

The Journey of the Ojibwe Spirit Horse

An art, music, and story guide
celebrating three artists carrying forward
the true living tradition of the Ojibwe Spirit Horses



DARCY WHITECROW

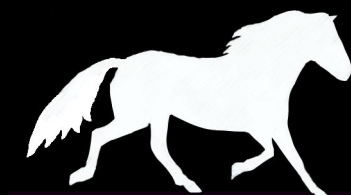


JODI CONTIN



RHONDA SNOW

FREE
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OJIBWE HORSE SOCIETY

1977 - 2027

50
YEARS

SINCE THE RESCUE

The Journey of the Ojibwe Spirit Horse showcases three artists bringing awareness to the Ojibwe Spirit Horses. They were helpers to all Nations who were almost completely displaced by larger European breeds and forgotten in the age of machinery.

This season, the Ojibwe Horse Society celebrates the 50th year since the last horses of the breed were rescued in the dramatic real-life "Heist Across the Ice".

The art, music, and stories in this guide are for everyone to enjoy. Please copy the guide for educational purposes in your truth and reconciliation programming this year, as a gift from the Ojibwe Horse Society.

The Ojibwe Spirit Horses were sometimes called "Indian Ponies" or "Native Ponies" by settlers, and "mistatim" or "bebezhiigooganzhii" amongst other words by Indigenous people. All seem to agree these names first referred to the small horses that lived closely with many First Nations, mostly in Ontario, and whose presence may have predated colonization. After the 1977 rescue of the last of them, the Lac La Croix Indian Pony Society was formed, becoming the Ojibwe Horse Society.

We are grateful to the breeders, volunteers, supporters, and the artists who have generously shared their talents here. We hope you'll consider supporting the Ojibwe Horse Society so we can continue our efforts to research and preserve the living heritage of this critically-endangered breed.

Ken MacDonald
Secretary-Treasurer
Ojibwe Horse Society

To become a member or donate, visit ojibwehorse.ca



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The last of the "Indian Ponies" at Lac La Croix / .Gakijiwanong Anishinaabe Nation in 1977.

Photo: Ojibwe Horse Society Archives

DARCY WHITECROW

Ojibwe Spirit Horse caretaker and author





Darcy lived with Ojibwe Spirit Horses growing up in Seine River First Nation, Ontario. **Wiijibibamatoon-Anangoonan**, or **Runs With The Stars**, tells the story of a young child who learns about the horses from his grandfather, just like Darcy did.

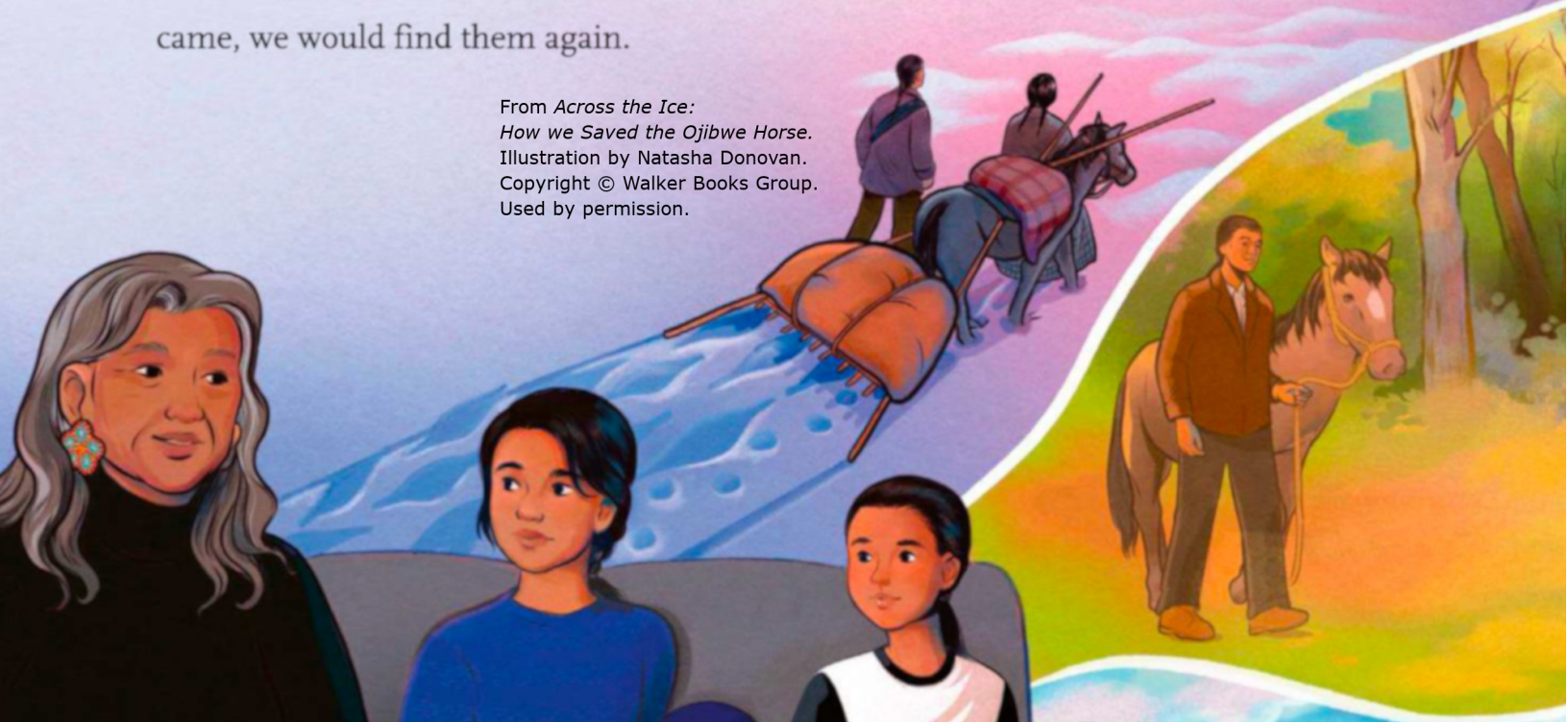
The Ojibwe Spirit Horses nearly disappeared, replaced by larger European breeds and machines. Now, Darcy and Kim Campbell are helping to bring back the breed at Grey Raven Ranch.

