

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

English Transcript | Volume 14

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

Thursday | Sheshatshiu | 8 June 2023

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Audio recording loss due to technical issue.] – sittings this week for the Inquiry and we have presenters today.

Again, some few preliminary words. I think the – the health support team has very wisely reminded the Commissioners and all of us that there are many stresses on the community. Some come from outside and some come from within the community, and this is a – a bit of a trying time in light of the fact that the community now has to look for a new leader.

So we should be mindful that when people are speaking to us, they're – they may have many things on their mind and that might be an additional stressor for them. So we'll – we'll keep that in mind and – and try to respond accordingly.

We are grateful for that reminder. We're very happy as well that the Elders in the community continue to support the Inquiry and are present with us. In a moment, Tshaukuesh will lead us in a prayer and Anastasia will also have a few words to say.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'm just saying that we have support workers here in the back: Deborah Nuna, Audrey Snow, Nanshi Pokue, Mary Sillett, Edward Nuna, Louise Bradley and Sean Allen to give support for those that may need support. And I'd like to acknowledge the Elders that are here with us today and we do have a – a tent set up on the side there if during break or if any time anybody wants to go there, they're – feel free to – to go.

So we'll open the – the session now with a prayer.

Tshaukuesh.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): I just want to acknowledge before my prayer, let us look at our community, what we are going through, the hardships that we are facing and the long, hard work awaiting for the Commissioners to do their tasks on behalf of our – both communities, Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

Also, I want to mention about the young people in our community, their struggles. And we see that, we hear that, and hope one day that they wake up; because it is the children that we are trying to help, trying to support them in any way out of the outcomes that will become here in the future.

And I would like to say prayer to – for this Inquiry, the hardship that parents will testify, individuals will testify, and that they know we are here to support them.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Approximately 11 seconds of audio recording lost due to technical issue.] – for her testimony today. Have a seat right there next to the interpreter, Mary Angela.

Thank you very much for coming here to express your thoughts, your feelings, your opinions, anything that you feel that you would like to tell the Commission. We're very happy to have you here, and feel free to speak as long as you wish.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Nuna and M. A. Gregoire in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

M. A. GREGOIRE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] – anger, hurt. Abused sexual, physical, mental, psychological, you know. You name it and – physical abuse that I get from my mommy. I came here because I have to tell the truth, what happened to me.

What happened to me? My mother, she gave me up because she wanted alcohol – she wanted alcohol more than she wanted me. That's what (inaudible). I got awarded to the government. I didn't came in here because I want to make everybody happier.

I came in here because I want to tell the truth, the whole truth but nothing but the truth and help me, Lord.

I'm not here to please nobody, not even my family. I'm here – I feel like I'm here to repent myself because I did a lot of damage, too, when I was young.

I was a little girl. I had nobody to take care of me. I had – I took care of myself when I was nine years old and until I was like, probably almost 12 years old; nobody took care of me. I learned how to steal. I learned how to survive on my own. With stealing – without no stealing, I could have never made it on my own.

Not only that, I believe in Jesus and God so much that it was so powerful for me. When I was just a young girl, I believed that so much in my heart that there's something greater than me that is so powerful. I always carried that in my heart.

I'm 56 years old now. I still have that in my heart. I – I believe that there's something greater than me that is always gonna take care of me. Even though, like, I am a – I am an alcoholic, I'm a drug addict, I'm starting my program on Monday, and is the first step for me. I don't have a lot of support from my family but I always do everything on my own because I – I'm very – I know how to fight on my own. I know my – I know myself. I know what's good for me and what I know is not good for me. What – I know what is bad. I know who my friends are, I know who not my friend. But my greatest – the greatest of all of my friend is Jesus Christ, is the one that always take care of me, he's always never gonna let me – let me go, you know. That's my greatest belief.

But I would like to say that we come in here like, I had a lot of bad experience. Like, I came to the scoop. I – I did a lot of damage when I was young because of my – my anger that control of me. I was probably only 11 years old, probably turning 12. I don't know how old I was. I did a lot of damage in my community. I was involved with vandalism in North West River cable cars. That's when I say that I lived alone; I have nobody to take care of me. There's no excuse for that.

