

**Voices Telling: Stories Rising from a  
Place Called Wiikwedong / Kettle Point**

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## **Abstract**

The primary purpose of this endeavour is to tell a story of the community called Wiiwkwedong, or Kettle Point. A main premise of the telling is that story – or narrative voice - emerges from the natural environment through a reciprocation of personal memory and dream and more deeply of blood, or spirit memory. This concept in emergence of Story is significant for its fundamental difference from the positivist Western paradigm of knowledge and learning with relation to environment.

The program's purpose, then, is to articulate a re-emergence of some of the lost relationships between the human community and the land known as Wiiwkwedong.

## With Acknowledgement and Thanks

The forming and recording of these stories and my own personal material have been done as a way of giving back something from what was instilled in childhood and beyond. They are born out of respect for my community of people, and for the greater Creation which enfolds us. That respect extends to the wealth of Story and knowledge held in the greater sphere of oral culture. The stories within the oral tradition come as truth-tellers from the past, and are held as inviolate.

While knowing that the heart of this writing springs from that time in childhood, i do not claim to know a lot more about it than that. Indigenous people speak about *blood-memory*, *ancestor-memory* and *spirit-memory* which, in turn, interfuse with dream and vision. Instinctual telling for me has sprung from this esoteric form of memory, as well as from common memory and dream. The stories recorded here are by no means given as *aadsookaanun*, or 'sacred stories,' but are offered as examples in an effort to reclaim and rebuild an all-but-lost tradition of Story, both oral and written. They, and the Journal, are directly and deliberately referenced to the site and community on Lake Huron known as *Wiiwkwedong/Kikonaang*. They are stories *of and from this place*.

I am grateful for the time and knowledge given so freely by the people of my community, and from outside it. Many old friends and relatives, and many new friends have privileged me with that sharing. Particular among these have been elders Rachel Shawkence and Clifford George. As well, i wish to thank my wife and children whose unflinching support enabled me to pursue this endeavour to its completion. Chi-miigwech.



## Foreword

### History and Movement

In his many exploits, the Anishnaabe culture hero and anti-hero, Nenabush, or Nenaboozhoo, was most often described as travelling, i.e., "Once long ago, Nenabush was travelling beside a lake..." His movement was seen to be in concert with the seasonal migrations of animals and birds, and the changing seasons. In this way, the concept of movement was made natural for the Anishnaabeg in their hunting, fishing and gathering lifestyle. For countless generations they, too, had travelled seasonally around the great lakes basin since migrating from the shores of the ocean to the east (Benton-Banai 1988: 94-102).

Victor Gulewitsch observes that the Aboriginal people had inhabited the area around the great lakes over an "Archaic Period" of three thousand to four thousand years (1994: 1). Referring to a time around the beginning of the eighteenth century, he then notes the manner in which the Anishnaabe people

migrated seasonally. They utilized the resources of loosely defined home territories which corresponded to the seasonally available resources of local river watersheds, the Lake Huron shoreline, and numerous inland hunting and maple-sugaring territories. (*Ibid* 1,2)

Despite previous shifts in cultural populations (mainly Iroquois and Ojibway), by the early eighteenth century, the Anishnaabeg had made a permanent home around the great lakes and further west. The British recognized the sovereignty of the "Ojibway Nation" over these lands, and began a process of treaty-making which afforded the colonizers swift acquisition (*Ibid* 2). This possession-through-treaty saw over two million acres in southwestern Ontario become the legal domain of the English Monarch. While surrendering this area under Treaty # 29 of 1827, four 'Chippewa' bands retained less than eighteen thousand acres (*Ibid* 5). The community of Wiiwkwedong, or Kettle Point on Lake Huron was allotted two thousand, four hundred and forty-six acres, or just under two square miles (*Ibid*).

In this way, the previous free movement of various small bands of Anishnaabeg was curtailed, and the imperative of control and domination applied. The wish for a 'civilizing policy' and the general scorn in which the traditional Indian was held is seen in an excerpt from the Legislative Assembly of 1844:

These Indians are among the first whom Sir John Colborne endeavoured to settle and civilize. Previously to 1830, they were wandering heathens like their brethren elsewhere scattered over the western part of the Upper Province; they were drunken and dissipated in their habits, and without either religion or moral restraint (*Ibid* 39).

It is accepted knowledge that a significant intent of colonial authority was directed towards the dispossession and disempowerment of the Aboriginal peoples. Only through such means could the ideal of (indigenous) *movement-as-life* not only be curtailed, but eradicated. This colonial perception is seen in the government-initiated move in 1901 to have the land at Kettle Point surveyed and sub-divided. This was completed against the almost unanimous objections of the Reserve residents, who held the land as communal. The Indian Agent at the time stated to his supervisors that: "they would (then) not feel at liberty to run all over the reserves cutting and destroying timber as they do now" (*Ibid* 15, 57).

Perhaps the most telling words arising from the Legislative excerpt are the words "wandering heathen," for they attest to the fear and prejudice harboured by much of the colonial population of the day. Synonymous with this phrase are terms such as *pagan*, *savage*, and (the concept of) *wild*, which have prevailed to stigmatize and stereotype down through the generations (La Roque 1975: 50).



### **The Land as Resource; the Land as Spirit**

Just as the indigenous inhabitants of the land were perceived to be untamed (and thus, a threat), so it was with the land. This old perception remains

the underlying cause of ensuing appropriation and exploitation. This, in turn, remains both historically and presently the cause of an environmental degradation of increasing magnitude. The totalizing capitalist ideals imposed by the European colonizer/settler population remain as blankets of hardship upon the concept of *wild, pagan* and *savage*.

Returning to the Legislative excerpt (p. 6), it can be argued that the speaker's reference to "their brethren elsewhere" would include all indigenous people. Again, so it is with the land. In its sacred, intrinsic depths, the land goes largely unacknowledged. As Neil Evernden observes, the land - i.e., the complete environment - is held singularly as resource:

Once adopted, resourcism transforms all relationships to nature into a simple subject-object, or user-used one... Resourcism, in reducing all values to one, may well be the Trojan horse of the Industrial State... Resourcism requires that we think of the (natural) world the way slavers once thought of their human merchandise. (1992: 24)

It is asserted that in order to avoid this way of thinking, thinking itself - as *singular mental process* - must be avoided. In order to "return to things themselves," as stated by Merleau-Ponty, "it is necessary to return to a world that precedes knowledge" (cited in Evernden, 110). This is taken to mean a knowledge that resides in the primordial essence of things, and therefore a primordial knowledge, or wisdom. As it is necessary to dispense with the singular faculty of conceptualization, it is suggested that in returning to primordial essence, it is equally necessary to dispense with a reference to *things*.

But environmentalism, in the deepest sense, is not about environment. It is not about things, but relationships; not about being, but Being; not about world, but about the inseparability of self and circumstance. (*Ibid* 142)

Many good and insightful comments are lessened, it seems, by the singular reference to the *mind*, and to *thinking*. In his discussion of the child's

relationship to the exterior world, Richard Coe apparently avoids the troublesome *cogito dictum* (despite his reference to the child as "it"): "the child *becomes* the sensation that the outside world arouses in it: inner-self made one with exterior phenomenon" (1984: 119). Continuing in the discussion, however, the ubiquitous fixation again appears:

God, it may be assumed, is at least Mind, whereas the pebble is not-Mind. To apprehend that which is not-Mind is the severest challenge which the human intellect can encounter. (*Ibid* 116)

By over-emphasizing the importance of *mind*, (i.e., by the excessive attending to *cogito*), Coe loads his description with unnecessary gravity. The emphasis can only subvert a desired return toward primordial consciousness, or Being. While his description of pebble as "not-Mind" faces a better direction, Coe does no favour to that realm by signifying it only as "the severest challenge, etc."

The continuum signified as 'not-Mind' has also been designated, for example, as *Hologram*, *Implicate Order*, and a Greek Goddess (Gaia)-hidden-within-a-more-comfortably-scientific-condition-of-*Homeostasis*. While it is realized that from a scientific perspective this observation is perhaps an oversimplification, in the Aboriginal context the *oneness* is simply what it is. In his own discussion on a "sensing earth," David Abram likens the "ineffability of the air," to that of (indigenous) awareness:

We should not be surprised that many indigenous peoples construe awareness, or 'mind,' not as a power that resides inside their heads, but rather as a quality that they themselves are inside of, along with the other animals and plants, the mountains and the clouds. (1996: 227)

It is not an insurmountable challenge to the intellect, for surely this perception only makes what is being signified all the more alien and inaccessible. These designations indicate a reluctance to name a oneness that is - quite simply in the Native purview - *Spirit*.

This is not to suggest that there is an absence of spiritual acknowledgement outside the traditional Native paradigms. Rather, there is a growing readiness and need to acknowledge a pervasiveness of Spirit, as seen in Susan Griffin:

Do our thoughts belong to another realm eternally divided from matter? For many centuries it has been the opinion of Science that matter is inanimate and therefore has no possibility at all of possessing that quality we call spirit. (1992: 80)

Also from the scientific perspective, Ken Wilber declares this with a note of optimism:

at most, the new science demands spirit; at least, it makes room for spirit. Either way, modern science is no longer denying spirit. And that, *that* is epochal. (1982: 4)



### **How Do We Come to a Place?**

Coe's metaphor of *pebble* is useful as microcosm and hologram. In the context of Continuum, Environment is seen as a continuation, an infinite expansion of Pebble: hence Place is seen to continue into Place. Accordingly, if Spirit is recognized as inherent in Environment, or Place, then a symbiotic continuum must also be recognized. In the Native purview, Pebble becomes Earth becomes Universe. All is animate in the sense of Spirit.

While perhaps not differing physically from the scientific knowledge that Atom becomes Earth becomes Universe, the difference in the concept and context of Spirit is immense. The *disacknowledgement of Spirit* is a demarcation which relegates Environment as well as other-than-human-Beings upon the earth (and ultimately all of Creation) to a spiritual inanimacy or kind of death. As an example, the forced survey and sub-division of their communally held land by the



government in 1901 began, for the people of Wiiwkwedong, a *severance from Spirit in the land* which continued to the present day.

It is through this demarcation - the seemingly inevitable *cogito dictum* - that the object of Place can be held without compassion. Thus are enabled the colonizing imperatives and criteria which open Place to the prospect of abuse through exploitation and pollution. From this signification the relevant question must then be asked: *how do we come to a place?*

Without acknowledgement of Spirit, Place is unacknowledged for itself and its own worth; the question is not asked 'who lives there,' but 'what.' In turn, this *emptying of being* opens the probability that *who lives there* is displaced, dispossessed, disempowered and disinherited. Foremost in the relegation of 'who' to 'what,' is *disrespect*. It is asserted that by living in the grand assumption of 'first priority' and 'power-over,' Human, in a profound sense disinherits himself in his own future generations. In order to resist and reverse the more destructive mode of disrespect, therefore, the crucial question begs the answer: *We come with respect and acknowledgement.*



### **Sacred Embeddedness, Presence and Language**

During his closing remarks at a Traditional Awareness Gathering, the Anishnaabe teacher, James Dumont spoke of the "momentary ecstasy or elation" experienced from time to time in peoples' lives. He defined this experience as a manifestation of Spirit, suggesting that the spirit wants to speak, to be heard and felt (2001: Conference). Accordingly, an embeddedness or residence of Spirit can be perceived in the Land - a relationship that is described by Merleau-Ponty: "The presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh" (cited in Abram: 69).

It is this *embeddedness and presence of Spirit* which the human spirit recognizes, and to which it harkens. This recognition - as Basso says, quoting Momaday - can take the form of language through utterance:

men and women learn to *appropriate* their landscapes, to think and act 'with' them, as well as about them and upon them, and to weave them with spoken words into the very foundations of social life.  
(1996: 75)

Just as this Presence is always there, so is the possibility for acknowledgement. Every interaction with environment is thus invested and imbued with this same possibility. It can be held as a kind of *language* in which the means of acknowledgement such as drum, pipe and medicine are employed as *signifiers*, (i.e., mediators, facilitators) of meaning, communication and acknowledgement. As it is with the word in language, the sign (signifier) is arbitrary and can be anything, such as breathing, walking (making tracks), making ripples on water, etc. This perception and means-of-relationship-to-Spirit (i.e. Sacred) is not held in the conventional sense of 'religion' so much as a *way of being* in the world.

They were just ways of seeking life...How a people come to learn their sacred ways, how they express the Sacred, and how these ways reflect the world. One of the ideas expressed...is that the sacred ways are felt to be inseparable from the "ordinary." (Beck et al. 1992: 5,6)



### **Spirit as Animacy**

In his discussion of photography, Roland Barthes states that a photograph touches one most when one remembers it, thinks back on it, and "allows the detail to arise of its own accord into the affective consciousness" (1981: 55). The discussion is useful because it engages the provocative notion of *animus* in such a technological product as a photograph. His position is important for its assertion that in the sense of *animus* (for him as beholder), the photograph lives.

Barthes identifies an 'average affect' of the photograph which he calls the "studium":

It is by the *studium* that I am interested...that I participate in the gestures, the faces, the figures, the settings, the actions. (*Ibid* 27)

A second, more esoteric aspect identified is called the "punctum" which, though more intense, can be more difficult to define:

...the effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp yet lands in a vague zone of myself; it is acute, yet muffled; it cries out in silence (*Ibid* 51).

Barthes' purpose (both assertion and assumption) is that in animating and humanizing the photograph, it is possible that we find (i.e., recognize) ourselves: "it is what I add to the photograph *and what is nonetheless already there*" (*Ibid* 55). Barthes is asserting an *inherent animacy* whose implications are great when extrapolated to the perceived inanimate, and to the concept of landscape. This is made more pertinent in the following quotation where Barthes refers to a photograph of his own mother as a child:

I do much more than recognize her (clumsy word): I discover her, a sudden awakening outside of "likeness": a *satori* in which words fail...(*ibid* 109)

Barthes' discussion is in some ways analogous to Basso's discourse from research among the Western Apache. In his discussion Basso examines the legacy of Place and Story which survives there. These elements exist symbiotically as moral guardians in that society. In these terms, parallels can be drawn between the metaphors of landscape and photograph. With the photograph, the beholder discerns the *punctum* which "rises from the scene, shouts out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (*Ibid* 26). The person is affected in a particular way by an exchange, a *reciprocal animation* (*Ibid* 59). This aspect of the photograph finds an equivalent phenomenon in Basso's description of

Apache Place and Story. If a person is seen to have strayed from the accepted moral code of behaviour, that person is, in effect, "shot." By this, it is meant that the person is *told* a particular story, and is said to be "stalked" by the moral teaching of that story: "Historical tales, like arrows, leave wounds" (1996: 60).

It is by bringing himself to the environment in this way that Human retains the possibility of primal relationship. He is invested in the land through the stories that are placed there over many generations.

They imagine themselves to be standing in their ancestors' tracks, and from this psychological perspective which is sometimes described as an intense form of 'daydreaming,' traditional accounts of ancestral events are...recalled with singular clarity and force. (Basso 1996: 89)

It seems that as thought patterns go to make up language, so the concept of Place builds and extends itself into the landscape. Ancestral bonds are mediated particularly through the idea and sense of Place, which seems to be as natural for non-human as for human. Birds, fish and animals go to certain places for their food, particular places to mate, and to make their homes. It is the configuration of trees, rocks and water that makes Place to be what it is, but more than that. As it is with Human, so also other-than-human is invested where ancestors have given their bones and spirits into that place.

In Basso's discussion, the sense of Place as repository for ancestral presence-through-story is admirably and poignantly articulated. In his fundamental assessment, however, he pronounces that despite its own intrinsic worth (i.e., "aesthetic immediacy...shifting moods and relevancies," etc.), Place lives only in what is bestowed by Human:

Animated by the thoughts and feelings of persons who attend to them, places express only what their animators enable them to say; like the thirsty sponges to which the philosopher [Sartre] alludes, they yield to consciousness only what consciousness has given them to absorb. (*Ibid* 108; parentheses added)

This is somehow reminiscent of the scientists who, wishing credulity and fearing derision from their peers, find it difficult to speak in terms of *Spirit/ Earth/ Mother/Alive*. Alive also, it seems, is the pervasive tyranny of *cogito*.

In comparing the discussions of Barthes and Basso, the former would seem more subjectively indulgent and less substantial in theme than the latter. In light of Basso's assessment, however, the question arises - is his discussion, no matter how articulate or cogent, finally any more valid or significant than one such as Barthes'? In his own discussion, Abram reflects on the way in which human language, through the development of written text, became:

...a self-referential system, closed off from the larger world that once engendered it ... what had once been a porous membrane became an impenetrable barrier, a hall of mirrors. (1996: 257)

By implicitly denying the possibility of a sensing, evocative presence of Place - *a spirit that lives, and of which Human is an ineluctable part* - Basso substantiates, even amplifies the denial of Western Science that has echoed from the Enlightenment. The Land, though described with such poignancy and compassion, is ultimately relegated by Basso to the dimension of a "self-referential system," closed off from the deeper aspect of *living presence*.



### **Living in Story**

Story is itself a living entity which enfolds the mythic prospect and possibility; which enlivens that power and is enlivened by it. Though it is the concept of God which Campbell describes as "an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere (1988: video), it is also the concept of Story that is aptly described in this metaphor. We are born into the sphere in which each life unfolds. As the great earth is composed to her fullness in organism and molecule (whether seen as 'animate' or not), so the great sphere holds every word of Story enfolded, and ever-unfolding. It is the purpose of Story to live itself outward, to spread itself from the central point of generative life. Its

spreading can be seen metaphorically as water, land, or, perhaps most appropriately, air. In the sense of relationship to earth, all is good metaphor, for through it, vital traverses are made.

