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

Transcript | Interview Private Session 1

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

Wednesday November 6, 2024

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I guess Paula has talked to you about, like that it's private, so you don't want your identifying information used right?

S. C.: You can use his name.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Use your name, that's it. Okay, so she's got all of that taken care of, right. All right.

S. C.: We're just talking about for media, right?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mmm?

S. C.: We don't wanna be – I mean, I don't mind being videoed for –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Not media.

S. C.: As long as it's not media, we're fine with the video.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You can double-check with Paula but I'm pretty sure that that's part of it 'cause he would have to give consent for media too. So just make sure that you understand that.

I was going to say something then, I lost it that quickly.

S. COOPER: I hear you. I was gonna –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: That's why it's difficult speaking and having –

S. C.: Yeah –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – interpretation.

S. C.: – I was gonna come in blind and then I thought, no, I better put some notes just in case I lose it.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You're used to this kind of – you go with the flow, right?

S. C.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So that is a challenge, for sure.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: (Inaudible) just made that announcement, (inaudible) in a private session, we'll start at 11, yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So we're saying that one of us could stay for all this, the other one could go at 11.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: At 11, yeah, I can go out at 11.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: What? You can go – so you'll keep track of the time?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.
Did you wanna get here? I hear better here.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: It don't matter to me – oh! Here?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I hear better here.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh, okay. (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: (Inaudible) this ear is not so great, so this one is better for me.

S. C.: And for Jason too, I think, that lots of what he got to say is just basically what I said already –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

S. C.: – just from his point of view, right.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

S. C.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, well we wanna hear that too.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: We wanna hear that.

S. C.: Jason is – he's a shy one so good luck on – so I hope you're asking him questions and not expecting him to just talk.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, that's right. If we ask questions at the end, it's usually more for clarification or understanding. There's something we wanna be clear about that's not clear.

S. C.: Okay so –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: But it's not – there's no –

S. C.: – are you gonna just talk.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – Jason, there's no trick questions, it's nothing like an interview.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: No, it's not what we do. We let people talk.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah. You just tell your story.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Tell your story, yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: That's basically like you heard your mom say this morning, right.

J.K.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And this is your time. So, like, there's no rush. You just –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – you know, like, talk us – if you need to take a minute, a break or anything like that, then we can do that. I guess it's formal in a way, but we try to keep it as informal as we can so that you're comfortable, that's – 'cause it's important for us to hear what you have to say.

S. C.: Are you okay with that? Are you okay with just talking?

J.K.: About, like, my whole life?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Pardon?

J.K: Like, my whole life?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, you can talk about – 'cause sometimes when people start talking, they might talk about one part and then another and that's okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: If you talk about when you're 16 and talk about when you were five, if you jump back and forth, don't worry about that. That's pretty common, actually.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Is the recorder on?

S. C.: Yeah, he said it's good to go.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: The boys were in. So – yeah.

Okay?

All right. So whenever – and we're gonna take the notes that you saw this morning. So I hope this doesn't distract from what you're saying, but that's for our own purposes. Again, that's private between us, right? So –

S. C.: Do you wanna start anywhere in particular?

J.K: I'd like to go from youngest to oldest.

S. C.: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: That's good. Yeah.

J.K: It's gonna be hard.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Take your time.

J.K: Well when I – before I was fostered by my mother, I'd been in other homes and

there was this one home where I came out with cigarette burns all over my body. And I suppose when I first saw Sheila Cooper I had a bag of clothes with like, lice in it, and there was sour milk in my bottle.

And after that I had separation anxiety.

This is pretty hard.

S. C.: Do you want me to leave?

J. K.: No.

S. C.: Would it be easier?

Do you want to talk about that memory that you had, of me trying to drown you?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Or you could go to something that's not so hard. Is there any part that's not as hard, any easier perhaps, to tell first?

S. C.: Can I talk about that for a minute? About that, because I just brought it up, I just wanna clarify that I never tried to drown him.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No, no, I know. (Inaudible.)

S. C.: But he did have that memory; and do you wanna talk a little bit about that or –?

J. K.: It's kind of foggy.

S. C.: Is it?

J. K.: Yeah.

S. C.: And I knows exactly what he's talking about.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So that sounds like it's a bit lighter, so (inaudible) if you wish.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: What happened?

