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

Transcript | Interview Private Session 2

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so how are you both today?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good.

H. A.: Good.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So now with the session, it is private, so anything you say won't be made public or anything. You've talked to Paula, I guess, about that, so you understand that part of it.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You've been to sessions here before, listening?

H. A.: Yeah, I've been here listening, but I haven't been in the private ones, though.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes.

H. A.: Just in the – out there in the big room.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

So with this, is then, if you're probably familiar, you just tell your story, whatever part of your truth that you want to talk about. When you're ready, I'll just say you can start. Don't feel like you have to rush; take your time, and if you need to break, or like if you think you can't speak for a while, that's fine. Silence is good, sometimes.

H. A.: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I'm certainly okay with that, and I might have some questions after, but usually it's not a whole lot, it's just – it might be more trying to clarify something you might have said, or something like that.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Or I might have a question or two.

H. A.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: But I think basically that's it.

And I'm gonna take some notes on my scribbler.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I hope that don't distract you –

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – but I like to keep notes of what you have to say. Okay?

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: All right.

H. A.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I'm left-handed.

H. A.: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Actually, I went to school to the nuns also, the Sisters, and they tried to get me to write with my right hand. They didn't – 'cause apparently, then, it was the Devil, right –

H. A.: Superstition.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – but they didn't succeed. And I'm glad they didn't.

H. A.: They had a lot of superstition, I guess.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: It was a lot, yup. It certainly was.

Okay.

H.A.: I'm left-handed as well.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Are you?

H.A: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There's no devil in her at all.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I have two siblings – my sixth sibling is (inaudible) left-handed, interesting right? (Inaudible) percentage is, but yeah.

Okay.

H. A.: My name is Helen Andrew, and I am 58 years old. I'll be 59 in two months.

So my story – I have never ever talked about my story of the time that I was in the residential school. This is the first time I ever talk about it in public.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

H. A.: And I wanted to do this long, long ago, but I can't seem to do it. I have a lot of problems in my mind arising whenever I think about it and also my body starts, like, having kind of – I feel sick.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

H. A.: I feel sick, and I feel like I can't think straight, and my breathing is going –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: – I feel anxiety, I guess.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Anxiety, yeah, it sounds like it.

H. A.: Just thinking about that – yeah.

And there's some things I think I have blocked out, because a lot of my time at the residential school is – there's some missing parts.

So I don't know what year it was that I was taken from my parents. I lived with my parents, my mother and father and my six sisters. There's just us sisters and there were – the last three youngest was me and my two sisters and we were the ones taken. The other ones were older than all of us. So, I have a sister who's younger than me, and I don't know what year it was.

I just know that I was a little girl. I was probably around maybe seven, maybe six. But I do remember going to school in – when I was home, and I started kindergarten. I remember that my family got me ready. I was still home then, so I think you start at age five going to school. So, I think I was still home at age five.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And you grew up in Sheshatshiu?

H. A.: Yes, I am from Sheshatshiu.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

H. A.: I grew up here. My mother and father, they were born – both born in the 1930s sometime, and they don't speak English at all. They didn't speak English.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: They're both passed away now.

I had sisters – older sisters. My oldest sister now is 69, or 68, around those. And my parents didn't speak any English at all; but my father was working all the time. Even in the summertimes, he was working. And he was a carpenter, and he worked in sawmill and working on the houses that were being built, and my mother was home, taking care of us. Yeah.

They were both born in the country, in Nutshimit, both of them. My mother is from Davis Inlet area, up north. She's Mushuau Innu. And my mother [read: father] was from Quebec. He was born in Quebec and his –

they moved here, him and his father and his brothers and sisters, when they were young. So that's what I know about my parents.

And I never had any – I did not know when I was taken that I was being taken. I had – the nun who worked at the school, her name was Sister Coffey, Joan Coffey, and she stopped on the street where we lived and there were a lot of us playing on the – outside, and she would tell us: Come, let's go for a ride, and we did go for a ride.

And then the next thing I know, that we were taken across the river in North West River, and there was a residential school place there, and that's where we were put. And I never saw my home again. I never saw my father and mother again, my sisters. And I never understood why I was being taken. I had a older sister. She was about two years older than me, and she never told me what's – why we were there. So I had no understanding as a child why I was in a different place.

