

Final Reflections of Peter

I am eighty-three years young. As I sit looking out over the peaceful water, I am contemplating that my voyage here on this earth will soon be done. Last month I told my daughter that I had wished to remain at the helm for 10 more years, to be able to chart a course that included seeing my grandchildren graduate and get married, perhaps adding great grandfather to my titles. I keep telling myself that the oncologist could be wrong, citing that the cancer had not progressed as quickly as they had thought it would. Watching my wife slip away five months ago made it real for me—a mirroring my own fate.

As the second youngest of nine children, I thrived in a council house in a working-class neighbourhood in Bath, England. My father was a railroader, working away from home on the tracks for weeks at a time. When he returned home, it was like a coupler had secured us together and I was his favourite shadow. My hard-working mother and six sisters ran a tight ship at home. During WW II, I was six to twelve years of age, my chums and I would explore our neighbours' bombed-out houses on mornings after an air raid; my older sister wanted to trade our food ration coupons to buy a new dress, and later, my older brother was never able to tell me of what horrors he witnessed during the D-Day landings on Sword beach.

As a teen, I soared carefree on the narrow and steep streets whilst on my motorcycle and going to the pub with my mates. At eighteen, there was mandatory conscription and two years of military service, with its friendships and adventures. I winged my way as a paratrooper and marveled at the pyramids of Egypt. Following my service, I became a

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tradesman, assimilating the assorted alloys, and welding perfect metal seams to aircraft. I married a steadfast, intelligent, young woman and we settled in a quaint Keynsham cottage, our first child on the way. Some of my siblings were immigrating to a young, spacious country full of opportunity; it beckoned to me. Our family flew to Canada in 1957. Finding work and health care was challenging at first and I was full of gratitude when my son landed safely into our lives. Seven years later we welcomed a daughter, who seemed part mermaid. On weekends, I drove a big boat Pontiac Parisienne to our lakeside cottage, where we could relax and enjoy waterskiing, sailing, windsurfing, and the company of family and friends. I introduced visiting family from the UK to Canadian cottage life.

I swam in prosperity. I made lifelong friends working at a welding firm. I fashioned the wheels for the new TTC streetcars, roof trestles for the tubular design ceiling at the Oshawa Centre Mall (OC), and most notably, I executed welding tasks on the Canada space arm for the Space shuttle. Incidentally, those trestles are still holding up the OC roof, now painted white to match the newer millennial color scheme there. With my family's support, I started my own business, which thrived at first. I fulfilled my dream of flight, obtaining my private pilot's license. I flew a twin-seater Cessna over the lake and saw our cottage and sailboat below; I also performed an engine stall, much to the dismay of my daughter seated next to me.

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Years later, my business crashed and was gone. That journey taught me some incredible life lessons. I was fortunate to have my wife and children as my lifelines during that devastating time.

Captaining my own boat, I retired to the cottage, swinging out games of golf, riding the wind on my sailboat, and relishing time with my grandchildren. I took flight on the swings at the playground and splashed with them at the lake.

When a chest cold wouldn't abate, I was subject to further diagnostic testing. Then a minor surgery and a bleak prognosis with some decisions I had to make. I am still here two years later, longer than they gave me. My children and grandchildren are attempting to take me sailing on my boat again. Sometimes I feel like I am drowning as I make peace with my mortality.

I can be found taking silent momentary breaks like this, to rest and ponder what was, what is, and what may lie ahead. The muted orangey pink, purple sun sets on me, I am the calm of the lake in my reflection. I am the weathered driftwood I am perched on, washed up on shore, now an observer of other boaters and flying gulls, recalling days of piloting small aircraft, cruising my speedboats, and sailing my masthead sloop rig through the lakes and canals. I am filled with the comfortable familiarity of the heady scent of canvas boat seat covers, lingering gasoline vapors from the day's outboard motors, and that fishy pungency of shoreline water. I am carried by the music of the rhythmic lapping of easy waves on the rocks, and by the symphony of several seagulls, calling out their chorus. I have been smoothed by the years, like the nature's log bench on which I sit, its

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satiny finish intermingled with grooves and knots. I pray that I have been the dependable rock on which my soft soles rest upon.

I reassure myself: when I am no longer visible in moments like this, I will be the wind that touches the sky, the earth and the water forever.