

Spirit of the Island: Manitoulin's People  
Stories of Indigenous-Settler Historical Dynamics

*Ezhi-minidoowang Minis: Minidoo-wining Bemaadizjig Wiin E-zhi-kendaang  
gaa-zhiwebizid nji Anishinaabewid-Gaa-bi-daajig gaa-bi-zhi-gjigdoowaad*

Gathering Thirteen – ‘Sacred Water’; ‘Gchi-Nibi’



by Dr. Rhonda L. Paulsen

with Anishinaabemowin Translators Elder Shirley I. Williams-Pheasant and Isadore Toulouse



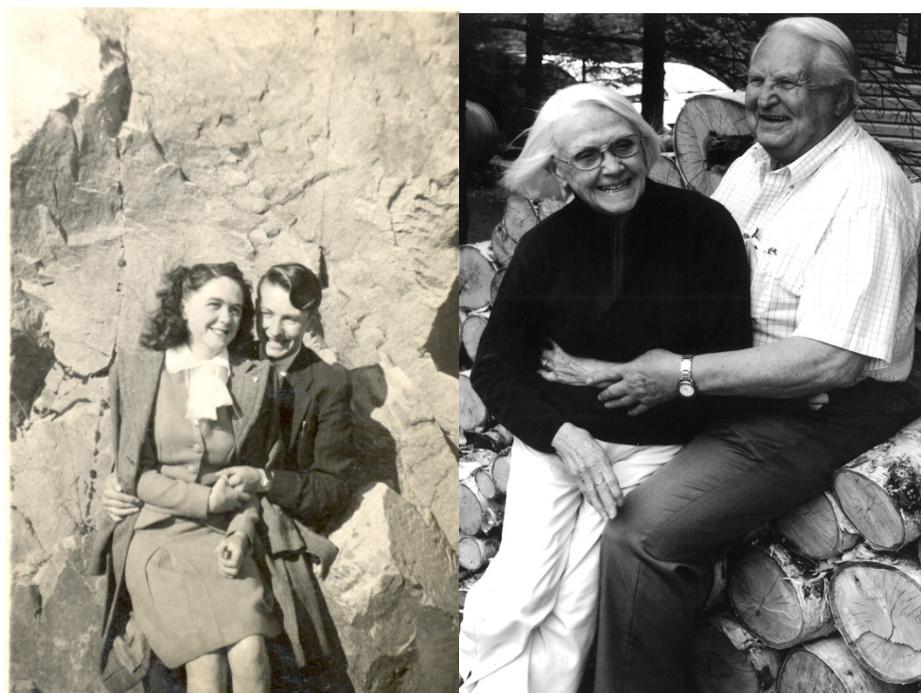
*Lovingly dedicated to my mom and dad,  
Ronald Oscar and Elizabeth Patricia Paulsen*



*Ezhi-zaagigwaa ndoo-minaajaak Ngashi miiniwaa noos,  
Ronald Oscar miiniwaa Elizabeth Patricia Paulsen*



*Affectueusement dédié à ma mère et à mon père,  
Ronald Oscar et Elizabeth Patricia Paulsen*



1947 - Terrace, British Columbia      2010 - Manitoulin Island, Ontario

To honour the life of my most amazing dad, 1930-2014  
and in loving memory of my dear son Joey, 1982.



*Wii-mnaadendamog noos-ba bemaadiziwinim gaa-moonji gchi-twaawid, 1930-2014  
miiniwaa wii-menjimenmog ngwisen-ba gaa-zhi-gchi-twaawendamog Joey-ba, 1982.*



*Pour rendre hommage à la vie de mon père, un être exceptionnel, 1930-2014  
et à la mémoire de mon cher fils Joey, 1982.*



