



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

Work together for unified city

BY JERRI-LYNN ORR
THUNDER BAY

IT has been a year-and-a-half since I moved to Thunder Bay from Winnipeg, and what a change it has been! Getting used to a smaller city, finding affordable housing and a good job was not easy.

My husband and I moved here with our three kids to be closer to family. For my husband though, it was more of a homecoming as this is where he was born and raised and I felt comfortable with our decision because I grew up coming here to see my dad every summer.

Because we took the plunge knowing that we would be moving without having a place to live or jobs to go to once we moved, it was exciting and scary at the same time.

About a week before we left Winnipeg, our fathers worked together to help us secure housing. At the same time, I got a call for a job interview and not too long afterward, the same happened for my husband. Wow, what? This was certainly meant to be! The transition was pretty easy for our family because we felt at home but things were different here than in Winnipeg.

To put things in perspective, I am a Metis woman. I wasn't raised in my culture and my mom never spoke to us in her language.

Growing up, life was crazy for my sister and I. My mom was a residential school survivor and my parents had separated. We had to deal with all the issues that go with those things, but we pulled through and we are doing well, considering the situation. So, you will understand where I am coming from.

Things seemed different here in Thunder Bay. It was such a small city with such big racism problems! I guess I thought because it was a smaller city the racism wouldn't be so obvious, but of course it is everywhere and anywhere you go, even in Winnipeg where the population of indigenous people is the highest of any other city in Canada.

It was still very unsettling to see it so pronounced here in Thunder Bay. I was shocked by the racist comments that came along with the James Street bridge being burned and also by advertisements that were placed in the newspaper.

I was also disturbed by the stories that I heard about racism from friends, family and students I work with. How can this still be happening in this day and age? Why are we pushing each other down, instead of lifting each other up? We are all one but still uniquely different. We each have our own cultures and traditions; we can learn so much from each other by appreciating what each person has to offer.

Thunder Bay has a very unique opportunity with Fort William First Nation being so close. Why not take time to get to know one another, reach out to each other to take advantage of these opportunities to do some major capacity building?

Yes, there have been and there are struggles, but let's figure out how to work together instead of against one another. We literally need to start building bridges that unite the indigenous and non-indigenous communities together. We need to stand strong and be there for each other.

It's easy to think that it has nothing to do with you, but what kind of world are we leaving behind for future generations? What can you do to make sure we leave this world a better place for them, one without the hurt of racism? We only get one life. What are you going to do to be a shining light in this dark world?

Jerri-Lynn Orr is the Native Access Program co-ordinator and university transitions instructor at Lakehead University.

28.01.15