

**Loretta Alexander** My earliest memory of some of the word Eternity is probably when my mother and I used to go down to Sydney. I grew up in Canberra and we used to go down for the weekend to Sydney, it was usually a shopping trip, and we used to go into the CBD to go to Mark Voy's or, you know, to DJ's. And I remember holding my mother's hand and seeing the word Eternity written on the pavement and reaching down and touching it. And then mum telling me the story about the Eternity man. And the Eternity man, apparently, nobody knew who he was and that these words would just appear throughout Sydney. And it was just a mystery because nobody knew who was writing it. And I suppose as a child, to me, it was just such a wondrous story and such a mystery. And it just just that, childhood wonderment, I suppose, it was just an exciting story to see, and then when we'd find these these words, we'd then go and try to be finding more of the Eternity Eternity words on the pavements.

**Loretta Alexander** Not really, because as I say, I was a young child. I was probably six, five, six. So I don't remember the streets, but but we used to go shopping. It was George Street and Elizabeth Street. So it was around that main shopping area in the CBD in Sydney.

**Loretta Alexander** Now you're asking me to give away my age. So that would have been around '65. '66.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah, I suppose what was going through my mind when we would see these words was just the mystery, because, again, my mother told us the story of that these words were written by somebody that nobody knew and they would just appear in the pavement. So, when I would see those words, it was just really that feeling of delight, excitement and just mystery.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah, so probably just a couple, one or two, because it was really, you know, it was just part of our day. So we'd run from one to the other. My brother and I would one run from one to the other. But it was really just a couple of day that we would say we were just shopping in Sydney.

**Loretta Alexander** I was just it was special. It was really special because it was exciting, you know, and we'd come to the big city and it was just this whole mystery of nobody really knew who was writing these, these words. It was sort of like the Banksy of the 60s, I suppose.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a couple of trips. Probably every three months or so we'd come down because Canberra back in those days was only, it was a big country town. So that's why we would come to to Sydney to do our shopping and to see family and friends. And part of the excitement, of course, was the shopping and the new toys. But then again, when we'd see these words, it was around just that excitement of being touched by something that was mysterious. Yeah.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah, absolutely. It was a game. You know, my brother and I used to play the game, so once we would see one we would be going looking for the next one. And it was it was a game or a competition to see who would spot it first.

**Loretta Alexander** It would depend on who had the most eagle eyes.

**Loretta Alexander** I think for us coming down from the country and that's what we call because Canberra was a country town back then coming from the country. You were coming to the big smoke. Sydney was filled with, you know, people. It was crowds and we didn't have crowds where, in Canberra back in those days. It was people. It was big buildings. It was those beautiful old buildings because, you know, in the CBD, there wasn't the high rises that there are now. So there was the beautiful old Queen Victoria Building. And they were the ones that you were shopping in. Going into the Strand Arcade, it was just like it was like going to Disneyland to walk through the Strand Arcade because it was so beautiful and so different from what we had ever seen before. So that's what Sydney was to us. It was excitement. It was something different. It was was the big smoke. It was like another land.

**Loretta Alexander** So we never knew who the who the Eternity man was. As I said, my mother used to always say that nobody knew who he was. And that was part of the the mystery, part of the excitement of seeing the word Eternity was that nobody knew who was actually writing it. It was just like magic that it was actually appearing. It was only many years later that I heard the word Arthur, or heard the name Arthur Stace. And I think that was years later in relation to the fireworks in the year 2000 when the Eternity appeared on the bridge. And I just remember seeing it and getting that little bit about, oh, little ahot aha moment. Oh, there it is again. And I think it was just not long after that there was an article in the paper and I saw the name Arthur Stace and I thought, oh, that's who it actually was. And I think that was the first time I'd actually realised or heard who had actually written Eternity. Up till then, it was always just part of that mystery and part of that magic of childhood.

**Loretta Alexander** It's an exciting. So in the year 2000, when Eternity appeared on the bridge in in at New Year's Eve as part of the fireworks on New Year's Eve, and we were just at home and I had my children at home and we were just watching the fireworks on the TV. And then the word Eternity appeared. And again, it was one of those, Oh! children, you know, kids look at that because they they also knew the story of the Eternity Man. My mother died when I was relatively young. I was thirty two when she died. So she so our children didn't know her. And they used to always ask me to tell stories about my childhood. And so this was the Eternity Man. And finding the word Eternity on the pavement in Sydney when I was younger was one of the stories that I had told them over the years. So when the word Eternity appeared on the bridge, they knew what it meant too. I think what surprised me the most about seeing Eternity appear on the bridge was that other people knew about it. It was it was like, I didn't realise it, that those words appearing and the way that it was written on the pavement was so well known. It was like it was a little bit of my childhood, but I didn't realise it was part of so many other people's shared memory as well.

