

Transcription of Ruth Dorey - Our Voices Matter Interview

Interviewer: Anna Quon

AQ- This is the Our Voices Matter project and this is a supplementary interview with Ruth Dorey. I am Anna Quon, interviewing Ruth. It's September the 16th and we're conducting this interview at the Bloomfield Center in Halifax. Hi Ruth!

RD- Hi Anna!

AQ- Thanks for coming in again.

RD- Oh your welcome.

AQ-After our last interview, I realized that I hadn't asked you about your ethnic back ground. Can you tell me a bit about that?

RD- Well my father is a native man; he doesn't have the card but he's eligible to get the card he just didn't go get the card, and I don't know if I would be eligible or not. And my mom is also part native, but she or they don't have any cards on that side of the family. Which is a native card, status card.

AQ-Right

RD- So I was umm, I was brought up by the white side of my family, and there wasn't any emphasis on that, rather it was deemphasised. They just didn't talk about it at all. It took me awhile to realize that I was of like, native heritage. When I had my first child, I looked at him and he looked like a fellow that was on TV, he played a Chinese character, and I looked at my baby and said ``my baby is Chinese do you think they gave me the wrong one?'' and I didn't

really think about it at all until then. Oh I was so concerned I had said do you think they have given me the wrong child. And then after awhile I'm thinking "you know if my father is native person am I not a native person too". I was like "oh I can't believe it this child looks so native." But I thought Chinese at first because somewhat the light. Well anyways.

AQ- How old were you when you knew that your father was native?

RD- I had heard it off and on, "that Indian guy that your mother married" or something like that. They had no respect for him at all. And so I was like, I didn't even think about it, I was running around and playing. I didn't care.

AQ- OK so when you were growing up, it sounds like your dad, would you, what kind of reputation did he have with your family, I guess.

RD- They thought he was no darn good that he was a no darn good Indian, and he had done this thing and that thing. And he wasn't standing by his family, and he was no darn good.

AQ- Right, and when did you, so it was when you had your child that you kind of thought of yourself as maybe being native?

RD- I still didn't think of myself as native for quite awhile after that cause I hadn't been around any native people.

AQ- So when was it that you began to see that as a part of you?

RD- Well I went to Winnipeg to work and there where a large population of native people and they were in a very sad condition. And I started thinking you know I am native and these people are in such bad and shameful condition, I was, I was ashamed of my native part because they were in alcoholic states and all kinds of sad conditions. First I was ashamed, and then I was,

what would I say, I was angry because they shouldn't have been that way, and I started to identify with their plight and so I started meeting the native people there but they were like a different group of a native people so I didn't know how well we would understand each other. So we just had kind of like little friendships.

AQ- Yeah, OK, So what role do you think discovering you where a native person or beginning to identify a native person, what role has that had in your mental health or recovery?

RD- Well ah, it's very confusing to be of two raciest, I found it difficult at first because, then when I started thinking of myself as a native person I started rejecting my white part, and saying those are the people who came and took away the land from the native people, their evil and then I was in quiet a mixed stated for awhile, and I said, then I talked to some other mixed race people and they said it's a gift from god that we are mixed race and we have a foot in two different worlds and we can have a chance to bring, you know, togetherness to the world. And I thought that was really helpful and then I went and studied with a native woman, her name is Ilene Brooks, and she is well known in the community, she's a very nice lady, she took me on a fast, and helped me to make a pipe, which is very important. I haven't got the complete story of what the pipe means but that's probably going to come in time.

AQ- So when was it that you started studying with this Ilene Brooks?

RD- I think it was 2001, and she was in town then working, so we could see each other a lot and now she's not in town and I don't see her very often. She's a really nice lady.

AQ- So when you mentioned the pipe, is it a special job to prepare the pipe? Can you tell me about that?

RD- Yes, the head of the pipe is made by a native artisan, but everybody prepares their own stem, which they give you or you choose a piece of wood and you carve it and it's a certain kind of wood that you put a wire down through it and it has a soft spot in the middle and that makes the whole down the middle all the way through so that you can smoke your pipe after. So we all went on a, well actually it was only a couple of us at that particular umm what do you call it, that particular fast. And we just, that's one of our tasks and then there was prayers we had to do, and some of it we had to not speak for twenty-four hours and some mostly prayer tasks and things.

AQ- Prayer Casts?

RD- Prayer Tasks

AQ- Prayer tasks?

RD- Tasks! We had to make little prayer ties with tobacco in them, because tobacco is considered sacred and then you pray over the little one and then hang them in a tree.

AQ- When you say prayer tie, is that it?

RD- Yup, it's a little red piece of cloth that is tied up and tobacco inside of it.

AQ- K, OK. So do you have a special title, I think you mentioned something the other day about a smoke something?

