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

English Transcript | Volume 22

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

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**Recess**

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** Thank you for your patience, ladies and gentlemen.

We have a presenter and it's Mr. Penashue – Gervais Penashue.

So what we usually do is asked anyone who wants to come forward and tell us about Innu life, Innu experience, experience growing up or experiences with CSSD, child welfare, please come in and give us your opinions and your thoughts. We're happy to hear them.

Thank you very much for being here, Sir.

[Dialogue between G. Penashue and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

**G. PENASHUE:** Okay, I'll try to speak English, I guess.

I don't know where to start, but I got a support on my right-hand side, Penote Antuan. When I seen him, when I walked in, right away I thought about my dad, about Mount Cashel, because my dad would always talked about Mount Cashel.

I never understood. I never understood when I was young, why there was so much violence. Growing up, I could never get it. I had so much grudge against other parents. Why are their parents different from us? Why did they get along? Why is there food at their house, but not us? It was difficult.

And there is no – there was never any discussion about – growing up, from my parents, about consent, sexuality, whatever it may be. Like, growing up, eight, 10 years old, we eventually ended up in the priest – priest's house, because my parents thought that was a safe haven – safe haven for us, safe place for us to sleep, to eat, but that's what – that was not the case.

That was the worst, evil place that I ever felt in my life. I didn't know what touching meant, consent meant. I didn't know. Because my parents respected the priest, we always had to go to church on Sundays and my parents were very happy when we were in the altar boys. They were happy when we got home around lunchtime when the church was over. You guys did a good job being an altar boy, helping the priest, they would say.

I was so happy to get out of the church, for it to be finished, just to run home. I didn't know how to – I guess we, me and my brothers, didn't know how to tell our parents, because they respected the church – my parents. I was caught in a boundary of how to get out of there. How do I get out? We were vulnerable. My parents were alcoholics and the priest knew that. He took advantage of my parents.

Sometimes we would hide in the woods when the darkness came, because we were afraid to go to his place. I remember when I was a kid, we would hide behind my parents' house. It was dark and there's the vehicle going to my parents' house and it was the priest.

Then we seen him leave – the vehicle leave. Then we went into my house – our house, my parents' house. Then my parents said: The priest was just here. He's concerned. He's concerned of you guys. We didn't know how to tell my mom or dad. He said the priest is mad at you guys. Why won't you go to his place? We didn't know how to tell my parents.

Eventually after a few days – we were hiding still in the woods – eventually we were at the playground; I remember it quite well. It was dark. Now this time, he wasn't using his vehicle. He was walking by foot. He grabbed us. He dragged us to his place. We were ashamed because we were seen by our friends. We couldn't say anything. We were ashamed. Just feels like it's yesterday.

Our friends thought we were sleeping good and fed well. No way. I never had an appetite to eat there. Even though I was hungry, I never had the appetite to eat. I was so eager to get out of that place.

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** (Inaudible)?

**G. PENASHUE:** All right.

I didn't know. Okay, sorry.

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** It's all right.

**INTERPRETER NUNA:** [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

**G. PENASHUE:** You felt trapped because there was no – nowhere to turn to. No – there was no Social Services back then, no social worker or no – there's nothing to look forward to for – you didn't know which direction to ask for help because church was like a government. Priests was like a government. My parents were vulnerable. It seemed that church had money.

My parents couldn't take us out to outings. Like, I remember the priest, I guess he must have asked my mom and my dad, that he was going to take us to Quebec City, Sainte-Anne, and my parents were so happier because they couldn't afford, themself, the trip. That, I remember.

You couldn't say no. So we went with him, travelling by vehicle during the nights. Whoever sat in the front seat was the – me and my brother that day, I remember, we were fighting. You sit in the front seat – you sit in the front seat. No, you sit in the front seat. So we were always fighting, me and my brother. Until we took the train from Esker to Sept-Îles.

Then he rented the vehicle from Sept-Îles there. Again, we didn't know – you didn't know how to say no. The cycle kept going and going, and when you got to Sainte-Anne – Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré – every night, I don't know he ever slept or not. It seemed that he was always awake. I remembers, at times my brother and I would – he would say – he would pinch me or – to

warn me, to give me warning that he was after him or me. It was very – even though you're in a spiritual place at the church in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, I felt so much sickness to my stomach.

I was mad. I was mad at the world. I was mad at my parents. I was mad. The only time I was happy was when I was with my buddies, my friends, and when he wasn't around.

I don't know how we managed to get home. I don't know. Sometimes I black out this. I don't want to look at it or don't want to face it or I get upset. Maybe that's why my dad was like that when he was drinking. He was different when he was drinking; maybe that's why.

Because I remember my dad, when he was still living, he said to me – that's when he was stopped drinking – my son, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I thought what I did, when I put you in the priest's house, I thought I was doing the right thing. Because he came from Mount Cashel, like I told you, he thought the things would stop there. He never thought his kids would be abused.

And just recently, not too long ago, I was kind of pissed off here and this new priest that – that's here now, he – when he first – the first year, I guess, he was here he came to my – our house, and my mom was with him and my sister. They come for – they came for supper at my house.

And the priest says to me – I have two girls, one boy and then one adopted in – who was adopted in Quebec – and he says to me: Gervais, why I don't ever see your kids at the church? Why don't you send them to church?

A flashback came to me. That's the thing that I was told – I heard when I was a kid. And for this priest to tell me, with my kids around, and I spoke to my mom in my own language. I said: Does he know where I come from? Does he know the situation when I was a kid? I was caught off guard. I was – I didn't feel like eating with him, the way he tried to control me, the words that he – the words that I heard from him.

