

Lost hunter considered suicide

Jan 18

By Tom Blackwell
The Canadian Press

As the temperature plummeted, a frigid, soaking Allen Trudeau figured he would die in the snow-covered bush of Northern Ontario.

Unable to face death from exposure, the lightly dressed Ojibwa hunter from Manitoulin Island considered suicide using the rifle slung over his shoulder.

"I almost gave up," Trudeau said Monday from the Wikwemikong reserve, reflecting on his 10-day ordeal in the woods.

But then, despite a mind muddled by three nights without sleep, his will to survive surged back.

"When I thought of my people I felt stronger," said the soft-spoken Trudeau, 35. "I was thinking of my wife and my kids and I had to keep going."

Days later and long after the provincial police had given him up for dead, volunteer searchers from Wikwemikong finally found him on Dec. 30.

It's a story of survival against the elements that brought an impoverished native community closer together.

Two reserve residents rented helicopters with \$4,000 of their own money to look for Trudeau. Another got lost himself and had to sleep standing up in a tree to evade the wolves on his trail.

*'I was thinking of
my wife and my
kids and I knew I
had to keep going.'*
Allen Trudeau

One member of the band, a self-described clairvoyant, buoyed the community's spirits with a prediction that Trudeau, who has a one-year-old daughter and another child on the way, was still alive a week after he was last seen.

Trudeau set out Dec. 21 to the mainland — near Killarney on the northern shore of Georgian Bay — with two hunting companions, dressed only in sweat pants, rubber boots and a flannel work shirt.

One of the estimated 90 per cent of Wikwemikong residents who are unemployed, he doesn't normally hunt after the deep snows of winter come but was "desperate" to bring back meat for Christmas dinner.

As he followed deer tracks, Trudeau became lost in the dense bush, then kept walking for three days and nights, wandering far away from his friends.

When he crashed through ice

and up to his waist in river water, he was ready to give up. The temperature was around -40 C.

But he found a cabin and some food that helped him survive a few days more until he walked into a camp where one of the searchers was tending a fire.

"I cried," he recalls shyly. "I was just so happy to see someone."

Provincial police searched for him Dec. 23 and 24, assigning 11 officers, tracking dogs and a helicopter. But, by Christmas Eve, they were convinced he was dead or had wandered far out of the search area.

The police search was ended

Boxing Day.

"All the searchers and his hunting companions were of the opinion we were no longer searching for someone who was alive," said Insp. Wayne Nethery.

There was nothing more police could have done, Nethery says.

But volunteers took up where the police left off.

There were some tense moments as one of the searchers got lost. But he showed up about the same time as Trudeau, having slept inside a hole in a tree warmed by a small fire, said Josh Eshkawkogan, the Wikwemikong man who headed the volunteer search party.