

John Paul Darden interview transcript. Running time 3 min, 21 sec. Conducted at the Chitimacha Museum in Charenton, Louisiana, on November 23, 2021, by Independent Curator Dayna Bowker Lee. Written interview transcription by Curatorial Assistant Alex Landry. Interview text and audio have been edited for clarity by Newcomb Curator Laura Blereau with Landry.

John Paul Darden. I was born in 1960. I was born in a hospital in New Iberia. I grew up here on a reservation, so I lived all my life on reservation. I moved away for three years and that's about as long as I could stay away. I was in New Iberia and we wound up back here, so we were here every day when I was off. All our families are here, mine and Scarlett's. For me, it was my grandmother always wove. Scarlett's grandmother wove. They got older, so we actually would bring them out to gather cane.

We've got baskets that have been around for hundreds of years. And they go from one generation to the next, and that's why our patterns are consistent. You know, they're handed down. But like I said, unfortunately, every family doesn't have every pattern. They have different favorites that they like to do. Like, my grandmother loved to do 'bear's ear' pattern, or the 'bear's earring' we call it, that was one of her favorites. Of course, there's an old one, that's a pattern basket on that. And then we've got pattern baskets for trunk-shaped double weaves and just different ones.

Baskets come from the heart. And it's something that when you're ready to do, you do. Scarlett and I, we were both grown when we learned to do the baskets. And it's just a connection that we have. That's actually, for me, it's a connection for the tribe. I mean, that's something that has been around forever, and it's handed down generation to generation and you're proud of that. When you do your first basket, you'll see you're very proud, too, but it's something that you have to feel from within. It's not something that you're going to do just for—my grandmother did it all her life, worked on baskets. Scarlett's grandmother had worked on baskets like that. They did it to help support their families. But you don't start out doing baskets just for the sale of baskets. You start out for the gratification of that basket. And that's a

connection to your past. That's something that's always been here, that's Chitimacha. You learn to appreciate that. And I always say when you make a basket, it comes from within. It's a little part of you that goes in every one of those that you make.

Every basket really is unique. Might have the same patterns, it might have a little bit different turn or something, and it depends on when you're weaving what you feel. And when you look at it if you're okay with that or if you want to go a little more one way or the other. So, there's a little of you in every basket. And you know, we got different moods and different stuff, so sometimes they're a little different. They all have a number pattern to them. And every one, once it gets halfway, you go back with your numbers. But Scarlett weaves by just looking at the patterns. I remember numbers in my head. So I weave by numbers, and if I'm doing something like these, these are simple. That's simple because it's basically just 21232123. And then that next row is going to be 5353. And you're just doing it in steps, you just keep doing that repetitively the whole thing. And it looks nice, real easy compared to any of the other patterns. Just like a bird's eye pattern. Bird's eye is real easy compared to any of the rest and looks beautiful.

Darden baskets, if you look at our baskets, in any one that we do it, once we finish our patterns, we always put a red [splint]. So you can always see that. When we finish, you're gonna see that red, that row of red. And no matter how old that basket is, if you see that row of red, you know it's one of our family members that made it.