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Respect for all people begins at home

The City of Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to encourage dialogue among residents of the city and surrounding area in order to address some common assumptions or misconceptions. The committee hopes to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

BY ANN MAGISKAN

ONE CITY, MANY VOICES

I remember clearly an incident that happened when my children were very young. My husband and I had taken them out for a walk early one evening. I noticed two little girls playing in the front of their home and said to my husband how sweet they looked with their little ringlets, playing together so wonderfully.

As we came closer to their home, the two young girls cried out to each other, "Look at the Indians," and ran into their home.

My husband and I were shocked and thankfully, our children were not old enough to fully understand what had just happened.

I will always remember this and remind myself that the teachings of respecting all races, creeds and colours begin within the home. Our family has tried to instill these values in our own children.

IN ORDER to help you understand the impact that these types of incidents can have, I want to share with you another incident that took place not that long ago at a local retail store.

I have a status card, which I tend to use when making large purchases in order to save on the tax.

I had been standing in line with my cart of goods and observing the cashier and her interaction with the customers as she served them, which was very friendly and accommodating.

As she turned to serve me, I stated that I had a status card and presented it to her. I noticed that her attitude changed instantly and there was a very noticeable sigh as she brought out the book she needed to fill in with my status card information.

The friendly and accommodating cashier that had greeted the previous customers was replaced suddenly by someone who found these extra steps burdensome.

My first instinct was to become defensive and apologize for the extra work I was putting her through. As I waited I made the decision to speak with the manager regarding his staff providing customer service to all customers whether they produce a status card or not.

I concluded my purchase and took everything out to my vehicle. I asked my husband to give me five minutes as I wanted to speak to the store manager.

When I met with the manager, I told him what had happened and let him know that I frequent this retail store on a regular basis as they carry a variety of products that are needed daily. Consequently, I tend to spend quite a bit of money in his establishment.

I let him know that all customers, whether they produce a status card or not, should be treated with the utmost respect as the business they are in is to provide a service to the customer. He stated that he would speak to the cashier regarding her actions and ensure that it didn't happen again.

I will strive to share the message of respect and proudly wear my button. Some of you may not be aware but the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee, Confederation College and the Crime Prevention Council partnered to launch a RESPECT campaign that will be rolled out city-wide because "Respect begins with you and me!"

Meegwetch.

Ann Magiskan is the Aboriginal Outreach Co-ordinator for the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board and the chair of the City of Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee.

AS Aboriginal Outreach Co-ordinator for the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board I represent the board on a number of community committees. When the seat for chair of the city's Anti-Racism Committee became available, I put my name forward and stepped into the role.

My reason is two-fold: one, because I want to see change in our community where people are accepted for who they are, regardless of race or creed. The other reason is personal. I want to see the city of Thunder Bay as a place where my grandchildren can thrive without feeling shame for who they are as first nations people.

I am a mother of three wonderful grown children and a grandmother of three beautiful grand babies. I have been raised in Thunder Bay since the age of four and have had the honour of raising my own children here. My grandchildren are the next generation and I would love to see them grow in a community where they are accepted and respected for who they are.

Throughout my years of living in Thunder Bay I have faced racism in numerous forms. Upon reflection, some people don't realize they are displaying racism.

These forms of racism have caused me to question who I am. Why is it that people feel the need to classify people who are not like them into categories?