

1. I'm writing this down so I don't forget. I want to be one of those seventy-year-old women with their photo albums and old diaries, the ones who can recite stories from when they were children or from even further back. Migizi used to say things like "we are future ancestors" all the time.

I think about that a lot.

2. I started thinking about this the other day and it occurred to me that maybe what we need is an instruction book. *How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls*. Or maybe, *An Indigenous Futurist's Guide to Life*. The first one was my idea, because that's what I am, a Native girl surviving the apocalypse (that's what Migizi liked to call it). But then my kookum told me about this old movement from when she was my age. She said that a long time ago, Black people invented something called Afrofuturism. The Afrofuturists imagined the future, but not just any future. They imagined ways that they could get free, ways they could hold their ancestors and descendants in the same hands. And my kookum said that other Indigenous people thought this was a beautiful thing, so they began calling their imaginings Indigenous futurisms.

My kookum said that sometimes there were border wars. Sometimes, the border wars were literal. I know this because my girlfriend Shanay is Black and Anishinaabe and the Nation didn't want to let her grandma in when she was little, because she didn't have papers. Apparently papers used to be very important. Migizi, who always knew about history things even though they weren't even old, said now we have Kinship instead, but I don't think Migizi always liked Kinship either because sometimes they would argue with council members about it. My kookum won't tell me but I'm pretty sure that's why Migizi had to leave. Because they argued too much.

3. Here is my first instruction: when the apocalypse happens, make sure you bring your kookum. Mine is named Alicia. She doesn't have an Anishinaabe name, because when she was born they were only starting to get them back. You're going to want your kookum when the apocalypse happens because kookums know everything. Mooshums do too but they can get bossy and think they're right all the time, like the council does. Kookums secretly *know* that they're right all the time, but they also know that different teachings are correct.

Oh—maybe I should make that another instruction. That one is important.

3.5. Different teachings are correct. My kookum says she learned this from an old lady she knew as a kid, a woman from Nigigoonsiminikaaning who taught her the language and also how to set snares, which is really useful after the apocalypse. My kookum named me in her honour, Nigig, after the community she came from. The woman from Nigigoonsiminikaaning told my kookum (and lots of other people) that everyone is taught in a different way. You can't say that one teaching is the only correct one, because then you would be putting down someone else's teaching.

I think this is a good instruction, but sometimes I wonder about it. Migizi told me that a long time ago, around the same time when Indigenous futurism was invented, there were the Skirt Wars. They weren't actual wars, unlike the border wars, but people argued a lot then, about whether Native girls have to wear skirts to ceremony, and how 2spirit people should act during ceremony. Migizi always looked really upset by the Skirt Wars stories, and I don't blame them. They're 2spirit, too, even though I am ekwewaadizid and they are eniniiwaa-dizid. I wonder if anyone ever told Migizi that they had to wear a skirt to ceremony.

4. Maybe I should start off with what I know. If someone (such as a Native girl living after the apocalypse) finds this, how can I guarantee they know about what happened? Will they know about the border wars and the hungry years? Will they know about Kinship and about the council?

I just realized, they won't know who Migizi was. Oh.

5. I've decided that everything is too much. Also, I'm not sure that I know everything. So I will ask my kookum later. But I can tell you (the future Native girl reading this) about me. I was born to the Crane Clan during the Bakadeng, what people who speak English call the hungry years. I was born near the end of the Bakadeng, which started when my parents were young adults after the other kind of borders collapsed, the one they used to call the Medicine Line. As a kid I used to look at the old papers, all of them written in English, that my family had to carry around when they crossed those borders. It was my way of remembering my parents, who died when I was only a baby. Now I travel around Anishinaabewaki with my kookum, with no papers needed at all. I'm sixteen years old and when I grow up I'm going to be a storyteller like Migizi.

Migizi. That's the name of my best friend. Migizi was born before me by many years, but we've been friends as long as I can remember. When I was little Migizi used to tell me stories about 2spirit people from a long time ago. I used to think they knew every Anishinaabe 2spirit who ever lived.

Migizi was the one who helped me realize that 2spirit is a thing I could be. That I could be a Native girl—that I could even be a Native girl who loves other girls! What a wonderful discovery.

Not everyone liked Migizi as much as I did. They were the one who gave me this book, though, so I feel like I should explain about them. When Migizi got their new name, the elders decided to name them after Eagle. I don't know why they did that, but it always reminds me of this story about Eagle. You know, the one where Eagle flies around the earth every day to make sure there is at least one person putting down tobacco and being a good person? See, Migizi has this thing about them. They are trying so hard to always be a good person that it makes everyone around them want to be a better person too.

