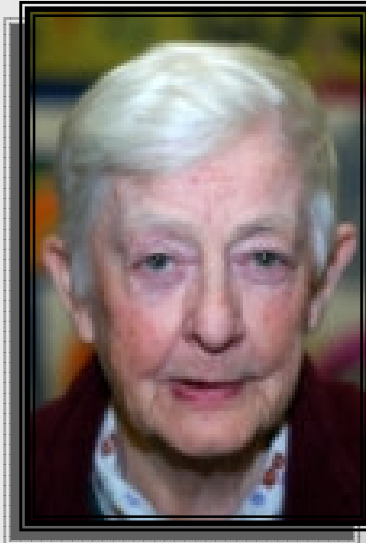
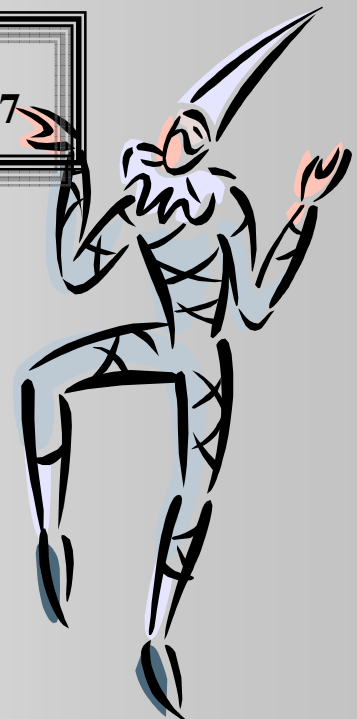


B A C K C O M M U N I T Y

News from the New Zealand Theatre Federation Inc.



Jannat
20.1.1934 - 15.6.2007



President's Column:

Dear Theatre People,

You will all be saddened to learn that Jannat Aitchison passed away quietly. Everyone will have their own favourite memory of her and we on the committee will always remember her unswerving devotion to N.Z. Theatre Federation.

So now our library is in the process of being shifted to Palmerston North so please be patient over the next weeks until it is housed and up and running.

We hope you will continue to support this important asset that belongs to us all and celebrate New Zealand writing as much as possible.

I hope you are enjoying getting plays ready for local Festivals and look forward to seeing many of them as they move on to Regionals and Finals. It is a great way to hone your skills or step in to trying out directing. The only way our work can grow is from outside input so keep an open mind and you will learn a lot

Lyn, Pat and David worked very hard packing and sorting the Christchurch office and we are all completely indebted to them. (I left it too late to get a booking to go up and help which makes me feel very guilty.)

Best wishes in all your theatrical endeavours.

*Denise Walsh
President*



To Jannat

You loved the autumn leaves
nestled about your home,
the purple polyanthus
seeking the winter sun
in your shaded garden.
Your books and play scripts,
crosswords and cards,
the warmth and laughter
of your grandchildren
visiting Sundays
and your cat.



How you loved the thrill
of a sporting competition
Go the Blackcaps!
Go Team New Zealand!
Go the Silver Ferns!

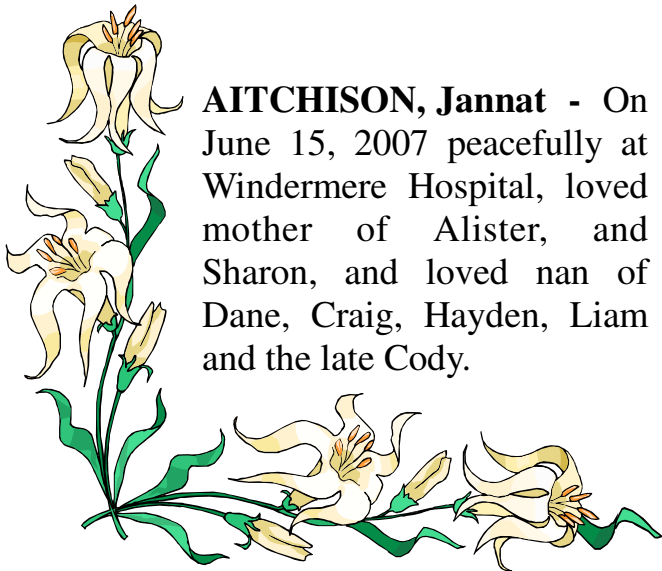
You loved the theatre
It was your passion and sanctuary.
You didn't search for the spotlight,
applause or reviews.
You worked behind the scenes
at Downstage, Square Edge
and New Zealand Theatre Fed
where you tenderly cared for hundreds
of library play scripts
as if they were your purple polyanthus
needing shelter from the cold and damp
in that old Litchfield Street building

How those play scripts grieve for your touch
as we all grieve too, Jannat, for your passing,
We remember your mischievous smile,
your good humour and wisdom,
generosity and caring
and the way you wore your caps.

Farewell, our dear friend
Haere ra, haere ra.

