

Peter D. Bell, 1940–2014

An Appreciation

(Prepared by Abraham F. Lowenthal at the request of the *LASA Forum*)

Peter Dexter Bell, an outstanding leader of foundations and civil society organizations, worked tirelessly to advance human rights, social justice, and humanitarianism throughout the world, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Peter's deep internationalism began when he visited Japan on an AFS high school exchange. His restless curiosity, shy charm, warm smile, infectious openness, and sincere caring were evident already in his youth and in his many roles thereafter: as a Ford Foundation officer in Brazil and Chile in the 1960s and '70s and later in New York; as Deputy Undersecretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Carter administration; as president of the Inter-American Foundation in the early 1980s; as president of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation; and as CEO of CARE USA, one of the world's largest private relief and development organizations.

In all these assignments, Peter demonstrated consummate administrative and programmatic leadership; broad vision, strategic instincts, and keen attention to detail; sensitive handling of personnel issues; calm and collected responses to crises; integrity, decency, and courtesy. He left a strong positive impact on each of the organizations he led and on numerous organizations where he served on or chaired governance boards, including the Inter-American Dialogue, the Bernard van Leer Group Foundation, Human Rights Watch, the Refugee Policy Group, the International Center for Research on Women, and the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS, among others. In all these organizations, Peter was a recognized leader in mobilizing energies to confront the most important issues.

A soft-spoken man with a tentative affect in speech, Peter was always persuasive when

he addressed a tough question. He was a wonderful promoter and steward of worthwhile institutions, deeply committed to the public good.

On occasion, Peter stepped back to reflect and write. At Harvard's Center for International Affairs, he wrote a pathbreaking essay, "The Ford Foundation as a Transnational Actor," published in *International Organization*. At the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, he wrote and spoke extensively in search of a just and peaceful resolution of Central America's civil conflicts, and published "Democracy and Double Standards: The View from Chile," a trenchant critique of Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick's defense of anticommunist authoritarian regimes. He published numerous columns on refugees, public health, education, human rights, and democracy.

Peter traveled the whole world constantly, but his first love and strongest connection was with Latin America, especially with the disadvantaged, the victims of human rights abuses, and the courageous social scientists and civil society activists striving to build democratic governance. In his years with the Ford Foundation, Peter took farsighted decisions, opposed at the time by local governments, U.S. government officials, and powerful private interests, but importantly supported by Foundation president McGeorge Bundy.

Peter was very much a man of Gloucester, Massachusetts, his birthplace, where his parents and siblings were pillars of the community, where he summered throughout his peripatetic career, and where he returned with his wife, Karen, to live for the past few years and to enjoy visits from their children and grandchildren. He loved the sea smells, neighborhoods, scenic vistas, and people of

Gloucester; the hardy resilience of its fishermen; the old Portuguese and new Brazilian influences; and the cultural institutions in which he and Karen became so involved.

I first connected with Peter 50 years ago when we were both newly minted MPAs starting our careers in the Ford Foundation's Latin America and Caribbean program. We stayed in touch from then on, meeting in Gloucester and Boston, then in South America, in Washington in the 1970s, and with increasing frequency over the next years. We worked together with Sol Linowitz to found the Inter-American Dialogue, coauthored its first reports, and continued to exchange ideas frequently until Peter's final months on how to strengthen the Dialogue and its impact. We undertook a Human Rights Watch mission to Chile in 1988 to monitor preparations for the historic plebiscite in which so many of our common friends were engaged, and we worked together on a variety of other issues.

Our own friendship was much more than professional. We became close, together with our wives, participating annually in an eclectic symposium of kindred spirits; taking a Mediterranean cruise; going to Fenway Park together once a year and often commiserating or rejoicing about the Red Sox; counseling each other at various of life's crossroads; commenting on each other's writings (he was a constructively critical editor); and caring about and sometimes advising each other's children. Peter was always thoughtful, insightful, considerate, scrupulous, and fair. I sought and took his advice, even when it wasn't what I wanted to hear. I will miss him greatly. So will the worlds of philanthropy and of Latin American studies and policy.

April 10, 2014 ■