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

English Transcript | Volume 7

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Welcome, Mr. Nui. We're very happy to have you here.

And any statement you want to give or any thoughts that you have, we'll be very happy to hear them.

D. NUI: First of all, thank you, Commissioners. And, I wanna – I want to start off, uh – what I remember back in Davis.

I can't – I can't really talk about what I heard, which I did – I didn't see in the past. And the only thing I can share is what I see. And is also – is always – every time I wanna speak, I always remember my – my grandfather, James Pasteen. When you share your stories, the stories that you see, that you had experience with, and that – those are the stories that you should share. Not those stories, what you heard, you're not even there. And this is what I'm going to – going to try to, the best – to share what – what I see in Davis Inlet.

Okay, uh, in – when we – when the Innu move – when the Innu moved to – from first old Davis Inlet to Davis, to Davis Inlet, that was – that was back in '67, I was told by my parents. And we came to this little village and there was about – only about, what I remember, probably 40 or 50 homes. Without any – without any water, running water, bedrooms with beds and everything. It's all empty – empty homes that we entered, that – those (inaudible). That's the first part I can remember, when I was growing up.

And I'm also very pleased that the Inquiry had – had finally go ahead. And, to me, the Inquiry is not about just the social services; it's about the missionaries, the policing, the education, the police, everything. And, uh, there's a lot of things that I had seen when I was growing up, growing up with friends here in this room, and a lot of it that we didn't know they were liked. And I guess who – whoever was doing it, they think that they're – that that was right. That was before, when we were just boys and girls.

And as we went to school, then a lot of us – the lot of us were – were taught in Innu, English. When we don't understand English, and the teachers get upset with us. And, to me, what I – what – what I remember back then is I had that feeling that we were – we were forced not to – not to speak our own language. That's back in Davis.

So uh, a lot of the – a lot of the people that I grew up with in the schools – in the school – they were scared. So, if they can't do the work in the classroom, they usually get, uh – get punished for it. So, sometimes the, uh – the priests and the nuns and the teachers used to keep us after school, and sometimes we get – we get punished, what we didn't learn at that day.

So a lot of these – most of these, it came from the priests and the nuns. But I do remember some of our teachers were very great to us. And they, uh – usually they spend – usually they spend with us, uh – we spent some time in the afternoons and the weekends. But, I do – sometimes I do see them in Goose Bay, when I'm in Goose Bay, most of the time. And when I think about those things – when I think about those things, these cause a lot of anger when – when – the last few years now. Like, when I hear that, the last person was talking, and the one I heard yesterday, they had no one – they had no one to turn to, no one to talk to.

It's like, believe – trying to force us to believe in their books, like social services books. They come from the university and come to a community and do – try to remove the kids or the Innu children not – not well looked after. They come to the community with a book. And when you look at the Innu people, they don't have a book.

When I say – when I say they don't have a book, when Innu don't have a book, our parents don't have – my parents don't have a book, my grandparents don't have a book and the Innu don't have a book at all. It's what they believe in; it's what's in their heart. And that's also taken away from them by the social workers and the missionaries. Everything is – is taken away from them. Even the children; their children.

I remember, we – uh – there was – one of my cousin were brought down into our home back in Davis. He was supposed to look – under – care under my parents. Then all of a sudden, all those few months that – that he was living with us, when I was – when we were growing up with him, all of a sudden he was gone. And we didn't know that – where he went, or what happened to him.

It was only a few years back that I start to think about it, and so, uh, when I found out he was living in Quebec. I don't know what – I don't know where he went after, when he left – when he was taken away from our – my parent's care all those years.

Anyway, that – he came back and we find out he was in Quebec. Now I'm – now that I see him recently in Natuashish.

So, to things that – to things that you – that I had experience with, and see in the community, it's very – it's very hard to – to

remember those things. And you see them, you see those people in the community, that – the ones that have hurt us in the past. Not just like today, like the people the same age as me. They hurt our parents, but the parents – the parents weren't – were scared to talk, to fight back.

The social work – the social workers have the police on their side, and the other organizations. A lot of them – a lot of those people, they're no longer with us. And I'm glad today that the Inquiry has gone – has gone ahead and what I'm a little bit angry about this, this Inquiry, is the – is the people in the past that have passed on. They had more – they had more stories about – if they were still here and share their stories.

And those stories we will never hear. They're gone; history. None of us will ever hear those stories again.

But I'm glad – but I'm glad that I had a chance to talk to the Commissioners today, to – what I remember, what I seen, what I have witnessed. Since I've been involved with – since 1988, myself, I start off with the recreation director back in Davis, and to work for the Innu people.

Right now then, I'm still working for the Innu people. It's very – I – I'm involved with the (inaudible) in the past. One of them is the relocation for this community. And I'm involved with the leadership. I'm personally – personally involved with – with language for the – for the Innu from Sheshatshiu and – for the Innu of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

But every time when I'm sitting with the Innu team in those – in those tables, last 30, 40 years, it's very frustrating. What I see in the – in the – in the land rights is that – is the people – is the Innu people are slowly going down, and slowly people are getting to be destroyed. We had lost our – we had lost our – a lot of good leadership in the past, and a lot of good Elders that – that they had advised us. And that – they're gone too.

