Through the establishment of the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society in December of 1996, the return of White Calf’s Medicine Pipe Bundle in 1997, and the memorandum of understanding that was signed between the Mookaakin Society and the Glenbow Museum on 6 March 1998, I have become intimately involved with negotiations for the return of religious materials to our Blackfoot-speaking communities. In fact, my experience with repatriations in general began as early as 1972, when I became the keeper of a Iitskinaiksi bundle that was brought home from the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton. Although I don’t consider myself to have a lengthy history in relation to repatriations, or to be the only member of our community to have played an essential role in bringing our ceremonial bundles back into their original
contexts, I have recently felt pressure from my peers and the museum community to document what background I do possess.

Normally, I prefer to follow our own system of oral instruction, passing down what I know of our historic, religious, and intellectual traditions by memory to those members of future generations who would find useful what I have to offer. The European equivalent, what I call the “paper trail,” allows sensitive information to be available for those who might misuse it and promotes forgetfulness and misinterpretation. It is important to pass along our knowledge face to face among our own people. At the same time, we must also accept the fact that we are living in a multicultural environment and that it is critical for us to have the ability to communicate our concerns in ways that will be validated by the non-Native communities with whom we have to negotiate in order to maximally benefit the future lives of our children. Our traditions and protocols have never been stagnant. Our people’s main concerns have always been to maintain a sense of comfort, to lead our lives in ways that will better our future generations, and to sustain the language, ceremonies, and religious beliefs that have been passed down to us from the Creator and the spirits of our land.

When new and useful avenues of experience have been opened to us, we have always found ways to adapt them into our culture. While our oral traditions and cultural protocols are perfectly suited to support communications within our own community, we cannot expect them to benefit us in the same way when we are dealing with non-Natives. Instead, we will have to occasionally utilize some means of expressing our beliefs that will be familiar and understandable outside of our community in order to gain external support for our concerns. In other words, we must cooperate enough to meet them halfway in order for them to hear us. As well, non-Native researchers and writers have already written about our cultural beliefs and practices, as well as our history. These writers often interpreted what they saw through their own experiences and belief systems and have not always presented a fair or a true representation of us. It is important that we record our own history for our young people and for the wider world. We need to tell our own story, in our own words.

With this in mind, I have decided to document my own repatriation experiences. My main reason for doing this is to make this documentation available to Blackfoot-speaking people, who can use it as a resource to assist in their own repatriation efforts. I hope it will also help non-Native people.
working in the museum community as they work to support our repatriation negotiations. I have not gone in-depth into any of the specific collection histories or religious aspects of the bundles described below. Nor have I included any information that could be misinterpreted to contradict our interests. My only intent is that this document be used to briefly illustrate my role in our repatriation history and to assist in communicating our cultural protocols to those who need to gain a partial understanding of those practices in order to assist us in achieving our ambitions.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Repatriation, the recovery of culturally important materials that were alienated from our community without rightful consent, had never been a foreign concept in the tradition of Blackfoot-speaking communities. Yet, in all of our remembered history, the religious practices that originated among our people had never been threatened by the theft of physical ceremonial articles to the extent that they have been since the time of European contact.

In the late nineteenth century, after foreign diseases swept through our families, taking away scores of Elders and children, and while the buffalo herds were being destroyed, our leaders agreed to share portions of our territories with European immigrants in return for money, goods, protection, and educational, economic, and health assistance. While portions of our land base were to be shared, other areas were reserved for the sole use of our people. This type of arrangement, the making of treaties and establishment of reserves, is a history common to many Native North American communities. So, too, have most Indian tribes encountered similar repercussions: the Canadian and US governments took for themselves what land we had agreed to share (as well as some areas that we had retained for ourselves) and forced members of our communities to stay within the boundaries of our reserves. They also withheld the goods and funds that were promised, allowed our people to starve and suffer sickness, and brought religious clergy from various Christian traditions to educate and ultimately abuse our children in boarding schools. Furthermore, these foreign political entities outlawed any practice of our religious traditions, even on the reserves, and strove to make our children forget their Native languages.
With Aboriginal communities across North America sharing these same oppressive conditions during the turn of the past century, Natives and non-Natives alike were led to believe that Native religions and languages—if not the people themselves—would soon become extinct. Simultaneously, in the expanding cities along the eastern shores of this continent, a massive push to establish public educational facilities that could serve common European immigrants brought a healthy sum of national and philanthropic funding to newly founded science and curiosity museums. Scholars from these institutions were instructed to travel west in hopes of salvaging material and linguistic remains of Native cultures, which could then be stored and exhibited in these public museums as well as traded to similar facilities around the world. These exhibits were designed to reflect academic beliefs in the Darwinian theory of evolution, presenting Native cultural materials as technologically inferior to those of our European counterparts, thereby convincing the general public of the evolutionary righteousness of their participation in the colonial expansion over Native territories.

From the 1870s to the 1940s, representatives of the museums and freelance collectors from around the world flooded our reserve communities, spreading their belief in the soon-to-come extinction of Native religions and languages. These collectors used various funding sources to purchase whatever Native cultural materials they could, but when our people refused to sell their antiques and religious objects, some of the collectors stole directly from our grandparents’ graves—even taking human remains, the skulls of which were used to further probe for evidence of the evolutionary inferiority of Native people. Merchants who settled around and within the reserves caught onto this salvage paradigm and used it to their entrepreneurial advantage. Often, merchants would accept Native religious materials in a pawn relationship for food during extremely hard times, only to turn around and sell the materials to museums and private collectors, making it impossible for their Native customers to have the belongings returned once they became more financially stable. Of course, the Christian clergy were only too supportive of collection practices, for in their opinion, the disappearance of Native religious materials would help considerably to “civilize” the children they were trying to convert and educate.

Here in our own Blackfoot-speaking communities, the older generations resisted the destructive processes underlying collection projects described by
the well-intentioned scholars who visited our reserves. In fact, it wasn't until rather late in the collections era that the majority of our religious materials found their way into museum accessions. By the 1920s, a generation of our children had already been through boarding schools, and some of these young people had then become convinced of the European prophecies that stressed the extinction of Native cultural practices. On occasion, these younger people would seek to have religious bundles ceremonially transferred to them for the covert purpose of selling those materials to collectors. On other occasions, they would actually steal our bundles from the homes of their parents in order to trade them away. Because of our love for children, no legal repercussions ever befell these individuals. Similarly, when our former religious leaders became financially destitute, or converted to European spiritual practices, and decided to sell our bundles off the reserves, nobody ever laid charges. Instead, we followed our own traditions and tended to socially shun those who cooperated with collectors. In fact, we had no other choice; even if we had sought to have the stolen materials returned, it was highly likely that, even if any court did agree to hear us, we would have only succeeded in putting another one of our brothers or sisters behind bars. It seemed as though the materials that left the reserves would be gone forever.

