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

English Transcript | Volume 13

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Welcome back, everyone, and we're very happy to welcome Jerome. I looked up, I said: My God, Bart is here. But no, it's Jerome.

Jerome, good to see you. Welcome. I know that you have in your mind what you'd like to say. Feel free to express yourself or talk about any – any aspect of Innu life that you would like us to hear.

J. JACK: Okay, my name is Jerome. I'm from Sheshatshiu. As of right today, I'm 60 years old.

Far as I can remember, growing up in the community, my parents – as of now, they're both deceased – they're – they're gone – and they're – they were very old. Like, my dad was 93 years old when he passed away and my mom was 87 years old. They – they died of old age. And they live off the land. They were hunters and they – they – they – they live off the land, and in my family we have about 13 – 12 siblings, brothers and sisters.

I've lost about four brothers, and all my sisters still living as of today. And growing up with my parents, both of my parents were alcoholics. They were drinking heavy and … and it's sad when I – when I grew up because I've always experience of alcohol and violence, and … as growing up I've experienced so many things in my life, like, I was abused by a missionary priest. I'm a survivor, and – and over the years I – I – I've been in trouble and I lived in different places; like, my grandma and grandfather raised me and I moved to different houses all the time. Moved to all over the place in the community.

And it's really hard growing up, you know? And I see in my other friends that they have the same problems. Back in the '60s and the '70s, I think, when – that's when the people have started really drinking, going on in the community. It was really, really – people drinking and we see a lot of violence, people fighting.

And at the time, when I went to school, I remember I wasn't really into school because I – I – I – I got sick of seeing my own family drinking, and I hanged around with other kids my same age, trying to be part of them. Like, doing stuff, like, break and enters or – we – we tried everything. Like, we done sniffing gas and doing drugs and everything, right? And we done everything, like, as – as growing up – and then gradually I ended up in the Boys' Home. I went to Whitbourne in – in Newfoundland.

I was probably about 13, I think, or 12 – or maybe 14. And I stayed in Whitbourne for maybe a year – one year, and that's where I learned how to speak English. I – I didn't speak English when I, you know, was apprehended by the Social Services because I'd done so many B and Es and vandalism. I think the reason why I did that because I – I was mad, I was angry with my own family because they were drinking. Even my siblings, like my brothers and sisters, they had the same problem. They were drinking, they – nobody look after us, so I took care of myself. I – I said: Hell with it. I – I'll do – I'll hang around with my friends. I – I – I wanted to be part of them, I wanted to be – I grew up with them, right?

And I stayed in Boys' Home, like I said, and then as soon as I got out from the Boys'

Home, then I started being in trouble with the law again. This time was different because I was old enough to go to jail. I went to HMP in St. John's and there I stayed, like – first sentence I had was six months. I went to jail for six months.

And then from then on I continue on drinking, continue on drugging. And I think when – what happened when I was young, I think, I always blocked – numbed my pain because I was sexually abused by – by a priest, right? And all that time, I didn't wanna talk about it. I – I've always wanted to run away, like, drinking or – or drugging, right? Doing drugs or – just to numb my pain, right?

But I didn't know how to deal with my – my pain. I – I just continued on drinking and – and I was angry and doing break and enter, drinking and fighting and – I didn't care who I hurt. I just wanted to get away, yeah? Get away from my own family.

And life was so hard for me, yeah? Life was really, really difficult. I didn't know how to handle it. I didn't know how – who I talk to. Even if I wanna talk to the priest I – I – I didn't trust priests because I was afraid of priests and I – the – the teachers, like, you know? Teachers seems to be as bad as the priest, right? You know, they don't – they don't treat you very good, you know?

Then on from now, then I continued on doing the same thing over and over. Like, just in and out of jail and I remember the Judge – Judge Igloliorte. I – I know him pretty good, because I always face him in a court, you know? But – but times change after a while. After a while I – I went to programs – like treatment programs. I went there. And then I started, try to work. I tried to find – maybe if I changed my life a different way, right, like working.

So I started working. Try to find a different place, like, life … and I worked at Voisey's Bay when I started that exploration, back in '94. That's when I wanted to change my life. I – I said this is – I can't handle it no more. Like, I can't – I didn't wanna drink no more. So I worked anyway. I worked at Voisey's Bay, like, five years I think.

