

GOODBYE APRIL AND THANKYOU

WHEN I RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA after many years abroad, my dream was to publish a national arts magazine, OZ ARTS. April Hersey made that happen.

April was in her sixties, my mother's generation, and our families had known each other most of our lives, as we all lived in Glenbrook. I knew that April was a writer and that she had worked at the Craft Council of Australia and had been an editor of their very popular craft magazine which was published until 1988.

Janet De Boer, formerly editor of Textile Fibre Forum and a past President of the Craft Council of Queensland remembers their early contact when April was with the Craft Council of Australia and the various State leaders came together for national policy meetings. "This taught me

a huge amount about arts administration. Plus we had a lot of fun... I'm sure April was instrumental in creating the national slide library back then (early 1980s) – what an archive! She did much good.'

April was a published writer of many books and articles from the age of 20. Her son Shane Hersey reminded us in his eulogy of April's many achievements in this area and, most importantly, the securing of her famous parents' histories and reputations—Zora Cross and David McKee Wright. Shane described how the family home

'was her fortress where she fought for her parents' reputations over many decades, first her father's and then her mother's. There were many battles over the years but it was a war that April won, thanks largely to her ally Cathy Perkins, who wrote an excellent biography of April's mother Zora Cross, for which I am personally very grateful, because it was the most important thing there was for April towards the end of her life and I think it gave her strength to continue to the age of 96 years old.'

Cathy Perkins tells how she first contacted April in 2012 to say 'I was writing a biography of her mother. She was delighted and wrote back to say her mother deserved a sympathetic and well-researched biography as over the years she had been misunderstood as a kind of femme fatale when she was in fact a dedicated writer and scholar. I went to meet April at the property in Glenbrook her parents had bought in 1919 and where April had lived for most of her life. It was very moving to visit the beautiful garden that April had looked after, partly as a tribute to her parents. She gave me a warm welcome and I returned several times over the next seven years. Through meeting Zora's daughter I felt closer to my biography subject and more determined to complete the book. Although April had a strong idea of how her mother's story should be told,

she gave me the freedom to write it as I saw it. When 'The Shelf Life of Zora Cross' was published in November 2019 I took a copy to April who was then in hospital at the age of 95. She beamed when she held the book with a beautiful picture of her mother on the cover.'

With such an eventful life and so many people recalling with such warmth their own particular memories, the interlude which April and I shared when she was editor of my publication in the early 1990s, her last editing job, has slipped from many minds but it is very special to me.

It was 1990 and April set about organising the launch and commissioning writers for the new magazine with gusto. Her enormous network of friends and acquaintances in the arts were called upon and they rallied. People welcomed a new national arts magazine, the arts were jumping at this time, and everyone wanted to be involved.

April's friend Nadine Amadio was our unofficial press officer. A member of the famous Amadio musical family, Nadine was wellknown and loved, an author, journalist, poet, arts critic and film scriptwriter. The Australian arts were her passion. Nadine asked who I would like to launch the magazine. I said Rodney Hall, then head of the Australia Council. So of course Nadine arranged that and for the launch to be held at Gene Sherman's stylish Sydney gallery. In those days the ABC had a weekly arts program and they did a program about our new magazine.

We commissioned stories from the best arts writers at the time, some of them still writing today, 25 years later: Caroline Baum, Bronwyn Watson, Marie Geissler, Quentin Chester, Dorothy Erickson (a regular contributor still), Janet



Mansfield of Ceramics, Art & Perception, Noris Ioannou from SA, Jeremy Eccles, Michael Sharkey, Gay Bilson, Rod Moss, Anna Maryke, Rosemary Valadon, Glenn A. Baker, Grace Cochrane and Julian Leatherdale. Wonderful people and wonderful writers passionate about the arts in Australia.

Publishing any magazine is tough, but especially in Australia, and eventually the dream came to an end. But it had been worth it. Over the following years I occasionally met April – still pretty and sweet voiced – but not as often as I would have liked. It was a great thrill to read of the publication of Cathy Perkins' biography of Zora Cross and to see its excellent reviews a year ago. April must have been thrilled.

Carolynne Skinner

April Hersey, née April Maeve McKee-Wright 1924-2020