

We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home: Reimagining Respectful Indigenous Rematriation and
Repatriation at the University of Manitoba

by

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Abstract

Indigenous Ancestors (Indigenous “human remains”) and Belongings (Indigenous “cultural heritage”) continue to be housed in heritage-holding institutions (such as universities, museums, galleries, etc.) worldwide, and receive little to no respectful or culturally appropriate caregiving. It is a human rights concern in how Ancestors and Belongings are acquired, possessed, handled, studied, tested, analyzed, and stored by heritage-holding institutions. In Canada, there is currently no federal repatriation legislation that compels institutions to engage in return processes with Indigenous descendant communities, and there are none or very few institutions that have proactive repatriation policies or initiatives, and/or are informed and led by Indigenous Elders and ceremony.

The Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony (RRRC) is an Indigenous and Elder-led Ceremony at the University of Manitoba, which is the first university in Canada to have a proactive repatriation policy. This thesis is a documentation of one significant moment in the larger RRRC – the *Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony* – the bringing of Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings into the newly created temporary Resting Room at the University of Manitoba. I reflect on my own participation in the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony, and through interviews I share the experiences and insights of seven other Ceremony participants, and the impacts that the RRRC had on transforming the University as an institution. This manifested in several ways both in and beyond the University of Manitoba – tangibly, intangibly, symbolically, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and even temporally.

This thesis found that when repatriation processes follow Indigenous Protocols, repatriation can go beyond functionality, and the rematriation of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing can create healing spaces. Through the RRRC’s example, this research contributes toward a better understanding of how Indigenous paradigms to return are vital to respectful and meaningful repatriation policies and processes, and can act to transform heritage-holding institutions themselves in both tangible and intangible ways.

Keywords: Indigenous, rematriation, repatriation, return

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“Thank you” and this one acknowledgement section isn’t large enough to name all of you, and sing all of your praises and express my gratitude and appreciation to the extent that you all deserve. I hope you all know how much I appreciate and love and care for you, always. Thank you to all who I haven’t been able to mention by name – those who have contributed but wished to remain anonymous, my family, my friends, those who I was raised with, and those who have raised and taught me my entire life. Thank you all for the random adventures, life changing walks and talks, and for always sharing your brilliance, intelligence, and good hearts. Thank you all for always challenging the status quo and changing the way I think about everything. Thank you all, for all of the love and laughter and hugs and kisses that kept me going when things were hard. Ekosani, Chi-Miigwetch, Thank You, a million times over.

I want to acknowledge and honour those who were taking care of my home and my loved ones for me, so that I could write this thesis. Thank you to my family – Grandma Janet, Vanessa, Auntie Bobbi-Jo, Ted, Robert, Kevin, Lee-Ann, Darcy, Kyra, Walker, Tristan, Julie, Janessa, Kaylee, and Jayden; my love Godwin; and my friends Dante, MK, Sawyer, Nikki, and Kryn – who always had a roof over my head, a bed for me to sleep in, food on the table, dishes washed and laundry folded, and ran errands with me. Thank you for taking care of Momo when I was away and for giving her a home too, especially Auntie Andrea, Mummy, Didi, and Gavin. Thank you Greg for saving my life that one night. Thank you to my Breezy Bend boys, my second family – Craig, Keith (Diesel), Kyle, Reid, Jimmy, Karl, Garth (The Legend), Ross, Phil, Ron, Andy, Oliver, Graham, Eric (Duey), and Nathan (Booter or Skippy). Thank you for teaching me new things and always driving me home.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Kathleen Buddle and Dr. Laura Kelvin for your wisdom, strength, insights, and counsel – you've not only challenged me to grow intellectually, but also supported me with kindness and belief over the years. Thank you to Leo Pettipas, Noah Malazdrewicz, and Rachel ten Bruggencate especially, who's knowledge, expertise, and guidance were invaluable to giving me direction while researching. Thank you to Diane Simone and Victoria James from the Toronto Metropolitan University who taught me how to write Indigenously, and how to write a thesis in general. Thank you to the Elders Council, the Working Circle, the Anthropology Repatriation Committee. Thank you to my friends Pahan, Wanbdi, Vanessa, Larry, Wes, Rachel, and Chelsea – your experiences and everything that you've shared with me made this all possible. Thank you especially to my mom Vanessa, Auntie Bobbi-Jo, and Pahan for mentoring me and for keeping me strong in my roots, my culture, and my teachings. Thank you especially to my dad Kevin, for lending me all the tools I needed to create my artwork, telling me which materials would be best suited for what I wanted to do, and for transporting that huge cedar plaque both into the garage, and once more again into the University. Thank you Uncle Fred and Auntie Reagan for buying me the heaters that kept me warm while I was working on the artwork in the garage through the winter. Thank you Grandma Janet for hand-making those beautiful “thank you” cards I gave out to my co-researchers.

Last but not least, the biggest thank you goes to my Advisor and my friend, Dr. Lara Rosenoff Gauvin. You made everything possible in so many ways, not just for me but for so many others. You've been instrumental in my growth both as a person and as an academic, and you've always believed in the value of my Voice. I carry all the lessons you've given me since the moment we've met with reverence and gratitude, and I hope to walk with integrity and humility in a way that honours the example you've set and the trust you've placed in me. <3

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Ancestors, who are now resting, and will one day return home.

Ekosani, Chi-Miigwetch, Thank You for everything.

Janessa and Walker, I hope that what I've been able to contribute here will change the institutions and the world that you will one day walk into years from now when you're all grown up. Auntie loves you forever and ever.

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PROLOGUE

University of Manitoba Public Rematriation and Repatriation Apology; June 3, 2024 - Student Statement

Nipi-Mikinak Iskwew nitisnikason. Mikinak nidodem.

My name is Savannah Moon. My family roots are in St. Peter's/Peguis and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

I am truly honoured and humbled to be here before you, and I am so grateful to everyone who has made this day a reality. Thank you to our Elders Council, our Working Circle, our Anthropology Repatriation Committee.

I am a master's student here at the University of Manitoba, and my thesis has been based on the rematriation and repatriation of Indigenous Ancestors held here.

This path for me was not born from nothing, and looking back on the last ten years since I first became a student, I understand why I am standing here today.

When I first became a student in 2013 at just 18 years old, one of the first things I heard from other students when I got on campus was something to the effect of, *"Did you hear they got Indian bones in there?"*

Nobody whispered about this shocking truth. It was an open secret. It was something that our own professors acknowledged in our classrooms, but said there was nothing they could do.

I say these troubling things out loud so that you know it happened, and that you can bear witness to what an Indigenous student first learned from a university institution when she walked through these doors. It was that these violences are happening right now in our generation. And

that policies in heritage-holding institutions were interested in making sure that these violences stayed alive for the next generations.

People involved in heritage-holding and educational institutions have been afraid and hesitant to broach this topic; and have been worried that this may make things “explosive” and “divisive.” Harms and violences could be acknowledged, but never addressed.

Through our past inaction, we teach our students – who go on to become our next professors, our administrators, our curators, our researchers, our laboratory supervisors, our department heads, our policy makers – to continue believing that this was not something that would be possible in our lifetimes. That having our Ancestors stored in cardboard boxes was not only considered acceptable and professional conduct, but that heritage-holding institutions were built on denying basic humanity and dignity.

That’s what I thought ten years ago.

But that’s not what I see before me today.

Our Ancestors are now in handmade cedar boxes, lovingly placed in a Resting Room, covered with coloured fabrics, adorned by paintings, smelling of sacred medicines, waiting to be returned to their communities and descendants.

Today marks a recognition – that has taught everyone that change is possible.

Our fears for the future only become true if we *do not try*.

You must not be afraid to start these conversations, you must not be afraid to change your policies, you must not hesitate to do better by, with and for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

People. You must not be afraid to do better for your students and by Our Mother the Earth, Turtle Island – our homeland that we call Canada.

To now see that my community, professors, fellow colleagues and students, and now my University have challenged an old vision of the future, and that we have done it hand in hand with our Elders and descendant communities... it tells me that we don't have to be afraid anymore. When we have brave spaces with courageous conversations, and allow the truth to come out, we can work together towards a reconciled future. Because of the courage, perseverance, and dedication of many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and allies - **we can bring our Ancestors home.**

Ekosani, Miigwetch.

(University of Manitoba, at 1:03:03-1:07:25)

(CBC Listen, at 0:20-4:36)



Image 1 – “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home.” Artwork by Savannah Moon (2024).

Jessica Tapatai, “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” Cedar Plaque, March 7, 2025, Photograph, UM Today, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/transforming-spaces-for-generations-to-follow/>.

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1. Did you hear they got Indian bones in there? (Personal Story - Opening)

It began back in 2013;¹ I was just 18 years old, and it was my very first semester on the University of Manitoba (UM) campus. I'm from the country, so the city of Winnipeg was a very big culture shock to me. My Indigenous² identity was not something that I was wholly embracing at the time, but I was eager to enter an institution that I perceived as being more open-minded and forward-thinking than the small town I grew up in. So one day, when I heard a group of random students in the hallways openly discussing the fact that there were Indigenous "remains"³ in classrooms and laboratories – "*Did you hear they got Indian bones in there?*" – it was very uncomfortable for me, and yet not all that surprising. Given the context and the attitudes held at the time, this was actually extremely normal (I had this same event occur to me more than once over the years – students excitedly saying to each other *Indian bones*, as if our

¹ The way I tell this thesis is not an authoritative account of everything there is to tell about the RRRC, and the breadth of work and community service that was happening long before its inception, that contributed to laying the foundations for it to be created. I have not heard or represented all the stories there are to tell about it, but I am claiming my own experiences and how I made meaning from it in this thesis.

² I am choosing to write this thesis as per the formatting recommendations in "Indigenous Elements of Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples" (Younging 2018), as well as employing a personalized Indigenous-English academic writing strategy. I have purposefully chosen to de-emphasize conventional western spellings. Words such as Western, White, Eurocentric, Department, etc. will not be capitalized (with the exception of "University" as it's usage throughout this thesis is specifically referring to the University of Manitoba when capitalized); but, words such as Indigenous, Indigenous People(s)/Person, Indigenous Nation(s), [Indigenous] Ancestors/Ancestral, Belongings, Resting Room, Resting Place, Indigenous Law(s), Indigenous Protocol(s), Indigenous Knowledge, [Indigenous] Voice, Clan, Treaty/Treaties, Right(s), Truth and Reconciliation, in a Good Way, and Mother Earth will be capitalized when used within an Indigenous context. Because this thesis is being told from an Indigenous perspective, Indigenous style should take precedence over status quo academic writing conventions; especially considering that most documentation regarding repatriation has mainly used the latter, which has been harmful as it has contributed to continued systemic violence against Indigenous People. I hope that by using Indigenous style, I can contribute to better and more respectful practices when writing about repatriation and repatriation.

³ I am choosing to use the word "remains" in the Prologue, as this was the language that was used to refer to the Ancestors at the time. It is an intentional choice, to reflect the way that I authentically experienced this. Any usage of the word "remains" throughout this thesis will be in quotations to indicate that while this may have been the word used in a certain source that I must repeat for the sake of keeping its context (excluding any direct quotations), it is not a respectful word to use (and has offensive implications). Although it is common (if not standard practice) to use the term "remains," it is a term I do not personally advocate for when referring to Indigenous Belongings and Ancestors.

sacred, stolen, and desecrated relatives were a novelty to them). And yet, this still had a profound impact on me. Every day that I walked onto campus after that, I knew I was entering an institution and a class where those ideas that I hoped would be addressed or spoken about in university...it was not what I had hoped for, to say the least.

In January of 2015 (the Winter 2015 semester; I was 20 now), I had my first encounter with the reality of this open secret myself. I had finally decided to pursue anthropology as my major in my first undergraduate degree (I have two⁴). As a budding anthropologist/archaeologist, I was (perhaps a little naïvely) starry-eyed about wanting to be “BONES” or Indiana Jones or Lara Croft. To me, these were the role models of these professions, because they fought for the “greater good” to make the world a better and safer place. And when I was young, I wanted to be like them, because I too wanted to change the world.

But when I went into my first osteology⁵ class, I had to reckon with the very much overlooked “graverobbing” part of some of my on-screen heroes – I was directly confronted with the reality of Indigenous trauma and systemic racism. Before class even officially began, my professor made a disclosure that acknowledged that the whispers I had heard a few years ago were true. Further, I learned that it was actually several laboratories across campus – kinesiology, anatomy, nursing, and of course, anthropology⁶ – which all possessed, at some point in their histories, Indigenous skeletal “remains.” The professor told the class that the “remains” in the

⁴ I first graduated in 2016 with a 3-year Bachelor of Arts (General), and then again in 2022 with a 4-year Bachelor of Arts (Honours) – both with a major in Anthropology.

⁵ Osteology is the study of bones (whether human or non-human), which includes understanding and analyzing things such as their morphology, articulations, pathology, growth and development, amongst other things.

⁶ Referring to both the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories.

anthropology labs “came to be here”⁷ from “salvage archaeology”⁸ that was conducted in the 1960’s (a large group which came specifically from the Red River Floodway and “Fidler Mounds” archaeological projects from sites in southern Manitoba⁹). And we were told that they remained there, unorganized and in cardboard boxes, due to poor archaeological record-keeping, lack of personnel, and funding.¹⁰ The professor admitted that between not having proper documentation in the first place and lacking the resources (and the prioritization) to find out – that the anthropology department¹¹ didn’t actually *know* who they had, where they came from, or who was Indigenous or not. They said these “remains” had previously been in the teaching “collections” (the ones students would use to learn with¹² in a classroom setting), but that they had since been removed...however, they couldn’t guarantee that there were *none* that remained. We were told that there was nothing my professor, or the department, could do. And then we were told that if you want to get a passing grade, we *may* encounter some of *my* relatives, but

⁷ This is the phrase I remember the professor using to describe how Indigenous Ancestors arrived at the University of Manitoba in the first place. This oversimplification left out the truth of the violences committed both during and after the inappropriate acquisition, storage, and handling of Indigenous Ancestors, and also failed to address our continuation of those violences in that class.

⁸ “Salvage archaeology” refers to archaeological practices where – in response to a threat of destruction (through human activities, particularly those that alter land in some way such as construction, development, or war; or natural phenomena, such as flooding) – sites, “remains,” “artifacts,” or otherwise that are deemed to be archaeological in nature must be “preserved.” Due to the threat of imminent danger, these projects are often rushed due to time constraints, and the primary focus is on retrieval of information (often at the expense of employing standard excavation practices).

⁹ More information in Section 2.3.

¹⁰ I have since found out that this was a gross oversimplification, and was not altogether true. In fact, many Ancestors *were* organized, with records attached (while of course, some were not).

¹¹ At the time, I believed that this applied both generally amongst the department, as well as specifically to those who used the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories.

¹² Osteology students would learn different bones each week. We would get trays with that week’s particular bone(s) placed in front of us, so that we could examine it more closely and better understand smaller features and details (such as foramen, condyles, sutures, etc.), and their articulations with other bones. Sometimes we would articulate an entire skeleton (though this was mainly with casts). Bones were also used for “bell ringer tests,” where students would have one minute to answer some identification/articulation questions about the particular bone(s) on display at a “station,” before moving onto the next station once a bell/buzzer was rung – there were roughly 30 stations during each test (some bones were casts, some were not). These learning and testing activities occurred in both of the osteology classes I attended. I am unsure of past practices and usage of the teaching “collections” before (and after, up until 2018 – see Section 1.1) my own time and experience learning with them.

that we must learn anyways (there was no option to opt-out). And so when a white styrofoam tray was placed in front of me –

I touched the bones.

I will never forget how I suddenly felt swallowed whole by the sea of whispers that followed in that moment in that first osteology class. I felt isolated amongst my peers as I heard students voices almost tinged with excitement as they shared with each other what was seemingly a novelty to them – *Indian bones*.¹³ I looked around; I have white passing privilege myself, but as far as I could gather from a glance around the room, I was the only Indigenous student in the Winter 2015 class that year. And although the professor looked regretful and sympathetic after the disclaimer, seconds later we immediately went into our lesson plan as though nothing had happened.

It was never brought up in class again. I ended up dropping the course within the month.

When I decided to re-take the osteology class again a few months later in September (the Fall 2015 semester), this “disclosure” was yet again made to me before class had even begun, but this time it was by a fellow student. I distinctly remember one of the first things my classmate (now very close friend) said to me, because they simply turned to me and asked me point-blank, “So. **Did you hear they got Indian bones in here?**”¹⁴ And of course I had – apparently

¹³ Though I suppose whispers are only one form of violence – one Indigenous UM student I spoke with who shared a similar experience to mine said they had instead heard students be outright offensive after their professor’s disclosure. The student later shared with me that, “it wasn’t so much that students outright laughed at the news, but there was space for them to make their own insensitive remarks about the topic following the disclosure. I just remember feeling stunned that this wasn’t serious to others I shared space with and whereas for me, it was shocking. At the time, I believed that could have been avoided if the university as an institution had set a proper example. As a young student the shock of realizing this was happening at the school I was proudly attending for post-secondary was a stark reminder that these places weren’t always the safe or inclusive spaces they claimed to be” (email to author, June 2, 2025).

¹⁴ To be fair to them, they immediately followed this up with something along the lines of “Crazy. That’s messed up, isn’t it?”

everyone had! This wasn't shocking news to me now – it was a rhetorical question. Everyone knew, but to me it seemed that nobody truly cared.

This especially seemed doubly so when, even though there was a different professor teaching for the Fall semester, they made almost the exact same “disclosure” to the class mere moments after my classmate had – right down to same explanation, the “nothing we can do about it” disclaimer, the same sympathetic and regretful look, and then the immediate jump into the lesson plan (and then the never bringing it up again). At least this time, I was prepared. Two years of my education had gone by at this point, and two things were always in the back of my mind: the first was “is this one of them?” when another one of those white styrofoam trays would come around, and the second was “somebody should do something about this” (and also...why *hasn't* somebody done something about this?). Although I finally passed and received an “A” in osteology, those thoughts never left during the remainder of that class (nor did they even after that course had ended). And again, to my knowledge, I was perhaps the only Indigenous student in class. I felt I was the only one who cared, because I was the only one who was worrying. Because to seemingly everyone but me, this was, again – actually extremely “normal.”

As an undergraduate student, I didn't think there was anything that I could do – but I wished that someone would. So when as a graduate student an opportunity arose to *become* that someone who could do something about it, I was ready and willing.

1.1 How Did this Research Emerge? (Need for the Research)

In early 2019, former graduate student Rachel ten Bruggencate¹⁵ approached the new head of the department of anthropology about Indigenous human “remains” (**hereafter**

¹⁵ Rachel would soon become the newly appointed laboratory supervisor for the anthropology laboratories (referring to both the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories).

Ancestors) and material cultural heritage (**hereafter Belongings**¹⁶) that she knew were not being properly cared for, nor repatriated, within the laboratories. The department head was receptive and agreed this was something that needed to be addressed. The department of anthropology as a whole agreed that things needed to change, though they didn't know where to start. Camille Callison (a member of Tahltan Nation, then Indigenous Strategies Librarian, UM) and Cary Miller (St. Croix and Leech Lake Anishinaabe, then Head of the Department of Indigenous Studies,¹⁷ UM) urged them to seek out Indigenous and Elder guidance as they began imagining what a collaborative and respectful approach to addressing this matter might look like.

It was soon after this time (when I was in my second undergraduate degree) that I met my current advisor, Dr. Lara Rosenoff Gauvin. I was one of her students for a cultural anthropology class that I was taking for the Winter 2020 semester. I had only known her for 2 months before the Covid-19 pandemic struck in the beginning of March halfway through the course, but in that time she had approached me about becoming a student research assistant (SRA) in the department of anthropology's recently begun repatriation work. I said I was interested in being involved, and to stay in touch.

On June 26, 2020, we had our first official meeting for what was to become the department of anthropology's repatriation committee. A group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous

¹⁶ "Belongings" is the preferred term that the UM uses when referring to Indigenous material cultural heritage. Throughout this thesis, the term "cultural heritage" will also be used (as opposed to "*material* cultural heritage") as it encompasses and acknowledges the fact that heritage can be both tangible and intangible. The terms "Belongings" and "cultural heritage" may be used interchangeably with one another, while material cultural heritage will specifically refer to Belongings that are tangible. The exception to this would be when the word "collections" is used to describe Belongings - it will be put into quotations to indicate that while this may have been the word used in a certain source that I must repeat for the sake of keeping its context (excluding any direct quotations), it is not a respectful word to use (and has offensive implications).

¹⁷ At the time it was called the Department of Native Studies, until it was "reminted" in the Fall 2022 semester. (Department of Indigenous Studies, *UM Indigenous Newsletter*, Fall 2022, <https://umanitoba.ca/arts/sites/arts/files/2022-09/Indigneous-newsletter-Fall2022.pdf>)

people; academics and non-academics, Elders, and even one mother with her baby, gathered in a circle on the lawn of Migizii Agamik (the Indigenous Student Centre at the University of Manitoba campus). We were social distancing and wearing masks, but it was here that we created space, entered into relationship, and held ceremony¹⁸ for the very first time.

.....

The department head acknowledged the violences out loud.

“There are many Ancestral remains¹⁹ at the University.”

It was also here that the department head said they were sorry.

“We want to address the problematic legacy of colonialism of stewardship that these remains²⁰ represent.”

“We want to bring the department into a space where we can listen.”

“Reconciliation is us developing kinship relationships and acknowledging this.”

Two Indigenous community Elders spoke on what was to be done next.

¹⁸ Although we did partake in a water ceremony during this gathering, I refer to ceremony here not as a *particular* process, but in the way as it is described later on in this thesis, as engagement and participation in ceremony – Pahan PteSanWin says in her master’s thesis that “Participation in ceremony serves three roles: healing from trauma, the growth of sacred knowledge,” (2003, 88) and using your sacred gifts and listening for and acting upon sacred guidance (95-96). Through my own experiences and teachings I know this to be true, and that ceremony can be considered as anything that includes one or all or a combination of these things, in whichever way or form that it manifests (both tangible and intangible). We gathered there that day for those purposes, and thus “entered into ceremony.”

¹⁹ “Remains” are not in quotations here, as this is a direct quote and reflects the language that was used to refer to the Ancestors at the time.

²⁰ “Remains” are not in quotations here, as this is a direct quote and reflects the language that was used to refer to the Ancestors at the time.

“We have to fix this. It’s brave to acknowledge that this is happening...but there is a lot of hurt. We should move forward in a Good Way and have ceremony to make the Ancestors comfortable while they wait.”

