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

English Transcript | Volume 9

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Welcome, Mr. Green. We're very, very happy to have you here. Thank you for your attendance.

Just be comfortable and speak as if you were talking to Anastasia and just having a conversation with her. Whatever you

thought you wanted to say, what's ever's on your mind, we're very happy to receive it. It doesn't have to be about child protection, but it can be. It can be about your life, it can be about the community, whatever you'd like the Commission to learn about your life, Innu life, community life.

Thank you for coming.

B. RICH GREEN: Thank you.

My name is Bernard Rich originally, but biologically, today my name is Bernard Green, for the record.

I was taken in 1973, '74? And I was put in a foster home for four years under no legal basis and I got adopted when I was eight. And the only reason I didn't come back is because I lost my language.

I was in foster home for, like, 12 years and in those times I lost my culture, language, family, everything. My name's not even Bernard.

Yeah, for the 12 years I lived there they were – there was a lot of abuse going on: physical abuse, psychological abuse. I think psychological abuse is probably the worst. Today I have PTSD, ADHD, maybe OCD, a few other things, maybe.

But for the longest time after I left, there was – I knew something was wrong. Something wasn't right, so I just – I started self-healing. I did a lot of reading and attending conferences.

Yeah, throughout my journey I met a lot of people, learned a lot of lessons – life lessons. I've been back since 1992, almost 30 years – 30 years now. I was born in Sheshatshiu.

I know what happens when you send kids to foster homes. I know what happens while they're in there and when they leave, what condition they're in when they leave. The whole idea is to assimilate the Native people into a European way of life, I guess.

But I was – I had to go to church. I used to go to church when I was a kid, but there was something about it that I – I didn't believe. I didn't – it doesn't resonate with me. You know, something about it that wasn't genuine, I call it.

So I didn't follow Christ or Christianity, but I knew I had my – at that time after I left my foster home I moved to Toronto and because I didn't believe in God or Christianity and I didn't know about my own culture, Native culture. I was – it's hard to say – like, stuck in between like – I called it an empty shell. At the time I called myself an empty shell, there was no – I had no religious – I don't know what they call it – agnostic or atheist, something like that.

And then I met a – I was introduced to a Native woman, and she introduced me to Native culture and that really resonated with me. It made a lot of sense – a lot more sense than Christianity. And then from there I got spiritual, and I got adopted – again – by Iroquois people. And they give me a – a name, the translation means: he's coming back.

After I was introduced to Native culture, I just started – got more and more and more, and then I think I accidentally found my family just – almost by accident. I don't know if you guys remember, there was a show called – a radio show, talk show – Ron Pumphrey had a show years ago something like child – some kind of child find.

And my foster mother at the time, heard it on the radio and gave a description – heard a description of my biological sister, of me, and she knew she was talking about me so she called me in Ontario – at the time I was living – and I called the radio station and we talked for the first time in, like, 20 years.

I came back, I think it was April ’92, for a few months and I ended up staying for three years. And I went back to Ontario, Alberta, came back again. But it took for – it took a while to realize this is my home, like, where I belong.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: When you came back in ’92, was that to Natuashish or Sheshatshiu?

B. RICH GREEN: Davis Inlet.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

B. RICH GREEN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

B. RICH GREEN: Yeah. Yeah.

And that was a really big thing for me. Like – like, I never had no brothers or sisters or – everything was taken, like, so … like, I have a biological brother, a sister, my dad, his family, my real family – biological family. Like, that meant a lot to me, so I finally found a place to call home. It took a few years because I never really had a home.

So, like I had – I was in a lot of different fosters homes, different addresses for – up until my 20s, and came back here. And even then it took a couple years to realize, like, yeah, this is – this is my home now. Home. A place to call home.

But it’s a good thing I came back, ’cause while I was living in Toronto, I think the lowest point in my life was because I had no emotional attachment to people. I – it’s hard – it’s gonna be hard to say this – might be hard to listen to, but – I never thought of – I never thought of people as people. They were – like, in my eyes, they were just objects.