And the place that they took us was a great big house, I guess, a home, a residential place. And I remember when I was walking in there, there was a lot of children there; white, Innu and Inuit and they were all staring at us when we were brought in and I recognized some of the Innu children that were there. And then we were told – they took us up into upstairs; there was an upstairs, that's where the children's sleeping area was and they told us this is where we will be staying from now on. And so they showed us where we were to stay and there was a place there for girls, little girls and there was also a place for big girls.

So that's where I was in with my two other sisters, and there was another girl also taken from our street. When they took us, they took her too and she was the same age as my younger sister. So there were four of us and that's how it all started.

I was never told why I was there. I remember throughout the years that I was there, I was always wanting to go home. I was always – as I grew older, I remember that I was always running away. I wanted to go home. But I never – I could never understand why I wasn't allowed to go home. Nobody explained it to me. Then I think it was so much trauma that I don't remember a lot of that part. Some of the parts I do remember like the discipline, the beatings and those things that really traumatized me. Seeing other kids beaten, I remember those things.

Yeah, and I was scared of most of my time that I was there. I felt like I needed to protect my younger sister and the other girl who was with us and then there was the fighting all the time with the other children in there. We were being bullied. I felt like I was trying to survive in that place. That's what I felt like. It didn't feel like a home to me. It didn't feel like welcoming, it felt like –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: – I needed to survive in this place that – where I was.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So just to go back for a second, so you said there was two caretakers, or two people there, is that what –

H. A.: Um –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – who were the adults that –

H. A.: There was – they were called house mothers.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: House mothers, okay.

H. A.: Yup. I didn't know any of them, but they were adults, and there was some who worked with the little girls and some who worked on the boys. And then there were kitchen workers, people who worked in the kitchen, there was people who worked in

the laundry. I got to know them over the years.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: I got to know some of them. Some of them were really nice and some were not. There was a lot of racism in there. Especially from the white kids that were there, the older ones.

We went to school here in Sheshatshiu, we went across the cable car. The rules were we went to school, and we had to go back; we weren't allowed to come into the community to be with our families.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: Yeah. So as I got older, around maybe nine or 10, I used to run away after school, I used to stay over here, and then they had the cops looking for me. And I used to go with the other girls who were in that dorm with me, and they were also running away with me. And we would hide when the cops were looking for us.

And still at that age I still had no understanding why I was in the dorm. Nobody explained to me while I was there.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: Yeah. There was – when I first went in the dorm it was back in the '70s and there was a person who run the place. She was – I don't know her name, but she was very mean, a very mean woman. The other kids were afraid of her. And then after the years there was a change in the person who ran the place, and she wasn't that mean as she was – people, the kids weren't afraid of her.

I lived in fear for the first few years that I was at the dorm. I always wanted to sleep with my sisters in the same bed, but we weren't allowed –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: – 'cause at home we slept together, but in this place, we weren't allowed, we had our own beds, and I didn't feel safe in my bed by myself so I usually in the nighttime would crawl into bed with my other sisters and we did that, all of us did that, four of us. There were four of us there. So we slept in one small bed. They would tell us in the mornings, you're not allowed to do that, you're not allowed to sleep together but we kept doing that.

I remember times that my father came to the place. I think I was around eight. My father came and he was tipsy, but he wasn't drunk, and I was so happy to see him, all of us were. And the lady who ran the place, said that he could stay. You wanna stay and have supper with your children? And we asked my father in Innu, and he said yes. So he stayed and had supper with us.

And I knew then when I was a little girl that my father wanted us home. Because he didn't speak English, and he came. He just wanted to be with us, and I always remember that. That's one thing I could never forgot when I was growing up.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I apologize for not having tissues. Do you want to – I can get some if you want to take a minute.

H. A.: No, that's fine. I think I have some in my –

That's fine.

But my mother never came 'cause she – I don't think she felt safe to go there. Apparently, it was too hurtful for her.

I was very, very happy when my father came, 'cause I felt like he wanted us, he wanted me. That he hadn't forgotten about us. And we kept telling him when he got there: When are you gonna take us home?

I was so happy when I saw him. I thought he came to get us. He had no answer. I was sad when he went back.

There was only one in my family that ever came to see us. All my sisters never came, just my father. And that gave me hope as a little child that I was loved by my family, and the running away and the – got more – I risked my life every time I ran away.

One time I remember going across on the ice and it was spring. I remember walking across and the ice was breaking up, but I wanted to go home so bad that I risked my life to go across on the ice to the other side. And I remember going across on the cable car; the men who worked on the cable car were really – they were white people from North West River, and they were really mean. We were afraid of them.

