



WATER: OUR BUSINESS

CHAPTER 9 - EKO-ZHAANGCHIING GINJIGAN

One spring afternoon, Nokomis Annie 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.

Nokomis Annie was happy to find *Miskwaadesi* basking on a large, moss covered log. It was the first time Nokomis Annie had seen her since she went to the bottom of the marsh to sleep for the winter. The old turtle seemed to be enjoying the beautiful spring day.

She was thinking a lot about *Miskwaadesi*, ever since the *kwewag* of the community met and planned their *nibi* walk. Nokomis Annie was certain that *Miskwaadesi* would approve of the turtle posters they created and their walk around the marsh.

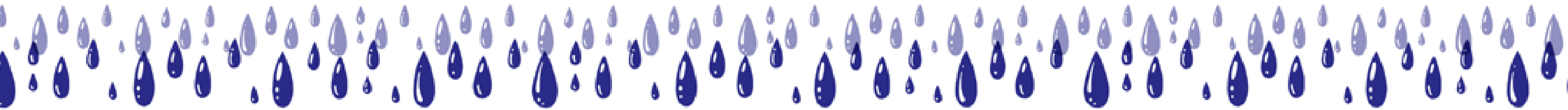
"*Aaniin Miskwaadesi*. It is so good to see you today," said Nokomis Annie.

"*Ho-wah! Aaniin* Nokomis Annie. I have just woken from my winter sleep. It is a nice afternoon to sit by the *nibi* and soak up some sun to warm my body after a long, cold winter." The old turtle's quiet voice seemed stronger than before.

Nokomis Annie sat down beside *Miskwaadesi*. She told the old turtle what the community was doing to learn about the different turtle species. Nokomis Annie spoke about Josephine Mandamin, the Water Walkers, and how the *kwewag* in the community organized a *nibi* walk for the youth. All the children took turns carrying buckets of *nibi* around the wetland while singing songs for *nibi*. The youth were learning to protect the sacred resource.

Miskwaadesi blinked slowly. Nokomis Annie noticed a few tears forming at the corners of the old turtle's eyes. She seemed to nod her head with grateful approval.

"*Nibi* is so important to my turtle family and friends." said *Miskwaadesi*. "I spend almost all of my days and nights in *nbiing*. The elements of *nibi*, sun, air, and earth are all a part of our lives. I sleep under the ice of the *nbiing* for six moons of the year. I am surrounded by *nibi* when I am swimming and when I am looking for dinner. I need fresh and clean *nibi* every day for my life."



The *nibi* looked so inviting to Nokomis Annie on the beautiful spring afternoon. She thought that *Miskwaadesi* must enjoy the water when it looked like this. The little *nibi* bugs swam around, a few minnows dashed between *nibi* plants, while some tiny tadpoles wiggled in the shallow *nibiing*.

Nokomis Annie thought about *Miskwaadesi's* dependence on the *nibi*. It was as important as air for breathing! She thought about the elements

and how important they are for both *Miskwaadesi*, herself and all living things.

Nokomis Annie started to think about the amount of *nibi* her *Okomisan* used when she lived in the bush without running *nibi*. She fondly remembered her childhood summers at her *Okomisan's* little house. Nokomis Annie spoke to the turtle about some of her memories, "I remember spending a lot of time with my *Okomisan* when I was small. We used to carry *nibi* from the creek to use in the house. She taught me to fill my bucket by scooping

downstream, so the *nibi* was not disturbed. We always had a little bit of *asemaa* to place as an offering at the edge of the *nibi*. My *Okomisan* said that the *asemaa* was to say *miigwech* to the *nibi* and to honour it."

Miskwaadesi continued listening to Nokomis Annie. "My *Okomisan* said we needed to take care of *nibi* because it is important for our health. We did not waste any *nibi* in those times. I remember that she gave me a little cup of *nibi* for my toothbrush. She had an outhouse that was behind the house, away from the *nibi*. When it was time to bathe, we would use a basin to scrub our hands and face

and a round tub for a bath in the winter time. She always respected *nibi* and reminded me to look after the creek and be grateful for the good, cold *nibi* that came to us. My *Okomisan* understood that *nibi* is alive and that it has a Spirit. I think that my *Okomisan* was a good keeper of *nibi*! She had a very small *nibi* footprint on the earth. Mine is much bigger than hers was." Nokomis Annie was uncomfortable with this realization as she continued speaking to

Miskwaadesi. "I have to be careful with my use because my *nibi* comes from a well and I do not want it to run dry. It is so tasty, cold, and clean! I know it keeps me healthy!"

The old turtle reminded Nokomis Annie to place her *asemaa* as an offering every day to offer her personal prayers, "Remember, your ancestors have lived in the watersheds of Turtle Island and prayed for its health for thousands of years," said *Miskwaadesi*. "They were very careful to keep *nibi* clean. *Kwewag* are responsible for *nibi* and this is taken very seriously. Their ceremonies, prayers, and actions teach children how important *nibi* is."

Miskwaadesi continued, "Too much *nibi* 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 *nibi*, Nokomis?" challenged *Miskwaadesi*. "Now that you know how much water you use, come back down to the *nibi*. Listen to the *mogkii*. What are they saying? Look at the little creatures in and around the *nibi*, then record what you see. This is your *tenth challenge*."

Miskwaadesi snapped at a buzzing fly and suddenly plopped into the *nibi*. The minnows and tadpoles swam for cover as the ripples spread out around her shell. As she swam away, the ripples reminded Nokomis Annie that everything humans do causes a ripple on *Aki*, affecting everything else in Creation. Thinking about her water use, Nokomis Annie completed the ninth challenge, and now she was excited for the next!

