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

English Transcript | Volume 19

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

Tuesday | Sheshatshiu | 17 October 2023

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Audio recording loss due to technical issue.] Our next presenter is Penote.

Go ahead, Sir, and we're – welcome you back. Thank you for being here so often. Thank you for being willing to share your experience with us.

ELDER ANTUAN: Okay, first of all I want to say, the three people who were in the front here, I'm very thankful for them to ask me to come in and speak. He gotta speak English or do I speak – do I have to speak Innu?

The other thing I want to thank is the people who are surround us here who are working with the Inquiry, and I also thank the people who I certainly miss them. When I said the prayer the other day, I just remember them because they didn't have a time for themselves to tell the story, like I do. I came back to my community to tell my story and them, those people who didn't come home in their communities, they didn't tell. They didn't – they weren't home. So I just remember them – remember – every time you speak, you – I talk – I speak, I remember them individually and those people I never met them, also.

I never met them, but I just hear them. They were – their bodies were found just outside where they were going to school in residential schools and I'm very glad to speak on behalf of them, also. Because I was the one also was taken away from my community and came back to tell my story to my community and to my Elders.

The only thing I never told that story about myself while I was in the school, was my mother. I never told my mother about it. And the other people that I never told was my children who were born after I met – I married the lady that I was married. We never discussed anything about my education while I was in St. John's and I never told them about it, what happened.

I kept it myself, because what I kept in my – here inside of me, myself, it doesn't go anywhere. It just hurt me a lot. It hurt me a lot. I didn't want to say to my children: This is what happened while I was away and I didn't want to say to my wife: This is what happened while I was away.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Penote, I'm going to interrupt you so we can allow Anne to translate.

ELDER ANTUAN: I'm sorry about that. That's okay, yeah.

Yeah, okay.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER ANTUAN: I did knew – I didn't know before I married to my wife what happened to my community, changed – it changed a lot. I was 15 – no, I was 16 when I first met the welfares – the welfare people. These people were men, they working – there weren't any women working with the Social Services then.

That's when I found out that they were going to take the people – from my community, they were going to take the people out. They took one of my cousins who was born here in Sheshatshiu. And there was another cousin of mine who was taken in the community – in this community here when I was 16, without any reason. Telling the parents: This is why we're taking those children. Without any reason or word that they have to be taken away.

Now, one of them are lost. She passed away – he passed away, I mean. The other one is still alive here in Sheshatshiu. She's a young woman now. She's married. She got a young children.

So I recall what happened, I can't speak to them, the – like, my cousin and my other cousin. They weren't understand – they didn't understand why they were taken away from the community. As far as I can remember from the – my cousin, he was old enough when he came back in the community. He was old. He was probably 20, 17, maybe, I don't know. I don't know

how old he was. And the other cousin that I had, he was probably 20, 21 when he came back – she came back.

Both of them didn't quite understand the Innu language. Both of them didn't know where they came from, who their mother was, who their parents were. One of them, my cousin, was – her parents were – both of them were passed away and the other cousin that I have, only his mother was still alive when he came back.

And it's very difficult for a person, who is myself, to communicate those people who are left the community. Even to understand why they leave the community and why they didn't stay with their parents, it's very difficult.

Like, the first word that my cousin asked me: Where was my father? Why didn't he stop happening to me to take away from – to go away from your community? Why did my father didn't want to stop? Same word that I hear from the other cousin. Same thing: Why did we had to – ?

The only thing I can explain to them is just because Social Services were willing to take anyone from our community and tell us that: Oh, they got better life to be outside from the community here. This is what I was told when I went to St. John's. Going to school there, I had better life rather than staying in your community.

The other thing I want to say to you people, especially for the people who are gathered here, most of us Elders don't have a paper or pen to write on our memories. They're here in our heads. That's why I don't carry paper or pen or pencil; it's here. Everything is here.

That's one thing I always said to myself when I was sitting with the Elder when there was a meeting: Why doesn't he have a pen or a paper to write it out what he wants to say? I was talking to one of my Elders when I – before I was Elder myself, I was talking to him. I said: Why don't you have a paper like they do here, the other people are doing there? He said – and he told me everything is here, in my head. Everything is there. So that's the reason why I don't carry a paper or pen. People sees me, why not just speak to you people.

I was like – I had began my life. That's when – after I married, I began my life. The system that was changing in my community, I want to fight it – I want to fight it.

After I got married, so I went – the first two gentlemen that were Social Services working, I was talking to them in my own – in English because I could understand the English very – well, it wasn't that much good, but I knew what I was saying to the people.

I told one of the gentleman, I said: If I can't control my children in this community, then I will ask you for your help. That's all I said to him: If I cannot control to my children, then I will ask you to help me, but if I don't ask you, don't come even closer to me and try to force me out to look after my kids, my children.

I said I bring those children on this earth. I raised them as good as I can as a father and also as a – as their mother. She always – she did what she want to do with her kids, everything. We were working together side by side. The only thing we got help was our – my mother and her mother. That's the only help that we had. They gave us guidance where to go and where to lead those children.

Now I'm very happy, as today, they're all grown up. They're all women and men. I have seven children: I have two boys, they're all grown up; five girls, they're all grown up. Two are not married yet. Two of them, they're not married. The rest of them, they got their own children and I'm very happy for my grandchildren to be raised the way I raised their parents. The way I raised it – the way I raised my children while they were young people.

Like I said a few minutes ago, I was very happy. I feel good about my children. They follow my path to go through my life and

their mother, they followed the path 'cause we were the same path that we went in.

The other thing I want to say to you people: Every person in this community, everybody knows each other, every person understand each other, they speak the same language, they know their ideas and they're well known to each other – very well known to each other, and if there's something going on in the community, there's always somebody deal about it.