And I remember that they were cursing and swearing at us when we were in the cable car while the cable car was moving. And I saw my sister, she was so afraid, I guess, of the men cursing at us and she ran out and jumped off and I ran and jumped too, from the cable car. That's how afraid we were.

And then we weren't allowed to go on the cable car 'cause, I guess, the people who ran the place called over and told them not to take us over. Sometimes we would find Innu people coming in to the store, doing their shopping and then we would go with them. I guess people thought we were their children. That's how we got across the river.

I remember some of the workers beating us up. I remember one of the women there who worked when I was small, that she would hit me and knock me out. I remember waking up on the floor and I had a cut on my head and then the girls told me: She knocked you out. She hit you. She knocked you out and left you there, but they were there sitting beside me, waiting for me to wake up.

And that woman, I never trusted her. I never wanted to be around her. Everything that went bad with us I always told my older sister, the one who was there, what happened, hoping that she would help me some way or some of the stuff would stop. That's how they controlled us; by beating us up to listen to them.

I remember another house mother, she hit me with her hand, closed fist, on my nose and I started having a nosebleed. I couldn't stop the nosebleed, and she would take me into the bathroom, and she would try to stop it. And then she would keep saying: I told you to listen to me, now look what you've done. You've done this, that's what she would say and make me feel like I did this to myself. I guess I believed this after a while because they kept telling us that you don't listen. Look what happens when you don't listen. Stuff like that.

I would see a lot of the other children get beat up, and there was nothing I can do 'cause I was going through the same thing.

I didn't understand sometimes why we got a beating. All of a sudden they would come in, and they would beat us up in the room. My little sister when she saw me getting beat, she would be, like, quiet and just try to hide away. I was always fighting, I was always defiant of everything, I guess. The things that we had to go through.

I saw my sister when one time we were having supper and my sister couldn't eat all of her food and then I was – all the kids left and I was told come sit by her, you're not going anywhere 'til she finishes her food and I would tell my sister eat it, eat your food. And she would try to eat it and then she would throw it back up and then they would take it and put it back in her mouth. I said to her: Eat it and drink the water at the same time. Then she would learn – she would learn very fast to eat her food, even if she didn't like it.

I tried to stay away from some of the girls who were really getting a lot of beatings 'cause I didn't wanna get beaten too. I tried to avoid them.

There was a hospital building next to the place where the residential school was–

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: – and I remember sometimes after school we would go in the hospital and go on the ward and see if there were Innu people in there, just to be around Innu people. And in the evening sometimes we would go over there.

Even in that place in the dorm, it was always – it was also worse in the community of North West River too, the racism that we went through. The beatings sometimes we got from the children of North West River, and the things said to us by adults from North West River and the things that were done to us by them, some of them. I think I grew up in North West River for eight years.

And there were some good memories out of that. I grew older, I remember the good memories; joining Girl Guides, that was a good memory. There was a lot of girls there, my sister was there, and I felt safe 'cause she was going to Girl Guides too.

And then we went on trips. One trip when I was in a dorm with dorm children, we went with the woman who was the supervisor, I guess, of all the children. She took us to Newfoundland on a boat, on a trip. Those are the good memories that I remember.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So that was Girl Guides?

H. A.: Yeah. We were in Brownies first and then we moved up to Girl Guides.

The other thing that stands out to me was when we were in that dorm when I first came in, the old dorm it was – I don't know when it was built, but it was an old building, and it had a fireplace. And one night there was a fire, and we were all – the fire bell rang, and we were all woke up, all of us. And the first thing me and my older sister did was run into the next room to get my sister and the other girl who was there, and we all ran outside. I don't know what year that was. And then they moved us into the other dorm, the senior dorm.

So we shared that senior dorm with them for a number of years. I think they renovated the place. They renovated the old dorm. And while we were in the senior dorm, there were older children there, young people who were going to high school in North West River. And they were from the coast, some of them. They were all from Labrador Coast.

And a lot of the things that we went through in the junior dorm stopped, like the beatings and all that, because there were other people around. There were other people around who were – I guess they couldn't do that because there were other eyes in the place. So that became a good memory also, 'cause the beatings were stopped.

I remember there was a man there that was hired for the residential school, and his name – I remember his name and he was not Canadian, he was American. There were some men who were hired to work, and they were older. Like, they were men, probably in their 20s or so, and they were hired to work with the children.

And I remember one time this man, he was taking care of us, like, the little girls. And he told us to have a bath. So it was probably four or five of us. There were bathroom stalls there and bathtubs, and me and this other girl was in one bathtub, and the other small ones were in the other one. And this man came in and he said – he was sitting there beside the bathtub watching us and we didn't think nothing of it.

