



*A celebration of the life of*

**Meg Barrett**

26<sup>th</sup> July 1949 - 8<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Meg Barrett was a brave, generous and inspiring woman with a wicked sense of humour and a formidable intellect. She was born in Brisbane on July 26, 1949 - first child of Peg and Ken Hely (now both deceased) and big sister to Liz and Ruth.

Meg had a passion for the English language that influenced every aspect of her life. This included her choice of career, her business ventures and things she did for fun like teaching public speaking, coaching debating teams and treading the boards. This passion was especially evident in her relationships with the people closest to her. Each special friend asked to contribute to this eulogy mentioned, above all else, the hours of talking and talking, and revelling in the sheer delight of it.

Meg loved to talk. She talked before she could walk, demonstrating an early preference for language over physical activity. Nothing changed.

Education played a huge role in Meg's life. She spent all of her childhood in Camp Hill and of course loved to remind us that she attended State High in Brisbane. It was here that she met Pauline, her closest school friend and talking partner in these years.

Meg loved learning and as we know, it was no effort for her to excel academically, which made both her parents, but in particular her father, Ken Hely, extremely proud. She graduated from Teachers' College in 1968 and attended UQ before beginning her teaching career in Boonah. She married Keith, also a teacher, in 1970. The marriage was short lived. In Boonah, she met another teacher, Ken Barrett, Amy's father. They later moved to Kilcoy. (Actually, to be precise, Meg told me she was run out of town. Amy has her own theory on this.)

Amy was born in Kilcoy in 1975. Meg once told me that her biggest achievement in life was as Amy's mother.

They moved to Woodford and then to Maleny in 1978 where she began teaching at the Secondary Department. Meg was in a league of her own and her female teaching colleagues were most envious of the way she continued with her career, leaving Ken at home happy in his role as father.

Meg was an exceptional teacher and teaching English was her passion. She was highly intelligent, set high standards and brought out the best in her students. Meg trained student debating teams with great success and organised social outings out of school hours. She modelled commitment and determination and empowered students to excel. Meg changed young lives (and the lives of others).

Robyn, a former student and another person with whom Meg spent hours talking, will attest to her brilliance as a teacher.

Meg loved to be serious (a quality she passed on to Amy at the age of three) and revelled in philosophical discussions. We quickly learned that we could win if Meg was on our *Trivial Pursuit* team but lose if we opposed her in an argument. I remember accusing her one day of being too serious. She said "I do it so well". I couldn't argue.

In 1984, Meg became very ill with a rare inherited lung disease and was given two years to live. Not happy with this prognosis, she changed her doctor and her lifestyle. She managed to live another 18 years. During this time she met her partner Jan and began a long conversation with her.

Meg resigned from teaching in 1987 and for a time was lost. She joined Mountain Fare, a women's cooperative and developed the educational wing, teaching public speaking and organising Spring Workshops. It was during this cooperative phase that she also served on the boards of Maple St Co-op and the Maleny Credit Union.

She purchased *The Range News* around 1994 and began another phase in her love affair with the English language; this time as editor of the local paper. With her attention to detail and the correct use of the apostrophe, Meg was perfect in this role. She always regretted selling it.

Later Meg and Jan established Double Take Publishing and then ob-la-di (the Maleny Magazine). Each successive career required a little less physical activity. Always determined to make the most of what she was allowed by her declining health, Meg came up with creative ways to satisfy her desire to work. She refused to lie down and die.

Around this time Meg lost her mother Peg whom she really loved. Peg lived just long enough to meet Amy's daughter, and Meg's granddaughter, Shinnai, now four. She never expected to outlive her mother or become a grandmother. Meg once told me that becoming a grandmother was like falling in love again.

Her health declined to a point where a lung transplant was the only option. Her main social contact during the months before her operation was a small group of supportive women. Even in her darkest moments she found pleasure in talking, although her health had declined to the point where even finding the breath to speak was an effort. During this time she found another great talking partner in Jayanti Fitzgerald (who passed away in September 2000).

In August 2000 Meg received her new lungs. Her life was transformed. In her own words "To be able to say a whole sentence without needing a breath in the middle! To swim in the sea again! To sing *Eensy Weensy Spider* with Shinnai! This is the ordinary stuff of life. Yet for me, it's simply a miracle."

Sadly, devastatingly, the miracle was short-lived. After just 14 months Meg developed chronic rejection of her new lungs and her health began to decline once again, but this time over just a few months.

Even during this distressing time she continued to make a social contribution through her love of language, publishing the LTX Newsletter and maintaining her involvement with the lung transplant unit at The Prince Charles Hospital.

On Monday the 8th of July she passed away peacefully at the hospital after saying goodbye to her family and many of her friends. Meg's conversation with people and the world, in which she took tremendous delight and which sustained her wonderful and generous spirit for 52 years, came to an end.

