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

English Transcript | Volume 8

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

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Recess

P. RALPH: That turns the microphone on.

GABRIEL RICH: Okay.

P. RALPH: Okay.

GABRIEL RICH: All right.

P. RALPH: And you – you're gonna – interpret – you're gonna speak in English and interpret yourself or do you want someone to interpret for you?

GABRIEL RICH: Let somebody else interpret me, because –

P. RALPH: In Innu-aimun? So you'll speak in English and they'll interpret Innu-aimun?

GABRIEL RICH: Yeah, in their dialect right?

P. RALPH: Yeah.

He'll speak English and you interpret Innu-aimun –

INTERPRETER NOAH: Mm.

P. RALPH: – okay? So that Joachim can understand.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yeah.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Noah and Gabriel Rich in Mushuau-aimun.]

GABRIEL RICH: I hope there's words for it (inaudible), that's why –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, we'll begin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll do that. We'll (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: What's that?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh.

Okay. Well, thank you for coming to speak to us this afternoon.

P. RALPH: He can speak English, so she's gonna – he'll speak English and she's gonna translate (inaudible).

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

GABRIEL RICH: Thank you.

I appreciate the time – that you guys gonna have time to listen to my story, and – about intergenerational trauma, where it happened. Like, I can tell you a part of my story, how I grew up in a broken home, in an alcoholic home.

So I wanna take the time to share something that – that really affected me, how my life went. And – and I don't think – like, I – I don't feel like I trust anybody, but I do, really. I really do trust everybody. That's why here I'm so comfortable by sharing my story, right?

Okay, I – I wanna share how I grew up when – when this all began. Well, when I was drinking very heavily and nearly lost my life to it. And – when I grew up in a broken, alcoholic home, I – I never had the ability to love and to be free for myself because I – I grew up with domestic violence and so much drinking and so much abandonment, and there's a lot of things I haven't experienced as a child. And when I grew up, that became a part of me. And with the domestic violence, you know, I became that person, too. I had those things with me, 'cause that's all I knew.

INTERPRETER NOAH: I'll try my best to translate some of it.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Interpreter Noah and Gabriel Rich in Innu-aimun.]

GABRIEL RICH: Okay.

I didn't know I became that part of a pain when I grew up. I was starting to hurt people I didn't even know of. I thought living that way was the only way of life, of living as an Innu person, because that's the way I was shown.

However, there was a point in my life, I had to go through some stuff in my life. I – I actually went through sexual abuse, like, from others. And that was a hard one for me, letting someone do something for me, which I had no idea at that time. And it really greatly affected me, how I grew up.

You know, I was sexually confused. I've never lost virginity until I was almost 18, and I thought I was doing good. But no, that part of me, that pain was always there, that – that guilt and shame. And it affected me so bad that this pain I was carrying, it was very difficult to open up to people.

And [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

At that time, I was drinking very, very heavily. I was numbing my pain, and I thought I was doing okay. But no, I was never okay. After trying a few attempts of suicide at that time, but, you know, I never had the guts to do it.

However – [Mushuau-aimun spoken] for me, I never experienced a really great childhood, like – just like everybody else. Like, I really wanted that, to have a healthy family. But I didn't. [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

So those things happened. I never got want I wanted. So I thought about every negative thing in my head. I was living in my head, thinking my parents never loved me, I was always alone. I always felt that loneliness, even though I had friends, I – I never knew how to be a friend as well. It's just the things I wanted from my friends, that's all.

How this intergenerational trauma affected me is so unreal. I almost lost my life attempting suicide because of the pain I was carrying and that's something I always think about my life. Like, to be honest with you, I have no idea how I end up right here. I'm almost 39 years old.

The government [Mushuau-aimun spoken] laws. It affected me too, this residential school stuff, it's affected me. It's kind of like a disease, it's like a wildfire spreading to one another. It's kind of like spreading pain to one another. That's how it is. That's the way I see it. And it's used on everything, masking residential schools with CSSD, you know. But I'll get to that point later.

Right now, I think about my life today, I did commit a suicide. I survived. I don't know how, but I did. Where living all that pain really affects my life performance. I didn't have nobody. I didn't have love. I didn't have the ability to provide those things, and I was the one that was causing domestic violence at that time as well, and I got arrested. And I pled guilty, along the way. It's very hard for me to – well, I did have a hard time moving on from that.

Now, today I look back. I think about these ideas all the time. I see other kids, I see my other friends committing suicide because – this intergenerational trauma. I always wonder how would it would be like if they were still alive today, but that's it. That's the reality.