We weren't afraid or we weren't – and then he started touching the other girl. Like, he was almost bathing her, but he was touching her with his hands, and then he started touching me, too. And he was hurting me. He was touching me in the

places that you're not supposed to touch little girls.

And the other girl saw what was happening. She got up and ran out and I ran out too, and I ran into the room and got under the blankets hiding from him, and then he came in and he got under the blankets and the other girl was under the blankets and he was saying to us: I'm not gonna hurt you, I'm not gonna hurt you.

That's all I remember of that, I don't remember anything else. And I asked the girl, she was about my age, and I asked her about that time, she doesn't even remember it.

I told my sister, my older sister, I told her what happened. I said this man was touching us, he was hurting us, and we ran away. I don't know how many – how many times this man was working for. I don't know how long, maybe a summer, but I don't remember any other incidents with him.

I don't know what my sister did to the information I gave her. But I was always afraid of him and the other girls were afraid of him. (Inaudible) the person who ran – when I look at it now, the person who ran that place, the supervisor, she was very – when I look back on it and I see the history, she was always very poor in picking people to work in these places, when I look at it now as an adult. Like, she placed one of those children, those boys, into a home of a teacher who molested that boy, and the teacher killed himself. He committed suicide after a while.

And then she brought all these men who were pedophiles to the place, to the residential school. These men were now – they're pedophiles, some of them went to court. Some of them went, killed themselves. I think we had to literally fend for ourselves in that place, because none of the staff, I don't think they were listening. Nobody was listening.

But some of the staff were really nice. Some of them. I remember one lady, she taught me how to cook. I got a recipe for a birthday, and then I gave it to her and then she taught me how to cook. She was from North West River, this lady. But a lot of the other workers didn't have time for us, I guess. They didn't. This other lady was teaching us how to cook and there were other staff who were teaching us some things.

Some staff I felt safe with, like this other lady – this lady there, and one of the house mothers was teaching us about – she wasn't from Canada, she was from England. She was teaching us of her travels that she was doing, and I was so interested in listening to the travels she was doing. And she told me there's a whole world out there. That's what she was telling me.

And I felt safe with her, and she would take pictures, and she would sometimes – some of these house mothers, they were called, they would – we would visit them in their houses, me and the other girls, and she would show us things that she brought from different countries. And, like, that we would visit after school, and then we'd have to go back to the dorm.

I think one of the girls talked to this lady that we visit all the time and told her what was happening, and after a while, she was asking us questions. And I don't know what happened, but she got – she wasn't there anymore. People said she got fired. She was asking questions in – she got fired. She was told to go. I don't know.

A lot of the stuff that I don't remember, I'm not trying to remember it anymore. I wanna let it go 'cause it's hurting me too much. When I think about the time I spent there, all I felt was pain. But then I started thinking about the good memories and it was bearable to think.

A lot of the children who were there are older now and I see them, especially the

Inuit children and I became friends with them, but when we see each other, we don't talk about the dorm days because I understand and they understand, I guess, it was painful, but we do have a connection there.

There was a lot of Innu children in that place. Some stayed for a little but and some stayed longer and there were children there who were longer than us. They were there before we got there, and they were still there when we left. And that's one of the saddest times for every child in that place was when a child got to go home. We were all sad 'cause they were leaving, but that child was really happy that they were going home. But that that meant he was going.

I guess that was another trauma for us; seeing other children go home, leaving, 'cause they were like family to us. Even though there was a lot of infightings inside, we grew close to each other, all of us. 'Cause we saw what was happening.

I saw this young man, one time, he was getting beating early in the morning. I could hear him. He was screaming and screaming and then I – nobody was up – I went over to the door where the little boys' room was, and I could hear one of the house mothers beating and beating him and he was crying and crying. And he had – I think he had diarrhea, and he was – he could smell it and they dragged him to the bathroom and threw him in the shower, I think it was. He was crying and crying. There was nothing I could do to help him.

I had fear; and I still see this man, and he's a man now living – he lives in Goose Bay. I still see him, and I remember the time that I saw him getting beaten and that was not the first time, he was always treated really bad because he was mentally handicap, I guess.

Some of the children there, when they grew up, they committed suicide and it felt like a loss to the rest of the children, I guess. It felt like a loss to me when I heard that they had taken their lives.

