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

English Transcript | Volume 41

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

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Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We welcome Shelton Toma back –

S. TOMA: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – who couldn't conclude his testimony yesterday because of a power outage.

You were telling us some things about your life. And whatever you wish to continue please go ahead, Shelton. Thank you for being here today.

S. TOMA: Yeah.

When I was in Saskatchewan the treatment facility is called Ranch Ehrlo. And when I first walk in I thought I would be okay and then I called my sister. I didn't want to call my mother and dad, say I'm way over there, all the way to Saskatchewan.

And the first thing I did there, I called my sister. They didn't want to let me to call my sister but I forced them to let me. And I did talk to my sister and I was like I'm so far away. I had to come and talk to you right now. I wasn't allowed to talk to you. I convince them to talk to you and they allowed me.

And I said, does our mom and dad know, I told her. She's just like, she doesn't even know. Then I stayed there for a year or two.

Before Ranch Ehrlo I was in Newfoundland. I didn't do good there. I was being bad guy – being bad kid. I didn't like how I was treated, that's why.

And then I did things that comes to my mind that help me to deal with things during the day. And one time I got out of hand when my cousin told me: If you don't like him, do something about it. Then I tried to do it but I stopped myself. I actually stopped myself. That's pretty big for me, to stop myself. I could've been a bad kid, bad guy, but I stopped myself because of our mother; she's so innocent.

And then I went to a young adults jail facility. And then after that flew to Saskatchewan. When I start feeling like this, I was in Ontario. I was thinking how adults going to treat me if I go home and am I going to raise myself – raised by myself if I go home.

That was like 2015 when I moved to Natuashish. I was in Ontario since I was nine. I moved back to Natuashish when I was 13. And when I move here I didn't like it – I didn't like it at all. Me and my family weren't equal. I was raised to be equal and that was kind of unfair. Then I went outside to walk around to look for friends – to make friends, I guess – and then that's how I started how I'm feeling.

I don't know when – I think it was three years ago or four years ago – I was living in the Labrador group home. And there's something, I felt something, how the 24-7 workers who stay there treat us differently. Like, I don't know, I felt something and I told the CSSD that something bad – like, something terrible is going to happen. You got to, you guys, do something.

The social workers care about me – they didn't care about anyone that was in the house. There was like four or five people in the house, us teenagers. And then I told my social worker, I want to move out of here or something bad will happen. And then they fought for me to go live by myself.

Then I was in another company that's taking care of kids. And then after like, at least, six months, eight months, my cousin passed away. I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all. I was, I don't know, mad at the world, I guess, or mad at myself because it's really hard, like actually protecting things.

Since I moved in Goose Bay, I think that was – well, I'm 22 – six years ago, I tried so hard to come home to Natuashish because I knew I had some length of time left for someone. And then it didn't work out – always.

After like four years, I started visiting Natuashish. It was kind of good and kind of bad at the same time, coming in and out to Natuashish, but the family part just ticks me off. I really like the city but my mother, she's the one who makes me to come home. And to be honest, she's the one that – I never lost my language. I always talks to her every weekend when I was out of town.

I can't believe my little siblings lost their language. It's because they like to argue each other, that's why. And I told them before they lost their language, they got to be nice to each other. You got to protect each other.

And then the people that take care of my siblings just lost it, then they didn't have the heart to tell them be nice, take care of each other. They just told them off, not to speak Innu. It makes me laugh because that's kind of crazy. That's crazy to tell the people to not speak their own language.

I always respect people who speak their language. I always try to understand what they're saying but – that's weird…

The first that I felt that I was raising myself is when someone said, you got to be strong; you got to move forward. And I kind of think of my younger days, like when I was a toddler, when I was Grade 3, Grade 2, Grade 1, I always got into fights. You know, I was such a bad kid – such a tough guy.

Such a tough little kid, I was, and then I told the guy – he was at least, I don't know, 30 or 28 and I was 11 or 12 – he could do anything that you want with me, I told him. And then we went to a high school field. We went to the back, played soccer, talk about how I felt, how I was seeing things.

