I said to them one day, "Why are you doing this?" That's his grandparents. They love him. I know they wouldn't harm him. I know they would keep him safe.

[00:14:29.12] 'Well, they didn't keep him safe when his parents had him and they never reported it.' My thought was, and most of the time my thought doesn't come from here (*points to head*), it comes from here (*points to heart*), 'Who would report your children?' (*coughs*) Excuse me. (*coughs again*). You'd have to be very strong to do that. (*pause*).

[00:14:58.03] So I said I think, you know we as a department think that they can keep him safe. And umm, but no, they kept making them go through all these hoops and doing all this stuff. And they did it. They didn't care where they had to travel, what they had to do, they just did it. And we ended up in court in Calais and we were still fighting them. It was a year and a half, a year and a half we went through this. Of a life that made him more confused than he already was. And the judge told the State that we needed to sit there, all of us together, and collectively and do something, because he wasn't going to allow it to go any further.

[00:15:55.25] We had to make sure that he could be safe, and the State had to allow us to do that. So, the grandparents took him from the residential facility and took him home, where they took care of him and nurtured him and took him to his counseling appointments, or whatever it was that they had. But he was a troubled little boy, he'd been through a lot.. and, so when he started being a teenager and go out there in the world he would do that and come home and they had a few struggles with him, but they didn't give up on him. They were just there for him. And umm...I was always angry about that. And I think I still am today. Umm....because even though the Machias office has gotten a little better, they still have the upper hand. And umm...even though they notify us immediately, I'm not sure...and they ask us to find placement which most of the time, we do...We still have to jump through a lot of hoops. And I know state workers work on policy, we work on family. So... those two systems buck a little bit.

[00:17:42.22] After Penthea and I talked that night I thought . . . (*pause*) I always felt like when I met with anybody from the state that I didn't know anything...Or they thought I didn't know anything... And, so you question yourself... You know, you doubt... Are you doing the right thing? You know... Are you ever going to be able to make a difference? Umm...

[00:18:19.19] But we keep plugging away at that system... and the turnover with State workers ... it's just like you just get comfortable that you can work with somebody and somebody new comes in the door... And it's like, "Who's that?" Somebody walked by my office – I'm in the

middle office, so anybody who comes in, they have to walk through my office if they're going to see Molly or the investigator, or whatever. When they get done I say, "Who was that?" You know, it was a new State worker. And it's like, Oh My God, are we going to have to start all over again? And umm... so, it's frustrating. Um...

[00:19:08.21] We always think we know what's best for children... And, recently we had placed 2, 3 children... yeah, that the State had in custody. And they asked us if we had a foster home, and we found a foster . . .one of them was a set of twins, one of them was just a little... well not just, she was a little girl. Well, actually it was the sister of the twins that had just been born. But we had to separate them because the people couldn't take care of all three, cause the oldest girl was only like 2 years old. And, um, so we found places for them. And they just made them jump through a million hoops. You know, it's just like, you know, this is getting old.

[00:20:12.00] And, they asked Molly if we could do the home study. So, we went and did it. Just so things would run smoothly. But they had to get fingerprinting... and if they wanted the fingerprinting. . .And if they had to have fingerprinting, and if they have it done they had to pay for it. You know, that doesn't make sense to me. If I'm trying to find a family to be a foster family, being a licensing worker, I wouldn't make them pay for a license, but that's their policy in the Department of Human Services. So we ended up paying for their license, because it's a family that has one parent worker, they don't have anything extra. They have children of their own. You know, so we felt we should be doing that. They were kind enough to take these children that are native. And we could do that, so we did. There's just lots of situations that are frustrating, you know, and... *(pause)*

[00:21:25.27] I look back over the years and think , 'How did we do it? How did we do it before the coalition came in?' We didn't. The State had control and we had none. We do a little bit more today, which is helpful. *(pause)*

[00:21:53.08] But it's still complicated. We had an ICWA liaison that replaced Sandi that was fantastic. And her job position changed so they gave us a different one which never contacted us. We never had any involvement. So Molly kindly told the head person at the Department in that program that it wasn't working. So we got Martha back. Which I know at the drop of a hat I can contact her if I have a question, or need something and she will respond. If she's not there immediately, she always responds. And, so it gives me a little strength to know that she's out there in this world. I guess I finally said to Penthea when I told her I would do this, *(pause)* I just lost my thought. *(long pause)* *(shakes head)* I lost it. Old timers. It might come back to me *(laughter)*

LC: If you don't think about it. It might come back.

