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 QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.] Thank you for coming Sean.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.] I'd like to acknowledge Louise.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

So I'd just like to say that I'm pleased that we had that bit of a break yesterday. I think we – we all needed it and – and – so it's good to come back this morning and be ready to – to listen again.

I – so I'm just acknowledge the – the healing services that are here. The staff that are here from Innu Round Table: Helen Andrew, Tommy Penashue and Jenni-Rose Montague. And also Sean Allen has been working with our community for the last three years, and Louise Bradley who is working with us and also working with the – the healing services.

So I'd like to thank people that are – that are here today and continuing on.

Thank you. Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And we also recognize the dedication and work from Kenn – Kenn Richard.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

So I just acknowledge the work that you do, Kenn, for the – for the First Nations communities.

Thanks.

C. URQUHART: Tshenashkumitin, Commissioners.

Good morning. Nin au Caitlin and I'm one of the lawyers with the Inquiry.

I'm just gonna start with a few housekeeping remarks. So as the Commissioner noted, we started a bit late today, but generally we're gonna run from 9:30 to 4:30 and try to break from 12 to 1:30 for lunch. Unfortunately we are not serving lunch but we do have tea, coffee and – and some light refreshments for you to enjoy throughout the day. However, on Friday we're very delighted to be able to have a community meal – a community lunch and as well, entertainment from Shipu Penashue.

We want to hear from as many people as possible. We've scheduled two people each for the mornings and the afternoon sessions and so, in order to make sure we can hear from everyone, we've asked people to keep their statements under one hour, but we won't be interrupting anyone or cutting anyone off. People will be able to speak as long as they need to.

If we have time after the scheduled speakers, people in the room who may be interested in speaking will have an opportunity to do so, and we'll keep coming back until everyone has had a chance to speak.

So we're very lucky to have Anne here to translate. Thank you, Anne.

INTERPRETER NUNA: Mm-hmm.

C. URQUHART: It's always hard I'm sure to – to – the wonderful Anne. How does that translate into Innu?

So these sessions are being recorded, but the recordings are only used for the purposes of the Inquiry unless the speaker wants them shared. Then – and the names of the speakers will not be used unless they ask us to use them. So those are the choices of the individual speakers and we'd ask everyone to respect those choices as well.

Also if anyone would like to speak to the Commissioners privately, we can arrange for that as well. Just let Nathan or Paula know and we will coordinate that.

So this morning we expect to hear from Julianna and Mânîmat, and so we'll turn it

over to Julianna now if she's ready. You're welcome to come up to the front, please.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin, mother of the baby that we have with the Inquiry. Mr. Giles, I call him, Mr. Giles.

Yes, some of you who listen to CBC radio will know that people have been interviewed and even though we retain what people say here for our purposes, CBC has been invited and – and for our purposes, very happily has been running stories. And of course, what CBC does, Heidi – Heidi Atter does, is ask the individual if they'd like to make a statement. And any time you want to speak with CBC after you've presented here, that's entirely your choice.

And we're actually glad that the rest of the province, the rest of the country, gets to hear some of the very difficult testimony that has been given. It must be put out into the public. We will, of course, report it in our recommendations, but we also encourage and are – are very happy to hear that people are willing to share their stories with the public generally.

So now we welcome Mary Julianna Rich. And Mary Julianna, we'll give you a chance to express what's in your mind, what you've been thinking about, what it is you'd like the Inquiry to hear about your thinking, your circumstances, you life.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Anne. I went on too long but I know how smart you are so I'm not too worried that you will forget.

M. J. RICH: Good morning. My name is Mary Julianna Rich. I live in Sheshatshiu. I'm a mother – a single mother and I'm a grandmother and also I'm a great-grandma as well now. And I'm 61 years old and I've been living in Sheshatshiu probably like 61 years now, I guess, and this is my first time doing the – this Inquiry for myself. I have siblings. There's only three of us. There were eight of us but all them passed away and I'm the youngest one. And I think I'm – I remember what happened when I was five.

It started when I was five years old, I was abused – physical abuse. I didn't – I didn't know nothing about that. I thought it was normal but it wasn't. My mom was still alive that happened. Like, a little kid doesn't know. It's just like, I was – we were in the country, like, somewhere like in Kenamu. That's where my mom used to stayed when I was – me and my – my brother and we were the only ones were with my mom 'cause my other siblings were married, had their own lives, had their children.

I don't know how to explain. I was – there was an Elder. I was happy when he took me up in – took me on canoe. I didn't know nothing about it. I enjoy – I do love nature very much. I do and I respect that. And growing up wasn't easy and I struggle. And when the – when an Elder took me somewhere else that's – that's how it started. I didn't know nothing like – I used to come with him on the – on the canoe trip.