“There’s a lot of processes to go through. It’s not something we did, but it’s something we can fix.”

“This needs to be dealt with. But we need to be cognizant of developing protocols.”

“One aspect is settlers reconciling with Indigenous People for sure, but another is Indigenous People reconciling with their Ancestors and living in a way that would make them proud.”

After everyone had spoken, we feasted from a potluck at the picnic tables and enjoyed the summer sunshine. This was a big step to entering into the right relationship with each other – together.

.....

Just after this first meeting, I officially began my SRA work for my advisor from July 2020 until April 2021. I was tasked with two things: the first was researching the history of the department of anthropology at the University of Manitoba itself and the second was researching the history of archaeological practices and legislation within Manitoba and Canada, and their intersections with Indigenous People and the University of Manitoba. The information I found helped to contribute to the important truth-telling regarding how and why Indigenous Ancestors were brought to the University of Manitoba and also made clear the department of anthropology’s history of exploitation of Indigenous Ancestors.

What I began to learn through that research was precisely *how* Indigenous Ancestors came to be possessed by the University, particularly after the creation of the department of anthropology (with sociology) in 1961/1962.²¹ I also learned how museums, heritage-holding and academic institutions are not required to return Ancestors to descendant communities, notify them of their existence, or even respectfully care-give for them. Through this work I also specifically looked at examining the current practices institutions use to house²² and repatriate Indigenous Ancestors and their cultural Belongings.

In January 2021, Camille and Lara organized two initial meetings with all Elders on campus (from which an Elder Council formed),²³ and from there the Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony (RRRC or UM RRRC) was created. The head of the department of anthropology apologized to the Elders, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, and Knowledge Keepers employed at the University (see Appendix A - Department Apology for legacy of disrespect to Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island), asking for their forgiveness, and help and guidance in making things right moving forward. From there, three individuals were appointed to be the RRRC Co-Chairs: Pahan PteSanWin (a Métis Niheyaw doctoral student in Indigenous Studies), Dr. Lara Rosenoff Gauvin (professor in the department of anthropology), and at the time Cary Miller (St. Croix and Leech Lake Anishinaabe, former Head of the Department of Indigenous Studies, UM) who would later pass the role on to Dr. Lorena Sekwan Fontaine (Cree and

²¹ I will discuss this more in Section 2.3.

²² The word “house/housing” is preferred over the term “stewarded/stewarding” throughout this thesis, as to steward something implies that i) something was *entrusted* to a steward, and ii) that it is *taken care of* by those who are stewarding it. I do not feel that using the phrase “stewarding” accurately applies to Ancestors and Belongings that are held in institutions (as many were stolen and/or obtained unethically, and are not being cared for). Although, the term “steward” may be used occasionally when it is within the context of ownership, as the term “housing” can be limited in that it mainly refers to where something is being kept.

²³ Five Elders came forward – Elder Wanda Joy Murdock, Grandfather Wanbdi Wakita, Elder Norman Meade, Elder Carl Stone, and Indigenous Knowledge Holder Ed Azure – and have been meeting monthly since. Grandmother Karen Courchene joined the Elders Council in September 2024.

Anishinaabe from Sagkeeng First Nation, the new Head of the Department of Indigenous Studies, UM).

My advisor Lara and I kept communicating online until the social distancing restrictions were lifted, and I ended up graduating my second undergraduate degree a year later in May 2022. I decided to pursue a master's degree in the Fall semester of that same year (where I officially asked her to be my master's advisor). My master's inquiries grew out of the research that I did as an undergraduate, and I decided to focus my thesis research on how we – the RRRC at UM – can *respectfully* care-give for Indigenous Ancestors while they are at the University, until we are able to return them to their descendant communities.

1.2 Why an Indigenous and Ceremonial Paradigm – How Did you Come to Begin Your (Master's) Research? (Context of the Research)

Due to my field of study,²⁴ I first came *to know* of repatriation in very archaeological and biological anthropological terms and concepts. However, through both my undergraduate and graduate research, I have come to learn that that is certainly not all that it is. And much of what I have come to know did not come from books, but from the connections made from creating relationships, from ceremony, and from my life experiences. And I came to understand the importance of considering rematriation in tandem with repatriation processes as well. This is what led me to consider that repatriation concerning Indigenous Ancestors should be done within Indigenous rematriation and repatriation paradigms, and to understand it within ceremonial terms – because the way that *I experienced it* at UM, and truly came to know repatriation, was through ceremony. As one of the RRRC Council Elders Wanda Joy Murdock has said, “*everything related to repatriation is ceremony*” (pers. comm., n.d., 2021). Within Indigenous paradigms,

²⁴ Anthropology – during both my undergraduate degrees my primary interest was in archaeology and bio-anthropology. My focus has shifted since then to include more cultural anthropology.

repatriation and rematriation and ceremony are inextricable from each other. Respectful caregiving for our Ancestors is inherent as a part of following Indigenous Protocols.

And yet, repatriation has still principally been approached from eurocentric, patriarchal, legal, empirical, capitalistic, functional and bureaucratic paradigms and perspectives. This occurs despite conventional scientific frameworks often being dismissive of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and worldviews, and often has been the basis used to support racist ideologies (Walker 2003). Particularly when conducting and designing research, “When Indigenous researchers wish to set their work within a defined methodological framework, most often they are required to do so within Western paradigms” (37). And so, Indigenous “data” (even when it may have been collected by an Indigenous Person) is mainly collected and interpreted through eurocentric methodologies in order to be considered legitimate by academic and scientific standards – and it is then also evaluated, validated, and disseminated through these same colonial, white, male-dominated systems (38). Repatriation has also mainly been documented and written about from a colonial and/or non-Indigenous point of view, and rematriation is hardly spoken about at all in academic, legalistic, or other settler-authored content or texts (with the exception, to my knowledge, of Robin Gray 2022, a Ts’msyen scholar, who discusses how institutions should use rematriation paradigms in repatriation as they are grounded in Indigenous Laws and Protocols). Repatriation has predominantly been looked at and done in this non-Indigenous way – but do non-Indigenous epistemes and practices truly have the capacity to understand Indigenous Rights, Rights to return, and sovereignty?

This gap was revealed to me throughout the early development of the RRRC and from the SRA research I was conducting, as it started to become apparent that while a common concern was “*how* do we repatriate/return?” – I found that very few have investigated “how do

we repatriate/return *in a Good Way*?” I think even fewer, especially non-Indigenous people, know that “in a Good Way” is a teaching that Indigenous People use to mean in a way that *follows* Indigenous Protocols (Indigenous Laws), or that has been able to engage with Protocols in a meaningful way (or at all) during repatriation processes.

Repatriation is *functional* as a western-based mode of return, as it is primarily conceptualized as a legal avenue that transfers “ownership” of Ancestors and other cultural heritage from institutions back to descendant communities. While there are many problems with this, the two greatest concerns I find are that the construct of repatriation: 1) fails to recognize that those Ancestors and other cultural heritage in heritage-holding institutions were primarily stolen and so ownership was never relinquished in the first place; and 2) does not consider that owning people is dehumanizing, not appropriate, and part of the larger narrative and functionality of settler colonial erasure and violence. Furthermore, academics and other agents of Canadian institutions consistently fail to approach “respecting” in ways that Indigenous polities consider appropriate. Repatriation does not prioritize being *respectful* of Indigenous sovereignty, ownership and control – because it follows western laws, not Indigenous Laws (Indigenous Protocols). Respect is not necessarily legislated in Canadian law, but it is in Indigenous Laws (and is inherent as a part of following our Protocols). Returning Indigenous Ancestors to Indigenous Nations, People, and communities requires ***respectful and meaningful co-designed repatriation methodologies that seek to learn about and center the epistemes, relational practices and principles, and other ways of engaging as prioritized and determined by descendant communit(ies).***

The University of Manitoba responded to the need for repatriation to be functional *as well as* respectful, and has followed Indigenous Protocols by entering into a good relationship with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People. They have not only acknowledged the violence, but have asked for forgiveness, the guidance of Elders, and committed to truth-telling and change (see Appendix B – the University of Manitoba’s Official Apology²⁵). Through the RRRC, the University of Manitoba is the first university in Canada to establish and follow an Elders’ repatriation Council – and to create a *proactive, collaboratively written and community/university co-authored* repatriation policy.



Image 2 – A screenshot of the YouTube livestream of the University of Manitoba’s Public Apology, featuring Savannah Moon and Amari Dion-Hart as they give their student statements (June 3, 2024).

University of Manitoba, “*Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba*,” June 3, 2024, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6z-GSfZ5QPQ>.

²⁵ Although I describe this in depth later, UM President Michael Benarroch publicly apologized to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People for the violence of accepting Ancestors and Belongs without consent on June 3, 2024.

I want to share what that development of that “good” relationship has been like through my own eyes.

That’s why my master’s thesis shares knowledge that can inform Canadian institutional repatriation frameworks, practices, and protocols; and transform past violent colonial practices by reimagining respectful rematriation and repatriation within institutional spaces. Reimagining rematriation and repatriation from an Indigenous perspective means following Indigenous Protocols, which asserts the creation of healing spaces within academic institutions; and explores how a practical and culturally inclusive way to repatriate in a Good Way comes from Indigenous paradigms, through ceremony. Because, as I shared previously, Elder Wanda Joy Murdock emphasized early on that *everything related to repatriation is ceremony*.

1.3 What Am I Researching? (Thesis Statement)

Using the RRRC at the University of Manitoba as a case study, my main research question is: Can repatriation go beyond functionality and act to transform institutions? As you will see, I discuss here different moments within the RRRC, and conclude that the creation of healing spaces within the institution, and the transformation of the institution itself, is vital to Indigenous approaches to repatriation.

1.4 How Did Your Research Develop – What Does the Rest of this Thesis Look Like? (Situating the Research)

What it is that makes something a ceremony can be very broad,²⁶ especially when Wanda Joy Murdock has said, “*everything* related to repatriation is ceremony” (pers. comm., n.d., 2021). However, the only qualifiers that (when I think about ceremony within the context of Indigenous rematriation) make a ceremony *a ceremony*, lies not in its precise processes or frameworks, but

²⁶ There is and can be no singular or unified definition for “ceremony.”

in engagement with and participation in ceremony (in sanctioned ways). Pahan PteSanWin said in her master's thesis that "Participation in ceremony serves three roles: healing from personal trauma, the growth of sacred knowledge," (2023, 88) and to exercise your sacred gifts and listen for and act upon sacred guidance (95-96). And, as Angie Bruce, the University of Manitoba's Vice-President (Indigenous), said in her statement during the Apology, "repatriation is not just merely the *process*; it is a step towards healing" (University of Manitoba 2024, at 14:35). Repatriation through an Indigenous ceremonial lens means that we understand that repatriation is the creation of a space where healing – in whichever way or form that it manifests (both tangible and intangible) – can occur.

Understanding that healing is fundamental to Indigenous paradigms of repatriation then, I would like to share a key event within the RRRC where healing spaces were created through ceremony. I refer to this event throughout the rest of this thesis as the "Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony."

The **Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony** was described to Wanbdi Wakita as a Dakota funeral practice, and was a one-day Indigenous and Elder-led ceremony that is a part of the much larger RRRC at the University of Manitoba. The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony marks a significant moment in the RRRC timeline – the bringing of the Ancestors into the newly created temporary Resting Room on the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry campus.

In this thesis, I am going to speak my truth with you, by telling you my research story – it's a culmination of my own stories, and the stories that have been shared with me by many others who were in this time and space alongside me. Our Indigenous Protocols were passed down through stories – so while writing a thesis as a story might not make sense to some people, telling stories is a way that keeps our oral traditions intact in the written word. "Indigenous

storywork” is a mutually beneficial Indigenous practice of oral storytelling that not only gives guidance to others but is shown to also contribute to the healing process specifically for those who in engage in repatriation-related storywork, whether they are the tellers or the listeners (Atalay 2019, 84). “Narrative inquiry” is one qualitative approach to storying that values lived experience as a source of knowledge, enabling participants to share their personal stories while emphasizing collaboration and mutual reflexivity (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Your thesis *is* your research “story,” and “researchers are storytellers” (2). Telling stories – about ourselves, about our world, about our research – can be a way to connect with them more meaningfully and may help others to connect with them as well.

1.5 Who I Am (Self-Location)

Understanding who I am as a person and as a researcher is the first step in knowing my stories. It is also important to be upfront about which discourses informed my ideas, as “researchers who continue to avoid transparency regarding their cultural background and worldview continue the colonial practice of assuming their worldview represents reality for Indigenous people involved in the research” (Walker 2003, 39).

*Nipi-Mikinak Iskwew nitisnikason. Mikinak nidodem.*²⁷ My sacred spirit name is Water Turtle Woman, and I am from Turtle Clan. My birth name is Savannah Moon Kisilowsky, though I prefer to go just by Savannah Moon. I am an anthropologist with both Indigenous (Cree and Métis) and settler (Welsh and Scottish/Irish) and immigrant (German) parentage. I was born in Winnipeg and raised in the (then) little town of Stonewall and the surrounding areas all my life. I have family roots in St. Peter’s/Original Peguis First Nation (Treaty 1A), and my family is one of the original land holders of the original Manitoba Métis Red River settlement and has lived along

²⁷ Cree for “My name is Water Turtle Woman. My Clan is Turtle.”

the banks of the Red River and in present-day Treaty One territory for generations. We are Lillies and Harpers and Moars. By federal *Indian Act* standards, I would be a “non-status,” “Status,” “métis,” and “Métis”²⁸ Indian (yes, you read that right. To fully explain that might need a thesis of its own...). Indigenous identity can be complex, and growing up with a typical Canadian melting pot of ancestry and cultures means that I tend to think in all the colours of the rainbow, rather than strictly in black and white.

I am currently a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, with an academic background that mainly dabbles in archaeology/ biological/cultural anthropology, and Indigenous Studies. Part of my role in the RRRC is being a researcher, Ceremony participant, and meeting note-taker of the department of anthropology’s repatriation committee; where I discuss ethical issues and offer input into policy-making decisions surrounding the respectful repatriation and repatriation of Ancestors from my student perspective. This has given me a much deeper insight into the more bureaucratic and institutional discourses that constrain repatriation and



Image 3 – Savannah Moon on the day of the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony (June 10, 2023).

Savannah Moon, personal photo, June 10, 2023.

²⁸ I am currently a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF).

rematriation work and has revealed some of the complexities that happen behind the scenes. As someone who is an Indigenous academic, I have experiential knowledge of and membership in a variety of both Indigenous communities and academic institutions. I introduce myself in this way so that you can see not only my academic positionality, but my ability to locate myself within my communities as per my Indigenous Protocols, and that I write this thesis from the intersection of all these worlds.

1.6 Why Are You Writing on This Topic? (Purpose of the Research)

The purpose of this research is in line with following the spiritual duties and responsibilities to my Indigenous name and Clan and community, and as a part of my personal commitment to the Ancestors to respectfully letting them rest. As an Indigenous woman scholar, I also know my responsibilities and gifts include using my Voice,²⁹ my writing, my culture, and my art as a medium for institutional introspection, dialogue, and healing.

1.7 Why is This Important to You? Why is This Important in General? (Rationale of the Research)

The background and need for my thesis research is twofold. It comes from a very personal place (see Section 1), and how I approached this research is rooted in my own background, in an auto-ethnographic documentation of my experience. However, the overall context for this rematriation and repatriation research also comes from a much larger historical need for truth-telling and reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Repatriation is important to contemporary research,³⁰ curation, and reconciliation practices because there is a serious ethical dilemma in how Indigenous Ancestors and cultural

²⁹ As per Younging (2018), Indigenous Voice can also be capitalized (79). I capitalize it here because I am not just using *my* voice as Savannah, but my Indigenous Voice as *Nipi Mikinak Iskwew*.

³⁰ In particular, especially any academics whose research relies on or benefits from use or knowledge of Belongings and/or Ancestors.

heritage (both tangible and intangible) “collections” were acquired, possessed, stored, and used (and are still stored and used) by heritage-holding institutions. These ethical conundrums cannot readily be addressed through the legal system, which constrains the repatriation of Indigenous Ancestors and cultural heritage through colonial definitions of “ownership” (Breske 2018) that ties return to legal channels and resources that are largely inaccessible to Indigenous Peoples and communities. Unethically possessing and housing Ancestors within institutions is part of an unacknowledged and unaddressed chapter of Canada’s ongoing genocide against Indigenous People. The crux is that institutions rarely engage in robust and proactive engagement to repatriate, which results in the continued institutionalization of hundreds of thousands of Ancestors worldwide. Further, very few institutions worldwide – if any – have repatriation initiatives that are informed and led by Indigenous ceremony. If Canada wishes to truly fulfill its commitments to the Treaties and Indigenous People in the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, it must be proactive and engage with Indigenous People and communities in good faith – even in the absence of legally mandated set of protocols. Therefore, it is the ethical duty and responsibility of Canadian academic institutions to be proactive and initiate repatriation actions, or to at minimum ethically respond to queries from descendant communities and/or Nations (“responsive repatriation” – see Meloche 2022).

1.8 What Do I Aim to Accomplish with this Research? (Objectives of the Study)

My intention is to document the RRRC’s evolving “respectful” caregiving processes, to make an original contribution to reimagining and transforming Canadian institutional repatriation policies and paradigms, and as Elder Wanda Joy Murdock says, to share teachings from this Ceremony. My aim is that this research will contribute to a list of best practices which might be practically applied in institutional settings to promote an ethos of Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in

community-engaged repatriation. My hope is that this thesis will contribute to advancing knowledge and forward thinking, as governments and institutions across Canada grapple with implementing ethical guidelines³¹ to protect the Rights of Indigenous People and communities and specifically the Rights to the repatriation of their Ancestors and material culture currently held by institutions without consent.

My objective with this thesis is not to offer a *framework for repatriation*, but to contribute to rematriation and repatriation work in Canada by sharing practices of the RRRC that are most respectful to Indigenous People asserting their Right to rematriate and repatriate their Ancestors. By documenting what institutional transformation looks like in practice, other heritage-holding institutions may have an example of a guiding ethos when investigating and rematriating their own Indigenous holdings.

1.9 Limitations

Limitations of this study are that UM's RRRC, and the specific Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony I describe here, cannot and should not be replicated exactly as it was created/performed/unfolded. Furthermore, the specific sacred details of what occurs in ceremony (other than what is shared through participant interviews) cannot and should not be documented and shared. As a Kitayatis, Niizhogobo (English name Robert Green) explains, “[The spirits] are the ones that come and tell us those things, teach us those things. That's why you don't copy anybody. When you see ceremonies done by somebody, you don't do that. You do what is taught to you. You have to do the ceremony in the way it is shown to you. The ceremony is specific to you” (Pahan PteSanWin 2023, 83).

³¹ Such as UNDRIP, which clearly acknowledges rightful Indigenous sovereignties over their own cultural heritage – see Section 2.1.

Although many qualitative case studies share this irreproducibility, this is especially true in the case of the Indigenous Elder-led RRRC at the University of Manitoba. As an example, the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony is unique to our Winnipeg/Manitoban/Indigenous community and is not one that has existed in this exact form before. As Pahan PteSanWin says about the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony, “How many times in a lifetime will people ever do something like that? Never! [You] Probably won’t meet anyone else who ever had that experience” (interview with author, May 17, 2024). This is intentional, and by design. However, these constraints do not detract from the findings. Repatriation processes should take whatever form is appropriate to each unique Nations, institution, and lands, as long as they are accountable to local Indigenous polities, organizations, governance institutions, and to local practices of meaningful collaboration and leadership. The precise avenue of return and redress does not rest in the specific methodology or processes, but in the intent. It is the intent – a respectful Indigenous Elder-led process – that can be replicated and implemented in various ways that upholds Indigenous Nations’ sovereignty and self-determination. This specific Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony is not a precursor to engaging in good relationships with Indigenous Nations, should other institutions look towards the RRRC’s example and wish to initiate repatriation processes. In that sense, the only constraints on engaging in and letting ceremony lead are the willingness and prioritization of the institution.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2. What Have Other People Said About This? (Literature Review)

This thesis research can be situated within the contemporary context of repatriation – both the geographical location in which this research took place, as well as the archaeological and legislative context of how Ancestors and Belongings came into, and remained in, the University’s possession.

2.1 Repatriation in Canada – Legal Context or Lack Thereof

Indigenous Ancestral “remains” continue to be housed in heritage-holding institutions (universities, museums, galleries, government heritage departments, etc.) throughout Canada. A Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions (2019) found that in Canadian museums and heritage-holding institutions alone, that there were 6.7 million Indigenous cultural “artefacts”³² and an estimated 2,500 Ancestral “remains” (including both partial and fragmentary “remains”) in Canadian museums (9). This does not include the estimated thousands more that are held in only 12 major Canadian university institutions (see Troian 2017, more in Section 2.2 below) and provincial government heritage departments. It is unknown how many Ancestors and other elements of cultural heritage may be held by other universities, colleges, other academic institutions, and government heritage units which were *not* surveyed by Troian. We also do not have an idea of how many Ancestors or cultural heritage are held in places such as private “collections” and other non-heritage-holding institutions, nor does this estimate include any of those of which may be held outside of Canada.

Canada also currently does not have any enactable federal repatriation legislation (for example, such as the United States of America’s NAGPRA) to compel heritage-holding

³² As per Younging (2018), “artifacts” and “artefacts” are both inappropriate terms to use within Indigenous contexts (52-53), and so will be in quotations throughout the rest of this thesis.

institutions (or otherwise) to initiate or engage in repatriation or repatriation (Bourgeois 2021, 2; Pullman 2018); and so any institutions or organizations that currently house “remains” of Ancestors are not legally required to do anything with them (including proper storage, care, or return). No Canadian university (with the exception of UM’s RRRC) has a pro-active, university-wide repatriation policy or process; only 4 Canadian universities (including the UM) currently have publicly accessible repatriation policies (Bourgeois 2021, 8), however (excluding the UM), they are not *proactive* policies.

Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that “**Indigenous Peoples have the right³³...to the repatriation of their human remains**” (United Nations General Assembly 2007, 12), but the local implementation of this Right globally has been uneven and inadequate. Additionally, Article 11 says that “Indigenous Peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures,” which include archaeological and historical sites and “artefacts” (11-12). Articles 18, 19, 31, and 32 are also relevant as they refer to: i) rights of decision-making in matters that affect Indigenous Peoples’ rights, ii) any legislation made affecting them, iii) intellectual property rights over the various manifestations of Indigenous ways of life and its expressions, and iv) the right to determine land and resource use including redress and mitigation for any adverse impacts (United Nations General Assembly 2007, 15-16, 22-24). In the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action Report* (2015), Calls to Action #43

³³ “Right” is not capitalized throughout this paragraph, as these are directly quoted and paraphrased from UNDRIP.

and #44 specifically call upon the Canadian government to “**fully adopt and implement the UNDRIP as the framework for reconciliation**” and to develop measures to enact them.³⁴

While Canada officially endorsed UNDRIP in 2016 after initially rejecting it, it has been slow to implementation in all facets. Although Bill C-391 *An Act Respecting a National Strategy for the Repatriation of Aboriginal³⁵ Cultural Property*, or the *Indigenous Human Remains and Cultural Property Repatriation Act*, had its first reading in the House of Commons in 2018, it has not seen further activity since a first reading in Senate in 2019 (Parliament of Canada 2019). Though, building upon Bill C-262,³⁶ which did not receive Royal Assent, Bill C-15 *An Act Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* passed the Senate and received Royal Assent on June 21, 2021; the 25th anniversary of National Indigenous Peoples Day (Parliament of Canada 2021). While the Government of Canada claims to have a 2023-2028 Action Plan in place (Government of Canada 2023), as of publishing this thesis, any further federal legislation that adopts UNDRIP’s principles and specifically addresses Indigenous repatriation has yet to emerge, with the exception of the province of British Columbia.³⁷

This means that, in Canada, while Indigenous People and communities are “acknowledged” in repatriation deliberations as being stakeholders, any formal decisions regarding stewardship still ultimately comes down to abiding by legally binding settler colonial

³⁴ Call to Action #67 is also relevant as it calls for funding to develop museum policies and practices that are UNDRIP compliant.

³⁵ “Aboriginal” was the preferred “umbrella term” used to refer to Indigenous Peoples in Canada since a change was made to Canada’s Constitution Act in section 35; though more recently the more common and legal usage of the word has since been changed to “Indigenous” (Younging 2018, 62-65). The usage of the word Aboriginal (when capitalized) today now generally refers to Australian Aboriginals, though Aboriginal still may be used in some Canadian contexts.

³⁶ Bill C-262 was *An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

³⁷ Although, in 2019 British Columbia was the first province to adopt UNDRIP – the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* was unanimously passed, and BC has developed an Action Plan for 2022-2027 (Government of British Columbia, n.d.).

governmental policies and procedures. Since legal heritage provisions and ethical protocols vary by province/territory, organization, and individual institution as “repatriation is typically very situational” (Bourgeois 2021, 2), Ancestors are subject to the handling, storage, testing, and study at the discretion of academic and heritage-holding institutions – who often do not prioritize an Indigenous-informed ethical standard for housing and caregiving for Ancestors and Belongings, nor are they legally required to initiate or engage in repatriations at all. There are no other governing guidelines that specifically outlines how to properly care for human “remains” or Indigenous tangible and intangible cultural heritage within Canada (Pullman 2018, 16).

2.2 Repatriation in Winnipeg – Complicities of the University of Manitoba

A journalistic report suggests that the vast majority of Canadian universities *do* hold Indigenous Ancestral “remains” – of the 12 Canadian universities that Troian had contacted in 2017 for APTN, only one had *no* Ancestors in their care (whether on or off site). Some could not even provide an estimate of how many Ancestors were held. These Ancestors and their Belongings are often held in poor conditions (plastic bags, plastic bins, wooden trays, and cardboard boxes inside of cabinets; Troian 2017), in perpetuity.

A 1992 Canadian Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples states that “there was a consensus in favour of the return of human remains and illegally obtained objects...to appropriate First Peoples” (Task Force on Museums, Assembly of First Nations, and Canadian Museums Association 1994, 5). In 2022, the Canadian Museums Association created a report called *Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums* in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Call to Action #67, which called on the Canadian Museums Association to determine the level of compliance of museums with UNDRIP and make recommendations (3). Building on the 1992 Report’s foundations, recommendations of the 2022

Report include enacting strong legislation and dedicating financial support for repatriation efforts of Ancestors and Belongings (Canadian Museums Association, 36).

The University of Manitoba is one of these heritage-holding institutions with unethical foundations and holdings (and was also one of the universities named in Troian’s media article). Although Troian’s article was written before the RRRC, she does name both UM and the University of Winnipeg (UW) as holding many Indigenous Ancestors. This is particularly concerning given the demographic context since, according to the 2021 census from Statistics Canada, that Winnipeg has the highest *total* Indigenous population (102,080 people) in any city across all of Canada’s provinces (Statistics Canada 2022, 11), and that Manitoba has the highest *share* of Indigenous People (18.1% of Manitoba’s total population) in the population in relation to non-Indigenous people, compared to other provinces in the country (3).

While both the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg have made previous repatriations³⁸ (in 2002 and 2018 respectively; Troian 2017) and have completed more (and are still actively pursuing future repatriations) since Troian’s article, both of these Winnipeg-based academic institutions still hold Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings as of writing this thesis.³⁹

2.3 One case study – The Excavation of the “Fidler Mounds” (through the Expansion of the Red River Floodway) and how Ancestors were Brought to the University of Manitoba

Many of the Ancestors that are currently housed in the temporary Resting Room at the University of Manitoba were brought to the department of anthropology as part of one “salvage

³⁸ The University of Manitoba most recently has made repatriations of Ancestors and Belongings back to two descendant communities in 2024 and 2025.

³⁹ The archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories at the UM has followed one set of Indigenous-centered practices and Protocols, and the Ancestors and Belongings have been in the Resting Room since 2023. The UW also has a Resting Room for the Ancestors and Belongings they house.

archaeology” project that took place in southern Manitoba between 1963 to 1964⁴⁰ under the “Floodway Salvage Project”⁴¹ (also referred to as the “1963 Salvage Operation”; Hewitt 2004, 82). Although there are Ancestors from several other sites throughout Manitoba, I will describe further the Floodway Salvage Project to highlight but one example of how Ancestors’ graves were desecrated, brought to the University, and “cared for.” My hope is that this contributes to the truth-telling aspects of repatriation.

The city of Winnipeg was set to begin construction on the “Greater Winnipeg Floodway” (sometimes referred to as “Duff’s Ditch,” referring to Duff Roblin, the premier of Manitoba who implemented the project at the time) – an expansion on what is more commonly called the Red River Floodway. Beginning in 1962 and completing construction in 1968, it was “one of the largest excavation projects in Canada” (Government of Manitoba n.d., “Manitoba Heritage Council Commemorative Plaques: Red River Floodway”). At the time of its expansion it was also the “second largest earth moving project in the world” (Government of Manitoba n.d., “Red River Floodway: Background and Description”). The Red River Floodway is not only a significant measure to protect the city of Winnipeg from its historically devastating floods, as “the city itself is located on a flood plain at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, on one of the flattest areas in North America” – but it’s also a National Historic Site of Canada and “an outstanding engineering achievement” (Canada’s Historic Places n.d., “Red River Floodway National Historic Site of Canada”).

⁴⁰ In the acknowledgements of Saylor’s thesis (1976, i), she mentions those who were involved in the project “in 1963-1964 and 12 years later.” Another source states that “A two-year \$25,000 archaeological salvage project will get underway June 1” (Department of Industry & Commerce 1963, 30).

⁴¹ During my SRA research the individual I was corresponding with from the HRB told me that it may also be referred to as the “Floodway Village Salvage Project.”

This expansion project, however, included the excavation (i.e. the desecration and destruction) of two Indigenous burial mounds (referred to as Mound 1 and Mound 2 in archaeological reports) that were in the floodway's construction path. These Indigenous burial mounds were named by settlers the "Fidler Mounds."⁴² These are located on the east bank of the Red River near the town of Lockport, approximately 19 km north of Winnipeg. According to archaeologists, the "Fidler Mounds" were originally constructed around 1800 BP⁴³ and were used as burial grounds by various Indigenous Peoples and Nations⁴⁴ for about 1000 years – until around 600 years ago (ten Bruggencate 2008, ii). The "Fidler Mounds" are one of, if not *the* earliest dated and excavated burial mound groups in Manitoba, and "exhibit a considerable temporal depth of use," being used as burial grounds from c. AD 260 to c. AD 1390 (49). Charles Napier Bell, Angus McCharles, Reverend George Bryce,⁴⁵ among others conducted extensive excavation had also occurred at the mounds in the late 1800s and early 1900s by (Dyck 2009; Anthropology Archives 1963, Accession No. 1).

The Ancestors "recovered" from this project remained in the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories until they were moved to the temporary Resting Room during the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony in 2023. Disclosing the total number of Ancestors that were "recovered" through the "Fidler Mound" projects, or the number that the University of Manitoba

⁴² "Fidler Mounds" will be in quotations throughout the rest of this thesis, as this is the settler name that was used to refer to these Indigenous burial mounds, and not the original/given Indigenous name. During my SRA research, the individual I was corresponding with from the HRB told me "be advised that no one consistently spelled Fidler Mounds correctly, so be on the look-out for multiple iterations of the name." It may also be spelled as Fidler/Fidlers/Fidler's/Fiddler, or even Gunn's Mound(s) (referring to Donald Gunn) (email to author, December 9, 2020).

⁴³ BP stands for "Before Present," and is a timescale that is commonly used in archaeology.

⁴⁴ In the archaeological record/contexts, Indigenous Peoples are often referred to as "precontact people." This is a colonial term that was used in these papers, that I am choosing not to use here.

⁴⁵ These individuals in particular are known as "Memorable Manitobans" by the Manitoba Historical Society (of which both Charles Napier Bell and Reverence George Bryce were founding members, and at various points in time the president, of) (Manitoba Historical Society, n.d.).

housed or currently houses is not consistent with respecting the privacy and wishes of the descendant communities, respecting Indigenous sovereignty, control, access, and possession of information, and as in accordance with the implementation of the UM's RRRC Policy (2024).⁴⁶

After excavation of the Mounds in 1963, "all material recovered from the mounds was taken to the University of Manitoba Anthropology Laboratory, where items were cleaned and curated" (Hewitt 2004, 82). Although the Mounds were extensively excavated (approximately 70% of Mound 1 and 50% of Mound 2; 82), after the dig ended in 1963 any further analysis was discontinued (no particular reason as to why was specified) and no more than a few reports were ever written in total (Saylor 1975, 1).

"Today, due to the efforts of amateur collectors, the work of the University of Manitoba 1963 salvage crew and the construction of the Winnipeg Floodway, all that remains of Fidler Mounds is half of the smaller of the two original cemetery mounds." (ten Bruggencate 2008, 47)

2.3a Archaeological Context – The "Care" of Ancestors and Cultural Belongings

When Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings come into the possession of heritage-holding institutions, it is often said that they are under the "care" of that institution. What I share below is a case study of the so-called "care" given to Ancestors removed from "Fidler Mounds" at the University Manitoba. This is based on the information found in archaeological reports that were documented at the time, as well as theses written on the Fidler Mounds by three University of Manitoba graduates – Saylor (1975), Hewitt (2004), and ten Bruggencate (2008).

⁴⁶ Publicly sharing sensitive details about Ancestors infringes on the Rights and sovereignty of Indigenous Nations and communities, and therefore it would be inappropriate for myself to do so on their behalf. The University of Manitoba has not and will not publicly disclose the total number of Ancestors, though the University does have "many." It is the Right of the descendant communities to choose whether or not to disclose this information to the public.

I think it is important to bear witness to these violences by sharing some of what has occurred during “common” archaeological and bio-anthropological practices involving Ancestors, such as standard (often destructive) testing methods and conservation measures. I will refrain from offering explicit details out of respect for descendant communities’ Rights to privacy. The violence is disturbing to read. If you wish to avoid this content, skip to Section 2.3b. Of the “remains” and “materials” that were recovered from the “Fidler Mounds” under the premise of “salvaging,” many of them became lost and/or damaged at various stages of the dig project – in the field, in the laboratory, and in storage.

For example, of the Ancestors that exhibited “cut marks,” over two-thirds of the cut mark damage were due to “trowel trauma”⁴⁷ that occurred during the excavation process (Hewitt 2004, 106). While teeth in particular can generally withstand burial processes, the cracking and chipping in the enamel of the teeth of Ancestors from the “Fidler Mounds” are specifically attributed to post-mortem processes such as recovery, storage, and handling (106-107). Of the teeth that were selected for Hewitt’s testing, several of the samples had actually been *glued into* the alveolar bone⁴⁸ by previous researchers “as a well-intentioned conservation measure” (ten Bruggencate 2008, 50) and so needed to be extracted manually – which further damaged some teeth in the process. This damage occurred before subsequent destructive testing methods, in which these teeth were later variously ground, polished, thin-sectioned, embedded in resin (Hewitt 2004, 95), left with burn marks (ten Bruggencate 2008, 50), marked in permanent ink, and stored in plastic containers (52).

⁴⁷ When the trowel hits something during an excavation (sometimes due to digging being fast paced, carelessness, etc.), it can have the unintended consequence the object struck – or in this case, an Ancestor – being chipped, scratched, flaked, or otherwise altered or damaged.

⁴⁸ The alveolar bone is within the jawbone, and is what one may more commonly refer to as a “tooth socket.”

Additionally, it was reported that a human tibia was lost in the field (Saylor 1975, 21), as well as a human mandible (22, 56) and a skull lost in storage (30-31), while other items associated with the excavations⁴⁹ continued to break, be lost, degrade, or disintegrate in storage. Lengthy storage and exposure to field and laboratory contaminants and handling can introduce foreign materials, which can accelerate natural decay processes, as well as interfere with analysis by affecting the chemical integrity of a “sample” (ten Bruggencate 2008, 22-24).

While it should be acknowledged that of course to some degree, natural decay and accidents (both in and out of the field) will occur, the information above showcases that, despite the intent to “salvage,” the various processes that occur throughout archaeological fieldwork, laboratory testing, storage, and even “conservation” methods can damage what was supposed to be “saved.” Regardless of how “good” the intentions were, it is disingenuous to say that Ancestors and Belongings received proper, respectful, or culturally appropriate “care” by archaeologists and bio-anthropologists.

While standard archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratory research practices and protocols may have been followed here, this section in particular highlights the many ways that Indigenous Protocols were not, and generally are not followed in contemporary archaeological and bio-anthropological processes. Mishandling of Ancestors and Belongings during excavation, storage, and research practices – aside from a marked lack of consent – demonstrates that archeologists and bio-anthropologists (among others) have not endeavoured to learn how to respect, care for, be accountable to, or engage with Indigenous Peoples or their Ancestors in or outside the academy.

⁴⁹ Such as a metal ring (Saylor 1975, 97-98), clay (123), and molluscs (125).

2.3b Intersections with the University of Manitoba – Complicities of the Department of Anthropology

The floodway expansion project and archaeological “salvage” excavation coincided with the founding of the University of Manitoba’s department of anthropology (and sociology⁵⁰) in 1961/1962 (University of Manitoba). Several of the department’s faculty and staff (and many students) were also members of the dig crew for this excavation.

Dr. William J. Mayer-Oakes first arrived at the University of Manitoba in 1962 and was the first professional appointment of an archaeologist in Manitoba’s history (Dyck 2009, 2). He became the head of the department of anthropology (with sociology) beginning in the 1963/1964⁵¹ academic year. He continued on as the head of the department of anthropology when anthropology and sociology split in 1968/1969. He was also the project director of the Floodway Salvage Project. Another notable dig crew member included Timothy Fiske, a doctoral student from the University of Minnesota at the time (Department of Industry & Commerce 1963, 30). Fiske was assigned by the University of Manitoba to “take charge of field work on the project” (Department of Industry & Commerce 1963, 30) and was a crew leader in 1963-1964

⁵⁰ The General Course Calendar shows that anthropology and sociology become a new department in the 1961/1962 academic year, though no department head is listed (University of Manitoba. 1961/1962. Brief Historical Sketch. In University of Manitoba General Course Calendar). The individual I was corresponding with in the UM Archives also noted that, “There are no ‘Officers of Instruction’ (i.e. profs) associated with Anthropology until 1962-1963. Up until that point, professors in the department are either economics or sociology” (email to author, June 4, 2025). Sociology was co-existing with other departments prior to this, and in 1952 was a part of the department of sociology and economics (prior to 1952, it was the department of sociology, economics, and geography). But, it wasn’t until 1962 when we see the department of anthropology first emerge. Though, the anthropology and sociology department split shortly after – and anthropology officially becomes its own standalone department in the 1968/1969 academic year (University of Manitoba. 1968/1969. Brief Historical Sketch. In University of Manitoba General Course Calendar).

⁵¹ There are several other online sources which say Dr. Mayer-Oakes was the *founding head* of anthropology beginning in 1962, however the UM Archives do not confirm this. It is possible that the discrepancy in dates may be due to several different documents, different meetings, etc. that was needed to push through the different bureaucratic levels in the University in the process of creating a new department. Although, the 1963/1964 timeline seems to be corroborated by another source dated April 11, 1963 which states that Dr. William J. Mayer-Oakes was the “head of its newly-formed department of anthropology” just before the “salvage project” began (Department of Industry & Commerce 1963, 30).

and a research assistant at the laboratory of anthropology (Saylor 1975, i). Dr. Mayer-Oakes and Fiske were two of the archaeologists/anthropologists with leading roles in the Floodway Salvage Project, conducting lab analysis and writing the subsequent archaeological reports once the dig project itself had concluded, in which “The only archaeological excavation at Fidler Mounds for which a known collection with strong documentation exists was conducted in 1963 by Timothy Fiske of the University of Manitoba” (Fiske, 1964 in ten Bruggencate 2008, 46). The University of Manitoba assumed responsibility for the project (Department of Industry & Commerce 1963, 30) and given Dr. Mayer-Oakes and Fiske’s positions in both the University of Manitoba and in the Floodway Salvage Project at this time, the University served as a “home base” for both storage and analysis of the Ancestors and Belongings that were recovered.

Although many of the total Ancestors housed at the University of Manitoba came from this excavation in the 1960’s, the earliest documentation of Indigenous Ancestral “remains” being brought into the University is from the early 1900’s (Anthropology Archives 1963, Accession No. 2). The University last acquired “remains” in 1980, but it wasn’t until 2018 when all research and teaching with the Ancestors finally ceased after the situation was brought to the attention of the new head of the department of anthropology.

From the lands that are currently called Manitoba, Indigenous Ancestors and their Belongings were brought to other Winnipeg-based heritage-holding institutions as well.⁵² In truth, the department of anthropology at the University of Manitoba itself was founded upon the “salvaged,” yet still desecrated, graves of Ancestors. Certain archaeology and bio-anthropology professors were able to advance their research and careers from these Ancestors and Belongings,

⁵² As previously mentioned, the University of Winnipeg, as well as others such as the Manitoba Museum (formerly known as the Museum of Man and Nature).

and several graduate students received degrees based on research on what/who had been “salvaged” during these excavations. Additionally, other archaeology and bio-anthropology students over the decades advanced their education by participating in excavations, performing analysis and general research in/for the archaeology and bio-anthropology (amongst other) laboratories and departments; or up until recently, learning about osteology from the teaching “collections” (myself included) of which the Ancestors were a part of. Hewitt’s thesis mentions that students from the University of Manitoba participated in the “Fidler Mound” excavation project (2004, 82), with another source confirming that it was specifically anthropology undergraduate students (Department of Industry & Commerce 1963, 30).⁵³

2.3c Intersections with Canadian Legislation (the Indian Act)

In 1962, under legislation at the time that both the department of anthropology was founded and the floodway expansion were taking place, several laws allowed for not only this excavation to happen, but also for the University of Manitoba to retain possession of the Ancestors and Belongings that had been “salvaged” during the digs.

To historically contextualize the perception and treatment of Indigenous Peoples, one important thing to keep in mind was that under the *Indian Act* – Indigenous People (specifically, Status Indians) were not legally considered “people” until the *Indian Act* was revised in 1951 (Joseph 2018, 27). And further, before this revision, a “person” was defined under the Act as “an individual *other than* an Indian” (27; italics emphasis added). Citizenship was only granted to Indians through enfranchisement (either voluntary or compulsory, i.e. assimilation). This was granted first through the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857), which would later become the *Gradual*

⁵³ It is not documented what this participation may have involved and/or to what extent students were involved after the excavation’s conclusion.

Enfranchisement Act (1869); and of which both would eventually become incorporated, along with hundreds of other legislative pieces, into the *Indian Act* (1876) (Kirkby 2020, 614). Under the *Indian Act* (which, after many amendments, is the current legislation in effect today that still governs the legal relationship between the Canadian government and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People), Indigenous People were not considered Canadian citizens until the right to vote was finally extended to them in 1960 (Joseph 2018, 30, 82). While a change in legislation is a significant step forward, it does not change the attitudes or beliefs held towards Indigenous People; and it is likely that the socio-political perceptions of Indigenous People were influenced by the enforcement of this legislation, and vice-versa. When I speak about the dehumanization of Indigenous Ancestors, this attitude is clearly laid out in the law that equally dehumanized *living* Indigenous People.

2.3d Intersections with Manitoba's Heritage Legislation

Prior to 1986, Manitoba had few legal provisions concerning human “remains” as well as material cultural heritage,⁵⁴ particularly when they were Indigenous. Under current Manitoban heritage legislation (*The Heritage Resources Act*, passed in 1986), provisions regarding found human “remains” fall under the “Policy Respecting the Reporting, Exhumation and Reburial of Found Human Remains,” or “Manitoba’s Burial Policy” (Government of Manitoba 1987). Upon discovery, the policy is carried out in accordance with *The Heritage Resources Act* (Government of Manitoba 1986). Manitoba’s Burial Policy (1987) establishes what to do with found “historical” (i.e. Indigenous) human “remains,” and *The Heritage Resources Act* (1986) is the primary legislation on heritage, and “encourages municipal governments to protect heritage resources of regional and local significance through designation” (Canada’s Historic Places

⁵⁴ Cultural heritage objects may also be called “artifacts” or “grave goods” by archaeologists (Government of Manitoba 1987, 1).