When I mean seeing things, like how I felt about the world. And one time I was out of hand, I told him I'm not afraid of pain. If you hit me, I will just laugh or lay down, play dead. And then I make him – I make him to restrain me, I guess; not to beat me up, restrain me, and then it was kind of hard to get up.

But, eventually, I went up and he was surprised and we were friends for 32 years. And he moved out of my life. I can't believe he's really gone. I just found out – when was it – two years ago or three years ago that he passed away. He never had a girl or kids, but I'm always going to remember him to make me strong to move forward.

That's the first traumatize I ever had. That was my first trauma.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Oh, tried to speak Innu.

P. RALPH: Go ahead if you want.

S. TOMA: Since I came to – no, since I move out of social service I guess, I was thinking. I was thinking to myself, why does

people leave me when they get to know me so much, like when they know who I was when I was a teenager? And since I left out how I am and how I was when I was – the younger days, I guess, then we became friends. Like, I don't know, we always hanging out. I always choose the worker than my friends because we always hang out.

And then one day my worker didn't show up. I was sad. I needed to talk to someone privately. And the manager said he's not coming. He's moved out. He moved out of town. I'm like what the fuck, man. That's crazy, man. And I always thought that's like the eighth time that the really great person left me. Like, people or my best friends left me out of my life.

And they always told me, every single one of them, I love kids. I could adopt a lot of kids if they want to, they say, but they can't. And that's the people that helped me. That's the people who showed me that I really love children, too.

Like I really want to help kids, too, I don't know. The environment is so weird to fuel freedom, I guess. I don't know. I just love kids; I want to make the generations look different compared to my generation. My generation is so unstable compared to the 30s and the 40s. The 30-year-olds and the 40-year-olds compared to the 20-year-olds are so different compared to those alpha gens.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: If I can, I just have to interrupt you for one second, Shelton.

I got to leave the table now. I'm heading for Hopedale. I'm taking the day off and visiting my brothers. And if I want to get any salmon tags, I've got to get them today.

So Nastash and Professor Devine are still going to stay here. I'll see you next trip.

S. TOMA: Okay.

You have a good day, Sir.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Sir.

S. TOMA: Yeah.

To be honest, I'm so happy. I'm super happy with this life. But my mind or my heart keeps saying be sad. Don't do this, don't do that. Do what it tells you to do in your brain.

But I always try to convince that feeling to walk away, to do something to keep my mind off this because I told myself in my head, I talk to myself in my head saying: Give me the hardest feeling ever, like how people treat me – give me that. I told that to my head and I talk to myself: Give me everything. I want to feel sad again. I just want to feel different again because I was too out of hand to feel happy. I wasn't myself, the way I was really, really happy.

And then it came to me, I always up walking around finding something to do. Now I heard you guys doing this and I was surprised. I didn't know what to do. I was thinking a flight out of town or do some work, you know, I just wanted to do something to ease off the brain, I guess.

Sometimes I'm amazed how family and yourself works. When I was almost 13 or 14, that's when another trauma happened to me, too. My sibling was getting beat up and I couldn't do nothing because I was just a little kid. I just listened to argument and then I went outside. I was smoking a cigarette.

And then my sibling's partner didn't like how she was and they start scrapping each other and I had enough. He said something, I forgot what it was but it make me feel weird. It make me felt I don't live in this world. Like, this world is for people who are not there, I guess. That's how I was thinking when I was 13 or 14 like, I don't belong in this world.

And then I have enough – I have enough. I saw them and then I yelled. I told them to come here. I told them that they want to beat me up too, I'll be in the leather tent. That's a small Innu tent that can fit three or four people, or six.

And then I caught his eye; I got his attention. He came at me. I ran to the small tent and then I told him sit down man, and he did. He did sit down. I wouldn't know if he was going to listen to me, but he did. I told him if you want to beat me up, I'm going to listen to one song. And then I listened to one song. It was country song. It's a really good song.