Here is a page from another book Darcy and his friend Heather M. O'Connor wrote about the rescue of the breed, called **Across the Ice: How We Saved the Ojibwe Horse**.

“Many years ago,” Nookomis begins, “long before cars and trucks and snow machines, our people shared this land with herds of wild ponies. The ponies were curious and friendly. They were easy to catch and quick to learn.

“In the winter, they helped us run our traplines, pull sleighs, and haul wood. In the spring, they carried us to our summer camps. Then we turned them loose to wander free and have their foals in the summer. When fall came, we would find them again.

From *Across the Ice: How we Saved the Ojibwe Horse*.
Illustration by Natasha Donovan.
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JODI CONTIN

Hand Drummer and Community Leader



Jodi shares her songs and hand drumming across Turtle Island. At home in Wasauksing First Nation, she has many different roles in her work with children and cultural activities. She was awarded The Order of Parry Sound because of her powerful voice, both as a singer and as a community advocate. Her grandfather was a Chief of the village and she recalls hearing about the special relationship he had with his little Ojibwe Spirit Horse.

She wrote ***Song for Asemaa'kwe*** to honour a very special Ojibwe Spirit Horse. It is featured in ***The Spirit Horse Returns***, a show with music, stories, and artwork about the Ojibwe Spirit Horses. You can learn it too! Listen to Jodi sing it here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xBVTy5IUvQ



Photo: Mark Rash

(ah-SEM-ah kway)

(SOCAN)

20.  Musical score for the song "Chi-nok-ii'-A nish-i - naa - be, - Ah! Bezh-goon - zhii. A -". The score is in 2/4 time and features a vocal line (Vo.) and a guitar line (D/H). The vocal line starts with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The lyrics are: "Chi - nok-ii'-A nish-i - naa - be, - Ah! Bezh-goon - zhii. A -".

The Spirit Horse Returns Study Guide – page 30

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Vo. *sem - aa-kwe, o-hey!* *Mii - gwetch, Man-i - do! Maa-ba A - na -*

D/H

30

Vo. *ish - i - naa - be! Bez-gon - zhi A - sem-aa' - kwe, Oh way!* *D.S. al Fine*

D/H

Translations

Way ha yah ho, Way hah yah!
Way ha yah ho, Way hah yah!
Way ha yah ho, Way hah yah, oh way!

vocables

Anishinaabe bezhgoonzii
Asemaa'kwe zhinnkaazod

Ojibwe Horse
Tobacco Woman is her name

Chi-nokiid Anishinaabe bezhgoonzii

Big working Ojibwe Horse

Miigwetch Manido
Maaba Anishinaabe bezhgoonzii

Thank you, Creator
For this Ojibwe Horse

Asemaa'kwe

Tobacco Woman

RHONDA SNOW

**Artist and
Ojibwe Spirit
Horse Advocate**





Ken MacDonald and Jodi Contin with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Artwork by Rhonda Snow. Photo: Matt Duboff.

