

WALKING
WITH
A'NÓ:WARA



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Walking with A'no:wara

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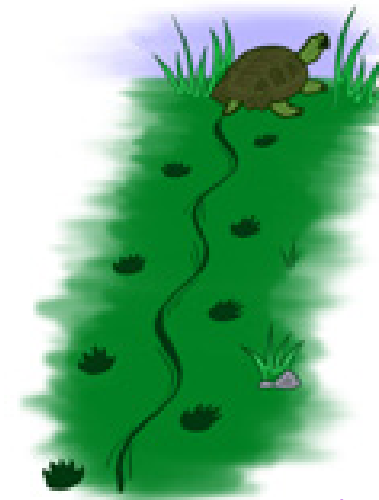
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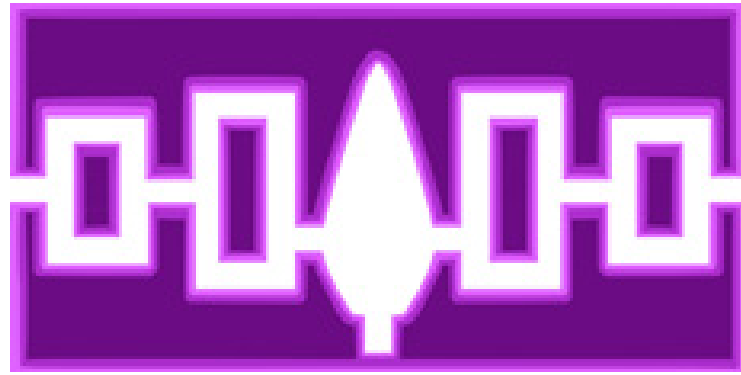
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Special mention and thanks goes to Rick Hill Senior who skillfully reworked the story to be culturally reflective of the Haudenosaunee nation and to Wesley "Tehawannahkwa" Miller who patiently provided all of the translations.

All my relations,
Misheeken n'dodem, Shkode Neegan Wawaskone,
Shawanaga n'doonji Anishinaabe Kwe n'dow.
Turtle Clan, Kim Wheatley, Head of the Fire Flower,
Shawanaga First Nation, Anishinaabe

WELCOME

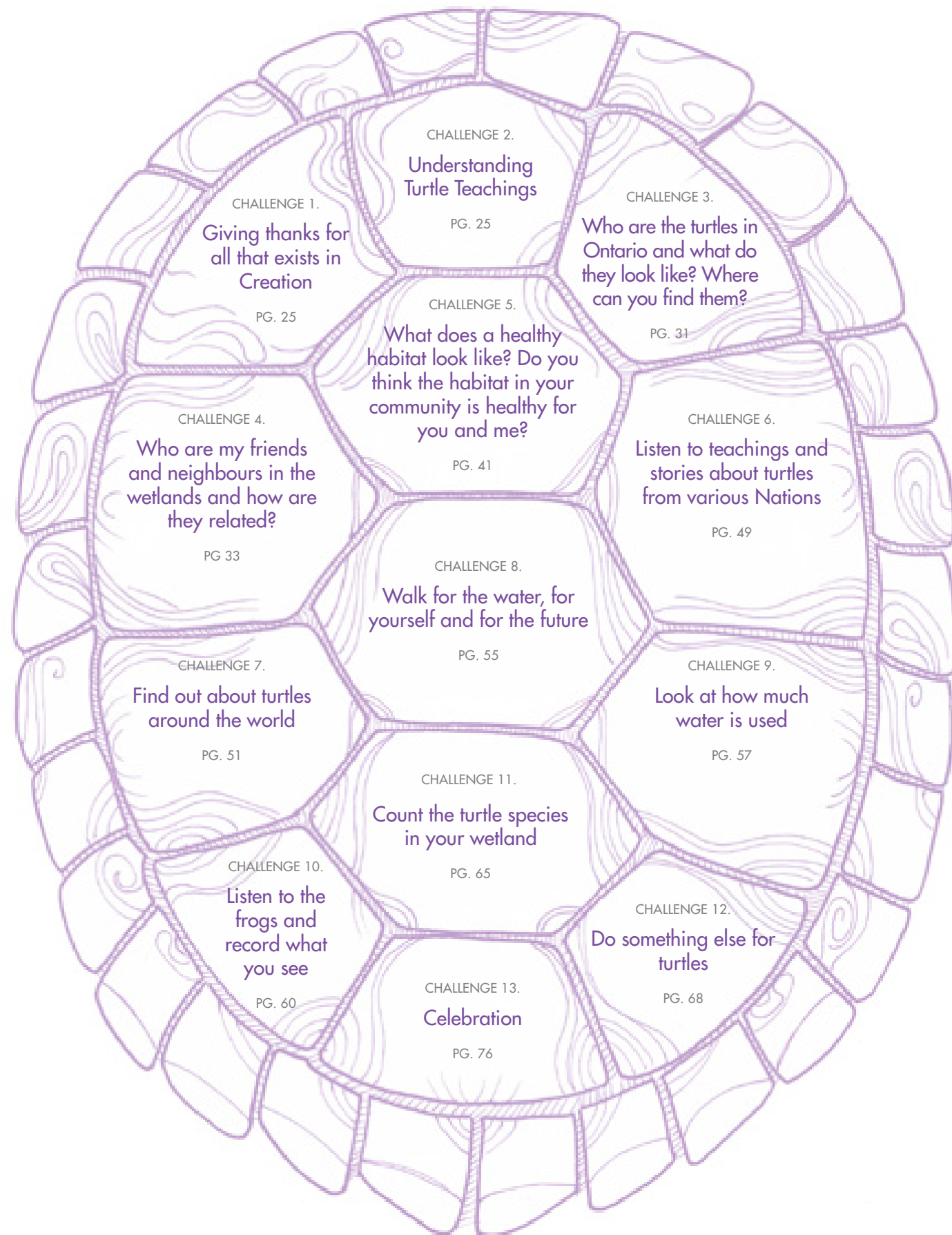
She:kon and Welcome to Walking with *A'nó:wara*! This story is designed to invite readers into the world of turtles designated Species at Risk through the eyes of *A'nó:wara*, a snapping turtle.

This is a journey which enlists the Traditional Knowledge of the Haudenosaunee People. The wisdom and knowledge contained in this book includes the authentic voices of recognized Traditional Knowledge Keepers located in the upper Great Lakes region of Ontario, Canada.

The Toronto Zoo's Turtle Island Conservation programme hopes that as you take this journey with *A'nó:wara*, you will gain an insight into the distinct ways of knowing of the Haudenosaunee People and effectively contribute to the preservation of wetlands and the creatures that inhabit them for generations to come.



A'NÓ:WARA'S THIRTEEN CHALLENGES



INTRODUCTION

By Henry Lickers

She:kon My Friends,

I hope this story reaches you and your families in good health and spirits.

My H.S.T. (harmonized sales tax) name is Henry Lickers, I'm Seneca Nation, Turtle Clan, Haudenosaunee.

I was born on the Six Nation Reserve near Brantford, Ontario Canada and as a young boy lived with my Great Grandmother and Grand Parents until I was 13 years old. I received my understanding and knowledge of the world from my family and my education from Trent University and the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I am a biologist who has worked with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne for the past 35 years.

Turtles and their stories are near and dear to my heart. As a Turtle Clan member, I know that the World starts with the arrival of Sky Woman who fell from the Sky World. While the geese helped to slow her fall, they could not hold her. The animals of the world would have despaired if the Great Turtle had not agreed to bear Skywoman on her back. Today North America is known as Turtle Island.

To Western Society this may be a quaint story, but it reflects the philosophy of the North American Aboriginal People. The turtle reflects the obligation and commitment that all living things, including people, should have to support the Natural World and all of creation. This version of the creation of the world is no different than that of any other society of the world. Turtles are viewed as spiritual creatures with vast knowledge and good power.

There are many turtles that live in Canada and the United States. Some are abundant and some are listed on the Endangered Species List. Although Painted turtles are not listed, they are not as abundant as they were at the

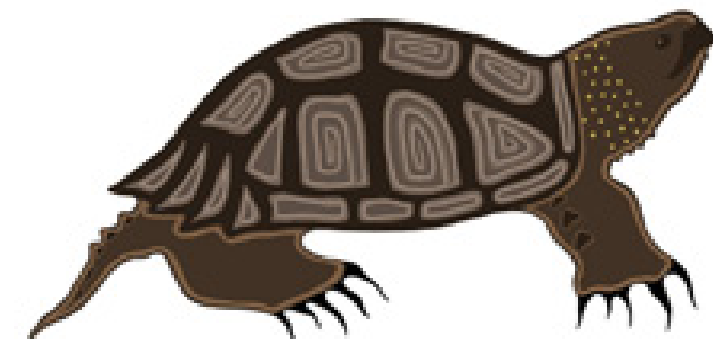
time of first contact with Europeans. Turtles such as Spotted, Stinkpot, Blanding's, Northern Map and Spiny Softshelled are considered rare to endangered. These are protected by the Species at Risk Act in Canada, one of the few Provincial Acts that include First Nation values.

Turtles are a good indicator of environmental contaminants. In Akwesasne, snapping turtles contain many types of organic and inorganic contaminants; so much so that they exceed the definition of toxic waste under the Environmental Protection Act and Environment Canada. If they are caught, their meat cannot be consumed and would have to be disposed of as toxic waste. This condition is appalling to the Mohawk People of Akwesasne.

A System of Clans gave everyone the protection of extended matrilineal families. The totem of the clan was to inspire its members to greatness and to follow the ways of Peace. The Turtle Clan is one of the major clans of the Haudenosaunee. The Turtle is revered for its ability to plan and stay the course. To have a Clan totem contaminated by industrial poison means that the very foundations of the world are threatened and would be considered obscene to the Haudenosaunee.

The Turtle's place in the environment makes it a good indicator of the physical world, even at its own expense. The preservation of these animals is everyone's duty. Anyone who wantonly destroys these animals is committing a crime against Mother Earth, against the Haudenosaunee, all First Nations and against Canada. In times past, wanton destruction of the environment was considered a capital crime and could earn someone banishment from the nation forever.

Turtles, to all Aboriginal people are the very foundation of the spiritual, physical and political world and each of them have their own stories.



GREETING THE NEW DAY

CHAPTER 1

Tota Ma marvelled at the beauty of a new day. The early morning light was just beginning to fill the eastern sky and *Orhen'kene* was calling the sun back for another day's journey. It was time to give thanks and greet all of Creation. As Tota Ma got ready, she thought about the importance of giving thanks to the Creator for all the gifts given to the *Onkwehonwe*. Tota Ma worried that people

were forgetting how to be thankful. Tota Ma liked to use the *Ohenton Karihwaterhkwen* which she learned from her *Akoso'tha* who grew up speaking *Kanyen'keha*.

She stepped out into the beautiful morning sunshine and placed an offering of *oyen'kwa'onwe* on the water. She then began offering thanks:

Ohenton Karihwaterhkwen

Teyethinonhweratons ne onkweshon'a
Teyethinonhweratons ne yethinihstenha tsi yohwentsyake
teyethinonhweratons ne kahnekaronnyon
teyethinonhweratons ne kentsyonshon'a
teyethinonhweratons ne ohenteshon'a
teyethinonhweratons ne ononkwashon'a
teyethinonhweratons ne otsinonwashon'a
teyethinonhweratons ne kahikshon'a
teyethinonhweratons ne tyonnhehkwen
teyethinonhweratons ne kontiriyo
teyethinonhweratons ne karontashon'a tahnnon okwireshon'a
teyethinonhweraton ne otsi'ten'okon'a
teyethinonhweratons ne kayeri nikawerake
teyethinonhweratons ne yethisothokon ratiwerahs
tethsitewanonhweratons ne etsitewatsi'a tyohkenekha karahkwa
teyethinonhweratons ne yethiso'tha ahsontennekha wennitaratyes
teyethinonhweratons ne yotsistokwaronnyon tsi tkaronhyake
tethsitewanonhweratons ne shonkwaya'tison
thok nikawennake



Tota Ma always felt good hearing or saying these words. She felt great joy when she visited the Quinte Mohawk School at Tyendinaga and heard students reciting the *Ohenton Karihwaterkwon* during the morning announcements. Their voices sounded so wonderful! She closed her eyes and thought about how it must have been in times long ago, when all *Rotinonhsyonni* people greeted the morning this way. It made her feel that it was possible for the cycle of life to continue as originally intended.

As a little girl, Tota Ma was taught by her grandparents the importance of being grateful and thankful for the many gifts given by the Creator. Her grandparents taught her to be thankful for the things often taken for granted in life, like the sun and the moon. Teachings share that two suns were created in the sky. One sun was the daytime sun, and he was called the Big Man. Elders say that the rays of sun are like the hands of the Creator and with those hands, touch each one of us when the light surrounds every human on earth. The second sun is the night time sun, our grandmother. The Elders say she walks twenty-eight to thirty days on a single predictable path in the universe. As she does this, she orchestrates the women of every nation.



Tota Ma was told that, as the youngest members of Creation, humans depend upon everything else for daily life. This included a teaching from her *Akoso'tha* about the importance of trees. Her *Akoso'tha* said that with every breath taken in comes oxygen that the tree gives as a gift. With every breath out, carbon dioxide returns to the tree. One responsibility of the tree is to take up carbon dioxide and store it in its trunk so the air is clean and healthy. The air is like the breath of the Creator, provided so that we can continue to live on this Great Turtle Island in good health.



Her *Akoso'tha* also said that trees are important because they provide people with fuel to heat their homes, shade on a hot summer day, wood for making tools and utensils, and food as well. They provide food for bugs who like to munch on leaves, and become a home for birds. Tota Ma was taught that wood from trees can make good baskets. She was also told about the medicines that come from trees. Tea from the buds and the bark, as well as syrup and sap, help people to stay healthy. In the old days, the *Rotinonhsyonni* would make long houses covered with bark of the mighty Red Elm.

That tree has suffered because of bugs that came from Europe. Today most Red Elms have been eaten away.

Tota Ma could remember hugging trees as a child and it would feel like the trees were hugging back. She would also place an offering of *oyen'kwa'onwe* at the base of the tree and say *wa'ikonnonhweratons*. Now a grandmother, Tota Ma must think about ways she can explain to her grandchildren the importance of knowledge, respect, and gratitude for the gifts of Creation.

TURTLE TEACHINGS

CHAPTER 2



These were some of their favourite foods and the children could already tell it was going to be a great visit!

After supper, everyone enjoyed watching the colourful sunset over the water. The children played the listening game and they tried to count the many different sounds they could hear as the birds gathered to sing a goodnight song to the sun. Wari and Sewatis realized that there were more sounds at Tota Ma's house than there were in the city.

Just as the mosquitoes started to buzz, cousin Sose rode up on his bike.

"She:kon Tota Ma, are they here yet? Oh great! Hey there, Sewatis."

"Hey Sose!" said Sewatis.

"I am so excited that you are here! Wari how are you? Did your Tota tell you about the work she is doing this summer down at the marsh? You should see her up to her ankles in mud! Tota Ma, tell us about your dream again!" Sose urged. The other children were excited to hear a story from their Tota as well!

As the sky began to darken and evening arrived, Tota Ma pulled her shawl up over her shoulders and settled into her favourite chair. Sewatis and Wari curled up at her feet.

Wari read the note over one last time as the bus turned off the highway and pulled into the stop at Tyendingaga. With a smile, she put the piece of paper into her backpack, nudged her brother Sewatis awake, and collected her belongings. Their adventure was about to begin!

Tota Ma was waiting and gathered the children in her arms with a big welcoming hug.

"Kwe kwe! Kwe kwe! My beautiful grandchildren, I am so glad that you have come. We are going to have a wonderful summer together!" she exclaimed.

When Tota Ma and her grandchildren arrived at her house, there was a fresh pan of corn bread, baked fish, and cranberry juice waiting for them.

Wari noticed that Tota Ma was wearing a nice pair of moccasins with turtles beaded on each one. She hoped to have a pair like that some day. Sose leaned on the railing, impatiently waiting for Tota Ma to share her dream.

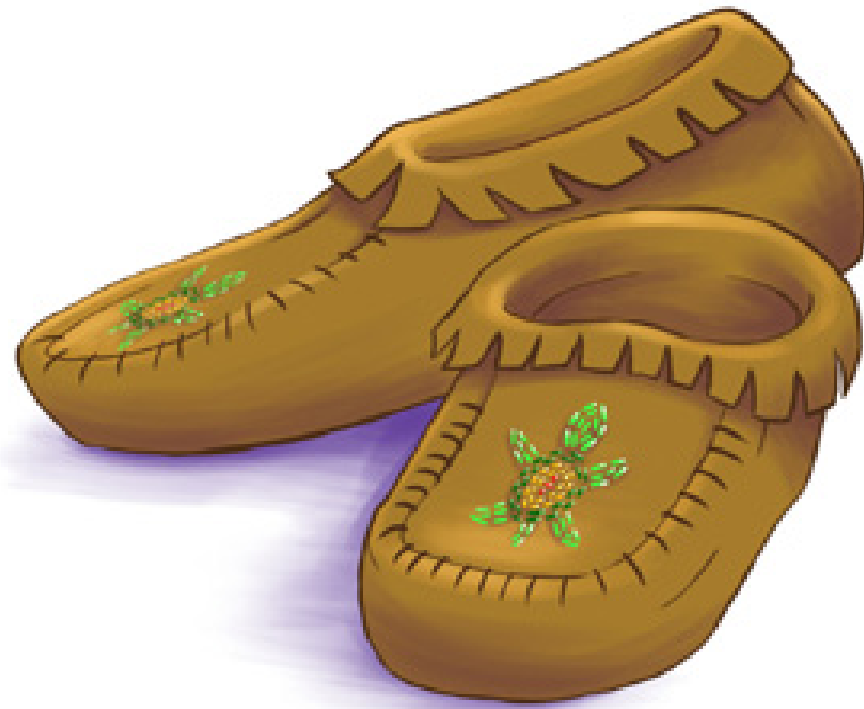
"You know my children," Tota Ma began, "when I was young, my grandparents told me that dreams are very important. They hold special significance for us and we should listen to them carefully. I would like to share with you a dream that I had about Turtle Teachings. Do you remember the Creation Story I shared with you last summer?" asked Tota Ma.

