

Commerative Account: Peter Robert Borien 1927-2015

It is with a huge sense of pride that I write this commerative account about this truly exceptional man, my father, Peter Robert Borien.



Peter was born on 25th October 1927 at [personal/sensitive] , Cape Town, South Africa. He was one of eight children born to William and Amelia Borien. William was of French and Dutch ancestry, Amelia's roots were in Scotland.

William worked as a leather worker in a tannery - Amelia worked as a domestic maid. They were a desperately poor family who suffered daily hardships primarily because of William's poor health. Peter's mother, Amelia became the main provider of the family and the glue which held the family together.

William and Amelia were blessed however with a son, Peter, who was honest, extremely hard working and responsible.



He was also blessed with a wonderful singing voice. His strong work ethic and singing abilities were handed down to him by his mother, with whom he shared a very close and special relationship.

From an early age he would sing in his local protestant church choir. It did not take long for his singing skills to be recognised. Soon after he became the cantor in his church for which he was paid half a crown every Sunday for his singing at three different Sunday services. The money would go straight to his mother to help her to feed her family.

Peter attended Wesley Training College, as did, unbeknown him at the time, his future wife, Ruby Vincent.

After leaving school Peter worked during the day as a tailor's cutter Jaques Hau Clothing Factory in Micawber Road, Woodstock and as a travelling salesman during the evenings and weekends. His reputation as a hard working young man in the city of Cape Town and the surrounding areas went before him. When I returned to South Africa later in my life I found that my father's work ethos and his determined approach to life had reached almost legendary proportions through the continuous re-telling of stories about my father by his sister and her family.

In 1947 Peter met Ruby Vincent for the first time. They were engaged the following year and married on 24th September 1949 at St Francis RC Church, Woodstock in Cape Town.



Peter willingly gave up his position in the protestant church to marry Ruby, a Roman Catholic. It led to him being effectively cast aside by the local protestant vicar.

A year before, in 1948, the South African government introduced a system of social segregation in which the race and colour of a person's skin determined their right of access to jobs, schools, shops, buses and trains. Separate entrances were created for white people and non-white people in cinemas, museums and shops. Crude processes were used to determine the colour band in which people were classified, and barriers were put up which immediately limited the educational and employment opportunities for millions of black and coloured people.

The arbitrary nature of the new system caused confusion and frustration in many families. In my father's family some of William's and Amelia's children were classified as coloured whilst others were classified as white. My father was classified as non white and suffered public humiliation at the hands

of the Nationalist Government and its agencies. He became increasingly frustrated and angry at the way all people of colour were denigrated and intimidated by the authorities.

Seeing no future for himself and his three children in Apartheid South Africa he decided to take his family to the UK. His priority was for his three children to have a better life, detached from poverty, - so that none of us would have to experience the poverty which he had grown up with in his childhood.

Selling every possession they owned and using money earned by working on the ocean trawlers Peter bought five tickets for passage on a ship to England.

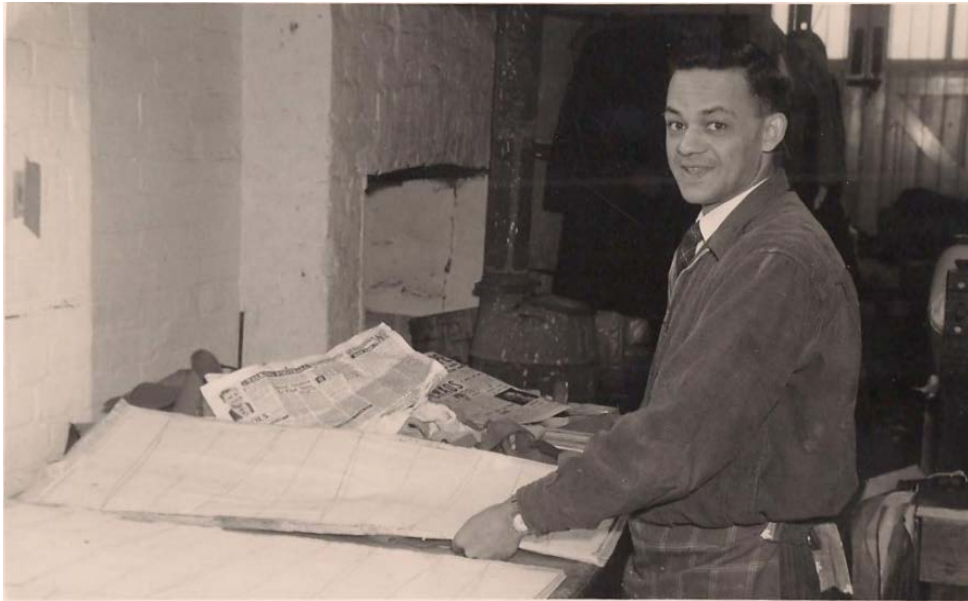
In August 1956 my father and mother arrived in Southampton with three young children, very little money and no-where to stay.

Needless to say life suddenly became very tough again for my mum and dad. Those early days were spent with relatives and in centres for the homeless when our relatives were no longer able to assist us.

I remember months of one room bed sits, my mother and father going off each day to work and then coming home for one of them to head off for another job in the evening.

My most vivid memory however was my father trying to sell a packet of cigarettes he had brought from SA so that he could feed us that evening.

Somehow my father and mother eked out an existence. My father eventually obtained jobs with two tailoring companies: W. Caston and then with Fogel and Sons, where my father's experience as a tailor's cutter was put to good use. He managed to buy a bicycle and would use it every day, to cycle in all weather conditions, the 10 miles from our home in Tottenham in North London to his places of work in Dalston and Stoke Newington. Strapped to the back of the bike was the cloth he brought home at night to sew in readiness for the next day.



In 1969 the family moved to Wickford in Essex. Peter continued his work as a tailor's cutter travelling by car up to London each day. In 1983 he took up the same role with Bender Clothing Company on the Charfleets Industrial Estate on Canvey Island.

At the age of 60 he decided it was time to start a new career! Instead of slowing down he went on to work at Metwins, an engineering company in Canvey Island – a job he held until he was 78. Working had been a part of his whole being and he wasn't going to stop simply because the official retirement age was 65.

Peter was the rock on which his family was built. None of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren would be where we are today if it was not for him and his belief in the opportunities which might arise from a good education. Although we all know that education is more than academic qualifications his UK family hold 5 first degrees, 2 master's degrees, 2 doctorates and numerous diplomas and certificates. He was very proud of us all.



It is in his honour and his memory that the Borien Educational Foundation for Southern Africa was established in 2004 to assist children living in the poorest areas of South Africa to escape the poverty he endured. The charity works to support children in 55 schools in the poorest area of South Africa through the educational programmes and activities it runs. My father's support of the charity's work was always under-stated but news of our work was always enthusiastically received.

Peter was an exceptional person. He was thoroughly decent and hardworking. He never said a bad word about anyone, never complained about anything and even in his final days never asked for help. He was always eternally grateful for everything he had, especially before and after meals, thanking God every day for what he had and was always encouraging us to be grateful for what we had, rather than moaning about what we didn't have. When he was distressed or worried he would sing hymns and songs, the words of which he somehow managed to remember even though some were over 50 years old.

Peter made his family what it is today and supported each family member to achieve their dreams.

He achieved more in his life than I ever will and we all miss him with every breath.

I thank God that my mother had 65 years with him and that my brother, sister and I had a great father like him.

Peter died on 11 February 2015 aged 87, 12 days after being discharged from Rochford Community Hospital. He had been wrongly sectioned under the Mental Health Act at Basildon Hospital after becoming unwell on the 24th December 2014.