

Miigwech Gidigaa Migizi-ban, my Friend

Opening Words

I would have never in a million years have ever thought that one of my best friends in the entire world would be a Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg Elder. Never could I have imagined, when I walked into his office, in the bowels of Otonabee College 18 years ago, that Gidigaa Migizi-ban (Doug Williams) was to become one of my closest dearest friends. He was my confidante, my teacher, my guide, my mentor, and he dreamed my Nishnaabeg name, and he gave that to me.

He was loving, kind, generous, forgiving, and intellectual, he was a thinker too – I believe that is why we got along so well – we often thought a lot together...thinking about countless issues. Mostly, these issues were concentrated on Indigenous rights and more specifically on his people: the Michi Saagiig.

He cared deeply and passionately about his people and was concerned with the continuation of their culture and language. To this end he was profoundly dedicated and driven, and gently relentless. He never stopped. Up until his last day – we were still working on compiling and completing his second book, which I have vowed and committed to compiling and publishing for him.

Gidigaa Migizi-ban was also a proponent of truth and reconciliation and of dismantling the legacy of colonialism. We concentrated most of our efforts together on the truth aspect of this work – transcribing and recording the stories of his people so that they may be included in the historical and archaeological narratives in Ontario, so that the truth of his people's existence and experiences deep into antiquity may be more widely known. The reconciliation aspect of our work also focused on finding and working with allies to promote more meaningful relationships between local communities and the Michi Saagiig Nation.

Speaking about allies, Gidigaa Migizi-ban shared with me his thoughts about what allyship means to him, and in particular what 'true' allyship entails. He said he had been thinking (as he often did while lying in bed late at night or in the early morning) about who he knew that he would consider allies, and he formulated somewhat of a list in his mind. He went on to say that as he thought about it more deeply that there were less and less 'making the cut' as he applied what allyship truly meant in terms of action – while he was considering various individuals. He said that a true ally advocated at great risk. He said that it was those people who put their reputation, their employment, their own well-being on the line to defend and advance Indigenous rights who are the true allies. People who address the legacy of colonialism at every turn, beyond work and in everyday life, are the true helpers. He said that not many people actually do that, and while on the surface they seem like allies for the cause, when push comes to shove they usually back away. He told me that when he thought about me and what I do, that this was the definition of true allyship. He told me that I was one of very few people who put themselves out there on the line consistently – and that I had taken risks and had much to lose by doing so. He said I was a true ally to Nishnaabeg. This was the highest and most meaningful compliment I have ever received in my life. I was overwhelmingly moved and this kind of support from this spectacular individual only spurred me on to advocate with more voracity. I have continued to do so, and at great cost.

Let me share with you a little bit about what true allyship means to me. Most of the time, being a true ally to Indigenous peoples entails 'speaking truth to power' – standing up for what is right, what is moral and just with regard to Indigenous rights.

Speaking truth to power is not easy, but it is always the right thing to do.

Standing up for what is right and holding true to Anishinaabeg values and Teachings, as well as supporting and being guided by an Indigenous rights framework, can come at great risk. Just look at how Jody Wilson-Raybould was treated by her own party, by the Prime Minister, when she spoke truth to power. She was discredited, labelled as “difficult” and “aggressive,” was removed from her position as Attorney General of Canada, and then punted out of the Liberal Caucus altogether (Wilson-Raybould 2021). For what? For speaking truth to power and holding strong to core values, integrity, and the law. To be a true ally to Nishnaabeg people, and to all Indigenous peoples, we must be like Jody. She is an extraordinary model.

A true ally is willing to put themselves on the line, to risk their reputation, to risk loss such as employment opportunities or promotions, or take positions and do work with little to no remuneration. To put Nishnaabeg rights and interests ahead of your own. To fight for justice, and to persist.

It has been my honour to be labelled as such by Gidigaa Migizi-ban. He was one of the greatest human beings I have ever known. I miss him deeply. A piece of my heart broke when he died. In many ways I still have not fully accepted the reality that he is gone. I still feel like I will visit him, spend time with him, laugh with him, and listen to more stories with him....I still have the last meeting with him recorded on my phone, waiting to be transcribed – the story was about a dugout canoe. I am not sure I am ready for that just yet. I was not ready for him to go – we still had work to do. It was his wish to keep telling stories, to keep speaking and teaching the language, to keep the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg culture alive and sustained into the future – to pass on his knowledge.