2008). The Historic Resources Branch⁵⁵ (HRB) administers *The Heritage Resources Act* (1986), and any protection, preservation and disposition of found human “remains” and associated heritage objects will be overseen by personnel designated by the HRB (Manitoba Burial Policy 1987, Legal Provision G). None of these heritage legislations at any point in time or in any of their amendments mention Indigenous Peoples or their cultural heritage, or repatriation specifically.⁵⁶

The years here are important to note – as Manitoba’s Burial Policy states that “C. The property in, and the title and right of possession to, any human remains found by any person after May 3, 1967, is and vests in the Crown (section 45)” (1987, Legal Provision C). *The Heritage Resources Act* (1986) does not specify what to do with “remains” found before this date. This means that any human “remains” found *before* this date are not subject to the provisions outlined in this legislation. Any human “remains” and heritage objects that would have been found during The Floodway Salvage Project were found in 1963, and *The Heritage Resources Act* (1986) would not have applied to them retroactively (as *The Heritage Resources Act* was created post-excavation, and only applied to “remains” found after 1967).

Manitoba’s *The Heritage Resources Act* (1986) Sections 45 and 46 states that:

45. The property in, and the title and right of possession to, any human remains found by any person after May 3, 1967, is and vests with the Crown.

⁵⁵ Under the Government of Manitoba’s Department of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

⁵⁶ However, one online fact sheet says about Manitoba’s Burial Policy (1987) that “6. Reburial of human remains when a First Nation is involved is arranged by the Aboriginal Liaison Officer of the Historic Resources Branch in conjunction with the community. Reburial in all other cases will be handled only by personnel designated by the Historic Resources Branch.” (Historic Resources Branch, n.d., Provisions Regarding Found Human Remains). But, this specific language is not actually used in the Policy, and the only relevant section it may be referring to would be “3. Where human remains may be traced to a particular cultural group, procedures with regard to exhumation, identification and reburial, as outlined below, will be reviewed with that community” (Government of Manitoba 1987).

46. Every person who finds an object that is or that the person believes to be a heritage object, or remains that are or that the person believes to be human remains, shall forthwith report the find to the minister and shall not handle, disturb or do anything to the object or the remains except in accordance with such requirements as the minister may prescribe.

(Historic Resources Branch, n.d., Provisions Regarding Found Human Remains)

What to do about found human “remains” and heritage objects was but one concern – ownership was another. In most provinces,⁵⁷ archaeological discoveries do not belong to the public, landowner, or the finder, but the ownership of found archaeological items belongs “to the provincial Crown” (Government of Canada, n.d., Finders Keepers?). Further, Section 44 of Manitoba’s active *The Heritage Resources Act* (1986) states that ownership and possession of heritage artifacts belongs to the Crown by default, but that (a) if the heritage object is found on Crown land (it remains in the *custody* of the finder) and (b) if the heritage object is found on private land (it remains in the *custody* of the owner of the land). The Act defines a “heritage object” as including an archaeological object. Neither of these provisions or definitions specifically mentions Indigenous People. However, the many practical and conceptual troubling issues regarding the dehumanization of Ancestors are compounded considerably when “The archaeological record in Canada is predominantly that of Indigenous peoples” (Canadian Archaeological Association, n.d.). By these definitions and under Canadian law, ***all Indigenous heritage and cultural material has been made archaeological by default***. Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings can only ever be “owned” by the *Crown*, and only ever *in the custody* of a

⁵⁷ The exception being Ontario and Quebec.

“finder” or a land owner – never an Indigenous Nation and/or descendant community.

Indigenous People can neither “own” *nor* “have custody” over themselves.

2.3f Analysis

Both contemporary Indigenous People and Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings (particularly when found through archaeological excavations) have been legally interpreted within capitalistic property ownership frameworks, and are refused personhood due to being considered property (Breske 2018). It is my opinion that since Indigenous People were not viewed as “people” until more recently in time, and that (as per Breske 2018) Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings are legally considered property that is controlled by the Government of Canada and the Crown and kept in the “custody” of either “finders” or landowners (and not Indigenous Nations, and/or descendant communities), it was and is easier to view Indigenous Peoples as “samples,” “data,” “objects,” and other non-human/dehumanized objects of that nature. This is evident from the archaeological reports and case study that were presented in this Section.

It is now better understood and critically examined that archaeologists have played a significant role in shaping popular narratives surrounding Indigenous identities through their interpretations of archaeological heritage (Murray 2011). Archaeological excavations are not subject to the same human subject reviews that cultural anthropologists are, and so archaeologists tend to become the authority, decision-makers, and voices of Indigenous pasts, often without Indigenous or other ethical consultations (Bendremer and Richman 2006). Although archaeology can be mobilized to document, expose, and address historic injustices, it has also been used to erase histories and enact violence through maintaining and enforcing settler colonial structures against Indigenous people that has reverberating impacts to this day

(Montgomery and Supernant 2022). When institutions such as universities and museums (whose primary purposes lie in both research and education) present this information without the full context of how these holdings were obtained or how this research was conducted or represented – the epistemic violences that make controlling Indigenous bodies and lands possible is sustained into the future. The continuation of current housing practices and the refusal to repatriate permits institutions to retain possession and control of these holdings, over Indigenous Rights and sovereignty in the interest of scientific knowledge – and the continuation of these practices in the interest of academic or "scientific" knowledge is considered a human rights abuse (Feld 2022, 56; Breske 2018, 347). And (as discussed in Section 2.1), it is a breach of human rights and Indigenous Peoples Rights as outlined in Article 12 of UNDRIP.

Standard archaeological practice concerning Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings both enables and justifies institutional violences. When repatriation is neither regulated nor legislated, some institutions “consider repatriation as falling outside of their mandates” (Bourgeois 2021, 2) and fail to initiate return processes. The outcome is that historically in Manitoba, whenever unidentified human “remains” from ancient origins, personal “collections,” or past archaeological specimens from storage are (re)discovered, they were “donated” to museums and universities. This meant that the majority of human “remains” (i.e. Indigenous Ancestors) are subject to the handling, storage, and study within academic or heritage-holding institutions (technically under ownership of the Crown if removed *after* May 3, 1967). The necessity for humane care for, and return of, Ancestors and Belongings has remained far beyond the imaginative repertoire of archeological ethical practice until recently. This has delayed and denied the return of Ancestors and Belongings to Indigenous descendant communities.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter briefly examines contemporary repatriation and “caregiving” practices within Canada, specifically within the province of Manitoba, from an archaeological and bio-anthropological perspective. It also reviewed the relevant legislation that would have allowed for heritage-holding institutions to obtain and possess Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings. The first section provides the legal context, and discusses how despite endorsing UNDRIP (as well as having millions of Belongings and thousands of Ancestors in institutional possession throughout the country), Canada still lacks any federal repatriation legislation that would require institutions to repatriate Ancestors and Belongings back to descendant communities, notify them of their existence, or provide care for them in ways that are respectful and culturally appropriate.

The second section provides the institutional context and discusses how most Canadian universities hold Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings without consent.

The third section provides both the local and the archaeological context by discussing a case study of the “Fidler Mounds,” which was excavated during the Floodway Salvage Project due to the expansion of Winnipeg’s Red River Floodway. This project desecrated two Indigenous burial mounds, with Ancestors and Belongings being taken to the UM for analysis, testing, research, and storage. The founding of the UM’s department of anthropology is deeply intertwined with this archaeological project. I detail the resulting (lack of) “caregiving” from this “salvage” operation, which was often damaging and destructive. These practices were supported by federal and provincial laws (including the *Indian Act* and eventual heritage Acts) that allowed institutions to obtain, possess, and claim control over Indigenous “remains” and material cultural heritage.

This chapter frames this history and these practices not only as violences but as ongoing human rights abuses. It identifies the complicities of archeological and bio-anthropological practices and those who participated in and benefited from storing, studying and failing to return Ancestors, Belongings and other non-ethically “acquired” or housed “remains” at the University of Manitoba. This account highlights the need for institutions to not only proactively engage in repatriations of their holdings of Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings, but to engage in truth-telling and to atone by finally following Indigenous Protocols and rematriation paradigms when doing so.

CHAPTER THREE – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGIES, METHODS

3. How Did You Do It/Come to this Knowledge?

It had become apparent to me that to conduct Indigenous research in a Good Way, I would need to make a methodological shift and ground myself within Indigenous paradigms; especially as (even though I am Indigenous myself) I have received a formal western academic training for my entire life. I wanted to prioritize methodologies that employed one or more Indigenous epistemological orientations. I agree with Wilson when he says that “it is not possible for me to use an assimilated view (i.e., to try to conduct this research as a white researcher would)” (2008, 21), and that “an Indigenous research paradigm needs to be followed through all stages of research” (15).

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Since Indigenous theory is grounded in processes, transformation, and sparking conversations that urge institutions to take responsibility (Wilson 2008), prioritizing Indigenous values during research allows us to respect the participants whose lives we draw our knowledge from in a way that conventional scientific practices often overlook. This is why my research grounds itself in both an Indigenous research paradigm (Research is Ceremony) and Public Anthropology to examine the respectful care and return of Indigenous Ancestors.

3.1a Research is Ceremony

Shawn Wilson’s well-known assertion that “research is ceremony” is a shift away from conventional extractive academic and scientific practices, where through an Indigenous lens, research is seen a form of accountability to both relationships and practices (2008). When research becomes a process about relations, we can begin to view research as a form of ceremony too, where our practices *are* our relationships (Simpson 2017, 142). Research is a *part*

of the efforts of a research project, but seen through Indigenous lenses, our research is not “work” with our “research subjects” to gather “data” – it is practicing *good* relationships and ceremony with our Indigenous co-researchers,⁵⁸ colleagues, and relatives. *Knowing* that we should be held accountable to our relations, versus *being* accountable to them is the difference between research *and* ceremony – but from Wilson’s Indigenous theoretical framework, the two are inextricable. Elder-in-Residence at the University of Manitoba Wanda Joy Murdock reminds us that *everything* related to repatriation of the Ancestors is ceremony – from Zoom meetings, to pipe ceremonies, to grant applications, etc. (pers. comm., n.d., 2021). Dr. Chris Mato Nunpa, a Dakota Elder, also says “do not forget that our spirituality is inextricably intertwined with our life, including our academic life” (2003, 363). Research *is* ceremony. Understanding that my Research is Ceremony holds me accountable to all my relations at all stages of the research.

3.1b Public Anthropology

Public Anthropology is an anthropological paradigm that advocates for a swift and radical shift away from the often-extractive orientation of conventional research and requires that researchers orient their research toward serving the community rather than the institution or themselves (Borofsky 2019, 25-31). Public Anthropology focuses on four main research guides: i) conducting research that produces a demonstrable social impact, ii) fostering alternative forms of faculty accountability which may require forms of community reciprocity and engagement that stall rather than advance academic career building efforts, iii) transparency and community control and accessibility, and iv) forms of collaboration both in and beyond the academy which are often at odds with hegemonic knowledge production and dissemination efforts (31).

⁵⁸ As per Younging (2018), Indigenous participants and interviewees

Public Anthropology as a theoretical approach allows me to step away from the conventional archaeological practices and scientific positivism and allows some freedom to situate my research within one of many Indigenous orientations. Detaching from the limitations of status quo academic practices creates space for Indigenous Protocols to take place and supports ceremony as praxis. If our Indigenous spirituality is inextricable from our academic work and our research is ceremony, then Indigenous People and researchers must be more authentically represented. Research that is rooted in ill-formed relationships is not accurate, relevant, meaningful, and impactful, it is destructive – as silencing the expression of Indigenous spirituality creates fragmentary data with insufficient interpretations, that only reinforce extractive agendas, at the expense of Indigenous wellbeing (Walker 2003). Centering Indigenous epistemes prioritizes serving Indigenous communities instead of extracting from them, and redefining what constitutes “data” and “interpretation” according to non-academic community agendas gives academics and researchers opportunities to be accountable to Indigenous Peoples and communities and their long-term, meaningful relationships with them, instead of strictly to the academy. This reduces replicating the “Whiteness” of institutionalized inequality against marginalized researchers and research subjects (Blakey 2020), and is one small step in coming to know in a Good Way. This may partly coincide with the aims of Public Anthropology, and can support validating Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing within academia.

3.2 Methodologies

Indigenous methodologies should be prioritized to properly contextualize and accountably represent Indigenous experiences within the scope of research. My research uses two similar Indigenous methodologies that embrace both Indigenous ways of knowing and non-Indigenous status quo academic ones in a holistic way (Two-Eyed Seeing and Braided

Knowledge). I also center an approach that encourages stepping away from colonial practices (Refusal).

3.2a Two-Eyed Seeing and Braided Knowledge

Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's concept of "Two-Eyed Seeing" is an Indigenous methodology where a researcher does not allow one perspective to dominate the other, but balances both Indigenous and western/non-Indigenous perspectives, in a way where they integrate the knowledge of both in a strengths-based approach to a research project (Rankin et al. 2023). Expanding on that, "Braided Knowledge" is another Indigenous methodology that can see how both "Western and Indigenous knowledge complement each other, as well as ways that community and university knowledge can be integrated" (Atalay 2019, 82). When evaluating what is the "best" way of knowing and doing things, methodologies should focus instead on the *strongest* way of doing things and should never *only* be *either* Indigenous or western in their approach – they can be both Indigenous *and* western, so long as they are integrated and balanced together in a strengths-based approach. Aspects of the RRRC itself – the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony, UM's Public Rematriation and Repatriation Apology, the Artwork,⁵⁹ and the UM's RRRC Policy – are good examples of this, as all were an integration of both Indigenous Knowledge and university knowledge. I have done this in my own thesis by using conventional western methods to document and conduct the research (such as using conventional academic thesis formats to document my research in writing and conducting interviews), but by using my Indigenous Protocols when doing so to ensure that it is done in a Good Way (such as by prioritizing an Indigenous style of writing and language throughout an otherwise conventionally

⁵⁹ I will discuss this more in Chapter 5.

written academic thesis, and by offering tobacco and gifts to my participants before each interview and holding them in an informal conversational style).

3.2b Refusal

Indigenous researchers who operate solely by western/non-Indigenous systems throughout their research may have to compromise on practices that do not understand Indigenous ways of being, knowing, doing, Protocols, worldviews, or otherwise – which ultimately restricts the expertise the researcher can share, and limits what they are able to contribute towards pathways for reconciliation. This is why Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson encourages her readers to simply refuse to participate in white colonial systems, and to operate within our own (2017). Kanien'kehà:ka scholar Audra Simpson (2007) has also written about “ethnographic refusal,”⁶⁰ which she describes as refusing the authority of the state, refusing colonial logics, and asserting Indigenous sovereignty and Rights. Refusal may seem contrary to the above methodologies of Braided Knowledge and Two-Eyed Seeing – but it is not to say *never* to non-Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, but it is to give Indigenous People the control to say “no” to coerced compromise, or the continuation of colonial practices (that academic institutions and practices often systemically impose). The concept of Refusal is to *acknowledge* the power imbalances that colonial powers exert over Indigenous People, and simply not to participate in them. Refusal calls for Indigenous People to reclaim their autonomy and sovereignty in how we are allowed to regulate matters that concern our People, Nations, and communities.

⁶⁰ Audra Simpson also writes about ethnographic refusal in her book, “Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States” (2014).

3.3 Methods – “Tea at Granny’s” (Interviews)

When seeking advice on how to engage with my interview participants, Inninew Assistant Professor in the School of Public Policy at York University Bobbi-Jo Lillie Virtue said: “it’s just tea at Granny’s” (pers. comm., n.d., 2024). “Tea at Granny’s” refers to the idea that interviews should be entered on the premise that you are not only a researcher interviewing a participant, but that you are speaking to a relative – so that you aren’t entering into a conversation with an “extractive,” clinical, sterile, or an overly formal approach detached from your person or identity. Tea at Granny’s allows the course of conversation to flow normally and naturally, as though sitting down with your own grandmother over a cup of tea. In a Métis context, this has been spoken about as “The Visiting Way/Way of Visiting,” and “Métis Kitchen Table discussions/methodology” (Flaminio et al. 2020). Visiting and dialogue, especially over drink and food, is a way for Indigenous People to share and connect with one another – interviews to share knowledge should not be outside or separate from these practices.

To me though, this was a more personal method – as she was referring to my great-grandmother (her grandmother – Bobbi-Jo is my Aunt) Olive Lillie (nee Thelma Harper), the matriarch of the Lillie family. I knew exactly what she was referring to when she said “tea at Granny’s,” because I could instantly understand the sentiment she was trying to convey to me, because it was supposed to mean tea with Granny Lillie. Tea at Granny’s means putting your shoes on top of a pile of 30 other pairs in the mud room the size of a closet, each fighting for their lives to stay dry and partnered with the shoe they were paired with when they first entered. Tea at Granny’s means hearing, “ohhh, hello my girl!” and being embraced and welcomed and loved when you walk into the kitchen and see her waiting at the table for you. Tea at Granny’s means the kitchen is as warm as her hug, a furnace compared to the snow storm you just walked

in from; heated by the wood stove where the water is already boiling in the kettle, and the food is already out on the table (and glazed donuts from the grocery store are *of course* on the counter, because it's the special treat you and your brothers only ever get at Granny's, so she makes sure that she has them every time you come over). Tea at Granny's means having so many people over visiting that each room in the house is full of family, standing room only, wall-to-wall; and that even years later, you're still not sure who's technically your cousin or your uncle or maybe was just the neighbour visiting. Tea at Granny's means you get to stay up so late that even mom is yawning by the time you finish rummaging through Winter Boot Mountain, and have to drive home under the stars, the country highways lit up only by the moon's glow. Tea at Granny's is visiting and having dialogue and eating snacks and drinking tea, yes – but it is so much more. Tea at Granny's is making sure that you feel at home, and you feel like you are family – no matter how far away you came from, how you ended up there, when you showed up or what time you left, or how we know you. This was the intent that I entered each interview with, regardless of the background and my relationship to each participant, my Aunt's advice repeating in my mind – “it's just tea at Granny's.”

3.3a Indigenous Protocols (Relationship Building with Relatives)

Following Indigenous Protocols (and being accountable to your relations) is not just customary but expected when working with Indigenous communities. When I asked Pahan PteSanWin for guidance when writing my master's thesis, she told me that I needed to use my Indigenous Protocols of reciprocity and relations – passing tobacco, using medicines, making a prayer, giving thanks, singing a song, dancing a dance, and relationship with the Ancestors (Zoom meeting with author, February 15, 2024). At the time, I wasn't exactly sure what my Indigenous Protocols meant to me yet, so she said to “use your heart to choose your way. Then you'll be stronger. It can't be wrong” (Zoom meeting with author, February 15, 2024).

Indigenous Protocols vary by Nation and individual and does not follow a strict format. It is the spirit and intent of your actions that are most important when following Protocol. My own personal Indigenous Protocols are informed by my upbringing and community teachings that advise how I treat others and establish relationships, especially with those in my Indigenous community. As Pahan PteSanWin says, “some of us are [biological] *relatives*, some of us are *ceremonial* relatives, some of us are *work* relatives” (interview with author, May 17, 2024). To me, my mother has always taught me that my Indigenous Protocols should include offering tobacco when asking something of someone, giving gifts they’ll like as a way to say thank you for taking the time to visit together, and making sure your company is given food and something to drink (and offering to send them home with leftovers!). Following my own Protocol was important and necessary to relationship building with all my relations – all of my relatives, and thus all my interviewees, who have since become my thesis co-researchers.

Having tobacco and gifts and food and water prepared ensured that the person “having tea” with me had all their needs met the moment they sat down. I let them know that this gift was given freely for meeting with me, without any further expectations from me on their part, and that they were free to leave the interview at any point and for any reason. Opening up and sharing through conversation is much easier once you establish that the relationship is mutually reciprocal, that you show thoughtfulness by anticipating others wants and needs, and that you put time and effort into minimizing the ways they may feel vulnerable. When people are made to feel safe, cared for, and human – then the real relationship building can begin.

CHAPTER FOUR – “WHAT HAPPENED?”

4. The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony – The Pallbearer’s Perspective

It was a heavy, overcast morning. The clouds obscured the sun in such a way that the whole world felt encapsulated in a hazy grey. It was the opposite of what summer in June should feel like – and yet it felt promising. I was dressed in a silk ribbon skirt that my mother made me, wearing a matching beaded necklace and earrings gifted to me by my Aunt,⁶¹ and I wore both of my Eagle Feathers in my hair.⁶² I also wore a glitter strawberry shirt from Hot Topic.⁶³ It was 8:30 in the morning, and I was dressed for a ceremony unlike any that I had ever partaken in. I didn’t know what I was meant to do there that day, but I knew there was work to be done, and the Ancestors were waiting.

The building was quiet, empty, and still; except for those few who had arrived for a special ceremony taking place on campus that day. Some were relatives, some were co-workers, some were strangers. We were of varying backgrounds, specialties, and contributions. Yet we all were in one room, with one purpose that united us – to see our Ancestors respected and moved into a private temporary Resting Room, through ceremony.

The day began with a pipe ceremony. After some shared food, the procession began.

One by one, the pallbearers⁶⁴ accepted small boxes from our anthropology laboratory researchers into their arms. Some of the larger Resting Places (caskets) were placed onto the world’s wobbliest and creakiest wagon; the physical and emotional weight of holding a person in

⁶¹ Referring to Bobbi-Jo Lillie Virtue.

⁶² Although capitalizing Eagle Feathers isn’t necessarily spoken about in Younging’s (2018) book on Indigenous writing style, I feel it fits the spirit of the suggestions in the book here as the word is being used within an Indigenous context, and I am referring to Eagle Feathers that I have earned, and not referring to *an eagle’s feathers* in general.

⁶³ See Image 3 and Image 15.

⁶⁴ Myself included – my role in the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony that day was helper and Pallbearer. I did this alongside my mother Vanessa, Wes, and Larry.

your hands suspended for a brief moment in half-hidden smiles, crow's feet, and muffled laughter. The wagon's wheels screeched with every tug of the handle – deafening squeaks ringing throughout the entire floor, punctuating an otherwise silent procession. Unbeknownst to the other pallbearers, each were whispering their own dialogue and apologies and reassurances to the relative they cradled in their arms. In single file, the pallbearers walked from the harshly lit, clinical, sterile atmosphere of the laboratory – into the window-lined hallways illuminated only by that morning's still grey natural light. Although the building was square, the pallbearers more or less walked in a circle. The hallway walks the perimeter of the building's floor, bridging the laboratories to the Resting Room in the same interconnected propensity as a Medicine Wheel – a path representative of restoring the balance of death to life, from head to heart, honouring all four directions as we proceeded in this fashion.

