

Pearls

One of those canned questions on personality profiles is always:

Pearls or diamonds?

The only real answer to that is – Both!

I grew up in the south, and many of my lucky girl friends received a strand of pearls at the age of 16 or 18. In fact, if you look at the “Engagement Page” in the Memphis paper, and many other southern papers, you will notice almost every single girl wearing a black shirt and a white strand of pearls. Pearls are a classic fashion statement, and a romantic statement. In many parts of the country pearls are the traditional wedding gift. I am so glad to see women realizing that pearls can be worn every day, and casually. It’s about time pearls get the attention they deserve!

Pearls are one of the few organic gems. Gemologists refer to gems that are products of living animals, or a part of a once living animal as organic. Pearls are produced when an irritant enters a mussel, an oyster, or abalone. The mollusk secretes nacre over the irritant, and over time a beautiful pearl is the result. Pearls are a beautiful example of the verse in Ecclesiastes God makes all things beautiful in its time.

The most common type of cultured pearl is the Japanese Akoya. They tend to be 4-8mm, and are available in all colors.

South Sea Pearls are the most rare and expensive. They are from the warm waters of Australia, Philippines, and Indonesia. These breathtaking pearls are usually in the 8-14mm size.

Tahitian Pearls are from the islands of French Polynesia, and are similar in size to the South Sea varieties. This variety is often seen in silver, silver-blue, and greenish black hues.

Mabe, or Mobe Pearls are the hemispherical varieties pearl. At one time this pearl was attached to the mollusk’s shell. Once they are removed from the shell, a mother of pearl back is glued to the Mabe

Freshwater pearls are harvested from mussels in Japan, China, and the US. They are nucleated like other cultured pearls, but the nucleus is all tissue, and will dry up. The resulting pearl is completely nacre.

There are five value factors affecting pearls:

Lustre: surface reflections, sharper better

Surface: blemishes present/not

Shape: more spherical better than baroque

Size: Bigger, rarer, higher value

Color: How well a strand matches. Blush-like overtones in a single pearl are esteemed. Also prized is the rainbow effect/reflections known in the industry as orient.

Next time you look at pearls, remember that they are an amazing and beautiful product of a painful situation. Something unpleasant made lovely. That's the wonderful story of pearls.