



Interview with Major Sumner

A Ngarrindjeri Elder



What does Country mean to you?

“I’m a Ngarrindjeri man. I’m a part of this country and it’s a part of me, the birds, the snakes, the lizards, the fish the spiders – we’re all a part of each other.

I am tied to this country - it’s in me, the ceremonies, the stories about the creation of the land and the things that were created by our creator. Our country provides us with everything we need.

We tell our stories of our land and our ngatja (totems, friends) through our dances. My ngatji (totem) is the tal-kin-jeri (bustard). Because I am spiritually connected to the tal-kin-jeri, I must not hunt it or harm it in any way.

The Tal-kin-jeri dance group, of which I am the Elder and song man, honours the spirit of this land and all its creatures. The dances represent our connection to culture and they help to heal my people and country.



The Ngarrindjeri Nation dances and ceremonies have continued for thousands of years and as a young boy I remember the dances that were performed on the shores of Lake Alexandrina by Ngarrindjeri men.

I can never leave my country. When I go overseas I take a little bit (such as a rock) with me and then I bring it home and put it back where I found it.”

What does Culture mean to you?



“Nearly the same as country - but it is practicing our stories and activities and dancing and performing in ceremonies for my country and with other tribal groups.

This is important because it helps us to connect with other groups and keep up friendships. We all need each other for ceremonies.

I don’t practice culture for economic gain. I do it because I want to learn, teach and survive and be connected to my country and people.”

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