



Pamela Reid

*(Photograph: Michael Daly)*

## Pamela Ann Reid 1925–1996

*There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.*  
– Julius Caesar IV, iii

Perhaps it is these words of Marcus Brutus, spoken at Sardis on the eve of the Battle of Philippi, that epitomise Pamela Reid's philosophy in coming to terms with the moral issues she encountered during her eventful three score years and ten and which contributed so very largely to public acknowledgement of her achievements.

Her successes were, indeed, many and were particularly notable in the context of her times. They are sufficiently recorded elsewhere, and to dwell here at any length on the importance to the general citizenry of her productive years as a councillor, or the period of her illustrious mayoralty or her other civic attainments and, perhaps more significantly, on the accolades heaped upon her as a Freeman of the City of Pietermaritzburg and a Fellow of The Natal Society, awards made for singularly meritorious service (and which she prized greatly), would wantonly gild the lily.

Having regard, though, to the conventions that governed society in her youth and the mores then fashionable, the question that begs some response is what compelling event prompted Pamela Reid, much against, as it were, the run of play, to launch herself upon a course so open to public scrutiny, when she herself was cast in a very private and reticent mould.

Conventional wisdom suggests that one should be wary of the view that she was a nursery tyrant – some *enfant terrible* – destined for a vigorous Boadicean morrow at the hustings. The facts indeed suggest otherwise. After being enchanted in her later adolescent years by the pigs of Denmark, where she had gone after her schooldays in Natal to study their habits and other social graces, she should have been an odds-on favourite to spend her future somewhere in the countryside of her native land as a prominent breeder and admirer of one of her favourites of the animal kingdom.

However, that was not to be. The cataclysmic event that tilted, as it were, her axis from its predictable equilibrium and launched her into a new and altogether unexpected orbit was the advent to power of the National Party in 1948. She found intolerable the shameful legislation which followed and was deeply offended by the new government's disregard of the rule of law in its quest for absolute sovereignty. She rebelled against the iniquities, inhumanity and cruelty of the new order, which were to bring misery and overwhelming hardship to a great number of her compatriots.

Pamela Reid's response was to throw her weight behind the Liberal Party in its struggle to stem the ugly tide. When it was banned by an intolerant regime, her allegiance changed to the Progressive Party where it remained, through its every metamorphosis, until her death. But provincial and national politics were not her *métier*. She chose rather the municipal arena as her personal battleground. And it was there that she excelled, over many years and sometimes very much in isolation, in retaining a measure of justice and some sense of decency and fair play in the tattered shreds of a skewed society.

Once again, the constraints of the new age confronted her and she was forced to set course against tides of popular opinion running strongly counter to equitable

convention and to tack as best as she was able against the fierce totalitarian winds that blew quirkily over the land.

But Pamela Reid was made of enduring stuff. Against the odds she faced across the political divide, she remained unbending in principle and yielded nothing to her opponents. She was constantly disparaged and branded by them as hard and cold, excessively difficult and infuriatingly imperious; nevertheless, she gained their admiration and respect. Her adversaries were compelled by force of her example to acknowledge in her a formidable strength of character and an unshakeable belief in what was right and proper that rendered her impervious to corruption, whether in the cut and thrust of public life or in the private domain.

But just as the obverse of every coin has its reverse, so it was with Pamela Reid. Away from the jar and friction of municipal politics, her steely-eyed determination and her distant manner could be gone in a wink and suddenly there would appear a more affable and less forbidding Pamela Reid. However, because of her innate reserve, she was not blessed with an easy camaraderie. On the contrary, she found it difficult to be at ease except with her very close friends. On occasion with them, she could easily erupt into another more convivial Pam altogether, full of spontaneous humour, a great sense of fun, subtle repartee and much charm. She was, without doubt, marvellous company when the shadow of the City Hall fell elsewhere.

Who can forget the long country rambles birdwatching with intense fervour; who, the lazy days in summer sailing in her beloved *Nutshell* on Lake Merthley while her anglophile poodles patrolled the banks with all the gallic excitement they could muster against her return to land; or the casual ease with which she could set a dry fly on a promising mountain stream; or the beguiling hours spent among friends with music, art and language, where she commanded enormous knowledge and fluency.

Her life was filled with many different things that kept her far from the shallows. They, too, are her memorial.

Pamela Reid died on the evening of 13th June 1996 after an unexpected and very short illness that spared her, as she might have wished, the travail of declining years. In the sunshine of a winter's afternoon she was laid to her rest on a gentle slope overlooking the eastern hills of her beloved city.

As the words of Dean Forbes's closing blessing on the small band of family and friends gathered at the graveside faded from hearing, a fanciful ear might well have heard faintly in the distance the haunting lament of a lone piper leading her jubilant spirit home to her Scots ancestors:

*The Flowers of the Forest that foucht aye the foremost,  
The prime o' our land, are cauld in the clay.*