I first became involved with repatriation around 1974, when I was director of the Oldman River Cultural Centre on the Peigan Reserve. Joe Crowshoe, one of our Elders, came to visit me, and we began talking about our significant cultural ceremonies. At the time, Joe was the keeper of the Short Medicine Pipe Bundle, the only bundle left on the reserve. In fact, that was probably the only ceremony that was ongoing at the time. As we discussed how we could start to revive our traditional ceremonies, we started to focus on the O’kaan. Before long, we were at the point where we really wanted to have the O’kaan again. There was definitely a spiritual need for it, and it seemed we had most of the prerequisites to carry it out. The younger people who were coming to the cultural centre showed a real willingness to make the effort and perform the duties necessary to have an O’kaan. The appropriate ceremonial leaders, who had the sacred rights and
Figure 13. Sleeps First (Apatohsipiiikani) wearing a Natoas headdress, ca. 1930s. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-5425-72).

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the knowledge to have an O’kaan, were all still alive. The only missing compo-
nent was the Natoas bundle (fig. 13). Joe’s grandmother had had one, but it had ended up in the provincial museum in the late 1950s.

Joe pressured me to talk to the appropriate government people regard-
ing the possibility of purchasing the Natoas bundle or having it returned some other way. Joe and I met with Horst Schmidt, who was the minister of the Department of Culture at the time, and described how important it was for our community to try to revive our O’kaan. We also explained how crucial it was to have the Natoas bundle; without it, we could not have the O’kaan. Our discus-
sions were very involved and took a while, but finally we could see that a loan was possible. However, the only way they would let us have the Natoas bundle was if Joe Crowshoe gave the museum his Medicine Pipe Bundle as security. Joe basically said, “In order for us to have an O’kaan, I will give them my pipe to hold.” He brought his Medicine Pipe Bundle to the museum and brought out the Natoas bundle. That year, we revived our O’kaan.

**EARLY REPATRIATIONS**

This was about the same time that Adam Delaney from Kainai was approaching the government to have some Iitskinaiksi [Horn Society] bundles returned. He was also having difficulties negotiating with the museum. Later, we discovered that these problems were arising because Many Grey Horses [from Kainai], along with Adolf Hungry Wolf, had taken the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle from the museum without their permission. Although that had already hap-
pened, we hadn’t heard anything about it until our meeting with Mr. Schmidt. We felt that the bureaucrats unfairly used that as a reason not to trust us. They were blaming us for the actions of others. After the O’kaan, we took the Natoas bundle back and the museum returned the Medicine Pipe Bundle to Joe.

Then we wondered what else we could do. After a great deal of talk and thought, we realized that if our ceremonies were to continue, we would have to negotiate a longer-term loan of the bundle. Those discussions did occur but I wasn’t involved at that time. Joe knew what needed to be done.

But it got me thinking. In order to have a successful O’kaan, we had to revive the Kana’tsomitaiksi [Brave Dog Society] at Piikani. That society plays
a very important role in organizing the camp and constructing the centre lodge and is really necessary in order to conduct the O’kaan properly. Once the Kana’tsomitaiksi was brought back, it seemed to stimulate more interest in our culture. But we could still only do so much because we had only one Medicine Pipe Bundle at Piikani and the provincial government wanted us to leave it as collateral whenever we borrowed the Natoas bundle.

Interest in our traditional ways was definitely growing. Membership in Iitskinaiksi at Kainai had not changed for a very long time. However, by the early 1980s, there were younger people at Kainai who wanted to join the society. When the leadership of that society changed, it created a whole new wave of involvement both at Kainai and Piikani. More people showed a willingness to take part in our ceremonies and to be more involved in our traditional culture. I think people were starting to realize that there was nothing really wrong with our culture. Most of us had attended residential school, where we had been taught not to go in that direction. With the change of mind came the realization that our ways were more positive and more meaningful to us as First Nations people than anything the Christian beliefs had to offer. The interest was there, but we still lacked sacred articles to circulate among our community. This was stopping us from doing more with our culture and ceremonies.

