

Jeh Custer

Kshatriya Teacher Trainee Scholarship Application

For most of my time at university I had planned to move to Montreal to study two of my passions: yoga and documentary film. However, in the last year of my studies I came to the reality that financially I could not afford to do so and no scholarships were available to enable these opportunities. At the time I was living in Saskatoon, working for the Sierra Youth Coalition part-time, and taking classes full-time pursuing a degree in Land Use and Environmental Studies. So I started looking for a full-time job that I could feel meaningful about, because honestly I felt the world was in too bad a situation for me to only be pursuing my self-development.

The previous summer, in 2007, I had witnessed the devastation caused by the tar sands in Northern Alberta — the way people, animals, plants, and the Earth were being hugely impacted in ways that would adversely affect future generations. From my experiences the tar sands had come to represent the frontlines of colonialism, corporate hegemony, and unsustainability. So I started applying for jobs that would help to address the social and environmental issues stemming from tar sands activity. Fortunately, I ended up getting hired by Sierra Club Canada's Prairie Chapter as an Energy Campaigner and subsequently moved to Edmonton in May 2008.

Since getting settled into the new position I have helped to plan 2 large conferences, 3 trainings camps, 4 community tours and numerous other actions and events that have reached thousands of people. My job is a lifestyle that involves lots of travel, evening and weekend meetings, and ideas that I'm always thinking about. As an environmental and social justice activist for sustainability I struggle on a daily basis to contribute to the change that is desperately needed in our world, but sometimes I find myself beleaguered by the big picture scale I'm working at.

Humanity is currently headed on a path that has some major dilemmas looming on the horizon. Many predict that if I were to live to be an old man, in my lifetime I would witness the peak availability of fossil fuels, fresh-water, industrially produced food, all while humanity's population grows ever more staggering and the climate becomes more unpredictable. It's increasingly easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the realities we are faced with. Many people in North America disengage and seek personal gratification as a way to cope and find meaning, while others literally give their lives to bring positive change to the world. It is for both these groups that I want to be a yoga teacher: those disconnected from the solutions; and those consumed by the problems.

From my experience I have found there is one aspect of life that can never be taken away: our ability to choose how we will react. In my life I have survived all sorts of negative circumstances: my parents' tumultuous relationship, abuse, physical injury that limited what activities I could participate in, addiction, the breakup of my extended family, deaths of my closest allies, and near death experiences. Through it all spirituality has been a constant that has helped me to unwrap the darkness to reveal the light.

When I discovered the practice of yoga over 5 years ago I immediately connected to physical and spiritual aspects. My yoga practice helps me to feel physically nimble and capable. For example, over 10 years ago I received a knee injury while playing football — honestly the experience feels like a lifetime ago. Since then I have undergone 3 surgeries on my knee for ACL reconstruction, but I have found yoga to be the most therapeutic for keeping my body conditioned. Mentally, emotionally, and spiritually yoga has acted as a rootedness and sense of balance while dealing with the stresses of life. For example, my work can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout, but through my yoga practice I gain a sense of peace, renewal and fuel for my life force.

This past November I was in a truck rollover on the highway that I am lucky to have walked away from. The experience has given me a newfound appreciation for life and a desire to do things I've always wanted to do, including Yoga Teacher Training, which I had initially planned to Montreal. Since the accident I have been coming back to yoga for my spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health and my practice is helping me to stay positive, learn, heal, and realign.

Yoga gives me a sense of peace while helping to renew my compassion, align my body, and empower my vision. I am interested in the Kshatriya Teacher Training so that I can expand my personal practice and more aptly teach others what I have learned, especially those who are active for sustainability. On a daily basis I work closely with people who are working hard to make the world a better place. Many have expressed to me feeling burnout or generally not taking enough time to refuel and align their spirit, body, mind, and emotions. By participating in a process that is oriented around teaching yoga I hope to gain skills and knowledge that will make me a more effective teacher so that I may impart to others what I have learned in a way that helps them to unwrap the darkness and reveal their light.