6. Here's an instruction: Love is good. Today I saw Shanay again for the first time in a few months. My kookum and I travel around so she can do ceremony for people, and also because she's the gossip of Anishinaabewaki and has to know everything about everyone so they can ask her what's going on far away in Baawitigong or Onigamiinsing or Obishikokaang. Shanay just lives in Miskoziibiing all the time because she's studying with her grandma to become a doctor. Shanay's grandma is one of the best doctors, because she was trained both Anishinaabe-way and in one of the old universities before the borders broke down. She likes to joke that it's a good thing the apocalypse happened, because that way she didn't have to pay off her student loans, which were apparently a thing that, like money, used to be a big problem for people.

So I saw Shanay and I was reminded about Love. Love is part of Kinship laws—it is the Kinship laws. Of course in reality Kinship is just as much about hating each other and messing each other up as it is about loving each other, but without Love there wouldn't be any Kinship at all.

When I saw Shanay today, she said, “Wow, Nigig, I almost forgot how gorgeous you are.” I blushed a lot, could feel the warmth in my face. Then she pulled me into her arms and kissed my nose and my cheeks and finally my mouth and I melted.

That's Love.

7. I met Shanay at the 2spirit youth potluck in Miskoziibiing that Migizi took me to a while after we had the feast announcing I was a girl. She sat down in the chair next to me and gave me a little smile, and we introduced ourselves to each other.

“I'm from here originally, but my kookum and I were living in Onigamiinsing last year,” I told her. Then I corrected myself. “Well, Baawitigong a little bit too. Oh, and before that, Nogojiwanong.”

“Wow, you've been all over!” Shanay smiled ruefully and sighed. “I've lived here my whole life. My grandma's dad was from the south, outside Anishinaabewaki, and I've always wanted to learn about other places, but the truth is I get nervous even when I go too far outside Miskoziibiing for fasting.”

“Aww, well, that's because you're fasting, you're all alone in the woods!” I reached out a hand and touched her shoulder. She blinked for a second, her face a little flushed, and I quickly pulled away, not sure what had gotten into me. I coughed, and continued, “Travelling can be lonely too. But when you're doing it with someone you love ... that's when it's the best.”

As she opened her mouth to reply, Shanay was drowned out by the sound of Migizi on the hand drum. Around us everyone was circling

up for a round dance. I stood up, and made an awkward gesture at the crowd. “You wanna ...?”

For a terrifying second I thought she might say no. But then Shanay got up and, as she headed toward the circle, she turned just enough to grab my hand and tug me along with her.

We danced every song that night, and my hand never left hers, the warmth spreading from the place where we touched throughout my whole body. We’ve been inseparable ever since.

8. Shanay and I talked for a long time after I got back to Miskoziibiing. I told her about this book that I’m writing and she had some suggestions, so here are her ideas.

SHANAY’S SUGGESTION #1: “Everyone has ancestors, but not everyone knows theirs.” This is very wise, I think. I know most of my ancestors going way back because of the old papers from the Nation and from the government that existed before the Nation, but because of the border wars, some people don’t have those records, like Shanay. And some people, like Migizi, don’t have kookums to tell them the stories.

SHANAY’S SUGGESTION #2: She thinks I should talk more about Kinship. Shanay is a little bitter about Kinship, like Migizi, except she has even more reason to be bitter since her grandma was originally rejected from the Nation. See, when the borders broke, people decided that Kinship should be our main law instead. Except the problem was that Kinship means different things to different people. And sometimes people who should see each other as kin, inawemaagan, reject each other. That’s what happened to Shanay’s grandma, until one of the clan leaders adopted her.

SHANAY'S SUGGESTION #3: "You talk a lot about Migizi." That's what she said. I think she means I talk too much about Migizi. When she said this to me, I felt my face harden. It was the opposite of melting.

"What is wrong with talking about Migizi?" I asked her. She made an expression that was sad and disappointed and fond at the same time.

"Nigig," she told me. "You have to move on. Talking about Migizi all the time isn't going to bring them back."

"Migizi isn't dead," I said to her. Her face became pinched like she had bitten a lemon (a fruit I tasted once recently which is very tart). Then she rubbed her eyes very hard and when she looked up again I could see that there were some tears there. Migizi was my best friend but I forget sometimes that other people loved them too.

Shanay took my hand in her hand and squeezed. "Nigig," she said again. "You have to learn to live with what is here *now*. You have to just *be*."

9. Sometimes Love is not so good. When that happens Kinship can sometimes help, and sometimes it can hurt. That is what happened to Migizi.

I still don't know when Migizi was born, but I know they came of age around the time I was born, during the Bakadeng. We call that time the hungry years not just because people often went without enough food, but also because there was often another kind of hunger. The kind of hunger that causes people to do terrible things: wiindigo hunger.

