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

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Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good evening, people.

We are commencing our evening session. Our presenter is Pien Gregoire.

Pien, welcome. Nice to see you. Will you be speaking in English or Innu-aimun?

P. GREGOIRE: Speaking English.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay, we're gonna ask Anne to translate, so break your talk down into sections that she can remember; not too long, not too short, just perfect.

P. GREGOIRE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Please feel free to begin.

P. GREGOIRE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] – I'm nervous – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken].

INTERPRETER NUNA: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Don't worry.

INTERPRETER NUNA: Mm-hmm.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay, yup.

Okay, my name is Pien Gregoire and I'm 63 years old and I was born and raised in Sheshatshiu. I could remember when I was a boy that I had a pretty much a nice childhood. I played with my friends, and I played with my friends with my neighbours, my neighbourhood boys, and I went to school and I enjoyed school very much.

And then, there wasn't so much drinking. I could remember my father sometimes drinking homebrew – my mother and father drinking homebrew. Or my father invited other neighbour husbands and he used to drink with them. They were very – they were sociable [1 second of audio loss due to technical issue.] I can – I think – I know that because they weren't fighting, or they went home afterwards.

But after a while, as I got older, it seems to be more hostility in the drinking. I don't know why. But I didn't understand why it was hostility in the home. I didn't

understand because there was conflicts, between my mother and my father, and then that escalated into my older brothers who were – I was 10 years old then, in 1970.

And I can remember when I was a boy, 10 years old, that my brothers used to say that they were rationed to buy beers. One could buy one dozen beer, and the other could get one dozen beer and the other. So they all pitch in and then have the – that one big party. Then they said they get their applications to get that RCMP station, to get that approval to buy beer, wherever the beer was sold. I can remember that.

But then the – this hostile drinking affected me very much. It affected my other siblings. There was one, two, three, four, five girls, and then there was one, two, three, four fellows – four brothers. I was a – my younger brother was the youngest brother and I was the second after the youngest, and my two older brothers were already growing up. And Sheshatshiu, I think, was born in – around in the ’50s, early ’50s – ’52, somewhere around there.

And then I – and then this hostility was getting too much for my father because the hostility was – I could remember that we was eating supper and my sister was coming home drunk and he was fighting with my father and with my mother, and the supper was damaged. There was no supper. There was too much commotion of the hostility.

And then so – then this kind – this type of hostility occurred and now from time to time, after time. I think that was in 1973, my father decided he was going to – he was not staying around in this kind of environment. We moved to Schefferville, Quebec.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Can I interrupt you, please? You don’t mind? For translation.

You okay, Pien?

P. GREGOIRE: Huh?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I’m gonna let her translate for a minute. Okay?

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sorry to interrupt.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. GREGOIRE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I remember after the school was over in June, we left in July. It was very nice to meet my other relatives in Schefferville. They were very nice to me. And some of those relatives are still alive and a lot of them have passed on. And I remember my – some of my uncles and my aunts and my cousins. They were very nice and some of them are still alive.

But then, after a while when we were in Schefferville, like maybe two months afterwards or three months, I became very homesick for my home and for my real home friends. But we lived – we didn’t get – we stayed in there for three years. Then my mother and my father split up. But during those three years in Schefferville, I was very – when I started school in September, I entered a public school where there were just white people, no Indian people at all.

It’s kinda of a – like a – I was kinda nervous about this. I was not used to suddenly entering a white school, because Sheshatshiu there were just Innu school with no white people at all. And I was starting to drop – to miss – not understand and I ended up not asking questions because I was nervous and I was shy.

But some – a lot of the students were Roman Catholics from Newfoundland. The children, I was going school with, and they made me welcome, but I also felt – started feeling inferior about myself that I was Innu, that I didn’t have white skin or blond hair and I didn’t speak – and I certainly didn’t speak very good English. They were playing, they were talking and carrying on

with themself and I couldn't get involved in that because I was different. I was Innu and they were white people. My mother told me I should get to be with them – like, be like them, but I just couldn't.

But anyways, I ended up there and I went to school and started failing my – failing grades. My teacher expected me to do – read a book, then make a book report after I finished the book. And all the other ones there they did their best and I couldn't do mine. I never had that when I was in Sheshatshiu.

