

Mi'kmaq Moons

The Seasons in Mi'kma'ki



Cathy LeBlanc and David Chapman
Illustrated by Loretta Gould

The Mi'kmaq have long tracked the changing seasons using the Moon. The new Moon phase marks the beginning of a lunar month named after events in the natural world. *Squoljuiku's* – or Frogs Croaking Time – is the springtime month when peeper frogs can be heard in Mi'kma'ki. Mate Calling Time – or *Wikumkewiku's* – is the time of year when moose are mating.

In this book, Cathy LeBlanc and David Chapman reflect this traditional knowledge and present it in accessible stories for young readers. Accompanying each of the stories of the annual cycle of 12 Moons are stunning paintings by Mi'kmaq artist Loretta Gould.

Mi'kmaq Lunar Months are maintained alongside the familiar and globally used Gregorian calendar. Cathy and David underscore the value of “Two-Eyed Seeing” which values and draws on the knowledge of different cultures.





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Wikumkewiku's
Mate Calling Time



Wikewiku's
Animal Fattening Time



Keptekewiku's
Rivers Freezing Over Time



Kjiku's
Chief Moon



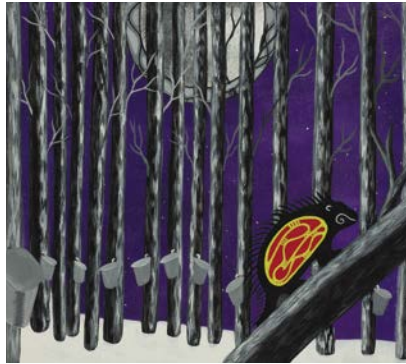
Punamujuiku's
Tomcod Spawning Time



Apuknajit
Snow Blinding Time



Siwkewiku's
Spring Time



Penatmuiku's
Birds Laying Eggs Time



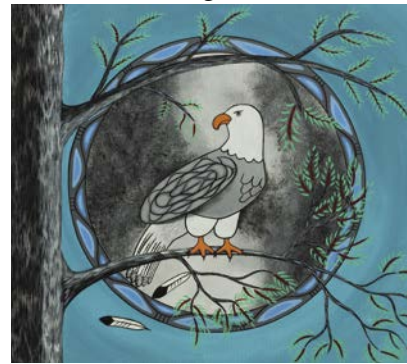
Sqoljuiku's
Frogs Croaking Time



Nipniku's
Trees Fully Leafed Time



Peskewiku's
Birds Shedding Feathers Time



Kisikewiku's
Berry Ripening Time



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Cathy LeBlanc and David Chapman

Illustrated by Loretta Gould

Formac Publishing Company Limited
Halifax

To my father, the brightest light that shines down on me. – C.L.

To my wife, Christine, our number-one fan. – D.C.

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Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	5
Pjila'si Mi'kma'ki – Welcome to Mi'kma'ki	5
The Role of Stories in Mi'kmaw Life	6
Patterns in Nature	8
Using the Moon to Track Months	9
PART I: The Mi'kmaw Seasons and Moons	10
TOQWA'Q – Autumn	12
Wikumkewiku's – Mate Calling Time	14
Wikewiku's – Animal Fattening Time	16
Keptekewiku's – Rivers Freezing Over Time	18
KESIK – Winter	20
Kjiku's – Chief Moon	22
Punamujuiku's – Tomcod Spawning Time	24
Apuknajit – Snow Blinding Time	26
SIWKW – Spring	28
Siwkewiku's – Spring Time	30
Penatmuiku's – Birds Laying Eggs Time	32
Sqoljuiku's – Frogs Croaking Time	34
NIPK – Summer	36
Nipniku's – Trees Fully Leafed Time	38
Peskewiku's – Birds Shedding Feathers Time	40
Kisikewiku's – Berry Ripening Time	42
In Search of the Thirteenth Moon	44
PART II: Two-Eyed Seeing – Using Both the Sun and Moon	46
Etuaptmumk – Two-Eyed Seeing	48
The World's Calendars	49
Lunar Calendars of the World	50
Glossary of Key Terms	54
Further Reading	55
Acknowledgments and Visual Credits	56

Preface

This book is a labour of love by two dear friends and project partners. For over nine years, we spent our spare time researching the role of the Moon in Mi'kmaw culture. We shared our findings with all who cared to listen. In many ways, we are completely different individuals – gender, age, education, origins, and race – but we are alike in the most important way: we have a shared passion for learning, understanding, and teaching about the Mi'kmaw Lunar Months. This journey and the response of our audiences have transformed us both.