**Loretta Alexander** What would you say? Well, when when I was talking to my children about the Eternity word and try to tell them that that story, it was really about the mystery. And of course, you try and make things exciting, make your stories exciting for your children. So it was all about the mystery of these words appearing and nobody knew who had written these words and they would

just appear and how exciting it was and how their uncle, my brother, and I would be running around trying to find these words as we're, we're know shopping with our with you know, with my mother in Sydney.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah, it just takes me back to my childhood and it takes me back to especially one moment, and I can specifically remember holding my mother's hand and looking down at this word and just it's just the feel of the sun on your back, the feel of my mother's, my hand or in my mother's or my holding my mother's hand and looking down at this word. And I think it was, it's the way that it was written. It was a beautiful script.

**Loretta Alexander** So when I see the word Eternity now and I see it written in that beautiful script, the way that it was written in the pavement, it just takes me straight back to that time in my childhood. I can feel the sun on my back. I can feel the softness of my mother's hand as I'm holding it, looking down at that pavement. So it takes me back to that moment. That's what it means to me. It means comfort. It means family. It it means magic.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah. Yeah. So there is an Art Show here in Taree that occurs every year around July, August, and of course didn't occur in 2020 due to covid. But we go to the Art Show every year and it's just a great opportunity for local artists to display their artworks and people from, artists from all over the state send artworks as well. So that's why we go. It's just a great, it's lovely to walk through, you know, up and down the the lines of artwork and just look at all of the different variations. So that's where I first saw the painting in 2018, '19, just try to think now of going back in time, I lose track.

**Loretta Alexander** OK, so this painting came into my life in 2019, I think it was around July, end of July at the Taree Art Show. So that's an annual Art Show that's held here, which is a great opportunity for local artists to display their artworks and for people like myself to go and view them and to buy them. And that's the first time that I when I saw this painting. And I suppose what, I remember walking up and down and I actually went past the painting a few times, I'd stop and have a look. And then I moved on and looked at other paintings, but I kept on coming back to it. What drew me, first of all, to this painting were the colours, the beautiful, especially the vivid, vivid blue, but also the composition of because again, thinking back to my time in Sydney, it sort of, I suppose, spoke to that time of my childhood and those beautiful old buildings in Sydney. And it was a few times that I actually had looked at it had come back to it before I actually saw the word Eternity on there. It was only about the second time I came back when suddenly I noticed Eternity was written on there. And that just took me straight back to that time again when, you know, holding my mother's hand, looking down at Eternity written on the pavement, the Eternity Man story, the mystery, the the magic of all of that. And that's what spoke to me. And that's why I had to buy the painting.

**Loretta Alexander** Absolutely, and every time I look at it, it takes me back there again. And that's why I love it so much. It's it it just takes me back, especially to that very vivid memory that I have of holding my mother's hand and looking down at the pavement. It takes me back there every time. And it just it's it's comforting.

**Loretta Alexander** I was with a friend and it was quite crowded. And at the Art Show, we were just walking around looking at the different paintings. I went back to this painting. I noticed it. I noticed the colours. First of all. I obviously liked the painting and then walked around and looked at a few other paintings. I actually bought another painting as well that day. So there was a few that I was looking at. But I just kept on coming back to this one, this painting, it just kept drawing me back. And it wasn't until probably the second time that I sort of went past to view it and I stood there and that's when the word Eternity jumped out at me. And I hadn't actually noticed it the first time I looked at it.

**Loretta Alexander** Wow, that's how does art bring people together? I think art is a very emotional medium so that different people can look at the same painting and and feel very different things. It goes back to even writing that Eternity word you know, some people, I'm sure, looked at that word written in chalk and felt nothing and walked over it and walk past it. Others, like myself, stopped, and it it had an emotional, emotional impact. So I think that's what art is. It does have an emotional impact upon, upon people. But that impact can be quite different, depending on your experience, where you are in your life, what, what your story is.

**Loretta Alexander** I suppose because why I thought of Banksy was because nobody knows, I don't think, who I'm sure some people do, but the story is that nobody knows who Banksy really is and that this amazing artwork just appears. And to me, that's a little bit like the story of the Eternity Man and the story that was told to me by my mother is nobody really knows or knew who was writing Eternity. These words would just appear like a mystery like magic, a little bit like Banksy. You know, it was just that that mystery

**Loretta Alexander** Do I know Joy Cooksey, the artist? No, I don't. I know that she's a local artist and I have seen other artworks by Joy, and have always, Joy, Joy's artworks always have lovely vivid colours. She has beautiful colours of the Australian landscape, beautiful paintings in the Australian landscape. So I have seen her paintings previously, but I don't personally know Joy.