A primal part of Story's purpose in its context of oral tradition is to teach; to impart through its mystery, drama and humour the knowledge that is vital to the continuance of its culture. An important aspect in Story's teaching, however, also resides in what is *not* said. This *listening into the silence of spirit* is addressed in Blaezer's discussion in which Cherokee writer Betty Bell recalls hearing stories told by Indian women in her mother's kitchen:

I listened, their stories settling forever in my blood ... they heard, and taught me to hear the truth in things not said. They listened, and taught me to listen in the space between the words. (Cited in Murray and Rice 1999: 62)

Story is described by Johnson and Peequayquat as having its roots in "a beginning of an understanding" between human people, the world (Earth), and Manido, or God (Cited in Dumont 1979: 39). It is this *beginning that is always happening*, and so goes on. The stories bring the past into the present and:

make it so you can see and hear and touch it; give it a face and a voice, take this care of it, bring it home like this. They can make a home out of this world. This is their power. (*Ibid*)



### **The Mythological Realm as Living Experience**

It is that which touches one's waking consciousness from the unconscious, sometimes dream-life. Intimations of taste, smell and vision flash seemingly from nowhere (it is *there*, but from *where?*). Though there may be the urge to know this *simultaneity of sign*, the instant must finally go unexplained. Such is Myth that within its metaphor we may live vicariously and see ourselves

in entirely different creatures and worlds. This “eternal aspect of the (mythological) moment” which Campbell defines (1988: videotape, parentheses added), is also suggested in William Thompson's description:

In the interval between each thought...between each heartbeat,  
in the space where there is no breath, we recall what we always  
knew. (1981: 7)

The call is heard today for a new mythology, a new story (Spangler in Hull 1993: 71; Highway in Powell, audio recording 1999; Hogan 1995: 94). There is concern that without a new perspective, in fact *a new way of being in the world*, there is little hope for the earth's survival. Native writers Linda Hogan and Tomson Highway speak of a need to recognize the intrinsic sacredness of relationship to the land (*Ibid*). Fritz Hull agrees, but expresses the danger of repeating mistakes:

Images and myths are powerful tools that can assist in this process,  
but they can also turn in our hands...they can become new beliefs  
and dogmas that substitute one orthodoxy for another without  
liberating us into the life of the holistic spirit that is our true goal. So  
the craft of re-imagining the Earth and Spirit is a delicate one.  
(1993: 71)

In his discussion of an Aboriginal way of seeing, James Dumont talks about the Mythic dimension as it exists for the Native person, and (as example) specifically for the Ojibway man. He asserts that the presence of this other, or “non-ordinary” reality can be wholly co-existent with the corporeal reality of everyday life (1979: 38). In elaborating his argument, Dumont uses as example the fasting ritual, or “dream-fast” as practised by the Ojibway. Integral to this ceremony is the *quest for vision*. It is this singular experience which becomes the metaphor for Dumont's argument. But, as he proposes, it is deeper than metaphor:

In his vision quest, the Ojibway man makes his journey into the inner realm of meaning, and his journey is actual *experiencing*. He has transcended 'normal' reality and entered the dimension of mythical reality. He has recovered mythical meaning. He has rediscovered and has been reintegrated into the mythical present. (*Ibid*: 39)

Fundamental to Dumont's argument is the imperative that a deeper understanding of the Ojibway (and Native) purview is not possible without the acceptance of the 'non-ordinary' realm as *lived experience* - one that has actually happened. Ordinary life is much affected by the overlap and impingement of this meta-realm:

Ojibway man is always *religious man* because he knows that, as 'soul/body' he moves about in both ordinary and non-ordinary reality...he must establish, once and for all, absolute contact with the spirit world. He will live the remainder of his life in a balance of the two realities. (*Ibid*)

By living his life as an integration of these disparate realities, Ojibway man learns to "see" life, and therefore live it with the greater 360-degree vision (*Ibid* 40). Dumont's entreaty is for all people to seek this greater vision. This more complete way of seeing and living equates with the earlier entreaty for holding the earth (i.e., Creation) as sacred, with acknowledgement and respect.



### **Relationship to Wiiwkwedong / Kikonaang - a Rationale**

The discussion, with relation to Kikonaang, has been elaborated with several intentions in mind. First, in order to provide an idea of the identity of both the people and the place known as Wiiwkwedong, a brief general history is given. This social and geographical background is meant to help impart a sense of relationship between the Anishnaabe people of Wiiwkwedong and the land they have inhabited through many generations.



As well, there is an intention to discuss, in terms of the colonial dichotomy of empowerment/disempowerment, the commonality between not just the inhabitants of Wiiwkwedong, but ultimately of all people and the natural environment. This single, underlying yet unrelenting reality is great in its implications for both. In a broad sense, the Western (imperialist) dichotomy determines the argument of all ensuing aspects of the discussion. The counter-argument describes the corrective, or change required that is perceived to be the heart of the remedy, that of *respect and acknowledgement*. This imperative is the core of my entire experience of going home (hence, the question: *how do we come to a Place?*). It lies behind and within every reflection and evocation expressed in the Journal, as well as all of the Stories which follow. It is the essence of relationship to childhood, and to the finding and emerging of Story.

Since spending time at Kikonaang as a child, i have come to feel and see the site as sacred. It is no exaggeration to say that i am on hallowed ground. Beneath me lie the kettles, held by the earth. Through Story, i remember their fiery arrival, feel their embeddedness, and know their link to the cosmos. Sitting on this high point of land, i look out at the water and know that a great stone called "Anung" lies buried in the lake, awaiting his chance.

In experiencing environment, i find that there is a sense of ambivalence. It is, first, an enveloping surround that is *now* as one sits, or stands, or moves. And yet the *now* is infused with the equally powerful sense of this life having come to this moment through an immensity somehow incomprehensible. But, as with Coe's *pebble* metaphor, it is quite simple. The *now* is an inheritance that is ours and yet is not.

It is by more than chance that i have gone back to the site of Kikonaang. Many parts of our lives are medicine if we want them to be, allow them to be. This site is one such part. But where does Kikonaang end and another part begin? Allowed by Story, i can sit on this height of land as *Aandeg*, the Crow, once did, look out to other places and be as profoundly *there* as i am *here*, at this place. Taken there, i am with the great Sturgeon, who have come from farther back than most life on earth. They are the old ones, the humble and wise ones,

the healers. It is the same with *Mzhiikenh*, the Turtle, and even Crow, who pretends to be the fool, but is also wise in his way.



### **Who is Trickster?**

In short, trickster is a boundary-crosser...the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities...Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox. (Hyde 1998: 6)

The elusive yet pervasive element of Trickster is not a singular incident, or series of events, but rather an ongoing and predominant force in life. Anything and anyone is potentially this force in their way, and in their time. In the Stories it is interesting to speculate on whether the figure of Gnebigoo the warrior, could, or should, be seen as Trickster. Initially, my feeling was that this terrible being was far too serious and seemingly evil to be Trickster. However, in examining the Anishnaabe character of Nenabush, it is clear that a seeming disregard for others' well-being is present, perhaps dominant in the character. A prerequisite is that the character be many-faceted, with empathy and compassion being often out-weighed by selfishness and cruelty.

The irony of Gnebigoo's transformation is deepened by the simultaneous lightning-strike of both him and Zhoomin, creating a bond of which neither is aware. It is this transformation which can be seen to have created Chi-Gnebig, a trickster-figure who must learn from his own hapless misadventures. The more virulently cruel Trickster force has existed in his former (human) self. Born most primally of Human, it is important that the serpent is ultimately held as intermediary between both physical and spiritual realms, both human and non.

A Trickster force is also seen in Waasmowin, the Lightning, who makes possible the learning and teaching which happens in the cross-over from malevolent human to good, though luckless serpent.

Perhaps the greatest Trickster force - one which dominates the Stories - is Water. This force, like no other, shows the power of compassion and patience, the strength of truth. Water brings a message of warning to Gnebigoo through the great elk, then forces him to look at his life. Water-spirit mirrors the serpent to himself and presages what will come. Water-spirit heals the serpent's wounds when no one else can, and facilitates his continuance through his union with Sturgeon. The intercession of Trickster both wittingly and unwittingly facilitates change, and thus Teaching and Learning.



### **The Oppositional Stance of Teaching and Learning**

I do not think it's simply by chance that Chi-mookmaan made a place in an oak tree at Kikonaang. True, he slept there in the breeze to get away from the bugs, but i believe there was more ("as there always is," Stone would say). Maybe Chi-mookmaan wanted to raise himself up so he could "see" more. His place in the tree can be held as a place where Dumont's 360 degree vision can be - if not acquired - at least sought. That elevated place can symbolize the quest for far- sightedness, and knowledge-through-dream.

But how is this 'far-sightedness/vision/knowledge' defined, and by whom? Chi-mookmaan himself dreams the story of the teacher and the children who come to the Point as part of a lesson in science (pg 27). Though the lesson is contextualized in the sense of *being there*, the power of Place is in danger of being over-ridden by the prescribed 'knowledge' of curriculum. In her childish wisdom, it is the little girl who subverts the rigid lesson with the primal acorn. This 'subversion' is the subject of Graveline's discussion:

much of traditional Aboriginal teaching is oppositional. Our teachers help us to see 'the upside-down, the opposite and the other balances of things around us in our human way of acting and talking.' (Beck & Walters 1977: 22, cited in Graveline 1998: 11)

It can be said that contextualized Teaching and Learning is held within the living organism of Story. In this form and concept, Story is the functioning heart of oral culture. Thus, the stories themselves - all Story - is the essence of contextualized Teaching and Learning. This is shown through Gnebigoo, and the mythic being he became. In his period of gestation or *dark-dreaming*, (pg 36), he was held upside-down in the rock. Thus, he was born of, and into the Trickster mold.

An imperative of mythic telling is that it sets itself against such notions as equanimity and status-quo. Accordingly, teaching through Trickster - in his levels of intensity - is fundamental to the "oppositional" ways of Aboriginal Teaching and Learning. His very ways of *being in the world* are (mis)adventures in the sphere of Teaching and Learning.



### **The Paradox of Boundary**

First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is...

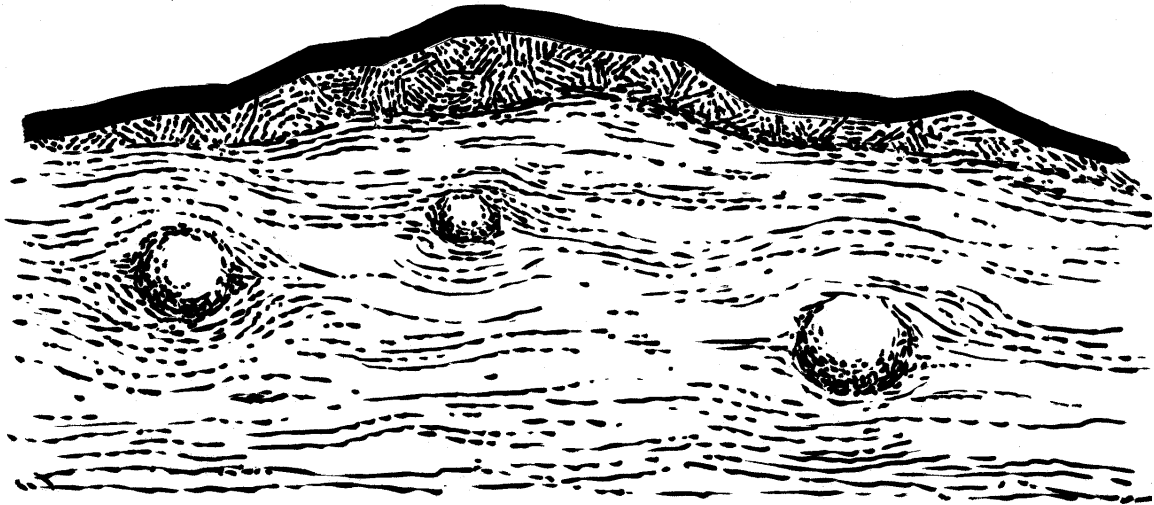
(British singer, Donovan)

In mythic story (Dumont's "non-ordinary" reality), boundary is as real and as necessary as in "ordinary" reality. However, while Story must demarcate boundary, in its essence - which is its telling - Story always already functions to diminish boundary. By its telling, words transform to actualize in vision and *being*, another place, time, reality. Because the listener is transported, taken *there*, it can be said that Story begins with an obscuring of boundary. This ephemeral sense is carried deeper in Story through the transformative power of myth.

In the story of the warrior, Gnebigoo, for example, Human is transformed through the combined power of Lightning, Fire, Pine and Stone. His new form of Serpent functions to crawl, fly, and swim through the perceived realms of Land, Air and Water. In the story of Tikib, he is torn from his mother's arms and transported to another realm of Spirit and Water (pg 23). Within the dimension of Myth, he can return to the physical realm or reality he left, but both he and that realm are irrevocably changed. The boy named Zhaagesh, too, is taken into another world and finds it natural that he is transformed into a fish (pg 24). The story suggests that this must happen in order that boundary be safely traversed. Through dream and vision, boundary is transgressed and - in a (mythological) sense - eclipsed.

The perceptual sense of Story lives and is most manifest at the site of Kikonaang through the round stones called 'kettles.' The relationship of Story to Stone - to say that Stone contains, indeed *embodies*, Story - is again perceptual boundary diminished. This paradox describes and works towards a oneness that lies behind and within every reality. It is the encompassing and inclusive sense of Spirit and Continuum in which boundary exists, and yet does not.





## **Journal from Summer, 1999**

June 3<sup>rd</sup>

*Upon my arrival, i drive to the jagged promontory which we call 'the Point.' For the moment there is no need to be anywhere else. On the shore, close to the water and facing the lake sits a great Stone. It is oddly shaped because it is really a fusion of two. These are the round stones called 'kettles,' which give the place and the community its name. One of the two stones is broken horizontally in half, making a natural seat. I have sat here many times.*

June 4<sup>th</sup>

*In my being away, i have dreamed this place. The small parts carried away have stayed with me as bits of story heard long ago. These are miinun, or seeds, which wait in alter-places of being and consciousness. In going back, one travels as in the sweat-lodge and in dream to find these places. It is a meeting.*

*These parts, which are feeling/image/word, have themselves been travelling. In their natural course, which itself is an evolving, they are joined with others, both old (perhaps ancient) and new. This growing and turning can emerge as idea, or perception. In this sense it is appropriate to replace the word miinun with its animate form, miinug.*

*The parts of story that i heard long ago, i have remembered and evolved into a fuller story. The presences i interacted with now help me to see that fuller story. I could not tell it without them, for they are its essence.*



June 7<sup>th</sup>

*I come to the Point in the early morning. It is a fine but breezy day. The water is out further than i can ever remember. This morning, though, my spirit is high like the wind. I come to this place knowing that my thoughts and words can arise in good company. There is a forbearance here that is needed. A forgiveness: below in rocks and water where sun is repeated in ripples; above in swirling birds.*

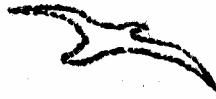
*This 'affirmation' started outside my brother's house at sunrise. Came out and saw them above the dark trees to the east: buzzards riding in the south wind. Then over here at the Point, swallows which swung and darted above this promontory of land. This site of kettle and slate called Kikonaang:*

*look out and observe a movement that is  
everywhere life moving in constant reproduction of  
itself, yet never exactly reproduced movement  
of cell, organ, element a deep-quilted  
stitching of one earth revolving  
always towards a completion  
never quite attained*

June 10<sup>th</sup>

*We say that we have lived here a long time, but it is they - these others - who have lived here longer. I try to see this place nearer to its beginning. I'm sure it was much bigger then, much higher. The way it stuck out further into the lake, it could have been the 'high place' where our ancient people came to fast. There were many more trees here then. Many oak, cherry, maple, and also spruce, pine and cedar were here.*

*It's said that Chief Chi-Mookmaan, or Big Knife, had built a small shelter in the branches of an oak tree on the promontory. Here he had the breeze to blow the mosquitoes away as he slept on hot summer nights. It is his presence as well as the oak that has endured here.*



June 12<sup>th</sup>

*Moses Wolfe was my grandfather. I cannot say that he was a large influence in my life, for i was adopted out of his family while still a baby. But i stayed in the community of Kettle Point, and each Sunday my first step-mother took me to the Anglican church where Moses Wolfe was custodian.*

*He must have carried 'chewing-gum' with him all the time, because whenever i saw him he gave me a stick. Wrigley's Spearmint. Though it was a welcome treat it was always a minor disappointment, for, of course, i wanted 'Juicy Fruit.'*

*He let me pull the big rope inside the church that rang the bell on the roof. 'Time to call the people,' he would say. With one arm he would pull the rope down to begin the movement, then he would watch in amusement as i rode the rope up and down like a mini Quasi-Modo.*

*These were almost the only things that i recall about my grandfather, Moses Wolfe. My first step-mother died when i was six, and i never attended church regularly after that. I learned things about him later that revealed him to be a less than perfect human being, like anyone else. But still, he was my grandfather.*

June 16<sup>th</sup>

*Here is a conversation i have partially remembered with one of my uncles. This was in the time of maple-sugaring in the big bush behind our place. Uncle had told a story about the frozen lake in winter. When i asked him where the story came from, he said something like this:*



Uncle: *"If you want to know where the story comes from, you've got to close yourself up. Your eyes, your ears - everything. Your feelings, too. You've got to start with nothing. Go back to nothing, because that's what you started with."*

Me: *"But uncle, how can somebody start with nothing?"*

Uncle: *"Well, maybe if you listen you'll find out."*

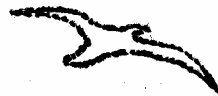
Me: *"Sorry, uncle. I'm listening."*

Uncle: *"The story is already there. You have heard it, and seen it, and felt it all around. If you close yourself up and empty out all of that stuff you don't need, then what fills up that empty space is just good old story. It might take a little while, but if you want to hear it speakin' you've got to teach yourself to do it."*

*Uncle takes a minute to spit in the snow between his boots, which have seen better days. He goes on:*

*"Too much of the time we fill ourselves up with all that stuff that only gets in the way. Just go down to the water, or back in the bush here. Lot of the time that story is waiting. There's a lot more to it than just people. There's those other ones there too. It can speak just as big and just as good as us if we only learn to listen."* Uncle now tries to spit between my boots but hits one of them.

