

SPEECH AT THE FUNERAL OF JAN PENTLAND

David Morawetz
morawetz@bigpond.com
24 August 2009

I will be in tears as I do this. That's OK with me. I hope it's OK with you.

Thank you all so much for coming here today to remember Jan Pentland, and to celebrate her amazing life.

Thank you, too, to so many people for your caring and support.
That wonderful support is very important in how I'm feeling right now.

It is beautiful and moving to look out on the patches of purple in this room. And judging by the hundreds of emails and cards of support that I have been receiving from around Australia and around the world, there will be people wearing purple today in Uganda and the United States, in Rwanda and Nepal, and in many other places as well.

To Jan's children:
Liz, Cathy and Chris

and to Jan's grandchildren:
Tamsyn, Ryley, Taj, Rebecca, Amber and Isla:

"Please know ALWAYS that your Mum and your Nanna loved you more than anybody in the world."

And now to you, my love.

I am so SAD that you have died, my love. So SAD.

And in the days and weeks and months and years to come,
I will discover ever new ways that I will miss you.

And yet, for some reason, although it seems strange, after the initial shock and disbelief after your death, I am particularly in touch these days, with the fact that:

"I feel FORTUNATE to have had the last 20 years with you, my love."

I feel fortunate to have been able to walk with you, side by side, to be your best friend, and you mine, each of us helping the other to grow and appreciate life. I am grateful for all of it – the good times, the tough times, the fights, the joy.

I feel fortunate that you and I shared so many things, my love, so many things.

First and foremost, we shared similar VALUES.

We both had a passion for Social Justice, and it was front and centre for both of us.

I remember very early on, we once had a fight with raised voices, until 2 am, with me trying to convince you that even though I grew up middle class, I do still have a passion for social justice.

That wasn't our only dispute, either.

At a rocky stage in our relationship, about five years ago, we went together to couples counselling. It was only a couple of sessions, but it was so helpful.

The counsellor said: "A beautiful relationship is like a beautiful garden. If you don't look after it, water it, fertilise it, weed it, after a while it will no longer be beautiful."

From that point on, you and I recommitted ourselves to each other. These last five years, as you began talking to me more about what was going on inside you, we were closer together than we had ever been. I feel fortunate to have had these years with you, my love.

As you know, I believe that "taking for granted" is "the cancer of relationships". I am so pleased that, most of the time, I did not take you for granted, nor you me.

You said a number of times in recent years:
"I have never allowed myself to be so vulnerable before, never opened myself up so much to anybody before." I so treasured that, my love.

We both put high store on our own integrity, on being honest and truthful with ourselves and with each other.

We both loved our families, and we gave each other support, and space, to be with them.

I feel fortunate that we had so many INTERESTS in common as well.

You were passionately involved in the work of the Social Justice Fund. I passed nearly every project proposal on to you for your comments. You had so much of that important but rare commodity: common sense. I will so miss being able to pass project proposals by you to get your thoughts, my love.

I loved travelling with you. After a few big blow-ups in the early days, we learned to travel really easily together.

Many trips were primarily to look at Social Justice Fund-supported projects in developing countries – and what a joy it was to see, with our own eyes, the wonderful work on behalf of the underprivileged that so many dedicated people are doing all over the world.

On some of these visits, people used to say to us – you are such a good team, you two. David, with his background in the economics of developing countries, and in psychology, and Jan with hers in community development. We were a good team in so many ways, my love – and I will miss that so much.

We shared an interest in other people, other cultures, and history.

We had similar tastes and interests in books, movies, TV, politics, sports – so many things, my love.

Our Scrabble games at Somers were as highly competitive as our tackling of The Age cryptic crossword was collaborative.

Although you were a Tigers fan, you watched almost every Swans game with me, and you barracked for the Swans -- even if you had tipped the opposition!

I loved it that we had Buddhist-type leanings in common, with both of us being great fans of the Dalai Lama.

You helped me to find qualities in myself that I didn't know existed, and the same was true for you as well.

You were the one who thought up the idea of the Footy Tipping Competition that I run for family and friends, which is now completing its 20th year. I am not always great at maintaining relationships, so the Footy Tipping Competition has been a beautiful way for me to keep in regular contact with people who are important to me. Thank you so much for suggesting it, my love.

In that way, as in so many ways – I could not count the ways – you have enriched my life.

In addition to all the shared values and common interests, which were not to be assumed, we also had a number of fortunate complementarities as well, things where, by PURE CHANCE, we fitted in so well with each other.

To give just one example, you hated to be a passenger in a car, because you got car-sick. Whereas I hated to drive, because my back hurts when I drive. So you drove us almost everywhere, and it was a massive win for both of us.

You were a proud person. You once said to me, with tears in your eyes:

“I grew up on the wrong side of the tracks.
I didn’t have money, or social status.
So all I’ve got is me.”

I loved the way that, even though you were passionate about many things, if you got new evidence, you were always willing to change your mind. What a beautiful combination that was: passion, and open-mindedness.

You spoke in a respectful way to all people, especially the under-privileged – but even to the unpleasant debt collectors who called you to harass your vulnerable clients. It was never personal for you – the debt collectors were doing their job, you were doing yours.

You were brilliant at accepting “what is”, using the wonderful Al-Anon serenity prayer:

“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I can’t change,
The courage to change the things I can change,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”

You did have your little foibles. Many’s the time you set off the smoke alarm in the kitchen, because you liked to eat toast that was more charcoal than bread. You would then put far too much butter on it. I never could understand that one.

