

Critically endangered 'Ojibwe Spirit Horses' visit Seaforth P.S.

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SEAFORTH – Before the arrival of European settlers, the Original People of this land had incredible helpers called Ojibwe Spirit Horses.

Ojibwe Spirit Horses were in North America by the thousands before contact.

According to the Ojibwe Horse Society, “DNA evidence shows they are different from European-introduced horse breeds in distinctive ways that made them an integral and harmonious part of the North American boreal forest. The testimony of Indigenous Elders affirms they have had a spiritual and working relationship with the Ojibwe Horse throughout time.”

These friendly Indigenous horses roamed free, but they were always around to help the locals with the heavy lifting. They offered up their small backs to assist the People for things like hauling logs in from the forest or ice when it was brought to the camps.

Their compact bodies allowed them to weave in and around the trees in the forests, making them valuable assets.

The relationship between the People and these special little horses was very harmonious.

That special bond was nearly destroyed by the coming of the settlers, who at first used them horribly during the gold rush, and eventually declared them a nuisance, the government ordering them all to be slaughtered.

In 1977, there were only four of these small and resilient horses left. Today there are less than 230, with less than 30 breeding stallions.

Two of these beautiful creatures visited Seaforth Public School on June 9 as part of an ongoing initiative by the Avon Maitland District School Boards (AMDSB) Indigenous Education program.

“The initiative aims to increase engagement and awareness with AMDSB students about this unique breed of horse that was a historic part of society until they were considered pests by newcomers and brought to the brink of extinction in the early 1970s,” AMDSB said in their board meeting highlights on May 24.

Dale and Sallianne Patch run Aspens Ojibwe Horse Sanctuary just outside of Stratford and, in collaboration with Christin Dennis, a local knowledge keeper, have been bringing a message of hope for these horses to the schools in the AMDSB region.



Youth attendee Charlie Brown pets Odamia (I Play) with her EA Diana Steep watching. The young lady and the horse spent a long time looking at each other earlier in the morning of June 9, bringing tears of joy to Steep.

Cory Bilyea photos

The sanctuary focuses on three key elements, preservation, protection, and promotion of the Ojibwe Spirit Horses.

Surrounded by children, Odamia (I Play) and Takona (I Hold Him) were calm, happily munching on the school's grass and their net full of hay, taking in the excitement of the moment with the kids and making friends.

Odamia spent several minutes gazing into the eyes of a young lady named Charlie Brown, who was quite taken by the horse. That moment in time captured the pure gentleness of this special breed, bringing tears of joy to Diana Steep, the educational assistant (EA). She accompanied Charlie out to see the horses.

Sallianne spoke to the kids, telling them the story of the Ojibwe Spirit Horses, whose great, great-grandchildren were standing before them now.

Describing the unique relationship between the Spirit Horses and the People, the large group of young people was mesmerized, quietly listening to Sallianne as she went on to talk about what happened next.

“Then a thing called colonization happened. That was when people came from other countries, like my country, England... and they really liked Canada, or Turtle Island as First Nations call it. And First Nations were amazing, because they welcomed them, taught them how to live off the land

and that was OK for a while,” she said.

“But the newcomers wanted more and more, they didn't respect the Indigenous way of life, they thought it was strange, some of the ceremonies they had and so on, so they moved the First Nations onto reserves... and gave them very strict rules that they had to follow that was harmful to the Indigenous way of life.”

Referring to the infamous “Klondike gold rush,” Sallianne said, “They didn't respect these Indigenous horses, they were very cruel to them,” asking the children if they had heard about the gold rush.

Several of the youth nodded or spoke up, saying they had heard of that part of history.

Sallianne went on to talk about the people who used the Spirit Horses so severely, saying, “They needed something to carry their equipment, their tents and everything else, so they caught these ponies that were so friendly and easy to get along with; they wanted to please the people. They loaded them up way too heavy, with heavy loads, and they didn't feed them or treat them well. So, many of them died.”

National Park Service (NPS) wrote the following about the horses that died on White Pass Trail. This difficult-to-reach area is spread throughout the wilderness of the Skagway River Valley and into the Yukon.

“Ojibwe horses are black or dark coloured bay, or there's another colour called grullo, which is sort of a beige colour, and it's very pretty. We have one at the farm.”

