Chase Nebeker Peterson

December 27, 1929 ~ September 14, 2014

Dr. Chase Nebeker Peterson, physician, educator and university administrator whose career took him from Cache Valley, to Harvard, to the Presidency of the University of Utah, died on September 14 in Salt Lake. He was 84.

The cause was complications from pneumonia.

Born in Logan in 1929 to E. G. and Phebe Peterson, Dr. Peterson grew up on the campus of the then Utah State Agricultural College (later Utah State University) where his father, was president. He would recall with pleasure his days on College Hill where even as a little boy, he found his way into marching band rehearsals and bit parts in college theatrical productions. The direction of his life changed dramatically when in the ninth grade his principal at Logan Junior High School asked if we would like to take a scholarship exam for a New England boarding school. A month later his parents received a telegram announcing his scholarship to Middlesex School in Concord, Massachusetts. He arrived at Middlesex that September, the first Utahn and first Mormon to ever attend. He tackled the challenge of a classical education with enthusiasm, quickly learning to address his teachers as "sir", and wearing a coat and tie to classes. He was surrounded by young men of privilege, and found great satisfaction in negotiating this new world, but the pride Chase Peterson had for his LDS roots never left him, in his memoir, The Guardian Poplar, he explained, "I represented my family, my state, and my church as well as myself,Ä¶..As a Mormon boy I was far less likely to drink a bottle of beer in Concord than in Logan"

Three years later another scholarship made a college education at Harvard possible. Senior year he was awarded the Frothingham prize for his "contribution to the college" and elected first marshall by his classmates. He continued to act as marshal at every reunion for the Harvard Class of 1952. He chose to study medicine, specializing in endocrinology. He fell in love with Grethe Ballif, a young woman from Provo who was also studying in Cambridge, and they married after his graduation from medical school.

The by then Dr. Peterson did an internship at Yale, then served as a physician in the Army for two years in Frankfurt, Germany. He and Grethe returned to Yale for his residency program, finally moving to Utah in 1961 where Chase accepted a position as an endocrinologist at the Salt Lake Clinic; he was the first doctor in Utah trained to use the artificial kidney machine.

In 1967 Nathan Pusey, President of Harvard, reached out to Dr. Peterson and asked him to to be Dean of Admissions at the College. The Petersons, now parents of three children jumped at the chance to return to Cambridge. They arrived at a turbulent time of student unrest and cultural revolution. Dr. Peterson led the college in actively recruiting minority candidates, and hiring the first African Americans on the admissions committee. Five years later he became Harvard's vice president for alumni affairs and development. In 1977 President David Gardner asked him to return to Utah as Vice President for Health Sciences. Dr. Peterson's tenure there included

the implantation of the first artificial heart into Barney Clark. Dr. Peterson became a well-known figure in news reports, donning his white lab coat and carefully explaining to reporters the science and medicine that made Mr. Clark's procedure possible.

In 1983 Dr. Peterson became the University of Utah's 14th president. He was instrumental in building the university's research capability, especially as it related to genetics research. He also worked tirelessly with the state legislature and private donors to fund a great period of growth on campus. Under his leadership the Primary Children's Hospital moved next to the University Hospital and together they became an outstanding healthcare center for the intermountain west. The quality of student life was also important to Dr. Peterson: he supported the free speech of dissenting voices, promoted the Honors Program and held President's Office Hours, when any student could come and speak with him.

In 1989, President Peterson enthusiastically announced a breakthrough in cold fusion, the hypothetical process where a nuclear reaction takes place at room temperature. The research by Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons was immediately viewed with great skepticism by the scientific community at large, and the experiments were not immediately replicable. While Peterson acknowledged the complexities of the situation, and was disappointed when it became clear that cold fusion was far from being the new energy source it had first appeared to be, he strongly defended the right of any scientist to take research in new and controversial directions.

In 1991 Dr. Peterson retired as university president and returned to medicine. He took on the challenge of medical study for one year in order to pass his board exams and return to family practice after over twenty years away from the profession. He became a member of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Utah, served on the admissions committee of the U. Medical School and taught new generations of doctors to provide the best possible care by listening to their patients. He also was a regular volunteer at the Fourth Street Clinic, which served Salt Lake City's homeless population. Dr. Peterson's last lecture to medical school students was on July 21st.

He is survived by his wife Grethe, children Erika, Stuart, and Edward and their spouses; 14 grandchildren, and 1 great grandchild.

Dr. Peterson was a loving husband; he and Grethe were a team who worked to make their community a more engaging, just, and culturally richer place. He was a wonderful father, grandfather, and great-grandfather: sharing all aspects of his life--his family legacy, his intellect, his sense of humor, and his faith. Dr. Peterson's service to the LDS church was lifelong. He was a branch president, member of the high council, and devoted home teacher.

Anticipating his final years he wrote \"We have been fortunate to have had physical bodies that gave a full range to our earthly activities, a laboratory, if you will, for the exercise and enlargement of our spiritual, intellectual, and cultural experiences. But sooner or later that physical body must die...it is our faith that our spiritual and intellectual journey continues after death,Ä¶.."

Dr. Peterson was comfortable with contradiction. Faith and reason, modesty and pride, caution and boldness, justice and mercy--he lived his life embracing them all, grateful for every chance to he had to learn, to share, to build and to teach.

The Peterson family wishes to thank the wise, skilled, and compassionate physicians who took care of Chase: Dr. Thomas Caine of the University of Utah, Dr. Saundra Buys at the Huntsman Cancer Institute, Dr. Kenneth Andersen of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Dr. Mark Supiano and Dr. Carroll Baraldi; gratitude and admiration is also extended to the gentle caregivers at Emeritus Assisted Living, Danville Home Health Services, and the Silverado Aspen Park Hospice.

A visitation will be held at Larkin Sunset Lawn, 2350 East and 1300 South, in Salt Lake City on Friday, September 26 from 4-8pm

Funeral services will be held at the Monument Park North Stake Center, 1320 Wasatch Drive in Salt Lake at 10 am on Saturday, September 27. Following the funeral services the cremation will take place and the burial will occur at a later date. www.larkinmortuary.com