"Yes!" exclaimed Sose. "That was my favourite story. It is about turtles, right? Can you share it again?" he asked.

"Of course, my grandson. It is one of my favourites as well. I would love to tell you the Creation story shared with me by my grandparents."

Our Creation Story begins in a place called Karonhià:ke. It is a beautiful place where people live in bark-covered longhouses, plant corn and play lacrosse. It is place of magic and mystery.

This lady from the Sky World is named Atsi'tsiakà:. And in the middle of this world, there was a special tree that grew. They called it the Life Tree because it produced the things that made everything live. It was such a powerful life-giving



source that its blossoms glowed, giving off light so the Sky Beings could see how beautiful their world was. This tree also had everything growing on it. It had apples, peaches, plums, cherries, pears, every kind fruit you could imagine. Since this tree grew everything, it had a power.

And they were told that the tree would provide such sustenance only if the people were patient and respectful, giving the fruit time to ripen so that all could enjoy its bounty. This is an important teaching from the Sky World that we should pay attention to in our world.

Now there was a woman in the Sky World who got pregnant. When a woman gets pregnant, a new life begins to form in her body. So it affects the woman as she prepares to give birth. Her body begins to transform. While this is happening it is

important that she stay in a good mood and have what they call the Good Mind – kind thoughts and words to share.

However, as her body changes, so does her moods. So sometimes she is in a good mood, a happy mood. And then the next minute or the next half hour, she can feel angry or lonely. A minute later she could feel something else.

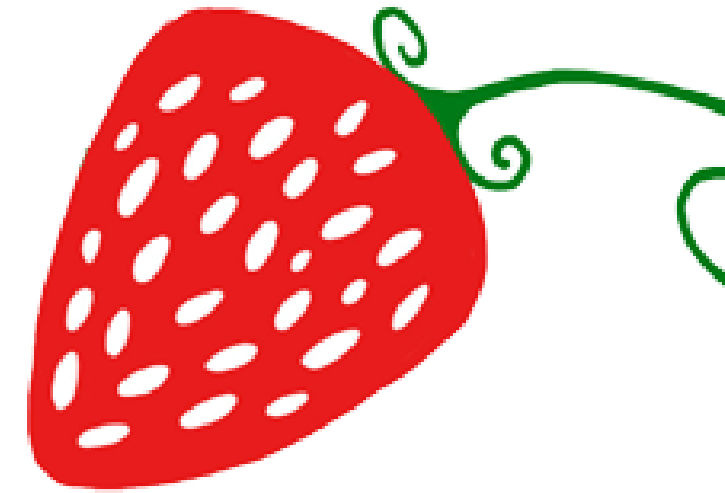
So this pregnant woman in the Sky World says to the Old Man who was guarding the Tree of Life, "I would have no greater pleasure, my husband, than if you were to go over to that tree, and get some of its small tender fresh roots, and its bark, its skin. Make a tea for me to drink. I would be so satisfied, and I would have such great peace."

Her husband answers, "Did you forget that we are not supposed to touch that tree?"

"Get over there and do what I asked," she said, "instead of talking about stuff like that."

He jumped up and got over to the big, beautiful tree with all of its fruit. He looked at the tree, and he was still reluctant. He did not want to do it. So he looked at that tree, and he went a little bit closer, but he did not touch it. He looked again. And right close to the base of the tree, there was a hole that appeared from nowhere, among the roots of the tree.

"Hmmm", he says, "you cannot see the bottom of it." And he was not going to get any closer. That



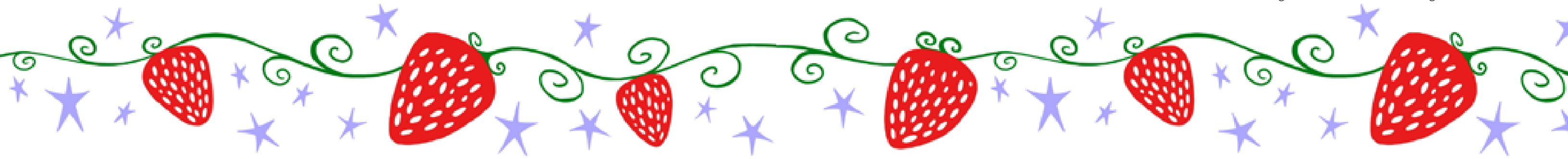
was enough for him. He backed off. So he went back home.

However, the pregnant woman asked, "You got that medicine or that root?"

"I could not do it," he says as he walks away.

"What is wrong with you?" she says, "Why won't you help me?"

The Old Man felt bad. She wouldn't give him a chance to explain anything either. She went over there and she saw that hole in the ground next to the tree. She said, "Gee, that's true, what he said. I wonder what did that?" She went closer and she looked at the hole. "I can't even see how far down it is." So she got on her hands and knees and she put her nose right to it and looked at it really hard. And that was not enough. This time she stuck her head in there. And she said, "Wow. I can't see what is down there, but I can hear animals and birds and it sounds like waves of water!" As she was busy investigating around in that hole, she did not notice that the grains of dirt were falling, as the hole



was getting bigger. The next thing you know she started to fall. She frantically tried to grab anything she could reach. And they say, because this was the Tree of Life, there were all kinds of seeds, things that fell around those roots onto the ground below, at the base of the tree. And as she tried to avoid falling, she grabbed at the edge of the hole and her hands became full of various kinds of seeds and plant roots.

Then, she began to fall down through the dark sky, through the atmosphere, tumbling, head over heels. And as she was falling down, you have to remember that on this earth where we live today did not exist. There was no land – no mountains, no valleys. The complete planet was surrounded by water. The only ones that lived here were turtles, fish, beavers, otters, muskrats, ducks, and geese. And all these creatures had webbed toes and fingers in order to survive in the water. But deer did not live here or any of those kinds of things that did not have webbed feet.

As she came falling down and caused such a commotion, all of the creatures of the water world held a council and decided to send up a flock of water birds to check it out. And they said, “What is that coming down here?” They had never seen such a creature. They did not know what it was. So they flew over close to where she was falling and they examined her. They looked at her skin, and they noticed it was not like the skin they had for water. And they looked at her toes and fingers and they noticed there was nothing between them; they were not webbed to help her swim. So they gathered that she was not from their world – the world of water. And if she was going there, she would not survive.

They felt sorry for her, and they tried to intervene. So what they said was “Let’s all fly together. We’ll hook our wings together and make a soft feathery place so she can gently fall on our bodies. We’ll catch her. Then she won’t get hurt. And we’ll try

to take her back where she came from because we don’t think she can survive in this water where we live.”

So they caught her gently on their feathery backs, and they began to go in an orchestrated way. They flew her way up high, as far as they could go. Pretty soon they became totally exhausted. They just did not have the energy to go any farther up. They came to the realization that they just could not get her back up there. It was too far, too high. They had run out of strength.

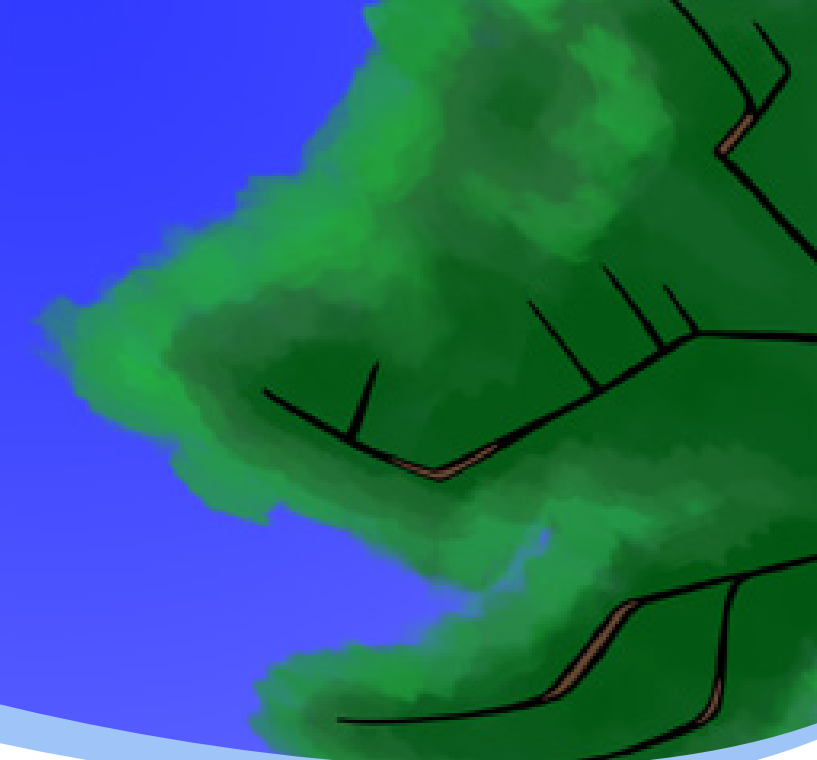
“We’ll have to take her to where we live. We don’t know what we’re going to do when we get there, though. She’s in trouble. We can’t fix that. Only choice we’ve got, so we better find something to help us.” And one of them said, “You go down first. Dive down there and tell all the different life in the water that there is a great emergency. Tell them what is happening. Maybe together they can find a way to think of a plan to help this being.”

So the water animals held a second council and it was decided that they needed to provide a safe place for her to land. At first, they were completely

befuddled about it. First a giant muskie offered his back but they said it was not big enough. Others offered but they too were too small. Just as they were ready to quit, since they did not have any options, the big turtle spoke up. And that turtle said, “I don’t really have an answer, either. But I might have a temporary answer. How about if when they get down here, you tell them to put that creature right in the middle of my back. I’ll stay afloat up on top of the water, and I’ll hold her up. And then we can try to keep thinking about what we might do to help her.”

So when they got down, they put her on that turtle. And she stood there. And all the animals came from every direction, of all sizes and shapes and forms. They were all curious to see what this creature was. And they looked at her. And they came to the same conclusion as the birds did – that she had to have land so she would not drown in the water.

And then she opened up her hands. She showed them that she had a strawberry plant. She had all those seeds in her hand, which were to be her food source. But there was no dirt to plant them. So the beaver said, “Dirt. I think I remember my grandfather



and great grandfathers talking one time when I was just a young kid. I heard that below this big water somewhere, way down, there is dirt down there. But we've never seen it. We've never been down there."

Then the otter said, "I seem to have heard that too, from our grandpa, and elders. They said that there was dirt." And they all came to the same conclusion. They had heard it. But none of them had ever been

there. So finally the beaver said, "Well, I have a big tail, you know. And it can push me, and I can go fast, and I'm a good swimmer. And I can hold my breath a long time. I could go and try to retrieve that dirt. And if I do, then I'll bring it for her, and she can plant those seeds, and she will have food."

So he took a run and a jump and he dove. He splashed into the water, and down he went. And he was gone a long time. And all of a sudden, his body popped out of the water. And everybody saw him. He was lifeless. He was not moving at all. It appeared that he had drowned; he had died. And so they pulled his body up there. And sure enough, he had drowned. He had never made it to the bottom of the big water.

So then the otter tried it. And then different ones tried it. They all took turns, but they all died. Finally, a little tiny one, the smallest one – the muskrat – he came forward. He does not have anything to help him to be great. He is just a little tiny thing, not like the beaver, not like the otter

with their streamlined bodies that make them swift as an arrow. He is just a skinny little old muskrat. But all the other creatures had tried it, and they could not do it, so now he was their last chance. So they were all looking at him. And if there was a place to hide, I suppose he would have hid. But there was no place. So he felt he had to be brave; he had to do his share. He said, "Well, I'm not a good swimmer. I don't have a big tail like the beaver to propel me down in the water. All I am is just a little old muskrat. And if they didn't make it, probably I'm not going to make it either. But at least I'm going to try."

So they said okay. And so he ran along on top of that turtle's back. And he jumped and he dove in and down he went. He was gone longer than every one of those animals. All of a sudden, his little old scroungy body came popping up on top. His eyes were closed. And there was no movement in his body whatsoever. And he, it appeared, had gone as well. He did not make it.

So the other animals, they went over there and grabbed him. They dragged him up on top of the turtle's back to examine him, to see if he was dead. They touched him all over, and he was cold as ice. But finally when they touched around his chest, they felt a little warmth and a little movement. A movement so faint...but he was living. So they pushed on his stomach, and water came up. And they pushed on his stomach, and more water came up. As they revived him, his eyes opened up, and he started to blink. And when they opened his little tiny black hand, there were some little granules of the dirt there, from the big water.

And so when he came to, he went over there to that woman and he gave it to her, that dirt. Everybody was happy. All the animals were so elated, so joyous, because they were able to do it



in their combined efforts, through great sacrifice. Life could begin. And so the woman took the dirt. And she put it right there in the middle of the turtle's back. And then she started a kind of slow, sideways shuffle dance in a circle where that dirt was in the middle. And as she started to move she started chanting the language of Karonhià:ke, for that's where she was from.

And as she went around there, the miracle of birth began. And the granules of dirt began to multiply and grow. Instead of a little speckle, it had become a pile. As the dirt began to grow she used the movement of her feet to spread it out, forming a small island on the back of the Turtle. And as she continued to sing or to chant that song, it began to multiply even more. And not only that, but the turtle began to grow in accordance with the growth of that dirt. And as she continued to go around in an even bigger circle, the turtle grew and grew until it became bigger. And

there was wall-to-wall dirt covering it now. That was the miracle of birth of this land.

So this island got bigger and bigger until it became what they call the Great Turtle Island. That is why the Lakota, the Blackfoot, the Mohawks, most all of the original people, when they refer to the earth, call it Turtle Island. That is what we call this earth where we live. And it came from this story.

(used with permission from Tom Porter's book, "And Grandma says")

When Tota Ma finished telling the story, the grandchildren began to shuffle in their seats.

"Gosh, I love that story" said Wari. "I remember a turtle in the story but I did not know that turtles could teach us so much! Are there other things we can learn from turtles, Tota?" Wari asked.

"I am so happy you asked that. As a matter of fact, just the other night I had a dream about an old turtle. This turtle's name was A'nó:wara. She spoke to me about her turtle troubles," Tota Ma explained.

The first stars were beginning to sparkle in the night sky as Tota Ma began to tell her grandchildren about the dream. "The A'nó:wara family and cousins have lived in the waterways and wetlands of Turtle Island since Creation. Some turtles live for over one hundred years! As keepers of stories and knowledge about the water, they have responsibilities to communities and to the Creator. A'nó:wara asked me who will take over those responsibilities when the turtles are gone. There are fewer of them to fulfil the responsibilities that were given by Shonkwaya'tihson," Tota Ma said quietly.

She paused for a few moments with her eyes closed, remembering the words and the sad voice of A'nó:wara, "A'nó:wara reminded me of a



traditional Turtle Teaching. Her shell is our calendar. In my dream, she used her claws to draw a turtle shell in the soft sand at the edge of the marsh. She then cut the shell into thirteen parts, which represent the thirteen full moons of every year. With each changing moon, there are different seasonal activities. For example, during *Ohyariha*, we gather strawberries," Tota Ma explained.

Wari asked, "Tota Ma, is that in June? I remember going to the *ken'niyohontehsa* farm with my class to pick *ken'niyohontehsa* in June."

"Yes, that is right Wari," said Tota Ma. "A'nó:wara also told me about thirteen challenges with activities for each moon. These challenges provide ways for us to help the turtles of Ontario! The *first challenge* is something we do daily; she asks that we *give thanks for all that exists in Creation*. Her *second challenge* asks us to *understand Turtle Teachings*, such as the calendar she carries on her back, and the Creation Story. As you can see, my grandchildren, there are many things to learn from A'nó:wara. Walking in her

footsteps may be challenging, but it is important so we can learn that there are different ways of knowing."

"Wow, Tota Ma, there is a whole lot to learn," Sose said as he yawned. "I am so tired! This has been such a great day and I am looking forward to learning more about A'nó:wara and what those challenges can teach us, but for right now, I need some sleep!" he said.

"I can see you are all getting tired. Time to get ready for bed," Tota Ma said.

Sose hopped on his bike. Wari and Sewatis said their goodbyes and scurried off to brush their teeth and change into pajamas.

"Goodnight my grandchildren," said Tota Ma. "Tomorrow will be a busy day."

Each child said goodnight and crawled into bed, looking forward to the exciting day ahead.



ONTARIO'S TURTLE FAMILIES AND SPECIES AT RISK

CHAPTER 3

"Good morning Tota Ma," said Wari and Sewatis, as they bounced into the brightly lit kitchen for breakfast.