At the same time, some people had become reluctant to transfer bundles in our traditional way. Museums and private collectors had been buying our cultural items, and this put a commercial value—a price tag—on our sacred bundles. Our traditional protocol of passing on bundles to others became very restricted as individuals and families held onto them because of their commercial value, rather than transferring them to others. We could see what would happen if this attitude persisted, and the lack of bundles really created a greater need and desire on our part to be more active in the revival of our traditional culture.

**Repatriation in the 1990s**

In the 1990s, the sudden willingness from the Glenbow Museum to return sacred bundles really drew our interest. As each of the Blackfoot communities began to take home most of our sacred objects from the Glenbow, we realized
that the Blackfoot people should come together and start collaborating more so that we would have successful repatriations. But the possibility of bringing home our sacred bundles brought with it some significant challenges.

First, we could not just reintroduce bundles into the community; we had to also reintroduce the protocols for handling and transferring them. For example, when the repatriation act [First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, Province of Alberta, 2000] was being proposed, we realized that we had to reorganize ourselves and to relearn that those bundles are not individually owned. This concept had changed when collectors and museums had started purchasing bundles from individuals. We had begun to think like mainstream society and were regarding bundles as individual, private property. Some people began to think that they still had the rights to sacred objects that their parents or relatives had sold. But according to our traditional practices, those bundles are communal or tribal property. It was difficult for us to come to that conclusion. But we had to all come to that conclusion in order for us to safely and successfully repatriate those articles. They are not individually owned. If a bundle was sold, then the family no longer has any ties to it. That was a very important concept to get clear.

Second, in order for us to safely and successfully repatriate those sacred articles, it was important for us not to critique or “gate keep” to the point where we would be judgmental about who gets the bundles. We had to come to the realization that as long as the bundles come back to the community, then maybe our traditional protocol would eventually come into play and maybe the bundles would be dealt with appropriately. But first our sacred items needed to come home. Our main concern was to get the bundles back to our communities.

We did not just look to the Glenbow for our bundles. We started looking at other museums and realized that there were other bundles in many other places. When the United States enacted NAGPRA [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act] in 1990, we started investigating repatriation bundles from museums in the United States. We often travelled to various museums and institutions to identify bundles. Some of the bundles had left the reserves such a long time ago that there were very few people who had an understanding or knowledge of them. This created another set of challenges for us because we could not always identify some bundles and we did not know the ceremonies for them. Luckily, among all of the Blackfoot, we still had enough
people with the appropriate knowledge. My exposure to ceremonies and the knowledge I gained by talking to my Elders gave me a broad view of our culture, and I was often able to help.

Those were some of the challenges that we faced.

Once we started successfully repatriating and really started working with other museums, we had to learn the museum procedures and how to deal with institutions in the United States. Of course, I think the collaborative efforts of both sides—museums and Blackfoot—as we recognize and respect each other’s protocols are important. To do that, you have to develop relationships and use diplomacy in negotiations.

BUNDLES I HAVE HELPED REPATRIATE

I have helped repatriate a number of bundles. I started out with Joe Crowshoe’s Natoas bundle. When we started Kana’tsomitaiksi in the 1970s, some of the members individually approached museums to repatriate some of the rattles. But I wasn’t directly involved.

