



***InStead*: Demonstrating allyship through a REDress reconciliation project**

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article raconte comment les parcours personnels de vérité et de réconciliation d'un professeur autochtone et d'un étudiant en maîtrise non autochtone (allié des colons) se sont rejoints après une exposition d'art à l'université. L'exposition REDress Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) a été inaugurée à la galerie d'art de l'université Thompson Rivers (TRU) en octobre 2021. Son objectif était d'honorer l'appel à l'action (2015) n° 41 de la Commission de vérité et de réconciliation du Canada. Lors de la cérémonie d'ouverture de l'exposition, Mukwa Musayett / Dr. Shelly Johnson a présenté un exposé universitaire autochtone sur les femmes, les filles et les personnes bispirituelles autochtones assassinées et disparues. L'exposition comprenait une sculpture en aiguilles de pin REDress de Patricia L. Smith. Cela a conduit à une discussion commune entre les deux femmes sur les expériences qui nous ont amenées à participer à l'exposition MMIWG2S dans le même établissement d'enseignement supérieur. Tout d'abord, nous avons élaboré un plan pour écrire sur cette expérience d'allié autochtone et colon entre un professeur et une étudiante. Deuxièmement, nous avons proposé de collaborer à un projet d'allié intitulé « Au lieu de » afin de favoriser l'éducation, la sensibilisation et la réconciliation concernant le MMIWG2S avec et entre d'autres professeurs, étudiants et membres de la communauté de l'enseignement postsecondaire.

INSTEAD: DEMONSTRATING ALLYSHIP THROUGH A REDRESS RECONCILIATION PROJECT

*Mukwa Musayett / Shelly Johnson
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Abstract: This article tells the story of how the personal truth and reconciliation journeys of an Indigenous professor and non-Indigenous (settler ally) master's student coiled together after a university-based art exhibition. The exhibit, *REDress Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S)*, opened at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Art Gallery in October 2021. Its purpose was to honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) call to

Mukwa Musayett: My paternal grandmother was Saulteaux/Ojibway from Keeseekeose First Nation in east central Saskatchewan. Orphaned as an infant, my grandmother was cared for by a maternal aunt and her husband until she was sent to the Lebrét Residential School (LRS) near Fort Qu'Appelle in the early 1900s. Upon leaving the LRS, she trained as a midwife, married my immigrant Norwegian/Sami grandfather, and raised a family of nine children. My late father was her second-youngest child. On my mother's side, I am a fourth-generation Canadian of Eastern European descent. My mother and all her siblings married people of Indigenous heritage. My parents moved to BC in the 1950s, escaping the overt racism that marriages between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people experienced in Saskatchewan at that time. I have always lived in BC, but frequently travelled to Saskatchewan to visit family as a child, youth, and adult.

Patricia: I am a fourth-generation Canadian of maternal Icelandic and Swedish/Norwegian ancestry, and paternal British/Scottish descent. I was born in Campbell River and have rarely left BC. My family was white settler 'traditional.' Dad was employed in the forest industry, which meant frequent moves, and Mom was a homemaker. The tiny coastal mill town of Ocean Falls, accessible only by boat or floatplane, remained our sense of familial 'home' long after the mill and therefore the town closed in the early 1970s. By 1977, we lived in Westbank (West Kelowna). Third-generation Japanese Canadian friends spoke of their families' losses of orchards during World War II. Their stories did not reflect Canadian school history lessons. Those lessons mainly described how North America was discovered and civilized. The horrors of social caste systems, persecution, and genocide happened elsewhere, never in Canada. An Indigenous rancher hired me as his rancher's aid in the summer of 1977. I worked moving irrigation pipes on Westbank First Nations grasslands.

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action #41. At the opening ceremony of the exhibit, Mukwa Musayett / Dr. Shelly Johnson gave a talk regarding murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. The exhibit included a REDress pine needle sculpture by Patricia L. Smith. The sculpture and talk led to a joint discussion between us about the experiences that brought us to participate in the MMIWG2S exhibit at the same postsecondary institution. First, we developed a plan to write about this experience of Indigenous and settler allyship between a professor and a student. Second, we identified a proposed collaboration on an allyship project entitled *InStead* to further education, awareness and reconciliation regarding MMIWG2S with and between other postsecondary faculty, students, and community members.

