

TRIBUTE to PETER ANEURIN ROWAN

If there is one thing that you could say about Peter Aneurin Rowan it is that he lived his life to the full and that he made up his own rules as he went about it. Neither age, nor ill health, nor anybody else's rules, were ever going to stop him. Until two weeks ago, and despite being 82, he was talking about what he would do once he got out of hospital;

- he was going to have some decent food
- go for a drink in the hills
- book a Shearings' coach holiday
- and he was also considering travelling to Australia to see his son, Alan,
- and then on to the Falklands Isles.

Only a few weeks earlier he had applied for and received a new passport.

So it came as a huge shock to everyone, including himself, that this lifestyle had finally caught up with him.

His family had half-believed that he had discovered a secret formula which gave him eternal life. After all he was a qualified chemist, a member of the Royal Society of Chemists, and a Fellow of the Chemical Society, so clearly he knew about the chemistry behind medicines, and would think nothing of administering his own concoctions. No doubt to the exasperation of his doctor. So what was the secret?

Could it have been the cod liver oil or the good quality single malt whisky both of which he took religiously? Or was it that he loved life and had a long, long, list of things that he still wanted to do? He had a number of passions and these drove him onwards.

Peter was born in 1936 in Stockport to Margery Edith Hughes and James Gordon Rowan. Margery's family had come from the remote Welsh valleys, Peters' middle name, Aneurin was the name of a great uncle. Her grandfather and father were church men and the family grew up in the Rectory in Llysfaen, in Denbighshire.

This tradition stretched back through many generations and was broken only by the Great War, when they left the Valleys to become merchant seaman. They survived the war and Peter's grandfather received a medal for his bravery. James Gordon's family were originally from Northern Ireland, moving to Liverpool on their way to North America, in search of work. James Gordon's father was a ship's steward, travelling the Atlantic, whilst James

was an insurance salesman with the Prudential before joining the Royal Air Force.

Margery and James were married in Sept 6th 1935 in Waterloo, Liverpool and Peter Aneurin Rowan was born a year later. He was by all accounts a beautiful baby, winning prizes at the Walton Baby Show, Breeze Hill Presbyterian Church, Liverpool in 1937. At the age of 16 he was baptised at Woodsmoor Methodist Church.

Peter had 8 lifelong passions which guided and directed him throughout his life.

Passion 1 Learning Peter attended MJJ Convent High School, Stockport where a school report of 1942 described him as 'intelligent but wanting in application'. Three years later he started at Stockport Grammar school attending the school until he was 17 in 1953.

He was by his own admission a very naughty boy who often played truant. He also enjoyed playing rugby and soccer for the school earning a reputation for being a tough competitor and one to avoid! It was during this time in his childhood that he developed a passion for Manchester City (he was a life long supporter), and also a passion for 'trains' spending hours watching and recording them travelling to and from Manchester.

After he left Stockport Grammar he kept in touch continuing to play soccer and golf for the school's Old Boys for the next 25 years.

He left school with qualifications in his own words 'of not too great a value', and because these were the days of National Service joined the RAF where he worked as a radar fitter operator based in Nigeria and then Aden. He met Janet Hackworth Hall whilst in the RAF and they married in Stockport in 1961 having their first child Helen Dianne in 1962, Alan Edward in 1964 and Matthew Peter in 1965.

Having left the RAF he was determined to improve himself studying A levels at night school, and then a degree in Chemical Engineering at Staffordshire Polytechnic, all of which he did whilst also supporting a wife and three very small children.

He subsequently worked at Courtaulds Chemicals in Leek, where he became one of the Production Managers until, after 25 years, he took early retirement. Retirement didn't stop him. He continued his own learning and in his 60's he

applied to Durham University to study for a Masters degree in Business management.

He was equally proud of his own children's successes and made sure to be there for each of their graduations. He was especially proud of Dianne's work as a curator at the British Museum, Matthew's graduation in Quantity Surveying and becoming a partner and director in his company, of Alan, following in his footsteps in studying Chemistry attaining a PhD and then taking a professorship firstly at Nijmegen University in Holland and more recently at the University of Queensland in Australia.

One of his favourite pastimes was to go to Goldenhill Working Mens Club on a Tuesday evening for the general knowledge quiz, where he would test his general knowledge or that of his fellow quizzers, and share a pint or two!