Even though we were in a university building, it became something else.⁶⁵ The spiritual energy we created by connecting and being in relationship to these sacred spirits – whether the closeness was proximity or having a history together long before there was ever a ceremony – was felt when we passed those boxes past the threshold of the hallway, and into the long-awaited Resting Room. No spoken words were exchanged, but the things we were saying to each other with our eyes was profound.⁶⁶ The Ancestors crossed the doorway into the warm, sanguine glow of the Resting Room, waiting to be received by several women in ribbon skirts. They too lined up in single file, and each Ancestor was carefully handed over, and then gently placed into their designated respite along the Room's shelving.

⁶⁵ Wes Nelson (Ceremony Participant), in discussion with the author, March 27, 2024. Transcript available on request.

⁶⁶ Pahan PteSanWin (RRRC Co-Chair), in discussion with the author, May 17, 2024. Transcript available on request.

The pallbearers repeated the procession circle in the hallway 28 times, until every last Ancestor was at rest – the 28th cortege being as meaningful as the first.⁶⁷ We then all gathered as we had in the morning, and in a circle, we prayed and shared our experience of the day. A man led the first procession with drumming and singing beautiful songs. He sang special memorial songs that only get sung at times like these; songs that are sung to honour the dead, who rely on our voices to sing them up to Spirit.⁶⁸ Our People have held these songs for us since time immemorial, and now we sing them to help them rest, as they begin on their journey home. The man's voice filled the hallways and room, the song lifting the Ancestors to Creator. The spirits voices echo down the corridors alongside him, dancing off of the now closed doors that respectfully housed the Ancestors. Doors which will only be opened again when the Ancestors are ready to be returned home to their rightful communities and descendants.

At the end of the day, we feasted ourselves and the Ancestors, laughing and celebrating life together. The ceremony was like a real funeral procession – truly befitting of our Ancestors, and giving them the respect that they deserve.⁶⁹

Our Ancestors are now in handmade cedar boxes, lovingly placed in a Resting Room, covered with coloured fabrics, adorned by paintings, smelling of sacred medicines, waiting to be returned to their communities and descendants.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Vanessa Lillie (Ceremony Participant), in discussion with the author, March 27, 2024. Transcript available on request.

⁶⁸ The individual who sung the songs wishes to remain anonymous, although he clarified for me that (as they are spirits) the Ancestors do not have a voice – and we are speaking on behalf of the Ancestors to Creator through our songs and ceremonies. We sing these songs to help them in their transition from Earth up to the Spirit World – “They don’t sing those songs for anything” (pers. comm., June 3, 2025).

⁶⁹ Wes Nelson (Ceremony Participant), in discussion with the author, March 27, 2024. Transcript available on request.

⁷⁰ As I said in my student statement at the UM Public Rematriation and Repatriation Apology on June 3, 2024.

When the ceremony was done, the sun came out.⁷¹



Image 4 – “Kisikohk” – Cree for “the heavens” or “the sky.” Artwork by Gayle Sinclair (2023).

Gayle Sinclair, *Kisikohk*, 2023, Photograph, University of Manitoba,
<https://umanitoba.ca/indigenous/engagement/respectful-repatriation>.

4.1 The Temporary Resting Room

The day I described above was a pivotal moment in the RRRC timeline – it was a culmination of all our communities’ inputs and efforts, and it was an actionable representation of the department of anthropology’s apology for disrespect that had been acknowledged *and* began to be redressed. It was an apology *and* a forgiveness that was finally made tangible.

⁷¹ Vanessa Lillie (Ceremony Participant), in discussion with the author, March 27, 2024. Transcript available on request.

Out of respect for Indigenous Protocols, I cannot share all the details from this day. What I can share is that the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony was a one-day ceremony that occurred on June 10, 2023. The Ancestors, up until this point, had lain in the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories. Construction for something we call a temporary “Resting Room” began in early 2022. The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony was a ceremony guided and directed by Elders, where each Ancestor was transferred from the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories into the Resting Room; hand carried by four pallbearers (myself included) and walked clockwise in the perimeter hallway from one room to the other and back again until each Ancestor was resting inside. The Resting Room is a separate room from the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories, with its only purpose being to act as a place where Indigenous Ancestors can respectfully rest in a culturally appropriate way on campus, while processes such as contacting descendant communities continue. The Resting Room is not meant to be a permanent home to Ancestors – it explicitly exists with the intention that these Ancestors *will* be returned home, or in the event that a single descendant community cannot be identified, will return to Mother Earth by a community or communities who have offered to care for them.⁷²

As part of their Apology and as part of their promise to work in partnership and be in *good* relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People – the University of Manitoba has relinquished its “ownership” of these Ancestors; they will never be returned to the teaching “collections,” they will not remain in the laboratories, and the University will never house Indigenous Ancestors in the future ever again (see Appendix C for RRRC Policy 2024; and see University of Manitoba Wise Practices/Procedure 2024). The University of Manitoba has promised that the Ancestors on campus will be cared for in the time that they remain here, with

⁷² i.e. will be rematriated.

the department of anthropology prioritizing many of their internal tasks to contribute to continuing to identify Ancestors and contacting and communicating with descendant communities. The department of anthropology is doing this in partnership with and under the guidance of the Elders Council on campus.



Image 5 – Artwork by Gayle Sinclair (2023). Please note that this photo was taken before the Ancestors were brought in with the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony. Photography is now forbidden in the Resting Room.

Gayle Sinclair, (from left to right) *a winter landscape, Kisikohk, and a fall landscape painting, featured in the Resting Room, 2023, Photograph, University of Manitoba.*

4.1a Caring for the Ancestors

The care that Ancestors now receive while in the Resting Room follows Indigenous Protocols. The cardboard boxes that the Ancestors were once held in were replaced with cedar boxes, each one handcrafted to size to fit the needs of each individual Ancestor. The Ancestors were wrapped in red cloth and have sacred medicines surrounding them. The cedar boxes were covered in yellow, white, red or blue cloth, and are each covered with a small star blanket. The Resting Room is simple in design – its walls are lined with shelves that are behind rolling doors, which are now only to be opened if an Ancestor is returning home. These doors are adorned by images (see Image 4 to 9) that were hand-painted by local Indigenous artist Gayle Sinclair; with the first one that you see upon entering the room being the Kisikohk (see Image 4 and 8). Prior to moving, the boxes and shelf spaces were carefully measured, so that each Ancestor has their own space, without being crowded on the shelf. The Resting Room is also regularly smudged and looked after. Ceremony is now held regularly to feast the Ancestors and to pray. The Resting Room is at an undisclosed location on campus.



Image 6 – Artwork by Gayle Sinclair (2023).

Gayle Sinclair, *A Prairie Sunset Overlooks a Green Field Filled with Two Birch Trees, Sage, and Dragonflies*, 2023, Photograph, University of Manitoba, <https://umanitoba.ca/indigenous/engagement/respectful-repatriation>.



Image 7 – Artwork by Gayle Sinclair (2023). Please note that this photo was taken before the Ancestors were brought in with the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony. Photography is now forbidden in the Resting Room.

Gayle Sinclair, *a painting of a winter landscape featured in the Resting Room*, 2023, Photograph, University of Manitoba.



Image 8 – Artwork by Gayle Sinclair (2023). Please note that this photo was taken before the Ancestors were brought in with the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony. Photography is now forbidden in the Resting Room.

Gayle Sinclair, *a painting of Kisikohk featured in the Resting Room*, 2023, Photograph, University of Manitoba.



Image 9 – Artwork by Gayle Sinclair (2023). Please note that this photo was taken before the Ancestors were brought in with the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony. Photography is now forbidden in the Resting Room.

Gayle Sinclair, *a painting of a summer landscape featured in the Resting Room*, 2023, Photograph, University of Manitoba.

4.2 The Interviews

The Elders Council stated early in the work (2021) that the RRRC is a teaching, and that we should document the teachings of the RRRC in various ways. Since the University of Manitoba is the first university in Canada to establish and follow an official Elders repatriation council and to create a proactive repatriation policy, as a master's student I took this opportunity to conduct research as a part of this documentation. I thought that interviewing several of the participants from the day of the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony could provide insights into a process that was crucial to the overall RRRC and to how we understand respect as integral to repatriation. And because I had a focus on how these processes have been handled respectfully and if it was done in a Good Way, I decided I would ask everyone not *what* they did on that day, but how they *felt* about that day.

The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony was made of and from individuals – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and University employees – who committed to working together to undertake constantly evolving roles and work, at and in collaboration with the University institution. The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony itself was organized according to the wishes and guidance of the RRRC Council – who had been advising on the day of the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony itself for over six months.

In total, I ended up interviewing seven ceremony participants, and my co-researchers in this thesis ended up being Pahan PteSanWin, Wanbdi Wakita, Vanessa Lillie, Larry Brass, Wes Nelson, Rachel ten Bruggencate, and Chelsea Meloche. There was, generally, some worry of whether the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony was “going to be done right.” However, each of my seven co-researchers in their interviews about their experiences of the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony echoed the sentiment that “the day happened as it was supposed to happen,” and

“everyone who needed to be there was present.” I was given similar guidance by some of my mentors when I expressed that I was unsure if I had done enough to prepare for my thesis and my research, and they said that those who were interviewed were meant to be interviewed, and that they said exactly what needed to be said. In that sense, I hope that the wisdom that was passed on to me and that I am sharing with you now is also read by the people who are meant to read it, and that you take away from it what you are meant to take away.

4.2a Interview Questions

The interviews took place around 9 months to almost a year after the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony (at various times throughout March 2024 to May 2024), and my co-researchers engaged in a self-reflection in their re-telling and remembering of this day. Each of my seven co-researchers had the chance to review and edit their interviews as presented below; italics in the transcripts are meant to identify where they placed emphasis on certain words during our interviews. I will let those individuals speak for themselves on what their experiences of participating in this day looked and felt like, and include their (condensed) responses to these (paraphrased) questions below:

- 1. How would you introduce yourself, and what was your role in the (Keeping of the Spirit) Ceremony?**
- 2. What do you remember about the (Keeping of the Spirit) Ceremony?**
- 3. Was this (Keeping of the Spirit) Ceremony done in a way that our Indigenous communities have been asking for, and in a way that the University of Manitoba was able to support?**

4. Based on your experiences did you feel a personal sense of fulfillment, or proud of how the (Keeping of the Spirit) Ceremony was carried out? Were you moved by the impacts/outcomes of the Ceremony?
5. Were you aware of any Indigenous repatriation procedures or protocols, either at the University of Manitoba or elsewhere? What were your previous feelings towards institutions holding Ancestors and Belongings?
6. Do you think that the lack of law and policy at the federal and provincial levels in Canada affects repatriation from occurring, whether generally or in institutions? In its absence, was rematriation and repatriation addressed within the University of Manitoba through this (Keeping of the Spirit) Ceremony?
7. What feelings come up, going forward, knowing that the University of Manitoba has a repatriation policy in place? Would other universities benefit from creating their own?
8. What would you like others to learn from you/this experience? What were the best practices of the RRRC that might practically be applied in institutional settings?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to share that I didn't ask you?

4.3 The Participants

4.3a Grey Swan Buffalo Woman – Pahan PteSanWin – RRRC Co-Chair – “The Coordinator”

Well my name is Pahan PteSanWin, “Grey Swan Buffalo Woman.”

And, my *role* for this Ceremony...well my husband sometimes calls me “the coordinator.” You know, the person who makes sure all the right people are there, and the things that you need; but *more* than that, because I already had felt like I had been in relationship with the *Ancestors*. Because I was one of the first *people* who went and did [the first] ceremony in the

lab, you know, *long* before June tenth [April 2021]. Long before there was ever a temporary *Resting Room*. And I *did* feel a *closeness* to them starting on that day [I initiated that relationship with the Ancestors]. And so, when it came to June *tenth*...I guess I felt like I was...*re-establishing* my relationship with them? Being able to tell them...we promised we would respect you, we promised we would look after you, and this is part of what we're doing to keep that promise...I also had the role of thinking about, "how do we continue." [This is] just a one little *stop*, there's lots of other parts of the Ceremony – it's not just that *day*, it's continuing. We have to keep continuing – we'll *always* do this...until they are *reburied*... 'Cause by the time they're reburied, we'll have established our relationship with them.

...because we [the community] were coming together to do it, and it was done in such a beautiful *way*...It was really uplifting. It was...it felt solemn and serious, of course – but having people there that I know, and I *love*, and that I feel like I'm walking on the same path in life with them, to do something to try to fix something that was hurtful...it was such a wonderful opportunity to get to do that...You know, being able to provide *care*, and *love*, and *respect*, and fix something that didn't feel good...Was really powerful. And, *I think we need that*. I think in Indigenous community we *know* all the struggles, we feel all the hurts and the pain, and we also are so intensely aware of the *injustices*. And so, being able to be a part of something that can *rectify* that – I think there's an opportunity for healing there. And, it felt like that for me...Now this [interview] is almost a *year* from that *day* – it's *different*...that was just a *moment*...I think when ever...[you have] a chance to be *close* to Ancestors...whether that's in a *ceremony*, or when...you *feel* them or you *hear* them or you *see* them – it's very *moving*. It *grounds* you...the *meaning* in your life gets really clear...And that's the way our community – that's one way we

love each other, that's one way we *care* for each other. We *take care* of each other. So that's what sticks out to me the most of that day.

...[The Ancestors are] supporting us – this is how I understand it – we think that we're helping them. We think that we're helping them, and that they're pitiful because someone *harmed* them in this way. But they're helping *us* – we're the ones who are pitiful...They *orchestrate* these experiences so that we can have a *learning* experience. And learning how to *restore* something after it's been damaged in a terrible way? Is a very powerful life lesson. And there's *more* that goes with that too. It's not just restoring...there's *returning*, there's also *forgiveness* in there, if we could even *imagine* that. Could we even *get* there? I think that they [the Ancestors] are offering us an opportunity to *explore* how we could get to forgiveness. Could we *forgive* people who made this kind of mistake. Could we forgive people who perpetrated this kind of colonial violence towards our Ancestors and our community. It seems unforgivable, really, in my *mind*. But I know that, when I feel the kind of *anger* that I have for those actions, that it *harms* me – it feels really heavy. So that's one thing that I've been praying about and thinking about since the last Ceremony. I feel like I've been called to think about how...would you be willing to let go of some of your anger and resentment about this, and step into forgiveness?...Well I like the *concept*, but maybe I still want to hang on to my *anger*, because I think it's *righteous*. But I don't like what it does to me. And I don't like that I'm not *free* to feel more happiness and joy and laughter. So, if you think of it *that way*, *that's* why we're the pitiful ones – because we have these learnings about *life*, all this opportunity for *healing* from what has happened *in* this rematriation process, and all the things that we talked about – having the relationship, having our connection to *Ancestors*. We're connecting to their sacred spirit by being triggered by their Ancestral remains. It's very powerful...But I feel like that day that you're

studying [the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony], and the work of rematriation – there’s an opportunity for forgiveness in there. It’s whether we want to pick it up or not, or whether we want to still suffer...sort of stewing in the anger. I’ll let you know if I get there – you’ll probably notice because I’ll be different! I think I would be softer.

...*life* prepares you for what’s coming up ahead. And, my life prepared me for the role I had that day. So, praying with the *pipe*, and calling in the *Ancestors*, it’s an honour and it’s a big responsibility. But I feel like I had lots of *practice*. So, I love being in that role! Because, there’s an *intimacy* that comes with having that role, an intimacy with the sacred spirits. And, being able to be *close* to them for just even a *moment* is something that’s very valuable to me. So, how did I feel? I felt *happy*. I felt *proud*. I felt proud of our *community*. I felt *relieved*. That we finally were able to do something that...when the *violence* is there...the *consequences* of the *violence* is still just *right there*. And then you can take some *action* to start *mending* that? That is a powerful, powerful gift. So that’s what we did that day, and you know, Savannah, *later* when I had times to talk with descendant communities – so since that time, we’ve had connections with people from descendant communities, *talking* about those Ancestors that we moved into that room that day. We got to *talk* about them. And so, we have to tell them about the terrible *history*. And so – but now we have something to put *beside* that. So, I can say, “oh by the way, you know, once the Council got *involved* and giving good *direction* on how we should look after them, *this* is what we did.” And I can *talk* about what happened that day with them. And then, their response to hearing how we demonstrated respect, and love, in the best way we know how – is that comfort that goes on top of it. Begin to start with that *mending*, so, that’s why it’s so important, that’s why it’s so powerful. And then I can say “we have taken care of your Ancestors, in the best way that we know how, with love and respect, while they’re waiting, until you’re ready to claim them

and take them home.” So, being able to say *that* was such a *relief* to me, to have to face descendant communities, and tell them of this terrible thing...it’s still *awful*! But, it’s *awful* because, there was no love, there was no care – there was the opposite of that. And then, to be able to change that story and put something else with it, is important for *me*. I was glad to have it, and I could see they were glad to hear it.

4.3b Wanbdi Wakita – Hotukahe – Wicasta Wakan – Pezi Huta Wicasta – Wapiya
Wanbdi Wakita. Miyedo – that’s “me.” It’s in Dakota language. And it means “Looking Eagle.” I got that name when I was 13 years old, when the ceremony from boy to manhood ceremony was done for me by an old man – his name is Leo Mennard – he came...came to set me off into the world, I really felt honoured to be part of that ceremony...So when we *finished* the ceremony, he told me, “Your name is *Wanbdi Wakita*. And the reason *why* the spirits brought you that name” he said, “you look over the people. Make sure everything is okay. And if it isn’t, you go and help them.” Some people call me, *Hotukahe*, “First Voice.” They call our old people back at home, “First Voices.” Over here, they’re all “Elders” – I don’t even know what that word means.⁷³ Back at home, sometimes they call me *Wicasta Wakan*, “Holy Man.” Sometimes they call me *Pezi Huta Wicasta*, “Medicine Man.” Sometimes they call me *Wapiya* – “Doctor.” “The One Who Calls Ancestors Down To Help The People Inside the Ceremony, The Ones Who Are Sick and Needing Help.” That’s what they call me...It’s not up to me to be called certain things. It’s up to Creator...Almost every day sacred instructions come. So that’s what I follow. And – I like living like that...Well, [ceremony] that’s my job! Creator gave me that kind of a job...It’s not only just ceremonies. Creator gave me, *instruction* on how to use *this* medicine...So. I appreciate those things very much. I *believe* in that.

⁷³ “Elder” is a colonial term (Lucas and Williams 2019, 22).

I remember that [Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony]. That's a pretty *precarious* ceremony. We have to prepare ourselves *really* good – with cleansing with medicine, and making lots of prayers, before you even go over there. And, at any time during that Ceremony – the Ancestors could come and take any one of us back home...it's a *dangerous* ceremony. That's why we need to prepare ourselves. Make it good. And I was *glad* those people [in the Ceremony]...they really wanted to be a part of that. So that it made it good, the Ceremony. 'Cause if they didn't, they would get sick or something...Yeah, that's heavy-duty stuff. *Long* before we got over there, we didn't know until things started to happen at the building – building started to *shake*, and the staff got *really* sick. And, that's when they started to come and ask me, "what can we do?" I really – I *appreciate* them asking for help that way. So we went through a *whole* bunch of ceremonies, just to quiet the building. 'Cause the spirits of those remains – they're up there, looking down on us. And we have to do the right thing [by them]. So, we tried our *best*. In that Ceremony, those people had a *good heart*, you know, to come there, and that's what kept things good for us at the Ceremony. Yeah. That's quite a deal. So now we gotta finish up what we need to do with those remains. Our *relatives* – when we first done a ceremony over there – there's five or six spirits came inside the ceremony [on their own], over there. And, two of them were little kids. It was very hard to see that. Very hard. Shook me up a little bit, you know? So then I made a request to the staff, "You can't do this any more. You can't take our People and cut them up or whatever it is that you do." [You] have to have a big ceremony too. There's a *lot* of things involved – people with good hearts need to be involved, food needs to be brought, medicine needs to be [brought], songs need to be sung, prayers need to be said. Yeah. That's quite a deal. But I'm glad we're doing that, you know? I'm glad that we're looking after that. We asked for forgiveness *many* times. One of the Indigenous staff...She got *very* sick, handling that, what they're doing. So we

brought her over here. We had to clean her up, get her well. As soon as she got well, she took off home. She didn't want to be here. That's how...yeah, we have to watch ourselves to make sure we do the right thing. Yeah. And one of the instructor's mom passed away too. Because they didn't know what to do...We came home and had purification ceremonies. To wipe ourselves clean. That's important. We do that for *all* the funerals. When we go to the funeral, we come home and go into the lodge.

When somebody passes away, we make prayers...So, when the government comes to change all of that – they told us, “You can no longer do that; you have to bury them *in* the ground.” Well, the government broke the *law* – one of our laws that Creator gave us. And put their own man-made law for us to do. Spoiled – they *spoiled* a lot of things, you know? I always say, “they don't *understand*,” but that's what causes a lot of trouble. When we have to do what – *other* laws that we have to follow, instead of our own Laws...If you follow sacred instructions, there is peace, there's love and peace. And if you don't follow that road, or if you don't know it – there's gonna be turmoil. And there's *lots* of turmoil. And you see that in the city. Every day.

You know, a ceremony is a person with a good heart. And taking care, and making offerings, and to always say thank you. That's a ceremony. And then you can be specific about your ceremony through your prayers, you know? So. It's not always a big gathering with pipes and all kinds of stuff, it's not always like that. It's good to get up in the morning and make a prayer. And mention your name, and that, when after awhile, when your Ancestors hear your name – they'll start to recognize you. And maybe at that time, they'll start to reveal themselves to you. It took me four years for my Ancestors to tell me who they were. Before that – nothing. So, I guess they were waiting to make sure that I really mean it, you know?...Prayer is always important. Cleansing yourself with medicine before you make a prayer. Looking up, as opposed

to looking down, bow your heads – how are they supposed to see you if you bow your heads? Look up, “this is me here, grandpa.” And, mention your name, and call on their names too... ‘Course, many people – they’re gonna have their own way... as long as they make prayers from their *heart*. That’s really important. Making prayers – *really* meaning it.

4.3c Mindimoway Zongiigabow – Vanessa Lillie – Pallbearer – Oskapewis – Witness – My Mother

Mindimoway Zongiigabow nitisinikason. Negig nidodem. I’m “Old Woman Standing Strong” and I am Otter Clan. My *other* name is Vanessa Lillie, and I’m Cree and Métis from St. Peter’s/Peguis.

