

Eulogy for Ann Louise Gilligan at her funeral, 17 June 2017 by Paul Downes

***‘To Katherine Zappone, whose love encourages, empowers and enables’*, are the words of Ann Louise in the dedication, for our book, *Beyond Educational Disadvantage*. Their love was transported into a philosophy of education based on encouragement, empowerment and enabling. Ann Louise liked alliteration!**

As a colleague and friend of Ann Louise for 17 years in St. Pat’s DCU, my primary memory of Ann Louise is not simply that of the fearless advocate to challenge the injustices of poverty and discrimination, but of how gentle, dreamy and full of hugs she was. Her kindness was apparent when, out of the blue, one day she said to me, ‘Can I call over to your house, Paul, I have a gift for you’. I responded, ‘Thanks Ann Louise, what is it?’ ‘A tree’, she said. When a philosopher of the imagination like Ann Louise gives you a tree, you know it ain’t simply a tree ! It is to be a symbol of something. When is a tree just a tree ? (!)

Her strength was of a different kind. Ann Louise fought because she loved, not because she loved to fight. Her strength was one that embraced fragility. She told me of one particular government minister, some years ago, who banged his fists on the table and shouted at her, as she challenged him. She firmly stood her ground. But hers was not a discourse of fists and walls. This was not her ambit.

One of her educational legacies is that she helped dissolve the silent tremor of thwarted hope in Irish society. Ann Louise converted people’s hope into expectation - and expectation into entitlement and rights.

She knew that there was a time to let things flow, a time to dig in, a time for work, a time for play...

A gift of Ann Louise and her beloved Katherine is how dreams are made flesh, how dreams become rooted in the soil of reality. And what a legacy. Co-founder with Katherine of An Cosán community lifelong learning centre, the founding Director of the St. Pat’s DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre in 2000, driving force behind the National Forum on Ending Disadvantage 2002, the first Chairperson of the National Educational Welfare Board, and of course, champions of the glorious campaign for marriage equality.

When Ann Louise spoke at Education Department meetings in St Pat’s DCU, everyone listened. She spoke with a grace and authority. As a teacher she has inspired so many. And now, in her passing, she speaks again – frankly, as a hero - to a rising generation and future generations.