Along the way, when I was 25 years old, I did some things that I am not proud of, you know. I was very, very sexually confused still, even though I was with a woman. But, the good thing is I – I never took action to any of it. I only thought about it. That almost ended my life there as well. Went drinking so heavily. That was my drug of choice, is drinking. And I can honestly say it leads nowhere, nothing to good, nowhere.

I see – I see a lot of kids taken away as well. In my experience, when they come back home, they only speak English. Something's not right there. Imagine these – imagining those kids, what I went through is the same thing what the kids are going through right now, and some has succeeded and some didn't.

It's terrible.

The way I see it, how this intergenerational trauma, we lost so many lives through that process, through residential schools. They – the phrase was: Kill the Indian in a child.

When I think about it, I think about assimilating our people in – into their system. That didn't work. That didn't work at all.

As you all know, a lot of people has lost their lives through genocide. With my experience, I can relate to those stories. So far I have – I have been here, I've been listening. When I think about the government having those laws pass through, where it happened, how it

happened, and it's just only for them to generate their own revenue, right. But that didn't work that way. A lot of families been destroyed because of that system. A lot of trauma has been passed on to one another. A lot of drinking, a lot of pain, a lot of struggling. There was absolutely no support system in there, in place. No safe place.

I had a good long thought about this, an hour and a half I had when I went home; and I put down a lot of notes on what needs to be improved. So I only share a little bit about myself this morning, like, right now. So, I see where it's coming from. So I'm gonna go through with the notes.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Noah and Gabriel Rich in Mushuau-aimun.]

I'm so sorry, like, I keep forgetting my translator.

But what they should have done, the government, is they need to provide support services, babysitters for parents that needs to go to recovery for their drinking. But not the other way around. They just took children, and caused more pain and that caused more suicide and being lonely and – and blaming and all this, blaming and contempt.

That's the way it should have been. The Social Services should've appeared, right – that person when there's a lot of heavy – heavily partying where there's kids around – they should have showed up and said – either a police officer or a social services worker – they should have – they should have been equipped with addiction.

Sometimes it's not the law they should be abiding. Sometimes it's a humanitarian they should be doing as well, being there for somebody. They're not equipped for that.

What they should have done, is they should have been their person. Yeah, jail are safe only for one day. But we need to be there for that person that needs support, whatever it is they're going through. Because this pain is what keeps me drinking, the pain I had carried. I had to let go all that pain to – to live this new lifestyle, right, in my recovery.

However, parents going through intergenerational trauma is a lot. It's all connected to – one pain to another. I see that every day. It's not just around here, but I see it out in the world, outside of my reservation. I see it everywhere. But the whole point is – is these homes that we should be focused on providing help.

The Social Services should have shown up at somebody's door: Do you need help? Do you want me to go get a babysitter? Do you need something? What do you need? Those are the type of things that we should be getting, instead of going to their homes and taking kids away just like that – using officers.

I shouldn't have been that way. If you want to help somebody, you should have been doing that. That's the way I think about the government. They're not helping right now. The law is still on today and it's still continue to cause an effect in these homes. I know that for sure, I've seen it.

And for example, Social Services didn't provide any safe recommendations. Just placed kids at unknown places and possibly caused suicide to being loneliness and more pain is spread through close family members and siblings, because cause and effect. Drinking and probably suicide – that's the other thing. Today's laws, that needs to be changed to the Indigenous laws, to be comfortable and requires not to hurt anybody. That's the kind of law that we need. It's not to hurt people.

And they need to have a support system – all the time. If the government can take away a kid in 24 hours, seven days a week, if they can do that, they need to have that kind of services 24-7 as well. The white laws shouldn't be affecting Indigenous laws, because you're in our jurisdiction, you're in

our lands. It should have Indigenous laws only. And it's all over across Canada.

Indigenous laws need to be set for Indigenous-only to provide support for whatever the cause may be. You wanna set things right, and that is the only way, and across Canada, for natives, so people can feel safe and ask for help whenever it's needed. That's what people matter first, and safety.

You know, what – what I'm trying to say is – is – is enable police officers and social services workers or whoever is working with the government, with child protection, whatever – they need to be doing that as well. Sometimes when people commit a crime – because sometimes people go through something, to do that. That enables people.

I have so much ideas about this Inquiry and how the governments should be setting laws. They need Indigenous people working behind those closed doors with the other lawmakers, with the Indigenous people who had experienced these kinds of things. What works and what doesn't work.

The white laws today that is being used with us today, is still in effect. It's always about masking the original idea to input to a new idea, but it's still the same, like residential school. It works with CSSD. Like they say, foster-care home is the new residential school. We don't know what happens to that kid. The kids won't open up because they're in a lot of fear, because CSSD was – does the background checks, whatever.