Keywords: Missing Murdered Indigenous Women Girls, REDress, Art, Pine Needle

Abstré : Cet article raconte comment les parcours personnels de vérité et de réconciliation d'un professeur autochtone et d'un étudiant en maîtrise non autochtone (allié des colons) se sont rejoints après une exposition d'art à l'université. L'exposition REDress Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) a été inaugurée à la galerie d'art de l'université Thompson Rivers (TRU) en octobre 2021. Son objectif était d'honorer l'appel à l'action (2015) n° 41 de la Commission de vérité et de réconciliation du Canada. Lors de la cérémonie d'ouverture de l'exposition, Mukwa Musayett / Dr. Shelly Johnson a présenté un exposé universitaire autochtone sur les femmes, les filles et les personnes bispirituelles autochtones assassinées et disparues. L'exposition comprenait une sculpture en aiguilles de pin REDress de Patricia L. Smith. Cela a conduit à une discussion commune entre les deux femmes sur les expériences qui nous ont amenées à participer à l'exposition MMIWG2S dans le même établissement d'enseignement supérieur. Tout d'abord, nous avons élaboré un plan pour écrire sur cette expérience d'allié autochtone et colon entre un professeur et une étudiante. Deuxièmement, nous avons proposé de collaborer à un projet d'allié intitulé « Au lieu de » afin de favoriser l'éducation, la sensibilisation et la réconciliation concernant le MMIWG2S avec et entre d'autres professeurs, étudiants et membres de la communauté de l'enseignement postsecondaire.

Mots-clés : Femmes et filles autochtones disparues et assassinées, REDress, art, Pine Needle

WE LIVE, LEARN AND WORK ON the unceded and occupied territory of the Secwepemc people in Secwepemcúlécw. As visitors, we are grateful to the Secwepemc people for making space here for our families in what

is now known as the central interior of British Columbia (BC), Canada. We are two mature women who both use the pronouns “she” and “her.” One is a Saulteaux First Nations and Norwegian academic in social work and education. The second is a settler ally artist and educator. This article explores how our life stories and work have coiled together. It also provides narrative reflections of our preliminary awareness-raising, education, and reconciliation work regarding MMIWG2S.

Our School Experiences and Formative Years

Patricia: At school, my girlfriends of First Nations heritage were either in foster care or lived with their white relatives. There were a few Indigenous students from the Westbank First Nation, but our social circles did not often weave together. I do not remember witnessing any targeted racial bullying or prejudice. However, it was apparent that a lower opinion of First Nations People existed in the social world of adults. I was vaguely aware that land negotiations were taking place, but believed that ‘our’ government was working on behalf of and for the benefit of Indigenous Peoples.

Compared to my high school, there were more students of visible minorities at Okanagan College in Kelowna, but none enrolled in my art courses. I move to the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver to pursue art education; there, my small graduating cohort contained only one First Nations student. He was a Haisla artist from Kitamaat, and his passion for his people’s art increased my own. In 1987, my young family moved to Secwepemc territory. I looked for examples of Indigenous art. Other than hearing of the pictographs at Magna Bay, Copper Island, and Tsútswecw (formerly Roderick Haig-Brown) Provincial Park, historical evidence of Secwepemc art-making was not apparent to this settler’s eye. I wondered why, with plentiful clay deposits, pottery and sculpture were not present.

Mukwa Musayett: Learning that my father, brother, and I were ‘different’ happened in 1967, during my first two weeks of grade one. My brother and I attended a small, rural public elementary school in BC. My mother invited all the children in the class to my sixth birthday party, which was in the second week of September. During Show and Tell the next day, a little girl stood to talk about the birthday party she had attended. Knowing it was my party, I remember the anticipatory excitement of what she might say. She told the class that there were a “lot of Indians” present. “Indians” was the commonly used term in 1967 for Indigenous People. I recall feeling confused, because the only people present at my party were my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other grade one students. Returning home at the end of the day, I questioned my mother: who were the “Indians” my classmate was talking about? Softly and gently, my mother explained that my dad, grandmother,

aunts, uncles, and cousins were “Indians,” and that made me and my brother “Indians” too. There were only three other “Indian” families in my elementary school, and not many more in my high school. This example remains my first profound memory of my “difference” from other students.

