

Speech at the Launch of the Jan Pentland Foundation

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This is in honour of my dear partner Jan Pentland, who died on 15 August 2009. The manner of her death was suicide. But Jan had everything to live for. She was at the peak of her magnificent professional career. She had three children, six grandchildren, and me, who loved her dearly, and whom she loved dearly. Unfortunately, the deep, dark, tormenting bipolar depression, caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, was stronger than all of that.

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

I would like to thank Jan's colleagues who had the idea for the Jan Pentland Foundation, and who have made it happen – including especially Carolyn Bond, Fiona Guthrie, Colin Neave, Delia Rickard, and David Tennant.

Thanks, too, to AFCCRA, and its new chair Carmel Franklin, who have committed to the ongoing administrative backup for the Jan Pentland Foundation.

Some people have asked me if I was a driving force behind setting up this Foundation. The answer is: absolutely NOT. This is a Foundation set up by Jan's colleagues to honour Jan and her legacy, and to make sure that her work continues into the future. Jan's colleagues kindly asked me if I would like to become one of the Trustees of the Foundation, and I said I'd be honoured, and I am honoured still. But the initiative was 100% that of Jan's colleagues.

Thanks, too, to FCRC -- the Financial and Consumer Rights Council of Victoria -- for the wonderful Award that they have created in memory of Jan.

I especially like it that the criterion for the Award is that it be given to “a financial counsellor who has excelled in service to the wider community, over and above their normal work”.

That was so JAN! “Beyond the call of duty” could have been her motto – in work, in relationships, in life.

So thank you, FCRC, for the great honour you have bestowed on Jan. She was very proud to be one of FCRC's two life members.

I was wondering:

If Jan was here today, what might she feel about the Jan Pentland Foundation?

I think the first thing she'd feel is embarrassed and uncomfortable.

“What do you think you’re doing, putting my name on a Foundation? Don’t be doing that! It’s not about me, it’s about the work for the disadvantaged!”

Then, I think she’d feel proud. In that context, I remember a conversation that I had with Jan a year or two ago. I said to her:

“You know, love, 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.’ ”

Jan said to me then, quietly -- and it was the only time I heard her say something like this:

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

So I think that part of her would be very proud – proud that her legacy is being acknowledged in this exceptional way.

I think she would feel humble.

And I think she would feel greatly honoured.

And after she had taken some time to experience these emotions, I think Jan would have said:

“RIGHT, we’ve got this Foundation now -- so what’s the absolute best we can do for the disadvantaged, and for the indigenous, with the resources that we’ve got? And how can we get more resources?”

Finally, a few words to you, my love.

I salute you, Jan Pentland, as a beautiful, compassionate human being.

I salute you: the modest, self-effacing, totally self-made Quiet Achiever, the mentor extraordinaire, who left a legacy so great that your colleagues have set up a Foundation in your name to commemorate you and your work.

I am so sorry that the deep, dark, tormenting bipolar depression was so painful for you that you just couldn’t bear it any more.

I carry you in my heart.

You are my love.

Thank you.