But I started drinking when I was 9 years old – probably 8 years old, anyway. My mom gave me the alcohol the first time. She got mad at me. She gave me a pack of smokes and make me smoke them all. She made me drink that hard tea, black tea. So the – made me eat the plate for my food. It was – I didn't even like. Yeah, that's what happened to us. There was a lot of abuse. There – there – there was nothing good about it.

I know they came from – I don't know where they came from but I could never like, even right now at 56 years old, now I'm starting to learn what is coming from my trauma. I always blame my family. I don't talk to my family right now. I don't have no bonding with them. Like, I have no communication. I don't even go and I don't even see them. I don't go there for the holidays. I disconnect myself with my family.

Even with my children. I have my children, he got murdered. I did everything wrong in my life, you know? I don't want to be burdening my family with my problems. I made a lot of mistakes. I'm not a very good human being. I am a very good human being, I know myself, I know who I am. But the people, they don't believe in me because I break so many bridges.

I've been in jail all my life and I've been in – with the Pleasantville school system. I cannot say that they never – I never learned anything. I learned my vocabulary, I learned my math, I learned how to speak English, I – I learned how to be polite, you know, I learned manners. There's nothing I can say that is – that is bad I learned, but there was also bad things that happened. It's not always going to be good, you know?

Like, the way I look at it, in my – in – in – in my days, when those things happened to me, like the abuse, sexual abuse, I felt like I deserved it because I did so much vandalism on the cable car, like, I can't, like, forgive myself, even to this day. Even to this day, like, I regret it, that like – I was in a

protest not too long ago with my people when I came from Montreal. That was like, 18 years ago.

I never met my family for 32 years. I was told that my family were dead and they didn't love me, they didn't care about me. I went on with my life thinking that my family were dead, they didn't give a shit about me. I didn't know what the truth was. I was so angry. Even my foster parents; they had to shut the group home down. There was too much abuse.

Even if I went and I told a social worker this is what happening to me, nobody believed me. All they told me was that: Angela, you're very – you're very lucky. You've got a bed to sleep in, you've got the food to eat. Your family don't even love you. They don't care about you. They're alcoholics. They don't love you.

I was not very – at the beginning I learned how to speak French language because there was – my dad was a French from Schefferville. My kindergarten until I was Grade 2. I came to Sheshatshiu at a very young age. I think I always live in Sheshatshiu – I'm very confused because we always go back and forth so I really don't know a sense of belonging, where I belong, really. I'm having a problem with that.

The government – he took – the government – not only the government. I can never blame the government. I think the government saved my life. I believe that if I was not removed from where I was, I could have died. I could have died a long time ago. Abandonment issues, neglect, child abuse, brutal abuse, everything, you name it. Like, there was nothing good about it.

I can never say that I was – I can't say that being awarded to the government was the best thing that could've ever happened to me, but it did help me. But it really screw up my life because I met the wrong people, the ones that abused me, my monsters, you know? I know the people, the ones that were in Pleasantville, they were good people. I learned how to speak English, I learned to do my math, I learned to do my spelling, I learned to do my manners, I learned to eat my vegetables, my fruits and all that.

At the beginning I – I couldn't eat no vegetables. I had to be in table for, like, until I finished my vegetables, my carrots, my turnips. I had to learn how to do that. I had to learn how to use my fork, my knife. I had to learn how to say thank you, you're welcome. I had to learn all the good things. It wasn't all that bad. You had to learn the manners, you know, in order to survive, too. You could never survive in the bushes all your life.

I can never say that I – there were bad monsters, yeah, there were bad people, but the people that taught me good, they taught me how to – how to do my math, geometry, algebra. I went to university. I went to the – I could've been a doctor because they put me on the – in the blackboard, I used to write in there like, two or three hours over there, standing there. And I had to learn how to – I had to eat my vegetables for me to be healthy. They taught me that to be – in order for me to be healthy, in – in order for me to be intellectual and to be smart. I didn't know nothing about English. My first kindergarten was French. And when I came in grade – probably at 4 years old, I was started again.