So, about the specific [Keeping of the Spirit] Ceremony of bringing the Ancestors into the Resting Room... I was a part of that process in my role at work... And to me, this was not going to *work*, even though I was going to my work *place*. This was going to *ceremony*. As a part of [going to] ceremony, I woke up in the morning and thought, “I need to bring my pipe.” And, “I need to bring my bundle.”... [but] I would say, that... I didn’t do it as a part of my [work] role, I did it as a part of my commitment to the Ancestors [and putting them to rest respectfully]... I would say [my role was] helper, *oskapewis*, or just... like a *witness* almost...

I *knew* that it was gonna be a *heavy* ceremony and heavy *work* that day [because of the *seriousness* of the Ceremony, and the *focus* that’s required to do *jiibay* work]... I went sort of *prepared* for that. One of the things that I *love* about *ceremony* – is that, no matter the occasion, there’s always *laughter*. And, I remember loving that there was students and, you know, other people, and Elders all together. And that that felt really *natural*. It felt *heavy*, but it also felt *good*?... it was a heavy day. But also a really *good* day... I remember that when we woke up it was overcast and *cloudy*, and at the end of the Ceremony it was *sunny*... And so that’s one thing

that really stands out to me...when I came outside at the end of the day and the *Sun* came out...It was like a *sign* that things were more peaceful in the world because that work was done.

I was really *overwhelmed* by the amount of *care* that was taken for the Resting Space. And how *beautiful* [it was]...I was really happy to smell *medicines*, and to be able to *smell* the *sage* from *smudging*, and tobacco from *pipes*, you know, those sorts of smells are comforting...I remember smelling, [that smell of] *new cloth*? 'Cause there was all that *fabric* there...That [smell] I always attribute to ceremony.

I know that *we*, the U of M, had very extensive consultations with *many* important Elders who *contributed* to the conversation. And because the *Nations* that the Ancestors were *from* was not always able to be *known*, it didn't make sense to go with just one Nation's ceremony. And so I *expected* that to actually be much more of an *issue* when it came to the Ceremony, and it wasn't at all. We have a really *diverse* group of Indigenous People in Manitoba – and I think that everybody's Protocols were *met*, and *respected*, and that that Ceremony was done in a really good way...I was really *grateful* for the amount of *attention* that the *non-Indigenous* people *went to*, to ensure that they were being respectful and following Protocols, and *learning* and *growing*...I think that...[people's] *good intentions* really came through on that day. And I also think that there was a lot of *bravery*, and courage shown throughout the *process*, because it was non-Indigenous people *leading* that. And, it's really *difficult* and *upsetting* for Indigenous People that these Ancestors are in the space and how they came to be at the U of M. And so I think it was very *courageous*, really *brave*, of the non-Indigenous people who headed that *project* to learn how to work together with all the different *Nations* and the extensive consultations that they did. And it really showed on the day of the Ceremony.

...for me, I don't think about it as working with the *dead*. And so I think of the Ancestors as alive *spirits*, and that we're looking after their *physical body*. And so I maybe have less issues with doing *jiibay*, because I recognize that they're *living*. And so I just tell them, "we're caring for you in the best way that we know *how*, and this is how we're looking after your physical *bodies*." And I don't feel afraid or in *danger*, and that's because I've received many *teachings* about that...[But] I wasn't necessarily *prepared* for the *extent* of what actually *happened*. Which I *suspect* – I'll never have that responsibility to carry that many Ancestors *at once* again. It's usually one person, *one time*, right? It's not however many Ancestors that there was...I have a lot of experience being with people when they pass *away*. And so when their spirit leaves their *body*, I've been with a number of my *relatives* when that's *happened*. And I always wonder, like, how do I *feel* about that? And, I feel *honoured*. Because, their spirit is separating from their *body* and returning to *Pakwankeesik*, and returning back to the *Star People* or *Creation*, right? And so...I just felt *honoured* to be *apart* of the Ceremony where we were able to *witness* putting the people to *rest*...So when I thought about those *Ancestors* I just really *think* about...that those are *physically*, like, *could potentially be* my *cousins*, or they could be *past family members*, right? And so I felt really *honoured* to be able to do *right* by them, and to be a part of that Ceremony. Which is why I was like, okay, so I'm walking around twenty-eight times...on the twenty-eighth time, I want it to have as much meaning as it did on the *first* time, because this person is *just as important* as the very first person. I would say that I just felt *honoured*...another reason that I felt so *honoured* was *also* because it's part of the *work* that my *child* is doing in our communities. And so as a *mother*, I feel...really *proud*? [long pause] [though tears] So I feel really proud to see what my *child* is doing to care for our communities. And so it was an *honour* to be a part of her work as well.

But also it took a *really* long time! So from that *first* meeting [2020] until the actual Ceremony...I wanna say, like, two [or three] years?...but I *also* understand on the *flip* side, that those Ancestors have been in the custody of U of M for...[almost] a hundred years? And so...if we look at the *history* – waiting three years to make sure we do it *well*? I appreciate that it took that *long* because of meaningful community engagement...Because it's actually really *upsetting*. There's this piece of it that's really *upsetting*, that this has happened at a place where I *work*. And so that part is upsetting, and also it's *systemic racism*. And so that's a difficult thing to *face*. But in the *same way*, I think that I felt *peaceful* [and comfortable] about the *work* that the *people* at the U of M were *doing* in order to make that right.

The *most* that I knew about it [repatriation policies and legislation] was that it was just institutions were *racist* in the way that they handled Indigenous People...I also think that there are different places that can work together to create best practices and learn from *each other*. So that they *are* creating a *standard* across the Nation...when it comes to repatriation and repatriation...[ceremony was able to address some of the barriers to repatriation and repatriation]...because Indigenous *pedagogy* was *prioritized*. And so, decolonizing – I don't really love that word in this *instance*, because, *really*, what was happening was – it was a respectful *way* of putting things *right*. Where Indigenous *People* were prioritized...I think we are not even at the place of necessarily realizing the *impacts* that that Ceremony is going to *have*. I think that it's a historic change in the way that institutions have treated Indigenous *Peoples* – past and present – and, I hope that it helps to create a new and more respectful way going forward.

4.3d Mahihkan – Larry Brass – Helper – Pallbearer – Resting Place Maker

My name is *Mahihkan*, or Larry Brass. Normally I introduce myself in Cree, so I would say *Mahihkan nitisnikason. Wuskwi Sipihk ochi niya*. I'm from Wuskwi Sipihk First Nations, or Birch River. I'm Anishnaabe, Cree and Ojibway.

I was asked to be a part of [the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony] by my Auntie Pahan PteSanWin and Father Wanbdi Wakita. They know that I also have a background in trades, and specifically woodworking, and I was asked to develop the prototypes for the Resting Places, or the caskets that the Ancestors are being housed in now. It was a really simple design...hopefully strong enough to hold up for...the journey that they'll be taking back home...making sure that the area that the work was being done in was constantly cleansed and not around any alcohol or drugs or anything like that. All of that is part of the process, and as you know, this being a *ceremony* in-and-of-itself, that entire process needed to be done from an Indigenous perspective. And, originally, I had heard that the University had hired a non-Indigenous contractor to do this work, and the Advisory Council sort of decided that that wasn't the best approach. And then that's when they approached me, and of course, looking at this from a *holistic* perspective, understanding that...the work *during* that process needed to come from a ceremonial perspective.

I remember feeling this barrage of emotions, only because of the relationship that I had developed with the Ancestors through the work that I was doing...here we are, in the present time, unfortunately dealing with the fact that their *physical* aspect of their lives, their bodies were dug up and brought into the University, and were now being placed within the Resting Places. All of that *time* that I had spent in making the Resting Places – the cutting, and the sanding, the burning of the wood – but the *thinking*, and the *emotional investment* that you have in doing all

of that was brought up again...In making the Resting Places, I was lucky enough to *see* things...[during the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony] *I closed my eyes* and I could *feel* the Ancestors there with us. And you could see them...And it wasn't only me that had seen that also. It was nice to sort of get that clarification from others that we weren't alone...And that was a *big part* of what we were doing, because it shows that we were getting support from them – that they were there with us. And then, to be so close to their *physical bodies*, was pretty emotional...And to be happy to see that this is sort of coming full circle, and that they're going back home...I remember thinking..."*we're here*"...it's been a long time in the making – and now it's happening, and we're bringing it to the room that they're being housed in...Just feeling that was sort of this [big] sense of accomplishment. With a team! A really good team. Non-Indigenous *and* Indigenous team.

Because the University [and especially the department of anthropology]...still has that *clinical* [association]...it still was very hard and confusing...to be a part of the process, because of where we were. [But] I remember feeling really safe because of what I have learned...to protect myself spiritually...The team that had done the work was doing it in a very respectful way, and I've gotten to know them *personally* – and so you worry a little bit about them also, just because they're handling remains of Ancestors that could be *upset* because of all this process, and so make lots of prayers for *them*, that they're okay...And although we have a lot of Ancestors I feel that are very upset, and [pause]...who knows what they're experiencing? They too see from a w(h)olistic perspective, and *know* from that perspective, of what the right way of doing things is, and I think we're doing it. We are there...You are where you're at, when and where you're *supposed* to be...And so, learning from a non-Indigenous perspective in this...hearing from people like Lara, and Rachel, and Chelsea, about what their *experiences*

were, what *loopholes* they had to go through or *find*, what *hurdles* they had to jump; and then the *reciprocal nature* of our *relationships*, learning from them and supporting *them* in being able to see things from an Indigenous perspective was exactly *how* it was supposed to *be*...*That*, I think...solidified what we're doing here...this *work* really identifies, unfortunately that we're all...on this *foundation*, built on the social construct of *racism*! [And] we've been able to *address* some of those things which really *highlight* the fact that our two people *can* work with one another! And we can do what we need to do in order to get the things that need to get done again, so that we can move forward in Truth and Reconciliation. So it was a *wonderful* experience.

...a lot of this work is being done in the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation. And *entities* like the University of Manitoba, other non-Indigenous organizations, that are unfortunately keeping Ancestral remains like this are a part of that process too – and with them *in* that spirit of Truth and Reconciliation we are mapping. We are mapping and setting markers to get to that place...And, it's real easy to get upset and angry in all of this...[especially with the subjugation and intentional assimilation of a people under colonial projects]...And you have a choice. You can decide to be angry, and allow that to grow inside of you and fester, or you can choose to acknowledge it and open yourself up, to...vulnerability, in working with somebody, with good people, like the team here at the University of Manitoba – with the hopes that things will eventually be done in the right way. And I feel like we have!

...if I know I'm not in the right place, especially when it comes to ceremony and there's other ceremonial leaders that do not provide that same sense? I never felt that *once* throughout [this] whole experience. I always felt safe. I always felt like the right people were there. And whether they were Indigenous or not, we did what we were *supposed to do*. Right from the very beginning of all of this...Because, this is something that's bigger than *all of us*! And what an

honour to be a *part* of this, you know? To have some small part...Again, we know our roles and responsibilities within *our* ceremonies and it never falters no matter what environment we're in. If the environment that we're in or the people that we're working with are unwilling to allow us to lead in *our* roles with the knowledge that *we* have? Then we simply just don't put ourselves in that environment. But that's not the way it was. The University, from my perspective, was always understanding of the fact that they had their strengths, again, and that we had ours. And that we needed to *trust* each other. And to support each other when *their* roles were needed, we stepped aside and they led; and when *our* roles were needed, they stepped aside and we led...

Knowing our history's a *huge* part of *understanding* why we are, where we are today. And, as a part of that, it's *important* to know of things like this...The willingness to work with non-Indigenous people is *tough* sometimes – because Indigenous People have been putting themselves in a place of vulnerability since [their] subjugation [in] colonial projects. And so, *again*, this is another situation where Indigenous People had to come from the comfort of their own homes, their Indigenous organizations – and place themselves in a position of vulnerability within an institution, and work *alongside* non-Indigenous people, for the hopes and betterment of Ancestral remains and artifacts...that shows the *level* in which Indigenous People are willing to work and get this done...because I know we *have* to come back to the universities in order to do this work. But when you think about the level of vulnerability that Indigenous People have been placing themselves in, it's time for these non-Indigenous entities to place themselves in positions of vulnerability to support what these relationships and what these initiatives would look like in the future...so many of these programs are developed by the government or non-Indigenous agencies that really have no relationship or understanding of Indigenous Knowledge, nor have they gone to *seek investment* from Indigenous People to be able to develop these programs that

are supposed to *heal* or help out. More often they don't work...And if there is the potential to be able to change many of those policies from an Indigenous Knowledge set [from that sharing circle perspective, from that strengths-based approach, where everyone is respected and equal], I would definitely recommend that. And, I think that that's what will lead to the success of any repatriation or rematriation initiatives in the future, because again you're utilizing both knowledge sets...this is important work that we're doing, and...I feel like we've done it in a right way...but *only* because of people *like* Lara, only because of people *like* Rachel, you know? Who recognize that something just wasn't right. And they knew in their *hearts* that this should be done a certain way. And then, they found the people that were willing to work with them, *because* of that. And then, it led to all of this...

This process...nobody *has done this*. I don't know anybody that has done this. And so all of this, is *necessary*. All of this is necessary. [pause]...we shared, we gave our experiences, we showed our strengths, and *utilized* those strengths, so that we could get to this point – that's the *spirit* in all of this. And it's always going to change. It will never be the same, because there'll be a *new* group of people with a new set of lived and living experiences, which will continuously *add* to whatever goals and outcomes that they want...Somebody who made mistakes, and *faults*, and had failures; *learned* from those things – changed, adapted, overcame, and then shared. I believe that that's where we are as Indigenous People, where our strengths lie – *in* those failures, *in* those tests, in those road bumps. *That's* where the knowledge is, and that's what people brought to this.

4.3e Sagataybinese – Wes Nelson – Helper – Pallbearer

Well yeah, my name's Wes Nelson, [and] my spirit name is *Sagataybinese*, so it's Anishinaabe. And it translates to "Sunrise Thunderbird." And so my clan is the Kingfisher –

Ogiishkimanisii – and I come from Treaty 3 territory, a couple hours east of Winnipeg. The community's called Northwest Angle. So *that's* my homeland, is out there...

Wanbdi and Pahan...they're my Aunt and Uncle, and I've been helping them with ceremony for probably about twelve years or so...I'd be their ceremony helper...And, we were the ones to *move* them [the Ancestors] from one place to the other and do it in a Good Way that way...so it *was* like a pallbearer type role that we were playing...*both* titles are appropriate.

...I guess if I reflect back...it had the degree of magnitude...and it was *important*; to me it's historical...And it was a *seven, eight hour day*...so that was a *long* Ceremony, and that was a long funeral procession. That was a *lot of times* around as a pallbearer, and so it was *hard work* that day! *Physically* and, emotionally and spiritually...And so there was a preparation...of getting your mind in a good place, and getting your *spirit*, or all of who you are, just to present yourself in a very good way...I wore a ribbon shirt, and I think I even wore moccasins. But I wanted to...put my best foot forward with representing our spiritual ways and making sure the Ancestors were welcomed in the best way that we could...we were all assembled in the Resting Room, and the Elders were consulting and we started off in ceremony. And we took turns going from the more sterile *environment* of them being in *trays*, and then the whole process of being put into boxes...And I found that [watching the beginning stages was] really impactful [and powerful]...and sort of demonstrating the *respect* that we *have* for these Ancestors...And we had a *singer* there, that's important too!...So we had the right songs being *sung* as we took those first group of Ancestors from the one place to the other...So *for me* I witnessed that and I said, "the process seemed to be very *solemn*...typical of...an actual *real* funeral that might occur;" like if someone were more *recently* passed away, and not a few thousands years or a few hundred years...there was a high degree of *thought* placed into [the Resting Room] – I mean, it was given

an appropriate *name*, it was painted in some very beautiful *imagery*...I thought that the government or academia could be *sterile* and *systematic* in how they do things – but this seemed like an *appropriate place* to *place* our Ancestors...*it felt like it was done right*...it felt like a *spiritual process*, it felt *collaborative*, it felt *respectful*...I felt very *honoured* to be there...

I felt the University *probably* had gone to our *Elders*, and they actually listened...So I found that was a very powerful thing too, I felt like the staff from the University, were...very *open* to just sitting and getting to know our Elders, and just everything wasn't "go fast"...sometimes government or other *organizations* – people want a "one and done" kind of *quick* thing – but when you have an undertaking like this, it's going to take some time to come to completion...And nothing felt *rushed* – we had the *entire day* to *do it*, so it wasn't like a *moving company* where we're just moving a bunch of *boxes* from one place to another – it felt like a *real procession*, and so I think that's the respect our Ancestors *deserve*...I sometimes talk with the Elders, as we sorta *implement* our spiritual *practices*, and we sorta *integrate* into *wherever it is we work*. It's a foreign concept for a lot of places...So, we always just *compromise*...and sometimes that's the path of least resistance...I've had a lot of these *dialogues* with Elders of, "how much do we compromise?" But I *don't* really feel like there was any *compromise*...

The *Ancestors* have been resting *peacefully* and, they were [*taken*] without their own families' *consent*, so I thought about that *disruption* of this *cycle of life*...I was trying to *envision* what actually had *occurred* to our Ancestors. One particular *situation* that stands out...it was an *Ancestor* they were putting in [the Resting Place]...And he had a *pipe* in there...if I went and got my pipe I have, and I put it on the table, the pipe will look just the same...So it was really amazing to think about the continuation of cultural *practices*...he probably smoked his pipe and made *prayers*, and here we were, all these [thousands of] years *later* in, what now is the

University of Manitoba and where we had just smoked our pipes, an hour or two before that...And, it was amazing too that we just put all this stuff back in the box with him and that'll go back to his family, or his community, wherever he comes from, and that'll go back probably into the ground, where it should go. Back into Mother Earth. And, that maybe *completes* the cycle of life that we disrupted...And I don't know about what other people did, but there was a couple times throughout the day that I would *acknowledge* that...I just treated it as their spirit was *there* with us...I kind of just *talked* to them, and said, "we're gonna try to do our best; we're gonna take care of you; we'll put you in this box, and we're gonna take you to a different place to rest, and eventually you'll make your way home." I'm kinda actually having *dialogue* with them, and in our *spiritual* way of *viewing* this *existence*, those spirits *did come*, and I know the Elders, Wanbdi spoke about that. He could *feel* them, or, had a little bit of communication with the actual Ancestors that had been *stirred* from their resting...very powerful stuff...that shows Indigenous *world view* or our *spirituality* – that we opened the doorway, we opened a place of ceremony, and our Ancestors are always just there – they're waiting for us! And we never met any of these people, but they are our Ancestors! And there's this *interrelatedness* and so we open that spiritual doorway, and that's our *belief system*, that they are just *right there* present with us...So I wouldn't have ever really thought that anywhere else, but, that's what ceremony does – we created a spiritual *space*, and then spiritual things *happen*, right?...And I don't know about anyone else, but...I could sort of feel the *presence*, or a *power* of – whether it's the *humans* gathered there [that] created this energy, or quite possibly our Ancestors who have been *waiting* for this time – I could feel that *spiritual energy* that was created. So even though we were in this building that's part of this *University*, it became something else...It's *two* things – it's very *physically*, we're taking our Ancestors and we're gonna *do* something with them that's

respectful, whether they go *home* or...somewhere closer by, but they're gonna find their resting place – but it's also *symbolically*, what's happened to Indigenous People over many many years, and the *treatments*. So *to me* there was a *dual process* happening there – we were taking care of our Ancestors that were *at the University*, but we're also righting the wrongs of *history*. And, I think everyone who was *present that day...probably* thought the same thing – that there's more than just that particular day *happening*...I'm not sure where that's happening across *North America*, but, it was happening in, *Winnipeg*, at the *University of Manitoba*, *that day*!

...personally I've worked in jobs where I *pretty intimately* know and *see* the outcomes of colonialism, and in my *own* family I *see* the wrongs that were done. And then, in some of my schooling I've *read* about it, and then in ceremony we *hear* about it, so – [it's] sort of, *saturated* throughout my entire *life*. I've seen the history of all of the things that have been *wrong*, and, I've been *lucky* enough to be a part of the work going into things that are starting to be *right*. And so, the Elders always say, "if you don't do it, who will?"...And so, in *my* mind I'm *healthy*, I know a few things, or I have the *ability*, and I was *invited*. And so, to turn that down would...be wrong for me. Wherever we can make an impact, we gotta stand up and have the courage to *do* that...So we were *doing it* – the *reclaiming* of things, is sometimes the *giving up* of *power* on the other side, and to *give* that power doesn't always come *freely*, it requires a lot of hard work by certain people. I thought about that on that day too, that *correcting* the wrongs of the past *takes a lot work* sometimes...probably the biggest thing is *changing* a bunch of *minds* that have always thought a *certain* way, into seeing *another* way. That was kind of the *fruition* of, probably a lot of years of hard work – and I guess that's what I *think* about moving forward, is there will be more hard work that continues to happen, and, hopefully at the *higher levels*, it reaches those other levels...and people begin to see the *value* in that – and we continue to *increase the*

momentum...I've always looked at policy, and a lot of them are *colonial in nature*, and a lot of them continue to *subjugate* and *oppress* Indigenous People. And so *to me* that's a repatriation, is...we had our own universities, we had our own *justice* in our communities, we had everything to function as a society!...I'm repatriating all sorts of things when I can. And it might be very miniscule, up to, hopefully, potentially, a little bit *bigger* – so you identify a *policy*, and then you have *resistance* to it, and then you *problem solve* and create a *better* policy that can still *address* it, but it's more *Indigenous*...and, so, that's a repatriation of our spiritual belief system...And, so to *whatever* degree that that is repatriation instead of reclaiming...So coming out to the University, it's another ceremony, and we're *reclaiming* our way of *doing* things...it's been *community* based, but I've enjoyed working with Indigenous People to reclaim our way of *being* – and then teaching settler *Canada* how to let go of some things. And maybe, participate and support that...it starts within us, and then, we move elsewhere...And then it gives *traction* for Indigenous Nations to *come forward*...So that's where sometimes, change *should* occur in our education system. So that's where we need to have all the things in place. And then hopefully it spills outward from there...So I guess, the reason why I brought that up is because academics leads a lot of other places, so, if we can do things *there* in the right way, then other places will follow.

4.3f Rachel ten Bruggencate – Laboratory Supervisor

So my name is Rachel ten Bruggencate, and I would introduce myself as Rachel.

