

Oala Reva the Jeweller

People



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Oala Reva was a former smallships engineer who retired in the 1940s. But his hands told a different story.

A Papuan Craftsman Goes Into the Jewellery Business I came across this story in the Pacific Islands monthly.

It was a lovely story but more importantly how relevant it is today. Sometimes the past reminds us that the challenges we face today aren't new... and neither is our potential.

Let me share it with you.

MEET OALA REVA

Oala Reva was a former smallships engineer who retired in the 1940s. But his hands told a different story. He had a natural gift for crafting tortoiseshell jewellery long before it was a commercial industry.

During the war he carved tortoiseshell hearts for soldiers with the words "Souvenir of Papua."

But like many SMEs today, he lived hand-to-mouth:

- cutting up teaspoons to obtain silver for inlays
- buying materials at full retail prices
- walking the streets of Moresby selling whatever he had just finished
- earning barely enough to start the next piece

His problem wasn't skill.

It was **opportunity**.

ENTER PATRICIA BRYANT

One day an Australian woman, Patricia Bryant, saw his work at a local show and recognised his talent.

She acted on it.

She:

1. Gave him the right tools (including power tools)
2. Gave him new designs and ideas
3. Helped him access markets he never had before

Together they created a line of Island-style jewellery that took off across the territory.

Demand exploded. Shops and hotels began stocking their pieces. Earrings, bangles, cuff links, rolled-gold tortoiseshell pieces, all beautifully made by Oala's hands, but elevated through support and partnership.

His craftsmanship didn't change.

His access to support did.

Why this story matters?

This is more than a feel-good story. It's a blueprint.

It reminds us of a simple truth:

- When talent meets the right support, industries grow.
- When SMEs receive tools, guidance, designs, training and market access, success follows.
- Capital helps, but systems of support transform.

Imagine if today's local SMEs had their own Patricia Bryants - people or organisations who believe in them, invest in them, and open doors to markets and opportunities.

- the right tools,
- a new idea,
- business guidance,
- or simply market access.

That small gesture can turn a craftsman into a business.

And it can turn a small business into a legacy.

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