But I learned the hard way. I – I did the hard way, with abuse, with the hard work and – and I met Judge Igloliorte when I got in trouble, like with the vandalism. It's not because I'm proud of what I did. It wasn't only me. I cannot go – I'm not gonna be blaming anybody or pinpointing anybody. I was living alone in a – I was abandoned by my family and of course I'm gonna blame them. It was their fault because they're the ones that's supposed to take care of me and they left me alone in a big house with my brothers where I got abused, now?

I'm not gonna hide about it. You know, like, what I talk about is because I wanna help people. I don't wanna hurt nobody. And a lot of things happened, you know, but things happen, we learn from them and we hope that – I hope that I help other people with

that. But I'm not gonna be kind about it forever. I hope one day somebody gonna take my message and they're gonna – they're gonna feel the – they've got to be strong, hey?

I know the – being in Pleasantville is not – yeah, it is a good thing to be in a home where you've been neglected all your life in the – in a home where it's very dirty. You've got no clean clothes, you've got no education, your parents are alcoholics and they don't really care about you and they abuse you physically, mentally and spiritually. Everything. I'm not gonna say everything. I'm not gonna – I'm not in here to protect nobody. I'm here to – to say – to let go of my hurt.

I – a lot of good things happened and a lot of bad things happened. But one thing I don't do is, like, I don't indulge – I don't indulge myself in – in the bad actses [sic] of other people, you know? Like, I try to balance everything, the good and the bad. So, you know, like, I don't try to make everything bad when it's not everything that's bad because everything we learn is from a lesson.

I was in the home, you know, like, in Pleasantville. I never got to see the Innu girls. I was – I was really skinny. Very – I drank like, at nine years old. I was old and mature for my age. I knew how to take care of everything; how to take care of my niece – my nephews, my nieces.

I always tried to do – I was always – what do you call it? Caretaker. I always wanted to make my – my family happy, try to please them before they wake up. When I was just a little girl we had no running water. We live near the water on the beach. I used to clean the house real good and do the dishes, clean the macaroni – there was nothing else to eat there – clean the children.

I don't understand why. I am 56 years old today. I've been in – in and out of jail. I committed a lot of crime because I'm so angry. I know that there's no excuse for my anger, but I am very angry and – angry. My mom and my dad, they're no longer with me. So they always corrupted themselves with hating with – with each other. My dad would say your mom is crazy. My dad would say your dad hates you. So I was kind of very confused why everybody hated me.

I came in here like, after I spent time in boys and girls home. I was sentenced to majority of age. [sic] I went in Stephenville when I was, like, 15 years old. I was 12 years old when I went in over at Pleasantville. I guess I was there like, two – two, three years. And then I – they put me in there because I was awarded to the government so they had to put me somewhere, I guess. I didn't know what was happening. Every time I – they always – they always told me: Oh, you gotta go now. I didn't know what the hell is going on. Like, where am I going?

And then I came to a little town: Stephenville, Newfoundland. I was 15 years old. I was awarded to the government because of my bad behaviour because my mom, she gave me up too because she didn't want to take care of me. She rather wanted to drink, and because I was a bad girl.

And then I met the monster of my life. He – he was on the CBC News. The monster that I met, that I thought it was my – was gonna be my dad, you know, was always (inaudible). But he wasn't about that, he was sexually abusing me, like, I didn't know that until after. Until he gave me all the bruises and they had to shut down the group home. They had to shut down the foster home. It was no good.

I came back home – I came back home to my village where I didn't know very many people. Even to this day, I don't even know very many people, not even my family. Because I was so disconnected right now. There's no bonding. Right now I walk alone because I got to walk alone. I'm – I'm just walking with Jesus Christ. That's – that's who I believe. That's who been my saviour all my life. Without him I wouldn't be here.

I came here because I have to tell the truth. Not everything is – is bad out there. I learned a lot. I learned a lot of good things

and I learned a lot of bad things. So everything is equal. But everything right now is – is very hard to comprehend because of all them things happening right now. So I don't know what's happening was right or what should I believe in my heart what is true.

