

Eulogy: Peter George Collins

Peter began his journey on the 6th of January 1943 in Dulwich, London, when he was born to George and Dorothy Collins. He was soon joined in the family by his two brothers David, in 1945, and Ian, in 1946.

The Collins family moved to Maidstone, Kent, in 1946 and then again to Coventry in 1949 where Peter went to Moseley Avenue Primary School. At 11, Peter moved on to Bablake Grammar School where he stayed until 18 taking O and A level examinations.

Peter joined the City of Coventry Water Undertaking as a Pupil Under Agreement and we still have his indentures. As a sponsored student at the University of Aston, Peter took a degree in Civil Engineering. He told me (many times – many times!) that he had also wanted to be a medical doctor and I believe he would have been a good one – especially with his inscrutable handwriting and I won't discuss his bedside manner. Many of you will know that he continued to keep himself up to date with the world of medical advances throughout his life. However, after passing the professional examinations to become a Chartered Engineer, he then became a Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers and a Member of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management.

He was also a practical engineer to the core. If he didn't already know how something worked, he would take it apart to work it out or look it up... and that meant books in the days before Google. Peter was well-known for being able to fix things rather than throw them away and buy a new one. It amused us all to watch time after time to see his repair solutions with what he called a "bodge". I still have some of these "bodes" ... they might not be pretty but they work! If you took his Swiss Army knife away from him, you might as well have cut off one of his arms. He could perform amazing feats with his knife and there are many stories I could tell.

While working as site engineer extending the capacity of Strensham Water Treatment Works, Peter met and married Helen Thompson in 1967.

Their first child, Anne, was born in 1969 and that same year the young family moved to Wadebridge, Cornwall, where Peter was appointed New Works Engineer to the North and Mid Cornwall Water Board. Michael was born in 1970 completing the then Collins family. I will let Anne and Michael speak for themselves of their lives with their Dad.

Whatever Peter was doing up until this time, he was clearly just waiting to take up sailing at Padstow Sailing Club. After what he admits was a steep learning curve, Peter became very successful at club level, was made Commodore in 1975 and sailed in the National Championships in the Yachting World Dayboat and Laser classes.

One of Peter's favourite books is *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame, and he often quoted from this section where Water Rat is talking about boats:

"Nice? It's the ONLY thing," said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leant forward for his stroke. "Believe me, my young friend, **there is NOTHING--absolute nothing--half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats...**"

Peter loved messing about in boats: he sailed them, rowed them, motored them, built them, rebuilt them, painted them and repaired them. I know of some occasions when he even swam them! Once, in Grand Turk, when our dinghy (affectionately called the "Rubber Duck") was left on the beach as he returned to the house to collect the oars, the wind picked the dinghy up and off it went all on its own out across the water heading for South Caicos. He grabbed his snorkel gear and headed off swimming in hot pursuit and managed to finally catch up to it at just about the point where he was about to say goodbye to it. I was watching from shore with the binoculars and great apprehension because I knew how large the barracudas were out there and had seen the sharks. He pulled the dinghy right up to his shoulder to make himself look larger and less appetising and swam it back to the beach. By the time he arrived he was knackered, but we still finished loading up the dinghy and he rowed back out to where our boat was on its mooring and we headed out for a day sail.

He didn't just mess about in boats. In 1973 and '74, Peter designed and built a new home for his family at Whitecross, Wadebridge.

There was a UK water industry amalgamation in 1974 and the South West Water Authority was formed. Peter was appointed Water Supply and Reclamation Manager for central Cornwall and was responsible for water supply and main drainage infrastructure in the area.

Peter and Helen were divorced in 1979. Shortly after that, in 1980, he was seconded under a British aid project to the Government of Fiji as Senior Water Engineer. He revelled in the opportunities and challenges this work provided both in terms of the projects but most particularly with the people he met. I think he also delighted in being able to wear shorts to work... even though he also had to wear long socks with his sandals.

We met in 1981, fell in love and were married in Suva at Government House on the day after my contract with the US Peace Corps ended. This day was the beginning of our lives together and our wedding photo shows that one of the 'witnesses' was Ratu Epenisa Seru Cakobau – or his statue in the gardens anyway.