And then they also told us to make projects. Make projects wherever you wanted to, New Zealand or Australia and all these things: population and economic and so forth. All this education, I couldn't comprehend it. I didn't know how to do it. This was all so suddenly to me and I just didn't know how to do it. And I started feeling – I started disliking school, but I went ahead in there and my teachers were very, very supportive to me.

He told me that there were Indians in Nova Scotia and that he was friends with one Black kid and he protected the Black kid from all the other white children, from the Black kid. When they tried to – when they all gathered around him, they – he protected that Black kid. And he tried to protect me, too. He told – he – I guess he took – told me to read, not to read comics but read books. Read books, he told me. He tried to help me, but I just couldn't comprehend it.

And then I – Grades 5, Grade 6 and then suddenly next year, Grade 7, I moved to another school and this school was kind of hostile to me, because the other Indians in there were Naskapi and they were kind of hostile or, more aggression from them. I find that they didn't – they weren't friendly to me but some of them were friendly and the other half were just, I don't know, belligerent or not very friendly. They called me other Indian from a other tribe, that kind of stuff. I wasn't – I didn't fit in, but I went ahead anyway.

Some of my other – my fellow other students from the Roman Catholic Church were split up. There was one Grade 7 over there and there was another Grade 7 over there because there was many, many students.

I got completely lost. From morning to afternoon they sent us – this is where you go to school for morning session. And 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock, I was roaming the hallways. I was lost. I didn't have many friends. I was starting to very lonesome and then I talked to my father and my mother. I said: I don't like school. I want to go with my father when he goes out trapping and hunting on the railroad – where he get off with the railroad, some place named – called – past Esker – Talzie.

And I said I –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm gonna stop you (inaudible).

P. GREGOIRE: Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, no sweat.

That's good.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

P. GREGOIRE: So after that, I went to that school and I made some friends, and some of them were not very friendly with me. I had a altercation with one of the bad students over there, and I never went back to school then.

I ran home from that guy because he tried to beat me up and he caught up with me and punched me and that was the end of my school. I was in Grade 7. And I stayed home and I think my parents wished that I went back to school but I just couldn't. I couldn't go to where I was being abused. And then I went in the country instead with my father.

I was amazed when I went into the country with my father. He was already over 60 –

he was probably over 65 because he was already having Old Age Pensions, and when you're 65 you have Old Age Pension. We stayed there in the tent and all the luxuries we have now today, when you live in tent, all the foam mattresses and like that, I don't even remember having those when we were in the tent. But in the daytime – it was so cold in the night, but my father was asleep very – he was asleep and I couldn't bother to wake him up to tell him how cold I was.

And I – when it was daytime, he cooked the meals, he made the tea and we set out to go to see his traps and so on. It was so amazing. I know that we went right to their – to the edge of that pond and he'll go one direction and get all his traps and we'll come out to the other end right where he went in. Then he'll just come out right there, like as if he was going – walking on the street in a town.

That was just simple to him and he showed me: I'll just put my trap over here like this on there and the animal would come in there and then this is where she will be trapped. Or we'll be right in the middle of the ice and then he say to me, this is a good spot for a fox to come by, and he'll set the trap. He made a long stake about this long and tied a little chain over there to it and set the trap there, and sure enough, everything he set out to do, it happened – it happened.

And I wasn't lazy and I kinda liked that, but I was also not – I was not able to be an Innu like my father. I was now failing in both cultures. In the white culture, I failed that and now this one, I tried to – the one I liked, I also failed at.

I guess the failure came because we trusted the government when he settled us in Sheshatshiu and I guess my – our Innu people gave their trust to the government, to the teachers, to the people.

Because my father said that it never happened like the way that this store manager said. He was selling his fur to the store manager, Northwest River, and he was reading the newspaper and he was sitting in his office and he said – my father told us that he said that if you sent your school to the children, your children will sit like this. They will sit in offices and be like them. They will – they don't have to trap or have a hard life.

But I saw my eldest brother go to school; he went to finish high school and go to university, but it never happened. It all – it was all – the life in Sheshatshiu was so failing. They built us houses but the houses were cold and there were – I could remember me and my brother, after my father and mother had split up and my mother came back to Sheshatshiu, we lived in our old house and – but there was no – there was nobody to do the woods. My brothers were drinking. And me and my brother were 15 and I was 16, and I – we couldn't – it was so cold that we couldn't fall asleep.

