

Peter Daniel Grundfossen

October 5, 1935 ~ April 5, 2025

Peter Daniel Grundfossen, 89, died on April 5, 2025, and the world lost a good soul.

Peter was born to Lela and Ivar Grundfossen in Chehalis, WA, in 1935. He grew up exploring the outdoors, the woods and creeks, of Washington, Oregon, and for 18 months, on the Island of Adak, Alaska, where his father was serving as fire chief for the Corp of Engineers after World War II. He had a happy and adventure filled childhood and generous and loving parents and a little sister, Sonja.

As a young man Peter was active in DeMolay and it is likely he began to develop his fine leadership skills in that environment. He served as Student Body President for what was then Portland State Collage, now PSU for two years in the late 50s. He earned both a BS and MS from Portland State and made lifelong friends in those years, and throughout his life. He began his career as a high school teacher in Hillsboro, Oregon but soon found his way into university student activities at PSU, where he had a transformative experience working with Training groups, or T-groups under the guidance of Martin Erickson (deceased), who became Peter's mentor, colleague and friend. His first T-group was held in Cedar City, Utah and introduced Peter to the red rock splendor of southern Utah and to the Dean of Students at the University of Utah, Virginia Frobes (deceased), who a year and half later recruited him to the U of U as her Assistant Dean of Students. He remained at the University until 1972.During that period, he was elected to the Utah House of Representatives as a proud democrat. He served one term, resigning to serve as Director of Modal Cities. He later directed a study on consolidation of city and county governments.

It was while doing this community organizing work that Peter decided to go to law school. He was 40. It was a big deal. He went from having a job, a paycheck, and significant career success to one struggling law student among many. Except all those other struggling law students were 15 years younger and fresh out of college. He often referred to this experience as one of the most humbling of his life. He was touring Norway and Sweden with his 17-year-old son Douglas, the poor man's way, on his road bike, sleeping in a wet tent along the way (locals said it was the wettest summer in 100 years), when he learned he had passed the bar. He told the story often and with a great deal of joy and relief. It was never Peter's intention to practice law, although he did give it a good try. He practiced for about 4 years with Lee Kapalawski and Jerry Kinghorn (deceased), old friends. He left law practice to serve as Administrative Law Judge for the Utah Public Utilities Commission a job he enjoyed and for which he was well suited. Peter, and his wife Cathryn Collis, moved to Portland, OR in 1985. In Oregon, he was the lobbyist for the Association of Oregon Housing Authorities and was instrumental in the passage of legislation creating the Oregon Housing Trust Fund, which provides money for low-income housing to this day. Peter retired in 2000. Peter was a public servant all of his career, save those four years in private practice.He always believed the role of government is to help people and he wanted to be a part of that.

For the last 30 years of Peter's life, he was an active Unitarian. He belonged to First Unitarian Church in Portland, OR and to the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Salt Lake City. He took so much pleasure from the Unitarian community, full of kind acceptance and liberal religious thought. He had truly found his religious home with the Unitarians.

Peter thought of himself as an amateur athlete for a while. He ran both the St. George and Boston marathons. He loved biking and his biking buddies. He rode the MS 100 two times and the length of Utah from Arizona to Idaho with his good friend, Peter Netka. He placed first in his age class in the first and only Capitol Reef Classic bike race, held in 2008. Not to take anything away from that amazing accomplishment, the route was grueling, but Peter was 74, and the only rider in his age class. There exists a wonderful photo of Peter looking tired, but with a great smile, alongside a young boy of about 12, who was also the winner, and only rider, in his age class.

Peter met Cathryn Collis on July 6th, 1979, at DB Coopers, a bar and hangout for democrats, and they were in love with one another from that night forward. They celebrated that date every year for 45 years. They were married in 1981.

Peter and Cathryn had so many good times together. Backpacking the Wasatch on a Fourth of July weekend and sitting in absolute silence watching far off fireworks. Backpacking to Tom's Lake in the Three Sisters in Oregon on another Fourth of July weekend and literally running down the trail with 35-pound backpacks to get through the swarms of mosquitoes. Traveling to Thailand just because they loved the Thai food served at their favorite Portland restaurant. Expedition kayaking in Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Alaska, and Baja. Camping, and living, briefly, in Utah red rock. Getting to know Capitol Reef.Touring Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Birding in Costa Rica. Seeing thousands of migrating sandhill cranes in Nebraska. Becoming groupies of Leonard Cohen, taking planes to see him perform live. Wintering in Tucson, summering in Bellingham. And so many more good times.

Cathryn's mother once said, after one of the many kindnesses Peter had shown her: "That Peter is a real gentleman." She was right about that. He was. He was an emotionally mature man with the playfulness of a nine-year-old boy. He was kind and deeply interested in people. He could tell about his crazy antics, some of them life threatening, and laugh about it along with everyone else. He could be overjoyed to the point of tears with the joys and success of others. His favorite book was "Boys in the Boat". He could never read it without crying. His favorite song was "Anthem" by Leonard Cohen. He went through a big Utah Phillips phase and his entire family and many of his friends can smile knowingly at the phrase "It's Good Though". He was sad that he had missed out on raising his sons and loved the time he spent with them. He was remorseful over purposefully killing small critters when he was young. He loved sports, especially basketball. He read a lot. He read to Cathryn. He read many, many books to Cathryn, a kind and generous gift.

Peter had three sons from his first marriage to Sharon Frey (deceased 2017). Daniel, (65) of Salt Lake City, Douglas (64) of Everett, WA, and Marc (Cynthia). (63) of Portland, OR.Peter is survived by his wife Cathryn, her two sons Daniel Velasquez (Camille) and Paul Velasquez (Karen) and her six grandchildren, his three sons, two grandchildren and three great grandchildren, sister Sonja Flener (Del, deceased) and her three children.

A Unitarian service to honor Peter will be held later this spring.

Many thanks to the generous and loving souls at Capitol Hill Senior Living Center and Hospice for Utah.We are so grateful to you all.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation in Peter's name to Crossroads Urban Center, The Other Side Academy, or the Utah Food Bank.

Held you for a little while. My oh my oh my.