

Lowitja O'Donoghue

By Lily Whitehouse

Lowitja O'Donoghue is a proud First Nation Australian, activist, and nurse. As a teenager, Lowitja set her mind on becoming a nurse. Now, she is most known for her many life awards, and all the work contributed towards fighting for Aboriginal rights. Lowitja O'Donoghue was born at a place called Indulkana (a small place in South Australia) on the first of August 1932, to a Pitjantjatjara Mother, and an Irish Father. At a very young age, Lowitja was taken away by missionaries from the South Australian's Aboriginal Protection Board, along with her two sisters, where they then grew up apart.

Sadly, Lowitja didn't end up seeing her mother for another 30 years, since she was taken. In spite of that, she didn't learn anything about her origin, language, or culture! After being taken, she began learning at the age of three, at Colebrook Children's Home, an Aboriginal school run by the mission in Quorn. When she finished primary school, she attended Unley General Technical High School in Adelaide. This is where she set her mind on nursing.

Lowitja graduated from school, studied, and trained to become a nurse. She tried to apply for the Royal Adelaide Hospital, but they declined her invite. This was all because she was Aboriginal, which Lowitja thought was very biased. As of this, she fought their decision. This is where Lowitja then began her loved life for fighting for Aboriginal rights. In the mid-1960s at the Baptists Overseas Mission in Assam, Lowitja O'Donoghue returned to Australia and joined the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Lowitja continued to fight for rights, fairness and justice. She accepted a job in the Australian town of Coober Pedy, where an aunt and uncle recognised her in a local supermarket. Through reuniting with them, she was finally reunited with her Mother, Lily, who at this time was living in the nearby town of Oodnadatta. In 1979 she married Gordon Smart, someone at the Repatriation Hospital who she had first met in 1964. Although they had no children of their own, Gordon had six adult children from a marriage before. After many years, in 1994, she finally became the first Aboriginal trainee nurse at a hospital. Lowitja became an official charge sister at that same hospital for another 10 years! Her adulthood was filled with many opportunities, and always to remember, many awards.

In 2009, Lowitja O'Donoghue received the NAIDOC lifetime achievements award, and was declared an Australian National Living Treasure in 1998. She has been rewarded lots of honours because of her contribution to Aboriginal rights, including, in 1977, being the first Aboriginal woman to be awarded the AO. The AO is The Order of Australia, recognises Australians who have demonstrated outstanding service or exceptional achievement.

Now currently at 89, Lowitja O'Donoghue, has achieved massive goals, and been rewarded many awards. She will be remembered for honours, contribution towards fighting for her culture's rights, and not to mention her nursing, helping others. Lowitja is such an inspiration in life, towards others willing to fight for freedom, and rights, to make everything fairer. Having had a rough childhood, and been separated from her mother and family, she is still trying to do the best she can do, not just for herself, but for a better world, kinder people, and a fairer society.