One social worker who worked very hard to get us home 'cause we were – my older sister was the one who was talking to her – and was working very hard to get us home. Then we had another social worker who came to visit us. She would come in through the dorm sometimes, sometimes she – she lived in North West River – she would ask us to come visit her and we did, this was after I was a little bit older.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So visit her at home, do you mean?

H. A.: We visit her in her home.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: In her home?

H. A.: Yup, sometimes we did after school. There was a bunch of Innu kids who went to her home, visit her. She was married to a minister. She was very nice, and her husband was very nice.

Every time I see that place where it is now, it's – it feels – I feel really sad and a lot of anger and I wanted that part of my life – I never visit that part of my life in there. When this started happening, when they started talking about it, it all came back to me, and I will take my grandchildren who are – they're teenagers – and I will take them over there and I will tell them, walk around the building and places and I'll tell them where my room was, but I would not tell them of the – in detail of what happened there. I tell them there's sad memories here.

And I will take them around the building and tell them which room was which, things that I remember, the laundry room and the kitchen and the living room area. The bathrooms, the bedrooms upstairs, the little boys' room, and the boys' side and the girls' side, so they would have a good – though they wouldn't know what it was like living there. I will tell them it was not just me, it was a lot of children. White children, Innu

children, Inuit; we all lived together here, and that's a part of my life that my grandchildren didn't know about.

But I was – I've been telling them now for the last two or three years. That part of my life. Some of the names of the workers, I don't remember them. It seems so long ago, I don't remember the names of the people who worked there. But I've been hearing from other – from my other – girls who were there, what they went through. Even though I was in there with them, I didn't know that they were going through that.

Some had it much worse than me because they were there without no siblings. I know one girl who was here, who is from here, she had no siblings, and she lived there, and she went through more – more than me. When she was talking about it, she was asking me: Do you remember this guy, do you remember this guy who worked here, and I couldn't remember. I couldn't remember their names, but I know who worked there, the men and the women. I said: I don't remember their names.

I remember we used to go to the church across the river, in the United Church. And then the nun from here, in Sheshatshiu, she put a stop to that. She said she told them, the worker there, these children are Roman Catholics. They're not supposed to be going to the United Church. And then they took us to the Roman Catholic church. We had a worker come with us, go to church in the morning and in the evening.

A lot of the things that I go through – I went through as an adult – beginning from the relationship that I started having with my husband, I think it stems from me having abandonment issues. There was a lot of insecurity there and a lot of violence, a lot of drinking. I started drinking when I was a teenager; I started drinking. And then in my 20s, I was already an alcoholic.

There's things I never dealt with, or – I think they were making impacts on me in my adult life. And I never, ever talked about it with my mother and my father, what we went through because I know that – they never talked about it. There was a lot of pain around it. They never talked about it to us. They never said this is why you were taken, or stuff like that. And none of us talked about it and when we went home – I think, I was around 13 or 14 when we went home – I was really happy.

My parents they took us straight into the country, a few months – about two months later, they took us to the country. We almost lost our language. I was mixing English and Innu together. My parents couldn't understand me, but we had another sister who never went to the dorm, and she would translate what we were saying.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: How long did you stay in the country then, when you went?

H. A.: We went for three and a half months. Yeah; and all we spoke was Innu, but our Innu was mixed with English. But after a while, when we were home all the time, it was always Innu speaking so we got our language back.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Very smart of your parents.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: A healing place, as I've heard so often.

H. A.: Yeah.

My mother, she never talked about our days, and our sister she would tell us – now that we're older she would tell us stories of what happened in the house when we were taken. She would tell us these stories of always fighting; my parents blaming each other. My father always beating up my mother, blaming each other and a lot of physical abuse between two of them. And my sister said: I hated you guys because

this was causing a lot of problem in our home, they were always fighting over you guys. That's what the fight began, and we didn't know that. We did not know that part.

I'm glad that they – I never shared my story with my father and mother. That's something that they didn't need to hear. But I told my sisters, and they didn't know. I really hurt them. I told them what we went through. They had a lot of anger.

It was so put into us as children when we were at the dorm, and I was always told: Don't talk about it. It's only gonna get worse if you talk about. See what happened to you? It was always – be put back to us that the beatings were coming because we were bad. That's what it was coming back to. So whenever we saw our families, we never talk about.

But as we got older and more (inaudible) I told my sisters what happened. I don't know what happened at the age of – we were still in the dorm. We were going to school. And I don't know what kind of things my older sister was going through in that place, but I think she had a nervous breakdown. When we were at the school I was called into the principal's office. I think I was around 12, maybe, and I went down into the principal's office, and she was there screaming and crying.

