

ONE IN A MILLION

by David Thomas
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Amy Huxtable was one of those rare individuals who cared about people.

Such was her loving care that even 13 years after her death she is fondly remembered and spoken of.

For younger generations and those of us who came to Bendigo in more recent times, Amy Huxtable may be just a name. But the person that name recalls can be found out if you make a few enquiries and look up some of the things she did during her 23 years as Social Editor of the **Bendigo Advertiser**.

This has been my happy task over the past few days, and what an enlightening and moving task it has been. For Amy Huxtable was truly one in a million - a great human being and a great Bendigo-nian.

All my reading and talking about Amy Huxtable has come about through the generosity of the Amy Huxtable Memorial Committee which will, in this coming week (October 25), present to the Bendigo Art Gallery three sculptures by Ola Cohn in Amy Huxtable's memory. And what a memory she has left behind!

Let me tell you something about this wonderful woman, what she did for women, Bendigo and the arts scene, both publically as a talented journalist and privately as a loving Christian woman.

Amy Huxtable was born in Cheltenham, Melbourne in 1919, the

second daughter of Robert and Violet Huxtable. In 1933 the family moved to Bendigo, where Amy completed her secondary education at the Bendigo High School.

After attending the Cox Business College in View Street, she became expert at shorthand. From there she moved to Radio 3BO where she worked for eight years as a copywriter.

Seeking experience in the metropolitan area, she went to Melbourne to join the staff of the large advertising agency, George Patterson Pty. Ltd., being personal assistant to the director of radio.

Ever keen to learn more, Amy Huxtable left for England in 1950 to study television, which had yet to come to Australia. She also continued her association with advertising. Active in a number of areas, her experiences include appearing in Richard Dimbelby's BBC television programme, **In London Tonight**.

Her first association with the **Bendigo Advertiser** began in 1953 when, for one year, after returning from London, she joined the newspaper as Social Editress, in the absence of Nell Millane. This soon became a three-year stint, and things began to happen.

Her lively approach to people and to journalism quickly won Amy wide support. In addition, in 1956 she compiled and produced **The Advertiser Recipe Book** based on readers' contributions. It was so successful that some 33,000 copies were sold, and it went into

five or six editions.

Its popularity was such that it is still in use in many Bendigo homes today.

When Miss Millane returned to the **Advertiser**, Amy vacated her position and joined the staff of **The Age** newspaper in Melbourne. Here her skills as a journalist were soon appreciated and she was offered the job of Deputy Social Editress.

But things had changed in Bendigo for she was offered, at the same time, the position of Social Editress at the **Advertiser**. Lucky for the newspaper and lucky for Bendigo she accepted the latter.

In June of 1957 began an association with the **Advertiser** that was to last until her death in 1980. Her contribution was such that even today she is remembered with great warmth, and some of the tales told about her have begun to take on the mantle of mythology.

At first she wrote under the pen name of 'Toora', short for Toorak. In later years she became widely known throughout central and northern Victoria for her writing and support of charitable causes and women's interests.

Bendigo historian, Frank Cusack recalls that she had a wonderful rapport with women. She transformed the women's pages of the

Bendigo Advertiser from mere social reporting to cover very widely women's affairs and interests. In this, reflected Frank Cusack, she contributed greatly to the development of women's role and status in life.

The list of Amy Huxtable's interests seemed to be without end - social, historical, musical, artistic, the elderly and the blind, Soroptimist International, the National Council of Women, the Spastic Society of Victoria, Bendigo Y.W.C.A., the Music Advancement Society of Victoria ...

"There has not been a concert in Bendigo over the last 10 years that didn't owe most of its success to her. Her enthusiasm, interest, knowledge and absolute dedication to her articles have made her the greatest single champion of music and all the arts in Bendigo", stated Edmund Beilhartz in 1980.

In the visual arts it was the same, her articles being notable for their enthusiastic support and genuine interest.

Such was the interest she caused that in 1969 G.E. Mayne, Administrator of the Bendigo Home and Hospital for the Aged wrote: "All our members are ^{so}conscious of the great and gracious contribution you have made to journalism in this city. A very large part of the success of **The Bendigo Advertiser** is, in our opinion, attributable to the high standards you have always attained."

This was high praise indeed, and he finished his letter to Amy

with the telling observation that she had "earned the respect and goodwill of every organisation in our city."

Proof of this came in a number of ways. She was appointed Life Governor of the Bendigo Home and Hospital for the Aged, and was also made a life governor of both the Bendigo and Northern District Base Hospital, and Mirridong Home for the Blind.

A devout Christian, she was dedicated to her Christian Scientist faith.

When Amy Huxtable died on January 16, 1980, Bendigo mourned her loss, a loss which was to be felt keenly then and in the future.

A favourite saying of Amy Huxtable's was "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness".

People with such dynamic optimism are few and far between. And she was readily recognised as one of those precious individuals that no community can afford to lose.

As a journalist, she was described as a true professional. Douglas Lockwood, then Managing Editor of the **Advertiser** said, "I have been in journalism all my life and have never known a more dedicated journalist."

