

The Legacy of Chester Peterson

By John K. Haws Jr.

Recently I typed up the biographical sketch of Chester Peterson. I never knew the man. He died long before I was born. He was an ordinary man. He worked by his hands on the farms and in the carpenter shops of Lehi. He worked by the sweat of his brow and the strength of his hands. He died at the young age of 45 in 1948. I looked hard at his picture and the characteristics of his face and chin. I look at him and feel like I know that man.

My best friend growing up was Kevin Peterson. We were inseparable mostly because of my efforts. Kevin was shy and I was more outward and aggressive. His brother Jeff, Kevin, Woody Berry were inseparable growing up and would play together. I would rise with the sun and would hurry to get my jobs done. I wanted to play with Kevin and Jeff so I was very motivated to get it done and get out to play.

The problem with that was that Kevin and Jeff were not early risers. Their dad would have plenty of work for them to do, and I would have to help them for many hours. I loved being with them, playing with them, and doing their gardening. I would usually have to get them out of bed to get going. Most family members would call me Johnny Peterson.

Kevin's dad Ron Peterson was Chester Peterson's son. He had a terrible case of Rheumatoid Arthritis and was confined to a wheelchair. His hands were gnarled with the disease and he found it hard to hold a shovel or rake and had to do any work he did from the confines of the wheelchair. He lived in a two story house and would come down the stairs with the use of crutches at personal danger and pain. This man was my hero.

He had a large garden spot in his backyard, but small for the amount of produce he obtained from this garden spot. He had an irrigation ditch that went

through his backyard and he watered from that ditch. When it was his turn to water, he would dam the ditch at specially prepared places with wood he had cut for just the right size. Along the ditch, connecting to the rows of garden, were spots where the water would go through to each row of garden. These would be controlled by a 4-6 inch piece of 2"x4" piece of wood which would be lifted to control how much water came to each row. It was a process on watering day to control the flow correctly so that each spot of the garden would get the correct amount of water on the short watering term that Ron had. It was a process and Ron was always barking out orders.

From that small garden spot would come potatoes to feed their family for the year. There would be carrots, turnips, parsnips, and other tuber vegetables that were put in a pit under their house to preserve for the winter. They would fill their jars with all kinds of beans, pickles, corn and tomatoes to use to feed the family. They all kinds of fruit trees to feed the family.

With crippled hands and unbelievable pain, Ron was a jeweler. I remember Kevin and I on our way home from school (Lehi Elementary) would stop at the E.N. Webb shop and see him working. Ron also had a shop in his house where he would work on fixing watches, clocks and repairing jewelry. These are very tedious parts. He would wear a magnifying eye on his head to be able to see the minute parts. He had specially designed tools so his hands could hold and control the parts. I would sit there unnoticed for the longest time as he worked on the minute parts. It would amaze me.

This amazing man did not let anything stop him from doing the things he would love. He took his boys hunting. He would stay with the vehicle and take them to areas he knew and the boys would leave the vehicle and go off to look for that perfect deer. Many times they would come home with a prized kill for their winter meat.

Ron was in a bishopric and financial clerk for many years. He always did his religious duties.

I caught my first fish-a catfish on the Jordan River, with Ron. I was so thrilled to finally get my on my hook. Most times I would go and watch the others fish. On Sunday afternoons, Ron would take us on a drive in his SUV. Some days we would go and follow the Jordan River, or the shore of Utah Lake to Genoa, or American Fork Canyon. The afternoon would end with a visit to some family member. I was always with them so I always addressed them as Uncle and Aunt like Kevin and Jeff did. All of them would call me Johnny Peterson.

As soon as March came, Ron would set up 2-two by fours into the ground that had been drilled to fit nails forming the basis for pole jumping. He had a bamboo pole that would fit across the poles. We would practice and jump onto the hard ground. We never had a mattress or a mat to break the fall. We just jumped. Kevin learned the correct process of jumping over the bar. I could never do it the correct way but I did sort of what they called a scissor jump over the bar. I tried to keep up but I did not have the natural ability of the Petersons.

When I was twelve years of age, I got a newspaper route. I would hurry and do the route so I could go and play basketball and whatever other sport that the Petersons would be doing. I could never excel, but went out and played both winter and summer shooting balls with Kevin and Jeff. Kevin was more diligent than any other person I have ever seen at practicing.

My friend Kevin is the spitting image of Chester Peterson. I look at his pictures and I see Kevin through and through. Chester was a farmer and his son Ron was too. Ron never complained but just kept going and doing the things his father had taught his to do.

