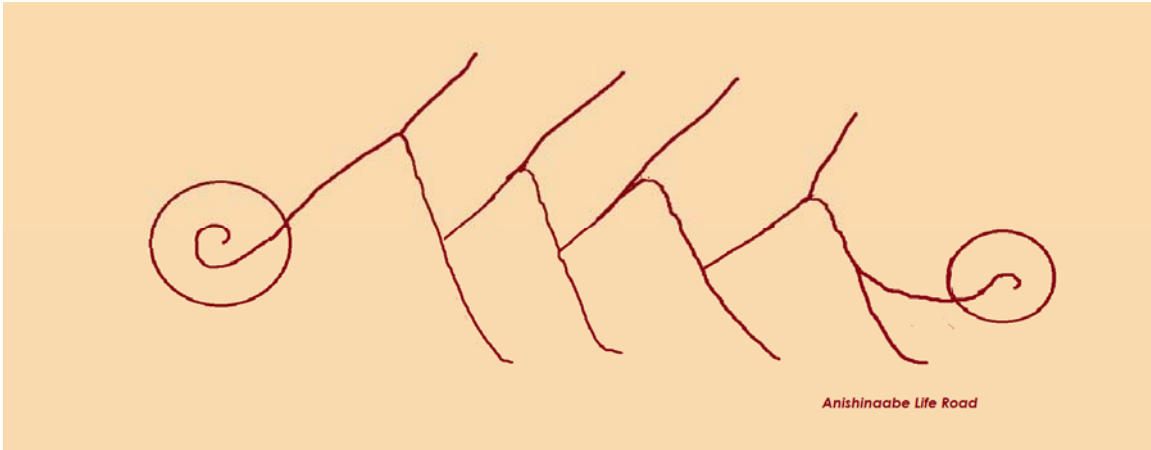

VIGNETTE
Invited Contribution



This figure is a depiction of the Anishinaabe Life Road by Rasunah Marsden. “This trail of life was originally depicted by the ancestors on ancient, holy birch bark scrolls, as a stylized path with seven or nine digressions or lines leading from life’s main trail. Kept safely within the caches of the Mide spiritual practices, the teachings of the True Path of Life have been passed down for many centuries.” (Giizhik)

The Way I Hunt

RASUNAH MARSDEN

A few decades back I had a conversation with a hunter. The following excerpt describes the gist of that conversation, which started with his giving me an explanation of the term:

Manidoo-minjimendamowin - Spirit Memory...the spirit memory transcends time and space, all the experiences of that individual’s ancestors can be revealed in his lifetime.... [accompanied by] other forms of listening which accompany intuition, dreams and vision. (Nokomis 2007)

Well, of course, I hunt where the animals are, in the bush. The first thing I do is take a walk through the forest. I’m just very quiet. But I will shake a few bushes to see if anything falls out. If something does, even if it is just a single leaf, I take stock of its

place, where it is, where it might have come from, who might have noticed it, how it might have gotten there, and so on. I might do this a few times, listening for both nearby and the distance, all the while.

Sometimes I am guided, without rattling any bushes my ears prick up when something goes still. I know the size of it and where I can locate it and how far away it is from the stillness. It won't move again until it determines whether I'm friendly or not. If it doesn't know, it will take only a few steps initially. All this happens invisibly.

If I'm really guided, one of the animals will move as I move, in a direction parallel to the direction I am taking, perhaps because it is curious, or maybe young, or both. Or instead, I will be the first to become aware of it and I will move as it moves, at the same pace.

But then I will start focusing on decreasing the distance, ever so slightly, between myself and this animal. The spirit animal in the both of us will determine whether this is safe, whether the intruder will become a threat or not. But it's not really necessary to pay attention to an intruder until the end.

With the final movement to capture the animal (by the throat, or by any means, for example) you become locked in the understanding that one of you will determine the outcome and the other will be required to submit.

I must tell you I once wrestled a huge wolf which had been stalking me at the top of a rise in the forest, many years ago. He had been following in such a friendly way, at first mostly unseen, then seen for not much more than a hundred yards, before making a final run and a lunging, menacing leap. It was such a shock, in a split second I knew the only way to stop the attack was to catch him by the throat and start squeezing. The struggle was such a life-or-death struggle for both of us that I never forgot it.

But to go back to my story (not the story within the story), it is instinct or intuition or *Manidoo-minjimendamowin* which taught me these things because I never went hunting with anyone else, and from the time I was struggling with the wolf, I always knew when an animal was there or not. It's as though the only way to be successful as a hunter is to know how it is to be hunted, what points you might escape, what points you might draw nearer, and so on.

Basically the first point to aim for is to 'lock directions'. Once you have understood how to lock directions, you can only become more and more accomplished at decreasing the distance. Next you decrease distance incrementally until the animal is in sight.

These days a lot of people don't like the idea of hunting and killing animals but if never doing so became a matter of life or death, they might think twice about it. In the old days, before and after setting out on a hunt, there were all kinds of preparations to be made. You sort of had to learn how to go about these things, or pretty soon, you would not find any animals in your territory. They would have lost their respect for you.

