

The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Secret Beach

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:06

To me, going out and collecting, it's not just collecting shells, it's me - connecting with my ancestors, it's understanding what they did.

00:00:15

The best way to describe it is, ahh, this is where I'm meant to be, that's how it feels.

00:00:23

I'm just lucky to have that, and so many people don't.

00:00:26

Even in our own community, not everyone knows how to do the shell stringing, collecting, so I just feel like I'm lucky.



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Shell Stringing

Hidden Gem: Place



The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Place

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:04

So I'm Melissa West, and this is my daughter Kasey, and we come from the North, and our actual ancestral family comes from the North East.

00:00:14

And we've travelled down today to do some *maireener* collecting, shell collecting, and we've travelled down to the South East to do that, because there's only about three places in Tasmania, that I'm aware of, that we can collect the shells.

00:00:28

It's a bit like finding hen's teeth, as we say, so once you find your patch, you preserve it as much as you possibly can through sustainability.

00:00:39

I was taught if you find a shell on the seaweed, you find one, you leave one, you find one, you leave one.

00:00:44

So there's guaranteed sustainability forever, hopefully.



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Shell Stringing

Hidden Gem: Background

The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Background

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:04

I probably started a bit over 10 years ago collecting shells.

00:00:08

It's very sacred in our community.

00:00:11

It's family sharing, generally.

00:00:14

I have some beautiful elders and aunties in my family who embrace me, to teach me the traditional way of collecting shells.

00:00:27

The first time I remember doing it, I was really nervous because it's not something you can race into.

00:00:36

You've got to be invited into that cultural tradition, and I'm thinking, "What if I do the wrong thing and my aunties won't let me go back, and what if I break traditional practices?"

00:00:47

So it was really nerve-wracking, but it's not just the collecting shells I love, it's being with the aunties, being able to sit and hear the stories.

00:00:54

It's a whole day of information.

00:00:56

It's not just the shell collecting it's everything that goes with it.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Exploring The Beach

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:00

So we could go right up towards the end of that point, because there's more of the seaweed that we collect our shells from, and you'll find that closer to where a lot of people walk – there's not a lot of them because they need to stay protected.

00:00:14

So they try and stay in areas where they're protected from boats or lots of people coming in and out of the water.

00:00:24

So we're looking for just normal *maireener* today, which are the tiny little shells that are a bit pearlised which we collect to make our shell necklaces.

00:00:35

Unfortunately, we only get to do it three times a year because of our weather and because of the tides.

00:00:40

So I'd leave home at about 8 o'clock in the morning – two and a half hour drive- and I'd spend all day there.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Disappearing

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:02

There's a patch that I've been collecting from for about 10 years.

00:00:07

So the last time I collected was two years ago.

00:00:09

I like to give it a break just so they can rebreed, and I was there for three days and not one single one did I find.

00:00:17

So I don't know whether they've up and moved or if there's something in the water that's killed them.

00:00:24

And it's so hard because you – it makes you a little bit sad, because if they have died off, why?

00:00:33

The elders have said to me that have taught me, the women said that they notice less and less.

00:00:39

If we lose that patch then it's one less patch that the future generations have got to choose from, and we don't have that many that we can choose from.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Finding Shells

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:01

So here's one, do you want to have a look at one on the seaweed?

00:00:04

I'll just get my hand still so that the water tries to stay unrippled because it's easier when you're collecting.

00:00:10

That's why it's such a perfect day for collecting because the water is really clear which I thought because of our storms on the weekend that it might be a bit murky, but it's absolutely beautiful.

00:00:24

Look, there's a big one there.

00:00:27

So out of those two, I would leave that one there because it's little and take the bigger one.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Kasey's First King

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:01

When you find a king *maireener*, it's literally like winning the jackpot, - because they're so difficult to find.

Kasey West

00:00:06

We were in the deepest spot and mum was looking at something and mum said, "what" and I went "look" and she said it was a king *maireener* and we were so excited.



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Shell Stringing

Hidden Gem: Kasey

The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Kasey

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:02

Kasey was in a capsule and we'd go down to the beach and she'd sit on the beach and I'd put an umbrella in and I'd be out collecting.

00:00:07

So she's done it forever.

00:00:13

Being able to show them and spend that time with no outside internet or phone, just that back to basics stuff.

00:00:22

It's really important and really heartwarming to watch them do that.

00:00:28

Sometimes she gets sick of it – because I'll sit here for like six hours straight and do this.

00:00:32

So she gets sick of it.

