

## Sahakarini Sandals – 2015 Journey

We initially thought we would take the sandals on a family trip to South Africa, but little did we know that another journey was in the works. “Life is what happens when you’re making other plans...”

A couple of weeks prior to the 2014 Loaves and Fishes dinner, about 40 Camrosians piled into a bus to hear David Suzuki speak in Edmonton on a final national tour that was to kick off the “Blue Dot Initiative”. Named after the celestial “blue dot” that is our home planet Earth, the Blue Dot movement aspired to include the right to live in a healthy environment – with clean air, clean water, and healthy food – in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The strategy is to encourage local communities to adopt a declaration affirming these rights and, moving up the various levels of government, eventually change Canada’s constitution.



Most of us returned home inspired from the evening, but with little intention to pursue the matter much further. My mom, having grown up drinking water straight from a well and never imagining a time when water would be an issue, had other plans. Thus began a family and community journey to help Camrose adopt the Blue Dot Declaration.

It is appropriate that, given the origins of the blue on our blue dot – water, the one substance that makes our planet uniquely suitable for life – this journey was one that made its way via the water element, one of four sacred elements in Cree tradition. As the Camrose Blue Dot movement grew, we visited our local water treatment plant, attended a Cree water ceremony in Maskwacis, took city councillors on a trip along the Battle River, and on three occasions visited Battle Lake, the headwaters of our watershed.



It is also appropriate that, along the way, the sandals passed through the hands of Willie Littlechild (pictured left with former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell and Maya Rathnavalu), one of three Commissioners for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada – the Commission charged with looking to reconcile Canadians with the truth about our residential school history and its ongoing destructive legacy.

In her introduction to this year’s Fall Newsletter, Sahakarini President Gail Stollee highlights our new project in India: the Pipal Tree Children’s College.

This college gathers children who have been “expelled from their traditional land and way of life” and the college’s goal is to “strengthen their education so that they will be able to participate

fully in life in modern India while at the same time valuing rather than destroying their cultural heritage.” She concludes that, “These are people displaced within their own country by the conflict between tradition and modernity.” It is interesting to note the many parallels with our own country, particularly given what we have recently learned from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission findings. We too live amidst an ongoing conflict between indigenous tradition and “modern” life.



Often this conflict plays itself out as conflict between economy and ecology. Whereas “traditional” societies view the natural elements as sacred, “modern” culture tends to view the natural world, our blue dot, as mere commodities to be exploited to grow the economy. And while the Pipal College has at its centre educational goals, we too have much to learn. Perhaps first and foremost is the understanding that a healthy economy and a

healthy environment are not mutually exclusive but, by definition, must include and encompass each other.

Tonight’s theme is “Growing Hope Together.” Healthy water, healthy air, and healthy land are the essential elements for any possible growth. Of course we must learn to work together: modern society, traditional culture, economic health and ecological integrity. And hope: if we recognize these first two points, there is infinite positive hope for the future.



The sandal’s journey, as I’m sure it has been for every other year, followed a similar hopeful path. The Blue Dot initiative was a work that brought many people in this area together: city councillors, managers, and workers, together with citizens young and old to strengthen a common vision of our community that includes all peoples, including future generations, along with the sacred elements of our natural world. I am pleased to say that this hopeful community vision grew and blossomed this year and on October 5, Camrose became the first city in Alberta to pass the Blue Dot Declaration.

