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

English Transcript | Volume 3

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

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CLERK (Battcock): All rise.

This Commission of Inquiry is now open.

Please be seated.

P. RALPH: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Good morning and welcome to the third day of the Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System.

We'd like to start the day again with a prayer from Tshaukuesh Penashue.

I would ask the – I would ask the translators to come up as well.

Tshaukuesh, give the translators a chance –

ELDER PENASHUE: Yes.

P. RALPH: – is it okay?

ELDER PENASHUE: Yes.

P. RALPH: Good.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): We'll start again with a prayer for each one of us to have a good day today, to have the strength and to be amongst each other and give each other the strength to have this day that we look forward to.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Elizabeth was only saying the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary, and asked our Creator to help us with – today, what we are going to look forward to.

Thank you.

P. RALPH: Thank you.

Thank you, Tshaukuesh.

And before we start, I'd like to recognize the contribution of our two translators, who are doing a fantastic job under pretty challenging circumstances.

So if we could give them a hand?

And Benjamin, perhaps you could outline – Mr. Brookwell – outline for us the witnesses that Innu-representative organizations are planning to call today.

B. BROOKWELL: Good morning, Commissioners.

Today, the witnesses that we intend to hear from are Mr. Penote Antuan, Joachim Nui, Tshaukuesh Penashue, Janet Bellefleur and Nykesha Gregoire.

P. RALPH: And I guess before we get started with the resumption of the examination of Mr. Antuan, on behalf of the Commissioners, Mr. Antuan, I'd like to thank you for coming back again today. I know it's not easy, but we're really thankful that you're – that you could come back again and talk to us again today.

B. BROOKWELL: Before we continue, Penote, I wanted to check if you can hear me okay or if you want the headphones again?

ELDER ANTUAN: (Inaudible.)

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

ELDER ANTUAN: Can you hear me?

B. BROOKWELL: Maybe a little closer.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible) slide your chair in closer, maybe.

ELDER ANTUAN: Okay?

P. RALPH: Yes, that's good.

ELDER ANTUAN: Good.
You let me know when to start.

B. BROOKWELL: Yup.

ELDER ANTUAN: Um –

B. BROOKWELL: All right.

So the – what we spoke a bit about yesterday was Mount Cashel, and I have a few questions about Mount Cashel.

At Mount Cashel, could you tell us what language was spoken?

ELDER ANTUAN: The language that I did – that I did use when I was – when I went away, in my community, it was English. It was the second language that I used. I wasn't very fluent as I am now. I can only pick the words – one by – words. Whatever I was taught in here – in this community here.

The priest was different – was a teacher at the beginning in – in my community. Because he was a (inaudible), he couldn't even – well, he taught in English in some ways, but also he – he used the Innu language also.

B. BROOKWELL: At Mount Cashel, what would happen if you spoke in Innu – in Innu-aimun?

ELDER ANTUAN: While we were at Mount Cashel, we could only speak in English. That's the second language we spoke. In order for us to speak our own language between of us – between – there was only two of us then – in order for us to speak in Innu, we were hiding away from the – the Brothers who were watching us. To use this – to use our own language.

And if – if we – if we ever caught using our own language we would – we would be punished. We would be punished. The punishment that we had was – we – we had our fingers laid on a – on a – on a table and they – each finger – we had five or six straps on each hand. That's how cruel they were.

That's what I call cruel in my – my lifetime. You don't see a person doing that to you – to you. To the other people, like that. They don't do that. Because they were different Brothers. The first thing I knew they were Irish Brothers, from Ireland. They weren't – they weren't here – they were – they were not from Newfoundland or Canada.

B. BROOKWELL: Thank you for speaking about that. I know it is difficult.

I want to –

ELDER ANTUAN: I –

B. BROOKWELL: – oh – go ahead.

ELDER ANTUAN: I'd like to say a few – (inaudible) – about a few things.