00:00:33

So she's always got something she can do - find jellyfish, build sandcastles, it's like a little playground of her own.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Responsibility

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:04

It's my responsibility as an Aboriginal person to pass these traditions and cultures down to the younger generation.

00:00:12

My children first and then there will be people in the family or community to hopefully, as I'm older, the younger generation do come and ask for me to help them learn the process.

00:00:24

That's what I feel like I have to do.

00:00:26

I have to show them, to guarantee that our culture stays alive.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Focusing On The Positive

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:01

Whenever I'm out on Country doing something like this, I always give thanks to the ancestors.

00:00:08

It is sad, but I don't like to concentrate on that.

00:00:11

I don't know if that's because I don't know how to cope with that sadness all the time, but I also think I've got to concentrate on the positive and think about what they used to do, and even we're walking along the track.

00:00:24

There was three or four bits of food I've seen along the way and you look around and go, "This is exactly why they lived here."

00:00:32

You don't have to carry an esky or a bag of food, as you're walking there's food.

Kasey West

00:00:36

I'm hungry.

Melissa West

00:00:37

Yeah, I'm hungry.

Kasey West

00:00:39

She's talking about food and I'm hungry.

Melissa West

00:00:41

How do you feel, Kase, when you're out collecting?

Kasey West

00:00:43

Happy.

Melissa West

00:00:44

Happy?

00:00:44

What makes you happy about it?

Kasey West

00:00:46

Because I'm collecting things that my ancestor used to collect.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Hidden Gem → Holder Of Knowledge

Video Transcript

Melissa West

00:00:00

When you are out there, you look around and you put things together and you go “this is why this happens” or “this is why they sit here.”

00:00:10

I mean, I learn every time I come out here.

00:00:12

I learn, you know, the different tides or different weather, different sea-weeds.

00:00:16

I learn every single day, especially our culture.

00:00:21

That’s the important part that I want to make sure my girls know.

00:00:24

It’s not just a take it for granted lets go out and pick the shells, it’s all those little things that they’ve got to learn to value what they are given.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Fifth Generation

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:05

My name is Bronwyn and I'm fifth generation from Fanny Cochrane Smith.

00:00:10

I've always collected shells always.

00:00:15

A lot of the times I would pick up *maireener*, which is the jewel of the sea, and they're very hard to get these days.

00:00:23

So I would have clear jam jars all around my room and I'd have named on them which beach I got them from.

00:00:31

I had a shell book and, you know, I'd look through that and name the shells.

00:00:37

It wasn't until I got a bit older later on in life that I learned that that's a part of me, that's a part of my culture and that's why I've been doing it.



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Shell Stringing

Full Circle: Arlo

The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Arlo

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:03

This is Arlo and he's my two year old son.

00:00:07

He's very into *rinas*, that's the palawa kani word for shell.

00:00:13

Any type of shell is a *rina*, "*rina*", yes.

00:00:19

And he loves collecting with me, and even though he's only two years old he can spot a *maireener*.

00:00:28

It's really, really cool and he enjoys it, you know, paddling in the rockpools with me and spending quality time together.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Special Beach

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:03

When I first got to this beach, I didn't know there were shells here.

00:00:08

And I was standing up here with one of my best friends and I said, "I might just go and have a look over there for some shells."

00:00:16

And she said, "Oh, is there shells here?"

00:00:17

And I said, "I'm not sure, I've just got a funny feeling that there is."

00:00:21

And I went over there and I couldn't believe how many shells were there and I was like, "there's shells, there's shells, come over, bring everyone."

00:00:29

And so this has been a really favourite place of mine to be able to take the children and collect shells, keeping in line with respecting the environment around us.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Sustainable

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:01

I do really only collect from areas that I know, and I know that other people don't go there, and I look after that area.

00:00:11

I've never been worried about a shortage of shells, but with the *maireener*, definitely.

00:00:18

They're really, really hard to find and when you find a honey hole you have to really respect that area.

00:00:26

So you wouldn't take juvenile shells off there, you'll only take the ones that are grown.

00:00:31

You'd never pull the weed out of the ground and then the year after, you go back and those little ones, they're ready for you.

00:00:38

And if you respect that, it's going to respect you back and give you what you need.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Collecting

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:03

I don't think you can actually find shells.

00:00:07

It's not until you're taught how to do it, but it's until you're ready.

00:00:10

And I call it – it's my own made up word, it's called the '*maireener* eye', and I don't think you get that until you are spiritually ready to take on the responsibility of what that means.

00:00:23

It all comes back to the environment and sustainability of that area as well.

