



Jairus Skye is of the Mohawk Nation, Turtle Clan from Six Nations of the Grand River.

Jairus has successfully completed an Honours Diploma in General Arts and Science at Mohawk College and an Honours BA in Anthropology and Religious Studies at McMaster University. He has received a Master's degree in Anthropology and written a thesis entitled "An Orchid in the Swamp: Traditional Medicine, Healing and Identity at an Urban Aboriginal Community Health Center." He has successfully completed his first year as a PhD student at McMaster.

Jairus considers his **decision to go back to school** after a ten year absence and pursue an academic career a major accomplishment.

He experienced many challenges with his return to school which included getting used to the workload, and improving his writing and public speaking skills. The biggest challenge he faced was "**overcoming my self doubt and fear**". Fear that he had made a huge mistake, that he did not belong in university, "**I'm too old, I'm not smart enough**". He found the strength to **at least try** one class to see what it was like or he would **regret it for the rest of his life**. Within minutes of his first class Jairus knew he had made the right choice. He had **worked hard to get this far** and it felt like this is where he was meant to be.

Jairus does not know if it is a specific attribute of an Onkwehon:we person, but his inherent stubbornness and persistence were certainly put to good use, especially when writing and researching papers. He feels he embodies the traditional Onkwehon:we values of **silence and listening**. He tries to listen and weigh his words carefully before speaking which has helped throughout his academic career.

A key challenge that Jairus feels needs to be addressed by Six Nations is the need for more Aboriginal people in academia and the health sciences. In his

opinion "this is an essential step in **improving aboriginal health**". Aboriginal researchers and physicians bring with them a **deeper cultural understanding** of Aboriginal conceptions of health and well-being. The internalization of having lived and experienced the culture **cannot be taught**. Therefore, he advocates that we encourage our youth prior to and during their high school education to **pursue** these avenues and **obtain a post secondary education**.

One of the most valuable lessons Jairus has learned that he would like to pass on is that "**you always need to do something that you don't want to do in order to do what you want**". Jairus knew he wanted to go to University, **he didn't always know** what he wanted to major in, but knew that is where he wanted to be. He knew going to school was going to be **a lot of work** and he knew there would be aspects of it that he **wasn't going to like** such as certain courses and lots of homework. What he didn't know was how much he would come to "**appreciate the whole experience**". There were times when it was really tough but he knew he needed to **persevere and get through it in order to achieve his goals**. Although it sounds cliché he feels that "**I am**

a better person for having stuck it out through the tough times". His university experience has "**humbled and enlightened him**". He has "**learned to be patient and appreciate the knowledge and wisdom of others**".

Jairus suggests that the community "not be afraid to **encourage the youth to pursue** a post secondary education in as many different locales and disciplines as possible". He has met many Aboriginal scholars from many different communities and countries and **none of them have forgotten who they are or where they come from** by receiving an education. Often these scholars have returned "home" and have used their educational experience to **improve the quality of life in their communities and abroad**. Historically, **First Nations people gathered and used knowledge from a variety of sources**. He thinks we need to **continue and maintain** this aspect of our culture. It will "**enable us to build a strong and secure future for our people**".