No, it should have been the other way around. It should have been the quality of life in a home. That's what it should have been looked at. Now sometimes it's overlooked. Just because they don't have a criminal record, yeah, they're good. No, that's not the case. It's the quality of life in – inside the Indigenous home only. That's the way it should have been looked at.

Like I said, white laws shouldn't be applied to us when we stepping into our lands, 'cause that's our jurisdiction. The Indigenous laws needs to be set, and people – like, for myself, I understand a lot and I feel somebody's pain when somebody is sharing with me. I can't name them. That's confidential. I keep it confidential 'cause it's just the way I am, neh.

With my experience with intergenerational trauma, it connects to a lot of things, a lot of ways. How to drink, drinking, boozing. Nobody is given the opportunity how to fight back addiction. That's the way I see it.

It's so clever that the government set these laws to kill an – to kill an Indigenous person one by one. That's a way of somebody killing somebody in the legal – in the legal way. That's the way I see it. And one leader dies, one, another. I see it happening. I never said anything.

I lost my parents. I lost my dad through drinking. He had a stroke. There's so much drinking. And I lost my sister through cancer, and I lost a few of my friends through suicide. I've lost so much, what meant the most to me, because this intergenerational trauma, it connects the pain and not knowing how to deal with it. Not knowing how to deal with it, that's an issue.

I know, so, I've been on recovery for 10 years and I've been sober for five years. I can share with any story I want. I can talk about myself. I don't talk about other people. I talk about myself all the time because I put a lot of trust and faith in my program.

Today I have a – a good life. I – my family, they're not suffering the way I did. I'm providing a clean home, sobriety. I want my kids to – I want my kids to be happy. I want kids to have something that I didn't have while I was growing up. That's what I'm really grateful for today and I'm working

really hard for it, on my sobriety. There is hope.

What I went through, I can relate just about anything. And asking for help is something – is always there but it's always a different kind of help when you ask for it. I just want to say, you know, my name is Gabriel and I'm an intergenerational trauma survivor and we can change. You can change the system, we can change how you look at things now. But you need to understand this kind of way of life – what our lives – our ancestors had a really peaceful life before the Europeans came in and started giving us things to deal with, start abusing things. I can only imagine where it happened, how it happened.

We had a peaceful life once. There was only hard work and providing, having families, teach our young kids how to be hard workers, you know, fixed marriages. But we don't have that today anymore. What I'm trying to say is we can change back into when we have Indigenous laws into our own lands.

Even though we're not self-government yet, but the government should be working on a taste of our own laws, how to help out each other, how to be there for each other, how to feel safe again. We need to feel that safe, in a secured way, where we can release our feelings to somebody, how we are feeling. That's what we need, but we don't have a lot around here. But I'm trying my best.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Noah and Gabriel Rich in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Interpreter Noah and Gabriel Rich in Mushuau-aimun.]

Okay.

GABRIEL RICH: Yeah, that's where – that's where my thoughts are. I just want to share a little bit myself because it's – the stuff I do carry is – is a lot of brutal, intense stories that I – I have and I can share them by detail – detail – every detail about it, the stuff that I've been going through. And there's – there's a lot of it.

The whole point of this is like, I know I was gonna die if I gonna keep on drinking. That's part of intergenerational trauma, right? Because I know one thing I do remember is when I was drinking, I was placing other interest to someone and police were called on me and – and now there's – there's kind of like, seven police officers pointing a gun at me. You know, if – I knew if I made a wrong move and that's where – I wouldn't be here. But I did the right thing just by listening to them, right?

I can tell you right now, that night, they saved my life. That's one thing I'm grateful for, I'm still alive today. And I don't regret it, but I have to accept that this is the life I have today. And all the pain that I was carrying, I had to let all that go to somebody. And it's not just because I wasn't letting go. I – when I was letting go, I didn't know I was helping somebody else as well, through sharing, eh?

And it really, really did mess me up. I can tell you from when I was three years old all the way to 25 years old, the stuff that I was doing. Being in pain, having sexual – sexual intercourse with somebody when I was young kid, like what it was done to me, and when I was drinking heavily, when I was causing domestic violence while I was drinking. I'm not that type of guy when I am so – when I am sober, to have caused all that. It's the stuff that I was carrying. I was carrying rage, anger and resentment, hatred, everything. You name it, those are the things I was carrying.

