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

English Transcript | Volume 12

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

Tuesday | Sheshatshiu | 6 June 2023

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sir.

INTERPRETER NUNA: Penote.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Penote – do you want to do another prayer?

ELDER ANTUAN: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

ELDER ANTUAN: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We got – we've gotta let the young fellers learn how to do it right.

ELDER ANTUAN: Good morning.

I'd like to say a – a prayer each one of you who is doing the – a – the work for this group in – in Sheshatshiu. I also want to pray each one of you to have improve your work and also to find a way to pure ourselves in good health and good spirit. I'll just say the Our Father. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Have a good day.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Sir.

C. URQUHART: Good morning everyone. We are going to start the public session here, again with Anne, our fabulous translator.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

C. URQUHART: And this morning we have Joanna Michel here to – to tell us her experiences. You may notice that Commissioner Anastasia Qupee is not here this morning as she's assisting a private session.

And I'll just quickly remind everyone that these sessions are being recorded for the purposes of the Inquiry only, and the speaker will have opportunity to have that recording shared if they – only if they want it to be shared.

And the name of the speaker will not be used unless they've asked us to share their name. It's entirely the choice of the speaker how public they want their story to be shared, and we'd ask that everyone respect their choices.

Thank you, everyone. Please help yourself to tea, coffee and enjoy.

Thank you.

Joanna, go ahead.

[Dialogue between J. Michel and Unidentified Speaker in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

J. MICHEL: Okay.

My name is Joanna Michel, and I'm a resident of this community, Sheshatshiu. I was born in 1964 to parents Anna Michel and Philip Michel. And my father was a carpenter. He built the houses in the old part of Sheshatshiu you see here. And my mother was a stay-home mom. And 1969, I – I went to school in Peenamin McKenzie School. And my parents were alcoholics. I grew up – my grandfather looked after me for a long time. And – until my grandfather was crippled with arthritis, he couldn't – wasn't able to walk. He – he was in the wheelchair.

And I grew up in a very violent home and a lot of times I had to sleep outdoors underneath the house because of my – my father was very abusive to my mother. And I lived like that for a number of years. And there was three – seven of us; it was only girls in the family. And I was – I was a human shield for my mother. I always wanted to protect her. And I grew up like that, in very angry – angry home. I saw many things that a child shouldn't see, and I also came – became an angry child.

And a lot of times I went outside to play, to escape from all this – to escape all the – what was happening in my – inside my home. And a lot of times my escape was to take care of my crippled grandfather and stay with him while everybody was gone drinking. I was – started at a very, very young age, to take responsibility for caring for my grandfather.

And after living like that for a number of years, in the 70s I got taken away. I got taken away where my daughter lives in that house today. The house is almost like, 50 years old, 40, 50 years old. I was taken away outside from there 'cause I was missing a lot of school. And at the time, the principal was a – a nun. And she was concerned that I was missing a lot of school and I was – because I couldn't sleep very well at night, all that – all the drinking all night was going on. I became – I was sleeping somewhere – someone else's, my cousin or my family house, just to be safe.

When I got taken away there, I – there was two – two male social workers. They told me that: We're gonna take you to a better place. And they took me to the school where – in the principal's office, and told me: You can't go back. You can't go back home. We're gonna take you across the river and that's where you're gonna be placed and that's where you're gonna – it's gonna be your home for now. For how – how long, I – I – I didn't know. But it became eight years that I stayed in the – the junior dorm in North West River.

In the eight years – I remember I was eight years old. And I begin to experience emotional, physical, sexual, psychological abuse. My world became torn. I now didn't have a mother, I didn't have a – a dad, and I didn't have grandparents that love me. It was all foreigners from England, and some of them were from Scotland, some were from the States and some were from Ontario.

When I first encountered what has happened to me, I found it very difficult. Bath times were really hard because that's when the sexual abuse happened. I didn't understand, I was just a – a small kid. Why is this happening to me? Why? And I be – I began to question what and I couldn't – I couldn't tell anybody. And that went on for about three or four years. I had a hard time. I thought it was only me that was – was happening to, but it wasn't.

I became a – a very scared child. I was afraid sometimes to – to sleep. I was afraid someone would come in my room and – but it always happened in the – on bath times. It never happened in the room because there were other – there were other girls in – we shared a room. There was about four girls. And I didn't know it happened to them, too, and we never talk about it, 'cause I thought that if I told somebody, that it would be a bad thing. As I learned to keep it all quiet.

