

Preface

Wendy Makoons Geniusz

Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do Is Ask is written by a Native woman, Mary Siisip Geniusz, my mother, who demonstrates the strength and vitality of *Anishinaabe-bimaadiziwin*, the Anishinaabe way of life, in her frequent references to contemporary life. This book does not lament the loss of our old ways, nor does it present a laundry list of how the Anishinaabe use plants. It is a detailed account of important teachings from *Anishinaabe-gikendaasowin*, Anishinaabe knowledge, and it will be a valuable contribution to Anishinaabe cultural revitalization. Throughout this book, my mother shares teachings she received from the late Keewaydinoquay, an *Anishinaabe-mashkikiikiiwikwe*, Anishinaabe/Ojibwe medicine woman, and ethnobotanist who was her first teacher of *Anishinaabe-gikendaasowin*. According to Keewaydinoquay's teachings, plants are thought of as beings with their own histories, stories, beliefs, and ways of life. Anishinaabe protocols require us to introduce plants just as we would introduce another human being, and this is what my mother does in this text. It is filled with stories, teachings, culinary and medicinal recipes—some from Anishinaabe traditions, some from the author's own life, and some from other traditions. I welcome and encourage readers to learn more about these cognizant beings who can be of such help to us if only we ask.

This scholarly text comes from a rich educational tradition, which is just as complex and has just as many protocols and levels of learning as non-Native educational systems. This book exemplifies the Biskaabiiyang approach to research, which I describe in my book, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Anishinaabe Botanical Teachings*. Following Biskaabiiyang research

methodologies, we, as Anishinaabe people, conduct our own scholarly research and create resources presenting our knowledge to the world in ways that will be beneficial to our communities, our families, and ourselves. To do this, we need to look at how colonization has negatively impacted our opinions of our people, our knowledge, and ourselves. Only from that perspective can we begin to conduct research that will be useful to our fellow Anishinaabeg, our own lives, and the rest of the world. My mother first told me about the Biskaabiiyang methods of research; she learned about them in her courses for the Masters of Indigenous Knowledge/Philosophy Program at the Seven Generations Education Institute, which is nestled between Couchiching First Nations Reserve and Fort Francis, Ontario, on Agency One Land.

I watched my mother experience the Biskaabiiyang process of looking back at herself and evaluating how she had personally been affected by colonization before returning to the teachings she was given by Keewaydinoquay and then synthesizing them into written form. She struggled when writing this book because the effects of colonization on her own mind told her that it contained knowledge that would be dismissed by those raised with value systems from non-Native cultures. I believe that readers of this book, regardless of their backgrounds, will go through a decolonizing process themselves as they read this book and explore another system of keeping knowledge. To readers looking at this book through the blinders of colonization, the connections to plants that my mother makes on many levels, involving so many senses, may seem irrelevant or misplaced in scholarly work. To read this book and view it as the scholarly work that it is, readers will have to ignore the image that dominant culture frequently portrays of "primitive" Native people, cultures, stories, and knowledge keeping systems. Our people are not childlike, our cultures are not limited to the creation of fire and stone tools, our stories are not fairytales meant only to entertain children, and our knowledge is not simplistic. When we ignore these misconceptions, we are in a more open state of mind to accept the idea that plants are other beings with whom we can interact and communicate, and their stories and talents, from the trivial to the essential, are vital to our continued interactions with them.

Keewaydinoquay

Keewaydinoquay always said that the year of her birth was not recorded until many years after the event, but officially her birth

year is 1918; this is also the year her mother wrote on a letter addressed to her own father (Keewaydinoquay's grandfather) as a year that she gave birth.* Keewaydinoquay spent much of her childhood in an Anishinaabe village on Cat Head Bay, on the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula in Lower Michigan. Like many Michigan tribes in the first half of the twentieth century, the band into which Keewaydinoquay was born was not federally recognized at the time of her birth. She began her training as a medicine woman when she was approximately nine years old and was apprenticed to Nodjimahkwe, a well-respected mashkikiiwikwe in the village.

