

# The Mishomis Story

Retold by Penny Olson

Illustrated by Cory Fontaine



Many, many years ago there was a Nokomis who loved to cook meals for all the people in her village. Whenever she cooked, people came from near and far to feast upon the food she made that was gathered from the earth. Everyone took great pride in Nokomis' meals, and everyone brought food for her to cook and helped her prepare it.

The women and children helped her tend the gardens with carrots, beans, peas, corn, leeks, and potatoes.

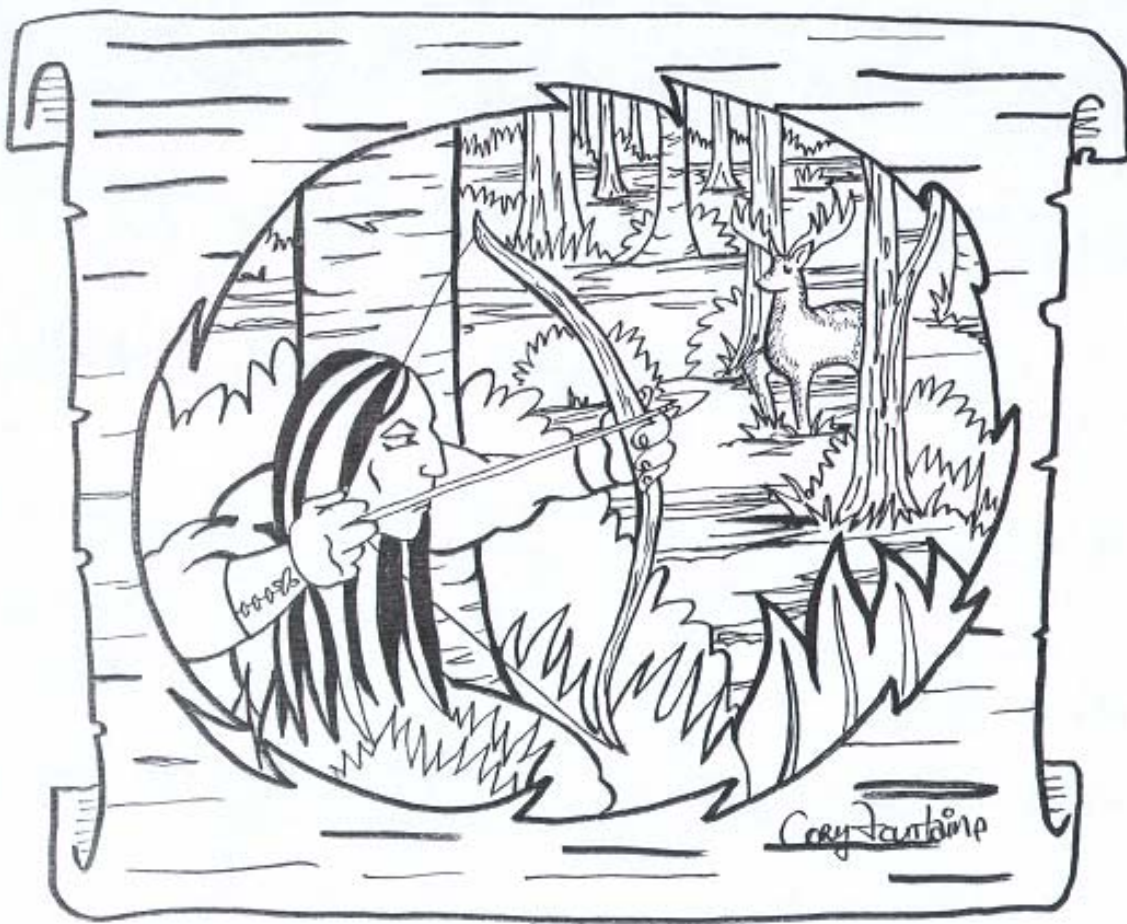


They picked mushrooms in the spring, and helped her gather strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and cranberries during the summer. Nokomis knew gathering berries was hard work, and after she offered her tobacco, she let the children snack as they collected berries. This gave the binoojinh just enough sweetness, so they would smile and laugh while they listened to the stories Nokomis shared with them as they picked and gathered berries.





In the early spring Nokomis showed the children how to tap the Maple trees, collect the sap, and boil it, so they had syrup and candy during the fall and winter. When the rickers went out in the late fall, they brought Nokomis back precious manomin which she would then cook, pop, use in soup, or make bread with for the people.



The hunters brought her rabbits, birds, deer, and bear. The fisherman gave her a steady supply of whitefish and other fish. Everyone shared the gifts the earth had shared with them with each other, and while they shared their efforts everyone had full bellies and good health.



One day two brothers were out on the lake fishing. The older brother had caught ten fish and told his younger brother that this proved he was the best fisherman of all. All of a sudden, the younger brother speared a white fish that must have weighed more than all the other fish in the boat combined. “Ha!” he yelled to his older brother. “Who’s the best fisherman now?”



The brothers continued their bickering and arguing all the way back to the shore. Once they pulled the boat out of Gitcheegoumee, they separated the fish and took them home instead of taking them to Nokomis. That night there was no sweet-tasting white fish in the pot when everyone came together to eat.





