**Turtle Island**

One legend is the creation of Turtle Island which represents North America. The Anishinabe see themselves as the original humans of North America.

Long ago, after the Great Spirit Kitchi-Manitou created human kind, the Anishinabe wandered away from their peaceful ways and began to fight amongst themselves. Brother fought against brother and sister fought against sister. Gone were the peoples’ harmonious ways. Discord, jealousy and bitterness ruled the people. Seeing that the people had lost their peaceful ways and there was no longer respect for all living beings, Kitchi-Mantiou decided to cleanse the Earth by bringing about a flood that drowned the Anishinabe people and most of the animals. This flood was known as mush-ko-be-wun.

The only person to survive the flood was Nanaboozhoo and a few animals that could swim or fly. Nanaboozhoo floated on a log and searched for land. No land could be found because the entire Earth had been flooded. As Nanaboozhoo was very kind, he allowed the remaining animals to take turns resting on the log.

Nanaboozhoo spoke and said, “I am going to dive to the bottom of the water and grab a handful of earth. With this earth, we could make a new land on which to live”. Nanaboozhoo dived into the water and disappeared for a long time. The animals waited and waited. They thought that he had drowned. Finally, Nanaboozhoo surfaced, gasping for air, and muttered, “the water is too deep for me to reach the bottom”.

Then “Mahng” the Loon spoke, “I can dive deep into the water that is how I catch my food. I will try to make it to the bottom and return with some Earth in my beak.”

The Loon made a clean dive into the water. After a few long minutes, only small bubbles of air broke the surface of the water. Finally after what seemed like the longest time, the Loon returned to the surface weakened and out of breath. “I could not make it, there must be no bottom to the water.” said the Loon

Next to try was Zhing-bi-biss, the helldiver. “Everyone knows that I can dive very well into deep water” and off went the helldiver head first into the water. After another long period of time, during which the animals scanned the surface of still water, the helldiver floated to the surface, unconscious. After he was revived, he too recounted how the water was too deep for him to reach the bottom.

After that, many more animals tried to reach the bottom to bring much needed earth to the surface. No one succeeded. Even Zhon-gwayzh, the mink and Mizhee-kay the turtle tried, but to no avail.

Then after it seemed that no one would be able to reach the bottom and bring earth to the surface in order to create a new beginning for all the living things, a soft muffled voice was heard to say, “I can do it”. To everyones astonishment, they looked about trying to see who had just spoken. It was Wazhusk the muskrat who came forward. Again he repeated, “I’ll try”. Some of the other larger, more powerful animals mocked the little muskrat. Nanaboozhoo spoke, reminding everyone that only Kitchi-Manitou can place judgment on others. Like the others, Wazhusk the muskrat must be given the chance to contribute.

Off into the water went the muskrat. Soon the wave that formed after he dived into the water disappeared and the water was perfectly still. He stayed underwater for what was the longest time. However, underneath the water, the muskrat had indeed reached the bottom. Feeling exhausted and with his lungs screaming for air, he grabbed some Earth in his paw and used all his remaining might and strength to return to the surface.

On the surface of the water, everyone waited and waited for what seemed an eternity. Finally, the muskrat’s body floated to the surface. Nanaboozhoo pulled the motionless body on to the log. “Brothers and sisters”, said Nanaboozhoo, “muskrat went too long without air and he is now dead”. A song of mourning and praise was heard across the water as the muskrat’s spirit passed on to the spirit world. Suddenly, Nanaboozhoo realized that the muskrat’s paw was clenched tightly. He carefully opened the small paw and then realizing what the muskrat held so tightly exclaimed in amazement, “Look there is a small ball of earth in muskrat’s paw!” All the other animals gathered around in awe and excitement. They all shouted with joyfulness, Muskrat sacrificed his life so that life on Earth could begin anew.

Nanaboozhoo took the ball of earth and held it in his hand. Just then, the turtle swam forward and said Use my back to bear the weight of this piece of Earth. With the help of Kitchi-Manitou, we can make a new earth. Nanaboozhoo put the small piece of earth on the turtles back. Suddenly, the wind blew from the Four Directions. The tiny ball of earth started to grow. It grew and grew until it formed a mi-ni-si or island in the water. The island grew larger and larger, heavier and heavier, but still the turtle bore the weight of the earth on his back. Nanaboozhoo and all the animals danced in a widening circle and sang songs of praise on the growing island. After a while, the Four Winds ceased to blow and the water became still. A huge island sat in the middle of the water and that island today is known to us as North America.

Many First Nations Peoples, including the Ojibway hold special respect for the turtle who sacrificed his life so that the Earths people could have a second chance. And not to be forgotten, the muskrat has been given a good life too. Though many marshes have been drained and the homes of many muskrat have been lost as mankind continues to spread his influence over the earth, the muskrat continues to survive. The muskrats do their part too in remembering the great flood. They build their homes in the shape of the little ball of earth that Wazhusk had bravely grabbed from the bottom of the depths.