RD- Yeah, the smoke, yeah I was called Fire Woman at first because I was umm, helping to keep the fire and I laid down to sleep and the fire yelled at me "Wake up, Wake up" and my eyes were as big as saucers because you don't expect the fire to talk to you. So I told the other fire keeper what had happened and then I came out and everyone is going "you're the fire woman" I was like "I don't know what happened I thought I was hallucinating". Apparently this is, it's not

looked at as the same way in the native culture if you hear something, they don't just say you're hallucinating, they say tell us about it, what was the content and your more respected cause of that kind of thing.

AQ- Has your, has knowing that you're a native person and identifying with that and the practices of native spirituality, has that had any effect on your recovery and your mental health?

RD- Well, it has had an affect both ways because it's confusing and I wasn't brought up that way, and sometimes I don't know what they're talking about, and I feel stupid sometimes because I think "oh I should understand this", but I was in the church in the white community for years' it's hard to understand what they're saying sometimes.

AQ- OK. Can I go back a bit and ask you about our relationship with your father. Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with him now, and how you felt about it in the past before you knew him?

RD- Yes, I could remember him because I was 3 or 3 ½ or something like that when he had left the family. He was very kind to me, very very good and I always like little girls do, I worshiped my dad. And I think a lot of girls do that. You know like I can remember the last just before he left, me and my brother where driving in the truck with him and we both learned to whistle that day, the last day that we saw him for a really long time. And that was a memory that stuck in my mind a lot. He was always so good, and now well it was, I can't think, it was 1997, I was in a pretty depressed state, and I thought I was going to do away with myself so I said "well I am going to find my father before I do that." And I was proactive I called up and said "Can I come and" I said to his wife at that time, I said "I'm his daughter, I would like to see him" and she said "you come on over" but she did not know that he had any children except by his second wife,

and we were by the first wife, so she did not have any knowledge that he had five children by this woman. So when I got there, he was pretty surprised and we hit it off right away. And he was like “are you my dad” and he was like “I think so” and it was kind if a little funny, and surprising, but it didn’t go totally smoothly because of all the feelings of anger, he left me when I was little and he’s a bad person to do that. So it was painful, and well I went out there and after awhile I couldn’t go there sometimes because of the feelings of abandonment and eventually I worked it out with my therapist and I got so I could go there and now we’re going to Costco this weekend, or whatever, and we go for drives a lot and we have a pretty good time. So it’s nice.

AQ- And when you were growing up, and your dad wasn’t around, did you have those feelings of anger and abandonment then as well?

RD- Well I, didn’t know why he had, why he didn’t get in contact with me, because I knew that he had loved me, so I would right these letters and send them in the mail, if I didn’t know his address I would just go Halifax, and send it to Halifax because I lived in Shelburne County, and they would back, address unknown, it was like a kick in the head or something every time they would come back. And I was, I was sort of upset today they didn’t, the people I was living with, didn’t help me to get the letter through cause they were kind of like “Oh yeah it will come back because you don’t know the address” and they didn’t help me get the address. So I am a little bit ticked off about that now.

AQ- Maybe we can talk a bit about education and the role it’s had on your life. Tell me what was the highest level of education that you had got?

RD- I have taken some courses at three different universities but I can’t remember what one it was. It was a Christian University and I took Ancient Hebrew, Classical Hebrew for two years,

and I took a course on the history of Christianity and I was about to take one called Herman Newdicks when I moved from there, but that's the interpretation of scripture. And the other ones I took a computer course at the University of Winnipeg. And at the University of Manitoba I took, what is it called, Medical Terminology, cause to work in a hospital you have to have that, and I have accounting course from community college here in Nova Scotia, and I also have a trade in carpentry, I took a year and a half at a vocational school and I have three thousand hours, you require eight thousand hours of work to become a carpenter, I am up to three thousand and I don't think that I am going to get the rest. It's getting a little long in the tooth for that sort of thing. I guess, I actually didn't finish school and after my children were born I took the GED and I did pretty good at that. That's how I got my high school.

AQ- So you didn't finish high school at first?

RD- Yeah

AQ- Ok, how old were you when you had your first child?

RD- I was eighteen

AQ- So where you in high school at the time?

RD- I had quit

AQ- Ok, Ok

RD- Cause I was like ugh, I had wanted to study but it was so much, it seemed like nobody was very studious, and I said I can't study here, and I got upset about it and I said I was not coming back.

AQ- It sounds like education is something that's been an interest of yours?

RD- Yeah

AQ- Has it helped you in any way your mental health or your recovery to learn new things?

RD- Oh definitely because I find when I am not reaching for the next level I am going down down in mood and if I haven't got something to keep my mind, I get really depressed so if I am busy and learning I am usually much more able to cope with things.

AQ- Right, OK, You told me recently that you had a little trouble getting into community college?

