INQUIRY RESPECTING THE TREATMENT, EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF INNU IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

English Transcript | Volume 2

Commissioners: Retired Judge James Igloliorte, Dr. Mike Devine and Anastasia Qupee

Tuesday | 14 February 2023

[redacted]

CLERK: Do you solemnly affirm, that the evidence you shall give –

[Dialogue between P. Antuan and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

CLERK: – to this Inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

[Dialogue between P. Antuan and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): Yes, I will tell the truth and nothing but the truth.

CLERK: Please state your name for the record.

ELDER ANTUAN: My name is Penote Antuan. I was born April 27, 1949, out in the country. I wasn't born in Sheshatshiu, I was in the country – I was born in the country.

B. BROOKWELL: Good afternoon, Penote. I'm over here, I'm going to ask a few questions this afternoon.

ELDER ANTUAN: I will try to answer everything what you – what you just ask me.

What I can – yup –what I can remember.

B. BROOKWELL: Today, I'm going to ask a question; then it'll get translated here, and translated in the back. So it'll be a bit slow.

ELDER ANTUAN: (Inaudible.)

B. BROOKWELL: So –

ELDER ANTUAN: (Inaudible.)

B. BROOKWELL: I said I'm going to ask a question and then it'll get translated here and in the back, so it'll be a bit slow – you'll see I'm going slowly.

ELDER ANTUAN: Okay.

P. RALPH: Ben, does he want to put some headphones on, it might help.

B. BROOKWELL: Yeah.

ELDER ANTUAN: Let me try them on.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry.

B. BROOKWELL: Can you hear me now?

ELDER ANTUAN: I can hear you, yes.

B. BROOKWELL: Okay.

ELDER ANTUAN: Yup.

B. BROOKWELL: So I'll just do – once again, I'll ask questions in English, and then Anne will translate to you in Innu-aimun, and Gerry will also translate, so it'll be a bit slower.

ELDER ANTUAN: Yes.

[Dialogue between P. Antuan and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

B. BROOKWELL: Could you tell us again when you were born?

ELDER ANTUAN: My name is Penote Antuan.

I was born in – in the country, Nutshimit. And I was born April 27, 1949.

B. BROOKWELL: Where did you grow up?

ELDER ANTUAN: As I can remember of the day I was born, I was born in the country. But as I grow older – like I – when I was five or six years old – I was in the community then.

B. BROOKWELL: And as a child, who did you live with?

ELDER ANTUAN: As a child I was with my mother. My father – my father died earlier, when I was only about two years old. I was – at two years old – I was – when my father died, that's when.

B. BROOKWELL: And what about your grandparents?

ELDER ANTUAN: I – my grandparents – you say – you – my grandparents?

B. BROOKWELL: Yes.

ELDER ANTUAN: My grandparents were (inaudible). They – they went – the time we went in the country that's when my grandparents – when we got to – in Sheshatshiu, that's when they passed away.

B. BROOKWELL: And where do you live now?

ELDER ANTUAN: I live in Sheshatshiu at the moment. And I – I have my five children – five girls and two boys in the family and my – my wife just passed away recent – about a year and a half ago.

B. BROOKWELL: Answers? Okay.

This is just a pause for a moment to check that the questions are going to be translated as well for both Sheshatshiu and Mushuau Innu.

Okay.

Okay. What we'll try is I'll ask the question and let's translate that first, and then we'll hear Penote's answer and then translate that.

P. RALPH: Benjamin, (inaudible) Gerry said that he's translating it first.

B. BROOKWELL: He is? Okay.

P. RALPH: Or he will.

B. BROOKWELL: Okay.

So when – as a child, when would you spend time in Nutshimit?

ELDER ANTUAN: As far as I – as far as I can remember going – going back and forth to the country, I was only about a – a young – young – young baby. Because we used to leave – go back and forth to the country, before the priest came into our community.

B. BROOKWELL: And – when would you spend time here, in the community, as a child?

ELDER ANTUAN: I – usually my parents were here for the – just for summer. Then they went back in the fall, by September, going back into the country and they were there in the country for the rest of the – the year, until next June came around.

B. BROOKWELL: How many other families would be out with you in the country?

ELDER ANTUAN: In total about – the whole family would – that was there in the country with us was around four or five families together. In the same place.

B. BROOKWELL: And how long would you stay in one spot when you were in the country?

ELDER ANTUAN: As my parents were there – they were – we were there about two or three months each place, then we have to walk right down the – down somewhere else and – that's what we did all the winter. We moved around.

B. BROOKWELL: And as a child, what did you learn when you were out in the country?

ELDER ANTUAN: As a child I would learn to do some kind of hunt which – which we call small game. Like partridge, rabbit, even squirrels, or any small animal that we can provide ourselves for food.

B. BROOKWELL: Just checking on translation.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible) Gerry.

(Inaudible.)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

B. BROOKWELL: Who taught you those things when you were out in the country?

ELDER ANTUAN: When we were in the country my – my parents were there with us. Like – my uncle, who was Ponus Nuke – at the time, he – when he was here – that's where I learned, from the – things – the things that I understand – (inaudible) what I know about.