I am the supervisor for the laboratories in the department of anthropology at the University of Manitoba...So as far back as 2018...the *Ceremony* didn't exist at that point, but I was involved in some of the things that led to [the department of] anthropology's participation in it...[which] has been *finding information* about Ancestors that we house, leading the census of

the Ancestors that we house...And also the *physical aspects* of bringing the Ancestors into a place where they're – of course not *properly* cared for, because that's back *home* – but *cared for* according to some of the guidelines that we were given, and Protocols from Elders and Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers working in the Ceremony...I would say that...what I *do* with the Ceremony is “*death care*”...It's a *fraught term*, because I've heard it said that the word “care” can't be applied within an institution like this for what happens with the Ancestors...I've heard of *folks* in other institutions bringing people to visit their Ancestors in *much different* circumstances, and how *painful* that is for them to *see*...*There is pain* in hearing, what has happened to Ancestors...and *disrespectful housing* is not something that has to be added to that pain...I hope I've *helped care* for them while they're here...I feel like the role I had was *part* of the day. But that a lot of people who participated, played so much of a larger role than *I* did...

[sighs] Oh, I remember the beautiful *songs* in the morning...there was an Elder there...who had just the most beautiful singing voice. And I remember your mom, with the smudging [laughs] dish...I remember seeing the smoke coming up through my fingers, as we were doing that. The *smell* of course...[breathes]...even beyond just the day itself, smudging...[usually sage] in the labs...that has become kind of a regular part of some of the work that we do in the labs. And so the *smell* is always quite *evocative* of – not just that work, but of course, the spiritual aspect of the work and then, it kind of resets the mind in any situation, so that was a big part of it too. And one that I'm very grateful for having shared with me...

...I was *directly* working with the Ancestors that day, and helping get them ready for their escort for the pallbearers to bring them to the Resting Room. And that kind of work, at least for *me*...is *difficult*. *Both* emotionally, but also physically. Because there is the reality of holding a person in your hands...who is very *fragile* sometimes, and *physically* vulnerable...the Ancestors

that we house in the department...through work I had done previously, are people whom I've known about – or have a *history* with that went back over ten years. At that point, in some ways it was saying “goodbye.” I still have some responsibilities for maintaining the Resting Room. But as far as the Census work, and working in a very *direct* and tangible way with those Ancestors, it was the end of that. And so, it was interesting – because there is a relationship I think you form, or at least *I* do, in working with people, in that way...they're the Ancestors you are accountable to, as you are helping them into their temporary Resting Place.

...when everybody was kind of giving their closing thoughts about the day, and...you're like, “*what am I feeling?*” And *not quite* having an answer at that point...But something that *had* been there previously felt like it wasn't at the end of the day...I think if I were to put it into more *precise* language, it was a *burden* I'd grown used to carrying...like something that I had become accustomed to had been lifted off. And I wasn't sure if it was something that I *miss* or not. [laughs] You know? How things become *comfortable* after a long time and, I'm not Indigenous, but the Ancestors were people I'd become *familiar* with. And my relationship to them had changed in that day. So it was not a feeling I was prepared for.

[Savannah Moon: *I forget* that of all people who would have a close, intimate relationship with the Ancestors, of course it would be you!...You come in and say hi to them!]

Yeah! Well, and not always a *good* one – you know about my work during my master's, and so it's...a complicated one. I also don't want to *presume* [laughs] to have a closer relationship with them than their descendants – of course I wouldn't. And it's a *complicated* thing, because I didn't come to know them in a *good* way. Their *being* here didn't happen in a good way. And so that kind of *colours* things. But like I said, they're people I've *worked with*.

And they're people I've come to *know*. And, *in that way* I think there is a relationship there...I hope I've helped.

I feel it [the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony] was something that...*had* to be done. And in that way, because I was where I was, in the time and place where I was, I feel it was something I *had* to do. But not because the University – I mean, the University would have probably just *ticked* along just fine!...[sighs]...I mean things were the way they were, for *decades*. I didn't feel like [pause] I had to do it 'cause it was my *job*? I felt I had to do it because it *needed* to be *done*, because it was just enough...and people need to go home...I'm not sure if it's even [on] my *heart*, I think there's a way the world needs to *be*. It's something that's been *disordered* in the world for so *long* – people *being* here, who shouldn't *be* here, who *didn't want* to be here, and who's descendants don't want them here...even [laughs] in white people culture *holding* people's Ancestors almost essentially *hostage*, that's a *criminal* thing. We have *laws* in our *society* against desecrating human remains! It just, it was something *wrong*, that needed to be right. And whether that's my heart, or my *brain*, or...it *had* to happen. Well, and maybe that's the *corollary* of things happening for a reason [laughs]. 'Cause it happened for a *reason*! And the reason was that *it needed to happen*.

But, *I felt proud* that the *community members*, that the *Elders*, the Grandmothers and Grandfathers, and *Knowledge Keepers*, that even my *colleagues* at the University, wanted my participation in that day, and were comfortable with me *carrying* the Ancestors – *that* I feel *proud* of...I think there is an *added* degree of *work* that goes in and *generosity* on the part of Council in providing that guidance to a thirty-seven year old woman. [laughs]...And, if the day went *well* and if people seemed to have some *release* from that day? And that I played a *role* in that, if I *did*? I'm *glad*. I'm not sure if "proud" is the right word? But I'm *glad*. But I'm *proud*

and *honoured* that I was *invited* to have the role in the day that I did...*particularly* given my own *history* with the Ancestors, and *who* I represent as the laboratory supervisor of the department of anthropology...as a[n] anthropologist, it's something that I always thought *you needed* to have permission from people to do. And that *not* asking that permission, or *finding* little ways to get out of it, was *not* the right thing to do...[sighs]...it's not like there's a *lack* of people *asking* for their Ancestors back...So even...the idea that you'd *lock away* someone so that their descendants couldn't have them back, because they're important to, what, *research*? [laughs] Is...no. Not right. People have been through enough. I mean *obviously* that *feeling* was not enough to *stop* me from *engaging* in that kind of research [I have since learned very well I hope]...When people ask for their Ancestors back...they should get their Ancestors back...I've been *glad* to see changes in the administration at the U of M and in our department, where the *reclaiming* our own kind of *honour* and actually *doing the right thing* has been enough to *push* what will be a very expensive thing, *forward*. I'm not sure that that's the case at all institutions though...I think good policy is policy that is as flexible as it *needs* to be to serve people who engage with the policy... I mean, the *idea* [with the UM's RRRC Policy] was to have the University *commit* to something. Because without them having their *own* rules saying, "they need to do this" – I didn't think they ever would. Because you deal with enough people who say, "*Well*, the budget..." It's like, "well yeah, the budget." You have money, you have priorities, and, where do we fit in that? And, without a policy saying that this is a *priority*...I feel like it was always going to be something that just got kicked into the future – because it always had been! So, I'm *hopeful* that having that *commitment* from the institution itself saying, "this is what we think our good behaviour needs to be"...And, I think it's always hardest to be one of the first?...But, it's always *easier* for other institutions to point at something that already exists and say, "we need to do this"...I am *glad* for these things

happening in our department, given, especially it's history. But even without that, I'm *glad* that this is an institution that these things *happen* here. That ceremony is *respected* here. That *Ancestors* are going to be *respected* here, and their *relationship* to their descendants will be respected. If the University can *follow through* on the *spirit* of that commitment as long as it takes – I'll be *proud*? [laughs] Of the work itself that day and the *role* that it *plays* in making this a place that I can feel proud to represent.

...every situation is *unique*, every *Ancestor* is unique, and every community is *different* and has *different* ways of doing things. But one of the common things throughout these *policies*, where there are *good* policies...and through *writing*, by scholars – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – in *practice* within anthropology labs – was that you should not be housing *Ancestors* and their burial *Belongings* in the same place as other groups of cultural heritage. You should not be housing them in a place where *students* may have unplanned encounters with them...But also that, placing the onus on community...*logically* it doesn't make sense. If you're not sharing who you're housing, how are people going to know? And approach a *university*! How do you even find the right phone number on the website? It's [sighs] *basically* putting up this huge barrier, and then saying, "well, no one's asking us to do anything."

I think I would speak to people who are like *me*, who are trained in a western academic tradition...and say that, what I'd *hoped* people would learn is not to be afraid. 'Cause I think *fear* of people finding out just how *awful* things have been at institutions, for *Ancestors* that those institutions purport to care for...and fear of that *backlash*...I think that *fear* holds back some people...there are *going to be* people upset...Of *course* there will be...but that, it's not going to get any *better* if you don't do anything about it...And I have been so fortunate to, [breathes] have had the *generosity* of the Elders on Council. People have been so much *kinder* than they needed

to be, given what I represent, given *my* history with the Ancestors, given this department's behaviour...every situation is different – but, I would *hope* that people who are in a situation similar to the one our department was *in* would just *get over* that fear. Just get over it! You have to tell someone. You have to...it can't just be a secret in your department. 'Cause it was a *secret* for so so long; "don't talk about it," "don't tell anyone." And you *have* to have accountability. You have to tell people outside your department, so that they can help you act right. And you have to take that direction that you get. Because that's a gift that you're being given, that's not a *burden* that's being placed on you. And, get over your PhD! Get over what you've been taught is right! *Use* the lessons that you're *taught* in your schooling! Because there are things I am an expert in because of just *being* at school for so long and having the privilege of that education. Use *those* gifts in a way that you're *asked* to. And...there's a difference between being *humble* and being *humiliated*. And, I think people are worried – that they're the same thing?...Just, it's not about *you*...It's about *healing* something, that people *like* me caused...It's not gonna get *easier* is what I would say...

...when I was in my – *certainly* in my undergraduate, working in the labs with people, I likely would have said, "oh, it doesn't *bother* me." *Particularly* when I was still in church – I probably would have said, "it doesn't bother me." But, I have *changed* [laughs]. And, *honestly*, even in a way, even though I'm not a *traditional Indigenous Person* – I don't have that *teaching* or that belief – and maybe I'm speaking in a little bit of a *metaphorical* way – it was the *Ancestors* that helped me change...I think too that, *given* what's been done, and *given* the history, and...the *fact* that reconciliation is something that's on the table...for people like *me*? Is such a *generous* thing. And, something that I don't think a lot of settler Canadians *realize*. And I *still*, of course, I'm not capable of *understanding* the full *pain*, of it. But, the *fact* that, there is *any* kind

of offer being made to have a relationship? That speaks of a degree of maturity, and, something that I think, we need to learn from. So that's something I don't take lightly. Given the, just...[breathes][sighs] *awful* things that have happened.

4.3g Chelsea Meloche – Postdoctoral researcher – “Organizational Captain”

My name is Chelsea Meloche, I would introduce myself as a settler person who has worked with and for Indigenous communities in different places across Canada for over ten years now. That included working at the University of Manitoba for almost two years as part of the Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony.

When I got to Manitoba, I was involved in the regular work with the Ancestors to *do* the physical census with their remains to be able to identify who was *there* and make sure that we were as *thorough* as possible so that when we would eventually *move* the Ancestors *into* that Resting Space, they were as complete as possible within their caskets. So I was involved in that process *very early on*, and I was involved in the *planning* process for the June tenth Ceremony. And then *on* June tenth...I *assumed* a leadership role...on the *lab* side of things, and I was *directing* that process of moving the Ancestors from the shelves...and *drawers*, that they had been *housed* in, into the caskets. And keeping things *organised* [on a spreadsheet] so that we knew...where the Ancestors were going, and we knew *where* they would end up in in the Resting Space...To the University, I was still just a postdoctoral researcher, technically working for the anthropology department, but for this Ceremony specifically...So, *my role* really within that one day Ceremony was like, “organisation captain”...in the *lab* side of things.

I...remember... *laughing* more than I expected to? Which was *nice* in a way, because it helped to *lighten* – again, *not* dismissing the gravity of the work at all – but it was very much like lightening the *energy*, and the work that we were doing...I think a lot of the *expectation*, was that

the day would be very *solemn*. And it was! It was very *solemn*, it was very weighty. But there were there were these pockets of *lightness*, that were *laughter* and *lightheartedness*...And, [almost a year later] I remember that probably more than anything else...

I think the *day* as a *whole* stands out for me in my *career*...it stands out as an example of what *can* be done if the right priorities are set by the institution...the *commitment* to properly care and house Ancestors. It stands out as an example of something to be *modelled* after...as something that *could be* achieved, if the right priorities are set...And I think the University of *Manitoba* *did* support that well in the *temporary* dedication of a space, and *renovation* of that space – to *be* a dedicated space for housing Ancestral human remains in a manner more aligned with a *mortuary* space, rather than a *lab* space...I think *moving* all of the Ancestors...in a *Ceremony* in one day – was a very powerful, process...I think for the amount of time we *spent* with those Ancestors, it was, *emotionally*, a very good...closed circle. *Almost* closed circle – the closing of the circle will be when they go home and when they're reburied. But like a good *quarter-turn* of the circle, of getting them into a better place, and into a better space...to be a *part* of that work...felt like taking a step forward...If you were identifying *key events* along the Ceremony *timeline* at U of M, I think that that would be like, a *peak* event...I [also] think [that] by far the best part of the Ceremony at U of M, is having in a diverse and *paid* Elders Council *directing* work. And I think that that right there is *key*, and I think something that could and *would* benefit [other] institutions facing these questions. And I think it's really important that UM started with a very representative Council as *well*, with representatives from [most] of the major culture groups in Manitoba...And I think that that creates a stronger position to work from when you're trying to change institutional practises and policies and *minds* within institutions.

...I am very *proud* of the work that I *did* as part of *my* role in the *larger* Ceremony, but also in that *day*. I think we brought the right *people* together...I don't know if "pride" is the right way to describe that, but...I'm *gratified*...I think we're in this *situation* for *not* good reasons, and my anthropological *ancestors* brought these Ancestors *to* the University, in *not* good ways, *not* ethical ways, often *very racist* ways. And the Ancestors are *in* that *space* for *not good reasons*. So it doesn't necessarily translate to "pride" – *pride* in doing what we're supposed to do *anyway*...It's more like I was just very *grateful* to be *involved* in the Ceremony, as a *whole*...the *reflecting* on the responsibility that *we* bear, as the *descendants* of those anthropological ancestors who *brought* these Ancestors *to* the University, and the responsibility we *feel* to *do* things in a better way and create the *least* amount of harm possible...

...One thing that I would love for others to learn from is how *practical* creating a dedicated Resting Space can be in institutions if the priorities are in the right place. So, like, how practical it was to *renovate* an existing space, for a purpose-built mortuary space, basically, on the institutional side. And how practical it was to commission [wooden] caskets to be built...I think that that is something that other institutions can and should learn from. And I carry [that] *forward* in my work in different ways...If Ancestors cannot be returned home tomorrow, and they *have* to stay on campus for an indefinite amount of *time* until they *can* be – how can we do better than we were...than we *have* been doing. That's probably the biggest lesson that I've taken away from it...And if it's a matter of *money*, there are ways to find money as part of that shifting of priorities, right? One of the things that sticks with me – I can't even remember *what* meeting or *where* it was – but Lara said at one time, she was like, "We just have to find the *funds*, and there are different ways to find *funding* – you can apply for grants, you can apply for *internal*

grants – if the institution is making this a priority, then the institution can create a *budget* for it, right?” This is something that is a very easy, *practical* step to overcome.

4.4 What Important Messages Can You Draw Out? (Discussion of the Findings)

In her interview, Chelsea put it best when she said that: “I think that the people *involved*, and the way that they experience the work – is how the work lives on and has a legacy after it’s *done*, in a lot of ways” (interview to author, May 13, 2024). Through hearing everyone’s stories, I hear the reach of the impact within themselves, within the institution, and beyond. People in the institution addressed the violences by reimagining repatriation from Indigenous paradigms and following Indigenous Protocols – and through this, through ceremony, healing spaces could be created; in turn, this allowed the transformation of the people, and thus the institution itself. And it didn’t just function – it flourished. The institution was transformed in several notable ways: tangibly, intangibly, symbolically, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and even temporally.

Pahan PteSanWin talks about how we continue to keep our promises to the Ancestors until they are reburied. Instead of helping the Ancestors, they took pity on and helped us. The Ancestors create healing spaces, because they are teaching us forgiveness and love and care. Being a part of this process contributes to rectifying the wrongs of history, and changes the trajectory of history – and may bring healing for all of us.

Wanbdi Wakita talks about spirituality – this Ceremony can be dangerous, but the staff and the University stopped using the Ancestors in the laboratories, asked for help, and came to ceremony with a good heart. He says when we follow other’s or the government’s laws – that causes turmoil. But following our own Indigenous Laws gives us peace and love. He stresses the importance of prayer – and because he could follow Indigenous Protocols, he was able to pray

and perform the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony for the Ancestors, to put them in the Resting Room safely, and to ask them for forgiveness on behalf of all of us.

Vanessa talks about the tangible change of the institution, and how she attributes certain smells to ceremony. The institution physically transformed into a healing space, because there were medicines and cloths. Indigenous Protocols could be followed, and everyone's Protocols were met even though they are very diverse. The institution was changed because there were brave Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who helped to change it. To her, that meant that there was love and care within.

Larry talks about teamwork between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People, and that the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony and the Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony highlights that we can work together and address systemic racism, using both of our knowledge sets, and by using a strengths-based approach. We have support from the Ancestors in this too.

Wes talks about the creation of healing spaces both physically and symbolically – how the University “became something else.” The entire institution was transformed, because we not only had a space dedicated to the Ancestors through the Resting Room, but when we opened a place of ceremony in there, we created a spiritual space with each other and with the Ancestors. He also talks about how writing a policy from an Indigenous perspective is a repatriation in and of itself – it's a reclaiming of our own way of being and our spiritual belief system.

Rachel talks about a change within herself, and her relationship with the Ancestors that was formed. She talks about how fear holds people back from telling the truth – but that when you look at the reactions and responses that happen when it's done well, right, and good, that

those fears are unfounded when we approach them with humility, with atonement, with love and with action.

Chelsea talks about how addressing the violences from an institutional perspective can actually be very practical, and that healing spaces can be created through the development and implementation of repatriation policies. However, it is a matter of institutional willingness to recognize their integral roles in the violences and harms done, and then prioritization of proactive investigation and engagement with Indigenous communities. It is essential to get an Elders Council, or other representative group from communities that are affected, to direct the work. This step – honouring and facilitating Indigenous Protocols in institutional spaces inevitably strengthens policies and practices in institutions, and has the potential to change minds and hearts along the way.

4.5 What Do You Want People To Take Away From This? (Conclusion)

Many people talked about how they perceived the government, academia, and heritage-holding institutions in general – as being places of violence and disrespect – colonial, sterile, and clinical. But that ceremony was what changed it – all of them remember the beautiful singing and the songs that were sung, the medicines, the cloths, and the star blankets. Many of them talk about a succession and a continuation of cultural practices in that way. They all remember laughing – that there was humour and laughter and joy.⁷⁴ But they were all concerned for each other's safety – both the Ancestors, and their friends and families.

Many of them talked about how it was their whole life's experiences that had prepared them for that day, and all of the participants talked about how before and through and beyond the

⁷⁴ And there *is* joy in repatriation – see Gudáang 'láa Hl k'iyanggang: I Am Finding Joy in Haida Repatriation and Research (Bell Sdahl K'awaas 2023).

Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony, they were able to establish relationships with the Ancestors, and some were able to see and speak to them.

This Ceremony also changed those relationships to those Ancestors. All of my co-researchers were never “proud” to do this work – but they were all *honoured*. They were grateful and they were glad to be a part of the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony. All of them thought that the work was done respectfully, and in a Good Way. They talked about how the work will always be different or never look the same because of who’s doing it – but that it’s okay to make mistakes, because that’s how we learn to do better. They all thought that we had all the right people there, and that we did what we were supposed to do – what we were *meant* to do.

The institution was changed in tangible ways – through hearing special memorial songs sung and having it echo down otherwise silent halls; smelling medicines and freshly cut cloth, seeing sage smoke from smudging in labs that are regularly cleansed. Intangibly, relationships with each other through doing this work as a team, perhaps even lifelong friendships – as well as relationships with the Ancestors were formed and strengthened.

The University was also changed symbolically – by starting to right the wrongs of history instead of representing violence – it can continue to transform to a place of trust, support, and safety.

A physical transformation of the Resting Room space and even the anthropology laboratories itself – one has been emptied, and one has been filled with beautiful paintings.

Spiritually, a similar thing has happened – both the temporary Resting Room and the laboratories are now places that are cleansed and smudged regularly; and the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony transformed these places into a place of spiritual energy. This work emotionally

changed a lot of the Ceremony participants as people themselves as well – the Ancestors and the work were able to teach forgiveness. All of these experiences are things that people are going to be able to carry on – within themselves, and with them into the future. The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony and the Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony is not only a continuation of past cultural practices, but it changes the trajectory of history by setting a standard of caregiving for archaeological and bio-anthropological practices to follow that will continue on into the future. The work doesn't stop here – this is only the beginning. And the hope is that after reading this, the work will continue on in you too.



Image 10 – Savannah Moon swaying the centre medallion of “Sings the Medicines” (Artwork by Lara Rosenoff Gauvin and Savannah Moon 2024), with “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” (Artwork by Savannah Moon 2024) in the background.

Jessica Tapatai, *Savannah Moon and “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home,”* March 7, 2025, Photograph, UM Today, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/transforming-spaces-for-generations-to-follow/>.

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSION

5. Nipi Mikinak Iskwew – Savannah Moon – Helper – Pallbearer – Artist

The research for this master's thesis was informed by the relationships I have forged, observations I have made, the experiences I have lived, and the personal insights of both myself (as a student participant of the larger RRRC) and Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony participants. This thesis explores Indigenous ceremony (as a part of following Indigenous Protocols) as a practical path forward for institutions in conceptualising and practicing repatriation – for practicing good return relationships between Indigenous Nations and institutions holding Ancestors. I also provide several examples of institutionally transformative rematriation and repatriation practices.

It was my participation in the Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony and the larger RRRC that inspired the student statement that I gave during the University of Manitoba's Public Rematriation and Repatriation Apology on June 3, 2024. This statement was the foundation for what would become the culmination of my thesis' research in the institutions transformation – resulting in an Artwork that was installed in the department of anthropology, on the fourth floor in the Fletcher Argue building (at the University of Manitoba) titled “**We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home**” (see Prologue for full transcript of text; see Image 1), which is now displayed alongside its sister piece “Sings the Medicines” (see Image 12 to 14).

When I first wrote my proposal and began my research, I initially intended only to conduct and transcribe what totaled to seven interviews amongst Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony participants. As time went on though, I quickly found myself outpacing the scope of my original research.

