

Everyone has a dream. On the long road of life we have all taken different roads to get to our destination. Some successfully find their way, while others get lost. For Darren Pollard, it took one BART ride to figure out what's been missing in his life.

On his way to a job interview, Darren happened to sit next to Diane Dodge, Executive Director of Seven Tepees. He asked if he was going the right way to San Francisco airport. From there, they began a conversation. He confessed that he was at a crossroads, unsure about a new position in Atlanta that would keep him in the same field. His first love, he admitted, was photography and working with people.

"You owe it to yourself to follow your passions, because if you don't, you'll always wonder what would have happened. Would you be interested in teaching photography at Seven Tepees?" Diane suggested. They exchanged numbers, and when Darren got to Atlanta he started thinking about what Diane had said. He went through the motions of going about his job interview, but realized he didn't want to be there. So he returned to San Francisco. A few weeks later, he found himself hospitalized from a bad stomach flu, and it caused him to think deeply about his life. When he left the hospital, he called Diane.

The next year changed his life. He volunteered with six High School Seven Tepees youth, educating them about photojournalism. He taught them to use a camera to find beauty and meaning in things that are usually overlooked. The youth took photos of their neighborhood. He witnessed the youth growing from his guidance.



Some of the first photography students, circa 2006 - From top left: LeShanti Smith, Juan Cabrera, Geoffrey Frye, Zeltzin Tellez & Sabrina Sanders.

"In the past, my idea of being prosperous had a financial value. Now, through my experience with Seven Tepees, being prosperous has a different meaning - following your true passion in life," says Darren.

He was so excited about his photography class that he started telling everyone who would listen. He met Joyce Gordon, an owner of a prestigious art gallery in Oakland. After hearing his story, Joyce was inspired to host a fundraiser to raise money for Seven Tepees. Youth from Darren's class showcased their work at the gallery opening, as well, along with famous photographers across the globe.

At Traveler's Insurance where Darren works, co-workers responded to his enthusiasm by raising funds to purchase a camera for every youth participant. They also donated a laptop and sent 10 volunteers last summer to paint our Learning Center, an event that also helped to recruit new mentors. This was all part of a community grant which also raised \$10,000.

Darren's story is another example of the magic that happens when we share Seven Tepees with others. Great people step up, help out, and get so much back personally. Darren recently moved to Chicago to be with his family, but his legacy continues to shine through for our youth. Seven Tepees honored Darren last year at our Awards Night by recognizing him as Volunteer of the Year.



Darren Pollard & his son, Ike Pollard

"I began to realize who I was and what I was willing to give of myself. If you are knowledgeable about something, you have to give it away so it can grow," Darren says.