

THE GREATEST IMPOSTER!

By Robert J. Williamson

My September Mountain News column entitled, "INUIT Elders' Visit Sparks Memories" of the old Hamilton Sanatorium site, was well received and I began to wonder how I could top that story. Then as I opened the Hamilton Spectator at breakfast on September 8, a story line dropped right into my lap.

It was an OBITUARY for Peter C. Newman, a famous veteran journalist and author "with no peers", who died in Belleville at the age of 94. What, you may ask has that got to do with the Hamilton Mountain?



Peter C. Newman 1930-2023

Photo by Robert Williamson

The answer is simple. It is rare for an ordinary Hamilton Mountain resident and community columnist such as myself to have worked with and shared life experiences with a man who was Editor-in-Chief of the Toronto Star and Maclean's Magazine. He was awarded the Companion of the Order of Canada for the 36 books that he published. They captured our imagination by bringing to life the people, places, and events that have shaped Canada. Some well known titles are: "Caesars of the Wilderness - The Hudson Bay Company", "Canada - 1892 Portrait of a Promised

Land" and "Renegade in Power-The Diefenbaker Years".

Although he was a few years senior to me, and I attended McMaster University and he, the University of Toronto, what brought us together was the Naval Reserve Training available in all Canadian universities in the 1945 post war period. As naval officers we shared training programs and social activities and we both had a deep interest in Canadian history.

I'll always remember how, despite his growing fame, he spoke casually about his days as an officer cadet, his international career experiences, the famous people that he met and interviewed and the books he had written. He especially enjoyed sharing the many humorous incidents in his career.

One evening during dinner in the officers mess, senior officers were sharing stories. At the time I was the commanding officer of HMCS STAR, Hamilton's Naval Reserve Division and Peter, then a Captain, had completed a tour of duty in Navy Public Relations. As everyone reminisced about their naval adventures, I thought I could impress the listeners with my training cruise story when the ship I was serving in was diverted to Long Beach California. A Canadian ship was needed to film scenes about the Korean War and the true story of Ferdinand Demara, an American who impersonated a Canadian navy Doctor on a Canadian destroyer. The 1960 movie was called "The Great Imposter" and starred Tony Curtis a popular actor who made two other movies at that time: "Some Like it Hot" with Marilyn Munroe and "Operation Petticoat" with Cary Grant. I didn't think anyone could top my adventure until Peter Newman shared his 'Imposter Story'. It was about a most memorable experience in Pearl Harbour, the world famous American naval base in Hawaii.

As a Commander on liaison duty in the Canadian Navy, Peter made a courtesy call on the American Admiral in Pearl Harbour, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific (CINC PAC). With his reputation,, Peter got on very well with the Admiral who in typical generous American fashion, sent Peter on a tour of the famous harbour in the Admiral's ceremonial barge. While viewing the wreck of the USS Arizona, a National Memorial, Peter was surprised to see elements of the American Pacific fleet entering harbour and steaming toward him. He was even more surprised when each ship piped a ceremonial salute. Somewhat sheepishly but with conviction, Commander Peter Newman, Canadian Navy Reserve, a former university naval cadet, stood in the admiral's barge and returned the salute for CINC PAC, which "in joshing" earned him the title, "**The Greatest Imposter**".

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Local Heritage.