I was always confused for what happened to me. Why is this happen to me? So my escape that I used, I used music. I had a record player for Christmas. I used to go in my room and listen to the music and it made me feel good; made me feel good about myself. And I was always trying to cope, looking after my two other siblings that were there, younger siblings. I – I wanted to make sure that they were always okay. And I wanted to be a – protect – protective parent, I guess.

One time I was going downstairs and my baby sister didn't like vegetables, and they were force-feeding her and she was throwing up. And they took her food and shoved it – shoved it in her mouth. And I told the worker to stop it, to stop doing that to her, stop hurting her. She's not used to having vegetables. We never had vegetables when – growing up. I find that very hard. I – I saw a lot of things there that the – the other kids, how they would pin them down and smack them around and make their nose bleed.

My other older sister, they did that thing to her and I grabbed the worker and hauled – I grab her on her back and hauled her hair, trying to get her off my sister. I was crying. She was – she was hitting her with her backhand and making her nose bleed.

And I found that really hard to – we used to go home Christmastime and we used to go home Easter time, and the summers, we go on summer vacation. A lot of the stuff that was happening in the – in the dorm was – I began to run away. I didn't wanna be there, I didn't feel safe. And they would call the people that were upgrading the – the cable car. They won't let us go over.

There was one time that it was open ice. It was in the springtime, we were running across. I was trying to get away, I wanted to go home. I wanted to – I didn't wanna be there anymore. I risked my – my life. I know it wasn't safe to run across 'cause it was open water. But I was so desperate to get away, I didn't wanna be – I don't wanna be hurt any more. I don't want a person to hurt me anymore. I always run – run away, and they used to call the cops and the cops will bring me back.

There's one – one night, my older – my younger sister, he ran away. I took her and I – we hid in the woods and she cut her hand. The cut was really bad, it was pretty deep. And we stayed over the early part of – maybe 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, I decided to take her over. And I got grounded and I got punished for doing that. They were saying: Look what you done. Look what you done and made – he's really – she got a really bad cut and you didn't have enough sense to bring her back, someone to – someone to band up – bandage up her wounds.

So for a while, that – that kept me not running away 'cause I – I felt bad, what I did. I felt like it was wrong, that my sister was in bad shape. So I used to just stay there in the dorm and wait for Christmases, wait for Easters to be taken – taken back to my community.

There was a – one time, I was very happy. My dad was coming, and I thought he was coming to get me. Not long after that, the cops came and took my dad. Took him back to the cable car and brought him home. That year was really hard. I used to be by the window all the time crying. Still the sexual abuse went on, for about three years, and I became mature and I – I was really confused about who I was when that happened, 'cause I was so damaged.

The years that went on, and the name calling went on; that I was a dirty rotten Indian, and I was no good. That tape went on in my head. When I went, that's what I thought I was, so I was ashamed of being Innu. I thought Innu was being dirty and wrong. I used to hide that I was Innu. Later on when I went to school outside, they told me – they want to know where I was from, and I told them I was from Goose Bay. I didn't tell them about my community. I didn't tell them that I was Innu. I was ashamed of who I was.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Joanna, any time you want to take a break, you just let us know.

J. MICHEL: Hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: It's up to you.

[Dialogue between J. Michel and Unidentified Speaker in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

J. MICHEL: That young girl, that was a – she was beaten and torn from her own culture. I truly didn't know who I was when I got out of the dorm in 1979. I was very – I was very damaged. I felt that I was a nobody. That's what I was told by the workers. I felt that I was worthless, that I didn't have a purpose. And I began to think in my mind that I deserve – I really deserve what I got, and it was really true what they were saying. It came – it was stuck in my mind. I didn't have no – I didn't have no real good thing to say about myself.

So when I got out, I was a very angry child. I became trouble with the law. I get – I got incarcerated. And because – I felt that I deserve nothing but bad, because I was always bad. I was always reminded by the workers that I was always bad. Why can't you be like her? Why can't you be like this one? I became torn apart by my family, and I began to question what the two male

social workers told me: I'm gonna take – take you to a better place.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Elder Antuan and J. Michel in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

J. MICHEL: Coming here, tell my story and my pain and my hurt gave me the courage, 'cause today I'm a grandmother. I'm also a great-grandmother, last year.