You were such a powerful package.
You were super-intelligent.
You were a wonderful strategic thinker.
You had first hand experience of what it is like to be underprivileged – so you knew in your bones the situations of the people you worked with and for.
You were a determined, assertive, tireless and effective worker, doing the jobs of any two other people.
And you had a passion for social justice in your heart.
What a powerful combination that was!

You were a STAR – but you were one of the most self-effacing stars I’ve ever seen.
There was so little ego in your motivation for your work.

You worked for ten years, totally UNPAID, to rescue AFCCRA from oblivion after it was defunded by John Howard – and what a sensational job you did on that!

I remember, a year or two ago, I said to you:

“I reckon a hundred years from now, people will look at your work, and they’ll say:

“That Jan Pentland, I wonder who she was, she must have been a pretty amazing person.”

You said to me then, quietly:

“They’ll know who I was, because I am leaving a legacy.”

How right you were on that, my love.

Just this morning, I received a hand-signed letter of condolence from Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister, with whom you met in Canberra in the week before you died. She wrote:

“Jan’s contributions to the Government’s Community Response Task Force, through her extensive knowledge of financial literacy matters, have greatly improved our understanding of this important subject matter.

Of particular note, Jan’s commitment to building capacity in the financial counselling sector through discussions with, and papers prepared for, the Task Force has provided the government with a strong foundation from which we will progress this important work.”

The sad thing, my love, was that, these last few weeks, you could not experience the joy of your magnificent achievements.

At the recent crowning conference that you organised, a number of people said to you:

“That was the best conference ever.”

But after each day of the conference you would come home, flop onto the couch, and say:

“It was so HARD for me to get through the day today. So hard.”

You had everything to live for, my love.

These last few weeks and months, you were at the peak of your magnificent professional career.

You were looking forward to winding down, to spending more time with the people you adored: your children, your grandchildren, and me.

You had said to me, numerous times:
“I want to grow old with you,”
and now was our chance.

But the Bipolar illness was stronger than all of that.

Towards the end, you thought you were a burden to me, and to everybody.

I tried to explain to you, in so many ways, that this was not true. That after all the times you had been there for me, and there with me – through two hip replacements and much, much more – it was now my turn to be there for you. It was a privilege for me to be able to repay to you just a bit of the care, concern and support that you had offered me so often.

But because of your illness, you just couldn't hear it.

You knew that I loved you – you knew that in your bones.

And I know that you loved me – I know that in my bones.

But you felt you were a burden to yourself;
so surely, you must be a burden to everyone else.

And to make it worse, you were stuck in that most human of beliefs:
the belief that “whatever I am feeling now, I will surely be feeling forever”.

If anything positive is to come out of your death, I hope it will remind us all:

“Don't take anything for granted. Experience this moment, because it is the only moment you can be sure that you've got. There may be other moments tomorrow, and there may not. Don't leave it till tomorrow to tell your friends that you love them, and to enjoy their presence – because, as your death amply illustrates, tomorrow may never come.”

I know that, for me, in the week since you died, I am aware more than ever of being grateful to be alive, grateful for every minute that I spend with my family and friends, experiencing the moments, not taking them for granted at all.

You will be pleased to know, my love, that I am not giving myself a hard time about your death.

Sure, I wish I had held you more, cuddled you more, comforted you more.

But apart from that, I am not saying to myself:
“I wish I had said this”, or, “I wish I had done that.”

I did and said almost everything that I knew how to do.

My one big regret is that I did not have a crystal ball.

If I had had a crystal ball, if I could have foreseen what was going to happen, I would have cancelled my life, and sat with you for eight weeks, or eight months, or eight years until you felt better -- whatever it took.

But I don't have a crystal ball, so I don't judge myself too harshly for that.

As you know, my love, I believe that ACCEPTANCE is one of the most under-rated words in the English language.

I am surprised to be able to say:

“I ACCEPT that you have died. “

I don't LIKE it, I don't WANT you to be dead, if I have a choice YOU DO NOT DIE – but I don't have a choice, so I accept that you are dead.

I do have flashes of ANGER at you now and then.

But they dissipate quickly, as soon as I remember your illness, and the torment and pain you were in.

I will never forget those times in the last week or two when you lay on the couch, too weak to do much else – and I sat about a metre from you. We would be looking into each other's eyes, hardly speaking, for half an hour, for an hour. From time to time, your eyes would focus back onto mine, and you would say, as if in wonderment:

“You're still with me in this, love.”

And I would say:
“I'm still with you in this, love.”

I am sad, so terribly SAD, that you have gone.
But at the moment, at least some of the time, I am sad in a peaceful kind of way.

I can't tell you how much I will MISS you.
I don't have the words that could say it.

I am so SORRY that you had to endure so much torment and pain.

I am GLAD that your torment and pain are over now.

Please, my love, take all of my love, and take the love of all your family and friends – in this room, around Australia, and around the world.

And rest in peace, my love.

Rest in peace.

My beloved partner, Jan Pentland, died on 15 Aug 2009 because she had Bipolar Mood Disorder. The way she died was by suicide. But given that she had everything to live for, if she had not had Bipolar Mood Disorder, she would not have died.

Dr David Morawetz
E-mail: morawetz@bigpond.com

Counselling Psychologist
Founder and Director, Social Justice Fund
(a fund of the Melbourne Community Foundation)

18 Mangarra Road, Canterbury, Victoria 3126, Australia
From Australia: Tel: (03) 9888 6169; Fax: (03) 9888 6455
From outside Australia: Tel: (61 3) 9888 6169; Fax: (61 3) 9888 6455