He was taught by my father and my mother too, and handed it down to me.

B. BROOKWELL: We're just checking – there may be a technical issue, sorry.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I just said that they're checking on the other translator, who has the Mushuau dialect.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible) before we make this better.

INTERPRETER NUNA: Yeah.

P. RALPH: Obviously it would be better for both (inaudible).

Commissioners, can we take five minutes (inaudible) working sound.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Of course, five minutes.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

No.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

ELDER ANTUAN: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Okay.

(Inaudible.)

ELDER ANTUAN: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

B. BROOKWELL: Okay. We're going to try something new.

When – at what age did you start going to school?

ELDER ANTUAN: I – as far as I can remember, coming to the community, I was only about seven years old. Then I started going to school with Father Pirson, who was teacher then.

B. BROOKWELL: And where was that school?

ELDER ANTUAN: The school was at the – in the community. Just by the – just by the church. If you – the old church was – demolished. The new one is – it's still there – the new one.

B. BROOKWELL: And for what part of the year would you be in school?

ELDER ANTUAN: I can't recall the first day that I went into school, but I was about seven years old. I – that's what I think, because my mother took me to school. To – the priest who was there with us, told us to get educated, the – the – the people like me.

B. BROOKWELL: And until what age did you go to that school?

ELDER ANTUAN: As I said before, I was – I was about seven years old. That was in – back in September but what – I can't recall the year.

B. BROOKWELL: Okay.

When did you stop going to that school?

ELDER ANTUAN: Uh, I was grade – I was – I can remember when I was Grade 4. I did Grade 4 in English; there was only small school days. Then, my mother asked me if I could go to school to Mount Cashel in 1958.

And I haven't – we haven't – I haven't heard, myself, who sent me there. Is it my mother or the teacher?

B. BROOKWELL: Where was Mount Cashel?

ELDER ANTUAN: Mount Cashel is located in St. John's.

B. BROOKWELL: What was your experience at Mount Cashel?

ELDER ANTUAN: The first thing I experienced when I was in Mount Cashel, there was a – I believe it was a school advisor or could be a Brother – was escort to me to the – to the building.

B. BROOKWELL: Is there more you'd like to share?

ELDER ANTUAN: I'd like to share some of the things that I – I knew before – before they will introduce me to the building, or to the classroom where I was gonna be.

The building itself – that the person I was with was a Brother – they call him – they call him Brother Ford. That was the first name I heard, Brother Ford. Which I overheard him, saying to the – to the other people who were there: I was a different person.

What he was saying, to the people there – to the students who they were there, he called me: Indian. That's when my scar came out from my heart. Which I don't like to be called the – the Indian – I'm Innu person!

That's the time that I – I never liked any person who called me Indian, especially the white.

And I've also heard over and over again with that Brother – the same Brother, Ford, telling – saying: There, look at him, Indian. He even say red, redskin. Which it's totally upsetted me, to be called redskin. Because I wasn't even red! I was the same – you – as the people – the same colour as I am.

The other thing I can remember was when they – when he did – when he did make fun of me, because only myself – but there were other – there were – another person with me, when we travelled to St. John's. And that – his name was Francis Penashue, but he was in a different classroom all day because he was much older.

And usually Brother said to – said to the – like to the – what other students were there: Here comes Indian! Here comes Indian! And he – what he does is – is put his mouth – his hand, and say like, whoo whoo whoo whoo!

And that's not a joke. Pure – pure racism. Pure racism that is. Because I was a young person then. I wouldn't have – I understand what they were – called me: Indian.

And ever since – I did – I never did like it, to be there.

I can remember one weekend the teacher's – the teacher's name was Mr. Nash, when he was there teaching in Sheshatshiu. The – the first – the school that was built in our community, that was in around the church somewhere, up the road.

I remember one weekend I was with – with the – with his parents, there, in St. John's. He took me where his parents was – were. And I was there for a weekend only, and they treat me very good. They gave me whatever – what I want – cookies, bread, anything that I want – eating. They were very good to me. Not like Brothers that I used to go – in the school.

I was there in St. John's for a – that's the – that's the thing I don't remember, when I went back to Sheshatshiu. I was old enough to forget everything. Even my language. Even my identity. Even my relationships with the people. Even my culture. Even who am I.

I always ask myself: Who am I?

That's the thing you have to ask yourself, too. I think I remember saying, who am I? Who am I?

The other thing I have to tell you people.

When I've – when I got back in my own community, I lost my language. The same thing I said before. I lost my identity, my culture, even my relationship to the community and my relation to everybody who was – who was my – there was my mother, and my mother's cousins and all that – and all of them. I lost them. I didn't know who they are – who they were.

And I couldn't even speak to my mother in Innu – Innu-aimun. I couldn't speak – I couldn't even talk to her because she didn't – she couldn't understand me in English. So I – I mean – I couldn't speak Innu. That's how much I lost when I was in – in St. John's. Everything. Everything.

The only people that I was – I can talk to them, was the teachers who were there in Sheshatshiu. And at the same time Father Pirson was there too. He was – he spoke English also. But he also learned the language, our language, at the time. That's how we communicate together, a priest alongside with my mother, sometimes.