Pahan PteSanWin had approached me at the 2024 ManitoAhbee Pow Wow (Winnipeg, Manitoba) shortly after Grand Entry, and said that the University of Manitoba was holding an event on campus where they would publicly apologize for housing the Ancestors; and that given my research focus and my various involvement/roles within the RRRC, it would be impactful to share my experiences and my thoughts from a student perspective (email to author, May 17, 2024). I thought about it for a week before I sent her an email, telling her that I would be honoured. She gave me no other direction about what to say, other than, “I encourage you to be authentic, speak from your heart, and provide a response from your perspective as a student.” (email to author, May 30, 2024).

The response that I received after I made my statement on June 3, 2024 also outpaced my perceived scope of the impacts. I had never anticipated that so many people would be so moved, or that my words would be such a powerful truth. To be honest, I thought that my words would most likely be lost on many people, because I had to follow so many other strong Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders who were speaking before me on that day – I thought that my Voice would be small in comparison. And as I was the second-last speaker of the event (just before another Indigenous student, Amari Dion-Hart, who shared her own statement alongside me), I felt as though there was a (self-imposed) responsibility to somehow end on a good note on what was already a long and difficult day; and I worried my story might only contribute to the countless others that had shared their own pain and experiences with these violences. But I remember that once the event concluded, it felt as though I had almost the entire room come up to me. People were shaking my hand, people were hugging me, people were crying, people were saying *thank you*: “You gave the community a gift that day. Hope, great hope.” (Pahan PteSanWin, email to author, June 14, 2024).

My truth was not as insignificant as I thought when I first stepped onto campus all those years ago.



Image 11 – A close-up of strawberries in the progress of being painted, on “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” (Artwork by Savannah Moon 2024).

Savannah Moon, personal photo, December 5, 2024.



Image 12 – A close-up of the centre medallion of “Sings the Medicines” (Artwork by Lara Rosenoff Gauvin and Savannah Moon 2024), with “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” (Artwork by Savannah Moon 2024) in the background.

Jessica Tapatai, *Savannah Moon and “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home,”* March 7, 2025, Photograph, UM Today, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/transforming-spaces-for-generations-to-follow/>.



Image 13 – “Sings the Medicines”, hanging from the atrium in the department of anthropology (Artwork by Lara Rosenoff Gauvin and Savannah Moon 2024).

Jessica Tapatai, *Savannah Moon and “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home,”* March 7, 2025, Photograph, UM Today, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/transforming-spaces-for-generations-to-follow/>.

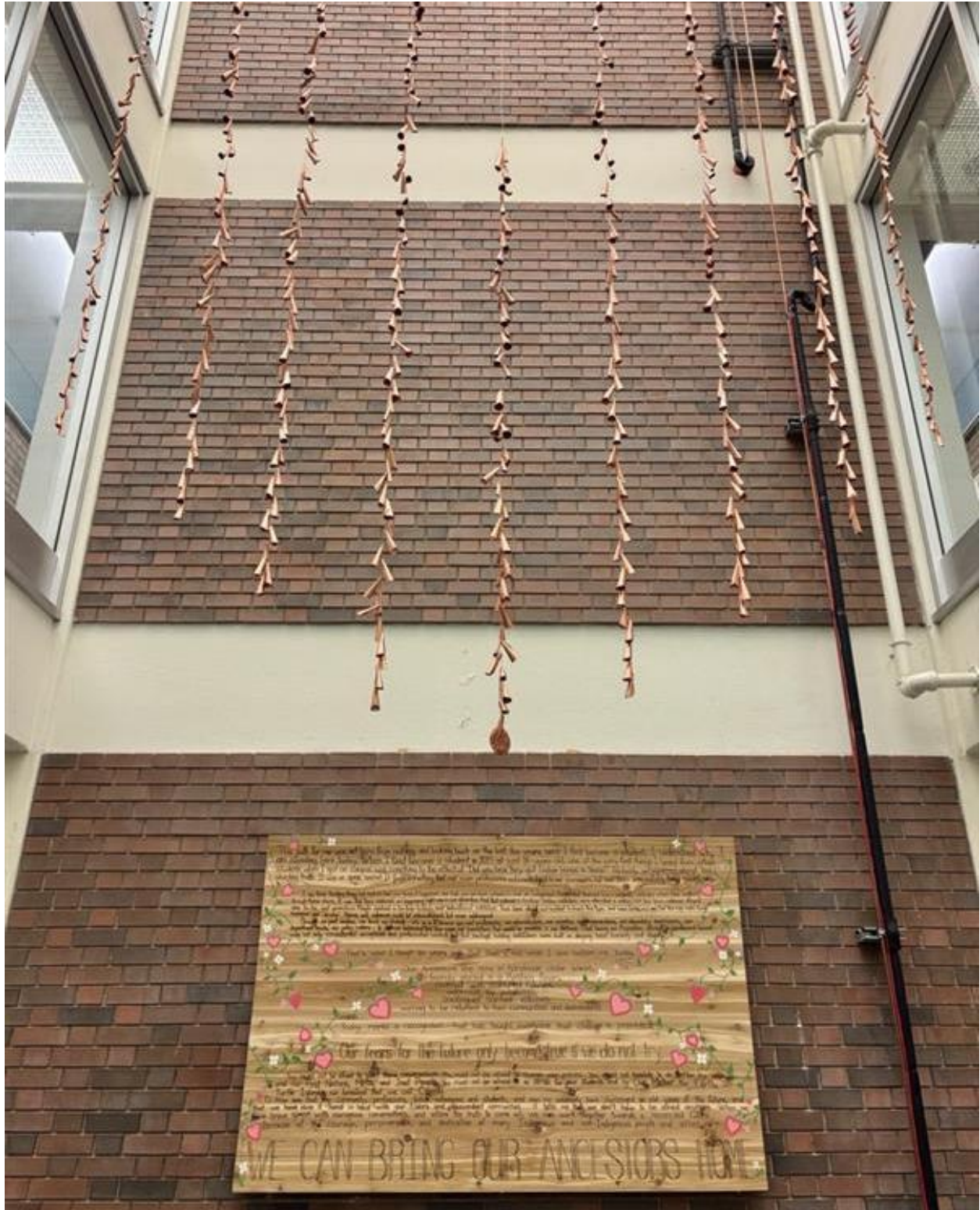


Image 14 – The sister artworks “Sings the Medicines” (Artwork by Lara Rosenoff Gauvin and Savannah Moon 2024) with “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” (Artwork by Savannah Moon 2024).

Jessica Tapatai, *Savannah Moon and “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home,”* March 7, 2025, Photograph, UManitoba Today, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/transforming-spaces-for-generations-to-follow/>.

5.1 What Did You Learn? (Conclusion)

Having Indigenous Ancestors and their cultural Belongings unethically obtained and housed in various heritage-holding institutions without knowledge or consent of descendant communities is contributing to ongoing trauma for Indigenous People, is against pre-existing repatriation frameworks (such as UNDRIP) that Canada wishes to emulate, and is against the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation. Indigenous People have the Right to repatriate, and returning Ancestors allows Indigenous People and communities the autonomy to care for and make decisions regarding their Ancestors and their Belongings, in a way that is important, respectful, and meaningful to them.

My work described here became about the creation of transformative and healing spaces at my University. This was not what I had envisioned when I had originally began writing my master's thesis – but as I am learning is the case with rematriation and repatriation work, it constantly evolves and adapts. Telling my story, and telling the story of others, was transformative in and of itself.

As Sonya Atalay (2019), an Anishinaabe-Ojibwe archaeologist says:

I have found that the stories of increased well-being or of healing that participants shared, during and after repatriations and reclaiming work, stood out and had a powerful impact. Participants regularly recounted experiences in which the process of reclaiming contributed to healing or brought increased well-being to themselves, their families, and/or their communities (p.79)...Since telling, and even listening to, such stories were described as healing, I felt it was particularly important to consider the role played by sharing one's experiences through stories as a means through which healing occurs" (p. 80).

Pahan PteSanWin says that “Colonial violence hurts everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike...It robs us of our humanity. We all need a chance to heal from that” (UM Today, 2024). By having Pahan PteSanWin, Wanbdi Wakita, Vanessa, Larry, Wes, Rachel, and Chelsea’s story shared with me, and by sharing my own here, I healed a little bit of that hurt that I was holding and carrying with me in that 18 year old girls’ heart. For me, I too witnessed the transformation of the University of Manitoba in all the different ways my co-researchers experienced it – tangibly, intangibly, symbolically, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and temporally – and I was honoured to play a small part in transforming it as well, through my statement at the Apology, the Artwork, and through this thesis. It changed me, and it changed my relationship to the Ancestors – and as the institution first changed me back in 2013, I was able to change it in turn, but this time in a Good Way. As the Elders said, the RRRC is a teaching, and we are meant to share those teachings from this Ceremony. For me, that teaching is forgiveness. The Ancestors taught me that I can forgive. That’s why there are strawberries painted on my art piece “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” – because “strawberries teach forgiveness and peace...the heart berry reminds us of reconciliation” (Elder Lillian Pitawanakwat).

“In the words of Mohawk Elder Jan Longboat, the strawberry represents *konnonrónhkwa*. Commonly translated as “I love you”, *konnonrónhkwa* more accurately translates as “I show you I care.” As Jan explains, *konnonrónhkwa* means caring and sharing from birth to death. When you say it to someone, you take on caring for them to the end. So the strawberry reminds us that to love someone is an active experience—one that involves commitment, compassion and caring.”

(Wabano Centre 2025).

By documenting my personal experiences with several of the processes in an auto-ethnographic thesis, I can hopefully better advise processes like repatriation policies, caregiving procedures, and all-around ethical guidelines at heritage-holding institutions across Canada. The hope is that we can lead by example and have other institutions in Canada more broadly examine their own holdings, repatriation policies and processes, and uphold respect for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit sovereignty moving forward in the future. There should not be Indigenous Ancestors in heritage-holding, or any other, institutions. Ever.

My hope is that We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home.



Image 1516 – Savannah Moon standing in front of the artwork “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” (Artwork by Savannah Moon 2024).

Jessica Tapatai, *Savannah Moon and “We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home,”* March 7, 2025, Photograph, UM Today, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/transforming-spaces-for-generations-to-follow/>.

Appendix A

Department APOLOGY for legacy of disrespect to Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island

We apologize for the Department's past complicity in colonial relations with Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. We dedicate ourselves to forging new relationships with Indigenous Nations and communities under their guidance.

We apologize for the Department's past violent actions and inactions with the Indigenous Ancestors and cultural items who are housed in our departmental laboratories.

We grieve at the disrespect that was paid to these Ancestors and cultural items in the many years that they were kept in our laboratories. They were inappropriately removed from the land and the sacred places where they had lain. We apologize for the failure to acknowledge or consult with living descendant populations and Nations at the time when these Ancestors and cultural items were removed from the ground, and for the many years since during which descendant populations and Nations were not consulted. We acknowledge that claiming or accepting stewardship of the Ancestors and cultural items is wrong and that it violates spirits, sacred places, families, and Nations' sovereignties. This violence has also damaged relationships between the University, its researchers, and Indigenous communities throughout Turtle Island.

We recognize these complicities with settler colonial violence and genocide, and humbly commit to atoning, listening, being respectful and doing better going forward. We commit to follow guidance from First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Nations and communities to address the violent and traumatic legacy of genocide and colonialism that our stewardship of these Ancestral remains and cultural items represent, and to building respectful relationships with members of descendant communities and Nations of Manitoba and the other areas from which these Ancestors and items have come.

Appendix B

The University of Manitoba's Official Apology

Presented by Dr. Michael Benarroch, President of the University of Manitoba

Greetings.

Before coming here today to speak with you, I had the honour of sitting in a pipe ceremony with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit friends, colleagues, and Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Grandmothers and Grandfathers. In ceremony, we reflected on the harm and indignity our University has historically caused and inflicted upon the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. And there was *deep* pain, felt by all.

We also reflected on the University's acts of atonement, and our hopes for the future going forward. I wanted to take a moment to reflect on my own traditions. In *my* tradition, we called atonement "teshuvah." And *teshuva* means "to return." It means to *acknowledge* the truth. It means to ask for forgiveness. It means that you must commit to change, and to address the harms that you have done. And it means that you must accept and *change* in the future. And while we who have transgressed ask for forgiveness, we cannot grant forgiveness. Forgiveness is granted by those who are harmed. And I'll hold *my* self responsible to that. This University has great respect and gratitude for the leaders who guide the ongoing repatriation and rematriation work. I want to thank our Elder Council, our Knowledge Keepers, Grandmothers and Grandfathers, who have been leading us, *teaching* us, how to be in the right relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

The University of Manitoba recognizes that healing begins with this University apologizing to the people we have profoundly hurt, and *deeply* harmed, through our violent actions. It also means changing how we think and act. For most of our history, this University has been in the *wrong* relationship with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. From our earliest days, starting in the 1890's, founding members of the University desecrated Indigenous graves, and mishandled their remains. These actions broke a basic principle of our shared humanity – a loved one buried for eternal rest, *must* remain at peace. Yet, our historical members justified their shameful and degrading behaviour in the name of science and education. Over the past 130 years, the University has also accepted stewardship of more Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings without consent. We used these Ancestral remains in classrooms, and in laboratories, and *sometimes* put them on display – all without consent from First Nation, Inuit, and Métis families, communities, and Nations.

For generations, colonial mindsets at our University have harmed and caused immense pain to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis People. For too long, we took, held, and wielded power that was not ours to begin with. We dehumanized Indigenous Peoples to justify our behaviour, and failed to recognize their sovereignty and dignity.

The University of Manitoba did not live up to their ideals in their true form. Today, we begin by atoning for our historic failures. We apologize for these past wrongs. We *are* sorry.

I am grateful for the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Grandmothers and Grandfathers that have worked with our University as we come with humility, asking for forgiveness.

We must *earn* the trust of First Nations, Inuit and Métis People, who have been *repeatedly* hurt by, and historically denied access to, our University. We are committed to transforming our institution so that we can be in *right* relationship with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis People. We recognize we must change, and we are changing. I see promise in our future, as so many in this community have come together to address this University's deeply troubling history. It gives me great hope that we are truly walking this path – together. I am grateful that all of you have joined us to witness this apology.

Appendix C

Timeline

Gradual Civilization Act – 1857
Gradual Enfranchisement Act – 1869
Indian Act – 1876
Earliest documentation of Indigenous Ancestors at the UM – 1900's
Indian Act revised – 1951
Indigenous Peoples in Canada are granted the right to vote – 1960
department of anthropology and sociology is co-created – 1961/1962
Mayer-Oakes becomes a professor at UM – 1962
Mayer-Oakes becomes the first professional archaeologist in Manitoba – 1962
Greater Floodway Expansion – 1962 - 1968
Excavation of the “Fidler Mounds” begins – June 1, 1963
The Floodway Salvage Project – 1963 - 1964
Mayer-Oakes becomes head of department of anthropology at UM – 1963/1964
department of anthropology splits from sociology; becomes standalone department – 1968/1969
The Historic Resources Branch was established – 1974
University of Manitoba last acquired Indigenous “remains” – 1980
The Heritage Resources Act – 1986
Manitoba's Burial Policy – 1987
Savannah Moon becomes a University of Manitoba student – August 2013
Savannah Moon's first osteology class – January 2015
Savannah Moon's second osteology class – September 2015
Savannah Moon graduated first undergraduate degree – May 2016
Savannah Moon began second undergraduate degree – May 2017
All research and teaching with the Ancestors ceased – 2018
department of anthropology repatriation committee was formed – June 26, 2020
Savannah Moon becomes student research assistant for advisor – from July 2020 until April 2021
RRRC and Elder's Council was formed – January 2021
First ceremony took place in the archaeology and bio-anthropology laboratories – April 2021
Construction of the Resting Room began – early 2022
Savannah Moon graduated second undergraduate degree – May 2022
Savannah Moon began master's degree – September 2022
Gayle Sinclair finishes painting the Resting Room – June 9, 2023
The Keeping of the Spirit Ceremony – June 10, 2023
University of Manitoba Public Rematriation and Repatriation Apology – June 3, 2024
University of Manitoba's Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony Guiding Document and Policy comes into effect – June 3, 2024
“Sings the Medicines” art installation – October 23, 2024
“We Can Bring Our Ancestors Home” art installation – January 9, 2025

Appendix D

Consent Form



Department of Anthropology
432 Fletcher Argue
15 Chancellor Circle
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada, R3T2N2
T: 204-558-2521
Lara.rosenoffgauvin@umanitoba.ca

Research Project Title: Respectful Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba.

Principal Investigator: Lara Rosenoff Gauvin.

Co-investigators: Pahan Pte San Win, Cary Miller, Julia Gamble (co-principal), Chelsea Meloche, Heather Bidzinski, Jaime Lavallee, Laura Kelvin, Linda Larcombe, Kjell Anderson, Adele Perry, Savannah Kisilowsky.

Interviewer and contact information: _____

Informed Consent

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It aims to give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please feel free to ask!

Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. You will also have the opportunity to go through it with a research team member before your interview/sharing circle, and all questions are very welcome.

Respectful Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba

This study is being undertaken as part of the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba. Under the guidance of a Council of Indigenous Elders, Grandparents, and Knowledge Keepers, the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony is a sacred proactive and Indigenous-led approach to facilitate the repatriation and/or rematriation of Indigenous Ancestors, their belongings, Indigenous human biological materials, and Indigenous tangible and intangible expressions currently held at the University that were obtained and stewarded without consent.

Why are we doing this study?

This research is part of an effort to document and tell the story of the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony and the accompanying creation of University policy.

What will your participation in this study be like?

If you are participating in a Sharing Circle, you will be asked to share on your participation in the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba as part of a small group of people involved in this project. Sharing Circles may take approximately 2-3 hours. Sharing Circles will take place in person or virtually, using a virtual conference program like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

If you are participating in a one-on-one interview, you will be asked to share on your participation in the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba. Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews may be conducted in person, over the phone, or using a virtual conference program like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

With your permission, the interview will be audio and/or video recorded, in addition to taking notes. The audio or video recordings will only be used for meaning making.

All sharing circles will be audio and video recorded, in addition to taking notes. The audio or video recordings will only be used for meaning making.

☐ ***Please check here if you consent to having this conversation video recorded.***

☐ ***Please check here if you consent to having this conversation audio recorded.***

You will continue to control, possess, have access to, and 'own' all of your data that is produced for this study. Once the interview/sharing circle is completed, our conversation will be transcribed using transcription software. If you would like to review the interview transcript and/or recording, participants will be provided with transcripts within 60 days of the interview and/or focus group/sharing circle. If you choose this option, the interviewer will contact you by phone or email after a two-week period to discuss your review of the transcript and/or recording. If you notice anything that you do not want included, the project team will redact it (remove it) from the transcript, and edited it out of the recording.

☐ ***Please check here if you would like to review and approve the interview transcript and recording.***

What are the possible risks?

Given the sensitive nature of repatriation, our conversation may address potentially distressing issues. Please feel comfortable declining to answer any question and if, at any time during the interview or after, you feel discomfort about what we have talked about, the interview will be paused and rescheduled, or you can decide to withdraw your participation without penalty.

What are the possible benefits?

An important objective of this study is to document the development of the Indigenous-led and proactive Respectful Repatriation Ceremony at the University of Manitoba, in order to share lessons learned with other heritage-holding institutions.

How will your identity be protected?

Two levels of confidentiality are offered for this study. Please indicate your preference:

☐ ***Full Confidentiality/Anonymous participation:*** If you decide that you would like to remain anonymous in your participation, the project team will not use any identifying information (name, age, occupation, etc.) in referring to your responses in the final documents. Any archived materials, if you so choose below, will be edited to reflect this anonymity.

☐ ***No Confidentiality/Fully Identifiable Participation:*** By agreeing to this option, you consent to allow the project team to identify you by your full name and any demographic information. Any archived materials, if you so choose below, may portray you as fully identifiable. You have a choice below to not be identifiable in archived materials if you so choose.

Please note, if an Interview or Sharing Circle is conducted over the phone or virtual conference program (i.e., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), there is no guarantee that the conversation will be completely confidential while taking place, as these are inherently unsecured connections. However, using a university account for the virtual conference program assists in aiming for high security.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from this study, the Research Team will immediately destroy all data collected from or about you. Don't worry, deciding not to participate will not have any adverse effect or consequence!

What will happen to the results of this study?

Original recording files (namely recordings and transcripts) will be stored securely on Lara Rosenoff Gauvin's password protected and UM secure storage. Only the project team will have access to any interview files for the duration of the study.

All data related to this study will be archived at the University of Manitoba, or in a place appropriate and determined by participants. Access will be restricted to projects approved by the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony co-chairs. If you would like to know if any archived materials are used in future studies (secondary use of data), you can choose this option below.

☐ ***Please check here if you wish to be notified of any future use of archived data (secondary use of data). We will keep your contact info in perpetuity.***

☐ Please check here to consent to having your transcripts and recordings archived. Any archived materials would be edited if necessary to reflect your choice of how you would like your identity protected (Full or No Confidentiality – as indicated above)

Some data and information from this study may be sent outside of the University of Manitoba to other researchers, organizations, or made publicly available. This is for further analysis, testing, as part of the research study, or a requirement by a granting agency or journal. If you have approved the use of your name in association with your research data (identifiable), we may share your name. However, if you wish to remain confidential outside of the research team, please let us know by checking the spot below. However, despite efforts to keep your personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

☐ ***Please check here if you wish to remain confidential/anonymous outside of this research team if archived data used in other studies.***

Upon completion, interview and sharing circle notes will be compiled into a project summary report. Information shared during interviews and/or sharing circles may also be used in project-related publications as paraphrased or direct quotes, or as a consolidated measurement with other responses (e.g., "60% of participants said..."). If a research team member is preparing a publication, they will meet first with the Respectful Repatriation Ceremony co-chairs to discuss their proposed publication, or as proposed by participants.

Copies of all publications related to this study will be provided to each participant in this study for their records.

☐ ***Please check here if you wish to be notified of any publications related to this research and wish to receive a copy. We will keep your contact info in perpetuity.***

Who can you contact if you have any questions about this study?

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact the principal investigator, Dr Lara Rosenoff Gauvin, by phone 204-558-2521, or email lara.rosenoffgauvin@umanitoba.ca

Consent to Participate

Your signature on this form and/or verbal consent to participate indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate in an interview or sharing circle.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so please feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at these research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant Signature

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Printed Participant Name

Participant Contact Information (*Optional*)

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Interviewer Signature if Verbal Consent
Obtained

Date (MM/DD/YYYY) Time

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