

Peter Denis Fuller

16th December 1924 -20th February 2019

Introduction

Peter lived a very good life. As we will soon hear he was a steadfast, loving and generous husband, father and grandfather, he was a respected colleague and a loyal friend to many. He served his community through his involvement in the Citizens Advice Bureau in St Albans and the National Children's Home in Harpenden. So he leaves a tremendous legacy.

Peter was leading a full and happy life until his devastating stroke five and a half years ago. After this he was unable to enjoy his life in a sense that we might imagine for ourselves, even though he was cared for beautifully in the nursing home and was visited faithfully by family and friends. So while we often think of death as a cruel thief robbing our loved ones of life, it would be hard to see death as anything other than a welcome friend easing Peter into a well - earned and welcome rest.

Peter and his faithful wife Sheila, who he married nearly seventy years ago and who died shortly after Peter's stroke were a formidable couple. Steadfast with each other, they were the backbone of the family and a wide circle of friends, a partnership that provided such stability, such fun and such engagement with all of you who are here today. Your loss has been and is great.

Peter's life

Peter Denis Fuller was born in Brentwood in December 1924, the younger son of Herbert and Lavinia Fuller. His brother, Harry, was two years older. Their mother stayed at home while their father worked for a large company, managing a number of grocery stores around London. His work involved the family moving house a number of times – which meant that Peter went to four different primary schools.

Aged eleven he went to Elliot Central School in Southfields. He enjoyed and was successful in school. Then in summer 1939 the family went on holiday to the seaside. On his return he had the shock of finding that all the staff and pupils had been evacuated to the countryside in preparation for the war, which in fact began a few weeks later. It is hard to believe that his parents were unaware of this impending move so you have to imagine that they wanted to avoid his being sent away. The sad thing is that Peter had no contact with the school or friends after that. His formal schooling came to an end and he was not able to complete his school certificate, which is something he always regretted.

Peter started working in a local factory office and was there for a short time until the family moved to Luton where his father managed a group of grocery shops. Peter worked for a while in the local Council office but eventually found work in the office of the largest local firm of chartered accountants.

When he was 18 in March 1943 Peter joined the RAF for flying training, but eventually settled for a ground job as a sergeant code and cipher operator. He served in Burma and India, translating the top secret messages to and from London, many relating to the allies' plans to attack the Japanese in Burma. It was while he was in India that he learned by letter that his brother Harry - who was also in the RAF - had been shot down and had died in the Lancaster bomber he was flying.

Peter's main stories of the war were – not about the work – but as he put it *mucking about* on leave and about all the places he was able to travel, including Calcutta, Darjeeling and Kashmir. It was as if the whole world had opened up for him. This was certainly the start of a life-long love of travel.

When he was demobilised in 1947 Peter returned to the Luton accountants' office and was determined to qualify as a chartered accountant. It took four years but he completed his final exams and qualified in 1952. He transferred to the firm's London

office the next year and become manager of its taxation department and then a partner in the firm in 1958.

The London office amalgamated with the international accounting firm Pannell Kerr Forster (now known as PKF) in May 1978. He was clearly highly respected, as in 1982 his colleagues elected him to be the senior partner. Peter became a specialist in tax accounting and as well as holding a senior position in an international company he managed high profile individual accounts. This took him regularly to Sweden and on other occasions to The Bahamas and a millionaire's yacht in Cannes. He was never awestruck by people with great wealth and never afraid to give straightforward advice that they may not have wanted to hear. Alan remembers his dad complaining that Monty Python's jokes about accountants being boring were unfair - he thought the comedians probably didn't like being told how to manage their money and were trying to get their own back!