*So that is what i did in my youth, and do again in my coming back. I must have known the paradox there, but would not have been able to name it. The 'closing up' that Uncle described was really an opening up.*



June 17<sup>th</sup>

*I recall that 'Zhiishiib,' the duck, spotted me that morning when i moved my head. Unknowingly, i had warned them off as they came in low across the bay just before sunrise. My brother grumpily informed me of this afterwards: 'You moved your head with that damn pom-pom on top,' he said. 'That's what they saw. That's all they needed to see.'*

*We had gone out before daylight in the boat onto which my brother had built a duck-hide. I had never before seen such a thing: a simple wooden frame attached to the middle third of the boat, with enough cross-pieces to allow for leafy branches and reeds to be tied into them. The old ten-horse Johnson drummed against the pre-dawn silence as we moved out of our channel and onto the broader plane of lake.*

*Upon this darkness and through the upper darkness of air, it seemed that we moved towards an as-yet-unknown mayhem. It was this moving thought of us upon the primal density of water-without-light that made me wonder: is this - as we understand it - the way language is made? Perhaps we do not understand it. The world, in its levels, shows us things we do not often perceive. This can be especially so in its darkness, it seems to me. The language which can come from such a thing as motor-boat on water is trans- sensual, perhaps omni-sensual in its speech. On such a morning, it is the varied darknesses which speak as they always have.*

*Keeping close to shore, we make our way south to where the bay - this part of Wiikwedong - becomes shallower. My brother cuts the motor, and lifts it clear of rocks. We drift into thick reeds by the shore. He takes up an oar, careful not to make a sound, for the birds would hear. Everyone would hear.*

June 22<sup>nd</sup> - (summer solstice), 7:15am

*Good walk this morning, but with the usual disquiet. Everywhere heavy with dew. Heavy déjà vu. Plant and spider-web glistening in rising sun. Something about this makes air and water seem waiting.*

9:20am

*The road walked is friend and perilous stranger. A constructed thing, it is therefore to be imagined differently. Hard and pot-holed, it is bare-skinned dust-holder where life barrels along in and out of my own. A place of instant death. A static place which only my human movement makes functional. It is a long place of waiting and listening. Of course, a boundary.*

*Life can move safely and freely off its limit, or most dangerously upon it. The road is paradox, for though static it is built for speed. It sits there for convenience and conveyance, this vacant space. Though hard it is not paved, and so the people who live beside it complain about the dust. Tax dollars say that the road must be oiled. So the road becomes an oil-slick where birds cannot land to drink and bathe in the puddles; squirrels, snakes, frogs cannot cross. Worms are shiny-black-dead. Now it is truly a human place.*

*But when i walk the road i can imagine that it celebrates my walking. It is a river which flows with my movement. It is the path of Great Serpent, Mishi-Gnebig, who travels just ahead. Her movement, more than mine, is a cross-stitch through the worlds. He is a sensuous needle, penetrating between the worlds, and into them.*

*There is a story which tells that it is desirable to lie down in the track of Great Serpent, because it is a healing place. But one must be careful that it is not the track of Mji-Gnebig, 'the bad one,' because he might double back and swallow up who lies there.*

June 24<sup>th</sup>

*Through the years, there has been some terrible destruction here at the Point. A desecration. Beginning early in the century, the kettles have been taken away from the site by both Native and non-Native people. Holes like empty sockets in the face of the Point. Children taken. It is the case of claiming its uniqueness for one's own. It is again the grand assumption of first priority and power-over: the kettles seen as adornment and ornament. There is little other perception or recognition, it seems.*

*Chief and Council deemed it efficacious to take the broken up streets of a nearby town and have the concrete deposited around the front of the Point. There is irony for you. This was during a time of high water, when there was concern about the Point and the road which follows the shore being washed away. Though perhaps enacted as a temporary measure, this jumble of concrete*

*shapes remains as permanent disfigurement to this natural form of land. The water now lies thirty feet withdrawn from the bulk.*



June 26<sup>th</sup>

*One great kettle sits in its place on the promontory of the Point. People see it when they pass on the road. Young people scratch their names on its surface. Coming back on my walk, i have seen it perched on the promontory: a sculpted presence against dark water, like baby on mother. This kind of perception is missed, though not entirely. I have seen offerings of tobacco left on rocks and tied in bushes here. Their presence like salve in the wounds.*

June 27<sup>th</sup>

*Here also upon the promontory, there is a kettle which is split in two. On each halved flatness are ridged lines coursing outward. There is no central core, only a point where movement outward begins.*

*One's first impression or impulse is to see only a monochromatic field, darkly defined. But look more closely, and it is a cosmic palate depicting a beginning and an intense explosion of energy and flight. Let flatness of hand explore these flat planes: slivers of light caught on fields of possibility so enticing, even sensual.*

*Yet should one look so close? In a sense, each halved flatness, no matter how enticing or seemingly knowledge-packed, is a falsehood. Draw back and see the broken, sundered whole, (is this one of those oxymorons?, Stone would ask). But i must ask - is the storied flatness (the 'inner story'), greater than the storied whole - the 'whole story'? It is my feeling that, in this sense, the flatness belies the whole. Perhaps it is this sense - this grand assumption which splits the whole, and within which we go forward - that could be entirely wrong.*

July 1<sup>st</sup>

*There is an old photograph taken here at the Point in which a group of five people stand on the flat surface of slate. A car - perhaps a Model T - is parked nearby, also on the slate. There are many more kettles of varying size in the photograph than are here today. The people stand among them regarding one another, perhaps in discussion. The man is in jacket and slacks, and straw boater; the women are in frilled and fashionable dresses and hats. A good example of fashion from the society of the day.*

*However, i find the photograph irksome, and wonder why. But i know why. It is the presence of the people and the car - there, in that distance of time away - but also felt here, in the immediacy of this place. It is their vertical shapes upon the flatness of slate, and among the roundness of kettles that is part of the photograph's 'punctum,' as Barthes called it. But more than this, it is their presence/intrusion and the implication of it, weighted against the paradox of embededness/openness, and the equally palpable implication of that which is the true 'punctum' of the photograph.*

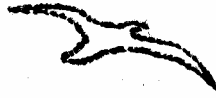
*The resentment felt in my reaction to the photograph is baggage from long ago, i know. A war waged against the transgressions of strangers was one taken up by most Indian children during the summers at Wiiwkwedong. This was done behind the blissfully simple enjoiner that they are the enemy because they are from 'out there,' and they are 'White'. This was also done for the most part without parental encouragement or knowledge.*

*But i also know it is something deeper than childhood animosity which feeds the present resentment. Could it be that it is because i see the place depicted in the photograph as stronger, more complete, and perhaps closer to a 'purity of origin?' I know that such a notion is dangerous in its power to minimize, or invalidate what is 'there' at the given moment. Yet, intuitively, and in the same sense that Stone speaks, i know that there is such a thing.*

July 2<sup>nd</sup>

*Now a hard question needs to be asked in relation to the Point and my feelings about the photograph. The question is this: how strongly is my sense of the Point as sacrosanct attached to an underlying sense of it, or identity with it, as being 'Aboriginal?' That is, my sense of 'that which is Indian,' which was behind our attitude and behaviour toward 'that which is not,' in our childhood. How strongly is this sense, in relation to both people and place, infused with the idea of 'purity of origin?' Perhaps this sense, or idea, verges on racism when applied to my feelings about the (non-Aboriginal) people and their car in the photograph. It is bothersome.*

*I know that the mixture of feelings evoked by the photograph are stirred by irony and paradox. The identities of people and place are tied inextricably by historical event, and the colonial imperative of control, exploitation and abuse.*



July 5<sup>th</sup>

*There is an openness, perhaps an open-endedness, about this formation of land. Its combination of water and sky is somehow like no other. I know that it's just me, but of course that is the wonder of it. So the question cannot help but be asked: what is to be made of this? The land shaped in exactly this way. Rocks which lie so that water interplays with certain sound and movement. In one sense it is the same as anywhere there is water and land. The combination is itself perhaps no great event, but part of a much larger event whose greatness lies in its continuance:*

*creation story here is perceived, though not as  
singular perception from singular place it swings around  
here as the birds have tumbles around me from  
my youth and beyond not in exactness of words, it is  
spoken from my people and from  
here, this place*

July 8<sup>th</sup>

*Here i can sit upon Stone, and know that i am 'here.' I know the reason in the marrow of my bones. It is in me so entirely that i could not expunge it from myself if i wanted. I am 'it,' 'it' is me. But that is wrong too, for it is not 'it,' only here in this place. It is also there, and there, and over there, where i cannot see.*

July 10<sup>th</sup>

*A government teacher told us in science class that a tree is a living thing that is spiritually dead. That's what it is and that's all it is, she said. It's the same with a fish or an animal. It's stupid to think that there is a spirit there.*

*As surely as i know my times-tables (as i once did), i know that there is no such thing as 'dead.' It is simply a transition back into greater Spirit.*

July 12<sup>th</sup>

*I have come to know that other beings, other forms of life besides human, are called 'grandmother,' and 'grandfather.' The great Stone which i sit upon, and which lies upon the finely broken shale is one such presence:*

*think about closing/opening deeper than thinking,  
of course, but it does not happen easily too much in the way,  
as uncle said think about Chi-Mookmaan here at this place,  
his own spirit remembering high in the oak tree remember  
my own crouched form upon the bleached hump of kettle feet  
stuck fast to his smooth back smooth, but with the pocks  
and fissures of his age watching intently the dark-squared  
form of minnow-net below in waterlight and shadow, the water  
giving these qualities their depth cleansing, silent world,  
yet for those who live there, no more silent than our own*

July 15<sup>th</sup>

*Whole half-days spent here catching minnows for my dad - his 'fishing business.'  
Behind closed eyes i can see and feel exactly where this was. Where great kettle  
lay half sunk with my small form upon him. Right there it was, where now it is dry  
beneath heaped rubble.*

*grandfather, let me be upon you again with my leathered  
summerfeet remember? in this place where our spirits  
meet, i can open and reveal what i know and you,  
on whom i sit can do the same it is trust that allows it,  
and belief perhaps because the human grandfather was  
silenced, the stone grandfather can speak:*

Try to imagine who i am, because imagining is another kind of remembering. I  
imagine you and remember you in your time here as one particle, one grain of  
sand. I know your father - the one who adopted you - and his grandfather, and  
his grandfather's father.

*You mean you knew them. They are all dead.*

What i said is what i meant. But going back that far, there weren't as many  
people around, of course. Not like now. Oh, they'd be around sometimes during  
the summers, but then like all things, they'd be gone. Recall your own summers  
here when the water was high. Does it seem that it was different?

Yes.

How was it different?

*It seemed fuller. There was more here.*

That's right. It's because the water has withdrawn. When the water goes, it takes  
so much. It is what keeps us whole.

*But you are a stone. Surely you don't need it the same as...*

The living creatures?

*I guess that's a bad assumption.*



And also sad. I like nothing better than to lie at the bottom of the lake with the fine cool water sweeping around me. It has been that way before, as i have moved around. When i first arrived i was quite a long ways from here, out in the water.

*When you first arrived. Does that mean you came from somewhere else?*

Like most humans you are amusing in a perverse kind of way. You can now travel in space, yet you still regard this speck as the center of the universe.

*It sounds as if you have a story to tell.*

The stories to tell are infinite like our shapes. A no-endingness. I can tell you stories about this place for the rest of your life, but it would only bore you.

*And would they be true?*

Yes, in their own way, they would. If what i'm going to tell you sounds trite, maybe it's because it is. But it's the best i can do: Truth is in the tides and currents and vibrations of this one you call the earth. It is in the particle of sand that exists in itself, but also in its life-within-life. The no-endingness. Understand?

*I'm not sure.*

Well, if you get even a glimmer, then it's ok. This story that you want to hear is only a glimmer of its real light - just a glimpse of what is there.

I have come to know much, for by your measure i am very old. Yet in the scheme of things i know nothing, for what am i but one stone. Well, really, i am two, but i suppose that's beside the point. Oh-ho, i have made a verbal pun, have i not? Two stones beside the point. That's very funny, for that's where we are.

*Yes, that's very funny. Beside the point.*

I can see you have a tremendous sense of humour. Where was i?

*You were telling me about your qualities as a Stone. You know much, but you know nothing. That's what you said.*

Alright. I know much, yet i know nothing. By your reasoning i cannot move, for i am a dead, inanimate thing. Yet i can tell you that i am everywhere. Something you cannot measure or disprove with rulers and calipers. You can move me around or break me up with your machines. The only way you hurt me is through your disrespect. The spirit remains.

There are places on the earth that are strong-points, where energy and resonance gather. These are places of exchange for all life-forms. It is not for anyone to change that place or take it apart as humans have done. Only human would come to such a place with presumption and disrespect.

Now, just as the stronger forces are gathered at such a place, so it is with stone. And this is especially true of the round stones you call kettles. It is as good a name as any. Of course, being doubly-endowed as i am, it is especially true for me. I am the point-of-speaking; i am the speaking-all-around; i am the sounding. Though my time here has not been from the beginning, it is long enough to say that i am of this place. You can say that others speak through me, though all can speak for themselves.

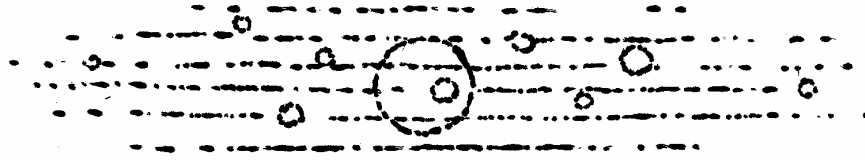
Also in dream can we come, and in your sweat and fasting-lodges. For a long time now it has been this way. In spite of what human has done, it is perfect at this place. It resides in the embededness of round stone within smooth slate here, you see? It is the paradox that is right for story to arise. It sounds like cooking, and i can see that you are hungry. To begin, let me tell you how it began as i have heard it.



### **Stone Begins to Tell**

This story goes back closer to the beginning, and that's a long ways back. The universe had been made - the suns and planets, the comets and asteriods - all these funny names. Everything was out there, but nothing was moving. It was as if Great Spirit had put it out there, and then waited to see what would happen. A kind of experiment, maybe. Well, what happened was that a great silence fell on all of that space and everything that was there. Silence and stillness. As if everything was waiting.

The earth, too, was unmoving, unturning in that great womb of space, they say. As time is measured and understood by humans, the silence lasted a long, long time.

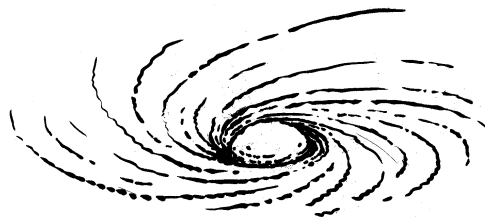


Now, here is the thing about this: in order for it to be a silence, there had to be somebody listening. And indeed, there was. The one who was listening was also spirit. You could say spirit of life, or spirit of woman. And not just human woman, but Coyote, Raven, Spider and Earth. All of those, and many more.

In the beginning that spirit was pretty faint, though - just barely there, they say. The spirit was listening very hard to that silence, as if something was supposed to come out of there. But nothing did. And that silence seemed to be endless. That woman-spirit listened until the listening became a longing, a loneliness - a wish to be heard. It has also been called dreaming. It became more intense, and finally it caused something to happen.

The woman-spirit was spread around in different places, and one of those places was in the round stone called earth. The earth was special right from the beginning, you see.

What finally happened was that the earth cracked open. Something came pouring out that started to fill the earth up on its surface. It was the very life-blood of the living rock: what today is called water. Not the water that is known today - don't forget it was the beginning. Everything started moving in circles then, they say. It was as if the universe, and the great stone called Earth, took its first breath.



After she was born, this earth went through some rough times. There was a time of great chaos, when the land was forming with the water. Things happened which made the land what it is. A story is told of a liquid that came up

out of the ground and lay on the earth around here. But, unlike the cleansing water which was to be full of life, this liquid was thick and black, and seemed to smother new life wherever it went.

But it got worse, because then the Thunder-beings struck this liquid and set it on fire. For a long time the land and even the water was covered with flames that leaped into the air. The sky was black, and the days were dark from the smoke from that terrible fire. The land itself was reformed in layers as the fire died. Spirit of water rose to cover the blackened land, which cooled and layered itself out smooth under the great weight of the water.

That is the story as it is told here, of how this place was formed. That is the way the *manidoog*, the spirits of water, and fire, and earth, and sky tell the story. They are the ones that form the spirit of this place. But back then, that spirit was not yet complete (well, it never is), because now the time was coming for the event which brought the special stones to this place. The round stones of every size, of which i am one - or two. That is the next story, which is a bigger one than mine alone.



### **The Story of Anung, and the Coming of the Kettles**

It was during the time of the great chaos that the upper oceans of earth were forming: everything and everyone working hard to get the mixture right. The spirits tell that though most kinds of life were still in the water, there was a feeling of something coming out of the turmoil going on. Expectancy of some kind was in the thin air of those times. Maybe the word is *hope*. It was fearsome and joyful at the same time, they say.

The night sky was not so fearsome, but was just as much alive with light. Silence and longing were reflected there as it has always been before that time and since.

Well, about that time a light was seen up there that began to stand out from the rest. That light grew so that it became the brightest one except for the moon, who was

looking down big and full. That was a big stone that was coming down to earth from out there in space. Seen from below, that light became a round fire up there until it was bigger than the moon. There was a tail of fire behind it, they say, and pieces of fire flying off which became a rain of stones coming down.



That big ball of fire hit out there in the lake, and don't you think it caused a shudder of the earth! It wasn't long before a wave came in that was as high as a mountain, then other waves that followed. Some of the spirits say that the water stood up and fell over the land. Those are the kind of things that happened during that time.

Now, there is a story about the big stone that hit out there. It is related to this place, but the relationship has not been a good one, or a happy one. First, it must be told that the arrival of the big stone was also the time of my own arrival, and all of the round stones called 'kettles.' We are the ones that flew off of the giant stone as it burned into the atmosphere of earth, then into earth herself.

Once leaving the great fire of our parent we cooled quickly, our forms becoming rounded as we fell. We hit with such force that many of us burrowed deep into the soft slate beneath the water. My own double form kept me near the surface, but it was countless turnings of the earth before i saw the light of this sun.

You may ask why the story of my birth is told from a place on the earth, when it was from the sky that i came. It is because, as spirit, my life did not start until i had lived in the earth and become part of her. Before then, there is only a remembrance of light. But light that i know nothing of except that it is from untold

time and distance away. It is older than earth, or her sun. It is a light that i hold within myself.

As i have said, the big stone that is now called *Anung* (which means 'star'), hit the lake out there with a force that made our splashes seem like those of pebbles. Then that mountain of water that followed would have swept all kinds of life away, but at the time it was mostly bare rock. After that great crash, it was a while before things settled down, for it seemed as if the earth had been brutalized. That is what i felt from my mother. Only after countless more turnings did a kind of calm prevail.

Then one day the sky in the west grew dark, and *nodin*, the wind, began to act strangely. That one began darting in circles and changing direction, as if unsure which way to go. Then far out near the horizon a terrible motion began.



The water was lifted from the surface of the lake and taken into the air by the wind. It whirled around until a great storm was made out there, and then it came in to the land. By then many forms lived on the land, and everything had to hide or cling to the earth. Still, many were swept up in the storm.

Now, here is how the story is told: that storm was made when a spirit arose from the lake. It was a spirit of terrible anger and violence that came out of the big stone that struck the earth out there. It was the spirit that is named *Anung*, who lay buried in the bottom of the lake. Since that first time long ago, storms have arisen because that spirit is restless. That spirit is trapped in the earth.

### **The Baby Named Tikib is Taken by the Storm**

The story tells that again a long time went by. People called humans began to travel through this place. Many battles were fought between them, until the ones who called themselves Anishnabeg began to make their homes more permanently here. The fishing and hunting were good, and they grew to love this place beside *gchi-gumi*, the big lake.

There was a woman among them who had a child, a son, whose name was *Tikib* - 'the freshwater spring.' It's said that this boy was greatly loved by his parents and by his community of people.

One day in summer, the boy's mother, *Zhekwe*, took her son to visit relatives, who lived a little ways away. Their progress was slow as Tikib walked beside his mother, for he still had not seen his second autumn. They walked on a path that was well used by the Anishnabeg. A path that led them first through the bush, then through a clear place beside a marsh. It was when they came into the open that Zhekwe noticed how the sky had suddenly grown dark. The wind began to make strange movements in the grass around them. She heard a rushing of wind behind them and turned to see a whiteness sweeping towards them from the lake. She picked up her son and began to run back towards the trees. But quickly, the storm surrounded them. It howled at them while Zhekwe stood, unable to move. Then, she felt her son being pulled from her arms. Desperately, she tried to hold him but the wind took her breath, and water filled her mouth. Her small son, Tikib, was torn from her.



Now, again in the story, a lot of time and many generations passed among the Anishnabeg. Stories were told about the baby named Tikib who was taken from his mother and carried away by the storm. Stories were told about the storms that were somehow made in that certain part of the lake. But when people

spoke of them and of that place, they spoke in hushed voices. They thought of it as a place of power that they did not understand. Perhaps could not understand.

For years afterwards it was said that whenever the sky grew dark with storm, Zhekwe, 'Going-back-woman,' could be seen walking the roads and open spaces around Wiikwedong. Her pitiful figure would stand with arms lifted up, calling to the sky. Of course, no one knew what became of the baby named Tikib. He was never seen again by his parents or by anyone who was alive then. That was a long time ago.