Ron's brother Arthur Peterson was janitor of the Lehi High School. Chester had taught him to take care of what you have and he did that for the taxpayers of Lehi. When American Fork High School looked like nobody cared, Lehi High School looked like it was new. When I went to the High School he always called me Johnny Peterson and I always called him Uncle Art. Oh how I love that man.

When Kevin and I were in Kindergarten and first grade they were having the cold war drills. We would have to hurry home from the Lehi Elementary and then have our parents call the school and tell them we made it home. We would practice getting under our desk in case of attack and we would buy war bonds as they were offered.

Uncle Art was in the military. One drill when we had to rush home, Kevin and I went right to their basement. I remember Kevin and I kneeling down and saying a prayer to bless Uncle Art in the military and to bring him home safely. This moment had special meaning in my life. I can tell you this day that special feelings came over me. Uncle Art is still alive today.

Laurel Berry, daughter of Chester, lived right down the street from us. At this time, she only had the two girls-Leslie and Collette and later Rialeen. They were the most beautiful ladies you had ever seen. The Neighborhood would have all kinds of activities. At the Berry home, we would play "No Bears are out tonight, Daddy killed them all last night. We would leave the porch singing that and then the Bear would come out from nowhere and get us. We would play idiover, comeback. We would yell this and throw a tennis or play ball over the roof, until the ball would finally go over the house. If they caught the ball, they they would come and try to get us before we could run to the back of the house. If not they would throw it over to us. These were fun times. These usually happened in the Summer right before the sun went down. The Berry front light brightened the whole yard and the games could continue after dark.

Aunt Laurel, as I call her to this day, always made us feel so loved and secure. One of the funnest things I remember was the plays that Leslie, Lolly (known today as Samantha), Peggy Wilson (Lewis) and Caroline Leany (Cooper) and others would put on plays. They would hang sheets on the clothes lines and make a stage. I would love these plays so much. I remember seeing Peter Pan and Cinderella and other Disney cartoons of the time. I wanted to be in them so much. I would never miss one of their plays and would appreciate the great moments. It

made me want to be in plays so much and I finally had that opportunity in High School.

Whenever I was having a hard time even to this day, Aunt Laurel would call me and give me some kind words and love. I will be ever grateful to Chester for giving me an Aunt Laurel.

Chester's other son was Valno Peterson. Valno was also a school janitor like his brother Art. He was the janitor at the Lehi Elementary. Valno's sons have always been very close to me. Steve, Mark, Phillip and Douglas were always friends. Phillip was the same age as I am in both school and our LDS ward. Dennis Sorenson lived next door and Kevin, Dennis and Phillip would play together quite regularly. I loved being in the Peterson home. We had sleepovers in a treehouse which was actually above the garage. It was such a neat place and we would have great times there together. Both Phil and I lost a son at about the same time and it has always been a tie to us.

Valno's daughter Susan babysat me regularly and I loved it when she would come. Valno and everyone of his children were good with their hands. Doug has been a contractor, Steve is an engineer. Mark was a star basketball player. Kevin and I would go to all of his games in High School. I was very sad when Valno died.

Lou Gene Kirkham was a favorite of mine. She lived with and took care of her mother and Chester's wife...Georgia Whitman. We would go over and visit them. They were both quite loud and boisterous. Sometimes I can remember being a little bit scared of Grandma Peterson. But Lou never scared me, she loved me and cared up until she died. I have loved all of her children-Peggy, Samantha (my dear friend), Danny, and Glade. All four of these have made a significant difference in my life and in the life of Lehi. They all still live here as do their children and grandchildren.

Chester was a cabinet maker by trade. He made many of the cabinets in the

old Lehi Tabernacle and in the Lehi Fifth Ward. As a young man, I would have lots of fun times hiding in the cabinets in the upper room of the old Lehi Fifth Ward. These cabinets were used for people to change clothes to perform Prayer Circles in the upper room of the Fifth Ward. I did not look at them as sacred, but a great place to hide when we wanted to get out of Roadshow practice with Tilly Zimmerman.

The legacy of his workmanship with wood has been torn down and no longer for people to view. But the legacy that one man has brought to this community is so massive and the influence on my life has been tremendous. Someday I look forward to meeting Chester and thanking him for what he brought into my life.

I look forward to be able to see my dear Ron able to run and do all the things he had such a struggle to do in this life. At the end of his life, he couldn't hold up his head from the effects of the disease. I am grateful for his example of his love for me even if I did not belong to the Peterson tree. I feel today like my name should be on their somewhere and hope that the Peterson crowd would be proud of me. Chester...your legacy lives on in Lehi.