Anne McAuley
June 2007





AITCHISON, Jannat - On June 15, 2007 peacefully at Windermere Hospital, loved mother of Alister, and Sharon, and loved nan of Dane, Craig, Hayden, Liam and the late Cody.

Jannat was an avid collector of clowns and her favourite print style - **Comic Sans**



Words on Jannat

Jannat the Original Recycler, long before recycling became a trend. A scotswoman, through and through, organised, frugal and loyal to her commitments, a great heart, but most of all to her friends a special and wonderful lady. Not one for verbosity and high flown phrases, she had no time for that but to her friends she gave a loyalty and companionship of some wonderful rarity. About now she would say "Oh be quiet Nanette you're saying too much".

However she left a request with Lyn that I be asked to write a few words about her and I am truly honoured so I will continue: As National Executive officer and as National Librarian Jannat excelled. She kept meticulous records and she economised brilliantly, taking a meagre salary for this task. She brought many new members into the library fold, especially from schools. She was instrumental in re-establishing N.Z.T.F on a firm financial footing. During my years on the National Executive and as National President, she was completely loyal and supportive. Amazingly we never had a cross word. Her care of amateur theatre was paramount in her life. She and David made a great team to work with

And then there was Jannat,
my friend,
my very bestest secretary

Over the years I worked with her I was in awe of her dedication, her efficiency, and her deep and abiding love for her family, her true friends, the elderly people she cared for and her beloved cat CeeCee.

There were many facets to Jannat and we are the poorer for her loss. I will miss our long telephone conversations when we set the world to rights.

You were special in my life and I cherish the loyalty and friendship you gave me. I will miss you so my dear friend.

Nanette Wright

Loved theatre, wouldn't act

Tiny Jannat leaves giant footprints across New Zealand and city theatre.

By Lee Matthews
lee.matthews@msl.co.nz

Jannat Aitchison, Theatre 'aunty'; born: c1934; died: Christchurch, June 15, 2007.

"Aunty" to hundreds of aspiring actors and New Zealand Theatre Federation's (NZTF) long-serving executive officer Jannat Aitchison has died in Christchurch, aged 73, after a battle with cancer.

Palmerston North's theatrical community mourned her passing this week.

Ms Aitchison lived in Palmerston North from the early 1980s, managing the Square Edge Arts Centre. She taught speech and drama, ran theatre classes, wrote amusingly embarrassing singing telegrams, wrote stories for the then Evening Standard's arts pages and was Great Aunt Isabella to several generations of children through the newspaper's kiddies' page.

She also mothered her cat CC for 26 years. CC had turned up as a starving stray kitten at Square Edge not long after she came to the city.

She was the first secretary of the

NZTF, and helped build the federation's May Ives Library, the collection of copies of plays hired by theatre companies. She was particularly keen on New Zealand plays.

Longtime friend Joan Ford of Feilding remembered Ms Aitchison cycling round Palmerston North on an old black boneshaker bike, keeping fit. In the 1970s, she'd ridden a bike right round New Zealand, to publicise the theatre federation and the services it offered.

She loved theatre, but hated being onstage herself. And she refused to sew, ever – it is believed she was the first stage manager at Wellington's Downstage Theatre to not have responsibility for wardrobe included in her contract.

"She did every backstage job in theatre there was, directing, stage managing, training actors. But she hated being on stage herself," Mrs Ford said.

Another dislike was computers, preferring to keep what she needed to know in her excellent memory. She was just so much fun. She took no prisoners, didn't suffer fools.

"She was only about four-foot nothing high, and she had the most



Former Square Edge arts centre manager and New Zealand theatre powerhouse Jannat Aitchison, with her cat CC.

wonderful sense of humour," Mrs Ford said.

Ms Aitchison was also an enthusiastic member of Palmerston North's chapter of the Red Hat Society, grown from Jenny Joseph poem Warning: "When I am an old woman, I shall wear purple..." The

society was popular worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s, cherishing the ideal that being middleaged doesn't mean becoming boring. Purple and a clashing red hat were club badges.

Palmerston North speech and drama teacher Sheridan Hickey said Ms Aitchison had spotted and given

early training to some big names in New Zealand theatre. The Ugly Shakespeare Company co-founder Richard Green got his start in Ms Aitchison's classes, as did Australian-based actor Lara McGregor.

Ms Aitchison took shows into schools as Stage Truck Productions, doing Shakespeare and Dr Suss.

"She did everything, built set, drove the truck, managed the lot – but she wouldn't act," Mrs Hickey said.

Manawatu Standard theatre critic Richard Mays remembered Ms Aitchison from his 1970s Downstage Theatre trainee actor days.

"She was really an Aunty to New Zealand drama," he said. "She never seemed to age, she was a very inclusive person."

Mrs Ford said Ms Aitchison had returned to Palmerston North last year for the finals of NZTF's Festival of Community One Act Plays at the Globe Theatre. She had moved to Christchurch, closer to her family.

"We all thought she'd beaten [cancer]. We really thought she had."

