



In celebration of
PETER CHARLES McCARTHY ROBINSON
9 November 1951 to 6 October 2004

Words and thoughts from the service held on
November 13th, 2004 at St. Peter's Church, Brighton, 3.00pm

The Rugby League Hymn

Abide With Me

Words: Henry F Lyte, 1847

Music: *Eventide*, William H Monk

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word;
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord,
Familiar, condescending, patient, free.
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings,
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea—
Come, Friend of sinners, and thus abide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile;
And, though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee,
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Family Memories Pete's Brother and Sisters

Catherine (Robinson) Macadam

Peter was first and foremost my brother. I didn't grow up thinking there was anything extraordinary about him. He was clever, witty, kind and loving. He was fun to have around, incredibly sociable, and as we got older the house always seemed to be buzzing with his many and varied friends.

I just thought all older brothers were like this.

Not surprisingly, my strongest memories are of childhood days and, as well as the holidays in Ireland, which are now too well publicised to need further comment, my most vivid memories are of schooldays. Peter was doing A-levels at West Park, St. Helens when I began at the sister school of Notre Dame. Even in those days travel with Peter was a bit of an adventure – nothing so mundane as travel on the school bus for us. My memory is of setting off with Peter for the bus stop but inevitably missing the bus and hitching the 8 miles to St. Helens. I soon realised from the way Peter was greeted by various regulars that this was his preferred mode of transport – and we could of course pocket the bus fare – Peter was never one for throwing money away.

Even in my school it was soon obvious that he was just a bit special – older girls kept appearing in our classroom at lunchtime trying to find out which one of us was Peter Robinson's sister.

I don't think at that stage it was his literary abilities which was the attraction though.

He awakened my literary sensibilities shortly after this when he asked me to copy up some notes on *Madame Bovary*. There was a word I didn't understand and went to ask mum why the word "where" was spelt with an o –there was a great fuss and he had to copy his own notes after that. It did give *Madame B* a certain attraction though and I still have the copy he gave me for Christmas 1971 with his inscription "one of Europe's greatest novels which even school couldn't destroy".

Most of all Peter was a very kind brother – he was never ashamed to have me hanging around his mates in the evening of that first term at grammar school waiting for the bus home – we'd go and buy cream buns in Helena House and – believe it or not - he would always pay for mine!

He invited me to Leicester when he was at university there and I was a mere 14 year old. We made pancakes in Stamford Hall – about 20 of us packed into the tiny kitchen at the end of the corridor – and then went for a curry. It seemed wildly exciting and ensured I worked hard for the next 4 years so I too could benefit from such an academic education.

When he was on his first trip around the States he phoned home on the day of my A-level results to see how I'd done, and then in my first few weeks at uni he came to see me to persuade me that being homesick was all part of the experience.

I'm incredibly proud of Peter's success and the fact that he enriched so many people's lives, and it gives me a real thrill when I see someone clutching a copy of *McCarthy's Bar*, but most of all he was a kind and loving brother and went on to be a kind and loving father to Alice, Bella and Coral.

Patricia (Robinson) Bartlett

Like Catherine I have wonderful memories of growing up together.

I have no embarrassment in saying Peter was and will always be someone so special in my heart that I know my words will never do justice to the depth of my love for him.

I don't recall one moment spent in his company that wasn't exceptional. Maybe like the long hot summers in Ireland, that's statistically impossible – but that's the way I remember it. He made me feel so special – how many 19-year-old brothers want their kid sisters to join in their fun at university? With hindsight I'm amazed we were ever allowed to go down to Leicester, at such a tender age – but we did and were introduced to another world that we embraced wholeheartedly.

I remember his 21st party at the house in Lower Hastings Street – Catherine and I shared a large bed with the wonderful McConnell sisters – and they shared their fur coats as we tried to keep warm and get a few hours sleep after the partying had stopped.

We all knew Peter was exceptionally bright despite his first school report from the Brothers, which he described in *McCarthy's Bar*: “ Peter is an unpleasant and frivolous boy who talks too much and will never make anything of himself, but he does take a punch well” Possibly a hint of poetic licence. However, Sister Benedict at his primary school, the one that later become a pub, recognised his talent for writing at a very early age, when she said in a school report “ Peter has a very fluent pen”

Years later Mum and Dad were to get the school report to top all others. They received a letter from Professor Collins, Head of the English Faculty at Leicester University.

