Jen Maser:
I'm Jen Maser, associate director of internal communications at Syracuse
University, and you're listening to the 'Cuse Conversations podcast.
Diane Schenandoah:
The Haudenosaunee went through great wars and great turmoil because we had
forgotten our original instructions, which we say that all peoples around the world
have been given original instructions, how to live as human beings on this earth.
And I like to tell the students how the Haudenosaunee were sitting in the capital of
the Confederacy. We are on Onondaga Nation homeland and I try to guide them
through this process of the power of forgiveness because that's what happened.
That's how we came to these principles of peace, is through love and forgiveness.
Jen Maser:
Welcome back to another episode of 'Cuse Conversations. We're thrilled to be
joined today by Diane Schenandoah, a staff member in the Barnes Center at The
Arch who joined Syracuse University last fall in the role of Honwadiyenawa'sek.
Diane Schenandoah:
Yes.
Jen Maser:
Which is the Haudenosaunee word for "one who helps them." She is a faithkeeper
of the Oneida Nation Wolf Clan, a 2011 alumna of the College of Visual and
Performing Arts, a graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe,
New Mexico, a sculptor, a singer, and an all-around lovely human being as far as I
can tell. Thanks so much for joining us today.
Diane Schenandoah:
Well thank you for having me.
Jen Maser:
So I was hoping we could start by going back to the beginning, tell me about your
cultural background and upbringing and what was your life like as a young girl
growing up on Oneida Nation?
Diane Schenandoah:
Well, as a young girl, my mother was a clan mother, a Wolf Clan mother of the
Oneida Nation and she was responsible for the social, political and spiritual
wellbeing of our people. And many times I would wake up with strangers in our
living room, people that needed a place to stay or she'd be walking with a package
of diapers under one arm and groceries and coming in and just overseeing and
overlooking the community. People looked to her for guidance and she kind of
reestablished the Oneida Nation territory out in Oneida. My father was a Pine Tree
chief of the Onondaga Nation. He had passed early on, when I was 12. So my

mother's very strong woman. There were six of myself, my siblings, and five sisters
and one brother. And so we had a fun childhood growing up. My father was a jazz

So that and do ing ene rgy work, kind of sho wing

little tools they c an use in their

daily li fe with energy work. I also use tuning forks and there are particular

acupressure points with the tuning forks. I do dream interpretation. It's really

rewarding to see the student's face light up when they disco ver their own inner

stre ngths o r their own energy or their own cente re dness . I jus t give them a lot of

too ls that the y can use as students for SU

and beyond in their lives, in their

fam ilie s. So we have full m oon cere mo nies eve ry m onth and that's just kind of to

take a paus e and thank Grandmother M oon. She watches o ver the nighttim e sky.

She co ntrols the cycles o f

the water, the ocean tides, the planting cycles, the cycle

of women. S he determ ines our ce remonies when babies are born. So Grandmo ther

M oon is continuing he r duties . So we j ust stop and take a pause once a month to

have a small full moon ceremony where we get to thank water, we get to send

good thoughts and our goo d energy to the creator through our tobac co burning. So

I don't burn tobacco here ,

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goes beyond that to check in. A lot
 of people don't know their neighbors. A lot of
people don't know who lives around them, especially being in a city. So I think that
that energy of gratitude is contagious, if you will, like you smile at somebody and
they'll smile back. It's a nice feeling
 just to share that bit of energy because we're
all connected. We're all connected and all need each other.

Jen Maser:

So you mentioned some of your techniques and modalities that you practice with
students, the art therapy
,
 tuning forks, acupressure. Can you walk us through what
your typical process is when a student comes in to work with you? What would their
experience be like and how do you get to the bottom of what they might need or
what they might be looking for by coming to see you?

Diane Schenandoah:

Well I start out with telling them how the Haudenosaunee came together, they
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There's a shortened version in the pharmacy, the Thanksgiving address book, that
was done by Chief Jake Swamp. And in there it has all of the different elements to
be grateful for: the earth, Mother Earth gives us all we need, the water, all that is
in the water. Our bodies are partially water, so we have to remember that to give
thanks for our body, ourselves, our human beings. And then it moves on up to the
animals and plant life, the medicine plants and the trees on up through all that lives
in the trees. And so it kind of moves on up to the birds and of course the
protectors, the beings, the teachers, all of the four directions and on up to the
creator. And of course this is an incredibly brief description of it, but it's a very... Is
that time again to acknowledge for all things and be thankful and grateful for all
things and say thank you. And that's how life continues; that energy of gratitude
helps all of life continue.
Jen Maser:
Yeah, I mean just hearing you describe a session, I feel much more relaxed and
grounded so I can only imagine what benefit it's having for our students.
Diane Schenandoah:
Oh, thank you.
Jen Maser:
Without going in obviously to any identifying details, are there any stories or
examples you can think of from your time so far where you feel like you've really
made a difference in a student's life or if they've reached out to you after the fact
and expressed gratitude for how you were able to help them or any anecdotes like
that?
Diane Schenandoah:
Oh for sure. There have been a few students actually that would just, after we've
had our talk and our session, burst into tears and say, "I'm so grateful you're here
and thank you so much." And some have come back for several sessions just to get
some more energy work or to do dream interpretation or just having those
conversations about the teachings or gratitude. I mean, I've had several students
coming back over and over and I had one student all summer long that, and they
just came all summer and just wanted to find some peace in their hectic world out
there. So that's

