

Keep exploring Indigenous history throughout the year

BY GERALDINE KAKEEWAY

BOOZHOO, Aniin. Hello. Migisikwe n'digo, Name n'dodem. Naotkamegwanning n'doonjii. My name given to me as a child by Sarah Mandamin-aban (aban denotes she has passed onto the spirit world) translates to "Bald Eagle Woman." My clan is Sturgeon and I am a band member of Naotkamegwanning First Nation, located about an hour south of Kenora.

My choice to start with a traditional greeting is a deliberate act of self recognition and self affirmation of who I am — an Anishinaabekwe. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your life at this particular moment in time.

June is officially the National Indigenous History Month. The Government of Canada website states: "learn more about National Indigenous History Month" and "This year, National Indigenous History Month is dedicated to the missing children, the families left behind and the survivors of residential schools. Start your learning journey here to help you mark this important month and National Indigenous Peoples Day by exploring more about the rich and diverse cultures, voices, experiences and histories of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples." One can proceed to click through a number of creative, user friendly virtual resources to read, listen, watch, and try.

If you peruse the government website, attend events in person, or participate in learning about Indigenous history, I highly encourage you to do so all year round, not just in June. We have eleven other months for people from every na-



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.

tionality to pick up a book, listen to a podcast, rock it out with some fantastic talented musicians. Indigenous people are contemporaries, we are here and now, not just a peoples frozen in time, relegated to historical artifacts and museum displays. We are neighbours, co-workers, friends, and family.

I am going to circle back to the dedication on the Government of Canada website: "dedicated to the missing children, the families left behind and the survivors of residential schools." I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge what has been in the forefront this past month or so. For some it is "new" news, and for many of us, this is nothing new.

I am compelled to acknowledge because I am a daughter of a woman who attended St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Kenora.

Nimama-aban was Madeleine Bird; she and her sisters, Josephine-aban and Rosaline-aban went to St. Mary's. Rosaline Bird was only 10 years old when she

died there in 1941. Mom was about 11 and Josephine was about 12 years old. I have a black and white photo taken by somebody on the day of Rosaline's funeral. The grief on their young faces, along with the sadness of my grandmother, is painfully visible and captured for historical posterity.

Josephine died of tuberculosis at 19 at the "Squaw Bay Hospital" at the Mission Reserve (aka Thunder Bay) in 1947, as written in her official death certificate.

I am here because my mother survived residential school, my grandmother survived having her children taken from her; she had no choice but to submit to the authority of the government officials. I speak my language because these two matriarchs insisted that my siblings and I learn Anishinaabemowin as our first language. I continue to learn because ancestors and today's knowledge keepers are rejuvenating and reviving our culture and our languages.

Canadians have an opportunity to expand their knowledge because there are resources, events taking place virtually or in person that celebrates this fact. Don't squander it, Canadians have 365 days a year to learn, not just this one month out of 12.

Geraldine Kakeeway is an Anishinaabekwe, band member of Naotkamegwanning First Nation, living in Kenora. She is currently employed as the Indigenous regional liaison for Confederation College, located out of the Lake of the Woods campus. Geraldine is the proud mother of two adult children, Sean and Erin. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.