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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Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you once again. The Inquiry welcomes Michel Pastitshi. Very happy to have you here, Sir. And you and Anne can decide if you're going to speak English or Innu-aimun; up to you guys.

INTERPRETER NUNA: He is going to speak Innu.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

M. PASTITSHI: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): He tell me that – to tell you the – that he was – he used to be very afraid of you when you were working as a judge in front of a bench. But today, he can speak – speak to the Commissioners.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

M. PASTITSHI: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: First of all, this is Michel Pastitshi, and would like to share his experience with CSSD. He – they have a daughter who they adopted traditionally – traditional adoption. And the – the granddaughter had – no, their daughter, foster daughter, had two – two children; two grandkids, and they were – their names are Cameron and Connor. And Michel – Michel's wife is deceased not too long ago. And he said they were drinking then, plus their foster daughter used to drink.

But when it came to drinking, they always paid the babysitter to look after his grandchildren. And after the father broke up with his foster daughter, he called the CSSD and reported against my daughter and CSSD took their grandchildren.

I remember and I knew we paid the babysitter to look after my grandchildren, but CSSD already had taken my grandchildren. 'Cause after we had drank, my daughter went up to get her kids, and they were already in the hands of CSSD.

My grandkids were in care in Goose Bay, and when they're in CSSD's care, my wife stopped drinking. We were asked to start going to AA meetings and to stop drink – drinking. Both of my grandchildren were held a long time in care. We always heard about the word: Drink responsibly. And I felt we did that, because we paid for the babysitter and went.

And when we tried to get our grandkids back, they were already in – with CSSD. And that's why my wife stopped drinking then. And to this day, I don't know why they took my grandchildren because the father called on my foster daughter, called CSSD, and I don't know what happened there. I still don't know why they were taken away from us.

And I have another third grandchild. This time it was the uncle who told – who took – CSD [read: CSSD] who took the other grandchild.

Now I'm gonna talk about my parents; my late parents and my siblings. My parents were incarcerated. I did not know why – because one of my cousins came to tell me – why my parents were in jail. And I – I am the oldest and I was looking after my siblings. But in time I knew why my parents were in jail. They went to the school principal who lived in the community. I didn't understand why they went to jail, but when they talked to late Bart Jack Sr., he told my parents they were not supposed to be incarcerated. They had – they were incarcerated one month each. Dad was the first one to be let out and then my mom.

And while my cousin was there in our house, he asked us to go and get water. At that time, there was no running water in the community. And just as about we approached our house, there was a lady there standing by – almost by the porch. She was with late Charlie Pokue. This lady was working in the junior dorm in North West River back then.

I also remember that lady's name was Mrs. Sheppard. Charlie Pokue was already in the junior dorm, and when he was with this lady, he's the one who translated for her. I do not remember whether we brought the water in our home; can't remember that. But I do remember being taken – me and my siblings – taken to the junior dorm. We went on a cable car.

At that time also, we were told that the junior dorm was being renovated. We were placed in the senior dorm. And I remember it was a Friday. I was on the second floor. My dad came to visit because he was the first one who got let out from being

incarcerated. And as he left, I watched my dad walk back to the cable car.

And then, about a few years ago, we heard about the compensation that went to the – the – to the other young people that were staying in the dorms in North West River, and they received compensation. And when we submitted our applications, me and my siblings, we were one day late and never received it since then.

And here's another topic I would like to address. The government has already taken kids into CSSD. We lost everything, like our language, Innu-aimun. But when we talk about our parents, some of our parents who were hunters, they reared up their children in a good way, in a good place, in Nutshimit – country – because they taught their kids about their culture, the land. Women had their own way of teaching to their daughters, the girls; and men and grandfathers taught the boys about the country, Nutshimit, like hunting, fishing, trapping, et cetera.

Also, I'd like to say these were broken lives of us. Government did this to us, broke our lives, to be able to live in Nutshimit healthy and have a lifestyle of our own. And I would also like to mention that I have seen a shaking tent. I saw it with my own eyes; it was done by an Elder. Now that is also gone because of what was done to us. No more put – no one performs it anymore.

And I would like to stress this again, to be heard: We lost our livelihood, we lost our – I am hearing also that we are losing our language, and we have no more shaking tent being performed. And this is what the government had made us lose, what it has done to the Innu.

I would also like to thank my grandparents on my dad's side. His name was Simeon and his mom was Mary. Six years – it has been six years now that my dad died; four years for my mom; and one year for my wife. I miss them dearly every day because these are the people who gave me the strength, the courage, to be where I am today.

I want to thank – for listening to me, especially Igloliorte, taking your time to listen to me. As everybody –knows, in our community he is known as Judge Igloliorte. And I would like to thank the people that are here who have come to listen to me and others. And I wanted only to stress out this, that three things that I mentioned here, and I didn't want to take much of your time to be here. But I'm glad I made it here and I'm glad I – I spoke of my own experience, of my own stories, too, that I have.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Michel, thank you for remembering your grandparents and your family for us. Thank you for speaking so forcefully and clearly about why it is important to be an Innu person and to speak your language.

A couple of people have told me, like you have told me, that they're much happier to see me here doing the Inquiry than being a judge. But the points you make are – are very powerful and we will use them. We will think about you when we are writing our report and making recommendations to the government about the value of Innu life, the value of Nutshimit, living in there and having people retain their culture.

You're asking us to recognize that in families, sometimes jealousies and anger between families result in things happening that should be thought about more carefully if you lived in the community and you knew the language and you knew the culture and you – and you knew how to deal with them. So you have – in this short talk you gave us, you have taught us a lot.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: I just –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: I just want to add and I guess to be noted, that for Michel to be talking about the shaking tent, I think that was really important. You don't hear a lot of it – a lot of those stories anymore. And I think – so it makes me – me proud for him

to – to talk about that, and the language and being in Nutshimit because we need to hear more stories about – about those. And –

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Thank you.

M. PASTITSHI: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Thank you all for listening to me.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

I think we'll see you all again tomorrow morning at 9:30.

C. URQUHART: We need a prayer.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We would like to ask Elizabeth one more favour.

Tshaukuesh?

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]