Allyship: Standing in Solidarity with Indigenous Sisters

Patricia: In the spring of 2021, a call to apply for inclusion in the TRU Art Gallery’s October exhibition *REDress MMIWG2S* was extended to TRU Visual Arts students. I desired the opportunity to stand in solidarity with my Indigenous sisters, but wondered if it would be appropriate for a settler to apply. What could I possibly contribute to the reconciliation conversation surrounding the TRC call to action #41: Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls?

I thought, by September, I would be able to complete a life-sized dress sculpted of red-dyed Ponderosa pine needles (Figure 1). I intended to include 215 undyed baskets within the dress, but when I asked an Indigenous friend, an artist, for her thoughts, she felt the dress would represent female Indigenosity and should be displayed above the baskets, as she guarded and mourned her missing children. I listened to her heart. Harvesting, dying, and coiling the needles into the dress in addition to the miniature baskets took nearly 300 hours. Global warming’s heat dome made it easier than it would have otherwise been for me to collect Ponderosa pine needles, as that summer the pines dropped needles in unprecedented amounts throughout the Okanagan and Secwepemcúlécw.

To create the sculpture, I hid a wire hoop the circumference of my waist with pine needles. The six-bundle-thick continuous strand contains copper-coloured wire. The wire represents one of the resources colonial industries stripped from Mother Earth, and adds a subtle sparkle to the dress. By leaning a row of wire slightly to the inside or outside above the last, the dress’s ‘walls’ can be made to curve. The stitches are waxed artificial sinew. The various-sized circles adorning the dress represent the different ages of missing children. Because Indigenous women are seven times as likely to be victims of sexual violence than non-Indigenous women in Canada, I cradled the circles between coils in a pattern of three, then four. Four is a significant number to First Peoples (seasons, directions, elements, and more), while three, to me, represent the holy trinity of Western religions. The sculpture’s coiling ‘S’ pattern reminded me of the undulating ocean waves of my childhood. The bodice is separate from the skirt to reveal the midriff. I kept it strappy as, too often, women and girls are said to be ‘asking for it’ in their fashion choices. I wanted the dress to be beautiful — a symbol of the desire to be worthy of happiness,

love, and respect. She would hang, emptied, *InStead* of her owner, one of the missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Figure 1. *InStead: The REDress of dyed pine needles by Patricia L. Smith.*



At the opening of *REDress MMIWG2S+*, I was nervous about the reception that *InStead* and I might receive. The many Indigenous women who approached me were all very gracious, warm, and welcoming. As Mukwa Musayett introduced herself, I felt an instant kinship. We continued the conversation and arranged for Mukwa Musayett to become *InStead's* permanent guardian, setting a price to cover the expense of wire, artificial sinew, and dye used. I know that *InStead* is where she belongs. I

am grateful for the privilege of creating her and for the opportunity to be visually heard in this important conversation. My hope is that she may serve as a conversation-starter, and to create and deepen understandings between differing cultures. My hope is also that we may learn we are more similar than different — that she may spark interest in sharing experiences. I hope she helps to forge and reinforce positive, reciprocal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. I hope she assists to further fuel efforts into addressing the still occurring instances of MMIWG2S.

Mukwa Musayett: I toured the artist exhibit prior to delivering my talk on the day that Patricia and I met. The red-dyed pine needle REDress is an exquisite, breath-taking, and unique creation. The stunning piece — measuring four feet in length and made entirely from Ponderosa pine needles, wire, and sinew — was unlike any other in the exhibit, or any I have seen. I felt sure that the creator must be an Indigenous woman, likely from the local territory, with years of pine needle basket – making experience. She is not. Patricia is of settler ancestry, learned the art of pine needle coiling from books, and gathered and cleaned the thousands of needles by herself.

Our conversation is one that I wish I had recorded. In a sea of settler students and faculty members who find diverse reasons to be stuck on the way to reconciliation, she stepped forward into allyship. She created a piece of soul work that speaks to a central tenet of allyship: taking action toward reconciliation. She confessed to fears of having her work criticized by faculty, students, and Indigenous Peoples. I nearly wept with relief at her tenacity to do reconciliation work — to do what she could through her art to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, particularly with women. Too many times, the familiar refrain I hear from non-Indigenous peoples is, “I am afraid to do the wrong thing. It is not my place. I don’t know how to be an ally. It’s not my place to speak on behalf of.” — and more. Sometimes, it almost sounds like a frustrating rationale to do nothing. Instead of remaining immobilized with fear and doing nothing, Patricia chose to act with her art, doing what she can, as one person, to make a difference. In her decision to create a respectful and meaningful art piece, she showed others how to be an ally, connected with me in a deep and personal way, and *InStead* created a pathway for others.

