

A celebration of life

Peter Richard Wisbey

21 May 1950 – 21 March 2020

1.00-1.30 pm, 9 April 2020, New Southgate Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Tribute

Peter Wisbey, known to all as Pete, was a caring person, both literally and by nature. He cared for his wife Deborah in her final illness, and he cared for his son Miles as he grew from a toddler towards adulthood. But he also cared about things, about nature: he was someone you can talk to, a wise counsel, a man who did what felt right with a willing heart. There was nothing pious about him though – he was known for his dry sense of humour – and he could take his belief in what was right to the point of stubbornness!

Pete was born on 21st May 1950 to Lilian and Harry, when his sister Sue was three years old. Five years later another sister, Jayne, came along. Sue describes their early life, living on the Artizans estate in Wood Green, as a 'good childhood'. The family wasn't well off but there was lots of fun – going to the park at the end of the road, playing in the street, bicycle rides. Kids had a lot of freedom then and were often out playing all day long. When they were teenagers, their father and little Jayne both suffered serious ill health, and the two elder siblings always seemed to be visiting one or the other, going from hospital to nursing home and back, and this shared experience drew them even closer together. Pete was a lot more than a little brother to Sue.

They also shared a love of music, particularly jazz and, later, blues. Together they went to the local jazz club in Wood Green, and Pete soon became part of Sue's group of friends. They have continued to enjoy each other's company ever since, going out, spending Christmases together, and keeping in touch by phone and email the rest of the time.

Pete was a bright lad, and the only person in his year group to pass the 11 plus, but he didn't take well to Stationers, his secondary school, and persuaded his father to send him to the London Nautical School – he had an idea he wanted to serve in the Navy as his father had done. In the end, he didn't really like it there either – especially having to go to school every morning in his officer's uniform. But he loved art and was good at it – Sue remembers sitting at the kitchen table with him doing drawings and paintings – so when he left, he trained as a commercial artist.

His first job was at the Queen's Theatre, then he moved around a bit before going freelance and renting studio space just off Regent Street with a group of other artist friends. He was with David Baker for quite a long time, moving into directing photography shoots for advertisements, and he progressed to Art Director.

But he also loved working with his hands, and studied cabinet making at the London College of Furniture. He made some beautiful pieces for friends including an oak chest and mirror that Rosey has found the drawings for. This led to commissions, which he started doing full-time when he left David Baker. He then did an HND in multi-media which led to a degree, and by the early 2000s he was poised to take up a teaching job.

But at this point his life turned upside down. He and his partner Deborah had recently had a child together, Miles. But not long after Miles was born, Deborah was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Pete became her carer and they decided to marry. She died when Miles was 18 months old, and Pete then became a full-time father.

Both parents were sensitive to Miles's needs, and determined that he would always know how much he was loved. Deborah left him a memory box which he could get out of the cupboard to look through whenever he wanted to. Pete took lots of photos of him growing up and meticulously filed them – a visual record of his life and the place he holds in his father's heart. And, so that he could be there for Miles for as long as possible, he did all in his power to keep fit and healthy.

In his new role, he was soon adopted by the mums at Miles's crèche, and later at his school. They gave him lots of support and became his friends. He was always easy to talk to, with a wry, sometimes irreverent, way of looking at life. He had an enquiring mind and could speak knowledgeably about a building, an artist, or indeed anything that caught his attention. He did have rather firm views on things though, especially politics, and in an argument would never give in.

Allied to this stubbornness was his perfectionism, although as Sue says, it had its bounds, and didn't extend to dusting! But it was Pete that Sue always called upon to

fix things round the house, and he was much better at finishing off jobs for other people than he was the ones round his own house. He usually had a project on and couldn't pass by a skip full of wood without rescuing some of it and stashing it in the hall – carefully 'filed' and tidily arranged so he knew where everything was – but still in the hall! He couldn't bear to see good stuff wasted and was confident in using his materials as he came from a family of woodworkers, and his father had also been a plumber. So to him it was natural to understand arcane matters like how Victorian plasterers put up ceilings.

He had all his dad's tools, which he much preferred to modern ones, partly because he saw them as more solid and trustworthy but also because he couldn't see the point of buying new things when he didn't need them. His BMW was 30 years old, and he saw absolutely no reason why he should get a smart phone when his ancient one still allowed him to make telephone calls. If he liked something, he would stick to it, and that extended even to having his hair cut. He had always had it cut by his sister Jayne, a hairdresser, and he refused to go to the barber's as he didn't trust anyone else to cut it in the way he wanted.

This was the Pete everyone knew and loved, his foibles contrasting and complementing his gift for engaging with people. He loved to cook for friends, and had a stash of recipes collected from magazines as well as piles of cookery books. And he cooked well, spending days preparing a dinner. He wanted it to be right. It mattered that he had put effort into it – it was his way of honouring the friendship.

The care and forethought he showed in life led to one end – that of ensuring the health and happiness of those he loved. When Miles's mother died, Pete made a commitment to be father and mother to his son. Rosey, in her turn, made a promise to Pete that, should anything happen to him, she would be there for Miles as guide and friend. She never expected to be called upon to honour it so soon, but she does so willingly, a perfect fusion of love and doing the right thing.

Remembering Pete – Rosemary Varley

Pete and I had known each other a long time, being in a group of friends centred around our dear mutual friend Cressida but in Spring 2011 the time was right and as the saying goes we got together. By the summer Miles was becoming more aware of my existence as I began joining outings of various sorts. By the next summer I was fully on board, joining Miles and Pete for annual trips to Cornwall, Christmas theatre outings, and generally life in between. I was embraced by the Stoke Newington School parents gang as Pete's girlfriend and we also got to know and love each other's wider families.

Pete and I had a mutual interest in art and we loved the Tate and V&A but Pete also introduced me to the more eclectic cultural treasures of London like the John Soane museum, which he naturally emulated in his own house. We often walked on Hampstead Heath, where we would spot hawks and herons, and critique the new high-rise architecture in view from Parliament Hill. We also spent hours in his pretty garden, drinking tea or idly pruning the shrubs, or having barbeques. We would listen to jazz, blues or bossanova which was piped through some unimaginably complex system of old wires. We would be joined by his beloved cats Alfie and Flo and when food was on offer, by Miles.

I, we all, will miss so much Pete's soft voice and wise, grounding words. His broad, kind smile and jolly laugh. Like so many others have said in recent letters and messages, Pete was a good listener, a valued mentor, with a direct and honest manner to aspire to.

I, we ten, and so many family and friends who would normally have been here today are fortunate and grateful to have had Pete in our lives. A big hole has been left in our hearts but an abundance of memories left in our minds.