

The
Making
of
No Ordinary Sheila



The Creators
The Characters
The Places

HUGH MACDONALD Director

55 years making films ... still going strong



Hugh directing cameraman Dave McCarlie on Ulva Island nature reserve, February 2015.



First year on the job, 1962 - trainee director Hugh on the National Film Unit sound stage.



First overseas assignment, 1964 - directing Take A Ship on the Ellinis.



Biggest hit, 1970s – This is New Zealand was seen by 2 million people at Expo 70 in Japan, and 400,000+ when shown in the four main centres in New Zealand in 1971.



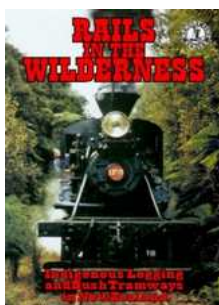
Embassy Theatre, Wellington, 1971 – movie-goers wanting to see This is New Zealand form a long queue down Kent Ice.



Hugh directing Two Weeks at Manutuke on the Manutuke marae, Hawkes Bay, 1970.



D.O.P. Alun Bollinger and Hugh talk film. Albol operated the film crane on the Manutuke shoot.



The Memory Line series - 6 documentaries produced & directed by Hugh in the 1990s.



Hugh directing cameraman Richard Mekalek filming for No Ordinary Sheila, November 2015.

Read and see more on Hugh and his films at

www.hughmacfilm.co.nz

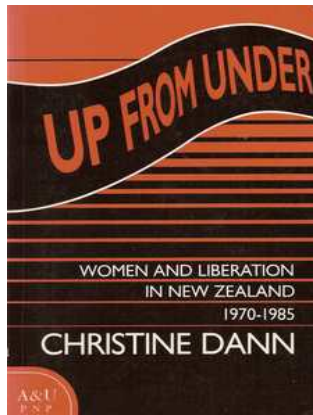


Christine checks the view of the Silverpeaks from Mt Cargill, Dunedin, July 2015.

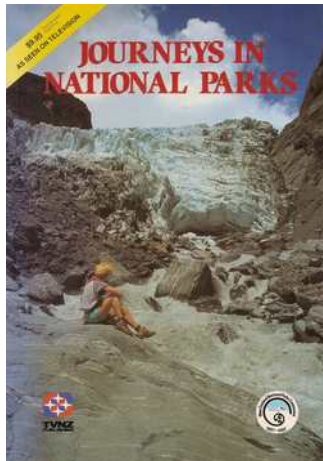
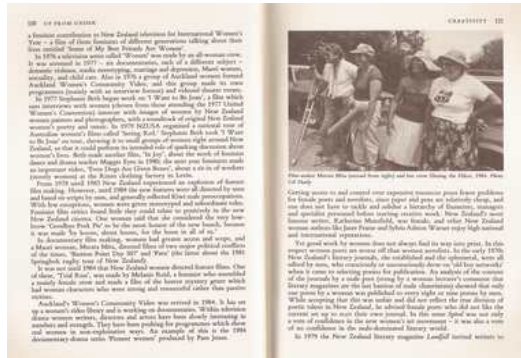
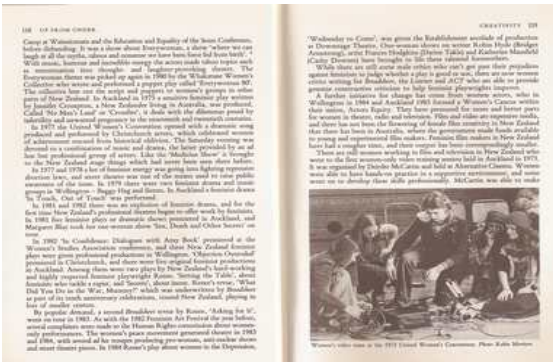
CHRISTINE DANN

Producer & Writer & Researcher

5 years of making films ... learning fast



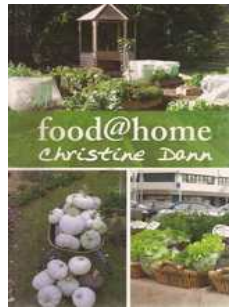
Christine's first book has 3 pages covering New Zealand's 1970s & 80s independent women film-makers.



Christine's next book was written to complement TVNZ's five part documentary series Journeys in National Parks. Christine was the Natural History Unit's researcher for this and other programmes 1985-1988.



Summit of Mt Ruapehu, 1986. Christine (right) on the job of researching Journeys in National Parks.



Christine's most recent book (2012) covers the evolution of new food systems in NZ.



The first documentary (2014) researched, written and produced by Christine documents and celebrates the history and variety of family farming in New Zealand.



Ship Creek beach, Haast, November 2015. Christine wears her 'Complex Female Protagonist' film cap – very appropriate for working on No Ordinary Sheila!

