



**NORTHAMPTON COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
MEMORIAL SERVICE
OCTOBER 1, 1996**

**EULOGY PRESENTED IN MEMORY OF
WALTER L. PETERS, ESQ.**

May it please the Court.

Mrs. Peters, friends, members of the Northampton County Bar Association, ladies and gentlemen.

I am here to offer a memorial for Walter L. Peters, who passed away on Tuesday, September 12, 1995. But, to speak of memorials and eulogies for Walter would be to ignore a far more appropriate opportunity. For a man whose career as a lawyer and whose life as a human being were as rich and full and varied as his,

we would better consider this as a time to celebrate the life of a man worthy of our admiration and emulation.

Walter Peters was born in Plainfield Township, Northampton County, on October 3, 1915. He was raised in the Nazareth area and educated in its schools. In 1932, he graduated from Nazareth High School, honored as the class valedictorian, senior class president, and captain of the football team. Walter moved on to achieve academic and athletic excellence at Lafayette College. In 1936, he graduated from Lafayette magna cum laude and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and an outstanding catcher on the baseball team.

At Lafayette, Walter decided to pursue a career in the law. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Law in 1940 and then accepted a three-year clerkship with Judge Chester H. Rhodes of the Pennsylvania Superior Court.

During his years with the Superior Court, Walter pondered a variety of career opportunities available to a young man of his ability and achievements. However, he decided to return to his native Nazareth in 1943. As his widow, Margaret, recalls, Walter rented a small office on the first floor of the Nazareth Inn, hung up his shingle, and sat and waited for the first client to walk in.

It was in this modest manner that Walter began his fifty-year career as a practicing lawyer. At first, he was a general practitioner who handled the varied

legal needs of a small town's clientele. But as his practice evolved, Walter developed particular expertise in estate planning and probate law. His clientele and practice grew and expanded. What began as a one-person law office became the four-lawyer and nine-secretary firm of Peters, Moritz, Peischl and Zulick by the time of his retirement. His reputation for honesty, integrity, intelligence, and good common sense attracted devoted clients from far beyond the Nazareth area.

Walter's clients included financial institutions, municipalities, significant corporations, and individuals of means and prominence. He also served on the boards of clients such as Nazareth National Bank, Nazareth Mutual Insurance Company, and The Martin Guitar Company. However, I believe that Walter was proudest of the fact that he continued to serve the ordinary person who most needed his counsel as an attorney. These were the people whom Walter came back to Nazareth to serve, and these were the clients who energized him. I remember his easily shifting to talking to clients in Pennsylvania Dutch, if he sensed that this would put them at ease. Long before there was mandated pro bono service, Walter deeply discounted clients' bills or even declined issuing invoices if he felt circumstances warranted such generosity. Until he retired at age 77, Walter insisted on working long hours to serve his clients' needs and willingly met with them evenings and weekends if this better accommodated their work schedules. George Weitzman, with characteristic tongue in cheek, once told me that he always

dreaded facing Walter in an adversarial situation, simply because Walter never had a client who was ever wrong.

Perhaps Walter's devotion to the law and to his clients is best capsulized by what he characteristically said to Margaret when the demands of his practice required especially long hours or necessitated a change in personal plans. As Margaret recalls, Walter would pointedly say: "Remember, Margaret, the law is a jealous mistress."

Although Walter may have seen the law as his jealous mistress, the real object of his devotion and dedication for nearly 55 years of marriage was his gracious, supportive, and loving wife, Margaret. Walter and Margaret developed mutual interests in a broad variety of intellectual and cultural pursuits that enriched and complemented each other. Unlike many other couples whose marriages span long years, Walter and Margaret maintained a relationship that was vital and youthful; they continued to be each other's best friend and soul mate.

To remember Walter Peters without considering his extracurricular pursuits would be to focus on an isolated section of a large and fascinating collage composed of diverse elements.

Walter was an avid student of history of all eras. However, his deepest inquiries and studies were into the history of the Moravian church and its settlements in the Lehigh Valley. At times his knowledge seemed so deep and rich

that one had to wonder whether Walter might not have been at Peter Boehler's side when he founded Nazareth in 1740. Walter shared his love of Moravian history by serving for many years as an officer of the Moravian Historical Society and the Jacobsburg Historical Society and by giving generously of his resources to these organizations.