[00:23:44.13] MLB: One of the reasons I think that I'm doing this, I think about that little guy often . . .that we messed with his life . . .well, we didn't, but his life was messed with. And, he went in the wrong direction. He's not with us today. He got killed in Bangor on the street *(looks teary)*



LC: *sympathetic* hmmm

[00:24:15.16] MLB: Would things have been different? That's my thought. Maybe not. But we'll never know that today. So . . . And I know his grandparents are friends of mine . . . I know how devastated they were. *(pause)* I guess I wanted to do this for him. *(gets weepy and is handed a tissue, takes her time, wipes her eyes)*

And for *(pause)* any other tribal children that could be with their families. *(long pause)*
(hear children's laughter in the background)
(pause continues, wipes nose)

[00:26:16.16] Oh and I guess the other thing I want to share is, when I started in social services, well when I started in child welfare the tribe had a code that reflected state law that basically is still in effect. It's a tribal code, but the information in it came from the State. And, as a department, and Molly being the director, we've changed that code to be culturally relevant for our needs. It's almost passed. We don't have much longer to go. That will help us particularly, in the... department likes to do prevention more than taking children out of their homes. Cause that's not our purpose in life. Our purpose is to, but also keep families intact. So we've worked on that really hard. Like I say, have almost accomplished that. It won't give us a lot of strength with the State, but it will give us a lot of strength for ourselves. And I'm just hoping that whoever works in that department, years down the road, will do the same thing. Because for a long time we had 4 kids in custody. When Molly first came, we had 28 kids in custody...On the reservation. We had those 4 kids in custody for quite a few years. Until recently. We have 11 kids now. But we really try to keep them in their house, in with their families. Keep their families intact... *(pause)*

[00:28:47.27] Anyway, I've probably forgotten something. I guess that was my message. For the commission. That we have to work hard all the time, you know, with the State. We want to keep kids here, if at all possible. And with their families, if at all possible. *(shrugs, pause)*...That's it, I guess.

LC: That's a powerful message.

MLB: *(Nods)*

MN: She's going to ask you a couple of questions:

LC: I am

MLB: Yep.

LC: Are you ready for this? Are you done? Do you want to take a . . .

MLB: Excuse me?

LC: Are you done?

MLB: I'm done. Yes.

LC: Can I make a comment before I ask a couple questions?

MLB: Sure.

LC: Thank you for telling your story and your statement.

MLB: *(Nods)*

[00:30:02.28] LC: You said a little while in that you felt in relation to the department workers somehow less than and you sometimes questioned whether or not you were making a difference and as you were talking, I kept thinking how, what an incredible difference you make by being someone who is consistent and has been here. You know you said at times you had the experience of different workers coming in then leaving and new ones coming in and leaving, and I can't imagine but believe that your being here day in, day out, year after year, the consistency that you offered probably has made a huge difference to many people that you've worked with, and many families.

MLB: Thank you.

LC: The other things is that, in your position it seems like you have been a witness to a lot of other people's experiences, some of them really painful, and you know, you thought a lot about whether or not you had something to say, whether or not what you had to say would make a difference, or would matter. I think that when you are a witness to other people's pain, it's equally painful. And sometimes, I don't know, more or less, but it's equally painful. And you're in a position where you feel because it's not happening to you you feel even more powerless. So for you to hang in there and continue to be a witness and then to have the courage and the strength to come forward and talk about your experience and to, you know validate your experience, the way that you are by coming and making a statement is, you know . . . I'm touched by your willingness and ability to do that.

MLB: Thank you.

(pause)

[00:32:37.17] LC: The two questions I've been asked to ask you . . . One of them you've already really answered. But the question is, "What does reconciliation mean to you?"

MLB: Oh dear. Big question.

LC: *(laughs)* It is a big question.

GW: *(mumbles)* we're still trying to answer that one

MLB: I guess to... umm...Move on. Move forward in a more positive manner. *(long pause)*
And do what's best for children and families. I think that's where I want to go with that.

LC: OK. And, um, the other question is: What do you want people to know about your experience?

[00:33:56.06] MLB: Wow.

LC: *(mumbles agreement)*

(laughter)

MN: "That's a big one." *(more laughter)*. They both are.

LC: The other thing I forgot to mention you earlier, if at some point you want to add to your statement, or take away, or change in any way, you can do that. So, these are big questions and if you would want, you know, once you've had a chance to think about it, if you ever want to add, you can.

