

Happy Aboriginal Day!

It has been one of the joys of my life becoming friends with Althea Guiboche, the Bannock Lady, and working with her at Got Bannock.

I have learned so much from her - and not just how to open cans faster.

We are all Treaty people in Manitoba. To me, that means we have a bond. The treaties are not one-sided: as non-Indigenous Canadians, we have obligations to honour and uphold our end of the deal.

We need to engage in reconciliation and healing and work to right wrongs, both past and present.

On Aboriginal Day, I hope that those of us who are “newcomers,” or the descendants of newcomers, reflect on the fact our lives in Manitoba and Canada are made possible because of the treaties. Even more important, there are thousands of descendants of settlers who are alive today only because Indigenous people helped feed them and keep them alive.

This is true of Chief Peguis. This year is the 200th anniversary of the Peguis - Selkirk Treaty. Lord Selkirk was trying to save the lives of Scottish farmers from starving and freezing to death after they were driven off their lands in the Highland Clearances. On three separate occasions, Chief Peguis helped save the lives of the Selkirk Settlers.

Every Manitoban and Canadian should know the story of John Ramsay, who helped save the lives of Icelandic settlers to Manitoba. His extraordinary efforts saved dozens of lives, though cold, famine and sickness and he kept expressing kindness and love.

And when Elijah Harper said “No” to the Meech Lake Accord because it risked closing the door to addressing Indigenous rights, Pierre Trudeau famously said “Les autochtones ont sauvé le Canada” - “Indigenous people have saved Canada.”

As Treaty people, we must recognize with gratitude the gestures of generosity and hospitality expressed in the Treaties and honour them by returning it in kind.

- Dougald