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

Transcript | Interview Private Session

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So is your wife here with you? Is that your –

G. N.: My wife, yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, you have a family?

G. N.: Yeah, I've got a small family.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, we'll wait for Caitlin now, she'll be here shortly.

You've been at the session, you've been (inaudible) before –

G. N.: Yeah, I have been, yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – so you have an idea of how it goes.

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So that's good, that's always helpful.

So I'm from on the Island, so I grew up in a small place called Renews, which is about an hour and 20 minutes south of St. John's, and even though it's close to St. John's as a young fellow, we never got there very often. It was a long ways in, it was a fishing town. I'm out of town (inaudible), six hours.

And that's what my father did, he was a fisherman all his life.

G. N.: Where do you live now, in St. John's?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Where do I live now? In the East End. On London Road, yeah.

G. N.: The good part.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I always say that I make my home in St. John's but I'm from Renews. So it's important to me. Where you come from, and –

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I guess we'll start. I mean, we're very open in terms of what you want to say and what you want to talk about, so it's, kind of, you tell us what you want to tell us. It's been explained to you that this is private, right?

G. N.: Yup.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And what that all means, there will be no identifying information and – what else, anything else, Caitlin?

C. URQUHART: So just that, you know, obviously, the story that you tell here will help to inform the report that the Commissioners write and any recommendations that they make. Yeah, as the Commissioner (inaudible) your name wouldn't be used, or your video, unless you want it to be, and –

G. N.: Mm-hmm.

C. URQUHART: So I'm Caitlin Urquhart; I'm one of the lawyers for the Inquiry.

G. N.: Yeah.

What happened to the other gentleman that were there?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh, Jim –

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – Igloliorte? He had to resign for personal reasons. That was back in July. So the government is looking for a new Commissioner, and they were looking for while now, but they are working with the Innu in terms of, I guess, both of them agreeing on who the Commissioner would be.

At this point in time, we really don't know very much about it, if they have people selected and they're trying to figure that out. So the government will advise us as soon as they have some information for us. That's what they've told us.

G. N.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We have inquired a few times about it.

So yes, I'll be taking some notes with my left hand – and I'm just putting an initial there – so I hope that don't throw you off –

G. N.: No, no, no.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – I'm just writing a few notes. It is recorded, so I will get the transcript of it, too, right?

G. N.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: But, again, they're under a thing called private sessions and that.

As Anastasia mentioned then, is that, with this session, we will give you back something that you can actually see the video and all that for yourself, for your own private use or whatever, right?

G. N.: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: It might be some time before you get it back because I couldn't say the timeline, but –

C. URQUHART: Yeah, it takes a bit of time for us to process them.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

C. URQUHART: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, yeah. A lot of technology I don't know about that has to be done to get that.

G. N.: Yep.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, Sir, whenever you're ready and however you wanna start, go ahead.

G. N.: Perhaps I'll start with my name. My name is G. N. – I don't have a middle name. They just never got around to giving me a middle name.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Must have been hard enough trying to pick the first name, see, to get it right.

G. N.: Yeah.

I lived pretty much here my whole life in the community of Sheshatshiu, and from an early age – well, just going back to my younger years when I first remember going to school, it's a funny story that I tell to my kids and the people that know me, you know?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

G. N.: It's September, pretty much the weather like this, and my mother comes and says, G., it's time to get dressed. So I go like this: Yeah? We got you some new clothes. So I got some new clothes and shoes, and my sister was going at school at the time.

At the time, there was no gymnasium; there was just the regular school. So I get dressed and I thought we were going to go to some place fun, not realizing my mother tells me at the last minute, you're going to school. I said: What? I'm not ready to go to school, I says to my mother. And my sister grabs my hand. She said, you're going to school – that was my sister, C. N. And I'm holding on to the door of the house: I don't want to school; I'm not ready for it.

So my mom, sort of, pushes me out to go to school. Here I am holding on to the edge of the door, my sister has got my other arm and I said: I'm not ready; I don't wanna go. I'm scared to go to school, you know? My two other brothers already left, and I was the last one.

I guess it was an experience to leave home for – to go into a foreign place for a young child is –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Sure.

G. N.: – can be detrimental. It's a white school. There's a lot of white people there and I wasn't used to, you know, being –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

G. N.: – and the first day there was about 35 students in my class and it was our first day and nobody know each other. So we were made to sit down and listen to the teacher. They usually start a prayer which was a little bit, you know, foreign when you're five –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

G. N.: – and you're made to stand up there, trying to find out what's going on and you got this speaker on top of the classroom. Technology back then, I wasn't used to it. We didn't have a TV at our house or electricity. Everything was all manual, burning wood stove. So it was an eye-opening experience for me.

And I was still frightened, you know? I think we were all frightened of each other and each of us were made to stand up in front of the class and say our name and how old we were to a stranger I had never seen.

Eventually, once you knew who you were and you knew some of the students that lived closed by, we sort of got used to each other.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: And, eventually, I can tell, out of the 35 students, a few of them started to sort of disappear. Well, not disappear, made to go to a different – what we call special class. Because, at the time, I don't think any of this concept was made aware of or wasn't even diagnosed. I think some of the students were autistic at the time. That's why they were taken out, to put in the special class, 'cause they sort of acted out a little bit, rebellious.

And some of those students who didn't comply with the rules of the classroom or the teacher's instructions, you know, some of them were taken out to the principal's office and they were made to comply with – they were beaten on their hands with the strap, not knowing what they were supposed to be doing because – and they didn't speak English. We didn't speak English. It's only by listening to the teacher and, you know, over and over, then we got the habit of learning, like the alphabets and the numbers and all that stuff.

We knew how to count in Innu 'cause my father, when I was young, he used to take me out to the country and he'd count the number of – if we got rabbits or birds, he'd show me how to count in Innu, which is fine. I learned a lot there from my father. At a young age, we learn how to hunt and be a contributor to the well-being of the family.

And for me, it was, I guess, traumatic from time to time. And from time to time, the other students would come over and I'd ask them questions: What are you guys doing in the special classroom? This would be by the stairwell. There was a small room in there. Maybe it was about eight by 14 long. It had an exit door there, and along that door there they had little chairs for students, and it would be taught by – there was a male teacher that used to teach them, bring them in. And sometimes, being autistic and not being able – people, you know, in cramped spaces – not being touched, and they were rebellious. The teacher sort of manhandled the children because – throw them in there and it's time for you to learn this and that.

I guess from looking back at it now, there was a lot of new diseases, like autism and FASD and ADHD, that was undiagnosed at the time going to that school.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So remind me of the roughly around – what year would that be?

G. N.: That would be –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So you'd be five.

G. N.: – 1970 or '71.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Yeah, there wasn't much then.

G. N.: And every now, you know, the students would come – what's going on

there? How come you're special – I said how come you're special, in my language, and we're not, we're just here, regularly. They didn't know how to answer and if I asked him questions, they would be very vague. They wouldn't tell me what the teachers were doing to the students –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N: – and they sort of shied away from it.

I think that it was the beginning when some of the students were taken advantage of by certain teachers at that time.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So when you said taken advantage of –

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – do you mean –?

G. N.: I mean abused sexually and stuff because, looking back on it now, there's certain students that were very quiet and certain girls, they didn't ask any questions. They just put their heads down and they were, like, writing. From time to time, the teacher would, you know, take them out to the coat room. There was coat room there. I have a good memory in the layout of the school. In my mind, I can draw the picture of the size of the rooms and the washrooms, and it's still fresh there in my mind.

And they would be taken to the coat room where we hang up and the door would be closed. I don't know what was going on to everybody because we didn't hear much. We were made to stay in the classroom at the time.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

G. N.: Sometimes the girls and maybe a boy would come out crying, but they wouldn't say what was going on to them.

As we got a little bit older and moved up to Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, there was a continuation of certain segregating students, still going on in that special little classroom. And there was some certain teachers that, you know, were good. I guess I was one of those students that asked a lot of questions and tried to find the answers, and most often they left me alone. I guess they knew that I picked up pretty fast and asked questions, trying to find answers, and that's why they left me alone.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: On occasion, there was a complaint where I stood up against one of my teachers and started asking what's going on in the back. How come we don't know what's going on? I was sort of rebellious. I think I was in Grade 3, and I was made to go into the principal's office. At the time, there was a teacher – well, a nun, Sister [redacted], and when the teacher told me to go down to the front office, there's a little switch there, when you go out of the office, and it says G. N. will be coming down to the office because so and so and so – I didn't hear him but by the time I got there, the principal –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: The Sister was the principal?

