

Harper could not make the PMO dealers understand that he was not there to deal, just to listen out of politeness. They could not comprehend why he could not be bought when everyone else they had ever encountered was buyable.

But the PMO delegation did not know that, nearly 10 years ago, Elijah Harper had been one of the Canadian chiefs who had gone to London to ask the Queen to make sure aboriginals were as fairly treated in the constitution as those who dared to call themselves the "founding" races of Canada.

They did not know that he had refused his invitation to attend the signing ceremony when the Queen came to Ottawa in 1982.

They did not know that he has been waiting 10 years for this moment.

They thought that he was in this for the short run.

Still, they did wear him down, and Elijah Harper is convinced that if it weren't for the feather, he might not have lasted.

Found feather

His older brother, Saul, a trapper and a dedicated follower of the traditional ways, felt that he was being told to walk to a clearing near Red Sucker Lake. He got there, and the eagle feather was lying in the middle of it.

Saul Harper gave it to Darryl Harper, a younger brother, and Darryl immediately brought it down to Winnipeg, where he gave to Elijah.

Elijah Harper rose to speak against the accord in the legislature, carefully holding the eagle feather. He spoke and then sat to a standing ovation, carefully placing the feather in his pocket.

The feather, he decided, would go to the young baby who was born in the midst of all this turmoil.

It will be a reminder to the child that powerful forces were at work in Canada in the second last week of June, 1990.