

Transcript: Oodgeroo Noonuccal speaking in 1989 about her life and the origins and inspirations behind her writing

"I am of Aboriginal descent. I am classed as a poet. I was born on November the 3rd 1920. I spent my childhood on Stradbroke Island. I am of the Noonuccal tribe of Stradbroke Island.

I was a child who preferred to communicate with nature rather than my fellow man. I never made friends easily. With my schoolmates I preferred to be alone and spent much time investigating the beauty of nature. My love of Nature, and my constant communication with her, gave me time to study the struggle man was enduring and why man was enduring the struggle. I realised that man had lost his balance with nature and wondered whether I could help him find that balance. In my own Aboriginal world, I lived by the balance of nature. I learned early to realise that man had substituted the balance of nature from material and commercialised gain. Man had found a new, false God who, in his vanity, tried to outsmart nature and in so doing lost himself in the process.

In study in nature, the exercise was to lead me to the written word, for I longed to communicate with my fellow man. I found myself searching for words to express my feelings. Even at school I was lost. I was classed as a child with crazy ideas, not to be taken seriously with my pen and paper.

I was drawn to a world of my own. The world I found had tranquillity, peace, tolerance and understanding. In fact, all the emotions necessary, for man to live in harmony with his fellow man. Through my poetry, I hope to enlighten or educate the lost man. It was inevitable that my poem should complain, and natural. Ever aware of nature, ever aware of the balance of all elements, I found myself a very lonely person. Even my schoolmates class me as a rather odd, uncivilised, half wild, born to be and stay, scrub gym to the end. It was firmly believed by Aborigines, and non Aborigines, that I was a lost cause and that, no matter how much the so-called superior white race did, they were wasting their time on me.

My loneliness was, however, balanced by Nature herself who allowed me to enter her realm, and in so doing, became my greatest teacher. She taught me the reason for rain floods, storms and why it was necessary to uproot the beautiful trees she had herself created. Why at times she could be peaceful, calm and beautiful and at times be angry and violent. She taught me much about the sea. Taught me not to fear it but, at all times, to respect it. I saw the sea, at times, as a mature woman crooning to her children. And there were times when I saw her as a violent angry, hungry woman grasping at all and everything within her grasp. Nature slowly, but surely, drew me into her own understanding. In view of all this it was inevitable that my poetry would be spiced with all the emotions of sorrow. pain, tolerance, love, peace happiness and hope."

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