I helped return the Many Shots Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Provincial Museum of Alberta to people at Siksika (fig. 14). In the mid-1990s, a group from Siksika was trying to repatriate a Iitskinaiksi bundle from the provincial museum. They had developed a very antagonistic negotiating pattern with the museum director at the time. When I was brought in by the director to help with the discussions, I realized that Siksika people were not approaching this bundle with appropriate protocol. The person who wanted the bundle had asked someone who was, in fact, his spiritual parent to transfer it to him. But our protocol is that a bundle keeper cannot independently transfer a bundle to a new keeper. A third party—a spiritual grandfather—has to be involved. I explained to them that if they wanted to repatriate this bundle correctly, they had to approach it in the right way. Following that, I met with the Siksika and told them, “Hey, do it correctly. Get your proper Elders. If you don’t have them at home, get them from Kainai. Get them up here and they’ll tell you what you need to do to successfully repatriate all your Iitskinaiksi bundles.” I organized that meeting for them and invited Adam Delaney to come up and talk to them about Iitskinaiksi protocol. They started following that and soon held the first Aako’ka’tssin in thirty years.
Figure 14. Many Shots, ca. 1930. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-583-2).
The concept of protocol means going about things in an appropriate way. The people who wanted to revive and join the Iitskinaiksi had to be separated by a generation of bundle keepers from the people who had been the keepers before that. We refer to these people as the grandfathers of the person to whom the bundle will be transferred, whereas the person who currently holds the bundle is the parent of the new keeper. If the people who had last kept the bundles had already passed away, then someone would have to act as an adoptive parent. Moreover, the new bundle keepers and their parents have to be kept physically separate. Elders, we call them grandfathers, are needed to advise and direct the new keepers. That is what the people at Siksika did; otherwise, they would have been going around in circles. I helped that process get going. I wasn’t directly involved in repatriating all of the Iitskinaiksi bundles, but this initial undertaking helped successively repatriate the rest of the Iitskinaiksi bundles.

I also travelled to New York and Boston with Kainai. They were working on repatriating—I’ll refer to the bundle by the name of the past keeper—the Eagle Speaker Beaver Bundle that was at Peabody Museum, near Boston. They brought that bundle back home, but at that point the people who had wanted to take that bundle decided that they were not ready for it. When Kainai people told me to take care of it, I said, “Well, then I’m going to do it properly.” I went down to Montana and met with Mike Swims Under, one of the few people who still knew all of the Beaver Bundle ceremonies and protocols. I talked to him and said, “Well, just come up and paint me. While it is at my house and waiting for people to come for it, I’d feel more comfortable with that bundle if I was painted to take care of it.” When he came up, I had been thinking about it, and I asked him, “Why don’t you just transfer it to me?” That was basically what the people at Kainai were telling me—just have it transferred since no one is ready to take care of it. That is how I came to have that Beaver Bundle transferred to me.

Later on, I became more involved in repatriating the Medicine Pipe Bundle that came from the Smithsonian. Frank Weasel Head kept it when it first came home. He transferred it to Narcisse Blood, who then transferred it to Pete Standing Alone. Pete has recently transferred it to another family.

We repatriated more Beaver Bundles from the Scriver Collection at the Provincial Museum of Alberta. At first, the museum said that the Scriver Collection was immune to Alberta’s repatriation act. However, after discussing

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this with others, I said, “Let’s write a letter asking for the bundle and push the envelope.” Through that, we were successful in repatriating the Home Gun Beaver Bundle. Once that was home, I transferred it to John Murray and requested the White Calf Beaver Bundle (fig. 15). That stayed at my place for a
year or two, and I successfully transferred it to Rick Grounds in Montana. Then I helped with repatriating the Bos Ribs Beaver Bundle, which is now being kept by Ryan Heavy Head.

I didn’t repatriate many other Natoas bundles, although I did help to have one returned from the Glenbow Museum for an O’kaan that Chris McHugh from Siksika held. I believe it had belonged to Margaret Waterchief. That went to my daughter, who was Chris’s partner in the ceremony.

I also helped repatriate the Head Carrier Beaver Bundle from the Smithsonian. That went to Chris McHugh from Siksika, who later transferred it to Leonard Bastien from Piikani. Leonard still has it. I think that is the one that is mentioned in Clark Wissler’s books.

The Split-Eared Seizer’s Pipe Bundle was repatriated from the Smithsonian. That is the one that Richard Right Hand at Siksika has. I also helped Chris McHugh repatriate a Bear Knife Bundle from the Smithsonian. Finally, there was the Medicine Pipe Bundle from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, which Martin Heavy Head kept. While I didn’t help with repatriation, I did help fix it up and put things together after it came home.

Those are the repatriations in which I have been directly involved. I think all the major bundles that I was involved with have been successfully reintegrated into our communities, and our proper protocol and responsibilities for caring for them are occurring. I am quite happy with that.