Read more about Christine and her writing at

www.christinedann.org

SHEILA NATUSCH

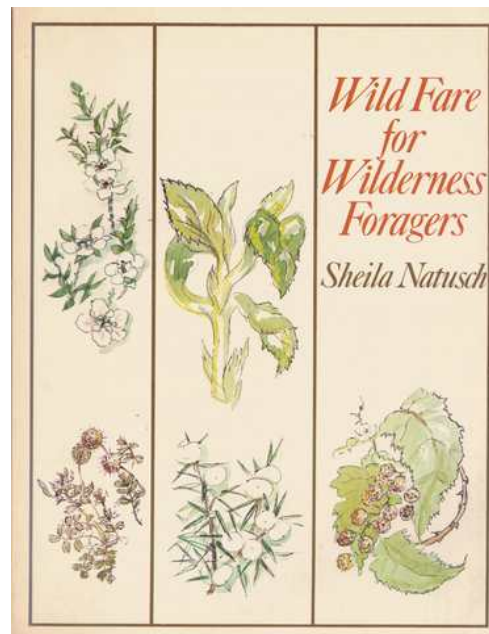
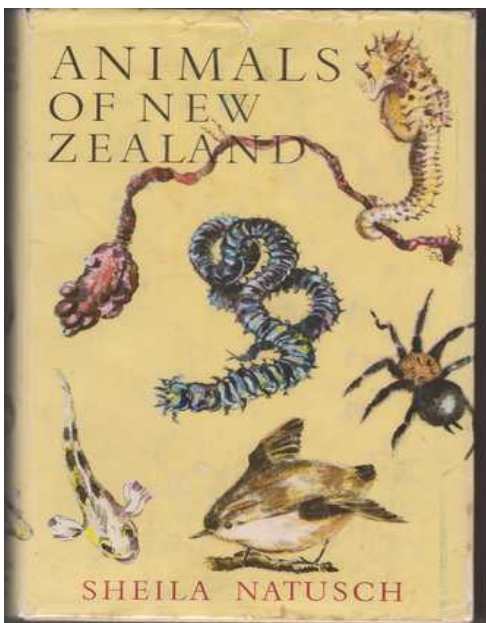
A Natural Star



Sheila on top of Carrington Peak, Southern Alps, 1950.



Graduating with M.A. Hons., Otago University, 1949.



Sheila wrote and illustrated the first comprehensive lay person's guide to the native animals of New Zealand, published in 1967. She also wrote and illustrated our first guide to foraging for wild food (1979).



Sheila was sailing before she could walk. As well as sailing everything from home-rigged dinghies to tall ships, she wrote books about historic ships and voyages, and amusing articles on her sailing exploits.



In 1949 Sheila met her husband Gilbert on a tramping club trip. Nine years later they cycled from Picton to Bluff via the West Coast – before the 60km of road leading to and from the Haast River was built and the river was bridged.



Growing older has brought the usual health challenges for Sheila, which she meets with her characteristic sense of humour (and drawing skills). At 89 she was still one of the most lively graduates of Otago University.

Read about Sheila's early life at
<http://hughmacfilm.co.nz/sheila-s-early-life.html>

Filming a force of nature

Hugh had been wanting to make a film about his remarkable relative Sheila Natusch for a long time. The time wasn't right until Christine arrived to research, write and produce the film. Like Sheila she is a writer and nature lover. She already had a collection of Sheila's books and had used some of them for her own work, as a researcher for TVNZ's Natural History Unit and a writer of gardening books. She'd also heard tales from afar about this wonderfully creative and entertaining woman who lived in a famously cluttered cabin of a house at the end of Happy Valley Road. (Is that a real road? Could Sheila be a learned witch?)

At the end of 2013 Hugh and Christine caught the cable car up to the 'witch's' eyrie, perched on a ledge of rock carved from the cliffs behind Owhiro Bay. Sheila had lived there for 62 years, swimming and sailing in the bay, collecting kaimoana from the coastline, and writing and illustrating all of her 30 plus books from a writer's room at the top of the house. A room with a great view of her beloved South Island mountains across Cook Strait – and of every southerly gale to blast the coast. A great view of a passing whale or a pod of dolphins, as well – Sheila would rush out to draw them, or take her dinghy out to row among them.

Sheila was keen to make a film with us. Although well into her eighties, she wasn't going to let small details like a dodgy heart and a recent diagnosis of liver cancer stop her from doing something new, interesting and fun. But because of her advanced age and her declining state of health, we had to rush into production before all our research and writing – and fundraising – was complete. There was a lot of research to do because Sheila has lived an extremely active life, with many interests and enthusiasms in addition to her professional work of writing and illustrating. They include teaching by correspondence, boats, sailing and maritime history, tramping and cycle touring, foraging for wild food, geology, astronomy, and a wild card – Iceland.

At the height of her writing career in the 1960s and 70s she was contributing a regular column, book reviews and occasional articles to the *New Zealand Listener*, and she wrote for other magazines as well. She illustrated other people's books about plants and animals, and she was a member of the Council of the Royal Society of New Zealand for several years – only the fourth woman of seven in its first 100 years to be such.

We couldn't fit all that detail in the film, and we had to find a way to touch on all these aspects of her life, and open them up as far as we could, without being didactic or dull. We chose to go with filming Sheila in conversation with people who understand and share her interests; some of them old friends or colleagues, and others who are new to her work and life and deeply interested in it. In between the conversations we show Sheila's world, including her personal world of childhood home and environment on Stewart Island, her student digs in Dunedin, the south coast of Wellington and her perch in Owhiro Bay.

The film also shows her wider world of the realm of nature, which stretches from the plants and creatures of the sea to the rocks that form the earth, to every living thing on that creeps on that earth or flies over it, and finally to the stars in the highest heavens. 'Our' visual symphonies' are accompanied by aural ones – music by Gareth Farr, or music especially arranged or composed for the film. This is the natural world of New Zealand as Sheila sees it – beautiful, powerful, amusing, exhilarating.