He said he'd felt compelled to write to them to let them know how exceptional a student Peter was. Not enough that he had achieved a first class honours degree – but that his marks were so ahead of anyone else's they did a recount! He'd observed that Peter knew when to work and when to play – and he did both supremely well.

In fact he seemed to have achieved the perfect symbiosis in his life – in his acknowledgements at the end of *McCarthy's Bar*, Peter “thanked his family for their support and for keeping straight faces whenever he referred to wandering round the mountains and bars of the west of Ireland as going to work. No job was ever this much fun”.

How we missed him when he embarked on his year travelling after university. I have a vivid image of the night he returned from his year in the US and Mexico. He was tanned, bearded, so handsome, dressed from head to toe in white cheesecloth – I remember him saying I had changed from a little girl into a young woman while he was away. And he had changed too. His experiences that year travelling coloured the rest of his life

In the summer of 1975 when we had finished our 'A' Levels, my friend Susan and I went to stay in his house, River Hundred, in Suffolk. By day we borrowed a tandem and cycled along the lanes with their distinctive high hedgerows, and ate the best fish and chips I can ever remember on the beach at Aldeburgh, and at night we went to exotic parties with my big brother.

So many of my memories exalt his love of people, which is so central to who he was. As a family we have shared the joy of his friendships – Mum and Dad have loved filling their house with his friends, whether Cliffhanger on tour in need of a bed or floor for the night, or Tommy Harris needing a couple of pints of Dad's home brew, lethal, by the way, when mixed with Newcastle Brown.

The last eight months have been unbearably hard for everyone who loved Peter – and as I cope with my own grief my thoughts turn constantly to the intensity of loss for Irene, Alice, Bella and Coral.

Peter embraced parenthood a little later in life than many – but embrace it he did. Peter's love for his daughters was central to his very being. Peter wrote: "parenthood opens up a part of us men that we never knew existed." It was a magical experience for him.

I hope as the girls grow up they will find comfort in the knowledge, as is so evident today, of how special he was and that he was loved and respected by so many people whose lives he had touched.

Life will never be the same without Peter but I will try to take his advice from *McCarthy's Bar*; during his sojourn at St Peter's Purgatory on Station Island, Peter snuggled down in bed to read a book when the lights suddenly went out.

He writes:

"I suppose there is a lesson here for me. Where's the incentive to be frugal with life's pleasures, to save up the pages in your favourite book for later, if your going to be lunged into the darkened abyss at some arbitrary hour? If life is a book, then read it while you can. Don't save up any pages for later, because there might not be one"

Paul Robinson

Because of our age differences, my childhood memories of growing up with Peter are different to my sisters'. I grew up in awe of Peter. Not due to his performances or writing, although that did come later, but simply because he was my big brother.

The age difference that separated us meant that by the time he left home to go to university, I was only just starting my first full year at infant school. Apart from some vague recollections of him doing his homework at the kitchen table, I can't really remember that much.

What I do remember, and what initiated those awe-inspiring moments, were his returns home, particularly the ones at the Christmas, Easter and summer holidays.

Christmases were my favourite. He was always late arriving; the presents he had bought us were never wrapped. He'd cook some weird foreign food we'd never heard of in Warrington in the early 1970s, like spaghetti Bolognese. His friends would visit and play football or rugby with me and I loved every minute of it, not wishing those moments to end. They did of course, but a few weeks or months later it would all happen again.

The night he came back from his year in the States was the most exciting of all, after so much time away, yet so many wonderful letters vividly describing to us these amazing adventures.

I listened to his stories for days afterwards. Not wanting to be outdone, I pointed out to him that was all well and good, but while he was away our team, Warrington, had got to the final of the Rugby League Challenge Cup for the first time in 20 years. We'd all gone down to Wembley for the match and he'd missed it!

For the sake of a couple of still sensitive Yorkshiremen here today I won't dwell on the 26-9 defeat of Featherstone Rovers in any detail. I think Peter has had many an argument with Mrs McNicholas about that one already.

Fortunately for Peter, history repeated itself the following year, and then again in 1990 when we managed to go to both games together. He would have enjoyed today's hymn, 'Abide With Me' as for us it always signified a great occasion, although he would have expected a decent match to follow.

