

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

English Transcript | Volume 24

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Inquiry in progress at start of recording] – her opinions, her views, anything that she'd like to report and say to the Commission. We're very happy to have you here.

R. TSHAKAPESH: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

R. TSHAKAPESH: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Translate – try to translate.

Far as I remember when I was young, there's one event I remember was – I know I was young, I don't know how old – me and my brothers and sisters were taken. I don't know why but we were taken. We were in that – there's a building down below, there's a big building. We were – I remember being put there and – six of us.

I remember my one – one day my – that day, my sister – the building is tall and my sister, she jumped over – jumped and got up, opened the window and got out and she got every one of us – asked us to get out. We did. My younger sister was a baby then. We took her out from that big – I don't know, maybe 12 feet or maybe – I don't know how many feet but it was a tall building. It's a long way down. I don't remember getting hurt, but I remember being free from that place.

So we ran home where we belong and next day, I remember being taken again. I don't know how many times, but we always went home – home where we belong.

One day I went home, ran away from that place they tried to kidnaps – kidnap us, let's put it that way. I went home, I saw my mother. She was sweeping the floor, crying. As soon as I looked at her, she was crying sweeping the floor. She was alone. That break – that broke my heart. I didn't know, but I knew we were a family. We belong in my mother's care and my dad's. I had brothers and sisters. But it hurt, somebody to come in and rip – try to rip up – rip the family apart. It still hurts me thinking about it.

I was telling my husband while I was driving up, I said it was a big building and we all ran out. I said, I think they got sick of us, I said, because we keep going back to where we belong. I can't imagine other families not able to run home like we always did. Every kid that was taken, I know the feeling that you always gotta go back where you belong, and some of them died.

My nephew died. My mother tried her hardest to take his grandkids back and he never got to go home. He died in Montreal. We couldn't bring him home, too, because of the department. We weren't white enough. Our colour was different.

I didn't go to the funeral because I was kind of pissed off and I didn't wanna be part of that – to have to see the foster parents, too. I never talked to that lady again and she was a Mohawk. Money – it was about money for her, I guess, but children – that was my brother's kids. My brother's kids weren't for sale. Those kids weren't for sale. They didn't get to go home.

I told my niece – she's still in Montreal, we all did our best to get them, bring them back home, but we weren't successful. But I told her I tried to be a foster parent to them because as I was given the responsibility from my mom to try to fight the courts for those kids. I wasn't successful. I wasn't white enough. I wasn't – I guess, I didn't look like them, put it that way.

And then I talked about in my language after, I said: Losing a child is really – losing somebody you love is really – it's heartbreaking. That person, your dear heart really shatters, your heart and your dreams and you don't – it doesn't come – it'll never come back. You won't able to see his family. You won't able to see your grandkids either and never – you never – there's no more of that person.

And I recently lost my boy, my son, my oldest son. He, too, went through the system. His kids were taken and he draw – he turned to alcohol and drugs and doctors gave him antidepressants, too. He keep wanting his family back but he said he doesn't have a chance, nobody does – nobody does.

I keep trying my best to be a mother to my boy, trying to encourage him to stop drinking and you'll get your family back. He died July – July 14. He never got his family back. The pills killed him. Doctors keep prescribing pills, and he's drinking, too. I keep reminding him that pills will kill him; gotta stop drinking, too, you'll get your kids back. No, he shattered my heart.

But the doctors, they knew that he was an alcoholic; they knew that the Social Services shattered his dreams; they knew that he drank every day, they still prescribe him pills and even antidepressant pills. I told one doctor that he was in a coma once. I told him: Now, stop! Stop prescribing him pills. You're gonna kill my son.

Nobody listens to us. When I lost my first – my second son, Thunderheart, they try to give me prescription of pills, antidepressants, after I lost him through this suicide and this – antidepressant pills was the first thing they wanted to give me, those doctors. I said no, no, I don't want pills, I said. I said my son died of those, too, and my second son this year died of those pills.

I don't know, I'm crying for help. I don't know where to turn. How many people – how many sons are we gonna lose? I don't have any more, but whose son is next? Whose son's next is gonna die from this? Those hospitals giving that pills to our nephews now. Maybe are my grandkids. I wonder who's gonna stop this?

I wanted to say something, but today I said it: I wanted people to listen, that hospital doctors has to stop prescribing those pills to our children and to our grandkids and to our nephews. I no longer have sons – to save my sons.

And for mothers, my sister, she never got her kids and she's not all there. She never healed from it. Every time you mention Social Services she goes bananas. She's really angry. She'll say something like: It's your fault.

How many mothers are like that? How many mothers are gonna be like that before they wake up? Who is fighting for us now? How many children of ours are gonna be for sale? They use them for – Innu children are used for mortgage, it's still happening!

I think that's it. That's all I need to say because I'm – I just need a break, and just needed to get that out.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Ruby, thank you so much for adding your voice to the many others we've heard and touching our hearts with the way that you and your children have been treated so cruelly. But as you said, it has to be said, it has to come out and we're grateful that you had the strength to do that today.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Ruby, tshenashkumitin.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you also, Ruby.

