



NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS

CHAPTER 4 - EKO-NIIWING GINJIGAN

After a morning spent with their grandmother, Noodin and Ziigwan went outside for a bike ride to the *nibi* with Waaban. It was a hot day and perfect for a swim! Nokomis Annie packed a delicious picnic lunch of fried fish and *bannock* for the children. Once they were down at the *nibi*, Waaban unpacked the picnic lunch for everyone to enjoy. After a quick swim, the children gathered up all of their belongings and headed back to Nokomis Annie's house. At home, the children began asking Nokomis Annie more questions about *Miskwaadesi*.

"Nokomis, what is *Miskwaadesi's* fourth challenge?" Waaban asked.

His grandmother answered, trying to clearly recite the old turtle's words, "Who are my friends and neighbours in the wetlands? How are they related?"

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

"I wonder that too," said Waaban, as he sat in his favourite chair on the porch.

Nokomis Annie replied, "There are many animals that are part of the web of life which support *Miskwaadesi*. I remember my *Okomisan* explaining the many ways things are connected.

Every life form, no matter how small or large, needs food, water, shelter, and space. All things exist within a web of interdependence. If the web is damaged or changed, all life forms are affected." Nokomis Annie enjoyed explaining these relationships to her grandchildren, just like her *Okomisan* 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. Imagine the berries that ripen to feed the bear before a long sleep. We too depend on the berry harvest to feed us over our long winter. This is all part of our Traditional Knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. We give thanks to the sun and understand that the sun provides energy which all life forms need."

"I knew that already," exclaimed Ziigwan. "I learned in my science class that animals who eat plants are called herbivores! They get their energy from the sun too!" she said with excitement.

Nokomis Annie continued speaking. "Some animals get their energy by eating other animals. What are these called, Ziigwan?"

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

“Good job, my girl!” exclaimed Nokomis Annie. “The relationships between animals are similar to the relationships between First Nations clans. We understand that our *doodemwan* or clans have interconnected responsibilities based on their original instructions given by the Creator. 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,” Nokomis Annie explained. The children stretched their legs while contemplating the wisdom of First Nations. This made them think about their own *doodemwan*.

Nokomis continued. “The Anishinaabe Nations are divided into clan groupings. Anishinaabe clans are inherited through their fathers. Traditionally, these clans have special characteristics and responsibilities within the community. Clans also serve as a system of traditional government. Today there are five recognized clans including the crane, bear, marten, turtle and fish,” Nokomis Annie explained.

“Each of these clans hold different traditional roles. The Crane clan’s traditional responsibility is leadership, the Bear clan’s is defense, sustenance falls under the Marten clan, learning under the Fish clan, and



medicine under the Turtle clan’s responsibilities. This is the community model we followed representing the five needs of people and the five functions of society in Anishinaabe traditional teachings. Later, other clans were added.”

Noodin wondered aloud if all First Nations people use the clan system. His Nokomis answered, “My friend Jan, from the community of Tyendinega, explained to me that the Haudenosaunee People are also divided into clan groupings. The three main clans are Turtle, Bear, and Wolf. Clans sit together for ceremony in specific areas of the longhouse. Haudenosaunee clans are inherited through their mothers.”

These clan relationships helped Ziigwan and Noodin understand their connection to Wasauksing

and to their family members they had outside of the city! The children understood the importance of their 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 Nokomis Annie was going to miss her grandchildren when they went back to school. However, Nokomis Annie had faith that Ziigwan and Noodin were leaving with knowledge that they would share with their classmates and friends. They had made so many plans to help *Miskwaadesi* that Nokomis Annie could hardly wait for them to come back to continue their work!