

City is evolving

Why I volunteer for Thunder Bay Multicultural Association

BY LAURA FRALICK

I HAVE LIVED in Thunder Bay all my life and have seen the evolution of our city from a small, northern community populated by Indigenous people, as well as by settlers from the last century's migration waves. It was extremely rare to meet any people from non-European cultures, not to mention from remote northern communities, during those years.

My mother's parents arrived in Canada seeking new opportunities for work and prosperity after the Second World War and found that many newcomers had deeply ingrained attitudes toward each other, as they competed for jobs and a foothold in their chosen communities. People carried grievances and prejudices from various cultures into the new situation.

Growing up with this backdrop, my parents decided to be different. From my earliest childhood, they introduced me and my siblings to people from all over the world as they came here for work or study.

I initially met nurses from the Caribbean who were frequent visitors at our home when we were young children. When Lakehead University was established, we started to meet students from Asia and Africa who were often very lonely during holidays. My parents would invite them to our home.

It saddens me that we did not meet or know any Indigenous people at that time, although my father would meet people from northern commu-



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

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

nities when he worked in the Sioux Lookout area. In fact, during my high school years, I only knew two people from indigenous communities in my group of friends.

Ismaili Muslim people were forced out of Uganda in the '70s and several families made their homes here. As a teenager, I was really happy to sample Indian-style cuisine, share saris and other fashion items and apply henna "Mehndi" to my hands (as an early, temporary introduction to tattooing).

During my adult years, I went through a (thankfully short) period of crisis and social isolation that I have spoken about with many people over the years. The hard times were, ultimately, my best teacher and I opened my mind to recognizing that other people could also feel isolated.

I remember the day I plunked down on a chair in the offices of Thunder Bay Multicultural Associa-

tion, asking if they needed someone to volunteer with newcomers. My idea was that "my worst day might be another person's best day," especially for those who leave their homes, families and country due to war.

Thunder Bay can be a great place for newcomers to make their home. We see a deep pool of talent and education coming to our city and this is essential for the growth and prosperity of our city.

As for me, there isn't much I can do about global peace and understanding, but if I can make a difference to a refugee's situation, offer friendship and networking to newcomers and learn to appreciate other cultures, I believe there is no limit to the effect I can have on lives and our shared future. My life has been enriched and our small northern city feels like it has a place in our global village.

Laura Fralick is a lifelong resident of Thunder Bay and is a certified financial planner with IG Wealth Management. She is an active volunteer with the Multicultural Association PARO: Centre for Women's Enterprise, Stiletto Network and Asian Women's Tapestry Network. Laura is a strong supporter of local arts, including Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra. Her Travelling Painting fundraising initiative continues to raise money for Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation. She is an alumni of Leadership Thunder Bay (class of 2015/16). Laura's family includes Phil, daughter Kate and parents Marion and Peter.