

ALL OUR RELATIONS

The old people say that we are all related—not just to the people that live in our house, but to the plants, the animals, the air, the water, and the land.

Our Nokomis is the moon. The earth is our first mama. Our father is the sky. Our Mishomis is the sun.

We are just one big, beautiful family, with many different branches.

The Nishnaabeg have always known this. Because of this knowledge, we have lived a fantastic, marvellous life here on Chi'Mikinakong for a cabillion generations.

But, sometimes, just sometimes, we get busy. We forget the small things, and, when we do, we learn that they are actually big, important things.

This is exactly what happened a long, long time ago.

Our ancestors were very smart people, and they knew more than anybody about how to live in our territory in a good way because they paid attention to the Elders and to the animals and to the plants. They paid attention to each other.

Usually, things were very good in the Niibin, but one summer, the Nishnaabeg were finding it very hard to find food. The ode'minan had bloomed, but there were no berries. It was the same with the miskominag and the miinan. Many of the flowers were missing, and many of the insects, too. The hunters had caught a bear to eat, but the meat was very sour. The people were worried.

They called all the Elders, the Grandmothers, the Grandfathers and the Medicine People together and asked for advice. After a ceremony and a meeting, the Elders and the Grandmothers and the Grandfathers and the Medicine People suggested that the people go and ask Makwa.

So they went and talked with Makwa.

Makwa said, "Don't ask me. Ask Aamoo."

So the people went and visited Aamoo.

Aamoo said, "Don't ask me. Ask Waawaasgoneh."

So the people went and visited with Waawaasgoneh, and Waawaasgoneh told them a very sad story about the rose, Ginii.

"A long time ago, there were lots and lots of flowers," Waawaasgoneh began. "There were lots and lots of roses. All summer long, they bloomed and smiled and waited for the Nishnaabeg to notice. But no one ever did. Not until the fall, when it was time to pick the rose hips so the Nishnaabeg would have vitamin C all winter long. The roses felt lonely, unappreciated, and taken for granted. They felt miserable and used. So the roses, they left."

The Nishnaabeg realized what they had done.

Waawaasgoneh continued: "Then Aamoo couldn't find any nectar to make honey, and then Makwa couldn't find any honey to help her get through the long winter, and now you, the Nishnaabeg, are very hungry."

The Nishnaabeg listened and thought about this problem. They asked those Old People what to do. The Elders, the Grandmothers, the Grandfathers and the Medicine People had a big, long, kinda-boring-for-the-kids meeting. At the end, they all agreed. They told the people to go and see the Bineshiinyag. They told the people to ask Bineshiinyag to fly all around and find a Ginii and bring it back.

So the Nishnaabeg went to talk to the birds, and those birds agreed to help. They got up very early in the morning and went out in every direction, searching for Ginii. They searched for

long hours, day after day, in the north, the south, the east, and the west. But, day after day, they returned with empty beaks.

“There are none left,” reported Migizi.

No sooner had the bald eagle spoken than little Naa-nooshkeshiinh, the ruby-throated hummingbird, flew up with a wilted rose plant in her mouth.

“Naanooshkeshiinh! Naanooshkeshiinh!” the people said softly.

The Nishnaabeg gently took the plant and put Ginii’s roots in soil. They were so worried because Ginii just lay there on the soil, tired and sad.

They sang to her.

They gave her nibiish.

They made sure her leaves felt the morning sun. Most importantly, and in their quietest and most gentle voices, they talked to her. They told her how much they had missed her, how much they loved her.

They talked about the deep raspberry colour of her petals. They talked about how soft those petals were on their cheeks. They talked about the tea they loved to make out of her rose hips.

After a few days, Ginii began to get stronger, and, in a few more days, she stood up. When she was strong, the Nishnaabeg used her roots to plant more flowers. Soon, those flowers spread to more parts of the bush.

Then the Nishnaabeg found the Aamoog and showed them where all the new plants were. Those Aamoog got busy pollinating. Soon there were lots of roses, lots of fat Aamoog, and there was lots of sweet, sweet honey.

This made Makwa very happy, because he was also getting fat from eating all of that good honey.

And, soon, the Nishnaabeg were feeling much stronger and much healthier, too, because they ate that good, sweet, bear meat. After that, the Nishnaabeg remembered Ginii and all the flowers in their land.

So, you see how important each one of those plants and animals are? We should never destroy anything.

That's what those old Elders always say.

Nishnaabemowin: Nokomis is Grandmother; Mishomis is Grandfather; Chi'Mikinakong is the big place of the turtle, or turtle island and is a Mississauga name for North America according to Curve Lake Elder Doug Williams; niibin is summer; ode'minan (ode'iminan) are strawberries; miskominag are raspberries; and miinan are blueberries; makwa means bear; aamoo is a bee; aamoog are bees; waawaasgonenh is a flower; ginii (oginii-waabigwan) is a rose; bineshiinyag are birds; migizi is a bald eagle; naanooshkeshiinh is a ruby-throated humming bird; and nibiish is water.