Reflecting

Patricia: I now understand how narrow, segregated, and privileged my childhood was. Rarely were there families other than those of European descent in our communities. What I ‘knew’ was that “Indigenous Peoples chose” to isolate themselves on their own special lands. Children with any medical or educational differences were, I believed, fortunate to live in institutions designed to meet their needs. As a child, I did not question

any of this so-called knowledge. I did not feel privileged in my youth, yet now I acknowledge my white privilege. I seek to further decolonize my thoughts and actions.

Mukwa Musayett: My elementary and secondary education clarified my understanding that my family differed from settler families. I sought other Indigenous students to befriend, making academics and sports my primary endeavours. Due to the small size of my hometown, most teachers and students were aware of my Indigenous ancestry. My academic and sports success, as well as my lighter complexion, protected me from overt racism. My younger brother, who was more visibly Indigenous than I, was not protected from overt or internalized racism from either Indigenous or non-Indigenous students.

The next section discusses the devastating news of Le Estcwicwey — “the Missing” — that profoundly impacts people living on Secwépemc territory, in Canada, and around the world. This event occurred between the time of the TRU calls for MMIWG2S exhibits and the actual exhibit. It continues to have significant impacts on both authors, our collaborative work, on many others in this community and elsewhere.

Kamloops Indian Residential School: 215 Le Estcwicwey – the Missing

Patricia: On May 27, 2021, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Kukpi7 (Chief Rosanne Casimir) released the news that ground-penetrating radar confirmed that the remains of 215 children were located on the Kamloops Indian Residential School (IRS) grounds. Media flooded this news to the world, often referring to the “discovery of graves” (CBC 2021). This news shocked the world. Many non-Indigenous Canadians were hearing of this for the first time. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that IRS survivors and their families have been speaking of these missing children for generations. The public outcry seemed to galvanize the Canadian government toward responding to some of the TRC’s 94 calls to action (2015).

To process this horrendous confirmation, I felt compelled to create a tiny basket to represent each of the 215 missing children. At first, a basket took me about 40 minutes to complete. Occasionally I experienced a wave of futility, but repeated Dukdukdiya’s humble phrase, “I am doing what I can” (Yahgulaanaas, 2008, p. 30). I thought of my nephew, grandnephew, and granddaughter of Indigenous and settler descent as I continued to create the 215 baskets.

I am honoured to be a member of a small Circle of Truth and Reconciliation group in the settlement of Enderby, founded by Splatsin activist Crystal Morris, IRS survivor Adele Thomas, and ally Laura Jameson. In one meeting, Crystal shared her anger at the word “grave” being used to describe the sites in which the bodies had been disposed. To her,

graves have headstones with an engraved name, recording the existence of the human remains. I now use the words “scientific confirmation of unacknowledged burials.”

Mukwa Musayett: I was teaching an online Master’s-level course on Indigenous research, methodologies, and protocols when the 2021 news reached us about the 215 potential unacknowledged burials at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School (CBC News, 2021). We were shocked and horrified to learn that some of the buried children were only toddlers, and that the Christians administering the school had planted an orchard over the children in an attempt to hide the deaths. One online international student commented that her parents and grandparents did not want her to return to TRU after COVID-19 protocols were lifted by the Canadian government because “they kill brown children there” (Master’s student, personal communication). Since this time, thousands of other potential unacknowledged burials at former Canadian residential schools have been reported, including at those which my family members were forced to attend.

The Paradigm Shift, Seeking Roots, Redefining Purpose

Patricia: Over thirty years of teaching, I have witnessed the burden and harm to Indigenous People inflicted by Canada’s residential school project and the Sixties Scoop policies. I have lost former students and community members to violent and mysterious deaths. I have taught those who have gone on to perpetrate violent crimes. I, too, have lost children. I often drive long distances north to visit our eldest son and his family, and have travelled the Highway of Tears. My mind and heart fracture each time I witness yet another poster of a missing, beloved family or community member.