The teacher said: We don't know what happened, we don't know what's going on with her. When she saw me, she grabbed hold of me and was crying and she was scaring me, but I was there holding her. And then they said they were going to take us back to the dorm, back home. And we went back there, and they put her in her room, and she wanted me to be with her. And then she was screaming and crying, and she was seeing these things in the room. I didn't see anything. She was seeing these monsters in the room. She was describing them, and I said, there's nothing there. I don't see it.

Then I think about it today and I think, what happened to her? What happened to her that she felt – it sounds like she had a breakdown or something and still, to this day, she doesn't remember it. She doesn't remember what happened. Sometimes she has issues like that where she almost has a breakdown when life gets too hard for her. As a young girl going through that I did not understand what was going on with her. I was just sitting there with her and telling her, like: There's nothing there. You're just seeing things, I don't see anything that would calm her down.

It started in the school, and she was like that for, probably, 'til the next day. The next day she got better because she never talked to me what was going on with her in that place. She never talked about it.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So was she the younger or older?

H.A.: She was older than me.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oldest.

H.A.: Yeah.

I remember sitting inside the dorm, one time, when I was small. There was a big picture window there as big as this wall. It was facing the river and in the river you can see the – across the river you could see Sheshatshiu, and I remember one time when I was sitting there and just looking over and I really wanted to go home so bad.

I was sitting there – the kids were in there watching TV and I was sitting there crying. I had tears running down my face and just looking over in Sheshatshiu and just thinking about my grandfather – he was still alive – and wishing that I was at his house and thinking about how, what's he doing now, what are they doing, are they thinking about us, and stuff like that.

And I was sitting there crying. I had so many times like that where I would sit at the beach

and just look over at Sheshatshiu and wanting to go home so fast. And sometimes I see Innu people; we would go to the store and just hang around there, because they would go shopping, and we would see them there. And then we'd ask them: Have you seen my father, have you seen my mother? Can you tell them to come get us?

Even after, when we were released, we were never told – I was never told why I was taken. I didn't understand it. Nobody ever told me why I was taken. Not even the social workers who were talking to us sometimes.

There's a lot of pain around this for me. There's a lot of pain still. The pain continues because still children today are still being taken from their families. And in my family that happened. My children were taken when I was a young mother, and they were placed – not in, like, care, but in family members', but it was still very hurtful, bringing up the old wounds of being taken, and then my grandchildren were taken.

My grandchildren, they spoke Innu – Mushuau dialect, Natuashish dialect, and when they were taken – my son's children reported that when they were taken, they were sent out to Springdale, Newfoundland and other parts of Newfoundland. They were separated and when they came back, they didn't speak no Innu and still to this day they don't speak Innu. I have to speak to all of my grandchildren in English. They don't speak no Innu at all.

I was sober. I wasn't drinking. I had a job, and I offered to take my grandchildren, but CSSD didn't even look at me to take my grandchildren in my care, and they just sent them out.

And after a while, a couple of years they were gone and when they came back, they didn't speak any Innu.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So did they tell you why you weren't approved to take them?

H. A.: No. No.

I was talking to the social worker, and she never said anything. Then my daughter's children also were taken, she had two children. They were taken from her, and one was placed in Roddickton for nine years, nine or eight years, and the other one was here in Sheshatshiu – her oldest one – because she was drinking a lot, that's why they took – and then she had two more children and they were taken from the hospital. One was taken from the hospital and the other one was taken when she was a couple of months old.

Still to this day, her family is still not together, only her two oldest are with her. I took her two oldest from the foster care, into my care and then they remained with me. My grandson was nine when he came back from Roddickton. Now he's 14. And my other granddaughter, she's 17 now.

So they've been both with me, and then when my daughter sobered up – she's been sober now for one year and a half almost – I told her the reason I took her children into my care was my grandson was visiting us one time and – my grandson who was in Roddickton for eight or nine years – and he was crying. He was saying I wanna come home, help. Help me get home. And then I told my daughter I'm gonna help you. I'll get him back, but I want you to help yourself. Once you help yourself, you can have him back in your care. I'll give you back once CSSD is not involved in his case at all. And she said okay.

And I did it for both of her oldest children. I got them in my care, and I got them legally, through the court system. CSSD helped me, and now they're fully in my care and then I gave them back to her not too long ago. About maybe three months ago I gave them back to her, and she's doing really good.

