

In Honour of Pam Stone OAM JP

Phil Barresi, former Liberal Federal Member for Deakin and life long friend

Thank you and it is an honour to be asked by the family to speak at this commemoration of a life so well lived by Pam Stone. Many have commented about her contribution to the local community, I instead wish to confine myself to her qualities and her legacy – the Stone family.

When I first met Shane almost 50 years ago, we were both at university in Canberra. I the son of a working class migrant family and Shane from Wodonga, raised on the Wodonga Housing Commission Estate.

In the lead up to today two things have struck me

1. Firstly, I recall the love, admiration, and complete pride that Shane always exhibited when talking about his father and mother. In those early days he was stricken by grief as Les had also passed away that year. It's rare that one sees much emotion in Shane, his stoicism is in stark contrast to that in our Italian family. The grief was also evident a few weeks ago when news came through of Pam's declining health as we planned to meet for dinner up in Queensland.
2. Secondly, what is so self-evident is how much of Pam we see in Shane and his family. Confidence, ambition, drive to succeed and make a difference. Not following the consensus but doing it their way. *Much of Pam's qualities passed through to Shane. I had the honour of being in Pam's presence on many occasions and the beneficiary of her strident counsel it's mainly through the family.*

Today I want to pass on the condolences of my family, Cate and our children to Shane, Josie, Jack & Maddy, and in her absence to Susan.

Driving up here yesterday in the torrential rain, I also reflected on how much the Border community has changed since those long and sometimes dangerous drives I made up the Hume Highway to Canberra, stopping in at Albury to stay the night with relatives running a restaurant. The infamous Holbrook stretch still sends shivers to my spine.

The changes in this region, especially in those early days were no doubt due to the vision and persistence of two giants in the local government community – Les and Pam. They knew what was needed and how to get it despite the obstacles and challenges thrown in the way.

To get a sense of the qualities need for Pam to succeed in those days, one only needs to consider the comments of close family friend Jean Whitla to the ABC.

Pam was a figure who was "always progressive".

Pam's attitude wasn't that 'it can't be done' but 'how can it be done'."

"Pam instituted changes by her persistency and intelligence,"

"There had to be another way of doing this and she would find it."

A core feature of Pam's time in local government was a battle for equality — a fight not only on issues like a fair living wage for widows but also a fight for respect and acceptance.

To me Pam stands as a beacon, a role model for young women who may doubt themselves - from an earlier age than perhaps Pam may have desired she had to fight for her rights and those she cared for. It wouldn't have been easy following in the footsteps of a giant in her husband Les. An achiever in his own right. And in a local government steeped with male tradition and power plays.

I never had a chance to introduce Pam to my daughter Carla, as an adult but I know that if she had then a word of advice on seizing life's opportunities and doing it your way with conviction and passion would have been a major part of it.

I reminded Shane the other day that my personal gratitude to Pam would always be her small part in getting me into the property market. Together the three of us became co owners for a short time in a small property on the Sunshine Coast. Little did I know at that time that it would lead to a love for the beautiful coast and Cate and I being part time residents in our own place not far from that place and the Stones. I would have struggled like so many other young people for a lot longer to get into the market if not for that little venture.

I first met Pam when the Stones invited me to their home in Kensington St South Yarra for a lunch soon after Christmas. I was in my early 20's and a little intimidated on meeting someone who I knew was a most formidable person.

Perhaps Shane had built her up, although based on what we know, Pam has always been quite formidable. A fighter throughout her life. In the end Pam left us in the way she wanted to leave independent and in control of her own destiny. Although in saying this it would be remiss not to acknowledge that Josie did more than her share of taking care of Pam's needs from afar, at all hours of the day.

At moments like these I am reminded of that beautiful and powerful poem about life, our momentary presence, and our role within it. You may know it, called The Dash by Linda Ellis. I won't read it out. The poem invites us to recall the significance of the dash between our birth date and death. The meaning is simple – how we choose to live life, how we strive throughout life will define us. Legacies are not about bridges built, schools opened or plaques on building - they are about the lives we touched, we made, we lifted to greater heights. The opportunities we gave others to shine and be the best people they can possibly be. Looking at Shane and his family I see Pam's legacy and I know that she would be proud as they are proud of her. We will remember Pam for the inspiration and fortitude in the way she lived out her dash.

Rest in Peace Pam.