I have a strength, Sir, I have a very – a good strength, to know what they were doing to us. Because you – I – we couldn't see anybody around us who can protect us, at the same time when we were punished for it. And the thing is that – because we were two of them – there was only two of us, there was nobody else – nobody else – to protect us. And the reason I say that, because I'm pretty sure if we – if – if we ever done anything wrong, they would really punish us, for good.

That's what I want to say in that session, and tell the things I – I like to share with you also.

First of all, I want to say a few words of my old – all– all my Elders who passed away in this community.

We have lost all the Elders who were – who were born, who were living here in Sheshatshiu, and also we – we just – lost – losing everything. Like I – I said to the – to the – a person yesterday – do you know

that person who was doing the drum – drum dance yesterday? I said, that's the only one – one man – one Elder – that he – who could sing with the drum.

Like me, I'm a – I'm the Elder too, as respected Elder in the community here in Sheshatshiu. I don't have that system with my – it's – it's – who has that system to – to do the drumming – drumming and also to do like, drum dance. Those things are very difficult for a – for a person to understand.

I had my grandfather who passed away long ago, when I was only about – three years old, I think, when he passed away. [redacted]

He spoke with his – Mishtapeu and asked him to look for food around the community here, when there was no – when there was some caribou around in the country, but they couldn't get it. Once they found out that he was – he can do a few things that no other person can do, we asked my grandfather – some people here in the community knew about it. He – what – greatest gift that he ever had given to him, you know?

[redacted]

We have caribou, has his own boss. The birds have their own boss. Fish have their own boss. And we have names for them, also. And when you – when you think all of this things have been done to us you'd be surprised what we have, that you don't have.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Now those things were never told by our people. Were never told to the – you people – like, you people. And those things, we don't want to lose them. We don't want to lose them, because they're sacred to us. Just the same way we do with the caribou – sacred to us.

When you say Mother Nature is giving the – we say to Mother Nature, we – give us the food in order for us to survive in this world. And I think the best way to say to the earth, is Mother Nature. She's the one who is – supply us our food in the country. Anything. We even collect our medication in the woods, trees – many kinds.

That's the first item I was trying to correct – correct it. The second one is matutishan – matutishan. [redacted]

Matutishan was used for – they call – we – you people call sweat tent, and that's what I heard from other people, say sweat tent.

The thing they used for sweat tent is that they – if you were ill – ill somewhere in your body. So they put the person inside the sweat tent to heal himself. And some of the – one of the Elders would have – what do you – what do you call it – hold on now. Let me explain to you so that some – way so that you can understand.

An Elder can go inside the sweat tent, and tell the – a person, where does he feel pain, okay?

[redacted] he asked the person where he's ill – what part of his body is sick. So what the Elders were – were doing, he blow – blow – you know, blow the heat over to her – over to him, and he got cured afterwards, see.

Now I got – I only brief you on these two things. I – I – they have spoken. By individuals who were speaking to us yesterday, and now – yesterday, for this time. It's only brief – I just brief out everything that they – telling – tell – was it done.

Now the other thing I want to say is that I got grow old, like – I'm an Elder now. I – as far as I can remember, when they build the houses in Sheshatshiu, I remember that. I'm pretty well remember – well remembered. What the people – the government were saying to us: If you don't go in the country, you stay here in the community, we build houses – we'll build the houses.

So a lot of people were anxious to see that – their house – a lot of people. Now also – I also – I'm also anxious to see the house, where my mother can stay, 'cause I'm only – young – a young man then. Back in '60s or '70s I think – I don't know for sure what day it was – what date – because I can't – I never – I never followed a calendar so much, but I knew what is coming to us.

When they build the houses, they built 20 … 25, I'm not sure – were they 25. The first road, which we called North West Point Road – this is the first road here – the second – and down the beach, that's where they build all.

The – the Innu wanted them – have the running water. The Innu wanted them – have a bathroom. And they were told by the government officials: Now your house is finished – all done. Just a stove in a house. Windows all there. The panels all there. Everything – but no water – no water.

And the water – before that, we did get water from the river. Do you see the pond here somewhere – I think – somewhere here – and there's another pond over – (inaudible). This is where we get our water, to drink, to make a tea, to make a bread, we even use it as cooking.