But uh, the people, the Innu people, hardly have Elders now. The only person that I – that I think he's told us when – in Natuashish, is my dad, Joachim; Joachim Nui. And very – not many – not many Elders in Sheshatshiu as well. And those – and those were of – those were the people – those are the people that have given us directions, where we are now.

And too many – there's too many things going on all in one time. A lot of us are not well-educated like you people, and none of you people are educated in our culture. And why do – and why do non-Innu people comes to – come to our – to our communities with a book in their hand to take away all the children – the children in the community?

Even – even – they are not my children, those children are part of my – my life as well, the ones who are taken away. A lot of the mothers that I heard, when they give birth to their children and the social workers come in to the – come in to the room and take the kid in the back door of the hospitals.

And those – those are the things that the parents will never forget, and the parents will never forgive. And those – and the child – if a child ever grows up to – if the child grows old enough to understand when – when he grows up. But I don't know how many children were outside – outside from – from their parents. But I do know the feeling.

It's very – it's – I don't know what – I don't know what – exactly what – what – what I should say, this – what's on – what's on my mind the last – the last couple of days when I heard that the Inquiry is coming into – to Natuashish. But I was just hoping that – I hope whoever – whoever speaks in the Inquiry, that a lot of people share their stories as well.

P. RALPH: David, if you want to break for lunch now, maybe you can finish after lunch? Does that work for you, or do you wanna –

D. NUI: Do you wanna –

P. RALPH: – (inaudible.)

D. NUI: – do you wanna adjourn now?

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

D. NUI: Yeah, oh yeah.

Do you want to adjourn or is – do you want me to keep on going?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, we got lots of time.

D. NUI: What?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Lots of time.

D. NUI: Yeah, ehe.

There's a – I wanna – there's a lot of things that – that the government's – the government has to understand, where the Innu are coming from. And a lot of the people, a lot of the – the outsiders, like the people coming into our community to work, they have reason to come to – they have a reason to come into our community. There's a reason why they came here.

And if we don't – if we – if the – if those government people can't work with the Innu people, and you don't know anything about the Innu people, if you – you have no knowledge of any – any – where the Innu come from. A lot of teachers were told to have this awareness, Innu awareness, and I understand some of them don't want to participate in that. Even the social workers in the community. And this is the book that I'm talking about.

Their book is not – is not our culture. Everything – what we – who we are as Innu person, Innu people, is all from the heart of the Innu people. And we are not bad people. So this is the kinds of things that I strongly believe, that any outsider that comes to the community to work with the Innu, are you willing to work with the Innu people?

And I've seen it; they're not working with them. I've seen the policing not working with the Innu people; I've seen the social workers not working. And I don't know – I'm not sure about the school. That's including the health in the community, the – the clinic.

I came here to – to speak, not just about the social workers, I came here to talk about – to speak about the, like, the policing, the health, social workers, what they did – what they did in the past the last – the last few years, the last number of years.

To me, what I see in the community since we – since we moved to Natuashish over 20 years ago, it's not the leadership that's running the community. It's the social workers running the community; it's the policing running the community; and it's the health that's running the community.

And that's – this is what I believe and what I see. That's – that's – that's what I'm saying. That's the reason I'm saying that, what I see in the community. But I seen it in the past, back in Davis Inlet. And all those – all the strength that we had before, before they were involved, the Innu are pretty strong. When we came to – when we got contacts with the – with the missionaries, the police and everything, everybody, then I started to realize when I was growing up that we – we started to lose the strength that we had.

Now that I seen it – I seen the Elders that – I heard the Elders in the past that – most of them have passed away. It's not what – it's not what it – it is not what you believe in another person, it's what you believe in yourself, and that's what you need to do. And it is exactly what the people of Natuashish and Sheshatshiu are trying to do, what I say now. Because to me, that is – it's the leadership, the leadership need to – needs – to understand where we're going.

I – growing up – growing up with – growing up in Davis, Davis Inlet. So I seen – I seen a lot of alcoholism in the community when I was growing up. There were people drinking early in the mornings, like 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the mornings, all day, during all night

We eventually – eventually, in Davis, we start drinking as well because when we

were watching them drinking, it's – they're having – we were saying – I was saying to myself: They're having fun. Why can't I do the same?

So – but it didn't turn out that way; so all the friends that I drank with, it's like we created more problems in the community. That's because we were being – we were being abused in the school. Then, after a while then, the gas sniffing started to pick up in the community.

There's a lot of things that – going on in the community. There was suicides. I remember the first suicide in the community. And – we were coming from Goose Bay, from our meetings. During that afternoon and – this lady took his life. So – so everybody in the community rush where there was the – where was the shooting to, the – the woman took his life, to see exactly what's going on, and who was it.

Then I – there are more suicide after that, and a few more after that. And eventually, that I see – that I see in the community, so – people didn't – it seems like people didn't care after suicides – after suicide. These – these almost – they took it like normal.

