

# When language wasn't written

## *Treaty night event to explore oral, pictorial context*

BY CYNTHIA NAULT

I WASN'T afforded the luxury of being raised with my culture or community. Intergenerational effects such as poverty, abuse and constant moving left me without a feeling of home or belonging.

At about age 10, it was something that I always wondered and dreamed about, consciously trying to learn more.

I didn't have resources to research on my own and I certainly didn't have the community that I do today after 30 years of learning and reconnecting.

My family has been very fortunate and privileged. We were especially honoured that my mother's gifts include carrying a teaching lodge, which was revealed in a ceremony in 2007.

We get to share with the community and be in the ceremony together and we are humbled to bear witness to others finding their own healing and home/place in the community.

In 2017, Canada's 150, the City of Thunder Bay approached us to build the teaching lodge at the marina for July 1. We did this in the spirit of bridge-building and reconciliation.

As a community, we built the lodge in probably the most mainstream location we ever had there by having many more people see it, potentially experience it than would have otherwise; people who wouldn't have sought us out.

There were lots of stories and sharing that took place in the lodge during that time.

One conversation stayed with me. A man told me about the animal symbols on some treaties.

I had never seen them or pictures of them but this idea really took hold in my mind.

During the Thunder Bay Art



ONE CITY,  
MANY VOICES

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

Gallery's time with the Indigenous Ingenuity exhibit this past winter, when planning for Oshdeebeganwin began, as part of my research I found some such images. Our ancestors signed with these symbols that resemble pictographs corresponding to the clans.

Now, I am not a fluent speaker of Anishnaabemowin but what I do know about the language, the clan system and how concepts and complex teachings are built into the language — which pre-contact was not a written language — inspired so many questions in me about what additional meaning these symbols carry.

Our clans tell us more information about who we are, what gifts we may carry, and what responsibilities we have to ourselves, our families, our communities and be-

### ***-Oshdeebeganwin-***

**Treaty Night**

**July 14**

**7-9 p.m.**

**Thunder Bay  
Art Gallery**

yond.

Treaties represent agreements between two or more parties. There are rights and responsibilities that go along with them.

In regards to our treaty, the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850, much more was agreed to than made it into the document.

I believe that there is much context missing and we, as Canadians, are not upholding all of our responsibilities (to each other but also to our relatives, i.e., the land, plants and animals).

Some context might be there if we (re)learn the concepts built into these original systems.

Key knowledge will have been passed down through oral history and teachings that were given to descendants of the original signers.

We are honoured to have one of these descendants joining us for our treaty night event.

Elder Gene Nowegejick is one of three speakers planned.

I invite you to join me on this journey of learning, for Oshdeebeganwin (Oshdee — cross your heart, Begaa-win — written agreement) on July 14, 7-9 p.m., in-person at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1080 Keewatin St., or on our YouTube channel.

*Cynthia Nault is two-spirit Anishnaabekwe, Wolverine Clan, from Opwaaganisiniing (Red Rock Indian Band). She is also French. Cynthia holds an Ontario College advanced diploma in multimedia production from Confederation College. Cynthia is the community engagement co-ordinator at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, which presents exhibitions of work by contemporary Indigenous artists, artists from Northwestern Ontario and travelling exhibitions.*