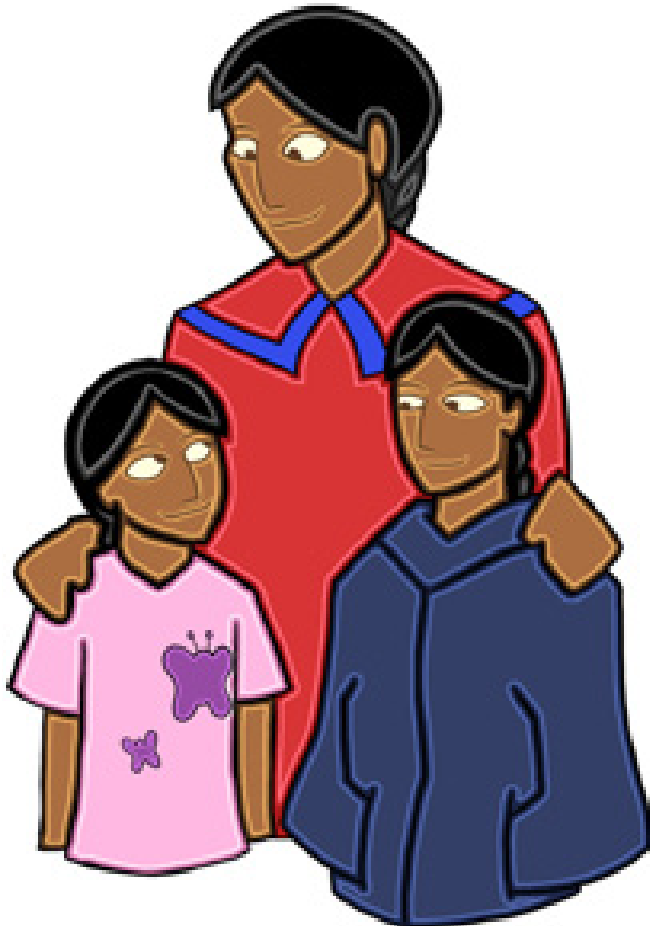
"Good morning my children! Did you sleep well?" Tota Ma asked. Sewatis gave his Tota a big hug and pulled out a chair to sit beside her while Wari sat down across from them.

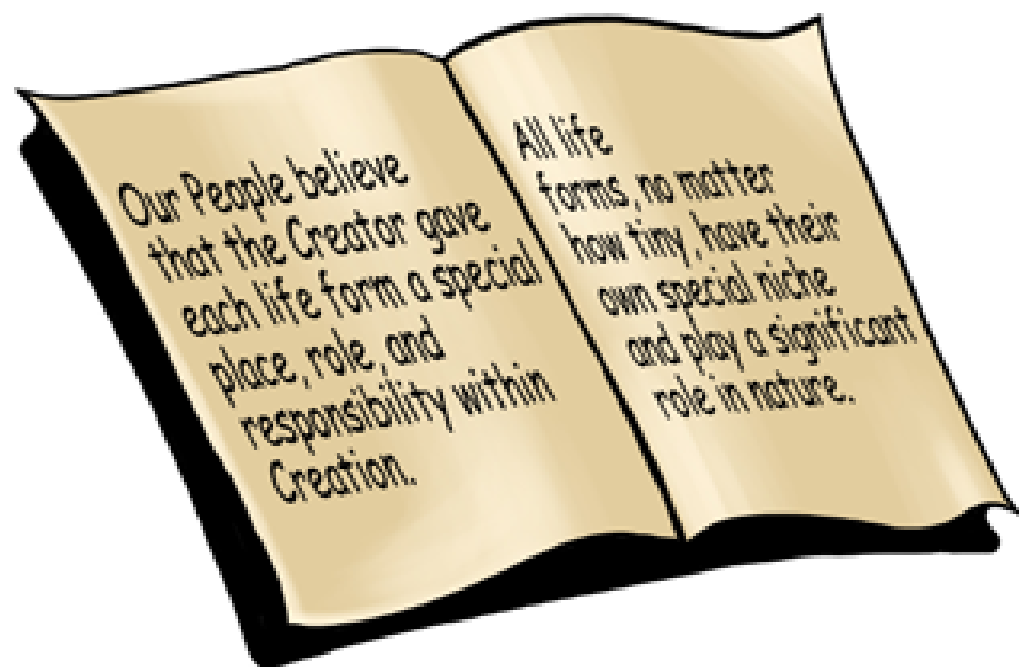
"What are you working on today?" he asked. Tota Ma was sitting at the kitchen table with her journal, a turtle poster, and a few pamphlets beside her cup of tea.

"Here children, take a look at this poster from the Toronto Zoo. It shows Ontario's turtle species and it is in our language. Can you recognize any of the turtles in the poster? I thought about what A'nó:wara said to me and I wondered about the turtle species that are disappearing," Tota Ma explained to her grandchildren.

"Oh Tota! I have seen turtles like A'nó:wara on the edge of the road down south," Wari added, looking at her Tota Ma with a smile. "Mom said that they were trying to lay their eggs. I always wondered why they wanted to put their eggs along a road instead of someplace safer. I do not remember seeing any other types though" Wari said as she pointed to the Map turtle on the poster.

Tota Ma followed Wari's gaze. "Hmm, I remember seeing some of them when I was young. We used to go down to the big marsh and the other wet places in the spring to pick medicine plants. In the fall, we dug roots there as well. For many years, Uncle Buddy trapped muskrat and beaver in the big marsh with his grandfather. They knew almost every trail and waterway through the cattails. I think that he knows about some of the other turtle species that lived around here. We will have to go and talk to him about A'nó:wara. I remember Uncle Buddy saying that he knows when it is time to prepare for hunting season when he does not see A'nó:wara basking in the sun. This is because A'nó:wara is one of the first creatures to dig down into the mud at the bottom of the ponds and creeks to begin its winter sleep."





Tota Ma looked over at the poster Wari was holding, “Now that I think about it, I have not seen the pretty little turtle with the stars on its back for a long time. There are turtles in the big marsh, out by the bay. I can remember seeing them lay their eggs in the soft gravel near the edge of the marsh, just at the beginning of *Ohyariha*.” The children continued looking at the turtle posters, wondering what turtle eggs looked like.

“Tota, this poster says that seven turtle species are at risk. What does that mean?” asked Wari.

“I wondered about that as well. Here are some pamphlets that talk about Species at Risk. I was reading them and thinking about what it means to be at risk or threatened. I wrote some ideas down in my

journal. Do you want to hear them?” the grandmother asked. The children nodded their heads.

“There is supposed to be room for everyone and everything. That is biodiversity. Turtle history is a part of our history. If a life form disappears, the entire community suffers and it will never be the same again,” explained Tota Ma.

She continued speaking, “You know, my grandchildren, my Auntie Sadie once told me that no life form is able to change its habitat at will. Changes within a community happen, but they take place over long periods of time so the life forms can adapt. That means we cannot move an animal or plant to someplace new and expect it to survive.

All life forms are interdependent. That means that everything is connected together. After thousands of years of watching, listening, and thinking about the world around us, we *Onkwehono* have come to understand that some life forms are flexible within their own habitat and are able to adapt to changes. However, other life forms are very limited in their ability to change or adapt.” Tota Ma finished her thought and then paused for a moment.

“Wait Tota,” said Sewatis, “I noticed something interesting the other day while walking to the pond. The milkweed plants caught my eye and I noticed that all around them were beautiful orange butterflies! Are butterflies connected to everything?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Tota Ma. “Sewatis, do you remember last summer when we found that pretty monarch butterfly? It is a life form with a very limited ability to change. The young monarch only eats milkweed leaves, so if these plants are sprayed with pesticides, there will be no food for the young monarchs. This butterfly goes all the way to Mexico in the fall because it cannot survive Canadian winters with the ice and snow.”

“It sure is cold here in the winter,” said Wari with a shiver, “good thing I have my winter coat—but butterflies do not have winter coats!”

“Imagine that! A winter with no coat? They would have no way to keep warm and nothing to eat! Snow covers everything in the winter,” agreed Sewatis.

Tota Ma nodded in agreement and sipped her tea. She thoughtfully continued, “As they travel south, the monarchs only sleep in oyamel trees, which look like our spruce trees. However, these trees are being cut down for wood and soon there may be no place for monarchs to spend their winters. There may come a time when those beautiful butterflies do not dance in our fields.” Wari’s eyes filled with tears thinking about the loss of butterflies. She treasured a pair of beautiful butterfly earrings she was given as a little girl from her Tota Ma. This gift sparked Wari’s love for butterflies.

Sewatis understood his sister’s feelings and wondered, “How do other plants and animals survive in the winter, Tota?”

“Some plants and animals can adjust to seasonal weather changes, like our brothers the deer who are able to grow an extra coat of fur for the winter,” explained Tota Ma. “Others must move away, like the geese and ducks in the fall, or leave behind a seed for next season, just as some plants do.”

Tota Ma continued, “Many animals, plants, and elements are under stress. Life forms at risk are referred to as Species at Risk. It is good that science acknowledges how fragile our ecosystems are.



First Nations people have had this understanding for thousands of years. This is a reason why we are asked to be respectful of other life forms." Tota Ma sipped her tea and looked at Wari as her granddaughter opened the Toronto Zoo's Species at Risk pamphlet on the table.

"Here Tota, take a look at this pamphlet. Many of the Species at Risk in Canada are found around bodies of water, but over seventy percent of the wetlands in our Great Lakes watershed have been drained! Many of our fish used for food begin as eggs in a wetland. Wetlands are a great nursery area. There are many birds, mammals, and reptiles that are dependent on these watersheds in Ontario. Wow! We all need to worry about the loss of wetland habitat. I never realized how important wetlands were to everyone" said Wari with concern.

"When you think about it," said Tota Ma, "wetlands are important for our health and wellness too. This is true because many of our medicine plants grow around wetlands. My *Akoso'tha* spent a lot of time harvesting healing plants from the marsh near our home. I still go there when I need to make tea

for medicine. These plants depend on the animals in the wetlands to help them grow and stay healthy."

Sewatis and Wari continued listening to their Tota as they looked out onto the glistening water. They wondered where they might find medicine plants around the lake. Sewatis filled his glass with more cranberry juice and continued listening to Tota Ma.

"Our turtle brothers and sisters who are identified as Species at Risk tell us that our wetland communities are also at risk. We understand turtles are near the top of the food chain within the wetland. The Map turtle you saw on the poster Wari, is listed as a Species at Risk. This turtle, like others, has a role and responsibility within the wetland to keep the water clean. They do this by looking after animals that have died and by eating some of the insects that grow and reproduce in the wetland. When I see turtle species on a poster like this from the Toronto Zoo, it makes me sad. It is not just turtles who are at risk, but it is the



entire community. Animals, like our First Nations communities, all depend upon one another," said Tota Ma.

Sewatis sat very quietly, thinking about his Tota's reflection. "What is *A'nó:wara's* next challenge for us then?" he asked.

Tota Ma reflected on *A'nó:wara's* words, as she recalled the third challenge from her dream: "Who are the turtles in Ontario and what do they look like? Where can you find them? Why are turtle families on the Species at Risk list?"

Wari and Sewatis jumped excitedly out of their chairs as their Tota repeated *A'nó:wara's* words.

"Tota, it is not only turtles that are important. We must find out about water, wetlands, communities, and more if we want to have a good understanding of how we are all connected. This is going to be a big challenge!" exclaimed Sewatis with a smile.

Tota Ma gave Sewatis a big hug. "You are right, my boy! I am so glad that you are here to help us. Now I understand why *A'nó:wara* has come to see me. There is a lot of work to be done!"



NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS

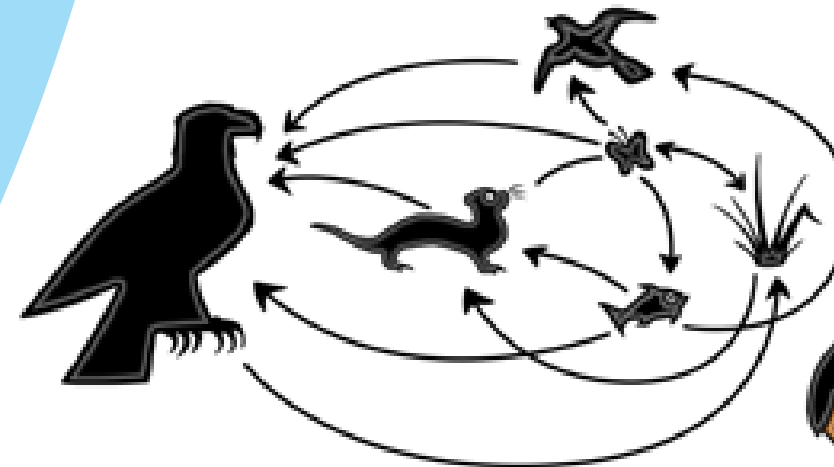
CHAPTER 4

After a morning spent with Tota Ma, Wari and Sewatis went outside for a bike ride to the water's edge with Sose. It was a hot day and perfect for a swim! They brought a delicious picnic lunch of fry fish and corn bread. Once they were down at the water, Sose unpacked the lunch and they enjoyed their meal. After a quick swim, the children packed up and headed back to Tota Ma's house. Once at home, the children began asking Tota Ma more questions about *A'nó:wara* and the challenges. The children were excited about the *fourth challenge*, to discover *A'nó:wara's friends and neighbours in the wetlands and how are they related.*

"Tota, there are so many different animals and plants in the world. How does anyone understand all the relationships in a wetland?" asked Wari.

Tota Ma replied, "There are many animals that are a part of the web of life that support *A'nó:wara*. I remember my *Akoso'tha* and Auntie Sadie explaining the many ways things are connected when they would sit together to sew or bead. They would say that every life form, no matter how small or large, has needs for food, water, shelter, and space. All things exist within a web of interdependence. If the web is damaged or changed, all life forms will be affected." Tota Ma enjoyed explaining these relationships to her grandchildren, just like her *Akoso'tha* explained to her long ago.

The grandchildren continued listening with interest. "Living within this web over thousands of generations, First Nations people have come to understand some of the delicate relationships that are necessary for life to continue in balance. Before European contact, the people of this territory learned how to live in peace with one another. The Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe people practiced mutual peace based on respect, reciprocity, relationship, and responsibility. Our Haudenosaunee ancestors called this treaty, "The Dish with One Spoon." The 'dish' represented the



shared hunting territories of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee in the region of Southern Ontario. The Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe both realized that their territories overlapped and they had to share caretaking responsibilities for the land. Through this understanding, the two communities were able to co-exist and live sustainably with the earth and one another." The grandchildren were excited to learn about their culture from their Tota.

Tota Ma continued, "This is all part of our Traditional Knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. Giving thanks for knowledge is important. We give thanks to the sun and understand that the sun provides energy which all life forms need, either directly or indirectly. Photosynthesis is an example of the direct relationship between the sun and plants. We understand that some animals and birds get their energy from the sun, by eating plants. These animals are called herbivores."

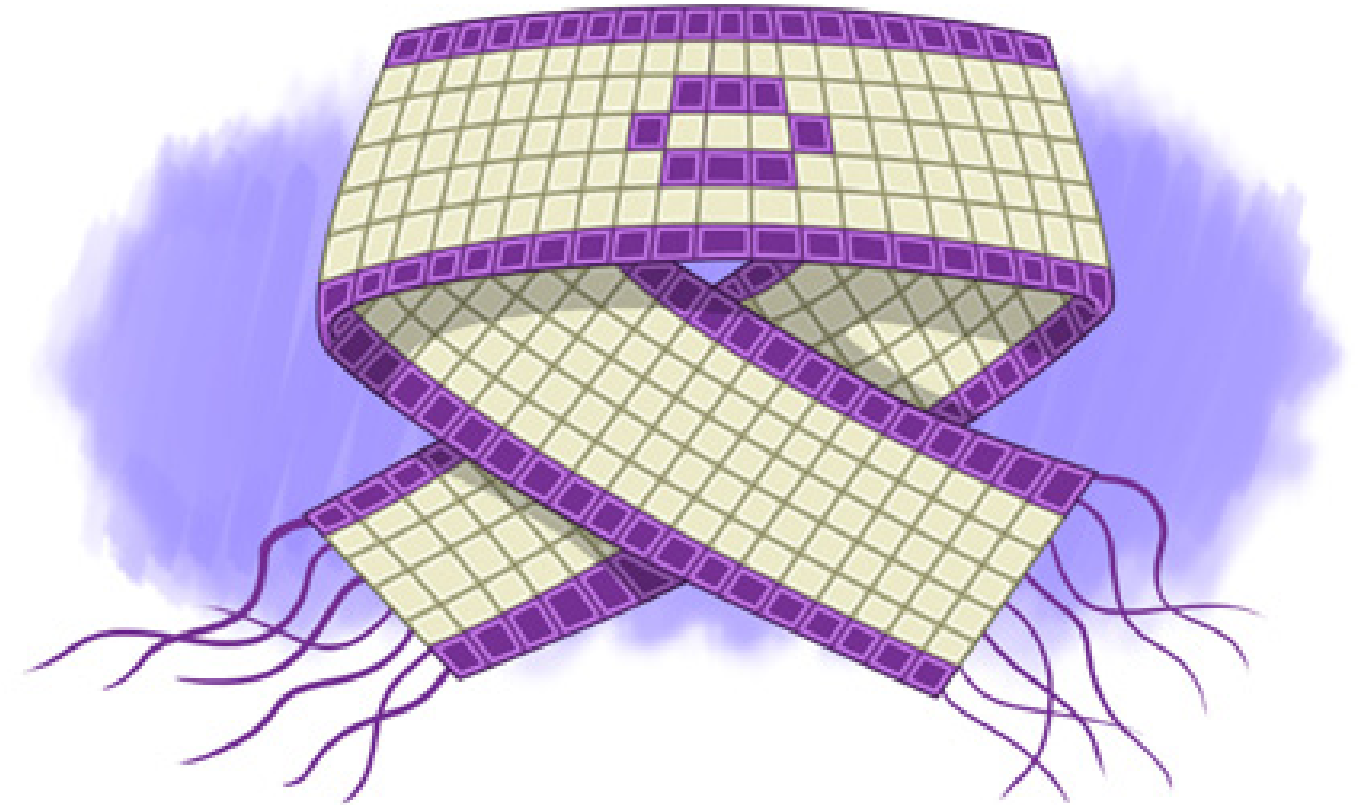
"I knew that already," exclaimed Sewatis. "I learned about that in my science class!"