As my work was teaching Biology at Richmond Methodist High School on the island of Kadavu, I came in to Suva for a couple weeks at the end of each school term to buy food and supplies for the next three months. Peace Corps friends who lived in Suva introduced me to a British bachelor who lived in a three-bedroom house and didn't mind if people came to stay – we all knew where he kept a key on a string

hanging in his garage for late arrivals. It wasn't long before we realised our friendship was much more and that we wanted to share the rest of our lives with each other.

What did he do in Fiji other than work and marry me? He sailed his own boat, drove a Mini Moke, pottered around town with his Honda scooter, ran with the Suva Hash House Harriers, ran two marathons, ran with the Thursday Runners Club (sometimes called the Thirsty Runners) and belonged to a hiking club. Some of you may find it difficult to imagine but he was also a Morris Dancer – I think it was just the scary bashing sticks part he really liked.

He played host to many overseas visitors treating them to hikes in the beautiful Fiji countryside, bilibili raft trips and stays with villagers and yaqona ceremonies. The most important visitors were Anne and Michael who came out to stay with their Dad during their school holidays. Their first visit after Peter and I were married was a nervous time for us all as none of us knew what to expect. I knew that I wasn't just married to Peter, I was, in effect, married to Anne and Michael too because they were a part of him! Fortunately, we all got on well and our relationships have only deepened since.

There were always trips out in the sailboat, snorkelling, and fishing and, for me, just learning the ropes... literally. He was very patient teaching me not to call it the "pointy end" of the boat, the ropes were actually lines or sheets (go figure) and which was my port and which my starboard.

One time we were out beyond the reef and the wind came up until the boat was well-heeled over. He needed to tack, so as this was my first-ever sailboat experience, he carefully explained each step and when I should release the sheet from one cleat after he said, "Ready about, lee ho" and then pull it in on the opposite side. What he didn't tell me was that I was supposed to at the same time shift my entire body to the opposite side too. I had correctly exchanged the jib sheets, Peter had deftly ducked under the shifting boom and placed himself on the upwind side of the boat... leaving me crouched on the inside of the seat since the boat was now so far heeled over the mast was virtually touching the water. My weight in that location wasn't helping and, as he struggled to keep the boat from going over, he calmly said, "Would you care to join me up here?" You have to love a true gentleman.

I remember him telling me that he travelled out to Fiji with only two suitcases. By the time we left Fiji in 1982, he had accumulated not only me but it took a container load to get all our things back to Cornwall. We had both fallen in love with Fiji and the Fijians we'd met and counted as friends and the Fijian way of life. We have been back a couple times since then, but it has always given us far more than we were able to give it.

As Peter was recently so ill in Hospice, we were deeply moved when Tevita Naroba brought members of the Fijian choir from Vermont Uniting Church to Daw House and sang "Isa Lei", the traditional song of farewell, to Peter while he was still alive. There

were not many dry eyes in the room and peace in my heart when I knew that Peter did, in fact, take it in. Vinaka vakalevu, Tevita and Vermont Uniting!

For me, the move to Cornwall was a move to a foreign country. For Peter, he was going home. Anne and Michael were there and he could share more often in their lives as they went to school and had their events and they could share in ours. His parents and brothers and their families were there. His friends were there. Let me not forget to say his boat was there! Peter was especially sensitive about me possibly feeling out of place, but they all made me welcome as we built our Cornish lives together.

We were in Cornwall from 1982 to 1985 as Peter worked for the South West Water Authority overseeing the operations and maintenance of the Main Drainage function in the Fal District... that's sewage and sewerage or, as Peter called it, "Dirty Water" (as opposed to "Clean Water" which he preferred).

Mylor Bridge, Cornwall, was our 'home' base for the next 24 years even as we took up contracts overseas for years at a time, it was always Cornwall we came back to... until we emigrated to South Australia in 2006 – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

I could sum up Cornwall in three words: family, friends and sailing. Peter could help Anne and Michael with their homework at weekends and make sure they had a new supply of his endless supply of information and words. Trips to visit the wider Collins family always resulted in long, rather loud meals where the whole Collins clan discussed everything, EVERYTHING! Even the two taboo subjects for polite conversation – politics and religion – were ALWAYS brought up and 'discussed' with, shall we say "gusto"... and red wine. All I can say is that it was a challenge but certainly made me realise I needed to question my own views about issues until I understood what I thought myself!