G. N.: Yup, Sister [redacted] was the principal at the time.

And I was made to sit there because there were about three or four students ahead of me. I was the fourth one and I could hear the ruler and strap being – to the other students there. They sort of screamed because they were in pain and, eventually, I got up and they were gone back to their classroom and I was the other one, the fourth one coming in.

She looked a little bit upset and asked me why I was acting up in the classroom. I said, I'm just trying to find – asking questions. So it's like they didn't want that; they didn't want to tell me what was going on. Maybe they knew or maybe they didn't knew –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: – and I was made to put my hands up in front of them, like this, which I did. Then

the strap came down, I sort of pulled back and that made it even worse, because I had to – she hold my hands down this time, and she gave me an extra 10 more for being, you know, scared.

I didn't wanna be – I didn't wanna cry, and by the time of maybe 10 to 15 straps, she sort of – I guess she could see it in my eyes that she broke me, and I had tears in my eyes, but I didn't really scream out in pain because I was – my hands were burning, like on fire, and I didn't wanna cry or be in pain.

I wanted to be strong so much as I can be, and she let me go after that and I sort of, you know, behaved in their own thing there. I didn't ask as many questions, but I did talk to the other students in private and stuff, and trying to find out what's going on. At this time, some of them, you know, sort of opened up – they didn't go into detail – but just said: It's not good, G. That's what he said, it's not good. And I had a sense of –

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

G. N.: I guess, what was not good.

Because I could sort of read between the lines when I looked at them in their face because I can see the hurt in their eyes and the emotion that you feel for one human being to another that's going through pain, but they didn't go into detail about. I knew then that they were abused sexually and made to do certain stuff. Eventually some of them didn't come to school. They just stopped coming. They would be, sort of like – what do you call – the teacher would talk to the social worker, and they would talk to the priest.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: To find out what's going on. And that's when social workers began to take action and taking away children there from their parents.

One day, I think I was probably in Grade 4, I wasn't feeling well; I had a bad stomach. And it was about 9:30, we had a two-little-story house, and I was upstairs and I wasn't feeling well. There was a knock on the door and my mother answered and I could hear Father Pirson. He spoke in Innu and he said: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] – is your son in there, G. How come he's not in school? And my mother didn't answer.

And he walked into the house. I could hear his steps coming upstairs, and he throw me out of bed and told me to get dressed. And just before I got outdoors – I'm dressed – he kicks me from the back, here in my back, and he kicks me all the way to the school, and I'm crying. I said I'm not feeling well but he continued to, all the way to school, kick me and then I eventually made it to a class.

And I wasn't very happy the way I was treated. They didn't have any sympathy for the people who were sick. They wanted to make you follow the rules no matter what. It was their rule. My parents didn't have any say in it because I could be taken away by Social Services any time.

At the time, growing up in the community, both of my parents used to drink on and off, and there were days when I felt so neglected. And I could tell that they were having some hard times, sometimes the police would come.

One early morning, I think I was about 11, everything was fine in the morning. I had been in school all day and somebody must have come to the house and they had a fight. Somebody said they might have had a fight with the police or a neighbour, I didn't get the full story. And it was very discouraging. You come out of school expecting to go home, and I run down home, I hit the road and I notice there was no door in the house and every window in the house was all busted up and my mother and my father were nowhere to be seen and I just stood there frozen. What's going on? You know, what happened? I'm trying to find answers of everything, but none of my brothers or my other sisters are home either. I guess they find out what was going on, but they never told me, but I had sensed there was a big fight there.

At the time my mother and my father were drinking on and off (inaudible) and I've always thought about it, tried to get the answers and I asked my mother some questions when she was still alive, but she wouldn't give me the answers, but I know this was related to alcohol.

I'd go down to my nephew's house, we were in the same grade, and he's got the same problems that I got, his mother and father are alcoholics and there were times there, when he's outside crying and he was – little brothers and sisters, and I consoled him, tell them it'll be all right, it'll be over. There were days that I had nowhere else to go so I just went into the woods behind the school because I wasn't allowed to go down to the beach area. My mother said: Never go down there, there are big kids down there, they're going to throw you in the water.

I didn't have many friends, so I went behind the old Peenamin McKenzie School there. You probably know, there's an old telephone building there behind the Mary May Centre. So every now and then, if I had snare wire, I'd go out by myself and I'd set up these little snares for rabbits.

So I was there most of the time, going up there alone. Eventually, you know, my nephew –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, no, I'm just wondering so, that day when windows were broke out, door was off, was gone, what happened after that? Did it get repaired? Did you move back in?

G. N.: The next day, I think, my father and my mother returned, and we had – they had fixed some of the doors and we had these thick transparent plastic that were on the windows.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

G. N.: And, fire was going, and – it normally is like that, we have fire and my mom would cook and stuff, but you couldn't, growing up in that house.

And sometimes when they would fight at night, I'd get so scared because all of my brothers and my sisters, you know, they had gone on to my grandfathers or their friend's house to stay for the night because they knew my mother and my father were drinking. And my mother regularly got – my father would beat up my mother and I'd get so scared. I'd be upstairs alone, by myself, and I'd hear his screamings, like somebody was being tortured and my mom would get beaten up pretty – black eyes and stuff.

And I didn't have anybody to turn to. I cried most of the time to myself, to sleep, and I didn't sleep on top of the bed. I sleep under the bed, on the floor, because I feared for my father to come up there, to beat me too. And it was like that for many years. My brother who is a year older than me, he had other friends that, you know, that he can stay with, and my other sisters were gone out of the house. I was left alone.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Are you the youngest?

G. N.: I'm the youngest of the nine children. My oldest brother is Pien Nuna. He's the oldest. Then there is my second oldest sister, Theresa Pinette, married a man there from Sept-Îles. Then there is my other sister, Ann Marie Andrew, and then there's my brother, Basile Nuna, and there's my other sister, Justine Nuna. She passed away there a couple of years back. And there's my other brother Daniel and my other brother Emmette, Edward and me, G.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You're Edward's brother. I know him.

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes, of course.

G. N.: My brother who was sent away, Basile, for a little bit to – because I knew they sent some students out to Mount Cashel – My brother was sent out, Basile, and my other brother, Daniel, was sent out there too.

My brother, Basile, when he was home sober, he used to stop the fights there between my mother and my father. My father respected him enough that he could argue with my mother, but he cannot beat her up and my brother stepped in there, which was always so comforting for me because I didn't want to hear the screams and I didn't want to hear the windows breaking and, you know, running away from the house.

My brothers went there to Mount Cashel. I don't know what year it was because they were quite a few older. And my other brother, I've noticed, maybe a year or two, when they came back, they were not the same. I asked them questions, like, what's going on? How was school? And again, they had the same answer. They didn't really want to talk about it.

Eventually my brother Daniel, I think he spoke to my father one time and told him what was going on. Daniel was rebellious. He didn't wanna go back. He drank alcohol as much as he could. Then he never come home. He didn't wanna go back to St. John's. The same with my other brother, and they never talked about it, but I could sense that there was something wrong, what's going on there. There would always be anger in their voice. I can hear it.

I wanted to find out because I'm still that same person that asked questions, trying to find out if there's any way I could help them or, you know, but no, they wouldn't answer. There was years and years and years later that I find out what was going on with my brother Daniel, how the Brothers abused him. When he fought back, I heard there was this little room. There was a big fireplace down below on the main floor and this big old chimney, maybe three or four stories high, and at the very top of the chimney there's a little door. I heard one story that if you didn't comply to what they were going to do to you, they would shove these boy or girl – mostly boys – in that little room and lock them away there for the night.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So this was up top or was it down at the base?

G. N.: Up at the top where nobody can hear them. They would lock him up there because he fought back what they were trying to do. And they would beat him severely with a belt and those cane sticks that they usually carry around.

In later years in my life, I began to know and ask questions because I can tell who was going to answer my questions when we were in class, and there's some good teachers that would answer most of my questions that I asked relating to the subjects, or mathematics and stuff. There were some good teachers there; I befriended them. I think they had respect for me, just as much as I had respect for them, and understood what they were trying to teach.