This is how we were put in this community.

What I'm doing here, this morning, I'm just briefing the things that we done in our community – just briefing. There are times – when I will be – when you do come again in our community, to extend the – the – what do you call it here – it's a –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

ELDER ANTUAN: – sharing.

And I will also give you more information if you need – if you need it because what I understand of my Elders, it passes on to us, to say to you people who are listening. Try to listen to us – some of the ways that we endure in our lives.

The other – the – the – the other thing is I want to talk about – a little bit of – just to give you a brief – education in the community.

Education, when I – when I knew, we – they built three new schools in the community. One was the – the old school, which I call old school. There was only one – one teacher there. It was Father Pearson; taught – who teach – who teached us school.

The second school that was built is down below, which was called Our Lady – Our Lady of the Snows school. The third one was built here – around here somewhere – exactly right here I think. Was built – was built by the – the government, and was called Peenamin Mackenzie School. That was the third one, which housed from kindergarten to Grade 12.

And the second school that was built down below us – it was – house for kindergarten to Grade 9. Both – like – the school that was built – the second one.

That's the part of education.

The education was told by – told us, by the Government of Newfoundland that we have to send our kids into the schools. If we don't – if we don't send our kids in a school, we wouldn't have got our family allowance, our assistance by Social Services, we won't get anything from the government, money-wise.

That's what we were told.

B. BROOKWELL: Penote, I think we're going to take a short break for translation in a few minutes. Just wanted to let you know in case you wanted to start on something new. But if now is a good time for a break –

ELDER ANTUAN: The last thing I wanna – I was gonna do with it was the – the Social Services part.

B. BROOKWELL: Okay.

ELDER ANTUAN: If you want to finish I'll leave it off from there. You still want a break?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You go right ahead.

B. BROOKWELL: Yeah, go ahead.

ELDER ANTUAN: As far as I can remember, the first Social Service came in in our – not in Labrador – not in our community, but he – he – he was working on the other side, with us. He didn't stay here – be out here.

I was the only person who could speak English. It was my – my – my uncle could speak English – Ponus Nuke – he was fluent with English too. I, myself, with my mother went to – I don't even know – recall his name, the – the person who was working there. I couldn't recall.

My mother was asking assistance from – from that person. And I told the person, I said: She need assistance. And he asked questions like: How many in your family? There was only two of us, then. And Mother answered: There's two – there's two of us, myself and him, he said.

The first question that they ask us – they ask my mother: If you're working – are you working? And that hit me in my – somewhere in my head. Hit me. To say that to the lady – I'll call her lady who – I mean – to say to her: Are you working?

You know what I thought? When he told that – my mom: Are you working? There's no jobs before – there was no jobs. There were no jobs to look for. All he has – go to social assistance – to the Social Services. That was my first reaction to Social Services.

That's the things I – I've seen in my lifetime. Where – that's when it starts, by the way, Social Services argue to Innu people about everything that they – they want them – them – to do, I think, that's why they're arguing.

When you look at – in the – in this community now, you look at the – who – the younger people, who have their kids in their home, and who have their uncles in their home, who have their aunts in their home.

It's so important for us, and also you people, to understand how – how we are doing in our community. Especially the group of your relation-people who are there with you. You have to give them understanding.

You also have to give them help – what they need. You also want to give them – understand the way *you* people operated in this world, because you cannot put one person into your understanding. And also I cannot put one person in my understanding – in my – in my wording, when I say the

word, to understand. I will (inaudible) more people to be there.

I'm just about finished what I want to say for the Social Services; but I will add – add on, when you people come back again. I believe you'll be back here in March, to hear again – to hear you – from you people.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay. We will – we'll take a short break.

We'll take a short break for the benefit of the interpreters, Penote; but some of the lawyers, and your lawyer, may want to still ask you a few questions, so can you come back in ten minutes?

ELDER ANTUAN: Yup. (Inaudible.)