Toward the end of the collections era, in an attempt to avoid flagrant thefts, some of our old people decided that it might benefit our future generations if they ceremonially transferred religious materials to museum collectors themselves. By our traditions, religious articles are never owned or sold. Rather, they are temporarily kept. The rights to keep one of our bundles can only be obtained through a ceremonial transfer. One of the main conditions that is expressed and agreed upon during a bundle’s transfer arrangement is that in the future, when another able Blackfoot-speaking person comes forth with the intent to have a particular bundle transferred to him, such an exchange must occur. In other words, a person can become a bundle’s keeper only if they agree to eventually develop into a bundle’s releaser. In fact, until keepers transfer the bundle to another Blackfoot-speaking individual, they are considered only as children in our religious ranks. It is through the transfer itself that bundles live and create Elders. So, in light of the thefts that had taken place, and in consideration of the anthropologists’ expressed purpose of saving the religious materials for our own future generations, some of our Elders decided to ceremonially transfer
their bundles to museum representatives. These transfers took place in the usual manner, with all the same conditions attached as would be expressed if the bundles were being transferred among Blackfoot people alone. Only afterwards, when these materials were safely under lock and key in museum storage facilities, and after the representatives who had sat through the transfers had retired, did the museums lose all recollection of the ceremonies that had occurred and the conditions that went with them. From our perspective, these museums—even though they had funded the transfers—did not have any rights whatsoever to even temporarily keep our bundles. In the same manner, if I financed a transfer for my son, it would still be he who had all of the rights to keep the bundle, for only he would have sat through the ceremony and agreed to its conditions. Even when these transfer ceremonies were documented or filmed, the museums still refused to release the bundles. Instead, they ignored overwhelming evidence and argued that our religious materials were their “property.”

When we visit museums today and request the return of portions of their accessions, we base our claims on our understanding of the collection history from our Blackfoot reserves. We have never asked for the return of any materials that were utilitarian rather than ceremonial. Nor have we ever asked for anything that we did not sincerely believe to have been taken from our community without proper consent. And yet, although we always articulate our memories in the above manner, it is not uncommon for collection institutions to argue for their rights to the possession of our religious objects. The understanding we maintain is that these materials were often stolen, that museums know nothing about them and have no educational use for them. The only beneficial avenue of use for these objects is within their community of origin, where we know their ceremonies, histories, and intellectual purposes. Collection facilities, which have always been funded as institutions of enlightenment, should be able to see how the return of portions of their collections to Native communities would indeed serve their stated purpose to promote education.

OUR EARLY EXPERIENCES WITH REPARTIATION

In 1972, we saw, for the first time, ceremonial materials returned to the Blood Reserve from a collection institution. Repatriation was unheard of back then,
and museums were not in the general practice of deaccessioning their trophies to Native communities. Adam Delaney (fig. 19) and Pete Standing Alone, two of my contemporaries, had approached the provincial museum in Edmonton, hoping to negotiate the release of four Iitskinaiksi bundles. Horst Schmidt, then minister for the Cultural Development Branch of the Alberta government, agreed to loan the four Iitskinaiksi bundles to the Kainai for the duration of the annual Aako’ka’tssin encampment each summer—with the condition that the museum maintain storage of the materials throughout the remainder of the year. When these bundles were transferred at the Aako’ka’tssin, I became the keeper of one of them.

Figure 19. Bruce Wolf Child (left) and Adam Delaney (right) talking to students in the Glenbow Museum’s First Nations storage area. Photograph courtesy of Ryan Heavy Head.
As promised, we returned all four bundles after that Aako’ka’tssin—even though doing so constituted a major break in our normal protocol for those of us who had sought the responsibility of becoming bundle keepers. Over the next year, the provincial museum had a less-than-desirable—yet totally unrelated—experience with a couple of other people who were associated with our community. When we returned to Edmonton in the spring of 1973 to make arrangements for that year’s Aako’ka’tssin, Horst Schmidt refused to meet with us. Of course, we had no idea why he was shunning us. We only knew that he had made a promise and that the ceremonies we had worked so hard to strengthen were again in jeopardy. That’s when I first became directly involved in repatriation negotiations. A group of us—Pete, Adam, their wives, and I and my wife—followed Schmidt from Edmonton to Calgary, and back again to Edmonton, hoping to at least speak with him. Still, he refused. Adam Delaney, who was our Iitskinaiksi leader, finally decided to call a Roman Catholic priest he knew in Ottawa named Denis Chatain. With Chatain intervening on our part, Horst Schmidt was once again convinced to return the four Iitskinaiksi bundles to us on loan for the Aako’ka’tssin. Schmidt and his representatives met with the Blood Council in Standoff to finalize the loan, but I was unable to attend because of my work schedule that day.

Adam and Pete, not wanting to risk a reoccurrence of this event the following year, thought it would be best to invite Horst Schmidt to our Aako’ka’tssin so that he could witness first-hand the ceremonies for which these bundles are so important. That decision on the part of our leaders proved to be very wise, because right after the Aako’ka’tssin ended, Schmidt sent us a letter in the form of a bill of sale, which asked us to trade a single penny for complete ownership of all four Iitskinaiksi bundles. Unfortunately, even though some of our protocols and beliefs had been set aside to establish the loan arrangement, we felt that if we agreed to purchase these bundles (even for a penny), it would somehow be taking our neglect of tradition too far. Worried that this refusal to cooperate might again stir conflict and confusion, jeopardizing the following year’s ceremonies, we decided to keep the bundles rather than return them. Since that time, the provincial museum has felt that we retained the four bundles by force, and, as Schmidt has retired, they no longer recollect any offers that were made to sell these materials. Although our refusal to return the four bundles turned out to be very beneficial for the future of our Iitskinaiksi (these bundles have
been transferred to five new generations of keepers since they left Edmonton), it seriously altered the provincial museum’s willingness to work with us over the following two decades. Only recently has any hope of further negotiations between our parties returned.

In 1988, Wilton Good Striker negotiated the return of a Iitskinaiksi bundle from the Glenbow Museum. I was not involved in dealing directly with the museum. However, once this bundle was returned, my partner, Floyd Many Bears, and I had it transferred to us as keepers. Over the last ten years, this bundle has been transferred to three other generations of keepers besides Floyd and myself.

