

Weaver Spotlight: Jennifer Malone



“WE ARE STILL HERE”

Transcript recording from
NAFP Zoom Webinar – September, 18, 2026



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I am Jennifer Malone, Wukchumni, Tachi, and Yokuts. I am a traditional basket weaver, a teacher, a language learner and teacher, and an elder who continues to carry forward the traditions, teachings, and ways of life passed down to me by my mother and grandmother.

For more than 25 years, I have been weaving baskets and sharing what I have learned with my community. My teachings did not come from a book. They came from my mother, my grandmother, and the people who came before me. My responsibility is to keep those teachings going and to pass them on in a good way.

Basket weaving is more than making a basket. It is a way of life.

When we gather materials, we give an offering, a prayer, or a song to show our appreciation for the plants and for what we are able to gather. We do not gather more than we can use, and we respect the areas where we gather. If an area belongs to another family or community, we ask permission.

These are not simply rules for gathering materials.



Jennifer Malone in Sacramento for CA Indian Days 2026

They are teachings about respect, responsibility, gratitude, and how we live with one another and with the land. We also teach our children how to give. One of our teachings is that when you make your first project, you give it to someone else. It can be difficult to give away something you have just made and love, but learning to give instead of always taking is an important lesson. You learn that you can make another one, and perhaps make it even better.

Sharing is also important because not everyone can gather materials for themselves. As I have gotten older, I depend on family and friends to share materials with me. I am grateful for those who continue to help me gather what I need so that I can keep weaving and teaching.

Our materials are precious. We should not take more than we can use. We should prepare what we gather and take care of it. Our plants, medicines, and materials have purpose, and I want to see them respected and kept as natural as possible. These teachings came from our elders, and we have a responsibility to carry them forward.

Our baskets also carry meaning. The materials, colors, patterns, and designs are connected to our ways. Redbud, white root, deer grass, sedge, sourberry and other materials each have their place. The designs are not simply decorations. They have meaning and connect us to our knowledge and traditions. Some of the baskets I have today were made by my grandmother. They are more than objects to me. They carry family history and knowledge. My grandmother's baskets remind me of what I am still learning and give me something to strive toward.

My grandmother also taught me that baskets should be used. A basket should not simply sit in a museum or be put away and forgotten. I made a basket for my mother based on a basket that had belonged to her grandmother, and my mother used it every day. She would put popcorn and other snacks in it. Seeing her use that basket made me happy because the basket was continuing to live.

Our traditions also include games, ceremonies, language, and other cultural practices. One example is our gambling tray and dice game, which was being lost. My mother and I taught my granddaughter how to play, and I made her a gambling tray so she could continue teaching others. Today, people are still learning the game.

That is what I want for all of our traditions: for them to continue. Language is especially important to me.

**BASKET WEAVING IS MORE THAN MAKING A BASKET.
IT IS A WAY OF LIFE.
- JENNIFER MALONE**



I am working to keep our language going and have apprentices who are learning. Language is healing. When we gather together to learn and speak our language, it can bring people together and make them feel better. Our language carries our knowledge, our relationships, and our connection to those who came before us.

I want our young people to spend time with their elders. Listen to their stories. Learn your ways. Ask questions. Learn who your parents and grandparents are. Know your family. Then pass those stories and teachings on to your children. That is how these things continue.

As an elder, I have also begun thinking about how knowledge and belongings will be cared for in the future. I have assigned family members to be keepers of different things, and I have assigned my grandson to be our family archivist. Keeping our family history is important because knowing where we come from helps us understand who we are and how we are related to one another.

We also have to remember those who are gone. I think about my mother, my grandmother, and other family members who have passed on. I remember the good times and think of them as continuing to guide us. Their teachings are still with us.

I have a cassette tape my mother made for me before she passed away. She labeled it for me, and I have not listened to it yet. I am waiting for the right time. I know it will be difficult because it is her voice, and some of it is in our language. But I also know that when I am ready, I will be able to understand what she is saying.

**“ ONLY GOODNESS SHOULD GO INTO THE BASKET. YOU
NEED TO BE IN A GOOD WAY WHEN YOU ARE CREATING.
- JENNIFER MALONE ”**



That is part of carrying our people forward—holding on to what was given to us and knowing when it is time to pass it on. Basket weaving is also a healing process for me. When I sit down to weave or do beadwork, I can focus on what is in front of me and leave the troubles of the day behind. But there is an important teaching: you should not weave when you are angry, troubled, or sad. Only goodness should go into the basket. You need to be in a good way when you are creating.

Sometimes the basket itself teaches you. If something is not right—the size, the color, the count—the material may break or the basket may not cooperate. You learn to listen and pay attention.

When I am struggling with a basket, I talk to my grandmother and ask her to help me. I feel that the voices and songs of the past continue to guide me. This is why it is important to keep teaching.

I have taught young people who have stayed with basket weaving for many years. One young man began learning from me when he was only 12 years old. He came after school several times a week to learn and weave. I have taught young people who have stayed with basket weaving for many years. One young man began learning from me when he was only 12 years old. He came after school several times a week to learn and weave. Today, he is an adult, continues to weave, teaches at different events, and has become an excellent weaver.

Seeing someone take what they have learned and continue carrying it forward is one of the greatest rewards of teaching. I hope the next generation will do the same. We need our young people involved in our communities. We need them to learn our language, our gathering practices, our basketry, our ceremonies, our games, our stories, and our responsibilities. We need to give them opportunities to learn from their elders and to become teachers themselves.

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STAY STRONG, REMEMBER YOUR ROOTS, TAKE CARE
OF YOUR FAMILY, BE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE,
TREAT PEOPLE THE WAY YOU WOULD WANT TO BE
TREATED, AND ALWAYS TRY TO WALK IN A GOOD WAY.
-JENNIFER MALONE

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Jennifer Malone in Graton, CA
CIBA Annual Gathering 2026

We are still here.

We are still gathering.

We are still weaving.

We are still speaking our languages.

We are still practicing our ceremonies.

We are still teaching our children.

And we are still learning.

My message is simple: stay strong, remember your roots, take care of your family, be grateful for what you have, treat people the way you would want to be treated, and always try to walk in a good way.

Be humble.

Keep your heart good.

Keep learning.

Keep teaching.

Keep sharing.

And most importantly, keep our traditions going.

Because as long as we continue to practice, teach, remember, and pass these ways on to the next generation, we are still here.