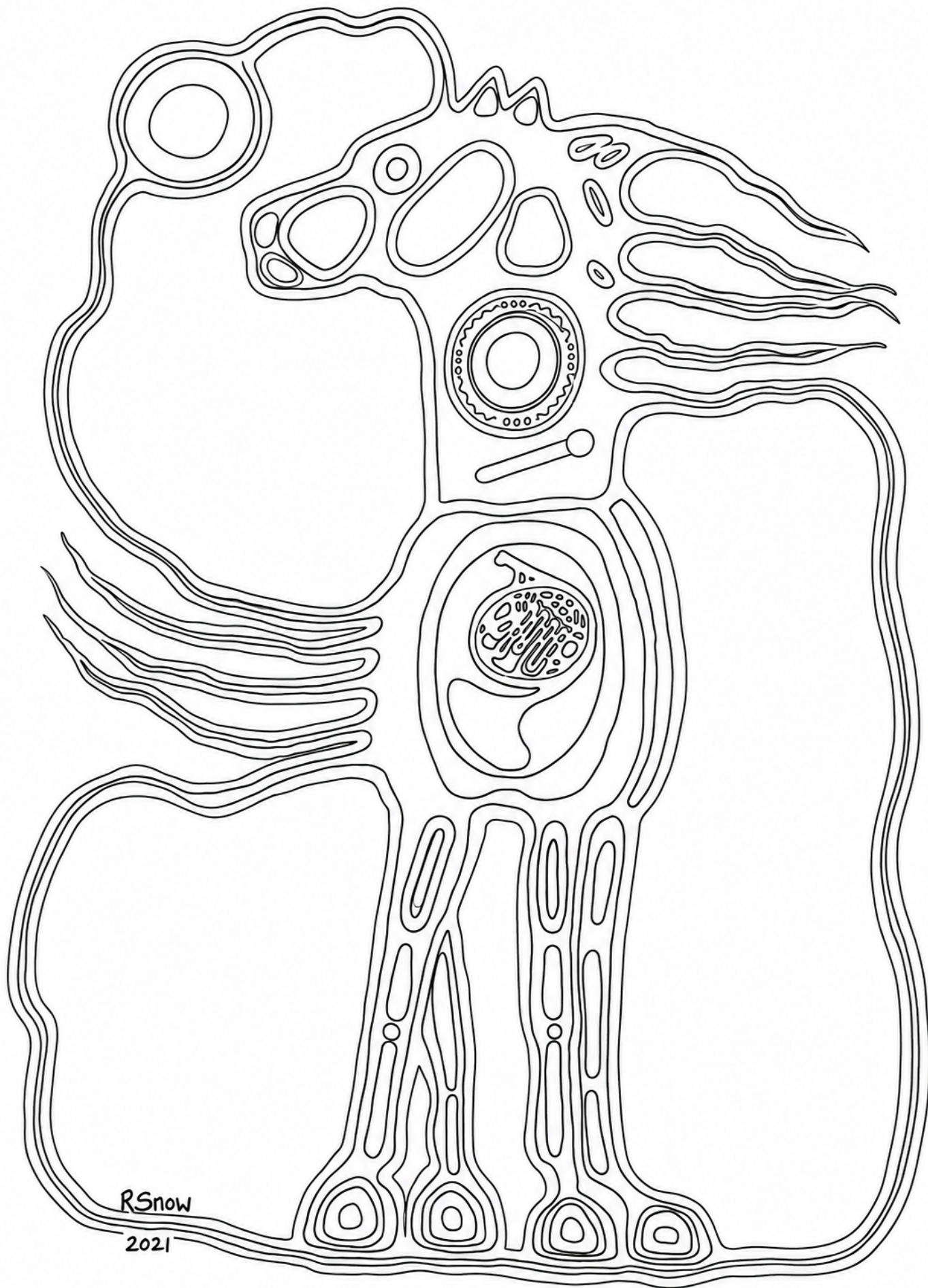
Rhonda was eleven when she heard about the small native ponies living on the nearby island in the bush. She always looked for them but couldn't find them.