S. C.: His memory is that I tried to drown him, and my memory is he was kicking and screaming, and I was cleaning his hair, and there was no two ways about it, he was getting his hair washed. But to him, that was a serious memory, right?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

S. C.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: From the trauma before.

S. C.: Yeah, and it's a serious memory that he carried with him.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

S. C.: Yeah, until he talked to me about it, and I had to explain to him that, you know, I know exactly what you're talking about, and no, I didn't try to drown you. And after that, we had another foster kid that the same thing happened to, and I said this is how it was, this is how it became your memory.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: How old was he?

S. C.: Two.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Two?

S. C.: Yeah.

J. K.: I guess after separation anxiety, it just turned into anxiety, like, social anxiety, and Social Services noticed it and they put me on Concerta, which made me neutral, like, I couldn't feel nothing. And there was times where I would stare at nothing, and times where I would just randomly cry.

And we've also been trying to get a visit for my family, so I can visit them. But Social Services never accepted it. Basically the only times I would actually meet them was when they came to Goose Bay for medical reasons.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: How old were you then?

J. K.: I'm pretty sure I was 14 years old, 14 to 17.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And how was that for you?

J. K.: It made me feel left out.

S. C.: And, you know, living in a white home – white; I'm Nunatsiavut, but living in a white home and feeling that Innu racism and stuff like that, too. Jason has dealt with that stuff too, right.

J. K.: Could I see your notes?

S. C.: My notes?

And there is a lot, there's a lot of Innu racism. Even so much as getting a key to a bathroom. I could have one child go in that's white and then Jason go in and he'll get a key and Jason wouldn't. Right, so there's standing in line at stores. And so how do you belong? You don't belong with the Innu, you don't belong with the white. We talked about that, too, right. So maybe you could touch on how you feel about that stuff?

J. K.: And all my life I've been trying to learn my own language. But Social Services wouldn't help with that. Which made me feel left out, 'cause I wanna be able to communicate with my family members.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, 'cause the Mushuau Innu is different than the Sheshatshiu Innu. So it wouldn't – may not – well I guess there'd be some here from Natuashish who might have the language, right.

S. C.: But even if he learned from here, people of Natuashish mostly knows both languages anyway, right.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm, they understand.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so if you learned Sheshatshiu Innu it would work?

S. C.: People in Natuashish would be able to –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

S. C.: – know what he was saying.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: It would still be (inaudible).

S. C.: And being with me, when he first came, he basically only knew Innu. He only knew Innu. So he goes into a family where he can speak Innu, but the family can't speak Innu. So how's that for a little child?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

S. C.: Yeah. Who gotta learn a whole new language and loses his own language, right. And he was so good at it. And had they – I'm a good foster parent, don't get my wrong – but had they kept him with his culture, I think that would've made a big difference. I think it's important that Innu children stay with their language, and stay with their culture –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

S.C.: – and that's just my own personal opinion.

And how do you feel about that, Jase?

J. K.: Left out.

S.C.: Like forgotten or … left out? Just left out?

J. K.: Forgotten.

S.C.: I think that's where a lot of Jason's anger came in, too, when he was younger. Even sometimes – sometimes even now, but not – you're not like you used to be, eh?

J. K.: No.

Then there's Social Services, trying to turn me into someone that I'm not.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: How do you mean?

S.C.: Do you mean like turning you into like, a white person, or do you mean like when they were saying about you're – that you're mentally delayed? Or both?

J. K.: I suppose both of 'em.

And when my foster brother's parents – or parent – died, they only had enough for themselves and not me because of financial issues, and my mom tried to – or, yeah, my mom – tried to ask Social Services that there is not enough money and now I need another ticket, but they declined it.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

S. C.: So what he's saying is when his foster brother's mother passed away –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

S. C.: – and she died by suicide.

And that whole news story, and she's native too.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

S. C.: The kids are white. But when she died, she died in Edmonton, and we had to go to Edmonton to her funeral. Well, we didn't have to, but we wanted to; I wanted to for the kids. And we tried with children's services to get him a ticket, and children's services declined. And so, luckily, my brother Woody got us a ticket on his Visa that I could pay off.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Mm-hmm.

S. C.: Yeah, but still it's just another way to leave him left out, I guess. Right?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

S. C.: Like, he's not part of the family 'cause he can't go, but lucky, he got to go. And for in our home, there's no separation, you know; I know Jason's Innu, but there's no separation between anybody because he's no different to me than my biological child, but when we're out – once we go out our door it always gets slapped in your face, right?

