

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

English Transcript | Volume 26

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, let’s get back, please, for our next speaker.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is she ready? Are you ready?

P. RALPH: Veronica.

V. RICH: Oh.

P. RALPH: That’s okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

P. RALPH: You can sit like that.

Whenever you’re ready.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Good morning, Veronica.

Welcome.

V. RICH: Good morning.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You can talk about your experiences in, kind of, any way you want. So, you begin and just tell us what you have to say and just give us your full name, too, for the record, please.

Thank you.

V. RICH: My name is Veronica Rich. I’m 48 years old. I have four children of my own. Right now, I raise five kids. My kids are grown up. They’re adults. They’re on their own. They’re raising their own family, raising their own children.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

V. RICH: Like I said, I grew up in a tent, pretty much all my life. As newborn to age 10, that's when my grandmother, the one – the woman that raised me passed away.

I also grew up in a alcoholic home. My grandparents raised me from birth 'til age 10. Sometimes I'm asked to be a bartender; I'm asked to be – to boil water or to pick up whatever ingredients you need for homebrew.

And where I was the only child in this – with my grandfather and my grandmother – I was the only child that they raised, and I was basically the one that collected boughs, collected twigs for a fire or boughs for our floor in the tent. Like, I understand why my grandparents did that to me, because that's what I do now with my own kids. I go take 'em out in the woods, we go pick boughs, we go berry picking, we go cut wood, whatever needs to be done outside.

The spring of April 1985, we was camping at Daniel's Rattle and one morning my grandfather woke me up and he said: Go to Patrick's tent and tell him that your grandmother has passed away.

So after I got to the other tent to let these people know that my grandmother has passed away and they tried to keep me in that tent, but I wouldn't stay so I went back to our tent. I had no shoes, I had no socks, snow on the ground, no feeling in my feet and that didn't bother me because I was more trying to figure out what this death meant.

So, after I got to the tent, I don't know how they – they must've had a radio or something, 'cause some guy came from Davis Inlet on a Ski-Doo and just flat komatik to pick up my grandmother's body, I guess, that time.

So, after this guy arrived to our campsite, I was watching people putting blankets on the flat komatik. Then I seen my grandmother being put on the komatik and in the blanket. So the – my grandfather and another person went back in the tent to gather more stuff, I guess. But I crawled in the sleeping bag with my grandmother in the komatik.

So, I hid in the blankets with him – with my grandmother – on the komatik and I can hear my grandfather calling for me. Calling for me, and I wouldn't answer. I wouldn't say anything 'cause I stayed in the komatik with my grandma. 'Cause I didn't know she was dead. I didn't know she was dead; I thought she was just sick.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: She said she hid in the blankets with her grandmother's body – in her grandmother's body. She said: I couldn't – no.

Okay, speaking English again.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

V. RICH: They started wrapping the komatik with rope. I still never said anything, even though all the pain with the rope and on your back, or on your shoulders, on your legs. I didn't say nothing, I just wanted to stay with her, and I kept talking to her, trying to wake her up.

So, when we got to the clinic in Davis Inlet, they untied the komatik, they unwrapped the body, and that's where they found me with her. And they asked me what I'm doing there.

From there, I don't know what happened after that, but I remember, I think was a few days later or after funeral, my grandfather, he was talking to me. He was telling me that he couldn't take care of me anymore because people were going to say stuff. They would accuse him of abusing me. So, he told me he can't take care of me anymore and he was going to put me – he was going talk to his nephew who is

Joachim Nui Senior. And that's where I moved. That's where my grandfather took me when he couldn't take care of me no more.

So, besides all this pain, I had a good life with my grandparents, for what I can remember, or for what I understand at that age. I thought it was a good life.

But, now, I return that favour now being a foster child all my life. Now I am a foster mom for 27 years. I've worked with CSSD for the last 27 years. In one year, I had 14 kids – 2018 and 2019, I had 14 kids in my home, transitioning them back to wherever they were going: to their families, to EPH, to wherever they would be put.

And, right now, I have five kids. The little girl is traditionally adopted. I took her right out of the hospital. She's four years old. The little boy I had since he was nine days old. He's six now. And the three more that I have since June, they're brothers and sister. So I have age four-, five-, six-, seven-, eight-year-olds. And I'm basically a single mom. I do have a partner, not from here, but he do work here. He's on rotation all the time, so I'm still basically single mom.

I think that's all for now. [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Mm-hmm.

Okay, that's about – that's it for now.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, well, thank you very much, Veronica, for coming to speak to us this morning, and for sharing.

I guess what I want to say, I can't find the words. I think it's tremendous work that you're doing in your community as a foster mother, and just wonderful.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

V. RICH: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: I just wanna – I just told Veronica that it's very emotional, growing up and – it's hard – It's a hard experience. But I am glad to see her here today, and the strength she has and the courage she has to come forward and be able to share that story.

And it's very courageous of her to give back to the community, to come back here and give back and give the children the hope and using what she's learned from her grandparents. Using that to help other children is very – it's very courageous, and she is strong and I am proud of her, and I love her.

Thank you.

P. RALPH: Veronica and I spoke before she spoke and I let her know that if there – if there's some things she thinks about later –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

P. RALPH: – she is welcome to come back while we're here this week or when we're here next time to share some more.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

V. RICH: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Tshenashkumitin. Thank you.

P. RALPH: Jo is here but he left; said he'd be back this afternoon.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh, Joachim, yep.

P. RALPH: Yeah, Joachim.

So I don't think – I was speaking with Nympha earlier and she said she'd like the opportunity to speak.

Five-minute break and then we'll start.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

So, five minutes and the next speaker will be Nympha.

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