Tota Ma continued speaking. "Some animals get their energy by eating other animals. What are these called, Wari?"

"That is a carnivore," she answered. "Omnivores eat both plants and animals to get their energy," she said proudly.

"Good job, my girl!" exclaimed her Tota. "The relationships between animals are similar to the relationships between First Nations clans. We understand that our clans have interconnected responsibilities. We must acknowledge that our First Nations communities function best when clans work together for the health of all. These understandings are thousands of years old and they are very important to Our People," Tota Ma explained. The children stretched their legs listening to their Tota speak. This made them think about their own clans.

Tota continued, "the *Kanyen'kehaka* Nation is divided into clan groupings. *Kanyen'kehaka* clans are inherited through their mother's blood lines. Traditionally, these clans had special characteristics and responsibilities within the community. Clans also served as a system of traditional government. There are three clans comprised of turtle, wolf and bear.



Sewatis asked his Tota what else she knew about the *Kanyen'kehaka* clan system. Tota answered Sewatis with enthusiasm, "Clans sit together in the longhouse for ceremony. *Rotinonhsyonni* clans are inherited from their mother, which is different from the Anishinaabe people who follow their father's clan."

These clan teachings helped Wari and Sewatis understand their connection to Tyendinaga and to family members they had outside of the community! The children understood the importance of strong family ties. It was also exciting to learn that clan members are not always blood related and that one can meet new clan members in all sorts of places, even in the city.

The summer had come to an end and Tota Ma was going to miss her grandchildren when they went back to school. However, Tota Ma had faith that Wari and Sewatis were leaving with information that they would share with their classmates and friends. They had made so many plans to help *A'nó:wara*. Tota Ma could hardly wait for them to come back and visit over their winter break to continue their work!





HEALTHY HABITATS

CHAPTER 5

During a visit to the marsh, Tota Ma stopped to observe changes in the season. She placed an offering of *oyen'kwa'on:we* at the edge of the water, sat down on her favourite rock, and closed her eyes while she focused on the sounds of the community. When Tota Ma first sat down, there were few sounds coming from the marsh. After she had settled down on that old *raksotha*, the Grandfather rock, the animals went back to their work and she heard their sounds again.

Tota Ma remembered when she was a little girl, helping her grandfather catch minnows in the marsh down the road from her house. There were many things to look at and listen to down at the water such as birds singing and frogs croaking. It was a place full of life! Her grandfather talked to her about the marsh and the wonderful gifts it had to offer. He talked about how much it was needed, mosquitoes and all! Tota Ma's grandfather told her that all living things have four basic needs—food, water, shelter, and space. However, the food must be nutritious

and healthy, the water drinkable and clean, and the shelter must protect creatures from weather and predators. He also explained that shelter includes a place to be cared for. Shelter is more than a house, it is a home! Every plant and animal needs enough space to find food, water, and shelter. These needs create the niche which each living thing requires.

Tota Ma's grandfather shared the understanding of Creation that each plant and animal on *Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya*, Our Mother Earth, has its own special place. Tota Ma thought about her needs and realized that humans depend upon every other member of Creation, because they were the last created.

The sun was warm on Tota Ma's back and she was starting to nod off when she sensed something watching her. She opened one eye slowly and there at her feet sat *A'nó:wara!* The old turtle's shell was wet and sparkling in the afternoon sun.

"She:kon Tota, it is good to see you today. I was hoping that you would come by," said *A'nó:wara* happily.

Tota Ma told *A'nó:wara* that she was grateful for all of the sights and sounds of life in the wetland. *A'nó:wara* nodded her ancient head slowly in agreement.

The old turtle spoke again in her quiet voice, *"It is your responsibility to be thankful for the gifts that*



grateful and thankful for the many gifts they had been blessed with. The Creator looked down upon all of Creation and was very upset that the only members of Creation who had free will were not showing gratitude. The Creator threatened to destroy *Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya* and everything on it. *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa*, Our Elder Brother, understood the Creator's thoughts and spoke up in defence of humans who were young and weak. *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa* asked that humans be given another chance. The Creator sent *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa* to fly over all of Creation, from east to west, looking for a lodge where humans were showing thanks and gratitude. The Creator promised to spare Creation if good news was brought back.

At dawn the next day, *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa* set out on his journey across Turtle Island, flying from east to west, searching for signs of thanks. At the very last village, in a tiny lodge at the end of the trail, *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa* saw a thin plume of smoke rising up to the sky. The smoke was from the *oyen'kwa'on:we* which an old *akoksten'a* and *roksten'a* placed on their morning fire. The elderly couple was offering words of thanksgiving, speaking to all the different plants, animals, elements, and helpers that surrounded them. *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa* flew back to the Sky-world to report to the Creator that he had found one couple who remembered to be grateful. The Creator was pleased and promised to spare Creation as long as there was evidence of thanks and gratitude." *A'no:wara* took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

have been given to you. That reminds me of a very old teaching from long ago. After the Creator had thought everything into existence and placed all the elements, plants, and animals on *Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya*, the Creator gave each their responsibilities. Then, when everything was ready, the Creator created humans," said *A'no:wara*.

"My turtle ancestors shared this teaching with me. They talked about how much humans depended on us. We, the older brothers and sisters of Creation, were given the responsibility to provide humans with food and to make sure that water stayed clean and healthy. Humans are the only members of Creation who were given free will," explained the old turtle. *A'no:wara* paused briefly to observe a beautiful dragonfly zip across the pond.

"All that the Creator asked of you, the youngest of Creation, was that you show gratitude and give thanks for the other members of Creation who so readily shared themselves with you. Those first humans agreed and showed their gratitude every morning by offering their *oyen'kwa'on:we*, and thanksgiving to the Creator," explained *A'no:wara*.

The old turtle continued, "As time went by, the humans became forgetful. They were so busy enjoying the gifts of Creation that they forgot to be



Tota Ma remembered the story and thanked A'no:wara for bringing it back to her memory.

The turtle continued her teaching, "The Old People say that is why humans need to begin each day with an expression of thankfulness, acknowledging all the other members of the great community working together to make life possible. When *Etshitewatsi'a Karahkwa* flies from east to west every morning as the sun rises, it gathers up prayers and takes them to the Creator. Remind your grandchildren Tota Ma, to wake up when the sun rises and offer words of thanksgiving. This will ensure that the world will continue for many generations to come."

"My Auntie Jan is Turtle clan," Tota Ma explained to A'no:wara. "She knows a lot about turtles. She told me that turtle families have specific needs for food, water, shelter, and space. Some of their needs are similar, yet each member of the turtle family is unique and has a special place, responsibility, and role. Sometimes, more than one turtle family will live in a wetland," said Tota Ma.

"I am pleased your Auntie Jan knows so much about my turtle family!" said A'no:wara happily. "Some turtles in the wetland eat only plants and seeds. Some eat small fish like minnows, tiny water plants, snails, tadpoles, worms and sometimes little insects found along the shore," the old turtle shared. "My family members spend most of their lives in the water where we can find food, but we like to bask on logs or rocks to absorb energy from the sun to keep us warm."

A'no:wara continued, "My family can only live in marshes, ponds, and bays that have rocks and logs where we can bask in the sun to soak up its warm rays. I did not start making nests until I was ten years old. When it was time to lay eggs, I returned to my nesting area near the shoreline. My hatchlings usually stay in the nest until spring and then they climb out and hurry back to the water. They need to find shelter in the water plants to be safe from the herons, raccoons, and big fish who like to eat them." Tota Ma thought about the eggs she saved last year by placing a protective covering over them. She hoped that most of those babies survived.

A'no:wara continued to explain to Tota Ma the importance of turtles, "One of the responsibilities



carried on by my turtle babies is to ensure that the water in the marsh is clean and safe. We are also responsible for bringing the message of changing seasons to other animals and plants which live in the wetlands. The Painted turtle is one of the first turtles to hibernate in autumn. I need plenty of space to live, sunning logs, and rocks to warm my body after the long winter. I communicate with the Creator and all other plants and animals in the wetland. If my environment is clean and healthy, I can live to be over one hundred years old!" she explained. Tota Ma was impressed that turtles could live so long, but upset that their life expectancy depended on how much humans polluted the water.

The old turtle continued speaking, "However, many of my family members are not living as long anymore. Changes in the marsh, such as lower water tables, are making it difficult for us. You know, Tota Ma, when you were a little girl, you could not sit on that *raksotha* rock where you are sitting now because it was under water! The marsh has been shrinking in size and that means every living thing has less space to live. Where did all that water go?" A'no:wara asked in a troubled voice.

"The water is warmer than it used to be and it is not as good to drink. I am trying hard to keep the waters clean but there used to be many more turtle brothers and sisters to help. Now there are only a few cousins and myself. We cannot keep up with all the work that must be done." A'no:wara blinked, snapped at a damselfly that landed near the edge of the water, and slowly turned away from the shore.

"My fifth challenge asked you to find out what turtles need to survive. What does a healthy habitat look like? Do you think the habitat in your community is healthy for me and you?" A'no:wara asked.

Tota Ma thought about A'no:wara's words as the old turtle slipped quietly into the water. She watched as A'no:wara swam out of sight, leaving behind ripples in the water and time to think about the teaching shared. She thought about the water. Where did it go? What might happen when A'no:wara and her turtle cousins are gone? Who will keep the water clean in the wetland? She got up slowly and walked back to the house. Tota Ma had a lot to think about.





TURTLE STORIES

CHAPTER 6

Wari and Sewatis were back from the city to visit with Tota Ma over the winter holidays. There was snow in the bush and the snowbanks were getting high. Sewatis was looking forward to using the old snowshoes and spending some time on Uncle Buddy's trapline. The swamps and marshes were frozen and it was time to set traps on the muskrat push-ups. After supper, Sewatis eagerly looked in the shed for all the equipment he needed for the morning when Uncle Buddy arrived. Everything was ready for their big adventure! It would be fun to travel over the frozen marsh and the swamp without getting wet feet.

When it was time for bed, Sewatis had trouble falling asleep because he was so excited about the next morning! He turned over and over on the mattress, pulling the covers off his cousin, Sose, and making noise that bothered his sister Wari.

"Tota, Sewatis will not settle down. I cannot go to sleep. He will not stop rolling around and making noise!" complained Wari.

Tota Ma came into the room. "What is happening in here?" she questioned calmly.

"Tota, I am having trouble getting to sleep. Will you tell us a story about the animals and the plants?" asked Sewatis.

Tota had her old journal tucked under her arm. She settled down in the big rocking chair and opened her journal to the page where she had drawn a turtle shell. She looked at the drawing for a few moments thoughtfully and started to speak in her quiet, calm voice. "Winter time is *Akohserake*. This is the time of stories and teachings," she began. "Our People say that we should wait until the snow is on the ground and the plants and animals are sleeping before we begin telling stories about them."

"Yes Tota, I remember. Can you share a story about the animals that live in the marsh? I am looking forward to going out with Uncle Buddy tomorrow. It will be the first time I have been out on the marsh in the winter time," said Sewatis.

Tota Ma nodded and was quiet for a few moments while she gathered her thoughts. "I can remember the stories that my grandfather used to tell us in the winter time when we were small. He and my grandmother lived in a two-room log house. We used to sleep in one room and the other room was our kitchen. The wood stove in the kitchen kept us nice and warm in the winter time. There was always a line of mittens and socks drying behind the stove. I also remember a big table and benches to sit at and a cupboard for our food and dishes. In the day time, we rolled up the mattresses and sat on them like a couch. We went to bed when it got dark, used a coal oil lamp for light in the house, and carried our water from the well down the road. There was

always a pot of white pine tea on the stove and a fresh pan of corn bread to eat. At night, when we were all tucked into our blankets, my grandfather would tell us stories about the animals and plants.”

Tota Ma recalled one of her favourites her grandfather used to tell.

Long ago, Turtle lived in a small pond. It was a fine place. There were Alder trees along the banks to provide shade, and a fine grassy bank where Turtle could crawl out and sun himself. There were plenty of fish for Turtle to catch. The small pond had everything any turtle could ever want, and Turtle thought his pond was the finest place in the whole world. Turtle spent his time swimming around, sunning himself, and catching fish whenever he was hungry. So it went until the cold winds began to blow down from the north.

“Ah,” Turtle said, “It is time for me to go to sleep.” Then he dove down to the bottom of the pond and burrowed into the mud. He went to sleep for the winter. He slept deeply, in fact, he slept a little later than usual and did not wake up until it was late in the spring. The warming waters of the pond woke him, and he crawled out of the mud and began to swim toward the surface. Something was wrong, though, for it seemed to take much too long to get to the surface of his small pond. Turtle was certain the water had not been that deep when he went to sleep.

As soon as Turtle reached the surface and looked around, he was surprised to find that things were not as they should be. His small pond was more than twice its normal size. His fine grassy bank for sunning himself was underwater! His beautiful Alder trees were cut down and made into a big dam.



"Who had done this to my pond?" Turtle said.

Just then Turtle heard a loud sound. WHAP! Turtle turned to look and saw a strange animal swimming toward him across the surface of his pond. It had a big, flat tail and hit the surface of the water with it. WHAP!

"Who are you?" Turtle said. "What are you doing in my pond? What have you done to my beautiful trees?"

"Hunh!" the strange animal said. "This is not your pond. This is my pond! I am Beaver and I cut down those trees with my teeth and I built that dam and made this pond nice and deep. This is my pond and you must leave."

"No," Turtle said. "This is my pond. If you do not leave, I will fight you. I am a great warrior."

"Hunh!" Beaver said. "That is good. Let us fight. I will call my relatives to help me, and they will chew your head off with their strong teeth."

Turtle looked closely at Beaver's teeth. They were long and yellow and looked very sharp.

"Hah!" Turtle said, "I can see it would be too easy to fight you. Instead we should have a contest to decide which of us will leave this pond forever."

"Hunh!" Beaver said. "That is a good idea. Let us see who can stay underwater the longest. I can stay under for a whole day."

As soon as Beaver said that, Turtle saw he would have to think of a different contest. He had been about to suggest that they see who could stay underwater the longest, but if what Beaver said was true, then he would beat Turtle.

"Hah!" Turtle said. "It would be too easy to defeat you that way. Let us have a race instead. The first





one to reach the other side of the pond is the winner. The loser must leave the pond forever.”

“Hunh!” Beaver said. “That is a good contest. I am the fastest swimmer of all. When I win, you will have to leave my pond forever. Let us begin to race.”

“Wait,” Turtle said, “I am such a fast swimmer that it would not be fair unless I started from behind you.”

Then Turtle placed himself behind Beaver, right next to Beaver’s big tail.

“I am ready,” Turtle said, “let us begin!”

Beaver began to swim. He was such a fast swimmer that Turtle could barely keep up with him.

When they were halfway across the pond, Turtle began to fall even further behind. But Turtle had a plan. He stuck his long neck out and grabbed Beaver’s tail in his jaws.

Beaver felt something grab his tail, but he could not look back. He was too busy swimming, trying to win the race. He swung his tail back and forth, but Turtle held on tight. Now Beaver was almost to the other side of the pond. Turtle bit down even harder. Beaver swung his tail up into the air, trying to shake free whatever had hold of him. Just as Beaver’s tail reached the top of its swing, Turtle let go. He flew through the air and landed on the bank! Beaver looked up, and there was Turtle! Turtle had won the race.

So it was that Beaver had to leave and Turtle, once again, had his pond to himself. With its new deeper water there were soon even more fish than there were before and Turtle’s Alders grew back once more. Truly, Turtle’s pond was the finest place in the whole world.

Soft snoring made Tota Ma look over at the sleeping children. She remembered A’no:wara’s words which described the challenge, “My sixth challenge asked you to listen to teachings and stories about turtles.” Tota was excited to share the stories that she knew, and stories she would learn, with her grandchildren.



TURTLE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER 7

Tota Ma was sleeping in her favourite rocking chair when she woke up with a start. She had dozed off while watching Aboriginal People's Television Network. Wari and Sewatis were back in the city after their winter holidays in Tyendinaga. They kept very busy during their visit and Tota Ma was tired! She had fallen asleep and was dreaming about A'nó:wara explaining the *seventh challenge*, to find out about turtles located around the world.

The television was still on and there was a special show airing about turtles. There were images of baby sea turtles hatching on the sandy shores of Australia. This reminded Tota Ma of distant brothers and sisters, the Aborigines, and their connection to turtles. It seemed that Indigenous people worldwide had many teachings about turtles.