My long-term Lyme disease entailed an arduous journey for diagnosis, as medical officials believed it did not exist in Western Canada. I was finally on an intense course of antibiotics to combat the disease when I also underwent chemotherapy for breast cancer. I returned to work while still physically recovering, and a demoralizing long strike ensued. Several friends and family members encountered hardships. My mom was dying of dementia. I could not save her and almost followed when reconstructive surgery turned septic. This series of trials culminated in a loss of sense of purpose, feeling unrooted and adrift.

A slim library book gave me solace and inspiration: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’ (2008) *Flight of the Hummingbird*. Yahgulanaas tells a story based on the parable of the Quechuan people of present-day Ecuador. It is illustrated in his signature style, Haida manga. The hummingbird, little Dukdukdiya, returns time and again to an encroaching wildfire with a single drop of water in her beak. Forest mates, fear-frozen, ask her what she is doing. She responds, “I am doing what I can” (Yahgulanaas,

2008, p. 30). That phrase helped me out of bed on bad days. I could not solve the world's problems or leave the house for work, but I could accomplish one household task at a time. Any positive action is better than overwhelmed inaction.

That book brought a positive and powerful message. Small actions have the potential for impactful consequences. The 2006 grassroots movement that sprung from Tarana Burke's "#MeToo" response to empower young girls of colour is but one example, and it was co-opted in 2017. Then, the white movie industry sexual harassment and abuse scandal surrounding Harvey Weinstein became news. Actress and activist Alyssa Milano impulsively tweeted for all women harassed and abused to respond with the hashtag #MeToo. That sparked a worldwide shift in mindset. *New York Times* writer Sandra Garcia (2017) wrote that it sparked a less-reported second outcry: those with white privilege co-opted the slogan intended to empower women and girls of colour. Milano quickly reached out to Burke, apologized, and sought to ally with her. I admired the solidarity of #MeToo, but did not find the courage to respond.

I was rudderless. Switching gears to create art in isolation was overwhelming. I needed the connection of being with people focused on topics again to reconnect with life's spark. A few mature women artist friends were commuting to TRU to study for their Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees. I followed their lead, a single course at a time.

TRU offered an anthropology course online for the COVID-19 spring of 2021, titled "Secwepemc Knowledge," based on *Secwepemc People, Lands and Laws* (2017) by Marianne Ignace and Chief Ron Ignace. I immediately enrolled to learn more about my neighbours,' friends', and next generations family members' history and culture. I hoped to learn about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 calls to action (2015) — why they are needed and their potential to change our world.

I was shocked and enraged when I learned how the papal bull decreed by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 led to the colonial mindset of "terra nullius": empty land, theirs for the taking. This concept resulted in hundreds of years of physical, biological, and cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples on their own lands. I felt that the public education system had lied to me all my life.

I learned that the Canadian history indoctrination is not true, nor does it honestly reflect our 'shared' history. The public education system where I taught served to reinforce Euro-Christian dominance and systemic racism. Bob Joseph's (2018) *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* clarified how devalued, disempowered, and vulnerable Indigenous women became through the imposition of the Indian Act. They lost their tribal identities and were forced to take on their husband's. Until 1951, Indigenous women lost their status by marrying a non-Indigenous man, yet the offspring of an Indigenous man married to a non-Indigenous woman

retained theirs. Women lost political standing due to the imposition of a patriarchal European-based system of electing chiefs and councils whose roles reinforced the Indian Act. Their matriarchal, generational education and cultural identities were severely harmed through Canada's enforcement of their Residential School policy.

It was a paradigm-shifting revelation to compare Indigenous Peoples' profound relationship with Mother Earth and Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Wisdom (TEKW) to the capitalist view of plunder for profit. First Nations beliefs include that the environment belongs to future generations and is borrowed in this time and space. Stewarding her resources is a reciprocal honour and responsibility. Canada's capitalist society has little consideration of the consequences of environmental abuse. This lack of care is the leading cause of the climate crisis. Through Nancy Turner's (2014) *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge*, I gained great respect for women's contributions before colonization. Secwepemc women had a comprehensive knowledge of the care and harvesting of plants and trees. I am amazed by their understanding of plants' medicinal and nutritional properties, and their ability to transform roots and bulbs into flour and digestible foods in a pit oven. I also found evidence of historic Secwepemc artistry in basketry.

