

MAANDA NDINENDA

First aid for the environment

By Ron Plain

It was 2001 when the plant I worked at hired a new General Manager. He was a bit of an odd sort but likeable. He had both saved someone and been saved by someone using First Aid.

To say he was a health and safety guy is an understatement. He posted an opportunity for "volunteers" to take the American Red Cross First Aid CPR courses. I thought to myself I'm 40-something, I should know this stuff and signed up. Of the 90 employees of the plant only one other signed up.

Our initiative earned us carte blanche. We could, at full pay, take any course the Red Cross offered. I took them all, quickly advancing up to Health and Safety representative for the plant.

I took the qualifications earned at the plant and began doing First Aid courses on Aamjiwnaang. During these courses I repeatedly stated if you do not have a first aid kit in your house, car, boat, RV and camper you were being negligent. During one of these courses one participant said if I believe that I should sell first aid kits. All of a sudden I was in the medical supply business.

My career as an environmentalist began when Sunoco decided it was okay to build an ethanol plant next to our community and I became part of the new Aamjiwnaang Environment Committee. My time on the committee took me away from my business and then the business closed. My work became being a full-time volunteer, which, in turn, led to my election as committee Chair.

On January 15th of this year I resigned my position as Chair and from the Aamjiwnaang Environment Committee. Ada Lockridge is now Chair and it has never been in better hands. She says she could never fill my shoes. I am glad to hear that

because my size 11's would look like clown feet on her. It has been a couple of months and she has settled into the position exactly as I knew she would. Change is difficult and stressful but she, and the committee, have worked through the change with focus and determination. I became a Researcher, a Consultant if you will. My exposure to the bigger picture of Aboriginal environmental issues is leading me to exciting and fulfilling opportunities to effect change on a national basis. Working with Indigenous groups from Mexico, the United States and Canada is allowing me to share our stories with international ears, and to learn from the stories and experiences of our relations in these other countries.

Making conversation with a stranger on a train almost always leads to the "What do you do?" question. When I explain what I do they ask, "How did you find a job like this?" I do not have that answer. I believe I am now doing what I was training for my entire life, that each event good or bad has led me to this point.

My writing here in the Anishinabek News allows me the opportunity to share with you the news and events of environmental issues that affect you and I. I enjoy this and am thankful I am able to write.

Over the course of the next year I will be traveling throughout Ontario talking with you. Since I need to continue to work for Aamjiwnaang's health and environmental concerns, continue to work internationally to learn how other communities have succeeded, I must also hear your stories. I need to continue to expose your stories to other Anishinabek communities so we can all learn and grow together.



Ron Plain



Ada Lockridge,
The new
Aamjiwnaang
Environment
Committee
Chairperson