“You must be yourself to be comfortable in your own skin.”

The Connector

Terri Janke

As Terri Janke will modestly tell you, she is ‘a Murri from Cairns’.

With family connections to both the Torres Strait Islands (Meriam) and Cape York Peninsula (Wuthathi), Terri has joked that she took a class at university because she wanted to become an intellectual.

The Sydney-based lawyer, international speaker and author has truly proved that and beyond.

Terri’s first novel, *Butterfly Song*, was published in 2005 and her roles include Board Member of Tourism Australia, consultant to the World Intellectual Property Organisation and until recently, Chairwoman of National Indigenous Television. As Solicitor Director of Terri Janke and Company Pty Ltd, which represents Indigenous artists and creators, Terri is a world authority on Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.

Just as her 100 per cent Indigenous-owned company has a goal to build a culture of respect where knowledge and innovation work together, Terri strives for recognition for Indigenous people all over the world who share not only common life challenges, but opportunities in sharing their traditional knowledge, culture and extraordinary talents with the wider community to mutual benefit.

What does happiness mean to you? Happiness is that feeling which makes you feel that you smile from the inside out. Happiness is smiling at yourself, thinking that there are things that you are grateful for. It might just be being alive. Or you may be thinking of good memories, like remembering your childhood – the day you met someone special, touching the finger of your newborn child, having made a decision to go into business, having made a decision to do what you want to do, to sing, to write books and to do it because it makes you happy.

What are your happiest memories? Happiest times were when the children were born and now, is the family life we have together. I love being part of this family and every day I draw strength from them.

What is your favourite way to relax? My favourite way to relax is to be with my family, on a beach in the warm sun.

What has been your biggest challenge? I had really bad eczema as a child. It made me feel very uncomfortable and I was always scratching. Kids used to make fun of me and I also got teased for being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. But as I grew older, I grew more confident and my eczema went away. I think this has become a lesson for my life. When I stopped and paid attention and found 'me' in the crowded world, I grew strong in my identity, as an Indigenous woman and as me, Terri.

What do you think will be one of the biggest future challenges for society? Keeping connected to our spirit. This challenge is at the heart of the wider challenge for caring for our planet and looking after the land, the plants and animals, the people. Keeping connections is also about learning to live with other people and remembering that we are just part of an ongoing thing called life. What can we do about it? Remember that we are part of this integral thing called life. Live with passion, but remember to leave something to pass on to the future generations.

Your tips to maintain a balanced, healthy and happy life? Firstly, eat fresh fruit and vegetables. Secondly, drink lots of water. Thirdly, work on projects with people that inspire you, not drain your energy.

What was the best thing your mother taught you? When it gets hard, that's when most people give up – keep going and you will achieve.

Your greatest teacher? I was influenced by my high school psychology teacher. Her passion for the subject, her calm manner, clear way of speaking, her respect for other people, has always stayed with me. I gravitated to the topic and was open to a whole new insight. Up until that time I hadn't really thought I could achieve things or do well at anything. It was all about just plodding along. It was always 'Terri could do better', but this teacher engaged me and she always encouraged me. It is an example of a teacher talking the talk and walking the walk. She had real integrity. I ran into her at a busy airport a few years ago, thinking she'd never remember me. She at least pretended she remembered me and said, "It looks like you used what you learnt in my classes." So true! I use those lessons every day.

Can love conquer all? In its pure sense, not just romantic love, but pure love, can do amazing things. It's got to be used for good means – you don't want to use love as a hold back, a stick, a ball and chain. For real love may mean giving up things, not getting your way, but if you listen to love to make true decisions, it's hardly ever wrong.

Why is love so important? We need it more than we think we do.

What qualities do you aspire to have? Courage, integrity, empathy and vision.

Who has made a difference to your life? I have had many mentors who have helped me in my careers from professional to personal friends. I think I have drawn inspiration from a lot of people who have just listened and then given advice. My husband, Andrew, is my strongest mentor. He is patient, listens and has always been there for me, without fail.

Best business decision ever made? Going into my own legal practice.

Your biggest mistake? Not learning from my mistakes.

Do you set yourself benchmarks for success and how do you reward yourself? Chocolate has always worked wonders for me! But seriously, when I finish a big job, or reach a highlight, I take time out and have some time for me.

What are two things you wish you knew earlier in life? You don't have to please everyone. This would have saved me time with some of the harder decisions I had to make. Hold the line – when things seem tough, they will pass and then you will wonder what all the worry was about.

What makes a great relationship? Patience, lots of passion and love, being able to grow with each other, listening, not always trying to solve it all and allowing that other person scope to be themselves.

How do you achieve work and life balance? I find this concept hard to grasp. I often work in the middle of the night and find it hard to take time off. I am working on how to better achieve the work and life balance by placing just as much importance on holidays, health appointments, time with my children and husband. I have to turn off the mobile phone and leave the laptop at home. Some of the better holidays I have had is where the mobile is out of range and there is no internet connection. Next time I might try a place where there is no power because this will stop me trying to write all night in my journal, or read those business books.

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