[00:34:21.17] MLB: I think that I would want to see everyone work together. That state, the tribe to do what's best for children that we're involved with. Umm. And to try to get over, for them to try to get over that stigma that we don't know what they're doing or that we... I always question whether they think that we're keeping kids safe. I said that earlier. I still think that. You know, we try to keep children safe and we try to keep them with their families. If not their immediate family, then their system, you know, so they're comfortable. So, we're equal. I've always, and I'll say this because Gail is here, when Molly first came on to the job, I said to her you know people with Master's degrees some of them don't have much common sense. They don't. And she would just laugh at me. So when she got her Master's, it's like 'okay Tus...'

GW: We took all that common sense away. *(laughter)* I'm sorry, Mary Lou. *(laughter)*. No, Luckily we didn't... She gave us some.

[00:36:15.17] MLB: You know... Sometimes I question that, but umm... I just feel a lot of times, people are so caught up in what it says in the book that they don't think about families. Or they don't think about children... *(pause)*

I have a lot of friends that have Master's degrees. I think they're *(inaudible)*. I used to say, Holy crap! Where is that person coming from? Honest to God...*(laughter)*

LC: Well what you're saying is that a Master's degree doesn't give you the kind of knowledge that you have, that comes from your experience of knowing people, and knowing your people...

MLB: Well I think experience a big thing. I really do. I was never book smart, but I was always there to listen, you know, to people. And, um so I mean I may be, if I was influenced a lot, I could have went in that direction, but I wasn't. I had a family. I don't take those kind of risks. I kind of stay where I'm comfortable. *(laughter)* So that's where I've been. But thinking back on like people who were in that circle today I've dealt with them when I was a protective worker. Or I've dealt with their families. Some of 'em were in state custody. Some of 'em were in tribal custody. And it's not difficult, but it's hard to hear some of their stories, you know, about what went on a long time ago. That's really difficult

(murmurs of agreement)

[00:38:47.14] MLB: Not that they were all bad. That's the way they seen it and I was going to, I told the person that spoke today in the circle that *(pause)* and she mentioned me by name *(pause)*... Her attitude towards non-native people was not good. 'Cause she never had a good experience when she lived off the reservation. And really didn't want anything to do with non-native people, so her and I had a lot of struggles when her kids were in care. And her daughter was put into a residential facility, away from here. And, I ended up having to give her a ride because she didn't have vehicles or a driver's license. How was she going to get there? So I felt, well *(shrugs)* I'll offer to take her with me. And I did that. And her and I went back and forth, 2 hour drive up, 2 hour drive back. And, it was a touchy situation. And a lot of times, she would get angry when we were in the meeting. Man, what are we doing? Lugging her around. She's going to flip out on me. Well after 4 or 5 trips I dropped her off one day, and I told her I was going to say this in the meeting, and I didn't. And she said, Oh I'm glad you didn't. But I'm going to say it here. When she got ready to get out of the car she turned around and looked at me, and she said, You know you're not half bad for a white woman. And I took that as a huge compliment. Huge compliment.

(murmurs of agreement)

[00:41:01.07] MLB: And her and I get along a lot better today than we did years ago. Because that's who I am. I try to *(pause)* treat everybody the way I like to be treated even though sometimes I'm not. *(laughs)* You know, so . . . Does that answer your question?

(laughter)

LC: Yes.

MN: I had no idea she was in the circle.

MLB: Huh?

MN: I had no idea she was in the circle.

MLB: She came in late.

MN: After I left?

MLB: Yep

MN: Wow.

MLB: And what she said was awesome. What she said was awesome. Um, she was right.

MN: Wow

MLB: Yep. Trying to break the cycle...

GW: Yep

MN: Good for her.

(general agreement)

MN: Good for her.

GW: Yep. It was powerful. What you both said.

[00:42:15.20] LC: It takes a lot to be able to do that.

GW: So am I breaking Rachel's protocol if I get to ask questions?

LC: I don't think so. I think we're allowed, I think we can do what we want to do here.
(laughter)

MLB: You can do anything you want

LC: We get to make our own rules.

GW: Well I don't know honestly, because I'm not, I'm not the person... um...

[00:42:37.17] I guess one of the things, because I think... I mirror everything that Libbet said, just how much commitment you've had here, and to the families... to see everybody, I think, as people... not in terms of their belongings, or their history, or their... what their house looks like...or how much money they have... which I think is one of the areas that the state kind of falls flat on it's face sometimes.

