Web Video Text Track (VTT)

# **Video Title**

The title of the video is “Dr. Richard Hill – Voices from Here.” The video is thirteen minutes and fourteen second in length.

# **Video Description**

In this video, Richard Hill shares about the complexities of Haudenosaunee territory, wampum belt teachings, and his work to repatriate material culture to his community.

# **Web Video Text Track**

00:08

The idea was that this beautiful earth that was given to us is like a dish

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and inside that dish is everything for us to be healthy and to be fed.

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So, all the plants, the animals, the birds…

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And the concept was:

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we're all going to share from the dish with the same spoon.

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Everybody gets their equal share;

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everybody gets an opportunity to take that.

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So, it's about sharing the resources of this land.

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But in order to share it, there are some simple rules.

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One is you only take what you need right now.

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Feed yourself, make yourself well.

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You always leave something in the dish for other people

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so they can enjoy it as well.

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And you keep the dish clean.

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You don't pollute your kitchen;

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you don't pollute where the food comes from.

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Only recently, in the last few years,

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have the Anishinabek people and the Haudenosaunee people said,

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“Let’s get back to this sharing, let’s get back to this idea.”

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So, we’re working very hard to recover our notion of

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the Great Dish, and the Dish with One Spoon.

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Why is it important that we share?

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It’s got to do with hunting, fishing, and gathering.

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But it’s also got to do with a healthy frame of mind.

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That maybe inside that dish – what nature provides –

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is healthier for us than what the supermarkets provide.

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Maybe what’s inside this dish will help us be stronger Indigenous people.

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So, that’s why we’re trying to explore that.

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Maybe the Dish will even help us recover

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from colonization and residential school trauma.

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My name is Rick Hill.

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I'm a Tuscarora - we follow our mother's side of the family.

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My dad's a Mohawk, but my mother is a Tuscarora.

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We're here at Six Nations, at Chiefswood Park

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- it's a very historic site.

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There was a Mohawk man, George Martin Johnson,

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who built an estate here.

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He was married to an English woman, which was quite rare back then.

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They had a daughter named Pauline Johnson.

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She became a noted poet.

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Behind me is the Grand River.

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My ancestors followed this river from Lake Eerie up to this spot and settled here.

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Ironically, my mother's people, the Tuscaroras, fought against my dad's people, the Mohawks,

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during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

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But apparently, in 1950, they finally made up and they made me.

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So, the reason why we're here at Grand River is

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when the British lost the American Revolution,

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they promised to provide land here for everything that was lost in New York.

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So, my dad's ancestors moved here.

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My mother's ancestors live on the New York side of the border.

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So, that border, the Niagara River, became a political border.

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Even though we say there's no border between our people,

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there's a border.

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Ever since I was a young man, I worked in museums.

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I was really quite lucky to enter that world.

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Because in a museum, I saw things that I never saw at home.

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These old objects, all these old photographs,

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these old documents about my people, the Haudenosaunee -

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the Tuscaroras, in particular.

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So, it was a great adventure in learning.

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I’d dig around the archives,

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or go look in the storage,

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and it kind of made something click inside of me.

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That I'm connected to these people they’re talking about;

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I'm connected to the people who made this stuff.

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But I didn't grow up knowing about that.

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So, it kind of made me angry at the same time.

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"How come I don't know about my own culture? How come I don't know my own history?"

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"How come I don't speak my own language?"

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But it pushed me to learn.

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So, I spent all my life working in museums,

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in archives, at universities.

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One day, I was at a museum in Buffalo, I pulled this drawer out

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and there were these little, tiny shell beads

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- little tubular beads.

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I had heard about wampum, but I'd never seen it before.

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So, I began to explore it.

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Fortunately, I was also working with a number of elders in the city of Buffalo

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and the surrounding the communities of Tuscarora and Tonawanda.

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And they helped me understand the significance.

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Wampum beads aren't just beads, but they are devices by which the memory of our ancestors

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is passed on to the future.

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So, when you think about it, I could hold a set of beads that

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were maybe 500 years old and the memory of my ancestors was locked in those beads.

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It was a great gift.

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Of course, the problem was, tapping into that memory.

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How do I do it, as an English-speaking person,

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trying to get in touch with my relatives who only spoke their native language?

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But there is power in those beads. There's power to help you understand.

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That's why they existed.

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So, from there, I began to learn more and more about wampum,

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and I began to realize that there were hundreds of wampum belts.

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But there weren't any in our communities.

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What I brought with me are replicas of wampum belts.

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The actual belts are made of these tiny shell beads -

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they're considered sacred and powerful.

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But we use these replicas to help teach about them.

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This big belt that I have here

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represents the foundation of our way of life, our government.

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Originally, there were Five Nations. You can see them here on the belt:

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the Senecas, the Cayugas,

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it the middle are the Onondagas, then the Oneidas, and the Mohawks.

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They joined together to make a Confederacy of Peace.

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I'm a Tuscarora, we joined this Confederacy in about 1715.

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Today, we are called the Six Nations. But the wampum belt records the time -

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it was a tough time, people were fighting.

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It records this message of piece that comes - that's what the white represents.

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In a field of darkness, it brings unity and peacefulness to our way of life.

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This is like our constitution. And it carries the memory of our ancestors.

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Now, we believe this actually came from the Sky World, from the Creator.

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He wanted us to live in peace, so he introduced it.

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In the centre, you can see, is a pine tree. It's a white pine.

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It's our symbol of peace.

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If you drive around, you look in the woods,

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you'll notice these tall trees sticking up every now and then -

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that's the white pine.

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It's meant to shelter us.

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If we gather together under the pine tree, we can live in peace.

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We can come to one mind on these matters.

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So, this one is called the Two Row Wampum,

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and it represents an agreement that we are going to co-exist on the river of life.