- Sallianne Patch

“Horses were not equipped with the constant physical demands, boggy mud holes, and slippery rocks. No one knows the exact amount of animals that took the two trails but it is estimated that 3,000 horses died in a one-year period on the White Pass Trail, earning it the nickname ‘Dead Horse Trail.’”

After the gold rush ended, the government declared the Ojibwe Spirit horse to be a nuisance and a health hazard to the Indigenous People who kept the horses on the reserves with them, ordering the animals to be shot, destroyed, or sent to glue factories.

By the late 1970s, there were only four left, and these horses were rounded up, hidden by four men, two non-natives, and two of the People, who then shipped them to Minnesota, where they were safe.

Unfortunately, these four horses were all female.

They were bred to a Spanish horse named Smokey, Sallianne told the students.

“And from there, we now have six generations down.”

The children had the opportunity to ask questions, with one youth asking if they were all the same colour.

Sallianne said, “Ojibwe horses are black or dark coloured bay, or there's another colour called grullo, which is sort of a beige colour, and it's very pretty. We have one at the farm.”

The two Spirit Horses that visited Seaforth were a male and a female, Sallianne told the youth in response to another question.

“We have their two children back at the farm,” she said. “It's very neat and unique to have a whole family intact.”

Dennis spoke to the youth next, reminding them of previous lessons he had shared with them, including a song he had taught them, which they remembered and sang along with him while he played his hand drum.

Monique Pregent, Indigenous education lead at AMDSP, also spoke about previous sessions with the children where they had learned to say several common words in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibway). They were happy to repeat what they had learned.

The student's then put on a small art show, presenting their drawings about the experience of learning about the Ojibwe Spirit Horses as Pregent, Dennis, and the Patch couple looked at each one, the kids receiving some one-on-one attention and praise for their creations.

At long last, the youth were able to pet the horses, lining up, respectfully approaching their small guests. Their smiling faces were testimony to the unique and wonderful experience they had learning about the Spirit Horses.



(Above) Christin Dennis, local Indigenous knowledge keeper, speaks to the youth gathered at Seaforth Public School on June 9 about the Ojibwe Spirit Horses. (Below) Sallianne Patch watches while one of the youth pets Odamia (I Play) during a visit to Seaforth Public School on June 9.



Zettel: It's natural to be afraid

Continued from page 5

The consensus is that the best path forward is “electrification,” which will require massive amounts of non-emitting electricity generation. This puts nuclear in a different light. Nuclear power is a necessary part of the solution, and permanent storage of spent fuel is a necessary part of nuclear power.

As someone who has had the great privilege of working in and around the nuclear industry for a couple of decades, I feel a debt of responsibility to help bring my neighbours to a better level of understanding and to overcome unfounded fears. We who have worked in the indus-

try know the extreme, almost religious approach to safety that prevails in our nuclear generating stations. We know the pervasive passion for protecting people and the environment from radiation, and the layers upon layers of protection the industry puts in place to do so. We know the constant improvements in science and engineering that have been achieved over the past decades, and continue to take place today. Many of us have accumulated a wealth of experience working with nuclear technology, as operators, maintainers, scientists and managers.

That's what makes South Bruce one of the best places in Canada to build the DGR. We don't need

to rely solely on outsiders to explain how things work, or what's safe – we can talk with industry insiders right here in our own community.

Soon, we residents of South Bruce will need to decide whether or not we are a “willing host community.” My fervent hope is that we will each make up our own mind with a clear head, informed by sensible discussion and the science at hand, based on the expected impacts and benefits for our community, and not on unfounded fears.

Sincerely,

Tony Zettel
Mildmay

The importance of going beyond the symbols

National Day of Awareness for MMIW2S ceremonies meant as reminder to learn more

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SAUGEEN – The haunting cry of a Mi-Gi-Zi’ (Eagle) filled the air during a ceremony honouring murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and 2-spirits (MMIWG2S).

This is a significant and humbling experience to be joined by that Mi-Gi-Zi’; many Anishnaabeg people believe the Mi-Gi-Zi’ is the one who speaks to the Creator on our behalf and feel honoured when they see one.

Held on the grounds of Kabaeshiwim, the respite women’s shelter located on the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation, about 30 people came to show their support and respect to those who never came home.