And then I played it and I swing at him and then he, as soon as I swing at him, started punching me. And then I told him I dare you to punch me a lot of times, and he punched me a lot of times. You know, I felt something. I felt something that I will never forget. I was really hallucinating this feeling and I was hearing stuff while the music was playing, while he was beating me up.

And then after the music stopped, he stopped playing. He woke up. He woke up from his blackout, I guess. He woke up from his drunk side, I guess. And he said what did I do? And how he make me felt while hitting me, it make me felt stronger and then I just told him off. Told him to fight me. And then that's the last thing I ever remember saying that to him. He didn't wanna fight me. He just stopped talking suddenly after the music stopped and after I told him off, too.

That's my second trauma, man. That's crazy how it felt.

When I first started at Labrador group home, my first day, I stomped my feet on the patio and take the mud off. And there was an older lady who just yelled at me. Holy crap, the first day I got yelled at. That's crazy. It make me feel not to care anything, I guess. That's when I first start thinking not to care anything, when that lady told me off.

And then every day I was in my mind, living my mind. And there's at least five things that I saw when I was alone. I'm always alone since I was nine, I guess, when I moved out of my mom's care. I seen a lot of things when I was alone, yeah. It got me scared trying to find a light, to actually to see him. But when I'm in the streetlight, I don't care about nothing. I always think if it wants to get me, it can get me but I never actually prayed.

I'll actually pray when I need – I felt when no one's listening, I guess. When people pray and they ask for something for someone else, I don't think that way. My mind always thinks about my future and that's how I get, I guess, response from God from my prayers, I guess.

When I pray once in a while and I thinks about my future, that's when I thinks that someone's giving me something for my prayers. I always felt something going to happen and when I dream something, it happens in like a month or two. And sometimes it makes me scared because I'm the only one who knows it, I guess, the only one who witness it.

When I was nine or eight or seven, my mom and dad always told me, don't be alone out in the streets. Don't be alone because some random guy will just take you. And I'm like how? People are so nice. And then he showed me a video of how the world is.

And how I am right now just kind of amaze me, because how my dad showed me his favourite movies. He kind of make me feel like I'm better than that, I guess, and better than him, I guess, because he showed me. And they were always alone, too, my mom and dad. That's the reason I came back to them. All my siblings are out of my mom's care. I was the first one that was getting out of my mom's care.

People in the town are just no good. It's a really beautiful place but the people in town are no good. People got to do something to the town to make people stay away out of bad things. I've been following the Chief and Council meetings. Some of it just makes my head go hard, man. I have a headache.

They talk about renovation and building houses instead of building sports complex or a theatre. The Chief and council amaze me sometimes how they're working right now, instead of helping the people. They need to at least build something for the kids, or entertainment. There's no entertainment

here in Natuashish, but it's really good to exercise here, to work out. It's really best. But just entertainment is really – there's people going off, people going out of towns, losing people. It's because of that, no entertainment.

After my uncle-grandpa passed away, he talked to me. I couldn't understand him because he was losing his voice. And my cousin told me to give him his last respects, my last words, I guess. And I talked for like 20 minutes to 30 minutes to him, telling him about today's world won't be the same if some people can't help each other, work together.

I'll be old until the people start working together. That's how I imagine it to me, I told him, because today's people are out of hand. This place is supposed to be the most Christian place ever but it is not. We're losing the culture so much. We were supposed to be the biggest Christians ever but when the new stuff came out, like the screens and the social medias, that changed.

A girl without phone, a girl without social media – all I had was music. That's all I had with me. I still listen to music to this day. I love music. And my uncle-grandpa, I told him people don't work hard here in Natuashish; they don't even work 24-7. They only work five days and take two days break.