Here is a teaching about wiindigoog for you: Wiindigoog are more than just cannibals. They are possessed by a hunger that only increases every time they try to fill it. That hunger can be for anything—food, drugs, sex, love, but most of all, power. Migizi's parents were the kind of people who were infected by the wiindigo spirit of the Bakadeng. Migizi never talked about it, not even with me, but they had scars on their hands and arms like burn marks. They wore long sleeves to cover

them most days, but they stood out if you noticed them, still faintly redder than the brown of Migizi's skin.

Once, when I first met Migizi, I asked them where they grew up. Migizi's eyes went a little blurry, like they were looking far into the distance. Their breath turned shallow and their whole body tensed. They reminded me of how deer react when they spot you in the woods with a gun. I stood still, as though my own sudden moves might scare Migizi just like one of those deer.

"A place that doesn't exist anymore," Migizi said finally, their breath starting to deepen again.

"Where did it go?" I asked. I was just a kid and didn't know how to read the words in Migizi's face.

For a long moment I didn't think Migizi was going to answer me. They were still staring ahead, not looking at me, their lips held tightly shut. But then they said, very quietly, "It was consumed by wiindi-goog." And they refused to say anything else.

It wasn't until I began to realize that I was not the boy everyone thought I was that Migizi told me more. When I told them I was going to talk to my kookum to see if we could have a feast for me being a girl, Migizi's jaw became tense and they were silent for a minute.

"Nigig," they said to me, "I'm going to tell you something, and I don't want to scare you. But it's something you should know about."

Which made me scared just on principle. But then Migizi told me. They told me about how they had asked their parents, as a young teenager, if they could cut their hair and ask an elder for a new name, one that didn't end in kwe. They told me about how their mother had cried and their father had screamed, how they had left in the dead of night. They told me how the people they had grown up with, their close and extended kin, had one by one shut their doors in Migizi's face, even though it was winter in Anishinaabewaki.



“I survived that night,” Migizi said slowly. “I went west to Miskoziibiing, found another 2spirit who showed me safe places to sleep.”

“Why are you telling me this?” I whispered.

Migizi reached out suddenly, wrapped an arm around me, and smooshed me against their shoulder. “I just want you to know, Nigig. I want you to know that for some people, inawemaagan doesn’t include people like me and you.”

I didn’t want to understand then. “But the Kinship laws—”

I could feel Migizi shake their head. “Kinship is a two-sided coin, Nigig. You always gotta ask yourself, who is being excluded here?”

10. Instruction inspired by today: Watch those in power carefully. That is what my kookum always tells me when she makes me attend council even though I’m not old enough to participate yet. I’ve been going since I was little. That’s where I first saw Migizi, actually. They were arguing with the council, of course, even back then when they were just my age.

Today Shanay, her grandma, my kookum, and I all went to the western door council meeting. It was my first time at council without Migizi, and I tried not to think about that too hard. Shanay’s grandma gave a report on the situation in the Miskoziibiing hospital, and a lot of people frowned while listening. Shanay’s hand gripped mine tightly the entire time. I didn’t miss the looks a few people gave Shanay and her grandma when they walked in. A little tension in the room flowed out when Shanay’s grandma started talking—she is one of the few people of my kookum’s generation who grew up speaking Anishinaabemowin, and her accent is flawless. Still, my other hand, the one not holding Shanay’s, curled around the edge of my seat until my knuckles started to hurt. The news about the hospital wasn’t so good.

One of the council members, a woman from Eagle Clan, stood up after Shanay’s grandma. Her voice filled the room even without shouting.

“Perhaps supplies wouldn’t be so low,” she said, looking straight at Shanay’s grandmother, “if you weren’t treating every single stranger who comes to your door.”

There were quiet gasps, but just as many people seemed to be nodding. The word she used for stranger was *meyaagizid*—someone who was not kin.

Shanay’s grandma looked right back at her and said in her forever-steady voice, “Since it was established, the Miskoziibiing hospital has *always* made it our policy to treat *all* who need our services. Whether they are *inawemaagan* or *meyaagizid*.”

The Eagle Clan woman’s face was stormy. “Policy it may be.” Her tone was slow, deliberate, and a little vicious. “But all must still abide by the laws of Kinship within Anishinaabewaki.”

“Kinship does not exclude kindness toward strangers,” my kookum said loudly, standing up next to Shanay’s grandma. The Eagle Clan woman’s frown deepened. I think she realized she was facing two respected women who were her elders, and that the very Kinship laws she was arguing for insisted she defer to them. She sat down hard and began whispering furiously to the council members next to her.

My kookum leaned over then and said very low in my ear the instruction that I just shared: Watch those in power carefully. That’s why I wrote this down. And my kookum was right, because writing it down made me remember that Migizi was from Eagle Clan, and the woman who argued with Shanay’s grandma was the one in charge of their fate.

11. Sometimes, when it’s the apocalypse, you have to just do things for yourself.

My kookum won’t tell me about what happened to Migizi. When I ask, she gets a very pained expression on her face, and refuses to speak