She's sober, she has a job and she's working on – she's trying to get a house and then she wants her two little youngest ones with her, too. She's working on that.

And the other ones who were taken to Springdale and – four of them, their mother – after a couple of years, their mother and father sobered up, went to the court and they got them back in their care and they lived in Goose Bay. And then they didn't go to school in Goose Bay. There's too much racism, they said, in Goose Bay. So they asked if they could come and stay here and go to school here, so I said yes. So they're still here. The oldest one is 18 now and the youngest one is nine. So there's four of them. So at one time I had six grandchildren living in my house.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well it's (inaudible); you have a lot of traffic through.

H. A.: Yeah. So they're still there. I'm hoping that their parents get new houses so they can – but none of them speak Innu, that's a bad thing. All of them speak English. I try very hard to teach them Innu. They even got the phone app where you can learn Innu, they have that.

But the mother and father of those kids, they had three more children after the four were returned; they had three more after that, and one had a heart condition. She had open-heart surgery, and she was told by the doctors to stay close to the hospital so that's why they can't move. She's from – my daughter-in-law is from Natuashish and that's why they can't move back to Natuashish. That's where she is now, there.

And with my children I never told them the bad parts of my life living in the dorm, but they do know that I was in a dorm; I told them, but they don't know the details of it.

So having my grandchildren in the system was hurting me all over again. I think, that's why I have a passion to help families reunite with their children who are in the system, 'cause the system is not helping us at all. Separating families, separating us from our culture. That's what it did for me when I was a child. In the dorm we weren't allowed to sleep together, and that togetherness is important for the bonding of siblings, and we weren't allowed to do that. So the system was not helping us at all.

And it has totally decimated Innu language of my grandchildren because they spoke Innu – all of them spoke Innu before they were taken into the system, all of them. But now none of them speak Innu.

The good memories also was sometimes we came – in the summertime, as we got older, living in the dorm, we came to Sheshatshiu to live with my sister, my oldest sister; with her family for the summer. That was a good memory.

I think that's the reason why we didn't lose our language in the dorms, because we had other Innu children there who were speaking in Innu. We weren't allowed to speak Innu, but we still did because, I guess, that's just a natural part of when you speak to an Innu person you speak to them in Innu. Yeah.

And sometimes then when we speak Innu, they would say: What are you talking about? Speak English so everyone can know what you're talking about. Then we would get disciplined. We would get disciplined for speaking Innu and we went to the school, the Innu school here, so all day we spoke Innu with the other students in the school. That's the only reason that they said was – over there, a lot of the other kids weren't speaking Innu. Speak English so they can understand what you're saying, that's what they told us.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H.A.: Yeah. And sometimes I would say, but I'm not speaking to them. I'm speaking to this girl. That's what I would say. Yeah.

I wanted to write my story. I was beginning to write my story, but I couldn't because it was too heavy for me. It was really, really heavy, I couldn't write it. 'Cause this is the first time I'm talking about my story, my life in the – and in being in care.

And it was too heavy for me to write my story, but I hope as time goes that it will get easier. That's why I did it. I tried so many times before to come and speak and I couldn't. I would – just my body would all –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: – feel like it was shutting down. I said to myself: You can't speak; what if you can't speak at all? What if nothing comes out? But (inaudible) is here.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: (Inaudible) did good.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And sometimes it takes a few times. We've had some people who've had to come back a number of times.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Because they start, and they can't finish.

H. A.: Yeah. I know that once I'm speaking about it, I think more memories will start coming.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

H. A.: And sometimes I'm afraid of that, too.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

Well, since you mentioned that I want to give you this, is that what we are doing – will be doing, and are working on it now, is for those who have spoken, we – 'cause it's videotaped, but it's your personal, you know, it's a personal thing – that we will give you a copy of that, basically. So on one of those flash drives, so you can look at it yourself, if you feel up to it sometime.

We hadn't – we're not planning to give people the written part of it, 'cause what we do is (inaudible) the written part and then I'll go through it again and it helps us in writing up, getting all of the stories together and writing about that. So if you were to remind me – well, either of the two Helens could remind me in a few months time – when we get the written part, then we could possibly send you the written part of it.

So you can look at it and you see – if you wish, now, (inaudible) if you think it's gonna be too heavy even to read your own voice – is what you'd be reading. And that's something that we could do too. So just something for you to think about.

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

H. A.: Yeah, that'd be good.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

I didn't mean to cut you off now, so is there anything else you wanted to say, by all means.