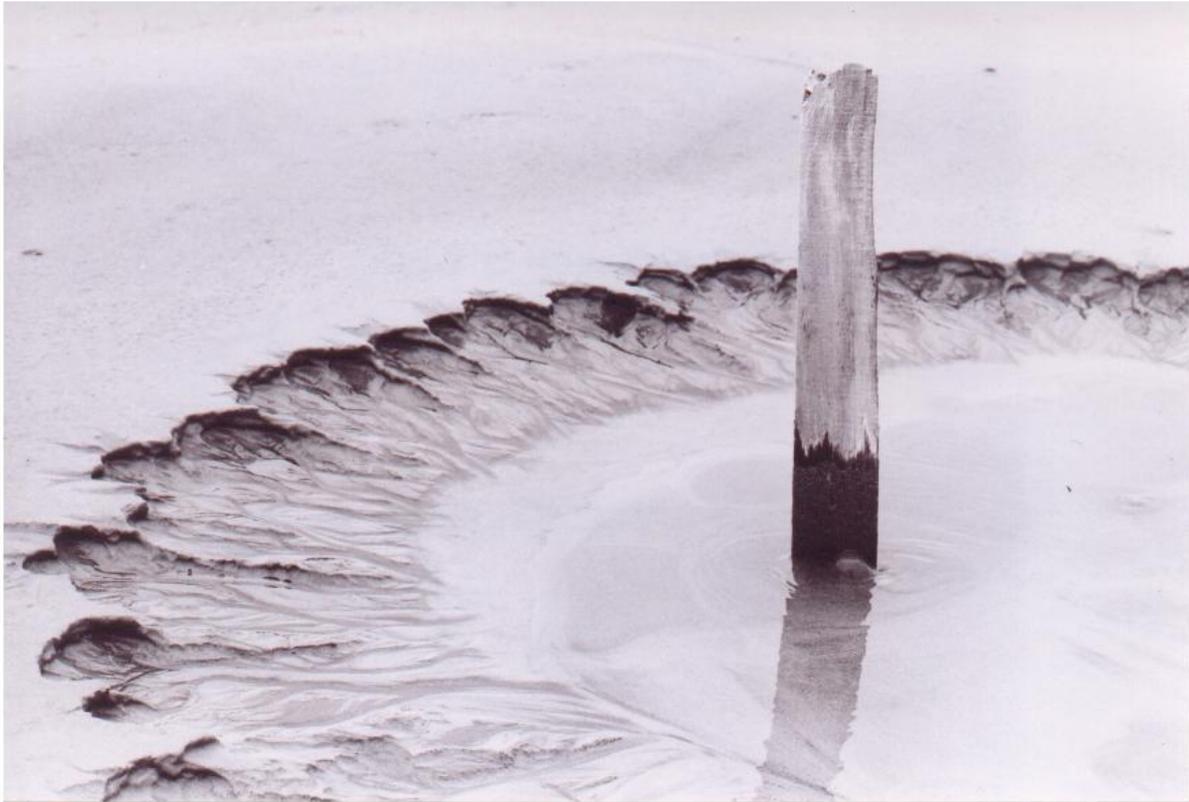
*First Nations, Metis, and Inuit pedagogy aim to create a safe and respectful learning environment for all students and teachers alike. Due to the nature of the material shared in this book, you may encounter information and perspectives that are new and that challenge views of community, society, spirituality, history, and contemporary situations.*

*This may create a sense of confusion, discomfort, or pain. As you proceed through reading our stories and the supportive data, we encourage you to contact the teacher, counsellor, or First Nations, Metis, Inuit representative at your school or district school board.*

*Please do not think you need to cope with reactions on your own.*



STUDENT CENTER – GATHERING THIRTEEN



*Water depth measuring stick, Dominion Bay*

*photo by E. J. Thippawong*

*“Argue for your limitations and sure enough they are yours.”*

*author unknown*

*Learning Outcomes ~ upon completion of this gathering, the student will be able to...*

1. Understand how peoples’ worldviews, values, and beliefs are reflected in daily life.
2. Investigate policies and practices of environmental management and sustainable development.
3. Interact with others in ways that encourage the ‘good mind’; contribute to effective working and personal relationships, and the achievement of goals.



