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

English Transcript | Volume 46

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. So I have our next speaker now. So if you'd introduce yourself to the Inquiry and tell us what you're –

K. NUNA: Okay, my name is Kenny Nuna, and I think I'm gonna speak English at the best of my ability.

As I'm sitting here and – oh, like I said, my name is Kenny Nuna and as I'm sitting here listening to my wife share, she reminded me of a few things about what we've been through together as a couple.

I guess I find it a little bit hard sharing my story there, too, and just trying so hard to give my wife support when she was sharing. And we've been together for 20 years.

Like, today I'm 50 years old and my wife, well, she's 43 and we have three kids, and just like she said, our kids were – they were small when they were taken at first. Like, I remember my daughter was about five, and she's 19 today. And when our kids were taken – there were two of them at that time, and we didn't have our third child then. So our second child was – I think he was about two, and my daughter, I think, was about four at that time when they were first taken.

Yeah, it's been hard thinking about that when I'm listening to my wife and thinking about my daughter there too. You know, we used to – me and my wife used to argue at times way back then, blaming each other.

You know, I used to blame her, and she used to blame me what – you know, like, who was the cause of taking our kids away? Me or her. There were so many times that my wife wanted to leave me, and I wanted to leave her, too, and we did talk about that over the years, and we've seen a loft of people have gone through this same, similar situations that we were in – arguments and seeing other people – their kids were taken away and they wouldn't be together too long, and they would leave their relationship and – Oh, sorry!

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

K. NUNA: Me and my wife, today there are times I'm happy that we're still together. Like, we've seen a lot of the couples, after losing their kids they would leave their relationships and they would never go back to each other and I'm grateful today that we've been through that, me and my wife, even though it was really hard at times, losing our kids in – what do you call 'em today, CSSD? – in their care.

My first oldest, my daughter was always worried about me and my wife are gonna leave each other, and I used to tell my daughter: I'm never gonna leave your mom. She would always worry about me leaving her mom. I said: I really love your mom, I said, I can't see myself leaving her. Like, I wanna be there, I said.

It's been hard, us being together and over the years whatever happened to us between me and my wife, towards child and family services. Like I heard my wife was sharing a story about what she went – well, what we went through, every time when we were gonna go to meet with them. She would always felt like – like she was really mad.

We would always talk about, before we meets them, how we're feeling before we're going to meet them. And the way I was feeling, yeah, both of us we were so – I guess we were so frustrated. But we had to meet them anyway, like calmly, trying to control ourselves, how we felt. Trying to manage how I felt and trying to help her be – I'm glad I was there with her too, like,

calming her down before we meet with them.

And – oh! I guess I'll stop myself.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

K. NUNA: Yeah, it's been hard there. The path we took between me and my wife, what we went through with child family services. Hearing my wife share her story there too, like she said, it's true that – what they said to us when we were at the court, like the way my wife was saying they told so many lies about us while we were in front of them. And we just sat there and listened to what they were saying about us and it's almost like we didn't wanna be there, but at the same time, we forced ourselves to sit there and listen to what they were saying about us.

And I have shared my stories with a few of the people who think that – you know, like, there are some people in the past we have talked to, me and my wife, like counsellors and people that we trusted and shared our stories, what we were going through and how we were feeling.

Yeah, and it's like there's so much emotions right now, like, the way I'm feeling right now. Like, I don't know how many times I've felt this way in the past, like what I'm feeling right now. Just like the way my wife said, like, she felt like she wanted to explode at times, and I taught myself how to control my emotions. They're – I have learned over the years how to control my anger, and I guess I can say I have found the ways to manage how to handle my anger, and I have helped my wife with that along the way.

And another thing there, too, what I heard about my wife sharing about our kids, the – you know, her father and my father were in the hospital one time, at the same time. At that time, while we were at the gathering and our kids were not in our care at that time, our oldest – and her father and my father, both of them were requesting to see our kids, my daughter and my youngest – at that time they wanted to see them.

We even went to child family services to see if they can allow it, for them to come home for a little bit to see my dad and her dad, and it's almost like we weren't heard. And my dad at the time, when he was sick in the hospital, and I think he wasn't there for too long, for a least a week or a couple of weeks, the same as her dad too, they were both at that time in the hospital, next door to each other.

