



BRENT PELTIER

(Maintenance, Shop Steward)

Aanii (Hello). My name is Brent Peltier. I’m Anishinaabe from Serpent River First Nation. I’m Bear Clan, a Sundancer, Buffalo Dancer and Pipe Carrier. I was born in Blind River, Ontario. I lived the first four years of my life on a reservation (a concentration camp). My family moved to Toronto because there were very few job opportunities for Indigenous people, due to systemic racism and colonialism.

During the 1940s/50s, the men in our family had to put their name on employers’ lists to get picked for work. Every employer was aware that the name Peltier, my family name, were Indigenous People. My family was never given employment due to employers’ racism. So, my family decided to change the spelling of our last name to the French way - “Pelletier”. That’s when my family got chosen for work.

I’ve had similar experiences with employment as I still kept the French spelling of my last name. Employers assumed that I was French. Once they met me in person, due to their racism, they declined to hire me. I’ve always worn my hair long except for a couple of years since I was 13. I wear my hair long because it’s a part of my spirit and I’m a proud Indigenous man. I also wear my hair long to honour the children who were murdered and those that survived the residential school system, like my father. They were forced to cut their hair during the cultural genocide brought on by the church, Canadian government and British crown.

I haven’t always known about my culture, I was raised as a Roman Catholic because my father was a residential school survivor and served in the Canadian military. He raised us in a non-traditional manner. My mother lived a traditional way of life - hunting and trapping. For a long time, our cultural traditions and ceremonies were outlawed by the Canadian government. I didn’t find out about my own culture until I was 13 when I met a man who belonged to the

American Indian Movement (AIM). He woke up my true identity as a young Anishinaabe man. I started singing at the drum and going to traditional social gatherings. I’ve learned different teachings through different Elders in my travels.

Working with the TTC for over 27 years, I always felt I was working under a microscope with my peers and management of how I carry myself, how I talk, how I get along with others and during TTC social events. The assumption that I drank or used drugs was always brought up to me. It was also assumed that I didn’t drink alcohol or use drugs because I had an addiction, but the reason is because it’s not part of my culture. I choose not to. As a pipe carrier, it’s a huge responsibility. Not all Indigenous people drink or use drugs, but the ones who do are suffering from a great generational trauma that dates back to first contact. Genocidal practices continue to this day, as affirmed in the Indian Act, the Truth and Reconciliation Report, the National Inquiry’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the lack of clean drinking water in many Indigenous communities.

Today’s Indigenous young people are learning to keep our cultures, languages and traditions alive. As well, they have become doctors, lawyers, professors, architects, engineers, TTC workers, etc., because of the dedication and pride that they hold for our people. I want to stress how important it is for everyone to see our resilience.

I am a member of ATU Local 113. I’m proud to have this opportunity and be given a chance to be heard as an Indigenous man from Turtle Island. ATU, being an international body, I’m proud to call you my brothers and sisters on both sides of that imaginary line they call “the border”.

Chi Miigwetch (Big Thank you)