My next experience with repatriation came in 1990, when the late Dan Weasel Moccasin, along with the late Florence Scout, obtained a Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. This bundle was released to Dan on a yearly loan basis, meaning that every twelve months, he or Florence would have to account for its whereabouts and sign a loan renewal. I was not involved in any of the negotiations for this Medicine Pipe Bundle’s return, but once it came home, I was the Elder who ceremonially transferred it to Dan’s son, Daniel. Since that time, this bundle has had three other generations of keepers, and I have always led the transfer ceremony.

**NAGPRA Repatriations from the United States**

In 1994, I was approached by Narcisse Blood, Francis First Charger, and Martin Heavy Head, who had been working through our brothers and sisters of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana to arrange for the repatriation of a Medicine Pipe Bundle from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. By that time, the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was just beginning to work for tribes in the United States—the final rules for the act had yet to be published. Our Blackfoot-speaking communities had traditionally occupied land that encompassed most of southern Alberta and the state of Montana. The introduction of the non-geologic boundary that eventually separated Canada from the United States did not change our memories of the extent of our original land base or the relationships our northern and southern communities had with each other. We have always been related by blood, language,
and ceremony, and these alliances continue into the present day. Thus, when collection institutions in the United States have demanded that Blackfoot repatriations be negotiated through personnel in Browning who are appointed as legal NAGPRA contacts in the Federal Register, we have been able to gain our brothers’ and sisters’ help in seeing that our bundles return home.

Since I had experience with handling Medicine Pipe Bundles, I was asked to accompany the delegation that would travel to Gonzaga. Before we travelled, I learned that the Medicine Pipe Bundle we were to procure was only partially intact. Paul Raczka, a friend of mine who was living in Sun Valley, Idaho, at the time, told me that the people who had originally sold that bundle off the reserve had left portions of it with another collector. This unnamed second party had passed the missing objects to Paul, and he was willing to give them back to the bundle once it was released by Gonzaga. So on our way back from Spokane, we met Paul in Missoula, Montana, and he handed us the misplaced portions. When we returned home, I was involved in the transfer of this bundle to Martin and Pam Heavy Head. It has since been transferred to two more families for keeping.

After that success, we became very excited by the possibilities that the US repatriation legislation held in helping us to strengthen our religious traditions. Over the years since the collections era, young people had constantly been approaching our Elders in hopes of becoming more involved in learning our ceremonies and language. Unfortunately, those Elders did not have enough of our old religious materials on hand to assist all of these people in fully realizing their ambitions. NAGPRA, and the hope that Canada would follow suit with similar legislation, gave us the opportunity we needed to enhance the religious benefits we could offer to our children. With this in mind, a delegation was formed in 1996 to search for some of our missing bundles in the American Museum of Natural History and the Heye Foundation in New York (which had become part of the new Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian), as well as the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. We were also planning to retrieve a Beaver Bundle from Harvard’s Peabody Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In September of 1995, a student from the University of Massachusetts named Ryan Hancock (who later changed his name through marriage to Ryan Heavy Head) had begun a long-term project to locate and electronically
inventory all Blackfoot museum collections worldwide. By December of that year, he had communicated with Joyce Spoonhunter in Browning about a Beaver Bundle that was located in Harvard’s museum, not two miles from his apartment in Boston. Joyce recruited him to negotiate for the release of that bundle on behalf of the tribe, and, over the next four months, he and Joyce focused all of their efforts on convincing the Peabody Museum to comply with their request. In early May of 1996, while travelling between New York and Chicago, our delegation—which included Allan Pard from the Piikani Nation, Carol Murray and Tom Black Weasel from the Blackfeet Nation in Montana, and Martin Heavy Head, Narcisse Blood and Alvine Mountain Horse, Dorothy First Rider, Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Les Healy, Francis First Charger, and myself from Kainai—went to Cambridge, packed up the Beaver Bundle, and walked out of the Peabody with it. Carol and Tom took it immediately back to Browning while the rest of us went to Chicago. Then, when our entire delegation had returned home, the Beaver Bundle was transferred to Allan Pard.

While we were in Chicago, we ran into a familiar problem associated with repatriations: they wanted us to take home human remains. During the collections era, agents of the institutions in the east and other entrepreneurs often stole from our ancestors’ graves in order to obtain human remains and cultural materials that they could not otherwise convince people to sell. Here in Blackfoot territory, where our traditional burials involved setting individuals on platforms in lonely places, our graves were easy targets for such collection practices. As the times changed and collection institutions began to realize how unconscientious their former exploitation had been, they moved their human remains out of display and into storage. It really wasn’t until formal legislation demanded the return of Indigenous human remains that these institutions suddenly developed a desire to deaccession their embarrassing grave collections. Of course, from our perspective, it is very important that our ancestors’ remains be reburied on our traditional lands. At the same time, our religious protocols and beliefs forbid any contact with human remains, and so we can’t really work with their returns directly. Our opinion is that if a collection institution truly wants to return Blackfoot human remains, they should come forward and make all of the arrangements for the burials. We will gladly provide whatever space they need. In other words, we definitely want our ancestors returned to their Native land, but in order for that to happen, the collection institutions
themselves will have to approach us—admitting their inappropriate history—to arrange proper burials.

June of 1996 brought our delegation to the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC, and back to the American Museum of Natural History and the Heye Foundation in New York for a second assessment of their collections. On that occasion, the delegation consisted of Allan Pard, Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, Francis First Charger, Margaret Crop Eared Wolf, Ryan Heavy Head, and myself. We flew to Washington, DC, first, and then went to New York.

