

Thanadelthur: The Peacemaker

During the years of the fur trade, life up north was hard for everyone, but for the Dené people it was particularly difficult. In those days, the Ojibway referred to the Dené people as "Chipewyan." In the Ojibway language, this meant "people with pointed parkas." Today, we call this First Nation Dené, which means "the people."

In 1713, a young Dené woman named Thanadelthur and some other Dené people were taken captive by the Cree. After about a year, she and another woman escaped and set out to find their own people. It was not easy to find her people. The two women often had to change their travel route in order to find food or to escape danger. Thanadelthur and her friend searched for nearly a year, but they did not find their people. They decided to travel to Fort York where they knew they would be allowed to stay. Five days before they reached Fort York, Thanadelthur's friend died.

The Hudson's Bay governor, James Knight, was willing to help Thanadelthur, but in exchange he needed her help translating the language to English. He needed a translator to help him trade with the Dené people. These people had valuable furs, and they also talked of having copper and "yellow metal." Knight thought the yellow metal might be gold. Governor Knight knew that if he wanted to have profitable fur trade, he had to help make peace between the Cree and the Dené.

In early June, the governor hosted a feast for the Cree who lived around the fort, and persuaded them to go on a peace mission to the Dené. There were about 150 people in the group, and Thanadelthur was the interpreter. They took special gifts to the Dené people. Thanadelthur was so important that the governor sent a trader named William Stuart to protect her.

It was a difficult trip. People got sick, and they soon began to run out of food. Most of the group returned to the fort, but Thanadelthur, Stuart, and about a dozen Cree people carried on. Finally, they found a group of about 400 Dené people.

Thanadelthur talked for ten days, until the two groups agreed and smoked a pipe of peace. Some of the Dené returned to the Fort with the Cree and Thanadelthur.

Knight planned to send Thanadelthur to bring more people, but she never made the trip. That winter, she became ill and died within several weeks.

Nobody knows when Thanadelthur was born, but it is estimated that she was born sometime around 1690. She died in York Factory on February 5, 1717. She was only about 27 years old when she died. She did a lot in those 27 years! She is remembered as a brave Dené woman who helped bring peace to the people of the north.

Date: _____

Names: _____

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Important events in the story:

Plans for your presentation:

Materials needed for your presentation:

