

DR CHARLES PERKINS AO
2011 MEMORIAL ORATION
AND MEMORIAL PRIZE



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



PROGRAM

THURSDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2011

1

- 6.00pm Event commences**
The Great Hall
- 6.30pm Official proceedings**
Dr Jeff McMullen AM
Master of Ceremonies
- 6.40pm Welcome to Country**
Mr Charles Madden
Director, Aboriginal Medical Service
- 6.45pm Vice-Chancellor's address**
Dr Michael Spence (BA '85 LLB '87)
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
The University of Sydney
- 6.50pm Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Oration**
Professor Shane Houston
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Strategy and Services)
- TOPIC: 'I am not a victim'*
- 7.25pm Vote of thanks and introduction to the Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Prize**
Dr Jeff McMullen AM
Master of Ceremonies
- 7.30pm Presentation of the Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Prize**
Dr Janet Mooney, Director, Koori Centre
Prizes to be presented by
Dr Michael Spence, Vice-Chancellor and Principal and
Ms Hetti Perkins
- 7.45pm Summation and close of proceedings**
Dr Jeff McMullen AM
Master of Ceremonies
- 7.50pm Refreshments served**
The Great Hall
- 8.30pm Event concludes**

Front Cover: The University of Sydney appreciates the generous permission of the Perkins family and The Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students for the use of this photograph.
Photograph © Robert McFarlane.

Inside Cover: Reconciliation Week, Sea of Hands 2011, Photograph by Ted Sealey.
Page 6: Charles Perkins attending a lecture on the introduction of the Pill at the University of Sydney in 1963.
Photograph © Robert McFarlane.

DR CHARLES PERKINS AO ANNUAL MEMORIAL ORATION

In 2001, the University of Sydney, in collaboration with the Koori Centre, launched the Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Oration.

The establishment of the Oration began as a recommendation of the Committee to Review Aboriginal Education at the University of Sydney, of which Dr Perkins was a member.

The University, in consultation with the Koori Centre, adopted in principle that the University establish an Annual Oration, "to be given by an internationally high-profile race relations leader... as a demonstration of its continuing commitment to fostering excellence in education and leadership among its Indigenous staff and graduates."¹

The University, in consultation with the Koori Centre, believed it would be fitting to name the Oration in honour of the University's first Indigenous graduate, Dr Charles Perkins AO.

The Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Oration was established with the full support of the Perkins family and in acknowledgement of Dr Perkins' tireless dedication to human rights and social justice for Indigenous Australians.

¹ Vice-Chancellor's Preliminary Response to the Report of the Committee established to review Aboriginal education at the University of Sydney, 2000.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Shane Houston
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
(Indigenous Strategy and Services)

With a strong background in education and health, Shane Houston leads the University's institution-wide strategy to advance Indigenous participation, engagement, education and research.

Professor Houston was previously executive director of systems performance and Aboriginal policy with the NT Department of Health and Families. He has been actively engaged in Aboriginal advancement issues for more than 30 years at a community level, working in government and in a number of international settings, including various United Nations-related activities. He has a long-standing interest in the development of culturally secure health services and systems, and in health economics – especially in finding greater equity in how health systems allocate and use resources.

Professor Houston was appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Strategy and Services) at the University of Sydney in April 2011. He had previously been a board member of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health and the Lowitja Institute.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Dr Jeff McMullen AM

An author, journalist and film maker for over 45 years, you may recognise Dr Jeff McMullen from his work on *Foreign Correspondent*, *Four Corners* and *Sixty Minutes* or as the host of the ABC television series *Difference of Opinion*. Dr McMullen has written, filmed and campaigned around the world to improve the health, education and human rights of Indigenous people. Some of his many achievements and contribution to the Indigenous community include:

- Honorary CEO of Ian Thorpe's Foundation for Youth, focusing on early learning programs and literacy.
- Director of AIME, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience, connecting university undergraduates as mentors for Aboriginal high school students in urban areas
- Director of the Australia Indigenous Engineering Aid Summer School program, building opportunities in tertiary education.
- Trustee of the Jimmy Little Foundation, aimed at reduction and prevention of the epidemic of chronic illness.
- Patron of the University of Canberra's Healthpact Centre, developing health promotion and social equity programs, especially for aboriginal children.