Umm... But umm... when you worked with the state caseworkers, umm... I guess... what was the... what was the typical caseworker like in terms of working with them? Young? Old? Experienced? Not experienced? Know about ICWA? Not about... just... whatever your th. .. I know that's kind of hard because you know, their different and there is so much turn over... but sort of, what's... what's that typical caseworker?... like for you over the years, 'cause you know, you really know the history from when ICWA first came...

[00:43:54.22] MLB: The typical caseworker... umm... when I was doing protection before I started doing foster care and licensing, was... older than they are today... they had been with the State quite a while... umm... but they were not really forthwith until they had to start... umm... communicating with the tribes.

[00:44:35.20] and one thing that really irked me was whenever we went to a meeting, you'd ask the caseworker a question and she would not be able to answer that, she would have to go back and talk to her supervisor... which was not involved with the case... sent somebody else out on it... and usually in our early experience... it probably wasn't what we wanted... **[GW:** Mhmmm] ... you know... the answer that would come back wouldn't be what we'd want....

[00:45:18.19] Umm... or they would say they were going to do one thing and do just the completely opposite when we got to court... you know...so... umm... and I mean I had gone to team meetings with younger caseworkers that probably weren't even interested in what we had to say....That's when I would doubt myself, when I... you know... **[LC:** yeah]... would come out.

[00:45:58.19] Today, what I see of, and I don't have a lot of dealings with them, I have some dealings with them, but not a lot, is their young, their inexperienced... I can't say that they have a lot of compassion (*small chuckle*)... that's my experience. Umm... their there to do it by the book. This is what it says we have to do and this is what we're doing. **[GW:** *soft* yep.]

[00:46:37.15] Yep... I don't expect them to love everybody, you know, we know everybody here. You know. I can tell you when Molly gets up in the morning and takes a shower because smoke's comin' out her chimney... (*general laughter*)... and I could do the same thing for my next door neighbor...

LC: That information's not in the book... (*general laughter*)

MLB: And that's always been one of my arguments with the Bureau of Indian Affairs when they come down to go through our files is... you know... we place kids sometimes before we

have application. [GW: mhmm] umm.. and if they come, if they see that, they question that... I know them, I live next door to them, I work with them, [GW: mhmm] I see them.

GW: You mean a foster care type of application?

MLB: Yeah. You know, I see them at functions that the tribe has, like socials and things, I know these people... you know.. their family... it's a small community, everybody knows everybody else's business. So...

[00:47:53.04] GW: Has it changed at all in terms of the state's being more receptive to the grandparents caring for kids, or to some of that kinship care? I mean that's supposed to be the new quote un-quote policy. Do you see that happening more? Or in a better way? Or...

MLB: I don't think that they would have a problem with it today if we, when they called us, if we suggested that...[GW: mhmm] umm... but I don't know that either. I would hope that they would work with families better than they used to years ago, and they're supposed, I know they're supposed to to be on that track. Umm... but we haven't had that experience, I don't think, lately.

[00:48:50.03] GW: What do you think, I know this is kind of putting you on the spot Mary Lou, but of all the families that you've worked with, and many of those people haven't come to talk to us... (*MLB coughs*) let's see, I know this is a tough question...but if those... start with the kid, the separate... What would the... and these are families that have been involved with child welfare in some way, maybe their kids were in placement, maybe they weren't in placement, maybe they were in placement themselves as a child or whatever... what would, what do you think some of the families, people that you've worked with over these years, who didn't come to talk to us for a whole bunch of, probably very clear, legitimate, difficult reasons, what do you think, what would they tell us? What would they... I know I am making you speak for them, but what do you think they would the Commission, if it felt safer, if it felt umm... whatever... if I was waving my magic wand and people just automatically felt like it was okay to come and tell their story and tell us what were the things that we really needed to know as commissioners. What do you think they would try and tell us?

[00:50:26.15] GW: Sorry, I know that is a big, giant question but...

MLB: Because that one particular family sticks in my mind so much... I think that they would tell you that they're not bad people and that they just wanted to care and love their grandson so that he didn't have to be put through everything that he was put through...

And when you talked about people not having the best of anything, their house may not be as clean as, I won't say mine because mine's not, I'm a clutterer... umm...we don't look at that. We

look at how loving and caring families are and if you've got a grandparent that wants to care for their grandchildren, to me that's ideal...