In the background, two missing posters with the faces and names of two young women connected to Saugeen, one of the missing girls is the granddaughter of respected Saugeen Elder and knowledge keeper Vernon Roote.

Shannon Mary Dale Alexander, 17 and Maisy Marie Odjick, 16, were last seen on Sept. 6, 2008 in Maniwaki, Quebec.

Although both girls disappeared without taking any of their personal items, their purses, backpacks, identification, and medications were left behind; according to reports, the police initially listed the girls as runaways and did not open a missing persons file for several weeks.

On Sept. 12, 2008, the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation set up a press conference to seek the public’s assistance, but unfortunately, only one local reporter showed up.

The lack of police and media response to missing Indigenous people is what several women who spoke to the small gathering of people talked about.

Cheryl George, manager of Kabaeshiwim, welcomed the people and thanked them for coming out to show their support for this critical, ongoing



Cory Bilyea photos

Missing posters of two young Indigenous women who disappeared in 2008, a haunting reminder to those who attended a ceremony to remember and honour MMIWG2S, at the Chippewa of Saugeen women’s shelter on May 5.

issue, amid a collection of red dresses.

The red dress is a symbol meant to draw attention to the missing and murdered and the lack of police response, despite the pleas from their families to find out what happened to them.

“May 5 is a day that we bring awareness for the missing and murdered women and girls, and including the men,” George said. “We have some men out there that are missing as well.”

The group began collecting red dresses during the year. They are hoping to collect more to place them all over their territory, especially on the highway that runs through it.

“That’s a travel road,” she said.

“And that’s where most of our women have gone missing,” referring to Highway 21 that runs through Saugeen territory and the Highway of Tears, the infamous highway in B.C. where many women have disappeared.

The Highway of Tears is a 725-kilometre corridor of Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert, B.C.

George talked about the rising number of MMIWG2S people who continue to disappear; the estimate is currently around 5,000 missing.

“This is just the reported cases, what about the women and girls who have not been reported,” said George.

National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people, also known as Red Dress Day, is held annually on May 5.

However, the issue is ongoing. A recent announcement from the Vancouver police states they have identified the body of a young Indigenous woman discovered near an abandoned building in April as 24-year-old Chelsea Poorman, missing since September 2020.

The coroner’s report does not deem her death suspicious. Still, the fact that Poorman’s remains were left undiscovered for nearly 18 months outside of an abandoned house is very concerning.

Sheila Poorman, Chelsea’s mom, told The Tyee journalist Jen St. Denis that the police didn’t take her seriously, waiting 10 days to issue a press release.

“They just didn’t seem like they were too interested in looking for Chelsea. At one point the police officers told my one daughter that they had more important things to do,” Sheila said.

The lack of response from many police agencies, in-

cluding the RCMP, is an all too familiar complaint from loved ones of missing Indigenous people; the dismissal of concerns and nearly zero communications quite often leave families alone and in the dark, and some parents passing away, never knowing what happened to their child.

Lou Thomas, knowledge keeper from Six Nations, said, “It started in B.C., not the Red Dress, but the whole idea of the unheard cries of the people, of the families, losing their loved ones.”

Thomas talked about Indigenous lawyer Beverly Jacobs, the lead researcher of “No More Stolen Sisters,” a ground-breaking report on Canada’s missing and murdered Indigenous

women by Amnesty International.

“That was a really important start to this discussion,” said Thomas. “It’s really not about the red dress.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action include a request for a public inquiry. The Indigenous Watchdog reports that “the federal government’s MMIWG Action Plan is widely panned by a majority of Indigenous women’s advocacy groups for its lack of substantive details, timelines or budget.

“Entitled Reclaiming Power and Place, the National Inquiry’s two-volume final report released on June 3, 2019 calls for transformative legal and social changes to resolve the crisis that has devastated Indigenous communities across the country. It delivers 231 individual Calls for Justice directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries and all Canadians in addition to the recommendations and calls for immediate action included in the Interim Report.”

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the AFN Women’s Council released Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice: An Action Plan to End Violence Against First Nations Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ People with recommendations in four priority areas:

Justice: address barriers and inequalities in Canada’s justice system.

Human security: ensure equitable access to basic needs, including shelter, food, and education.

Health and wellness: provide services and programs that are culturally appropriate and trauma informed.

Culture as safety: make cultural identity a priority in all preventative, supportive, and healing activities.

