



in order to entice the public to come by, we bought a collection of delicate mismatched teacups from the local thrift stores and dropped them off in conspicuous places across the city: on park benches, in bus shelters, on fire hydrants and parking metres – with tags that read “Please take me back to the Whitwater Gallery, 143 Main Street West, have a cup of tea and share a story!”

When the teacups were returned we noted where they were found, photographed the visitors, and welcomed them to join us for a cup of tea and draw, write, or tell us about their Four Lands. In this way we collected the stories of over fifty residents of Nipissing: stories from youth, elders, mothers and children from North Bay, Nipissing First Nation and surrounding areas.

In the evenings, the residency moved to the Big Medicine Studio at Nipissing First Nation, where Penny Couchie and Sid Bobb run Aanmi-taagzi, an organization that engages the local community in large-

scale creative projects and also welcomes children, youth and adults to weekly workshops in contemporary dance, traditional drumming and singing and other activities.

At Big Medicine Studio we sat with groups of children and youth in nightly workshops, and invited them to relate to us through drawing what they felt was encompassed within their Four Lands. We closed the workshops by sharing our stories through a collective poem or creative dialogue.

The week ended with a Winter Solstice celebration at the Big Medecine Studio, with all involved invited to come and see what had been collected and created throughout the week.

The Four Lands of Nipissing micro-residency project was a success on a number of levels. It was heartwarming to be so welcomed into the community, and have so many willing participants come and share their stories.

Many friendships were fostered throughout the week – between artists and community members, and between people of all ages and backgrounds. The project brought people from the city of North Bay, the community of Nipissing First Nation and the surrounding area together in the spirit of creative collaboration.

We learned during this experience that although many people share the same physical and geographic boundaries, their experiences within those boundaries can be vastly different, as everyone draws from their own personal, cultural and communal histories and perspectives to express their relationship to a place. What also emerged were common threads: connection with nature, distrust of cities, an inherent attraction to the calmness of a lake.



The project also reconfirmed that, if asked, people will come together to share and create. Many people, from many places of knowing, will respond if they are invited, because this work is infused with the guiding principle that ‘everyone is welcome’. It seems simple, but it is elegantly true.

...the four lands of nippissing



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