Our project began simply, when Dave went to Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site to help launch the Dark-Sky Preserve (DSP). There he met Cathy, a Parks Canada cultural interpreter. The collaboration between Parks Canada and the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) was successful, and the DSP was declared in 2010. Since that time, Dave and other RASC volunteers have supported the dark-sky programs at Kejimikujik, especially the annual Dark-Sky Weekend. One thing led to another, and soon Dave and Cathy were sharing with each other their knowledge of the night sky and Mi'kmaw ways. Each had much to learn from the other, and the *Mi'kmaw Moons* project began slowly, through long, patient, respectful conversations. This project partnership has resulted in countless presentations on Mi'kmaw Lunar Months to all ages, a Facebook page, a set of language videos on YouTube, and an award-winning essay in the *Griffith Observer*, a well-respected astronomy periodical published in Los Angeles.

From the beginning, we knew this book would tell stories, the traditional means of keeping and sharing Indigenous knowledge. These are supported by science. We employ the principle of *Etuaptmumk*/Two-Eyed Seeing, where traditional Indigenous knowledge and modern science each guide the other toward a better appreciation of the subject matter. This approach informs all aspects of our project.

We have been assisted, guided, and encouraged on our journey by so many: Cheryl Bartlett, Laurie Lacey, Gerald Gloade, Tim Bernard, Curtis L. Michael, Roy Bishop, Chris Young, Michelle Fitzsimmons, Elder Dr. Albert Marshall. To all, *wela'lioq*, thank you.

We are delighted that Formac Publishing invited us to help create this book, which was always a dream of ours. We were also pleased to work with the acquiring editor Kara Turner, who has always been a keen supporter of the project, and illustrator Loretta Gould, whose vivid and beautiful artwork complements our words and brings them to life. Many thanks also to Heather Epp and her production team for finalizing this book for publication with their creative insights. We hope you enjoy the teachings in this book as much as we enjoyed sharing them.

– Cathy LeBlanc and Dave Chapman

Introduction

Pjila'si Mi'kma'ki

WELCOME TO MI'KMA'KI



The Mi'kmaq are a First Nation of Indigenous people whose territory, called Mi'kma'ki, includes Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, parts of Newfoundland and Quebec. The Mi'kmaq have lived in Mi'kma'ki for thousands of years, long before it was called Atlantic Canada, or the British and French came and forced the Mi'kmaq to change their way of life. The Mi'kmaq often refer to themselves as L'nu'k, the People.

Make it meaningful

Try saying these Mi'kmaw words

Pjila'si

(ip-jill-laah-see)

A welcome greeting

Mi'kma'ki

(meeg-gm-maw-gee)

The Mi'kmaq live in Mi'kma'ki, which includes Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec, parts of New Brunswick, and parts of Newfoundland.

Mi'kmaq

(meeg-gm-mawg)

Used for plural (more than one Mi'kmaw person, place, or thing). The whole First Nation as a group.

Mi'kmaw

(meeg-gm-maw)

Used to describe a person, place, or thing that is Mi'kmaw (a Mi'kmaw child, a Mi'kmaw community, a Mi'kmaw dress). The name of the language.

L'nu'k

(ul-noog)

Translates literally as "the people" and is the Mi'kmaw word for the Indigenous people of Mi'kma'ki.

The Role of Stories in Mi'kmaw Life

Storytelling is an important practice for the Mi'kmaq, and not just for entertainment! Elders hold great knowledge and wisdom and are the keepers of traditions. Elders hand down important history, information, and life lessons by repeating stories to younger generations. When the stories are told over and over, cultural and oral traditions live on over generations.

Mi'kmaw Elders have passed down stories that teach that *Kisu'lk*, the Creator, brought the world and the heavens into existence. These teachings also tell that *Kluskap* is the earthly hero who gave form to mountains, rivers, plants, and animals. There are many stories in Mi'kmaw oral tradition about *Kluskap* and his adventures.

Mi'kmaw knowledge teaches that everything in nature has a living spirit; not only humans and animals, but also rocks and water. This understanding is the core of the Mi'kmaw teaching that everything and everyone is connected through their spirits. This spirituality leads to respect for the natural world and the conservation of natural resources.