Indigenous Elder and Knowledge Keeper Peter Shuler spoke to the Wingham Advance Times about the Red Dress and the Orange Shirt symbols, sharing his thoughts on the importance of digging deeper and learning more.

“One of the things I kind of look at, the Orange Shirt and the Red Dress can become just a checkbox,” said Shuler. “If you don’t get the stories behind them, why the orange shirt and why the red dress, that can be just a checkbox for people.”

Added Shuler, “It’s like a flag or something to get your attention and then you start digging into it, digging into the stories behind that. When you see the Orange Shirt or the Red Dress, don’t stop there, don’t make it a checkbox. Do some research, do some digging.”

As the ceremony wrapped up in Saugeen, George reminded people to be vigilant, keep an eye on each other, try to travel in pairs, and report any suspicious incidents.

If you have any information on these or other missing person cases, you can contact the Missing Children Society of Canada at 1-800-661-6160 and the Missing Children’s Network at 1-888-692-4673.



(Above) Several people attended the MMIWG2S ceremony on May 5 at the Chippewa of Saugeen women’s shelter. (Right) A red dress display at the MMIWG2S ceremony held on May 5 at the Chippewa of Saugeen women’s shelter.



Survivor's Flag unveiled at Parliament ceremony

Call to Action #80 completed

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CANADA – The first legislated federal holiday on Sept. 30 was meant to commemorate and honour the people who endured the residential school system and their families.

On Sept. 29, Ottawa hosted a special ceremony, lighting up the parliament building with orange lights, listening to survivors speak, and raising a new flag, the Survivor's Flag.

Survivors created the flag as their expression of remembrance to share with the broader public. Each survivor who consulted received the flag to raise in their community for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation's first legislated day of remembrance.

Many of the contributing survivors hope that the flag will be incorporated at public events and that remembrance becomes a regular part of practice at gatherings.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation said, "The Survivors' Flag is an expression of remembrance, meant to honour residential school survivors and all the lives and communities impacted by the residential school system in Canada. Each element depicted on the flag was carefully selected by survivors from across Canada, who were consulted in the flag's creation."



This Survivor's Flag includes many symbolic and essential messages. It holds significant meaning to those people who helped to create it.

Each symbol represents an aspect of the past, the present, and the future, a true path to reconciliation and, more importantly, to healing.



The Family

Some saw the adults as our ancestors watching over us; others saw these as parents signifying whole families ripped apart and also reuniting to represent healing.



The Children

More than one child is depicted in the design as often whole sibling groups were taken from their parents, younger siblings, grandparents, and community.



The Seeds Below the Ground

Represent the spirits of the children who never returned home. Although they have always been present, they are now seen and searched for.



Tree of Peace

Haudenosaunee symbol of how nations were united and brought to peace, which in turn provides protection, comfort, and renewal.



Cedar Branch

Sacred medicine that represents protection and healing, but also what is used by some Indigenous cultures when one enters the physical world and then again when they pass on to the next (i.e., medicine bath). The seven branches acknowledge the seven sacred teachings taught in many Indigenous cultures.



Cosmic Symbolism

Represents Sun, Moon, Stars, and Planets. The Sun represents the divine protection that ensures those who survived came home. The North Star is prominent as it

is an important navigation guide for many Indigenous cultures.



The Métis Sash

The Sash is a prominent ceremonial regalia worn with pride. Certain colours of thread represent lives that were lost, while others signal connectedness as humans and resilience through trauma. All the threads woven together spell out part of history, but no single thread defines the whole story.



The Eagle Feather

The Eagle Feather represents that the Creator's spirit is among us. It is depicted pointing upwards which mirrors how it is held when one speaks their truth.



The Inuksuit

Inuksuit are used as navigational guides for Inuit people and link to tradition.

The Honourable Levinia Brown, Inuk survivor who attended Chesterfield Inlet Residential School, said, "This project came about at a time when the grief survivors carried, as well as that of the families of those who were lost, came back to the surface. The news that children lay in unmarked graves was not unimaginable to us as survivors because our memories of these schools are marked by abuse, pain, neglect and profound loss. It was important that the design show the missing children are present because there is much work ahead of us and their memory must also be part of that work."