There was no wood, no heaters, nothing and I told my brother: We have to get out of here. My brother's name was Michel. And I told him – I took him to my elder sister that was married and had his – her own family, and I told him: You go there. You go there and I will go to my girlfriend's house. I'll try to live in there. And I was 18 then – I'm sure I was 18 or 17, but our life – my life was already ruined then.

I had already spent time in St. John's, in the St. John's penitentiary – I was 17 and I came back and I was already drinking. And the thing that hurted me most was the thing I was crying for. It was on a Friday night, Friday evening, and all the boys down there were just in the weight room and I was in there, too, and there was not too many people but I bumped into one guy who was living in St. John's and I got friends with him. And I managed through when I bumped into him.

I'd gone back – went back home and life was very, very hard. I can – I didn't see my mother – I saw my mother and she looked like she got bruises on her face and that made me cry. I was then probably just 18. And all this hard life, this is now in 1980.

And then I got – I guess, went steady with my wife and life just went – when I was sober, we had a wonderful life. But sometimes my wife left and I was young and I was – when you're young, you was not mature. You don't feel good when your girlfriend left you. She was gone to party with other girls or with other people and you just get paranoid. I don't know, you think that something is going on. Something is happening and you're not seeing it, put it that way.

And then we had a hard time then, I was starting to punch her out and things like that. Accusing her and her accusing me. It was like that, a back and forth.

I had – it went along like that and I gave up my punching days after RCMP officer told me that you'll hurt your wife. You'll seriously hurt your wife if you don't stop it. I thank the cop because he didn't arrest me, it was – I was in the hospital. I had punched out my – I had – I guess I could say my wife was – both of us were – I was sober and she attacked me verbally and we both were – we were both no good. I could say that because, she was attacking me and I listened and listened and listened to her until I couldn't take it no more and I lashed out my hand.

Exploded, I could say, I exploded, and I hit her right on the nose and she had a bad nosebleed – real, real bad nosebleed. I went to court for that to the judge, James Igloliorte, and he told me if you don't – can't stop this, if your wife attacks you, verbally, you should just leave your house. Put your coat on and go somewhere else and come back later and you'll – and I did that. Then after that, I never touched my wife since, and that was Mr. James Igloliorte.

But now – and then all this stuff was going on. The – stopped going to – people go in treatment and so on and I went to AA and that stuff, too. And then after a while, I never touched it now 23 years. And I have never hit my wife since.

And then, this – we hadded two kids: I hadded my granddaughter and I hadded my niece's son. And this is where it comes in that the Social Services – I don't know – my – I had already stopped drinking. Probably three years later or four years later, I don't know. We don't really remember the years, but I was doing well. I was working at Voisey's Bay and Muskrat Falls, and I was making good money and my wife was working and so on.

But we had these two kids and all my other little children were starting to grow up and they were looking after their two little – our two little babies. One – my son – our adopted son, Raphael Gregoire, and his other little friends, I told Raphael: Do you want to come with us? We're going to four-mile mark. We're going to look for partridges and some small game hunting.

But she chose to stay home and be – play with his other friends. He was probably seven years old, or six years – or seven years old or eight; but she was six, I think, and – seven and she told us – and this is what happened. This is where child, family, youth services stepped in to our lives.

Our son and the other kids – we went, and my daughter stayed home with the children. My daughter's name is Anne Philomena Gregoire, and she stayed with the children and he said he went to visit next-door neighbours across the street. And he said there was a bunch of kids came to our house and they – a lot, probably 10 – 10 kids and he said that Raphael was hurt. Our little boy was hurt.

They had played with canisters, like Raid, and throw them there in the fire, and they exploded and they jumped away. And my son explained to us that he – there was another little younger kid that he was too near the fire, and he tried to take him away there so he wouldn't be in danger of the exploding – these canisters, but instead he got it – he got the canisters in his eye, the spray.

When we came home, my daughter told us what happened and we went to the hospital. We went to get our boy, see what happening. And this is where the Social

Services stepped into our lives. He said we were not supervising our children, even though my daughter was already probably 17, and was supervising the kid but some – you let the Indian kids sometimes just go in – go to the baseball field, things like that.

