

# Living Memories of our Ancestors

by Kerry Prosper & Mary Jane Paulette  
Paq'tnekek Fish and Wildlife Society\*

On the water on a calm night fishing eels can sometimes bring the strangest experiences. Through our research, we have had the privilege to listen and document such experiences from our Elders. It is particularly through these stories and our own experiences that we know our ancestors walk with us still. Let us listen with our hearts and minds to our Ancestors and Elders whose experiences clearly indicate that we as Mi'kmaq People are spiritually and culturally connected to this land and its resources:

The night is calm and the water glistens like glass. You and a friend are out eeling along the shoreline. for this is the ideal night for eeling. A lantern clearly illuminates the bottom, exposing any movements of eels who may be trying to hide from your presence. While you are both moving along the estuary, you see what appears to be a small glow on a distant shore. As you draw nearer to the shore, the glow grows larger and larger, to the point that you can now clearly recognize a fire. As you continue to focus, you begin to see outlines of people moving and dancing around the fire. You can now hear voices talking in a familiar language - *Mi'kmaq*. You know these words are of Mi'kmaq descent but the words do not make sense - for these are words not of

the present but of the past.

Curiosity quickly overwhelms you, and the both of you begin to move towards shore with hopes of getting a drink of tea and maybe something to eat. As the boat draws nearer to the shore, the fire slowly begins to die down. Despite this, you continue to paddle. Soon you realize there is no fire, no people dancing and no voices... the shore now appears empty. You and your companion still continue towards the shore. Just then, your lantern unexpectedly goes out. You scramble for the flashlight in the dark, but it doesn't work either. You now know both of you will have to go to shore and try to get the light working again before you continue on your journey.

As soon as you step out of the boat, someone or something begins nudging you, making you feel as though you are in the way. At first you assume it's your partner, but when you ask them - they ask the same in return. Chills run and up and down your body. Without words or hesitation, both of you get back into the boat and leave. As the boat gets farther from the shore, the flashlight becomes functional and you are able to relight your lantern. You glance back towards the shore, and a small glow reappears. As the glow grows larger, you can once again hear the voices - voices from the past.

These types of experiences are not uncommon among the Mi'kmaq, as they are part of what acknowl-

edges us as a people. These types of stories speak of the presence of the spiritual linkages between our past, present and future. We have listened to these types of stories throughout our daily lives. They were passed down to us for a reason - to remind us of the importance of life. We need to respect them, for these stories describe the memories and experiences of our Elders and Ancestors, and the information they hold. These stories allow us to understand how connecting with the past helps us to treat the present in order to ensure our peoples' future.

Through our study, we have documented and examined such stories and found that our community has been participating in this whole process. Our community has kept in living memory the knowledge of our Ancestors and Elders. Many of those who were identified by the Paq'tnekek community as knowing a lot about fishing, cooking and preparing K'at were of the spirit world. Although passed on, these persons are acknowledged as the providers of knowledge. Our community keeps in mind those who have taught us. Thus, our Elders' and Ancestors' knowledge is kept alive within the present.

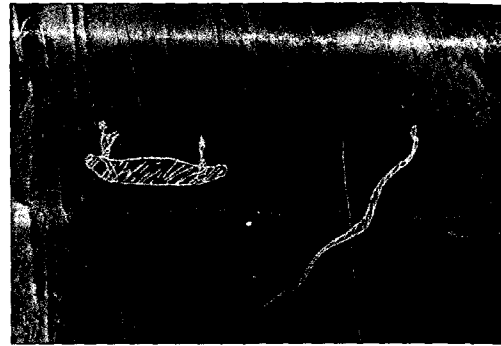
The Mi'kmaq language also gives a new name to those who have passed on. If someone is referring to a person who has passed on into the spiritual world - an additional suffix of o'q is added to their first names. This additional suffix may

also be used to indicate the absence of a person physically, or to indicate unconsciousness. These people are still acknowledged even though they may be sleeping, absent or not of this world. Their state of existence is such that they are only not able to communicate directly at this time.

These stories describe the intersection between two worlds - a connecting point. This link between the past and present has been referred to in many legends. For instance, in the story of Papkootparout, "...there is a bridge across the gap created by physical death. Relationships between parents and children, or between husband and wife, are changed by death, interrupted perhaps, but not ended. This is the circle of life - the living have a connection with their dead ancestors, and at the same time they are the ancestors of those who have not yet come into this world."

The following is another story that tells us of the importance of respect:

A young boy is out fishing eels with his uncle, just as they have done many times before. Yet this day was different - everything was very calm and peaceful. As they approached a certain area, they could hear someone hollering. Almost immediately, the young boy hollered back. But as quickly as he hollered; he was silenced by his uncle. His uncle explains to the boy that the hollering is not coming from a human being, but from an individual from the



Mi'kmaq man and woman in a canoe; serpent Fairy Bay, Kejimikujik National Park, NS Olive and Arthur Kelsall, 1946—1955 Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax NS. The above petroglyph brings to life the voices of our Ancestors. It also demonstrates the Mi'kmaq world view in which humanity struggles to exist as a harmonious part of nature. Available on-line: <http://museum.gov.ns.ca/mikmaq/p0005.htm>

past. If he was holler back, he would be showing disrespect to those voices of the past and something may happen to them.

What is additionally remarkable about the two experiences described here is that they both took place in the same place. This land holds a critical meaning for our people and must be treated with respect. These stories confirm we as a people are spiritually and culturally connected to this land for they are the same lands from which our Ancestors have gathered natural resources, fished, prepared foods and lived. This is the land where our Ancestors walked. Thus, we know our spiritual and cultural ties to this land were never broken.

It is through these ties that we know we have a spiritual and cultural connection to the land and its resources. Yet, along with this, comes

the obligation to the land - to manage our resources in a sustainable manner. We need to think of those yet to be born for they will be our future. They will also be obligated to manage the natural resources for their own futures. These stories also tell us about the "circle of life, that life has no beginning and no end." The obligations passed on to us from our Ancestors will be passed on to the future - the unborn. It is with this article that we wish to acknowledge those who have passed on before us and with whose spirits we walk today.

To all of those who have passed before us, Wela'lin.

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