In 1985, a job opportunity came up for Peter in Botswana. We were conscious of Anne and Michael's feelings and agreed we would ask them whether they would like us to remain in Cornwall, where we could see them more often, or would they prefer we go to Botswana, where they could come out on their school holidays? They didn't hesitate in choosing Botswana for us (and them). We packed up, arranged to rent out our little bungalow and Peter became the Deputy Chief Executive for the Botswana Water Utilities Corporation in Gaborone. He helped develop and implement a programme for the phased 'localisation' of all management levels in the Corporation. It's one of those jobs where, if you're successful, you work yourself out of a job.

Botswana was one of those places that make you feel alive; really alive! We soon fell in with the Kalahari Hash House Harriers as it seemed a natural place to start meeting people. Boy did we meet people and have fun. Peter ended up being the Hash Grand Master (which is not as grand as it sounds) and gained a well-earned

reputation for leading people on False Trails. We must have got a bit keen at one stage because we also joined the Gaborone Runners Club.

Peter bought us a Series 2 Landrover so we could get out into the bush. It was bright yellow and had lots of quirks. We called it "The Yellow Peril". One of the things about owning a Landrover is the owner spends a fair amount of time with his head under the bonnet or crawling underneath. The Yellow Peril looked after us because Peter looked after it and together they took us to places I'd only previously read about in the National Geographic.

When we left Botswana in 1989, we both left part of our hearts in Africa and took part of it with us. Those friendships have stayed with us and are now really more like family.

We got back to Cornwall, back into our house and Peter went back to work as Project Manager for South West Water Services' water mains rehabilitation programme. He lived in a bed 'n breakfast near Exeter during the week, travelling home once in the middle of the week and returning again at the weekends to exchange loads of laundry, do chores and catch up. Although we took up where we left off having a wonderful time with family and friends and sailing, it wasn't a way we wanted to live and Peter looked at the overseas vacancies again.

So that's how we found ourselves at home on Grand Turk in the Turks and Caicos Islands in the Caribbean from 1990 to 1995. Peter was the Chief Engineer responsible for the management of the Public Works Department for the whole 'country'. A major development program by the government meant a lot of aid money had to be spent in the TCI and Peter played a key role in identifying, preparing and implementing the in-house and donor-funded projects. He had to help spend millions of dollars... and managed! Do you have any idea how hard that is?

We lived about 50m from the sea at Corktree Beach. As I mentioned, our boat, Tiffie, was anchored on a mooring that Peter put down himself (but that's another story). We timed ourselves once and we could leave the house, carry down and load the dinghy, row out to Tiffie and have the sails up and under way in 15 minutes. Can you imagine what that meant to a sailor like Peter?

Grand Turk is about seven miles long by one mile at its widest point (which is the landing strip for the airport). We were told there were about 3,000 people living there... but we never saw them. Both of us were working and we often went beachcombing or snorkelling and qualified as PADI divers. Tiffie got us off the island so we could look back at it and say to ourselves, "So is that what all the trouble is about?" and keep things in perspective.

From 1995 to 1999, Peter was a Technical Expert with the European Commission to the Government of Jamaica. He worked with a team to improve the institutional

capacity of the National Water Commission as well as implementing two major programmes funded by the European Union.

We were pleased to be able to join the Jamaica Hash Harriers on their inaugural run and the other runners soon learned about Peter's delight in sending the most unsuspecting runners on False Trails – he was a master of the bluff and double bluff and no one, not even otherwise harmless ladies were spared. These runs took us out into some of the most beautiful areas of Jamaica and even through parts of Kingston all shouting On-On and False Trail.

We again moved back home to Cornwall, settled in our little bungalow and into the routine of walks on the coastal paths and Natural Trust properties and sailing and pantomimes and family and friends. Peter even gutted the kitchen (after only 20+ years) and installed a new one; he also built an addition to the house with a new master ensuite bedroom. We fed the tits (both great and blue), the squirrels and even the badgers. We got a new sailboat that was not a traditional, clinker built one, but not a Tupperware one either. We had the family and friends and visits and holidays. We were very happy.

Peter thought he'd retired, but an opportunity came up with a contract for a few months in the Windward Islands in 2001. While I stayed in Cornwall doing my own work, he headed out to offer technical assistance to the governments of the Windward Islands to identify projects and to prepare the documents needed by the European Commission so they could receive money in for a Banana Support Programme... yes, I did say "bananas". No, I can't explain except bananas must be a lot more like water than you or I realised.