Then again, off then on I quit drinking and then go back drinking and then I started drinking more and then I started to get in trouble with the law again. Like, fighting and being abusive towards my – my – my – my girlfriend. But my girlfriend deceased years and years ago. I continued on hurting her, you know? Even my – my children growing up, you know?

And then as more I got older I just started thinking more I wanted to quit – quit drinking and I – I – I – I went to about 10 different programs in – in – in Atlantic Region trying to deal with my – my past. I went to Brentwood for 90-days program. I went there three times. The first time I went was two months; I didn't graduate, but then again I went back. I went back to Windsor, then I graduated their 90-day program and then again, I went there again two times. Like, I graduate two times in Brentwood.

And ever since, now, like it's – like it's been 24 years now I've been sober. Twenty-four years I've been clean and sober, but I'm not perfect. I won't say I'm perfect. I'm not – I'm not the greatest guy and I've been sober for like 24 years. But I know what I'm doing. I know my life changed, right? My life changed. And it's – it's – it's – it's really, really hard sometimes to – to look at your life, see what happened and – like for the last maybe four years – maybe three years – I've lost about nine of my family: my dad, my mom, like my three brothers, my three nephews and my niece, like, in – within the range of two years, I think.

Most of them, they died of alcohol; most of them died of complication of diabetes.

[Dialogue between J. Jack and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

I just want Anne to translate it, too.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Don't worry, she's good.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

J. JACK: As of today, thinking about my life is kind of – very difficult sometimes, you know? Look – to look – to look back and say, you know … time flies, you know? Time flies, it's very, very ….

'Cause over the years – back in '87, I became a leader. I – I – I – I – I ran for council, as a band councillor, and then I got elected. I got elected, I think, at the time Anastasia was became Chief, at that time. And – when we campaign, I – I – I – I used alcohol and drugs to become elected. I played dirty politics. I – I – I – I didn't like that, but at the time people – people always wanted to do something to become popular, you know? They do stuff – crazy things.

So I got elected, like, for three years for band councillor but – but I – sometimes I regret that, you know? To be a dirty politician, it's – it's – it's bad, you know? Because you're hurting a lot of children because you – you – you give alcohol to families and then these families lose their kids, like, to – to Social Services. Because people, they get hungry, they … and that's sad, you know? That's sad sometimes, when you think about that.

I became – twice, I got elected in the community twice: back in '87 and back in 2007. You know, sometimes it really hurts me to look at – back at what I did to some of the people that I abused; I give them drugs and give them alcohol. Free – free beer. Like, I buy, like, maybe 40 dozen and take it to the community, distributing to the people, you know? And that's – that's – that's sad. I – I – I – I'm not happy for that and I – I never will be happy for that I think – I don't think.

But over the years, looking at the community here, there's some people doing really good, you know, they're – they're trying to help the people: children, elderly people. And – and where we're speaking about the people, like social workers – like Social Services taking these kids out of the community – it's not right, you know, it's not good. Because I experienced that myself because I have about seven grandkids and there's three times, I think, Social Services came to my place and want to apprehend my grandkids but I – I won't let them. I don't take – I don't – I don't let them take the kids. I always fight.

And – but there was one time, there was two police officers and two social workers and, I think, two translators – Innu women translating for the Social Services people – and they – they – they were outside my house and I didn't let the door open for at least one hour – two hours, I think, and I then I give up. I said: Okay take them. Take the kids.

And they took the kids for that – just for that weekend. They placed them in – in Goose Bay, I think, for overnight maybe – couple of nights. Then on Monday they came back and they said: They're gonna do this safety plan. I didn't know what the hell – what they're saying – what – safety plan. I thought I was a safety guy looking after my own grand – grandkids, right? I didn't know what the hell – what safety plan meant. So they just wanted me to sign the paper and then that's it, you know, and then they – they have that authority to do that instead of me.

So – well anyway so they – they – they took the kids and I was their guardian. I – my grand – my daughter wasn't allowed to – to – to near to – to be with her kids so – that happened like for three months, I think, I took care of the kids. My – my – my daughter wasn't allowed at my house but I – I always sneak her in the house. I never tell the Social Services that my daughter was there. I didn't – I didn't tell Social Services that my daughter was in the house, right?

