

Dr. Peter Mott

My dad, Dr. Peter Mott, died at home in Rochester, New York, on Wednesday night, with my mom, brothers Jim and Bill, and Vlatka and me by his side. He was 86. My sister Emily, who lives with her family in the UK, was in touch throughout the day and during the many days before. Vlatka and I drove back to DC from Rochester Thursday so that I could comfort my boys, and they me, and we'll return next week.

My dad's death is a great loss that leaves us missing him deeply, but not because this was unexpected. He had been fading for several years, the result of the disease Parkinsonism, which gradually took his mobility (he had been an excellent athlete—a runner, rower, paddler, tennis player, and skier) and slowed him cognitively, but never diminished his ability to show his love and appreciation for his life, family, and friends—which he did repeatedly, right to the end—and never tempering his lifelong fight for social change and social justice. My dad was a wonderful person—kind, gentle, and strong—who touched countless family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, fellow activists, and strangers with his optimism, determination, and goodness.

The son of a doctor, my dad followed his father into medicine and public health. (My grandfather, Frederick Mott, championed universal health care, worked with and for the United Mine Workers and United Auto Workers, established a network of hospitals for miners in Appalachia, and set up the first provincial universal health care system in Canada, in Saskatchewan, where my dad attended High School). My dad himself left the private practice of medicine after the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, to run health centers in the poorest sections of Baltimore and Tucson before moving to the Rochester area to direct the Regional Medical Program, where he established and arranged funding and staffing of clinics and insured proper medical care for residents of a seven-county region of Western New York which suffers from extreme rural and urban poverty.

All through this period, my dad dedicated the bulk of his free time, usually alongside my mother, to the Sanctuary Movement, immigrant rights, the Alliance for Democracy and other national issues and, on a local level, to the fight against poverty in the city of Rochester and the region. He wrote dozens of letters to the editor, right up to his mid-80's, each shared with his proud children and grandchildren. For decades (before the internet age), my parents published "Interconnect"—a quarterly dedicated to connecting for common cause hundreds of organizations/non-profits working on issues impacting the Latino community in the United States and in Latin America—to greater impact needed social change and to attempt to push our country away from its traditional role south of the border to one that values justice, democracy, and human rights. It is a testament to my dad's unfailing and contagious optimism and dedication that he maintained this work and vision until the end.

At age 60, my dad retired from medicine (although not from his lifelong crusade for universal health care), to work full-time for social and political change. At age 66, nine months after open heart surgery, he and my mom flew into Chiapas, in the southern Mexican jungle, as international observers to help protect a Mayan village surrounded by Mexican army paratroopers and threatened with destruction. (Many discussions with concerned family members preceded this journey on which they insisted on going). At age 69, my dad helped organize and

load vans with 500 tons of medical supplies for the neediest citizens of Cuba and traveled with the caravan across the border to Canada and on to Cuba. Fourteen years ago, at age 72, he wrote a book, *Cancer in the Body Politic: Diagnosis and Prescription for an America in Decline*, in which he clinically diagnosed the various ills affecting our society and outlined the prescription for their cure. We could pick out dozens of similar efforts and missions, large and small, which he embraced, championed, and led.

Throughout, my dad stood determined but selfless. On one occasion when I was a young teen and we were talking about one of the areas of his focus, he told me something that has stuck with me: it does not matter in the least who gets credit for important work that helps others, as long as the job gets done. It's not easy to live up to this credo. My father always did. A few days before his death, after smiling when I told him I was there, a smile and look of contentment that deepened as I named each of his children and grandchildren and told him that we were each sending all our love, my dad said suddenly, "we're making great progress!" Not certain, of course, which of the many individual, local, national, or international causes to which he was referring, I simply responded "you're absolutely right, Pops, and we are going to get it done!" He smiled broadly, firmly held my hand, and fell back asleep.

My parents marriage of 65 years was a true love story, from their romance and wedding at ages 21 and 22 all the way into his later years, during which our dad moved through phases of diminished health, right until his death. At each step along the way, we witnessed only love, respect, and patience. Two people could not have been more tender.

Family was the very center of my dad's life, and how he loved his children and grandchildren! Growing up, my dad was always there to support us, but he never tried to direct or manage. He and my mom came to every meet, race, game, show and exhibit. They reveled in our successes and suffered through our disappointments, just as they have with their six lovely grandchildren. (In his later years, my dad had no greater pleasure than spending time with, hearing stories about, seeing pictures of, and hearing recordings by his grandchildren). Throughout, they left us independent to make our own choices and take our own paths. This is the family in which we grew up as children and adults, and each of us—from my mom to the kids and the grandchildren—knows how extraordinarily fortunate we are.

My dad did step in once that I recall, and I'm glad he did. We moved to the Rochester area at a tough time for me: the beginning of 8th grade when I was a tall and gangly new kid with glasses, lacking confidence. I was bullied mercilessly by two boys at school for months as others looked on, and I became lonelier and more depressed. I tried to "turn the other cheek", disregard them, and endure, but it was all too much. My dad stepped in. To my surprise, this most mild mannered of men told me that it was time to fight back and to "do what you have to do!" Quite pleased that he had sanctioned this form of response, and trusting him completely, I didn't wait. The next day, I fought the bigger of the bullies to a bloody standstill on the playground before being hauled off to the Principal's office. Later that day, I punched the other kid into a locker on the way to the bus. They never bothered me again. Life improved. My dad was delighted then, and he grinned and chuckled about the story when I shared it again a couple weeks ago—quite pleased with the memory and the result! So our quiet, strong, warm, and gentle father and grandfather had a practical side as well.

Throughout his illness and throughout his life, I never heard my dad complain—not once—except about injustice. He focused on others and on the good around him. He was a spiritual man, but not in any traditional sense. His outlook blended Buddhism and Liberation Theology along with certain home-grown elements. Good natured, with a great sense of humor and perspective, he found beauty and purpose in the garden, the outdoors (especially the lakes and woods of the Laurentians), and his connection with others. We watched as he pushed aside decades of bureaucratic and administrative stresses and found peace in living in the moment, which he did with calm and grace and beauty. My dad cared deeply. He showed his love and appreciation. In fact, in the week or so before his death, during which he slept most of the day and rarely spoke, my dad summoned the strength to call and talk with each of his children (my brothers Bill and Jim and sister Emily), and my boys, Luke and Sam, and other family members, to let each one of us know that he loved us and was proud of us and to say goodbye, while each of us was able to say the same to him. Those words could not be more true. We could not have loved a person more than our dad and grandfather, Dr. Peter Mott. We could not be more proud.