## [Sacred Water, Thirteen Grandmother Moons, and Turtle Island](#)

[Elder Shirley J. Williams-Pheasant and Rhonda L. Paulsen](#)

### **Sacred Water**

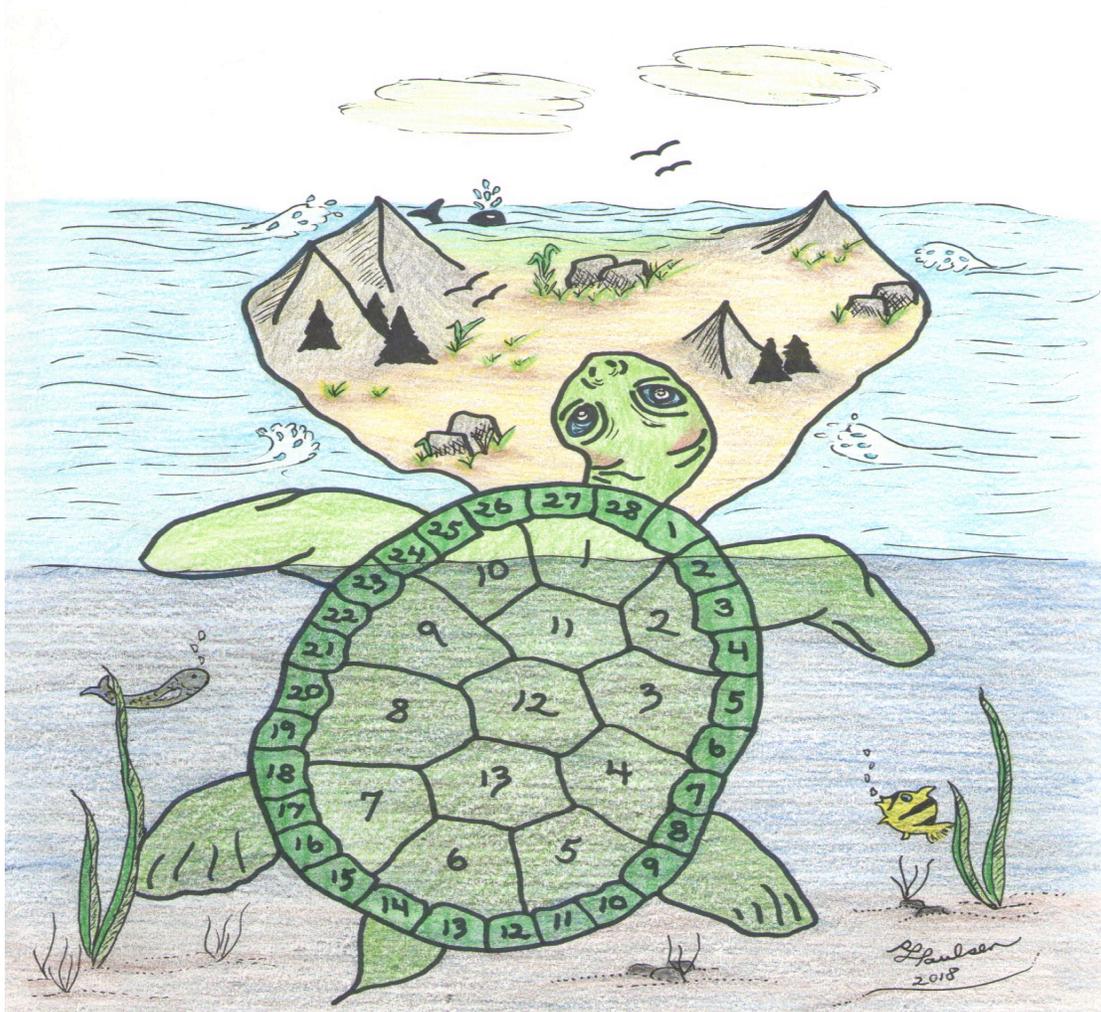
Water teachings come from the Midewiwin Lodge teachings, which are ancient Anishinabek spiritual medicine teachings (whereas mashkiki refers to physical medicine) that go back to the story of creation. At the time of creation, the Creator gave four gifts: water, fire, air, and earth, which in Anishinabek worldview are spiritual elements held in Mother Earth. Water shapes us, fire transforms us, air moves us, and the earth heals us, while it is Spirit that guides us (Magdelene, M.; Manitowabi, E.; O'Chise, P.; Williams-Pheasant, S. I., personal communications). Knowledge holder and Elder Benton-Banai (1978) explains the Anishinabe creation story, which tells that at...

the fourth stage of creation – having created the star world with his thoughts, having built the first fire in the universe (the Sun), and having created the twin (Grandmother Moon) – the whole of the universe was established and he caused the universe to move according to the four directions...When he had completed the Earth [he] caused the waters to flow in and around the Earth (being her veins and arteries to carry the force of life itself).