That's the communication that I – I learned again. My own language – my own language took me four years to learn the language back – just the language, now, just the language. I didn't know nothing about the other – other things.

I still have a problem in my community.

The things I never did learn about my own people. Like I only – I only just knew, again – again because I lost going back into the country. Only recently – after I married – with my children, my wife – we went in the country together to learn more about my – my own – my own culture.

Right at this moment, I can tell you the children – my own children – because we – we haven't spent that much in the country, okay? We don't spend that much in the country when we were – when we were – when they were baby – young men or boys, or my young girls and daughters. They – they didn't – we didn't – they didn't have time. And I certainly didn't have a – teach them that much, because I didn't know

nothing about it – about going back into the country.

I had to learn first, in order for me to understand all the things that are done in the country. That's how hard it is.

To leave your community for a long time, you're gonna lose everything. You're gonna lose everything. Totally yourself. You're going to lose everything.

The other thing is, I – I know in my own – my own – state that I – I never will – I'll never be able to, like, the way – my grandchildren, now, they're having a problem with their language. I have – three – three – three years old – a kid, who is my grandchild – speak English. No – no words of Innu – no word – not a word of Innu.

Whose fault is it? Whose fault is it? I want to know, whose fault is it? Is it me or is – it's a – is it other people? The only thing I can believe, when they say it's not you: TV, radio. That's what they're saying: TV and radio.

Now when I look at it, there's a certain limit for our kids to understand. If you don't use your language, you're gone – you're gone completely. Out of the world. When I say all over the world, I said you're not – you're – you can't – you can't satisfy yourself you're not – you're not Innu. You just – they all – you are – you're gonna be there, all the rest of your life, to be English.

Like me, I was – I – to me, I was changed from Innu – when I left here – like, when I left here I was Innu. When I went in St. John's for a number of years, I was English there. When I came back to Sheshatshiu, I was trying to learn a language – my Innu identity; everything that I lost.

See, none of – none of you, as a white person, I don't think he can do that for themselves. (Inaudible) – hard to get back with learning, but to me, it was precious; things that I want to learn. The way my grandparents were – were doing before – before me. The things that they – they were hunting, they were doing in the country all their life. That's the thing I want – I did want to learn.

B. BROOKWELL: Penote, I know there's much more that you wish to say and more questions that I'd like to ask. We're running close to the end of today so I'd like to continue tomorrow, to hear some more from you.

ELDER ANTUAN: I will try to come in tomorrow, in the morning; but I have other commitments that I have to attend, also.

And I also want to thank you people as – as people working – trying to work with us. I think it's – this is my first time that I ever spoke about Mount Cashel to the people, and about the things that was happening to me – especially to me. Because I didn't see the other person who was with me when we – we were in different classrooms altogether.

Him – he could have told the whole story, too, in his own words in – in his own experience.

And the thing is, I think I will – I think it's important for you people to understand, when you're trying to work with us about our situation in our community. I haven't spoke about the people who are trying to break – break the culture and the other – introduce the other things that they want to. That's the Social Services. That's what they're doing.

They're not – they're not helping to the people. Only just referring to the – to the – to the – to the people, yes, you do this, you do – you do that, and you do this and not that. That's all they say. When we can work with – we can work out together.

If I can remember I've – I have one comment. I am a foster parent in my community. Me and my wife raised – probably – seven or ten kids. They were

from Natuashish. Also they – when they went to school here, I took them as a foster parent. They were staying with me and I know them personally.

And these things – you know – these things I – I never – I never (inaudible). I never – I want to say, I don't like the way that the – the government or the Social Services are working toward us, like that. In order for us, or other people to understand – it's just because they are ruined. They ruined the people. They ruined the people.

Remember the – remember when I said it? The first thing I came in myself – a scar, that was still in my heart. It's still there. I'm 73 years old now. It's still there.

Now the other thing I – I'm going to put in here in this word: reconciliation. They're talking about – about – about reconciliation. What's gonna do with that? I – I don't think reconciliation will help me so much. I have already put – they have already punished me. The way I say that a scar – a scar is in my – inside of me.

You just can't – you just can't get rid – rid – rid of my scar saying I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry – no way.

(Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Penote, thank you so much for being so strong, and we hope to see you again tomorrow when you're ready in the morning. When you have to go, you just tell us that you do have to go, and if you want to continue any time when we're back again, don't worry, you're – you're always welcome to speak to us.

ELDER ANTUAN: I certainly want to thank the – the people who are spreading the (inaudible) and the people who are – they – as a – as a – people who work with us. I'd like to thank them also, but I also want to thank all the people – all the people who are here today to listen to my story about – there's another story I could tell you about (inaudible). That's the – the – the old people that we have lost. They were a good – they were good people. We understand it when they talk to us, and they're also telling us what to do before we can commit ourselves to work (inaudible).

And that's the thing I would like to thank all of you – all of you who are here today, and thank you very much.

CLERK: All rise.

This Commission of Inquiry is concluded for today.