

# MEET MY FRIEND, PAM

By Beth Gallagher

Hello, I am here to introduce to you my friend, Pam Barnard. She is a woman with a seriously wicked sense of humor and a commitment to teasing and poking fun. With these keenly defined talents, I knew almost immediately that we were going to get along just fine. Before I ever met Pam I was aware that she had a story to tell.



Pam is 44 years old and a fiery advocate that won't take NO for an answer. She has learned in her life to fight for herself and to not let anyone tell her that she can't do something. Pam has spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy. I was contacted in February of 2005 to see if Life Works was taking any more referrals. I told her we were available and the following week we met face to face. Pam told me about her current living situation.

She has a gigantic vocabulary but can be difficult to understand when you first meet her. She does have a communicator that she can use if you don't understand her right away. I learned really fast that I needed to pay close attention to her speech. During our initial meeting I guess I had become distracted while she was telling me something. Apparently I had started to do the incredibly rude smile and nod acting like I understood her when I clearly did not. She was laughing hysterically, I mean with tears and spit flying and everything when I asked her to please type to me what she had been telling me. I was smiling and nodding to her asking me, Hey dumb ass, you don't have a clue what I am talking about, do you?

Pam lived in a home in Golden Hill, a community near downtown San Diego. I met her at the home of her mother. Her mother owned a very large, two story, 4 bedroom craftsman home. It needed some TLC for instance some paint, serious yard care and a massive clean up around the inside. She had lived there all of her 43 years with her family. Until just very recently she was living there with her mother and two caretakers, Barbara and Terry. Her mother is very ill and getting progressively more fragile. Her mother needed full time care as well. Pam's father passed away approximately 5 years ago. He left the home with no mortgage to Pam and her mother in a trust. Within a year of her father's passing, her brother Joey passed away. He was in his late 40's and died from heart disease. Pam noted that the past 5 years have been very, very trying on her. Coupled with the grief, there had been a great deal of stress.

The person that Pam called dad was actually her step father. She explained that her real father had not been in her life since she was seven years old. He was a very mean man who had no hope that Pam would be able to amount to anything. Pam was terrified of her birth father. When she was four years old he attempted to kill her by placing a pillow over her face and trying to smother her. Her Grandma caught him and kicked him out of the house. He hung on until Pam was about seven when her step father met her mother and married.

A couple of years ago things in regards to money and her family began to fall apart. Pam's sister began abusing (siphoning) the funds coming into the house from both IHSS and from SSI to care for both Pam and her mother. Apparently Pam's sister had some significant addiction issues including gambling and drugs. At one point her sister took out a loan against the house by conning her terminally ill mother to sign loan documents. That loan quickly became delinquent and caused the house to go into foreclosure proceedings. Her sister also took all of the IHSS funds, which were supposed to be going to a couple, Barbara and Terry, in lieu of taking care of the ladies.

On March 10th, 2005 I got a phone call from Terry saying that Pam's sister had become extremely aggressive and that he feared that Pam was in danger. She was kicking Barbara and Terry out of the house with no where to live. Things became verbally aggressive and threatening. The police became involved immediately. The next morning Pam had APS call me to tell me that she needed to get out of there right away! Of course I didn't have anything set up for Pam yet but since Pam had told the police and APS about Life Works, they assumed that we were in the business of supporting Pam! We were still in the assessment phase of supported living at that time but in light of the circumstances it seemed appropriate to get more deeply involved, and quickly. Pam decided to move immediately to a Level 3 group home to get into a safe environment and about 8 hours later she was completely moved to her new abode. She was planning to live there temporarily while Life Works finished developing a supported living arrangement for her. The group home did the best they could to support Pam, but it was a good 20 miles away from anywhere that meant home to Pam. She couldn't go to church, she didn't see her friends, and the group home didn't have transportation that could accommodate Pam. Her visits with friends all but stopped. Her family time fell apart. Her life ceased as she knew it. She really missed home and everything that meant comfort to her.

Pam grew more and more determined to move into a home of her own. The funding process and the lack of money situation on Pam's behalf threw wrenches into her move. She fumbled around with 3 different people that she hired for roommates. Each of them brought great strengths and even greater inadequacies. All of them failed miserably prior to Pam ever leaving the group home. Perhaps that was a blessing in disguise. In November of 2005, Pam finally met her roommate, Sharron. Sharron is a problem solver and a go getter. She got things done in a huge way. She maneuvered through the challenges of getting Pam mobile enough to go search for apartments. She smooth talked landlords and she helped Pam land a great house only a couple of blocks from her home in Golden Hill. She moved into her new house on January 6th of 2006. She has a bathroom all to herself. She gets to sleep in if she wants to. She has friends over anytime she wants to. Pam has joined the Neighborhood Action Committee and participates in a monthly Neighborhood Clean-Up group in her area.

On January 7th she entertained for the first time. Pam assisted her Support Facilitator in preparing a lovely dinner of Liver and Onions for Pam and her special friend. They ate outside on the patio beneath the moon light in the glow of candlelight.

Pam had finally moved home.