Important Considerations

Gidigaa Migizi-ban was intensely affected by the erasure of his peoples’ culture in the archaeological narrative in Ontario. He was motivated to get the Michi Saagiig stories out there – he did not want his people to be forgotten, as they had been for so long. The 1923 Williams Treaties deeply affected him as well – and fighting for the rights of his people. It can be said that through his challenge to the government regarding his people’s right to harvest, he re-ignited the drive to address the injustices of the 1923 treaties. And thankfully he was able to see the negotiations and settlement through to completion in 2018, before he left us in 2022. His advocating for the cultural heritage rights of his people, and for his nation’s inclusion in disseminating historical and archaeological narratives continued until his last days.

Gidigaa Migizi-ban was fascinated by archaeology – and the ancient material culture and heritage of all those who came long before. He was concerned that more of his people were not involved in the field of archaeology and that the stories were being told by mostly non-Indigenous white men – and that the narrative was also very Iroquoian biased and rendered Anishinaabeg invisible in their own history and on their own lands. He was both disturbed and disgusted with how his people were often portrayed in historical writings as “marauding bands,” wandering the lands aimlessly and lawlessly. He was equally disturbed with the celebrations in 2015 commemorating Samuel de Champlain’s 400 year-old visit to the Kawarthas. Champlain caused great suffering and damage to the Anishinaabeg in the Kawarthas, and beyond, and to celebrate his arrival in the Kawartha perpetrates a one-sided colonial history (see Doug Williams 2015, Peterborough Examiner). Gidigaa Migizi-ban wanted the whole story to be told, a balanced more complete picture of how historical figures interacted and affected his people.

I was privileged to spend the last 18 years listening, learning and laughing with this man. We spent time together. We ate together. We planned together. We wrote many small articles together. Eventually we started recording everything. And then transcribing everything. I learned a lot during these times. Gidigaa

Migizi-ban had much to say. He wanted archaeologists to learn about his people, to better understand his people, to better portray his people in the stories being told about their ancestors.

He wanted archaeologists to know that his people have oral stories that span into time immemorial. He wanted people to know that his peoples' knowledges were just as valid and useful as western knowledges and he often shared ancient stories of glacial advances and retreats – stories about B'Boon and Nanabozho. Stories that have not been included in the telling of the past.

I have been told stories about the 'ancient ones' as we call them, by older people who helped raise me. When you translate it from our language, it means "people that lived long ago." These stories have not been told as part of the archaeological narrative in what is now known as Ontario. The Elders who were part of my upbringing were telling me stories that were told by their forefathers that were told by their grandparents, and so forth. Our stories are passed down from generation to generation – that's how we keep our history. It is important to understand this history if you want to understand the antiquity of humans in Ontario. (Gidigaa Migizi in Finlayson 2020: Foreword xxiii).

He wanted archaeologists to know that the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg have been here for thousands of years and have a deep, beautiful, rich, cultural knowledge that should inherently be applied to archaeological methodology in this part of world. He was very concerned about the misinterpretation of the archaeological record:

Something I feel is significant for archaeologists to know, is that my people traded heavily with the Haudenosaunee and with the Wendat. The Iroquois peoples were better at making certain things, and our people knew it. Similarly, the Iroquois peoples knew we were better at making other things. For example, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat loved our canoes, but they couldn't make a birch bark canoe even if they tried, as was the joke. But it was the same with our people – we recognized that they were really good pottery makers. So, we would trade numerous birch bark items for large amounts of pottery because we were good at working with birch bark and they were good at working with pottery. This means that we would have Iroquois pottery with us, and they would have Anishinaabe birch bark items with them.

Now birch bark really deteriorates quite quickly in terms of the archaeological record, within 200 years or so, while pottery can lay on the ground for thousands of years. So when an archaeologist comes across a pottery find, the assumption is that it is Iroquoian. There is no archaeological evidence of Anishinaabeg in this instance because most of our items are perishable. This kind of thing can easily happen and as a result, the archaeological record is misinterpreted (Gidigaa Migizi in Finlayson 2020: Foreword xxv-xxvi).