Like, me when I noticed the – when I notice the first time. I was only 16, I said: When this community would change. Social Services want to take over the community and they haven't got a clue what's going on in the community. They haven't got a clue, only his – their ideas. Ideas were there in your heads.

One thing they say – they tell the people: No, we gotta take out – your kids out from your community because you don't care them. How can you say a person, his own children, his own grandchildren, you don't care them? I certainly don't believe that kind of foolishness, to tell you.

And it hurts, hurts me a lot when I hear Social Services say that you don't care about your children. It's very (inaudible). That's why I seen a lot of people who speak here, they got emotion, feelings, they've cried.

But I can handle myself. I really want to cry when I said a child shouldn't be taken away from their community. A child doesn't even know what's going on. A young child doesn't even know what's going on, and they didn't even know who – where he's going and who's gonna – when he's getting older, who's gonna teach the Innu-aimun? Who's gonna teach that? All they can hear is white-speaking person in her care or in his care.

And it hurts. That's why a lot of people are crying when they speak. But I'm strong enough to say that I don't wanna cry. I want to do it the right way, to keep you informed what did happen and why they didn't tell us what's going on with these children. They're not sick. They're just taken. Taken away from their parents.

I also think the reason why the Social Services were taking the people – the young people in my community, they were saying they got better life to be outside in their community, which is not true. But it's not true; because whatever my grandfather were doing the things that were right for me to be here in my community. Whatever my grandfather, my grandmother did to me and tried to teach me the way they were in their lifestyle and whatever they can get out of me.

The other thing I remember when my grandfather and my grandmom told me about it: Don't cross – they drawed a line in front of me. He said: Don't ever let other people – other person cross your line. But the thing is I didn't quite understand. I was a young person then, when my father told me that. From my age now, I can understand why he said that to me: Don't ever let anybody cross your line.

Now, if you want to find out the reason why I said that, the line. As far as I can recall what my grandfather told me and my grandmother, don't ever let someone cross your line. That's you people, I say, Social Services. Any person who is not Innu, they always want to cross our line because they know better. That's what they were saying to us: We know better. We are educated people. Not so – not so fast. You got to understand what my grandfather said to me: Don't ever let any person cross that line.

That's how I use my grandfather words as today, and my grandmother's and my Elders. That's why I use today the wording. The wording that they were saying to us: Don't let anyone pass you, that line. And I still have it. I got strong feelings about that. I have strong feelings and I have very – sometimes emotion – emotionally, taking what my grandfather and my grandmom told me. And I believe a lot of Elders who were here before me had the same knowledge, the same thing in their heads,

that don't let anyone pass you – pass the line.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Elder Antuan, considering the time, I'll give you about five more minutes.

ELDER ANTUAN: I'm sorry, I couldn't hardly hear you.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Nuna and Elder Antuan in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

ELDER ANTUAN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

ELDER ANTUAN: I will be – another thing I want to tell you people. Everything that is happening in our community, it's not ours – it's not our fault – it's not our fault. It's the people, I want to tell them it – the Social Services are doing. They followed the footsteps of their government.

I believe it's noted in the papers. I've – I didn't see – I haven't seen yet it noted that the children, the Innu children, has to be take care of from outside, not in the community. I think that's what's it stated, whether it's not, I don't know. I don't know, but I've heard about it.

The other thing I'm hoping, I'm hoping is that the Social Services will stop their ideas about our community. Some of the Social Services were telling us we were drunk. Innu people were drunk. They don't care their children. They don't have enough food in their houses or in their tents, but we manage to let those kids grow as they want to be.

And that's why I said let it do it and stop it for the Social Services to look after us. We can look after ourselves. We can look after ourselves, even though we are – we do have hard times to live in this earth. Even though we have – I find myself, when I was a young man, I had very hard feelings about the white because they – I couldn't find a job. I couldn't find a job where I want to work. Whose fault was it? It wasn't me. It's the fault of white people because they don't wanna hire Innu people. They don't wanna hire Indians.

I'm very strong and I've always said that, I'm very strong person to say that because, a lot of times, I hear other people saying how come you're not – you can't overcome what the white people are saying to you? I've heard the white people saying to me: How come you cannot overcome?

One time I was working the highways – the department of highways. Other time I was working with the roads. Same thing, same department, the department of highways. Each one of us – there was white person and I'm Innu person, each one of us were learning how to drive a truck and who got failed? You know who fail it? The white person failed it because he didn't – he couldn't – well, he understand the white way of living and he had – he want to raise his family and I also did wanna raise my family.

And this – the boss that I was – who was looking after us said: How come you cannot learn, while this young Innu person can learn as fast as he can to understand his work? That's what he said to the white person. And now you put me where he wants to put me, the spot, that I'm used to it.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mr. Antuan, I'm gonna ask you to finish up now with your last statement, please, if you would.

ELDER ANTUAN: My conclusion as today, I'd like to thank you, all of you, for listening to me – what I have to say. And I still got a lots – a lot of words I have to spell out into the – in this Commission.

And I also thank all the people who participate the hearings, and I'd like to thank all of you.

Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We also want to thank you for your presentation.

I noticed that you were looking at Victor – Mr. Ryan – when you were talking. I know

that you never meant anything towards him personally. I understand you're talking to non-Innu people when you're saying: You people have done this to us. So, I wanna make sure that Victor doesn't feel too bad when you were looking at him. He got big shoulders.

Once again, thank you for always being here with us.

1:30, please.

ELDER ANTUAN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

P. RALPH: We'll give you more chances to speak. We know that you got a lot more to say.

ELDER ANTUAN: I got a lot more to say.

P. RALPH: We'll hear from you for more. We'll hear you.

Recess