Usually the students who sit in the back, who don't really – the quiet ones usually sit in the back and the front ones are the one who – I usually sit because I ask a lot of questions. And the girls usually sit in the back, and a few boys that didn't know how to write or ask questions and didn't understand what was going on and I'd share my work with them from time to time.

Out of the – I think when I was in Grade 6 there was this foreign teacher. She passed away a few years ago. She was there from the Philippines. And every Friday – well, not every Friday, maybe once a month on Friday – it's around 2:30 in the afternoon, and those students who were left behind, you know, we'd have this wrestling match.

But there was people that were bigger than me, and there were some girls that were there and we were made to take off our shirts and our pants and we'd fight naked. Maybe that's how they do it in those countries, like sumo wrestling or wrestling – and she would sit there and watch us fight one another, wrestle.

I wasn't the biggest or the strongest. And the girls would be there too, you know, wrestling each other. I didn't think that was

the right thing to do, to make us do all those things. It was hurtful for me and embarrassing to take off your clothes and get beaten up by another student. Eventually as we got to older – more and more grades, to 7, 8, 9, the other students began to drop off, because they didn't want to continue their education the way they were – the way things were unfolding as a learning process, I guess, to be ridiculed and to be shamed and humiliated.

And every now and then I'd come in late to that very place when I first started, that little classroom in the stairwell. There would still be certain students there. And if I'm late I'd stand there, try to find out what they're teaching, and every now and then I can hear an ow, or – I dunno if they were being pinched, or what they were doing to them. And just to throw the teacher off, I'd knock on the door, and I'd run up the stairs slowly to stop whatever's going on there. I have a sense, I guess.

And I was scared because I didn't really want to go to the place and maybe around when I was in Grade 7, I didn't do my homework, I was a little bit lazy and one of the teachers got up and said, G., you're gonna go downstairs today, to that special class. I said why; I just didn't do my homework, I listened to you, but she said: You're going to go to that special class.

At the time there was a teacher called – I think his name was Mr. McDonald. He was from Newfoundland. There were about five or six of us there. There was a young guy there that eventually opened up to me and I was given maybe 20 sheets of work to do. He's still alive here, that young guy, his name is Andrew Pokue. I looked at them and tried to ask questions and I can see the hurt in his eyes, like he wanted to cry, but he didn't.

And the teacher gave me 20 sheets of work and I completed it within the hour and handed to him. Then he corrected all of the work, and he said: You don't belong here; you got to go back up to your regular classroom, you're not Special Ed student. You can do any work that the teacher can assign you, but you're not doing it. So I was only there for an hour and there were about four other students there and they kept to themselves, quiet.

Years and years later I met up with Andrew; he's sort of a distant relation of mine. I went to a teacher's house, we usually go to a teacher's house to watch TV because nobody had TVs or games. A funny thing he said, there was nobody around and they were both standing outdoors and for some reason, I didn't pick up on it because Andrew was sort of – he was holding Andrew on the shoulders and telling him something. I didn't wanna get into the conversation so I just said: I'm gonna go in and watch TV in your house, which he let me and I did.

But Andrew was still out there, he sort of like crying. I think, I must almost caught them because he was one of the children that was abused by one of the teachers and that teacher passed away. He committed suicide. His name was James Cameron Newton.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: James who?

G. N.: James Cameron Newton. He was in there from Guelph, Ontario.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Cameron?

G. N.: Yeah. Newton.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Newton.

G.N.: Yeah.

He adopted a boy in his home to take care of. I don't know what the process it was at the time there. I think he made the application to be a foster parent, and he fostered that boy. He was a pretty good friend of mine because there were some days if I didn't have any place to go, I'd go over and sleep with him for the night; get out of the cold during the winters. He'd invite me and we'd talk.

My friend's name was Joseph Riche. Joseph is about two years older than I am.

He's a former Grand Chief of the Innu Nation. And I learned a lot of things there from Joseph, growing up with him.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So was Joseph the adopted one? Okay.

G. N.: And many of the other students who had probably come down did the same thing that I used to. He was a teacher for many years in the school. He used to be a teacher down across the river. I know he had taught there, in schools there in South America, Guyana, somewhere in there because he had loads of pictures of the area and of the students too. Often when we were siting there, he would take pictures of us.

He's got maybe thousands of pictures, and he used to, you know, show them to the other students, friends in the living room playing around. He used to go out in the community. He was a photographer and teacher. He was a good photographer because I've seen a lot of students when – out in the old pond there where we used to go out. He used to be out there and take photographs if we were playing hockey and all that stuff.

I think I was about 15 and there was a great gathering there, the first gathering there in the '80s in Churchill Road, maybe and there was a marriage there and at the time, the priest was there.

Perhaps I should go back a little bit, when I was 11 again. I used to go regularly to church; me and my brothers used to go to church, and when the bell rang there was about 10 or 12 of us. I lived on top of the hill, when the bell rang, my mother would say you guys maybe should go to church, so we'd get dressed and we'd run down to the church. And we'd sit up in the front and the priest would come out. I think it was still Father Pirson at the time and he would pick maybe two young people to be the altar boys. And we'd stay for the whole session, we'd all get dressed and help him with the procession of the church.

Eventually, being in that age and on the weekends, they'd have movie night and you had to pay like a quarter. If you didn't have any money, we just all hung outside and listened on the audio what was going on. There was this one particular time when there was 12 of us and I think there was a complaint made that we were hanging around opening the door to the parish hall, there. And Father Pirson came walking up there and we were sort of like wondering what was going on and he said, guys line up here. So we'd form a line; I thought we were going to go into the movies, free pass. And he explained to us: If you don't have any money, you shouldn't be here, you should go home. And he said if you don't do what I tell you, you are gonna get a beating.

So we're still in the lineup and he takes out his belt. I'm about seventh or eighth there from the lineup. There's about four or five others behind me. And I think the boys were – he took the boy's pants off and turned him around and whipped him with his belt. I was about four behind and the other boys were crying, and they were walking away to go home. And I said to the other boys [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken]. I said I'm going to run away before I get there. So if I – like that, I'm taking off. I don't want to get beaten by a little priest.

I do my signal and I'm the first one to go off and the other boys followed suit. They all ran in different directions. But because I was the first one to run off, Father Pirson followed me and eventually caught up to me and he beat me with the belt. I guess I learned my lesson to not to go there if I don't have any money to go to the movie or something.

But other students, you know, they never spoke of it. I think they were afraid to speak, and it was a horrible experience to be beaten up with the belt, and the pain and the anguish. The pain is only there for maybe an hour – the physical pain. But the mental pain is still here in my mind, what happened to me.

And many teachers, you know, did the same thing to the other students, too. I still – out of the 35 students that were in kindergarten at the time, only three of us

made it to high school to graduate. All of the other students stopped going and started having families at a younger age. Stayed home and, you know, I guess there wasn't a whole lot of job prospects in the community, so you were on Social Services list.

I'm going to go back to when I was about 14 at the gathering. That teacher I was telling you about, Jim Newton, I was on the road, and I was really – I was going to go home and he picked us up, me and another students. And he drove us home there from the gathering. I wasn't particularly feeling well. I was feeling a little bit of a – sick. I had fever and high temperature. And I asked him, do you have anything to – 'cause I'm not feeling well.

He said he might be able to help me. So I know he went to the kitchen, and he brought me some milk. And he said: This will put you to sleep. I know he – it smelled a little bit. There was liquor in there. He said: You'll be all right. You can sleep in my bed. He said: Why don't you take off your clothes, just, you know, leave your underwear on? And I said: Sure, it's 10 o'clock. I'm gonna go to bed. I'm still not feeling well.

Later in that night, he took off all of his clothes and he slept behind me. And he was sort of touching my behind and everything. I didn't know what to do because he was already on top of me, I couldn't move. From there on, I blacked out. When I came to in the morning my underwear was off, and he was already gone from his bed, and I was left naked on his bed. I knew what he had done to me.

I couldn't comprehend who I should tell or if anybody was going to believe me. Eventually, I told Joseph, his foster son, and I told him, and I can tell that he's been doing the same thing to him, too, ever since he was in his care.

