

# Early Life

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (also known as Kath Walker) is a famous Aboriginal Australian poet, writer and activist. She was born the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1920 and she died on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1993.



Oodgeroo was born in Stradbroke Island, east of Brisbane. Stradbroke Island is the traditional land and waters of the Noonuccal tribe.

When Oodgeroo was young she loved the sea and the seashore but she did not enjoy school. She wrote with her left hand and was punished for it. Oodgeroo left school when she was 13 years old.

In 1942 Oodgeroo joined the Australian Women's Army Service as a communication worker in the army. In the same year Oodgeroo

married Bruce Walker who was an Aboriginal welder and boxer. In 1946 when their first son Dennis Walker was born they decided to separate.

In the early 1950s Oodgeroo began work as a domestic in the household of Raphael Cilento and during this time she conceived and gave birth to her second son Vivian Walker in 1953. Vivian Walker died in 1991 at the age of 38.

In addition to having her second child in 1953, Oodgeroo also joined the Communist Party of Australia. At the time, the Communist Party was the only Australian political party that disagreed with the way in which White Australian Law discriminated against Aboriginal people.

# Career

During the 50s and 60s Oodgeroo became a well known activist, public speaker and poet. She talked about the feelings of Aboriginal people in a way that had not been done before.

After Oodgeroo joined the Communist Party of Australia, she joined the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in 1958. When she was there she worked alongside white people who at the time were also fighting for Aboriginal rights.

In 1960, Oodgeroo attended the annual conferences for the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement and then became Queensland's first state secretary in 1962.

Oodgeroo had seen the disadvantage of Aboriginal people. At the time, Oodgeroo liked the FCAATSI because she thought this was the most effective political approach to change laws and attitudes.

Oodgeroo was a main figure in a campaign for the reform of the Australian Constitution to allow Aboriginal people full citizenship for Australia.

In 1964 Judith Wright encouraged Oodgeroo to publish her poems. The first poem she published was, *We Are Going*. Judith said about Oodgeroo's poetry, "*These stories belong to the Aboriginal people and you are only the tool to write them down*".

Oodgeroo was the first Aboriginal poet to publish a book of verse. She published many more poems and books.<sup>1</sup> Oodgeroo also won several literary awards, such as the Mary Gilmore Medal and the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Award.

In 1968 Oodgeroo went to a World Council of Churches consultation in London. After this, she changed her political philosophy rapidly. In particular, she changed her mind about the FCAATSI. She decided she didn't like it because she thought that Aboriginal people should become a unified and solid fighting force before they entered into coalitions with whites.

In 1970 Oodgeroo supported Pittock amendments to FCAATSI constitution which would have increased Indigenous power on the Federal Council. When the amendments failed she was instrumental in establishing the National Tribal Council.

One of my favourite adult poems by Oodgeroo Noonuccal is called '*No More Boomerang*.' I have copied this poem below. I also like Oodgeroo's children's poems. They are happier and easier to understand.

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<sup>1</sup> We are Going: Poems (1964), The Dawn is at Hand: Poems (1966), My People: A Kath Walker collection (1970), Stradbroke Dreamtime (1972), Quandamooka, the Art of Kath Walker (1985), Little Fella (1986), Kath Walker in China (1988), The Rainbow Serpent (1988), Oodgeroo (1994), Father Sky and Mother Earth (1981), Towards a Global Village in the Southern Hemisphere (1989), The Spirit of Australia (1989), Australian Legends And Landscapes (1990), Australia's Unwritten History: More legends of our land (1992)

# No More Boomerang

By Oodgeroo Noonuccal

No more boomerang  
No more spear;  
Now all civilized --  
Colour bar and beer.

No more corroboree,  
Gay dance and din.  
Now we got movies,  
And pay to go in.

No more sharing  
What the hunter brings.  
Now we work for money,  
Then pay it back for things.

Now we track bosses  
To catch a few bob,  
Now we go walkabout  
On bus to the job.

One time naked,  
Who never knew shame;  
Now we put clothes on  
To hide whatsaname.

No more gunya,  
Now bungalow,  
Paid by hire purchase  
In twenty year or so.

Lay down the stone axe,  
Take up the steel,  
And work like a nigger  
For a white man meal

No more fire sticks  
That made the whites scoff.  
Now all electric,  
And no better off.

Bunyip he finish,  
Now got instead  
White fella Bunyip,  
Call him Red.

Abstract picture now --  
What they coming at?  
Cripes, in our caves we  
Did better than that.

Black hunted wallaby,  
White hunt dollar;  
White fella witchdoctor  
Wear dog-collar.

No more message-stick;  
Lubras and lads.  
Got television now,  
Mostly ads.

Lay down the woomera,  
Lay down the waddy.  
Now we got atom-bomb,  
End everybody.

# Later Life

Oodgeroo's priorities in the 1970s and 1980s changed when she returned to her beloved Stradbroke Island. She focused on art (her writing as well as the visual arts) and education.

Oodgeroo believed passionately in the power of education to change an unjust world.

In 1972 Oodgeroo bought a property on Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island) which she called Moongalba ('sitting-down place'), and established the Noonuccal-Nughie Education and Cultural Centre.

In 1985 Oodgeroo appeared with her grandson, Denis Walker junior in Bruce Beresford's film *The Fringedwellers*.

Then in 1988 she adopted her traditional name Oodgeroo meaning 'paper bark tree' recognising her Noonuccal ancestors whose land she had returned to. She also changed her name to make a political statement at the condition of her people in the year of Australia's Bicentenary celebrations. Then Oodgeroo died in 1993.

# Achievements And Influences

Oodgeroo has achieved many things such as being the first Aboriginal woman to publish a book verse. She became Queensland's first state secretary and she also won many literary awards such as the Mary Gilmore medal and the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Award. She achieved many more things after that. Oodgeroo's achievements have been recognised across Australia. Oodgeroo has also influenced our society by writing about aboriginal rights and their feelings in a way that had not been done before. Her poems helped people see Aboriginal people through their eyes. Oodgeroo has influenced our Australian culture and I think she has helped build a better future between all Australians.

# References

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oodgeroo\\_Noonuccal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oodgeroo_Noonuccal)

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