And it happened – I think, we were at the gathering at that time, when they were in the hospital – and both of them passed when we were at the gathering, two days after – her father died first, and my dad died two days after. And at that time it was really hard for us, me and her, and we even tried – we went to the CSSD to see if they can come home for the funerals and same thing happened. They couldn't say – like, we never heard them say anything – oh, they wanna come home.

I just only told them that we wanted them to come home for a funeral, and my daughter mentioned that to me yesterday: Can you tell that story?

Oh sorry! I'm so into that.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

K. NUNA: I'm trying so hard not to be so emotional. Like I know this kind of stuff I'm sharing right now is really hard for me, to talk about how I'm feeling right now. And sharing that last story about our dads passing away at that time. You know, the two funerals happening that same week, too, and I couldn't go with my wife when she went home. Her family's in Natuashish and my family from here.

So I had to be home, here in Sheshatshiu, to go to the funeral on my dad, and she had

to go to her dad's funeral, too, and I couldn't be there for my wife and my wife couldn't be there for me. And our kids, at the same time, couldn't be there, couldn't be here to see their grandpas passing away and – my oldest and the youngest.

You know, we tried everything for them. I haven't told my daughter that we tried, like, we even spoke to child and family services to see if he can come home. You know, my daughter really loved his grandparents – her grandparents, I mean. Looking at my daughter I think she's been hurt, you know, for her not coming home. She mentioned that to me a couple of days ago what – I'm sorry that she can't be here today; I think at the same time, I understand that it's also hard for her too, to be here. We talked about it yesterday, are you gonna come with us. She said yeah and …

It's like as I'm sitting here today, like right now, I'm thinking about my daughter and I think she's gonna be happy, us sharing her story, too. She would probably have shared her story if she was – like, if she was here with us today. So, I know she has her side of the story, too, what she went through with child and family services.

And it's like my mind goes blank. Right now, I know once probably I stop talking, it's gonna come back, like, I don't know. This happened to me last time when I spoke here, a lot things came back after I shared everything that happened and ….

Thinking about – thinking about my grandmother. My daughter was talking to me about my grandmother there; well, not too long ago, about she remembered her. She was about four or five years old when my grandmother passed away and at that time, looking at my daughter, she remembers her. Even when they took her away.

Remember my grandmother, there too, wasn't happy when she was still alive. Like I said, she wasn't happy when our kids were taken away. I remember she would have tried so hard to help us to get our kids back if she was alive back then.

I'm glad that my daughter remembers Mom – well, I call my grandmother my mom because she was the one that adopted me when I was – from the birth. She told me that I was about five months old when she adopted me. She's kinda like my mom.

My daughter was sharing a story there about her, and she remembers her even when she was taken away from child family services. I'm glad that, even when my grandmother passed away, she shared us a story of one time and my grandmother came and visited her in the room. She said she used to come in the room, sat there and she said she couldn't understand what she was saying, but – at that time, my daughter was speaking English and my grandmother in Innu.

She said she used to come in the room, even though she passed – passed away at that time. She used to come in the room sat there and I even told: Were you afraid? She said: I wasn't afraid. Just sat there with me. And she even done that a few times, she visit me, and I remember my mom used to – she loved my kids.

Also what came to my mind today, like this morning when I woke up, it's the first time in a while that I haven't thought about my grandmother, just came to my mind this morning. You know, the way I felt was like – it's almost like she's trying to be there in my mind. You know, like for a visit, that's the way I took it, when I thought about her.

Like I was doing – even yesterday – I was doing, like, burning the sage. Usually I does that and smudge the house and – with my wife – and my mom, my grandmother came to my mind 'cause she used to love me doing that, she used to pray after I smudged the house and she used to love doing that too, like smudging herself too, with a prayer. And that make me felt good, when I thought

about her, and I had to share that with my wife, how I felt, my mom coming to my mind at that time.

There's so much I wanna share but it's, like, I don't know.

Okay.

I'm just thinking about what I shared one time. I shared this to my wife one time, about I said to her, I feel like – there are times I thought about, I said, probably me writing a book about what we went through. You know, it's almost like I've never checked the time or find the time to do that, and I know I've written so much about how I felt in the past, like, I don't know what you call them – diaries or journals – how I really felt over the years and make a book about it.

How we've been treated, here, in this community. And also sharing our people, what they have went through. I shared this to my wife one time how I really felt. Like, I know how to write and it's almost like I wanna find that time first where I can do it and … and I even know – I even shared, probably, a few people about what the cover's going to be and the name of the book in my mind.