Recently Molly placed a little baby with his grandmother... and I think if she wasn't involved, or the tribe didn't take jurisdiction, the state probably wouldn't have done that... they would have 'cause we would have pitched a fit.. (laugh). Because that's where he needs to be as an infant... and he is, probably his grandparents don't have a heck of a lot, but they have a lot of love and they're good people, so... I just think that we've grown enough that we wouldn't been forceful if the state had kept custody. That, 'yeah, that's where he was going to go.'

[00:52:56.27] GW: Yeah, I wish the caseworkers could hear the number of stories that I feel like I've heard in the last couple days that have mentioned the importance of a grandparent. The number of people who have sat in those circles and talked about really painful situations, and then you just get this like, shining light, you can see it in their face when they start talking about a grandparent, or grandparents, and what that person meant, even if it was for a small part of their life, even if it was something changed but they weren't... but that it's...yeah I sort of wanted to like bottle it or... I guess it's got to find an articulate way into the report, speaking for myself... but yeah....

LC: I find that too, in the work that I do when I listen to people as adults who have been abused and then they come to me and talk, and...ummm... often a very important healing, part of their ability to heal later in life has to do with a grandparent or a teacher or a neighbor who maybe had a small part to play in their lives, but it made all the difference for them.

GW: So it sounds like one thing though that's changed, a little bit, is that the voice that the tribe has, you and Molly and the folks who have been doing child protective work, with the state, in terms of hashing out, you know 'this is tribal,' 'this is state'... I mean it sounds like that's become a stronger voice of advoc... that's gotten to be a stronger voice than when I heard you start your testimony talking about what happened in '78 '79, the early '80s. Is that accurate do you think?

MLB: Oh yeah... back then it was nothing. I mean today, at least the Machias office, I don't think we've had much dealing with Southern Maine or... but yeah, they gladly like us to take it if it's a jurisdiction issue with... they initially have to if it's off reservation, that's their job.

GW: mmmm, right.

MLB: But, they involve the tribe immediately...

GW: A lot more than they used to?

MLB: Oh yeah, a lot more. Yeah...

LC: Do you think that's...



[00:55:59.04] MLB: So things have gotten a little better, but it's just like, when they have a turn over in staff you have to start from square one all over again. You know, so... But we keep working on it. And they keep calling us, and we're there. Molly makes sure that the investigator goes out, or she goes out or whatever and feels out the situation and you know... just comes back and we all wrack out brains about what we're going to do with children we need to place, or if she knows someone right off the top of her head, you know... we kind of do a genealogy type thing and weed out the people where we wouldn't place them, and place them. Always try to place them with family. So...even if the family's off...

LC: Off reservation?

MLB: Excuse me?

LC: Even if that family's off reservation?

MLB: Off reservation (*nodding*), sorry. (*laughs*)... that was a good choice of words...

GW: They could be off and off.

MLB: Yeah

(*collective laugh*)

LC: But still on

(*collective laugh*)

MN: I know that this is Mary Lou's interview but the questions that you've been asking, I've just been sitting over here biting my tongue and maybe we should have a chat, because like I said this is Mary Lou's interview, but I would like to be able to answer and respond to these last 4 questions that you've asked.

GW: Yeah. Well I would love to hear them.

MN: 'Cause, you know, I think that I have a different perspective than Mary Lou does. Mary Lou takes care of my foster kids, you know... so she's not really child protective. [GW: Right, right]. You know? So, she has a different perspective than I do. But if you want to sit and have a chat about those 4 questions I would definitely be open to doing that with you.

GW: Yeah, I would love to.

MN: Good.

GW: Yeah, yeah, 'cause it is, it's a different, it's a different role and responsibility, very much obviously. [MLB: Yep] Certainly, not quite the same hot button as if you're doing the investigation. [MLB: No]. That's, that's a whole other... [MLB: Yep, right...] that's a whole other piece so...

MN: I mean Mary Lou sees bits and pieces yes, and that's how she can respond to those bits and pieces that she does see, or that she hears us talking about. You know, but yeah...

LC: And if you would want that to be on the record, you could do that in a way where it was set up, we'd be happy...

GW: Yeah, we'd be happy to do it.

MN: Yeah. Sure.

GW: And I also have to put out there, there's a little bit of self-serving in me, that I can't remember who I've repeated this too, I think I've said this to, I can't remember if I've told you Molly, but, that my son's gone back for his MSW.