I have run into this type of thing before in the work that I do, particularly when reviewing archaeological reports. It is common to see the identification of a 'campsite' with the qualifier: 'Iroquoian,' thus *Iroquoian campsite*. I questioned what the determining factor was in that campsite to connote the Iroquoian ethnic attribute. The answer was always: pottery. Really? I think that many archaeologists would agree that there is an Iroquoian bias within Ontario archaeology and would be truthful in admitting that they too have fallen into this habit. It is long overdue to overcome this bad habit and this includes letting go of the terminology from the 'Ontario Iroquois Tradition' for good. Gidigaa Migizi-ban supported this change and often questioned how terminology such as "Early/Middle/Late Ontario Iroquois" to characterize a time

horizon was appropriate if the site was indeed associated with the Nishnaabeg. Joyce Wright (2020: xxx) has pointed out that her father, Jim Wright “would be delighted to note the discussion and refinement of the cultural taxonomy he called the Ontario Iroquois Tradition and Lawrence Jackson has since renamed the Ontario Woodland Tradition to reflect Algonquian as well as Iroquoian participation, an involvement Jim acknowledged shortly before his death, in *A History of the Native People of Canada (volume III)*.”

Gidigaa Migizi-ban also had concerns about how archaeologists could interpret his peoples’ past culture without knowing their language, and thus their worldview – how does one analyse and interpret the past from a completely different ontological framework than those who created the archaeological record?

My other concern about archaeology, and science in general, is that the archaeologists and the scientists don’t know our language, and so how can they know those stories? And how do archaeologists determine which peoples were on the land based on finding pottery? Pottery doesn’t talk, right? Therefore, if archaeologists conclude that the pottery means an Iroquoian presence, they, in fact, can be misinterpreting the entire story. Why are “isolated find spots” of pottery generally labelled as Iroquoian? So if archaeologists conclude that is an Iroquoian site when, in fact, it is being used by Anishinaabeg and the pottery was a trade item, then in this instance, the past is being grossly misinterpreted (Gidigaa Migizi in Finlayson 2020: Foreword xxiv).

The small reference above to the importance of understanding Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwa language) to truly understand the stories and the history cannot be understated – and archaeologists have yet to delve into the linguistics of Indigenous languages and how it is intimately connected with understanding the past. The presence of words and concepts in Anishinaabemowin reveal much pertinent information that has not yet been fully explored in terms of its application to archaeological interpretation (see Williams and Kapyrka 2015).

Some archaeologists agree that misinterpretation can occur, particularly in association with the Anishinaabeg presence on the land in the archaeological record. Jackson (2020: 6) points out that archaeologists have overlooked much about Algonquin practices such as ossuary burial associated with the Feast of the Dead, and sweat lodges, and cautions that “we may have missed or misinterpreted significant evidence of Algonquin occupation because of a marked assimilation of material culture between Algonquin and Iroquois people.” The Anishinaabeg still practice the Feast of the Dead to this day. I have attended many of these ceremonies, and some with Gidigaa Migizi-ban. These ceremonies and traditions continue to thrive. However, in archaeological contexts, the Feast of the Dead is predominantly associated with only one nation of people, and it is not the Anishinaabeg. Jackson (2020: 7) further explains that several archaeologists have drawn attention to: “our virtual inability to distinguish between Iroquois, Iroquois influenced, and Algonquin ceramics on Ontario sites,” and that “to this day, most of us would be hard pressed to identify an Algonquin vessel in southern Ontario even though we know they were here and had well defined ceramic traditions going back to the Early and Middle Woodland periods.” The fact is that Anishinaabeg people had, used, traded, and made pottery. They also had corn.

Gidigaa Migizi-ban wanted archaeologists to know that his people had corn and grew it too, and had strong kinship alliances with certain “Iroquoian speaking peoples,” particularly the Huron-Wendat (see Gitiga Migizi and Kapyrka 2015).