I don't know how, why did it happen, why did he done that to me. 'Cause I learned from growing up – I got older, then I knew it wasn't good. And I haven't told my mom. I didn't tell my mom because my mom was an alcoholic himself.

I kept that thing at the age of five and I remember looking at my mom, I wanna tell her but I can't. I have fear growing up. And it haunted me, I think, about all those years now. And when I was eight my mom passed away. I didn't see my mom – I didn't see my mom because I was in hospital. I had – I had TV [read: TB]. I had TV [read: TB].

There was so much TV [read: TB] in our community, and I was one of them. When my sister approached me and Father Pearson was there, I remember I was sitting at the table. We had milk, we had cookies and I sort of said: What's – what's happening? I was happy to see her. She was visiting me, but I was surprised why the Father – priest was coming with her. I don't

know why. The main thing was I was happy to see my sister.

And I said: I wanna see our mom, but I wasn't allowed to go. I – I couldn't go. I had to chase my sister through the hallway just to get out. But they won't let – they won't let me go and see my mom. That is – that's the one that haunted me of all those years. And I never went to church. I never even see where she – where they put her.

As I grow up older, me and my brother were placed in a foster home because we didn't – we didn't know where we gonna go. Who's gonna look after us?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sorry to interrupt you (inaudible). Sometimes we (inaudible) the Innu translation to be done as well. Do you mind if we allow Anne to translate into Innu-aimun so people can understand too, people who don't speak English. You okay with that?

M. J. RICH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I don't wanna stop you.

M. J. RICH: No, it's okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: If you wanna keep going, you keep going.

M. J. RICH: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

M. J. RICH: After that happened, when my mom left us, we were placed in our siblings. We were raised by our siblings. And I was – and I said to my brother we were so lucky that we're here. And I remember – 'cause I know we were on the file, like, the social workers had to do all this work since we didn't have a – parents.

All those files, now, I see a lot of it, too. And we were placed in our siblings when our mom – when – when my mom died and I didn't know what to think of it. And there was so much – so much drama. Even my sibling's, where – where I stayed, there was so much drinking going on.

For me growing up, I didn't know where to go, I wanted to stay with my sister, I didn't want – I wanted to stay with my brother. I was going back and forth, and it was – it was hurting me, like, where – where do I really belong? Who's gonna look after me?

I have nobody, I said to myself, but I have to listen to the rules from Social Services – that time when they used to call it – 'cause it – a social worker usually come up just to see my sister or my brother. How I've been doing in the household.

And when I – when I stay there I move – I moved to – to my brother's, 'cause my sister used to take care of me. My sister was always drinking and I end – then I moved to my brother's. When I moved to my brother's I – I – I felt I was safe. I thought I was. But no, I wasn't safe.

And when I was 10 – at the age of 10 – I couldn't sleep in the room. I have fear with this – another Elder – another Elder – which I never expect to see this happen again. And I had to run to the other room, because I had to jump in one of her daughter's room to be safe. And that's how it started again. An Elder abused me. Sexual abuse again start – started in that place where I stayed with my brother.

And I have feared. Feared what am I gonna do; what – how am I gonna say – but – but I – I was just a child. I was, like, just sitting there nothing ever happened. I had to go to school; I had to follow the rules. But how am I gonna tell my brother, I said? How am I gonna share it with my brother and my – and my in-law? What am I gonna do? I was stuck.

Then – and I had to – then I – then I moved – then I move again to my other sibling and I move back with my sister again. That's how I escape – I escape, not to be touched. I don't want nobody to touch me again. Just sleep normal, like a child.

I felt safe when I was staying with my sister 'cause I moved back there. I – I still go to school and I – and I follow her rules too. 'Cause this how – how – how I grew up: running away, going back and forth so I didn't know how to – didn't know how to share or talk about it 'cause I – I was – I had fear they might not believe me. I was scared they might think I'm just making up stories.

But – and I was close, I think. Close means like I – I – I just kept shutting it up to myself with my siblings. And my – my sister used to say: How come you're going back and forth? You're leaving your brother again, you're back here again? I said: I don't like it there I don't want to live there anymore. I want to stay here with you. 'Cause I was carrying the – the pain, right? I – I didn't want to tell her, too.

And – and I kept it since. Growing up a teenager with all that. It was hard. My life was very hard for me growing up with no parents. From growing up to going to school – 'cause I went to school as far as Grade 10 and I stayed with – with my sister since. After what – 'cause I didn't – I didn't like the Elder. I didn't wanna go back to that house again. I felt gross when I see him. I just wanted – I just wanted to be around with my sister, to be safe.

From there then, growing up, at the age I – now I'm in 30s now. That's when it start. I took Nechi program '94–'95, and that's when I start opening up slowly about what happened with my life. And I – and I call my brother for the first time, and I said to him: I need to talk to you. And – and I – I told him the next day 'cause he told me himself he couldn't sleep. Like, he didn't know what to – he didn't know what I was gonna tell him. He didn't know what to think.