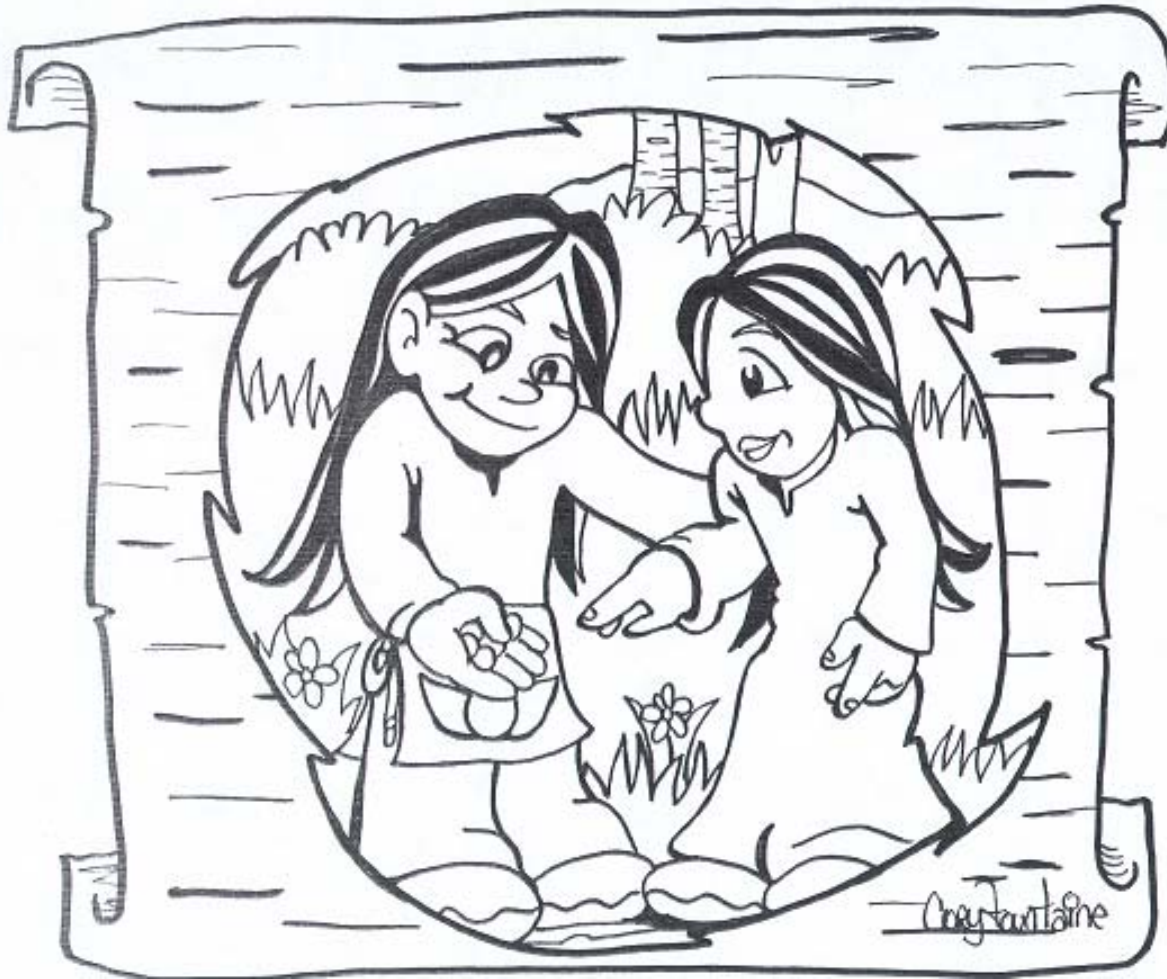


This attitude soon spread throughout the village. If someone couldn't be known as the best hunter, vegetable grower, fisherman, ricer or berry picker, they stopped bringing food to Nokomis. The meals which had kept the tribe healthy for so long became less and less. The people still showed up to eat, but they went away hungry with their bellies grumbling and growling.





One night when the people showed up to eat, all that remained was the fire pit with ashes and small pieces of charred wood. Once that fire pit had held Nokomis' big pot from where so many wonderful meals had come. Now there was no Nokomis, no pot, and no food.



After awhile as the stomachs rumbled and grumbled, two of the children shared some dried berries with other children that they had been keeping. Another child shared some maple candy. Soon some vegetables were shared. Before long, everyone brought some food forth and began sharing it with each other.



It became one of the biggest feasts the people had ever had. The next day Nokomis was back home with her big pot. Once again everyone brought food to her, and as she started to cook, the children gathered around her to listen and laugh as she told one of her stories.







“Nokomis, where were you yesterday?” the children finally asked. “We missed you.”

“I had to go away,” she answered, “so you would remember how to share. That is what made the food taste so good and filled all of your bellies tonight.”



Ever since then when the people gather together, they honor that Nokomis with their gifts of food and good will towards each other, and no one ever goes away hungry or with bad feelings.

*Penny's Mishomis (grandfather) is a member of the Bay Mills Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.*

*Penny holds BA, MA, and MFA in Creative Writing degrees from Northern Michigan University and is a published author. She currently teaches literature and composition at Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College.*

*Megwitch, Penny, for sharing this family treasure!*