I think about what has happened to me. I found it hard. I find it hard today to sit here and talk about my pain because the most – the ones that I hurt was my children. I didn't try to hurt them but this is what residential school did to me. It brought a lot of pain and hurt; thinking that I was a nobody, and I deserve better. I don't deserve anything at all.

What I found was that's where most of my pain is today, in my children, because I didn't know how to be a parent. I was in too much pain. I used alcohol and drugs to numb myself and there was numerous times I wanted to take my own life 'cause I feel so worthless. Why would anybody want me, anyway? All that – all that was flooding in my mind.

And I couldn't take care of my first-born. I gave him up to my parents as I was trying to finish school. And my second-born. I couldn't take care of her 'cause I was busy numbing my pain with alcohol and drugs, and I didn't have a home for her at the time. I used to walk around in the nighttime looking for a place to stay, to go. I didn't have my own home.

So my last three children, I went to the Chief one day and told him. I said: If I don't get a home, I'm gonna give up my kids. I got nowhere to stay right now, I'm staying in a tent. And one of them has asthma and the asthma is really hard on the – the carpet – the carpet is really hard on kids with asthma. She almost died one time. I became ashamed. I became so guilty of what happened to me, thinking it was all my fault, that this is a (inaudible). I always thought I was – that I was worthless and I was not worthy to be a mother.

And the time came I started to get on my feet, I started going to treatment centres trying to get some help. And I went outside and I started to talk about it and it got – became easier. And the Inuit had – in 2011, had a conference about residential school. That was my first time talking about my experience. And I decided not to go public 'cause I don't think I was ready. But instead, I did an auto [read: audio], video, talk about my experience.

And at the time, I really didn't wanna share about the sexual abuse part, because I still carried a lot of shame. And I had a lot of – I had a lot of trouble with my identity, who I was. I became a very angry and bitter person. I wanted to hurt – hurt others who – the others hurt me. I began to hurt myself. I use alcohol; I use drugs; I use abusive relationships I got myself into, and I feel like I deserve it. I'm not gonna die anyway. My mother lived like this. She never died. I used to talk to myself like that.

And when – after I got help, I became more and more to talk about my residential school. And when I went deeper and deeper, the harder it was. So I would relapse, I would go back drinking. And that was – that was my life story 'til I got a little bit older, older and mature. I had – I had a very rough upbringing and the residential school experience didn't help much, and I was in a lot of pain.

So one – one day, where the cross is over there by the gas station, I was lying down and I was saying: Is this it? Is this all that life has to offer me? And I don't want no part of it. I was gonna go home and kill myself. And my sister came and talked to me and said: I want you to come – I want you to come with me. So I went with her and that's different – was a different experience altogether.

She had a really good home. She started to love her kids. And I used to say to myself: Yeah, that's what I want. That's the kind of person I want to be, a loving person, a loving mother.

I was so tired. I got run – run down by all these – all of what happened to me. I begin to have flashbacks in the – in the bathroom, bath times. I began to have flashbacks and I told my co-worker: I really need help. If I don't get the help I need, I – I'm thinking of committing suicide 'cause I can't bear it much longer. I don't want to live. I don't know. I don't wanna – I don't know how to love myself, I don't know how to do anything right. And I said: And the children, I – I damaged them. So, I got help, went to a treatment centre. I had – I had a hard time coping, talking about – talking about it 'cause I carried a lot of shame over the years.

This is what I got from the – this is my – my audio, my story. And this day, my children can pick it up and listen to it. And this is what they gave me at the conference. So my story, to whoever who – whoever listen, especially the government, that brought residential schools to this area. This is real. The pain is real. And I had to live with this pain. I'm going on 60 years old now, soon, and I'm still living with this pain today.

And the sad part of – the sad part of the – this journey, where it took me, the other survivors didn't survive to tell their story like me. So the government, yes, they gave us money, compensate us, but that's – that is nothing compared to the damage that was done. You can't go back and fix it. You can't. You can't fix us, 'cause that's the way we are today. We are survivors. We learned to get on our feet again and we learn how to fight.

I had to relearn about being Innu; Innu school. As a Innu woman, I had to learn about my culture. I was shamed speaking my own language and I almost lost my language. I was talking really funny when I came home and even my own siblings were making fun of me.

