

IN MEMORIAM

Jac Alder

December 8, 1934 – May 22, 2015

By Shari Goldstein Stern

Dallas lost a legend last week when Jac Alder passed away at the age of 80. He was surrounded by friends at Baylor Hospital, where he suffered from respiratory failure. He had been ill with chronic lymphocytic leukemia for years, but it rarely kept him out of the theatre he loved.

Alder was born on Dec. 8, 1934 in Oklahoma and studied architecture at the University of Oklahoma. He became involved with a touring theater group while serving overseas in the military. That's when he fell in love with theater.

The Okie ended up in Dallas, where Margo Jones' legendary Theatre '47 at Fair Park was the country's first professional theatre-in-the-round. Alder and Jones became great friends as well as artistic colleagues. Theatre '47 closed in 1955 following Jones' death.

Executive Director-Producer of Theatre Three (T3), Alder's name has always been synonymous with "Theatre Three." He was the theater's co-founder with his late wife, Norma



Photos courtesy of the Alder Family

Young, and close friends, Esther Ragland and Robert Dracup. Young passed away in 1998, and T3's main stage bears her name.

The founders breathed life into the theatre-in-the-round in a Sheraton Hotel ballroom, emulating Margo Jones' model. Always up for a challenge, Alder relocated the hotel ballroom theatre to a cozy, former seat cover store on Main Street in what is now Deep Ellum.

It's there that Alder directed two young actresses from Lake Highlands, sisters Cathryn and Patsy McClenny. Cathryn Hartt is now a successful Dallas acting coach with Hartt and Soul Studio. She said:

"I cannot imagine a world without Jac Alder. Heaven must be in need of a good set or score ... or Jac would never have left this place he loved for it."

Hartt's sister, Patsy, went on to gain success and fame as television and film actress Morgan Fairchild. She said: "I would have no career if it were not for Jac Alder and Norma Young. They saw potential in two children who arrived on their doorstep and gave my sister, Cathryn, and me our chance to pursue our dreams. They were tough, taskmasters and gave us fabulous training, filled with love. He offered that gift to so many over the decades, and so many loved him for it. He saw the potential in each of us, and he never lost his sense of humor.

At the time he was hospitalized, Alder was directing "The Liar." B.J. Cleveland has taken over the production, which will run through May 31. On T3's Facebook page, Cleveland expressed what Jac would say, "See you at the theater!"

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