Some events during these June visits can serve to exemplify our typical experiences when communicating with collection institutions. Perhaps the worst insult came when we visited the American Museum of Natural History. While viewing the portion of their Blackfoot collection on exhibit, we noticed that they had part of a Beaver Bundle and a very famous Weather Dancers’ Bundle on display. We instructed their repatriation coordinator that the components of our bundles should never be separated, that they should have never opened the bundles without proper transferred rights, and that when bundles are opened for public viewing, it is only within a ceremonial context. Their repatriation coordinator informed me that previous visitors from Blackfoot tribes had already expressed these concerns but that the museum had refused to even consider taking any appropriate action unless an official request for the change in exhibition practices was sent by our tribal government. At that point, I noticed some problems with another portion of their display. Behind a glass wall, they had replicated the inside of one of our tipis, complete with clothed mannequins and our familiar household items. One of the mistakes that I noticed was that they had taken sets of clothing that would normally be worn as one complete outfit and separated their components onto different mannequins—so that the moccasins from an outfit would be on the feet of one mannequin, while the matching leggings would be worn by another, and the shirt on yet a third. The second mistake I noticed in their life-sized diorama was in how they had placed willow backrests against the walls of the tipi. In reality, these backrests should be supported by tripods within the tipi so as to make a series of couches around the perimeter that could be divided by blanket walls to allow for the privacy of single occupancy chambers. When I pointed out these misrepresentations of our material culture, their repatriation coordinator
again stressed that no change in the display would even be considered without a formal tribal request. In other words, the American Museum of Natural History was not concerned with our expressed views of their exhibits, or even with accurately informing their audience as to the historical use of the materials in their collections. When we came back to our reserves the following week, our tribal governments received phone calls from the American Museum of Natural History stating that our delegation of religious Elders had wasted the time of their repatriation personnel because we had not brought along the one person listed on the Federal Register in the United States as our NAGPRA representative. We were informed that future visits and discussions with their repatriation personnel would not be welcomed without the inclusion of Joyce Spoonhunter, the representative from Browning whom we often advised in repatriation matters.

The Heye Foundation facility—housing Native cultural materials and human remains—included dual guard stations and a razor-wire perimeter. While inside, viewing the collections, we were escorted by a museum delegation of equal number to our own, and they kept a watchful eye on all of our movements—thus ensuring that we would be unlikely to succeed in sleights-of-hand to conceal their collections in our jeans pockets. However, we did locate White Calf’s old Medicine Pipe Bundle that had been collected from one of our communities in Canada. In fact, we found a number of significant bundles on that excursion, but it would be some time before any steps were taken to retrieve them.

In the meantime, I was becoming increasingly frustrated at what little work was being done with the information our delegation had collected in Chicago, Washington, DC, and New York over the previous year. In particular, I wanted to see the return of White Calf’s Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Heye Foundation. In February of 1997, my friend Ryan Heavy Head came to our reserve for a visit, and one afternoon, during lunch, I discussed my frustrations with him. I strongly felt that repatriation-related pursuits were being conducted in a manner contrary to our religious protocols. By our traditions, as I described earlier, people who had possession of our bundles were only temporary keepers. In fact, our beliefs—based on observations of processes ever present in our environment—hold that nothing can ever really be owned. Everything, even that which non-Natives would consider inanimate, has its
own period of life and eventually loses its form and returns to basic natural elements. Any materials we use to enable our own survival and comfort during our lives is merely borrowed, in a sense. For that reason, it is still common practice for us to leave tobacco as a payment to earthly spirits whenever we pick up something from our land—as when we gather sweetgrass or berries for our ceremonies. When our own belongings wear out and are of no use to us, we bring them outside and leave them as offerings to Creation, allowing those things to pass their old age naturally while being brought back into elementary forms. So, too, do we replace components of our religious bundles when they wear out, so that the bundles have long life and history, just like our community. When bundles are in museum storage facilities, subject to curation practices that involve pesticides and hi-tech humidity-controlled environments, they are in a period of stagnation, unable to live out their days and serve their original purposes as educational and health tools for our people. At home, they are allowed to live and be transferred among individuals, rather than families or larger community units—ensuring that their lives will touch thousands of generations of religious initiates and that they will be made available to assist all of our people, without being tied up in political or community disputes.

What I saw happening with the legal process of repatriation was a well-intentioned disregard for our basic transfer and keeping practices. Academics and some Native people alike wanted to simplify our traditions, to classify our religious materials merely as communally owned, so that conflicts over rights to possession could be easily settled. Accepting this interpretation, the collection institutions—wanting to negotiate all legal obstacles safely—were demanding to deal only with tribal governments, and specifically with those people within the governments that were listed in the Federal Register as NAGPRA contacts. Our own traditional religious practices demand that requests for bundle transfers be sought on an individual basis, for reasons that often involved vows of sacrifice for the purpose of healing oneself or one’s family. Although our bundles were, in the past, communal property, this was because we were living in a fairly closed society that encompassed only Blackfoot-speaking people. When the various spirits originally gave us our bundles, and the ceremonies to accompany them, they were for the benefit of all our people (that is, Blackfoot-speaking people, those whom we were related to by family). But along with those first transfer ceremonies came the conditional agreement
that our bundles be kept and transferred among individuals, who would have to sacrifice or manipulate their lifestyles in accordance with the protocols that went with the teachings involved in keeping each particular bundle.

Although some members of our tribal governments are familiar with this understanding and participate in our ceremonial life, others do not. Our tribal governments are arranged to justly represent all of the people in our communities, and many families have been actively involved in Christian religions for a number of generations. For this reason, they might be too focused on other community interests to actively pursue a particular bundle for a specific tribal member. In addition, when our ceremonial materials are being repatriated only through the consent of our tribal governments, the individuals who are seeking the transfers—who should be the main negotiators—become relegated to positions of third-party involvement. Their desires and initial risks in seeking the transfers are not really even a consideration in the negotiations.

For these reasons, I dictated a letter to Ryan requesting that the Heye Foundation transfer the White Calf Medicine Pipe Bundle from themselves to me through a traditional transfer ceremony. By our old ways, the only third party involved in transfer arrangements might be a messenger sent by the hopeful initiate to state his or her basic intentions. In this case, the paper would be my messenger. I was able to briefly articulate, in written English, the concepts and protocols involved in such a transfer, the history of Medicine Pipe Bundles, and the reasons why I believed that I had the right to become that particular bundle’s keeper.

