

PETER HUGHES DETAILS.

D.O.B: 18 July 1938

Place: Stockwell – London

Education: Various Primary & Prep schools till 1952

Framlingham 1952 – 1956

(Apprenticed to Boots Southport 1956 - 1958)

Southport Technical College – A Levels. 1959

Liverpool College of Technology 60 – 62. Pharmacy degree

Employment.

Initially worked as a Pharmacist for Boots but then Manager for village Chemist in Surrey.

Became involved with SE Chemists Assoc and also

SE London Pharmacists Society as Secretary.

Australia

Emigrated in March 1968

Initially worked as a Locum Pharmacist in Forbes in Central New South Wales – from which experience he had a fund of hilarious anecdotes relating to his attempts to conquer the local parlance from the beer size (middy, schooner etc), type (old ale, new ale - lager usually) to the common names of various medical ailments besetting the inhabitants and their animals. 'The Squits' instantly springs to mind but there were many. Local common greetings also had Peter mightily baffled. 'You right, Mate?' upon entering a shop or place of business (to which he was reported to have replied, yes, thank you very much, imagining they were asking him how he was), 'Big yaws' ('beg yours' for *I beg your pardon*) which is what Peter heard when someone asked him to repeat what he'd said (of course, his accent and 'New Pom' way of speaking must have had many of the locals baffled too! He did say that the 'yaws' had him worried initially as he was aware it was a serious medical complaint. Now, I'm not sure if that was an embellishment for the interests of a good tale, but his story was so funny, it really didn't matter!

You need to understand that Peter had an amazing ability to reproduce accents and he did just that – at every opportunity all accompanied with the appropriate facial and physical expression and body movement – think Indian with the sideways head wobble for example.

In 1970 Peter successfully applied for a pharmaceutical position at the Darwin Hospital and travelled up by train, the old Ghan, with his car somewhere at the back. He loved the trip but was puzzled when he was requested to leave the train at Alice Springs. It transpired that the Alice hospital was seriously short of a pharmacist and had decided to 'kidnap' the Pom on his way up north. To Peter it was just another adventure and so he acquiesced gracefully, drove into town and never did make it to Darwin – I'm not sure he would have stayed long up north as, for the 33 years I've known him, he's intensely disliked humid weather. Cairns has been a bit of a challenge weather-wise at times, but it pales against Darwin's crippling humidity.

Alice Springs Hospital proved to be a fascinating workplace with a full social life thrown in. Which is how he came to meet his first wife Kate O'Neill, a physiotherapist from Adelaide and it appears they fell in love and married shortly after on 29 December 1971. First son David born 1 March 1973, followed by Rory a few years later on 4 April 1977. Kate took up a very lucrative private physiotherapy practice when the boys came along and Peter moved on from Pharmacy to Health Education, then became involved with Community groups relating to Aboriginal Health, Drug and Alcohol Education and eventually joined the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation, Ethnic Affairs and the Arts! Public Service and Peter... bit of an odd fit really as although he had all the bureaucratic language, he was too bright to be a paper shuffler. Eventually, he and the Public Service parted company and Peter did a pharmacy refresher course which provided him with a reasonable living until he retired at age 75 or thereabouts. He quite enjoyed most aspects of his work and happily kept answering the call to service while he was able. Peter was popular with the customers as he always found the time to discuss their queries and ailments.

The Labor Party has been one of Peter's most rewarding pursuits since the early Alice Springs days. He was a great admirer of their Socialist policies and stood as a local member at one election in the early 80's but though unsuccessful, he turned his talents to becoming a tireless worker and an able and ardent supporter of the Party in all the many roles politics provided both in the Northern Territory and here in Queensland. His keen strategising, across the board knowledge of current affairs and astute reasoning made him a valuable and sought after member. His work and dedication was publicly acknowledged when the State Premier invited him to a recognition ceremony to award him Life Membership which, unfortunately due to failing health, he was unable to attend.

Peter had a passion for the theatre and his theatrical career started while in Alice Springs where the local theatre, The Totem Theatre - was of the progressive and 'go ahead' variety – just what Peter liked! Totem Theatre had taken over an old wartime 'Sydney Williams' corrugated iron shed, which had previously served as the officers mess during WW2. The original one lane bitumen highway to Darwin – The Stuart Highway – was constructed for the Coral Sea Campaign and the base camp was on the Alice Springs Anzac Oval which is where the Darwin Army was encamped. (This information provided by Peter). Anyway, the theatre seated, and still does, an audience of 120 and supposedly had/has a female ghost garbed in white.

He had many roles, many of them leading roles and also a one-hander by Jack Hibberd called 'Stretch of the Imagination'. Max Gillies is the most famous actor to play the role of *Monk O'Neill*, the old and crazy character the play is about but Peter carried the demanding and verbose role very convincingly! He also had main roles in plays by Bertold Brecht, Anton Chekhov, Lois Nowra and Steele Rudd and many more. He had a role in the filming of 'Evil Angels' and took the part of the Ayres Rock Park Ranger, but because he was embroiled in legal matters pertaining to Azaria Chamberlain's search, the part was dropped from the film before release. Peter still got paid – handsomely as it turned out and he also got to hand out coffee and doughnuts to the other cast members with Meryl Streep and Sam Neill.

The Cairns Little Theatre or The Rondo has been Peter's second home during most of the twenty two years he has been in Cairns. He made many appearances in all types of productions – except musicals as he claimed he couldn't sing – though he's been heard to have a fine baritone while in the shower. Peter's penultimate role was as an old sleazy and lecherous retired opera singer called Wilf in the play *The Quartet*. The film of the play featured Billy Connolly playing Wilf, though Peter never watched the movie wanting instead to give the character his own stamp. He succeeded brilliantly by all accounts. Peter's last performance was playing the doctor in 'One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest' and his was the only sane part in the entire play. Very well received by the audience, it was a rewarding end to a lifetime of treading the boards.

Janet and Peter met and fell in love while doing a satirical show at the Casino in Alice Springs in 1984 called 'The Blather and Skite Show'. Janet's first memory of Peter is him sitting with the other actor rehearsing a funny sketch called 'Trouble at Mill' set in Manchester, with the worker's broad vowels and coarse speech as opposed to the plum voiced Boss. She couldn't stand up for laughing.