**ON MAKING NEW BUNDLES**

It is important to understand why we can’t just make new bundles. I think most of the bundles in museums are still in fairly good condition. Because we were just in this infant stage of reviving our culture—you might say reviving our ceremonies through repatriation—it was important for us to cling to, to hold onto, something that had some sentimental and spiritual value to our people. A ceremony would not have the same effect with a remade bundle. So it was important to have possession of the emotional and spiritual value that is in place in those ancient bundles. I don’t think any of us felt quite appropriate, quite spiritually adequate, to remake those bundles. It was of more value to us if we had the real thing.
WHAT MAKES SOMETHING ELIGIBLE FOR REPATRIATION

When we consider repatriating a bundle, the most important criterion is need. There has to be desire for the bundle to be returned and a willingness on the part of our people to take care of it. The bundle must have a spiritual and sentimental value to our people. If the bundle still exists, then we should try our utmost to get it repatriated before we consider duplicating it or replicating it.

I think the most important part of repatriation is successfully identifying the bundles. There is a lot of confusion about bundles. For example, some people don’t distinguish between a split-horn headdress and a litskinaiksi headdress. We also have to be aware that some of the material in museum collections was duplicated. When we are attending those institutions, we have to examine the material carefully to determine whether it is a replica or the real thing. If it is a Natoas bundle, was it actually used in an O’kaan? You can see the telltale signs, such as the paint. People have to know what they are doing, what they are looking for.

Sometimes, we can mix parts from different bundles if we follow the proper protocol. For example, Mike Swims Under advised us that if we could just repatriate the Beaver pipe, we could always get the rest of the articles either from other bundles or by going directly to the source and getting a pelt or a skin. I think it was important for us to know that. Sometimes, these bundles were incomplete. Some had been opened and parts sold separately. For example, a Medicine Pipe Bundle might be missing a fan or a bowl. If there was one in another museum, it would have no significant value to the museum, but there would be sentimental reasons for it to become part of the bundle. At least it would be used in its proper way.

Sometimes, we had to think about what to repatriate and what to leave behind. There are some paraphernalia that probably make no sense to repatriate because of their value. Something might be priceless as an art form. Or the museum might be able to preserve something that is very old and almost worn out so that in the future we can see what it looked like and how it was made. I think sometimes we have to put a value on that, as opposed to taking it out of the museum and saying it is no longer useful and then putting it out as an offering. We could just leave it in the museum as an offering. That’s how we should be looking at those things and realizing maybe it would be more valuable just
Figure 16. Ammskaapipiikani man wearing traditional headdress and weasel tail suit. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-3587-1).
leaving them there where they can be preserved so that in the future, if people want to duplicate or replicate them, they will have something to work with. In that manner, it’s important.

Headdresses and weasel tail suits are also transferable items that should be repatriated (fig. 16). They present interesting questions to us and to museums. If those suits are useable and in fair condition, I think that there may have to be some negotiations with institutions. Maybe a person can repatriate the weasel tail suit until it starts to wear out, and then they would feel good about returning it to the institution and working on a replication. For that reason, I think we have to at least have it in our possession so that we feel comfortable about replicating it. I think there is room to work with some of these things. We have to have some serious discussions about items such as headdresses and weasel tail suits as an art form and as priceless artifacts. It might be better to preserve them in museums rather than using them in ceremonies. Some thought and effort has to be made in that regard.

I think sometimes we repatriate because we can’t find some of those animals or some of those bundles anymore. For example, eagle feather headdresses—there are laws about collecting and keeping eagle feathers. There are all kinds of restrictions concerning the possession of these feathers. Consequently, sometimes it seems easier just to repatriate a headdress. If it is only in collection storage and not being displayed, then that’s where other thoughts have to come into play. I would sooner see them being used than stuck in storage.

IMPACTS OF REPATRIATION

All this has had some pretty major impacts in our communities. Now there are more ceremonies creating more opportunities for our people to get involved. The young people are becoming more interested in our culture and more willing to participate. I’m not saying it’s like that for all of our people in the communities. Our people have diverse interests. But these opportunities are available for the traditional people. Repatriation creates a need in our community to recognize and honour all the diverse interests. It’s here; it’s happened.

