

PERCY MUMBULLA



Percy Mumbulla with Christine Smith
who wrote the words for this song

PERCY MUMBULLA — Aboriginal Elder and Mystic as remembered by Christine Smith

Percy Mumbulla was an elder of the South Coast Aboriginal people. I was also told he was a clever man of the tribe. He lived the culture as strongly as any Aboriginal person in a remote area of Australia, and his cultural life was lived even amidst the commercial developments of the South Coast, so close to Sydney. It was as if he lived in a parallel universe and the Western ways didn't touch him. He had a mystical consciousness which he delighted in sharing.

It was Father Ted Kennedy who introduced me to Percy Mumbulla. I was going down the South Coast for a few days with friends when Ted said to me... "call in with a message from me to Percy Mumbulla in South Nowra." I was given instructions to go down Browns Road to Mumbulla Avenue. There I found some housing commission houses and at the corner house there was Percy sitting on a big coil of rope with a sailor's hat perched jauntily on his head. I fell in love with him on first sighting and he seemed all that I could want a human being to be. He was one to chuckle and laugh a lot and he was steeped in Aboriginal law and custom. He said something about never walking on a woman's shadow as it is so full of power.... I loved his appearance, his white hair and the fine chiselled features of his face. His brother Frank was lovable as well. Frank was crippled from arthritis, which he said he developed from picking peas in the cold wet weather on the South Coast. Later on when I was spending some time out in Wilcannia, Frank would say... "every night I turn towards the west where the sun is setting and say hello to you." Such poets were these two brothers.

On one of my visits to Percy he took me down to the park at the end of Mumbulla Avenue where he practised his golf and after a bit of golfing he led me through the bush to an old man sitting by a fire. It was then I met Uncle Poncho. Uncle Poncho always had a fire to sit by, no matter what the season, and there he was so close to the Pacific Highway (about fifty yards) living his Aboriginal way among the tall gum trees. Who would think there are such people so close to the mad mayhem of the white commercial world. Percy would then come to Sydney with his golf clubs slung over his shoulder and play at Moore Park. I had plenty of visits with Percy and he would look after me and buy me lunch at South Nowra....chips and Fanta and an apple slice. We were two kids together. I also introduced him to my mum and dad. Now in my mind's eye I can see my dad and Percy sitting together at Central Station yarning away.....two little men who were very original and who got on together.

Later on when Percy was dying I went to see him in hospital. He was lying there, a lone Aboriginal man in the ward, his white hair billowing out over the pillow. His eyes were closed and his lips constantly moved. He was speaking his language and I felt he was communing with the spirits. Thinking about Percy in this moment it seems that if I had met no one but him, I would consider myself a lucky woman. Mystical in life, mystical in death. Thank you Percy. *(Christine Smith)*