

**Friday 6th October 11 am St. Nicholas Church, Chlorakas, Paphos, Cyprus, 8221**

Introductions and thanks for attending to celebrate the life of  
Peter McCausland Gibbs 30th September 1934 - 30th September 2023

Music played while gathering for the burial

*That's my Home* by Humphrey Littleton [That's My Home - YouTube](#)

*Take 5* by The Dave Brubeck Quartet [Dave Brubeck, The Dave Brubeck Quartet - Take Five \(Audio\) - YouTube](#)

### **Eulogy read by Mum**

**T**hank you all for joining us to commemorate the adventurous life of my beloved husband and Simon and Joanna's much-loved father Peter McCausland Gibbs. My late son James's presence and that of our wider family circle is very much with us as we gather here today.

On hearing of Peter's death, the Nepalese head monk formerly of the Sri Lankan monastery where James died while training to become a Buddhist monk contacted us to say that his monastery in Nepal is today conducting a Buddhist funeral for Peter in Kathmandu.

I've chosen today to relate just a few of the many remarkable feats of exploration that for all his unassuming, quiet and gentle demeanour, truly characterised Peter's life. He was born in 1934 in Rhodesia and later moved to South Africa, where his father was dean of Cape Town cathedral. His adventurous spirit soon saw him making many childhood climbs on Table Mountain, in the Cederberg and the Drakensberg.

At the age of 18 he set off for a two-month trip into the wild and desolate terrain of the upper Orange River, acting as guide and all-round handyman for an intrepid 78-year-old widow with a passion for gold prospecting. She was most impressed with his initiative, bush-craft skills and can-do attitude, less so with being kept awake half the night by Peter playing jazz round the campfire on his mouth organ. He never lost this great love of jazz and chose to have his favourite jazz musicians played at today's service.

His gold prospecting trip sparked Peter's interest in the Orange River and still aged just 18 he hand-built his own canoe, bartered with an Afrikaans farmer for a pony, which he christened Donald, and set off with his pet bull terrier Biltong and school friend David Needham to make a 1,450 mile journey from the source to the mouth of the Orange River. Peter pony trekked to reach the mouth of the river, where he sold Donald to a passing Bantu tribesman for the equivalent of three euros more than he had bought him for, before he and David set off by canoe with Bill the bull terrier either tied by a long rope and trotting along the bank, or riding out the rapids perched on the prow of the canoe. In this precarious fashion, Peter and David paddled the remaining distance, setting a record and becoming the first people to journey from the source to the mouth of the Orange River.

In the mid-1950s Peter took up a place to read geography at Keble, known as the 'Gibbs college' as it was built for Oxford University by his cousin William. In these happy undergraduate years he canoed across Lapland with the Oxford University Lapland expedition, cycled alone over 2,000 miles across Scandinavia, and struck up a friendship with Frank Debenham, who had been one of the three geologists on Captain Scott's Terra Nova British Antarctic expedition.

In his last year at university, Peter spotted an advertisement for a glaciologist with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, which later became the British Antarctic Survey. They trained him as a surveyor and chose him at the age of 24 to become the Base Leader of a six-man team whose scientific studies and exploration were among the last to be conducted under similar living conditions and using the same means of transportation as Shackleton and Scott's teams before them: man hauling in two- or three-men teams who would camp out for up to eight weeks away from the base camp, travelling on skis over the glaciers, or by sledges drawn by teams of husky dogs. The lead dogs of Peter's pack, Babe, Ruth and Wally, always retained pride of place in his heart.

His first year in Antarctica was spent in an uninsulated refuge hut in which the ice could often become up to a foot thick on the inside and the next year and a half in the marginally more hospitable Base Camp on Stonington Island in Marguerite Bay. His teams' clothing consisted of woolly jumpers, windcheaters and in Peter's

case, a pair of gloves he stitched out of a wolf skin he bought down on the London docks before setting off.