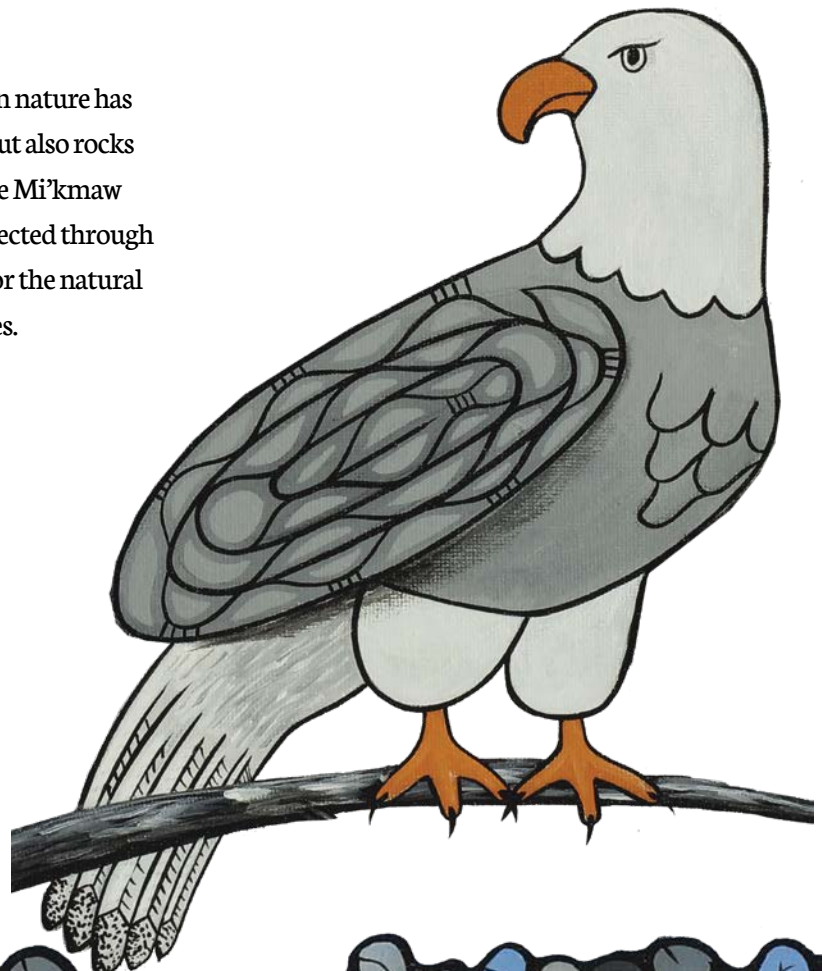
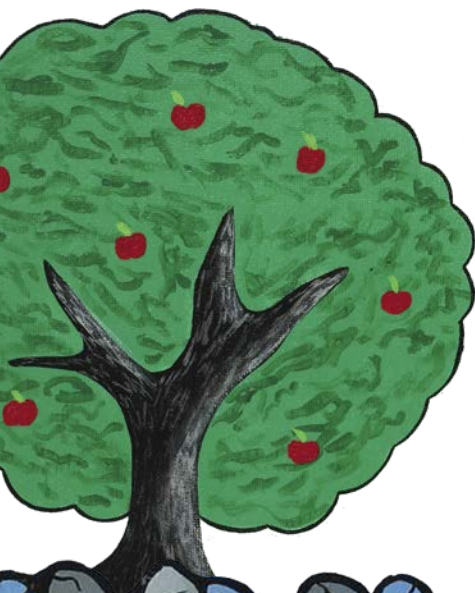
Make it meaningful Try saying these Mi'kmaw words

Kisu'lk
(gis-oolg)

*The Creator of the world
and the heavens*

Kluskap
(goose-cub)

*The legendary hero who
gave form to all things
on Earth*



In this book, the knowledge behind the names of the Mi'kmaw Lunar Months is told to Holly (a young Mi'kmaw girl) by her auntie. They both live in the present day and are keeping their traditions alive. Holly addresses her mother's sister as "Auntie" as a sign of respect. Aunties are honoured like mothers. They love, guide, and support their nieces and nephews. As a Mi'kmaw, if you don't have a mother, you will never be motherless, because your auntie would be honoured to fill that role. She accepts any relative's child as she would her own. By sharing these stories, Auntie is helping Holly connect with her history and culture as well as with the natural world around her.

The stories that follow contain traditional knowledge that has been passed down through generations, and modern scientific knowledge. By repeating the stories they become more than stories; they become part of what it means to be Mi'kmaq in today's world. One day Holly will be the keeper of these stories and will pass them down to the next generations.



Patterns in Nature

Long before calendars, clocks, and cellphones became part of daily life, the Mi'kmaq used nature to keep track of days, months, and years.

The Mi'kmaq way of life has always relied on paying attention to how the natural world changes. By studying patterns in the natural world, they knew when to expect seasonal changes in animals, plants, and weather. Mi'kmaq Elders passed on their knowledge of these natural patterns to their descendants.



Many Indigenous Peoples see the circle as representing different aspects of life. Time does not have a beginning or end, just like a circle. The alternating of day and night and the four seasons are a cycle with no beginning or end, just like a circle. This is how the Mi'kmaq, and many other cultures, think of a year. In this book, we explain how the traditional lunar months do not always line up with the calendar months. Here you see that artist Monica Alexander has linked each month to a Mi'kmaq Lunar Month, and that some of the names are different from the names in this book. This is because Mi'kmaq teachings vary across Mi'kma'ki.