**Loretta Alexander** Well, she sounds like a very nice lady, so I don't know about a connection, I'm sure if if we did meet and we probably have have met, you know, it's a small town. So I'm sure at some stage in some forum, we may have been there together. And if you showed her my photo or my or this footage, she may go, oh, I know that lady, I've seen her around. And that's so if I saw a photo, I don't know what Joy looks like. If I saw a picture, I'd probably go, yeah, I've seen that lady around, but I don't know her personally.

**Loretta Alexander** Yeah, yeah, it's just one of those things that just appears at different points in time, and I suppose you call it like a like an aha aha moment. You know, like when Eternity appeared on the bridge, as I say, I didn't know anything about Arthur Stace. I didn't know that he was the person, he was the Eternity man. But not long after that, there was an article in the paper. You just go, Oh, that's who it was, you know, and there's just a few times like that. And then there'll be something else or or something will appear on the on the TV. And you've got, oh, Eternity again. And I think it's just something about the word. It's a way. It's

something about the way that he used to write the word as well. It's very distinctive. It's beautiful. A beautiful script. He obviously had a very practised and beautiful writing hand. And it really is, I think it's just, you know, those things that that sort of add to that whole story of the mystery of it all really. So it's just that it just repeats every once in a while in my life and I'll go, oh, that's Eternity again, especially when I see it written in the way that Arthur wrote it.

**Loretta Alexander** Yes, yeah. Yeah. And that's why I think I was quite surprised when Eternity was written on the Harbour Bridge. Because I just, it was just something that I remember from my childhood seeing that word, but I didn't realise that it was such a big thing or that other people had noticed it. It was like it was my private little story or my private little memory. And all of a sudden there it was on the Harbour Bridge. Yeah, I just found it odd, it was it was funny, it was a lovely surprise and I was quite surprised when I saw it.

**Loretta Alexander** Why does the word into Eternity endear itself to people? I think it's a combination of the word itself. I think the word Eternity is a word that makes you think of mystery, of the unknown, of possibilities. So it's the word. It's also the way that the word was written. I think the way that the Eternity Man, or Arthur Stace wrote that word with that beautiful flowing script, in a way, enhanced that whole idea of mystery and possibility and the unknown, it was just the way that he actually wrote that very evocative word.

**Loretta Alexander** I'd say thank you. I'd say, did you realise you were making such an impact? Because I understand that he was a very humble man, he obviously was a humble man because he didn't want anybody to know who he was, but he had such an impact and he's had an impact on my life. He's had an impact on my children's life. So I'd say thank you. And isn't it amazing that the smallest of things can have such a widespread impact and the ripples, how far the ripples can flow.

**Loretta Alexander** If Arthur Stace came into my kitchen today I'd say, thank you.

**Loretta Alexander** So, yeah. So I have put this painting in a fairly prominent position in my home. It's in, near my kitchen, in our living area. So it's the area where we spend the most time. It's the area where I can, I spend the most time so I can always look over and and see the painting. And every time I look at it, every time I see that word Eternity, it takes me back to that moment, standing in the sun, holding my mother's hand, looking down at the word on the pavement. Every time.

**Loretta Alexander** Look, when I when I brought the painting home, my husband, because I was a little bit nervous because it's the paint the colours in the painting are really quite prominent. And so I was a bit nervous about what he would think of it, but he loved it too. And then I pointed out Eternity, and I said to him, did you ever, did you know about the Eternity Man? And did you ever see Eternity written in Sydney? And he had as well. It was, it didn't have the same emotional effect on him that it did on me at the time.

But he does remember seeing the word written. And when I pointed out, he went, Oh, that's right, I forgot about that. And so it actually took him back to a memory that he had. So that was really nice. So we've both got a connection with it now.

**Loretta Alexander** OK, so, yeah, the the painting hangs in a fairly prominent place in my kitchen. And previous previously it was a photo of the family that was there. So unfortunately I had to move the family to hang the painting.

**Loretta Alexander** Has there ever been another word that has, I suppose, spoken to me like the word Eternity has? And I, I don't think so. The only other word is that I suppose if you think of your favourite word is serendipity. And again, it's one of that's another word a bit like Eternity that that is about the unknown. It's about promise. It's about ambiguity. It's about change. So I think maybe that says something about my personality. I don't know. But it's the word Eternity that I always come back to. It's the word Eternity that if I see it written or if I read it, it just evokes that, I suppose, a little response, that little, oh, response in me.

**Loretta Alexander** I'm Loretta Alexander, and in 2019, I bought a painting featuring the word Eternity.