



*A photographic testament to the ways modern  
Potawatomi people honor ancestors through regalia*

## **Dancing for Our Tribe** *Potawatomi Tradition in the New Millennium*

By Sharon Hoogstraten

In the heyday of the Anishinaabe Confederacy, the Potawatomis spread across Canada, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Pressured by the westward expansion of the fledgling United States of America, they became the most treated of any Indian tribe. Forced removals and multiple treaty-era relocations resulted in cultural chaos and an enduring threat to their connections to the ancestors. Despite these hardships, they have managed to maintain (or restore) their rich heritage.

Beginning with Citizen Potawatomi Nation, photographer and Citizen Potawatomi Sharon Hoogstraten visited all nine nations of the scattered Potawatomi tribe to construct a permanent record of present-day Potawatomis wearing the traditional regalia passed down through the generations, modified to reflect the influence and storytelling of contemporary life. While the silver monochrome portraits that captured Native life at the turn of the twentieth century are a priceless record of those times, they contribute to the impression that most Indian tribes exist only as obscure remnants of a dimly remembered past. With more than 150 formal portraits and illuminating handwritten statements, *Dancing for Our Tribe* portrays the fresh reality of today's Native descendants and their regalia: people who live in a world of assimilation, sewing machines, polyester fabrics, duct tape, tattoos, favorite sports teams, proud military service, and high-resolution digital cameras.

The Potawatomi nations have merged loss and optimism to reinforce their legacy for generations to come. We learn from the elders the old arts of language, ribbonwork, beading, and quillwork with renewed urgency. Preserving Potawatomi culture, tribal members are translating traditional designs into their own artistic celebration of continuing existence, lighting the path forward for the next seven generations. *Dancing for Our Tribe* illustrates vividly that in this new millennium, "We Are Still Here."

Michigan native **Sharon Hoogstraten** previously published *Green City Market: A Song of Thanks*, a pictorial retrospective of the groundbreaking farmers' market that boosted Chicago's culinary reputation as a nationally acclaimed food destination. She lives in Chicago.

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