



## SHEILA: THE ROCK OF THE FAMILY

*A Celebration of the Life of Sheila Mary Sullivan Peterson*

### I. SHEILA, THE ROCK

Sheila was the rock of our family. She also rocked our lives and the lives of many others. If I know Sheila, right now she is rocking up the place with the Lord.

### II. THE NAME 'SHEILA'

The name 'Sheila' is an Irish name derived from the name "Cecelia." St. Cecilia is the patron saint of music and as my children point out to me, two of whom have undertaken careers in poetry, also the patron saint of poetry, organ-grinders, and circus performers. Sheila loved both music and poetry and one might suppose organ-grinders and circus-performers as well, because she enjoyed almost all forms of entertainment.

### III. MY WIFE

Sheila was my wife of almost 36 years. My life was at a stall if not in reverse until I met her. She became everything to me. Our relationship was one of total love, devotion, and commitment to each other. We shared responsibilities in the raising of our children and in my work. We shared our spiritual lives. We shared everything.

### IV. FIRST DATE

I met Sheila in the late fall of 1971 on a blind date dinner with Sheila's good friends Mary Lou and Allan Giannini. Our first independently established date was my firm's holiday party in December of 1971. Three (3) of my partners are former law clerks for Sheila's late father, Justice Raymond L. Sullivan. This was simply a matter of coincidence. There were nor prior connections between Sheila and me because of this. When these partners discovered at the holiday party that my date was Ray Sullivan's daughter, they were all over her like a bum on a ham sandwich. Sheila always took great interest in my work, in part because her father had been a lawyer and later one of the finest justices in history of the California Supreme Court. She involved herself with and established personal relationships with many of my clients, attending conferences, dinners, and other engagements. As most

of you know, she dispensed her opinions freely, often offering business clients unsolicited advice on how to conduct their business.

## V. MOTHER, SPIRITUAL AND INSPIRATIONAL LEADER

But most importantly, Sheila was the mother of and mentor to our three children, Molly, Katie, and Mike, and the spiritual and inspirational leader of our family. She was totally immersed in the education and spiritual development of our children. Her basic principle in raising children was that if you didn't do a good job in this, you had failed in your most fundamental responsibility in life. Molly, Katie, and Mike are a living tribute to Sheila, all of her principles and values, and Sheila's fulfillment of what she perceived as her most fundamental responsibility. Simply put: she excelled at this. In a family mass said by Father Pat LaBelle at Stanford Hospital shortly before her death, Sheila's mastery of her role in our family was likened to today's Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 13-16. Sheila was "the salt of the earth, the light of the world." Like salt which brings out the flavor of food and light which brings out the color and texture of objects, Sheila brought out the best in our children, in me, and many others whose lives she touched.

## VI. CATHOLIC FAITH

If evidence of this were required, one need only examine her commitment to her Catholic faith and her commitment to Sacred Heart Schools. Sheila was the inspiration for my commitment to the Catholic faith. She didn't coax or nudge me; she simply set an example that I found compelling. We have been members of the Catholic Community at Stanford for almost twenty (20) years. I could truly think of no greater joy than attending Sunday mass with Sheila and sharing my faith with her. I might add parenthetically that the Catholic Community at Stanford is the platinum standard and absolute role model for college and university campus ministries, in large part due to the work of Father Pat, with the assistance of Father Carl who is celebrating Sheila's funeral mass this afternoon, and will continue under the guidance of Father Nathan.

## VII. SACRED HEART SCHOOLS

Sheila and our family have been involved with Sacred Heart Schools for many years. Sheila's involvement is almost legendary. Molly, Katie, and Mike often said that they thought she ran this place. Sheila herself was a blue ribbon graduate. Our children are also graduates, having attended Sacred Heart Schools for a combined total of thirty-six (36) years, not counting Katie's one rambunctious year at Montessori. Sheila worked for several years with our dear friend Sister Joan McKenna who was then serving as the Director of Schools. She was a member of the Board of Trustees for many years. She was a recipient of the Saint Madeleine Sophie award for her service to the schools, an award which she treasured and which another of our dear friends Anna Eshoo placed in

the congressional record. Katie and Mike both taught at Sacred Heart Prep. Sheila frequently and freely offered her advice on their lesson plans. "Just make them do it," she would advise. Katie has been honored to be the commencement speaker at this year's graduation. Although not formally designated as such, Sheila, over the years, has acted as self-appointed historian and consultant to the current director, Rich Dioli. Watch out, Rich – I doubt Sheila intends to relinquish this position anytime in the near future.