Dr McMullen was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for services to journalism and efforts to raise awareness of economic, social and human rights issues in Australia and overseas as well as service to charity.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Mr Charles 'Chicka' Madden

A respected Elder, Mr Charles Madden has lived in Cadigal country in the Sydney region for most of his life.

For over 35 years he has served as a Director of the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern, and is a Life Member of the Redfern All Blacks Junior Rugby League Football Club.

Charles is also a board member of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

PERFORMERS

Mrs Megan Hanlon

Torres Strait Islander – Stephen Island (Ugar)
Aboriginal – Kukuyalantji
Bachelor of Music and Performance
Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Major: Bass guitar

Mr Che deBoehmler

Certificate in Contemporary Music
Composer, performer and tutor
Major: Guitar



DR CHARLES PERKINS AO ANNUAL MEMORIAL PRIZE

5

Established by the Koori Centre in 2000, the Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Prize commemorates the lifelong achievements of Dr Perkins AO, the first Indigenous Australian graduate of the University of Sydney.

The prize is awarded annually to Indigenous Australian students who have completed a bachelor's or honour's degree and have achieved outstanding results during their studies.

The single prize was increased to a maximum of three recipients in 2003, with the support of the Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students, the Koori Centre and the Pro-Vice-Chancellors of the University of Sydney.

Previous winners of this prestigious prize are listed below.

2001

Ms Tracey Sharon Kickett

2002

Ms Llewellyn Williams

2003

Mr Christopher Davis
Ms Jodie Wellington

2004

Ms Cheryl Davis
Ms Simone Nelson
Ms Yvette Balla-Gow

2005

Ms Kate Makin
Mr Percival Knight
Mr Victor Wood

2006

Mr Dylan Hughes
Mr John Henderson
Ms Stephanie Walton

2007

Ms Jade Swan
Ms Kerry Wallace-Massone
Mr Nicholas Beeton

2008

Ms Alana Moffett
Ms Naomi May Cook
Mr Paul Gray

2009

Mr Adam Ridgeway
Mr Chad Todhunter
Ms Sarah Callan

2010

Ms Amanda Porter
Ms Rebecca O'Brien
Ms Yvonne Payne



THE CHARLIE PERKINS TRUST
for Children & Students



DR CHARLES NELSON PERRURLE PERKINS AO (BA '66)

Arrernte and Kalkadoon Man 1936 – 2000

Charles's grandmother, Nellie Errerreke Perkins, and his mother Hetti, were Eastern Arrernte women, born at Arltunga. Hetti's young life was spent around the mines and working on pastoral stations. During this time she had eight children: Percival, Bill, George, Nita, Margaret, Alec, Don and May. Nita and Margaret were taken away from her at a young age and sent to Adelaide. She never saw them again. In 1935, Hetti met Martin Connelly while living at the Bungalow near Alice Springs. Martin's mother was a Kalkadoon woman from the Mt Isa region and his father was Irish. Hetti had two children to Martin. They named their first child, who was born in 1936, Charles Nelson Perkins, and his young brother, Ernest. Charles did not meet his father until he was 33 years old.

In 1945, Father Percy Smith, an Anglican priest, took Charles and a number of other boys to Adelaide, with the permission of their mothers, to further their education. While Charles tried to make the most of the opportunity offered to him, he recalled the harsh discipline of the boy's home, particularly after the departure of Father Smith. At St Francis House, the boys formed a strong, lifelong bond with Father and Mrs Smith and each other. It was during his years in Adelaide that Charles began to understand the extent of discrimination against Aboriginal people.

Charles's outstanding skills as a soccer player led him to England in 1957 to play for Everton. On his return to Australia, he married Eileen in 1961 and they moved to Sydney. His soccer career culminated in him playing as captain/coach for Pan-Hellenic in Sydney. He was passionate about soccer and it helped finance his way through university. In Sydney, Ted Noffs was to influence and support Charles in his endeavours. Charles entered the University of Sydney in 1963 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in May 1966. He was the first Indigenous Australian to graduate from university. At this time, he was also

instrumental in establishing the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in Sydney and forged a lasting connection with the Sydney Aboriginal community.