These days I just rely on "*Manidoo-Waaniwin* - Revealed Knowledge...The Anishinaabe refers to this as that which means seeing in a Spirit Way." (Nokomis, 2007)

The Way I Research

In order to do research well, you need to use whatever resources you have to hand. One of the resources I use is *Manidoo-minjimendamowin* - spirit memory. It puts me in tune with how my ancestors did things in the old days, and how they were able to find sustenance and resources. When younger I was surprised to find I had a memory of ancestors who I had never met, but I learned that they were calling me, or they would send me 'gifts' – such as knowledge and visions, intuition, dreams. Eventually I learned how to access this area of my psyche whenever I wanted to 'know' something. This is kind of a relationship which is spirit-to-spirit...either you have a visitor or you are the visitor...

You would not immediately think this was important unless this was a matter of surviving or not surviving. Spirit Memory, therefore, is a crucial survival skill.

Well, of course, I identify where the information is, in known repositories. The first thing I do is take a walk through libraries and resources of all kinds. I'm just very quiet. But I will examine a few articles to see if anything in them strikes a chord. If something does, even if it is just a single note struck, I take stock of its location, where it is positioned, where the idea might have originated, who might have studied it, how it might have been carried forward, and so on. I might repeat this activity a few times, taking further scope of the literature, all the while.

Sometimes I am guided, and without much effort, I can amass a lot of knowledge speedily. I will assess the amount of it and where it can be located and whether some of it will be difficult to obtain - in silence, without any human intervention. New information won't present itself again until it determines whether I'm 'ready' or not. If the information I need is not immediately available, it will take more than a single effort to provide a few glimpses initially. When I'm ready, the details will 'reveal themselves'. All of these activities happen in silence.

If I'm really guided, the literature I select will move with me, in a direction parallel to the direction I am taking, perhaps because there is something curious about it, or recent, or both. Or instead, I will be the first to become aware of it emerging and I will follow it as it is generated, at the same pace.

But then I will start focusing on decreasing the distance, ever so slightly, between myself and the ideas I am studying. I will listen to the *Aadizookaan*, the spirit of the story. The *Aadizookaan* is "a being who has existed from time immemorial and has always been available for social interaction with the Anishinaabeg... In some cases *Aadizookaan* can communicate directly with an individual through a dream path. In the dream the spoken word is replaced by the implicit meaning of the thought." (Nokomis, 2007). The *Aadizookaan* to be found in both the researcher and the research and will determine whether the knowledge is safe or whether an intruder will become a threat or not. But it's not really necessary to pay attention to an intruder until the final stages of the research work.

In the final stages of apprehending the literature (by various means of analysis, for example) you become locked in the understanding that you will shape the research or the research will shape you.

I must tell you I once wrestled with a huge amount of classified technical research which I had been immersed in, many years ago, as part of a military curriculum development team. The information seemed mostly benign, until the specter of what I was 'not' writing about became visible. It was such a shock, in the split second I understood the only way to deal with the curriculum (which gave no warning of the danger in maintaining certain systems - the rocket ejection seat, for example,) I decided that the only way to decrease the threat to life was to question the "need to know" classifications used by the curriculum designers team and push to change it. The ensuing struggle was such a life-or-death struggle for all concerned, especially those who would follow the curriculum, that I never forgot it.

But to go back to my story (not the story within the story), it is instinct or intuition or *Manidoo-minjimendamowin* which taught me how to do these things because I was never taught how to do research, I never did research with anyone else, and from the time I was struggling with the curriculum team director, I always knew when sufficient information was provided or not. It's as though the only way to be successful as a researcher is to know how it is to be handled, what points you might avoid, what points you might elucidate more clearly, and so on.

Basically the first point to aim for is to have a specific focus. Once you have understood how to find it and use it, you can only become more and more accomplished at decreasing the distance between yourself and the materials which are needed both for yourself and the research community. Next you decrease distance incrementally until the end of the process is in sight.

These days a lot of people don't like the idea of engaging with and executing (dense) research but if never doing so became a matter which involved life or death consequences, they might think twice about it. In the early days, before and after setting out on a research project, there were all kinds of preparations to be made. You sort of had to learn how to go about these things, or pretty soon, you would not be able to find the information you needed in the territory or domains you had selected. You would not be surprised that the chance to apprehend it had vanished. Your own lack of expertise in research would have defeated you.

These days I just rely on "*Manidoo-Waaniwin* - Revealed Knowledge... the Anishinaabe refers to this as that which means seeing in a Spirit Way" (Nokomis, 2007).

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About the Author:

Rasunah Marsden completed her Masters of Education at UBC in November 2013 and has worked in Aboriginal post-secondary educational institutions in B.C. for over 10 years as a board member, associate dean, program coordinator and instructor. She has been awarded for her contributions to literature and education by her First Nations community (Anishinaabe). Earlier she worked overseas as a technical and advertising writer, ESL instructor and adult and high school language instructor in Jakarta, Brisbane, and Sydney. Her educational background also includes a Post Graduate Diploma of Design (University of Technology, New South Wales), Professional Teacher Training (UBC), coursework for the Master of Fine Arts (UBC) and a BA (Eng) from SFU. She is also an established, anthologized Native poet and prose writer, and editor of *Crisp Blue Edges*, Canada's first collection of creative non-fiction, published by Theytus Books in the year 2000. *Dancing the Rounds*, her collection of poetry, was published by Dreamstairway (U.K.) in 2011.

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