



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

Everyone deserves respect

BY BRANDON WALKER
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I'VE often compared sports to life, because the struggles and challenges sometimes feel the same, but I wish life wasn't competitive in the same way.

I recently watched a Facebook debate with interest. A friend of mine posted an article that sparked a discussion about white privilege. Her friend didn't seem to understand what it means.

He kept saying he didn't grow up privileged. I didn't grow up privileged, either. My parents divorced when I was six years old. Nothing was handed to me on a silver platter, but I understand what white privilege is and how it may hold other people back.

White privilege is a difficult concept to describe. Perhaps it's about respect. As a white male, I have never walked down the street and worried that someone might throw an egg — or anything else — at me. It could happen, sure, but I don't believe it will happen to me.

I've interviewed for a few jobs I wasn't hired for, and never wondered if it was due to the colour of my skin. I've never been blatantly followed by staff while shopping. There are many other examples I could provide, but I think you understand my point.

stand my point.

I was raised to believe that it's not about the colour of your skin or where you come from. Everyone deserves respect, whether you are rich or poor, white or any other skin tone.

As a kid, most of my time was spent playing basketball with anyone and everyone — it didn't matter if the person was older, younger, or a person of colour.

If you showed up with running shoes (or in some cases, bare feet) and you wanted to play, it would be a battle, but in the end we would shake hands or slap a high five, and life would go on.

That's the beauty of sports. It's a level playing field. If you put in the work, you'll be successful — if only by winning. Even if you lose, you know you tried your best and everyone was playing by the same rules.

Sometimes I wish life were more like sports — at least the teamwork part of sports, but not the competition. We should all work together, not against one another.

People shouldn't be judged on where they come from, what they look like, how they speak, or for the things their great-great-grandparents did.

Perhaps we're all just struggling to survive, but it shouldn't be that way.

It should be about your attitude, ambition and potential, your energy, how hard you're willing to work, and what you're willing to do to be successful.

It should be a level playing field where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, where everyone is given a fair chance to live a life free of discrimination, poverty and harassment.

I know Thunder Bay has issues, but I choose to stay positive and hope that things will improve for everyone here.

Brandon Walker is a communications professional who has lived in Thunder Bay since 2009.