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One path represents the canoe of my ancestors.

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Think of it this way - if you're getting in a canoe,

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inside you put your laws, your customs, your beliefs, your language.

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The other path represents the ship of the Europeans.

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Inside their ship are the same things:

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their laws, their beliefs, their customs, everything that matters to them.

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These two ships are supposed to go down the river together,

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but they're not supposed to interfere with each other.

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People in the canoe aren't supposed to steer the ship.

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People in the ship aren't supposed to try to steer the canoe.

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This was really the founding treaty.

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Now, treaty isn't just words on a paper.

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It's really about the relationship between these two things.

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The relationship of the people of the canoe to the people of the ship.

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So, part of my job was to recover this.

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How do I get the wampum from the museums returned back to our communities,

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so that we can use it and learn from that?

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They called that repatriation:

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returning something to another country or the place of origin.

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And that's been a very important part of my life.

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So, when the English defeated the Dutch, in the 1600s,

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they made a treaty with the Haudenosaunee, the Five Nations,

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symbolized by this Wampum belt.

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It’s called the Covenant Chain of Peace.

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On one side, we see the Crown head of Great Britain.

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On the other side, we see the Native leaders -

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the Haudenosaunee Chiefs.

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They made this chain, this path that connects them together.

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And it means that they're always going to be honest with each other,

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they're always going to be helpful to each other,

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they're going to promote peace.

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But when the King wanted our attention, he would shake the chain.

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We would come to his Indian agents working in Albany

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and the Indian agents would gather us together.

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And they would usually ask us to do a couple of things.

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First, they would put in our hand a tomahawk, like this.

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A tomahawk is interesting because it's a pipe where you can make peace,

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or it's a blade, which you can force people to want to make peace.

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With this, they would say, "Take this and go fight our enemies,"

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"the enemies of the King. Get them into submission."

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Being loyal allies, we did that, we took that tomahawk.

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We then fought the people who were jeopardizing the Crown's colony,

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which often meant fighting against France and their Native allies.

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And then, we'd make peace, and we would gather together

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to polish this chain, as they say.

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So, you can think of the chain as three links in a silver chain.

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This represents our desire for peace,

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that we'll always have respect for one another,

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and if we do that, we're going to have on-going friendship.

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Now, the meaning of these links kind of changed through time,

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but its basic principles: good mindedness,

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meaning we'll be honest, trustworthy.

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We’re going to be respectful to each other.

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We're going to solve our problems without resorting to violence.

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We are going to make amends when our people do hurt one another

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because what we want is for that chain to be strong and last forever.

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When we forget the Chain, it gets a little, dusty or dirty.

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So, when we gather in a treaty meeting, we're polishing the chain.

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We're renewing our friendship.

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We're renewing our agreements.

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This is what's very important to us -

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- is that the treaty isn't just about what was written in 1677, or 1701, or 1784,

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it's the quality of this relationship.

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Now like all relationships, you're going to have a little difficulty.

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And if you don't sit down and use your good mind to resolve those difficulties,

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there's going to be chaos.

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And that worked really quite well until about 1830.

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Then the British and the Canadians changed their thinking.

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They began to look at us as subjects, or wards of the government.

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So, I spent all my life working in museums, archives, and at universities.

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I kind of look at myself as a cultural detective.

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My job is to go and find this evidence, find this information,

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try to figure out if it's true.

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Connect the dots and help me understand myself and my people.

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But also, help me understand how did we get in this situation we are in?

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Now one thing I learned

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is just because it's written doesn't mean it's true.

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Oftentimes, the British and the French would alter what was said,

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would put words in the mouths of my ancestors and write it

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for their convenience and not for ours.

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One of the biggest challenges in working with an archive

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is having the authority or the credentials to get into places.

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Since I didn't have a PhD and I wasn't a recognized scholar,

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oftentimes, I would get locked out of these places.

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Or I'd have to go in there with some non-Native scholar.

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But things began to change, rules have changed.

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We had a lot of protests going on in the '70s and '80s

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trying to force museums to recognize that

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the people living today

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have a right to understand and have access to their material culture –

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the objects and written documents.

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So, it was quite a power struggle

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to get anthropologists and historians to realize

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that we have a legitimate right to our information, to our knowledge,

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and that their job has been to help collect it and preserve it,

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but ultimately, to pass it on to people like myself.

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Otherwise, they come to our communities, harvest all the knowledge,

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get all of the objects, and off it goes, and you never see them again.

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I’m proud to say that our group, our team,

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we’ve recovered over 400 wampum items from different museums in

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the United States and Canada.

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It’s helped us immensely understand better about our history, our culture,

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and our personality as Haudenosaunee people.

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And I’ve been working at that ever since about 1970.

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So, it’s been a long time.

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Some things I still don’t understand.

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Some things I’m still trying really hard to grasp.

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But without the document, without the photograph, without the artifact,

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or the object, I wouldn’t even have the questions to answer.

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So, I’m very happy to have been working in museums all my life.

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And if we draw upon these great traditions of the past,

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I think we can live and coexist peacefully, as intended in that Two Row Wampum.

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So, we have to kind of build that relationship

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and maybe focus a little bit less on government to government, and more on people to people.

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Then maybe this next generation of Canadians will understand more clearly what happened

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to our people, what happened to their people, and will find better ways to make amends for that.

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But not out of guilt or shame, but because renewing peace with Indigenous people is

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a powerful thing.

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Our ancestors enjoyed it.

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They realized this is the only gift we can give to the future generations.

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It’s a mechanism by which they can respect one another.

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So, it’s all here. It’s all laid out.

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We have to pick up those wampum belts, we have to polish that chain.

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We have to start treating each other as if we’re members of one family.