The following April, I received a reply from the Heye Foundation to the effect that my letter was one of the most convincing repatriation requests they had ever read. Still, in order to maintain a safe legal stance, they decided to seek the approval of our tribal government. I felt that their decision to consult a third party was their own business and that it had not really corrupted the traditional protocols, because at least I had taken what steps I could to act appropriately in the situation. If they had, in the long run, refused my request based on their discussions with our tribal council, then I would find their decision problematic. I had approached them just as if they had the rights to be keeping that bundle. By our traditions, since I had made a vow and had come to them in accordance with as much protocol as was possible, and since I was willing and able to make a respectable transfer payment, they really could not refuse me.
Over the next seven months, I learned first-hand how much patience one needs to possess when negotiating repatriations with large collection institutions. Contrary to some people’s beliefs, we cannot simply walk into a museum with a copy of the NAGPRA regulations in our hands and expect to come out with a bundle. The collection institutions, being of a different society, have their own protocol, and the language of NAGPRA allows them room to maintain those practices. After the original response from the Heye Foundation, I had to wait until June before their review committee — comprised mostly of volunteers — was able to even consider my request. They agreed that my claim was well founded and, at that point, began their own research process in relation to the claim. They had to assign someone to look into their archival information in order to ensure that they had no evidence that might contradict my statements and also to interpret my request and research relevant anthropological literature so that they could document the event and the concepts behind it. In August, while this work was being conducted, I had to travel to their museum again to correctly identify and inventory all of the bundle’s components. Then, in October, their research was completed and their review committee met again to approve my request. At that point, all I had to do was wait through a public notification period, until November, to receive the bundle. Dorothy First Rider, Narcisse Blood, Adam Delaney, John and Lisa McDougal, Martin and Pam Heavy Head, and Francis First Charger accompanied me to New York that month. Pam carried the bundle out of the museum, and in May of 1998, it was transferred to me, my wife Silvya, our daughter, and our grandson.

On 24 August 1997, a number of members of the Mookaakin Society, including myself, travelled to the Denver Art Museum in Colorado. The Denver museum was a major customer for the freelance collector Madge Hardin Walters, who worked through a couple of members of our community during the 1920s and 1930s to obtain many of our bundles. Although extensive trade of these collections occurred between Denver and a number of the large East Coast museums in the United States, many of our bundles are still being held in Colorado. During that visit, we conducted a full inventory of these materials to begin negotiations for those that are most urgently needed.

During the winter of 1997–98, Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Dorothy First Rider, and Narcisse Blood, through our tribal government department, began negotiations with Denver Art Museum for the return of the bundles that were
most urgently needed. By the following summer, we had arranged for a tripartite loan agreement among the Mookaakin Society, the Glenbow Museum, and Denver Art Museum that allowed most of the bundles from the Maoto’kiiksi, or Buffalo Women’s Society, to be brought home for the Aako’ka’tssin. This was similar to the very first repatriation agreement we had in the 1970s with the provincial museum. Some other bundles had eagle feathers in them, and the US Fish and Wildlife regulations prohibited us from taking them out of the country. However, by the end of July 1998, we were able to negotiate the loan of these as well—but, again, just for the duration of the Aako’ka’tssin. In late August 1998, we returned the bundles to Denver.

The following year, we again entered into a tripartite agreement; however, this time we were allowed to keep the bundles for one year, with the provision that someone from the Glenbow would visually check the bundles once each month to ensure that they were still in the possession of Mookaakin members. The bundles with eagle feathers were not initially loaned to us. However, we prevailed upon authorities in Washington, and, once more, special permission was given for these bundles to travel across the border.

These repatriation negotiations became very difficult and were very hard on us. When the United States passed NAGPRA in 1990, they made a distinction between items that were owned by individuals and those that were kept on behalf of the entire tribe or band. The former are private property and therefore can be sold by an individual. These kinds of items do not have to be repatriated, since they were sold legally. Items kept on behalf of the tribe were not owned by individuals and could not have been legally sold. These items are eligible for repatriation. The Denver Art Museum believed that these Maoto’kiiksi bundles were privately owned, not communally owned, and had therefore been legally sold. It was the museum’s opinion that they were not obligated to repatriate these sacred objects under the guidelines of NAGPRA.

Our Elders all provided information indicating that these bundles were really communally owned and had been sold improperly. But there was one person at the Denver Art Museum who was intent on proving us wrong. Roger Echo Hawk, the museum’s repatriation officer, did not believe our oral traditions. He brought out letters that Walters had received from our people saying “I own this” or “I own that” and indicating that they were willing to sell the bundles to her. We tried to explain that this was a problem translating between
Blackfoot and English—that individuals could not “own” such bundles. But he would not listen to our arguments. He made it very hard on us. Our old people were very afraid that the bundles would never come home to stay.

In the end, we enlisted the help of a national Native legal committee in Denver, who approached the mayor of Denver for support. As a result, John Goes In The Center, a Native American who was on the Board of Directors at the Denver Art Museum, visited us to learn about our ceremonies and bundles first-hand. It still took a long time, but in the end, the board decided to give us the bundles without going through the formalities of NAGPRA.

Once more, we found that there were bureaucratic obstacles to bringing the bundles back to Canada. We again worked with our Ammskaapipiikani brothers and sisters in Montana. They supported our request and helped us by signing the official repatriation form.

We retrieved several other ceremonial bundles at the same time that we brought the Maoto’kiiksi bundles home. One was a Small, or Warrior’s, Medicine Pipe Bundle. I took that home and kept it. When nobody requested it, I had it transferred to my grandson, who still has it today.

**First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act**

In December of 1996, Dal McCloy, one of the new members of the Kainai Chieftainship, decided that he would like to do something helpful for the Kainai. McCloy decided to start the Mookaakin Heritage and Culture Society, a nonprofit organization that could collect funds to support repatriation and cultural research projects. I was asked to become a member of the Mookaakin Society, which was named after my dad, and we began repatriation discussions with the Glenbow Museum.

During the time that my own negotiations were proceeding with the Heye Foundation, members of the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society continued to meet with the staff of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. We negotiated a memorandum of understanding that was signed between the museum and the Mookaakin Society on 6 March 1998 and witnessed by Premier Ralph Klein. This memorandum described a co-management arrangement that would allow the Mookaakin Society to advise the Glenbow as to the appropriate methods.
of managing and exhibiting their Blackfoot collections. The memorandum also designated the Mookaakin Society as the negotiating agent for all future Kainai repatriations from the Glenbow and myself as the signatory for any such arrangements. After that memorandum was signed, a curator of Native American materials from the Glenbow, Gerry Conaty, sat on the board of the Mookaakin Society, and I was appointed to the First Nations Advisory Council at the museum.

In February of 1998, before we signed the memorandum of understanding with the Glenbow, Jerry Potts, Allan Pard, and Reg Crowshoe from the North Piikani Reserve and Herman Yellow Old Woman and Irvin Scalplock from Siksika had begun communicating with the Provincial Museum of Alberta (which is now the Royal Alberta Museum). On the morning that our memorandum with the Glenbow was signed, these five individuals recommended that Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, and myself join them to sit on a committee that would be meeting with the provincial museum. We then requested and received band council resolutions from each of our three tribes recognizing our committee as the responsible party for repatriations and all associated negotiations with the provincial museum. Although twenty-some years have passed since our first repatriation efforts at that institution, they still have a vivid recollection of the four Iitskinaiksi bundles that we supposedly took by force. It is with some caution that we again began considering long-term loans or full repatriations. However, Ralph Klein, the premier of Alberta, had recently been inducted into the Kainai Chieftainship (an honorary recognition by our community). We were hoping that, with his recent association established with the Kainai, Klein would be willing to help us reopen the provincial museum’s doors for the return of our ceremonial materials from Edmonton.

