



## THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER

### CHAPTER 8 - EKONWAACHING GINJIGAN

After learning about turtles from around the world, Nokomis Annie was excited to learn about turtles close to home. All winter, she hoped *Miskwaadesi* would visit her in a dream. It was in the early months of spring when Nokomis Annie finally heard from her friend *Miskwaadesi*.

"Nokomis, the Spirit of *nibi* has spoken to me," said the turtle. "It is telling me that Elder Josephine Mandamin is coming. Go and meet her. She has a message for you. Josephine has thought about the seven generations that came before us and she is thinking about the seven generations to come. Josephine is honouring the *nibi* and the Spirit of *nibi*. She will arrive soon with her group of Water Walkers. Listen to what they have to share and take their message home to your community. When you walk for the *nibi*, you will be walking for me and for all that live in our *nibi*. Listen to Josephine's message and then you will understand my *eighth challenge*: Walk for the *nibi*, walk for the turtle, walk for yourself, and your future."

*Miskwaadesi's* words blazed in Nokomis Annie's heart. She called the Friendship Centre to find out if they knew about Josephine's visit. Those at the Friendship Centre said Josephine and the Water Walkers were coming soon and they planned to stop in the community. Josephine would speak about her walk around the Great Lakes, focused on her concerns about the health of *nibi*. She began her very special journey in 2003. At that time, she spoke to the *kwewag* in her community and encouraged them to join her Great Lakes Water Walk. On this walk, they would pray for the *nibi* and teach others about the importance of *nibi*.

Nokomis Annie went to bed early that night. She was looking forward to meeting this wonderful woman from Manitoulin Island!

When and Nokomis Annie got to the Friendship Centre, there were many people gathered to welcome Josephine and her Water Walkers. It was inspiring to hear her message about the importance of *nibi*. Josephine asked everyone to remember to

pray daily for *nibi* and her gentle, motivating words touched all!

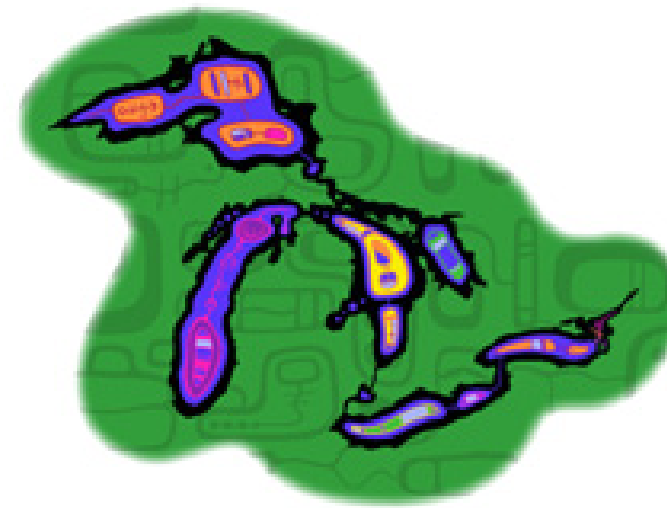
Nokomis Annie continued feeling honoured after meeting Josephine Mandamin, the Elder who journeyed around all of the Great Lakes. Josephine's message was a reminder to everyone about the importance of fresh *nibi* for all people, not just First Nations.

After this visit, Nokomis Annie realized that Josephine took her responsibilities as an Elder very seriously. Josephine reminded First Nation communities about the traditional responsibilities that women have as *nibi* keepers. She shared with Nokomis Annie the understanding that *nibi* is precious and sacred. It is one of the basic elements

needed for all life to exist. She also explained that all people need to be concerned about local *nibi* use. This would build awareness of how much *nibi* is being used or wasted.

Nokomis Annie remembered some of the facts Josephine talked about. Nokomis Annie was surprised to learn that over forty million people live within the beautiful Great Lakes watershed. This helped her realize why Josephine was worried about *nibi*. People surrounding the Great Lakes have clean and fresh *nibi* available to them but some have taken it for granted. *Nibi* that flows underground has become sick with the pollution of industry and population. Many people do not understand that they have an effect on those living downstream. They must make sure that the *nibi* they send downstream is clean and healthy.

*Nibi* is essential for survival and health because everything is related to *nibi*. First Nations people living in Ontario were aware of *nibi* pollution in the Great Lake when settlers began polluting the *nibi*. Since the beginning of time, the *Anishinaabeg*



peoples living along the shores and rivers of the Great Lakes watershed have carried within their hearts an ongoing responsibility for *nibi*. The need to keep *nibi* clean and healthy was understood. It is *nibi* that cleanses and heals body, mind, and spirit, and everything depends on *nibi* for continued life. There is a connection between *nibi* and all life forms, gifted to humans by Creation.

Nokomis Annie remembered Elders speaking of the need to keep *nibi* clean and pure for the sake of the seventh generation yet to come. Ceremonies include *nibi* for its healing and nourishing power. The First Nations people of Turtle Island believe that *nibi* is sacred and it is the life-blood of our First Mother, *Aki*. There is a need to come together with all people living in the watershed and share awareness of *Aki's* freshwater.

Josephine's words were still rippling through Nokomis's thoughts as she went to bed. Before she knew it, she was dreaming about sitting by the marsh in the early morning,

listening to the Red-winged Blackbirds. *Miskwaadesi* peeked out from under some floating duckweed.

"*Aanii Miskwaadesi*. It is so good to see you. *Mino giizhigad!* I met Josephine Mandamin, the wonderful Elder you told me about. Josephine and the Water Walkers have been walking around the Great Lakes watershed, carrying a bucket of *nibi* to remind everyone about the importance of *nibi*. I spoke to her about the challenges you have shared with me. Josephine reminded me that turtles need clean and healthy *nibi*, just as we do. She thought that if the women and children got together, they could walk around the wetlands and *nibiing* in their communities. By carrying a bucket of *nibi* to symbolize its sacred nature, the walk would let everyone know that there is a serious concern for *nibi*. Josephine hoped that any litter or garbage found would be picked up, so when the turtles awoke from their winter sleep, they would find a cleaner and healthier place to live. She reminded everyone that women have a responsibility to care for *nibi*, just as the turtles do. *Miskwaadesi*, I am so inspired. What is my next challenge?" The old turtle blinked in the bright sunlight.

"Nokomis, your *ninth challenge* is to look at how much water you use. Honour the *nibi* Spirit for its gifts by protecting it. *Nibi* for drinking, washing, cooking, and bathing is becoming scarce. Many people use too much and do not consider the effects of their use on wetlands and the creatures that live in them. My turtle family members and friends cannot live in a wetland if *nibi* is not plentiful and healthy."

*Miskwaadesi* swam away under the duckweed, leaving Nokomis Annie to her thoughts. The old woman knew that her use of *nibi* had changed over time, but she was determined to make positive changes for the future.

