

We are all immigrants

BY PAUL PUGH
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COMING from someone whose mother and paternal grandparents were immigrants to the United States, U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump's outbursts against immigrants are the sort of thing most of us shake our heads at, as we mutter "only in the U.S." Alas, as comedian Rick Mercer has noted, similar nonsense can be heard here in Canada too, from Kevin O'Leary and others.

Of many things that may be said to characterize humans, surely travel is one. The genus "homo" (human) originated in Africa. Species of the genus "homo" also first evolved in Africa, then travelled to, and inhabited Eurasia. Modern humans, "homo sapiens," likewise evolved in Africa, and migrated to Eurasia around 100,000 years ago. They encountered earlier human types, "Neanderthal" and "Denisovan," but by around 30,000 years ago, only "homo sapiens" remained.

One of the consequences of these migrations and encounters is that only those whose ancestors never left Africa have completely modern DNA, the rest of us have minute traces of "Neanderthal" and/or "Denisovan" in our DNA.

There has been some controversy over when the original inhabitants of the Americas arrived.



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Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

For some time, it was commonly thought that this took place some 14,000 years ago across an Ice Age land bridge between Siberian Asia and Alaska. Such migration very probably did take place. However, that was not all.

Radio carbon dating provides evidence of human activities in Uruguay 13,000 years ago and in Monte Verde, Chile, some 14,800 years ago.

In order for humans to have reached Uruguay and Chile, in the south of South America, that long ago, there must have been migration to the Americas prior to 14,000 years ago.

It is now generally agreed that the original populating of the Americas took place over a considerable period of time, some via land bridge, and

some by boat, following the Pacific coast, as with the original populating of Australia, 40,000 or more years ago. Modern humans certainly had the technology, and were just as prone to travel as earlier human types.

ON Feb. 28, I had the privilege of attending the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the Cummins Site, one of several archeological sites documenting early First Nation presence in the Thunder Bay area. Cummins Site research confirms First Nation presence dating back 9,500 years, and also indicates trading networks involving local



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Homo sapiens are the ancestor of the modern human. They migrated from Africa to the Americas some 14,000 years ago — the continents' first immigrants.

taconite as far away as present day Wisconsin.

Last week, my wife Evelina and I, along with hundreds of others, once again enjoyed the Lakehead University Native Student Association (LUNSA) annual powwow, allowing us to appreciate our region's rich First Nations culture.

In a few weeks, the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association will hold its 43rd annual Folklore Festival, featuring a wide range of activities, foods, and artifacts by many of the different cultural groups that have made Thunder Bay their home.

We have a wealth of cultural heritage in the Thunder Bay region, dating back to First Nations inhabitants at least 9,500 years ago, and continuing with more recent arrivals, including some in recent weeks fleeing Middle East conflicts.

In view of what is known about human migration, comments by Donald Trump should be taken for what they are: rantings of a spoiled rich boy (born a millionaire) looking for publicity. While we may not have Mr. Trump's financial wealth, we take pride in our cultural wealth, going back thousands of years, honouring those who were here before us, while welcoming those recently arriving.

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Paul Pugh is a Thunder Bay city councillor and member of the city's anti-racism committee.