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

Transcript | Interview | Private Session 3

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Now, would you rather I sit here next to you or sit here? You're fine either way?

D. P.: Either way.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, I'll sit next to you.

C. URQUHART: D. P., I don't know if they spoke to you, but normally I'd be in the room. I'm one of the lawyers.

D. P.: Yeah.

C. URQUHART: But it's up to you if you would like me here or not.

D. P.: Mm-hmm, it don't matter.

C. URQUHART: Okay, then I'll sit over here, too. I'm just here to take notes.

D. P.: Okay.

So how does it work out?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I'll tell you a little bit. Let me shut that door now.

First, I should tell you a little bit about me because you don't know anything about me. You just met me 10 minutes ago. So, basically, I'm from the Island, from Newfoundland.

D. P.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I grew up in a small community of 500, an hour and a half south of St. John's. When I was a young fella, we never got to St. John's very often.

D. P.: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: It was different back then. So it was a fishing community. I grew up with three brothers and three sisters. Then I went to school in St. John's and became a social worker.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I was a social worker for 23 years, involved in child protection most of that time, and then I went to the university and I started teaching there, I taught there for 20 years.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I've a lot of knowledge of child protection and child welfare and different kinds of things relating to child welfare.

I retired in 2018, so in 2020 I was asked if I would be interested in coming to be part of the Inquiry, because of my background and experience and that. It was something I was very interested in. People were asking me and I thought I could contribute, make a positive difference, and I said I'll certainly be ….

D. P.: So where do you work at social work, over in Newfoundland?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes, over in Newfoundland, just mostly on the eastern part, so places like Bonavista and St. Mary's and St. John's a fair bit.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, but didn't live in St. John's 'til much later. I preferred the outports, let's just say.

For six years, I drove an hour and 10 minutes to St. John's every day and an hour and 10 minutes back. But I had to give up and move to St. John's in retirement –

C. URQUHART: You gave in to the pull of St. John's.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: People ask me where I'm from, I always say that I'm from Renews, that's the name of the place I grew up in.

D. P.: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: But I make my home in St. John's. So I'm very attached to my community where I grew up.

So just to give you some sense of who I am. My wife and I, like I say, we have six children between us; she had three children, and her husband passed, and I was divorced and had three children. Now we have six grandchildren between the two of us. Only two of them are – well, none of them are in St. John's, two were in St. John's.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Four were in Alberta, and now the two who were in St. John's are going to school in New Brunswick, so.

D. P.: Mmm, okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. So. Empty nest a second time.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So how this works D is that – I don't know if you've attended any sessions before?

D. P.: Never, I was trying to stay away, trying –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

D. P.: I dunno, it hurts, so that's why.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Sure.

So basically what we'll do is we'll – it's about child protection, but it can be kind of any aspects of your life.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Because there's a lot of people that are affected by child protection in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

D. P.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And where you were directly involved, or either family and friends or people you knew were involved in this, you know, that's all relevant and important, so we're just trying to leave it as broad as you want it to be.

D. P.: Mmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You tell your story. We basically will let you have your say without trying to stop and ask you questions or anything like that.

D. P.: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So you just talk. If you need to take a pause or anything, you know, whatever, for a few minutes, or if you need a break and that stuff.

D. P.: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So this time is your time. I'm gonna take a few notes, but I'll try not to take too many so I can be able to listen to what you have to say.

D. P.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, so that's what the Inquiry part of it is about, is hearing from the people in the community about their experiences and what they have to say.

D. P.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Any questions before you start?

D. P.: No.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Are you okay?

D. P.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

D. P.: So how do I begin?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You can begin where you like because then you can go back and all that, so don't worry about –

D. P.: Well, as you know, my name is D. P., and I'm one of the elected officials here in the community. I was born in North West River, but as soon as I was born, I lived with my grandmother. Five years later, my mother took me and I lived in Schefferville, the Quebec border between Labrador. It was rough out there because I felt like an outsider and I was always on the system there, too. I would be sent away to Sept-Îles because a lot of drug and alcohol use of my parents.

So I came back here to Labrador when I was 14 –13. My grandmother passed away and I stayed ever since because I felt at home here because my family was here. I felt more safe.

I was married at a young age. I have four kids with my ex-wife, three girls and a boy. Now I'm married again, we have one child together.

I want to start with the young age. Like I said, we were having trouble, where we were so young and having children and kinda needed some kind of help because there was also drug and alcohol use on our end with my ex-wife.

When my oldest daughter was about 11 or 12, I believe, she was taken away by CSSD and she stayed in Ontario until she was 16. My other girl, third youngest, she was sent as well to Ontario and Regina. The youngest one, too, as well, she was sent to Regina – all my girls.

They always wanted to come home. Trying to get help around the community or from the CSSD was kind of hard, you know. Everything was delayed all the time. Every time there was court dates, we wouldn't know about it. CSSD would go ahead with it, proceed with the court case, and the justice would side with the CSSD.

What breaks my heart, too, is when CSSD said they're there to help the kids, but we didn't find out when my daughter Nascha was given anti-depressant pills over at Regina. That's what I did with her, any way I can get them back here, you know what I mean? What kind of support would be here, too, at the same time because the ex-wife and I, we're just starting to talk, for the sake of the kids.

One of the girls, my oldest, she's about 27, she's battling with her mental health – bad. She's killing herself right now. The third one, Nascha – my Nascha – she took her life.

I'm telling you she would have been here if she was alive, I know. Why? Because she said: I wanna be a social worker. I know how the kids are treated up there, she said. How they're misrepresent, how they're lied all the time. She was very angry about it.

When she was getting ready to come home from there, she was so adamant to take her sister out. She said: I wanna take my sister out. I don't wanna leave my sister here. I know how they're treating people here, on the outside.

Then she came back and everything went well for a bit. She had a child and, all of a sudden, everything derailed. When I heard that she took her life, you know, that just killed me deep down. So I go in the country, Nutshimit, and stayed there for a good two months. While everybody was going home, I wanted to stay a little longer just by myself. But there was always somebody there who wanted to stay with me. It was my cousin, Jerome. I thank him for that.

So I had to deal with those kind of demons, you know, with losing my daughter to suicide. And the mother of my child, my ex-wife, she took her life, too.

Did it contribute to that because of CSSD? I don't know. I think it contributed.

Yeah, my girls was the ones who are struggling really hard. My ex-wife's – our youngest one, she's very quiet, you know. But when she uses alcohol or drugs, she would explode.

Yeah, that's those problems I have right now, if you know what I mean, it's hard to trust the CSSD right now. I have two little grandchildren there who were almost apprehended.

[Recording ends/is cut off.]