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

Sheshatshiu

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good afternoon again, everybody. Thank you very much for being here for the afternoon's session. We're beginning with our presenter and interpreter. Mânîmat is going to come forward.

When people come here they're – they're ready to speak so I'm quite happy to invite you, Marie Martha, to say what's on your mind or tell us any of your history you want. Entirely up to you.

ELDER ANDREW: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Marie Martha Andrew, but in Innu it's Mânîmat. And I've asked my daughter, Pamela, to sit with me as I need her for support.

And I want to thank – thank everyone for being here and I understand that with the Commissioners, too, that – that whatever you hear, like, I know you need a break too. Like, you need to take care of yourself as well. That's what I keep reminding my sister, Anastasia, for you.

First of all, I want to say that I'm a Innu teacher at the Sheshatshiu Innu School and I work with the kindergartens to Grade 4. Teach them our Innu language and work closely with Anne, here. And I'm happy to be working in the – in the field of – as a teacher, because I love working with kids. And since I've been working with them, like – like, you see them, so many has, like, gone by and graduated and you see all these young people, like, having their own kids and still I'm with small kids teaching them. It's nice to – to see them go their own way.

It's not – I'm still finding the – finding it hard to – to talk about what I'm going to talk about. First of all, my mom had 18 children and some of them have since passed away – maybe four. My mom was from – like grew up in the country – in Nutshimit. And out there – like she have left me some good stories about the land where they came from.

Like there was nobody to – they really had a happy life out there. Like nobody to disturb them. Like no non-Native people to – like today we have CSSD and RCMP or – you know. And I listened to her while she talked and what stories she used to share with me, like the upbringing of the children in Nutshimit.

Like, for me, I wasn't born in the country, I was born in North West River when the hospital was there. I was born in 1960 and that's when the people – the Innu people were settled in the – in the community.

The stories she told me about, like, the kids – their children. Like, they had a healthy lives. They lived in a healthy environment and nobody to disturb them. Like, they had – I feel like that they had a really wonderful people – Innu people. They – they were our historians. They were – they had a wealth of knowledge. They were their own doctors. They were their own scientists. That's what I like about what I heard about my people long ago.

But then as soon as they were settled in the community, then you started to see the social – like, the people, they were told not to take their children to the country. And the – they – the men left and the women had to stay behind with their – while their kids were going to school, and to me that – that was the damage that was being done right there, as – as soon as they were settled in the – in the community.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We want the (inaudible) so please hold on a second, and we would love for the Innu language to be spoken and–

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – translation.

P. RALPH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you. Sorry about that.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER ANDREW: And another thing I want to mention is when we started school, it was in – I think it was 1967 or '66 – and we never had a happy life when – when we went to school. Like, you know, when your child is ready to go to school they're right excited and – you know? But we never had that.

Like, these are the people you're supposed to trust and – like, the priest, he was supposed to be a person – like, people look at him as a – I don't know what to say. Like, it – there's really too much anger when it brings back memories, and how he treated us, just like we're – we wasn't a people. Like, he made – he made us live in fear.

You know, it's supposed to be happy when you're in school, like, when you're a young person. But it wasn't like that. Every time he says a word everybody was right quiet. And I remember one time – we're the same age – one of the students. The priest ask – she came in right quietly, and she knew what she was getting into if she was late. And the priest said – the girl said: I wanna pencil. And the priest said: What did you do with your pencil? Did you eat it? Then he kick – he went over to her, she was sitting – where she was sitting to, and he kicked the table and she tipped over. And she had a bleeding nose.

Like, if that's not abuse I don't know what is.

And like this was all happening behind closed doors. Nobody to defend us; nobody was there to – we couldn't tell our – what was happening. And we didn't speak very good English at that time.

And another thing I want to talk about is my son. I adopted my nephew. I took him from the hospital. My sister didn't see her child and he was ready to be flown out to – I don't know where they would have taken him – and we would have never find out where he was.

In October, this – this coming October he will be 37 years old. I've had him since he was born, and I'm happy to say I took that in – in our hands to – to watch him. And now he's married, he got four kids of his own, and he's very protective of her children – of his children, and I'm happy for that. I was going to get him to come with me, but he's working so I didn't want to disturb him. But he knows where – I've been telling him the stories since, like, he's been growing up. Always, whenever he leaves or whenever I see him, he always say: I love you, mom.

