

TURTLE TALLY

CHAPTER 11 - *EKO-MADAACHING-SHI-BEZHIG GINJIGAN*

The loud ringing of the phone startled Nokomis Annie. Ziigwan was calling from the city and she sounded very excited. "Nokomis, guess what Noodin 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 Ziigwan.

"Nokomis, can we visit and take a walk with you to the wetland? Maybe we will find some of *Miskwaadesi's* friends," exclaimed Ziigwan excitedly. "Uncle Buddy is coming out 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 Nokomis Annie would say yes!

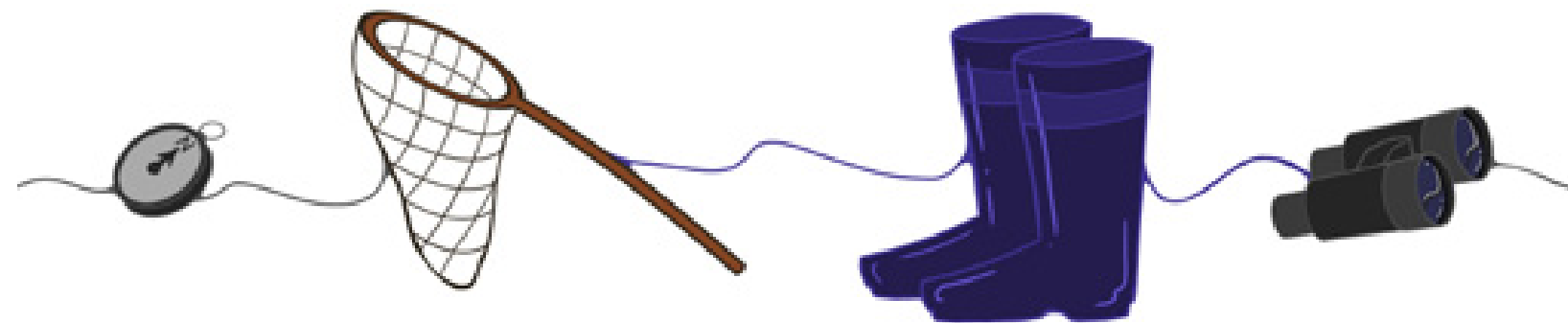
Nokomis Annie was so happy to hear from her grandchildren. It was always nice when they came to visit. She missed them, especially during the long winter. Soon the children would be visiting for the summer.

Nokomis Annie exclaimed, "How kind of Uncle Buddy. If it is okay with your mom, it is okay with me." Her grandchildren were always welcome.

"The *kwewag* 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," Nokomis Annie explained. "You will be surprised with some of the things they saw and heard as the marsh and the wetland awakened this spring. Red-winged Blackbirds, Mallard Ducks, frogs, and even a couple of moose down by the open area in the little bay were spotted. I am sure they would welcome some more eyes and ears," said Nokomis Annie.





Ziigwan copied the Turtle Tally information from the website to read to her Nokomis. “We need to go and watch for signs of turtles, basking in the sun, 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! Noodin says that he is bringing his new rubber boots just in case we need him to go looking right into the *nibi*. 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. This will help save turtles!” Ziigwan explained. “Then we can add what we see to our community map!” Ziigwan was very excited to help her community.

This sounded like a great idea to Nokomis Annie as she said goodbye to Ziigwan. Nokomis Annie 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 *bannock* and fry up some fresh fish on Friday for their supper. She knew how much her grandchildren loved this meal! Nokomis Annie called Waaban and asked if he would like to come over for dinner as well. She went to bed early that night, eagerly looking forward to everyone’s arrival.

That night, *Miskwaadesi* came to Nokomis Annie in her dreams to remind her of the eleventh challenge. “Go to the *nibi*. Count the turtles. You must be quiet to see the turtles. Learn what we look

like and where we like to live. This information will help you protect us.”

It seemed as if the old turtle had heard Ziigwan’s phone call. Nokomis Annie listened carefully to the soft voice of the old turtle so that she would remember what was said. She pictured *Miskwaadesi* sitting on the edge of the wetland, calling to her and her grandchildren. Nokomis Annie wanted to do the challenge the best she could!

When Noodin and Ziigwan arrived, they were excited to hear what their Nokomis had planned for the weekend! It was a beautiful day and they were going to be outdoors all day. Staying at Nokomis Annie’s house was fun because there was so much space to play. Their weekends in the city were very different than their visits with Nokomis Annie.