So it hasn't been easy, this journey – this journey brought a lot of courage, to tell you my story today. And I hope that this Inquiry wakes up. I could easily been out there with the others, still in their pain, still drinking, still doing drugs. But I chose a different path.

I have been sober for a number of years now and I've helped in treatment centres and I've taught my experience to the school here because it needs to be told. The history of residential school needs to be told and I can't – I'm so happy that I didn't take my own life. I got to enjoy my family, I got to enjoy to tell the story; the – the painful part was in the process, that someone you love got hurt. That's the sad part that never can be undone. But I said so many sorries and I'm tired of saying sorry.

I gained a lot of knowledge of who I am. I'm proud to be Indigenous; I'm proud to be Innu. My brown skin, that's who I am; a damaged soul that once knew what pain was all about. Pain, it does two things: It drives you out of this world or brings you down. You have to get up. You have to fight every day. And that's what I had to do.

And I thank you very much for your listening ear. I thank you very much for recording this, 'cause it will go down in history. When I'm gone, my grandchildren will know my story, my grand-great-children [sic] will know my story. It hasn't been easy. I had a very sleepless nights knowing that I was going to speak today. I couldn't sleep very long. I couldn't eat yesterday. I went for a walk; a lot of walks. So thank you very much. I hope you tell the government. The government needs to take full responsibility for what they do – did to the Innu kids in the junior dorm, the senior dorm and the infant's home.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You want to add anything more, Joanna?

J. MICHEL: I wanna take a break 'cause I wanna talk about my grandson.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good for you.

J. MICHEL: Yeah.

The Inquiry needs to know.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

J. MICHEL: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Let's take a 15-minute break and come back again.

Recess

[Audio recording loss due to technical issue.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – being patient.

Joanna, you want to continue, maybe on another topic? It's all related; it's all the same thing. We want to hear about the impacts on Innu, what they have learned, what they have experienced, what opinions they have. So be – feel free to talk about anything.

J. MICHEL: Oh, okay. I'm going to speak English and I'm here to talk about my – my grandson, Napesh. In 19 – 2013, Napesh, my grandson, he was almost five months old and he passed away. And at that time, there was – we told Child, Youth and Family Services at the time, and we tried to get help from them. And the – we never got no response. Ongoing problems with my son and his spouse led to my grandson's death, and at the – at the time, we wasn't aware what really went on behind closed doors.

And we took quite a – quite a number of months to – to do the investigation. The Child Advocate came and did an internal investigation with the CYFS, with my grandson's death. And it's been – it's been really hard to talk about it and there was no really proper closure. It what's – it's painful today.

Because at the time that they didn't wanna work with us, so we didn't have any other choice to go to the Child Advocate. So they help us. They did a internal investigation, like I said, with, like, what – the people that were interviewed and the people that were involved, that the investigation led very – led us very traumatized.

And after the investigation that the Child Advocate did, they came to Goose Bay at the administration building in behind the hospital. They came with the report. Not expecting to see the title, *A Stolen Life*. That's exactly what it is. My grandson was stolen from me, 2013. And a month later, my son was incarcerated. I was working with Ben, in Finance, at the time. I had a very hard time when he got arrested. I was working there in the office and I – my daughter called me and she said that: They took my brother; three cops went to your house.

The investigation started, and there was a forensic came from Corner Brook and they interviewed everybody. And they wanted to find out, wanted to get to the bottom of what really went on, I guess. Not ever knowing that – that my son was going to be incarcerated. He was incarcerated for seven months. It seems like everything was up in the air, what really happened to my grandson. Why – why was he – what happened to him?

Today I want to – I wanted to do something after this happened because I couldn't do it, because my son was incarcerated. And I kept visiting him, make sure that he was mentally stable to go to trial. And the lawyer said that you're looking at maybe 10 years. And every time I used to go visit him in the correctional centre, he would say: Mom, why am I here? What am I doing here? And I used to say to him: It's up to you, son. You have the answer. I don't know. Seems like I'm doing someone else's time, he used to say.

Today, as a grandmother, looking for answers hasn't been easy. And I had a lot of – I had a lot of pain in the process. I used to go back and forth on the ambulance; back and forth to Goose Bay. And today, the government, I feel, is responsible for what happened to my grandson. Not giving us the help we need at the time, and the so little they did.