Tota Ma thought about the sea turtle story, a journey of many kilometres and years. The baby turtle hatches from its shell, swims through the seas and oceans of the world, until it comes back to lay eggs on the very same beach it was



born, instinctively finding its way back home. This reminded Tota Ma of young people who often journeyed from her community to find a job, go to school, or to find their own path. She thought that youth needed to remember the sea turtle and its life journey home. Tota Ma understood how strong the sea turtle's call to come home was.

She thought back to when she was younger and had to move to the city to go to school. It was so hard for her to be away from home. She remembered how she used to sit outside at night and look up at the stars, thinking about home and the family and friends that she missed. She was so lonely for home then and realized that sea turtles must feel that way too.



Tota Ma imagined walking into the sea as a tiny baby turtle and spending the next twenty years swimming through the oceans, far from home. How happy that turtle must be when it returns to the beach where its life began, so it can lay eggs and begin the cycle of life over again.

Tota Ma remembered reading about turtles caught in fish nets and beaches that were turned into parking lots, hotels, and resorts. She thought it must be confusing for turtles to travel to their birth place and find their home not there.

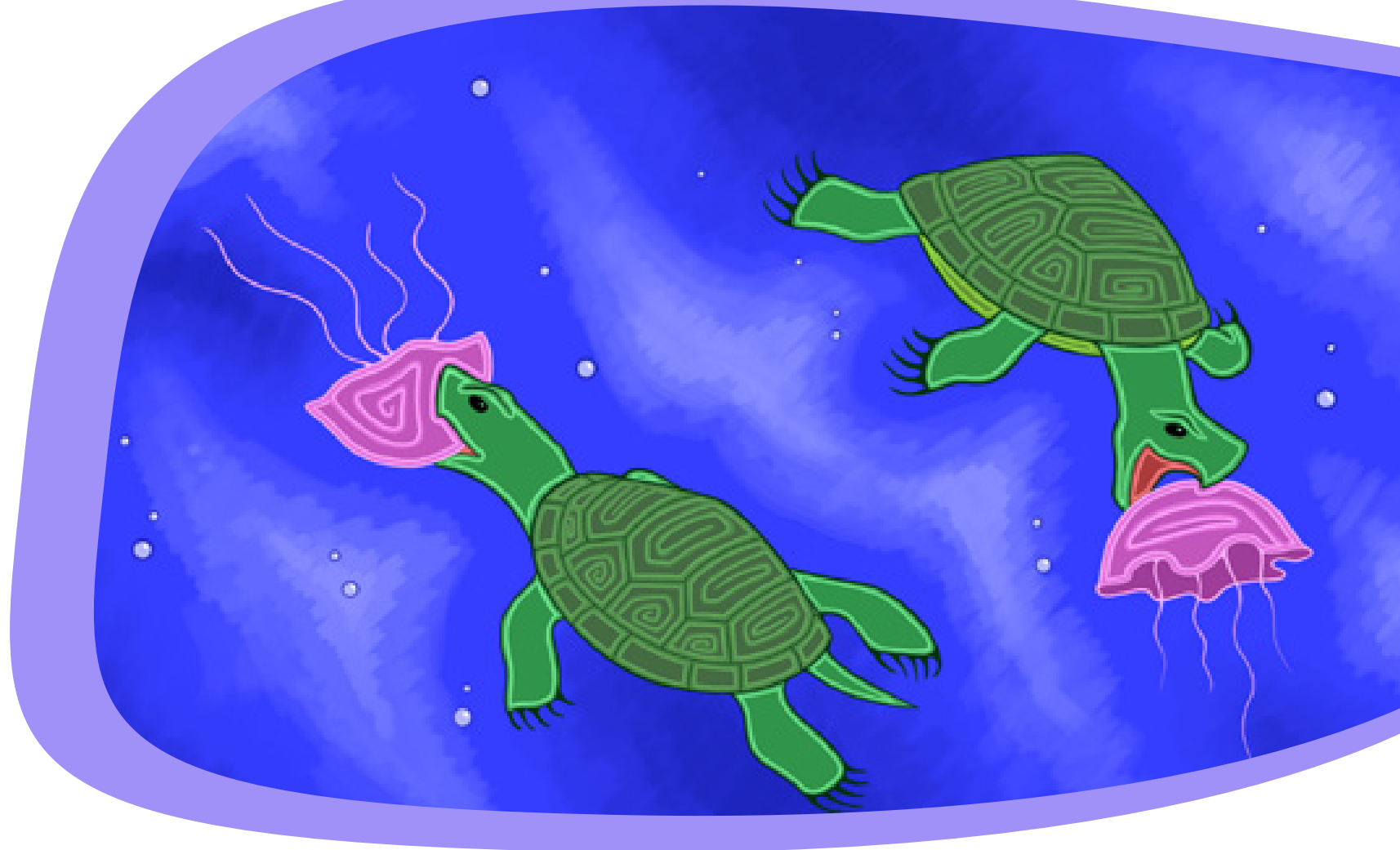
This made her think about something a teacher once told her. She was learning about animals and her teacher said that the turtle is one of the few animals that has a home on its back. She thought

a lot about this. It seemed that the turtle may have a house on its back, but a home is more than just shelter. It is food, a special place to live in, clean water, and shelter too. This was the moment that Tota Ma realized that there is no place like home, even for turtles!

The television show explained that sea turtles are under great stress with the loss of habitat and pollution of the ocean waters. Plastic bags and rings floating in the waters cause many turtles to die when they mistakenly eat the plastic, thinking it is food.

"This is so sad!" Tota Ma exclaimed out loud. "These are similar problems to turtles in my wetland."

The television show continued talking about a sea turtle called the leatherback, who feeds on jellyfish



in the ocean near Nova Scotia. Scientists have found these same turtles in Trinidad in the Caribbean Ocean—a journey of 3 000 kilometres! It made her sad to think about the terrible difficulties turtles must overcome to survive each day.

Later that day, Tota Ma walked through the wet slush to the school and asked for help to find out more about turtles around the world. The librarian helped Tota Ma search for information on sea turtles and tortoises. She found an interesting website and spent some time reading and thinking about sea turtles. She compared them to fresh water turtle species. Tota Ma was excited to share this new information with her grandchildren.

"I did not know that turtles have been around for 225 million years!" she said to the librarian, "or that so many turtles worldwide are in danger from loss of habitat." The librarian seemed surprised because she did not realize either.

Knowing that *A'no:wara* and her turtle relatives have so much knowledge to share, Tota Ma knew that she must try very hard to change her behaviours so that turtles could survive for the future.

That night, Tota Ma went home thinking about the importance of wetland conservation. Suddenly the world seemed so much smaller as she thought about the turtle species around the world and their need for help. If everyone worked together, they could help make a big difference.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER

CHAPTER 8

After learning about turtles from around the world, Tota Ma was excited to learn more about turtles and their habitats close to home. All winter, she hoped *A'nó:wara* would visit her in a dream. It was in the early months of spring, when Tota Ma finally heard from her friend *A'nó:wara*.

"Tota, the Spirit of the water has spoken to me" said the turtle. "It is telling me that Elder Josephine Mandamin is coming. Go and meet her. She has a message for you. Josephine has thought about the seven generations that came before us and she is thinking about the seven generations to come. Josephine is honouring the water and the Spirit of water. She will arrive soon with her group of Water Walkers. Listen to what they have to share and take their message home to your community. When you walk for the water, you will be walking for me and for all that live in the water. Listen to Josephine's message and then you will understand my eighth challenge: Walk for water, walk for the turtle, walk for yourself, and your future."

A'nó:wara's words blazed in Tota Ma's heart. She called the Friendship Centre to find out if they heard about Josephine's travels. Those at the Friendship Centre said Josephine and the Water Walkers were coming soon and Josephine would stop at the Friendship Centre. She began her very special journey in 2003. At that time, she spoke to the women on her territory and encouraged them to join her Great Lakes Water

Walk. On this walk, they would pray for the water and teach others about the importance of the water. Josephine would speak about her walk around the Great Lakes to bring attention to the health of the water. She would show care for the water by praying for it.

Tota Ma went to bed early that night. She was looking forward to meeting this wonderful grandmother from Manitoulin Island!

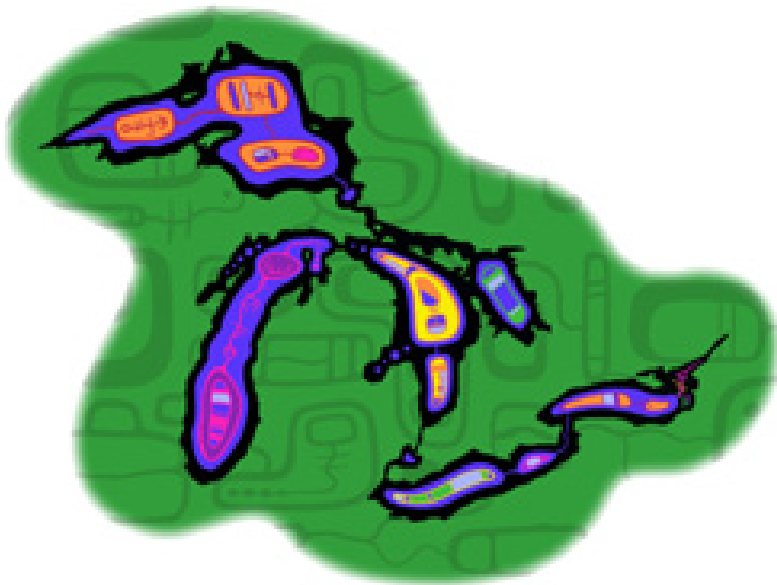
When Tota Ma got to the Friendship Centre, there were many people gathered to welcome Josephine and her Water Walkers. It was inspiring to hear her message about the importance of water. Josephine asked everyone to remember to pray for the water and her gentle, motivating words touched all!

For days after the visit, Tota Ma felt honoured to meet Josephine Mandamin, the Elder who journeyed around all of the Great Lakes. Josephine's message was to continually remind everyone how important fresh water is to all people, not just First Nations.



After this visit, Tota Ma realized that Josephine took her responsibilities as an Elder very seriously. Josephine reminded the community of the responsibilities that women have as water keepers. She shared with Tota Ma the understanding that water is precious and sacred. It is one of the basic elements needed for all life to exist. She also explained that people everywhere need to be concerned about local water use. This would build awareness about how much water is being used or wasted.

Tota Ma remembered some of the facts Josephine talked about. She was surprised to learn that over forty million people live within the beautiful Great Lakes watershed. This helped her realize why Josephine was worried about water. People surrounding the Great Lakes have clean and fresh water available to them but some have taken it for granted. Groundwater has become sick with the pollution of industry and population growth. Many people do not understand that they have an effect on those living downstream. They must make sure that water they send downstream is clean and healthy.



Thinking about how water is essential to survival and health, Tota Ma realized that everything is related to water! First Nations people living in Ontario are aware of water pollution in the Great Lakes. Since the beginning of time, the First Nations people living along the shores and rivers of the Great Lakes watershed have carried a responsibility for the water. The need to keep the water clean and healthy was understood. It is the water that cleanses and heals body, mind, and spirit, and everything depends on water for continued life. There is a connection between water and all life forms, gifted to humans by the Creator.

Tota Ma remembered Elders speaking about the need to keep water clean and pure for the next seven generations to come. Ceremonies include water for its healing and nourishing power. The First Nations people of Turtle Island believe that water is sacred and it is the life-blood of our First Mother, *Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya*. There is a need to come together with all people living in the watershed and share awareness of the declining condition of the Earth's fresh water.

Josephine's words were still rippling through Tota's thoughts as she went to bed. Before she knew it, she was dreaming about sitting by the marsh in the early morning, listening to the Red-winged Blackbirds. *A'nó:wara* peeked out from under some floating duckweed.

"*A'nó:wara, She:kon*. It is so good to see you. *Senhniseriyohsten!* I met Josephine Mandamin. She was the wonderful Elder you told me about. Josephine and the Water Walkers have been



family cannot live in a wetland if water is not plentiful and healthy."

The old woman knew that her use of water changed over time, but she was determined to make positive changes for the future. There was a lot for Tota Ma to think about and act upon.

walking around the Great Lakes watershed, carrying a bucket of water to remind everyone about the importance of water. I spoke to her about you and the challenges. Josephine reminded me that turtles need clean and healthy water, just as we do. She thought that if the women and children got together, they could walk around the wetlands and the waters in their communities. By carrying a bucket of water to symbolize its sacred nature, the walk would let everyone know that there is a serious concern for water. Josephine hoped that any litter or garbage found would be picked up, so when the turtles awoke from their winter sleep, they would find a cleaner and healthier place to live. She reminded everyone that women have a responsibility to care for water, just as the turtles do. *A'nó:wara*, I am so inspired. What is my next challenge?" The old turtle blinked in the bright sunlight.

"Tota Ma, your *ninth challenge* is to look at how much water you use. Honour the water Spirit for its gifts by protecting it. Water for drinking, washing, cooking, and bathing is becoming scarce. My turtle



WATER: OUR BUSINESS

CHAPTER 9



One spring afternoon, Tota Ma was walking along the road by the marsh. The sun shone warmly on her face and the sky was bright blue. The bugs were not biting yet, so it was a good day for a walk.

Tota Ma was happy to find A'no:wara basking on a large, moss covered log. It was the first time Tota Ma had seen her since she went to sleep at the bottom of the marsh for the winter. The old turtle seemed to be enjoying the beautiful spring day.

She had been thinking a lot about A'no:wara, ever since the women of the community met and planned their Water Walk. Tota Ma was certain that A'no:wara would approve of the turtle posters and the walk around the marsh.

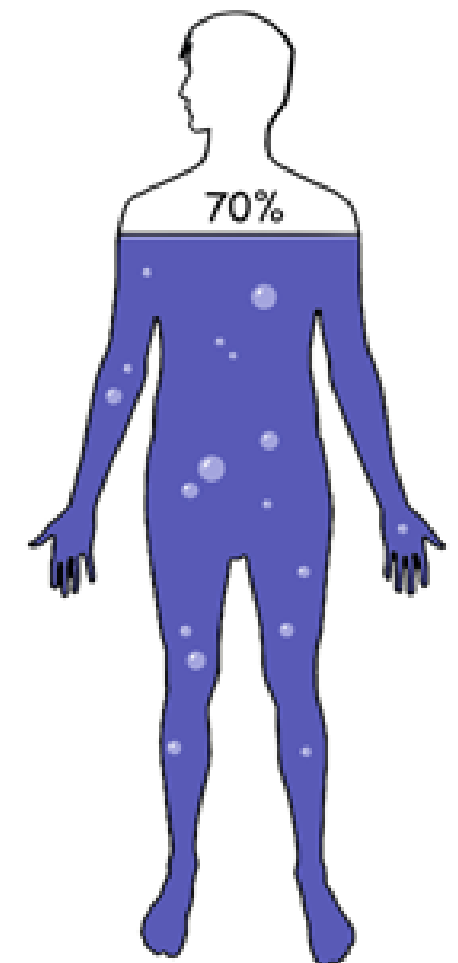
"She:kon A'no:wara. It is so good to see you today," said Tota Ma.

"Hao! She:kon Tota Ma. I have just woken from my winter sleep. It is a nice afternoon to sit by the water and soak up some sun to warm my body after a long, cold winter." The old turtle's quiet voice seemed stronger than before.

Tota Ma sat down beside A'no:wara. She told the old turtle what they were doing to learn about the different turtle species. Tota Ma spoke about Josephine Mandamin, the Water Walkers, and how the women in the community organized a Water Walk for the youth. All the children took turns carrying buckets of water around the wetland and sang songs for the water.

A'no:wara blinked slowly. Tota Ma noticed a few tears forming at the corners of the old turtle's eyes. She seemed to nod her head in approval of the community's good work.

"Water is so important to our families," said A'now:ara. "I spend almost all of my days and nights in the wetland. Everything I need for a good life is connected to the water. The elements of water, sun, air, and earth are all a part of my life. I sleep under the ice for six moons of the year. I am surrounded by water when I am swimming and when I am looking for dinner. I need fresh and clean water every day for my life."



The water looked so inviting to Tota Ma on this beautiful spring afternoon. The little bugs swam around, a few minnows dashed between water plants, while some tiny tadpoles wiggled in the shallow water.

Tota Ma thought about the turtle's dependence on water. It was as important as air for breathing!

Tota Ma started to realize that she was dependent on water in many ways, and that turtles were a good example of how everything is connected. She thought about how much water her Akoso'tha used when she lived in the bush without running water. She remembered fondly her childhood summers at her Tota's little house.