"Her public work is well known. What isn't so well known is that she did so much by stealth".

Amy Huxtable could not and would not be forgotten.

Mayor of Bendigo, Cr. R. L. Campbell called a public meeting and a committee was set up to establish a suitable memorial and launch the Amy Huxtable Memorial Fund.

First under Douglas Lockwood and then, after his untimely death, under Miss Norma Young (who is still the committee's chairman today), the Amy Huxtable Memorial Committee got to work. Suggestions and money flowed in - the naming of a new rose as the 'Amy Huxtable Rose', a town clock, drinking fountain, a scholarship, citizen of the year award, the sponsorship of a child through World Vision, a work of art for the Bendigo Art Gallery, and a trust fund with which to make a different endowment each year, were some of them.

The **Bendigo Advertiser** commissioned a portrait of Amy Huxtable from the Bendigo artist, Jan Neil. It also changed the name of the **Bendigo Advertiser Aria**, to the **Amy Huxtable Memorial Operatic Area** be an annual award at the Bendigo Competitions.

With money in hand, the Memorial Fund made its first donation in 1981 - a specially designed garden seat, located in the Conservatory Gardens opposite the Advertiser.

On the second anniversary of her death the Bendigo Historical Society held its inaugural **Amy Huxtable Memorial Lecture**, with

Frank Cusack speaking on "They Wrote of Bendigo".

At the official opening of the new Bendigo City Library headquarters of the Northern Central Goldfields Regional Library Services in November 1984, microfilms and indexes of some 639 articles written by Amy Huxtable and published by the **Advertiser**, were presented to the Library. Their value to scholars and the people of Bendigo alike have been great. Parts of this article could not have been written without them.

The Amy Huxtable Memorial Fund continued to give support with a \$1,000 donation to the Capital Theatre in 1990 for five seats in the new theatre. The plaque on each reads "Donated by the Amy Huxtable Memorial Committee in memory of Amy Huxtable."

Now, on October 25, the Committee will be giving three sculptures by Ola Cohn to the Bendigo Art Gallery as its final gift in memory of Amy.

Why the Art Gallery, and why Ola Cohn? A gift of a work of art to the Bendigo Art Gallery was one of the original proposals. And Bendigo-born Ola Cohn was an artist and a woman much admired by Amy Huxtable.

Mrs. Kitty Rose, who shared a loving friendship with Amy Huxtable said that Amy and Ola had "much the same outlook on life."

This is confirmed in a series of three articles that Amy Huxtable wrote on Ola Cohn for the **Advertiser** in 1965.

"There dwelt deep within Ola Cohn a respect and love for Life - for the dignity of Man. She was a simple, warm-hearted person,

with a great love for children and for animals."

She saw Ola Cohn as "the pioneer of modern sculpture in Australia." While hailing her as "Australia's greatest woman sculptor", she entertained the thought that perhaps she was "the greatest of Australia's sculptors."

Amy Huxtable first met Ola Cohn at a women's art exhibition in Melbourne. "On first acquaintance one was immediately struck by a pair of piercingly blue-green eyes, peering out from a 'bunch of undisciplined hair', dark and curly and brushed back from a broad, intelligent brow".

Cohn's extraordinary ability and her "vivacious and warm-hearted personality" appealed to Amy Huxtable, whom she described as "a truly great Australian".

"Ola Cohn's work was not confined to sacred themes. Yet, hers was a truly religious sculpture. Usually symbolic, often mystical. Its essence lay in its recognition of the underlying Force of Life."

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In/writing about Ola Cohn, one cannot help feeling that one is also reading about the writer herself.

Mrs. Kitty Rose, former chairman of Mirradong Home for the Blind and a friend, described Amy Huxtable as being "alive to the feeling of others, reliable, and very highly respected. She was

quick to do little kindnesses and always gracious."

Amy Huxtable wrote of Ola Cohn, "perhaps her truest monument will lie in her legacy of beauty and memories of a great kindness."

Miss Norma Young and her Committee's choice of work by Ola Cohn to be a memorial to Amy Huxtable could not have been a better one.

With the Committee's support, I was pleased to be able to choose three very different works by Cohn.

The first, a religious stoneware sculpture, **Behold the Man**, was made in about 1940. It presents a strong, commanding face of Christ, with an overall highly active treatment of the surface of the image.

In contrast, **Woman and Two Children** of the same date is a highly characteristic work, showing that feeling of tenderness that Cohn was so able to express in the female face and form.

The third work is a pair of bookends, **Woman with Owl** made in plaster in about 1933 and given a bronze-like patina, or surface. This is a charming work and is bound to please the many admirers of Cohn's work.

Together, the three works give a very fine representation of Ola Cohn's work in the art gallery of her birth place.

Together, they will provide a lasting memorial to the achievements of a truly great Bendigo woman.

Amy Huxtable was a leader for those in need. Her memory should make us all want to strive for what she stood for and to make Bendigo so much the better place in which to live.

In looking back over the life and achievements of this remarkable woman, perhaps the best monument to her should be those words of Kitty Rose - 'We want another Amy'.