And I – and I said: I've been abused, I said. I've been sexual abused by an Elder. Which one? I said: When you were staying that house. I was scared. I was scared he might hit me or he didn't believe me. Then he got emotional himself. He was really down. He says: Sis, I'm very sorry. I'm so sorry, I didn't know. Why didn't you tell me before?

Oh. Excuse me.

And that's the time when I was open at – when I was 30 years old with him. And I – I said I – of all the stuff that I've been through, because I was scared. And I said I've – and I'll – also I've been raped when I was 13, I said, and it's – it's hard.

So that's how it started at the age of 30 and I opened up. 'Cause I –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Can I ask you to –

M. J. RICH: Sure.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

M. J. RICH: Yeah. Yes.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

M. J. RICH: After sharing with my brother that time, he asked me: What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do? Do you – do you need my help?

But I only said: It's in the past, but I'm here. The only thing I want you to do is for – I need you – I need you to – no, I'm – what I was gonna say? I want you that I'm here as your sister. I'll forgive you about what happened. Because growing up was – was so much pain, and I – I confront him as well, too, when I was in the – in the foster home with him.

That age in – in the country, he hit me with a stick. I was in the country and I – and I seen my – my nephew when he was just sitting up, and I said to my brother: Why did you do that to me?

Then he said: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to do it. But – but then of all those years, I say, you've been looking after me, I want to tell you that I forgive you and I wanna move on and I'm so thankful that you raised me. If he didn't raise me, I could've been taken away. So he was hurting, too, when I told him.

And when I went to school – I went to school and there was so much drama going on in the school, too. Of course I had to go to school and I had to follow the rule, I was just a – a foster child, I guess, growing up. When I went to school there was Father Pearson. We got to be at – at nine – we got to be there at 9 o'clock.

So I was – when I went there, I knew I was nervous, I knew something's gonna happen, I knew – yeah – we been told we was gonna get hit by Father Pearson. Then I – then I went to school – then I – when I went into school and opened the door, there he was. He was standing there. I was like – oh my – so I just have to go – I gotta go to school. So I went, and there he was, standing there. He was screaming at me.

He said: You're late. And he had a belt. He had a belt and I knew I was gonna cry but I had to be strong. He said: Put your hands in the front. I said: What? Why? You're late.

So I had to give my hands to him and I knew he was gonna hit my hands and he uses a belt, and I was, like, closing my eyes. I was closing my eyes and I knew I was – it's gonna hurt me because – I don't know how many times he done that to me. And there was – Sister Coffey was the principal that time. He was just looking at him. And my hands were so red.

So I had to go to school so I had to follow the rules because – 'cause I was placed in a foster home, that's why I have to do that. Listen – listen to the rules. I think Father Pearson was, like, very controlling. Like what – I didn't know, just seeing him as – growing up, as a – as a child. Seeing him; I was scared of him too.

So – so this is the story of me growing up. How I survived was, my beliefs were to heal myself; to find help, to talk about it, to share. I thought I was alone, but I wasn't. It happened the same thing we – with my brother, too, I didn't know. He just told me. 'Cause we were siblings with no parents. I felt his pain. I said: I didn't know that. Why didn't you tell me?

So, since I shared my story about – that's how I start my healing. And at times I do have flashbacks still but – but I have to keep going, 'cause I don't want to look at the past. Because past is – is – how – how do I say it?

Past is history. That's gone. You can never bring it back. And moving forward, now, and of all those years since I survive, I'm still walking. And I've been helping people and I – and they hears me when I share about my own background. I have to be honest with them about – about my history where I grew up.

And as an adult now, I – I used to drink, because I was numbing the pain. I didn't want to feel the pain. But I wasn't very heavy drinker, but I – but I just wanted to keep going, 'cause I have children to look after. 'Cause I didn't wanna see my children growing up with no mom. Where I used to be. I have five children but one died. I have four: two boys, two girls. They're all adults now.

And I help my community 'cause I used to do programs now. Give back with the community. And I kept going and I, now, since – since I keep moving forward, I'm healing now. 'Cause I don't – I don't want – I don't want to see that – that happen again, 'cause I – I'm a mom and I have grand – and I don't want to see my grandchildren to be treated – to be touched by other people too, 'cause it's sickness.

So that's the story of me, and thank you very much. Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, very – Mary Julianna for adding your voice to so many others who are telling us the truth, making us understand that despite experiencing things that no child should ever go through, you are still a good, strong person in this community.

Thank you for teaching us that this community needs peace and we have to all work together in reaching that goal. We're so sorry that you had to – to tell us such painful experiences about your childhood

and adulthood, but we also think that it does help others.

Tshenashkumitin.

We'll take break of 10 minutes please.

Recess