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

English Transcript | Volume 40

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

Wednesday | Natuashish | 26 June 2024

[redacted]

Recess

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

M. POKUE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

M. POKUE: My name is Marie Pokue. I'm 60 years old. I live in Natuashish. I work here at the Healing Lodge as an addiction counsellor for 10 years now. And I want to tell my story.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE (providing English translation): I'm going to start by telling you – like, I will tell my story when she was with her parents when she was young. She said to let you know how she grew up and when they were living in the country and the stuff that she eat when she was out in the bush.

She said that I will tell you a story, like how I see my father when he used to be a snowshoe maker. He used to make snowshoes for my mother. She used to make snowshoes with my brothers and sisters.

And also my mother, I will be telling you how she used to make traditional – she knows about traditional skills. She knows how she make the moccasins also; she used to make moccasins. And how she used to weave the snowshoes when my father is doing the frames for the snowshoes.

So when they're all together in the family, she said, I just want to talk about how good that was. How caring our parents were towards us and love us. She said later on, the family was broken apart because all that stuff that happened. You know, like where we were out in the bush, it was so beautiful and everything was so good, the caring and everything. And when they start drinking, things start falling apart when they took that drink.

She said sometimes they don't go to school 'cause they were out in the bush and sometimes we're in school. We stay in school when the parents are back in the community. And sometimes it's not so good in school either and 'cause it's hard.

She said later on, there was a lot of drinking. My parents were drinking a lot and that's when they were not looked after. The parents, once they drink, they didn't look after them and they were often very hungry, no food.

And the parents will be drinking, will be very messy, were dirty. There was not much clothing back then too. She said a lot of times we didn't have mattresses. We slept, just our blankets, on the floor. She said, I didn't really want to stay home in her home. She said she goes to her other family, their cousins, and stayed there.

She said, I remember the last time we were all together, me and my parents out here somewhere not too far from here. They have their tents here in Natuashish. And the lake over here, around there, that's where she said the last time I remember seeing my father making snowshoes – that was the last time.

And she said when I grew up, I was 12 years old when they stayed up here. She said that's the last time I remember we were all together with my family: my brothers, my parents. And my sister was pregnant then and that was her first child, around that time.

That was in the springtime, she said, when we were up here. And then we went back to Davis Inlet again and they went back to their drinking. That one summer – my dad always likes to be out in the country, around here and go on their boat – and she said I remember the first thing in the morning, she remember her dad was already drinking.

That morning, her father told them to gather up their things and pack and put their clothes on. They were ready to go out on the boat to go out somewhere up here to the country. And she said I remember my sister was pregnant. She was showing. Her belly shows as she was getting bigger. The baby was growing. And she said, maybe she was married then. I can't remember.

And she said, I'm not going on that boat when they were ready to leave, they were ready to go, packing and stuff. She said my brother, Prote, told me to go with them. She said, my uncle came while we were down on that beach and they has a lot. She said I see a lot of gear in the boat. The boat was not very big. It's a small boat. It looks like a canoe. I don't know if you remember which ones I'm talking about.

Then she said, there's a lot of us on that boat because, you know, Mani had brothers and sisters. And when she looked at it she said, Mani, that is full. Like, the canoe is full of stuff and then including them. There was a lot of us. And then she said: My mother's brother came over while we were getting ready, you know, while we were at the beach and she gave my mother the cross, a small cross. And maybe, she said, he knew what was going to happen. What was coming. He probably know. She said my Uncle Gilbert – Gilbert Rich.

When they left, she said, the water was so calm and no waves. They were just so – you know, the water was just so calm. As they went further quite a ways in the ocean, out this way here – it's not far from here; they were coming this way – she said the waves are starting to be big. It was not calm anymore; it was stormy. There was big waves.

She said she was very frightened. The waves were big and then, she said, she saw all the water coming in their boat. Our boat was full of water. We didn't know what to do, didn't know where to go. She said that she couldn't find some of her brothers and sisters. She didn't see them.

Then the boat tipped over and we were hanging on the boat. She said I heard my father calling but I didn't see my mom anywhere. I grabbed one of my sisters, she said; her name was Joyce. And when I looked at her, the water was in her mouth already.

She said, I almost went swimming but I was not a strong swimmer. Her brother-in-law, Henry, told her to keep going – swimming. She said she went back to where they were hanging on to the boat. My sister, her husband put her on the top of the boat because the boat is already tipped over, and she said there was only three of us left on that boat. Everybody was gone.

We didn't want to let go of that boat, we hang on, on the boat. It was in the evening when we got on the island. The boat was floating that way towards that island. That was in the evening when they were finally there. Her brother-in-law, Henry, when they got closer to the island, grabbed the boat and went to the shore with the boat but, she said, there was nothing in that boat when they got there. And she said Henry couldn't hardly walk because he was shaking trying to get the boat to the shore.

She said that we were there, then we stayed overnight on that island. I don't know what happened, she said. I don't remember much because I don't know how we got warm. But they didn't have anything.

And she said they saw, first thing in the morning, somebody paddling towards them. They were waving at them and it was Tomas Noah and his wife, Alice. They went to them. They were paddling towards them. She said when they got there, Alice and Tomas, they just liked that the Elder, Tomas Noah, knows what happened. He had tear

in his eyes. And she said they took us back to Davis Inlet.

She said I never really looked at that, not realizing how many of us were on that boat that time. I looked in the book, she said; I look at the date. It was in August 28, 1977, when that happened. And it says in there: seven died and three alive. That means we were 10 of us in that small boat, in that canoe.

My parents were drinking, my mom and dad, and that's why this happened. Later on, I was married and I already had children, but I dreamt about it.

She had a dream about her dream. She wrote it down on the paper and she said, I will do this. I believe I can do this. When that dream that she wrote down, she said, I couldn't do what I said I can and I'm strong enough to do this. It's just, like, she said she had broken her dream because, she said, she already promised that she would do it.

She was saying that she would never drink. But she's broken that dream, she said, 'cause she already promised that she wouldn't drink after what happened. So, she said, I broke my dream, I went drinking too.

She said, after that happened, my uncle looked after me, Uncle Philip Rich. And she said, I don't remember any social workers being involved back then. And where she was staying, somebody had asked her where would she like to stay, and that's where she was placed. It was in her uncle's care, Uncle Philip.

That's it for now, she said. I will talk again.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you for sharing this terrible experience. As Commissioners and as people in the Inquiry, we're very sorry that you had to go through this experience, but we are still grateful that you have the strength to speak to us.

Thank you. The Inquiry will take a break now until 1:30.

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