She never forgot the old stories, and learned more all the time. She helped to bring the Ojibwe Spirit Horses back from near-extinction and was recognized by Rare Breeds Canada with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Now, she paints about the old stories she has heard and the new ones being made right now.

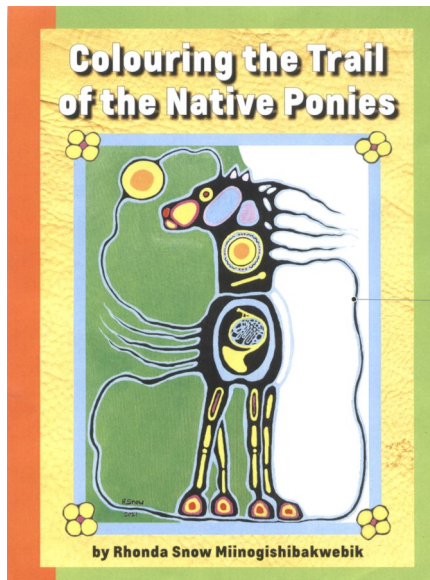
This is a colouring page of Asemaa'kwe, the same horse that Jodi wrote a song about. Rhonda loves to use a lot of colour in her Woodlands-style painting. She invites you to make yours colourful, too!





Credits and Resources

Study Guide by Ken MacDonald © Ojibwe Horse Society 2026



Colouring the Trail of the Native Ponies \$25
The Trail of the Native Ponies Under the Stars \$60
Shipping included. rhonda1111snow@gmail.com



The Spirit Horse Returns

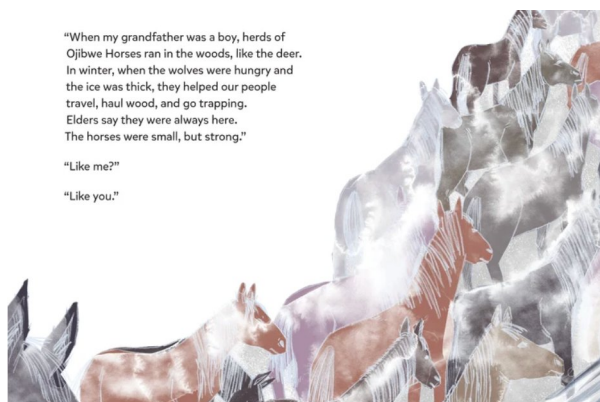
A young horse finds her way to a new home through a real-life network of caretakers in this live concert production featuring vivid woodlands artwork, memorable songs, and a lush original score.

"A more beautiful and engaging production would be difficult to imagine" - Angela Birdsell, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Starring Jodi Contin and Ken MacDonald. Art by Rhonda Snow. Original score by Kevin Lau with Andrew Balfour.



spirithorsereturns.ca



"When my grandfather was a boy, herds of Ojibwe Horses ran in the woods, like the deer. In winter, when the wolves were hungry and the ice was thick, they helped our people travel, haul wood, and go trapping. Elders say they were always here. The horses were small, but strong."

"Like me?"

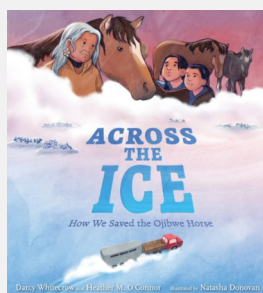
"Like you."

Runs with the Stars

By Darcy Whitecrow and Heather M. O'Connor
Illustrated by Lenny Lischenko
Second Story Press 2022

A man teaches his grandchild about the Ojibwe Horses that used to roam the forests of northwestern Ontario. The horses once ran wild and free, but when Grandfather was a boy, they almost disappeared. Now he is the caretaker of his own small herd, keeping the breed alive for future generations and teaching his grandchild about the loving bond between human and animals.

Available here: bit.ly/4yKQAFn



Across the Ice: How We Saved the Ojibwe Horse

By Darcy Whitecrow and Heather M. O'Connor
Illustrated by Natasha Donovan
Candlewick Press 2025

"Across the Ice tells this little-known story through the gentle voice of Nookomis, along with glowing illustrations in a vibrant palette and clean, crisp lines...This gorgeous book is a must-read in ELA and social-studies classes."

—Booklist (starred review)

Available here: bit.ly/4ykSOC1