



Peter James Quandt

June 18, 2020

Chappaqua - Peter James Quandt, 71, of Chappaqua, New York, passed away on June 18, 2020 of cancer.

Peter was born in Fort Benning, Georgia, where his father, Dr. Val Quandt, was stationed during World War II. Peter's mother, Faith L. (Hurtig) Quandt, was a nurse and homemaker. After the war, the family moved back to Wisconsin, settling in Hartford, where Peter grew up with a younger brother and sister.

In school, Peter was known for his intellect and for always questioning everything and everyone, including his teachers. Upon graduating, Peter was the only student in his class to attend college out of state. Peter graduated from Georgetown University magna cum laude with a degree in government.

Peter went on to a successful career in publishing. From his first job writing summaries for book jackets, he rose through the ranks of Macmillan Book Clubs, Inc., becoming President and CEO in 1988. When Macmillan Book Clubs was acquired by K-III and became Newbridge Communications, Peter remained at the helm. He was later promoted to President and CEO of the K-III Education Group. Peter Bergen, a colleague during this time period, remembered Peter for his "unflinching honesty and decency" and for his interest in and respect for others. Mr. Bergen also highlighted the impressive

growth in sales and profits that Peter created.

In 1996, Peter began his own company, Hights Cross Communications (HCC), which acquired various subsidiaries that published educational, medical, and audio materials, including Recorded Books. In 2007, Peter left HCC and started a few new ventures, including Illume, an online platform for university instructors and their students to create, compare, and access learning materials. Peter created Illume to democratize access to educational content and drive down its escalating costs. His business partner, Justin Irizarry, explained, "providing a public good was as important to Peter as the business' success."

Outside of the publishing world, Peter devoted his time to several non-profits. From 2002 to 2012, Peter was the chair of the board of the Fund for Social Change, a foundation that used philanthropy to increase the power and well-being of disempowered people in New York City. David Tobis, the founder of the Fund, said, "Peter brought his brilliance as an administrator, his passion for justice, and his boundless kindness to impeccably guide the Fund throughout its existence." Peter and his wife also hosted students at their home for many summers from the Chappaqua Summer Scholarship Program, an academic enrichment program for students in New York City public high schools.

Peter met his future wife, the former Diane Ferguson, at a party at Vassar College when they were undergraduates. When Diane went to Washington, D.C. for a semester, and moved into the house Peter had just left, they started dating. Two years later, Peter and Diane cycled across Southern Canada, from the Thousand Islands Bridge to Golden, British Columbia. They carried all their gear and camped along the way, often in farmers' fields by the road. The trip was cut short when Diane developed appendicitis in the Canadian Rockies, just four hundred miles short of Vancouver.

Peter and Diane were married in 1973. They lived in New York City and had three children: Mark, Lauren, and Gillian. The family experienced a great loss when Lauren died unexpectedly as a baby. In 1985, Peter and Diane moved their family to Chappaqua and often returned to the city for concerts, events, and dinner with friends.

When his children were young, Peter enjoyed reading with them and teaching them to ski. He was especially interested in their schooling and sports as they got older and then later in their professional careers in finance and law. He and Diane always visited Mark and Gillian wherever they lived, including Tanzania, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, and Cambodia. Peter enjoyed getting to know his children's friends and later their spouses, Mary and Omar.

One of Peter's defining traits was his relentless desire for knowledge. He never accepted anything at face value and always wanted to know the facts behind any argument. Before the internet, he would consult encyclopedias and dictionaries daily. Peter delighted in the easy access to information that Wikipedia and the iPhone provided. Peter was well-versed on many different topics—he took online calculus classes for fun in his mid-60s—and expected those around him to be similarly curious and well-informed. Peter could be opinionated and stubborn but was receptive to different opinions if they were supported by rational arguments and data.

Peter was a voracious reader and participated in many reading groups throughout his life. Besides calculus courses, he also took photography and wine tasting classes. Peter loved good food and drink, sampling a wide array of new music and art, and learning about other cultures. Together with his wife, he traveled to many countries, often exploring by bicycle. After his family and work, his biggest passion was for exercise. Peter ran cross-country in

high school and began running again in his mid-twenties. From then on, he ran almost every day of his life and completed several marathons. He also enjoyed long bike rides, alone or with his wife or friends. At the time of his cancer diagnosis in late 2018, Peter was training for a triathlon.

Peter was clear-sighted about his terminal diagnosis and determined to enjoy as much of life as possible. Even while undergoing grueling chemotherapy, Peter pushed himself to lift weights, cycle, and walk. Peter's final year and a half was spent with friends and family and pursuing his insatiable quest for knowledge. He and Diane traveled to France, Morocco, California, Hawaii and picked up where they had left off nearly fifty years earlier to finish the final four hundred miles of their Canada trip— this time by car and train.

Peter was predeceased by his parents and his daughter, Lauren. Surviving are his wife of 47 years, the former Diane M. Ferguson; children, Mark Ferguson (Mary) Quandt and Gillian Ferguson (Omar Elafifi) Quandt; grandchildren, Ethan Quandt and Layla Elafifi; sister, Heidi Rossiter; brother, Mark David Quandt; niece, Molly Callahan; nephew, Noah Wolf; and aunt, Audrey Larsen.

Private graveside services were held in North Syracuse Cemetery. Donations may be made to Chappaqua Summer Scholarship Program (chappaquasummerscholarship.com) or the Wikimedia Foundation (wikimediafoundation.org).