But I know that one thing in my heart is that, like, Judge Igloliorte, I think – I think I know Judge Igloliorte, like, a very young age. Probably a teenager. I don't know he – if he's the one that sentenced me to go to the Pleasantville, or it could have been Judge Browne. I don't know, there was two of them.

Anyway, it doesn't matter. They helped me. I thank them. I think they tried, but I think they went the wrong way. It could have been a different way. Instead, in my heart, I feel like I got what I deserve because of my vandalism and my social worker telling me: You're such a – you was just a little girl, seven years old. What the hell do you know, you know?

I'm 56 – 56 years old today and I still walk alone and I do have a faith. I do believe. Even though I get in trouble a lot of times, you know, like, I'm – I'm always gonna get – gonna get in trouble. When you shit on me, I'll shit on you. That's how it works with me, you know? You respect me, I'll respect you. If people don't respect me, I don't respect them. It's not because I want – I don't – I want to be a bad woman, it's because that's who I am. I want respect.

There's so many things that I can talk about, negative things that – that happened to me in the – with the – with the Mount Cashel, Whitbourne, I know all of them. Mount Cashel, Pleasantville; they were my neighbours. We had a – dances every weekends. I know the kids from the Mount Cashel, they were with the brothers, and the Whitbourne, because we're all connected to – we're all connected to the government.

Everybody want – everybody wanted to see me when I was in St. John's, when I was in the girls' home. When I went in there, I went with – with a woman working in here from Sheshatshiu. She's not here right now, but she's helping me take care of my – my compensation, and she's doing a very good job. She's the one that took me to the Pleasantville when I was awarded to the government 'til the majority of age [sic] because my mom gave me up. She's the one that gave me up. Because I was a bad girl, I vandalized the cars, I hurted people, when I was 11 years old. I don't know what I was doing. I was just a kid.

When I went there – the first time I went in there before the Pleasantville school, I didn't even know what was going on with me. I started drinking when I was 9 years old. I've been in trouble ever since, trying to protect myself, to not get hungry, to put the clothes on me. I had to take care of myself, I had to, like, show to myself how to do everything on my own.

When I was, like, 11 years old, I felt like I was 30 years old because I had to take care of my family. I had to take care of my nieces, my nephews. I had to cook for them and wash them. I never got to be a child like I was supposed to be. And now people, they shit on me all the time. They say: Oh, Angela, you're so bad. Well, now you're gonna grow up. I grew up when I was a baby. I never got to be a child. That is my explanation to anybody.

I got a lot of people that support me, a lot of people that believe in me, a lot of people that – that – that don't because I know I burn a lot of bridges. I've been in prison all my life, you know? Like, I've been in and out of prison. It's only been, like, for a short while now, like, I came back to Jesus Christ, you know? Because I left him because of my hurt and my anger, because I – I was so mad at Jesus and he wasn't helping. I believed you so much and you – you abandoned me, you forsaken me. How can I believe you?

But I came back again. I was crying. I woke up one day, I said: What am I doing? My God. Jesus talked to me and never abandoned you, you abandoned yourself. I woke up. I said: I better wake up now. I went to church. I sat in there all morning by

the doorstep crying, asking for forgiveness. And I said Jesus, you know, like, I left you. Like, I know that I only come to you when I need you, like when I'm – when I'm hurting or when I need things. I don't mean to be like that. I wanna walk with you and serve you and be humble. That's what I wanna do.

I forgive everybody that hurt me, and I hurt myself, too. I don't want to hurt anybody. And the people, the ones that hurt me, I forgive them. If I don't forgive them, Jesus will never forgive me, too. I love them no matter what. But whatever happens now, it – it happened for a reason. I don't come in here to make – to make people pity – pity me. Things happen. Like, it happened because of my family, my – it happened because of my – the generations after that is a trauma. So I can really blame nobody. I cannot blame my mom; I cannot blame the judge in front of you.

I made mistakes, too. I vandalized. It was wrong. I should have known better when my anger took control of me. But I wasn't – I should have never been abused. I should never have been raped. I should never had to go through what I endured in there; what I had to go through for hours and hours in the blackboard, writing the chalkboard: I must not – I must not.