### **The Boy Named Zhaagesh Meets Tikib**

Once again, the story stays at the place called Wiikwedong, but moves to a time many human years and generations later. It was a time when the Anishnabeg began to see more of the ones they called *Wemtigoozhiiyug*, and *Shugnaashug* - the French and English White people.

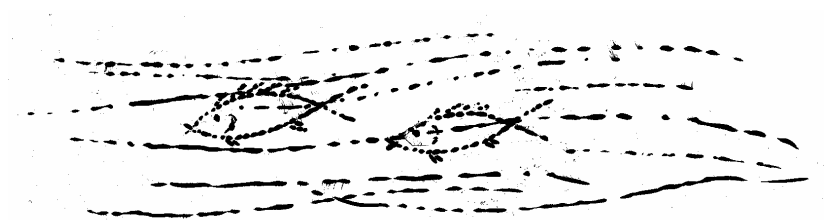
Many Anishnabeg had begun to hunt and trap the animal-beings only for their fur. This would make life better for themselves and their families, they were told. And so this is what they thought. But it was also because they wished to possess the frightening new weapon called a gun. Many also traded for the crazy-water which brought sadness and sickness to the communities. To the animal-people, it seemed that the Anishnabeg had betrayed them, who were their older relatives: these ones with whom they had lived in good balance through the ages. Now a time of imbalance came to the Anishnabeg, with many dying of diseases that their medicine people seemed powerless to stop. Spirit, mind and body were in turmoil as never before.

It was around this time that the round stones in this place came to be known by the name they now have. They reminded the Anishnabeg of the black cooking-pots called 'kettles' brought by the Whites. Because their own name for such a pot was 'kik,' they began to call this place *Kikonaang*, 'the place of the kettles.' However, the larger meaning of the word, as it was understood then, was 'the place where the round stones live.' We were seen then as living beings - another kind of person.



So it was that at this time, a young boy was making his way along the rocky shore near Kikonaang. This boy was called *Zhaagesh*, named after *zhaageshiinh*, the little crayfish who lives among the rocks in the water. It was in the spring of the year when *shigunug*, the bass, were in the shallows. Zhaagesh was looking for the soft-shelled ones that would attract the bass to his hook. As he bent to move the rocks, he saw his reflection in the water. When he looked closer, however, he saw that it was not his image that looked back, but that of someone else. It was the image of a boy very much like himself who seemed to be talking to him. The boy beckoned, and Zhaagesh bent closer. Then he did something that some say was foolish, but Zhaagesh was never afraid to do things. He put his face in the water, and that was the last anyone saw of him for some time.

Zhaagesh was taken into the water, then he found himself travelling fast. He didn't know how it was happening, but he was being taken out into the lake - out here off Kikonaang. He knew that it was getting deep, because it was getting cold and dark. They say that as Zhaagesh travelled, he knew from the way he was swimming that he had become a fish. Maybe one of those bass he was always trying to catch.



He came to a place out there that was deeper. It was a place that went straight down into the earth. Now, for the first time Zhaagesh was getting scared, because he was going down into that hole. He didn't know what was there, and he couldn't stop himself.

There was some kind of spirit down there that he could feel, but that he couldn't see. Then what he saw was a faint light shining from the darkness: from one part of that darkness. He went towards it, and there was the boy whose reflection he had seen at Kikonaang.

That boy was Anishnabe by his features, but his face was light, or lighted, they say. He spoke to Zhaagesh in their language, but Zhaagesh didn't understand some of the words, so old was the language that boy used. His name was Tikib, he said. He told Zhaagesh not to be afraid, that he wouldn't be harmed. Zhaagesh looked down, and saw that he had his own body again. Somehow he could breathe down there. They played some games, because it's what that boy wanted to do. But as they played, Zhaagesh noticed that the boy didn't touch him, or allow himself to be touched - his hands, or any part of him. He kept always out of reach.

This boy named Tikib talked some more in his very old language. Zhaagesh felt something very strong coming from him, and suddenly he reached out to touch him. When he did this there was a movement, a disturbance in the darkness around them. Zhaagesh heard the echoing of words, and Tikib told him that it was all the words they had spoken in that place.

'Anung keeps them,' he said, 'just as he keeps everything to gather strength.'

Again Zhaagesh felt something moving, as if a great force was stirring.

'You have to go now,' Tikib said urgently. 'Tell our people that when the storm comes to also remember me with their tobacco.'

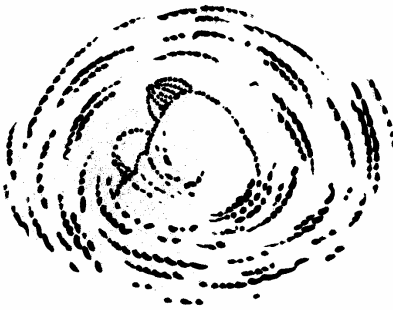
Zhaagesh heard Tikib's fading voice as he was taken upwards out of that dark place. Again he was travelling fast. Again he was a fish.

When Zhaagesh was back among his people, it seemed to him that he had only been gone for part of a day. But he found that nearly a moon had passed, and his family, his community, thought he had drowned. Their eyes grew wide when Zhaagesh told them about the place in the lake where the spirit of Anung slept restlessly, and where the spirit of Tikib was imprisoned. If enough spirit was gathered into the place called 'Anung's Chamber,' the big stone could continue the journey that was interrupted, and the boy named Tikib would be freed.

But from Tikib's words and feelings, Zhaagesh knew that it would never happen. Through the ages, Tikib had not done what Anung told him he must do.

Tikib couldn't do what had been done to him. Zhaagesh had felt Tikib's great sadness, but also love for his people, the Anishnabeg.

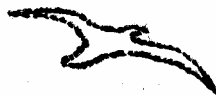
Now, there are some things that have been told since that time that are not part of the story as i, Stone, have told it. It has been said that Tikib did come back at some time, but found that he no longer knew his people. They had become different, and had forgotten many of their ways - their language, beliefs and ceremonies.



As some have told it, Tikib became an old man very quickly and went to live alone. His spirit has since been heard and sometimes seen in places that are apart from humans, or perhaps only the Anishnabeg. He drums and sings a lament in the hollow caves where the lake-ice ends in the dead of winter, or inside a hollow stone-hill in the middle of the bush in summer. Places most remote and lonely are where Tikib has gone.

The stories also tell of a ghostly figure which appears near the marsh, or on an open road at Wiikwedong. When the sky grows dark with storm, it is the form of a woman who can be seen with arms raised up, imploring to the sky.

These are the parts that have been told in the past by others. Consider them part of the larger story.



## Journal

July 18<sup>th</sup> - end of day

*The water too warm and withdrawn. Something happening in the lake wh ich is not good. My walk jangled & uneasy...*

*The sun is not set, but rests  
above the horizon, becoming oblong, an  
almost lurid depth of colour.*

*Day rests around me, seeming to  
settle, but i know that it is not really so;  
that something is here amongst  
the sifted clean stones, and pebbles; the  
broken shale on which i walk.*

*Look back and see my singular tracks  
pushed up as if evoking words from  
below in wordless language.*

*If 'good sense' says that it can't be  
so, why then do i feel it as i walk, making  
these marks, this exchange? Go along,  
and keep the walk a good one.*

*The marks behind are tracks which  
are not mine, but in that language become  
a welling up, gathering here in my  
throat; amassing what the tracks  
speak from earth; telling of  
something which this unsettled end of  
day wishes me to see.*

*And sure enough, as light  
glimmers down, a shape  
emerges from surface of earth and  
water; from shape of rock. A fish,  
but one that is not regular shape of fish. It is  
not carp, or catfish, or trout, or even  
one so common as sucker.*

*I come up beside this body  
here on the shore, which something said*

*was here, and look down.  
It is Maanmeg, the Sturgeon.  
Right away it is different because  
it is Sturgeon. It is not the others,  
but this one. With her body  
pale as light in this uneasy end of day,  
she is faced away from where sun sits flattened  
on the horizon, ready to disappear.  
The gulls have had their way with  
this one. Eyes gone, tube-shaped  
mouth and filigreed gills only partly there.  
Good strong pectoral fins are there, but  
hang whitely dead. Now see above  
where eyes had been, the elongated plate which  
when i look closer holds  
a story. Fine lines etched into its surface  
divide the plate. Thirteen parts.  
Closer still, and see the story - its ancientness  
the same as Turtle's. Would it be  
interesting to know how  
this happened - to see the secret unfold  
through time-lapse photography? But no.  
Such a thing would be nothing  
more than another intrusion. Sturgeon  
and Turtle speak through these lines  
of common ancestry, but more. Unspeaking,  
they tell of knowing and way of being.  
Lines joined in a way that is common with  
Spider. They speak of uncounted  
invisible paths running in criss-cross pattern  
within every form that is Earth and*

*Universe. Earth-lines form and emanate  
from Turtle and from Sturgeon: this one  
now before me on this uneasy brink  
of shore. End of day shudders up  
from water into sky. Up from down,  
down from up. It is one.*

### **Stone Tells of Tree Spirit, and Chi-Mookman's Dreaming**

There is a dreaming of this place which is told by other spirit. Tree has not been here as long as Stone, but spirit of Tree is as strong here as any other. Though it is mainly oak here now, it doesn't much matter. The dreaming is as much a part of the story as any event that may or may not have happened here in a certain way. It is as much an acorn that falls in a certain place as it is a storm that sweeps in from the lake. These are equal in importance to anything that happens or has happened at this place.

The dreaming is all of these together: the acorn that begins its growth as a dreaming of roots down and branches up; the dreaming of Chi- Mookmaan, too, lives timeless here. He remembers a lesson once taught and learned:



### **The Children See All Around**

One time a teacher comes here with young ones on a breezy day, early afternoon she brings them right up here on this height of land those children can see all around sky above them, water below the round stones down there too but that young teacher is a bit unsure, i see maybe a little afraid, as if she don't much trust this place lookin older with her sweater pulled around her, she's watchin the children they are playin around up there for awhile then her voice rises above them stay away

*from the edge* stay where you can be seen, or you will be in trouble now the children show her the tricky path to the water down the ledge they take her along there, two older girls holdin her hands by the shore now that young woman looks out at the water, choppy with the west wind again she is looking unsure, her voice a little unsteady like the wind, she calls *stay away from the water* gathering now around a good size kettle there she speaks to them I want you to see that the rock formation here is quite unusual remember, children, what we took in class that these rocks were formed long ago by volcanic action she's lookin at them, and puts the fingers of one hand on the kettle just the ends of those fingers that movement makes the children look away therefore, what kind of rock is this?

one of the boys says *ik*, but stops she nods her head, tryin to help him *ignn*, she says another boy gets big eyes and yells *ignerant!* that teacher's head stops movin and she's lookin at him no Matthew, the rock is not ignorant it is not anything but a rock but if you don't learn, then you will be ignorant she sighs and bounces her hand on the kettle as she is speaking does not one of you remember?

it's *igneous*, says one of the girls now a little smile is on the teacher's face thank you Mary, she says it's igneous rock, created by the fire and heat of volcanic action and that is also how it got to be this shape she is lookin down and movin her hand on the stone now another girl is speakin up my grampa says there's stories in there, and that's what makes it round the boy who yelled out says, everybody knows your old grampa's a witch that teacher's voice rises steadier than before that's enough out of you her hand is stopped on the stone and she is lookin at the girl who spoke what kinds of stories does your grandfather say are in there, Jeanette? the girl is lookin at the

kettle about the land, and about our people, she says that's interesting, Jeanette, but i don't think that's possible, do you? That girl makes a little shrug and says nothing more you must look at someone when they're talking to you, Jeanette now look at me that young girl is lookin at the teacher now tell us how it's possible that words - these stories your grandfather speaks of - can make this kettle round that girl's eyes on the teacher are fillin with tears while behind her some of them kids are gigglin she looks away now, still sayin nothing

now there is another story behind this one that i see it is the same except for the last maybe this one is truer, maybe not it is happening in the same place at the same time that girl Jeanette stands there, but that teacher does not make a mockery or use the girl to show what might happen when somebody makes a sign or speaks about the old ways

the girl is holdin her hands close in front she reaches over now and is puttin something on top of the kettle an acorn that young teacher saw the children pickin them up when they ran up on the height of land the boys running to the edge, throwin them out over the water the teacher is seein the acorn perched on top of the kettle in this place with wind, rock, water all around their humanness all around she is feelin its stranger-like smallness why did you put that there?

my grampa says the kettle is round because the stories are never done they come from a long ways and keep going on he showed me like this that the acorn is the same because it grows all around like a story he showed me

now, it could be that the teacher is gettin mad sweepin that acorn away and gettin on with her lesson but that is



not what happens that young teacher is followin her instinct  
and lettin that acorn stand pretty soon them children one  
by one are puttin their own acorns there beside that little  
one's the one who spoke up



up there in the branches i had a dream one time that there  
was children standin all around here they went right around  
the back near the road, and right around the front where the  
kettles are lookin out like eyes comin out like birth that  
was a really powerful dream

### **Stone Tells About a Man Named Hungrybun**

I knew a man named *Bkadewnini*, the 'hungry man,' who used to come around here a lot. Maybe he was sweet on one of the women here, or maybe he just liked to come and trade stories with me. Knowing him, it was probably both.

He was a man who came from somewhere else, so he knew a lot of stories from other places. But this place was special to him, because he never stopped coming here right up to the time he passed on. Nobody knew what happened to him exactly - he just stopped coming around. That's when people started calling him *Hungrybun*, meaning he's passed on.

I never knew a human who knew so many stories as that man. Hungry was a good name for him, because everywhere he went people fed him food for stories. It wasn't very often that he went hungry. He's the one who first mentioned anything about *Mshi-gnebigoo*, the Great Serpents.

Well, of course i knew a lot of stories about them, and maybe i thought i knew them all. But that old man came out with some i never heard. We swapped all of them that we knew between us, which must have been most of them. But no matter how much somebody thinks they know, there's always more. I'll tell

some of the ones we told, me and Hungrybun. But first i'll tell the one that got it going. The one about Gchi-Gnebig, the first big serpent, and how he came to be.



### **How Gnebigoo the Warrior was Transformed**

There are stories still heard about the Great Serpents among the Anishnaabe people of *Wiikwedong*, or Kettle Point. But the Great Serpents themselves haven't always been around. This first part of a longer story is about how they came to be.

Long ago, a young man named Gnebigoo became one of the foremost warriors of the Anishnaabeg. During the ongoing war with the *Naadweg* - that is, the Iroquois - from the south and from the east, Gnebigoo proved himself to be a formidable adversary. He was tall and slim in stature, but also very strong.

Though the war had brought much to him in the way of fame, it had also taken much from him. It had taken his parents when he was a child, and most recently, his young wife. The people saw how he was affected by this, for his temperament became one of anger, vengeance, and even hatred. Because of this, it's said that Gnebigoo's own people came to fear him. They also saw that with his fame had come arrogance and vanity. He liked to array himself in bright colours. So, People saw him coming, and made sure they stayed out of his way.

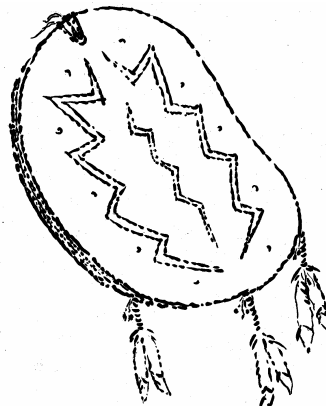
### **Gnebigoo Dreams of the Great Shield**

Now, around this time Gnebigoo had two dreams. In the first dream he saw himself as a still greater warrior. He carried a shield that was made somehow from a pine tree. This is what he knew in the dream. The shield seemed translucent, and shone with amber light. But the greatest thing about the shield was that it deflected all the weapons of the enemy. Spears, arrows and war-clubs were rendered harmless against it. Gnebigoo saw that such a shield, combined with his fighting skill, would make him all but invincible as a warrior.

Upon waking, however, he found himself filled with questions and doubt. What had the amazing shield in his dream been made of? How could such a shield be made? He didn't know. As the first dream ended, Gnebigoo saw fire, and he saw a stream of amber light filling a great basin of some kind.

In his second dream, Gnebigoo saw a large flat stone whose surface had been gently hollowed through the ages by water. He recognized the stone and knew where it was. Upon it he saw poured the amber liquid of pine and fire. So, from this second dream Gnebigoo knew that the shield was somehow made from this essence of pine and fire.

But still he wasn't sure. He went into a pine forest and looked at the trees, but at first couldn't see a way to make the shield as he had seen in his dream. Then, looking more closely he saw the sun glint through a drop of resin on the bark of one of these trees. He knew that the shining liquid he had seen in his dream was melted pine-gum. This was a substance used by the Anishnaabeg as a powerful healing medicine. So, from these dreams Gnebigoo knew that the shield also possessed this medicine power, this spirit power. This is what he thought.



### **Gnebigoo Makes the Shield**

Now, though he felt that his dream was very close to becoming real, Gnebigoo also felt that his time shouldn't be wasted gathering the large quantity of pine-resin that would be needed to make the shield. Instead, he used his cunning to trick the trusting *Sungoo* - the squirrels - into doing this for him. He told them that he would make a strong new medicine with the resin which would

rid them of the bothersome parasites that lived in their fur and in their nests. When they heard this, the squirrels gathered the resin eagerly, though this was time they should have spent gathering their store of winter food.

Now, Gnebigoo knew from his dreams that the greatest power in the shield was given through *Mshkode*, or Fire. And he knew that spirit of Fire was everywhere, though it was usually hiding. So Gnebigoo called on Fire to help him make a sweat-lodge. Some of his people were sick, he said, and the sweat-lodge would help them. So, wanting to help the Anishnaabeg, it's said that Fire came through Flint. She danced in the dry wood that Gnebigoo had gathered to heat the rocks for the sweat-lodge.

But then, the warrior revealed his true intention. He moved Fire and made her dance instead around the hollow stone that he had seen in his dream. He put all of the resin into the stone's basin, then waited as the stone grew hot and the resin began to melt. Gnebigoo's eyes gleamed from the fire, and a smile formed on his long face. Thus, Fire was tricked and made to dance, just as the *Sungoog* were made to work, for Gnebigoo's own purpose.

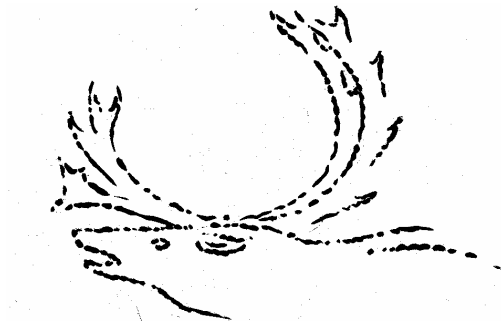
And just as it was in his dream, the resin melted and spread until it covered the bottom of the stone's hollow basin. Gnebigoo let Fire go and she disappeared. Impatiently he waited as the stone cooled, then he loosened the resin from the stone and lifted up his shield. He fashioned holds in the back of the shield for his arm and hand. Using brightly coloured dyes, Gnebigoo blazoned the face of it with *Waasmowin*, the Lightning, which was his own warrior sign. Once it cooled, Gnebigoo found that no matter how he tried he could not break or crack the shield. As in his dream the structure was light and strong, for was it not imbued with the spirit power of Pine and Flint and Fire and Stone? Now he wanted to test the shield, this new power he possessed, and fulfill his dream.