Mukwa Musayett: In Canadian universities, only approximately 1.4% of all university professors and 3% of college teachers are Indigenous (Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT], 2018). This leaves more than 98.6% of non-Indigenous university professors and 97% of college teachers to consider their roles in advancing the TRC calls to action (2015), and specifically call #41, regarding MMIWG2S. It also encourages action from all students and Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty to further reconciliation and awareness. Patricia's work to create a pine needle REDress for a university-level art exhibit, instead of choosing inaction, encourages other non-Indigenous people to consider what they can do, alone or in groups, to effect change. It can also support Indigenous People to know that non-Indigenous people are joining in actions to effect change, and that we are not alone in this work to bring awareness and education to the issues of MMIWG2S in Canada and elsewhere. The lesson for me is that Patricia was afraid of how her work may be received by many people, and she chose to do it anyway. Even in the face of potential criticism, bravery is the purest form of allyship.

The Mighty Pine and Women's Work

Patricia: The Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) one of the largest of the western pine species. Growing to between 25 and 40 meters in height, its straight trunk can have a diameter of two meters. The needles usually grow in threes and average 20 centimeters in length. The tree has large, long tap roots, which means it can find water in poor soil even through

droughts and can withstand strong winds. Its thick, deeply fissured bark provides protection from insects and the increasing threat of wildfires. As this species of pine can live 500 years, many fire-scarred Ponderosas thrive throughout Secwepemcúlécw. Although not endangered, its numbers have been impacted by logging and urban growth. I equate its strength and resiliency with that of Indigenous women.

My mom and grandma taught me what they perceived to be womanly crafts, such as embroidery, knitting, and quilting. Crafting has always brought me back to their love. About 1997, I learned to coil a pine needle basket from *Pine Needle Basketry, From Forest Floor to Finished Project* by Judy Mallow (1997). I was in awe of the birch and cedar baskets made by Neskonith First Nations Elder Dr. Mary Thomas, but somehow considered them to be “small c” craft rather than “capital A” Art. I know better now. I also did not know that pine needle basketry was practiced in the Secwepemc region. I did not coil again until 2021, as I was researching a project for the Secwepemc Knowledge course. I believe that ancestral art forms and sources of economy are the property of their originators. Mallow’s (1997) settler family had been coiling their longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) needles in North Carolina for five generations. She shares that *The Ladies Home Journal* was offering directions in pine needle basketry as a handcraft in 1917. The Bureau of Indian Affairs ‘taught’ Indigenous Peoples this knowledge around 1933. She speculates the knowledge may have come to her region via slaves who had traditionally coiled African grasses. The Seminoles and Couthatta First Peoples had originally coiled swamp-cane, only adopting pine needles when settler cultivation depleted their resources.

In his article “Couthatta basketry and identity politics: The role of pine-needle baskets in the federal rerecognition of the Couthatta Tribe of Louisiana,” ethnobotanist Jay Precht (2015) reports that, long before European contact, Couthatta women produced pine needle baskets for sifting and storing corn. Basketry is widely believed to be the oldest craft in the world, predating pottery. The inclination to coil available natural resources has existed worldwide forever, and varieties of pine exist in many regions. In *Barking up the Right Tree: Understanding Birch Bark Artifacts from the Canadian Plateau, British Columbia*, Shannon Croft and Rolf Mathewes (2014) point out a patriarchal bias in archeology. The evidence of birchbark baskets has existed as long as arrowheads. However, importance was granted to men’s technologies, while the contributions of women were dismissed.

Coiled cedar and birch bark baskets were crucial in pre-contact Secwepemc lives. Baskets are durable and lightweight; they can be watertight for cooking and storage, and can contain materials when traveling to the next seasonal location. Added to this, birchbark possesses anti-septic, anti-fungal, and anti-rot properties that helped preserve

foodstuffs. There simply was no need to invent heavy and easily broken pottery.