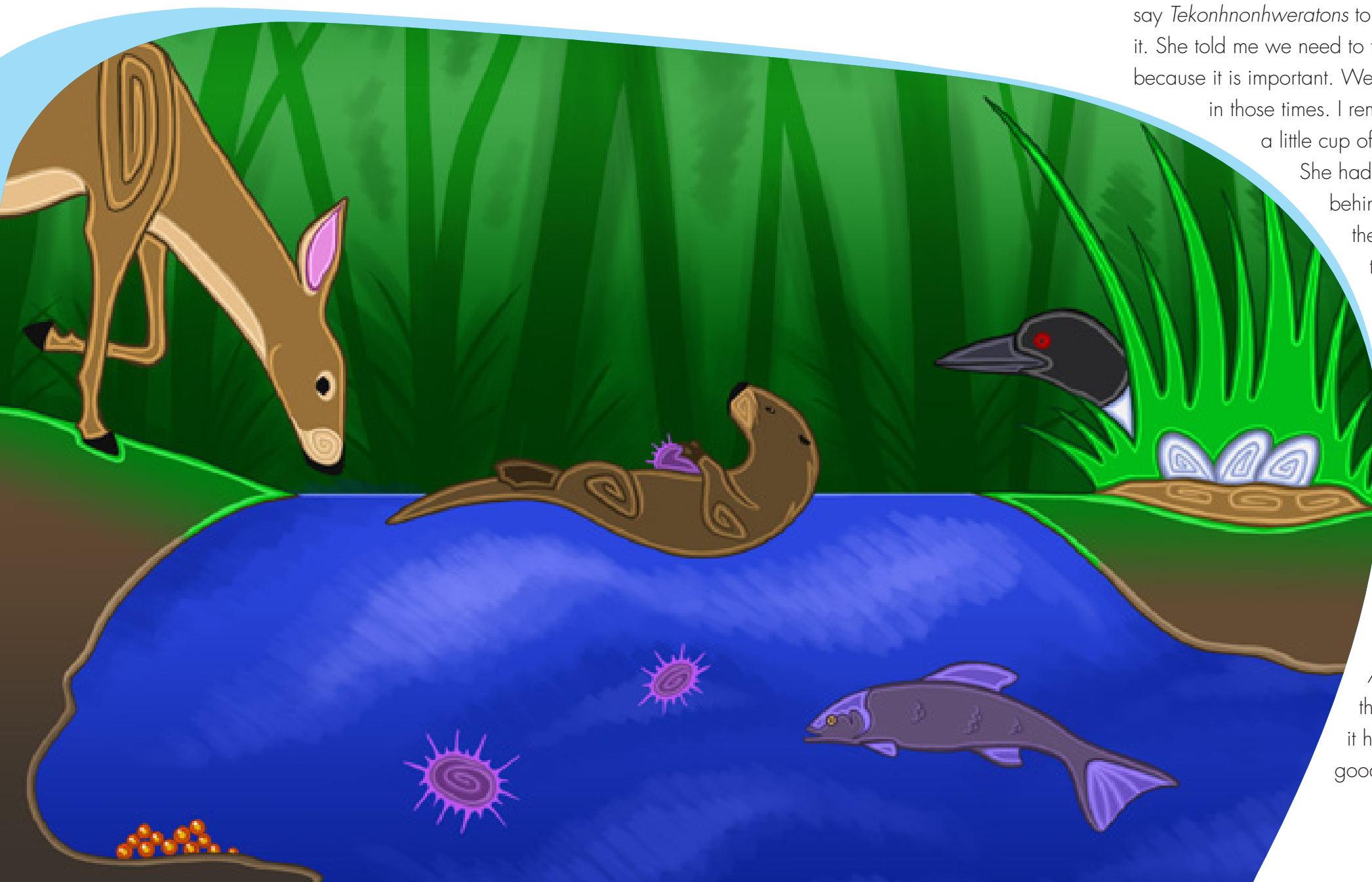
She explained to the turtle, "I remember spending a lot of time with my Akoso'tha when I was small. We used to carry water from the creek to use in the house. She taught me to fill my bucket by scooping downstream, so the water was not disturbed. She always had a little bit of Oyen'kwa'on:we with her when she went down to the water and she would place an offering just at the water's edge. My Akoso'tha said that the Oyen'kwa'on:we was to say Tekonhnonhweratons to the water and to honour it. She told me we need to take care of the water because it is important. We did not waste any water in those times. I remember that she gave me a little cup of water for my toothbrush.

She had an outhouse that was behind the house, away from the water. When it was time to bathe, we would use a basin to scrub our hands and face, and a round, metal tub for a bath in the winter time. She was always respectful of the water and reminded me to look after the creek and to be grateful for the good, cold water that came to us. My Akoso'tha understood that water is alive and that it has a spirit. She was a good keeper of the water!

She had a very small water footprint on the earth. Mine is much bigger than hers was." Tota Ma was uncomfortable with this thought as she continued speaking to A'nó:wara, "I must be careful with my use because my water comes from a well and I do not want it to run dry. It is so tasty, cold, and clean!"

The old turtle reminded Tota Ma to place her Oyen'kwa'on:we as an offering every day to show her personal thanks. "Remember, your ancestors have lived in the watersheds of Turtle Island and said the words of thankfulness for thousands of years," said A'nó:wara. "They were very careful to keep the water clean. Traditionally, women were caretakers of the water and this responsibility was taken very seriously. Ceremonies and actions taught the children how important the water was." A'nów:ara continued, "Too much water is wasted and polluted and it cannot clean itself quickly enough. Every drop of this sacred resource saved provides life for plants and animals. Can you help the water Tota?" asked A'nów:ara. "Come back down to the water. Look at the little creatures in and around the water. The tenth challenge is to listen to the frogs, then record what you see."

A'nów:ara snapped at a buzzing fly and suddenly plopped into the water of the wetland. The minnows and tadpoles swam for cover as the ripples spread out around her shell. As she swam away, the ripples reminded Tota Ma that everything humans do causes a ripple on Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya, affecting everything else in Creation. Tota Ma completed the ninth challenge, and was excited for the next!





FROG FRIENDS

CHAPTER 10

Tota Ma went to find her rubber boots standing in the corner of the closet. A home-made net and a white basin were sitting by the door. Sose was cheerfully coming down the overgrown path. It was a bright spring afternoon in Tyendinaga and it was time to count the frogs.

"*She:kon*, Sose," smiled Tota Ma. "What a beautiful day! Look at the frog poster I picked up at the Band Office. It is from the Toronto Zoo. It shows all the frogs that we might see in Ontario. It is laminated too so it will not get wet when we take it to the water! There was also a Frog and Toad Calls CD from the Toronto Zoo. They have recorded all of the different frog calls. I listened to it last night. It is in our *Kanyen'keha* language! Did you know that the children at school are going to listen to it this week in their language class?" she asked.

Sose was excited to learn about frogs in his language. He loved frogs!

Tota Ma shared with Sose that she was asked to take some students out for a short walk down to the water's edge every afternoon next week to listen for frogs. "The students are going to listen to the calls and practice filling in the forms about the frogs they hear or see. They are really happy to be included in the FrogWatch program."

"I am too! I like that basin you found," said Sose.

"It's white so we will be able to see all those little swimmers that we catch with our net," Tota Ma explained.

"I brought my bug book and some white pine tea in case we get thirsty," said Sose.

"I am anxious to see if I can find some medicine plants near the shore because I have used all the medicines picked last year. Let's get going!" said Tota Ma.

Sose and Tota Ma walked down the path to the road and turned towards the shimmering water. Tota Ma brought *Oyen'kwa'onwe* and she spoke to Sose about the importance of placing an offering to thank and honour the water. Together they set their nets, basins, and notebooks on the big *Raksotha* rock that waited for them at the edge of the marsh.

Soon they were busy scooping marsh water into the basin to look for signs of life. The sun shone down on the pair as they worked, filling the air with laughter and chatter. Sose was busy taking pictures to send to his cousins, Wari and Sewatis in the city. As they scooped, they counted the tiny insect babies that they saw.

Tota Ma helped Sose look in the wetland to understand what each insect meant in relation to the water's cleanliness. The Toronto Zoo had sent them a 'Wetland Report Card' which explained how to check the water's oxygen levels and cleanliness according to the types of insects found. Each wetland was split up into categories 'A', 'B', or 'C'.

Type 'A' wetlands had the cleanest water and the most oxygen, type 'B' had less oxygen, and type 'C' had very little oxygen where the water could be polluted.

Working together, they had the 'Wetland Report Card' finished quickly. They found many insects from the 'B' category and a few from 'A' and 'C'. When Tota Ma and Sose looked at their chart, they decided that the big wetland would get a 'B' grade. This was good news because it meant that the wetland was fairly healthy! Maybe later in the spring it would need a litter cleanup, followed by some water testing. From the far side of the marsh came the 'peep, peep' of the Spring Peepers, singing a song of joy and thanksgiving for the return of the spring. The marsh was waking up!

Tota Ma thought about some of the teachings her Elders shared with her when she was young. When another season of life begins in the watershed, one of the very first birds of spring to return to the waterways is the Red-winged Blackbird. The male



blackbirds arrive when there is still ice on the ponds and waterways. Some of the Old People say that it is the blackbirds' call that wakes up those little Spring Peepers and encourages them to start climbing out of their mud beds to join the new season.

Another teaching Tota Ma remembered says that when the Spring Peepers start to call, it is time to take the spiles out of the maple trees because sap season is coming to an end. Modern science shares the accuracy of this teaching. When the temperature is warm enough in the waterways and wetlands, the first frog singers come out. This is when the sap in the maple trees begins to get cloudy and sweetness fades from the sap.

"Sose, next week when we come back, can you bring your iPod and digital recorder to record some of the sounds of spring in our wetland?" asked Tota Ma. She gently returned the insect babies to the water and rinsed out the basin.

"Of course I can. I will also have to listen to the frog calls CD a few more times so that I am ready for next week. But I can already sing like a Peeper! Peep! Peep! Peep!" Sose sang just like the Spring Peepers.

"This is going to be fun, listening for frogs while we are out walking for our health. I really love the return of spring! The weather is nice for walking and each week new frogs will sing their songs for us," said Tota Ma.

She sat on the *Raksotha* rock for a few moments longer, listening to the sounds of spring before she and Sose began their walk home. Tota Ma remembered *A'nó:vara's* eleventh challenge: "Come down to the wetland, Tota Ma. Bring your family with you. Show them how to help the turtles. Tell the Elders where we lay our eggs so our nesting sites can be protected. Count all of the turtle species to help protect us."

TURTLE TALLY

CHAPTER 11



The loud ringing of the telephone startled Tota Ma. Sewatis was calling from the city and she sounded very excited. "Tota, guess what Wari and I found when we were looking at the Toronto Zoo's Adopt-A-Pond website at school yesterday? They need communities to go out and watch for turtles. It is called Turtle Tally. The website asked that we go walking and look for turtles in June. This is around the time when they lay their eggs," said Sewatis.

"Tota, can we visit and take a walk with you to the wetland? Maybe we will find some of A'nó:wara's friends," exclaimed Sewatis excitedly. "Uncle Buddy is coming to the reserve from the city and he said that he will bring us if it is okay with you." This idea was very exciting for the children. They hoped Tota Ma would say yes!

Tota Ma was so happy to hear from her grandchildren. It was always nice when they came to visit. She missed them, especially during the long winter. Soon the children would be visiting for the summer.

Tota Ma exclaimed, "How kind of Uncle Buddy. If it is okay with your mom, it is okay with me." Tota Ma's grandchildren were always welcome.

"The women of the 'Friends of the Turtle' walking group have been out every afternoon and on some evenings too! They are looking and listening for signs of spring while they walk," Tota Ma explained. "You will be surprised with some of the things they saw and heard as the marsh and the wetland woke

up this spring. *Tsyokwaris*, *sora* and *tsikara`tanya`ks* singing, even a couple of *z* were spotted down by the open area in the little bay. I am sure they would welcome some more eyes and ears," said Tota Ma.

Sewatis copied the Turtle Tally information from the website to read to his grandmother. "We need to go and watch for signs of turtles, basking in the sun or walking on the road, while looking for places where they might lay eggs. We can even look for signs of turtle nests. I can bring a pair of binoculars and a copy of the Turtle Tally form. We should bring



the turtle poster too! Wari says that he is bringing her new rubber boots just in case we need to go looking into the wetland. We must copy down what we see and then send the information to the Toronto Zoo website. They will take our information and add it to the Turtle Tally results," Sewatis explained.

This sounded like a great idea to Tota Ma as she said goodbye to Sewatis. Tota Ma started getting things ready for her grandchildren's arrival. The sleeping bags and extra pillows were taken out of the closet and hung outside in the fresh air. She

decided to bake a big pan of corn bread and fry up some fresh fish on Friday for their supper. She knew how much her grandchildren loved this meal! Tota Ma called Sose and asked if he would like to come over for dinner as well. She went to bed early that night, looking forward to everyone's arrival.

That night, *A'nó:wara* came to Tota Ma in her dreams to remind her about the *eleventh challenge*. "Come down to the water, Tota Ma. Bring your family with you. Show them how to help the turtles. Tell the Elders where we lay our eggs so our nesting sites can be protected. Come to the water, Tota Ma, and visit with me and my relatives. Count all of the turtle species in your waters."

When Tota Ma's grandchildren arrived, they were excited to hear what their Tota had planned for the weekend! It was a beautiful day and they were hoping it would be something outdoors. Staying at Tota Ma's house was fun because there was so much space to play. Their weekends in the city were very different than their visits with Tota Ma.

"Good morning, my children. Get ready! We have lots to do today. *A'nó:wara* reminded me to check on her family members," said Tota Ma.

Tota Ma explained to Sewatis and Wari the responsible and respectful way for interacting with plants and animals in the water and wetland. She also pulled out the turtle poster from the Toronto Zoo. The poster displayed all

eight Ontario turtle species, which helped to explain the differences between each, making them easier to identify in the wetland.

"The Turtle Tally says to report turtle nests too! We want to make sure we are aware of turtle behaviours to understand how to help them," explained Tota Ma.

Once Tota Ma, Wari, and Sewatis had their binoculars, snacks for the journey, and Turtle Tally forms, they were on their way to *A'nó:wara's* wetland.

When they arrived, they quickly realized how quiet they had to be to spot any wetland creatures.

"I wonder what we will see today?" said Wari. A couple of *Orhyokon* scurried away quickly at the sound of his voice.

"Shhh, you are going to scare everything away!" said Sewatis.

Tota Ma smiled and appreciated how dedicated her grandchildren were to helping the Turtle Tally program. As they walked further into the wetland, they stepped with care. Sewatis looked intently into the pond and noticed something that looked like a rock sitting on top of a log.

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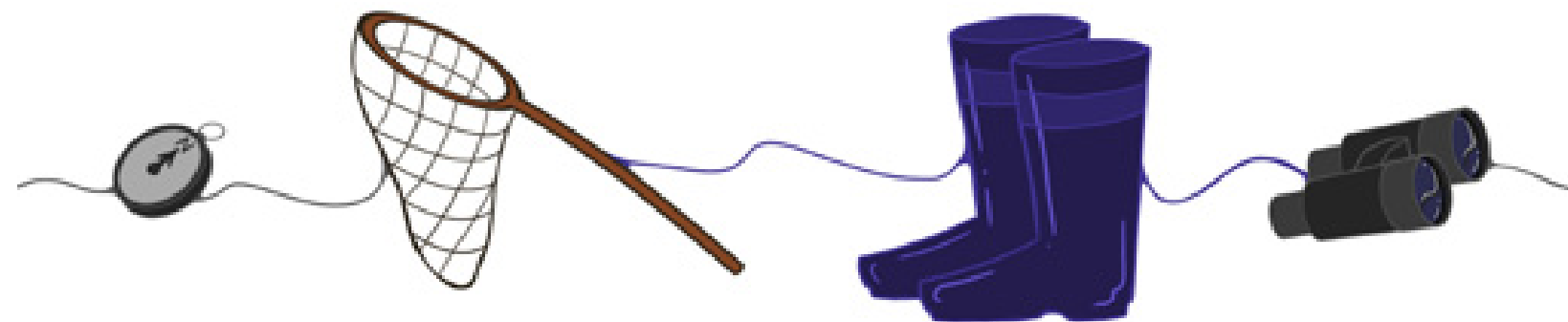
the pond and noticed something that looked like a rock sitting on top of a log.

"Tota! What is that?" Sewatis asked. Tota Ma quickly looked through her binoculars and spotted a turtle sunning itself.

"That is a Blanding's turtle, my child," answered Tota Ma. "He is sitting on that log to absorb heat from the sun. This is very exciting! According to the turtle poster we have, Blanding's turtles are a threatened species. We must be quiet and not disturb him. Wari, write down on our Turtle Tally forms what we see." Wari quickly recorded the type of turtle.

They continued their walk through the wetland, sharing knowledge about the different plant species they could identify, and the special places Tota Ma could remember from her childhood. Sewatis and Wari began to realize how important wetlands were. Many different types of plants and animals were living in the wetland together. The grandchildren were grateful for this special time with Tota Ma and grateful for the turtles who shared this special place.

On the way home from the wetland, the family helped a turtle cross the road and they thought about the many challenges turtles must overcome. This helped Tota Ma focus on her *twelfth challenge*, to do something else for *A'nó:wara* and her turtle family members.





WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

CHAPTER 12

Tota Ma realized it was time to get active! She needed to call upon Wari, Sewatis, and Sose for some ideas. She wondered what else they could do to help turtles and their wetland homes. They would need to tell others about what they saw living in the wetland. She would invite Elders to speak about the medicine plants, traditional places, and the importance of turtles.

A clean up of the waterways and the shoreline would be a great idea too, thought Tota Ma. She decided to put out garbage boxes and recycling bins, and put up turtle crossing signs to help protect turtles on their way to nesting areas.

Tota Ma would encourage community members to look at their fresh water usage to ensure water would be available for future generations. Most importantly, Tota Ma decided to speak about what she learned with Chief and Band Council. She needed to find more help to get all of the work done!

