
Laurence Shames

Not Fade Away
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You met Peter Barton at the end of his life, when his terminal illness put serious constraints on his day-to-day activity. In what ways was his zest for life obvious to you even then?

Peter's energy was quite limited by the time I knew him, but his gusto for life was evident in everything he did. He was still a whirlwind at the piano. He still loved swapping jokes. He still coached his kids' lacrosse teams and threw tennis balls for his dogs. And even when he'd used up his energy and had to rest, there was always a twinkle in his eye. He just didn't want to miss anything.

In your preface, you allude to your concerns about involving yourself in a project with someone who was dying. Did Peter's illness make writing *Not Fade Away* more challenging on an emotional level than other books you have written?

Very much so. I've always felt that writing well demands a seamless blending of emotion and craft. But those two elements exist in differing proportions in different books. *Not Fade Away* involved so much emotion that it took a great effort to do justice to the feelings without being overwhelmed by them.

How did writing this book affect you in the short and long term?

In the short term, working on this book was an exhausting roller-coaster. Each time I went to Denver, I practically had to force myself to get on the plane, because I knew Peter would be sicker than the last time I'd seen him, and I dreaded confronting that. Yet every time I returned from Denver, I felt uplifted. I'd learned something. And I'd sit down for a joyful stint of work, trying to explain as clearly as I could what it was I'd seen and felt.

In the long term — and this was Peter's great gift to me — writing this book has made me calmer. My life has grown simpler. I'm less likely to be bothered by small annoyances. I'm more focused on those few things that really matter — health, my marriage, friends, laughter, kindness.

Peter's family is everywhere present in this book. What role did they play in the creation and publication of *Not Fade Away*?

Without the support and endless patience of Laura Barton, this book would not exist. Laura and the Barton kids welcomed me into their home at the most difficult time imaginable. They knew, I think, that this was very important to Peter — that he was happiest when he had a project and a purpose. I felt both great love and great pain in that household; a richness that found its way, I hope, into the pages of the book.

You mention that at the end of Peter's life "there was no longer any tension between the past, the present, and the future. His entire life was available, compressed, in every passing instant." How did this change in Peter's perspective impact the composition of *Not Fade Away*?

As a technical matter, trying to convey what seemed to be happening to Peter's sense of time was one of the most challenging parts of writing this book. Most of us have the habit of thinking in a sequence. This happens, then that happens. The past is behind, the future is ahead. And of course language itself supports those habits of perception, because language, too, is linear. But Peter's changing sense of time made me realize that the reality isn't quite so tidy. A memory can be as "present" as a scene before your eyes. "Future" is a hollow concept to someone who is dying. My hope is that, by realizing those things, each of us will value the present moment more highly.

Aside from issues related to Peter's illness, were there any unusual challenges in co-authoring this book?

The greatest challenge, honestly, was in asking people to overcome their resistance to thinking about death. Death is not a dirty word, but in our culture it remains taboo. This is perverse, since death is the most universal fact of life. I will die; you will die; trust me on this! I happen to believe that the acceptance of death sets us free to live life more honestly, more passionately, more happily. Persuading people to think seriously about that is difficult.

To what extent do you think his eclectic experiences as ski bum and hippie in early adulthood were necessary for the extraordinary professional success Peter achieved in later years as political consultant and CEO of Liberty Media?

One of the things I admired about Peter is that he didn't compartmentalize his life. He put all of himself into everything he did. The wildly successful businessman still contained the hippie and the ski bum and the rock musician. Peter's success, in large part, was a function of his wholeness — the original meaning, after all, of integrity.

Peter writes that the births of his children were some of his greatest accomplishments. Does this surprise you, given his numerous achievements during his lifetime?

No, it doesn't surprise me. Peter, first and foremost, was a father. He had an ego, sure, and it was important to him to be successful in the eyes of the world. But that satisfaction was secondary. What really drove him was the desire to raise a loving and secure family.

***Not Fade Away* was published after Peter's death. How much of the final manuscript did he live to see?**

At the time Peter and I decided to work together, the doctors had told him he had 3-4 months to live. I thought it would probably take about that long to find a publisher, then another year or so for me to write the book. Peter thought there was no chance he would live to see a manuscript, but he really hoped to have the comfort of knowing, at least, that his story would be published at some point. I promised him I'd work my tail off to make that happen ... Then a series of wonderful — I'm half-tempted to say miraculous — things took place. We found a publisher almost immediately. I became obsessed with Peter's story and was able to complete a draft much faster than I'd thought possible. And Peter lived not 4 months, but 8. So he was able to see almost the whole book. Laura read the later parts to him, when he no longer had the strength to read it himself. It means an incredible amount to me that Peter was happy with the way his story was told.

In his introduction, Peter describes himself as a skeptic of religion, but the book he co-authored with you is one of deep spiritual resonance. How did his spirituality or views on faith change in the time you knew him?

Like a lot of people our age, Peter was not a fan of organized religion; he saw it as something that divided people and gave rise to bias, hatred, even war. But as he was forced to think more deeply about final things, he realized that "religion" and spirituality were separate questions. Peter didn't need or want a church, a minister, a liturgy. He craved only the comfort of feeling connected to something larger than himself. He needed to believe that he would not be obliterated by death, that he would still be linked somehow to the people he loved. I know he achieved the peace that accompanies that belief. Exactly how he got there remains, I think, one of life's great mysteries.