Using the Moon to Track Months

By observing the Moon's changing appearance at night the Mi'kmaq kept track of the months. The Mi'kmaq organized months that lasted the same time as the Moon's cycle. Months based on the Moon are called "lunar" months.

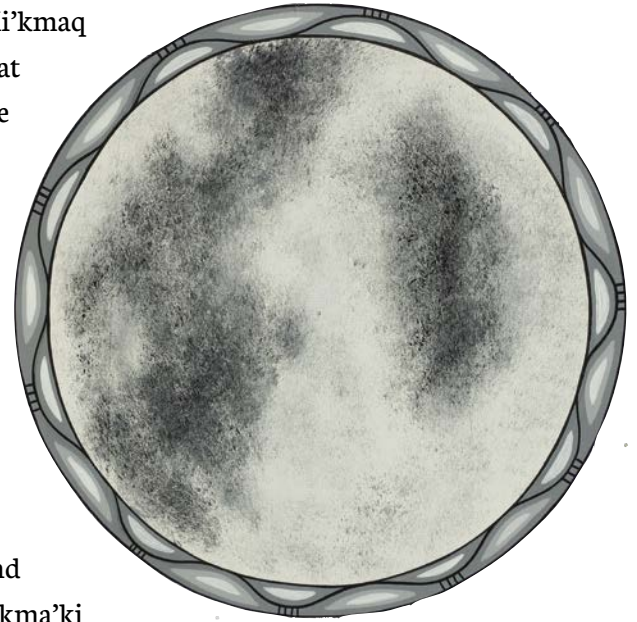
A Mi'kmaw Lunar Month starts after the new Moon and lasts for an entire cycle of lunar phases (about twenty-nine days), with the full Moon appearing halfway through. The next lunar month begins with the following new Moon.

The Mi'kmaw names for the lunar months describe the sights, sounds, and seasonal changes found in Mi'kma'ki during that lunar month. The names Berry Ripening Time and Frogs Croaking Time tell you a lot about what happens in Mi'kma'ki during those lunar months.

To follow the cycle of the year, the Mi'kmaq observed the height of the Sun at midday, the position of the stars at night, and the seasonal events around them. An important Mi'kmaw night sky story is Muin and the Seven Bird Hunters (see Further Reading on page 55). The characters in Muin are played by stars in the northern sky as viewed through the seasons by the fire-watchers, just before dawn. In the words of the Mi'kmaw Elders, "the stars are the time-givers, they are the calendar."

As the Earth spins and days pass, the Earth is orbiting the Sun in a near-perfect circle. Its journey takes about 365 days – that's a year! As it moves, the Earth is tilted to one side, meaning more light and heat from the Sun reach the part of Earth that is angled toward the Sun. In the northern hemisphere, this makes summers bright and hot, winters dark and cold, and spring and fall mild.

Each season is made up of three lunar months. The date that the season starts and ends depends on the Moon's cycle, and when the new Moons occur.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The name of the full Moon and the Mi'kmaw Lunar Month match. For example, the full Moon that is midway through Birds Laying Eggs Time is called Birds Laying Eggs Moon.

PART I

The Mi'kmaw Seasons and Moons



TOQWA'Q (*doke-waak*) – AUTUMN

Wikumkewiku's
we-goom-gay-we-goos



MATE CALLING TIME

Wikewiku's
wig-gay-wee-goos



ANIMAL FATTENING TIME

Keptekewiku's
geb-deg-gay-we-goos



RIVERS FREEZING OVER TIME

SIWKW (*see-uke*) – SPRING

Siwkewiku's
see-uke-ay-we-goos



SPRING TIME

Penatmuiku's
ben-a-dim-ooch-we-goos



BIRDS LAYING EGGS TIME

Sqoljuiku's
skoalch-ooch-we-goos



FROGS CROAKING TIME



KESIK (*ges-sig*) – WINTER

Kjiku's
ook-jee-goos

Punamujuiku's
boo-na-moo-jooey-goos

Apuknajit
ah-boo-ga-na-jeet



CHIEF MOON



TOMCOD SPAWNING TIME



SNOW BLINDING TIME

NIPK (*nibk*) – SUMMER

Nipniku's
nib-nee-goos

Peskewiku's
bes-gay-we-goos

Kisikewiku's
gis-ig-ay-we-goos



TREES FULLY LEAFED TIME



BIRDS SHEDDING FEATHERS TIME



BERRY RIPENING TIME