Several stories are told of exactly what happened next. Some say that Gnebigoo, in his eagerness for battle, set out on his own to find the enemy camp. The more common version, however, tells of how Gnebigoo stayed to raise a war-party among the young men of his village. He became crazed, they say, by

the new power that the dreams and the shield had brought. It was during this time that Gnebigoo and his shield 'gained story,' as the Anishnaabeg say. Some of the stories are about Gnebigoo's invincibility in battle, which the dreams had foretold. Others told of how covetously he kept the shield, letting no one else touch it and keeping it even from the sight of others as much as he could. Gnebigoo slept with the shield clutched tight against him under his robes.

### **Gnebigoo Battles the Great Elk, and is Taken Into the Lake**

One story tells of a time on this journey when the war-party was traveling beside *gchi-gumi*, the Great Lake that would later be called Huron. These men thought they saw an island in the lake which was moving, and this island had trees on it. As they watched, the island drew closer in the water. Then they saw that the trees were not trees but horns, and the island was the head of a large animal. It came ashore, and the men saw that it was a giant elk which stood nearly twice the height of a man. Shaking its horns, the animal came towards the warriors.



Not knowing its intention these young men backed away, fearing that it was a spirit of some kind. They say that now Gnebigoo, resplendent in his colours, stepped forward.

"If you are only a beast, then I will kill you," he said. "If you are a spirit, then I will also fight you, for my power is greater." Wielding his weapons of shield and war-club, Gnebigoo then stepped into battle with the great elk.

In this fight, Gnebigoo was thrown into the air many times by the animal. Using his shield to protect him, he escaped the points of the giant horns but

could not land a blow with his war-club. Finally, by chance his shield was caught in the horns and Gnebigoo was also carried there. Quickly, he jumped to the great elk's back and from there struck with all his force on his head. Now the beast was stunned, but would not fall. Seeing their chance, the young warriors now closed upon the elk and one of them pierced its belly with a spear. When the great elk fell, Gnebigoo took his shield from the horns as the warriors raised the war-cry. It was then that from its place on the ground the animal spoke:

"I have come to tell Gnebigoo that Waasmowin, his guardian spirit, has left him," the elk said. "Instead, he must beware for Waasmowin now hunts him."

Then something started to come out from the wound in the elk's belly. More and more it came out, and as it did the body of the great elk shrunk until only the hide and the horns remained. As the warriors watched, the hide too began to disappear. These things that came out could barely be seen because they indeed were spirits of some kind. They moved around on the ground at first, then some of them flew into the air. They flew like bees around the warriors, driving them back and making them crazy. Then they went at Gnebigoo, some at his head and some at his feet, knocking him down. Against his will, these spirits rolled the big warrior over the rocks very roughly to the edge of the lake. His shield, which he had somehow held on to, was wrested from him and left there by the water. Gnebigoo was rolled right into the lake, because he was so dazed that he couldn't stop it.

In the water he thrashed, but still the spirits held him. Turning and turning, Gnebigoo felt long reeds winding around him, holding his arms and his legs fast. He knew that he was drowning. An inglorious way for a warrior such as him to die, he thought, helpless in the water. But Gnebigoo did not drown. It's said that somehow he could breathe under there. Instead, he turned more and more slowly as the water soothed him, as the turning took him back.

As the reeds bound him, Gnebigoo felt himself held tight again inside his cradleboard, and he slept. These spirits took him back so that he saw again that whole land and time of his boyhood. As he dreamed, Gnebigoo was taken again

within the circle of his family and his people. His mother, *Waasookwe*, was close, and his father, *Aazhbik*.

But those spirits, those little ones, wouldn't let him see much. They let him go back to that time and place long enough to remember the circle of his people. The goodness and caring that was there. The spirits wanted to humble Gnebigoo, because he had forgotten those things.

Now, they took him pretty far out, pretty deep in the lake. And while he was dreaming out there, *maanmegoog* - some sturgeons - came along and started swimming close to him. Just looking him over, that colourful warrior. Some of those sturgeons were very big - even longer than Gnebigoo - and he could hear them talking as they swam around him, speaking in a language that he couldn't understand. For awhile they swam around him like that, and then they swam away.

Well, before they brought him back, yes, those spirits wanted to humble Gnebigoo, so they took all of his clothes. They brought him in and he awoke because he couldn't breathe under there anymore. Gnebigoo came ashore near the place where those spirits had rolled him away, but this time he was naked. He was pretty scraped up and bruised, but on his lips was a song that his mother had sung in his underwater dream. It was a song that he had forgotten. A song she had often sung when he had hung in his cradleboard.

Gnebigoo then sat down on a big stone, there at the place where the black shale burned your feet. That place where the slate had been laid down in layers which stuck out in a jagged point above the lake. This slate went smoothly out into the water at the place his father had called *Wiikwedong*. It was a place where his people had always come to hunt and fish. Sitting on this round stone by the shore, Gnebigoo still heard his mother's song, and he wept.

For quite a long time Gnebigoo sat there in that place, for it's thought that the spirits compelled him to stay in order that he see himself and his life. The little ones had told him that the spirit of *Waasmowin*, his own guardian spirit, now hunted him, and Gnebigoo knew why. It's said that now he fought his hardest battle as he sat at that place. Again his tears welled up from the memory of his

parents and his young wife killed, his people destroyed by the long and terrible war with the Naadweg. But the love and goodness shown to him now turned again to ashes of bitterness.

### **Gnebigoo's Decision, and His Act of Vengeance**

The strong medicine of the water spirits had not worked to heal Gnebigoo. Instead, after a while he looked around him for his shield and war-club. The warriors that Gnebigoo had traveled with were gone and so were his weapons. The bundle containing his extra clothing had been overlooked, however, and lay nearby. Shirt, leggings, breach-clout, moccasins. He thought of his shield in the hands of another warrior, perhaps even falling into the hands of the hated enemy. A vengeful anger rose in Gnebigoo. As he started out toward the east, *Nimkii* the Thunder, rumbled from a dark place across the water.

As he ran, Gnebigoo became inflamed by the thought of the shield. He knew that it was he who had given the shield its power, through his dreams and through his own cunning. He knew that through his exploits, the young warriors were in awe of its power. But he also knew that now the shield and his position as leader among the warriors would be taken by a man named *Zhoomin*. Though it had never been spoken aloud, he knew that Zhoomin was his greatest rival.

This young man was held in high esteem among their people, and seen as a future leader. Unlike Gnebigoo, who held his position through fear, Zhoomin was respected for his strength of character, his quiet ways, and his good heart. The story tells that since boyhood, Gnebigoo had harboured envy and jealousy toward Zhoomin. Now, as he ran, he decided that he would rid himself of Zhoomin's rivalry once and for all. He would prove that the shield's power was his alone, and would do it by defeating Zhoomin, and killing him. These were his thoughts as his long legs carried him swiftly across the land. But across the sky above him, Gnebigoo was stalked by the spirit of Waasmowin, who ran silent and unseen.

Gnebigoo followed the warriors into the night. Soon he realized that they were not headed east as he had thought, but had started heading south towards



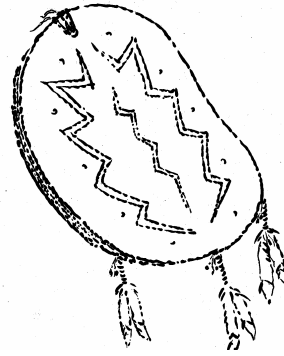
the camp of their people. He smiled, thinking of them scurrying back without him like frightened rabbits. This was Zhoomin's doing, he knew, for without Gnebigoo to incite their spirit for war, Zhoomin would turn the small war-party into a hunting-party as they headed home.

Now, Zhoomin had a younger brother named *Maanoonhs*. Big for his age, but barely more than a boy, Maanoonhs was anxious to prove himself as a warrior. Zhoomin knew that this combination was dangerous in such a fiery young man as his brother. He was concerned for his brother's safety, so when Gnebigoo had formed his war-party, Zhoomin also joined.

After the small spirits had chased the warriors away at Wiikwedong, it was Maanoonhs who went back and retrieved Gnebigoo's shield and war-club. Seeing the big warrior disappear into the water, Maanoonhs thought that surely he had drowned, and now the weapons were his. Once they had started back toward their peoples' encampment, the party relaxed and began to joke among themselves. Zhoomin knew that the shield was somehow powerful. He was uncomfortable to see it in the hands of his inexperienced younger brother. But when he jokingly tried to take the shield from Maanoonhs, the young man became deadly serious.

"Gnebigoo's weapons are mine now," he said. "No one will take them."

Zhoomin, too, became serious. "You can keep the war-club," he said, "but the shield has a power that we don't understand. It will go to our medicine people, and if its power is good, then perhaps you can have it. It's for them to decide." Zhoomin saw the defiance turn to disappointment in his younger brother. He told him finally that he could keep the shield until they arrived home in their village.



The next morning before sunrise, Gnebigoo came upon the young men's camp as they slept. He had run all night and was close to exhaustion. But when he saw his shield beside the sleeping Maanoonhs, he felt his strength return.

Because they were close to their village, the young men had stayed late, telling stories around the fire. Now, except for one, they all slept soundly as Gnebigoo approached. Zhoomin lay awake, for he had been uneasy during the night. He knew that with the water spirits almost anything was possible, and he was not convinced that the tall warrior had drowned. He heard a slight sound now and watched as Gnebigoo emerged from the dark bush that surrounded them.

To Zhoomin, who lay on the ground, Gnebigoo seemed even bigger than he was. Zhoomin was no coward, but still he lay for a moment frozen in his place. He watched Gnebigoo creep close to his brother, which was enough to put him into motion. With his war-club in hand, Zhoomin drew close to Gnebigoo as he bent toward the sleeping Maanoonhs. Striking once, he caught Gnebigoo on the rump, sending him sprawling to the ground. Standing over the big warrior, he then lowered his war-club.

"Gnebigoo, I don't wish to fight you," he said. "I struck you only to save my brother, for I know your vengeance."

Gnebigoo's eyes searched the ground for his war-club, and found it nearby.

"We know that you are a great warrior," Zhoomin continued. "Let these young men now see the true greatness that is in your lenience."

The young men had risen up, suddenly fearful at the sight of Gnebigoo. However, Maanoonhs held the shield and looked at him defiantly.

"Maanoonhs," Zhoomin said forcefully, "give him his shield."

But Maanoons shook his head. "Now I have its power," he said, "let him try to take it."

Something now happened that was even more strange and terrible than the smile which crossed Gnebigoo's face. The shield was torn from Maanoonhs and flew to Gnebigoo's hand. The mask of *Giiwnaadis* - the madness - was on his face as he now took up his war-club and attacked the defenceless Maanoonhs.

Zhoomin also clutched his weapon again, and leaped to defend his brother. With all of his strength and quickness he struck at Gnebigoo. But no matter where he struck, the shield was there. Even when Gnebigoo was turned away, the shield defended his back. In a moment Maanoonhs lay mortally wounded. Then, with the madness still on him, Gnebigoo turned to Zhoomin. Two of the other warriors now tried to help Zhoomin while the others watched in terror. Blows rained again at Gnebigoo, but again the shield protected him as one by one he struck them down. When it was finished, four young men lay on the ground. The others disappeared into the dark woods.

### **Gnebigoo Challenges Waasmowin, and is Transformed**

Of those warriors who lay on the ground one still lived, and that one was Zhoomin. This whole story is told because Zhoomin lived.

After the fight, Gnebigoo heard Nimkii, the Thunder, and knew that the Lightning, too, was all around him. He raised his shield and challenged Waasmowin, but nothing happened. Now Gnebigoo ran to a large outcropping of rock nearby and climbed it. The story tells of how the day was new and bright, but how dark clouds gathered quickly above that scene. The edges of these clouds were yellow, as if a great energy was building in them. Gnebigoo emerged on a ledge of rock the height of two men off the ground. Tall and brightly coloured, he stood and again raised his weapons. But this time before he made a

sound, Waasmowin came out of the clouds and struck Gnebigoo where he stood. Now, this bolt of lightning was split. When one part hit Gnebigoo, the other part hit the ground beside where Zhoomin lay. He said that the Lightning woke him that day and right away he could get up. Because of this we say that while the spirit of Lightning can kill and destroy, it is also healing, purifying, and transforming.

He saw Gnebigoo upon the ledge with his shield on fire, then he saw him fall. Zhoomin could only see the fire blazing up there, and hear Gnebigoo scream. His scream became a gargle, then a hissing sound in that fire. Zhoomin attended the three young men on the ground, but saw that they were dead. A terrible rage filled him then, because he knew that Gnebigoo had done this.

Although Zhoomin couldn't see exactly what happened, he knew that it was strange because when he went up on the ledge after the fire had died, Gnebigoo was not there. He saw scorch marks on the rock made by the fire. These marks led into a big hole in the rock up there. He saw Gnebigoo's war-club and parts of his clothing which still burned, but everything else was gone. Though different stories have arisen about what happened there, here is how the main story tells it.

When the shield caught fire from the lightning it started to melt, just as Gnebigoo had melted it on the big stone. This was the shield's weakness, for its essence was the resin which burns in torches. Once the burning shield fell on Gnebigoo, it melted around him like a fiery cloak. It burned off his hair, his eyelids, his nose and his ears. That shield of pine-resin became Gnebigoo's skin and melted him inside of it. The skin kept some of the bright colours that Gnebigoo wore, and some of the colours of Fire. Gnebigoo's tongue became forked like Fire and Lightning, to mark his deceit. From that time onward he must show his tongue wherever he went.

While he was burning, that's when he found that hole in the rock. He crawled in there because the rock is cold and damp inside and would put the fire out. As he crawled down into the rock, Gnebigoo's body stretched longer and longer, until it was the length of the serpent. That is how Gnebigoo the warrior

became *Gchi-Gnebig*, the big Snake. How he became *Mishi-Gnebig*, the Great Serpent, is another part of the story.



## Stories of the Big Serpent and the Man Called Zhoomin

### The Serpent's Dark Dreaming, and his Birth from the Rock

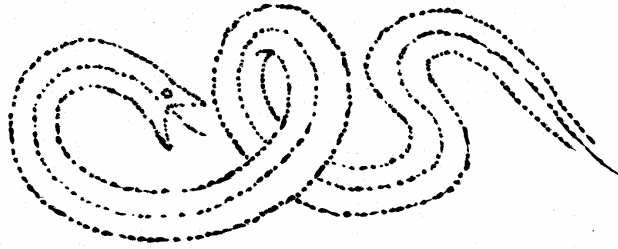
Zhoomin lived a long and a good life, and became an important man among his people. He was responsible for the coming of *mundaamin*, or corn, to the Anishnaabeg. But that story is told later.

As it was said, Zhoomin was given new life by the same lightning that ended Gnebigoo's life as a human being. After that day Zhoomin began to have dreams. In those dreams he saw a great snake - a serpent - which spoke to him. This snake was in a bad way because he was lost. Now, when they say that he was lost, it's meant his spirit was lost - that he really didn't know who he was. Zhoomin could only wonder about this creature who had begun to haunt his dreams. At first when he dreamed about the snake he saw only darkness, but he knew the creature's presence in that darkness. He saw the glint of an eye that did not close, and he felt fear and pain behind that eye. *Waasmowin*, the lightning, made it possible for Zhoomin to see what happened to Gnebigoo, and the creature that Gnebigoo became. This is how it is told.

That creature stayed inside the rock for a long time because he could not move, and dared not move. The creature's pain was very old and deep, for it was war that caused it.

The rock held him fast, and the creature stayed in a kind of half-life from the shock of what had happened. But it was also from the knowledge that everything was different. He did not know how different, and was afraid to find out. He stayed in that dark place until a time came when the rock around him began to tremble. The trembling grew until the rock split, and he was thrown into the blinding daylight.

Now for the first time the creature saw what he had become. He saw a body long and thick that rolled and coiled behind him, flashing many colours. He thrashed and rolled, trying to throw himself away from it, to flee from it. But wherever he went it followed, until he knew that he could not get away. The long serpent body was his.



Now, Zhoomin knew that Gnebigoo, the feared warrior of his people, had somehow become this creature in his dark dreams. This greatly troubled him because he still grieved for his younger brother, Maanoonhs, and the other young men who were slain by the tall warrior. Thinking that the creature could only be evil, Zhoomin determined that he should find him and kill him.

But in bringing this creature to Zhoomin, the dreams showed some things other than evil. The dreams brought an ancientness of dreaming - a knowledge that was there, but not known. This creature sometimes came to be called *Gnowaabshkaanh*, the Long Person, but he was most often called *Chi-Gnebig*, the Big Serpent.

This one now started his life in the marshes which were spread beside the big lakes. These marshes were the home of birds which sometimes filled the sky, so many there were. It was the same with animals of every kind that lived in the marshes and in the forests which grew around them. Here the serpent lived and travelled, feeding first on the reeds and shoots which grew in profusion, then

learning to take small animals and eggs as his food. Chi-Gnebig soon found that his movement could transfix an animal he would have as food.

Now, these Anishnaabeg had remained in the area beside the big lake furthest south. There the fishing and hunting were plentiful. During the spring Zhoomin had gone by himself to fast and to pray, then returned to his village. Though he was helped by his time alone, he was still haunted by these dreams of the serpent. The war with the Iroquois had died down, and with the easier times of summer coming Zhoomin now decided to go in search of the serpent. He replenished his arrows and strung his hunting bow, then went into the flat marshland and bush to the north of that lake.

### **The Serpent's Life is Divided Between Water and Land**

Now, after that big serpent was born of Fire and Rock, these are some things that happened to him. Some things that Zhoomin saw in his dreams.

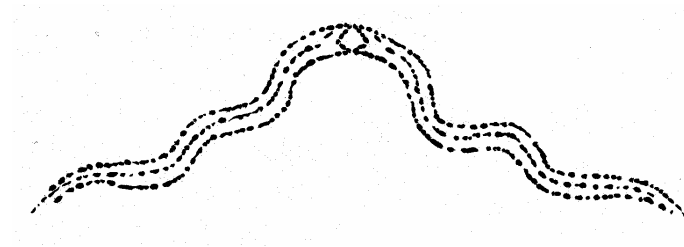
Not long after he was released from the rock, the serpent began to lose his vision. It was as if a cloud had gathered around him and grew thicker until he was almost blind. He made his way near the big lake to a place hidden among large rocks. Dead branches lay around there too. Then, strangely, as the pine sheds its bark, the skin on the serpent's body split open so that it seemed as if he were slowly crawling from his own shining form. This transparent skin still held some power of healing and renewal that was given to the serpent. Leaving this ghost of himself in that place he then went out, hungry and full of life, and brilliant in the water.

