

# Building A Future of Peace and Friendship

by **SADIE BEATON** /// EAC Staff

As a settler on Mi'kmaq lands, I have a lot to learn about Peace and Friendship. Some of my ancestors came to settle here in Mi'kma'ki during the time that treaties were first drawn up between Mi'kmaq Nation and the British crown. But even though the treaties are the law of the land, I never heard about them growing up. When I learned about relationships between Mi'kmaq communities and settlers at school, it was always in the past tense, punctuated with pioneer cabins made from popsicle sticks.

Meanwhile, Mi'kmaq folks have known all along that a blueprint for us to live well together is encoded in the Peace and Friendship treaties. I'm beginning to understand how these treaties might help us remember and re-imagine different ways to relate to each other and the land. Importantly, the Peace and Friendship Treaties are also the law here—a fact affirmed by the Supreme Court time and again, including the Marshall Decision in 1999 that reaffirmed the Mi'kmaq treaty right to fish.

I'm still learning, but I wanted to share some excerpts of conversations I have had about the treaties with Mi'kmaq rights holders.

**Rebecca Moore:** “Here on the east coast of Canada—and in some of the States—we are in unceded Mi'kmaq territory. That is unsurrendered territory where Mi'kmaq people still hold inherent title. In Mi'kmaq territory we have the strongest treaties with the crown. What we have to realize is that there is more than one nation that has jurisdiction on these lands. Not just Canada—the Mi'kmaq Nation also has jurisdiction here.”

**Cathy Martin:** “We signed a Peace and Friendship because the British were having a very difficult time conquering us. The British just could not, after a hundred year war on the water, figure out how to beat us. So they asked us to have a Peace and Friendship treaty, whereby we wouldn't attack and they wouldn't attack, and that as long as we did that, there would be certain things that everybody agreed upon. That we as Mi'kmaq live according to the way of life that we always lived for 14,000-something years, and that we as Mi'kmaq were able to continue to be who we are and that they as British, and those they signed on behalf of, would also be able to live according to what they set out in their parts of the treaty. And so, in 1752, our ancestors, very, very smart, knowing people about the next seven generations ahead, signed this Peace and Friendship treaty.”

**Barbara Low:** “Here in Mi'kma'ki, I wouldn't say that the land is stolen, I would say that it is misappropriated. Our treaty is about sharing so we by no means never have and probably never will ask the settlers to leave. We have always welcomed people here, even the uninvited, and we always will, because that is what we are about. Because we actually value true peace and true friendship. When we say peace it is not the absence of war it is the existence of good living for everyone. That's when there is peace. When everyone is fed, when everyone is comforted and comfortable that is peace. We don't have a right even as L'nu in these lands to say what can and cannot live here, or who can and cannot live here. It is however our place to instruct on how to live here if you are going to.”

“...friendship will be the soil from which a new politics will emerge.”

-Ivan Illyich

**Cathy Martin:** “The British, soon after they signed the Peace and Friendship Treaty, quickly stopped honouring that treaty, and that's a long history. But in 1985, there was the Jim Simon case, where we won the right to hunt based on Jim Simon being arrested for hunting out of season, and in 1999, the Junior Marshall case, where Marshall, who spent 11 years in jail for a murder he didn't commit, went fishing eels according to his tradition. He was arrested and fined for fishing out of season, and we took that to court and we won.”

**Madonna Bernard:** “Us as grassroots indigenous people, we think seven generations ahead; we always have. That's why we have these inherent rights to protect Mother Earth. It's in our DNA to protect the next seven generations of not just our own people, of all people, of the air, the water, the land, the animals, all of it. You know, it's there to protect everybody. That's why when we say we are all treaty people, that's what we mean by we are all treaty people. You know, but it's the indigenous people that have to move that, with our allies side by side.”

**Jim Maloney:** “I agree that we are a treaty people, and I have heard the Premier say that. His treaty is on the paper. My treaty is on land. My tracks on my ground: that's my signature, not on a piece of paper. From 1925 – 1952 it was against the law for any lawyer to represent any Mi'kmaq or any indigenous person across Canada in the courts. They would have been thrown in jail and charged for doing that if you were trying to protect any indigenous person's inherent rights. The pie is already cut up and the pie is already divided out and now there is crumbs in the plate. So now we need your help. We need the alliances to work together because water and air and treaties and resources and food are all our interests.”

**Michelle Paul:** “We have treaty. We have to uphold it. If the colonial power is not going to honour it, then what are we supposed to do? We must resist. That's what Elsipogtog was all about, it is what Alton Gas is all about. It is certainly what Idle No More is all about. We've been resisting for five hundred years. When are they going to realize we are not going to stop resisting?”

**Sadie Beaton** feels immensely grateful for the generosity of Rebecca Moore, Madonna Bernard, Barbara Low, Sipekne'katik Warrior Chief Jim Maloney, Michelle Paul, Cathy Martin and so many other Mi'kmaq folks on the many kinds of front lines. You can hear more of these conversations throughout the of the Shades of Green environmental justice podcast series, part of a case study project with the Community Conservation Research Network. It's available on Apple Podcasts or at [ecologyaction.ca/news/shades-green-exploring-environmental-justice-nova-scotia](https://ecologyaction.ca/news/shades-green-exploring-environmental-justice-nova-scotia)

