Neville Symington

On the occasion of the Sydney Institute’s celebration of Neville’s receiving the prestigious Sigourney Award, Jim Telfer, paraphrasing Winnicott, stated ‘there is no such thing as a Neville - without a Joan, that is’ … Jim then added ‘Australian psychoanalysis has grown up with Joan and Neville’ …

Indeed, the arrival of Neville and Joan Symington was a game-changer for psychoanalysis in Australia …

A singular figure in his safari suit and satchel, Neville’s presence was always felt, wherever he went …. his initiative of a series of Public Lectures on Psychoanalysis in 1997, brought a breath of fresh air to the scene in Sydney, when the previously perceived elitist Institute threw open its doors, generating a buzz of discourse and debate in weekly meetings between analysts and candidates, psychotherapists, clinicians, university lecturers and students … it was there and then that I decided to pursue an earlier formulated desire to become a psychoanalyst …

Although I never benefitted from supervision with Neville as a candidate, I appreciated his insights generously offered … I found it puzzling that such a prodigious analytic output came from a regular daily routine of writing for 20 minutes, then plunging into the pool for his daily swim … I very much appreciated his generous hospitality, at his home or out, enlivened by his wide-ranging interests, and sense of humour … his offer to take me flying, having heard of my father’s flying exploits in WWII, resulted in an enthralling excursion to the central west one Sunday, with lunch at the aerodrome, followed by a no less enjoyable afternoon tea at home with Joan …

I missed Neville’s presence as he toured overseas, where it seems his offerings were greatly appreciated … in London lectures presented from his series ‘ Growth of Mind’, described as ‘ground breaking’, and ‘a new foundation for our understanding of the process’, were fully subscribed, and repeated the next day … I thought it sad that he felt his work was not as appreciated here in Australia as it was elsewhere …

Headstrong to the end, Neville did not take good care of his health, despite entreaties to the contrary, and lamentably succumbed to a terminal cancer, with very little time left after its diagnosis … it felt like a scramble to catch time with him … it made all the more meaningful for me, lunch with him at his club in London at the recent IPA conference, regrettably to be the last time …

The loss of Neville, along with Joan’s ongoing struggles with Parkinsons’ Disease, leaves the Sydney Institute without this seminal couple, and much the poorer …

Jenepher Thomas