

Farewell to a modest muse

HELEN Crichton loved road cycling races, especially the Tour de France and would sit glued to the TV set when it was telecast on SBS.

"She didn't care for board racing. She liked the road racing and with the Tour de France there was the countryside and mountains of France, which was a bonus," said husband John.

She loved her faith and her husband, liked her garden, cooking, took a keen interest in Dandenong's heritage and history, and was devoted to helping young people step up the ladder of life.

But most of all Helen - a quiet, warm, elegant lady with a dolorous expression that burst into an expression of joy when a friend approached - loved the theatre with a passion.

For almost 40 years Helen oversaw the Speech and Drama section of the Dandenong Festival of Music and Art for Youth.

There have been some remarkable musicians who launched their careers at the Dandenong festival, but Helen was terribly proud that a young girl called Zoe Caldwell took the laurels one year in the 1950s.

Ms Caldwell, Helen recalled, gave an outstanding performance from a Greek tragedy, Sophocles' *Electra*. She later went on to storm the stages in London and New York and is probably Australia's greatest and internationally most recognised actresses, who turned 64 last Tuesday.

The Thursday before that birthday, Helen died at a nursing home, the day before her 68th birthday.

A little over two months earlier Helen was having tea with John at their Hallam home when she

complained of an upset stomach. It was more than that.

Some days later Helen was taken to St Vincent's Hospital, placed in intensive care where doctors spent days trying to diagnose the problem, which was finally narrowed down to the rare, herpes encephalitis, a disease that affects only one in 100,000 people, impairing the brain's motor responses.

After 77 days at St Vincent's, Helen was moved to a private nursing home where a thrombosis developed in her left leg, causing her demise.

Brought up in the tiny town of Boorcan near Terang, Helen's family later moved to a farm on the corner of Thompsons and Frankston-Dandenong Rds, Lyndhurst, when Helen was six.

She went to Dandenong East Primary and later Dandenong High where she matriculated.

For a short spell Helen worked in the cosmetic department of Myer and remembered with delight she used to sell bottles of eau de cologne to wrestling legend Chief Little Wolf, who used it to 'overpower' his opponents at Festival Hall.

Helen later completed her primary teacher's diploma and taught at Alexandria, Dandenong East, Springvale, Dandenong West and



Doveton North primary schools.

Helen was very involved in the guiding movement, horse riding and hockey, where she was goalie for Dandenong.

In 1966 Helen and John, who had known each other for some time, were married at Sorrento.

It seemed everything they did, they did together - Helen the muse; John the sport and boy from the bush, both kind and generous people and especially to each other.

A very involved Anglican, Helen was a leading member of the St James parish. The church was packed for her funeral service last Monday.

She was buried at Bunurong cemetery, a good stone's throw from her old family home.

Helen is survived by John and daughter and son-in-law Katherine and David Gadisden.