As we got older, he said, he was in high school – there's a high school called Goose High School before they tore it down. One night I went over there he was doing his homework, and nobody was around and I was the only one there. Jim was behind Joseph, teaching him. I think they were in the kitchen; I was in the room. The next day, Joseph said: G., I wish you didn't have to go home that night. There was something that happened to him, I think, he done. He says: He done something to me that night, too, ever since they were together in the foster care.

He told me what he had done and, he said, don't tell anyone. I don't want anyone to find out. I tell you because I have trust in you, and you have good sense of what things are going on. I told him in my own story about what's happened to me, and we shared each other, and we both cried, and we held each other to comfort each other. We didn't know where to go or what was gonna happen to us.

G., I said, I wish you didn't go home, I wish you didn't go home that night. He told me I should go home and sleep at my house because Joseph was his foster son, and I said, I can stay, but he said no, I think, you go home. That's one of the first times that he told me what was going on. He was hurt by that and then I was hurt, too. Here's a teacher that we thought we could trust and help us, but it didn't turn out the way we had, I guess …

And there were other teachers there in the school that used to take students to their homes. There was an old, old residence right across there from the parish hall, there next to the church, and other students, maybe five or six of them, they went in there one night and they spent a weekend there with a teacher. And that's when the stories came out about this certain teacher, too, that he used to go at nights when the kids would sleep and touch them on their private parts and stuff. And eventually it was known.

I don't know if there was ever a proper investigation. Eventually the teacher, years later, was implicated in sexual abuse in those students there. And today, some of those students still recall what happened, and they're still hurt.

We were always fearful of the Department of Social Services coming, knocking on the door and taking us away from our families. I think our families are the key people that – that's Innu. Cultural thing is, the bond and the closeness between them; once you start to break them up, the children get segregated to other homes out of the community and they're completely lost.

In my experience, I had stayed in – not for a long time, but just to go out and meet other people. And there's always, I guess, sort of things that you gotta do in other people's houses that we weren't used to doing, like sitting down and praying. Some of them were Pentecostal, some of them were Catholics, and we knew what Catholic – what is meant by that, to follow the rules of God.

The priest was always – you couldn't speak up against the priest because he was the man that was next to God and if you ask questions about God, you would be doomed or damned to hell. And that was the belief there, culturally, that's what the priest told the Elders in the community to scare them. They would call the police if they didn't feel comfortable, to take away their children.

There is a gentleman that I work with. He is a little – maybe about 10 years older than I am. He says, at the time, when he spoke, he had worked with the community collecting stories. He used to collect stories there from the old, old people that were gone about 30, 40 years ago. He did the transcripts there at the Innu Nation and they would talk about how they were treated by the first priests that came into the community. He said the priest did terrible things. Sometimes he would impregnate the young girls, and the young girls would be sent off to have abortions.

And it was not just young girls. It was women, too, and he did do stuff to the elderly gentlemen, too, he said. Because I spoke to some of the Elders, because they used to have private meetings in – there is an old garage down there by the old parish hall, next to it. That's where he would take them and abuse these elderly gentlemen for his own.

The Elders, he told them about what was going on, but there was no way for these Elders to take their story and take it to the police, because they wouldn't believe what they were going through. You couldn't even, you know, say bad things about the priest, and the police were always on their side.

My father, who was young at the time, used to work with the priest. He would gather the winter wood supply, get all the water and he was made to work for next to nothing. 'Cause my mother, at the time, said we never had money. And if we did have money, it was there from those child tax benefits. If you didn't do what you were told, the priest could cut it off, and some families were really hungry.

And he said on one occasion the priest was very upset with my father. He came home to my mother's house. They had a tent and he had this long broomstick, maybe about that size there. And because my father wasn't working at that time, he came into the tent, unravelled the bed and started beating my father with the stick because he was sick. And he said he beat him for a long time. Eventually the handle broke in two. And there was nothing that my mother can do because my father was in such pain for days from all the bruising and everything.

Many of the people in the community saw what was done to my father. Because I still, you know, talk to some of them and they would still remember. Your father was a good man. He was respected, they said, because he volunteered. But they lost a lot of respect for the priest, the way he was treated by him.

That was the same priest, Father Pirson. He was a cruel and vicious man. But there was not many people that would people that would stand up to him. I think he came from Germany; he was one of the priests that came in. It might've been after the war, back in the '30s, '40s and '50s.

In the ’40s and ’50s, there was only that church that was built and the priest’s house by the beach. All around them, there was all nothing but tents, ’cause at the time people were still living the way of a nomadic life, going back to the country. It was the priest that said if you leave the community,7 your – what do you call those – rations or child tax benefits and your children will be taken away. You must stay here. Houses will be built. There’ll be jobs. That’s how they kept the people here year-round.

And people, at the time, were so afraid, they stopped practising their spirituality of respecting the animals, the land, the water. They were told that this is the work of the devil, and the priest would explain what would happen to them if they didn’t follow the new religion that was imposed on them.

And children were made to stay in the community. But there were a few families that left and knew what was going on. They went back then to Quebec North Shore and some of them even went down to Schefferville to continue their lifestyle.

There was no jobs for us. There was the Hudson Bay. They relied mostly on trapping furs and everything. There was no meaningful reason to stay other than – in the summertime, you know, when you’re nomadic, you go to a certain place and this is the certain place that the summer people used to come here to congregate, because they knew there was a priest here and that’s where they got married.

I don’t know if they were forced marriage or not because if you didn’t believe in certain things, then you have to pay for them. And children were baptized; they were all given Christian names. Most people would, you know, have special names for the children in our own language. But they were all given Christian names.

Being forced to accept something that you really don’t understand is very confusing. You try to, but you’re not educated. You don’t know the history of the new religion that’s imposed on you. All you know is that this man rose and had disciples. They couldn’t understand the full concept of the English language, too, but they went to church anyway to listen to the sermons and stuff. And many of the old, old ladies, I remember, they were all dressed in black, and they have these long beaded cross. They couldn’t speak English, but they were there to pray because they were told to.

Hard to understand. To this day, I still go to that old, old place. There is a old place there by – down the beach, where there’s a new cemetery. ’Cause, in my younger days, I used to go down there, and they used to make canoes – these old, old men. And I would sit there most of the day and they would use this crooked knife. They made canoes for the – going back into the fall. They were very skilled at it. They didn’t have, you know, education of measuring in numbers, but they learned to use – measure rope. They would tie one end and tie it to the other end as a measurement, to get these canoes there all the way.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: And they, you know, didn’t have degrees and everything but they knew how to build stuff with their hands. Canoes, komatiks, snowshoes, everything that the Innu needed was taken there from the land. I did a small exercise there, with one of the younger generation there a couple years back. I said to them, what do you see? There was a lone tree there, by itself. I said: What do you see?

He said: What do you mean? I said: I want you to tell me what do you see? He says, it’s bare. There’s nothing there. Just a tree. I said: That’s a start. But if you look beyond the tree, if you look down on the roots of the tree, there is life there. We have little animals like ants, wasp. In the tree, there’s life. We have a nest there up in the tree; we have squirrels go up the tree and feed from the cones. And the tree itself can be made into a tool to set up your tent. And it can be used to – you cut it down, you can use it for firewood.

I said the tree is life itself, because that’s how we live. You don’t need money; you

can throw money at the tree, but it's not going to do anything. But the tree itself will renew itself; after you cut it, it will grow back on again. It's renewable.

And today's concept in schools, children don't understand that. I take my two young boys on a foster-parent time, and I teach them. Teach them how to snare a rabbit, clean the rabbit and everything. I says, out here you don't money; you don't need a quarter or a nickel or a dime. This is our store. The woods is our store; it provides for us.

There is little streams there where you can get water, boil water, have a little bit of tea. And you can make fire. You don't necessarily need matches. You can look for a dry tree, cut it in half, quarter it, then you can rub the tree and make fire with it.

All these things that the white people have, it's all right, but what happens if they run out of matches, and they're done. But if we have that tree and the dry tinder and we rub it together, we don't need a match. Because that tree will always make fire for us and keep us warm.

And that gun that they carry, well, it's going to run out of bullets eventually. But with the deadfall trap, everything is there. You can make a deadfall trap to catch a beaver, a black bear, and other all kinds of animals, rabbits and stuff. That's forever. That's not going to change. But eventually, that steel trap that they got out there, that's gonna rust and break apart. But the tree that you cut to make those traps, that's been there thousands of years and still continue to be there.

