

Jan Lee Martin's Futures Foundation

By Anita Sykes-Kelleher with contributions from Peter Lazar, Sohail Inayatullah, John Baikie, Tim Longhurst, and Jan Lee Martin.

Introduction

Jan Lee Martin was one of Australasia's best-loved Futurists.

An avid reader of the world's great writers on philosophy, ethics, futures studies and happiness, Jan made a significant contribution to the field of Futures Studies. In 1995 she founded the Futures Foundation, edited its newsletter, *Future News* and, for the next 10 years, Co-Chaired the Australasian Node of the Millennium Project. Following the liquidation of the Futures Foundation in 2008 subsequent to Jan's selling the business in 2002, Jan worked closely with a small group of futurists to establish a new Australian futures program, FutureMakers, and mentored us encouraging our plans to form the Centre for Australian Foresight. Jan spoke at national and international conferences, wrote for learned journals and encouraged media commentators, business and community leaders to look further into the future and to turn away from short-term thinking.

Most all she will be remembered as a mentor to young students of Futures and for teaching that by making informed decisions today we can influence the futures we would prefer tomorrow. Borrowing from Jan's vocabulary, this chapter is a 'Herstory' of Jan's contribution to Australian Futures and of the Futures Foundation to 2002.

The Herstory

Following a long and successful career in public relations, including 16 years running her own consulting firm in Sydney, Jan Lee Martin sold the company in 1986 and began to explore new interests, including the study of change and futures. Jan's growing fascination with natural systems theories in the works of Fritjof Capra, and later Elisabet Sahtouris and the Human Systems Dynamics group, led to her forming a view of organisations as living systems that would continue to shape her thinking about change, corporate communications and futures work.

In 1995 Jan brought together a group of Australian futurists to establish a national consultancy network as the first step towards establishing a Futures Foundation. In the pre-launch issue of *Future News* Jan wrote "the network offers organisations a single point of access to a range of specialist consulting services. It will also support members and their clients with an information and resource centre, and use an electronic network with groupware to facilitate collaboration on shared projects."¹

In the papers Jan gave me from her records of the early years of starting the network and the Foundation, I discovered a 1995 paper written exactly as reproduced below entitled 'Introducing the Futures Foundation.'²

In this latter part of the 20th century, we have grown out of the naïve belief that we can impose human will on a mechanical world, that we can carefully control events or organisations.

Now we understand a little more about the chaos of nature and the nature of chaos. New, systemic thinking recognises that we are part of an organic whole, a system of living systems, and that in this social and biological ecology we are endlessly interdependent with each other and with our host planet.

This recognition calls for new understandings on the part of decision-makers, new skills for those who take action, new ways of learning to work together in co-creative teams.

The Futures Foundation has been formed to introduce this new thinking to the leaders of our organisations and our communities.

Its vision is a world of co-creation, of participation and collaboration, of supporting the brightest thinking and the soundest values, of taking a proactive approach to designing our futures.

When I read this I marvelled at Jan's insight 20 years ago and reflected that we are still introducing the concepts of values-based decision making, systems thinking, design thinking and collaborative ways of working to organisations and communities today. Jan would have appreciated the growing recognition by leaders of the value of this work and that this thinking is now reaching global scale as communities, local and global, recognise the need to shift our thinking if we are to avert the worst impacts of global challenges such as climate change and conflict. I felt inspired to ensure that the work of FutureMakers, the last project Jan and I worked on before she died, honoured her ethos and continued to build on her earlier work.

Originally intended as a foundation in the true sense of the word, Jan worked tirelessly to attract start-up capital intending to leverage and to attract corporate investment into the proposed Futures Foundation's Millennium Program funds.

Jan's aim was to build a capital fund of \$100m over five years. The funds were to be distributed to future-focused projects and programs that would empower communities to become active, informed participants in shaping their futures.

Jan's ethos was not solely charitable. She had a strong business head and recognised that the ongoing viability of the Foundation relied upon its members earning an income from the work. She established a brokerage system whereby she would take enquiries from interested organisations, communities and events organisers and recommend suitable futurists for the work. The Foundation received a fee for this service, covering business costs and contributing to the growth of the community-oriented funds.³

Jan also designed a Corporate Program of executive decision-support consulting services to provide specialist inputs on long-term trends and directions and more participative organisational processes. The Community Program complemented the Millennium Program and the Corporate Program offering 'communities the tools and facilitators to help them play an active role in designing their own visions for the future and devising strategies that will help them create those futures'.