Indigenous traditional initiatives to campus and sharing those out with the campus
community?
Diane Schenandoah:
Well, I think as a place of higher learning, such as Syracuse University, I think that
it's kind of now the responsibility of the higher learning educational spaces to take
up that responsibility of sharing Indigenous culture. And Syracuse University has
made amazing strides, even just in my position or to be really supportive of
Indigenous awareness. Our history has been so buried, so hidden, so erased that
many of even our own people don't even realize the history that has been hidden.
For example, if you drive through New York state, you'll see markers, historical
markers all over the place. And rarely will you see one acknowledging the Native
person or the Native community. Very rarely. And when you fly into Syracuse, and
I've said this before, when you fly in and land at the airport, there's no
acknowledgement at all of Indigenous people when this is the birthplace of
democracy.
This is where the United States government fashioned their government after the
Confederacy. They forgot one key important role of the women. It's the clan
mothers that choose these leaders. And it is a clan mother who has a duty to
remove them if they're not listening to other people. Now, that was one of the
major elements that the United States government left out. Imagine what a
different world it would be if women were to choose our leaders and remove them
when they didn't listen to their people. And so to me, that must come out in the
forefront because there has been so much harm done to Indigenous people, and
other races as well, this is true, but Indigenous people's history has been so buried
in education.
When I was growing up in high school, there was only five paragraphs that talked
about the, and it didn't even call us Haudenosaunee, they called us Iroquois which
is a French word for “snake heads” or something like that. I mean it's really a
terrible injustice of even the knowledge coming out. So I think that it's really
important that educational systems bring this to the forefront. Back in the ’40s, the
chiefs and clan mothers from Onondaga had rewritten, and actually I think it might
have even been in the ’60s or ’70s even and probably even more recent than that,
but they have rewritten some of the history books. And the educational system at
that time refused to let the history be told...
Jen Maser:
Right.
Diane Schenandoah:
Because they wanted to be the experts, which is really sad.
Jen Maser:
It's so shameful.
Diane Schenandoah:

It is, it absolutely is. So
 I'm proud of Syracuse University and the steps you're
taking and I think that that is kind of one of my main focuses here because they
wanted to title me Indigenous
 healer but I think the only healer there is, is our
creator. So "
one who helps them" is very befitting because I think that bringing
about the awareness is so important of Indigenous
 people. And the reason being is
because that when you think about, for example, the boarding schools, all of the

So in singing with Joanne, we used to sing when we were little together, and just
kind of grew up like I said, my dad was a jazz guitarist, so we had a lot of music
going around all the time. And then I went out to Santa Fe, she went off
 to college
herself. And so when I came back home in 1990, she said, "Why don't you come sing with me, Diane?" I said, "Okay."
So we flew up to Vancouver and opened for Gordon Lightfoot and 15,000 people.
And I was like, "Oh my God, Joanne, are you serious?" And she's like, "Just don't
look at anybody. Don't look at anybody." And my knees were shaking and it was...
Singing with her. So that took a bit to get used to
,
 large audiences, but we sung at
amazing places. Oh my gosh. We
’ve sung at the Vatican, we sung at the White
House several times, inaugural balls. We opened for Willie Nelson and Crystal Gayle
and Randy Travis and Smokey Robinson came and saw us sing and kissed our
hands
,
 how beautiful it was, and
 we have a picture of Johnny Cash kissing us. And
yeah, really I could name drop all afternoon
…

But we've had an amazing, amazing
time. And for that, I'm truly grateful. She brought me along and I lived an

extraordinary journey with her, sa5.8 (r)]TJ
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And again, I'm sorry for your loss.

Diane Schenandoah:

Thank you. Thank you.

Jen Maser:

So just one last thing, on a logistical note, if a student is listening to this interview
and wants to work with you and wants to be exposed to your amazing energy, how
would they go about doing that?

Diane Schenandoah:

They just call up the Barnes. Call the Barnes
 Center, 443
.8000
,
 and make an
appointment to see Diane Schenandoah, Honwadiyenawa'sek
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Jen Maser:

Perfect. Awesome.

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the 'Cuse Conversations podcast.
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