

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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[redacted]

Recess

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay. [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

[redacted]: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

I don't know where to begin. It's too much hard and heavy for the last two days, listening some of the stories triggered me as well yesterday. But I will tell it as I goes too – too long on my – what I have to say.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

[redacted]: And my siblings as well.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[redacted]: I begin my name. My name is [redacted]. [redacted] was my maiden name. Raised in Utshimassit, meaning of Davis Inlet or place of the boss.

As for me, I grew up as well in an alcoholic family. My late parents were alcoholics. There six of us but two of my siblings were traditionally adopted by other couples. Another one was raised my late grandfather and my aunt. My grand – my grandfather was only living grandparent on my late mom's side. My late dad parents also passed away when he was a boy.

My dad was raised by his late uncle, and later when he grows up, he lived with – with other married couples. And my mom's mother passed away as well when she was small. Mom only had one sister. My mom was raised by her aunt on her dad's side and my other aunt was raised by her other aunt on their mom's side. As she was grow up, my mom came to live with her uncles on her mom's side. She went with them whenever they goes to country. Later, while my mom grows up as a woman, me – there she and her dad met in the country. That's the only story that mom and dad told us.

So I will begin. It was hard growing up. I witnessed many times what is going on, for the violence, abuse. Sometimes my siblings would go – would go and stay at our grandfather and our aunt or other family members to stay with them, because that's where we feel safe and no – no loudness or arguments.

But when my parents sober, they should get us and take us home. It would only be a couple days to feel safe, happy and enjoy to stay home with them. And my mom would usually look for her cousins to look after us when it's time for them to go out drinking again. Sometimes babysitters would take us to my grand – grandfather's home. So we would stay there couple days, being like that, over and over. Later, then, there's no babysitters, just us, my siblings.

Whenever we stayed at my grand – my grandfather and my aunt, my aunt would give us to wear, feed, clean. She would only wash our hairs and give us clean clothes. Sometimes I don't bother to take my siblings to our grandfather; we just stayed home and stayed with our drunken parents.

When I was a teenager, I would then take my siblings to our grandfather and leave them there. I wanted to go out as well. And to start – I started sniffing gas with other kids. Later, my brother came along.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Later my brother saw, too?

[Dialogue between Interpreter Byrne and [redacted] in Mushuau-aimun.]

[redacted]: The only – I love my parents – is when we go to the country. This is – sometimes they drink at the country but sometimes they don't. When I thinks about this hard life I had, how can I – how can our parents do this to us, about neglect, abandoned on us, not cared for us.

That's – that's one reason why my siblings was taken by this family. This family went where we stayed. He said we were only ones there. He said we were only ones there, the house was cold and he sees my sister. He sees my sister sitting on the cold floor crying. He said he took my sister and looked for a blanket, then wrapped her and took her to his home. I think my sister was only 2 years old when she was taken by him and his wife. She was never returned back to our home. Even my parents never asked to take her back and get her.

I don't quite remember at that time what really happened. My sister adopted parents told us this, why they raised her. I guess they were the social workers, took care and keep my sister warm and safe place and to be raised. Since then, we always goes with them when they goes to the country, that then we get to see our sister all the time.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Byrne and [redacted] in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE (providing English translation): And she was thinking about, you know, when the – they took the child, it's just like Social Services to me. Just like social workers taking my child – my sister away. And she said every time they go out to the – oh, I'm talking in English. I'm supposed to say it in Innu.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[redacted]: And today I think it's – it's – it's about – it's like how does CSSD serve with the members and parents, but different way they save – they serve their system in a wrong way. Not like what the man and his wife protect my sister. They raised her good, and not having any mental issues like CSSD did to our children. Those people were using their own book.

And in 1983, July 24, unexpected news, which I never expected to hear. My husband aunts, there were three of them, came to where we stayed at – at his grandparent's home. I was then with – with my husband, we were young and seven months pregnant. One of our aunt told me to sit down and wanted to tell me something. She was crying as she told me.

She said my parents were – were drowned. I got up and ran away outside screaming, shouting. I said: You can no hurt us. And I saw people came toward me. I saw a few people came toward – to me. One of my mom's cousins came running to me and take me inside. She cried with me and there were also family members were inside and telling me to wait my grandpa to be here.

I don't know what was happening to me; didn't remember. I woke up in a couch. I told my husband: Is it true what you aunts had told me. And he didn't – he didn't say

anything. He just said: Wait you grandpa. My uncle and aunt went to get him. I waited and could not believe I only had my parents 17 years. It was early to leave us.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Byrne and [redacted]. [redacted] in Mushuau-aimun.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: They were only – like, once they were growing up, she said there was only 17 years.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[redacted]: Sometimes they makes me mad. It would be different if they never take that drink.

Today I miss them so much. I only think my dad – I think my dad only every father's day and my mom on mother's day. Especially when I delivered my first child. And most when I needed a place to put me on their shoulders, holding onto them, especially when I'm hurt.

