

June Farrer (1925 – 2012)

JUNE, the eldest of three children, was born in Pietermaritzburg on 28 February 1925. Her early life was spent in the country town of Ixopo and on her aunt Frances Gold's farm in the Ixopo district. Her brother Ian was born on 19 September 1926 and, close in age and of equally shy and sensitive natures, the two children became inseparable friends and companions. They received their first lessons from a tutor, an immigrant from England, and later attended Ixopo Junior School. The children enjoyed the freedom of country life, spending happy times in the peaceful town and the farm.

June's sister Ann was born in 1934. After moving several times, the family finally settled in Pietermaritzburg in the house at 43 Miller Street where June and Ann were to live for many years, and Ian until his death. June's education continued at Scottsville Primary School and she matriculated at Pietermaritzburg Girls' High School.

During the war years, June's father, John Bernard Farrer served in the army, seeing action in Greece and Austria and her mother Natalie was a member of the South African Women's Army Service.

June recalled how during those years, because of the proximity of their house to the Drill Hall, many men from the army and air force would pass by. Her mother, to show her sympathy and support for the servicemen, would call out to them and invite them in for tea and cakes, her hospitality being readily accepted by the homesick men.

This area of Pietermaritzburg was always to have special meaning for June as her mother, (born Agnes Natalie Murray), grew up in the gracious family residence "Atholl" in Bulwer Street.



June Farrer

June joined the Natal Society Library on 1 April 1945 on a salary of £5 a month. The library was then in Longmarket Street, a renovated but antiquated building with few staff amenities. Hours were long, to eight o'clock on a Friday evening. June's first years at the Lending Section's counter required her to stand for many hours, but during those years she made the acquaintance of many of Pietermaritzburg's prominent citizens and to hear her reminiscences was always a delight.

June studied by correspondence with the South African Library Association and after completing the Elementary Diploma, qualified with the Intermediate Library Diploma in 1954.

Her competence was recognised and in the mid-1950s she was appointed as head of the Lending Section, a role for which her careful work and ability to deal tactfully with staff and members of the public adequately equipped her.

During this time, June gained the experience needed to manage the library as a whole. She was able to see the wider picture of service excellence, while dealing with the minute details which heading a section of a library entailed. Her leadership style was gentle but firm.

In 1958, she was appointed as deputy chief librarian, a post she held until her retirement. From this time forward, she acted as library head and as secretary of the Natal Society Council meetings in the absence of the chief librarian.

She served on the *Natalia* editorial committee as secretary, and as a much-valued, sharp-eyed proof reader for 18 years from 1972 until 1990.

June enrolled with the University of Natal and while studying part-time, gained a BA degree in 1969. She continued studying with Unisa and, in the mid-1970s, gained the post-graduate Higher Diploma in Librarianship.

June was fully involved in all the library's developments. She assisted the chief librarian, Sue Judd, in the planning of the new library building and in 1975, was present when it opened its doors to its first borrowers.

She saw the start of the Housebound Service, the change from the Market Square Branch Library to the Children's Reference Library, and its subsequent establishment as the Bessie Head Children's Library in the new addition; the computerisation of the library's functions and the establishment of branch libraries in the suburbs, a development which she personally headed.

June worked at the side of the staff, never seeing her role only as a senior manager. It was this ability to be involved with ongoing work and projects that set June apart from many other team leaders. She was as comfortable helping to process books as she was

in her role as deputy chief librarian, or acting head. Her office was always open to senior members of the staff needing advice, or perhaps simply a chat to ease some moment of pressure. It was at these times when her distinctive chuckle could often be heard, as some new or remembered incident was recounted. It was indeed June's delightful sense of humour and sense of fun that will be remembered with affection by everyone who knew her.

Her colleagues recalled her methodical approach to her work in which she applied only the highest standards. To Shona Wallis, retired chief librarian, and Pat McKenzie, administrator and later deputy director, at whose sides she worked for many years, she was not only a respected colleague but a friend. Shona expressed what was thought by all:

"June, an extremely kind and gentle person, was a legend in the library world." (*The Witness*, 29 February 2012 p. 9).

Of Ann's lifetime memories of June's particular kindness, perhaps one of the most touching was of her thoughtful assistance to their brother Ian. Ann recalled that she cooked for him until his death in 1993.

She retired in 1990 after service of 45 years.

After the transfer of the Natal Society Library to the municipality in 2004, June, in a part-time capacity, became special adviser on the special book collections that had been entrusted to the Natal Society, which were transferred to the Alan Paton Library at the University of Natal. These comprised the bequeathed O'Brien and Hattersley collections and the Africana collections of old Natal books and documents.

June embraced retirement with enthusiasm and she was at last afforded the time to devote herself to reading, art and gardening. She joined an art group with Padca, (Pietermaritzburg and District Care of the Aged) attending art classes in the old library's gallery, producing delicate and beautiful work in which she showed great ability and by so doing, revived a remarkable talent for botanical drawings. Her garden provided hours of pleasure; its success based not only on hard work but a keen horticultural knowledge.

June loved all animals and spoke often of the dogs which had lived with her family. In her own home at 277 Bulwer Street she was never without at least one stray cat, which had moved in as soon as opportunity presented itself.

If June's work occupied much of her life before retirement, it was with her family that her heart really lay. She was devoted to all members of her family and was never happier than when in the company of her sister Ann with whom she shared a lifetime's memories and mutual interests. These included a

love of classical music and the tuneful melodies of the early to mid-twentieth century.

In March 2011, June sold her house and preparations were made to accommodate her at Ann and her husband Ian Player's home, Phuzamoya, in the Karkloof. She moved in September 2011 and although then in poor health, spent her last months in peace and happiness, enjoying the relaxed country atmosphere and the beauty of the farm. She died peacefully on 24 February, 2012 four days before her 87th birthday.

At June's memorial service on 10 March, family members, friends and former colleagues paid tribute to her in a gathering on the farm. During the ceremony, a plum tree was planted which was a reminder of the one in Ixopo which June had known as a child. In her notice in *The Witness*, Ann described June as "admirable, courageous and wise", and this is indeed how she will always be remembered by her family and her many friends.

JENNIFER LANCASTER

Edmond Hall, MMM, JCD (1927–2011)

COLONEL Eddie Hall, commanding officer of the Natal Carbineers from April 1985 to July 1990, after serving as second in command from June 1981, came from a family that devoted more years to that regiment than any other family since the Second World War. Not long before he passed away the Carbineers celebrated his 60 years of devoted service. For a few months, from May to July 1990, he also enjoyed the

distinction of having his son, John, as his Regimental Sergeant-Major – surely unique in Citizen Force/Reserve Force history. His own father, A.G. (Alfie) Hall, had served the regiment for 56 years.

In 1950 Eddie enrolled in the band as a cornet player and remained a bandsman throughout his military career, including his years as commanding officer. At one point there were three generations of Halls in the band: Alfie,