Tribute Wall



“ *Peter James Quandt*

October 06, 2023 at 10:42 AM



“ *We used to get together pretty often in the 60s when Pete lived in Wisconsin. Petes father Uncle Val was one of the best harmonica players and because of him I started to play harmonica. Petes mother Aunt Faye was big in arts and she used to talk about it. I visited Pete and his family in NYC when Uncle Val had come to NYC in the 70s. Even though we did not get together after the 70s, we were still in contact.*

Suraj Tschand - November 23, 2020 at 03:17 PM

“ I wasn't lucky enough to work with Peter. I grew up with him in Hartford, Wisconsin in the 1950s. I'm sure I was in classes with him before the 4th grade, but my first real memory of him was playing baseball at recess. I was chubby and slow, so I was catching. He was at bat...lefty. It didn't occur to me that I had to move to my left in order to catch a when a lefty was at bat. His follow-through caught me on my right cheekbone. I immediately had swelling that closed my right eye. Of course I got on my bicycle and rode home, crying. Fortunately, his father was a doctor. He took a look and gave me some ice packs so in three or four days I was able to go back to school with a magnificent shiner.

From that point forward, Peter and I were always good friends. Peter was definitely not a "normal" kid for the 50's in Wisconsin. His family was (to my way of thinking) wealthy and sophisticated. They went skiing. They took vacations. His father's name was the coolest name in the history of Hartford...Valerius Victor Quandt...V.V.Q. Who has those initials?

Two adventures stick out in my memory. I can't say precisely what dates they took place but they were surely both in the early-mid 1960s.

I may have been with Peter on his first bicycle camping trip. We weren't old enough to drive, so it was probably 1963 or 64. He rode from Hartford to Cedar Lake Wisconsin where I lived for the summers, in a cottage that had been in our family since the 1920s. From there we rode to Mauthe Lake campground, which was a total round-trip of about 50-60 miles. We camped for maybe one or two nights and returned. Believe me...in the 60s this was not something people were used to seeing. It is also something that I would never in a million years have done but for Peter. It led to both of us being life-long bicycle riders.

The other adventure I remember was probably in the same time frame, but maybe a bit later. We took the Greyhound bus to Madison one day to look around the UW campus and the big city. We went to a campus pizza shop and had pizza with ANCHOVIES! What the hell are anchovies? But Peter was adamant that we had to get them. Then we went to an "arts" movie theater and saw some

obscure Italian film with sub-titles. I was a small town bumpkin but it was an experience I haven't forgotten.

Val was always very interested in cars (he was involved in creating the Wisconsin Automotive Museum in Hartford, and is the author of a book about a well known automobile built in Hartford, the Kissel Goldbug.) Val owned one of the first Volkswagen beetles anybody in Hartford had seen. I believe the first car Peter was allowed to drive was a Buick Skylark, which was a terrible car, but it had four wheels and it was more or less his. Next was a 1965 Rambler Classic 770 Convertible. Imagine a kid in 1965 Hartford with his own convertible? This too was a beast of a car. But then he went to Georgetown and the next time I saw him in the summer of 1972 (?) he was driving a real icon, a VW Karmann Ghia. I would call it British Racing Green. It was gorgeous. Then we lost touch with each other. He went on to his well documented business career, and I to mine. But when I went to visit him in 2019 he was driving a cherry red Tesla S. I'm sure Val would have approved.

Diane, be well.

Larry Stephenson

Lawrence Stephenson - November 23, 2020 at 03:16 PM

TF

“ *Offering our deepest condolences during this time.*

The Ferguson Family - November 23, 2020 at 03:16 PM

KR

“ My heartfelt condolences to Peter's family. I feel enormously enriched for having crossed paths with him. To know him was to love him. Peter was a unicorn of a man with a rare 10/10 on integrity, business acumen, humor, and charm. And still he was an implausibly mellow and humble guy. I never glimpsed a hint of his ego. He had an uncanny knack for distilling complex business challenges down into a simply articulated essence, and making the road to success an intellectually invigorating adventure for everyone. I was freshly minted out of grad school, green as could be, and living in Richmond, VA when he invited me to NYC to interview for a director position. I had no business sitting in that chair. He gently persuaded me that I actually could do that job. After the so-called interview of 20 minutes, we chatted like long lost chums for another hour. We had the same birthday. We were both avid skiers. He got a big kick out of my anecdotes about managing a ski school. He made me feel like the most important person in the room. We talked about books. Of course, books. On my long train ride back home, my head was swimming in Breece D'J Pancake, Loading Mercury with a Pitchfork, and the book he recommended with dog stories by James Thurber. And so it went the entire time I worked for him. I learned a ton and had a blast. Years later, the warmhearted person that he was, Peter reached out to give me a boost when I kickstarted my consulting practice. He became my first client. As important as he was to the trajectory of my career, I know my story is far from unique. Peter touched many people's lives.

Ken Rybarczyk - November 23, 2020 at 03:16 PM

NM

“ Peter was a life-changing mentor to me and to many others in the Oakstone Publishing organization. When he purchased Educational Reviews Inc., we expected changes from this New Yorker coming to Birmingham, AL, and we got them. His business acumen, his direct marketing expertise and his insistence that we achieve at the highest levels all helped to create a much larger, more successful company, and we all benefited. I treasure the time spent in his company. God bless the family.

Nancy McMeekin

Nancy McMeekin - November 23, 2020 at 03:16 PM

MG

“ In loving memory of a wonderful person. From an old work colleague and friend. Rest In Peace.

Marc Glessner - November 23, 2020 at 03:15 PM