In his new life the serpent was drawn to the water, as if in another life he had lived there. This had begun in his dark dreaming, when the rock had held him fast. He found it to be true. While on the land he felt his body's weight holding him down, in the water his long body was taken easily into the depth and freely held. It's also said that the serpent felt somehow exposed to the sky above him, though he could not reason why this was. So, his life was divided in this way between the land world where he had been born, and the world of water where he was most free.

That one had begun to find tunnels and caves beneath those big marshes. When winter approached he felt the need to nourish his body, then as the cold sleep came upon him, he made one of those caves his lair. Some of these tunnels he made larger with the movement of his powerful body. Many of them were caverns and fissures which ran beneath the big lake. Here the water had travelled from the time of the first great water. Some of them, he found, ran a long way until they joined with other big lakes.

### **Through the Water-Spirits, He Meets Himself and Others**

One time when he was travelling in a part of the lake where he had not been before, he saw a creature out there in the water that looked like him. He chased it, but after a little while it disappeared. Then suddenly, that big snake rose up right in front of him. It looked exactly like him, and everything the serpent did, that one did the same. He tried to circle around it, and the other one circled too, so that they moved in a big spiral. Now they say that when Chi-Gnebig turned backwards in a circle then rushed straight towards that other one, it was exactly what the other one did. Those two big serpents would have hit head-on, but when they came together that other one disappeared. It seemed that he just disintegrated.



Now, Chi-Gnebig, was really confused out there. Really bewildered. When he turned around there was that creature the same as before, just looking back at him. No matter where he moved, no matter which way, that creature did the same. It was as if that creature knew what the serpent would do before he did it. Well, the insolence of it finally enraged that big one. He went closer, flicking his tongue and seeing that other one do exactly the same. Again the serpent circled and again he attacked, only to find the same thing - that other one disappeared.



But this time he noticed something. The creature's form didn't just disappear but flew into tiny parts.

He turned again, and this time he saw the form of a giant bird. This one had the look of an eagle, but was much bigger. The bird spread its wings to a span that equalled the serpent's length and fixed its eyes on him. Then, as the serpent watched, the form of this bird changed to that of a creature with horns, a thick body and webbed, taloned feet. This creature, too, fixed the serpent with its fierce round eyes, and then was gone.

Still the serpent watched, transfixed as the tiny forms danced before him in the dim light down there. Suddenly, they merged again into another figure which the serpent recognized. It was that of a great sturgeon, those ones he had seen them many times in his travels through the lake waters. Always he had felt warmly towards them, which stirred in him as something from the dark dreaming. This one now moved close, circling around him then, somehow encircling him. He felt this one's touch covering his body. When he moved to return the touch the tiny forms again moved apart and it seemed that he saw through the great sturgeon's body.

Now a voice came through the water and struck the serpent. As it spoke, the voice changed into one of many voices speaking. "Boozhoo, Gnowaabshkaanh," it said. "Greetings, Long Person. How do you do this long day? Are you on a long journey?"

The serpent thought he heard laughter, but made no reply.

"It's been a long time since you spoke, great warrior," said the chorus. "Perhaps not since you gave the war-cry. It was a good voice wasted." There was a long silence in which the serpent felt unease.

"Are you struck dumb by what you have seen, great warrior?"

The serpent thought that he knew nothing of the name he was called, yet that name stirred something from the dark dreaming in the rock.

"Speak your feelings through your mind," said the voices. "Have no others spoken to you?"

Finally, the serpent spoke: "I am not dumb, and no one else has spoken."

"Serpent, we have not much time. It cannot be as freely given as before," the voice said, now sounding like one. "You have seen some things that will come in your life. This fearsome countenance in which you are bound is your own device. As you were feared by your own people, so you are now feared through this. You are reborn for a reason which is for you to find."

Now the figures, first of Maanoonhs, then of Zhoomin appeared before the serpent.

"Again, Long Person, be warned that you are hunted. This time it is by the one called Zhoomin. Through this man you must seek the care of your people if that is what you want." Seeing these last figures, the serpent turned in fear and confusion, and fled.

### **He Battles With the Thunder-being, and is Blinded**

Now, the serpent had seen things in the dark dreaming that he did not understand. Maybe the fire which began his new life had burned away the memory of the old one. And yet the words and images of the water-spirits stirred other images and feelings. Chi-Gnebig was troubled by this and fled from it, ranging far in his travels on both the land and in the water.

One day as he made his way from the marsh towards the water of a big lake, he saw a shadow moving very quickly across the land. He looked up and saw coming straight towards him a giant bird. It was the great thunder-being, Bnesi, who the water-spirits had shown him. Before he could get to the water, the bird was upon him. Now he felt searing pain, and in spite of his great size and weight felt himself being lifted high above the land. What ensued was a mighty battle. The serpent writhed and managed to get his head under the body of the giant bird as he flew. And in the air the serpent wound himself up along the great bird's neck. So long was Chi-Gnebig that while held in Bnesi's claws, still he wound a coil of his body around the bird's neck. Now the thunder-bird began to climb into the sky. Higher and higher he flew until the serpent could scarcely breathe. Then the great bird turned over in the sky and plummeted back towards

the earth. As they dropped, so great was the speed that now the serpent became dizzy from the rushing wind.



But still neither would let go. Now Bnesi flew low above the tree-tops, breaking many branches as the serpent's body was dragged through them. And still Chi-Gnebig tightened his coil around the thunder-bird's neck. Finally, unable to fly further the great bird landed on high ground somewhere to the east of this place called Wiikwedong. Here the battle continued. The giant bird had the advantage of his sharp claws and beak, but the serpent's coil was ever tightening around his neck.

Now the bird began to strike at the serpent's eyes. Though a clear scale protected each of them, the bird's great power broke these and soon Chi-Gnebig was blinded. But now the serpent sensed where the next strike would come, and in that instant his mouth opened and clamped on the thunder-bird's head. And so, the two were locked in a grip from which it seemed neither could escape.

### **The Serpent is Seen as Good or Evil**

Now the story tells that Zhoomin had been travelling through that part of the land in his quest for the serpent when he saw the strange form plummeting earthward. Many other creatures were also alerted by the fearsome battle. Silently they gathered to watch these mighty spirits that fell from the sky.

It was an extraordinary sight that Zhoomin came upon which at first he could not make sense of. A fantastic creature with tremendous wings outspread. A feathered body and a scaled, multi-coloured neck which disappeared in coils of

itself. This is how it appeared to Zhoomin. Then, as he began to make out the form, Zhoomin could scarcely believe that here before him was the serpent that haunted his dreams. The evil one he hunted and had vowed to kill.

Of course, Zhoomin knew the power of the shield that Gnebigoo had made. He knew this only too well. He remembered, too, that the shield had become the serpent's skin, and would also be difficult to penetrate. And so Zhoomin took his own measures to help against Gnebigoo's power.

The story tells that in the spring Zhoomin had been given the secret of Gnebigoo's shield by the *Sungoog*, the squirrels, to help him kill the serpent. He had melted pine-resin as Gnebigoo had done, then dipped each flint-tipped arrow in the amber liquid. Finally, Zhoomin had set fire to each arrow-tip just long enough to darken it. Though not sure it would work, he hoped that his arrows were powerful enough to pierce the serpent's skin.

Now the serpent was defenceless in front of him, and Zhoomin saw the wounds where his eyes had been. Something close to pity touched his heart, but still he notched an arrow into his bow. Now, as he raised the bow, a curious thing happened. Zhoomin's hands began to tremble, they say. He could not find the strength to draw the bowstring fully back. The animals watched as Zhoomin struggled. Then *Waagosh*, the fox, spoke:

"Zhoomin, we know that you're a good hunter and a strong person, yet your strength now fails you. Maybe it's better you do not kill the Long Person. He is new among us, yet it seems that his knowledge is as old as ours. At first we thought like you that the Long Person was evil, the way he was thrown from the rock' the way he crawls on his belly and sends out his tongue. We were afraid to speak to him, my relations and I."

Zhoomin lowered the bow as *Waagosh* spoke, and stood with his eyes closed as if unable to look at the serpent who lay in front of him. It's thought that Zhoomin was remembering the vow he had taken to avenge the death of his younger brother, *Maanoonhs*. He was remembering the grief that Gnebigoo had caused among his own people. Again he raised the bow, and again his hands trembled. But this time Zhoomin was determined.

Now it was *Mkwa*, the bear, who spoke:

"Do you not wonder, Zhoomin, why your hands tremble and your strength fails?"

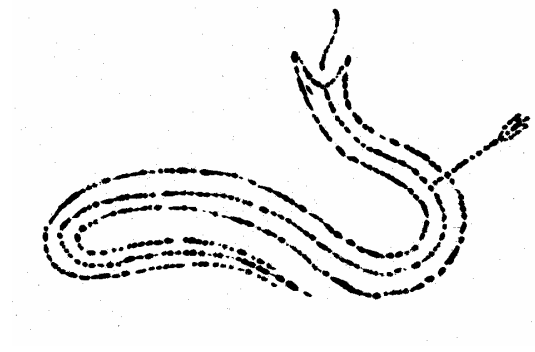
Zhoomin swung the bow toward the bear. "*Gdoombiigis!* - be quiet *Mkwa*, or I will shoot you!"

Finally, *Sungoo*, the squirrel spoke:

"Zhoomin, it was we, the *Sungoo*, who helped *Gnebigoo* make his terrible shield. Perhaps it is us you should shoot. We knew *Gnebigoo*'s evil and we told you his secret, but now it seems that the Long Person is different..."

"No," Zhoomin shouted, "he is no different!"

Now summoning all of his strength, Zhoomin drew the bow-string back beside his face and past the streams of wetness that fell from his eyes. Beside his ear the bow-string trembled, then he let it go.



Though Zhoomin could only guess where the serpent's heart was in that great length, the arrow flew straight and pierced deeply into the serpent's body. The power that Zhoomin had made with Flint and Fire guided the arrow close to the serpent's heart, they say. *Chi-Gnebig* now threw himself back from *Bnesi*'s head, his body loosened from around the great bird's neck. The big snake fell away. Now he was truly at the mercy of the Thunder-being. *Bnesi* had kept hold of the serpent's body with his long talons. Standing over him, *Bnesi*'s power was now seen. Lightning flashed as he sent forth a crash of thunder that shook the trees, the rocks, the very earth.

Many of the animals were terrified of his power and with his sudden eruption they scurried into the woods. One who did not run was Mkwa. As Bnesi now drew up his wings to fly, the bear spoke again:

"Bnesi, we don't think that the Long Person is evil. We ask that you leave him among us, so that we might give respect if he is dead, or heal him if he is alive."

The Thunder-being turned his head and looked at Mkwa. This was terrifying, for they knew that Bnesi could summon the lightning to fly from his eyes whenever he chose.

"Whether dead or alive he is my enemy," said Bnesi, "for by his size and countenance he is related to Mishepesu of the north."

Now Zhoomin spoke, and as he did Bnesi turned and fixed him with his eyes as his image had done far out in the lake.

"Great Thunderer," said Zhoomin, "you know how the Long Person was created, for you must have commanded the Lightning to strike the evil one, Gnebigoo. Because he was born of Gnebigoo, I too thought that the serpent was evil. But the dreaming which was sent to me has told me other things. My own grief was so great that I would not see what the dreams told me. My relations, with their great knowledge also told me, but still I would not listen. Now it's too late, for I think that I have killed him."

Bnesi continued to stare at Zhoomin, but said nothing.

"Great Thunderer," continued Zhoomin, "I owe you my life, for as Gnebigoo was transformed through Lightning and Fire, so I was healed from my wounds. Now I ask that the serpent be left so that our relations might heal him. Their knowledge is great..."

Suddenly and without a word, the great bird leaped into the air carrying the lifeless form of Chi-Gnebig. High into the air he soared until he was gone from the sight of watchers on the ground. Bnesi flew toward the north and the west. Once over the water he began to descend, flying lower and lower until the serpent's body touched the waves. Then Bnesi let go. This was done with no one

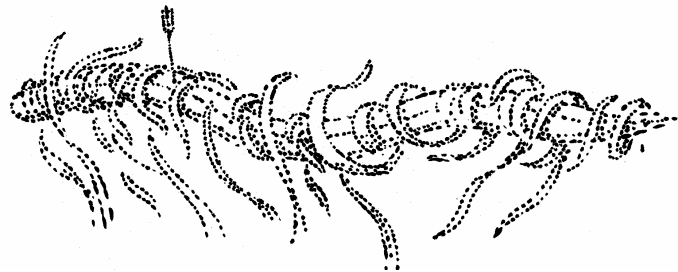
to see but the birds who spent their lives above the water, and the water-beings below who scattered from the shadow of the giant bird.

### **Chi-Gnebig's Return to the Water, and the Search for His Eyes**

Now the story tells that with the movement of the serpent's body through the air, the tip of Zhoomin's arrow had worked its way even closer to the serpent's heart. But once in the water, the agonizing weight of his own body was gone. Now as his body drifted, once again the water-spirits came to him, and also the dark sturgeon. These four circled the serpent and saw the wounds left by Bnesi. They stopped at the single arrow which stuck from the serpent's body. Here they stayed for a time, each with their nose and feelers almost touching the arrow. The only motion was that of their fins and tails, and the slow movement of their gills.

Then the sturgeon kept that position as they moved - very unhurried - up the serpent's body to the place on his head where the eyes had been. Bnesi had not only blinded him, but had also taken his eyes. And here, too, they stayed, silently at this spot.

Now, there are four winds inside the water, just as there are above it. The story tells that now the serpent was taken by these winds down there. As Gnebigoo the warrior could live for a time in the water, so it was that Chi-Gnebig, the serpent, was also given this ability. Again, as they had done with Gnebigoo, the small spirits wound the long body up in reed, so that the serpent slept. It's said that in this way he drifted in the water currents and in the cradle of his own spirit. Far out and in every direction he was taken, they say. That big spirit of water let him heal inside himself, and so his body healed.



The water worked slowly with the long body as it turned in a healing sleep. Those reeds were wound so that the arrow was left alone, just as it was. The water loosened the arrow, then worked its way inside the wound, and slowly, slowly the arrow came out. No other way could it have been done, so close was the arrow to the Chi-Gnebig's heart.

Now, these sturgeon went out, each in a different direction. They took the word out so that word could come back. There was something they needed to know. Through the word that passed along the shore and on the surface of the water, it became known that the serpent was alive, but that he was blind. The question came from the water to the land and the air: what had become of the serpent's eyes?

Now, the story tells that during this time the knowledge that existed among those that were not human - the air, land and water beings - was never questioned. It was just the way it was. During this time - the time of the Serpent and Zhoomin - an idea started that was about the serpent. Inside this non-human knowledge was the idea that the serpent was part human. The story tells that this idea was held in different ways. The idea that Human could be among them as one of them was something that few had ever imagined. It was an idea that brought both fear and hope.

For a long time within their knowledge were prophecies of destruction. Monsters of many kinds would some day begin to devour the earth, it was said. Because this knowledge came to these ones from the earth itself, belief in the prophecies was unquestioned.

When the big serpent first appeared, some of them said that surely he himself was one of these monsters. Others felt that it was Human who could help them, even saying that perhaps Human was their greatest hope. These feelings were not argued but were simply a part of the knowledge. Thus, when word came that the serpent lived, it was received with the same mixture of feelings. This news was never spoken aloud for fear that the Thunder-beings would hear.

And yet it was soon realized that someone must approach them. It was recalled how the power of Bnesi had struck the serpent's eyes out. Those who



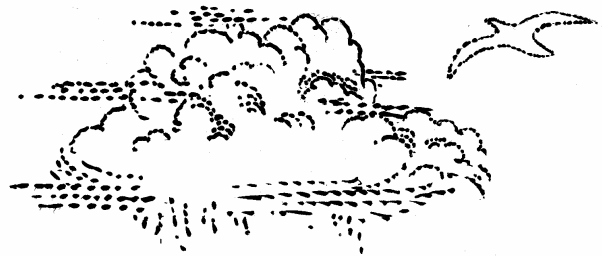
were there had seen this and were sure that Bnesi had kept them to mark his victory. Now, an idea arose that someone must go to the Thunder-being himself, the one who had taken Chi-Gnebig's eyes. Word went back to the water telling of this intention.

The word whirled all around, everywhere, and became the question - *who would go?* Of course, most of these creatures wanted nothing to do with the Thunderers. The one who went, it was felt, would need the power of flight, for who would dare to summon Bnesi from his home in the sky? *Migizi*, the eagle, and *Waabgaigaik*, the hawk, would not go, for as relations of Bnesi, they too saw the serpent as their enemy.

It was *Aandeg*, the crow, who first came forward. But was this one, who everyone knew was a bit mad, to be their emissary? The story tells that finally it was *Kiyaashk*, the gull, who was chosen. This one had almost the grace of eagle and hawk, and the soaring power needed to reach the Thunderers, but did he have the courage?

Well, the gull could not resist strutting near Aandeg, displaying his sparkling feathers and clean-cut form:

"I am chosen to speak to the Thunderers," he sang. "My name will ever be told in story."



But Aandeg cackled and chased *Kiyaashk* away. "Your name will ever be scoffed about in story," he said. "You may get to the home of Bnesi, but see if you have the courage to speak."

So the gull flew off and disappeared into the western sky. For a time he was gone, but it's not known for how long. The Thunders were heard some time afterward - an angry sound in the west.

Then Kiyaashk came back after a time, lighter in colour than when he left - the front of him white, they say. When asked what Bnesi had said, the gull walked back and forth on the shore. He couldn't stop walking back and forth.

"The Thunders were angry that I came, and at first would make only terrible noise," said Kiyaashk. "Then the one who fought the serpent, he spoke in a voice that almost blew me from the sky!" When he reported this, the gull was trembling at the memory.

"He said only that if he had kept the eyes, he most surely would have fed them to his young. He said that if I didn't get out of there, that's what would happen to me!" The gull continued his agitated walking.

"Then as I flew away, that Thunder-being said one more thing." The gull stopped walking then, and whispered to all who were gathered by the shore.

"The eyes look within," was all that he said. *"The eyes look within."*



### **Aandeg, the Medicine-Bird, has Knowledge and an Idea**

Now, Aandeg knew that the gull would fail to bring back the serpent's eyes. The story tells that he sometimes found things and hid them away. Among these objects that Aandeg possessed were two very round stones. These he had taken from a place where the land stuck out in a point above the lake that is now called Huron. A place that the human Anishnaabeg even then called Wiikwedong. These round stones were among many that were there, and were much smaller than most.

One day, Aandeg was seen jumping up and down by the water. Up and down he jumped while making a noise. *Nigik*, the Otter, was swimming nearby.

"Why are you doing that?" he asked. "You're not walking and you're not flying."

"Do I always have to be doing those things?" asked the crow. "I do this because I know something."

Up and down Aandeg went.

"What do you know that makes you do that?" asked Nigik, quite amused.

"I know where the serpent's eyes are," Aandeg said. "I know where the serpent's eyes are."

Now Otter stopped and sat up in the water. "You're bad to tell such a big lie, Aandeg." Aandeg stopped jumping. "It's not a lie," he said quite seriously. "Truly must Bnesi hate the serpent to feed him his own eyes!"

Now Nigik was very curious. "You must tell me the story." But of course, Aandeg only made it a bigger mystery.