These ancient ones intermarried. I know that our old people say that we lived with each other, we lived beside each other, and that we especially lived with the Huron-Wendat in the

winter time so that we could access the food that they stored. In other words, they would have access to their corn and squash because they saved it, and we didn't. Although the Anishinaabeg did get into the corn culture – we had the corn culture too. And we saved seeds after we were introduced to corn. Our stories tell about the saving of seeds. For example, Anishinaabeg had what they called “Georgian Bay seeds” and these were interesting to them because there was a lot of reference to them in our oral histories as being a nice type of corn to have because it stored well in Ontario. The corn that is largely found on archaeological sites in southern Ontario was mostly traded corn with the ‘Iroquoians’ and Huron-Wendat, which were strains that generally came from the south (Gidigaa Migizi in Finlayson 2020: Foreword xxiii-xxiv).

There has been an over-reliance in the archaeological record on referring to corn growing peoples as Iroquoian speaking only, as well as a focus put upon the search for agricultural villages built around fields of corn. The Anishinaabeg grew corn too, but also engaged in complex land management systems that included the creation of “food forests,” abundant with nut and fruit producing trees, small gardens of root vegetables, and the management and stewardship of vast areas of berry patches, wild rice, and fish weirs.

Furthermore, there are historical paintings from the 16th century that depict non-Iroquoian speaking peoples living in villages, with houses, and gardens, some surrounded by palisades and agricultural fields, albeit what is now in the United States (i.e. John White). Why is this phenomenon not addressed within Ontario archaeological contexts? Why is every village site Iroquoian? Sturt Manning et al (2018) provide new C-14 dates for several sites in Ontario that are challenging the long held assumptions about the chronological sequencing of Huron-Wendat villages. In a few instances, it is believed that community relocation sequences have been identified, where a single community moved from site A to site B to site C (e.g. Birch and Williamson 2013), but even these cases are invariably not without debate or caveat, and again lack an independent basis separate from various inherent assumptions (Manning et al 2020:1786). Moreover, Birch et al (2020:61) admit that the resulting revised chronology demands a rethinking of key assumptions about cultural process in the region regarding the directionality and timing of processes of coalescence and conflict and the introduction of European trade goods. Put together, what does this all mean? And what does it tell us? Gidigaa Migizi-ban and I would ponder such questions and engage in lengthy discussions about certain Nishnaabeg villages around Ontario that were part of his oral history, and significant places for the Michi Saagiig, but were not included in the archaeological analyses.

Gidigaa Migizi-ban took solace with the fact that some archaeologists had started to include dialogue about the Anishinaabeg presence in the archaeological record in Ontario, at least in his lifetime. He often mentioned his hope that archaeologists would listen to him, to his people. He also often acknowledged the archaeologists who were advocating for Indigenous Knowledge and the Anishinaabeg presence to be acknowledged and included, even as some admitted they would face backlash for doing so.

These are stories that have been excluded in the telling of the peoples of the past in Ontario mainstream archaeology, until now. It is about time that the Anishinaabeg are part of this narrative and are being incorporated into the story of Ontario. This is good and wonderful progress, and as a Storyteller and Knowledge Keeper for my people, it tells me that archaeologists are finally listening. (Gidigaa Migizi in Finlayson 2020: Foreword xxiii).

Gidigaa Migizi-ban wanted archaeologists to know that his people have been in Ontario for thousands of years; that the Michi Saagiig were the salmon people, the people of the big river mouths, and fished and hunted along the shores and lands of the Great Lakes and all of their tributaries. The title of the last book

he published was intentional and meaningful: *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This is our Territory*. Gidigaa Migizi-ban is letting people know that his people were here long ago, that they travelled great distances across the Great Lakes watershed, and that they are still here to this day. His voice is loud and clear: The Michi Saagiig are here, and have always been, this is their place.

Ultimately, Gidigaa Migizi-ban was advocating for inclusion and acknowledgement of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Nation within archaeological frameworks in Ontario:

- The inclusion of his people in the narratives that were being disseminated about his peoples;
- The inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges in archaeological method and theory;
- The application of Indigenous Knowledges to collections care and management;
- The inclusion of Anishinaabeg oral histories in the dissemination of the past;
- The promotion and support of more Nishnaabeg entering the field of archaeology;
- The advancement of including Anishinaabeg presence on the land into antiquity;
- The acknowledgement of the continuity of relationships to resources/relatives over millennia;
- The acknowledgement of Anishinaabeg connection to place.

