

Adaptations Future Conference testimonial

Oct 2023

Aanii, biindigen. Aiyana n'dizhnikaz, M'Chigeeng minwaa Mnidoo Mnising donjibaa, Ottawa minwaa Algonquin territory didaa, Anishinabe-kwe ndao!

My name is Aiyana, I am from M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulin Island located in Northeastern Ontario. I currently live in Ottawa as a visitor on Algonquin territory. I am Ojibwe.

In the summer of 2021, I worked for a non-profit organization that focused on the rehabilitation, enhancement, and protection of cold-water streams and river ecosystems on Manitoulin Island and the surrounding Great Lakes. The title of my position was "Waterkeeper". In this role I brought an Indigenous feminine perspective to our projects. My favourite part of that summer was organizing a water walk.

A water walk is of much significance for the Anishinabe, and I had to make sure I carried out the ceremony in the right way. So, I looked to the people in my life who held this knowledge, and who would support me. My mother, my auntie, and my Nookmis.

These women who have taught me what it means to be an Anishinaabe kwe. Water is fundamental to all life on Earth. In our creation story, water was here before land, animals, and people. We are held in the water within our mother's womb, and through its current, we are delivered into this physical world. We cannot exist without it and therefore it is our duty to take care of it.

For the water walk, I carried a copper pot of freshwater from one shoreline to the other, my aunt, mother, and Nookmis beside me. Once we reached the other shoreline, we offered prayers and thanked the spirits in all 4 directions, before releasing negative feelings that no longer served us as we plunged into the water.

I am filled with gratitude for the teachings that have been shared with me by my family and elders in the community, and am in awe to have led a ceremonial walk for water, like so many other water protectors have done.

I remember learning about Josephin Mandamin in class, the founding member of the water protectors movement from Wikemkoong First Nation, about a 30 minute drive from my community. I am inspired by Autumn Peltier, a young water protector also from Wikemkoong. It is these women amongst many others who have shown me that I too can be a steward for the water.

Indigenous women have always and continue to play vital roles in protecting our waters and ancestral ways of life. Our roles as the original stewards of this land has is ancient, and we will continue to pass down our knowledge through the generations, creating a ripple of benefits to our environment. One drop at a time.

Migwetch.

AIYANA LOUIS