Yeah, that's almost like that's where I am right now with that one.

And I know there's so much I wanna share right now; might take a whole day or – I dunno, but I just –

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, just on that, you can go on. And even though we're not holding these kinds of hearings again, there are other ways that you could share more too, if you wish.

K. NUNA: Hmm.

COMMISISONER DEVINE: And we can talk about that, and you can contact Paula over here if you need to. So just to know that this is kind of, not your only shot at it, if you like.

K. NUNA: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

K. NUNA: Yeah. Guess I'll share one more story. We talked about this, me and my wife, like I said, when our kids we were taken. And you know, as a child, as I remember, how come they were never there when I was young? My grandparents used to love drinking, and I was never happy when they were drinking. I used to sleep in other people's homes, and they were never there.

Now that's what came to my mind, and now they're here. Took my kids. Why weren't they there when I was younger, you know? And today they're all over the place and I used to be by myself out there being with other kids. I needed that kind of help, too.

Can I ask for a break?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Sure.

We'll take a break for about five minutes.

Recess

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so can we get back to our seats, please, and we'll continue on.

Thank you.

K. NUNA: The last thing that I wanna share is – it won't take a lot of time, probably about a few minutes, I would say. 'Cause between me and my wife, we never ate this morning, just came, we only had coffee, and I didn't wanna be late so it's (inaudible) could say that I'm hungry.

Like it's hard sitting here trying not to be emotional at the same time and I know it will come to me when I'm alone. Maybe I'm gonna have a good cry after what I just shared. I was thinking about my daughter,

ever since she came home – she was about 16 or 15 – she's a graduate. I'm glad that she finished school, Grade 12.

And here I'm thinking, even when she was in my care at that time, between me and my wife we used to wake her up early in the morning, telling her, you know, waking her up just to go to school. Setting up breakfast and everything and she used to listen to us. She would just get up, not argue with us, you know and not say anything just so she can stay home.

I'm glad that she got up and ate and took off to school. Today – not just today, but every now and then when I think about that, I must have done something wrong – or we must have done something, I mean, right. You know, her graduating, and glad that she listened to us.

I haven't told to my wife that me as growing up, I was never like that. You know, if I would have listened to my grandmother or my Mom, I would have graduated too, but I said I was a difficult child. You know, there are times I didn't listen to my grandmother to get up, go to school. No. I didn't wanna get up and I didn't wanna listen to her.

And I keep talking abouts this, like, I gave my grandmother a hard time too, as growing up. I even shared it to my daughter. One time, I said, if I would have listened too, I would have graduated. There is so many things I even thought about doing as growing up, I said. I wanted to become a police officer, but someone took that dream away from me, I said as growing up, in school. I was a quiet child as growing up. I never talked about any – if anyone hurt me, I would never talk about it.

I shared this story one time; one of the principal – I was told to go to the principal office, and I was hit. I never told anyone about whatever happened. I never told my grandmother. So that's one of the things that I didn't wanna go back to school. It's almost like I'm glad that my daughter finished school, thinking about I shared that story with her one time.

Yeah, I guess that's where I am with that right now. And I'm gonna thank you for listening my side of the story and my wife's side of the story and yeah, that's where – thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So I wanna thank you, Kenny, very much, for coming here to share your truths this morning. Just a few comments. Sometimes it's hard to put to words, you know, hearing the things that you both have had to endure in your lifetime and the many injustices that you felt.

And yet to be here today shows such strength and courage and resilience and so I really commend you on that, that despite all those challenges and even you talked about, you know, there's times when you felt like you had no control whatsoever, what was happening with regard to your children in particular and being so angry about that which was a justified anger I would say, but yet, despite all that control gone, you kept under control. You talked about how mad you were inside, but yet you didn't, you know, you didn't let that control you, that you controlled it.

So, I think, that shows a particularly great strength, and I just wanna say thank you again, and I really hope that things get better for you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I would like to thank Kenny for showing support to his wife, and also his wife showing support to him, to come and speak at the Inquiry.

There's something that Kenny said, and I'll say it in English, and I've said it in Innu: Someone took my dream away. And I think that it's like that for a lot of young people, it's like that for a lot of people in this generation as well. And I told Kenny that

what he said will stick with me and that it's time to make those dreams come true for our children.

So I wanna thank Kenny and Annie for coming and sharing their story.

Tshinashkumitin.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]