If I was in their shoes, I told him, I would. I'd work 24-7 for my people. I want to feel good for myself. I would just focus on the people who are struggling, I guess. People need a speech, they need a Chief and council to tell them how it is, I guess, how behind the doors are. Because everything is on the computer. No one (inaudible) on piece of paper anymore.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Excuse me, Shelton.

I wonder if it would be a good time for us to take a break now?

S. TOMA: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Ten minutes, please.

S. TOMA: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you.

Recess

P. RALPH: Okay, Shelton, which one do you want to start with first? Do you want to start Innu-aimun or do you want to start in English?

S. TOMA: I'm going to start English first and then Innu.

When I was taken out of care, the social service told me, you're only going to be there for six months. You're only there for a visit, to visit a friend of mine, I guess. He left me, too, and then I was like okay. I had no hesitations, just say yes.

And then after two or three weeks I went out of town. And I was riding around the city and my friend told me, you're going to stay here for a while. I'm going home first and then you're going home first. And I didn't want to listen. I didn't want to believe him. I told him I'm going to stay here for six months only, until Christmas, and then I'm going to see my mom. And he said no, you're staying for a while, man. I thought stop saying that. Stop lying.

And when November hit, when the Innu social workers came, I told them it's time for me to go home; you told me six months. And she's like you're going to stay here another three or four years. And that part, I didn't like visiting the Innu people because we, all the kids that Innu, were together with social service that's from Labrador; we were all together.

And then he told me I'm going to stay a little bit longer. Then I felt something, like why those people doesn't want to help me. And then stayed there for four years at Ontario; I was nine. Then I was 13, moved back to Natuashish, I was living with my aunt. I have to go outside to visit my mom, that I didn't

like. The reason I came back to Natuashish was because my mom.

When I wake up, I didn't like speaking English. Not for me, for my brain. It's just it's really hard to speak English. It's really –

P. RALPH: Shelton, you should translate that.

S. TOMA: Okay.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

When I turned 18, I feel like I'm free. I can make my own decisions now.

And then I test my friends. I show them how I felt for them, how they weren't there for me for the past two years. And then while I gave them what they need, they got out of hand. They didn't realize how much they were meant to me or how much they weren't there for me. They were sidetracking by something.

Some of them I don't hang out anymore. There's like four or five people I hangs out now. I used to hang out at least 10 people, but not anymore. The people who are here right now, I just try my best to give them what they need.

When I first came to Natuashish it was around August. I knew there were going to be a lot of problems; I just knew it. But I don't mind. I didn't care 'cause I was prepared. Yeah, I was prepared for myself, I guess. And for me, I just thinks in my head just be happy. Move on your day. Smile and wave. Stay in your own lane. Worry about yourself. Don't worry about anyone else. That's how I was in my brain.

And then I tried so hard to find work but none of the people, they won't pick me to work; none of the managers, supervisors want to pick me to work. And then I saw a post on Facebook that the school was looking for workers and I immediately applied and it got me back. I wanted to quit the school, but I didn't want to quit. I can't believe I made it this far, too, not to quit school because kids give me anxiety attack and then makes me stronger at the same time, too.

I think that's enough.

P. RALPH: That's enough?

S. TOMA: Yeah.

P. RALPH: Okay, Shelton.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good job.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, Shelton, it's a lot. So we do thank you for coming back today despite the interruption yesterday. And you've given us a good perspective, I think, as a younger person in the community, which we always welcome.

And, certainly, from many of the members in the community we've heard, there's lots for us to reflect on and to make part of this Inquiry so we thank you for that.

S. TOMA: No problem.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

So I'm just saying thank you to Shelton for coming and sharing his story and his experience. And I'm sure that, in thinking about the experience, there will be more things to share if he wants, and that he's welcome to come back.

Thank you. Tshenashkumitin.

P. RALPH: Okay.

Take a break now and see where we are?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah. Take a break, yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, we'll break for five minutes.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

P. RALPH: Thank you very much.

S. TOMA: (Inaudible.)

P. RALPH: That takes some courage.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: He's probably one of the few young people that's able to.

Recess

[redacted]