Thirty years on from retirement Peter is still fondly remembered by colleagues. The family has recently heard from a number of these: Roger Mew saying that he was a kind, well liked and respected man with a sense of humour; Graham Littlewood who regarded him both as a mentor and friend and continued to meet up with him over the years; and Don Simpson, who sadly can't be here today, who Peter helped at the early stages of his career. They remained good friends throughout and he visited Peter at St Christopher's when he was able. Lastly Martin Goodchild wrote *Peter was my principal and it was strange for me to become a young partner with him when he was the firms' Senior Partner. I always remember him telling Geoff Sibley that he had done a much better job than Geoff had in terms of training his trainees!*

When Peter retired in 1988, feeling that he needed to face new challenges, he decided to study for an Open University BA degree. He did this for the sake of the learning not for the qualification as such. At the same time he put his skills and knowledge to good use serving our community. For five years he was an adviser with the local Citizens Advice Bureau and he then served as their Executive Chairman for another six years. He also worked with the National Children's Home in Harpenden.

In answer to questions from his grandchildren for their school projects, Peter gives us a useful insight into his own attitude to work – and probably life too. Certainly he had a robust attitude to challenge. He wrote this.

My four years in the RAF served as my university of life training. I have always been confident that I could accomplish anything I was challenged with. Mostly my work

was my hobby and I enjoyed the legal studies necessary for a taxation specialist. I have always enjoyed resolving problems and sorting out messes (preferably not my own). I suppose my main personal characteristic is to "do it yourself" or self-reliance. My family life was very happy with loving parents, but my many primary schools and the eventual loss of the upper school at a formative age must have engendered this trait of self - reliance..... My belief was that I should not refuse a challenge so whenever a new position was offered I took it up and found out how to do it afterwards. What annoys me most is to hear someone say "I can't do that" when they have not really tried.

Let us now turn from his career and his voluntary work to considering Peter as a husband, father, grandfather and friend.

It was while he was working in the Luton office that he met Sheila Sinfield who was a secretary in the same firm. We have an interesting account about their courtship from Sheila's younger sister, Joan, which also gives us an early insight into his early approach to children.

I first met Peter when my twin sister and I were about 5 or 6, when he was invited to tea with our family...and I think we did our best to thwart him from taking our lovely sister away from us by making sure he was never alone with her in our front room....We would barge in and ask silly questions and, as he reminded us later on.....he had to endure our silly jokes and sticky hands all over his good suits.

Peter maintained that we were the bane of his courtship. We soon appreciated his inclusion into our family as Peter and Sheila were always willing to take us on trips to London on the train even though one of us was always sick and somehow we managed to arrive home with our white satin dresses quite dirty and our shiny black shoes very scuffed. He said that people often thought we were their children.

Despite Joan and her sister's machinations, Peter proposed to Sheila when they were on a holiday in Newquay. He said afterwards that he did not ask her parents for permission, *as it was not my style to ask anyone for permission to do anything.* Anyway they married in 1950 with Joan and her twin as bridesmaids. He proved to be a loyal and steadfast husband and they were together for sixty years until Sheila's death shortly after Peter's stroke.

Together they were dedicated parents to their sons, Richard, born in 1953 and Alan four years later. When the boys were young they moved to Harpenden, from where Peter was commuting to London. It was a long and difficult journey then, but Peter usually managed to be home with his family by 6pm – even if he did doze off in his chair.

He later told his grandchildren that his fondest memory of his own childhood was his close relationship with his parents and the shared humour and laughter. He seemed to replicate this in his family. His priority in life was that his family should have a lovely life and a lovely home and that his sons should have a good education. Rick and Alan have so many happy memories of the holidays they went on - to Paris, on cruises and spending Easter in Devon. Then there were the big Christmas celebrations, often with Sheila's family – and memories of playing games like cards, scrabble or monopoly, for which they used Peter's original 1937 set. He had always been a fiend at monopoly and used to play it with neighbours.

Peter positively liked being with his children. Both sons have special memories of their father spending time with them individually. Alan specially valued the Saturday mornings when his father took Alan shopping on their own together and also tells of going with him to a father and son scout camp, where Peter took his hip-flask too. Rick recalls being at university in London and meeting his father for lunch and Peter discussing challenges he was facing in his work. In this process Rick was absorbing lessons that stood him in good stead forty years later.

