

CELEBRATION

CHAPTER 13

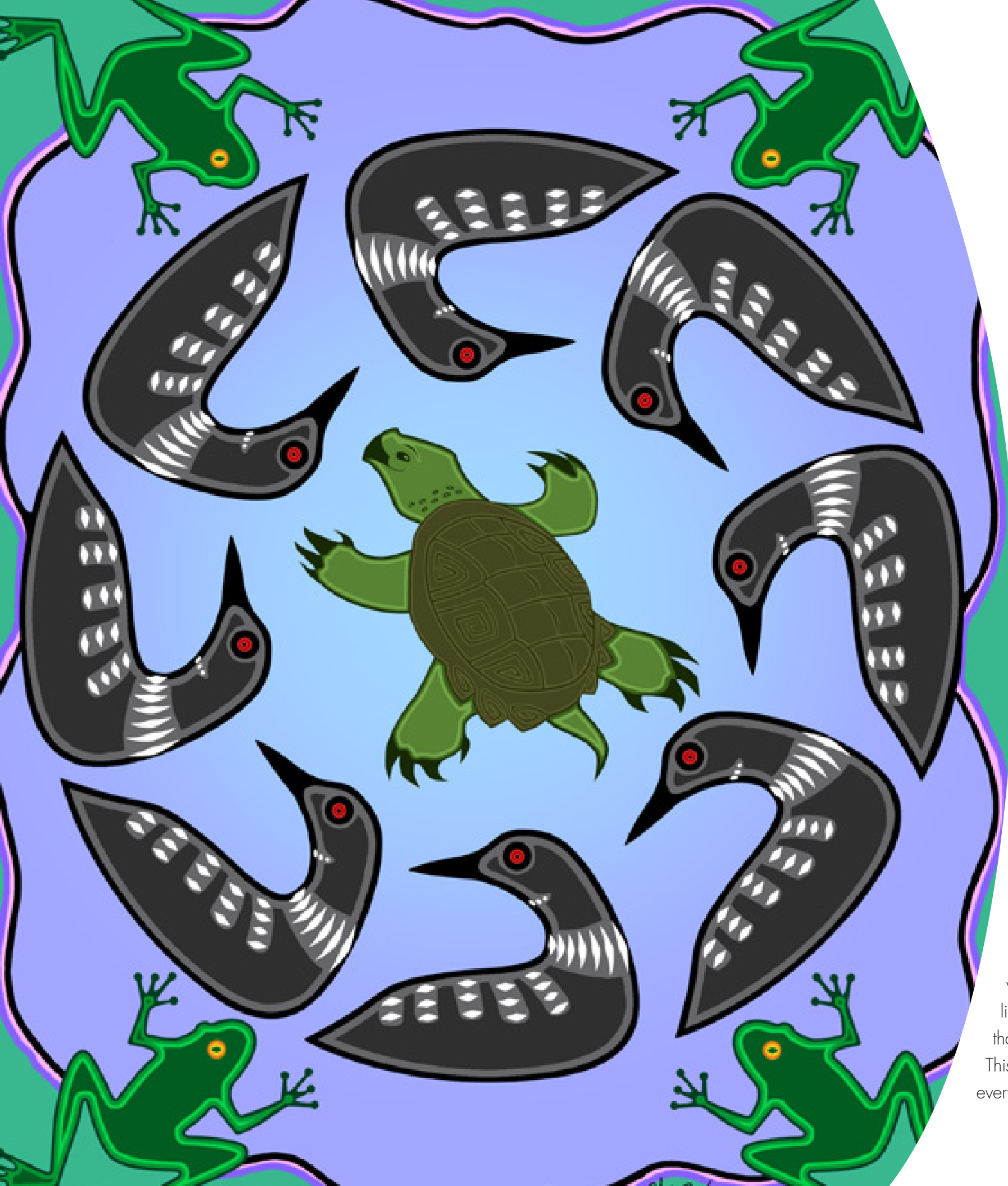


As Tota Ma sat by the water speaking to *A'nó:wara*, she reflected on the many challenges given. She thought about all they learned and the great adventure she shared with her grandchildren.

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

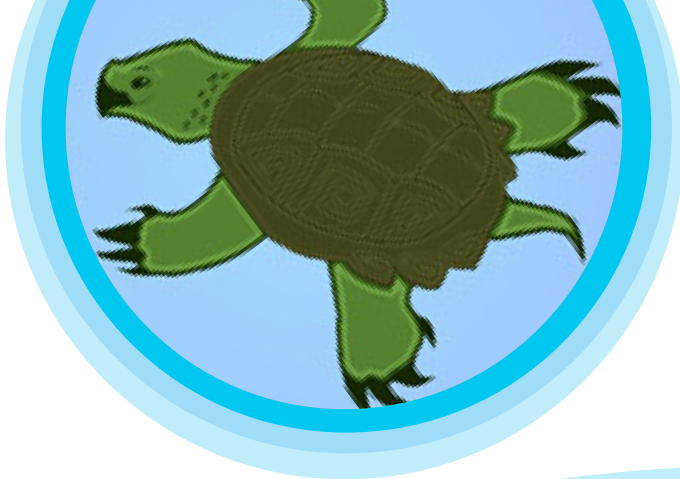


Walk. She is such an inspiration to all of us! There are so many gifts we have been given in Creation. I am grateful to you, *A'nó:wara*, for opening my eyes, my ears, and my heart to the joys of the waters and the wetlands that are home to our turtle relations."

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!"

