

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE5989

Hurley, Adelle

(1919 - 2010)

Born 21 May, 1919, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Died 4 March, 2010, Coffs Harbour New South Wales Australia

Occupation Professional photographer

Summary

Inspired by her newsreel photographer father, Adelle 'Front Page' Hurley is known as a pioneering woman press photographer; she was one of only three Australian women press photographers working in her time. She was fearless in pursuing her shots, and also fearless against the gender discrimination of her field, lasting over two decades in press photography. Her photographs include a diverse range of subjects, from army photography, vice squad busts, life at outback stations and taipan hunting.

Details

Adelie Hurley was born on 21 May 1919, in Sydney, to Antoinette Leighton and Frank Hurley. She had an identical twin sister named Toni, a brother, Frank Hurley, Jr., and another sister, Yvonne.

Her father was a newsreel photographer who was well known for his Antarctic and WW1 photography. He had a huge impact on her; she believed that, 'it was inbred ... born within me to become a photographer. I think it was a destiny. To me, he was the master, and to have his approval meant the world to me' (*Australian Story 2001*).

From an early age (Adelie was eight at the time), the children would assist their father in the development of his prints. When he was away on various expeditions, Adelie took it upon herself to teach herself photography.

In 1930, when she 11 years old, Hurley won a school photography prize for photographs she took of the school fete using a Box Brownie camera and an 'old bellows enlarger in the bathroom' (Australian Gallery Directors Council 17).

Hurley enrolled at the Sydney Technical College, where she studied commercial art for 18 months but dropped out as she found it 'too narrow and too conforming' (*Sydney Morning Herald*).

She began her career working as a model but preferred taking photographs herself. By 1938 she began working as a freelance photographer for *Pix* magazine (there were only two other Australian women press photographers working at that time), and in 1939 she became a member of the Australian Associated Press (AAP) staff.

She was known for her adventurous spirit and taking risks to capture the images she wanted. One of her adventures saw her stowing away in an overland troop convoy to travel up to Darwin. After being discovered she had to hitchhike to Darwin on her own. This adventure enabled her to produce a series of photographs about the army, which were published in the *Daily Telegraph* before the civilian evacuation. On another occasion, Hurley managed to photograph a raid of an opium den in Sydney by climbing a ladder to access the first floor of a Chinese laundry and 'jostling' with 'burly Vice Squad police.' The resultant photographs were a scoop and made the front page of *The Sunday Sun* newspaper and became known as 'Front Page Hurley.'

During 1941-1943 she travelled to the USA, working as a freelance photographer for *Pix* magazine. On her return to Australia Hurley began working full time as a casual photographer for *The Sun*. The management of *The Sun* did not employ her as a staff photographer as they claimed that 'there were no women's toilets on the photographic floor of the building' (Australian Gallery Directors Council 18).

Hurley decided to leave Sydney and for the next couple of years travelled and worked as a freelance photographer. She went onto work for the magazine *A.M.* (which was edited by Cyril Pearl) in 1950. When the magazine closed in 1953, Frank Packer employed her to work for the Australian Consolidated Press. She also worked for *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Women's Weekly*, which during the period 1956-1963 saw her travelling overseas, covering stories in Fiji, India and the USSR. She also travelled within Australia photographing life on outback stations, Aboriginal people, Aboriginal sacred sites in Arnhem Land and taipan hunting.

Adelie Hurley was to marry three times and did not have any children, moving up to North Queensland with her last husband, where they managed a resort in Bowen. Here, she took up portrait painting. She died in 2010

Adelie's career as a professional press photographer spanned the period 1938-1960. During that time her male colleagues resented her work as they felt she encroached on their domain. This resentment manifested to such an extent that her camera equipment was often sabotaged; in the end she had to keep her own photographic equipment under lock and key.

'I've taken literally millions of pictures. It was a great life but a lonely one in newspapers. I had a lot of acquaintances but not many friends. I married a few times over the years. Being a press photographer suits my personality: I'll go anywhere, anytime.'

Technical information

Hurley's first camera was a Box Brownie camera

Collections

National Library of Australia

Events

1938 - 1960

1930 - 1930

Adelie Hurley won a school photography prize for photographs she took of the school fete.

1981 - 1981

Adelie Hurley's work featured in the *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

Published resources

Exhibition Catalogue

Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

Book

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Newspaper Article

Pioneer in Female Journalism: Adelle Hurley, 1919-2010, Byrnes, Flip,

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/obituaries/pioneer-in-female-photojournalism-20100318-qi6j.html>

Farewell to Adelle, Scott, Belinda,

<http://www.coffscoastadvocate.com.au/news/farewell-to-adelie/482724/>

Book Section

Adelle Hurley, Irving, Winton, 1995

Resource Section

Out of the Blizzard, Latham, Rebecca, 2001,

<http://www.abc.net.au/austory/transcripts/s305854.htm>

Magazine article

A First For Women Photographers in Australia: Quick Thinking and Ladders Got the Top Shots, Bowen, Jill, 1981,

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55457051>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Adelle Hurley, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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