“Good morning, my children! *Miskwaadesi* came to me in a dream and asked me to check on her family members and where they are living. Get ready, we have lots to do today!” said Nokomis Annie.

Nokomis Annie explained to Ziigwan and Noodin the responsible and respectful way of interacting with plants and animals in *nbiing* and the wetland. She also pulled out the turtle poster from the Toronto Zoo. The poster displayed all eight Ontario species of turtles, which helped to explain the differences between each species, making it easier to identify them in the wetland. “The Turtle Tally says to report turtle nests too,” said Nokomis Annie. “We want to make sure we are aware of turtle behaviours to understand how to help them.”

Once Nokomis Annie, Noodin, and Ziigwan had their binoculars, snacks for the journey, and Turtle Tally forms ready, they were on the way to *Miskwaadesi's* wetland. When they arrived, they quickly realized how quiet they must be in order to spot any wetland creatures.

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

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

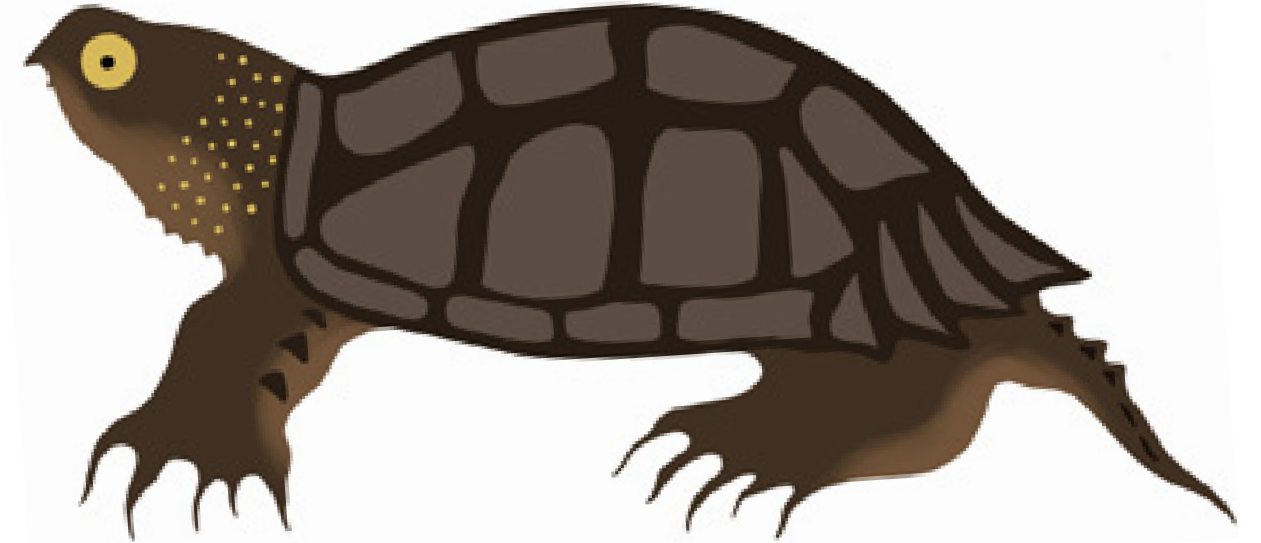
Nokomis Annie smiled and appreciated how dedicated her grandchildren were to helping the Turtle Tally program. As they walked further into the wetland, they stepped with care. Ziigwan looked



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

"Nokomis! What is that?" Ziigwan asked excitedly, but in a hushed voice. Nokomis Annie quickly looked through her binoculars and spotted a basking turtle with a yellow neck.

"That is a Blanding's turtle, my child," answered Nokomis Annie. "My father called this the turtle with the sun under its chin. He is sitting on that log to absorb heat from the sun. This is very exciting! Blanding's turtles are a threatened species, according to the turtle poster we have. We must be quiet and not disturb him. Noodin, write down on



our Turtle Tally forms what we see." Noodin 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 they needed in order to grow. Ziigwan and Noodin began to realize how many different types of plants and animals there were living together. They were also grateful for this special time with their Nokomis and grateful for the turtles who shared this special place.

On the way home that night, Nokomis Annie and her grandchildren helped a turtle cross the road. This made them think about the challenges turtles must overcome. In her dreams that night, Nokomis Annie heard *Miskwaadesi* give directions for the *twelfth challenge*, "Nokomis Annie, help my turtle relatives by doing something else for turtles."

Nokomis Annie woke the next morning determined to make a difference!