Recess

P. RALPH: Are we ready to resume?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

B. BROOKWELL: So, Penote, I have two last questions for you, and they're about Mount Cashel.

And can you tell us who sent you to Mount Castle – Cashel?

ELDER ANTUAN: The first thing I can tell you is that the first word, I heard from my mother, when she – when she told me I'm going to St. John's. And the only two people that I knew who were – who were out this trip, was a priest – was our priest in the community, whose name was Father Pearson. And the other person who was the – who was the mission at the Grenfell on the other side – Grenfell Mission. And that's the only people I can think of – that were – that were the ones sending me. Maybe there was a Social Services there too. (Inaudible.)

When we were told to go St. John's, we have some clothing from the Mission at North West River. We have clothes but that's where we got it from. And I also believe that they paid my whole way in St. John's.

That's all I can remember.

The things they do with our people, they don't consult them in some case – there's no consultation in – with us – what they were going doing to us. All they say was: Go in to school in St. John's. That was it.

So we left here September 1958 – when we got to St. John's.

B. BROOKWELL: So my last question is when you were at Mount Cashel, did you get to come home at all?

ELDER ANTUAN: As far as I can remember when I was at Mount Cashel, we were able to go home in – in the summer when there was a break, when there was no school in the summer. We're never been brought back until – until it was over.

Like they do now in the schools, you have a break for Christmas, you have a break for Easter and also we have a break for summer. We didn't have that – in – in my memory we didn't have that there. We stayed there in St. John's. We do all our duties in St. John's – what we were told to do. Look after the cow; look after the pig; look after – look after the hens.

B. BROOKWELL: Thank you very much.

Those are my questions. The other lawyers may have questions.

P. RALPH: I will ask counsel if they have questions.

Before I ask that, I've had a conversation with the Commissioners and also with Mr. Antuan, and it's our – the Commissioners' intention to bring him back, perhaps more than once or twice over the course of the Inquiry.

I think we all have, I think, a lot of questions we'd like to ask Mr. Antuan and I think he is also anxious to share his knowledge of the history of the Innu and so, again, we will – we will bring him back several times over the course of the Inquiry.

So I'll ask – I'll go through. Province of Newfoundland, do you have any questions for –?

Government of Canada?

Do any other counsel wish to seek leave to ask Mr. Antuan questions?

I'm sorry –

J. TARLTON: No, um – I – thank you and good morning, Commissioners, distinguished Elders, members of the Innu leadership.

My name is Jonathan Tarlton and I represent the Attorney General of Canada on behalf of Canada, along with other members of –

P. RALPH: Jonathan, just to interrupt you. I was – when Mr. Antuan leaves I was going to ask everyone to introduce themselves –

J. TARLTON: Yeah.

P. RALPH: – just that's –

J. TARLTON: I'll – I'll leave it then.

P. RALPH: Okay.

J. TARLTON: No, I just wanted to take the opportunity – no questions, but to thank Mr. Antuan for – I can appreciate it's very hard for him – he said – for him to speak yesterday and today, and we've had to listen to some very difficult things. But I wanted to thank him for coming and I look forward to hearing him in the future, in March and at other gatherings of the Commission, either formally or informally.

So I just wanted to say that before we – before he leaves.

Thank you very much.

P. RALPH: Thank you, Mr. Tarlton.

ELDER ANTUAN: Can I say a few words?

All you people, the rest of the lawyers who are here. I certainly want to thank my Elders who passed away. If they did – knew what was going on in this – in this community, they would have loved it, to understand. They have to – glad about it – they would be happy, if they see'd it.

And I think we should thank them, in our hearts and our – in our mind, for them. In order for them to (inaudible) they can't be here but certainly – certainly – they understand, where they are, and where we are.

And I'd like to thank the Commissioners, people who are working on it, and the lawyers who were working, and I thank you very much.

And I will soon see you again, next – next round, I guess. (Inaudible.)

Thank you very much and hope you enjoy the day. Keep up working – keep up good work. I called – I call to you, keep up the work and thank you.