I'm not sure, but after that, these things happened: My niece had another boy – had another older brother – my son had an older brother, and he was in the CSSD. He was already apprehended and my seven-year-old boy said he missed his brother. He wanted to be friends with his brother and bond.

So he had went to the Social Services about this and then this happened, like, she was seven years old or – yeah, and then I was – she was not apprehended. But one day the Social Services worker came. Her name was – she's – I remember her name but I can't recall her name now, but she said that my son was violent. That she picked up things like that. She would be violent when she's – grows older. She will be very violent when she gets older if you don't get treatment.

So the next thing I knew, I was working on the houses and when I went to go for my 10 o'clock break at my home, there was a – they had come there and there was a paper in there and he showed me the paper. Your son is apprehended. This is the paper and all that was in there, the apprehension paper. We – I couldn't do nothing. I couldn't fight back. They had the paper. They had the law on their side.

And then the – this was the worst nightmares started happening. I went over there and they said things like that. They said: It's October, I'm working and if she's out there in Happy Valley, out there somewhere on the – adopt – foster parents. And I said – we had telephones and we – telephone calls and my father – my son said: I want presents. I would like to have some presents from Mom and you. And we bought the presents and we thought she was going to come down and get the presents, but no. There was – November came, December came, the 18th, 20, 22, 23, and we told the social worker how come the – we want to send the presents to our boy. Then they said: Okay, you can take the presents over to your boy; she's at this place that – we know where the place was. Robert's Road and the number 62.

We already had a vehicle, because we were both working, and we were at the 10-mile mark. We had out – there is already this iPhones and you can use in the truck, and this phone call rang, my wife or me picked it up, and he said – social worker: Raphael don't want your presents; she don't want your presents. And we had to – we couldn't take the presents because this is what she said: Your son don't want your presents. But my son already said that he wants some presents.

So we went back home and – after that, we went back home. We couldn't go give him our presents so he'll be happy and we'll be happy, and then he called. Our son called, he said: Mom, Dad, I asked for presents; where's my presents? We said Social Services called us and they said that you said that – they told us that you didn't want our presents. He said that we – he never said that. And he was very, very upset. He was in – he was eight years old then.

And then he – I guess he started having this anger build up in him after this happened. He was already suffering things like his brother was already taken away by CSSD and he miss his brother and so on. That's why he wanted to be with his brother.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to stop you once more.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Pien, I'm going to give you 10 more minutes, just to be fair to Anne.

I could listen to you all – you're a very good storyteller. I could listen to you a long time,

but let's be fair, Anne has been working all day long.

P. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm. Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So I'd like to hear from you some more.

P. GREGOIRE: Tomorrow?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, you got 10 minutes now and then you can talk to Paula and we'll see if we can't fit you in some other time. I don't know about tomorrow –

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – but she'll let you know.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay, yeah.

I can finish my story. There's, I guess, another half-hour to finish my story.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Then we will want you back.

P. GREGOIRE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

Finish now and then we'll make sure you come back again to finish.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

P. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm.

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

P. GREGOIRE: Okay, yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yup.

P. GREGOIRE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good, good, good.

P. GREGOIRE: And we went through hard times. My son, Raphael, was sented to London, Ontario, and there was another spot down there he was sent and then he ended up as far as Regina, Saskatchewan. And they told us that – we went to visit – I – we went to visit Raphael in Regina. I went to visit Regina – in Regina for my son.

I call him my son because you love your foster parents so much that you call him your son and he calls you my father and my mother.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

P. GREGOIRE: He told us that his biological mother was not her mother; that my wife was her mother, she made sure of that.

But anyway, we went to visit him in Saskatchewan. I slept in the hotel with my other grandson, William. And when we went to visit Raphael, we wented out of Regina. We wented under – there was no – nothing down there, just road, grass and then we eventually came to a place called – I don't know where he was – where they were keeping him. They had a name but I don't remember it now. But there was a barn-like school in there, and I saw him playing in the – on a trampoline, and he like sports. He liked soccer or football or hockey. He liked all those.