## VIII. OTHER REMEMBRANCES

Our other remembrances of Sheila seem endless, but let me mention a few...

a. The Teacher and Educator – Sheila taught in the San Francisco public school system and voraciously read literature, biographies, history, and politics. Spending time with our children picking out books at Kepler's on Sunday afternoon became a favorite pastime.

b. The Master Planner, Organizer, Traffic Manager, General Contractor, and Travel Consultant –

- Sheila was so organized we couldn't stand it. "I have files on that," she would explain. "You need to make a file on that," she would demand. She was a logistical genius. When Molly, Katie, and Mike were and still are located in various parts of the country at various times, attending school or pursuing their careers, she had her finger on the pulse of everything at all times. She had a complete understanding of all the moving parts and which direction they were moving.

- She acted as general contractor for all six or seven of our home improvements and additions, and loved jousting with what she considered to be her sub-contractors.

- She knew more about making travel arrangements than most travel consultants (with the exception of our close friend and professional travel consultant, Jan Wood). She knew how to get deals, where to go, how to get there, and what to do when you got there.

c. The "Political Junkie" – Sheila loved politics. Some might say she was a political junkie, but her interest in politics stemmed from a serious concern for the underprivileged, and reflects something more than the term "political junkie" implies. She worked in Bobby Kennedy's campaign years ago. She was driven by her generous nature and goal of making things better for the underprivileged. Clearly, Barack Obama lost a vote on May 22nd.

d. The "People Person" – Sheila was a people person. Ask anyone at the post-office, Ace Hardware, Cindy's Flowers, Hudson Shell, Cook's Seafood, the Sacred Heart buildings and grounds crew, or the checkers and produce guys at Safeway. They all knew and loved her. Molly, Katie, Mike, and I always enjoyed going to movies with her because of the way she "worked the line." Sheila was never content to stand still. She would move up and down the line, engaging everyone in conversation. She would work a room in similar fashion. Even as her health failed, I enjoyed being with her as she worked the room

to introduce me to virtually every priest at the recent Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology dinner honoring Father Pat. She was known to say in good humor, "I have to go – my people are waiting," as in the case of her Curves group.

e. The "Sheriff" – Sheila was strong-willed, but with the best and kindest intentions. She would complain to our children, "When are you going to get married?" or "Why don't you get a job that pays more money?" She considered me to be too soft with them, complaining that I only did this for the purpose of securing favored treatment from them. Our children responded by good-naturedly bestowing upon her the title of "The Sheriff" and presenting her with a Sheriff's badge this past Mother's Day.

## IX. TEAM AWESOME: A TRIBUTE TO SHEILA

Let me conclude with something about our family. We are as close and supportive of each other as a family can be. While Sheila was courageously waging her battle with cancer, we became even closer and more supportive of Sheila and each other in the hope that she would win her battle. Since April of 2007, when she was first diagnosed with lymphoma, Molly, Katie, and Mike have endlessly shuttled to Menlo Park from New Orleans, Los Angeles, Deep Springs, and Greensboro to do whatever they could for their Mom and for me. They were at Sheila's side from the beginning, including during her most recent stay at Stanford Hospital. One of the nurses once remarked that our family's support was "awesome." Since Sheila had a variety of medical teams – from an oncology team to an infectious disease team to a neurology team – we decided to call ourselves a team, as well. Without intending to be self-serving, we adopted the name "Team Awesome." Team Awesome held meetings to plan our support for Sheila. We even adopted light-hearted rules of conduct as a means of relieving our own stresses and anxieties. The rules designate, for example, that "no meeting can start until everyone has an opportunity to go to the bathroom." But one rule we adopted goes to heart of our family culture. This rule evolved one day when I was leaving by myself to be with Sheila at the hospital and one of our children said, "You can't go by yourself. I'm going with you. No one travels alone." Just think about the significance of that rule for a minute, as a guiding principle of life. So simple, yet so meaningful. To us, it speaks to everything that is important to us as a family, all of which was inspired by Sheila.

## X. LUCKY OR UNLUCKY

Finally, I want to tell one story about Sheila's treatment these past thirteen (13) months. In my frustration with a report that Sheila's lymphoma had reached yet another area of her body, I said, "Why can't we get lucky for once and get a positive report?" Our children replied, "You know, Dad, maybe we have been lucky because we had bonus time with Mom for a little over a year since she was first diagnosed." Our children are right. We were lucky to have her during this time. Sheila rocked and was *the* rock, even during her cancer treatment.