Alberta’s repatriation act is the only such legislation in Canada. Premier Ralph Klein introduced the act because he wanted to return sacred objects to First Nations, but he was told he could not legally do so. As I understand it, there is another law in place, the Historical Resources Act, stipulating that all archaeological materials and similar items belong to the province, to all the people of Alberta. He was told that if he wanted to repatriate sacred objects to us, he would be breaking the law. So Klein introduced the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA) in order to override the Historical Resources Act.
The items we are most interested in are the ceremonial objects that are transferred from one person to another. It can be the tiniest little thing. We have these buffalo stones—iiniskim—that are transferred. You can’t just go pick one up and decide, “OK, I’ve got one,” and then brag about it. If somebody shows me one, I will ask them, “Who transferred it to you? Did you get your face painted? Were the songs sung for you?” It doesn’t matter what the item is, as long as it is sacred and as long as it was publicly transferred with songs and face painting.

FNSCORA was introduced by Premier Klein in March 2000. It went to third reading and was passed with the full support of all the other parties. But then the bureaucrats and the lawyers became involved. They had to set up rules and regulations that explained how the act was to be implemented. Although it took us four years to work out the proper wording, I still was not happy with the way the process was going to work. But I was getting scared that the act was going to sit on the table too long and never be put into use. Reluctantly, I agreed to the regulations for the act.

This is an example of the difference between our understanding and the non-Native governmental way of doing things. If I were to ask someone to do something and they agreed, I would not ask a third person to start coming up with all kinds of rules and regulations. A lot of our people understood that Premier Klein and the legislature had passed a bill, and now we were able go to the provincial museum and negotiate with them for the return of our sacred bundles. We did not know that the lawyers and everyone else were going to come into the picture and say, “This is what you have to do. And this is what you have to do.”

There is still a lot of controversy among my own people because they don’t understand the regulations that go with the act. Some of them don’t really want me to be involved when they apply for a bundle. But because of the rules and regulations that the bureaucrats developed, it is my responsibility to go to the Royal Alberta Museum, sign the documents for the bundle, and take it out of the museum. If we go through many hearings over a request and if that request is turned down, I get the blame for the rejection, even though I have no real say in the approval process. But because I have to sign, they put the blame on me. This is what I did not like when the regulations were developed. But I had to agree because the discussion had been going on too long. I had a feeling that they might let the legislation become defunct if it stayed on the books too long. The act has been hard on me.
That act covers all of the First Nations in Alberta who are part of Treaties 6, 7, and 8. So far only the Blackfoot-speaking people—that is, Apatohsipiikani (Piikani at Pincher Creek), Siksika (Blackfoot near Strathmore), and our own reserve (Kainai) have used it. The other two treaty areas have not really used the repatriation act.

Following the passing of the act, I helped Siksika retrieve two Medicine Pipe Bundles from the provincial museum. Both of those bundles are now back into practice in Siksika.

**BUNDLES FROM THE SCRIVER COLLECTION**

In 2002, I helped repatriate a Medicine Pipe Bundle from the Scriver Collection that had been sold to the Province of Alberta and had it transferred to a person from Browning, Montana. Robert Scriver was a world-renowned painter and writer and sculptor who lived among the Piikani Indians in Browning. He collected a lot of materials from both the Canadian and the American side of the border. When NAGPRA was going to be introduced, he was afraid that he would be forced to give everything back to the original owners. In order to prevent this, he sold his collections to the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton. When we started our negotiations, the provincial museum wasn’t too willing to repatriate Scriver’s collection. They argued that it belonged in Browning, Montana, and not at Kainai. They also argued that without regulations for the repatriation act, they could only loan items and that they could not make long-term loans across the international border. But we kept stressing the fact that when the artificial boundary was introduced, we happened to be camped in our traditional clan areas and therefore became separated. That is why we still call people from the four reserves our brothers and sisters; we are interrelated. For example, my grandmother on my mother’s side was from Montana, and I have lots of close relations in Montana, in Brocket, and in Siksika. It goes that way with just about everyone on the four reserves. Those bundles travelled freely among the four Blackfoot-speaking peoples before the reserves came into existence and before the artificial boundary was put in place. We kept stressing this fact, and we eventually obtained several sacred bundles from the Scriver Collection and had them transferred to the people in Montana. Some of those
bundles have since been transferred to people on the other three reserves, especially to Kainai and Piikani.

**Kakkooyiiksi**

My role as signatory for the release of material from the collections of the Royal Alberta Museum and the Glenbow has led to my involvement in a number of repatriations. The Kakkooyiiksi (Pigeons or Doves) is a young man’s society that had not been in practice at Kainai since the 1920s or early 1930s. Their bundles were at the provincial museum. But we were lucky enough to have some Elders who had been part of that society and still knew the ceremonies and the songs. Quentin Heavy Head and Duane Mistaken Chief retrieved those bundles and reintroduced that society. Now that society is going strong with about forty or fifty members. Some of them have transferred and moved on to other societies, and that has created a lot of new interest from our younger people.

I might add here that, before White people came, we had many societies, some for people even younger than Kakkooyiiksi. Those were our schools. What we, as society members, learned was our curriculum. They weren’t just spiritual societies. Members were taught how to live their lives: how to conduct themselves, how to raise a family, how to provide for their families. That was what those societies were all about. We were inducted into them as young people. It was just like sending your child to school. The members advanced to the next age group where they learned more, and so on, until they reached the top, the sacred societies: the Iitskinaiksi and the women’s society, the Maoto’kiiksi. We have been trying to reintroduce those societies so that our young children can have a stronger education not only in the White man’s ways but in our own cultural ways, in our own way of living. This is why when we get those holy things back, other things happen.

