

Memories of my brother

My brother Peter, 4 ½ years older than me was one of my five siblings. Peter is the reason I am called Jean, although my parents named me Hendrene Karen (for reasons which remain a mystery) The story is that when a neighbour asked Peter what his new baby sister's name was he lisped "henjean" . The neighbour understood it to be Jean and that's the name that stuck (again for unknown reasons but for that I am grateful.

Tragedy struck our family in 1954 when our father died in a car accident. This had a lasting effect on our family, but I imagine for Peter it was so very frightening and confusing as my mother 's grief was so devastating that she and the two youngest went to Wisconsin to be with her family there. While we were gone Peter was struck with polio, hospitalized, and isolated. I remember returning from that time away and my mother scanning the family that was waiting and asking, "where's Peter?" To protect her fragile state, she hadn't been told about Peter's sickness. Talking about that time with me much later my Mom told me that the doctor had remarked that Peter didn't cry or ask about her. She told the doctor to tell Peter that she was home and then she was told that Peter cried then. Peter also talked with me about that time and how when he no longer had to lie flat and was able to get up, he tried to stand up but fell right down. I believe that it was at this time that Peter learned he had to be tough and that stoic willpower was a defining trait throughout his life.

Peter loved sport whether playing little league baseball or cheering on his beloved Edmonton Eskimos football team. When they won the Grey Cup (the highest prize of the CFL) in 1956(I think) it was cause for celebration. Much to Peter's chagrin they were not given time off from school to attend the victory parade. So, he and some friends skipped school and went anyway, and I think he was almost as proud of that act as he was of the Eskimo's win.

In his teen years Peter was very close to his two older siblings Andrew and Gladys, I was just the pesky little sister. However, tragedy struck our family once again when Andrew and his wife Carolyn and Gladys were killed in a car accident. Sorrow and grief enveloped us all and Peter's grief was exhibited in absence, withdrawing both physically and emotionally. He was off to university only coming home for his summer job delivering milk for Silverwood dairy. I remember there was beer in our fridge, that was different. He didn't talk much but did have terse comments, like why are you wearing lipstick, or why doesn't your boyfriend go to the football games with you instead of his friends or telling me to get off the couch when he came home from work. Once he left a note for Mom "I'm having the young people over so take Jeanie and Herm to Bill and Dixie's" After university he was absent again as he set off on his world travels. I missed him but we were all finding our way in our lives with the scars of loss and grief. I got married and moved away from Edmonton, but only to Calgary. Peter married Anne and he moved much further - to Australia. But Peter and Anne visited his Canadian family often. We first visited them in 1990 with four kids in tow. Peter and Anne tried life in Canada for a few months, but their life was in Australia. We were able to visit Down Under often. Our children too were able to visit and are deeply grieving the uncle who loved them and whom they loved. We were able to travel together with Peter & Anne: China, Portugal & Croatia, Mexico, Vancouver Island, California, Washington, Oregon, a New Zealand cruise and here in Australia: Tasmania and most recently to the Flinders in May. So many memories and stories – too many to tell now. But one

common thread in our travels was that Peter did not like to shop, not at all. While I do. At times that necessitated some careful navigating which usually involved Clarence coming and coming and saying “Peter’s getting really annoyed” and maybe even coming again with the same message more urgently.

But even though the distance between us was great, as the years went by, we became closer to each other; our connection grew and flourished, and we have so many shared memories of our times together. And with the wonder of modern technology, we were able to talk deeply and often over facetime. Every face time session ended with saying “I love you”. At the end of his life, we were able to say our last “I love you” and good-bye face-to face. A bittersweet blessing. I’ll miss my big brother. I’ll miss his laugh, his mischievous grin as he would pretend, he wasn’t really cheering for the Edmonton Oilers, but was wearing an oilers tee shirt under his shirt., seeing his eyes light up as he talked about his grandchildren, playing five crowns, our conversations about faith, our children, politics, the books we were reading oh so many things. We weren’t ready for him to go.

Peter Wierenga

December 31, 1945 – January 20, 2023

It’s the dash that is important. The dash is Peter’s life. A life walked with God. A life in which there was sorrow and joy, struggles and pain, drama and romance, anger, sickness and laughter and celebration but most of all love. Peter was loved and he loved fiercely.