That's what I try to explain to the younger generations now. But many of the concepts are lost. Technology has eroded the minds and the way of living of the younger generation.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: But I'm still trying to teach my youngsters.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: (Inaudible.)

G. N.: I got married there in 1990. I was 23 years old after living the life of alcoholism and abusing my mind and my body. I lived with my girlfriend at the time who was 16, 17. By 17, we had a child, and I was drinking heavily, trying to lose myself. I didn't know how to deal with things of sexual abuse by teachers, priests, the system that, you know, was supposed to be good for us. I couldn't understand, so I drank heavily. I was still drinking there when I was in high school.

By the time my daughter was born, I used to play into a lot of sports, and I didn't come home for days because I'd be drinking with the boys, and I didn't want to take the responsibility of bringing up a child and my girlfriend – my wife now – she stayed home to take care of the family.

Eventually, as I got older and I told her my story and what I went through, she understood why I did all those things for the way I lived. I told her about being sexually abused and exploited by people. She opened up to me and told her story about how she was in the same boat as we were.

And back in – we stayed together on and off and sometimes, you know, I didn't come home. I guess I had another girlfriend somewhere. Eventually, she said as we got older – I was 23; she was 21 – I think it's time, maybe, we got married. I wasn't committed to marriage. I didn't want to believe, I guess, I could take the responsibility of, you know – but I spoke to an old, old friend who's a priest. His name was – he passed away – Father Chris Rushton. He was a good friend of mine and a teacher. Father Chris succeeded Father Len.

Back in 1979, Father Chris came into the community as the priest and a teacher. I think I was in Grade 7 or Grade 8 at the time, and he came up to the classroom. It was his very first day and he didn't know how to go about things. He introduced himself and he was in tears, because he was afraid, I guess.

Being the student that I was, I welcomed him into our classroom and there was about 12, 13 of us at the time. I know he was a good soul. He was a great teacher and a wonderful man, but he was scared. I took the time to get off my seat, which was at the front, and one after the other, behind him, I would introduce him to all the students: Paul Rich, Clementine Andrew, who is the smartest. I'd joke around with him, just to make him feel comfortable, and he thanked me for that, and we've been friends ever since then.

He'd always ask me questions and I would always fire back a question. Like one of the questions – you know, just joke around with the other students in the classroom. I says: Father Chris, if an angel loses a feather, does it hurt? In the biblical sense, I guess, they got feathers. If it falls off, does it hurt them? The questions I asked were hard. I'd make them hard so he couldn't really answer.

So we'd just laugh about it and stuff. He was that kind of a teacher. He was a wonderful, wonderful storyteller. He had all the experience and the respect of the Elders in the community. I often go to church and listen to his sermons, and I would volunteer to help him as an altar boy.

He was one of the best teachers and a priest in the community. He was the priest that was at the first gathering on Churchill Road. I have a picture of him. He gave me a picture – beautiful picture. Every now and then, when he was still alive, I'd go up to Goose Bay and knock on the door, he'd open up and offer tea to me and my wife and my children. We'd have dinner with him on occasions; he was a wonderful cook, too.

He used to work down in Davis Inlet, and he'd tell stories of the other students and the teachers and the wonderful times that they had teaching and learning about the culture, going outdoors, hunting and all this stuff. He had a great memory. Many of the older generations now, my age, still remember him because we were in high school at the time when he was there. He was one of the best teachers and best things in my life at the time. I was still going through my struggles too with alcoholism back then. But he was somebody I could relate to, and he'd listen to me and my stories and stuff.

He died out in Ottawa. I was fortunate to have a vehicle so me and my wife, we drove out to the funeral. Prior to that, a few weeks earlier on a business trip I went, he was at the palliative care. Me and the boys that worked at the land claim table went over and visit him. He was so frail, but he was still full of life, in his eyes I could see it. Even though he was really terribly sick, he had these old, old stories that he would tell of us and we'd all laugh at his bed.

He gave us some parting gifts. He gave me a little cross and a picture of him, which I still hold today in my house as a gift. Then their family told us that he passed away and then we told them we were coming for the funeral, so we went out. There was a funeral. Maybe seven of us from our community. I went out to this funeral, a beautiful funeral. We all said our goodbyes and cried and hugged each other. One of the good memories in my life.

There's so much yet to tell because my life had been a long journey of falling down and getting up.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So the getting up was the key part to that –

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – you know that, right?

G. N.: I didn't – I never gave up.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. No, I can just sense that from you, in listening to you this past while, so yeah.

G. N.: Eventually, I sort of smartened up. March 17 – funny old story, March 17. That's the day I got married. If you can picture it, there's a lot of snow, and everybody's at church. My mom's there, Jeannie's mother is there, and family, and

it's about 1 o'clock. And Jeannie was left home with another friend to get ready and makeup and everything. And they had this beautiful, long dress. And there was just two of them.

The girl left to walk over to the church, and the driver, who an old – a white Volkswagen. And the snow about that high and you can just barely move the car backwards. Well, anyway, it's 1 o'clock, then it's 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock. Father Eugene says: G., I got another mass at 5 o'clock. I said: Father Eugene, please, please stay, I'm sure she'll come.

Anyway, she was supposed to leave and they left, only to get stuck into the driveway because the car was nudged in there – they couldn't open the doors. They were there for hours. Eventually some of the people there from the new housing, they were rocking back and forth trying to get out, but they couldn't get out.

It was 4 o'clock now; Father Eugene is about to go up to Goose Bay. Mom and Dad are looking; they're after me. What's going on, G.? We've been sitting here for hours. Are we going to go ahead with it, or did she change here mind?

At the time, we didn't have any cellphones or anything and there was no phone in the church, 'cause everybody was at church. Anyway, she managed to roll down the window and she saw some people on the road and said, can you help us, we're stuck? We got to go to church.

Eventually, those two people, they had a few drinks, they got into the front and started nudging. They barely made it to church. Father Eugene just about gave up. I was going to be disappointed because we were about ready to go, too, because my mom and dad were, you know, maybe –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: She was obviously very determined to get married.

G. N.: Yeah.

It was a harrowing day, I guess, I thought I felt jilted, and she wasn't –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

G. N.: – she decided not to come back.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

G. N.: Oh yeah. But we made it.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: That's a good story.

G. N.: I still tell her every now and then: What happened? Maybe you didn't wanna come. She just look at me and laugh.

We have our ups and down, me and my wife.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: That's life – that's life.

G. N.: Yeah.

We got three kids, all grown up now. I got my daughter – my oldest daughter is Victoria Madeline Nuna. The second name after my mother, I guess. And I got Faith Nuna, my second daughter. And my son, Greg Junior, Greg Matthew Nuna. I don't call him Greg because it's sort of confusing. I just call him by his second name, Matthew.

C. URQUHART: And two foster kids?

G. N.: And my two foster kids that I fostered in 2013. I got a knock one day and there was this white woman I didn't know – I never seen her before. She was working with Social Services, and they carried a baby. I said: What are you guys doing carrying a baby? It was Ben – little Ben. He said: We heard that you were looking to foster. We were talking about it.

Well, prior to that, prior to being a foster parent, me and my wife, all our children left for college and university and just me and my wife. Every morning we get up, we do the same thing. We have breakfast. We don't have much to say to each other. What she referred to as a –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Empty nest?

G. N.: Empty nest syndrome.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. Yeah.

G. N.: We talked about everything we could talk about. There was nowhere else to go. We had so much free time. Then, eventually, she said maybe we should think about fostering. I wasn't overly grasping the idea because I like being by myself, working by myself. Anyway, eventually we got a knock on the door. It's little Ben. He's just looking at us. Like, this small child, two months old.

The mother was abusing weed and alcohol at the time, and the day he was born there, we went over to see him. He was so small and frail. When I closed the door, he had these withdrawal symptoms. He was shaking from the withdrawal symptoms. I was so disappointed. How can somebody do that to a child – abuse. And they were able to take him home for a month. Then she relapsed, going back to smoking weed and drinking. There was nobody to care for him.

