Ann Oakley

It is with much sadness and regret that we announce the recent passing of Ann Oakley after a long and brave battle against illness. Last month we made mention of Ann's considerable contribution to GEDS and fuller tribute by David Pittuck and Lesley Sherwood follows below.

Ann was passionate and brave in everything she did. She was difficult; some might say impossible. But anyone who has vision, is determined, energetic and single-minded will be difficult. If you became involved in an Ann Oakley production, you were snatched up by a whirlwind and finally deposited dazed, exhausted, inspired, strangely satisfied and determined to do even better next time.

She brought boundless energy and enthusiasm to everything she turned to; her work, her garden (she didn't "plant trees", she created small forests); her cats (only Ann could love Samantha) and, when she discovered it, the theatre.

Ann appeared to spring onto the GEDS scene a fully formed actress with a fascinating voice – it has been likened to a chocolate fondant with a double raspberry liqueur – and for a brief, golden period she seemed to be in everything. So great was her impact that it is surprising to find that she played in only seven plays in that period, culminating with the perfect role for a strong woman: Hedda Gabler.

When she turned to direction, she applied that same burning energy and attention to detail. The cast and crew that were prepared to work with her, temporarily became her family and she gave everyone all the time and attention they needed, but the price of this was dedication to her vision. She painted on a big canvass and rejoiced in the classics. Few of those involved will forget the 22 scene changes in Amadeus, the three-day tech for Othello, the scaffolding in A Man For All Seasons and the hijacking of the English Church for A Lion in Winter. Audiences remember her productions; they were powerful, brave and passionate like the woman who directed them.

Those characteristics were never more obvious than over the last several years as she fought to stave off the effects of multiple sclerosis and emphysema. Everyone around her during that time, including her doctors, was amazed at her boundless strength and fortitude.

Ann never gave up – she was true to herself till the end.

ANN OAKLEY 1941-2011