In between every single one of these events, Peter travelled with me back to my family home, Montana, and suffered the fact that my mother and my three sisters, not to mention my Dad, adored him. They couldn't do enough for him and, on his first visit to Montana, my sisters refused to take him to a local bar until they made sure he was suitably attired in jeans and they bought him a cowboy hat... he drew the line when they offered some cowboy boots! You really need the jeans to slap your thigh when you give the "You bet" positive response to any question.

Peter seemed to just 'fit' with my family – all of them. I can't tell you what a wonderful feeling that was for me too. They even came up with a new name for him: We. It seems that whenever my mother mentioned something that needed fixing, I would always respond, "We can do that!" So the name stuck and my mother even started asking me if "We" was able to join me on my next visit to Montana.

But the greatest move we made was to Australia. When our granddaughter, Ethne, was born, we realised that we wanted to be out here to be a part of her and Anne's lives and them in ours. Peter and I had both been raised with a sense of 'family' and this was what we wanted for Ethne as she grew up. It has been the best thing we ever did!

We became citizens after two years here and have felt and been made to feel a part of the Hills, Adelaide, South Australia and Australia through our friends, many camping trips in our trusty A'van and getting involved.

Peter soon noticed the Mitcham City Council were seeking submissions on their draft proposal for new trails in the Mitcham Hills. He called Heather Beckmann with the Blackwood / Belair and District Community Association and was drafted in for his comments. He later served as President of the BBDCa for a year and the BBDCa have been a part of his life ever since.

Through this association, he became aware of draft plans that were proposed regarding a flood mitigation plan for the Brown Hill and Keswick Creeks and their catchment areas. The more he read, the more convinced he became that all was not right with the world. This story is, perhaps, better told by our friends Michael Picton and Judith Weaver, who were instrumental in honouring Peter and John Hill a joint Australia Day 2013 Citizens of the Year award for the City of Mitcham.

Explaining how Peter got involved with the Natural History Society of South Australia is harder, but let me just say that from our first involvement with the group, we have both been captivated by the land, space, plants, lizards, birds and animals... but mostly by the southern hairy-nosed wombats who live on their wildlife reserves. Peter found his many skills and sheer energy were useful and appreciated by the Society. I will leave it to Peter Clements, the President, to speak for the Society a little later.

I would personally and on behalf of our family like to thank Dr Chris Karapetis, who was Peter's oncologist, for applying all his knowledge, contacts and efforts to give Peter the best possible outcome from the metastatic melanoma that eventually took him. Without Chris' work, we would have been here saying farewell many months before now. Thank you, Chris. Thank you for believing in Peter and thank you for caring enough to try.

I would also like to say the biggest, deepest thank you to all the staff and volunteers of Daw House Hospice and the Foundation that supports them. They don't just look after their patients, they CARE and they care enough to look after the family and friends too as we all go down the palliative care road with our loved ones.

Anne will be doing the 200km Ride to Conquer Cancer and my heart goes out to her and I wish her luck in both the ride and in raising funds for cancer research.

Our families, friends and neighbours have all responded with such love and offers to help. Thank you, we're all sure to need both your love and help as we find our way through from this day on.

Amongst the friends, I include the many people from Blackwood Uniting Church who have come together to do all the myriad things that needed to be done for today's

service – a big thank you. Your help has made it possible to give a proper tribute to Peter and celebrate his larger than life life.

But I cannot miss saying a thank you from the bottom of my heart to Leanne for all her steady, caring support for us both right through Peter's ordeal with melanoma. She and Peter agreed that they both didn't believe in the same god. Well, that's the One who's made a difference in all our lives.

One thing that Peter and I both believed: "Memories are better than dreams."

What can I say? Peter and I shared our dreams and then we tried very hard to turn them into memories. The family, friendships, experiences and memories travel with us everywhere we have gone and remain with us now.

A dear friend sent our family a card a couple days ago that said, "When we leave this earth, the love that we've given and received remains behind to light the lives of those we touched – each memory a candle burning bright."

We all now have memories surrounding our time with Peter and I believe they will now give light to our lives. Peter gave light to mine that light will continue to burn.