

# Maamwi miinwaa gdaa'aami - Story Spotlight: Randy Pitawanakwat

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Aanii, boozhoo, Randy Pitawanakwat n'dizhnikaaz, Wiikwemkoong miinwaa Atikameksheng Anishnawbek ndoonjibaa. My name is Randy Pitawanakwat and I am Anishnaabe from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory and Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. I am a father to a beautiful three year old, an uncle, and a sibling, with which I'm the oldest, yikes. I've been with Seneca College as a faculty member for a little over two years and I work out of Odeyto, First Peoples' at Seneca.

What a journey, the path leading to Seneca College. I grew up in Northern Ontario splitting my time between Manitoulin Island and Sudbury Ontario. From listening to my family speak Anishnaabemowin, running around at Pow Wows with my cousins to sitting in rows at school, and going to Sunday mass at the local church in my neighbourhood. Almost complete alternate realities happening sometimes at the same time. There was no safe space for my language, culture and tradition other than in my home, the local Friendship Centre or back on the Rez so I kept any conversations about who I was to a minimum and focused my friends' and their parents, attention on more superficial conversations, video games and hockey. This pattern stayed true for all of my childhood and youth.

If there was one thing I remember especially about school, was the advice I consistently got from my mom (Mah), which was go to school, stay in school and get school done, while you're young. To which I had, many excuses but in the end, I agreed, because when the dust settled, putting my head down and getting my work done, felt like I was representing my entire family and there was pride and enjoyment from that feeling. I moved away when I was 18 to attend College for Culinary Management where I was in the culinary arts for about 5-6 years. I wrapped up the large industrial kitchen scene, late nights, and put down the tongs to attend University and pursue social work and Indigenous studies. During this time, was where I realized so much about who I was because up to that point nothing was shared in the public school system about who I was as an Anishinaabe, other than my people were saved and clothed more appropriately. My four years during my undergrad was eye popping because of how much I didn't know about my own history and how relatable this content was to my own life. It was like reading and listening to my own story in some of the

teachings and stories the Elders and professors would share, and I immediately felt connected.

After graduation I didn't hesitate to continue my school journey and pursued both my BEd and Masters at the University of Toronto. Finding work in the field of education seemed at first glance to be simple, however finding full-time work in education was not. After some time with a school board as a supply teacher I found myself on the front lines of social work and engaging with my community throughout the GTA. Supporting and providing safe spaces for Indigenous youth and families was where I found my passion for over ten years of my professional and personal career. It was this experience I marked when I was presented with this opportunity to join the Seneca team. However what I wasn't prepared for was, how much I'd be asked to share about who I am, and getting to share my story, I am forever grateful for my family and community. My story is heard and continues because of these opportunities, nahow gchi miigwech, baamaa pii.

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