Arthur Steinhauer, Cree Survivor who attended Blue Quills Residential School, said, "Creating a flag in honour of survivors and those who did not return is very special. For me, the design symbolizes remembrance, hope for family, love and peace. It is a beautiful reminder of where we've been and who we are, as well as the goal of where we should be headed."

This marks the completion of Call to Action No. 80. However, questions have arisen about the sincerity of the government's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took a vacation with his family, issuing a formal apology when he returned.

The Assembly of First Nations National Chief RoseAnne Archibald released the following statement in response to Trudeau's apology.

"As I stated to the Catholic Church, hollow apologies will no longer be accepted. As National Chief, on behalf of all First Nations, I expect concrete action and changed behaviours. The Prime Minister must demonstrate through actions that he is committed to the healing path forward."

Archibald also called upon media outlets to do better, saying, "Let's remember that Truth and Reconciliation is about survivors and those children who died in the institutions of assimilation and genocide. Therefore, I ask media outlets to give as much time to survivors' stories as they are giving to the Prime Minister's behaviour on Sept. 30."

Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation unveils road sign

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NEYAASHIINIGMIING

Members of the Chippewas of Nawash walked from Native Child Welfare (NCW) to the Sydney Bay entrance. Members of the Lion's Head community walked from the little red hall at Purple Valley, where they met up at the entrance to commemorate the first legislated National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

The group unveiled a bright orange sign with changeable numbers that the band will periodically update to reflect the current number of children's remains found in unmarked graves at residential school grounds across Canada and the United States.

The day began with a sunrise ceremony where members of the territory offered prayers and sang songs, welcoming the children's spirits home after they remained hidden, some for 50 years.

Chief Veronica Smith spoke to the group about the importance of the day, "it's good to see everybody here," she said, "to com-

memorate this day of Truth and Reconciliation."

"I'd like to say Miigwetch to all of the walkers this morning," Smith added, "it's a special day for us all as we remember the children of residential schools."

"The children who didn't come home, the survivors, the families and of course this impacted the whole community."

Smith went on to talk about how when the young men from the SON territories went to war for Canada, they didn't know that the government and churches were busy at home taking all of their children. When they came home, they found a broken, empty community.

The community keeps a page on their website honouring those men that says, "Nawash Veterans have served their Nation well."

"Chief James Nawash served at the right hand of Tecumseh during the War of 1812. In the two major wars of the 20th century, the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation sent the largest proportion of eligible males of any community in Canada."

Intergenerational trauma survivor Marlene Keeshig spoke to the small group about her father, one of the soldiers who came home to a broken people.

"My father went to residential school when he was 10-years-old, with his family. He never had a chance to tell his story, so I am," Keeshig said.

"I am Randolph Keeshig's daughter and this is his great-great granddaughter," she said, introducing a young girl who stood with her.

"All of us have been affected by the fact that he was taken, with his siblings, to residential school," she said.

Choked with emotion, Keeshig went on to say, "My grandmother chased the RCMP vehicle all the way to the bottom of Colpoys Hill to try and get her kids out of that car."

"My dad didn't come back until he was 16, when the war had started and he became a soldier and went overseas."

Randolph Keeshig came back from overseas when he was 20 and married Marlene's mother.

"Because they never really had the chance to be children, teenagers or even know how it was to raise children, that they have natural feelings," Marlene Keeshig said she became a foster child. "I was in two foster homes before I reached 16 and that's when he died. I left. I couldn't take it anymore."

"The fallout of that, in my family, has led to our children being taken in to the children's aid," she said.

"My oldest son I never found until he was 45-years-old. He was six-months-old when I saw him last, and I found him in Long Island, New York...I searched for him all those years."

"This is not just an isolated incident, but I wanted people to know what my dad's story is."

Like the other children who went to residential school, siblings were forbidden to speak to each other once they arrived.

Marlene said her father and his siblings' heads were shaved when they got to the institution and all they could do was stare at each other through the fence.

She went on to address the mis-

conception that Indigenous children choose not to get an education, saying her father was only allowed to finish grade 5.

"The nuns where I was going to school seen him digging ditches across the road, and they used him as an example, 'see this is what happens when you don't get an education,'" Marlene recalled.

"It was them that only let him, only allowed him to have grade 5 and then released him when he was 16. He didn't go there for academics," she said. "He went there to feed the staff, and the teachers and whoever else was there."