He was also concerned with the nature of this inclusion and the governance of information and materials in terms of how the CRM industry currently dominates archaeological excavations in advance of land development projects in the province. The management of his peoples' cultural heritage is a thriving multi-million dollar industry in Ontario and to engage with the principles above include having to be subject to 'big business' standards, which include the potential for negative behaviours. Gidigaa Migizi-ban expressed concerns about what is sometimes called the: 'Indian industry,' a concept aptly described by Jody Wilson-Raybould (2021:165-166):

There has long been talk of the "Indian industry," a term that speaks to the ways in which lawyers and consultants can dominate aspects of the work of reconciliation. Many lawyers and consultants are fantastic – champions that we need. But there is also an industry, and some in that industry probably think there is less money in recognition and quick results. At least in the short term. Conflict and endless negotiations can be good for business.

Not only conflict, but fear has also played a role in supporting the 'Indian industry' as many proponents are so keen to be involved in reconciliation that they will acquiesce to unreasonable demands and engage with false representatives, for questionable services. Archaeologists must be careful and ensure that they do not engage or participate in that industry – an industry that does not put the rights of Indigenous peoples first. Too much emphasis still remains on debating whether or not there exists a duty to consult in archaeology and who is responsible to engage and when. This is not up for debate. Indigenous Peoples' rights exist, and have already been encoded in Canada's Constitution. Indigenous Peoples have rights to their cultural heritage. Treaties have been signed and territories acknowledged. These things already exist. Yet, the conflicts are still present and debates continue regarding who holds the duty to consult, while First Nations are not being meaningfully engaged, and the destruction of Indigenous burial sites and archaeological sites continues at an alarming rate to clear lands for development, and the vast majority of materials uncovered from archaeological sites are not in the care or control of Indigenous communities.

Changes in approaches to negotiations can only be effective with fundamental shifts by government to recognize and implement Indigenous rights as the framework for relations (Wilson-Raybould 2021). This insight can be applied to current archaeological contexts as well, particularly in the CRM industry. **'Recognize and implement Indigenous rights as the framework for relations,'** was what Gidigaa Migizi-

ban advocated for. The right of his people to be involved in all aspects of archaeology, from on-site fieldwork and methodology, to data analysis, to interpretations, to care and curation, and perhaps most importantly to control of the narrative and the dissemination of knowledge about Anishinaabeg cultural heritage.

We need to stop the reliance on government directives as the ultimate source of guidance, especially when they are not addressing the issues. I am sure there is consensus amongst Ontario archaeologists as well as First Nations, that the ministry that licenses and regulates archaeological practice in the province is not very supportive (because they are not supported themselves) and thus, less than helpful. I would imagine there is consensus as well amongst Ontario archaeologists and First Nations regarding 'what needs to be done' to ameliorate the current status quo, on many different levels.

We collectively have solutions, we collectively know what needs to be done. However, there is divisiveness amongst archaeologists. There is divisiveness amongst First Nations. There is divisiveness amongst and between relationships with each other. There is divisiveness at provincial ministries and between the province itself and municipalities. There is no cohesion currently between any of the parties to whom have rights and interests in archaeological practices in Ontario. This unbalanced situation exists as a result of colonial, paternalistic, oppressive and divisive policies and procedures that continue to govern archaeology in Ontario.

Part of the journey to reconciliation is in decolonizing the practice and profession of archaeology, to which all archaeologists and First Nations should be active participants. To truly decolonize archaeology, all participants, including divergent perspectives and worldviews, ultimately must work together. Imagine a united front of consultant archaeologists and First Nations presenting collaborative solutions to the province/ministry? We can change policy together. Gidigaa Migizi-ban consistently advocated for archaeologists and First Nations to work cooperatively.

