

Audio 3 [Erika]

So, this is a letter that Doreen Befus is writing to Sandra Anderson. And Sandra Anderson is one of the lawyers, in fact, the head lawyer, or the chief – the head of the legal team that supported Lelani Muir’s – or took Lelani Muir’s case to trial. Lelani Muir was the first and ultimately the only woman to successfully sue the Alberta government which she did ultimately in 1996. The trial began in 1995 and over, after months and months of proceedings, Lelani was ultimately awarded a settlement and an official apology from the provincial government and that was Ralph Klein, was the Premier at the time. In Lelani’s case it was a little bit different in that they determined that she was wrongfully sterilized – her IQ had been improperly assigned. That wasn’t necessarily the case in Doreen’s situation although she was assessed as having an IQ of 55 and, after reading her file and reading her diary and looking at some of the accomplishments she had throughout her life, it’s really difficult to imagine how anyone could have been considered severely intellectually impaired

--- an IQ of 55 is quite low – it draws into question a number of things about the Intelligence Quotients, but be that as it may, Doreen responds to Sandra Anderson’s letter, which is seeking additional information about sterilization – and whether --- it seems to be asking whether or not Doreen was aware of her sterilization and how she came to understand it or come to accept it. And, in some ways this letter is sort of typical of the way that Doreen approaches these things, she ultimately is a very tolerant and accepting person. She says in the letter that she understands that because of her IQ, she was sterilized and that the government was trying to reduce the number of individuals who were, she says, mentally handicapped or deformed. She also encourages the client and this is some unnamed person that Sandra Anderson is presumably talking about, to learn to accept their fate. And that seems to be part of Doreen’s resolve for many questions – that she accepts who she is and rather than feel embarrassed or shy, she turns that on its head and begins to embrace her differences and embraces her abilities as opposed to her disabilities. And even by looking at things that other people have labelled as disabled and turn that into an ability. She seems to take the same approach here with the letter – she talks about one of the ways, one of the strategies she used to come to terms with her own infertility and the realization that she had been sterilized without her consent, I should add, was that she did a lot of babysitting when she left the institution. This was very typical of a number of the women, particularly the women who lived in the Michener centre as teenagers and later as young adults. They were often asked to perform domestic duties outside in the community and many many of these cases ended up looking after other people’s children. In Doreen’s diary when she talks about taking care of children, she, it does trigger some rather painful emotional memories. The lack of a loving family in her own life, which, as an adult she tries to reconnect with her family, and she searches for her family, and it’s not necessarily a cheerful reunion – some of her siblings and extended family are rather reluctant to develop a relationship with her – some didn’t know that she was even alive, including her twin sister. And this is very painful for Doreen, because her family was essentially the other kids at the institution. And she realizes that having a loving mother and a father and extended family whether that’s

grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins is actually really critical in one's socialization and one's development. So, for someone who allegedly had an IQ that wasn't going to permit her to read or write or to understand, this is a pretty sophisticated set of insights and she reflects on it for herself, and somehow, comes to terms with her own infertility and seeks a set of relationships with people through these babysitting relationships and through the contacts that she makes in the community. So, it really demonstrates, I think, it's a real testimony to her character that she comes to terms, and comes to accept, her own situation. Ultimately, then, she encourages this client who is seeking retribution for sterilization to do the same, and to come to accept their fate. And as we know from the court cases that came out afterwards, that wasn't so easy for everybody.