And I didn't really like the – knowing that he was outside of – in some remote place. Just like end of the Grand Lake Road or that kind of stuff, with a few buildings in there, and there were some other guys in there – or kids in there, too. I don't know where they come from – up North.

Anyway, he – we went there two times and they ask us what did we want to ask them questions. They said that they gave him pills for his – there was not too much talk about his anger, but they told me after my son was come back to Sheshatshiu when he was 15 years old and was going to relieve him when he was 16, they told me that: Your son, Raphael, started smoking weed after he came to Saskatchewan when he was

probably 10 years old. I said this was a failure. There's no success in the – when you took him away and I wanted him back all the time. We wanted him back all the time and he wanted to come home all the time.

And when they told us that he was already smoking long time ago, there's no success in this story. You should have sent him back home to us when – as soon as you find out that he was being – not doing how – I don't know how they got the marijuana. But there's no success in this story.

My son now is just a full addict. He smokes marijuana and he has a daughter, and my poor – we love our granddaughter very, very much. He's her daughter. He's autism and he has come deaf, but he's very, very intelligent. I don't know how they're going to help my granddaughter as she gets older.

But he's very, very – he's very énergique – energy, and we live by the – close to the water, and when we look – try after, as much as we can, to look after her, and all of us in the home, the family, looks after her. But one day he ran out the door. Nobody saw him. We looked for her. I went down by the water and there he was down there playing by the water. Not on the water but there was – what do you call those – water spills out from there and – culverts. And there he was, three – 2½ years old. The energy and the rocks down there, I don't know how he managed to get down there on the sand and there he was.

But we now look – we try now, we lock the door, and we don't show her how to open the door, because of what happened. We try hard to be good parents and to look after them, but one incident like that, and the Social Services were on our backs just like that. That you're automatically – you were automatically told you're not good parents.

I keep saying to myself, they used to say Indians – what did they say back in the 1800s, when they're cowboys? You're a good Indian if you're a dead Indian – something like that.

But I say now the cop – the white people – the Social Services now or the cop – RCMP, say: You're a good Indian if you're a sober Indian, and you're a bad Indian if you're drinking – you're a drinking Indian. Just as simple – simple to me. I see a lot of my people childrens taken away because they got one incident.

I had my son, 30 years old, her two kids – she looked after her two kids, but she went home 5 o'clock in the morning and she had paid the babysitters over there. And she paid $200 and then she went home one – another night before, and then she went to a party and after the party she went home, and after she was sleep, she would get his kids, but that's not happen. The cops were driving and they said: Dominic, you're not supposed to be outside on the streets 5 o'clock in the morning. They take her in the cruiser, jailed him and kids – she was paying for the kids; they apprehend them. They took the kids away, like, over two years now.

Is that justice or injustice? To me, it's injustice. If you pay your babysitter and you go and get your kids the next day after you sobered up, but they don't look at it that way. You're a bad Indian if you're a drinking Indian. You're not worthy to be looking after your babies. But he was very, very good at looking after his children.

He didn't have job sometimes but sometimes he had a job. He worked at Voisey's Bay, and he worked – he did very good; but this, I guess, addiction got us all, all ruined in here in Sheshatshiu. Right down to you mind, everything. Like, I could tell that there's terrible, terrible wrong, that drinking that alcohol. It mess you, it mess your children, it made you angry, everything – all those bad feelings, I can tell.

But my son now never drink three months and the babies not home. Not taken away, but they gave him the weekend visits and the sleepovers.

And sometimes those (inaudible) taken back home to the EPH and they're bawl their – screamed their hearts out to not go

back to EPH and so on. But what can he do? We're – we don't have the power and the Band Council don't have the power, but it's the way it is. And I don't accept it, but I don't think that somebody drinking and coming home should be kids – their kids should be taken away like that.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going –

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – to stop you there.

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: But we welcome you back. So have a chat with Paula before you go.

P. GREGOIRE: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: And we'll set up a new schedule for you.

P. GREGOIRE: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much –

P. GREGOIRE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – for your presentation.

P. GREGOIRE: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We're going to end with a prayer.

Nastash, you can invite Janet.

P. RALPH: Is Anne gonna translate that last part?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sorry?

Do you want me to say it again?

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, once again.

And Nastash, you can invite –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll close the day with a prayer.

ELDER J. MICHEL: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.