But anyway, that happened two times. And the second time it happened they – they came again, but this time I took a video. I took a video – Social Services came into the house and I took a video and I said: I'll take you a video, all right? And then everything will be recorded then, because I can have the evidence that I – that I took a picture.

And I still have that picture in – in my phone. I still have that – that video.

And the police also came, but the police didn't like that I took the – the video. They didn't want to be in the video, but I still took them anyway. But the police left anyway. The police – two police offers left. They left the social workers there and then – then after they left the Social Services left too, right? So they never came back again. I waited – I waited to come – I wait for them again to come back; they never showed up.

Then when I posted that video, I think, they – they – they like – like, 2000 people liked the video because it was all over across Canada, I think, when – when I took that video. Because I didn't like the way Social Services wanted to control everything.

So I done that twice, I think, when they came to my house. Then I done again – the video, I done again. But they didn't want to come up. They were just parking right across the street. They knew I – they took the picture but they didn't want to come closer they just were afraid, I think.

But I don't think the – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] –

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

J. JACK: Ehe. Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: CSSD.

J. JACK: Yeah. Yeah.

So anyway, they never liked me because – and they never come to my house anymore. They – they just call, right, if they wanna see me or they – they don't – they're so afraid of my house again – this time, you know? They never wanted to go up there again.

[Dialogue between J. Jack and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

And I still help – help out with my siblings. Like, my sister, Katie, had the same problem with the Social Services, like, taking the kids. But my – Katie's grandkids, they stay at my house sometimes. I let them stay there, right? It's 'cause I don't want them to be taken away somewhere, like – but – somehow I – I don't feel right for Social Services to take the children away from the community.

I've always argue with the Social Services and I've always call out for help from other organizations. When Anastasia was a – became Director of Health in Mary May. I – I always used to call her to be part of the meetings when we had these meetings with Social Services. And we had a meeting with the minister and we invited him on a teleconference about – about taking the children away from the community.

David Nuke was involved and Sylvester Antuan and most of the staff of the Innu Nation and the band council, and most of the staff at IRT. They – they – they participated in this conference call with the minister: Why do we have a problem with this system, you know? Why can't we have our own system?
And even – I remember my friend – he passed away now, his name was Mark Restoule, he was involved with the Social Services. I met him in Windsor. He – we were roommates together when we done the program and over the years – after like 10 years – he came to Labrador and he was one of the social workers here. And then when he was here, he introduced the Kinship; because, the Kinship was involving Canada for many years. We never – we never knew that we had Kinship in – in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So he brought that – that Kinship because when we lose our kids, like for instance for an example, my sister would be Anne, right, and it's more like – would – they would – that's where they would place my – my grandkids, instead of ship them out somewhere, like – anywhere.

So we only knew that, like, maybe 10 years that the Kinship was in Canada but here in Labrador, it was never been introduced. But Newfoundland knew that there was Kinship

in – in the province so I don't know why they didn't – they didn't use that system here. So there's a lot of stuff that the government doesn't share with – our ideas, like you know?

So I think we are capable of looking after our own kids, like – because most people, they think that we're all drunks, you know? Like, stereotyping the Innu. But we're not. We're – we're – we're – we are human beings, we have hearts, we – because – it's – it's hard to explain, right? It's hard to explain sometimes.

I think I speak too long, now, I – I – I wants to share one more thing about my life. Being incarcerated for so many times …

Years ago, I – I – there was a performance of a sentencing circle. I – I – I was in sentencing circle once and I think that's when the time that I – I – I wanted to quit doing drugs and quit drinking and quit hurting people. And basically what happened in sentencing circle, I – I had so many – done bad stuff in my life, you know? I was – I was charged, like, a serious – a very, very serious charge and then I – I didn't know what I was doing because I was sick, you know? I was very sick, and I – I didn't think I – I was a good person.

I – I – when they performed this sentencing circle I was the one in – on – on a hot seat. I was the one, only people talk about me: Jerome, this is you, this is who you are, this is what happened. This is – like, people talk about me, like, real – really bad. I – I – I felt like I was so small, you know? I was so small. I didn't know – I – I want to run away, but I – I can't because I – I – I – I'm already in court, you know?