That's when we got the knock – would you like to take him home to be with you? I said: Yes, we would. Instantly, I fell in love with little Ben because his little eyes. I'll show you a picture. This is him, when he was a couple of months old.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Beautiful.

G. N.: When he looked at me, it's not the type of face that you'd say no to.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No, exactly.

G.N.: When he came, I was so fearful that we would lose him with SIDS and everything. He always slept by my side. Every time he wake up, I'd be up like that, and I'd feed him at nights. He's been a blessing in my life.

C. URQUHART: How old is he now?

G. N.: He's 10 now.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Wow.

G. N.: And he has FASD, ADHD and we just found out that his father, he's got Huntington's disease.

It sort of worries us, how are we going handle it. Should we take him to do testings? And what if he asks questions about why am I doing all these testing? How are we gonna answer him? It's very hard for me and my wife to explain. His father has been in and out of jail ever since he was a teenager. Now that he's in 30s, this has surfaced because it usually comes out in 30s and 40s, Huntington's.

The doctor said he may have the gene, and he may develop Huntington's too. That's why we're not sure if we're going to do the testing or not. We want him to grow up normally.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: That's a hard one.

C. URQUHART: Yeah.

G. N.: Yeah.

And he's one of the smartest kids in school. When we first started him out in school, we had no symptoms of FASD and when he went to classroom, he was all over the place. The teacher couldn't control him, so we had him eventually tested. They wouldn't do testing when they were in kindergarten, he was too young.

As he grew older and older, nurturing him and tell him how to behave, he began to pick up everything. I think he was – he learned to walk when he was 11 months old, because I'd prop him up and do all this stuff.

And ever since he's always been close to me, Dad. When he gets sick, he'll jump on my lap and say: Dad, I'm not feeling well. Eventually Jeff came into our life a few months after. Jeff is my other son. Same thing. Jeff's mom and Ben's mom, they're sisters, twins.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

G. N.: And they are like, three or four days apart, they were almost born at the same day.

But Ben has always been the leader between the two of them. Ben is fearless, when he wants to do something, he'll do it. Jeff on the other hand is the one that will follow Ben when he does something. I think Ben's going to be a good little leader when he grows up. He can pick up things. Like, he wants to drive the snowmobile, I let him drive the snowmobile in round circles, and he gets comfortable. Then it's Jeff's turn to go really slow.

Then I even showed them how to use the chainsaw, the correct way, to fall down a small tree. So I'm still teaching them stuff.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: The one thing I was disappointed at the time with Social Services, Jeff's mom did a program, and she finished the program. After so many weeks of completing the program, Social Services comes knocking at the door. Without no prior knowledge, or even time, they tell us: Pack up his stuff, Jeff is gonna go home today. I said: How is that possible? You have – at least give us some time or a couple weeks so we can adjust to it.

No, we didn't have any time. And Social Services came by within the hour and picked him up. He's going home. We say, is there any way we can continue on our relationship with him? Even, like a five-minute visit to his mother's house? G., I'm sorry, but this is not your time. This is mother and child time. We just wanted to visit.

Ben is like, four years old, and he understands what's going on. He said: Dad, stop it. Get him back, he's my brother, get him back, get him back. And I said to Ben, I can't. If I grab him back the police will be here, likelihood they will take you away, too, if I break the law.

So every time we drove by the top road, you know where the Helen Hart's house is? On top of the house there's a wood road that goes down there. At the bottom of the house that's where his house is, Jeff's new house. And Ben who sits in the back, you know, will jump out and grab me here, Dad, you're going the wrong way. You're supposed to be going that way, we have to pick up Jeff. I said, I can't; Social Services will take you away if I go in there.

One day I goes in there, just out of curiosity. Hi, it's me G., you know me. Can I see Jeff for a minute? No, you can't. You have no rights to Jeff to see him, that's what Noreen said. I'm there really hurt, and I don't know how to react. I said, just one minute. Just let me hug him and give him a kiss. No, this is not your child. You can't do that.

My wife is sitting in the car with me and there's not much we can do except cry. Little Ben is there, he wants Jeff home. Jeff wants to go home with us too. He's been taken away from Noreen. He doesn't know Noreen. All that he knows: Noreen is mom. That's it, got no relationship. There's no bond. That bond was broke, and the only bond that he had was with us, to hug him, tell him we love him every day and he was used to that. Now he's gone to a – sort of like a little foreign place where he doesn't get the hugs and the kisses and stuff that he needs.

And eventually one of the people who do the drinks, said, G., I was over there at the house and Noreen's drinking and people were passed out there. He was in the bedroom with his little sister. And he come out, and he turned on the – put a chair there, and he was trying to cook for his sister. A four-year-old boy trying to cook for his sister.

I called up Social Services: Do you know what's going on? This is what I've been told. Could you do an investigation? Can you at least go check him out? G., like we told you before, you have no more rights here to tell us what we can do and what we can't do. And they shut the door on me.

These things psychologically affect me and Ben and Jeff, and Jeannie, and my two daughters, who loved him to death. We don't know where to go or who to ask help for. Because we have no parental rights to Jeff; he's not biologically our child.

Jeff is hurt; he's four. You go to a place who says, this your mother. It's a perfect stranger, and you're told you can never go back to – we called him our son, and he knows he's our son, because we raised him. As the months pass by, me and my wife, we go to church every Sunday. One Sunday in particular, it was maybe early fall, and we usually sit up at front, me and my wife, because people are coming and going.

Then I hear this door; it closes. I knew right there and then, the way he walked, it was Jeff. And his mother was sitting in the back. He allowed Jeff to come over and see us for a few minutes because she couldn't do anything, the priest was there and everything. And Jeff was dressed up in her mother's blouse. He didn't have any clean clothes, and her mother's underwear, and it was falling to his ankles.

So I propped him up and said, Jeffrey, your underwear's falling – it was her mother's underwear – and I was heartbroken there. I wanted to go up there to the back of the church and tell her off, that she should be – he lost weight, too. He was skinny. And he just looked into my eyes, and I looked into his eyes, and I hugged him and I kissed him, hugged him so hard, and the mistreatment that he went through. He said, he wanted to come home. I said: I'd love to have you come back.

November came around, after a few – maybe about eight weeks and his mother comes around. I'm gonna leave Jeff with you for a couple of hours. We were ecstatic; we were happy. Jeff sat up to the front of the table and I prepared a meal for him to eat; he was hungry. Ben came around and he was so happy to see him, so they sat on the same chair and ate.

I was a little bit pissed off because there were some things that I wanted to say to Noreen, but I held back, the way he was treating Jeff. The malnourishment, being left alone for – and Jeff has always been – he still is, today, scared to be in a dark room by himself. I guess they told me that he used to lock him in the house, in the bedroom while they were drinking and smoking it up.

When Jeff came home in November, there was a sense of happiness on my part, but I could see the sadness in his eyes and the anger came out. He was really angry. He asked me, why didn't you visit? Why? He was angry at Ben. Ben has taken up most of his, you know, some toys and he wanted everything from Ben. He wanted his clothes. He wanted his bed. He wanted his time that he missed.

It's my time, not Ben's time, my time, Dad. He had feelings, you know? He had anger and we could all sense it. It's my time. These are my toys. No – Ben would say my toy, no, it's my toy now. It's my time because he missed so much time being away. Well, that November, that couple hours turned into a couple of weeks.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I was wondering that.

G. N.: She didn't come because she was working in Voisey's Bay and she was making a lot of money and buying alcohol, spending time there in St. John's. She didn't put any money into Jeff's well-being. Like, Jeff's got a birthday in November. She didn't show up. She didn't get any presents, no clothes or anything.

So we do the best that we can there for Jeff and we had a wonderful party for the both of them, Ben and Jeff. They're like three days apart, so we had one big party, and we invite some of the friends. They loved it. You know, there's still something missing, and Jeff was still a little bit angry. He wanted to blow out the candles and stuff by himself.

To this day, I have never been able to ask questions to Noreen, why he treated Jeff the way he treated him. Now, when I look back upon it now and the trauma that Jeff went

through, I can understand where Noreen's coming from and why he treated Jeff the way he treated him.

My brother-in-law, Gordon, and his wife, they broke up because of infidelities and stuff like that, and Noreen and Noelle and the other family, brothers and sisters, they didn't get the kind of love that Ben and Jeff were getting. They were raised by their grandmother or raised by Social Services in different places, and they never got the proper nourishment of love as family.