Plant tending, harvesting, and food preparation had been exclusively women's responsibility, as was the making of baskets. They were significant economically as a trade item between nations. Baskets remained the exclusive property of their creator, and that person decided who would inherit them. Birchbark baskets are often uncovered in Secwepemc gravesites, having been used as a pillow, or containing the owner's prized possessions, perhaps also symbolizing female nurturing and value. In *Learn About the Ancient Art of Basket Weaving and How You Can Make Your Own*, Madeline Muzdakakis (2020) shares that all baskets are referred to as "woven." There are seven distinct "weaving" styles: looping, knotting, plaiting, coiling, weaving, twining, and assembly (Muzdakakis 2020). My ancestors would likely have twined willow. Secwepemc people coiled cedar and assembled birch bark.

The harvesting and treating of cedar root were labour intensive. Also very time consuming was coiling and stitching with split cedar root as thread. Harvesting birch bark required time, but basket construction was much faster. Live culturally modified trees can still be found around Shuswap Lake, bearing witness to the skilled harvesting of their bark. A single piece of notched bark helped to assemble the basket, and then was folded and stitched together using split cedar or spruce root. In both techniques, designs were detailed with imbricated pin cherry bark or flattened bird quills. Each region developed a distinguishing style in both categories, and artistry was much valued. In *Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia*, Nancy Turner (2014) notes that paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) bark was as important to First Peoples of the interior as the western red cedar was to coastal peoples. Settlers considered the paper birch a weed tree and replaced entire groves with lumber trees such as lodgepole pine, which they perceived to be more useful.

When pine needle basketry became tradition in Secwepemcúlécw, it was not documented by any archeologists, anthropologists, or ethnobotanists I have read to date. Historic examples are hard to find. Pine needles decompose faster than cedar or birch bark, which may be a contributing factor. In *The Jessup North Pacific Expedition Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History New York*, ethnobiologist James Teit (1909) intricately detailed the coiled cedar and assembled birch bark baskets being made in Secwepemcúlécw. However, he makes no mention of the pine needle basket. It does not seem to have the same generational lineage or significance as those of cedar root or birch bark. Secwepemc pine needle baskets were not functional per se, but were a prestige item that tended to be small and lidded to store various objects and valuables. Canada's Indian Act and Residential School project disrupted the traditional matriarchal teaching of all forms of basketry.

In one of my meetings with Neskonlith First Nations Elder Delores Purdaby, she pointed out that, in the last few generations, basket-making knowledge was passed from women to both women and men. The director and curator of the Salmon Arm Art Centre, Tracey Kutschker, is a settler ally who strives to include contemporary Indigenous artists in each exhibition. She has included and displayed baskets of cedar and birch by such local masters as Secwepemc Knowledge Keeper Louis Thomas; Neskonlith Elders Gerry Thomas, Delores Purdaby, and Minnie Manuel; and the late Dr. Mary Thomas. Delores mentored a “rising star” in Canadian art — the Neskonlith artist, educator, and activist Tania Willard (n.d.) — in birchbark assemblage, which may be viewed on her website. Delores is often called upon to present workshops to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. I am only certain of two young Indigenous artists currently creating pine needle baskets for sale in Secwepemc territory: Patricia Purdaby is one, although her work cannot be found in a store or gallery; Bigstone Cree Nation member Jolene Calliou’s work is in Splastin member Shelly Vaarlan’s store Soapallie Soapworks in Enderby, BC.

Mukwa Musayett: My own Sauleaux women’s traditions are focused on star-blanket-making rather than basket-making. I learned from my grandmother who created many star blankets. I recall sitting quietly listening to the Elder women who would join her and quilt using a quilting frame, telling stories of long ago. Silently, I watched as they stitched many colours of fabric into star blanket patterns, talking about the person to whom they would gift the blanket, and why they chose specific colours and patterns. In this way of watching and demonstration, I also learned to quilt star blankets for others. In my family, gifting star blankets is a sign of love, protection, care, and warmth, and is detailed in my doctoral work as a metaphor for an Indigenous research process used in that project (Johnson, 2011). When I moved to Kamloops in 2008, two Secwepemc Elders from Skeetchestn First Nation and Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc tried to teach me how to make a pine needle basket. Although they were very patient with me, I was not a good student. I only created two small coaster-type pine needle objects which were gifted to extended family members. Quietly, the late Elder Norma Peters of Skeetchestn First Nation explained the rationale behind the protocols to give away our first efforts. I was shocked at the gratitude demonstrated by the receivers of my first attempts. It was a humbling experience.