There were a lot of unanswered questions, unresolved situation that we had among my family. I've endured a lot of pain, a lot of heartache, 'cause he's not here today. His life was stolen, where something could have been done about it. They could have helped us; this is the end result of the report, the Child Advocate report. Nothing was recorded, nothing was – nothing was taken in notes. What – when we went to them to get some help, I said: I did the Advocate report because I don't want anybody else suffering like I've suffered for many years. My grandson would have been nine, and still, it's very painful.

Today, we were left hanging to figure it out ourselves, what really went on. I'm thankful and I'm grateful for the Child Advocate today. I didn't know anything about Child Advocate 'til we were in contact with this – this person who was in charge, the minister, and seems like she wanted to help us when she got the story. It's caused me a lot of grief, and as a grandmother it caused me a lot of heartache. I – I – we used to go to sleep and wonder – wake up, will this be the day that I will get some kind of answer or some kind of a – some kind of a answer to what really happened.

I'm glad that I – I went to Child Advocate, but there's a lot of people that helped me in the process because I wasn't familiar with, and it was a lot of interviews, me and my daughter did. They did the interviews in the regional office in Goose Bay. It was a lot of brokenness and there was a lot of crying and there was a lot of breaks 'cause it was really fresh, what was going on.

Child Advocate said that you can take all the time you need to read – read the report, but it took really long 'cause you were going through different emotions. You were going through anger, you were going through disappointments, you were going through a lot of – going through a lot of stress on unanswered questions.

When Napesh was taken from us, I thought that – I thought there was – I didn't know that this – all this was gonna happen and – and unexpectedly endured a lot of pain and a lot of – I couldn't – I couldn't go – I couldn't even go to work. I couldn't – I had to take – I had to ask a doctor, give me a sick note 'til about six months, and he helped me and I had a hard time coping. And I – I feel like – I felt – I felt like I – I wasn't getting anywhere with – with it.

And finally my son got a good lawyer and he was – he was released. I couldn't believe that, what was happening, and I was in St. John's. My niece attempted suicide, and I got a call from the lawyer saying that my son is gonna be released. I don't know if I should have been happy or sad, 'cause grandchildren are supposed to be your second chance.

I had learned a lot of – a great deal about this, what happened – what happened to my grandson. It taught me a lot of things. I was very angry; I was in a lot of pain. And I say how – I don't know if I can cope with this anymore. I don't know what's really going on. I began to – my body was in a locked position. I was in my house. I was in Napesh's room and my – my body started to break down.

My sister called the ambulance. It took me up – it took me up on the ambulance, and I couldn't even talk. It was so traumatizing, I began to not – I began – my body started to numb out. I was like that for many months after his death.

Today I suffered a lot of – a lot of pain, 'cause he isn't here anymore. He would have been in school. I have to walk by the school every day. The first year he would been five, he would been going to school, this little guy comes over who's five years old. He was at the hospital when Napesh was born. And I talked to the mother and she – he just started school, and I said Napesh would've been in school today. I would've been so proud, a grandma would be there first day of school.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Elder Antuan and J. Michel in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

[No audio recorded from 16:14:27 to 16:15:14.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): I want to stress again that I suffered a lot of pain. He would have been in school. I walk by that school every day. A little boy came up to me. This little boy was in the hospital at a time when I lost my grandson. He came up to me, came to our house, and asked me: This would have been Napesh's first day of school, too? I told this five-year-old: He would have been in school.

[No audio recorded from 16:16:11 to 16:16:25.]

J. MICHEL: I stand here – stand here today as an advocate for grandchildren. It doesn't happen again. I did that report because nothing like this will ever happen again. I didn't do it as a revenge 'cause I don't like hurting other people. I remember I was brought up that way because today, there's so many – so many grandsons like Napesh, walking around today. And if you can get the help that they need, it doesn't happen again.

His death was tragic to our family. And I remember I went to the Co-op and my daughter said: I can't even go to the Co-op, I'm so scared. And I went to the Bargain! and this lady was saying to my son: That's the guy that killed his baby. That's the baby killer. I wanted to walk over and I wanted to thank her, but my son stopped me. He said don't bother, Ma. Just forgive.

