

ROBIN THOMAS

1943 – 2006



HER CAREER IN DRAMA EDUCATION

by Christine Comans

Robin began her teaching career at Monto Secondary Department where she taught English and Geography. After a number of happy years teaching Speech and Drama (amongst other subjects) at Kelvin Grove State High School, she took time off to have her two children. In 1979 Robin returned to teaching and was appointed Speech and Drama Head of Department at Brisbane's Girls Grammar School. It was at this time that Robin became actively involved in Drama Queensland, known then as QADIE (Queensland Association for Drama in Education). In the late 1980s, she served as the association's President and remained involved until the late 1990s.

As her friend and colleague for over 20 years, I can truthfully say that I owe my career in Drama education to Robin Thomas. Very new to the Drama teaching business, I was introduced to QADIE and NADIE (now Drama Australia) by Robin who gave me the confidence to take on committee positions and really get involved- from which point there was no turning back from a career in Drama Education! I tell this personal story because it speaks of the experience of many in the Drama community who were encouraged, mentored, believed in, by Robin. She had that rare ability to make you believe in yourself because she so generously took the time to see your potential and tell you "come on, you can do it!"

It wasn't long before Robin was snapped up by the then BSSSS (Board of Senior Secondary School Studies) as their Drama Review Officer, a position she held from the early 1990s to 1998 and in which she excelled. Travelling widely around Queensland, she was renowned for the support she gave regional Drama teachers, the young, inexperienced ones in particular.

As Board Review Officer, in 1991 Robin guided our way in the creation of a brand new Senior Drama Syllabus (to replace the old 'Theatre' and 'Speech and Drama' syllabuses) and its revision in 1997, asking the hard questions, making sure it was a rigorous, workable and exciting document for Queensland Drama teachers and students. She was before her time when it came to assessment: it was Robin who gave us the term 'double dipping', who reminded us that you can't mark the students' passion and commitment, who wrote articles on exit criteria and standard schemas, all as part of her successful campaign to give us a Queensland Senior Drama syllabus of the highest quality. At State Panel, her experience and wisdom was legendary – especially her "Now, Shay, Adrienne, Deb, Sue, Christine, can we *live* with this?" when we were struggling with a fine point about a school's submission.

In 1998 Robin had a career change and was responsible for the development and management of the Years 3, 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy tests including the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. In 2003 she was seconded to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs and, until her untimely death in 2006, worked in its Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce Secretariat located within the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts.

In 2002 Robin was made Drama Queensland's first Life Member to a standing ovation from a Drama community who loved and admired her greatly for her sustained and generous contribution. Her long association and work with Drama made Robin an obvious choice. And it was no secret that Robin considered her years spent in the service of Drama education as the most rewarding and satisfying time of her professional career.

Those of us in the Drama community who were Robin's friends and colleagues also fondly remember how much fun she was! When the serious stuff was over, her *joie de vivre* often knew no bounds at conferences and many of us had many a merry night of laughter and fun with Robin at the centre of activities.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

Josephine Wise:

It is difficult to find words that adequately describe the impact of this amazing woman. Robin was a true mentor who inspired, challenged and encouraged me; a friend who celebrated friends and family and lived her life to the fullest. She was passionate about professional teaching and learning in the arts. We acknowledge Robin as a transformational influence in our careers, our syllabus and for all the encouraging words and wise advice to teachers through her time as a leader in QADIE, now Drama Queensland.

Sue Davis:

It was Robin who first suggested I come along to a QADIE AGM and go onto the QADIE committee, who suggested I go on a Panel, encouraged me to nominate myself to do a workshop at a state conference and to publish my first article in QADIE Says. I'm not sure that I would have had the confidence in those days to do any of these things without her encouragement and support, and I know I'm not alone in this respect.

While Robin moved on from a day to day active role in the Drama community, her footprint was bold and indelible. For many of us, who we became as Drama educators was hugely influenced by her words, thoughts and actions. I recognise and appreciate the significant role she played in my professional and personal life and will always be grateful to her for it.

Nicky Peelgrane:

Robin was one of the pillars of Drama wisdom. Whenever I attended anything, I would always look for her and there she would be, talking, smiling and nodding with someone. You always had the feeling talking with Robin that anything you said would be listened to and considered before she would reply. She was always one of my heroes in the Drama teaching world: humble, kind and with this delightful sense of humour that wound its way into any conversation.

Kylie Readman:

For myself, I count Robin as the woman who moved my career forward at some key moments. She never had to phone me at Mareeba High and support me as the only drama teacher through my first few years, nor did she have to suggest I join the Cairns Drama Panel. But she did both and much more for me as a young regional teacher. Robin was a giver, of herself, her knowledge and her friendship and I am grateful for all of them.

Sean Lubbers:

It is because of people like Robin Thomas that Drama is as strong a pedagogic discipline as it is today. The number of schools and teachers Robin supported in her role as Review Officer at the then BSSSS over many years is in the hundreds. Not to mention the countless workshops and papers she presented at state and national conferences and her tireless work on QADIE committees in ensuring Drama had a voice of advocacy and a support network for teachers of all levels of experience.