

April Ossmann

In 1995, newly arrived in the Upper Valley to become editor in chief of the University Press of New England, I needed an assistant. At first, I hired an experienced assistant editor from New York, but when he decamped for Hollywood after a year, I hired one of the earlier applicants, an enthusiastic young poet with a most improbable story, April Ossmann. She informed me that she had left home in Santa Barbara, California when she was 19 and been on her own ever since. After batting around Southern California for a while, she headed east and landed somehow in Hanover and a job as a waitress at the Hanover Inn. Fortunately for her, Dartmouth College owned the Inn, and as a college employee, she qualified for tuition aid at Dartmouth where she enrolled as a part-time literature major focusing on poetry, but still paid her expenses as a waitress. After graduation from Dartmouth, she was accepted in the MFA program in poetry at Vermont College for Fine Arts – and where, in small world Upper Valley style, one of her mentors was Cynthia Huntington who read here at Canaan two weeks ago.

There not being a lot of paid poetry gigs, April went out looking for related career options, and that brought her to the University Press of New England. To say that she was a perfect assistant would be an understatement, and after several years of bringing some hard fought order to my legendary chaos, her many talents were widely recognized. So in 2000, continuing her long journey east and north as well as upward, she became executive director of Alice James Press, a cooperative feminist poetry press, located at the University of Southern Maine in Farmington. In the eight years that she served as director there, she turned a floundering press into one twice the size and with solid financial as well as publishing grounding,

After these very successful years at Alice James, in her characteristic fashion April decided it was time to move on again, with the difference this time being that her move was in geographic reverse, and brought her back here to the Upper Valley where she had lived and which she had loved for fifteen years. And once again she decided to do what was thought by many – not least your moderator – to be impossible: that is, to make a living as a free-lance editor for poetry manuscripts. Now nine years later, April has proved us all wrong yet again: she has more applicants to work with her than she can handle, and at last count more than 70 books of poetry that she has assisted with -- more books of poetry than many of us read in a lifetime -- have been published by poetry presses. When April says she can do, you'd better believe that she can – and will.

Most important, to her as well as to us, is that April really can do poetry. In 2007, while still director at Alice James, Four Way books published April's first book of poetry, *Anxious Music*, consisting of poems largely set in New England, mainly here in the Upper Valley. Poems in that collection had been published in a wide array of poetry journals including: Harvard Review, Seneca Review, Mid-American Review, Colorado Review, Puerto del Sol, and Prairie Schooner (where her 10 poems were voted the journal's annual Readers' Choice Award).

Perhaps what strikes me most strongly about that collection of poems, as well as her new collection, *Event Boundaries* (winner of a 2013 Vermont Arts Council grant) from which she will read this evening, is how many of the poems, how much of the language, reflect the incessant mobility of her own life. Not only do variations on the words "move" and "movement" recur frequently, but her themes often have to do with choosing to move rapidly or to move slowly, with moving between and moving past and moving towards alternate personal circumstances, traversing a variety of physical and emotional openings and thresholds -- doors are an image she deploys effectively -- that together constitute the "event boundaries" of the lead poem of the new collection. These are the portals to new experiences, overlaying or effacing what came before. And in the last sentence of the last poem of the new collection, Ossmann provides her most comprehensive statement of this theme, portraying the human condition as one of "multitude of humans en route through mystery to mystery." It appears to be the poets' task, and one that April has assumed with great facility, to provide voice and visibility to some of these existential passages and mysteries.

Let's give poet and mentor Cynthia Huntington the last word on these new poems. Cynthia writes: "The poems cast a cool eye on what holds us and what threatens our confidence, even as they maintain their fragile balance among uncertainties. Her understated wit continues to remind us that despair can be a failure of the imagination. What bright work this is, and how neatly it resists confusion"

For all that she has accomplished in the 22 years since she walked into my office, and for all the event boundaries she has and will yet traverse, I am very proud to introduce my friend, April Ossmann.

