

Cheryl Anne Lieberman 1953 – 2005

It is my special privilege to speak today about Cheryl Anne, my friend and colleague. Cheryl and I struggled many times together to find the right words to fill the space in front of us. Today, the space is too large to fill. But I will try to serve Cheryl well.

As a friend and as a colleague, Cheryl was generous with her gifts. A list of her gifts might begin with compassion and curiosity, humour, insight and intelligence, and it would certainly include courage and a strong will, as many of us were able to observe several weeks ago when she said good-bye to hundreds of us at a gathering that only Cheryl could have generated. Cheryl's gifts also included hundreds of little things, like unusual coasters or special dishes for holding paperclips, delightful little spoons or earrings made from beads taken from vintage jewellery.

In many ways, Cheryl was the embodiment of those principles of design that informed her life and her work. She was a lover of beauty and was herself a study in contrasts and balance.

Cheryl was that most priceless of colleagues, a graphic designer who actually read the words. Not only did she read them, she got them. And then she challenged them and made them sing. She knew that the words were not simply there to decorate the page (she expected them to mean something), and yet she was better than anyone I know at turning type, simple type, into a thing of beauty. I am a better writer because Cheryl taught me to look at the words as well as the pictures.

Cheryl was a model of good taste who never judged others if they lacked her relentless sense of style. How she found that perfect balance between excess and restraint, I will never know. But she always found it, even when it seemed

for a moment that she might have crossed the line. Perhaps it was this fine sense of balance that also led her to extend her lifelong love of exercise to include the practice of Pilates, which stretched her and changed her posture in the world and gave her a platform from which to develop her teaching abilities.

Cheryl was that most precious of friends, a strong woman who was not afraid to make herself vulnerable. Her fierce sense of loyalty led her to support her friends when they needed it most. It also led her to challenge her friends when she most felt the need to stand up for a principle.

Cheryl was a willing partner in any crazy experiment I cared to cook up and an energetic instigator of a few schemes of her own. Together with Anita Jenkins, we formed the Plain Language Group, a partnership in which we explored the meaning of clarity in design and writing. We learned from each other, we pushed each other, and together we formed the values that have continued to shape my writing practice, just as they have influenced Cheryl's design.

For many years, Cheryl made the Birks Building her domain, in a chaotic little office from which she worked her magic. Patricia Shields wrote in a recent email, "Over the years that Cheryl and I 'lived' and worked in the same building, we shared projects, confidences, life stories, laughter and tears. [I think there may have been coffee and cigarettes involved, too.] Cheryl's ability to establish and nurture so many close relationships with the people around her was another of her gifts and part of her legacy."

Cheryl was a consummate networking genius who never failed to provide the right contact. In fact, when Cheryl introduced me to Tony Warren, another of her longtime friends, a little over seven years ago, she said that we had to meet because we were a lot alike. At the time, I remember

thinking nobody is like me. But she was so right! Cheryl was “best woman” at our wedding a year later.

Most of you know Cheryl as a graphic designer, not as a writer. But, as with every aspect of her life, Cheryl developed her own style, even in writing. She used to say that I taught her how to write. And perhaps she said that to the many other good writers she worked with. But there was something astonishing even in the shortest email message from Cheryl. Over the past few days, friends sent me these examples that I would like to share with you. The first one is from Anita.

I thanked Cheryl for sending me photos from Catrin Owen’s wedding, saying: "Do you have a digital camera? They are quite wonderful, aren't they? Thanks also for the great pot. And the mango. And your friendship."

Her reply:

No camera. Not yet. You think I am a designer or something?

Friendship is a no brainer (and right back at ya)

the pot however...

You are welcome.

That's our Cheryl. It's going to be really hard to let her go.
Anita

From: Cheryl
Sent: Tuesday, October 04, 2005 2:10 PM
To: Pat Shields
Subject: Did you fall off the Planet or

just decide to escape?
Probably niether....
but where are you?
Cheryl

From: Cheryl
Sent: Thursday, August 04, 2005 9:56 PM
To: Pat Shields
Subject: almost forgot the colour cover

Still up?
Any hotels in Vancouver? Reasonable? My resos fell through. can't seem to catch a tail wind right now. Are you sailing? Hope so. Cheryl

Cheryl always said a lot with very little.

This fall, Cheryl launched her teaching career at Grant MacEwan, teaching two-dimensional design. She was terrified at the thought of teaching. But she did it anyway and was disappointed at having to leave the job midway through the semester. Patricia Shields and I were able to spend an afternoon with Cheryl two weeks ago, helping her put the final touches on a book on human rights. The book was, as usual, a work of beauty, a testament to Cheryl's love of type. It was typical that as we walked out the door, exhausted as she was, Cheryl called out that we should let her know how things went with the printer.

She left too soon, but we are grateful that she was able to leave quickly. Cheryl Anne Lieberman is still our best woman, a shining star who made our lives beautiful in so many ways. She said a lot in a very short time. Cheryl, things are fine at the printers, but they will never be the same. Have you caught a tail wind now? Are you sailing? Hope so.