

We can improve world with our words, actions

BY HEATHER MCLEOD

BIRDERS ask one another: “What was your spark bird?” Then they share what bird got them seriously into bird watching. At a community activism workshop this year I was asked: “What was your spark activism moment?” I thought of Grade 5.

Grade 5 was my third school, fourth town and second province. My family moved to where we could best afford to live.

More years than not, I was the new kid on the block or in the class. I know how it is to be invisible to everyone coming in looking for the people they know to expect. I know how that wave of distrust of the unknown feels when thrown on you upon being noticed in such a crowd. I know it is not personal. But it feels personal.



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario

In Grade 5, I went to a school that had just opened. Everyone was new. It was great.

I helped raise money for a girl my age who my Mom knew through her work. She had a rare disorder whose care cost more than her family had. When the fundraising concluded, the whole school gathered, plus press, and I was among

those to speak.

I went to give the girl the ‘I-see-you welcome’ I always crave, and realized she could not see me. She was blind with fear, doing this out of determined love and swimming in guilt. I returned to my seat and felt a tide of anger on her behalf rise up in me. When I was asked the question prepared for me I briefly answered then rolled on. I don’t remember what I said but I remember watching my words impact those listening like a wave of wind over a ripe field. They swept through the crowd and showed up in the press coverage. I felt visible in all the right ways.

Ever since, I raise my voice for needed change whenever I am convinced change is needed.

When my son Ben was 11, we watched a documentary about the climate crisis and he grew

agitated. I tried to comfort him, saying this is a crisis I’ve known of since I was 11, things are being done to address it. But the movie never got to that part of the story. And I realized I did not know that part of the story. Ben was appalled. So was I.

Since then I have devoted myself to understanding what change is needed, and raising my voice. I have come to understand the climate crisis as a deadly symptom of a singular disorder I call colonialism, others call capitalism — though none of these monikers quite fit. Its many interconnected solutions share the need to include and equally value everyone, all people and all our relations: footed, rooted, finned, stone, water, air, visible and invisible. Which means removing inequities and exclusions. Think about that a moment — it leads to so

many possibilities, all of them good. Not quick nor easy, but good.

In April 2022 I launched my podcast *Something Different This Way Comes* documenting this journey rooted in and rooting for Thunder Bay. In August 2023, I helped found the Northwest Climate Gathering, connecting and nurturing the climate-committed and climate-curious.

I want to help give my children a sustainable, welcoming world. And I cannot without the welcome including us all: all seen, all valued. It is personal.

Heather McLeod is an author, songwriter, gardener, podcaster and former CBC Radio journalist. Visit www.Something-DifferentThisWayComes.ca to find her podcast. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.