Peter wasn't only interested in his own immediate family. His sister in law, Joan wrote that he was always kind, generous and thoughtful and a valued source of advice to her family. When she and her sister had children of their own that he was always interested in their development, and would record events on his cine camera for them to enjoy.

In time, Rick and his wife Anette's children, Adam and Emma, came along. Peter and Sheila both loved being grandparents. Peter was not normally a man to show his feelings but he was quite animated and expressive when Emma was born, the first girl to be born into the Fuller family for generations. He would get down on the floor and play with her when she was a baby. Peter and Sheila saw the family every weekend and took them on holidays with them every year. They were devastated when they moved to California but managed to stay in touch with them every week

through Face-time and the family would come to stay with them every year. They would also go on holidays together to places like the Canaries or Florida.

Often they played monopoly. Always a shrewd gamer Peter made no concessions to the children – and in time the grandchildren developed their own skills in arguing. While he liked being the patriarch, insisting things were done his way, they had a relationship in which they could tease their grandfather and wind him up.

Peter and Sheila travelled extensively, not just with the family but with friends, especially with Keith and Mary who were good friends and travelling companions. They went on holiday together two or three times a year, in fact over thirty-seven times since 1992. They travelled all over the UK and parts of Europe. Their most frequent visits were to the Lake District.

Having missed out on so much education Peter was formidably self-educated. Having loved his studies with the OU, he was a ferocious reader, loving English history, science fiction and gruesome detective novels – some of which interests he shared with his daughter-in-law Anette, and sister-in-law Joan. He loved classical music; for many years he had a season ticket for the Royal Philharmonic when they played in Watford; and the music we are hearing today has been chosen from his extensive collection. He loved the theatre, belonging to a group that went to the theatre in London around six times year. And he loved pantomime. Going to the pantomime with the children, and taking part in all the *He's behind you's* was an essential part of Christmas for him.

Peter was extraordinarily sociable, embracing the wider families of both Anette and Celia, their sons' partners. In their next to last house in Harpenden he had a swimming pool built in the garden – arranging the access so that friends could let themselves in to use it without having to come through the house, with a charity box there for donations. He was kind too towards others in need of help and he often used his knowledge of accountancy to assist a number of elderly friends with their affairs.

Harpenden Methodist Church was very important in the lives of both Peter and Sheila. Although Peter did not share Sheila's faith he had many friends at the church and was an active member of the Friday Club. Some of the members of that group have been regular visitors to Peter following his stroke. The family would particularly

like to thank Keith, Andy, Ron and Marie for this demonstration of commitment and love.

Until his stroke he was fully engaged in life. Well into his 80s, it was still difficult to beat him at Scrabble or Upword. He had always loved technology, having been an early adopter of new technology from a cine camera in the 1960s to an early PC and later specialised hearing aids that were blue-toothed to his TV. He was using his computer daily, ordering goods and using email and face-timing Rick and family in the USA. It was certainly a rich life.

His love of family was undiminished. There is a particular touching story from the time shortly before the stroke curtailed this rich life of his so cruelly. The last time his grandchildren saw him when he was still well, he insisted that they sit down and listen to his stories of his childhood.

What a memory to leave them with! What an example to leave them with!

Tribute by his Granddaughter, Emma

I am reciting the famous daffodil poem for several reasons

- First, when my granny and papa went to the Lake District, they would read this together, so this poem symbolizes their relationship and connection.
- Second, this poem is about the power of a happy memory that even when you feel low or alone the memory flashes within us and fills us with the energy we need. My grandparents are my golden daffodils, whenever I feel down, I just think of the memories they gave me of unconditional love to guide me through.
- Third, my papa had an amazing ability to tell a story, he had a powerful imagination and was always so animated.

Daffodils by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.