That – even with the Innu people because they're talking to him in Innu and stuff and he's uncomfortable, whereas if had he learned his language, he wouldn't have been uncomfortable.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

S. C.: Yeah. The biggest thing you wanted to talk about, anyways, was what I already brought up out there, was the home visits and his language. I think they were the two biggest ones, was it, Jas?

J.K: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: How old are you, Jason.

J.K: What?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: How old are you?

J.K: Twenty-one.

S. C.: Do you feel like you're done, or do you feel like there's other things you want to say?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, Jason, just to – I don't know if I said it at the beginning, but like, this is not a one-shot deal. So if you feel like, whenever you finish – and I'm not suggesting you're finished now but if you – if it's kind of, all you can say for today, if you wanna come back to us then you certainly can.

Now we're not planning any meetings like this, right, in this form, but we'll say that people – we can do it through like FaceTime, Zoom meeting or something like that. Or if we're in having – in Sheshatshiu having other meetings then, if we know beforehand, we can set up a time to meet. And we're very flexible in terms of, you know, where we meet, when we meet. So even if you want us to go to your home, we can do that.

So, yeah, there are still opportunities if, you know – because you wanted to today, but it might end up that you don't get to say everything you want to say, and after you think, oh, I forgot that or I wish I'd said this.

S. C.: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So don't think that all is lost if you don't get to say it all today.

J. K.: I can't think of anything.

S. C.: Are you sure you don't want me to leave and – I just kind of feels like – is there something in there that you might wanna say about me, and if you do, like, I can leave or I can be good with it, whatever.

You good, though?

J. K.: Yeah.

S. C.: Okay.

Jason don't have many words at a good day.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No. Somebody's gotta listen, hey Jason.

S. C.: But he do when he's with his brothers – yap, yap, yap, yap, yap.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Can I ask you something of a personal question? I'm always curious about when people have their – what do they call it, their ink? – the younger folks. The clock that you have on your – on the back of your hand. Is that – what's the meaning on that, or is there a meaning?

Or if you don't want to share it, if it's too personal, then that's fine. But there is usually some meaning behind it. I have (inaudible) kids who've done it, so. I don't have one yet.

S. C.: Uncovered.

J. K.: I got this tattoo when – my brother Johnny did it, in Calgary.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

S. C.: John's my biological son.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And why did you pick that one, now? What's was the meaning behind that for you, or what is it just, like, you thought it was pretty cool or …? It doesn't have to be deep, but it could be.

J. K.: It's gonna be really weird, but –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: You don't have to – like I said, don't feel like you have to.

J. K.: Do you know about the Flash?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Flash?

J. K.: Like, the superhero.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh, no.

J. K.: Well I chose it 'cause, you know, time travel and all that.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh, okay. I do like sci-fi kind of stuff, but not – I haven't done the superhero ones, watched a few, yeah.

S. C.: And John passed away two years ago. So we went to see John at Christmastime.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Right.

S. C.: And then – and he lived in Calgary – and then we came back and in May, he had died. So –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I'm sorry to hear that.

S. C.: Fentanyl overdose – fentanyl poisoning.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Oh no.

S. C.: He went to a concert and bought a gram of coke.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

S. C.: His wife allowed him to have one gram of coke, and they went to a concert together and then he died of fentanyl. So –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So it actually does have very deep meaning then, obviously.

S. C.: So yeah, even deeper, eh.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

Thank you for sharing that.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

S.C.: Is that it? Any more to add?

J. K.: I think that's it.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

But like I said, this is not a one-shot deal, so if you decide you wanna speak to us again, then certainly let us know. Okay?

J.K.: Yep.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: All right, thank you very much.

S.C.: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I'm glad you came in to speak to us.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And it's good to meet you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: It's good to (inaudible).

S.C.: Man of few words, but –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, he's got – well, he's also got, you know, like I said, some struggles, but you've also got a very quieting disposition about you, which is kind of neat.

S. C.: And he's a good guy. He's not a drinker.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

S.C.: Don't smoke. Right good.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

S. C.: Yeah. He's bought his house, he's right – so momma can kick the bucket any day and he's taken care of. He's got a lot going on.

Thank you, guys.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Don't forget, Elizabeth wanna see you.

S.C.: Yes. Okay.