**Repatriations from Great Britain**

In the summer of 1999, Alison Brown, a graduate student at Oxford University, visited our reserve. She was looking for relatives of people who had sold items
to an American who had been collecting items for the British Museum in the
1930s and had been working with people at Piikani. Alison was at Kainai for
the Aako’ka’tssin and was sitting with a group of us, watching the Iitskinaiksi
dance. We explained to her how some of our bundles had disappeared and how
the society was not complete without them. As the members danced past us,
Alison had a good look at one of the headdresses whose matching partner was
missing. She pointed out that she had worked on a similar headdress at the
Marischal Museum when she was an undergraduate student at the University
of Aberdeen. The headdress had been sold in Browning in 1923 and ended up at
the museum in Aberdeen. When she returned to Oxford, Alison contacted the
curator in Aberdeen and notified him that we would be in touch.

In 2002, a group that included Randy Bottle and Karen White Quills,
Charlie Crow Chief, Duane Mistaken Chief, and Marvin and Betty Mistaken
Chief visited Aberdeen to view the headdress. The following February, Randy
Bottle asked me to go with him on a second visit, along with our good friend
Gerry Conaty. We met with the University of Aberdeen’s Court at Marischal
College in Aberdeen, Scotland, and had our negotiations. They wanted us to
make a replica of the headdress but to use turkey feathers instead of eagle
feathers. I did not agree with that. I simply wouldn’t. It would be like being a
hypocrite. I could have made a replica here, but I did not want to.

By the beginning of July, we had brought that bundle home, and it was imme-
diately put back into use. Now our most sacred society, the Iitskinaiksi, is complete
with all twenty-five bundles. I don’t think it has been complete since about 1923.

In the autumn of 2001, Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society made
an agreement with two researchers from the Pitt Rivers Museum at the
University of Oxford. Dr. Laura Peers and Dr. Alison Brown had discovered
photographs of our people that were taken in 1925 by a museum worker
named Beatrice Blackwell. They wanted to bring these images to our reserve
to see if anyone remembered the photographer or had any stories about the
people who were in the pictures. I met them in Calgary and introduced them
to some of our people. It took us all summer to identify the people in the
pictures and learn something about their history. Alison and Laura returned
those pictures to us, and they are now housed at Red Crow Community
College, where they are available for our students. We also collaborated on a
book with them, Museums and Source Communities.
From 1998 to 2001, seventeen people from the four Blackfoot reserves worked on a permanent display telling our way of life at the Glenbow Museum. The sacred objects that the Glenbow had repatriated to us built a strong relationship of trust and respect between people at the museum and Blackfoot people. We worked collaboratively as full partners, not as advisors, to create an exhibit that tells our story, in our words. As far as I know, this is the first time that a museum has allowed us to present our side of the story. The exhibit has become an important place for our students to have an introduction to our culture and history. I hope it also helps non-Native people to understand who we are as a people and as individuals.

The Glenbow then created a smaller exhibit that travelled to the Netherlands, Manchester, England, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Québec. I travelled to Manchester with Andy Blackwater, Sandra Crazy Bull (who was working on the education part of the Blackfoot gallery at the Glenbow), and some Glenbow staff. While in England, we visited with two other researchers who had worked with us on other projects. Dr. Laura Peers and Dr. Alison Brown took us to the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University where Dr. Peers worked. There we saw five Blackfoot warrior shirts. They were supposedly traded to the Hudson’s Bay Company governor George Simpson at Fort Edmonton in 1843. They fell into the possession of his secretary, Edward Hopkins, who took them to his home in Montreal about 1834. He then sent them back to England when he retired, and after his death, they were donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

I had heard of these kinds of shirts. They are warrior shirts and are transferable. They are decorated with porcupine quills. They are beautiful shirts. Although I had heard of them, I had never seen anything like them.

We worked for six years to arrange for these shirts to come to our community. After many years of hard work, mainly on the part of Laura Peers and Alison Brown, they were able to come home for a visit in the summer of 2010. They were displayed in the Glenbow Museum for about two months, and then they came down to Galt Museum in Lethbridge and were displayed for our community. Before each exhibit, Drs. Peers and Brown held workshops where we could get close to the shirts, examine them in detail, and talk about what the designs might mean, who might have owned them, and what they meant to our people (fig. 20). This was an important time for our Elders and our young people.
to come to see the shirts. And the project is still ongoing. Although the shirts returned to England in August of 2010, we are trying to find a way for them to be returned home permanently.

In the spring of 2011, I attended a conference at Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University with several others—Allan Pard, Charlene Wolf, Herman Yellow Old Woman, Narcisse Blood, Alvine Mountain Horse, Debbie Magee Shirer, Lea Whitford, Delia Cross Child, Albertine Crowshoe, Ryan Heavy Head, and Adrienne Heavy Head—along with curators Gerry Conaty from the Glenbow and Wendy Aitkens from the Galt Museum. We met with curators from a number of British museums and learned that these museums also house materials from the Blackfoot people. One has seven or nine sacred bundles that they are not allowed to open because their museum’s protocols prohibit them from touching sacred material. Another museum has Chief Crowfoot’s
full porcupine-quilled buckskin outfit intact and on display. Crowfoot was an important Siksika leader who was present at the making of Treaty 7. Those museums are now in the process of working with us to find better ways to care for these items and to discover ways of making this material more accessible to us. As you know, everything costs money, and our tribal governments just don’t have the finances for research or to travel halfway across the world to work on these projects. The researchers in Britain are trying to raise money so that we can visit other museums. Most of the museums we talked to are willing to repatriate, although we cannot really use the word “repatriate” in England without raising alarms. We use the term “long-term loans” when meeting with British museum workers.

While we were negotiating the loan of the shirts, Narcisse Blood, Alvine Mountain Horse, Ryan Heavy Head, Adrienne Heavy Head, and I, along with Marcella LeBeau from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, were invited to a conference at the University of Aberdeen in February 2010. There, we met with several curators from Scottish museums to discuss the process and implications of repatriation. The Kainai had brought home the Iitskinaiksi headdress, and a Ghost Dance shirt had been returned to the people at Rosebud. The people from the museums were very interested to learn more about the implications of repatriation, both for their museums and for us.

THE EFFECTS OF REPATRIATION

A lot of the bundles that we have brought home have been transferred to other families. Martin Heavy Head’s bundle, which we brought back in 1995 or 1996, was transferred to Roger Hunt and his family. He has since transferred it to another family. The new keeper had never been exposed to bundles, and when he had his first opening ceremony on 2 July 2011, he spoke about how good he felt to be the keeper of a bundle: “Now I am somebody.” It made him think of who he is as an individual and as part of our community. That is the reward I have been getting for the work I have been doing.

At Piikani, Jerry Potts repatriated a bundle from the Canadian Museum of Civilization. When he brought it home, his young nephew became part of the bundle family. This fellow did not speak much Blackfoot. In fact, he never said
a Blackfoot word. But in the summer of 2011, when he got up to dance with the pipe, he prayed in Blackfoot that was more fluent than mine.