That sounds – I know it sounds – it doesn’t sound good, but I seen people as objects. Like, the way I feel about this box of tissue or that thing right here, or this, that’s how I felt about other people. And that was the lowest point in my life and I still remember that today and it’s a – it’s a good thing I came back because I’m not sure what would’ve happened if I stayed out there.

And there’s words in my vocabulary that I don’t have, that you have, I don’t. Like – like, when you – like, when you say: I miss somebody – you miss somebody, I never had that in my vocabulary. That wasn’t part of my vocabulary.

I suffer from envy; because, I came back and everybody would come and see me and visit me and say – they would tell me: I’m – I just came back from visiting my mom, and that’s something I’ll never be able to experience. So, I get envious.

Yeah, I’m – I did a lot of healing since I’m back. I was – I met my partner, we were together 27 years. She passed away three years ago. My son passed away two years ago. I’m not sure how exactly I’m hanging on. Makes to wonder why I’m still here, how I’m still here, why I came back, and I could never figure it out. I’m just existing.

Even today I still – I still take meds for my conditions. There’s no cure for PS – PTSD, so.

All my – all my readings are true. I like reading documentaries and facts. Because I was on my own, I had to do my own thinking, and as a young man I felt – I felt like an old man inside a young man’s body, ’cause I had to grow up fast and think fast and think on my own. And today I feel like a young man in an old man’s body.

Hmm. I think the psychological abuse was the worst, because at the end – and the more I think about it, like, lately I’ve been thinking about it, and the thing, what was missing in my life, was love.

I remember telling my grandson just the other day, I said: I love you, when he left, eh? And I was thinking to myself, I don’t

remember anyone saying that to me, growing up.

And I was always alone. I remember dying a few times – I should've been dead a few times. When I was six years old I almost got lost at sea. We were kids playing at the Atlantic Ocean in the wintertime and we got stranded. But we could've got stuck and probably died, or crushed between those ice. We're just kids, right, like, six years old.

And I remember my foster parents found us, and I don't – I don't know why, but they were giving me shit. Like I was supposed to take care of this kid. But they were supposed to be taking care of me. So, yeah, it was messed up.

So I pretty much grew up on my own. All my foster brothers and sisters, they're all gone. They're all dysfunctional too. It was so many kids that came through that foster home. So many.

Yeah, I hope – well, I only came forward just to give you an insight of what happens when you sent children away. Because after you guys leave you don't know exactly what happens, or who they are or who their neighbours are, who their relatives are. They can come over and do whatever.

I suppose it's a little different today, though. This is back in the '70s. So, maybe today is different. No one's ever came and checked up on me. I don't remember any social worker coming over and saying … Hmm. I don't remember that.

Uh … I don't know. That's pretty much it, I guess. If it makes any sense at all. Hope it helps though.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: It does help, and thank you so very much.

Like so many people, you're very remarkable, strong and resilient. And in all kinds of witnesses who have spoken to us we see that quality in everyone. We're – we're so happy that you could give us that insight of how dehumanizing being taken from your culture, your community, your family, your people – what – how that happens and how that happens so quickly.

So who would ever want to continue those kind of laws? Who would ever want to inflict so much pain and hurt as you have experienced, and many other people have experienced. So that is really the task of this Commission. Look at all the ways that we can get information from Innu, the Innu experience and let – let you know that we are grieved by the suffering you had to have, but also we are so fortunate that you are here to tell us that.

Michael?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes.

Well, thank you for that, Bernard, and as my colleague just said, you know, we're really sorry to hear of the kind of experiences that you had as a young person and growing up.

I could never begin to imagine what it must have been like for you. We're really sorry to hear that that has happened to you. But thank you for sharing your story today, and that will help us as we go forward with this Inquiry.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Anastasia?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Thank you, Bernard, for sharing your story.

I – again, I share what Mike and Jim have said, and I just want to pass along, too, that I am sorry what – what you have gone through, and I am glad that you are here and to be able to – to take the first step of speaking about it.

And I do hope that you will come back and speak again. Thank you.

Tshenashkumitin.

B. RICH GREEN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin.

We'll have a short break now. Thank you so much.

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