Some Suggestions

We must be invested in upholding the true goal of meaningful engagement and real partnerships between archaeologists and First Nations. Meaningful engagement is inherently reciprocal and occurs at multiple levels. The learning and guidance goes both ways. Ideally, with regard to fieldwork, First Nations archaeological liaisons attend and participate in excavations and learn more about the technical aspects of working on an archaeological site as well as theoretical and interpretive contexts, while the liaison provides cultural/protocol oversight and knowledge enhancing the analysis and understanding of the particular site. Only well-trained liaisons can truly engage meaningfully – they must be equipped with cultural knowledge as well as technical knowledge to be empowered to lead methodologies, and address challenges for their respective nations. Support needs to be invested in the creation and maintenance of more robust archaeological liaison training programs, ones that include western academic archaeology, Indigenous Knowledges, CRM practices, and an extended in-field component on an actual site. This kind of training leads to successful outcomes through enabling meaningful engagement.

Engagement with First Nations communities should occur during or before a Stage 1 assessment. Gidigaa Migizi-ban would say: "Talk to us. Before you put a shovel in the ground. We know where burial sites are, and we know where there may be sites." Even prior to that, efforts in terms of relationship building can establish long lasting trusting associations between archaeologists and First Nations that would enable expedient and appropriate engagement as well as support potential collaborative projects.

Support and work within the principles of UNDRIP, support and engage the 94 TRC Calls to Action, acknowledge and uphold Section 35 rights, learn and understand Treaties. Stop debating and negotiating what Indigenous rights may be and start engaging in respectful acknowledgement of international direction and national guidance in reference to Indigenous cultural heritage.

Supporting the OCAP principles and their application to Ontario archaeology and how First Nations' data and information will be collected, protected, used, or shared. Standing for Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession, OCAP is a tool to support strong information governance on the path to First Nations data sovereignty (2023 The First Nations Information Governance Centre). Currently, First Nations must sign-off on a "data-sharing agreement" with the province to have access to information about their own ancestors' archaeological sites and cultural heritage. This needs address.

Supporting and advocating for a collections management facility in First Nations communities. This is long overdue. Something that has always stuck with me over the years was hearing Anne Taylor, Knowledge Keeper and Language Coordinator at Curve Lake First Nation say: "Why do we have to travel to Toronto, or Hamilton, to see our ancestors' belongings, to spend time with our ancestors?" This is a good question and also symptomatic of the continued legacy of colonialism that persists in Ontario collection management practices. True reconciliation will see nothing less than facilities owned, managed, and run by First Nations communities.

The work ahead lies in understanding that rights exist and how to apply that to your reconciliation action plan – not in deciding what rights exist and where and whose responsibility it is. Anishinaabeg people have a right to their cultural heritage. Period. Their ancestors inhabited the lands we now refer to as Ontario and the Great Lakes Region, for thousands of years. They travelled large distances on seasonal rounds, in a balanced relationship with the lands and waters, harvesting, hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering for foods and medicines. Anishinaabeg people have an inherent right to the materials and burial sites their ancestors left behind. This belongs to Anishinaabeg people – the artifacts, the burials, the history, the knowledge, the teachings, and ultimately the entire narrative.

This understanding is not upheld or widely supported – and thus, reconciliation outcomes are blocked. In terms of reconciliation outcomes, the point must be stressed that the word reconciliation itself is problematic because it assumes there was a relationship to begin with that needs to be reconciled. This was something that my colleague Tom Cowie, Knowledge Keeper, and Consultation Coordinator for Hiawatha First Nation often spoke about – that there was no relationship to begin with so how does one reconcile something that did not exist in the first place? In her 2022 text: *True Reconciliation: How to be a Force for Change*, Jody Wilson-Raybould also discusses this phenomenon in terms of the history of colonialism. She explains that we cannot reduce it to a story about people who had trouble in their relationships and, therefore, need to re-establish good ones, but rather, we need to look at it through the lens of colonialism and how as a practice based on beliefs about cultural and racial superiority, the taking of lands and resources, and the domination of some peoples by another, and understand that this is not a relationship (Wilson-Raybould 2022:184). She further stresses that true reconciliation and addressing the legacy of colonialism will not just occur through better relationships, although these will be critical, but that there is 'a lot more involved':

What true reconciliation requires, in addition to new relationships, are changes in how society is structured and organized, how we collectively live with each other, and the ways we make decisions, including about governance, economics, culture, and the environment. And being an agent of true reconciliation means understanding how we all need to contribute

and support these larger societal shifts through our conduct and choices in daily life (Wilson-Raybould 2022: 185-186).