Those were the things that I did. What happened to me, when I was hurting, I was hurting people, too. I was passing on pain to somebody. I had to cut that off. I'm not getting younger, but you know …

I'm well-educated. I went to school twice. I finished it twice with two different trades. I'm a mechanic and I'm – I drive heavy equipment now, and it's not just only that, but I do carry some of the things that I have with me. I have a big, loaded backpack with lots of goodies that I wanna share with people. It's like me, right? I'm going on an adventure; I'm going places. I have to keep meeting people and that's what my life is now today.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Noah and Gabriel Rich in Innu-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.] I need to get my glasses.

GABRIEL RICH: Although I am happy to be here to – to share some of my story, what I went through, I only can share a bit – a little bit, parts of it, right? What I can share are really, really heavy stuff if I wanted to, but that would take a lot of time, and I wanna give the opportunity to other people to share that, as well. Like, I'm thoughtful and courteous that way and I wanna thank you for listening and the stuff that I input, and hopefully it is heard.

And now I just wanna tell people that you're – you're not the only one that's feeling this way. It's like, we all have this thing that we carry every day, and – and it's tiring, right? And there is also always help around the corner; just gotta reach out. To me, it is – that's what I had to do. And it is possible to have a good life, to have a happy life, you know. Breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma, it's very, very challenging. It's up to me to change that so my kids don't have to go through that.

I don't have to provide any domestic violence to my family anymore. I don't want them to see what I saw when I was a young kid. I was scared. I was scaring – okay, I was scared shitless and being neglected. Growing up with that, I was starting to affect one of my kid and I didn't like it. That's how I grew up. So I knew I had to do something about myself. Not with others, myself. That's all I – pretty much I can do, is today – is to keep working on myself.

And what I like to see is to have the Indigenous laws input into here, provincial, Newfoundland and Labrador, to have – to feel kids safe and to have the right people on the job that are passionate about it, about their jobs, helping people. And I want – what I really, really need is, I want kids to have a very good future. I don't wanna see kids to get hurt again or any type of way what I went through.

It's not a very good place to be, where I was, and that almost led me to suicide. Even though I see some of the others did commit, you know, it's – we all have something that's very heavy that we carry around. And I know that for a fact because I've been through them as well. But I knew – but I knew I had to open up early because it's either that or I'm going to die. That's it. Period.

Then another voice would have been lost. You know, I'm always thinking, always. In a moment, I am. Thank you for your time. And remember, I'm an intergenerational survivor, and I need to break that cycle.

And – thank you.

P. RALPH: Did you wanna –

INTERPRETER NOAH: I'll try. It's longer.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: He's a politician.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, first of all, thank you very much, Gabriel, for sharing your story. It's certainly a – one of strength, courage and resilience.

INTERPRETER NOAH: I'm – I'm – I'm lost. Sorry.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Gabriel's got you beat out this afternoon.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.] What did you say?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you for sharing your story and for your courage, strength and resilience this afternoon.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You talked about intergenerational trauma, which is a very important part of the Inquiry's work to look at, to understand and to make some recommendations.

Too much, Christine – Justine?

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yeah, I'm getting tired.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You talked about intergenerational trauma.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Can you say that again?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You talked about intergenerational trauma. It's a very important part of the Commission's work, to look at the history of where that came from.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We have heard some of the history from the Elders, certainly in Sheshatshiu, so far.

As a Commission of Inquiry, we will be looking at ways to support the communities with the issue of intergenerational trauma.

With regard to the laws, you may know that the Innu Nation has applied to the government to develop their own law, which the Inquiry supports.

We are – we have already heard the Innu in terms of ways to do child protection in a better way, according to the Innu way. And I think that self-government, as you mentioned, is what the Innu need to ultimately get to.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Can you repeat that again?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Hmm? Oh, repeat that again. That –

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Gabriel talked about self-government.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Which is, I think, is very important for the Innu Nation, how it needs to be the Innu laws, not government laws.

One last thing I wanted to mention that you talked about – is providing help to people, while the family are still in their home.

INTERPRETER NOAH: Providing to people …?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, while they're in their home; not taking the children out.

INTERPRETER NOAH: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I think it's safe to say that as Commissioners, we – we would certainly be looking at that in a very strong sense. It needs to be that focus, I think it's fair to say.

So thank you again. Of course, you can come back at any time if you wish. You just let us know, and I'll see if any – if the other two Commissioners have anything to add to my comments.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I also express my thanks for Gabriel's contribution to this Inquiry.

I thank Justine for her hard work in helping us out in your language. One day you'll get paid – one day you'll get paid. Not sure when. But you may have to see Nympha; she'll pay you.

Everybody has made us very sad, but everybody has made us very happy. Sad because you have suffered so much, but happy because we can see so much strength in the community. So we will tell that to the government – that it came from ordinary people.

So, like, 10 minutes and we'll be back again.

Recess