My involvement with MMIWG2S began in 1994 with the disappearance of a fifteen-year-old girl from BC’s foster care system. I worked on a team with her social worker, who continues to carry guilt and sadness due to the youth’s death. The police recovered her remains approximately one month after her disappearance, dumped in a ditch outside Burns Lake, BC. Since that time, I have personally experienced the loss of an extended family member who is counted among the MMIWG2S. Professionally,

I continue to support many other Indigenous peoples whose family members have been disappeared or murdered, or are missing. For many Indigenous peoples such as myself, thinking about our MMIWG2S is not a theoretical exercise, but an ongoing reality.

On Being a Settler Ally with Indigenous Peoples: A Shared Way Forward

Patricia: The TRC (2015) explains that reconciliation is not an Indigenous problem: it is a Canadian one. The report also states that reconciliation, in this case, is not returning to a conciliatory state. There is not one to return to. Reconciliation in Canada is compared to a family coping with the aftermath of violence within itself, coming to terms with past events and (re)establishing respectful relationships in order to heal and move forwards together as a cohesive family unit.

Across the world and throughout time, people have collected craft art. Laughter scatters awkward silences, tears nourish seeds of personal growth, and burdens lighten. Intangible strands of culture weave together as knowledge is shared — both the technicalities of the task at hand and in life lessons shared, often in the form of stories told by Elders.

If future generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are to live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on shared lands, many conversations must take place. How can one settler help to make high-impact changes in a society in such desperate need? How does one tiny hummingbird approach this massive and complex wildfire? Again and again, with one drop of water at a time. Others may join in too or be sparked to approach it from a different direction, in a manner benefitting of their own strengths and skill set.

Looking Forward to Allyship as An Indigenous Social Work Researcher

Mukwa Musayett: As we begin a shared way forward, hanging in my post-secondary office is the constant reminder of the importance of healing and allyship in the form of the pine needle REDress. Shortly after Patricia and I met to discuss our potential future collaborative work, I was invited to participate in the development of a MMIWG2S Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) research proposal. This project initially included nursing faculties at the University of Victoria, Trinity Western University, the University of Manitoba, and TRU. With my involvement, the Faculties of Social Work and Education were added to the TRU project. Each institution is responsible to create an awareness and education project regarding MMIWG2S to further the TRC's call to action #41.

My first action was to approach Patricia and Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Elder and artist Colleen Seymour to invite their participation in the TRU project site. Specifically, I asked Colleen to suggest a Secwepemc sculpture as the Indigenous project's co-foundation. She envisioned the creation of a Secwepemc fish trap, crafted from red willow in the shape of a woman, to which the research participant's art objects may be attached. At the conclusion of the project, the red willow woman fish trap and artworks will be gifted back to her Secwepemc community. At that point, the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Elder will determine when, where, and how the MMIWG2S red willow woman fish trap sculpture will be exhibited throughout Secwepemc territory. Patricia was asked if she might be willing to use her REDress pine needle sculpture *InStead* as the co-foundation of this new MMIWG2S project. Together, we envision a day to coil together MMIWG2S stories from social work, health, and education representatives, and to educate participants of specific calls for justice (2019) and realities facing the families of MMIWG2S.

The MMIWG2S SSHRC project was initially envisioned as a health-based arts project. However, my inclusion and specific professional background in social work and education has broadened the project to include considerations in the profession of social work, social work practitioners, educators, policymakers, and students. The social work profession has significant leadership responsibilities to support MMIWG2S families and communities. As such, a critical first step is demonstrating ways to model and include allyship in social work, nursing, and education research. A second critical step is to honour the Indigenous principles of respect, reciprocity, and relevance, under the leadership direction of Indigenous Elders, community members and Knowledge Keepers (Archibald, 2008). In reaching out to include Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Elder Colleen Seymour, we hope to breathe life into meaningful discussions regarding relevant sections of *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG* (2019) in ways that make sense to the local First Nations community. At time of writing, this one-day workshop is in the planning phase and is scheduled for September 16, 2024. It is not everything that we can do as social work, education, and nursing educators, faculty members, students, and Indigenous community members. However, through our inclusive demonstration of allyship, it is important work that we will build together in Secwepemcúlécw, and share with the other research sites.

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