The sketch below depicts the story of origin addressed briefly above and in Gathering Twelve, in which Turtle Island, Mother Earth, and water are all elements of creation. Further, Bruchac (1992) relates that the Anishinabek

relate the cycles of the moon (called Grandmother Moon) to the seasons. In every year, there are thirteen moon cycles, each with twenty-eight days from one new moon to the next... the Turtle's back is a sort of calendar, with its pattern of thirteen large scutes standing for the thirteen moons of each year. It reminds them that all things are connected and we must try to live in balance.

As per the thirteen moon cycles, the Anishinabek calendar originally had thirteen months; the twelve-month concept was introduced by European colonists.



*Grandmother Moons and Turtle Island*

*pencil and ink sketch by R. L. Paulsen*

## **Sacred Water Walks**

As the Midewiwin Lodge teachings guide us, it is the responsibility for all people to maintain clean water and water management to ensure healthy living for humans, plants, and animals. As traditional Mohawk knowledge holder Tom Porter cautions: "... in order to maintain biodiversity... the understanding that people must ensure resources are protected for generations to come is essential to protect and sustain [the people]" (2008: 12). This philosophy is shared with Anishinabe women who hold Sacred Water Walks to bring awareness of water issues in Canada to all people.

Josephine Mandamin, a member of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge from Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island, started Sacred Water Walks in 2003 as a result of her growing concern over pollution in the waters of Turtle Island. Her journey began around the Great Lakes and Sacred Water Walks have since become an annual event in the spring, the time which symbolizes the renewal of Mother Earth. In 2016 Josephine received the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Excellence in Conservation. The work of Sacred Water Walks continues through Nibi Emosaawdamajig (Those who Walk for the Water), a group organized by Elder Shirley I. Williams-Pheasant and Elizabeth Osawamick.

A Sacred Water Walk is formed through people coming together to walk for a ceremony, demonstration, or festivity. For Anishinabek, it is the responsibility of Grandmothers to lead women in protecting and praying for the water, however, men and children also join these walks with men in their traditional roles of protecting the women (Williams-Pheasant 2018). Men and women share carrying a copper pail of water to lead the walks (copper being used due to its cleansing properties) which have become a time of celebrating the sacredness of water. People come together to pray, sing, speak, feast, rest, and bless the water in the Anishinabe way, which

involves sharing a pipe ceremony, walking to the drum, and usually stopping four times to bless the water in four directions. At the end of the walk, the water that has been carried in the copper pail is returned to the nearest body of water (whether it be a river, lake, or stream) as reciprocity is important. As Elder Williams-Pheasant explains: “We walk for water because we care for what happens to water, based on the belief that water is sacred to us and therefore we should treat it with respect and dignity” (2018).



*Josephine Mandamin*

*previously published*

## **The Right for Water**

Recently, attention has been drawn to water teachings through international concern for water, with March 22 having been declared International World Water Day - an attempt to remind people about the significance of pure water. March 22 has become a day to celebrate water, to promote sustainability for fresh water resource management, and a day to prepare for how we – as a global society - manage water in the future.

The urgency around pure water is evident in the state of many First Nations communities across Canada. For example, there are 169 First Nations reserves across Canada that are under boil-water advisories, with 79 in Ontario alone. Some of these communities have been under an advisory for years, even decades, such as: Neskantaga (in the district of Kenora) has been under an advisory since 1995; Shoal Lake (which borders Ontario and Manitoba) since 1997; and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte (on Lake Ontario) since 2003. Yet, in 2012, under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government, an omnibus bill was passed that left 99% of Canada's waterways unprotected and also weakened the use of environmental assessments (aandc.gc.ca). Between July 2015 and April 2016, the international Human Rights Watch (HRW) organization conducted water and sanitation research in Ontario's First Nations communities, which revealed coliform (*E. coli*), cancer-causing trihalomethanes, and uranium in the tap water. HRW's research conclusions found the Canadian government to be in violation of international human rights obligations toward Indigenous people "by failing to remedy the severe water crisis" (hrw.org 2018).

