



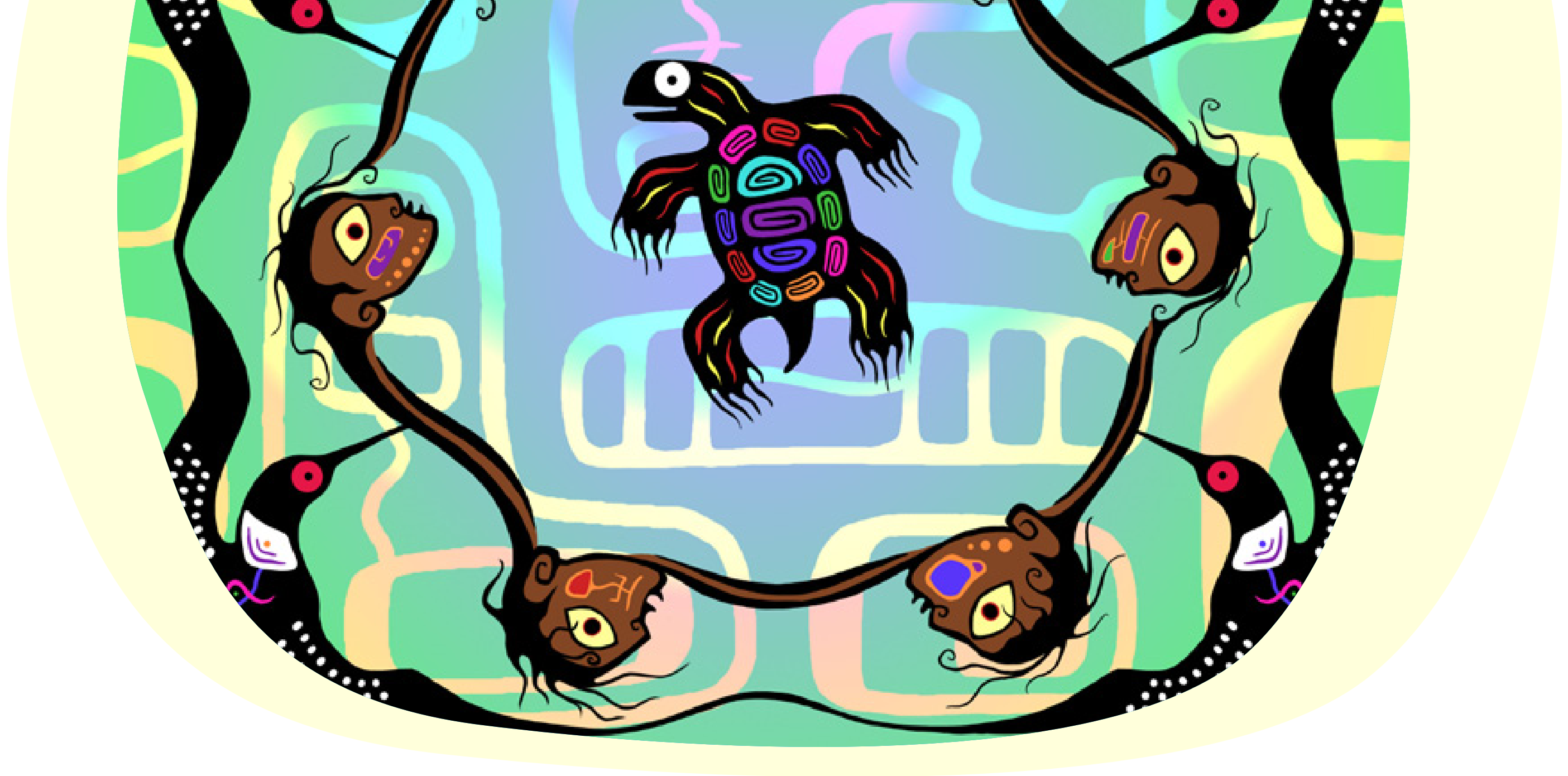
CELEBRATION

CHAPTER 13 - EKO-MDASSWI-SHI-NSWI GINJIGAN?

As Nokomis Annie sat by the *nibi* speaking to *Miskwaadesi*, she reflected on the many challenges given. She thought about all they learned and the great adventure she shared with her grandchildren.

Nokomis Annie said, "I have learned about the eight Ontario turtle families 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 when I was a little girl. This helped to create a better understanding of how everything

needs to work together. I really enjoyed sitting, before the blackflies woke up, 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 learning with my beautiful grandchildren Noodin, Ziigwan, and Waaban. 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 Wasauksing."



Miskwaadesi nodded her head in approval of Nokomis Annie's work.

Nokomis Annie 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 which we have been given in Creation. I am grateful to you, *Miskwaadesi*, for opening my eyes, my ears, and my heart to the joys of *nibi* and the wetlands that are home to our turtle relations."

"Everyone felt great when the wetland clean-up was complete. The youth brought down wooden benches they made and set them up at the edge of the marsh near the Elders' Lodge. Future visits can now be done comfortably with this new seating contributed by the youth. Now the Elders can go and sit next to the *nibi* to enjoy the sights and sounds, *Miskwaadesi*," Nokomis Annie said proudly. "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 *Miskwaadesi*. It looked like you were smiling and then I waved to you. I paused for a moment and said a special *gchi-miigwech* to you for all your guidance. After our clean up, everyone went to the Band Hall for the feast. We were feasting our connections to the turtle in celebration of all that you have shared!" Nokomis Annie explained.

"Please tell me about your feast," encouraged *Miskwaadesi*. "This celebration was your *thirteenth* and final *challenge*."

"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 of the Thirteen Moons, prompted by the calendar hanging in the Band Hall donated by the Toronto Zoo. Everyone mingled and laughed. Then an Elder offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Creator for the food, the community, and *Eskakimig-kwe*. The Elder exclaimed '*Wiisniin*,' once the prayer of

thanks was completed." Nokomis Annie gently laughed, remembering the great time she had at the feast.

Nokomis Annie continued to tell *Miskwaadesi* about the feast, "Everyone enjoyed sharing their experiences working through your challenges. The children who helped me with the project received special certificates from the Toronto Zoo for helping with the Turtle Tally program," she explained. Nokomis Annie then paused for a moment.

"This experience taught me to understand how much one person can do to make a change in the community. I will continue working for *mishiikeniyag* and *nibi*. After experiencing all of these challenges, I will think about ways that I can conserve *nibi* so that there will be more 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, the places that provide us with clean water, medicine plants, animals to feed us, and the places which are home to *Miskwaadesi* and her relatives."

Nokomis Annie promised, "My evening walks will continue year round. While I am walking, I will think of you, *Miskwaadesi*, and your family. I have

made a commitment to become your *Oshkabewis*. I will share turtle stories and teachings with others. *Gchi-miigwech Miskwaadesi*, to you and your family, for helping me see, listen, think, and act in a new way!"