So I've been working on a lot of forgiveness. I learned to be quiet when I'm not spoken to. I learned that I'd rather replace others that you love. I used to sit there in that house waiting for my grandson to crawl out of the – crawl out of the room, where he used to be. I sit there many, many, many days like that. I'll run out before I say anything else to my son. I'll run out and I'll cry, walk and cry, and had a lot of sleepless night.

It's very hard, talking about it, talking about my Napesh. This is Napesh, when he was born. I couldn't – I couldn't put up his pictures for a long time. And this is Napesh before he passed away. I was holding him.

So if you have grandkids, embrace them. Because that Monday, I was gonna take off, that day. I was working in Goose Bay in Finance. I was going to take the day off to spend time with him. I used to beat up myself for a long time. What would have happened if I took that day off? Maybe Napesh would be here today. Maybe I didn't have to cry in this auditorium. Maybe we only listen, Napesh would've been here today if he only listen; Grandma's cry for help and the auntie's. The auntie was crying and saying: We need help, we need help.

I had a letting – letting-go ceremony at nine miles in my camp, where we spent a lot of family time. I wrote a letter to Napesh. I said: Grandma – Grandma will fight on for you, Napesh. Grandma will get to what happened to you. I'm so – I was so blessed to be Napesh's grandma. I used to sing him this song. It was an uncle; his name was Napesh, too. I used to say: Napesh, Napesh, he's gonna fix my truck. And I was sitting in my living room and I rocked myself to sleep. And that's been the – the hardest – the hardest days without him.

I know Napesh is in a safe haven today. He's safe; no one can hurt Napesh. That's my comfort today. But listen – listen to my story. I wasn't gonna come and talk about it but I think it needs to happen 'cause so many of Napeshs out there don't need to suffer 'cause people didn't listen.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

[No audio recorded from 16:26:51 to 16:26:04.]

J. MICHEL: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

So I say to Inquiry: There's not a lot of resources that we can turn to. There's not – there's not much resources that are available in Labrador. Like, there's no Child Advocate – office here, and there's no – there's no real – like, things like that can

help mothers and grandparents to cope. So one of my friends got someone from Nova Scotia and she did a ceremony in my tent, a letting-go ceremony. And I was really – I was really glad. Someone came from – she had similar story. She lost a mother.

And I'm – I've learned a lot of – a lot of things in – in the process. You know, Napesh is not here now, but it has a – he has given me a – a different – a different review of what do you do – what do you do in the process when you – when you're caught up like this. You go out in anger and hurt more people. No. You learn to forgive and let go.

Still today, I don't have the full story of what really happened to my grandson. But maybe it's best to leave it all alone. Maybe it's best that – 'cause I know, like, there's a lot of hurt around it. There's a lot of hurt people here that are involved. And I'm not – I'm not looking for justice for Napesh 'cause it's kind of late now. He's gone and he's passed away. I try to cope every day with this, and that was another story that need to be heard and told by the Inquiry. I feel someone is listening.

A lot of times I was alone; alone crying by myself. There was no one really to listen until the Advocate report came out. There was more pain. But my family today have – they have coped with this and they done really well, coping with the – I said to my children: You need to let it go. You need to let it go and just – just forgive, 'cause a – an Innu always forgive Innu. They always re-embrace each other. If they wrong to each other in – in any way, they would reconcile at the end of the day.

I don't want to go walking around with pain, 'cause I have other grandkids that I am blessed with. I got 17 grandchildren. And I'm – I'll never forget my grandson, Napesh. He's – he made me happy when skies were grey. That's what I used to tell him. When things didn't go right, he was always making me smile. That's what my grandchildren do. Even though there a lot of pain and sickness around my family, I still – I still can have – cope today.

While this was going on my mother died in the process. She was diagnosed with cancer and she said: You know, the – you know, the real reason why I'm going so fast is because what's happening to you and I'm going really fast with this cancer. And she died in 2015. And in her death I said: Where's mom when I need her the most? And we were going through the process of court. Where do I go from there? I was always – she was always there for me and I liked in return to be there for my – my – my own children, my grandchildren.

And that's the story of my grandson.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Joanna, all we can say after listening to you this morning is thank you. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, the pain that you experienced, but also thank you for teaching us so much.

I'll ask Penote if he would close the morning with a prayer, please.

ELDER ANTUAN: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.