

THE PASSAIC WATER THAT FLOWS IN OUR VEINS

“MOM!” Nina shouted.

“Yes, I’m in the kitchen”, she responded.

“I need help with my homework. Ooo! What are you making for dinner?” Nina questioned.

“I’m making pinon soup.”

“Ugh! Can’t we just order pizza?” Nina complained.

“No, you want that every day. It’s not healthy”.

Nina went straight to her room. Why had she told her mother she needed help? Now her mom would bug her. Nina was thinking about her homework assignment. Her new 8th grade ELA teacher wanted to know more about each student, her teacher assigned a project that focused on each student’s family history. But Nina thought her family was boring. But she was trying to start off the school year on a positive note to get a good grade. Nina didn’t know much about her family history but she decided to wait until her father got home instead of dealing with her mother.

After dinner her Dad sat by her.

“So I heard you needed some help with homework?” questioned her father.

“Yes, Dad. I need help with a project about our family’s history. So, got any stories to tell?” exclaimed Nina.

“Well, I know some stories that your grandfather used to tell me about the Passaic River and our ancestors.”

“I’m all ears.” Nina responded.

“Our ancestors were part of the Lenape tribe. Now, this tribe is the ancient root of many other Native American tribes. The Lenape nation is called Lenapehoking. Our ancestors would

fish in the Passaic River. Did you know that ‘Passaic’ in the Lenape Indian language means ‘Valley’?”

“Really?”

“Yeah. The Passaic River used to be so beautiful. It was Lenape tradition to fish there and sing and dance for celebrations. It was our tribe’s source of life. Our people would not have been able to survive without the food and water it provided us. ”

“Yuck! Isn’t it murky now?”

“It wasn’t always,” Nina’s father muttered sadly.

Nina was curious, “Could we go see it?”

“Sure. I’ll try and get out of work early tomorrow.”

The next day, as soon as Nina was home from school, her dad was waiting for her. Nina ran to her room and immediately got ready to leave with her father.

“I’m ready Dad,” exclaimed Nina.

“Well, off we go then.”

They were near route 21 along the Passaic River, Nina saw out the window the trash in the river. She felt guilty for never noticing. She had always wanted things done her way and her way only. Her ignorance prevented her from seeing what was happening within her community and on earth, the only planet that humans could depend on to exist.

“Dad, could we see the trash down there?” asked Nina.

“Yeah, we’re going to see a lot at the Paterson Falls.”

Nina couldn’t understand how her dad spoke those words so nonchalantly. Like if, it was nothing. She didn’t know what to think.

She heard the water splashing over the rocks like a meteor hitting earth. She got out of the car and felt the breeze go through every strand of her hair. She realized they arrived.

“Nina!” someone shouted.

Nina turned around to notice it was grandfather Nebi.

“Papa Nebi?” said Nina surprised. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, you needed to know more about our family’s history with the Passaic River, so here I am”.

“Oh! Okay. Actually I have a question. When we were on the way here I saw garbage in the Passaic River.”

“Didn’t your father tell you the whole story?”

“What’s the whole story?” Nina asked confusedly.

“Well you see, that was the reason I brought you here. I didn’t tell you everything” explained her dad.

“Well, if he doesn’t tell you, I will,” interrupted Papa Nebi. “The Passaic River was the best place for our ancestors. However, it was the opposite for us grownups. By the time your father and I were born, the river was polluted because of the Industrial Revolution. Paterson was its birthplace. Their nickname is ‘Silk City’. There were no laws at the time protecting the environment from the factories waste. So it was dumped in the Passaic River. A thriving force of life for the Lenape.”

Nina shuddered, “Why didn’t our ancestors do anything to help?”

“Well, that’s another story, but they were powerless against the government. The Passaic River water was no longer safe to drink from and it’s unsure what can be done today to return it back to its original way. The garbage and debris left by the factories just piled up.”

“Eww! That’s gross and terrible.” Nina was horrified.

“Calm down Nina”, chuckled her father.

“Yeah, now they do this cleanup of the water and they are planning to make the water clear again,” Papa Nebi reported.

Nina glanced at the river. She thought of how the world would be different without pollution. How she could make a change and try to do something for this river, for her culture, and for her family, because she may be the only one able to prevent pollution from being on the river.

“Thanks for taking me here dad. And thank you for coming Papa Nebi.”, acknowledged Nina.

She knew what she was going to say. She knew her family’s history now. She knew the Passaic River’s story.

Later that evening, she wrote on her assignment all about how the Passaic River was important to her family’s history and its importance in the history of New Jersey.

“Hey mom, could you make pinon soup tomorrow?” Nina requested.

“Uh, sure?” replied her mom.

The next day when Nina got to school she presented her project and scored a 100. She also realized most of her classmates were shocked. She really hoped that this left her classmates thinking about the cause and effect of their actions. She was happy with her assignment and what she found out. She would do her best to protect her environment, her culture and the Passaic River.