Famous Aboriginals Of Australi Essay, Research Paper

Cathy Freeman was born in Mackay in Queensland in 1973. She is a very good runner and won a scholarship to boarding school where she was able to have professional coaching.

Freeman is the first Aboriginal sprinter to win a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games (1994). She also won a silver medal in the 1996 Olympic Games. She is very proud of her Aboriginal background and has carried the Australian and the Aboriginal flags around the track after winning a race. She has often appeared on television to encourage young people to live healthy lifestyles and to do their best.

She was made Young Australian of the Year in 1990 and Australian of the Year in 1998. She is the first person to receive both awards. In Atlanta, she was Australia’s only real gold medal hope, and to win she would have had to beat Perec, the 1992 gold medallist over 400m. Freeman ran the race of her life – making her the sixth fastest woman over the distance in history – but it was not enough for gold, she won the silver. However that silver medal made her the most successful Australian runner at Olympic level, male or female, since Debbie Flintoff-King at Seoul in 1988.

In 1997 she was also named Australian of the Year, becoming the first person to have been honoured with both the Young Australian and Australian of the Year awards

Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal,

Custodian of the land Minjerribah (1920-1993) Born Kath Walker, an Aborigine from the Noonuccal tribe of Stradbroke Island, she was one of the first of the modern Aboriginal protest writers. She worked as a domestic servant in Brisbane, joined the army and during the 1960s became actively involved in the Aboriginal activist movement. Her work includes poetry, Aboriginal legends and political essays and speeches. Some of her work includes We are Going (1964), which was the first book ever to be published by an Aborigine, My People (1970) and Stradbroke Dreaming (1972).

NEVILLE BONNER

(1922 – 1999)

Neville Bonner was the first Aboriginal person to sit in Federal Parliament as a Senator for Queensland from 1971 to 1983.On his journey from poverty to parliament house he experienced unemployment and discrimination. As a politician he worked to improve conditions for Aborigines, and became a voice for his people.Neville Bonner was born in 1922. His mother was an Aborigine, but he never knew his father, an Englishman who went back to England before Neville was born.

“I was born on Ukerebagh Island, in the mouth of the Tweed River. Because there was nowhere else for my mother to go, in those days, people won’t know too much about it, but in those days, Aboriginal people had to be out of the towns before sunset. And they couldn’t get back into town again until sunrise the next day, my mother was not allowed to go to hospital to give birth to me, she gave birth to me in a little gunya under the palm tree, that still lives down there, on a government issued blanket. Those are the kind of things that we had to cope with when I was born and when I was a small child, right up into my teenage years and into my manhood.”

When Neville was about five, they left the island to live with his grandparents in a hollow his grandfather cut under some lantana bushes. They had old bags and blankets, but no furniture and few possessions.

Life was tough. When Neville was only seven he had to help his stepfather and grandfather earn money by clearing the bush.

“… my job was to crawl underneath the lantana bushes and with a little tomahawk, cut the lantana off at the root.”

When Neville’s mother died he and his brother Jimmy lived with their grandparents. His grandmother spoke beautiful English and insisted on Neville speaking properly.

“She had an enormous influence on me in my growing up years after mother died.”

She also insisted on Neville learning to read and write.

“We were never allowed to attend a normal state school…but my grandmother talked the head teacher into allowing me to go and I attended there from fourteen to fifteen years of age. I actually reached third grade in that short period of time and that’s the only formal education I’ve had.”

Neville loved school but when his grandmother died he was heart broken and packed his swag and set off to find work.

“For many years I was a bit of a loner. I was out on cattle stations, I became a head stockman. Suppose I’ve done every labouring job known to man, cane cutting, scrub felling, timber cutting.”

While working in north-west Queensland he met Mona Banfield. They married in 1943 and lived on an Aboriginal settlement called Palm Island.

Along with his wife and five sons, Neville lived on the island for 16 years. During this time he took an interest in changing the way his people lived.

When he left Palm Island he joined OPAL – One people of Australia League, which helped Aborigines with welfare, housing and education.

A major breakthrough came in 1967. A referendum changed the way Aborigines were treated.

“Well it was when we, the indigenous people, were first given the vote and we were allowed to be counted in the census.”

Neville decided it was time to enter politics, so he joined the Liberal Party.

“You’ve got to get into the system, work through the system and make the changes. If you say a law is a bad law, you don’t break it, you try to change the law.”

In August 1971 Neville Bonner was sworn in as Australia’s first Aboriginal senator.

“For the first time in the history of this country there was an aboriginal voice in the parliament and that gave me an enormous feeling of overwhelming responsibility. I made people aware, the lawmakers in this country, I made them aware of indigenous people. I think that was an achievement.”

For twelve years Senator Bonner represented his people, and helped to change the face of Aboriginal rights in Australia. Always a honest and gentle man, he never let anger dominate his personality.

Neville remarried in 1972. Heather Ryan had worked beside him for many years and is still his fiercest supporter.

Neville Bonner continued to speak out on issues which divide black and white Australians.

“We’ve got to come together, that’s what we want for Australia. A one people. We’re all Australians, regardless of your ethnic background, regardless of your political belief, regardless of your religious beliefs we are all Australians.”

In 1998, shortly before the Constitutional Convention Neville Bonner announced he was dying of lung cancer but vowed to continue working.

Neville Bonner died of lung cancer at Ipswich, Qld in February 1999. He was 76 when he died. He is survived by four of his five sons by his first marriage, his second wife Heather, and three stepchildren.

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