00:00:28

So you'd never rip out the whole piece of seaweed that your shells are growing on.

00:00:34

You'd very gently put your hand under it, and you trickle your hand down and the shells fall into your hand.

00:00:40

Amazingly enough, they don't fall everywhere, they stay in your hand.

00:00:44

And then you just go along each leaf and you take them off very, very gently: it's a gentle process.

00:00:51

When you're out there and you're doing that, you're not thinking about anything else, you're just thinking about making sure these shells arrive safely at the beach.

00:01:00

It's, like I said before, very meditative.



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Shell Stringing

Full Circle: Sharing

The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Sharing

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:07

I was approached by TMAG to do the *luna tunapri* project, which involved shell-stringing necklaces being taught by my elders, and it was just an opportunity that you won't ever get again, and I jumped at it.

00:00:26

Well, I learned everything from collecting, to grading the shells.

00:00:33

Grading shells can take up to two weeks itself, so that's putting them in the same size group, if they already have holes in them, or if the tops are off them and just making sure you have, at the end of it, a bunch of absolutely perfect, pristine shells that you're going to be stringing a necklace with.

00:00:50

My teacher was Aunty Corrie, and she's an absolutely amazing woman.

00:00:54

She doesn't just teach you how to string shells, she gives you a story with absolutely everything that she teaches you.

00:01:02

So I learned a lot about Aunty Corrie during that time as well.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Grandmother's Necklace

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:02

This is a really, really precious piece to me.

00:00:06

It's the very first necklace that I ever made.

00:00:10

It's made from rice shells and blue gulls, and the whole time that I was making it, I was thinking of my grandmother, Ena Dillon, and, at the end of it, the obvious thing to do would be to give it to her.

00:00:29

So after I finished making it, I went down to her house at Nicholls Rivulet and she put on a pot of tea, and we were having a cup of tea, and I said, "Oh, ma," – because we used to call her 'ma' – "I've made you something. I went on a shell necklace making project, and we made a shell necklace, and I've made one and I want to give it to you."

00:00:49

I haven't, in my lifetime, seen her as happy as what I saw in her that day.

00:00:54

She was so excited and she was almost in my bag, she said, "Where is it? I have to see it, I have to see it."

00:01:00

And I got it out for her and she said it's so beautiful and she said, "Can you put it on for me?"

00:01:06

So I put it on her neck.

00:01:09

She's passed now and that's going to be one of those memories that's never, ever going to leave me, and I love that.

00:01:19

So when she passed, this was given back to me.

00:01:22

So it's a very precious part of my history.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Passing It On

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:03

Because this is women's business, that's just how it is.

00:00:08

Men have men's business and we have women's business.

00:00:10

So I won't teach either of my boys how to string necklaces, but I have no problems with them coming with me and collecting and identifying different types of shells, and knowing which ones are good shells, and which ones are not good shells.

00:00:24

I think one of the really important things is the knowledge to pass down to my boys, is when we do collect, is to look after our environment while we do that.

00:00:34

This part they see me do, they've watched me do it, but I won't be teaching them how to do it.

00:00:40

Maybe if one of them give me a little grandchild that's a girl, I'll be able to do that one day.

00:00:47

But, you know, I've a sister as well who I'm teaching how to do shell stringing, and all the girls in the family will eventually learn how to do this.

00:00:58

So in one way, it's a little bit sad that I can't teach the boys to do it, but we have an abundance of women that will be able to pass that knowledge down.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Making A Necklace

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:02

For me I have to be sitting down with everything out in front of me and as I go the story will begin of what necklace it's for.

00:00:11

I kind of go into a meditative state when I'm doing it, and it's like my hands already know what they're supposed to be doing.

00:00:18

I don't actually have to think too hard about what's happening, because I've been taught properly how to do it.

00:00:25

So, for example, I made a necklace a few weeks ago because my son, Oliver, he's 10, he sees the process of it and he sees the end result, and he's always, "When are you making me a necklace, mum? I want a necklace."

00:00:40

So I decided to make him a necklace; I wish I had brought it here today.

00:00:45

So what I did, I sat down and said, "Okay. I'm going to figure out a story for your necklace."

00:00:50

As I went through I went, "Alright. He's born on the 23rd of January."

00:00:55

So I did 23 blue gulls and then one *maireener*, so it's 23rd of the 1st and that was his necklace and it was amazing, it was really pretty.

00:01:05

So your story evolves as you make the necklace.

00:01:09

When I'm doing it, I'm not bothered by anything that's surrounding me.