They cut all my beautiful hair. Now I don't like to have beautiful hair. They put me in a bathtub, clean me right off like I'm frigging dirty. They looked at me and say I'm an Indian, like I was some kind of, like, a frigging doll, like, they're looking at me, like. It really hurt. I had to pee in my pants, shit in my pants. I felt very humiliated, I didn't even know what it means to be an Indian.

All my life I knew my family, they used to go to the country. They used to kill the rabbits to – to kill the fox. When I heard that thing – when I heard that word from when I went to – when they put me over there, they said that I'm a savage. I didn't know what that meant, savage, I'm a little savage. In my head, I thought it was a candy. I thought it was something good.

And they said: Indian and they were looking at me and people are standing there and, like, children are looking at me. I'm an Indian. They cut my hair, they put me in a bathtub, they cleaned me real good. They put the shampoo over my – to kill my lice. They gave me the – a robe, a nightie. I don't know what's going on. I never took a bath in my life. I grew up in the country, you know, like, with my family. My family never took care of me, there was no bathtub there, of course. Of course I'm gonna be dirty and full of lice and all that. I didn't know what was going on until I was – until I – until I learned that I was an Indian.

For me, Indian was such a bad word that – for me it was, like, a very dirty – I don't know how to say it. Because, me, in – in my language, we have no dirty language. We don't have no dirty word to say about anybody. We all have a clean hearts and clean spirits. We have nothing bad to say about people that – like, eff you. We got no – nothing, like, slang language. We don't do that.

I don't know what – what I supposed to talk about. I can only tell you the truth, it was good and it was bad. It wasn't all that bad. I learned a lot. I learned a lot; they taught me a lot, too, you know, like, I went to university. I was in Native national Quebec association with Canada. I did a lot of things. I worked with the universities. I did a lot and I accomplished a lot. I know how to speak French, I know how to speak Innu, a little bit. I learn how – I know how to speak English, too. I lived in Africa. I – I worked a lot. Not everything was all bad. But there was a lot of bad memories that go along with it, which I – I blocked out.

But I only came in here because I want to support the Native women, Native children, you know? All I can say is that: Never to remove the children from their culture, remove them from their people. They belong in here. That's what happened to me. I lost a lot. I cannot say that – well, my mom, she – she gave me up. She gave me up; she didn't want to take care of me. And I did bad things, too, which – which why I was taken away.

But it shouldn't be like that, you know? Like, I should have been here. I should have known my – my Innu language, would I have very hard time? Like, I don't even speak hardly Innu-aimun right now. I'm learning. I have my children, I have my grandchildren. None of my children speak Innu. My children, they speak French. So we're having – we're just into a process, learning to our culture. But I hope that if I get compensation, we will – we will get – get things right, you know? It's not about money. It's about what is right.

Anyway, I don't have very much to say. If you want to ask me questions, no problem.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Angela.

I'll also ask Anne, would you like to go through some of the testimony in Innu-aimun, Anne, for her?

INTERPRETER NUNA: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And Angela, if – if she misses something, if you want to add something, you can remind Anne.

M. A. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Interpreter Nuna and M. A. Gregoire in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Would you like to say any more, Angela?

M. A. GREGOIRE: I got a lot to say, but I just wanted to say what I – what I needed to say.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Please – please come back when we're back again, and you think that you'd like to add to your statement. I want to let you know that, like everybody else, for someone who's – has – has endured so much pain, your words are very powerful.

As Commissioners, we have agreed that when people come to speak, we won't try to interrupt them and we won't ask them questions. We want to let people express themselves without being questioned.

We remind ourselves that as Commissioners, we're here to listen and to believe what people say and to have respect for what people say.

And we believe you when you say that if you can change, then also the law should be able to change to respect Innu values instead of going on the way it has. It's clear to us that you are on a new path and you're on – you've learned to forgive even though you've endured so much, and you have learned to change even though you have been through so much. And both Anastasia and I are so grateful that you are teaching us there is a much better way to raise children who are in care.

Tshenashkumitin.

We'll have a break of 10 minutes.

Recess

[redacted]