"Maybe I'll tell you if you help me," he said, "and maybe I'll give you something bright."

Now Aandeg led the otter to a place along the shore where the land rose up quickly from the water. These stones were there in a pocket of land overgrown by cedar brush, and other of Aandeg's possessions were also there. Now, with Aandeg directing and Nigik working, the stones were carried to a ledge, then rolled down the sloping shore into the water.

"Now, furry one," said Aandeg, "you may have one thing that you have seen. But never forget that I am a great medicine-bird. If you steal from me your life will be cursed, and those of your children, and..."

"Yes, yes," said the otter. "I won't steal from you. But now you must tell me the story of how the serpent ate his own eyes."

Aandeg cleared his throat as Nigik came closer to hear.

"Yes, it's quite a story," said the crow. Of course, the story he told the otter was nothing like the one that really happened.

### **Aandeg Talks to Maanmeg, the Sturgeon**

There was something else, a bigger reason why Aandeg jumped up and down. Yes, he knew that the serpent had swallowed his own eyes, but others had also figured that out. No, what made Aandeg crazy was something that he knew, but did not know. He knew in his crow-bones that there was something

special about the round stones at Wiikwedong. But Aandeg didn't know what that was.

Now, because Aandeg was a great medicine-bird - or so he thought - he decided that he would sit on the point of land that stood above the round stones there. He sat there for a while, but probably not very long, since Aandeg wasn't known for his patience. After a while he saw a dark shape, pretty big out there in the water. Aandeg sat very still with his neck stretched up, watching that dark shape as it moved. He knew that it was Maanmeg, the sturgeon. *Here is someone who might know*, he thought.

Then Aandeg flew into the air and followed the sturgeon. He followed her to the mouth of a sandy river a ways to the north. Here he landed on the bank and called to Maanmeg. The sturgeon came close beside the bank.

"Maanmeg, you brought news that the serpent is alive, but that he is blind," said the crow. "Now I have news for you."

Maanmeg gave no response, so Aandeg continued. "Here is my news. The serpent's eyes are in his own belly."

Now the great sturgeon began to quiver in her place, then she swam out in a big circle around the mouth of the river. Around and around she swam, until the current there also went in a circle. Excited to see the effect his words had on such a great being, Aandeg jumped up and down again. After a time, the sturgeon came back beside the shore.

"We knew that he had fought with the Thunderers," she said, "but your words are shocking."

"Yes, it's an awful thing," said the crow. "Like any of us, the serpent is lost without his eyes. And here's more awful truth," he continued. "Even if the serpent's eyes survived Bnesi's terrible beak, they would not survive his own belly."

Maanmeg's fins and tail moved slowly. "For those of us who love him, it is a horrible thing," she said sadly.

Now Aandeg drew himself up, there beside the great form of the sturgeon. "Because I am a great medicine-bird, a visionary," he said, "I think there is yet a way to help the Long One."

"You also love him," said Maanmeg.

Now Aandeg leaped up again, flapping and kicking the air. "That's not it! That's not it!" he squawked. "There are sometimes things that even I don't understand. These round stones at the point of land..."

"Yes," said Maanmeg, "the ones which are black but which carry light."

Aandeg jumped again at hearing these words. "Carry light!" he called. "Round stones black, but carry light!"

Then the sturgeon also began moving with excitement beside the bank. "But how do you think they can help?"

The crow flew into the air. "I myself was blind," he said. "You have helped me see what I knew, but didn't know."

Now Aandeg thought that the sturgeon knew more than he did about the stones, and he was right. The story tells that Maanmeg took the stones together in her mouth and carried them from the shore at Wiiwkwedong to the place in the lake where the serpent slept. This is what she worked hard to do.



### **Chi-Gnebig is Healed by the Water-Spirit**

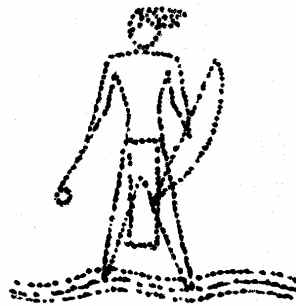
Now, they say that while the serpent slept he dreamed, and that his own eyes inside him could see. He remembered the man bound inside the serpent's skin. He remembered his arms and legs and how he had used them. As Gnebigoo the warrior had wept when remembering the child, so now the serpent wept when remembering the man.

While he healed, those spirits kept him sleeping because, indeed, he had no eyes to see outside himself. As his wounds healed under the reeds that bound him, those empty places where his eyes had been stayed as they were. Then these stones were brought by Maanmeg and put down there by the

serpent, they say. Again as before those sturgeon came and stayed with their noses almost touching the stones that lay there. Just for a time they stayed like that. Then two of them picked up the stones and put them carefully, most tenderly, into those empty places in the serpent's head.

Right away the serpent awoke. He began to struggle in the reeds that bound him, and soon he was free of them. At first he couldn't stand to look through those stones that were his eyes. Chi-Gnebig wore the mask of *Giiwnaadis*, the crazy one, after the stones were placed for his eyes. The story tells that from the serpent Zhoomin now received visions of distance and light, so powerful were the stones. For that short time maybe the serpent was seeing in ways that he wasn't meant to see. Indeed, the water had healed him, but now in order to survive he acted violently until the stones were thrown out. Long ago and far out in the lake this is what happened.

But perhaps the greatest healing that happened out there – and this the story does not tell - was that the serpent's own eyes within him were were restored. He was greatly changed, for he had seen within himself and into the dark dreaming. Of the things he knew from his inner dreaming, one was most important. He must seek out and find the man called Zhoomin.



### **Chi-Gnebig's Wish for a Mate**

Among the stories that are told about the big serpent is one which tells of his search for a mate. In his dreaming, the serpent saw the pain inflicted by the war-club of the warrior, Gnebigoo. It caused him pain to see this. But in seeing his human self, he saw the loving of woman, and this also affected him. He felt

the need to find a mate, as the man Gnebigoo had done. But he also knew that a woman of his kind would not be found.

One day as he travelled on the land, Chi-Gnebig came to a place near the lake where big trees grew almost to the shore. Very thick were the cedars there. As he moved, his tongue brought the scent of another being, and the scent stirred a feeling deep inside him. He saw someone there among the large stones and sand on the shore. This was a woman, as he remembered from the dreaming, with smooth skin and black hair, who was lit by the sun.



Chi-Gnebig watched this woman go into the water and silently he also eased his own body there. Under the water he swam and drew close to her. Truly beautiful she was to the serpent, they say, with her limbs and black hair flowing in the underwater light. Remembering the dream of loving woman, he felt his own great desire to love the woman this way. Under the water he circled her until she seemed to dance in the center of his long body. Then, as the serpent drew the circle smaller, the woman suddenly swam away.

She ran onto the shore and stood looking steadily for a time at the water, then she sat down. Chi-Gnebig watched her from a distance, wanting to be close to her, but fearing that she would see him. This was how he was torn, for always he had avoided humans, yet the dreaming made him wish for this closeness.

After a time in the warm sun, the woman lay back on the shore and fell asleep. Now, knowing that she slept, the serpent again swam towards her. He stole beside her on the shore, his heart quickening with the scent his tongue brought. Some say that with his power, the serpent put the woman into a deeper sleep. Further beside her he slid, and in her sleep the woman moved. Then

suddenly she awakened.

Now, this woman's screaming filled the air and trembled the thick cedars there. It stopped all other sound as the woman ran from that place. From there the serpent also fled, back into the water. Through his body he carried the sharpness of her cries as into the depth of the lake he swam to hide his shame and confusion.

### **Chi-Gnebig's Strange Mating**

Now, after this time the serpent had a dream. The story tells that through the stone eyes he had seen a vision of water and light which ran from the lake to the sky. A river of water and light. In his dream he saw the sturgeon, her dark form going upward from the lake through this river. Up she went, into a much greater river which encircled the whole earth. Here she became the sky-sturgeon, with her mouth pulling water through the light to feed the endless circling river. This was a strong dream which told Chi-Gnebig that sturgeon's power was great, and that somehow she could help him.

The sturgeon knew his story better than any. The story of Gnebigoo the warrior who became this Long Person. Always the sturgeon had been there to help, perhaps summoned by the water-spirit. But this time it was the serpent who went in search of the sturgeon. The great female who had brought the stone eyes from Aandeg. When those eyes failed, she couldn't bear to see the serpent suffer further. So she left, and went far into the sanctuary of another lake.

Now, it was during the winter and spring that the serpent travelled to find the sturgeon. Far out in the lake he roamed, and sometimes his loneliness was as sharp as Zhoomin's arrow. Always with him from his healing dreams was the image of this man, Zhoomin. The serpent knew that somewhere he would face him again.

During this time alone Chi-Gnebig thought more about his desire to mate. He remembered his rage when the water-spirits had shown him his own image. And now he began to despair about himself. *How truly am I alone*, he thought.



Now the voice of the water-spirit came, telling him that the sturgeon was returning to the waters near Wiiwkwedong.

"Why should I care where that one goes," he asked from his despair.

"Because she goes back there for a reason," the spirit said. "Have you forgotten the dream and the vision you were given?"

Now the serpent only deepened in his sorrow.

"She cares for you more than anyone," the voice continued. "Even more than we, the waters."

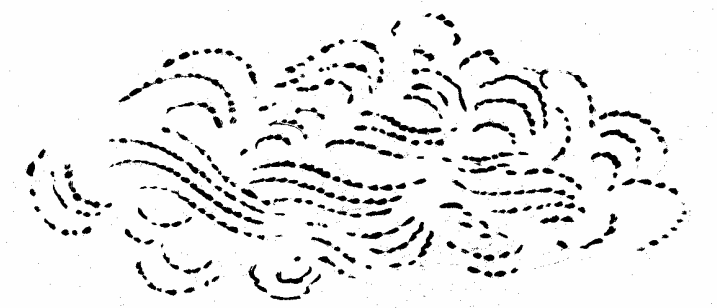
The serpent spoke again from his self-pity: "I never asked for anyone's help." Now a chill came into the water.

"You have wished for a mate, but it can never be," said the voice. Then the serpent heard the last words spoken by the spirit of water:

"Your future lies through her, and none else."

Holding strong to these words, and remembering the vision and the dream, the serpent made his way to the water near Wiiwkwedong. From afar he saw them, their dark shapes among the flat stones of the reef. Many sturgeon were there in the waves that broke over the shallows. Some of them were big females laying their eggs in the shallows. Many eggs there were, which stuck to the rocks.

Now this big female sturgeon came and placed herself beside him. When she held herself there, he was somehow entranced by her. For the last time the water took him into its hold and turned him in the clay and sediment of the lake bottom. In blankets of clay and silt he turned until his seed was mixed into the cloud. Now Chi-Gnebig was released and this cloud moved as a ghost among the rocks of the reef. Among the eggs of the great sturgeon.



### **A Bond With Zhoomin is Nurtured**

The story tells that a sickness came to Zhoomin's people just after the coming of the serpent, Chi-Gnebig. Though it was thought that Zhoomin had killed the serpent, yet he had been seen again on the land, and also in the water. Truly now, the serpent was thought to be a spirit, for had he not been carried off by the Thunder-being, Bnesi? Then a young woman of the Anishnaabeg had been terrorized while bathing. These things had made the people determined that he must be evil. It was even thought that the serpent might be related to the evil one in the sky, though that one had not been seen for a long time.

Yet when this sickness came, it was very bad. It was in the spring when many people fell ill with fever, and some - especially the very young and old - began to die.

At this time a healing ceremony was being done by a medicine-man whose name was Nimaajmod. Some babies were sick and had been brought to a certain place while this medicine-man prepared. Only for a little while were these babies left alone when the serpent appeared and carried one of them away. Now there was a great disturbance as some dogs and people chased the serpent down through the marsh and into the big lake. With the child in his jaws the serpent went at great speed and soon was gone from their sight.

Now, before this child was taken and before the sickness came, Zhoomin had gone into the bush alone to pray and to fast. It was there and at that time that the strongest dreams from the serpent came to him. When he saw the serpent figure in his dream, somehow it was not the serpent but the figure of the warrior, Gnebigoo, who appeared.



This figure held *binoojinh*, a small child, and seemed somehow to be shining. Zhoomin knew in his dream that it was not Gnebigoo but the serpent who he saw, and who spoke to him. He knew this deeply in his dream. This figure told Zhoomin that his people were sick, then held out the baby towards him. "This baby would have died," he said, "but now he is cured."

Much was told to Zhoomin by the serpent figure, and much knowledge of medicines given through these dreams. He was shown a flowering plant which grew only in certain places beside the water. The dried roots of this plant would cure the sickness that was killing his people, he was told.

Then the serpent figure of Gnebigoo vanished from his dream. Now Zhoomin saw a place beside the marsh which he knew. He went to this place, and there he found the child lying beside a quantity of the curing plant. Looking around, he saw the figure of Chi-Gnebig at the edge of the marsh. This big serpent lay with his head held up and his tongue flicking, then through the marsh he was gone.

Zhoomin's story was at first met with disbelief from his people. But then they saw that the baby was returned safe and healthy, whom they had thought was a meal for the serpent. However, now a conflict arose because of this knowledge that was given to Zhoomin. The medicine-man, Nimaajmod, was affronted that a knowledge greater than his had emerged. The old man felt that he had lost face and trust among the people.

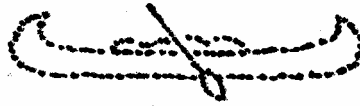
When Zhoomin saw the hurt and rancour in the medicine-man's eyes, he assured him that he would willingly share his knowledge:

"I receive this knowledge in dream," he said. "I don't know why this is so, but if it's good knowledge, is it not good for all of us?"

The old man nodded his head, but in his heart he swore to avenge himself. At that time, Zhoomin had still seen only twenty summers.

Now, during the time that Zhoomin was away fasting, Nimaajmod had tried to gain knowledge of the sickness through the shaking tent. He was not able to do this, however, and so he later told Zhoomin a lie. He told him that in the

shaking tent, he had seen this same sickness among their people to the north. Zhoomin never doubted the words of Nimaajmod, whom he had known all his life. And so Zhoomin determined that he would take this new medicine to their northern relatives. Without delay he made ready for the journey.



### **Zhoomin Journeys North in Good Faith**

Before his departure, the serpent figure again appeared to Zhoomin in dream. This time his message came as a warning.

"No matter what I say, you will make this journey," he said, "but know that great danger lies ahead for you. The medicine-man, Nimaajmod, schemes to kill you."

Now, in his dream the figure that appeared as Gnebigoo moved towards Zhoomin. As he moved, his tall form melted into that into that of Chi-Gnebig, the big serpent:

"Where you go, I will follow..." he said.

Zhoomin found the dream troubling, but he was determined that he must go, so long as this sickness was still among his people. His older sister had married a man from *Mnidoo-Minising*, the Spirit Island to the north. After gathering more of the curing plant, Zhoomin set off in a canoe he had made with his father.

Travelling alone, Zhoomin made good progress. Several times he had gone that way to hunt with his father, his uncles, and on the last trip, with his younger brother, Maanoonhs. But now Maanoonhs was dead from Gnebigoo's war-club, and his younger sister, Ziibinhs, from the terrible fever. Sometimes Zhoomin journeyed with sadness, but always his paddle was strong, his foot sure because his cause was good. The medicine he carried would help his people.

Often, he came upon the camps of Anishnaabeg, and always they welcomed him with food and lodging. Always, of course, he endured some teasing because he was young and still unmarried. But also where he stopped, the people were touched by the sincerity and strength of his purpose. Zhoomin

received much tobacco and gifts as he travelled on the rivers and near the shore of the big lake northward. Though he always made sure to leave knowledge of the medicine, Zhoomin found no sign of the sickness on his travels.



Always as he went, Zhoomin watched for some sign of Chi-Gnebig, but saw none. At times in the quiet he would hear a sudden sound of water, or some commotion close by. Sometimes as he travelled on the land he felt a presence. And, of course, there were the dreams.

Zhoomin was troubled because the knowledge he was given was brought through the hated figure of Gnebigoo. That in his dreams the figure appeared kind and benevolent he found only more troubling. But he knew that it was not for him to question.

Now, on his journey he came to the place where he would start his crossing to the great Spirit Island. As he was taught, there were islands in between that he must reach in order to cross safely. In his camp Zhoomin thought about the way he was taught by his father and his uncles. He must pay close attention to those ones around him that he could watch by day and by night. Those ones also watched him, he knew, and heard his offerings of prayer and acknowledgement. This was how he went.

As he lay in his camp near the water, Zhoomin began to drift in sleep. It seemed that a voice came from the water, though he could see nothing in the darkness there. Zhoomin thought he must be in a dream when he heard this voice.

"Zhoomin, it is I who comes," said the voice. Though it was different, Zhoomin thought he recognized the voice of the serpent. In his dream he stood up in anger and ran with his war-club to the water's edge.

"Why do you come to me here? Why do you follow me?" he called into the darkness.

There was no answer except the thrashing of a great body in the water. Zhoomin saw movement, the flash of moonlight on scales, and was hit by the spray. Then it was quiet.

By the shore, Zhoomin thought that he was no longer in a dream. But again he heard a voice, this time from behind him. He turned towards his camp.

"Zhoomin, I am here." It was a voice that seemed built by whispering.

### **Zhoomin Talks with the Serpent**

"What kind of spirit are you to play this game?" asked Zhoomin.

"You are deceived, for it was not I who spoke from the water," said the voice. Still, it was somehow the voice of Gnebigoo he heard.

"If you are the serpent, then why do you not show yourself?"

"I am here," the voice repeated.

Zhoomin walked towards his campfire, but still he saw nothing.

"Show yourself, Long Person, for your voice alone angers me!"

In a moment the voice came again: "If I hide, it is within myself."

"You hide within riddles," Zhoomin accused.

"It is through your fire, Zhoomin, that I can speak."



Now Zhoomin looked into the fire and knew what the serpent meant. In that moment, he remembered the time of Gnebigoo's burning, and the fire that created him.

"I speak this way because you are in great danger," said the voice from the fire. "The one who spoke from the water was not a dream. He is the horned one called *Mishepeshu*. As you go north, his power grows in the water."

"He has no reason to harm me," said Zhoomin. "I have acknowledged him with my tobacco and asked his permission to pass through these waters."

"That one has made a pact with Nimaajmod, who has deceived you," said the serpent. "Nowhere have you found your people dying of the fever as the medicine-man told you. He wanted you here, Zhoomin, where you are at the mercy of this underwater spirit." There was a pause, then the voice spoke slowly: "Zhoomin, it was Nimaajmod who made the people sick. Using bad medicine, he -"

As he stood before the fire, Zhoomin was suddenly filled with anger. It seemed that the voice - this voice of Gnebigoo - spoke against his people. That is how it seemed to him. It's thought that it might have been the bad medicine of Nimaajmod that was working there.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Would it have stopped you from coming?" asked the serpent's voice.

Now Zhoomin struck at the fire with his war-club until it lay in smouldering pieces. But still the voice came in its whispering parts.

"Zhoomin, you know the monster that I was, and the one that I now am. I am sorry that you do not see past my voice. Look on me, and know how truly I love my people."