To aid in curtailing this water crisis, on January 23, 2018 Jane Philpott, Indigenous Services Minister with the government of Canada, announced that in addition to the 1,000 new drinking water systems already targeted for implementation on First Nations reserves, approximately 250 additional drinking water systems will be included in the government's commitment to having clean drinking water on reserves and all long-term drinking water advisories to be lifted by March 2021 (aandc.gc.ca).



On Manitoulin Island, initiatives continue to be developed to address local environmental concerns and international climate change. Three examples are:

1. Manitoulin Streams Improvement Association is a regional group for “restoring water quality and the fisheries resource on Manitoulin Island and the Great Lakes that surround it” (manitoulinstreams.com). Some of the association’s stewardship initiatives include: partnerships with island fish hatcheries and fish aquaculture, stocking local lakes and streams, and the enhancement or rehabilitation of water systems. Educational projects include guiding students in establishing mini-hatcheries at their schools then together releasing the fish into restored water systems, as well as learning about monitoring techniques, healthy environmental habitats, and human impact, all of which helps youth become responsible stewards of the land.



*Chinook salmon run, Kagawong River, Manitoulin Island*

*photo by R. L. Paulsen*

2. Community members of M’Chigeeng First Nation created the ‘Little Warriors’ group, an after-school initiative that encourages healthy relationships with positive community role models who participate with the youth in events and activities that include traditional teachings and land-based knowledge. The goal is to establish a sense of responsibility to the land and water.



*Autumn Peltier*

*previously published photo by Linda Roy*

3. Recognized water protector Autumn Peltier, from Wikwemikong, is a youth advocate for sacred water. Part of her advocacy work involved speaking with Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa to voice her deep concern over a proposed pipeline that will cut through the forests and water systems of British Columbia. When thirteen years old, Autumn was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize because of her work in this area.

In 2008, after a five-year review through the Ministry of Natural Resources, Manitoulin Streams Improvement Association had approval for the rehabilitation of 184 waterways on the island, including the Kagawong River which passes over Bridal Veil Falls before feeding into Lake Huron. To demonstrate the changes that can occur in water systems naturally, through climate change, or by the introduction of dams, are two photographs of Bridal Veil Falls, the first taken in 1996 and the second taken in 2007. These photographs help to support the efforts of the island communities in preserving, respecting, and protecting the water.



*Bridal Veil Falls*

*photo by Ronald O. Paulsen, 1996*



*Bridal Veil Falls*

*photo by E. J. Thippawong, 2007*

As articulated by the Metis Nation of Ontario - Lands, Resources, and Consultations:

The land provides everything ... It is important that we protect these plants, animals, and organisms from threats such as invasive species, overharvesting, and development that can damage lakes and forests. Additionally, some species have become rare, often due to human actions, and they have become Species at Risk. They require special care and attention so that they are not lost forever from our lakes, rivers, forests, and skies (2012).



### Personal Inquiry

1. Why do we need water protection?
2. Many First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities have been under a boil-water advisory for years, sometimes decades. How long do you think an urban center, such as Toronto or Ottawa, would have to wait to rectify a boil-water advisory? 25 years? A generation born and raised into adulthood without safe drinking water.



### On that note... a personal message ~ Rhonda L. Paulsen

When I was a little girl growing up in Terrace, a remote northern British Columbia town, we did not have a television until around 1962 (the kind with ‘rabbit ears’, only one station, and black and white of course). The first show I watched was a cartoon (I was four years old), but what impacted me was an advertisement. There was a blonde-haired, perfectly groomed young boy playing on the shining floor of his kitchen, his mother at the sink running glistening water from the tap into a glass to give him to drink. And then the audio. Questions were asked of the

viewer: “Will there be *enough* water when your child grows up?”; “What if you need to *buy* water?” I was horrified. Not only did we have safe tap water but we were drinking water straight from glacial streams when hiking and it was delicious! I ran to my mother (in the kitchen) and asked her the questions, which were difficult because these advertisements were bringing new information that contained fear and shone the spotlight on assumptions of what was considered either a ‘right’ or a ‘privilege’. Water was considered an assumed right.