Once I grew up a bit, and got into music and drinking, our relationship was able to get onto a new level and we discovered many areas of common interest, including but not limited to the odd pint of Guinness.

The month spent driving and generally helping out Cliffhanger at the Edinburgh festival in 1981 was really something else and made up for all those occasions when I would be dumped out of my bed to make way for them each time they came through the North on tour. For me it was a four-week party that left me a stone and a half lighter and with a life-long allergy to Carlsberg Special Brew. It also gave me a profound insight into Peter at work, the incredible effort and total dedication he always put into his work, wherever he was and whatever he was doing... a behaviour which stayed with him always and clearly contributed to his success and for which our mum and dad, both here today, must take the credit their modesty has never allowed them to.

These are my early memories, the occasions that so colourfully lit up my life as a child and young adult and led to the lovely, warm and strong relationship we continued to enjoy up until his sad death.

We reminisced often about these and other happy memories during his illness, particularly during the hospital visits when despite everything he never lost that distinctive sense of humour that was such a part of the man he was.

I suppose it's a throwback to my early experiences of growing up and only seeing Peter in quick bursts that I always missed being with him, but I prefer to see it as making those times we were together, of which there were many, that bit more exciting and memorable.

He was my big brother and I loved him dearly. I will miss him terribly, but will cherish those memories for the rest of my life.

A Song: We Bid You Good Night

Andy Roberts

(Chorus)

Lay down, dear brother, lay down and take your rest
I want to lay your head upon your Saviour's breast
For we love you so, but Jesus loves you the best
And we bid you good night, good night,
We bid you good night

A Poem: November the Fifth

Roger McGough

As I write this, a bonfire is being lit in the garden next door,
while above, planes filled with strangers I will never meet,
are flying to places I will never visit. Tonight is Guy Fawkes night,
and rockets fail in glorious technicolour on their journey to the moon.
Pete, you can understand this, I am wearied of writing eulogies
for friends who have gone too soon.

News of a sudden death pulls the earth from under our feet.
Unprepared, we are crushed and bewildered.
But when dying is a slow and painful inevitability
we look on helplessly and hope for miracles.
We either choke on prayer, or else we rage
and refuse to imagine a future without you there.

But the fireworks you set off will continue to dazzle
and spark off memories, for we have your books.
We'll tell jokes, swap stories, we the regulars at McCarthy's Bar.
We'll laugh and we'll cry and we'll do our best
to drink the place dry, until somebody calls last orders,
and we stumble out to free-fall into the darkness

Pete, I am wearied of writing eulogies,
and this is one I thought I'd never have to write. It's so unfair.
Midnight now, and still the smell of sulphur in the air.
The bonfire has been put out, and for a few hours at least,
the sky, free of planes can settle down for the night.
Cheers mate, and God Bless.

A Song (Untitled)

Paul Buckley

Thoughts and readings

Father Michael McCarthy

As a place of pilgrimage, Lough Derg is on the Richter scale end of medieval penitential practises. It's not an experience I would aspire to myself. Why Pete chose it is always a puzzle to me. It was of course, a puzzle to him as well.

"Whatever the forces that led me there – and I couldn't identify them myself...

I'm glad I went to Lough Derg. Apart from being a bizarre and vivid experience

that I'll remember all my life, it changed things in ways I'm still trying to define...

I began to feel I was coming to understand, however incomplete, my relationship with this country...

the physical and spiritual drubbing... seems to be leading to a clarity and sense of purpose that wasn't there before. The fact that I didn't share most of their beliefs... was of surprisingly little consequence. I'm reminded of a line from Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I first read it when I was fifteen and have remembered it ever since.

'It is a curious thing, do you know,' Cranly said dispassionately, 'how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve. Did you believe it when you were at school? I bet you did.'

So, whatever was at the source of his search for meaning,
whatever he believed in at the core of his being,
whatever it was that caused his eyes to light up,
whatever brought a lump to his throat,
whatever he drew sustenance from,
whatever the loves of his life were,
whatever he used for prayer,
we celebrate them all here.

Their complexity, their subtlety, their wit.

We honour the many strands of his life, who he was, and those he loved.

I take one of those strands: his love of, and gift for language.