There were considerable risks in these two-and-a-half years spent in the Antarctic, with three men lost while crossing treacherous mid-winter sea ice to reach an Emperor penguin rookery on the Dion Islands. Peter waited for the ice to begin reforming and together with his life-long friend and colleague John Paisley, risked his life to retrace their journey in the hope of finding them still alive. Ten of the lost men's fourteen dogs eventually found their own way back to the base camp, but the men were never found. In later years their relatives contacted us to tell us how much Peter and John's willingness to risk their own lives on perilous, breaking sea ice in polar mid-winter to try and bring assistance to their loved ones had meant to them.

For his services in the Antarctic, Peter was awarded the Polar Medal by our late Queen Elizabeth II and there is a glacier named after him, the Gibbs glacier.

On returning to Britain, Peter and I met while I was visiting my brother in Wales. He rapidly proposed and we married in Chester Cathedral in a service conducted by Peter's father, who had by now become dean of Chester. We were ushered out of the cathedral under an avenue of ice axes held aloft by Peter's former Antarctic colleagues.

Wanderlust soon took us back to Africa, where as a surveyor for the Directorate of Overseas Surveys Peter took Simon, Joanna and me out into the Kalahari desert where we travelled in convoy, living under canvas, encountering many memorable episodes, of which the fleeting visits of nomadic groups of Kalahari bushmen who would come singing and dancing into camp were later to become an especially treasured memory for Peter, who felt that 'nothing lights up the heart like a Bushman's smile'.

Peter went on to be made head of Ordnance Survey Scotland, where he hand-drew many of the Ordnance Survey maps that are still used today, before taking posts in Libya under Colonel Gadhaffi, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and with James

and I spending seven happy years in Oman surveying the spectacular craggy mountains of the Moussandam peninsula.

Retiring to Cyprus 26 years ago, he enjoyed volunteering at Paphiakos' dog shelter, sailing his boat with James and always at the drop of a hat undertaking emergency rescues to remote foreign hospitals when James's health failed. Peter was immediately at James's side when he succumbed to illness for the last time at the monastery in Kandy, eight years ago. While over the last year Peter's health rapidly declined, we were fortunate to be able to enjoy a very happy 62<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary earlier this year.

To conclude this commemoration of Peter's eventful life, Joanna will now read a short version of one of his favourite poems, Ralph Hodgson's The Song of Honor.

### **Poem read by Joanna**

I'm soft spoken, but I'll do my best to project my voice as I read a very abbreviated version of this poem that meant a lot to our father. It speaks to the reverence with which dad approached the beauty of the creation, shining bright in the stars he so loved, and in his own gentle, unassuming, and wholly remarkable spirit.

The Song of Honour by Ralph Hodgson

I climbed a hill as light fell short,  
And rooks came home and filled the trees and sang themselves to sleep.  
Then many a star sailed into sight  
And all the stars, the flower of night,  
Were round me at a leap.

It seemed, so still the valleys were,  
As if the whole world knelt at prayer.

Then, sharp and sudden, there I heard  
The song of every singing bird that sings beneath the sky.  
I heard the hymn of being sound  
From every well of honour found  
In human sense and soul  
I heard it all, each, every note  
Of everything that lives and loves  
And upward, ever upward moves  
From lowly to sublime!

Earth's multitudinous Sons of Light,  
I heard them lift their lyric might  
With each and every chanting sprite  
That lit the sky that wondrous night  
As far as eye could climb!

I heard it all, I heard the whole  
Harmonious hymn of being roll  
Up through the chapel of my soul and at the altar die.  
And in the awful quiet then I stood  
Without a wish, without a will  
And stared until my eyes were blind with stars  
And still I stood upon that silent hill until  
Myself I heard, Amen, Amen,  
Amen I heard me cry!

Lowering of the coffin to *You'll Never Walk Alone* by Louis Armstrong [from 3'50"] | [Louis Armstrong - Tenderly/You'll Never Walk Alone - YouTube](#)

Further links

memoirs of Peter McCausland Gibbs can be found here

[Diaries, Memoirs and Reminiscences – Gibbs Family Tree](#)