And it was you, Judge Igloliorte, who – when the adoption was signed at court, North West River.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

ELDER ANDREW: Mm-hmm.

It was cute. He was wearing a fur hat and traditional clothes. Like, that's why I say I'm very – with kids, children, little children that can't defend for themselves I, as one of the community members, do not want to see any more of the kids being taken away.

Like, we are quite capable of taking care of our kids. So, it's different in Innu culture because in – the Innu people, like the mothers and the dads, like, they'll – they will share, like, taking care of the – the kids here in the community. But it's different when the CSSD – how they look at it. Like, they thinks they don't care about their kids. But we do. We are human beings too. We got feelings. And that's – people have to remember that.

Like, my mother never gave away her kids. She took care of them and that's what she kept encouraging us before she passed away: to take care of our nieces, nephews.

So at one point there, my nephew, he was a young fellow and they were looking for a foster – foster care home – foster parents, and they brought him to my house and I took care of him for a while. And that's – that's the words I'll never forget, what he said to me. Maybe he was 12, 11; he said: Come here. Sit down. I wanna talk to you. Then he said: I feel like I'm spinning, getting dizzy, from all the foster parents they have put – like placements and placements with foster parents.

That's what his words were and I'll never forget that, and that's why I'm very – I'm like always caring when people are – when I hear about kids being taken away from our community.

Those kids belong here in the community. Just try to imagine like if a – a social worker comes to your house and an RCMP standing next to her. She got somebody, like, that's protecting her and looking after her, but that person inside the house has no one. No one to go to. No one to maybe translate for that young mom and that's what needs to be talked about. Like in – we need to tell them that this is not okay.

When I see cops here in the village and social workers are talking to the single mom, like, it feels so – I bet you that girl is feeling very helpless. Like she got no one to support her. Even in – after – a young girl, after they have given birth in the hospital, the first person she runs into is the social worker: We're here to take your child away from you.

How would you feel? I bet you, you wouldn't feel very – you would try to fight for your child, because they have no – I don't think they have any business to do that to people. These people got feelings. It's an ongoing thing and hopefully – and I pray to God that one day we'll have – we will run our own, like, Innu people working towards helping the kids and the young moms and the parents here in the community.

And another thing I wanted to say is that like, you know, when you take away kids out into another province, like, I'm trying to imagine what must – what it must be like. Like, to see – to see, like, I'm looking at that child – like, if he was taken away and she don't, like, speak or understand, like, the English – English and when you bring them to the house in – like if a woman from Newfoundland takes a – a child, how do we know there's nothing happening? How do we know that? Do they contact the mothers or do they bring them out to Newfoundland?

Like, we don't know what's happen – happening behind closed doors. Some can be mistreated; some can be treated good. We don't know that. 'Cause one time a social worker came to – to a house and they placed this girl there for, maybe, 'til she was 16. And the social worker was knocking on the door. She never even bothered to come into the house. She just say: Is this – is she home? Can I talk to her outside?

Why couldn't she come in? She was welcome to come in. Like, what's wrong with her? I don't think that was very professional, to be doing that to her client. And there's so many things we don't know what's happening, with the workers. And do they take translators with them? 'Cause some of them maybe are reluctant to speak in English. They maybe want to be talking to – to her, like, and need – needing a translator.

And there is really, like, a lot of work to be done ahead of us. And I'm very – I'm happy that something is, like, being done, like, for the Commissioners to be here listening to the stories of the – for the – to the community members. And hopefully, maybe in two years time, we'll be able to do – to hear something. Like, we wanna see changes. We want to continue and move forward. We want to see people being happy.

And, like, that's all I want to say for today.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mânîmat, we want to thank you for being here with your family, and thank Pamela for supporting you and – and your sisters.

Thank you for taking care of children and showing so much love for them, as well as for your language. We can see you have a kind heart, you have a soft heart and you're a gentle person; and that is exactly what children need.

Feel free to come back when you have other ideas and thoughts that you want to share with us.

Okay?

ELDER ANDREW: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay. Thank you.

We'll have a break of 10 minutes please.

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