Ecclesiastes 1:4-9.

*A generation goes, a generation comes,
yet the earth stands firm forever.*

*The sun rises, the sun sets;
then to its place it speeds
and there it rises.*

*Southward goes the wind,
then turns to the north;
it turns and turns again;
back then to its circling goes the wind.*

*Into the sea all the rivers go,
and yet the sea is never filled,
and still to their goal the rivers go.*

*What was will be again;
what has been done
will be done again,
and there is nothing new under the sun.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

*For everything there is a season, and a time
for every purpose under heaven:*

*a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up
what is planted;*

*a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

*a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time
to gather stones together;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain
from embracing;*

*a time to seek and a time to loose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;*

*a time to keep silent, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Music: My Logan Love (Traditional)

Nick Pynn

A Eulogy

Richard Lightbody

You are just about to find out why Pete stood in front of the camera, and so many of us here today could only stand behind it. It's just over ten years since Pete stood up at the funeral of the lovely Pete Brown and delivered a masterful farewell eulogy. There seemed something indestructible about Pete, so much so, that like many of you, I always imaged him doing something similar for one of us.

Deep within me, mixed up with prayers that it would all come good, I started to write something in my head the day Pete told me he was ill. The 'phone call was an outstanding performance of bravery from a man who in his life never had just a chill, since he had a cold, who never had just a cold since he had the flu, who never had the flu because it had to be bronchial pneumonia.

At times Pete could be, to use his own words, a tad self-centred, but on that first day of March he seemed more concerned about how I'd take the news "that we won't be spending our 70th birthdays together in one of his favourite bars, the Toucan," than his own desperate situation.

Now just eight months on I'm still, as we probably all are, stammering to write something worthy of an incredibly warm and funny man.

I'm still trying to nail down the exacting moment when a professional relationship became a deep friendship. It was sometime very shortly after we met in 1992.

On first meeting Pete could disarm and then charm within the length it took a pint of Guinness to settle. He was often gregarious, but never overbearing; often irksome but never exasperating; often quiet but never switched-off. His mind was shark-like, always needing to move, constantly observing, remembering phrases and tales which, with supreme craftsmanship, he'd turn, at some point, into a comic performance or delightful page of prose. It was awe-inspiring his memory for detail – perhaps the skill amongst many that made him such a good storyteller.

He was a Luddite with everything, except everybody else's mobile phone and the steam iron. It will linger long, the image of him on his knees in a shabby Parisian hotel, the crew downstairs anxious to get to the location, but Pete equally anxious to be perfect in sound and vision. So on a tatty smelly nylon based-carpet "the star of the show" put a crease in his shirt that could have cut through butter. Eventually we arrived at the location, the famous Crazy Horse Saloon – and I don't think Pete ever realised that the punters were not there to look at someone focused on putting clothes on.

Generous of spirit, we oft teased him about his fiscal elegance, but we were never able to change him and that's why we miss him so much today. It's unlikely ever to come up in Trivial Pursuit, but should it do so here is the answer – On the day of Pete's funeral due to circumstances I found myself in Iford's beautiful little church yard alone - alone that is except for a half bottle of Jim Beam and the gravedigger. So much seemed wrong and so much right, but standing in the grave he put down the shovel and we toasted Pete. So when the question comes up the answer is the last person to have a drink on Pete was Derek the gravedigger. It was a unique moment. Unique is a much over-used word, but fitting for that he was, and delightfully so.

On the subject of drink, and money, he once fought for six months with a resort hotel in the Bahamas, which had after his departure, charged his credit card with something approaching five dollars for a chunk of chocolate and a non-alcoholic lager from the minibar. In admiration one night Pete appeared at dinner to tell us about the Hershey bar which had been half consumed by a previous occupant and carefully re-wrapped and placed back in the fridge, there was a twinkle in his eye, confectionery in minibars the world over would no longer be safe – the non-alcoholic lager was another matter. This went beyond even the five dollars; it was a question of principle.

"No court in the land could convict me," he said. "How dare they, I've never had a non-alcoholic beer in my life."

After months of trans-Atlantic phone calls, the five dollars was eventually, triumphantly, restored to his account.

In the 20+ films we made for *Travelog* I don't recall him ever being more uncomfortable with his surroundings than at that resort. Pete was anything but packaged; he was the completely independent individual.