Beyond rejuvenating the ceremonies, I think repatriation is creating more self-esteem for some of our youth. It is enhancing our cultural identity;
people are more self-assured and willing to identify themselves as Piikani. It’s still too early to really look at all the social impacts, but I feel that it has been positive for the people involved. I also see more willingness to collaborate with other Blackfoot communities. Our real Old People, who knew about the ceremonies and bundles, have left us. The younger generation was clinging to the identities that developed when we were forbidden to leave the reserves and we became separated from each other. We had developed tunnel vision. But the renewal of traditional practices and the repatriation of sacred material have brought more scope.

**Final Thoughts**

The people who were involved in repatriation were practicing our traditional beliefs and ceremonies. We wanted to utilize the sacred material that was ours. We also wondered how those bundles ended up in the museums. Some of them have very unhappy stories regarding how they ended up in museum collections. All those reasons motivated us to work toward the safe return of those bundles into our communities.

As soon as contact started happening, the sale of our bundles started happening. As soon as someone like George Catlin or Karl Bodmer or Paul Kane painted a subject, he would think, “Oh, I have to have his outfit or his pipe that he posed with.” The people back then gave them up readily because they knew they could successfully duplicate or make another one. They didn’t have the challenges that we face today. We don’t have the spiritual integrity that they had or the access to resources such as the buffalo hides or the skills to form the piece or the quill work. We don’t have the art behind replicating the bundles.

I think our biggest challenge with some of those bundles that were sold and ended up in museums, institutions, and private collections was the simultaneous loss of our culture. Laws were passed to curb our activities. Missionaries worked to imbue us with a negative attitude toward our culture, our activities, our ways, our language, and ourselves as a people. Many of us ended up believing that it was wrong to do what we were doing; it was wrong to be “Indian.” Our interest in repatriating bundles was stimulated when we finally came out of that way of thinking.
It is important for our people to understand that sacred bundles were not individually owned bundles. It is still important for our people to be exposed to that. It is also important to understand why it was necessary to have the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. Without the repatriation act, there is a legal stumbling block. Because those bundles were bought with public funds, the law had to be passed so that we could bring the bundles back home. A lot of people were wondering why we were just so accepting of this repatriation act. The advice of the Elders we were working with at the time was, “Hey, let’s just work with this as long as we can get our bundles repatriated without creating stumbling blocks for ourselves.” When we started realizing what NAGPRA, the repatriation act in the United States, was all about, it helped motivate us and stimulated more interest in the work we had to do on repatriation.

With NAGPRA, we just had to learn the process and had to have the proper people to document the efforts. That is where people like Ryan Heavy Head came in handy. He helped do the paperwork in repatriating some of those articles from the United States.

When repatriating bundles from the United States through NAGPRA, we needed to have the support and cooperation of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana. We were faced with the dilemma that many Ammskapipiikani in Browning, Montana, do not fully understand the importance of repatriation and the importance of maintaining and preserving our culture. They had to see that need. They had to look beyond their restrictions, their thinking. We are so diverse now, and we are not all traditional thinkers. Some of our thinking is motivated by some of the religious denominations. All of this has an impact on First Nations people.

I think the only remaining challenge that we face in repatriation is at the international level—beyond North America. There has been a successful repatriation from Scotland (a litskinaiksi headdress to the Kainai), so I think we just have to expand more into the European countries where the rest of our major bundles are.

The main point, and we can’t forget it, is not the repatriation itself, but the use. What helped us in the successful repatriation of our sacred articles was that we were still capable of performing those functions and those ceremonies. It makes no sense repatriating any sacred article if it cannot be put into use.
I am happy that Blackfoot people can repatriate almost any sacred article and put it into use. The bundles are moving through the communities—maybe not as much as we would like to see, but they are moving around. The membership in Iitskinaiksi at Kainai has changed many times. Even among the Siksika, Iitskinaiksi has transferred—and they are even looking at another bunch coming through. Most of the Medicine Pipe Bundles are being circulated. I think we are pretty active; the natural process is in place.