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Words for Pam

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R. Cahill 2015 Words for Pam Radical Sydney/Radical History

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Words for Pam

Abstract

Words spoken by Rowan Cahill during the funeral service for his wife, Pamela Anne Cahill (1948-2015),
Wednesday, 24 June 2015

Pam was born in Melbourne in January 1948.

She was variously my friend, partner, and wife since 1966.

The cause of her death was an unexpected and unforgiving brain aneurysm.

Pam was a remarkable person, and a teacher since 1970 in Sydney, and in the Southern Highlands of NSW,
one whose skills and care and personality and modesty touched the lives of many.

For her it was not a matter of building a CV or of attaining promotion or power. She had seen too many
inappropriate 'achievers' and 'wielders', and reckoned that 'awarded' and 'official' status all too often masked
ineptitude and was a meaningless charade.

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In many ways, and you have to understand this in a considered, classical and philosophical way, Pam was a gentle anarchist.

For her what mattered were the actualities of doing and teaching and caring, for in these *meaning* was to be found, and *worth* created. Leadership was about 'showing' how it was done, not 'telling' how it was done.

We met at Sydney University in 1966 in the days of the anti-war and anti-conscription movements. She accepted my proposal of marriage on the then open top-deck of Fisher Library one night in 1968, and we married in 1969.

When the state sought to incarcerate me for political offences for at least four years, she stood by me and supported the need to speak truth to power and not back down. For Christmas 1968 I gave her the Beatle's *Sgt Pepper's* album, and she gave me Che Guevara's collection of speeches and writings *Venceremos*. Such were the times.

Pam was a person of great inner strength and resilience, courage, love, and humility. Her love was unconditional, and in her teaching she had the ability to develop in students self-confidence, self-belief, and the desire to keep trying.

She had an incisive reflective intellect with the ability to see through what I would call 'bullshit', but what she would more carefully and correctly call 'pretence and falsity'. This was an ability that came with a huge vocabulary, after all her favourite book was 'Mr Oxford' as she called the *Oxford Dictionary*, and she hardly ever finished the day without completing the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Quick and Cryptic crosswords.

Pam called a spade a spade, and did so with a quiet unquavering forthrightness, because a spade was, and is, a spade. And 'quiet' was the name of the game, because hers was a strength that did not need proving.

She had an intellect, a reflective calmness, and a problem solving ability that I have benefited from over the years. My life and work are all the better for it.

Pam loved her family and was proud of the clan we helped create together, and this brought her great joy.

We were soulmates; we complemented each other and I am a better person for our nearly fifty years of voyaging together.

I am diminished by her not being here.

The world seems a darker place.

Rowan Cahill

24 June 2015