

## IN HER OWN WORDS

### Christina Pappas - Living Archaeology Weekend Demonstrator, Spinner, Weaver, and Archaeologist

---

I was always interested in making things with my hands. But I didn't start out knowing how to make fabrics using ancient American Indian techniques.

I started out being interested in art. I wanted to go to art school after high school. But painting became work. It wasn't fun anymore, so I decided to do something else.



*Chris Pappas – archaeologist, spinner, weaver. Chris is wearing a hat she made.*

#### **What I Did Instead**

I went to college. I became an anthropology major, and I learned to analyze textiles. But then I realized: I need to know how to make textiles myself to analyze them correctly. So that's what I did!

Before I went to graduate school, I worked for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It was super fun to work in their textile conservation lab, and I learned a lot.

I really like making textiles. And I'm good at it.

#### **How I Learned**

I didn't have a mentor. I learned by doing, by teaching myself. By trial and error.

I experimented. I worked with Seneca weavers. Spinning classes and workshops helped a lot. And I read, and read, and read about fabrics and textiles. I watched YouTube videos about spinning plant fibers into yarns and weaving yarns into textiles. Being an intern, and then an employee, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art helped, too.

Later, I worked with my friend Nettie Adams. She was analyzing Sudanese textiles. Nettie taught me that textiles are more than just objects. I learned that textiles tell stories about the people who made and used them.

## **I Joined LAW as a Demonstrator in 2012**

A Living Archaeology Weekend (LAW) Steering Committee member asked me to become a demonstrator. She knew about my research on Kentucky's ancient American Indian textile traditions. These traditions are especially rich in the Red River Gorge area, where Living Archaeology Weekend is held. That is because the Gorge's dry rockshelters preserve ancient perishable items, like textiles.



*One of Chris' textile replicas, in progress.*

Being a demonstrator has made me think about the many steps it takes to make textiles. It has made me think about the decisions Native weavers had to make. Questions students ask me at the event, like "Why did Native peoples do this?," make me ask myself the same questions.

My demonstration at LAW has many goals. I want you to understand that ancient Native peoples did not wear only animal skins. They wore clothing made from woven textiles. I also want you to know that it took Native weavers time and talent to make their shawls and mantles and tapestries.

Kentucky's ancient Native peoples were ingenious, and their problem-solving approaches were diverse. The fabrics they made are technologically advanced. They used textiles for so many reasons. I am always amazed to learn what materials Native peoples used to make fiber and yarns. Even a very simple technology can produce incredibly complicated fabrics.

## **If You Want to Become a Spinner and Weaver**

Read all you can about the textiles Native peoples made. Talk to American Indian weavers. Visit museums. Yarn shops have workshops. Look online for websites that provide information about textiles.

There also are spinning guilds and weaving guilds and fiber guilds. These people do not work with ancient American Indian textile technologies. However, they are interested in yarn and weaving. Connect with these people. They can provide beginners with support and guidance.

**Images courtesy Christina Pappas.**