H. A.: Still to this day I'm very close with the children who were at the dorm. They still feel like family to me, and many of them have passed on. And when I think of the dorm I think – I keep my focus on the good – on the good.

When I pass by that building, it's always the bad that's always there; the bad feeling and the hurt and the pain, but then I remind myself that there was good in there too. So I tell myself, keep your focus on the good.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, that's good. So the pain comes first but then you can kinda draw yourself out of it.

H.A.: Yeah. I think a lot of it also where I didn't wanna talk about it was that they were always – when they were beating us – they were saying: See what you made us do. You see what happened because you did this, you said this, or you did this. It was all blamed back on me whenever I got a beating.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H.A.: I think that that's ingrained something in me not to speak, not to say anything, not to tell, not to make trouble.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. And that's what abusers often do.

H.A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Like, they're the one doing the abusing, but they try this. So when you're a young, vulnerable child, you kind of somehow sense that you're responsible.

H.A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Where now as an adult you know well, indeed you weren't, but you were made to feel that all those years as a child.

H.A.: Yeah. I think that's why a lot of it – I didn't talk about it after I left the dorm. I never talked about it, even with my sister who was in the dorm with me.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

H.A.: We never talked about it. I think that was beaten into us not to talk about – not to talk at all.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. Yeah.

H.A.: Yeah. Even with the other girls after I left but they – people started talking about it when all this came out, all this Inquiry. Yeah. People started asking me: Did you see this person? Did this person do this to you? Do you remember this person? Do you remember this room? Do you – stuff like that.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: Yeah. But before, we never talked about it. Yeah.

As I grew older in the dorm, I felt safer because there was a Innu – two Innu ladies working there. I felt safe within that place. One of them was my cousin, and the other one was another Innu lady, her name was Madeline Michelin. I felt safe working – I mean, as I grew older.

Yeah. Sometimes we would – the first beginning stays when we were there, sometimes we would sleep under the beds because we felt so scared. There were bunkbeds in the rooms, and we would sleep under –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: – the beds. 'Cause we weren't feeling safe. Like, we were hiding. But after a while as I grew older, I could sleep in my own bed. I transitioned from the little girls' room to the big girls' room. That's how many years I was there. Yeah. And in the big girls' room, my sister was already there.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: Yeah.

And then there were more children; I remember more children coming in after we were there for a while, and we would take them under our wings, Innu children. I remember the Nuna children were there, all of them, and we would take care of them, take them under our wing, take them to school and protect them.

Yeah.

That's all I have to say.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

H. A.: I'm getting really tired.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, just a few things. First of all, thank you so much for coming in to share that. No wonder why you're tired. It's a lot of very personal information to share with a stranger, and I do appreciate that.

You know, and I think 'cause you think that and believe that the Inquiry will – you know, your truth, your story, will (inaudible) what the people will hear from this Inquiry, about what has happened.

H. A.: Yeah, that's what I'm hoping, that my story, my pain, will help my community.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

H. A.: Changes we need to make. Changes that need to happen and that we never have to go through that again with any child, with any parents, that kind of pain.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

H. A.: That's the hope that I have in coming forward.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

It takes a lot of strength and courage to come forward to tell that story. Of course, it shows a lot of resilience, after all you've been through, to be where you are today. Thank you, again.

Oh, the other thing I wanted to mention too, is that is if, you know, you go home or later on the week or a couple of weeks or a month, you think of – I think there's some things I would like to add to that –

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – then you can simply contact us. It's the – and there are a number of ways that you can but if – this is the last time we're doing this, this way for the week, but there are other ways that – like, if we're back in having other kinds of meetings, then we could arrange to meet with you. We'll meet like some place like here or in your home or wherever is comfortable for you. Also we could do like a Zoom, FaceTime kind of meeting too if you wanted to do that, so –

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – so there's a number of different ways.

I was going to say (inaudible) with you; as you said, you're not ready to write yet so –

H. A.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

H. A.: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And you're fortunate to have such a good support person.

H. A.: She's my childhood friend.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Is that right? Yeah, yeah.

H. A.: Yeah, we grew up together. We're only about a year apart.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

H. A.: I think, it's the first time her hearing my story too.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Not easy for you either.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No. No.

But I'm happy she told her story.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes.

So I hope that, you know, I hope that you are still glad that you shared the story, when you leave today.

H. A.: Yeah, yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Because I'm certainly glad that you came in.

Okay, thank you both.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

H. A.: Thank you.