

WINNIPEG STORIES

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WINN NIPI

By Jo MacDonald
Dancing Northern Lights Woman

A sound of a tap being turned on. The sound of running water filling a glass. The sound of a tap being turned off. A woman enters the stage dragging a chair and a glass of water. Stops, takes her hand off the chair, places the glass down, moves the chair beside the water. Sits. She reaches in a pocket and pulls out a tobacco tie. Holds it up.

Miigwech. (places the tobacco down.)Boozhoo aniin. (pause)(Quizzical)Tansi?(pause) Helloooo. (pause, arms stretched out) Biindigen. Welcome.(points down then makes a motion of water flowing with her hand)Winn nipi. Nipi. Nipi? (Picks up the glass) Nipi. Water. (Puts the glass down) Ziibi. Niiwin Ziibi. 4 rivers. Winn nipi. Win ni peg. Winnipeg. The river city. 4 rivers. Red. Seine. Assiniboine. Winnipeg. Four very muddy rivers. Muddy waters. Water. Life. Even muddy water.

These rivers. These rivers have been here longer than your recorded time. (Nodding) The stories they can tell. (Quietly)The secrets they kept. And they keep many. Many about this place.

This place. This winn nipi. This place where you are. This place you call home.

For thousands of years these rivers heard stories from the Anishinaabe and Cree. Stories that held a People together. Held traditions and ceremonies together. Held hearts together. This winn nipi.

Stories that spoke of the land and the future. Stories that gave honour to the land and to the water. Because these waters have life. These waters that weave in and around and freeze and melt and splash and drip and do what water must do. Is life. Winn nipi. Winnipeg. The muddy waters.

Stories of the past paved the way for this moment right now. Stories that traveled like the river (*motioning like flowing water*) from here to there from the top of our world to the bottom and then back up again. To be told over and over. So you never forget. Because water, muddy water, is life.

Like all places, this place, Winn nipi, began with water. Because all beginnings start with water. You. You began your life in water. Ah, but what about zaagi'idiwin (zaa gen de win)? What about love? Yes, love can be the catalyst for life but water is life. Water is sacred. Even muddy water. Some travel great distances to have nipi. Some even fight for the water, speak for the water lay down their lives for water. Nipi. Water is gold for some. Why else would some look to other worlds 54 million kilometres with the hope of finding nipi.

This Winn nipi. Your Winn nipi, she has plenty. And she tells her stories through her water.
(*Arms moving gently*)

Every creation story will tell you about water. Every history book.

The waters... a route for places to go, and for some a way to flee. A way to escape.

Journeys began on these waters.

The journeys here, began with the people...

They traveled.

Down these muddy waters.

And they brought everything they needed.

They had everything they needed.

Everything was provided because of the water.

Everything.

For ceremony.

They gathered.

Here.

To begin.

To smoke a pipe.

To thank.

To listen.

To dance.

To live.

To teach.

To be generous.

To trade.

To exchange. To fight. To lay claim. To protect.

To connect.

Because everything is connected to nipi, the water.

The muddy waters.

The rivers.

This Winn nipi.

The people traveled the rivers past those vast muddy shore banks as it was much more than just clay and sand and rock.

The Buddhists will say you can't have a flower without mud. It's all about balance. It's all about relationships. And the people respected this relationship.

But.

But these waters have a dark side.

They keep terrible secrets. Dark secrets that weave in and around and freeze and melt and drip and splash and seep to the murky bottom. Hidden. Never to surface.

Denial.

Nothing to see here. They hope.

Just move along.

Like the current.

Carrying the truth. Carrying the past and too many times carrying the pain of someone's past.
Too many times in this Winn nipi these water carried someone's past right to the end.

Too many times.

A mistake? Perhaps.

Not.

For it was a moment of

BIIJIDIGAZO (bee gee dee gah zo) ANGER,

Zhiingenim (zhii ga nim)HATE,

BAAGAAMANIMIZI (baa gaa ma ney may zay) FEAR,

and MISKWI (miss kway) BLOOD.

And the balance of mud and water becomes a bed of secrets. And eventually biiboan, a winter's storm will cover those secrets with white, pristine, crystal cold silence of unfinished business. Because what lies beneath is more than mashkaade azhaski (mash ka day ah jash kay) Prairie gumbo.

What lies beneath the compost with anticipation of ziigwan

(zee gwan-Spring) is more than nutrients derived from the dead... lying in wait too often is debwewin (day bway win)TRUTH

and too often many gather and find her here.

(sadly shakes her head)

Winn nipi. As long as the rivers flow you have stories to remember. Times when she has shown you her might.

As you watched her spread across this land. Rising. Rising! Unstoppable.

You were no match for her.

The path of least resistance is the path she takes.

She has shown you HER strength.

She tried again. And again. But this time you were prepared.

And when she tries again, for this land floods always,
you will be prepared.

Take comfort. The stories are yet to be told.

For this place, this Winn nipi, this place you call home.

Honour her. Honour her humble beginnings, her muddy waters,
her rivers, and especially her river stories.