RD- Yeah, well there's a program that my social worker made me aware of, and but there was, I had to have a medical paper filled out and the doctor said that I didn't have a disability and she wasn't going to fill it out. So I didn't get it filled out and now I am wondering if I am going to have a lot of difficulty continuing my disability cheque because I have to have a doctor to say there is something wrong with me, and she is not going to do it. She doesn't know my case that well.

AQ- That's a big thing, is how long have you been on disability?

RD- Since 1998 and I have been off it for a short period, but I went back to work and I didn't do all that well because when I am working full time I can't keep my nerves good, they start getting shattered, well the first few days were all right but then it got worse and worse.

AQ- What is, what are the things that keep you feeling well?

RD- Well I, if I have contact with a nice person that I can, we can understand each other and have some sympathy or empathy with each other and, like a two way street of giving, and sometimes it's very difficult to find a person who's willing to put the effort and time into a relationship, so it's a bit difficult. Well then there's also getting out and going on the bus's and meeting casual acquaintances on the bus's and you know go to a, well not that many coffee shop's but sometimes we'll go for a hamburger or something and that's fine.

AQ- K, Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about that we didn't cover in your interview last time?

RD- Well that's, I think it was completely through, you never know. Oh well, there is still a big problem with relationships in my family that were not all that close and I think it's sort of because there was a lot of poverty and upset when we were little, we didn't get our relationships going the way that they might have, were not as close as some other families maybe. But you got to work on these things I guess.

AQ- And uh, that thought went out of my mind. Oh, relationships of an intimate nature, do you, do they play any part in your health?

RD- Well I find them very difficult because I've allowed myself to be used by a lot of men and maybe I had a lot of intimate relationships that I probably shouldn't have, because I didn't know the person well and they were like "Oh come on lets have an intimate relationship" and I was like "I don't know" but then I would jump right into it. I think it might have, I decided at one point that I was going to be celibate until I had a really good reason to be different and that was the first time that felt that I had any power in relationships because I learned to say no at that

time. Time before it was “I want to have an intimate relationship with you” and I would say “yes” whether I really wanted to or not.

AQ- When was it that you came to that decision?

RD- That’s been probably in the 90’s sometime.

AQ- And what was it that led you to make that decision, or to be able to make that decision?

RD- Hmm, I think I was just doing a lot of therapy and it was important that I did what was good for me, instead of just what was good for somebody else. And I started thinking of myself as an important person in my own life. I never felt that way and I still sometimes don’t feel like an important person in my own life, that’s a kind of funny thing to say I guess but I guess that’s how I say.

AQ- Can you tell me about therapy and the role that it’s had in your life?

RD- I had the most wonderful wonderful therapist and she worked at Drug Dependency, I went there and she was so sweet, so gentle. If knocked on her door, whatever she was doing she would say “I have to get this finished but you wait out there and I’ll get you”. It was like I could go there anytime and she was like a mama, she was like a mama. A kind and loving mama that never disciplined you, so I got the best of everything. She was a really sweet person.

AQ- How long did you have her?

RD- I think about five years, or something like that. Then she moved away and then it was like a wrench. Yeah well these things happen.

AQ- Have there been other therapists or types of therapy that have worked well for you?

RD- Well I did that, what's it called, cognitive something or another, and that, if you had a thought "oh I am a stupid person" or something, you learn to refute that and say "you know I am very intelligent and this is the reason that I say that" and you give yourself reasons I went school, I passed and this and that and when there's a problem I know how to solve it, and things like that. You give yourself a different way of looking at yourself. So that was pretty good.

AQ- Is that cognitive behavioural therapy?

RD- Not sure exactly what it's called, but it's something like that.

AQ- Ok and how long did you go through that?

RD- I went three times, it was fast fast fast. It was like he says "go home and write down what you are thinking that's making you feel depressed," I had said "well I am not thinking anything that is" but when I got home and I started writing down what I was thinking, I saw what I was thinking, that I had depressive thoughts that made things worse. And then the next time I went back he said "now let's talk about these and see if we can change them" and the third I went back it was like really amazing, it's very fast, once you get it, it's like really fast.

AQ- Do you still practice it?

RD- Yeah, and I still get these thoughts and I will wake and be like "I feel terrible I must be stupid" and then you go "you know everybody has this sort of feeling and the reason I shouldn't feel this way is...whatever" It pulls you out of a lot of mess's when you think two or three different ways instead of one.

AQ- And my last question I guess would be how do you feel today about your recovery or where you are in your recovery?

RD- Well, I think I am pretty good, I want to go to work, but that may not be possible right now, because I have diabetes quite bad and I fibromyalgia and I do still have a lot of anxiety, so I am going to work on that and see, I feel a bit discouraged on that fact but I am going to try. So yeah, that's not too bad.

AQ- Well thank you Ruth, I really appreciated you telling me your story and the second part of it even again. So yeah, thank you very much.

RD- Well thank you Anna, it's been great.

AQ- Ok.