



Tribute to Gillian Hanna

Gillian Hanna was one of the founder members of Monstrous Regiment, initiating the process leading to its formation. Along with Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker, she remained a central figure in the company until her death in 2019.

At her funeral in September that year, Mary delivered a tribute to Gillian, extracts from which are reproduced below. About this tribute Mary now writes:

This is an edited version of the tribute for Gillie I delivered at her funeral in September 2019. I spoke to her in her coffin as I couldn't manage to speak as if she wasn't there with us.

"Memories are bullets. Some whiz by and only spook you. Others tear you open and leave you in pieces."

— Richard Kadrey

These are memories of Gillie Hanna, my colleague in Monstrous Regiment. Intelligent, funny, and witty she was an outstanding performer and a wonderful friend for all the years I knew her--- and an all-round exceptional human being.

I have a category for people I *really* like: *"they are people I wouldn't mind being trapped in a lift with -- for some time"*.

That's you, Gillie.

Gillie, you had many skills... one of them was the wonderful knack for putting people together... getting the right people in the right place at the right time.

You did that in August 1975. No email or quick text available in those days -- we are talking about the 70s... You sent out letters and we, the actors you chose, came.

It was the night London was hit by one of the worse storms in years. I can't remember everything we talked about that night. But we didn't waste time on what we didn't want to do. There was an energy zapping round the room, ideas bouncing off the walls by the dozen, all noted by you in that incredibly neat handwriting of yours. (Oh how I envied it).

You had the ability to skip from a highly detailed analysis of feminism, to wickedly funny observation about life, and continue writing or typing.

Another thing I envied.

We came together to put on plays and make space for women centre stage - their lives, our lives - to make a difference, and that's what we did. For audiences it was the plays, the content, the music, the acting that excited them. We were also part of something bigger than us: FEMINISM.

Maya Angelou said *"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Well Gillie I'm certain no one will ever forget how you made them feel, especially when they saw you on stage. You were riveting. You could lift simple text off the page and make it zing.

In *Calamity* as Jane. In the first act loud, raucous, fighting the bear, seeing off intruders... (It wasn't a real bear, we discussed that and decided it would be improper to subject a live animal to the rigours of small scale touring). You played the piano in that show and I sang "I'm always chasing rainbows"—it was a little moment of heaven with you. Then later as the ageing partially blind Jane you touched my soul --- every night.

You were generous with your time and insights, always ready to talk to people. But---The greatest gift you gave me? You made me feel you believed in me as an actor. That gave me the courage to go well beyond my comfort zone---and that was FUN. Especially when acting with you. You were always in the moment on stage, sometimes literally crackling with energy.

We acted in over 12 shows together; hundreds of performances all over the country, some abroad. Exhilarating. Exhausting. After the show you and I would pack the van; we were very good at it---we could have had another career.

In 2016 Katrina Duncan, ex-administrator and long-time board member, along with Jessica Hicks from Unfinished Histories, sat with you and me in your home in Peckham. We were there to pin down and record our memories of the Monstrous Regiment (now in the archive). It took all day -

--Jessica would ask a question and one of us would answer, never with one sentence when five would only scratch the surface of those times and the passion we had and still shared for theatre.

The nicest part was... we both laughed a lot and remembered with smiles and no regrets-- or niggles? Well-- we are actors, maybe a few niggles!!

No regrets.

When we sang together in *Floorshow*, way back in 1976, I used to say "you always sing in tune and I'm less... accurate". You would say "just belt it out McCusker".

Well Gillie, dear friend, I won't risk belting it out now, tears might get in the way.

The last lines from that song we sang...

Night Night see you in the morning

Night Night see you in the street

Night Night see you in the morning

Will you know my face next time we meet?

Will you know my face next time ... we meet?

Gillie Hanna I will never forget you and will always remember your face.

Mary McCusker September 2019