Many authors and illustrators are here today, and many have sent their apologies, including Patricia Mullins, Graeme Base and Donna Rawlins and some as you’ll hear have shared their memories of Albert and the important part he’s played in so many of our lives.

Liz Honey emailed to us

‘Albert was so Melbourne! The Little Bookroom was right here in the heart of the city. He was part of everything – and here we all are in the Myer MURAL Hall celebrating his life!’

On October 13, 1960, Albert Ullin bravely dared to open Australia's first specialist children's book shop. It soon became the Mecca for children's book enthusiasts and Albert was at the heart of it. He and his famous little bookshop were the fertiliser for a children's book industry that was about to blossom in this country.

Australia was ready for The Little Bookroom in 1960. The Mums, dads and teachers of the baby boomers’ generation were ready to learn that there was more than *John and Betty* to get their kids hooked on reading. It was the beginning of the significant movement to make School Libraries the ‘heart of the school’, so the knowledge and availability of a wide range of books was important to develop a love of Literature.

There were a number of young artists just discovering that it might be possible to direct their talents to creating children’s picture books. Some knew that there was a specialist tradition in overseas countries – but how to tap into that world. Welcome Albert! He attended international Book Fairs and imported the classics and inspirational contemporary books from England and America. I was a young art teacher-in-the-making and often dropped in to devour, and sometimes even buy the picture books I still treasure and am inspired by. Over many years I’ve grown my collection - so many came from this special place. Books created by John Burningham, Helen Oxenbury, Brian Wildsmith, Quentin Blake, John Yeoman, Pat Hutchins, Maurice Sendak, Ruth Krauss...and then the next wave: Anthony Browne, Chris Van Allsburg, Margot Zemach and Shel Silverstein,..and the next.

One of the youngest illustrators in the making to discover The Little Bookroom was a 6 year old Donna Rawlins who met the Moomintrolls nose to nose either side of its window in the early 1960s. Her Dad’s studio was around the corner-in Elizabeth Street. ‘I was hooked for life’ she said, ‘The Little Bookroom was a magic part of my childhood and Albert became a lifelong friend.

Albert developed an interest in illustration and the work of the emerging illustrators as the children's publishing industry in Australia really took off in the 70s & 80s. He encouraged Ron Brooks, Peter Pavey, Graeme Base, Jane Tanner , Donna Rawlins and many more who were introduced to what was possible and what was going on overseas through their connection with The Little Bookroom and Albert.

From Graeme Base - ‘I first met Albert at Dromkeen in 1984 - I was a 25-year-old author/illustrator with but one book to my name, but Albert thought he might purchase a piece of artwork from it to add to his collection of children’s book illustrations. For his part it was a small act of kindness towards a young unknown illustrator, but for me it was a huge moment.  
At the time I was teetering between doing another book or trying to break into the music industry - being given a sense that my artwork was perhaps good enough to stand with the likes of Peter Pavey and Ron Brooks, the leading lights of the industry at the time, was fundamental in steering me onwards into a career in children’s books and I will always be grateful to Albert for helping me make this life-changing decision.’

From Patricia Mullins – ‘Albert delighted in sharing a new children’s book or illustrator to enthuse about - and he had an exquisite eye for illustration. Later he was committed to finding the right home for his fabulous collection of children’s book illustrations, carefully selected over decades. It took some years of negotiation - Albert was determined, passionate and kept going.’

Albert’s illustration collection, donated to National Gallery of Victoria in 2015, is now a valuable resource of the history of Children’s' Book illustration in Australia.

Eventually Albert did sell ‘his’ Little Bookroom to like-minded enthusiastic colleagues. The current owners, Leesa Lambert and her family have continued to develop the tradition of The Little Bookroom, nurturing and celebrating our books and creators, and it continues to be a hub for our authors, illustrators and readers

Albert’s interest and involvement in the world of Children’s Literature and illustration never waned. His post-retirement telephone message to Liz Honey was inspirational – and revealing ‘Retirement is a very busy time…’

For many years he was involved in the CBCA. He was instrumental in establishing the May Gibbs Mentorship program and more recently the Morris Saxby Mentorship project. These initiatives have given support to both established and emerging creators of children’s books.

Ben Wood told us, ‘I met Albert when he selected me for the May Gibbs Mentorship program 2006. He had the sharpest wit, and always kept me on my toes when I visited for tea and cake. He opened a lot of doors for me as an illustrator, and I could always rely on him for brutally honest feedback. I’ll forever be grateful and honoured to have known him.”

Albert’s long life spanned important moments in children’s literary history in Australia and overseas and he met many of his, and our, heroes along the way.

We were all fascinated to hear his accounts. Leigh Hobbs remembers Albert reminiscing about having tea and cakes in London with the legendary Kaye Webb who established Puffin Children’s books. But it was Kaye’s husband, famous illustrator Ronald Searle or as Leigh describes him, the Mozart of draftsmen, who Leigh really wanted to hear about. Oh yes, Albert said, I saw him but very briefly. He raced in and upstairs and then dashed out again!

Mark Wilson, who worked closely with Albert over many years, shared this,

‘I truly loved the guy, and it’s hard to put all those memories into words. I’m sure everyone who knew him has the same thoughts. He was especially generous with his time, even when he was feeling pretty low from the various treatments he had to endure. We had many wonderful discussions about art, illustration and literature, which he was so passionate about. He was, and still is, an inspiration to me in many, many ways, but above all, he had a wonderful inner strength, just one of the many things I loved him for.’

So, thank you Albert for the important part you have played in the children’s book world, and for The Little Bookroom that introduced stories to generations of storytellers, librarians, teachers and especially the children and their families. And importantly too, you introduced us, the Australian authors and illustrators, and our books, to them.