Within one generation those fearful questions have become the current reality that people globally are required to answer. Sheila Watt-Cloutier defines ‘right’ as a “protection against the power of others, whether or not that power is wielded maliciously” (2015: 219). Since those in power are rarely willing to forfeit their power, it remains a responsibility for every person to take a stand for the right to clean air, earth, and water. A stand that is firm and unyielding, and that is supported by behaviours and attitudes demonstrating conviction behind the stance. We, as humans globally, simply cannot let those who choose to use their authoritative decision-making positions to destroy our natural resources do so, not without resistance and activism. As individuals and as collectives, efforts toward protecting the environment - our Mother the Earth – against the assaults made to her are needed now more than ever.

When I listen to people trying to determine the geographic location for the Garden of Eden, I am puzzled because if you believe that Earth originated as a result of creation, and then if you broaden your perspective to imagine that of the Creator’s, would it not make sense that the Earth – in its entirety – is Eden? You do not even have to look at our planet through the imagined perspective from the edge of the universe; when comparing Mother Earth and Grandmother Moon the earth looks like the Garden. And the teachings instruct us that it is our responsibility to care for and respect this planet, our shared global home.



*Dominion Acres*

*photo by Ronald O. Paulsen*

*“Don’t be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated.  
You can’t cross a chasm in two small jumps.”*

*David Lloyd George*

As we are now at the place of leaving each other’s company through our sharing time with the stories in this book, for which I am grateful, I leave with closing thoughts. Wherever you find yourself at this point in your life, no matter what your age, I encourage you to think beyond what you feel are your limitations. Consider standing as your own ‘witness’, i.e. observing yourself objectively without any negativity in your own thoughts or negativity from others, explore how you define your own identity. Then, in the purity of your personal exploration, think of where the Creator wants you to be; consider how far your existing ‘boundaries’ can be surpassed. What do you want to do? What will you do?



## Resources

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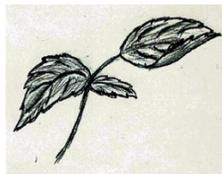
TBNewsWatch.com (2018)

Personal Communications

Nibi Emossawdamojig committee members: Horton, G.; Osawamick, L.; Williams-Pheasant, S.I.

Presentations, lectures, workshops: O'Chise, P.; Thrasher, M.

Women's teachings: Magdalene, M.; Manitowabi, E.





## *Breathe*

*relax*

*let your mind go at ease*

*let the cool gentle breeze*

*flow freely*

*massaging your thoughts*

*Rhonda L. Paulsen*



*photo by R. L. Paulsen*

## *Nesen*

*be-kaa-yaan*

*bgidnan gdi-nendimoowin ji-bekaatek*

*bgidnan ezhi-mina-nooding tkaasjigewin*

*ji-zhiibaabidek weweni*

*epiichi-maamaagbijigaadek*

*gdi-nendimoowinan*



## *Respirer*

*détendez-vous*

*libérez votre esprit*

*laissez la douce brise fraîche*

*circuler librement*

*et masser vos pensées*

*Rhonda L. Paulsen*



## Gathering Thirteen: 'Sacred Water' – 'Gchi-Nibi'

### Video Credits

By: Elder Shirley I. Williams-Pheasant and Dr. Rhonda L. Paulsen

Anishinaabemowin Translators:

Elder Shirley I. Williams-Pheasant and Isadore Toulouse

Bridal Veil Falls 1996 and Dominion Acres photos: Ronald O. Paulsen

Bridal Veil Falls 2007 photo: Elizabeth Thippawong

'Grandmother Moons and Turtle Island' pencil and ink sketch: Dr. Rhonda L. Paulsen

Oil on canvas 'Walking in Birches' banner: Laura L. Thippawong

Cover canoe photo: Elizabeth Thippawong

Videographer: Evan Brockest

Closed Captioning: GrassRootsDesign



### **For more information or to order the book**

*Spirit of the Island: Manitoulin's People ~ Stories of Indigenous – Settler Historical Dynamics*

and/or accompanying Instructor's Guidebook, please visit [www.pallasedu.com](http://www.pallasedu.com)

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