To this day, my brother-in-law, Gordon, still comes to my house and I said, when are you gonna stop drinking and start turning your life around? You've got grandkids here. He's not the type of person to hug, or to say to their grandkids, I love you, or a birthday card or anything like that. He's distant and cold. But every morning he comes down to the coffee and while I'm making breakfast – I cook for everybody in the house and he eats – I says, Gordon, you got to start caring for yourself and start caring for your kids.

And when I was young, living with my girlfriend, when you go back to this, I didn't see that very often in their house when I was living with my girlfriend. Their mother was distant, and their father was distant. They're not the kind of people that hug and tell their children that they love them. That's where it probably came from because they didn't learn it from their parents and that's how they raised their kids.

I was fortunate enough that – in their time, some of them went over to live in the dormitory because they were taken away from alcoholism, but I was sort of fortunate because I never got into the system because they didn't take me away. 'Cause my father worked as full-time with the forestry, and I went to school on a regular basis, and they sort of left me alone. And those people who didn't, they were all taken away across the river and some of them were there abused sexually.

Yeah …

One of the older – well, I can't name her because she wouldn't like to use it. They were taken out of the dormitory, and they went up to a camp place, and the ladies there who took these students out of the dormitory, some of them were up the coast there from Nain, Davis Inlet and Hopedale. Well, they forced them to be intimate when in front of everybody across the river and they tell stories, those workers there, how they were abused in front of everybody. They would, you know, watch them as they were …

And there was quite a few people there from this side – as well as at the coast and some people there, South Coast, but I don't know if there was ever a proper investigation done. One of them was my classmates; most of them I went to school with.

Then you hear all these stories of how traumatic the Innu life is. Sitting at the negotiation tables and sharing stories there with them. Right across Canada, I talk to people when I ever go to Toronto or if I go down to Whitehorse, there's other Aboriginal peoples and I talk to them, how they lived and how they were treated there in residential schools and the trauma and the tragedy that – the nuns running the school.

One in particular I remember, I think it was an old woman. She tells of the residential school. There was one vicious nun there. There's like a three-story building, and this kid in particular probably has autism and doesn't like to be touched and is constantly crying. He's only about two or three. He's sitting by the wall and this nun – I don't know her name or the child's name – he picks up this baby, two years old, opens the window because he's tired of the crying and throws him out the window, three stories and he's died instantly.

There was nothing that any of the students can do or say. They just bowed their heads down because they didn't want to go through the same thing and they were all scared, you know? They're all – it's the work of, you know, God. You can't question God, the way he's gonna– and there are

thousands of stories that I know and hear about.

Me and my wife used to watch a movie. It's a really sad movie, I don't know if you remember, about three young girls; they were in south Australia, called the *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Have you seen it?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No, I'm aware of it, but I don't think I've saw it.

G. N.: (Inaudible) about 20 years ago, but –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

C. URQUHART: Did you say rabbit-proof?

G. N.: *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, that's what it's about: children.

G. N.: At the time, they were taking away Aboriginals. At the time, one was eight, 12 and 14. They were taken away from their families and they show there somewhere in the – the government has got the names of these children in a town way off because they have report of who is – what they called half-caste, marrying or staying with a white man, having children, and they got registered all these names and take all these children to a special school, like a residential school, and they were all housed there.

And I've watched it over and over and you get the feeling how they were treated and taught – and the language, how they were beaten where they're not allowed to speak their own language. Eventually, the three girls, they're given a task to take the bucket out and throw it out, so they sneak out and they eventually run away from that place. It's like 1,200 miles: desert, open, snakes, spiders, everything you could imagine. They run away to go home, and the police are on their tails.

And along the way they meet some other people. They meet these two individual guys who are their kind, and they gave them a little bit of food and shelter and they eventually move on again. They meet this – another woman, who went to the same place where the girls came from, but she's old now. She's probably in her 30s and they give them shelter and food for the night. But somebody caught a hold of them, and they called the police on them, and they had to run away again, and there's this tracker there, following the children every step of the way. Eventually, after nine weeks, they make it home.

But on the way, one of them, they overhear one of the – I think, it's one of the guards – said your mother's dead. There's no point in you going home. She gives up and is taken back to the orphanage or the home and the other two, they don't believe. They continue on their journey crossing the desert, the heat, everything, with just the clothes on their little backs, but they make it home.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I'll have to watch that one.

G. N.: Jigalong, that's their home. They follow the rabbit-proof fence. It's a straight line and it goes from north to south.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Wow.

G. N.: And they make it.

It's a wonderful story of love for me, for their families and their culture, and they wanna go home where everything makes sense, you know? Everything makes sense at home because you got mom and dad there, you help mom and dad, and they help you. But to move into a certain place, a foreign place, where there's only English-speaking language, you lose your self-identity. You don't know who you are. You're just told to do what you're told to do, and they're told to pray to the certain religion.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Very familiar stories anywhere there's colonialism, right?

G. N.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: The stories are very similar – yeah, very.

Just go back to Jeff, when his mom dropped him off a couple of hours, he stayed a couple of weeks. So did that just continue on? Has that continued on?

G. N.: Yeah. Eventually Social Services come back, maybe a couple – a little after November or was it February –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

G. N.: He said: Can you continue to look after Jeff?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

G. N.: Then there was a process, I don't know if it's called kinship, we had to sign some papers for him to be in our care.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

G. N.: There had been so many turnovers in terms of different social workers working with us; we don't know who's coming and who's going. They stay for a couple of months and then a new worker comes in and it's just been ongoing after that. We lost a sense who our workers are.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: That's a problem, yeah.

G. N.: And one of these days I think they were checking up on me. There's a car that pulls up, my daughter is home and the boys are home – 'cause I got a camera – I think they go in and check in when you're not home, see who's looking after them and what's going on in the house.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

G. N.: I got a bing on my – and it's a social worker. Then I got her number, and I said, I see you on the camera. What are you doing? I says, you got my number, you should call me when you're gonna come to my house; my daughter is there and the two boys, she's looking after them while we're working.

She didn't have an answer. I think she was there to sort of, you know –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

G. N.: – see if the boys are properly taken care of or they're being abused or anything like that.

We had allegations against us abusing children. There was this one instance where her mother – not her, one of the – they used to give us children maybe once or twice a week to look after them, and this mother went on Facebook. She said we were giving children – sharing lice with them. Louse?

C. URQUHART: Hmm. Yup.

G. N.: And next day, Social Services, guys you got to go to public health, get checked out, there's been allegations you guys are abusing children, you're not cleaning them properly and all this stuff. So we didn't have any choice in the matter so we all got into our vehicles, me and my daughter and the two boys and this other young boy that we had in care temporarily. The mother made a complaint for us.

Anyway, we get checked out, we're given the clearance. There's no louse, there's no nothing like that. But when my wife went to the Facebook, she come across this, the mother's brushing her hair and she says, I must have given some – because they have a little bit of lice, to the child that came into our house. So that's why the allegation was there. She was brushing her, said she had some, I guess. And they told Social Services, we're the one who are not cleaning the children properly and we were hurt by that, you know, it's humiliating.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, yeah.

G. N.: Sometimes now –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Some things are hard to understand.

G. N.: Yeah.

Sometimes now, I still get a call from time to time, Social Services, can you take a child temporarily? Maybe for a few days or a few hours and they leave – and sometimes

they'll leave them for a week or two and we'll give you the assistance that you need. But when I ask for assistance to buy a little bit more food or Pampers for the child, you already had it. You already had it. So out of pocket, I'm employed, I can look after the kids but they say they'll help you as much as they can help you, but they sort of abandon you, Social Services and the children.

So I tell them nowadays, now I don't have any more room to take any more children. We had Noreen's daughter, too, for a while. Her name is Myra, Jeff's sister. Noreen had a relapse; they didn't have anywhere to take her, so Jeannie decided to take her for a couple of weeks. That child was never properly cleaned or anything, so Jeannie had to clean her hair and everything and bathe her on a regular basis and take care of her and treat her and everything.