00:01:12

It's like everything goes quiet and I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

00:01:17

Deep within, I feel content sitting and just stringing.



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Shell Stringing

Full Circle: Sacred

The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Sacred

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:05

Sharing is such an important part of my culture, but it's the trusting the people with the information that you give them, you know, not to spoil it.

00:00:16

For that *luna tunapri* project, it must have been so difficult for our old elders to let go and release that information, that they've held onto and kept quiet for how many years – so many years – and they came to us with open arms and showed us absolutely everything.

00:00:36

Now, I can see what a struggle it is to actually share that gift you that have, and I'm very careful in who I share my shell necklace stuff with.

00:00:49

Because it's a cultural activity, it's just for us mob, it's our special thing.

00:00:57

And I would love to keep it that way.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Full Circle → Resistance

Video Transcript

Bronwyn McAnally

00:00:03

My ancestor Fanny Cochrane Smith, I know she strung shells.

00:00:06

I wish I could just turn back time and just go and sit with her for a little while while she was stringing a necklace, you know, and see exactly what she did.

00:00:14

She was born at Wybalenna.

00:00:17

Which is where they christianised all of our people there and they weren't allowed to speak their language, and culture was really stripped.

00:00:25

So she held on to this practice from her mother.

00:00:30

And she kept it for a really long time before she was allowed to go and do it again.

00:00:37

And from what I know, when Fanny died on my line, I haven't spoken to anyone in my family who has actually done shell stringing since Fanny Cochrane Smith.

00:00:47

So when she died that's when the shell stringing died with her.

00:00:51

So that's why it was just such an important thing for me to be able to pick up.

00:00:56

Because it's an amazing way for me to connect with my fifth-generation grandmother.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Auntie Lola

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:01

My name is Lola Greeno, I'm an Aboriginal woman born on Cape Barren Island.

00:00:06

I remember walking on the beach with the elders to collect shells, so that was probably the first introduction to shell-necklace making.

00:00:17

I think the elders came down to mum's on a Sunday after church in those days.

00:00:23

So we all walked along the beach.

00:00:25

The beach was just about 100 yards from our house, so it was part of our backyard, part of our playground.

00:00:32

Running along beside the old women and picking up shells and putting it in their container for them, that was our contribution in those days.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Art School

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:02

It wasn't until I came to live in Launceston and decided to go and do a Diploma of Fine Arts, and the students started asking me where I came from, what we did over there.

00:00:14

When it first started, I decided I wasn't going to release any of that knowledge, it's going to stay here in my heart, that's where it belongs.

00:00:24

When I started reading about other artists, and I thought, "well, if there's no information to go with their work it doesn't have a value, in a sense, and you can't understand it".

00:00:37

So I thought very seriously, and thank goodness I did, because I thought to myself I've got to do some work with my mother while she's still here with us, and I did.

00:00:48

So I started doing some work with my mother and learning the tips of the trade, really.

00:00:53

Asking her questions about the island and my growing up as a kid over there.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Rediscovery

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:02

When we thought about working – which was probably more seriously in the early 90s – they weren't considered of any great value and within five years, prices tripled.

00:00:17

[The] majority of museums and art galleries around Australia had very few in their collection.

00:00:23

I think the Melbourne museum had some, and they didn't really know where to place them, where to exhibit them, whether they exhibit them in ethnographical collection, or whether they were in history or cultural.

00:00:35

Once this museum started collecting then everybody was asking about them.

00:00:41

Well, it's reached the stage for me that I can only do what I can cope with.

00:00:46

I mean, I'm represented by the National Gallery of Victoria.

00:00:50

I've got work in every museum and art gallery except WA and Northern Territory, and I have about three places that sell my work for me plus the internet, and that's enough.



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Shell Stringing

Cultural Evolution: Process



The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Process

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:02

I also go into the schools and talk to students and I take a short film and some slides, and I can talk to each slide, because there's so many processes to this – because I always have a slide of either me or my daughter in the water, so it gives them an idea about this is where it starts from.

00:00:17

It really starts from collecting on the beach, but the traditional shell was collected live from the kelp out of the water.

00:00:28

And so then you see all those processes, a number of processes, before you get it prepared, before it's ready to string, as they say, or thread to make into a necklace.

00:00:42

The other thing is we've always looked for special beaches to go, now, to get the best quality shells, and that took some years.

00:00:52

It takes searching.

00:00:52

Last Saturday I went looking for shells down the East Coast, two hours' drive down, two hours on the beach, two hours back, and I probably got out of those just a container twice that size which I can make a long necklace if I mix it with other shells.