The ceremony included a cash donation totalling \$3,300 from a store in Lion's Head called The Dandy Lion, which sold orange shirts, hats, and bumper stickers and donated 100 per cent of the proceeds to senior services Neyaashiinigiing.

In a social media post, the store owners said, "Thank you everyone who was able to purchase a shirt, hat, or bumper sticker. I know the senior's program will make good use of the funds."

Italian author dies in Canada, fulfilling his life's destiny

'It's paradise here'

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NEYAASHIINIGMIING – Soldiers from Neyaashiinigiim (Cape Croker) and Saukiing Anishnaabekiing (Saugeen) who fought in the Second World War are among the numerous Indigenous people from Canada and the United States highlighted in Matteo Incerti's novel.

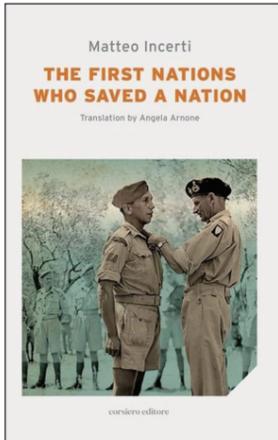
Written in Italian, 'I pellerossa che liberarono l'Italia,' translated to English, means "The First Nations who Saved a Nation." The Italian author wanted to tell the stories of the First Nations soldiers who served in the Italian Campaign and recognize their bravery and extreme sacrifice.

"Reliving lost threads in time, bringing to light the scattered memories of these peoples, who have been discriminated [against] for centuries," Incerti wrote, [this] "is a way to revive their awareness of the message of peace and brotherhood brought by their cultures."

Incerti came to the traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) People on Aug. 12 to meet and thank the relatives of the great soldiers he wrote about in his book. His journey was to take him to several locations across Canada to honour First Nations soldiers, including Tommy Prince and David Greyeyes.

That night he wrote on his social media page, "A journey that starts like this. Immersed in a forest of trees and stars with a Full Moon rising over Georgian Bay on Cape Croker's Ojibwa Reserve, home of many American heroes."

Less than two days later, Incerti died suddenly from a massive heart attack while fulfilling his life's



Submitted photo

Italian author Matteo Incerti wrote a book about the Canadian and American Indigenous soldiers in WW2 called "The First Nations who saved a Nation."

destiny, to stand on the soil once occupied by those men and women who were a considerable part of liberating Italy during the Second World War.

A greatly anticipated welcoming gathering scheduled as a part of Incerti's visit was still held at the Maadookii Seniors Centre in Neyaashiinigiim without the guest of honour.

Instead, the people mourned Incerti's passing, telling stories of their short time with him and honouring his memory, making plans to commemorate this man who opened the door for the stories to be told and heard worldwide about the brave and noble Indigenous warriors from Canada.

"Many veterans were remembered, and their descendants saw fleeting glimpses into the sacrifices made by their ancestors. Threads of their life's tapestries were gazed upon, revealing the beauty of the whole," the granddaughter of a First Nations soldier mentioned in the book, Jessica Johnston, said. "We spoke our collective prayers that went to his family and brother Michele

Incerti with special intent of comfort to his mother.

"We marveled at how his will was such, that it made obstacles (that would hinder many of us) – mere stepping stones to him. He somehow found the secret to bring the energy of his youth, and carry it with him the rest of his days. One can only imagine a lifetime spent in his presence, would be filled with electric moments. Our community spirit is with your family at this time."

They talked about how Incerti will help people to understand the experiences of the First Nations soldiers from Canada and the United States.

The trauma of war combined with the suffering from residential schools, where many First Nations soldiers resided before enlisting to fight for a country that was committing genocide on their people, was sometimes too hard to handle.

Memories of fathers awakening households with ear-piercing screams in the middle of the night, reliving the trauma that comes with fighting in a war. Guilt from breaking Indigenous ways of life and the Ten Commandments by killing others caused great grief and sorrow to many who returned.

We now know that war can cause post traumatic stress, but at that time, there was no help for the First Nations who returned from war.

Many returned to empty reserves, devoid of children, who were still being taken from their homes and placed in the residential school system and full of grief-stricken mothers, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers.