And – and I like – I liked that after – after they – they performed this sentencing circle and I – and I like it because I think it's – it really helped me – helped me change, you know? And I think that's what – that's where I had this turning point, I think. That's where I – I – I wanted to grow. I wanted to just forget what happened. I just wanted to have a new life.

And then I became a leader. Ever since now, I – I – I work with the Innu Nation, I work with the band council and I – I come from a long way. People don't know me, yeah? Some people don't know me in the community. They just – they just see me as: Jerome was a drunk. Jerome was a jailbird. That's all they see me.

They didn't see me – anything that I – I done so many things. I work with Anastasia when he was a Chief; I was a councillor and we built a lot of houses and we built a – everything. Paul Rich was the Chief and I was a councillor. Anastasia was a Chief; I was a councillor. And I work with the Innu Nation now. I work with Etienne and I work with Daniel, I work with Joseph Riche and – I know what's going on inside and out from the band council and the Innu Nation, because I – I've been there. I – I – I know.

And when I look at the government, I think when I – I – government is really, really tough. We cannot beat government. We're never gonna beat the government I don't think. I don't – I don't see it, you know? If we have a pie the government still gets – will – will eat that pie. We're only gonna eat the crumbs, that's all. I'm gonna eat the crumbs, the government is gonna eat all the pie, right? That's – that's the way it is.

But that's how bad it is, you know? And I'm glad I'm here for this Inquiry and I – I – I'm happy that I share my experience about my life in the community. And we still – we're still struggling, we're still fighting, we're still gonna go a long ways, right? Like we're – like Martha said, we're still – this is only the beginning, right?

But I'm – I – I know, some of you white people – why we're here is – it's – it's come from our heart, right? People always share. Like, people said they – they – they have this circle, you know? Because we – nobody corners us, right, but they can square – a white – white man is like – have a square, right, then they corner you, right? But in the circle they – they can't, you know?

And – and I miss the leaders. Like, Daniel and the old leaders. They fight – the land,

they fight for the people. I miss that, you know? I wish we could have more leaders like that, fighting the government instead of fighting each other, in our community. That's what happened in here, we fight each other. We hurt each other. So I don't – I don't – I think that should stop, you know? I think it's – its good – like we're trying today, right? Like, I'd rather see our leaders here listening to the people talk, you know? People talk about sharing their experience. The life of their – growing up here.

I was gonna share about the problem when I was in Boys' Home, but I've already signed a paper not to charge the priest again. I was abused in Boys' Home but – but I already signed paper. I don't know – it could change, right? But I'm gonna talk to a lawyer about that, you know? I – I always wanna talk about that but I – I don't wanna talk about it here now, because I – I wanna talk to a lawyer about that first and see what – what – what they say, right?

I know – I know we're talking about reconciliation. I know we're talking about where do we go from here, right? And – and it's still a long ways to go yet, you know? And – and I want to thank you all for listening, you know? I wish, just, my – my mom and dad and brothers, like Bart, should be here and listening to my story, you know? But I know they're – they're still listening. I know they hear me, you know?

And right now we only have so much Elders like – like Elizabeth Penashue. I'm happy Elizabeth is here and I hear Elizabeth talk on the radio most every – every day. Praying – praying for our leaders, praying for our young people, and is still fighting for land. Still trying to aware – you know aware of our – our land still exists, you know?

And I think we need to wake up, you know? Because when I look at my granddaughter, she's only four years old. She's gonna have kids too, one of these days and I don't want to see her talk – talk like this, you know? I'd rather see her happy. A happy child, you know?

And I'm glad I see Igloliorte again, you know, this time so relief, you know? Anyway that's – that's about it. Yeah that's it. That's it for me today.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:
(Inaudible) very much for your reflection about your life and about this community. It is very helpful to us.

I want to congratulate you for overcoming all the difficulties that you have experienced, and everyone is very proud of you. I'm proud of you.

And like everyone who has spoken to the Inquiry, it is clear that the Innu are – are very strong and we have the best wishes that in time – as you said, it will take time – you will have control over much of your own social work and all the other parts of government that Innu need to control. So each person who speaks gives us insights and helps point the way for that to happen.

The Commissioners, Anastasia and I –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – want to say tshenashkumitin.

Okay folks, 10 minutes.

Recess

[redacted]