These things illustrate what these bundles mean to us and what they do for us. The transfers that have taken place mean that more and more people have a chance to learn about our culture. The very first bundles that we brought back in the 1970s have been transferred six times. Each of those bundles requires three keepers. Look at how many people they have helped! That is the process of cultural and personal renewal that repatriation helps to maintain and flourish.

We do not see all the benefits of repatriation at once. Several weeks ago, I was having supper with my wife and we started talking about repatriation. Something occurred to me. In the 1970s, when we first brought back those bundles, the community started talking about taking over our health services. We did that, and now we run our own health services (fig. 21). When more bundles came back in the 1980s, we took over our education. Now, we run our own education, and about 90 percent of our education system is staffed by our own people (fig. 22). With each repatriation, something else happens. In the 1990s, we started our irrigation project. This is one of the largest in North America, bringing 25,000 to 30,000 acres under irrigation and providing much-needed income to our reserve. Now we are talking of repatriating our own children who have been placed in foster care outside of our communities. This requires negotiating a tripartite agreement with the Province, the federal government, and ourselves. We believe that just as our bundles belong at home, the community is the best place for our children.

The Alberta government has introduced a consultation process whereby we are now beginning to repatriate our sacred sites. For example, we have worked with the provincial and federal governments through Alberta Parks and Parks Canada on one of our most sacred grounds at Aisin’aipi (Writing-On-Stone), just east of Milk River. That is a very significant site. We have had it designated as a Provincial Historic Site and as a National Historic Site. Now we are working on having it designated as a World Heritage Site. To me, getting these sites recognized and keeping them safe is part of repatriation.

Now things happen that I have never heard our Elders talk about. The Kakkooyiiksi meet just about every month. When they found out that one member was drinking, they suspended him for one meeting. Our ancestors never did things like that! But these young people are policing themselves. Not
just in terms of drinking, but in their general behaviour at school and at home. They are policing themselves and that is what we need in our community. That is where we can get our balance and our harmony back.

Another part of our repatriation that I am involved with, aside from the sacred material, is the Kainai Peacemaking Centre. In the case of a dispute, instead of going to court, the parties come and we have a peacemaking session with them. In this session, the victim wins and the accused wins. It becomes a win-win situation where they can resolve their dispute. There is no sentencing circle. They, themselves, will settle it. They agree what one individual will do. We are repatriating that part of our way of life.

When the Blackfoot shirts were here, two people had transfers so that they could keep similar shirts that have been newly made. But now people ask me, “Are the shirts going to come home permanently? When are they going to come home?” And what answers can I give them? It is really hard for them. A lot of the materials are in storage, where nobody has access to them. Museums don’t
understand them. If you have a Medicine Pipe Bundle in a museum, there is no understanding of the use and what it means. It is hard to see these spiritually and culturally important things stored in museums where no one sees them and no one understands them. That’s the hard part for me.

But when we have these things in our community, being cared for by an individual or a family, there is an understanding of what they mean spiritually and what they mean to the community. And that is the point: If you don’t understand something, why keep it? When they are held in a museum, they aren’t in the community and they don’t fulfill their purpose. They have to be out here so that they can fulfill their purpose. To us, when they are in a museum, it is just like they are in a prison. They are not in the community doing what they are supposed to be doing. They are kept away. We treat them as living things. They are here to help us, not just spiritually, but in our everyday life.

It seems to me that whenever we bring home something that came from our ancestors, it ignites our will and our self-esteem. We remember that, at
one time, we were able to do all these things on our own. If we can bring back a bundle, we can bring back other parts of our culture. To me, it is all part of repatriation. It is not only a repatriation of sacred items. It is a repatriation of a way of life that was taken away from us through residential schools and all those other efforts to assimilate us. I have mentioned this to a few other Elders, and they are pondering it. We had a misunderstanding of repatriation—that it was just bringing our sacred bundles back. But as the years have gone by, I have started to realize that there is a lot more to repatriation. And hopefully, the general public would start understanding—museums, even private collectors—why we like to have our materials back.

These are the things that got started by Adam Delaney, Pete Standing Alone, and others, including me, but in a limited way in those first bundles. The young people are now really interested in our societies.

After all the misunderstandings and conflicts of culture that have occurred during our negotiations for repatriations, the future still looks very bright. Through religious transfers, and along with the responsibilities that come with keeping a bundle, many of our young people are becoming more interested in attending and eventually leading our ceremonies and in learning our language. Each year, our Aako’ka’tssin grows larger and our bundles, through repatriation, become more numerous. It is perhaps impossible to accurately communicate the full extent to which bringing our religious materials home has benefitted our people. Our families are strengthened more every year that these bundles are present. Yet there are still more bundles in collection facilities here in Canada, in the United States, and overseas than there are within our own communities. That being the case, there are great opportunities available for our future generations to continue to strengthen our religious practices through repatriations. Hopefully, I will be able to persist in giving what assistance I can offer to make these efforts successful.

When I say “I,” it has not only been me. Many of our own people have worked on repatriation. I will name a few: Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Dorothy First Rider, Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, Rodney First Rider, Randy Bottle, Calvin Williams, Quentin Heavy Head, Rosie Day Rider, the late Louise Crop Eared Wolf, and the late Adam Delaney. Adam was the pioneer and he supported it, and whatever we did, he was behind us. He made a couple of trips with us to New York. He wasn’t up front anymore, but he supported it. He was
a great inspiration. From Piikani, we have Allan Pard and Jerry Potts. From Ammskaapipiikani, we have John and Carol Murray. From Siksika, we have Herman Yellow Old Woman, Irvine Scalplock, and Chris McHugh. And our good friend who accompanied us on a lot of the trips and who was sort of the go-between with museums because he was a curator and he was a pioneer in repatriation from museums—Gerry Conaty always helped us and supported us. And sometimes he got doors opened for us in museums.

Through repatriation, we have built some very strong relationships with some museum personnel. People whom we once might have regarded with suspicion have become close friends, attending our ceremonies and the Aako’ka’tssin; celebrating our successes and supporting us in difficult times. Individuals such as Robert Janes, Irene Kerr, Beth Carter, and Gerry Conaty from the Glenbow, Laura Peers and Heather Richardson from the Pitt Rivers Museum, and Alison Brown from the University of Aberdeen are role models for museum workers everywhere.

I hope that whoever reads this can understand what I am trying to say.