

Leon Peterson

June 13, 1938 ~ November 21, 2020

A hero to so many of us, an indelible imprint left on more people than we can imagine, and with his loved ones attending him, Leon Peterson at long last went home. Diminished and reduced physically by the effects of Parkinson's disease, a disease which he battled for over 20 years, he remained a giant amongst us until the very end. He never could be kept down.

Leon was born June 13th, 1938 in Lehi, Utah to Lee Robert Peterson and Donna Eliza Boyack Peterson. Shortly after coming into the world, Leon and his mother found themselves alone without a father or a husband. After 7 formative years in Spanish Fork with the love and support of cousins and extended family, Leon and his mother moved to Salt Lake City as she remarried a widower, Burt Greenwood. They landed in Sugarhouse, across the street from the old prison, now Highland High.

Though initially an adjustment---a new family, step-father and step-siblings JoAnn, Pam, and Brent --- Leon adapted and thrived. It was here that Leon's world started to expand. He found the local Edgehill Ward and quickly became a gym rat playing basketball, making friends and helping out with the concessions. It was there an early mentor who upon seeing Leon's interest in basketball, encouraged him and maybe, more importantly, gave him his lifelong nickname. "We'll call you Pete." And they did! To his friends, he was always Pete.

As Leon matriculated through Irving Junior High and on to South High School, sports became a big part of his life. But not at the expense of part time jobs. From selling nightcrawlers to the fishermen driving up Parleys Canyon, to stock boy at Harward's Variety Drug Store, Leon loved to work! It was after a stint as a salesman at Bud's Duds in Sugarhouse that Leon really started to pay attention to his own wardrobe, a hobby he enjoyed the rest of his life.

Then followed a move to Millcrest Road in Olympus Cove. Leon always appreciated his step-father for this move and how it helped broaden his horizons, socially and otherwise. From there Leon began his college experience at the University of Utah.

Leon always thirsted for more in life. At the U, in addition to the rigors of academia, Leon felt a social component was missing. He found it at the Sigma Chi Fraternity. More than anything, Leon appreciated the many lifelong friendships he made while there.

After speaking at over 50 friend's Mission Farewells, (it is here the family suspects he fell in love with the microphone) Leon decided he should serve and was assigned to the British Isles mission in 1958. There, many life lessons were learned and a testimony was confirmed.

Upon returning home, an introduction was made on the steps of the Chi Omega House. This is where Leon met Karen Fotheringham, a recent graduate from Olympus High.

They were married in the Salt Lake Temple on July 31, 1964. The rest is history. It's not completely accurate to say that Karen merely "held on for the ride", but it is fair to say that when Leon promised to "show her the world" it was in no way, shape or form an understatement.

And Leon did not waste any time. Showing Karen "the world," began with their honeymoon. Money was made and saved by selling snowcones at summer parades, doing janitorial work at downtown office buildings and overseeing paper routes for a number of paper boys. Then, a trans-continental roadtrip ensued in their VW Beetle, to where finally, a trans-atlantic flight took them from New York to England. England was their jumping-off point to the rest of Europe and after 3 weeks on the road they arrived home to their apartment virtually penniless. But with no regrets. Leon graduated with an MS degree in Biology and an MBA from the University of Utah in 1967. Years later, he went back to the University to teach Business courses with an emphasis on real estate, thereby training his "future competition."

The "social experiment" at Indian Springs came next. Pete and Karen and great friends Bob and Kathi Garff and Clark and DeAnn Robinson, opted to convert an abandoned Country Club shell into three homes. It was Leon's first construction job and thankfully most of the trades were subbed out. It was here the three couples raised their families-to the delight of every one of the offspring.

Travel, and the perspective gained from travel, was a constant theme for Leon, so much so, that he and Karen took their family everywhere. The 70's had the family visiting the USSR and the People's Republic of China, the 80's South America, Australia and Scandinavia, with the Alps, Africa and the Middle East sprinkled in liberally here and there.

Working hard, and playing hard was a creed Leon lived by. Squash and tennis helped him manage the pressures at work while the annual Christmas trip to Maui helped him re-charge his batteries for the coming year.

Professionally, Leon made his own way. With the help of a lot of good people he established Peterson Development, a real estate firm that has developed shopping centers, office buildings, warehousing and residential neighborhoods throughout the western United States. More importantly, Leon is proud of the company that he built which has provided jobs and impacted countless lives. His children are even more proud of the way he battled through the ups and downs of the real estate cycles and, despite tremendous odds to the contrary, came out on top.

Leon left a legacy with the Sigma Chi Fraternity. By the time Leon was in his 60's he had seen repeated attempts by Alumni to renovate the aging Beta Epsilon Chapter House. All campaigns fell short. Leon decided that was enough and assembled, coordinated, twisted arms and gently
nudged generations of alumni to donate to the cause. His motive: to perpetuate the lofty ideals of the fraternity and continue to provide a place for students to pivot socially. Many individuals stepped forward and contributed but it is fair to say that without Leon's sheer force of will bringing everything to bear, it just would not have happened.

Leon served on many Boards and contributed in a myriad of ways to different causes. The Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, the First Security Bank Board, the University of Utah Alumni Board as well as the Honorary Chair of the School of Music at the U that he and Karen co-chaired. The Gifted Music School is an organization Leon and Karen are particularly fond of and hope to see flourish. The family thought it fitting that in 2004 he was honored with a Father of the Year award.

Leon's contributions to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints were many. Through service as a Bishop, in Bishoprics, and on High Councils Leon did honor to his faith and to society but it is fair to say that family was always the center of Leon's universe. Work was a top priority and demanding, as were accepting Church callings-but never at the expense of family or family time.

Leon is survived by his wife Karen Fotheringham Peterson, their five children, Brandon Leon Peterson (Katie White Peterson), Justin Vaun Peterson (Elizabeth Romney) Ryan Burton Peterson (Coco Warner) Barrett J Peterson (Allison Moore) and Ashley Brooke Peterson (James Clayton) Beck, their 23 grandchildren, as well as his siblings JoAnn Greenwood Black, and Brent Greenwood, both of Salt Lake City.

We gratefully acknowledge the tireless care, devotion, and love Siahi and her husband Tevita Makaafi provided to our father and mother for the past 2 ½ years.

Leon was preceded in death by his mother over 60 years ago. We weep at the thought of their reunion.

Leon was also preceded in death by his sister Pam and step brothers Darr and June Greenwood as well as his daughter-in-law Jennifer Thompson Peterson.

A socially distanced viewing will be Friday, November 27th from 6:00-8:00 pm at Larkin Sunset Lawn, 2350 East 1300 South, SLC, UT 84108.

A private funeral service will be held Saturday, November 28th at 12:00 pm at 2795 Crestview Drive, SLC, UT 84108. To view the service, the link is as follows:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85339018947

A graveside service will follow immediately after the funeral at Larkin Sunset Lawn. The family wishes to thank all those who have expressed their sympathy and condolences at this time.

In lieu of flowers, Karen and the family requests donations be sent to the LDS missionary fund or to the Gifted Music School, www.giftedmusicschool.org/peterson