Tota Ma told Sewatis and Wari right away about the plans she had for their day. With so much to do,

they had to get right to it! Cleaning the wetland was first on the list and Tota Ma knew that Sewatis, Wari and Sose would do a great job!

“Invite your friends to take part in our very special project today,” Tota Ma encouraged. She gathered all of the outdoor clothing she could find and filled a backpack with a delicious lunch. It was going to be a long day!

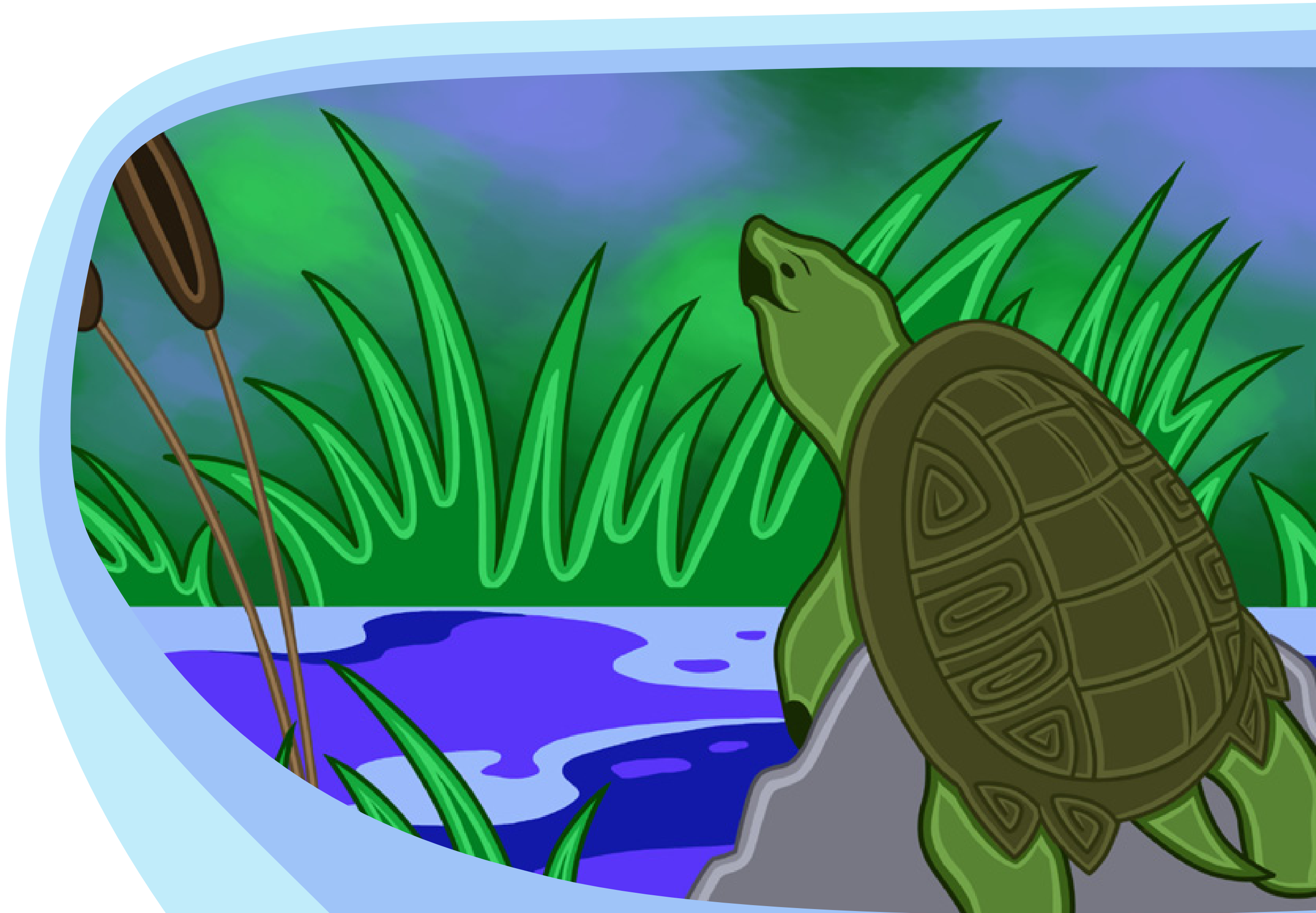
Everyone gathered at Tota Ma’s house to walk to the shoreline together. Children from the community came to help, along with their parents. Tota Ma thought it was nice to see parents as excited as their children. The group walked down to the wetland and broke up into groups to tackle the shoreline in sections. This would ensure the most thorough clean up. Everyone carried a garbage bag, along with a bucket for recyclable litter. Wari and Sewatis went with Tota Ma and three other groups went in different directions to start the clean up.

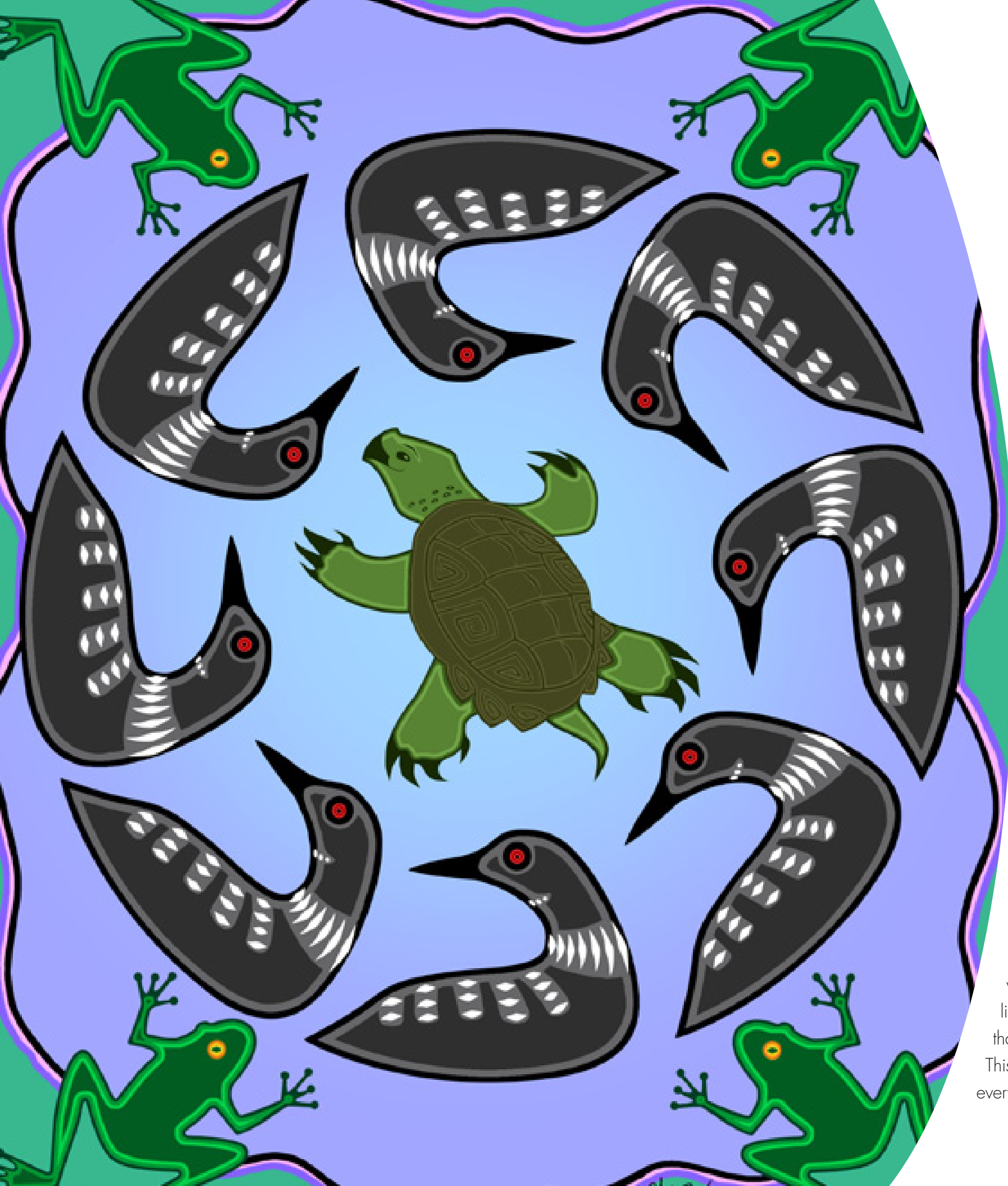
Wari and Sewatis were so excited Tota Ma could barely keep up with them. “Hey slow down, you two! If we go too quickly, we might miss some litter that needs to be picked up!” said Tota Ma. She was right! There were many little pieces of litter and fishing line which were easy to miss, but could make a big difference to safety of the creatures living in the wetland.

“Hey guys! I am going to make it my responsibility to pick up all of these bottle caps and plastic rings! I heard that these can be very harmful to turtles and other species living in the wetland,” said Wari with concern.

“Yes, that is a great idea Wari! I will be in charge of cans and bottles. We can recycle them when we get back to Tota’s house,” said Sewatis. Tota Ma was proud that her grandchildren were developing an appreciation for the land and a greater understanding of the importance of taking care of *Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya*.

Before they knew it, their section of the wetland looked as clean as could be! Wari and Sewatis were proud of the work they completed, and Tota Ma was happy to see their wetland looking so much more clean and beautiful. The group met up once everyone was done working to enjoy lunch. The local newspaper came to report on the good work of the community. What a successful day and a wonderful story the children could tell when they got back to the city. Tota Ma was sure that this was the beginning of a special new task that the community would continue.





CELEBRATION

CHAPTER 13



As Tota Ma sat by the water speaking to *A'nó:wara*, she reflected on the many challenges given. She thought about all they learned and the great adventure she shared with her grandchildren.

Tota Ma said, "I have learned about the eight Ontario turtle species living in this part of Turtle Island and how much help they need to continue living here. I discovered a whole new world of life in the marsh down the road from my little house. I remembered stories and teachings that were shared with me since I was a little girl. This helped to create a better understanding of how everything needs to work together. I really enjoyed

sitting and listening to the songs of the frogs and toads as they raised their voices in thanksgiving for the arrival of another spring. My daily walks down to the marsh and the wetland have given me more energy! I especially enjoyed sharing and learning with my beautiful grandchildren Wari, Sewatis, and Sose. It was a special occasion when we walked together, looking for signs of turtles in the wetlands. We also showed our respect by picking up garbage in the marsh and planned how we could help our turtles survive right here in Tyendinaga." *A'nó:wara* nodded her head in approval of Tota Ma's work.

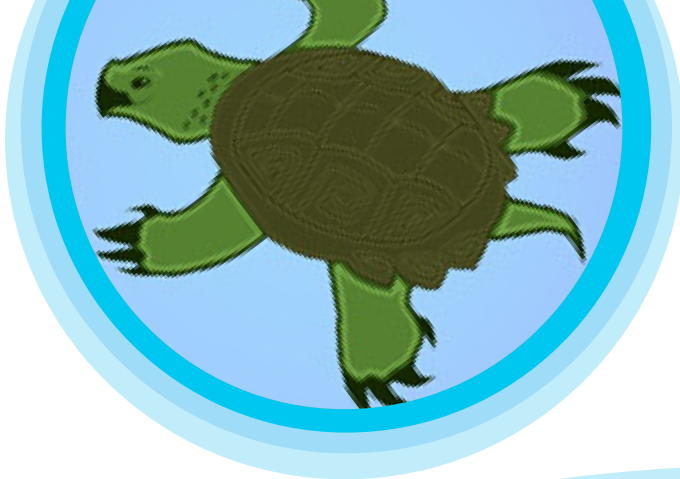
Tota Ma continued, "I will never forget meeting Josephine Mandamin and her story of the Water

Walk. She is such an inspiration to all of us! There are so many gifts we have been given in Creation. I am grateful to you, *A'nó:wara*, for opening my eyes, my ears, and my heart to the joys of the waters and the wetlands that are home to our turtle relations."

Tota Ma continued to explain what her community did for the water, "Everyone felt great when the wetland clean-up was complete. The youth brought down wooden benches and set them up at the edge of the marsh near the Elder's Lodge. Now the Elders can go to the water and sit and enjoy the sights and sounds, *A'nó:wara*. Just as we finished cleaning up, one of the little girls from the school came to tell me that she saw a turtle sitting on top of a log over by the muskrat push-up. I looked and I was sure it was you *A'nó:wara*. It looked like you were smiling and then I waved to you. I paused for a moment and said a special *Nyawenkowa* to you for all your guidance. After our clean-up, we went to the community centre for the feast. We were feasting in celebration, our connections to the turtle!" Tota Ma explained.

"Please tell me all about your celebration for the thirteenth challenge" *A'nó:wara* asked gently.

"Everyone brought their favourite food to the feast, while the children set up all of the tables for the Elders to sit at. It was a great opportunity for the community to get together and discuss all of their accomplishments! Our children shared their stories with our Elders who smiled, remembering their own youth. The Elders, in return, shared their stories related to the Thirteen Moons Turtle Calendar donated by the Toronto Zoo. Everyone mingled and laughed. Then an Elder offered words of thanksgiving to the Creator for the food, and the community. We were all invited to come and eat when the Elder exclaimed, '*To ii Tetewatskahon.*'



Everyone enjoyed sharing their experiences while working through your thirteen challenges, *A'nó:wara*."

"The children who helped me with the project received special certificates from the Toronto Zoo for helping with the Turtle Tally program. It was such a nice day for everyone filled with laughter and shared

memories!" Tota Ma paused for a moment as she gazed at *A'nó:wara*.

"This experience taught me to understand how much one can do to make a change in a community. I will continue working for turtles and the water. After experiencing these thirteen challenges, I will continue to think about ways to conserve water so



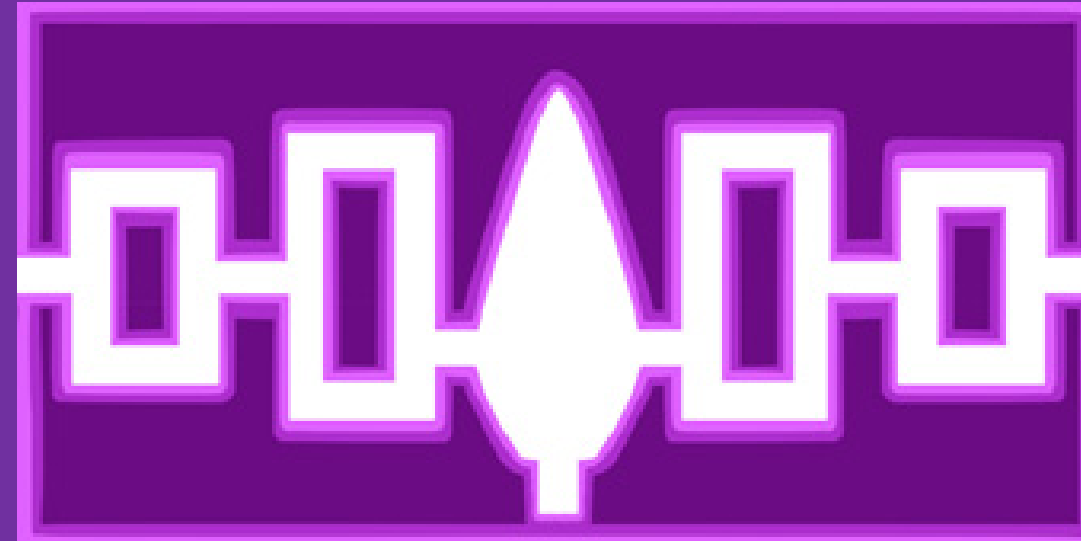
that there will be more water in the wetland and the watershed for everyone to share. I will write letters to the Band Office and to the newspaper about turtles and their needs for clean and healthy habitats. Then, our whole community will know about our special places are that give us clean water, provide places for medicine plants to grow, animals to feed us, and especially places for *A'nó:wara* families to live in."

Tota Ma promised, "My evening walks will continue year round. While I am walking, I will think of you, *A'nó:wara*, and your family. I have made a commitment to become your helper. I will share turtle stories and teachings with others. *Nyawenkowa A'nó:wara*, to you and your family, for helping me see, listen, think, and act in a better way!"



GLOSSARY

Please note all language words used in this book have been translated by Wesley Miller from the community of Six Nations, Joe Brown from Tyendingaga and Rick Hill Sr. from Six Nations. These are Haudenosaunee Iroquois communities located in Ontario, Canada.



