



## 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."