His love of history in turn led to a passionate support of historic preservation and restoration. For years, Walter was an active member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and served on the boards of Historic Bethlehem, the Annie Kemmerer Museum, and the Moravian Archives. He fought to preserve and worked to restore historic structures in Nazareth and Bethlehem. In the mid-1950s, Walter learned that one of Nazareth's earliest Moravian buildings located on Center Square was in danger of becoming a beer distributorship. Walter moved quickly to acquire this fine old 1771 structure and to renovate it at considerable expense into a home for his growing law firm. Walter's bold action produced a ripple effect which even today remains evident as Nazareth continues to cherish and preserve its heritage.

Art held a special fascination for Walter. He was the first to admit that his ability to create art was non-existent. However, he had a remarkable aesthetic sense that allowed him to appreciate the world's great art. Walter and Margaret travelled widely and focused many journeys on visiting the great museums of

America and Europe. Along the way, Walter developed a special affinity for the 18th century Moravian painter, John Valentine Haidt. Walter studied Haidt's life and art, personally provided for the restoration of his works, and lectured widely as a respected authority on this acclaimed painter of portraits and religious scenes.

It should be no surprise that Walter's incredible life of the mind embraced the world of fine music. Walter was not a musician and confessed that he could carry a tune about as well as he could sketch a landscape. But, Walter knew and loved the great classical music of the western world. Throughout their marriage, he and Margaret faithfully attended the Philadelphia Orchestra's concerts. Walter was a member of the boards of the Bach Choir and the Moravian Music Foundation, discovered a forgotten treasure trove of Moravian music in the Nazareth Moravian Church, and helped bring to light the beauty of the early Moravian religious anthems and hymns written here in the New World. Several years ago, Walter and Margaret generously provided for the restoration of the Nazareth Moravian Church's fine 18th century pipe organ. It is fascinating that this man who knew and enjoyed great music suffered from a serious hearing deficiency; Walter liked to say that, just as the deaf Beethoven found a way to feel the vibrations of his music and sense its rhythms and harmonies as he composed, Walter too developed a keen capacity to appreciate music which probably transcended the listening skills of those with perfect hearing.

Walter's love of the beautiful was at the core of his zealous defense of the environment. For Walter, pollution of the air and water, reckless consumption of our natural resources, mindless development of our wildernesses, and failure to keep our streets and communities clean were unforgivable violations against nature. As Chief Burgess of the Borough of Nazareth in the 1940s and 1950s, Walter led his community in adopting and enforcing strict air pollution ordinances long before the federal and state governments became interested. He fought threats to the environment wherever they appeared. Walter's greatest passion for the environment was focused on trees. He planted trees, nursed and watered them, and battled to prevent them from being cut down. The distant sound of a chain saw never failed to evoke in Walter a grimace that made apparent the genuine pain he felt.

I could also talk about Walter's commitment to decent health care and the 42 years he served on the board of trustees of St. Luke's Hospital. And, it would please him if you were to know that, amidst his more cerebral pursuits, Walter enjoyed playing golf at Saucon Valley Country Club and, after his years of athletic success on the football field and baseball diamond, became an avid armchair fan of football and baseball.

One last interest must be mentioned. Walter held a deep and abiding religious faith and thought and read as deeply about theology as he did about the

other passions in his life. When Walter entered Lafayette, he intended to prepare for the Methodist ministry. We used to tell him that, somewhere during his years on College Hill, he fortunately heard a higher calling and became a lawyer. But, Walter continued to be a diligent life-long student of religion and served his adopted Moravian Church in a variety of ways. For Walter, faith was a personal matter, and he seldom talked about the nature of his beliefs. Those who knew Walter well realized that he had an abiding sense of divine being that was omnipresent. Walter could look at a wooded setting and refer to it as “God’s nature”; he could gaze at a vista illuminated by a crimson sunset and see it as “God’s world.” Two weeks before his death, Walter and Margaret were in a small helicopter which landed on a remote glacier in Alaska; in the midst of this pristine beauty, Walter spread his arms as if to embrace the vista before him, turned to Margaret, and said: “This is God!”

When Walter Peters left us more than one year ago, each of us suffered a loss. Personally, I lost a close friend, mentor, partner, and kindred spirit. As this last year has evolved, my sense of loss has been tempered by the knowledge that, for more than 30 years, I knew Walter, practiced law with him, talked long hours about mutual interest, learned from him, grew as a human being by associating with him, and shared many a good bottle of wine with him. In similar and yet different ways, each of us here today, even those who may not have had the good

fortune to know him, have been enriched by the nearly 80 years that Walter Peters lived and worked among us. Human beings like Walter Peters seldom come our way; when they do, it is our good fortune and that of our profession when they happen to be lawyers.

I move this Honorable Court that, when it adjourns for the day, you do so in memory of, in honor of, and in celebration of the life of our colleague, Walter L. Peters.

Charles J. Peischl