In the summer of 1965, Charles organised a group of 30 students to travel to Walgett, Moree, Bowraville and Kempsey to protest against discrimination and poor living conditions. In his autobiography, Charles said "The Freedom Ride was probably the greatest and most exciting event that I have ever been involved in with Aboriginal affairs." This unprecedented protest exposed the apartheid of rural Australia and gave him a national profile in the media. He recognised that the media was a valuable tool to inform Australians of the plight of Indigenous Australians and he used it adeptly. In Canberra in 1972, he joined other young Aboriginal men at the Tent Embassy and defiantly called for compensation and recognition of Aboriginal land and human rights. It was also in this year that Charles received a life-saving kidney transplant.

Charles dedicated his life to achieving justice for Indigenous Australians. His extraordinary achievements included appointments as Secretary, Department of Aboriginal Affairs; Chairman, Aboriginal Development Commission and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. He was actively involved in Indigenous organisations wherever he lived. He was elected ATSIC Commissioner in both Alice Springs and Sydney. In 1987 he was awarded the Order of Australia.

But it was at the community level that he was a household name. He was a renowned activist and a fearless spokesman. The last 30 years of his life were made possible by the kidney donation. This miraculous gift made him determined to make a difference to Indigenous Australians and he did.

Later in his life, Charles proudly fulfilled his cultural obligations with his passage through law with his people, the Eastern Arrernte.

Charles loved his family. He and Eileen have three children, Hetti, Adam and Rachel and seven grandchildren, Tyson, Thea, Lille, Madeleine, Charles, Remy and Arnhem. His spirit is with us all.

ON ABORIGINAL CULTURE:

"It's just another world. There's another world out there and I didn't really understand it, but I do now. It's the same as when my friend, who came from up Derby way, saw his first white man. He was about eighteen and he saw the first white man he'd ever seen coming towards him on the first horse he'd ever seen. Imagine that. Everything changes straight away doesn't it ... you sit there at night, with the fires burning and maybe 200 people dancing: it was awe-inspiring ... you're going back 50,000 years in time. It writes new chapters in your brain."

ON BEING A BUREAUCRAT:

"Tread new fields. Break new ground. Make mistakes in achieving objectives. That's what it's all about. You've gotta do things in the space of one year that takes normal bureaucratic mechanisms to do in five to ten years. So you've gotta break a lotta rules – not deliberately so, but the best way you possibly can – so you achieve that objective in the quickest possible time ... You've got people out there you've probably never met sleeping under trees, bad health, no chance of employment and probably need a feed and a decent drink of water. So what are you doing about it?"

ON THE FREEDOM RIDE:

"That's the beginning. The eyes. The meaning of the eyes. The relationship, the eye conversation between people. The incident outside the RSL club, that was the most dramatic part of everything. A lot of things fell in place after that. We knew what we had to do. It set the pattern, the template. The eye conversation I had with hundreds of Aboriginal people. In the semi darkness, the fading afternoon and in the heat of the day. Just looking. Just looking. At something. And I was looking back at them. We were wondering what it was all about. One day I'll be able to explain it all I suppose. That was the magic message I got from the Freedom Ride."

ON HIS LIFE:

"I am a descendant of a once proud tribe from Central Australia – the Arrernte people. Today we number very few and own nothing. We cringe like dogs at the prospect of the 'White backlash'. We pray eternally that the White authority structure will not turn on us and impede what little progress we have made. We ask for land rights with tongue in cheek knowing full well in our hearts that the land belonged to us in the first instance. We stagger and stumble into each other in confusion when our identity ... is contested and thus allow ourselves to be moulded by others. Our land, our pride and our future has been taken away from us and our people buried in unmarked graves. We wander through Australian society as beggars. We live off the crumbs of the white Australian table and are told to be grateful. This is what Australia Day means to Aboriginal Australians. We celebrate with you but there is much sadness in our joy. It is like dancing on your mother's grave."

Many thanks to the Perkins family for permission to include this extract from 'State Funeral' program, Sydney Town Hall, 25 October 2000.



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