Several were denied essential benefits and help, living their lives in confusion and shame. They were



Cory Bilyea Photo

U.S. Marines Corporal Darren Johnston, Beth McLeod, Lila Johnston, Wendall Nadijwion, Patrick Lavalley and Jean Akiwenzie attend an event that was meant to introduce Italian author, Matteo Incerti to the residents of Neyaashiinigiim (Cape Croker), instead mourning the guest of honour. Incerti passed away on the reserve north of Wiarton on Aug. 14, 2022.

abandoned by a country that used them to fight a war that was not theirs, ridiculed by the general population of Canada, and left to fight a new battle on their own land.

"I am happy to have been able to write about these unspoken heroes of the Italian Campaign. I believe all allied soldiers who lost their lives in Italy between 1943 and 1945 deserve more attention. The 'D-Day Dodgers' were not on vacation, as the famous song says. Tens of thousands died in Italy. To share the stories of such simple yet heroic men is meaningful from a historical point of view," Incerti said.

"A citizen who ignores the history of his/her own nation is like a tree without roots, liable to fall at the first gust of wind," he added. "Being aware of our history is necessary in order to avoid committing the same mistakes over and over again. Instead of destroying statues I think it is vital to enhance education, social rights, and why

not, even explain the dark side of certain historical figures. Education is always a better alternative to destruction. We must build bridges, not dig grooves between the people of the world."

Lila Johnston (McLeod), daughter of Mary and John McLeod (who served in the First World War and was a member of the Veteran's Guard in the Second World War), sat quietly with her thoughts, taking it all in.

The older woman remembers her brothers and sister, who all went to fight in the Second World War. Unfortunately, two of her brothers never made it home, and two were wounded.

In 1972, Mary Louise McLeod became the first Indigenous Memorial Cross Mother to lay a wreath at the National War Memorial in Ottawa on behalf of all Canadian mothers.

Private Alfred Joseph McLeod, born on Oct. 10, 1914, enlisted in the Perth Regiment R.C.I.C. on Sept. 28, 1939, in Stratford and died from wounds sustained during battle on Jul. 27, 1944, at the age of 29. Alfred rests at the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery in Italy.

There are 1,615 graves at this cemetery, over 50 are unidentified, and 1,375 are Canadian.

Trooper John Joseph McLeod (Jack), born Sept. 28, 1922, joined the 1st Hussars, R.C.A.C. on June 16, 1940, in Owen Sound. He was killed in action at 21 years old on Jan. 17, 1944, and buried at the Bayeux War Cemetery in Calvados, France.

Johnston had been looking forward to sharing memories and stories with Incerti, and the tears began to flow as Rozella Johnston, who was an instrumental part in organizing his visit, presented the elder with gifts brought from Italy by the author.

Incerti came bearing gifts for those who helped him learn about the soldiers from Neyaashiinigiim

and those who were left behind.

Included in these gifts was a small, nondescript box. What was inside that box was the cause of the significant swelling of emotion that struck Johnston and everybody in the room.

Soil, gently and respectfully gathered from her brother Alfred's grave, was presented to Johnston amid tears for the past and present.

The 88-year-old grandmother held a private ceremony on Saturday, Aug. 20 at St. Mary's cemetery in Neyaashiinigiim, quietly adding the soil from her brother's grave in Italy to her mother's grave, symbolically putting them back together to rest for eternity.

Her son, Corporal Darren Johnston, is a United States Marine Corp veteran who fought in Desert Storm.

Lila's grandson, walking in the footsteps of his forefathers, recently enlisted.

The First Nations who Saved a Nation was translated into English by Angela Arnone, and the information is currently being verified by relatives and friends before being released.

According to veterans.gc.ca, "at least 3,000 First Nations members, including 72 women, enlisted, as well as an unknown number of Inuit, Métis, and other Indigenous people.

The actual numbers were no doubt much higher.

"The brave Indigenous men and women who left their homes during the Second World War to contribute to the struggle for peace were true heroes. The extra challenges that they had to face and overcome make their achievements all the more notable.

To learn more about their achievements and sacrifices, please refer to the Veterans Affairs Canada publication "Indigenous Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields," visit the Veterans Affairs Canada website at veterans.gc.ca or call 1-866-522-2122 toll free.



Submitted photo

Matteo Incerti visits the grave of an Indigenous soldier from Neyaashiinigiim at the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery in Italy, in an undated photo.