



Darren Thomas is Seneca Nation Bear Clan.

He graduated from Wilfrid Laurier University with a Bachelor of Science.

As a young man Darren was an addict and had a tremendous amount of anger inside. He was not happy with his life and contemplated suicide on many occasions. He overcame these barriers with counselling and therapy. He used the strength of his experiences to share with the Okwehon:we all across Turtle Island, to empower them to consider leaving these barriers behind.

Darren's biggest challenge in leaving the community as a young person to attend university was the **culture shock** and having his **identity questioned**. As a result he ended up leaving school as a young person. He

finished his degree as an adult part time student, which was another great challenge; trying to **balance work, family and schoolwork** was very hard.

As an Okwehon:we person the values or principles that guided him throughout his education and career was to constantly remind himself of **the appreciation for his traditional knowledge**. He knew the western educational institution did not respect his opinions. It was more of a factory where the institution wanted to just force you to think like them, be like them and act like them. **“You have to put everything through your own cultural filter.** I think as a young man this is what I did not have the strength to do, so I left.”

As a result of his education and upbringing, one of the most important things that he has done to contribute to our community is the effort he put into his life to try to **live by the Great Law**. He tries all the time to **empower** all the people he meets and works with. He tries to **be an example** of what is possible when you put the baggage of colonialism behind you and enjoy your life. Over the years Darren has worked in

community support, radio, addiction counselling and community development.

Darren believes we all need to **honour the teachings** that the Peacemaker has brought our people. Whether we follow the Longhouse, Christianity or nothing, we need to have **a foundation of strength, kindness, pride, integrity and love**. These are what the great law teaches us. **Knowing, living and understanding these values** will make us a better Longhouse person or a better Christian. We have to **strengthen our identities** as Haudenosaunee and **be proud of all that we have here**.

He has travelled to many First Nation Communities in his work and has visited some of the poorest places - so impoverished you would not believe. We here are **so lucky**, yet we complain so much of how bad things are. He has been in communities where they no longer have any language or traditional knowledge left. **“We need to be grateful for all that we have.”**

Western education can no doubt be a **mind changer**, if you allow it. He feels these institutions are set up as a screening system to higher culture and society in the Western World. Darren advises to **“not allow** these institutions to **change you or make you ashamed of who you are**. Make sure you **take with you your pride and strength** of being Haudenosaunee”.

There are a **lot of benefits** to a Western Education, it helps us to **understand** this modern world and the surrounding cultures that we now share Turtle Island with, but we **must not allow it to change who we are**. We have to find a **balance** between the western and traditional knowledge and somewhere in there is **Wisdom**.

“Laugh and enjoy the time that we have here on this earth. The Creator never promised us a life **without pain**, a life **without tears**.” Some of the most powerful learning experiences he has had in his life involved hardship. **“We can learn from these situations** or we can cry poor me. It is time we all learn to stop surviving this life; and **start living life**.”