Passion 2 Books: He loved books and was a collector of books, loving nothing more than either to scan charity shop shelves in search of a rare find or to sign up to bargain book clubs. His house was full of books and piles could be found in every room, propped up in corners or stuffed onto bookcases whose shelves were bowing under the weight. His books covered every sort of subject from wildlife and nature, travel, cookery, golf, books on medicines, to books on tracking down your ancestors. He also had an obsession for murder mysteries priding himself in his early editions of Agatha Christie and Ruth Rendall. He was also partial to the children's series of Just William stories. His collection of Train books was a particular cause of pride and is to now become a reference collection.

Passion 3 Music Peter had learnt to play the piano whilst still at school though he would often miss his lessons, hiding from his mother the teachers' absence notes and the money for the teacher under the carpet on the stairs, but when newly married he realised that they could not afford to live, so he applied for an evening job at a local pub where he claimed that he could play. His musical repertoire stretched to but a few songs but it was enough to set him on his musical career. From that point onwards playing the keyboards was to become an overriding part of his life. He would play either on his own, some would know him as Pete Sinclair, or Pete Rodgers or he played with the Rythm-aires - a group of trusted musicians. He remembered fondly his days at the Wayfarer Hotel (now called the Walton) in Stone playing with The Harry Good Affair with Big H Harry Mouat on the bass guitar, Alan Gilbey who replaced Trevor Mullock on the drums and Peter on the keyboards. The boys

would start at 9:30 playing until 1am where they would then be treated to a slap up meal in the restaurant area. Sometimes it would be 4am before anyone got home!

He dabbled at composing his own songs, becoming a member of the Songwriters Guild of Great Britain. In 1973 Janet and he applied for a license to run a music agency called BABS (Book a Band Service) and the Freelance Organist Agency which they ran from their home and which was to become very successful. He continued to play up until his late seventies and it was through his playing that he met his companion, Mary Carmel Harrison, who supported him in his playing throughout those later years.

Passion 4 Food and Drink He loved food. You only had to look in his kitchen. Cupboards were full to the brim, almost falling off their hinges under the weight of all of the food. crammed as they were with every kind of bargain/knock down priced food. He had a penchant for experimenting particularly with soy sauce and herbs and consulted his extensive collection of cook books. This made him very particular about food and 'woe betide' anyone who served up undercooked, overcooked, not hot enough or not enough, or didn't have the right utensils. He also loved a good Islay malt whisky and was a member of the Malt Whisky Distillers Society. His love for whisky was such that he once took his family on a camping holiday to the distilleries of Scotland.

Passion 5 Golf Peter was a member of the Leek golf club, and up until his death one of the longest serving members of the club. It was here that he made good friendships, and enjoyed not just the golf but a tippie at the 19th hole. He also played for the Plastics Industry Golfing Society, earning a number of trophies along the way.

Passion 6 Travel He had travelled extensively across Europe with his mother flying in de Havilland planes, and this love of travel continued throughout his life and was passed onto his children who have each lived abroad. Perhaps it was those many slide shows in the living room with a bed sheet as a projector back cloth, that inspired them to seek their own adventures? Together Mary and he enjoyed many adventures across the world travelling to countries such as America, China, India, and New Zealand to name a few.

Passion 7 Speaking his Mind

Peter never held back in his opinions and often accused others of not having a clue or more commonly not 'using their loaf'. There were many heated family discussions, to the point that there were more areas 'out of bounds' to discussion at family meals, than there were 'in bounds'. When staying at his house and looking for something to read it came as a great surprise that he had so many books on learning '**how to influence people**' and '**how to get the best out of people using different management styles**' when really he had only one style which was to say his piece and expect all to follow.

On retirement he was required to visit the employment office and on one such visit he felt an urge to tell them how they ought to be doing their jobs and that he could do much better. They took him at his words and challenged him to take on their role and try for himself. As hard as it is to believe, he did advise others and helped them get back into work?

And to his final passion:

Passion 8 Peak District Most of all he loved the hills, the huge open landscapes, and wide sweeping vistas of the Peak District, and he knew every back route without ever referring to a map. It was here that he went to drink and to take solace. He was in a way, despite all of his many activities and interests, a man who preferred his own company and whilst he didn't like to be alone and needed to know that others were there for him, his favourite thing to do was to take himself off into the hills, park the car, take in the view whatever the weather and read the papers and have a glass or two of wine. He loved talking to the ladies at his Friday lunch club particularly about their experiences of growing up in the Peak district or of working on the farms.

In his own words he described himself as 'jack of all trades and a master of not a great deal'. His passions in life all contributed to his 'odd crust' as he liked to put it.