



ANNIE LEE

It's been one of the great blessings of my life to work with Annie for the last 25 years. It's impossible to do justice to what she achieved in that time – there are so many people whose lives she touched and transformed.

But if I had to sum it all up in just a few words, I'd say this: Annie turned our company into a family.

She was the spine of Oxford Films. She held it all together – she held all of us together - through good times and bad. And she was the heart of Oxford Films. No one had a bigger heart than Annie Lee. That's why we all loved working with her for so many years and why so many freelancers came back to work at Oxford again and again.

She was a mentor to two generations of production managers and many of them are here today. You might say Annie ran her very own training academy and her students carry her influence to this day. The lessons she taught, she learnt from experience: how to be strong and also supportive, how to make tough choices but with empathy, and, perhaps most important of all, to never, ever give up. That was Annie's attitude to work and that was also her approach to life.

Annie's door was always open. And not just for production problems. She had a wise head and a good heart when it came to personal matters too. Annie never forgot a birthday – if you were lucky, she'd even bake you a cake. If you fell in love and became pregnant and were worried about balancing work and family, Annie was there for you. She knew what to say. She'd been there - nothing was more important to her than her husband Nick, and her daughters Flora and Emilia, and she was able to reassure younger colleagues following her down that path that life was good. No one worked harder than Annie but she always left the office early to be with her girls.

For directors and writers and producers, who were anxious about the creative aspects of their work, Annie was there for them. She knew how to keep the show on the road without losing sight of the fact that this is not just a business; it's also about making dreams come true.

Annie knew how to do that too.

Annie threw her heart and soul into everything: wrangling the Python presenter Terry Jones on *Medieval Lives*; keeping Damien Hirst's epic *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* on track in Venice (and afterwards, partying the night away to the Red Hot Chili Peppers – Annie also knew how to have fun).

She was patient and diplomatic dealing with our own Royal Family (even when they weren't talking to each other). And, on her very first production with us - Robert Hughes' landmark BBC series about Australia - Annie heroically kept the show on the road when, if you'll forgive the pun (Annie loved puns), the presenter conspicuously failed to keep his car on the road. In fact, seriously, Bob had a near-fatal car crash, which put him in a coma for three months. It's every production manager's worst nightmare but it didn't faze Annie for a moment. She held it together.

My only regret about my years working with Annie is that we never managed to get a food show off the ground. She would have loved that. As anyone who knows her will vouch, Annie was a big foodie.

It feels very strange talking about Annie like this. But the fact that I'm saying these words at this time of year also feels kind of appropriate. Because for the last 25 years, at this time of year, I would always make a speech at the Oxford Films Christmas Lunch and I would talk about Annie. Each year I would end my speech the same way, with a special thank you to Annie: my go-to consigliere, my partner, my rock, and my friend.

Annie, we all love you, we all miss you and - if I may - speaking for the people gathered here today, family and friends and so many others who couldn't make it here today but whose lives you touched and transformed, the memory of your wise head and your big heart will shine bright and strong forever.