Keewaydinoquay had a lifelong interest in all kinds of education. She was an elementary and secondary teacher for years, and she held several master's degrees. In 1976 she began working on a doctorate in biology at the University of Michigan, but although she completed the coursework for the degree she was not able to pass the required German proficiency examination and therefore could not take her preliminary exams or write her dissertation. She was teaching at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee when my mother met her in the early 1980s. My mother was her student, her teaching assistant, and eventually her *oshkaabewis*, her traditionally trained Anishinaabe apprentice. With this book my mother fulfills her promise to Keewaydinoquay that she would preserve and pass on this knowledge.

* Helen Hornbeck Tanner told me about this letter during an interview when I was writing an article about Keewaydinoquay's life (Geniusz 2005). The letter was in her possession at that time.

My Role as Editor

My mother had already written a complete book-length manuscript when I joined her as editor of this project. I reorganized the original manuscript and suggested additions and deletions, but this book is entirely my mother's work, and it is her voice that readers hear. The majority of my contribution concerns Ojibwe words, phrases, and plant names. Readers do learn about me, however: I am the child my mother refers to in various stories as "my daughter Makoons."

Plant Names

Ojibwe plant names are used throughout this book. All of the Ojibwe plant names that Keewaydinoquay gave to my mother are here, plus in some cases names from other sources are used, especially for plants for which Keewaydinoquay did not know an Ojibwe name. The names from other sources are included

out of respect for Keewaydinoquay, who always tried to use as many Ojibwe names as possible in her lectures. Whenever possible, Ojibwe plant names have been retranscribed into the double vowel writing system and translated. Occasionally Keewaydinoquay remembered only an English translation for an Ojibwe name, and these are included in quotation marks in the section headings. When a plant name refers to the spirit of a plant or a formal greeting to a plant (such as Nookomis Giizhik, My Grandmother Cedar), it is capitalized; otherwise it is not. English common names and scientific names are also provided for identification purposes; in the section headings, these names appear on their own lines so that readers will not confuse them with translations of Ojibwe names. More detailed information on these names is included in the book's glossary.

Ojibwe Names

Ojibwe names, also called Indian names, appear throughout this text. Out of respect for these names and the people known by them, no attempt has been made to standardize their spelling; the spellings in this book follow how the individuals choose to spell their own names or how other texts spell these names.

Notes

Keewaydinoquay was the source of most of the information in this book. She was an expert on Anishinaabe culture and medicine, and this book acknowledges that. For areas in which Keewaydinoquay was not an expert (for example, stories about how other peoples work with these plants), notes have been added for verification and to provide sources for further information. We intend no disrespect for Keewaydinoquay; we simply know that she would want all the information in the book to be accurate.

Acknowledgments

The knowledge that has been recorded in these pages has come to us through countless generations of the Gete-anishinaabeg, the Old Ones, our ancestors, and the Aadizookaanag, the spirits who hold our teachings, including those of the plants, trees, and animals who brought this knowledge to our ancestors. We first

and foremost would like to say Miigwech, thank you, to all of them.

We also respectfully say Miigwech to Keewaydinoquay, who so graciously brought these teachings to us, her ancestral teachers, and all those who taught them including: MidéOgema, her grandfather, and Nodjimahkwe, her herb mother and teacher.

Finally, we would like to say Miigwech to the elders who took their time to help us create the most accurate list of Ojibwe words possible for this book. They are introduced here as they asked to be identified. Miigwech to the late Kenneth Johnson Sr., from Seine River First Nation in Ontario, Canada; the late George McGeshick Sr., from the Mole Lake Sokaogon Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe and Chief of the Chicaugon Chippewa of Iron River, Michigan; Dora Dorothy Whipple, Leech Lake Elder; Ma-nee Chacaby, a two-spirit elder from Animikiwiikwedong, Thunder Bay, Ontario; and a woman who wished to be identified only as "Rose, an elder from Canada."