Zhoomin looked down, and near the glowing embers he saw the movement of a small serpent - a tiny one - that hurried away into the grass. He was very humbled and sorry then, as he put away his weapon and left that place.

### **Zhoomin meets Mishepesu and is taken by the Storm**

Now, after the serpent had appeared to Zhoomin that way, he was then unsure what he should do. Had he come this long way for nothing? The serpent had warned him that the water was dangerous because of the great Lynx. Mishepesu, who many saw as a dark spirit, could appear in the water at any time, and could smash a canoe or raft of any size if he chose. Indeed, he was the one, it's said, who caused the great flood out of which First Man, or *Nenaboozhoo*, created Turtle Island. All of this Zhoomin knew, but this young man also had great faith in himself and his own medicine. Knowing that he had offered his *semaa* and made his acknowledgements, Zhoomin decided that he would continue his journey to the Spirit Island, *Mnidoo Minis*. What happened at this time has been told in different ways during the very long time from those days to this. The story tells that this young man's journey ended in this way.

The islands which lie in the great channel on the way have always been known as the 'stepping-stones' to the Anishnaabeg who have made that journey. Here Zhoomin travelled without incident, though as before he often felt a presence in the water around his canoe.

Approaching the last island which was the largest, Zhoomin began to notice everything around him changing. He saw the sky turn dark in the west and felt the air grow heavy with heat. As the wind was gone, a silence fell over the water with only the sound of Zhoomin's paddle as he made for the island. But as he paddled, the water became clouded around him. A lighter colour that he could not see into. But he saw dark shapes begin to move there, churning the water.

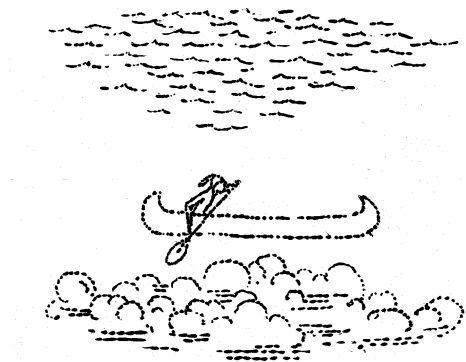
Now Zhoomin saw a whiteness coming across the lake from the west, and behind it lightning streaked the sky. As this storm approached, the young man felt great pain in his body. *Waasmowin*, the lightning which had healed him, now filled him again. Zhoomin knew that something was happening. Something was coming.

The wind hit, and it seemed that his canoe rose out of the water. But then it seemed that Zhoomin fell downward in his canoe. Downward through the water he went. The water cleared up down there, and when he looked up he saw the



surface of the water above him. This is how it seemed. And up there he saw dark shapes of the great monsters fighting. The serpent, Chi-Gnebig, and the great Lynx, Mishepesu twisting and turning in the light up there. Riding under the water Zhoomin held tight in his canoe, for he knew that it was part of his medicine. This canoe he had made with his father.

Then it was a strange thing that happened, for when Zhoomin looked below his canoe, these were also the things he saw. These fighting monsters and the light. But here it seemed that Zhoomin was looking down through the sky. This was his vision, perhaps given by the storm and the lightning: that above him he looked through the water, and below him through the sky. When he saw these things in his vision, his pain was gone.



Now while he watched, Zhoomin saw himself draw closer to the surface and to the great monsters fighting there. He saw that in the battle the serpent was wounded for he had not the fighting weapons of Mishepesu. Indeed, the serpent was almost helpless against the talons and teeth of the great horned Lynx. As he drew closer, the water again became unclear, but this time it was full of blood, so that he no longer saw the creatures. Then out of this cloud suddenly came Mishepesu and struck Zhoomin's canoe. He spun away from those fiery eyes, and down, down he fell, through the water and through the sky.

### Zhoomin's Rescue, and His Final Talk With the Serpent

Now Zhoomin fell toward a great darkness within that storm. Then from somewhere there came what seemed to him a river of light. He was borne away from the darkness, and he came again to the place of light at the surface. Zhoomin felt the warmth of sun as he was taken from the water and left on solid rock.

He awoke to find that he was alone on the shore. Though his canoe and all of his belongings were gone, Zhoomin gave thanks to be alive, for he remembered his dreaming vision. He remembered the river of light, and knew that it was the serpent who had brought him from the water. Looking around, Zhoomin found the serpent's trail and followed it into the bush. Across the rock-face the track would have been lost, but here he followed a trail of blood.

Now Zhoomin came to a small inland lake where the trail disappeared into the water. Here he decided that he would build a fire, for he had found good flint and strike-stone on his way inland. Still cold from the water, Zhoomin shivered as the sun lowered behind the trees. *I must build this fire well, and heed it well*, he thought. *Waa'ooweh*, the whipporwill, began to call from among the trees, then close by on the small lake came the trembling call of *Maang*, the loon. Many calls and sounds Zhoomin heard as he built his fire. Using birch-bark and willow he heated water for cedar tea, then drank this slowly before the fire. *He has found a place underground*, he thought. *That one may never come out if he is badly wounded*. When he was dry, Zhoomin lay near the fire and slept.

He awoke chilled again and saw that the moon was lowering in the west and the fire nearly out. *Koo-koo-koo*, the owl called as Zhoomin put more of the dry wood on the fire and blew into it with his breath. Now a voice came that he recognized, but barely heard.



"It is for me that the owl calls, I think."

Zhoomin was startled. He waited until the fire grew before he spoke.

"You have saved my life, Long Person, and the lives of many of my people," he said. "I am grateful and want to help you."

"Our people, Zhoomin," said the serpent. "They are my people, too."

Zhoomin nodded his head. "Yes," he said. "Our people."

"It was Bnesi, the Thunder-being, who helped to save you," said the serpent. "He drew the great Lynx into battle, for they are ancient enemies. *Waasmowin* struck the water and gave me new life after my battle with the Lynx. You felt it too, I am sure." The voice from the fire went on. "I was able to bring you from the depth where Mishepesu was sending you. It's good that you are safe now, Zhoomin, though I never much feared for you. Through the stone-eyes I saw you as an old man with many grandchildren."

Some time passed, with only the sound of the fire. Then Zhoomin heard the fire breathe and the voice came again.

"Not so for me, Zhoomin. The Lightning revived me, but I am not healed. The horned one's claw found my heart where your arrow could not."

Zhoomin shook his head and spoke almost angrily. "Gnowaabshkaanh, your medicine is strong. You will live as long as me."

"My words are numbered, Zhoomin," said the serpent. "Hear what I have to say."

"Through the stone-eyes I saw a long way - from where it has come and also where it will go. That Aandeg did something I should have eaten him for, but yet I bless him. Through his mistake I saw what no one should see - terror and wonder - a light that I couldn't stand."

"Yes," said Zhoomin, "I saw some of this in dream..."

"You saw only a small part in what I sent. The stone contains light that you cannot see, yet it is there because it has always been there. You must believe that the light is there, or there is a part of you that doesn't live."

The fire burned for a time until the voice came again. "Here is something else that you may not believe, Zhoomin. Know that through the water my seed is spread among the great sturgeon who are both wise and humble."

Now Zhoomin jumped up angrily from his place beside the fire. "Serpent, you are a twist of the natural order. If you have been tortured by that, why then do you want to pass on that misery?"

"It's true that I have been tortured by this limbless form in which I have lived," said the serpent, " - and yet it has been a wonder."

From the fire now a sound came which startled Zhoomin, for it was the sound, just for a moment, of laughter.

"Sit down and listen, Zhoomin, for I am nearly finished." The serpent's voice grew weaker as he spoke.

"In this second life I have tried to learn goodness that I did not learn in the first. Through dream I have tried to show you, tell you what I have learned. The medicine is good. Our people are good. And your heart is good." Now Zhoomin leaned toward the fire to hear as the voice spoke its last.

"Watch for my children, Zhoomin, and let them know you..."

Zhoomin never heard the voice again, and knew that serpent was dead. He waited for the next party of his people to come by that island. They came from the direction of *Mnidoo Minis*. A small group which included his sister were on their way south after hearing of the sickness among Zhoomin's people.



### **A Description of the Great Serpents which Proliferated after Chi-Gnebig's Death**

This was how the story of the serpent, Chi-Gnebig, came down from the man named Zhoomin. Though the serpent was first seen as evil, it was through Zhoomin that the Anishnaabe people came to see him as good. And as the serpent had foreseen, Zhoomin lived to be an old man, with many children and

grandchildren. He had great knowledge of the medicines by the time he was old. Much of this knowledge had come from the serpent himself, then as Zhoomin grew older, from the serpent's children.

These were the *Mishi-Gnebigoo*, the Great Serpents, born of the strange mating between Chi-Gnebig, the Big Serpent, and *Maanmeg*, the Sturgeon. These ones were also very big, with the serpent's length and roundness of body, but not his bright markings.

They were, instead, darker in colour; clad in the serpent's skin, which was scaled. Along their back was a spiny ridge, ending in a flatness at the tail, like the sturgeon's. They had not the split tongue of Chi-Gnebig, nor the tubular undermouth of Sturgeon. These ones, instead, had a good wide mouth at the front.

Like the sturgeon, an oblong plate was fitted to the top of the Great Serpent's head. This graceful plate was divided into thirteen parts by finely drawn lines. The Anishnaabeg saw the thirteen moons of their year in this plate, as they did on *Mzhiikenh*, the turtle's back. In this way, the Great Serpents were given the shield of Chi-Gnebig on their skin, and the ancient shield of *Maanmeg*, the Great Sturgeon, on their head.

The Mishi-Gnebigoo multiplied and even became familiar to the Anishnaabeg in the area to the north of the big lake now called Erie, and to the east of the one called Huron. Throughout their history, these great serpents did not stray much from their homeland, perhaps for fear of the underwater Lynx, *Mishepesu*, to the north, and the Thunderers, *Bnesiwug*, to the west. Most of these great serpents were shy, they say, with only the trail of their bodies sometimes seen through the marshes and along the shorelines. As it was with Chi-Gnebig, it seemed these ones could live more easily in the water than on the land.

Now, a little ways to the north of the place called *Wiikwedong* on Lake Huron, were a number of inland lakes. The smallest of these lakes was said to be bottomless, for it was linked by an underground tunnel to the great lake nearby. Indeed, the whole area around *Wiikwedong* is said to be connected by tunnels made long ago by the Great Serpents.

The Indian people knew when the great serpent was coming, for the water in the small lake would become disturbed, then it would begin to churn. The big serpent would emerge and lie on the warm sand. It's said that the Anishnaabeg could speak to Mishi-Gnebig in their language, and the great serpent understood. The Indian people brought gifts of food and *semaa*, which is tobacco, for they say that the serpents had received healing powers both from their father, Chi-Gnebig, and from their sturgeon mothers.

As with all things, however, there is a side to the story of the great serpents that is less appealing, more foreboding. It's said that when the people - the Anishnaabeg - forget their purpose of pursuing a good and balanced life, certain changes may occur that can be seen as omens. Perhaps sickness comes, or game becomes scarce. Signs which tell the people that they must pay close attention to the way they are living.

One of these omens came to be seen in the great serpents themselves. Rarely were they seen at any time, but if one were seen that was "fat and foul-smelling," it could mean that a time of *Mji-Gnebigoo* had come. These evil ones spread sickness and bad medicine (bad feelings, bad intentions), through the land and the people. Their greater girth was said to be a sign of their gluttony. They could not shed their skin as the healthier *Mishi-Gnebigoo* did. Without this ritual of purification and renewal, their lives were miserable and lowly. But this was only one sign among the many, both good and bad, that the Anishnaabeg watched for in their lives.



## **Afterword - a Non-conclusion**

The events of oral tradition, the occurrences, the comings into being, the community of story, these are the elements of tribal telling that many Native authors attempt to incorporate into their written works. Their goal, ultimately, is to destroy the closure of

their own texts by making them perform, turning them into dialogue, releasing them into the place of imagination. (Blaezer, cited in Murray and Rice 1999: 56)

The stated premise of this work has been "to tell a story," or, in other words, to emerge and develop a series of stories which can be the beginning of a larger body of stories. I feel that before completing this work, it must be mentioned that my home community of *Wiiwkwedong*, or Kettle Point, lives in close proximity with her sister community of *Azhoodenaang*, or Stony Point. Through the years since their inceptions as land-specific communities of Aboriginal people, they have been inseparable in such fundamental ways as blood relationship. Their stories, therefore, are equally as closely related, with the provocative likelihood of journey, romance, dispute, etc., always present between them. That being said, my concern and emphasis for this particular part of the story has, of course, been on my own home community of *Wiiwkwedong*.

Returning to the beginning of my program at York, my Plan of Study expresses both the uncertainty with which my venture began, and the hope of beginning to know:

As i walk now in some of those places where i played as a child, i can feel an acceptance from the land - that i can now come to it with patience to learn. In the greatness of its knowledge, wisdom and story that it is always ready to give, i must ask myself as never before - what can i give back? In the coming back that i now do, how close am i to what the land can tell me? How ready am i to receive it? These are questions i ask myself when i go home, because i think that the Land - Creation - can give us through its Places, the deeper knowledge of ourselves that we must seek to know. (Plan of Study, p. 1)

Most evident in the Plan of Study text is the concern about my (and therefore Human) relationship to land. As it is stated in the *Discussion* (pg 5), the land is held and perceived largely as resource, and therefore commodity. That issue, then - the perception and use (or abuse) of land by Human - has been of greatest concern within the larger context of Story. As stated in the *Rationale* (pg

11), it is the *relationship to land* that is the “core of my experience of going home... the essence of relationship to childhood, the finding and emerging of

The forces which gather against unquestioned destruction are led by the boundless possibility of Story. We can “make a home out of this world” with Story. This is how it is meant. It is the no-ending sphere “whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” that finds shape in the round stones at Kikonaang. The little girl of Chi-mookmaan's dream (pg 27), uttered the hope of possibility symbolized in the kettles: *my grampa says the kettle is round because the stories are never done...they come from a long ways and keep going on.*



## Glossary of Ojibway Words Found in the Text

(listed in alphabetical order)

Note - Since almost all words from the text are nouns, the forms of *animate* and *inanimate* are indicated as *na* (noun animate), and *ni* (noun inanimate). With some words the plural ending (if expressed in the text) is indicated as (*pl*). With place-names (eg., *Kikonaang*), the Locative is indicated as (*loc*).

<i>Aadsookaan, Aadsookaanun (pl) – ni</i>	Sacred stories.
<i>Aandeg – na</i>	Crow, raven.
<i>Aashoodenaang (loc) – na –</i>	‘The other side of town/village.’ A First Nation on Lake Huron.
<i>Aazhbik –ni</i>	Cliff, rock.
<i>Anishnaabe, Anishnaabeg (pl)</i>	Aboriginal people of the Algonquian Nation. Also said to mean ‘the good
<i>Anung – ni</i>	Star.
<i>Binoojiinh - na</i>	Small child.
<i>Bkadewnini – na</i>	This is a name, literally meaning ‘hungry
<i>Bnesi, Bnesiwug (pl) – na</i>	Thunder-bird(s), Thunder-being(s).
<i>Chi-Gnebig – na</i>	Big snake or serpent. (*seen also as ‘ <i>Gchi-Gnebig</i> ’).
<i>Chi-Mookmaan – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Big Knife.’
<i>Chippewa – na</i>	Usually understood to be the Americanization of ‘Ojibway.’
<i>Gchi-gumi – ni</i>	Big lake, great lake.
<i>Gdoombiigis!</i>	“Be quiet!” A command.
<i>Giiwnaadis – vb</i>	to be crazy, act crazy.
<i>Gnebig – na</i>	Snake, serpent.
<i>Gnowaabshkaanh – na</i>	One who is long, a long person.

<i>Jimnidoo – na</i>	Bad spirit, evil spirit. *Note – this is a combination of <i>Mji</i> , meaning ‘bad,’ and <i>Manidoo</i> , meaning ‘spirit.’
<i>Kik – na</i>	Kettle.
<i>Kikonaang (loc)</i>	Place of the kettles.
<i>Kiyaashk – na</i>	Gull, seagull.
<i>Koo-koo-koo – na</i>	Owl.
<i>Maang – na</i>	Loon.
<i>Maanmeg, Maanmegoog (pl) – na</i>	Sturgeon.
<i>Maanoonhs – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Ironwood.’
<i>Manidoo-minis, Manidoo-minising (loc)</i>	Spirit Island, (Manitoulin Island), at Spirit Island.
<i>Manidoog (pl) – na</i>	Spirits.
<i>Migizi – na</i>	Eagle.
<i>Miin, Miinun (pl) – ni</i>	Seed(s). Also seen as <i>Miinkaan(un)</i> .
<i>Minoomini-giizis – na</i>	Grain-moon, rice-moon, (August).
<i>Mishi-Gnebig, Mishi-Gnebigooog (pl) –na</i>	Great serpent(s).
<i>Mishipeshu – na</i>	The Great Water-Lynx. Also Underwater Panther.
<i>Mji-Gnebig, Mji-Gnebigooog (pl) – na</i>	Great evil serpent(s).
<i>Mshkode – na</i>	Fire. Can also mean ‘prairie.’
<i>Mundaamin – na</i>	Corn. Literally means ‘food/seed of
<i>Mzhiikenh – na</i>	Turtle.
<i>Naadwe, Naadweg (pl) – na</i>	Aboriginal person of the Six Nations Confederacy.
<i>Nenaboozhoo – na</i>	One of several names given to the culture-hero and anti-hero of Algonquian peoples. Many stories are told, and many lessons learned from the

	adventures and misadventures of this colourful figure.
<i>Nigik – na</i>	Otter.
<i>Nimaajmod – na</i>	A name meaning ‘he, or she goes away talking.’
<i>Nimkii – na</i>	Thunder, or Thunder-being.
<i>Nodin – ni</i>	Wind.
<i>Semaa – na</i>	Tobacco. Among the Anishnaabeg this is the ‘first medicine,’ the medicine of the east. Used in prayer to the Creator, it signifies respect and thanks.
<i>Shigunug (pl) – na</i>	Fish known as ‘Bass.’
<i>Shugunaash, Shugnaashug (pl) – na</i>	White people, originally designated English.
<i>Sungoo – na</i>	Black-squirrel.
<i>Tikib – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Fresh-water spring.’
<i>Waabgaigaik – na</i>	Hawk.
<i>Waabsiikwe – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Swan-woman.’
<i>Waagosh – na</i>	Fox.
<i>Waa’ooweh – na</i>	Whipporwill.
<i>Waasmowin – ni</i>	Lightning.
<i>Waasookwe – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Sparkling-woman.’
<i>Waawaashkesh – na</i>	Deer.
<i>Wemtigoosh, Wemtigooshiiyug (pl) – na</i>	French White person(s).
<i>Wiikwedong (loc)</i>	‘At the Bay,’ a First Nation on Lake Huron.
<i>Zhaagesh – na</i>	A name derived from the word ‘Zhaageshiinh,’ meaning ‘Cray-fish.’
<i>Zhekwe – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Going-back-woman.’
<i>Zhiishiib – na</i>	Duck.
<i>Ziibinhs – na</i>	A name meaning ‘Little river.’

*Zhoomin – na*

A name meaning 'Grape.'

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