So sorry about your loss. Also, thank you for coming today to speak. It certainly takes a great deal of courage to do so, and I believe you're doing it because you want things. You've been very clear: It's got to stop. And we've heard so many stories since we started these community meetings and there has to be big changes, as someone said this morning, and they have to be done quickly, but thoughtfully.

Thank you very much.

R. TSHAKAPESH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll have a short break, please.

ELDER TSHAKAPESH: I wanna – before –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Go ahead.

ELDER TSHAKAPESH: – before you say – before we take a break, I –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sure.

ELDER TSHAKAPESH: – I want to say a few stuff that really, really bothers me. And I was invited – thought there was gonna be a meeting, but obviously there was a lot of people taking the mics and – which is really good to see.

One of the things that I was sitting over there by the – by –

R. TSHAKAPESH: It's okay.

ELDER TSHAKAPESH: – sitting over there listen to the testimonies, whatever you call it, and I know – I realize and I know this – the fact that this is not a criminal procedure, I know that, and I was very commended to hear from one of the Commissioners this morning that – telling me, putting my – his

hand over my shoulder saying: Look, what I – what have you done.

And I told my wife that I still I find it very hard. I find it very hard – people. I'm struggling because of what transpired with our lives, me and my wife, and I said this publicly on CBC that this is probably one the hardest things that I ever gonna do in my life as an advocate, as the former Chief.

And it's happening but I was reluctant to be – to take part of it sometime, because I wasn't strong enough to speak, because it still hurts very much, what happened on May 24 – July – May 20 – May 24, 2017.

I want to read you a story that really bothers me; really, really, especially in the mornings – early mornings and in the evenings. I struggle but nobody sees that. They see Simeon walking around dressed nice, don't even feel about it, but you don't really how we've – how I felt inside.

I wanna tell you, I wanna give you this, to share with you. A young girl wrote somebody to the parents letting him know that – told him that he wrote a letter to him for them: Good afternoon, I'm so sorry to bother you, you know, but I saw you on YouTube and it really made me think there was ever apology – excuse me.

If it wasn't ever an apology or taken the – anything done about when he tried to restrain him in the care. He ended up in the ambulance. He had to go to hospital because he wasn't responding after what happened. I saw a lot of change in him. He wasn't playing his music the same. He wasn't even talking the same. I believe it had to do a lot with his death. I'm so sorry overstepping boundaries. I know do not know me and don't – you don't know me, but I knew him. I cared for him a lot.

And second thing, a young boy wrote to his mom, saying: Mom, I wanna come home. I wanna be with you. I can't eat. I feel I'm losing my language. I really wanna be with you, mom and dad. Can you please talk to my social worker? I wanna come home. To me, the boy was begging for his life.

And that boy was our son, Thunderheart. They killed our son. They took away from us. They beat him up. I never saw this message until Thunderheart took his life. What happened to him? What did they do to him?

The girl said they knock him – they bang his walls – on the concrete wall, knock him out and he wasn't responding. They rush him to the hospital in Regina.

What kind of child protection is that? They took our son away from us, and I said that – I miss my son. There's not a day that goes by and I don't think about him.

But you're gonna hear me in my testimony in January. I will have a presentation, with people need to see what they did to us and others. I even ask a criminal investigation what they did to him. And do you know what they said, the RCMP? Insufficient evidence. There is reasonable, probable grounds into they information – what this girl was saying. There is. I know. I was a cop, I know.

Assault, I don't know what section now, it's 274: No one is not to be hit without his consent. No one. What kind of law is that? These are the real criminals, and they prescribe my son antidepressants without even consult us.

We are not a violent people. Every time the Innu people, as long as I can remember – I'm an educated man but I'm not too – I'm an average person and educated and I'm not an academic student but I know right and wrong. I am a human.

My son was a human being. I wish I knew what they did to him, but it was too late. I knew my son wasn't the same. Something happened in here. Something happened, I know that, I seen him, I was the – I'm his father and I miss you my boy.

Somebody should be accountable. When is gonna end? When? Justice must prevail. There's gotta be some way and somehow. We gotta make them be accountable. If I was doing that a child, I know there will be a SWAT team in my front yard. There will be. I

know that. I know I would get arrested and wear shacks, handcuff, and it would be – and I would hit the headlines in the news media.

But when our stories are told like this, are you gonna see that in headlines, CBC, Globe and Mail, *National Post*? Very little; they'll grant us a line or stories, but it's not happening. It's not happening.

I want justice and I will not stop. If I have to protest, if I have to die, I'll die. I'm willing to die for it. I'm willing to die. I'm willing to take a bullet, because if I do that protesting, trying to fight for my rights, I know I'm gonna become the vandal and they become law. Why is that?

But I'll do my presentation in January that people need to see. These are the facts, those – the facts that I'm gonna present it, they are gonna be undisputed and I guarantee you that.

I need to get well. I need help, what's happening and I'm ready. I'm scheduled to go to treatment and I'm thankful for Louise for giving us assistance to go – for us, me and my wife and my daughter, to heal our own wounds. But they're not gonna be healed, but will ease them.

And thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Simeon, very much.

Thank you.

We'll have a break now and come back with the next presenter.

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