

Eulogy for PEJ News Editor Gerry Deiter

Posted by

Tuesday, 20 December 2005 16:01 - Last Updated Tuesday, 20 December 2005 16:01

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PEJ News - Hi. My name is Doug Koch and I'm one of the boys of Table 18 [at Swans Pub in Victoria, Canada]. I've been asked to help contribute to Gerry's eulogy.

Gerry once said, if he had the money, he'd have a boat here, one in the Caribbean, and another in the Mediterranean, with a jet to get around to each sea cruise. He may not have travelled to the four corners of the globe but he was indeed a man of the world ? idealistic, an activist for peace and a healthy environment, one enthusiastic socializer.

www.PEJ.org

My life, although interesting, seems like armchair travel compared to his.

What a full life he led. He photographed top New York fashion models, drove an Alfa Romeo, and squired beauties around town.

He photographed John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Bill Evans.

He had photos included on a couple of early Frank Zappa records. Lenny Bruce, Abbie Hoffman, Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, all crossed Gerry's path. Wow. These were the guys that i read in my youth.

There was John Lennon, the Bed-In, and Give Peace a Chance.

Gerry sailed on Greenpeace II up to Alaska to protest U.S. nuclear tests. In northern B.C., he started a muckraking newspaper and helped launch a coast guard auxillary.

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From where i am standing, Gerry lived the good life. I know that he was content, especially with the ride he was getting on the Lennon message and photos. Which brings me to Swan?s and Table 18. This pub has always attracted a creative clientele and many of the regulars treat each other like family.

A few years ago, Peter, Nigel, Tanis and others produced Swan?s Sketches, a book about the bar?s staff, musicians and patrons. How?s that for communal spirit. Bet ya Cheer?s didn?t do one. Gerry liked our spirit. He ended up sitting in what became the only reserved chair in the house, at the only regularly held table. Table 18. He felt ?special.?

It seemed we were like King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, telling stories, always equals, sharing good fellowship.

Most of us would have met each other through Swan?s, but only Gerry could hold us together as a unit. He had at least a few things in common with each of us. I hope our good times continue. Gerry?s spirit, whose passing has pulled us even closer together, will still be here to share many more laughs in the coming years.

Before i close, i wish to offer a few more bits of info, much of it verbatim, some of which i learned from an internet video interview recorded a year to the day before he passed. Shades of John Lennon.

Gerry grew up in a neighbourhood 1/3 Irish, 1/3 Italian, and 1/3 Jewish. He said in the video that everybody spoke and sounded the same.

Values from the Depression era stayed with him all of his life ? honesty and thrift, and what to react against.

A part of an extended Jewish family, his family was the least observant. They did not go to synagogue nor observe dietary laws, although they did celebrate special occasions like bar mitzvas.

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His first job, at 14 years old, paid 50 cents a day as a delivery boy for a local pharmacist. Even back then, he enjoyed the opportunity to get to know people.

His father wanted him to become an electrical engineer.

An Italian godfather adopted him. He promised to teach Gerry everything he needed to know about fancy eating, fancy drinking, and fancy loving.

Peddling his art to sell products drove him away from commercial photography and into photo-journalism. And he was tired of being asked to pimp models as dates for artistic directors, and felt that fashion photography by its very definition has no lasting value.

Gerry did not learn how to dance until his mid-30's, with his second wife to rock & roll and r&b.

He felt that getting up for a job, watching TV, what 80% of what people live for, was a life wasted. He spoke of taking his boat Luigi out to watch the sunset and, on return, many, if not all the boats shone a television glow.

Gerry once lost over 40% of the vision in his left eye. The retina was detached. He wore a patch. He had to deal with the fear. He listened to a Bach sonata and the music spoke to him. He realized that so long as music has the power to produce that depth of emotion, he could do without his eyes.

His mother died of congenital heart disease. His father of liver cancer.

Like the son, he liked his alcohol. Gerry was treated for bowel cancer about six years ago. After the operation, he quickly left the hospital. A young woman stayed and nursed him on his boat for over a week.

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What keeps people healthy, said Gerry, was attitude, attitude, attitude.

He flatly refused to grow old, and chased women fifty years younger.

He believed that this was not the first time that he had been on earth and it would not be the last.

A favourite quote by poet Theodore Roethke was perched up by the steering wheel of his boat. It read, I learn by steering where I have to go.

Gerry was a muckraker in an age when most of them come from the reactionary right. His everyday concerns, highlighted by the spirit of Give Peace a Chance, created a true man of the world. He faced many opportunities, and seized the moments. Like many of you, we at Table 18 are thankful to have known and learned from him, although none of us, except for maybe Nigel, could drink more than one of his favourite berry ales.

We love ya, Gerry. Cheers. And thanks.

Gerry Deiter's Bio

by Gerry Deiter

This bio was posted by Gerry when he was the USA Editor for PEJ News:

Gerry Deiter was born in Brooklyn; he discovered photography before he was 10, and Greenwich Village, its lifestyle, art, literature, and legendary bars while still in his teens.

He fled the US in 1968, after years of anti-war activism, and, after three years in Montreal, working as a photojournalist for TIME Canada, took to the road in an old van, heading for Vancouver Island.

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He arrived in time for the Gastown Smoke-In and to ship out as journalist/crewmember aboard Greenpeace Too. He replaced the van with a boat, and began exploring the BC coast. After a career in public relations and editing community newspapers on the North coast, he moved to Victoria, where, in 1996, he helped Sid Tafler start the first local newsmagazine on the Internet, NetBC.

After 9/11, he began showing photographs he took in 1969 for LIFE of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's Bed-In for Peace. Since then he has had exhibitions in California, Victoria, Vancouver, Montreal, Courtenay MusicFest and plans for many more.

www.elliottlouis.com/dynamic/artists/Gerry_Deiter.asp?category=B%2EPhotography