00:01:14

So I'm thinking that's the thought towards making a good necklace for an exhibition.

00:01:19

However, I didn't throw the other ones away because I'll use those for a workshop so they can make a bracelet.

00:01:26

It's a really nice feeling because while you're talking to them and while they're making something that they finish and can wear, there's pride in that and they're listening all the time.

00:01:37

So that's important to me - is to appreciate and be proud of what these are and what they represent for us.

00:01:47

Once you feel like you own the knowledge, you can then share it much easier, I think.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Practice

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:02

I said to my grandson yesterday, I got an order from New York this morning off the internet and he said, "Wow, nan," because he's internet connected when he wants to buy something online.

00:00:13

And he's thinking this process now something of mine is going to go the other way.

00:00:18

All in all, if somebody ordered one of these from me, they can take me 12 months because they're so scarce to get because there's only a couple of places now where they're left growing.

00:00:33

Something like this, I might say to them, "Look, you need to give me eight weeks' time to do it".

00:00:38

So when I'm in a big exhibition and I've got a number of pieces in my head, I'll continue to make.

00:00:44

But, quite often, it's what I've got in my kit at home, how many shells I've got in it and what shells I've got influences what can I make next.

00:00:54

And I think for me being lucky doing my associated diploma and then my Bachelor of Fine Arts, you're encouraged to look for new ideas and how you can make your stories into more contemporary work.

00:01:06

I just think it tells another story for us: it tells another story about me.

00:01:10

But, you know, even though I'm still connected to this and my culture and I know all about my growing up as a kid over there on the islands, to make this interesting, you can create new work in new ways, but that's - about the stage we're at now.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Patterns

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:01

I have invented one of my own patterns that I call the Cape Barren Goose Necklace, and I've used grey gull shells for the feathers, and the orange shells for its beak and it's got white under its wings and black on its feet.

00:00:20

Sometimes you do strive to get special shells – because I want to do 12 for Queensland next year – I'm going to be striving to make 12 different ones that I can, as much as I can.

00:00:35

There was a discussion that some families had a pattern, and the eldest one made the necklaces, then the younger sister learned from her, and you could almost say that was that family's necklaces.

00:00:51

When my mum told me that the first necklaces she made, she traded with a church minister, and it was quite interesting – years later when I worked for Arts Tasmania, we went to look at the museum in Stanley, and some of those old necklaces that the minister had gathered is in that collection down there.

00:01:13

We don't have names on them, but you know it's coming from there, because they've got rice shells in them and they've got green *maireener* in them.

00:01:22

So you can almost pick out what part of Tasmania they come from, in a sense.

00:01:28

My mum also told me a story that she was given a house from one of her uncles, but her grandmother had left some shells in there in jars for her.

00:01:38

So that's a nice story as well.

00:01:40

It's like symbolic of handing on to the next generation, because my mum's mother died when she was only 12 so it was her grandmother who taught her all that she needed to know.



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Shell Stringing

Cultural Evolution: Pride



The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Pride

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:01

When we opened the gallery here - The First Tasmanians - I wore a necklace that my mother-in-law made because she's the oldest necklace maker in Tasmania, I mean, she's 94.

00:00:10

I thought I'm going to have plenty of time to wear mine.

00:00:13

It would be nice to wear one that she'd given me.

00:00:19

We all wore necklaces that night which was saying, "Here we are, we're so proud of these, and they represent us in this sort of way".

00:00:27

And as soon as people see you wearing a necklace now – I mean, I wore one to my sister's funeral a few weeks ago.

00:00:33

They said, "You're wearing your necklace."

00:00:34

I said, "Yeah, I wore one to my brother's funeral too," because he was so proud of what I was doing, and so this was a way of celebrating his life and saying goodbye to him, but with this special object.

00:00:46

And I think that's what they are, is about being proud and showing who you are and wearing it that way and celebrating a life either way.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Shell Stringing → Cultural Evolution → Wisdom

Video Transcript

Lola Greeno

00:00:01

I just think that, you know, for young people in education it's really important to try and learn about it.

00:00:07

You've got to go back to older people and learn from them.

00:00:12

And try and go to the beach with other people, other children, or families.

00:00:20

And I think that's the best way to learn to appreciate it, I mean you've got to enjoy doing what you're doing.

00:00:27

And I think it's about that passion, you've got to have the passion for it.

00:00:31

And, you know, the love is got to be in your heart and you'll enjoy it.

00:00:37

And you will do, you can do, anything you want to.



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