So today, I say to my kids: God is everywhere, not just at the church. God is everywhere. I pray when I go to bed. I have my own beliefs and my children, I love them all.

So I – once this cycle with the priest ended – not ended, but then eventually lead to the school, to a teacher. I thought things would end. I thought this – things was still ongoing with alcohol back at home, but you still try to escape. Where do you go for food? I thought that – this teacher invited us to his place, a residence nearby the church, a big place. Maybe some people might remember that place, the white, big building.

And I think things – I thought things would change, but they didn't. We're – again, we were vulnerable. I guess he must have taken advantage of it. He seen my parents, how they were, so that's where it led. That's where, again, uncomfortableness, insecurity. Not – there was a lot of – when he did this I, you know, felt – because you never felt sexual abuse from a Native. Myself, I had never felt anything from a Native person. But a non-Aboriginal person, a priest, a schoolteacher to be doing this and not able to talk to your parents about it. And like, there was no counselling, no nothing. I didn't know where to turn to or – I guess we just let it go. Me and my brothers, we just let it go. Brush it off or – because there's no one to turn to.

Eventually, I remember it quite well, after school, that's how the word got out. After school – or lunchtime, I think, because we were eating, me and brothers. And he – one of them said to – he sexual abused you last night. He was making fun of us, because one of them – one of my brothers got mad because he didn't get enough food to eat. And my parents overheard this conversation between us. They said: What are you boys saying? My mom and my dad would say: Is this true what you're saying about the priest? That he's doing this to you? Yes, Mom.

And eventually my mom arranged a meeting with the bishop. I remember it quite well. He lived over at Sister Coffey's house. Rose Gregoire was the translator. We went over there, me and my brothers – Bishop Sutton. We were scared because we were meeting the priest's boss, I guess, higher level.

My mom was telling us then that if you're telling the truth, this got to be done. So we spoke about it and we told the bishop. And the bishop told us what he's going to do is transfer this priest to Davis Inlet. I felt okay about it, but I felt bad about the kids in Davis Inlet because he was being transferred.

And I remember also when at – we were at that school, Peenamin McKenzie School. There was an announcement. Sister Coffey made an announcement that this priest that abused us, was – went to Davis Inlet, ran off a cliff and is in – being medevaced. I was happy. I hope he dies, I said. I hope he dies, in my mind, but I didn't say it verbally. I hope he dies. No, he survived.

And growing up, when I was 15 years old, and I remember one of those teenagers in Davis Inlet committed suicide. He shot himself and I know why he did it. And people were crying when this priest – when we heard that he was – ran off a cliff. The teachers were crying. I didn't know who to tell, because our school was run by a nun, Sister Coffey. So you didn't know where to – who to talk to or who to run to. So you just had to close up.

I am glad that I got to speak again, because I – it seems that I was avoiding – this place to come in, because I've been driving on the road there and watching these vehicles parked outside and always hesitating to come up or what will people think of me, or – that's how you feel when you're a kid: What will they think of us?

But most of the time when I – when we spoke about this, when my parents heard about it, they blamed themselves. But after going through counselling and that, and understanding more about it, I said to my parents: It's not your fault. You didn't know what was going on. You thought we were in safe place, in which we weren't.

And today, like, I'm sober, clean and with my family and with my kids, my children. Today, I'm able to teach – talk about them about sexuality, about consent, in which my parents didn't know about back then, about consent.

Today I am not ashamed, but I still feel a bit scared at times. Scared when you think about it, when you go back to the days when it was difficult. And I wanted to thank the Inquiry for doing this. I'm glad I got the courage to come up, and thank you.

**COMMISSIONER QUPEE:**
Tshenashkumitin, Gervais.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

It's hard to not feel that pain, and I feel the pain.

And I thank Elder Penote Antuan for coming forward to give Gervais support.

And Gervais, tshenashkumitin, Gervais. Thank you.

**COMMISSIONER DEVINE:** First of all, I just want to say how very sorry I am to hear the difficulties – the major difficulties you had to go through in your life. I think, similar to Anastasia, is that I really felt that young boy in you, as you told your story, and can't begin to imagine what it must have been like for you.

However, you have shown such great strength and courage today, after having gone through that and being able to come here today and to speak. So I am really glad that you came in. And, as you go on your healing journey, I do wish you all the best and thank you so much for coming today.

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** We are privileged to know so many strong Innu people in this Inquiry. We believe you; we trust what you had to say actually helps you and other people.

And we understand that there are many people out there whose stories we have not heard, but we hope that hearing you tell yours in the presence of your family, in the presence of your community, gives them a strength to lift the burden of the past as well.

Thank you very much.

We'll break now for 10 or 15 minutes to see where we are on the schedule.

**Recess**

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** Ladies and gentlemen, the next speaker is unavailable today, so we will reschedule that.

That will mean, for today's purposes, we're done and we will be back here –

**P. RALPH:** Yeah.

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** – probably –

**P. RALPH:** In the afternoon but we're not –

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** – tomorrow afternoon. Not in the morning, for sure, yeah.

**P. RALPH:** (Inaudible.)

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** Thank you very much.

Can we have a prayer please, Penote, if you would?

**ELDER ANTUAN:** I'd like to do a closing prayer this afternoon.

And I've been enjoying all of my entry here. Coming in and to listen to the people's talking about themselves, about the residential school and all that. And I appreciate all you people, that you came here to listen to them.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

What I just said it, I'd like to thank all the people, all of you. And I also want to remind myself, the – especially to the residential school who didn't come home to tell their story about themselves and how did they wipe them out.

And I appreciate, thank you very much.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Thank you very much.

**P. RALPH:** Thank you.

**COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE:** Thank you, Sir.