She enjoyed staying with us, but eventually, it's only for a couple of weeks, then she went back because the program is finished again.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G. N.: It has always got to be the program. People got to jump through hoops in order to get their children back but what they don't understand is, you going back to the same house where there are the same people are there drinking and smoking, you're going back into the same cycle. If somebody offers you a free, like $1,000, you take it. If somebody offers you a free drink like whiskey or a bottle, when you're an alcoholic, you take it. You don't answer questions; you're happy. That's only temporary happiness. They're blinded by their addictions.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G.N.: And that's the way things are working in this community here. There's drug dealers. They've got – somebody said they've got speed on the go, $5 a pill. Two or three months down the road, once they know you need it again or you're hooked, it's $20 a pill. That's how they do it.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G.N.: It's very discouraging, you know, some of them at school you've got kids sharing gummie bears from time to time. You don't know what is in them, and it's eventually going to make their way there.

I've had –

C. URQUHART: You can just order that on the Internet now.

G.N.: Yeah, but these ones from local drug dealers, you know, they give you free, hook you. I mean I do the gummie bears myself.

C. URQUHART: Mm-hmm.

G.N.: It's only because of my – I damaged my shoulder and my knee.

C. URQUHART: Mm-hmm.

G.N.: It's not for me to get high; it's just for me to sleep. It doesn't make you high; it just takes away the pain. Maybe once every three days I take gummie bear because I can't sleep on one side. It's beneficial to some degree but it doesn't make me high or anything.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

Well, you told us a lot this morning – or this afternoon. I don't know what time it is.

G.N.: I'm just beginning. Going back to –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I don't wanna cut you off.

G.N.: No. No.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I just –

G.N.: Yeah. I'll tell you the other one.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

G.N.: The day I got married. The day I got married, November 17, is the day I stopped drinking. I stopped drinking because I wanted to stop drinking. I've seen my father

stop drinking because he wanted to have a good life with his children which was all right. I followed my father's footsteps. I stopped drinking and Jeannie set me straight. Responsibility as parents to our children, our community and our church.

And me and Jeannie, we sit on the parish council. We volunteer with the church, cleaning, fundraising, everything. Where there's certain stuff going on, like funerals, I will be the altar boy to help Father Joe. Father Joe is a good priest and a friend. And the little boys that I got, Ben or Jeff, every Sunday we go to church, and they are part of the church. Jeff and Ben and Jeannie will sit up front, and they will do the rosary. And the boys know the rosary through hand. We're trying to teach the younger generation now to come to church.

We were very disappointed to hear that they took religion out of the school system, and that has many implications on what's happening in the community, in terms of suicide rates and the forgotten of religion and all this stuff, being properly cared for. My nephew, two of my nieces – they all committed suicide, from alcoholism, drugs, sexual abuse. And on Jeannie's side too, my wife's side, that's the same thing.

We had to see a young, 17-year-old girl with – she can be the smartest, and prior to one week before coming, there was a suicide at the school, in Mealy Mountain. A week later, I guess it had psychological effects on her. Her mother told her one Saturday morning to go and clean up her room. She cleaned up all the room, nice and neat; then after clean-up, she took the rope and she hung herself in her room.

The suicide that goes around the community, it's got an effect on the children and how they perceive it. Because they think by killing themselves, they'll be able to see their friend on the other side, and it's not the case. Because there had been a rash of suicide back in the '80s in this community as well as in the community of Natuashish.

I had my brother-in-law who was drunk, and he had a gun, right there. It's Saturday night, 2:30 in the morning; the TV is blasting. Jeannie wakes me up and says go turn down the TV. So I see him there in front of the TV and there's cops in SWAT gear that snuck into the front porch, and he's on the phone with the other cop. So I go off there, get a glass of water and I knew. So I come back with a glass of water, drink it. I says, Archie, can you turn down the radio? Me and the kids and Jeannie are trying to sleep. So he reaches over the – so the gun is like this, he reaches over, then I grab the gun, wrestled from him, then the police come in and they take him off.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

G. N.: They take the gun – the gun was loaded; it was ready to go off, to kill himself.

I sort of saved him. He was going through a lot of anger issues and alcohol symptoms. Many friends like that –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: (Inaudible) that kind of experience is traumatic for you.

G. N.: Yeah. I've had a few people that I had to intervene in that way in my life. I have seen horrible, horrible things.

One of my friends, who was only 10 years old, invite me to go down to get some water – we had five-pound bucket of water. So he went up ahead and I said, I'm gonna run down get a piece of bread and butter and I'll follow you, and he was on a toboggan. It's only about a minute walk. He went down ahead without me and this car came there, a Volkswagen, and he hit it. It sheared off all of his leg on one side. He was lying there; the cops came. I knew he was gonna die. I kept talking, but his eyes began to roll up and he lost consciousness.

When he got to the hospital, the doctor told us he was dead. I could see the bone and everything, and it stuck with me for a long, long time, how it feels to – your friend. I said: That could have been me too if I didn't have bread and butter.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G. N.: We could have both been lying there.

If he had just, you know, listened to him. I said I'll be there in a minute, just hold on, just a few seconds. I mean, we would make it. He would be alive today.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G. N.: Things like that, you never get over.

I had these two other friends, too. One winter in March, there was a big storm, and his father was across the river on their way back, because he couldn't see either way or lights or anything. They passed each other in the night. Eventually his father made it home, but they took a turn, a wrong place to go. And they saw in the storm, they had smoke. Usually when you see smoke in the winter, it means it's cold enough, but not cold enough for the water to freeze, so there's a vapour there.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh yeah.

G. N.: So they went to that vapour, and they fell into the water. They could see one of the snowmobiles go up first with the light, so they jumped off and tried to follow Jeannie's uncle, tried to save him.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G. N.: But when they got too close, both of them fell in. My best friend, his name was George, and his brother's name is Jeff – he's still alive today. And George, when Jeff fell down, George jumped in there three times. He went up there about 10 or 12 feet and grabbed his brother up, hauled him up onto the ice because, by the third time, he was so exhausted. Both of them made it to shore.

By that time, it was so cold, his head around here, his hat froze to his head, and he didn't make it to the – there was a small cabin there. He was like 30 feet. He succumbed to hypothermia; that's where he died. But his brother made it – had fire.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

G. N.: He could warm himself up. But he tried to take him, but he was already frozen to the ice.

That night they invited me, and I was living with Jeannie at the time. I said: The boys are going to probably come by here and we'll go over across the bay to look for their father and I'll help them. They had a little snowmobile. But they didn't come and get me. They went alone by themselves. I guess fate had it that I wasn't supposed to die, too.

But Jeannie's uncle's body was never found. They were there for days and days trying to fish out if there's anything they can – it's probably floated off somewhere. We never got to say a memorial service, or bury him. Things like that.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, that's a lot.

G. N.: Oh! I hope I'm not keeping you from the 1 o'clock. We could be here for days.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I know.

G. N.: I've still got more stories.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I love listening to you. You are a good storyteller, too. You talked about this other gentleman that was. It's most interesting, but yeah, maybe we should end for today.

Now, we're here for the rest of the week and there's always different options, too, if you wanna speak to us at another time and it could be by Zoom or something like that. Or if we're here doing other meetings or something like that later on. So we'll leave that invitation open to you.

G. N.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: But, G., thank you for sharing this. You've shared a lot for us to sit down and look at and think about, you know, your life and the things that you've experienced and also interacting with

the child protection system and the church and state, I call it, like those kinds of things that have happened and the history of it which we – I think – what I like to say, anyway, is that when we started, we wanted to find out where is the problem really. I mean, I think we all had a good idea, but now it's being affirmed, and it has been confirmed by the people like yourself who spoke to us and said that's when it happened. Right? Forced settlement, I call it, and that's when it happened.

So all of these pieces that we get from different people are helpful to us in telling the Innu story of what's going on, what has happened and what's going on today.

So thank you very much for that. Really appreciate it.

G. N.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And it was great to meet you.

G. N.: That's only chapter one.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay –

G. N.: We'll talk again.

C. URQUHART: (Inaudible) for the novel.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I'm gonna be here 'til the end chapter so –

G. N.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, thank you very much. Nice to meet you, again.

C. URQUHART: Thank you.

G. N.: Maybe we should make a movie out of my story.

C. URQUHART: There we go.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I think you could.

C. URQUHART: Maybe it could be a series.

G. N.: Yeah.

C. URQUHART: A trilogy.