Wilson-Raybould (2022) provides a robust discourse on how to engage meaningful reconciliation in a 3-step process: Learn. Understand. Act. Although archaeologists are indeed much more enlightened today in terms of how their practice affects Indigenous peoples and cultures, learning and understanding the truth about the legacy of colonialism is only just beginning.

Archaeologists must recognize and acknowledge that archaeology and history are still constrained by exclusive western methodologies and perspectives, and this awareness must be present if we are to truly decolonize archaeological practice. Decolonizing archaeology means not only facing the truth, but also *telling* the truth – a truth-telling of the realities of the colonial past/present of archaeology and how the profession and discipline plays/played a role in the dispossession of the cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples. Only then can we be informed in terms of how reconciliation can be truly meaningful and enact actual change. This change would entail nothing less than First Nations directing, guiding, and sharing the narratives of the past, as well as exercising the right to care for artifacts and material culture left behind by their own ancestors and to have burial sites and sacred sites protected and undisturbed. This change will also include Indigenous peoples supervising and directing field methodologies as project managers and owners of CRM companies, reporting, and publishing. Learn, understand, act.

At the heart of learning is listening to and telling new stories. In particular, we need to tell a new story about how we arrived at this moment in history in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. This story needs to be reflective and inclusive of all of the experiences that have shaped the Canada of today, and it needs to transform the narrative of exclusion that has been predominant (Wilson-Raybould 2022: 179).

Truth-telling will transform the exclusive narrative that has been predominant in Ontario archaeology. Truth-telling may be very uncomfortable for some, but it is a necessary step in addressing the legacy of colonialism and the move towards true reconciliation. This is what would make Gidigaa Migizi-ban proud. Standing up, speaking out, advocating, working together, and never giving up. And doing so within the spirit of DEBWEWIN (Truth) to advance meaningful reconciliation. What must be acknowledged, is the sheer passionate commitment to his people to have Michi Saagiig knowledges, stories, and Teachings included in the narrative of Ontario archaeology, despite the harm that the discipline of archaeology has inflicted upon his people. Even after all that was taken from the Nishnaabeg – the sacred sites, material culture, burial sites, bodies, sacred items, Gidigaa Migizi-ban was still willing to work with archaeologists collaboratively to make things better. We must return that favour. For our part, as archaeologists, we can be ‘true’ allies, and carry on this work...even if it means taking risks.

We will carry on his work in the work that we do if we proceed with kindness and care, patience and understanding, but also standing up for what is right, and speaking out with integrity when injustice and destructive behaviour presents itself. If we continue to promote inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges and Nishnaabeg presence in the archaeological narrative, and look for it in the archaeological record, then we will inherently be carrying on his work. If we continue to support reconciliation work through DEBWEWIN (Truth) we carry on his work. If we continue to look for and activate ways to decolonize archaeology, we will carry on his work. Much of this work will involve speaking truth to power if we are to engage in true allyship. And this is much easier and more productive as a collective action.

Closing Words

This piece was hard for me to write. It hurt. But it has also been part of my healing in dealing with the grief and loss of my friend. I am thankful to the APA for asking me to contribute to this newsletter, to remember Gidigaa Migizi-ban and his work; and I am grateful for the kindness of the APA in offering patience as I struggled to get these words on paper. Thank you.

To close, with a short message: If we all strive to address the legacy of colonialism in all that we do, and practice an inclusive methodology in Ontario archaeology, we will be honouring Gidigaa Migizi-ban's memory and upholding the tenets of true allyship. He would like that.

Miigwech Gidigaa Migizi-ban for all that you have left behind, it remains for us to pick it up and continue. I am committed to doing this work and to remain being a true ally....

Baamaapii Gidigaa Migizi-ban, safe travels.

Much love my friend,
Julie Kapyrka

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