



## Ten Thousand Years of Culture

Few Europeans valued the many distinct Aboriginal cultures, expressed through ceremonies, stories, legends, inventions, medicines, and arts and crafts. To the newcomers, Aboriginal people were savages with heathen non-Christian beliefs.

When the oppressive laws of the Indian Act did not stop a traditional Aboriginal activity,

powerful forces stepped in. Missionaries forced pipe carriers to destroy their sacred pipes. Totem poles were removed from West Coast villages and sold around the world. Wampum belts were taken in Ontario. Author Larry Loyie's grandfather, Edward Twin (Cree), travelled into the remote northern Alberta forest to drum and dance with others. He used a tin plate as a hand drum because real drums were forbidden.

### STORYTELLING AS TEACHING

"Our Aboriginal Elders are the most respected members of the Mi'kmaw community because of the wisdom and knowledge collected from their life experiences. One of the principal ways of teaching young children is through the telling of legends that embody thousands of years of experience and living off the land. The storytellers emphasize living harmoniously with the two-legged, four-legged, the winged ones, and those that swim in the waters, all our relations. Even the plants are said to have a spirit and are our relations. When we have our sacred ceremonies, like the sweat lodge, we end it by saying, *Msit no'kmaq*, which means 'All my relations.'"

—Isabelle Knockwood is a Mi'kmaw Elder. She is author of *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*, the history of the Catholic school she attended from 1942 to 1953. She was awarded an honorary doctorate degree in civil law by St. Mary's University (Nova Scotia) in 2013 for her life's work among First Nations people.