MN: Oh is he? No, it wasn't me.

GW: He's at UVM and he's in his first year, and he had one of the IV-E child welfare scholarships, which means, this year, they... which is huge because we basically said 'we can't pay for grad school,' and so he's, this year doing, sort of similar to what Pen did, which is for his internship, interviewing kids that are in foster care, in Vermont. And...next year... you know he gets tuition benefits and and money from the Department, and he owes the Department 3 years when he graduates. And next year he goes out and he does the 3-day a week caseworker... In Vermont... and he's worked with some of those kids, he's worked in a group home for the last 3 years, mostly kids who've been placed, a small one, I think there's 5 kids there.

[01:00:22.24] But... but listening to... so fits the profile... He'll be 29 when he graduates, he has no kids, I personally as his mother thinks he's clueless sometimes (*collective laugh*), but I'm just his mother... But I, you know, in this process and just listening, I have to fess up some of the questions are also feeling like I wish I could open his, put a funnel in his brain and just, you know, let me just cram all this stuff into you Matt, because I know you care about kids. You clearly care about kids, but I do, I think, you know, he's a privileged upper middle class little white boy that's never had a major angst in his life, truly. And he's going to be going out working with very poor families in the state of Vermont and some may be native, some may not be native, and I just think what my friend and I used to say to each other after we'd been practicing for awhile: "Do you believe the crap we used to tell families when we were young, beginning social workers?"

So, it's sort of like I wanna capture some of this and say "Here Matt, you have to learn, I don't care that you're 29, you have to learn this and [MN: remember this] and remember this...

LC: So I have...

GW: I worry, you know, I think it's... I am concerned about that turnover and I am concerned about what that implication is for kids and families, and the age of the workers that go into that.

LC: So I have...

MN: I really don't think that it's anything to do with age Gail, I think it has a lot to do with bureaucracy.

GW: Yes.

[01:02:12.08] MN: You know...The Department of Health and Human Services has policies and procedures and... that they have to follow. Tribal Child Welfare has a community. So our mentality is totally different. Totally different. Where they have to be worried about you know, okay I have 15 out of 18 months to, I have to do this parallel plan... We don't think about that. Our biggest worry is finding family that's going to take them. So that, there's a major difference there in thought, in how we do business.

LC: Just how you think about what the task is.

GW: Yeah

MN: Exactly, exactly.

MLB: That's why I said at the beginning, it doesn't come from here (*pointing to her head*), it comes from here (*pointing to her heart*). I mean we have procedures that we have to follow according the Bureau of Indian Affairs, you know, but...

LC: But it's also what you said that you question sometimes yourself, about whether you knew as much. And what you're saying really, what we're all saying is that when it comes to the job that you're doing, you know so much, because of who you are and your experience, and your open heart.

GW: And being in the community.

MN and LC: Yes.

LC: Yes, that's where you got your Masters.

MN: Yeah.

GW: I mean that's huge,

LC: So I have a suggestion, umm... this is an interesting conversation, but I feel a little protective of that this is your statement...

MN: Exactly.

GW: I know.

LC: And we want to give to you, and I want to make sure that you have gotten enough, and what you wanted in terms of what you wanted to say and in terms of if there's anything that you wanted to take back.

MLB: Nope, I think I'm good.

GW: You're sure? Molly knows I can go off tangents.

(Collective laugh)

LC: You've given us so much, and now we're starting to move into asking both of you more questions about 'do you have some more you could offer to us,' but really I want to preserve first... [MN: I'm trying really hard not to cross that (collective laughs)] well really, this is so important because your voice is important and you know, so if we could just close out maybe this part, that's yours, and recognize and acknowledge so much of what you've given to us and to thank you for that and to appreciate that.

GW: Yes, thank you Mary Lou.

MLB: Cool.

LC: And then we could turn off the recording and then stop, and if we want to continue the discussion and turn the recording back on, we could do that, but I would like to close your experience.

MLB: Okay [LC: and recognize...] I'll close it, I'll tell you when to stop. [LC: Okay] I'm basically done. But I will put my tissue here (*into the basket to be burned in the sacred fire*)... Yeah, I'll probably have to grab another one, but... this is for John.

MN: It's interesting that you spoke of John today, because I spoke of John yesterday. (*MLB nods*) So yes, I agree, that this is from John. Thank you.



MLB: Thank you. Done.

GW: Thank you

LC: Thank you.

GW: Thank you too Molly.

[END OF RECORDING]