

## *David Morawetz talks about Jan Pentland*

### *By Danielle Archer*

I remember the first time I heard the name Jan Pentland. It was four years ago, for a job interview with The Consumer Action Law Centre, as the new MoneyHelp Liaison Officer. I had just stepped into the Jan Pentland Board Room. As I left the room that was decorated with the little vase of purple flowers, I didn't realise that hers was a name I would become more and more familiar with.

Jan's partner, Dr David Morawetz, describes her as, "...a quiet achiever who did a massive amount; yet at social events, you would hardly know she was there".

I asked David what aspect of Jan's career he thought her peers would talk about the most today and why. He said that one thing she would be remembered for was the key role she played in organising the national conferences, especially the component for Indigenous financial counsellors. "Jan went to school with Indigenous kids, and she never forgot it. She recruited and mentored Indigenous financial counsellors, and she introduced sessions for them into the conference. Before that, there was zero involvement".

David said that Jan's passionate advocacy and belief in changing things for the better for those who faced, "a wall of disadvantage", was a key feature of not just her professional, but her personal life too.

He spoke of her dedication, and it sounded like there were times when the line between personal life and professional life would blur. He spoke of memories of Financial Counselling Australia [then AFCCRA] national board meetings being held at their home, in the years after the Howard government defunded the sector. I bet Howard didn't count on Jan working as the Chair for ten years, for free, and hosting meetings in her own home even if it meant a few overnights on their couch!

Jan's own personal experience of disadvantage was part of what inspired her and pushed her towards a career helping others. She grew up in Silverton, a small town about an hour out of Broken Hill in the far west of NSW. "Jan really knew what it was like to grow up poor and disadvantaged. It was through much hard work and sheer cleverness that she got out of that, and she wanted to help others to do the same."

"Jan had a deep sense of empathy and caring for the disadvantaged". David says this in such a deliberate way that I realise he is not merely listing characteristics or reminiscing about her features, he is selective and precise with his words. A. Deep. Sense. Of. Empathy. And. Caring.

"Most people only knew part of what Jan did, nobody knew all of it, not even me"

David talked about his great surprise when Jan became the first non-lawyer and the first posthumous recipient of the Tim McCoy Award for community lawyers. He recounted that at the time there were seven nominations, including community lawyers who had helped in recovery after the bushfires.

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*John Mumford receives the Jan Pentland Memorial Award from David Morawetz in 2012*

He knew how closely Jan worked with community lawyers, but he never realised that her work was so extensive and impactful in the community legal sector as well as the financial counselling sector.

“Helping her clients and improving their lives is what Jan was about. She worked for 10 years in West Heidelberg, and the circumstances of some of her clients reminded her of her own background. She never forgot where she was from”.

As David talked about the many rewards that Jan found in her work, he really emphasized ‘LOVED’ when he said that she LOVED campaigning for change. “JAN LOVED to put on a campaign t-shirt and demonstrate outside the shop-front of a shonky lender.”

After Howard was re-elected for the third time, Jan would say, “Don’t mention the war”, a phrase popularized by John Cleese in the British comedy series Fawlty Towers. Later, Jan repurposed it, adding to it with, “Just keep fighting”. During this time she chaired AFCCRA for 10 years and kept her own troops motivated. For free. With no funding. Just spark and ambition. “Jan would just soldier on, whatever happened. She was very good at ACCEPTING what IS and working with it, to do the very best that was possible GIVEN the current circumstances.” *continued next page*



*2013 Jan Pentland Memorial Award recipient, Rhonda Manhoney, Financial Councillor, Colac Area Health*

## *David Morawetz talks about Jan Pentland continued*

### *By Danielle Archer*

David Morawetz and FCRC encourage people to nominate their peers who are doing great work for the Jan Pentland Award. So much work can go unnoticed by many, especially when you work with those who are as humble and self effacing as Jan.

“Don’t be doing that!” is what David imagines Jan would say if she knew there was an award named after her. She would say “It’s not about me, it’s about the work for the disadvantaged.” I wonder what she’d make of the JP Board Room, then?

The Jan Pentland Award is for an individual member of the FCRC who has demonstrated excellence in service to the wider community above and beyond their normal duties as a Financial Counsellor.

“As a mentor, Jan was always available, helping people very quietly one way or another. And she was always on committees, constantly. She was about being passionate.”

Jan is remembered fondly as a strong, driven and determined woman who found solutions where others couldn’t see them. I ask what attributes and qualities David would like to see in a recipient of the Jan Pentland Award.

“Someone warm and caring” is the first thing that David says. He elaborates with, “Someone who works not only to help their clients improve their lives in meaningful ways, but who also works to change the system and to mentor others. That was Jan. And doing all of that beyond the call of duty -- that was her trademark.”

If you are thinking of nominating someone, be aware that you may only know part of what your colleague is doing, and what you know may only be the tip of the iceberg. David says that Jan was very self-effacing, the opposite of a self promoter. So too, there are those in the sector who work quietly above and beyond the call of duty. David says the past winners [Barry White, Ken Slatter, John Mumford and Rhonda Mahoney] are very good examples of this, and that the award is a way of recognizing those who work in this way.

“It is an award worth winning, and a way of recognizing those who are Jan-like in their work. [yes, Microsoft, I am ignoring you, ‘Jan-like’ IS a word now, and I quite like it]. Their own version of Jan.”

I’d like to see a show of hands -- who wants to nominate someone for the Jan Pentland Award at the next FCRC conference? You see, it’s not just our hands we should be raising to this incredible woman, Jan Pentland. It’s our glasses, our aspirations and our standards as a sector.

The final words will be unspoken ones, the ones David imagines Jan would say to you, if she could.

*“No matter how bad things look in the short-term, soldier on. Keep working for your clients. For the cause. For law reform. Doing the best you can with what you’ve got.”*

If you would like to nominate a colleague please contact [darcher@frc.org.au](mailto:darcher@frc.org.au)

**The Devil’s Advocate thanks David Morawetz for his generous support of the Jan Pentland Memorial Award**