She preferred to remember her as she was at the one act plays' festival, in the wings, cap on to shade her eyes from the bright lights – and telling everyone what to do.

Our sincere thanks to Lee Mathews of the Manawatu Standard for permission to print this obituary.

Festival Results

**Results of District Festivals
Will be published in the next
Issue of Backchat.**

May Ives Library News

The Library is still in limbo as I write so in the meantime the best way to submit orders is to email them to NZTFNAT@xtra.co.nz. However, please be advised that there may be some delays - let me know if there is urgency so that I may suggest another course of action - Lyn

NORTH ISLAND REGIONALS Change of Venue

**Please note that the North Island Regionals
are now being held at the**

*Feilding Little Theatre
Stafford Street, Feilding
Saturday 25th August*

Apology and Thanks

I feel it appropriate at this time to offer my apology for the lateness of this issue of Backchat. With the sad loss of Jannat, the shifting of the May Ives Library and festival organisation, time has been at a premium for me.

I must also thank my family for putting up with many weekend absences on long trips to and from Christchurch, without their support I would be unable to continue my duties. Also thank you to Pat Barr-McLeod and David B r o c k e t t f o r t h e i r invaluable assistance with the library.

Thank you all
Lyn Doncliff
National Administrator

PAHIATUA REPERTORY SOCIETY PLAY WORKSHOP

(Article & Photo supplied by Lesley Courtney)

Pahiataua Repertory Society, seeing a need to grow the skills of their members, recently held a weekend workshop for actors and directors. Run by Bryan Aitken, a well known director, actor and adjudicator of Christchurch, the class was an intensive 15 hours of work, beginning on Friday night.

With a limit of 16 places, the Society decided to give priority to members with a desire to gain new skills, regardless of experience. The places were filled on just one ring around. Many more, on hearing about the workshop, asked to be considered, so it seems that this sort of class is of widespread interest.

Well what a weekend of work. All participants were challenged to grow their skills no matter what their level of expertise and experience. Bryan ascertained what people wanted to get out of the weekend initially and throughout the weekend referred back to these goals and directed his teachings to cater for them. Through a series of exercises for the whole group, small groups and individuals (and homework for Saturday night!) the participants worked with a number of scenarios and scripts exploring characterisation, motivation and wider script analysis. The pieces were then performed for the group. While this may seem daunting the atmosphere was such that all performances were given and received in a welcoming and learning environment.

The workshop was held with the help of a local Arts Council grant, which covered the costs of Bryan's fare and accommodation, and lunches and morning and afternoon teas for the two days (and didn't we eat well!). With the participants paying a fee the weekend workshop only required the Society to provide the opportunity and organisation. This was a very worthwhile exercise and one we will consider repeating or expanding upon.

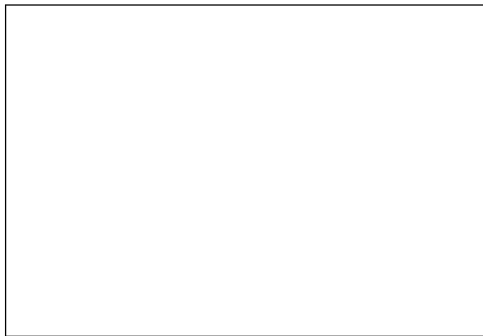
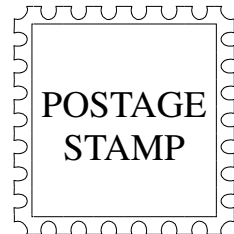
(photograph)

Participants at the theatre workshop. Back, from left: Karen Webster, Talitha van den Berg, Terry Powell, Pythia Horne, Ryan Little, Graeme Vial, Annette Swenson, Keith Cooper, Terry Stewart. Middle: Erin Green, Anita McCool, Bryan Aitken, Shane Brown, Eddie Wilman. Front: Peter Lea, Adrienne Hurley, Lesley Courtney



“What’s On”

New Players Theatre	<i>Take a Chance on Me</i> by Roger Hall	Jul 19 - Aug 4
Stagecraft Theatre	<i>Dead Man’s Hand</i> by Seymour Matthews	Jul 25 - Aug 4
South Canterbury Musical Theatre	<i>Chicago</i> by Maurine Dallas Watkins	Aug 4 - 11
Levin Little Theatre	<i>The Caretaker</i> by Harold Pinter	Aug 9 - Aug 18
Wellington Repertory Theatre	<i>The Crucible</i> by Arthur Miller	Aug 14 - Aug 15
Hutt Repertory Theatre	<i>The Countess</i> by Gregory Murphy	Aug 15 - Aug 25
Tawa Community Theatre	<i>Are You Being Served?</i> By Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft	Aug 23 - Sep 8



Deadline for next issue of Backchat

Aug 11, 2007

Contributions please to New Zealand Theatre Federation
email NZTFadmin@xtra.co.nz www.theatrenewzealand.co.nz

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WESTPORT**