There's – there were times that, too, that I – when I remembered all those things, all those things have happened to the Innu people, that I – sometimes I – being part of the leadership, I blame myself sometimes. We could have – we could have done more. There's always somebody – there's always somebody on the other side to – to do this; this is better, but it's not – but it wasn't. It wasn't. I seen a lot of things that – a lot of things happening, too, in the community, since the move.

And I wanna share – I wanna share the story this Elder told me. And he wasn't very happy when he walked into my office. That was when we had an office – when we still had an office in Davis. So this Elder told me that – can I come in and talk to you? I said come on in. I was – I was working with the project management for this community.

And this Elder told me that relocation is good for the community, were – good for the Innu people. But I wanna ask leadership: Don't speed up the process. I said – so I told him: Why? So he told me all those things, what I – what – what we were going to witness in the community in Natuashish.

He told me that: Since we've been here in Davis Inlet, the doors weren't – weren't lock. You could come in any time – any time of the day, and the curtains were wide open, and everybody welcomes you in their home. In Davis Inlet, you don't have to knock on somebody's door to walk in for a visit. That's back in Davis Inlet.

Then he told me the story about going into Davis – Natuashish. It's gonna be different. You're gonna lock your door. When you have – when you wanna have visitors, you're gonna have a knock on the door. Your curtains will be closed during the day and night. There'll be more drinking, there'll be more drugs, and, uh – and there'll be – there's gonna be a lot of fighting. And there's gonna be leadership fighting each other, and the – and the children will be fighting each other and the – and the people will get hurt and people will get killed.

All those 23 years that we've been living in the community, I seen it all. It's, uh – every time I thinks about that, then it's – it's very sad. I've – these – I say to myself: What is it that we can do? I think there's a lot to do here yet. One of the – the reason is to – one of the reason is to work together, whoever is willing to come to Natuashish and work with the Innu people. First you gotta learn where the Innu come from, and who are they. You just can't – you just can't walk into the community or try to take away the children – the childrens away from their parents or their guardians or their grandparents.

So it's what I see, the – it's the book that I don't like. We have university students and social workers coming in, and we have a policing coming in, the teachers coming in. Just one work, continue – continue the – the work that they're supposed to do, without asking: Who are those Innu people? They

don't want to do that. That's where the anger comes from. To me, it is.

So – so, I wanna – the other thing – the last thing I want to share is me and – me and my wife had – had raised two sisters. And, ah … one of them is 20 years old now, and the other one is 18, and those are sisters. I remember when they – when they first – when their mom, the first girl that they brought in to our home, is – she wanted – the first girl was wrapped up in blankets. Then her mom told us: Can you keep an eye on my daughter for a few hours, I want to spend some time with friends. Okay, I said. Me and my wife agreed to have – to keep her for a few hours.

Right now, that girl is 20 years old. We were only supposed to look for four hours – look after her. He got never – he got never picked up. He's 20 years old now. And the second one was – they brought the – I believe that the social workers had brought him over, so that we can take care of her 'til – have to find another home for her. Then the – so I don't know whether they had looked for a place for them.

And there's a little guy. The social – the Social Services brought him over four months ago. He's only two years old. We still have that little boy. Sometimes I told my wife, what have – what's – what's going on now for this little (inaudible). We were supposed to keep him for only four months, and four months is up now. It's almost, like, five months now. And I told my wife they probably forgot about him.

But – but I was – all those – those three kids that we've been looking after them, in our care. But I was always waiting for the social workers, if they ever want to take them away from the community. And they won't be going anywhere. They won't be leaving our house, they will not be taken away from our care, and they will – certainly will not be going outside this province. So I – we had a commitment to that ourselves. They're not going anywhere.

And there's this – there's another guy, he's actually under my brother's care, my brother Mark. And this guy, he's always – comes to our house. And he's spent more time with us, rather then spend it with his foster dad, who is (inaudible). And he's still at the house. And when I said earlier of this – when I was talking about the book, and the Innu have heart, I didn't have a book when I looked after those kids. Me and my wife looking after those kids. I have a heart.

So that's – it's hard, but it's not – but I want to tell everybody that, in this room, if they ever decided to remove those kids away from our care or away, to remove them from the community, or even outside the province – they're not going anywhere. And I'm – be honest with you all.

They're not going anywhere.

That's all I have to share with you all this morning.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mr. Nui, thank you for your perspectives about, not only child protection, but protection of the Innu way of life. You have given us a new way of looking at your community and your people.

We know that you appreciate how hard leadership of the Innu people, Innu Nation, have worked over many years to reach this point of examining how we should make sure that self-governance, and governance of Innu life should be done by the Innu.

We understand you when you say that the wrong book has been used, and it's now time to look at things through the Innu heart instead of just laws and other laws by non-Innu. We invite you to continue to think about how your community works, and in the future, if you have more to say, we want you to know that you're always welcome.

D. NUI: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: All right, we'll have a lunch break then. Back again –

P. RALPH: Around quarter to 2.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What time?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: 1:45.

Thank you.

Recess