My late grandpa and aunt raised my siblings, until they grow up to be on their own. They, too, have difficulties when they reach their teenage years.

Social Services didn't step in to take over because grandpa and aunt were there. And again, I guess there were – they were. I think their – they used their own book at that time again, for us.

As we live and continue to move on, something happened to my brothers as we grow enough to be take our responsibilities. My brother went to school at Sheshatshiu. Later, when he returned back, he wanted to tell me something.

He said: Don't tell anyone. Don't tell anyone. And I said: Yes, I won't. And then he said: Do you remember Brother [redacted]? I said: Yes, what about him? He said: He – he hurt me.

I thought he was fighting him. I didn't – I didn't really understand what he meant at that time. Right away I said: I will tell our grandpa. Then he said: You said you will not tell. He told me to go. I never asked or questioned him after.

Later, in a few years, he telled it. He telled it. I know what I said, is that when you told – when you tried – I told her – I told him: Is that what you tried to tell me? He said yes. I said to him: Now I understand. The hurt, and me not understanding it, I was so mad at myself and mad at my late parents for not being there and not seeing my brother went through.

My other brother went through it as well but he never mentioned it to me. I never experienced the Social Services to be involved in our lives when our parents were still alive. They were not even involved with the family that took my sister and raised her. Like I said, maybe there were – they were Innu-way government and was using – using their own book?

I'm thankful for this Inquiry that is finally happening. In the beginning, when it was made a discussion, I was on council. A meeting was held at Halifax; IRT main-table meeting; government officials were there. Whether that was the beginning. And I speak – I speak in the meeting and I – I said in the table: No good when – when newborns are taken out of hospitals and not telling – and letting know – know – letting moms know about it. And that the social workers sneaking and kidnapping – kidnapping. That's what I said in the meeting.

But, to me, that's the way I look at it. I feel hurt and pain in my heart, what's been happening to young mothers. One of them – one of them was my niece. Her baby was taken out of hospital. My sister granddaughter, never sees her until when she was about probably four or five years old.

That's what I think that is also why some – why some young parents are having mental issues. One of them is my niece – my niece. She will never be normal again. She will live with it for the rest of her life. She's been ruined by it, what she went through.

I was young mother once, too. My husband grandmother helped me with my first child and took over to raise him. Without any asking me, she just raised him. Like I said, they used their own – own policies, rules, their book. I thanked her for that. But my child stays with us sometimes, with no issues. Was all good to his growing up in years.

I also have my nephew who was in that system. He was damaged by given the meds – medications. Some that involved with CSSD were given the meds. Why given, I always thought – I always thought that. I look at it, is murder because when they were returned home they were not themself.

My nephew took his life not long ago, after he came home. Others were froze to death for wandering on the ice and got lost. They were my relatives. I wonder what is – what they thought and what kind of information they given while they were there. CSSD turned them into a mentally and physical – to them – to their lives.

I remember last time my nephew called me, asking money to get his smokes. I told him to get it. I gave him $20. That was the last time I see him. Two days later, he took his life. That is why I think CSSD murdered those youths, for giving them those meds and got mentally ill.

Today, I'm just – I'm – I'm just watching what is happening as we struggle to be in happiness and not hearing this and that for the youths, not hurting themselves. Especially the young ones, the very young ones.

I'm still involved in helping and assisting in any way I can. I am a mother, foster mother, grandmother, great-grandmother. Two foster children, my niece and nephew, and two traditional adoption of my grandchildren. I have 16 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Do you believe that?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nope.

[redacted]**:** I was – I was alcoholic as well. I've been through a lot as well. And one day, I stopped drinking because I don't want my other children to be – because I want my children to be safe and feel the love and care I have for them. And – and from not hurting themselves, no more taking that devil drink. No use, it's all getting me worse.

I fight for – for it almost 17 years now. Both my husband and I, thankful every day, especially our grandchildren. We did it to them as well. I have three children of my own and my first child took his life.

That is also why I stopped drinking, I don't wanna see my child to do the same. I want them to have a grandma and grandpa, that my children don't have and the door is always open for them, especially my grandchildren. And I want to see them, what they will become.

My – my grand – my grandchild will be graduating this – this year in June, and I'm – I'm happy for him, but at the same time, I feel – I feel sad because he's – he was the son of – of my child that he took his life.

Also, I think the parents should be given chances when their kids taken away. Not just following their books. I believe Innu book is strong without any to-do list to be followed.

Thank you for your – for hearing I had to share. It's me, [redacted], and my hard life.

Thanks again.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:
Tshenashkumitin, [redacted] and Nympha.

I know, Nympha, this is very difficult, to translate for a long time and we're very grateful that you could be here supporting [redacted].

Again, we have learned so much from what you had to say, your hard experiences, and the strength you have in raising your family.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.] I'm calling you a judge now.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You are following a good path and you are letting others know that there is much hope. So thank you very much.

[redacted]: Mm-hmm.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Ten minutes, please, everybody.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.