Jan had a proposed list of leaders and a Council for the Foundation, that, in her words were 'a mix of wishes, hopes, plans and actuals'. Her aim was to attract Janet Holmes a Court to the role of Founding President, with Edward de Bono as Vice President and to have the governing body supported by a professional advisory board of Peter Ellyard, Richard Slaughter, Colin Benjamin and Tony Stephenson. Office Bearers at start-up were John Baikie, Attracta Lagan, Peter Lazar, Richard Neville and Jan.

By 1997 Jan's Futures Foundation, primarily a Sydney Hub of futurists and business people, had outgrown the meeting rooms kindly supplied by the St James Ethics Centre and moved into a new meeting space at the Royal Exchange Club. Jan was writing articles on Peace Summits, Earth Summits, UN conferences, and other international forums with future-oriented themes as well as introducing Foundation members to new thinking and leadership and management methods that catalysed changes in the corporate world. She reported on World Futures Studies Federation conferences, wrote about modern societies having a dysfunctional relationship with time, social responsibility as a competitive advantage; organised events and held meetings that combined theory and practice development opportunities. In 1999 internationally renowned futurists Jim Dator from the US, Eleonora Masini from Europe, and Elisabet Sahtouris, evolution biologist and futurist, gave keynote talks to the Public Relations Institute Conferences in Sydney – and Australia was on the global map of countries engaging with futures thinking.

By 2002 Future News had contributors from leading fields discussing the human genome, sustainable futures, the future of food, the future of science, green energy and the biology of globalisation, amongst many others. The Futures Foundation had built a sizeable annual income and was providing work for many of the new field's emerging practitioners. Jan was delivering futures workshops

with Peter Saul, Peter Baume, Julian Crawford, Richard Neville, Martin Hanlon, Noel Winterburn, and Oliver Freeman in those earlier years and had started to include secondary school children in community forums as the voices of the future. She established a reputation for providing quality consulting services, interesting newsletters and learning events and had built a loyal client following and membership. She chaired the Millennium Project in Australia (at that time an initiative of the American Council of the United Nations University) and was a consulting editor to the *Journal of Futures Studies*. She was a professional member of the World Future Society and a member of the World Futures Studies Federation.

By now Jan was planning to retire and merged the Futures Foundation, which was strongly supported in New South Wales, with the Future of Work Foundation in Victoria. Sadly, whilst the new management retained the Futures Foundation name, they changed the business model and the ethos of the organisation. Within a couple of years the Futures Foundation had lost considerable goodwill, consulting opportunities and financial reserves. By 2008 the Foundation was in serious financial difficulty and was officially wound up by the newly appointed AFFA Board Members who, on discovery of loss of moneys held in trust, appointed liquidators and averted trading whilst insolvent.

Undaunted, Jan rallied her long-time supporters and helped the next generation of futurists to form their own network. Preferring not to use the Futures Foundation name again, Jan and I brainstormed the name for the new network at Pearl Beach and decided on FutureMakers, a program now auspiced by the Centre for Australian Foresight and run by the Centre's Co-Founders. Jan in the meantime continued her work in senior executive coaching, spoke at conferences, wrote articles for the media and business journals such as *Boss* magazine, and enjoyed more time with family and friends in Sydney and Pearl Beach.

FutureMakers was to have been launched by Jan and me at the 2012 Asia-Pacific Foresight Conference in Perth. Our aim was to reunite the Australian futures and foresight community, building on the positive results of previous AusForesight conferences, extending the conference beyond the established network of scholars and consultants and into organisations and communities. When Jan told me of her illness I found it hard to accept that this was one challenge she would not be able to overcome and it was with great sadness that we said goodbye before she died in August 2011.

Friend, mentor, colleague, 'Mother of Futures Studies', the contribution of Jan Lee Martin's Futures Foundation to the Australian futures community was unique. She left behind a community of practice all the richer for having known her, loved her, worked with her, and learned from her, particularly on the subject of how to communicate futures work! Thanks to Jan we have the Centre for Australian Foresight, FutureMakers, a repository of futures books in Queensland, a scholarship in her name, and cherished memories.

Jan was born in New Zealand, July 1941.

She died of cancer in Sydney, August 2011.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Richard Slaughter, John Baikie and Peter Lazar for contributing their knowledge of Jan's work in the early days of the Futures Foundation, all of the many people who wrote short biographies in honour of Jan's passing, and Jan herself who gave me her records of the startup of the Foundation at Pearl Beach in 2008 in the hope that I would be able to use them to restore the organisation to its former position in the field. Once the full details of the Foundation's situation were known there was no alternative but to legally wind it up and Jan continued to offer the AFFA directors her counsel and support through that difficult period.

1 Martin, JL, 1996. Pre-launch issue of Future News, Feb 1996.

2 Martin, JL, 1995. Draft 1 Introducing the Futures Foundation, Nov 1995.

3 This service is now provided through the Centre for Australian Foresight.