Akohserake (*A-goh-se-LAW-gay*) - winter time
Akoksten'a (*A-gok-STUH-ah*) - an old woman
Aksotha (*A-goh-SO-tah*) - Her grandmother -locative
Anishinaabe (*A-nish-NAW-bay*) - Ojibway
A'nó:wara (*Ah'-NO-wa-lah*) - turtle
Ao (*Ow*) - a Mohawk exclamation "hey"
Etshitewatsi'a karahkwa (*Eh-chi-day-wah-JEE'-ah Ga-LUCK-wah*) - sun
Kanyen'kehaka (*Gun-yun'-gay-HAW-gah*) - Mohawk Nation
Kanyen'keha (*Gun-yun'-GEH-hah*) - Mohawk Language
Karonhià:ke (*Ga-loon-HYA-gay*) - the place in the sky
Ken'niyohontehsha (*Guh'-nee-yo-hoon-DES-ha*) - strawberry
Kwe kwe (*Gway Gway*) - a Mohawk greeting
Manitoulin Island - Island located in central Ontario
Nyawenkowa (*Nya-wuh-GO-wah*) - a big thanks
Ohenton Karihwaterkwén (*O-hawn-duh Ga-lee-h-wa-DECK-wuh*) - words before all else
Ohyariha (*O-hya-LEE-hah*) - June
Onkwehonwe (*Oon-gway-HOON-way*) - Original peoples
Orhen'kene (*Ol-huh-GAY-nay*) - morning
Orhyokon (*Ol-HYO-gooh*) - chipmunk
Oyen'kwa'onwe (*O-yuh'-gwa'-OON-way*) - tobacco
Pow Wow - First Nations cultural gathering with music, food, artwork and traditional teachings
Raksotha (*Luck-SO-tah*) - grandfather

Roksten'a (*Loak-STUH-ah*) - an old man
Rotinonhsyonni (*Lo-dee-noon-SHYOON-nee*) - People of the longhouse
Senhniseriyohstha (*Suh-nee-zay-lee-YOH-stah*) - good morning
Sewatis (*Say-WA-deez*) - John
She:kon (*Say-goh*) - hello / still / again
Shonkwaya'tihson (*Soon-gwa-yut-DEE-soon*) - the Creator
Ska'nyonhsa (*Sga'-NYOONH-sah*) - moose
Sora (*Zo-la*) - duck
Sose (*Zo-zay*) - Joe
Tekonnonhweratons (*Day-goon-noonh-way-LAW-doons*) - I give thanks to you
To ii tetewatskahon (*Doe ee'-eeh day-day-wut-SKAW-hoon*) - let's eat
Tota (*Duh-da*) - a Mohawk reference to Grandmother
Tsikara'tanya'ks (*Jee-ga-la'-DUN'-yuks*) - frog
Tsi'tsiakà: (*Jee'-ja-GAW-yoon*) - the matured flower
Tsyokwaris (*JOE-gwa-lees*) - red winged black bird
Turtle Island - Name of North America used by First Nations communities based on creation stories
Tyendingaga (*Ty-en-di-NAY-gah*) - a Mohawk community located in southern Ontario
Wahta (*Wah-da*) - a maple tree or the Mohawk community located in the Muskokas
Wari (*Wa-lee*) - Mary
Wa'tkonnonhweraton (*Wut-goon-noonh-way-LAW-doon*) - I gave thanks
Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya (*Yeh-tee'-nee-STUH-hah Oh-WUN-ja*) - mother earth

KANIAN'KEHAKA (MOHAWK) THANKSGIVING ADDRESS



Ohenton kariwatehkwen

`words before all else`

Kentsyokwa sewatahonsiyohst ken'nikarihwehsha. Onen kati nonwa ne teyethinohweraton tsi nahoten wahshonkwawi

attention you all listen for a short while. So then now we will all give thanks for what he had given us

ne Shonkwaya'tison.

The creator.

Teyethinohweratons ne onkweshon'a

we all give thanks to the people

Teyethinohweratons ne yethinihstenha tsi yohwentsyake

we all give thanks to our mother the earth

teyethinohweratons ne kahnekaronnyon

we all give thanks to the water of the world

teyethinohweratons ne kentsyonshon'a

we all give thanks to the fish life

teyethinohweratons ne ohenteshon'a

we all give thanks to the grasses

teyethinohweratons ne ononhkwashton'a

we all give thanks to the medicine

teyethinohweratons ne otsinonwashon'a

we all give thanks to the insect life

teyethinohweratons ne kahikshon'a

we all give thanks to the fruits

teyethinohweratons ne tyonnhehkwen

we all give thanks to our sustenance (foods)

teyethinohweratons ne kontiriyo

we all give thanks to the animals

teyethinohweratons ne karontashon'a tahnon okwireshon'a

we all give thanks to the trees and bushes

teyethinohweraton ne otsi'ten'okon'a

we all give thanks to the birds

teyethinohweratons ne kayeri nikawerake

we all give thanks to the four winds

teyethinohweratons ne yethisothokon ratiwerahs

we all give thanks to our grandfather thunders

tethsitewanohweratons ne etsitewatsi'a tyohkenekha karahkwa

we all give him thanks, our eldest brother the day sun

teyethinohweratons ne yethiso'tha ahsonthennekha karahkwa

we all give thanks to our grandmother the night sun

teyethinohweratons ne yotsistokwaronnyon tsi tkaronhyake

we all give thanks to the stars in the sky

tethsitewanohweratons ne shonkwaya'tison

we all give him thanks our creator

tho kati nenyotonhake ne onkwa'nikonra

that is the way it will be in our minds

thok nikawennake

that is all the words

(Provided by Joseph Brown from Tyendinaga, Ontario)

THE WAYS OF KNOWING PARTNERSHIP TURTLE ISLAND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Toronto Zoo's Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation programme shares the hopes and goals of First Nation partners in our commitment to the preservation of wild life and wild places for those yet to come. This programme partners with Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee First Nation communities located in the province of Ontario, Canada to incorporate Traditional Knowledge into turtle and wetland conservation programming.

The intention of this partnership is to bring together Keepers of Traditional Knowledge, Elders, First Nation community

members and Turtle Island Conservation programme team members to support community cultural and natural history priorities incorporating Traditional Knowledge while building awareness with non-Aboriginals.

The programme employs First Nation youth and is guided by a First Nation Advisory group.

All teachings and knowledge remain with our partner communities for their decisions on how it is to be used

Our Objectives are:

1. To foster respect for self, community, Mother earth and the Creator.
2. To recognize and record significant landscapes valued by First Nations communities.
3. To integrate traditional ways of knowing with western science to monitor, protect, respect and restore landscapes.
4. To integrate language, art, and crafts to sustain traditional ways of knowing and living.
5. To facilitate understanding of the diversity of First Nation culture and way of knowing among non-Aboriginals.

For further information and companion resources available from this programme please visit:

www.turtleislandconservation.com

www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogWatchOntario.asp

www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp



Or write to:

Turtle Island Conservation, Toronto Zoo

361A Old Finch Avenue

Toronto, ON Canada M1B 5K7

T 416 393-6362

F 416-392-4979

turtleisland@torontozoo.ca

CHAPTER IMAGE EXPLANATIONS

COVER

It was important to me to emphasize two main topics, a cultural and content identity, in the cover illustration. *A'nó:wara* is our central figure in the book and therefore the central figure of our illustration. Everyone around *A'nó:wara* is celebrating the turtle as the key cultural figure while observing the relationship between teachings and environmental factors that are so important to the conservation of wetlands. The other figures on the cover are directly involved with *A'nó:wara* through oral tradition or habitat in the book. The wampum belt is the main cultural focal point symbolic of the Haudenosaunee cultural identity. Compositionally, it brings the focal point directly where it needs to be which is on *A'nó:wara*.

CHAPTER 1

The Morning Prayer in my opinion is one of the most important ceremonial practices. It is here we give thanks for everything we are about to receive during the course of the day, and give thanks to all that continues to sustain our well being and our livelihoods. This acknowledgment not only develops a perception of our place amongst the living populaces of this earth, but helps remind us that we live in a co-dependency.

It was in this image I strived to reflect wholesome interconnectedness that reflects a gentle and spiritual practice. My main focus here is the central figure of the person making the offering. The key element

included was the heart which is directly connected to the hand offering the tobacco. The hand is then reaching out to the turtle and water which is an acknowledgment of the inter-dependence between the species.

CHAPTER 2

Every creature has its medicine and its own teachings. Each teaching is always given to us from the heart. I wanted to depict the turtle with the heart showing figuratively within its "belly shell" (plastron) reminding us that teachings are always from the heart, and given directly to our own. The spiral encloses and points toward the heart reflecting the focus of these emotions and their importance.

CHAPTER 3

I wanted to convey the urgency and attention this chapter reflects on species conservation. Extinction is far more than just losing something forever. It is a direct reflection of our ignorance, cruelty, and selfishness that begins a chain reaction within an entire ecosystem. Nothing creates more sadness for me than to realize that the selfishness, of some people, who think their overindulgent life styles take precedence over the very earth that created them.

The internal decorations are symbolic of the abundance of life these species have, and are drawn from the local environments they call home. The connection lines

connect them with the land, yet their bodies are not as decorated as the one firmly on the land mass. This was symbolic of the dependence that these creatures have to the land, yet there are those that are being driven to extinction due to loss of habitat and are slowly becoming disconnected and fading away. The vibrant reds in this image stand out in stark contrast to the blues seen throughout the series of images produced for this project as a reminder that perhaps it should remain just as visibly important in our own minds.

CHAPTER 4

The title of this chapter made me rethink a basic fact of life: Our neighbors whatever species they may be are ALSO our friends. It's easy to forget that in our modern day living as we constantly block ourselves from our neighbors with fences and walls, where "privacy" has become an issue even in political debates. We forget that nothing is actually independent of anything. The commonly held contemporary outlook is to view nature and the natural world as something to be exploited and disconnected from ourselves, is uneducated and simply an incorrect perception. Our livelihoods depend on interconnected values of everyone working together in a community. Be it human and/or non human, we are all related to one another in some way. In this image I wanted to capture a very intimate friendship between the inhabitants of the wetlands, and their connection's to one another.

CHAPTER 5

A good habitat is one that can provide any species with all that it needs: Shelter, Food, and abundance. These things let all creatures thrive peacefully, with the capacity to create families of their own. I wanted the focal point of this image to be the bright white of the eggs in the ground which is a pure indication of the healthy and abundant landscape that the turtle lives in. I included the Loon

in this image for a symbolic reason as I was taught that the Loon is the protector of children. Sitting on top of the log is both a symbol of the relaxed and peaceful environment, as well as a Loon guardian for the turtle's children. The fish is a representation of the food chain and co-dependence of each species with one another.

CHAPTER 6

Storytelling and Oral Traditions have always played a key role in the culture of First Nations people. To me it is the heart of perpetuating the culture so I wanted the fire to be the main source of the image, as well as the turtle design in smoke. Symbolically these images represent the essence of life that propels First Nations cultural values forward. It is also the element that gathers the community around much like oral traditions.

CHAPTER 7

The Sacred Circle's teachings remind us of the; unity of our world, ethnicities and cultures, as well as life stages, seasons and also plays a key role in the understanding of our relationships with the world. As an image that represents all the turtles that exist in our entire world, I thought it would be important to incorporate this symbol as the key element that sets the stage for the image to unfold upon. The turtles chosen for this chapter image relate to the traditional colors within the circle: Yellow Belly Slider, Red Ear Slider, Black Tortoise and Albino Sea Turtle.

CHAPTER 8

I wanted to emphasize the First Nations traditional responsibility of women as Keepers of the Water. I drew association both physically in form while utilizing the figure of a woman. Her hair and body merge with the flowing wavy patterns of the ripples in the water. The nurturing quality of the water connects the female figure, with arms over

her breasts and heart, as a gesture of caring while depicting the concept of “Mother Nature” in the female form. We even see the womb bearing life - in this case a turtle which supports the concept of women and water as the fetus is carried and guarded by a water sac.

CHAPTER 9

This image focuses solely on the water while providing an introspective moment to value its fundamental importance, our use of it, our dependence on it, and lastly our responsibility for it. This image is a simple one visually highlighting the most common gesture humans take with water which is the cupping of hands beneath a falling cascade of liquid. It's such a simple gesture and yet it isn't unlike praying with our hands as they are raised to our faces while in deep thoughts of our proceeding actions. This is such a simple gesture yet striking in that it might soon come to an end if we are not careful with our resources. There may come a time when the simple task of washing our face or freely enjoying the pleasure of quenching our thirst will be looked upon as a past luxury with envy and regret if we do not take action towards the preservation of our water now.

CHAPTER 10

Frogs and Turtles enjoy more than just environmental connections they are also close friends in an ecosystem that depends on each other for survival. Both are environmental indicators and their health and abundance in a specific ecosystem can indicate the overall health or danger of an ecosystem. They become key factors and facilitators in keeping those ecosystems alive and well. My image focused on this connection and relationship to each other. Their poses indicate a circular, cyclical and whole form where each is dependant, a part of, and completing the other.

CHAPTER 11

I was thinking about “Stackable turtles” when I was considering the concept of “Tallying the numbers”. Like many other things we stack for the sake of numerical clarity, I recalled that turtles themselves could be viewed as “stacked” upon one another. This gave way to a comical image of a “Babushka Doll” made up of turtles in my creative mind. I also wanted to share another message about the fundamental dependence on water and show that Life was given to us by water which allows us and all living things to grow and multiply.

CHAPTER 12

The focus of this image is to depict a special bond between Human and Turtle. When a friend is hurt we often ask them “what can I do?” Reflecting on this, I wanted to create an image where the Human engages the Turtle with the same inquiry “What can we do?” Turtle and Human are connected by the universe in a more enlightened way rather than with words. I wanted to convey that knowledge is the key way we can help, by educating ourselves utilizing the wisdom of the Turtle and by learning ways of conserving them.

CHAPTER 13

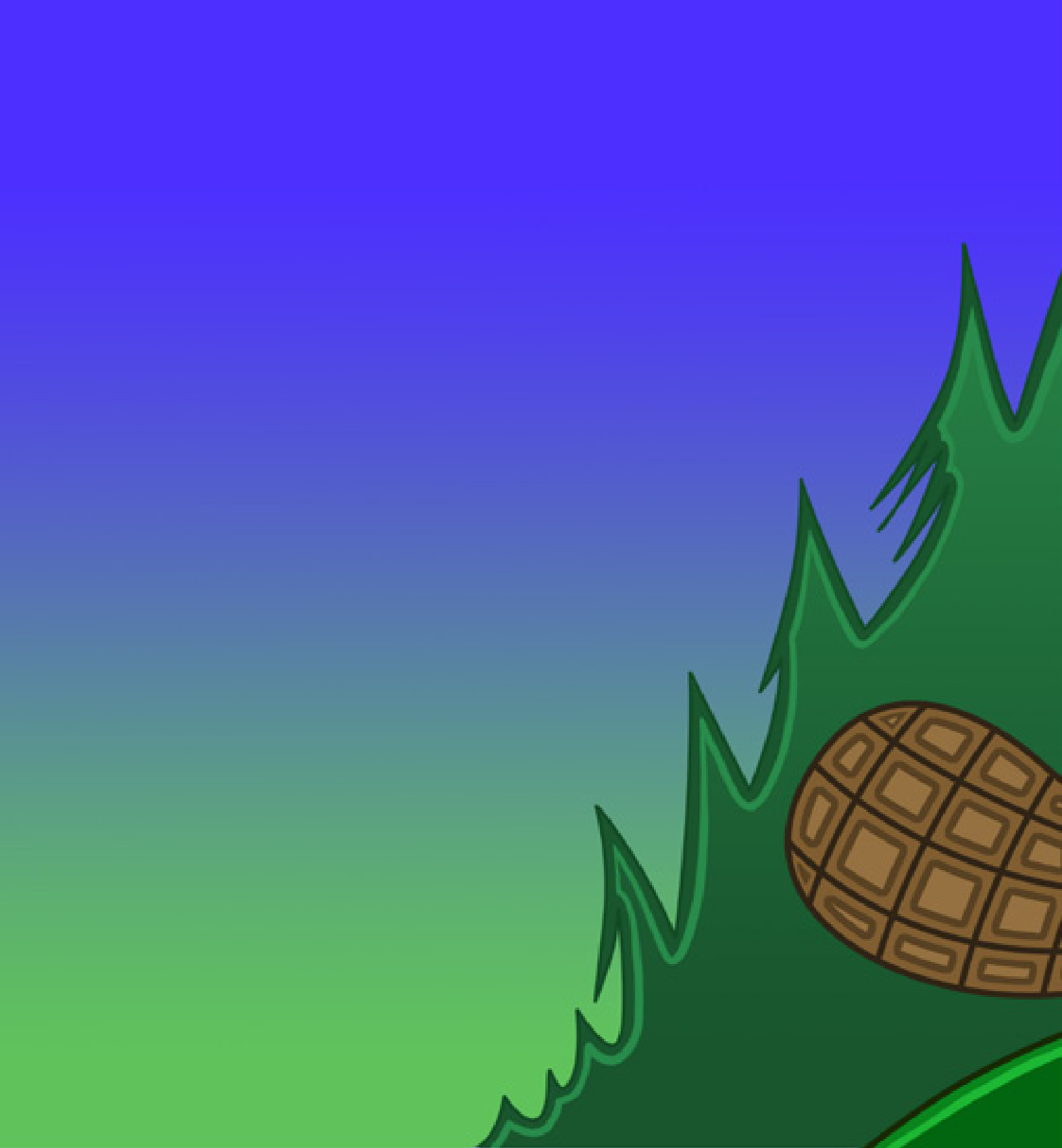
This illustrated image was created with the intent of sharing visually as much awe and joy as a celebration can. The central figure of the turtle is our focus. Around the turtle all the water folk are creating a dazzling celebratory dance presentation of life. Colors were kept light hearted to emphasize this joyous occasion.

BERNICE GORDON ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada Bernice Gordon has been drawing since she was two and a half years old. While growing up she developed a passion for animals, science fiction, cartoons, and ancient cultures. These subjects of interest have become the center stage for her images and illustrations.

Bernice is a graduate of the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Ontario and uses a wide variety of mediums to express all of her interests visually, sometimes merging the traditional with contemporary.





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