

SUBMITTED TESTIMONY
MINNIE PLENTY CHIEF-BROWN
SIOUX NATION OF STANDING ROCK
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

May 12, 2005

Dear Honorable Senator Dorgan,

Today I write you in response to your invite to submit testimonials to the hearing held on May 2, 2005.

My name is Minnie Plenty Chief-Brown. I am an enrolled member of the Great Sioux Nation of Standing Rock. My reasons for wanting to submit a letter for testimonial are due to the fact that I, too, have been subjected to suicide, and I want to share my story because we're survivors.

In 1994 my three eldest daughters' father completed suicide and ever since that day I wanted to understand why, but no one will ever understand. We will just look for the possibilities or circumstances surrounding it and I have accepted that. When I was thirteen to sixteen years of age, I attempted suicide. Believe me, I wanted out and my reasons were due to living in an alcoholic, abusive and broken home with no responsible adults to care for us or love us, and I got tired of being wakened in the middle of the night to cook for all the people at the party of my folks and then having to attempt to go to school. Sometimes I would go to school sporting a black eye or a big lip or bruised up, but I went, and believe me, I have the razor cuts from the years back of past attempted suicide.

I was placed in foster homes and put back into the same home of abuse after my folks promised the judge they would sober up and take care of us. You see, there are five of us total in our family and we all have trauma scars from our past; we were never shown how to show emotion, like love, caring, sharing and, yes, trust. Our mother never hugged us or said she loved us; neither did our father. But, we are survivors and back in those days we were told not to tell or talk to anyone or we'd get taken away from our folks, so years passed with this abuse and there never were laws to protect us.

Today, society woke up and took action and protects the children and I'm glad that was taken care of because no child should even have to live this way of life, which is the wrong way. Later on, my folks split up and divorced, which I think was the first good thing they did. They fought over us and my father got to take the two older girls and the oldest boy; my younger brother and I remained with my mother. Then things started to change. Our father came home for a spell and then they got in a horrible fight and things got crazy and he vanished without a trace. We found him ten years later when my eldest sister graduated from high school and things continued to improve. Our parents never got back together, but we all survived the whirlwind of reservation life.

I forgave my parents. I love them and tell my Mom every chance I get, and I hug her every chance I get. But, one thing is that I promised I would never be like them. Every chance I get, I tell my story to younger children and my own children and talk to them, and show them that the reservation is a small place and there's a big world out there for them to see and to never give up no matter how hard life gets once you get past high school, because that is when real life begins. I've kept other children in my home. Many parents ask me to keep their children when things get rough and they are always welcome to stay as long as they want because I know from a grassroots level that life is tough on the reservation. I'm honest with them when they want to talk or if they want to cry. I have more shoulders than they think or if they need a hug I'm there and my children enjoy sharing their mother. I've seen it all: car crashes, suicides, gang fights, alcoholism, and teenage pregnancies. Twice I saved the life of two teenagers – one who attempted suicide by an overdose of meds and the other attempted to hang himself. Those two are alive today and the one who OD'd is a mother and is happy she is alive and thankful, and the other, he's trying to finish school and go to college. Yes, this is the reservation.

As for my parents, my father went through extensive treatment and went to see holy men and because a spiritual leader (he has passed on), and my mother, she worked in the health field and retired. Currently, I am in college the second time around going for my Associates in Office Technology; my first time I received an Associates degree in Injury Prevention. I am a proud mother of seven children and my third to the oldest, Corrina Buffalo, from the father who completed suicide, graduates May 29, 2005 from Bismarck High School.

When I finish, one of my goals is to return to Standing Rock and create a program for intervention and prevention of suicide and create safe homes and find resources for after school activities and evening activities for the children. They are Wakan (sacred) and they are our future. I wrote to our Tribal Chairman, Mr. Murphy, begging him to apply for the Injury Prevention grant offered by HIS so that it will create a position for an Injury Prevention graduate and as of today I have not heard of he has someone to pursue it. This grant would enable that person to create these exact programs that the children of Standing Rock Grant School that you talked about on May 2, 2005 in the hearing.

With all that has been said it is late and I must retire now. I thank you for taking the time to listen to me and read what I have stated here via email. Should you have any further questions, I would be more than honored to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Minnie Plenty Chief-Brown

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