

John Paul Janke's Story – Transcript

(John Paul Janke – AIATSIS Community & Engagement)

I'm an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. I'm an Aboriginal from Cape York peninsula – Wuthathi country, which is on the eastern side of Cape York peninsula about 20 miles from the tip of Australia.

But also I'm a Torres Strait Islander. My heritage is from Murray island. My grandfather is a Torres Strait islander. So, I enjoy being able to identify as both as a Torres Strait islander. And comes from sort of rich heritage on both sides.

I think the Aboriginal side again gives us respectfulness of who we are in our identity. And it gives you a strong family connection. You know the ability to be able to say you're from Cape York peninsula. You're Wuthathi. You're Aboriginal. It gives you a bond with a lot of other far North Queensland – Murri and Kooris. But it gives you that strong family element. For me, that's one of the sort of the central cogs of who I am that strengthens my identity.

Cairns is always going to be home. As soon as I step off the plain – it's the salt, it's the salt water, it's the air, it's the humidity, it's the feeling of home. And going back to Cairns is part of that sort of spiritual journey. But you know Cairns is a really cosmopolitan place now. And growing up was very different than what it was. But it's always still home. You can see a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cultures now enforcing Cairns. That's very vibrant culture. I love going back to Cairns.

Going back to the Torres Strait, which I had the opportunity through work. It's going back and being reintroduced to culture and being reintroduced to family. And it's that family aspect of the Torres Strait Islander culture which is very important. It's one of the central cogs of who you are as a Torres Strait Islander.

So, having had the opportunity to go back to TI (Thursday Island) and meet relatives for the first time. Word gets around in TI that you're in town and people come down and actually introduce themselves to you and meet themselves. And you work out the family tree. And that gives you a pretty good grounding of who you are and where you come from.

I think it gives you strength of your identity. It shows that you have a really strong family connection. That family dates back to many generation.

I had the opportunity to watch Seaman Dan performed at the local Torres Strait Islander hotel. He's a Torres Strait Islander icon. So, I went up and introduced myself to him and told him who I was. And he was a very good friend of my grandfather, who is a Torres Strait islander. So, he remembers my grandfather and said to me "Boy, we're family. You're part of my family." And I got to talk to him about my grandfather. And now I also got to meet other people in the venue who heard me talked about who I was and my surname and they say "Look, I'm your aunty. I'm your cousin." So, it brought back a lot of memories and it actually taught me about more about who I was in relation to the islands.