

## PART 10: Aboriginal policing

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Last Updated: 15th December 2008, 4:07pm

There is only one cop, and one court officer, dedicated to aboriginal policing in this city.

Yet some 40,000 to 80,000 live across the Greater Toronto Area.

And, as the stats plainly show, they are disproportionately more likely to end up being arrested, denied bail and sent to jail than non-aboriginals.

As a consequence, the bridge that needs to exist, between police and a vulnerable, complex population - particularly when dealing with youth and the grey area that can exist between enforcement and arrest - is tenuous.

At Toronto Police, there are only 61 "self-identified" aboriginal officers on a uniformed force of 5,510, with 2008 statistics describing 979 of its officers, or 17.5%, as visible minorities.

On the civilian side, where there are 2,100 employees, 15 are identified as First Nations personnel.

There are, however, possibly as many as 75 uniformed officers of aboriginal descent on the Toronto force, but who, for one reason or another, and some of it is because of the tangled and often broken limbs of the family tree, keep the uncertainty of their Native ancestry to themselves.

"Some have skeletons," admits Kim Turner. "And some like those skeletons tucked away in the closet.

"Some don't know the culture. Some haven't been raised in it. Some don't want to be typecast or pigeon-holed, and some just don't want to recognize the fact.

"To each his own."

Const. Kim Turner, raised in the hard-pressed Finch-Weston area of the city, Ojibway blood in her veins, heads up the Toronto Police Aboriginal Peacekeeping Unit, and has for the last five years.

It is a squad of two.

Her partner is Darryl Morrison, an Ojibway court officer who, until last month, worked the unit two days a week, and the other three in the court system.

Since then he has been officially assigned to a full-time position with the aboriginal unit.

Kim Turner is 50. Her husband, Steve Turner, a retired Toronto cop with 29 years on the job, primarily in the traffic division, is also Anishnabe, or Ojibway.

They have four adopted Native children, ranging in age from 13 to seven — boy, girl, boy, girl. The

two youngest, brother and sister by birth, were also born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and all the complexities that it creates.

Steve and Kim Turner knew this going in, but never balked at the adoption of their two youngest.

They walk the walk.

The late Sgt. Bob Crawford, founding father of the force's then three-man aboriginal peacekeeping unit that is now Kim Turner's domain, was described as "a man who built bridges and healed hearts."

He died of throat cancer in 2004, nine years after his retirement from the force, and during which time he worked with Spirit of the People, an organization that helped aboriginal ex-offenders get their lives back on track.

"We are forever changed by his death but more so by his life," his wife, Noeleen, said at a memorial ceremony at police headquarters before presenting the force with a traditional Native portrait of her husband.

That portrait — embroidered with Crawford's Native name, Waabshki Migizii (White Eagle) — now hangs in Const. Kim Turner's office.

"He still inspires me," she says.

In the spring of 1991, as if any proof were needed that the First Nations are called first nation for a reason, the bones of a 50-year-old man, his remains wrapped in moose hide, were found along the banks of a stream running through a wooded Etobicoke park.

Two Native Toronto cops — Sgt. Clayton Mitchell and Sgt. Bob Crawford, having donned his traditional regalia — performed a purification ritual with smudged sweetgrass in a private ceremony at the coroner's building before the unknown man was properly buried on a reserve.

Forensic tests revealed the man's bones had been on those banks for hundreds of years, and that his death could not be attributed to any sort of foul play.

In the year Crawford, Mitchell, and Const. Bill Williams stepped into their roles as the first aboriginal peacekeeping unit, there were only 17 officers of Native descent on the entire Toronto force.

In the year Crawford died, there were 40.

Now, four years later, there are at least 60-plus, but only two assigned in the aboriginal unit.

It wasn't until the death of her father, in 1987, that Kim Turner became aware of her Native background, a situation that was not wholly accepted by all her family.

"It was at that point that I decided to embrace the culture, and learn it," says Turner. "My husband is Native from his mother's side, and here we were, already together.

"It was as if fate had come into play."

It was after the adoption of their first child that Kim Turner decided to put in for the aboriginal unit at Toronto Police, and she has been its fulcrum ever since.

“For one thing, it was a way for me to give back to the community that gave us our children,” she says.

Sitting in her office under the portrait gaze of Bob Crawford, Turner sees the primary role of the aboriginal unit as a conduit between the Native community and the police.

“If they come from up north, how do you access the police in the case of an emergency? It could be as simple as that,” she says. “I also provide the liaison between the various police divisions, and the Native community who live in those divisions ... because they are scattered.”

In Toronto alone, there are 54 Native agencies, and Kim Turner has most of them on her speed dial and the names of most of the key personnel etched in her brain.

She rhymes them off.

“We do a lot of outreach from this office,” she says. “We have such a vast area to cover.

“This unit was established to meet the need of the aboriginal people in Toronto. We know, historically, that the relationship between the police and the aboriginal people has not been good.

“That goes way back to the residential schools, and the RCMP taking the children out of their homes at the order of the government — with police, in general, having to carry the can for that abuse.

“So, the unit was desperately needed, and Bob Crawford made it happen.”

If there was an influence on Turner’s life, as a mentor and as a front-line police officer, it was, of course, Bob Crawford.

“He convinced me, especially after the adoption of our son in 1995, to be proud of where I came from,” she says. “And to instil that pride in your children, just as he instilled it in his.

“His influence was tremendous.

“He was a very special person.”

Tomorrow: Martin Blackwind