

Giulia Maria Crespi

Merate, June 6 1923 – Milan, July 19 2020

The death of Giulia Maria Crespi, founder and Honorary President of FAI - Fondo Ambiente Italiano (the National Trust for Italy) - marks a crucial moment in the history of the Foundation, and a moment of infinite sadness for the Board of Directors, the Board of Trustees, our staff and our volunteers in Italy and abroad who, with unanimous gratitude, dedicate this moving tribute to her. The clarity of her teaching, the path she followed, the style and enthusiasm infused in whatever she did indicate without uncertainty the path that FAI is called to follow for the good of the country, set in the mission that she helped define.

The ideas, emotions, style and events that marked Giulia Maria Crespi's long and industrious life are contained in her autobiography *Il mio filo rosso* published by Einaudi in 2015. After founding FAI in 1975 with Renato Bazzoni, Secretary General until 1996, she was the inspiring soul of FAI until the very end, although she was supported, first as President until 2009 and then as Honorary President until today, by figures who gradually became fundamental in the development of the Foundation, such as, since 1985, Marco Magnifico (today Executive Vice President), Ilaria Borletti Buitoni (President from 2010 to 2013), Angelo Maramai (Director General since 2009) and finally Andrea Carandini, President since 2013, as well as a structure of volunteers which has now reached, in terms of size and professionalism, the level of a large national non-profit cultural enterprise. Giulia Maria was educated along rigid principles of the Lombard bourgeoisie, according to which "those who have had a lot, must give a lot", a phrase that she loved to repeat. She therefore recognised, appreciated and encouraged the role that volunteer work plays in civil society – having always carried it out first-hand. Despite being of a strong and imperative nature, Giulia Maria Crespi always strongly believed in teamwork as the only way to obtain serious and lasting results.

An inexhaustible creativity, a reluctance to compromise, a passion for dialogue, a singular unity of ideals and pragmatism, a nonchalance towards difficulties - as stimulating as they were arduous - and a flawless perseverance have made her a demanding figure for anyone who has worked with her, but at the same time an inimitable and nuanced example of civic ideals and passion for life, culture, and the environment.

The protection and care of the Earth as a foundation for human health, a strenuous commitment to poison-free agriculture - as taught and practised on her large farm in Zelata on the shores of Ticino (she was one of the founders of the Association for Biodynamic Agriculture) - and a passion for the safeguarding of the environment, understood as something inseparable from history, are the issues that, together with a great attention to education, guided her tireless and generous activities in the last decade of her life.

“All of FAI is grieving for the loss of its founder. Reassured by the development of the Foundation in terms of the properties, landscapes and heritage that it looks after, she changed her focus to environmental preservation, concerned about the health of nature and of man. FAI has translated her suggestions into virtuous practices in its properties and educating about sustainability, and will always feel this last spur at its side.”

Andrea Carandini
President of FAI - Fondo Ambiente Italiano (the National Trust for Italy)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

When Giulia Maria Crespi founded FAI in 1975 she was best known for having been, until the previous year, owner of the “Corriere della Sera”.

An only child, she came from one of the main industrial families in Lombardy. She was home-schooled and had the fortune of being taught by Fernanda Wittgens, the great superintendent who revived the Brera museum after the Second World War. From her she gained a love for art and for the art of Italy, which she combined with her love for nature as a source of spiritual regeneration. Her ambitious mother made her visit the entire world in those years but, as she wrote in her autobiography *Il mio filo rosso* (Einaudi, 2015), her rebellious temperament caused her to make unconventional choices. She married Marco Paravicini, a former partisan commander, with whom she had twins, Aldo, who died prematurely two months ago, and Luca. The tragic death of her husband in a car accident left her a young widow, but with the sense that she had a destiny to fulfil. She married again in 1965, this time to the architect Guglielmo Mozzoni.

In 1962, after much insisting to her beloved father Aldo, she took over the management of the “Corriere della Sera”, a newspaper that she helped renovate under the direction of Giovanni Spadolini, but above all Piero Ottone. Writers and journalists such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Goffredo Parise were asked to collaborate, and it was Giulia Maria who personally called Antonio Cederna to write on newly emerging environmental issues.

By the end of the Fifties she had already become a member of Italia Nostra, where she met Renato Bazzoni who in 1967 helped to organise *Italia da salvare* (literally, “Italy to be saved”), a large photography exhibition that was the first to denounce the urban and environmental degradation of Italy after the economic boom of the 1960s. Clashes with the senior management of Italia Nostra led her to found the Alessandro Manzoni Association in 1968, prompted by Elena Croce, using the British National Trust as a model. The project did not take off, but another opportunity presented itself in 1975 when, together with Renato Bazzoni, Alberto Predieri and Franco Russoli, she founded FAI – Fondo Ambiente Italiano. It was Mrs. Crespi who donated the initial 500 million lira and bought the Roman-Longobard Monastery of Torba, which she immediately donated to FAI in 1976. The monastery therefore became the first important property of the Foundation, and a concrete manifestation that England was not the only country that could have an association of private individuals managing a property intended for public use. Giulia Maria Crespi has often stated that in the first few years of its life she did not have much faith in FAI, but it was the donation of the Abbey and the village of San Fruttuoso near Genoa by the Doria Pamphilj family that convinced her that she was on the right path and that pandered to the contagious enthusiasm of Renato Bazzoni. Throughout the Eighties, other important properties were acquired, such as the Castello della Manta, the Villa del Balbianello on Lake Como and Villa Della Porta Bozzolo in Casalzuigno.

When faced with a ‘growth crisis’, Mrs. Crespi had the idea of founding a support group called “I 200 del FAI” and asked her friend Marella Agnelli to be its president. It was in those years that she decided she wanted Marco Magnifico, then in his early thirties, to support the growth of the Foundation alongside Renato Bazzoni. It was her pioneering spirit that made her accept a bet to buy the Castello di Masino, one of the most important residences in Piedmont but which at the time was in a state of ruin. Around the same time, the Giornate FAI di Primavera (FAI Spring Days) and other events were founded, which helped FAI to grow in popularity by allowing it lose some of the elitist spirits of its origins, and which directed the Foundation’s mission towards the defence and promotion of Italy’s artistic and natural heritage alongside the State. Thus, after the death of Renato Bozzoni (1996), Mrs. Crespi had no doubts about pursuing the path she has taken, and agreed to the management of the Giardino della Kolymbethra in Agrigento, in concession by the Region of Sicily, and Parco Villa Gregoriana in Tivoli, granted on loan by the State. All of this is proof of the prestige achieved by FAI, but above all is a testament to the personal charisma of Mrs. Crespi, who was always ready to pick up the phone to call ministers, superintendents and sponsors.

Even though FAI has only been preponderant in the second part of Mrs. Crespi’s life, it was she who introduced biodynamic agriculture to Italy and therefore has always been a point of reference in the great environmental battles of Italy. In 2010 she became Honorary President of FAI, handing over her position to Ilaria Borletti Buitoni, and later approving the choice of Andrea Carandini, the current and third President of the Foundation, whose work she supported. FAI meanwhile has reached one hundred thousand members, then two hundred thousand, and there are now over sixty FAI properties, widening the scope of its activities and responsibilities. Mrs. Crespi continued to participate in the life of FAI, overseeing the training of new generations and welcoming the ever-growing FAI community to her home on Corso Venezia in Milan each December, where she would give no ordinary speech; one whose message did not cling to the results achieved that year, but which would look towards the future, as she always did.