He once thanked me for teaching him to travel and for giving him the key to the best job in the world, that's not true many here today were such a vital part of his complex makeup, but it was Jenny Duff who showed him the door – I was just the lucky one to be behind it – lucky through happy circumstance to be teamed up with a truly great traveller and a talented writer.

We experienced magical moments all over the world; we slept in a single police cell in New Zealand because there was no room at the inn, we got caught up in a coup on the remote Pacific island of Tanna where later we found a tribe in the jungle who worshiped the Duke of Edinburgh as a God. That day Pete was at his supreme best, it would have been so easy to take 'the mickey' – but purveyor of the cheap joke he was not.

With *Travelog* he toured the world, with *Desperately Seeking*, he toured our minds – it didn't matter where you ended up, with Pete it was always special, or just it seemed so. We've all had Pete moments, some exotic, some plain wonderful madness and that's why we are here today.

His timing was superb, except on this occasion. It's still very hard to say, but Pete's no longer with us - however he'll never leave us. We see him in Alice,

Bella and Coral - perhaps there's a great writer or comic lurking there, Irene will recognise that first magical moment.

It's fair to say Pete had a certain dress sense, one that allowed him to rummage in the most improbable corners of the most unlikely stores and come up with something that would suit no one on earth, no one that is except Pete.

As a shopper he was world-class, especially if he could wear the purchase for one brief second on camera, claim it on the budget and then wear it forever. The lumber jacket he wore on the cover of *The Road to McCarthy* was bought in Willeys General Store in Vermont. The picture is a composite, created in an artist's computer, but the smile on Pete's face is perfectly him. You just know that after the click of the shutter, some cracking one-liner would have been delivered.

His humour also always came at you from different and unsuspecting angles. My in-laws are Danish and after a particularly protracted period of visits to our small house in west London, Pete 'phoned for a chat and to organise getting together for a pint. I explained the domestic situation that Britt had taken her brother and his girlfriend to the airport. There was a pause, and then he whispered down the phone, "now you can start putting the tops back on the sandwiches".

The observation and obliqueness of the remark were supremely McCarthy-esque. We all have a Pete one-liner in our heads that's especially precious since it never tasted a microphone or touched paper. It was a personal moment shared with a genuinely witty man.

I count myself beyond good fortune to have shared a thousand quips in a hundred bars in twenty or so countries. We who knew him are lucky to have been in at the moment of conception of a joke or thought process that would forever be held in the libraries of not just the UK and Ireland, but also in the States, Australia, France, Germany, Holland and most recently Hungary.

He died not knowing that there would be outbursts of spontaneous laughter on the trams of Budapest for the next ten years or so.

The sad fact that time only allowed him to write two books makes every phrase on every page all the more valuable. The happy fact is that we can read those books a hundred times and still enjoy the slickness of phrase, the wit, the sniper accuracy of observation.

The legacy is that we know that in the future when we want cheering up, at random we can read a paragraph and we'll be together again on some hapless journey.

When I saw him for the last time, in bed in a Brighton hospital, we knew it was goodbye. I told him not to go on any recce without me. He gave me a weak smile, except that it wasn't weak, it was pure Pete. That little twitch of the mouth, typical Pete not giving too much away, the showman who liked to remain deeply private. Now, and not for the first time, he's done his own independent thing. I know we'll meet again and he'll have a reservoir of new tales as well as a fist full of receipts.

He'll also have that wry smile.

And that's it, the pain will fade, the sorrow will linger, but the laughter will endure. Please take a quiet second or two to recall a personal favourite moment and then share it, share the joke, share the laugh – because Pete would have liked that.

Richard Lightbody
November 13, 2004

A Silence

Music: Carrickfergus

The Earl's Clan Reel
Nick Pynn

Readings from Pete's Work

Pete Howells

Lord of All Hopefulness

Words: Jan Struther, 20th Century

Music: Slane, Irish Ballad Melody

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

A Blessing

Father Colin

Music on Leaving: Widor's Toccata from The Organ Symphony

Organist: John Hunt

Bell Ringing

St Peter's Bellringers:

David House (conductor)

Caroline House

Marion Huang

Hazel Platzer

Gavin Bennett

Luke Perkins

and friends

