

Peter Stanley Smith? No. It has to be Smudger for me . I don't remember when I first called him by that name and only as a bit of a joke but it seems to have caught on since. It's more of an affectionate name really. In reality he was never really a Smudger. I suppose that's why I said it. It's a bit like calling me Lofty!! Doesn't really suit.

Peter was the first person I met on joining CAODS in 1973. I had just finished playing in Carmen with the Chelmsford Opera Group and was about to play Nanki Poo in CAODS Mikado. CAODS were putting on a cabaret locally and the tenor had dropped out so Peter called me to replace him. What a fortunate meeting and phone call for me. We rehearsed in Dukes Night Club – well not quite it was the fairly respectable Lion and Lamb pub then!

Little did I guess how closely we would work together for the next 39 years and what good friends we would become.

Some of you may have heard some of my words today before as I've had the privilege of speaking about Peter - to his face - at a number of his landmark birthdays – he seems to have had so many. It's very comforting for me to know that for the first and only time he won't be able to correct any factual mistakes that I make. But we all know he's a patient man and will probably be waiting to tell me. I do so hope it will be a very long wait!

He had first joined the Society in 1948 his first show being Bitter Sweet. In those days he was only a dancer - oops sorry – a dancer only and I'm told that everyone wanted him as their partner as he was the best and wasn't really thought of as a singer or player of parts. He must have been a natural as I've never heard tell of him taking any dancing lessons. But then, of course, he was a natural at everything that he decided to put his artistic talents towards.

Ten years later and with all the experience he had gained from CAODS shows, he joined the 1st Chelmsford gang show at Hoffman's Hall to help with make-up. He stayed helping for just over 20 years during which time he managed to get promoted from make-up, to direction and make-up, to direction, choreography and make-up! He was also District Scout Secretary from '73 to '76.

As I mentioned, Peter started as a dancer 64 years ago. Through his love of theatre and strong ambition to improve himself as a performer, he soon started to play minor roles both singing and acting until in 1968 he played probably his greatest role to date. In 1968 CAODS performed one of the earliest amateur versions of Oliver which attracted over 90 children to audition, there being no other form of youth theatre anywhere probably in the south east. Peter's thought was what will happen afterwards. "These kids will go away with nothing to do." So both he and Stan Parsons , the then Chairman of CAODS, decided it was a golden opportunity to keep them interested by forming a CAODS youth group later to become independent under the title of Chelmsford Young Generation – the first I imagine in this whole area. And what a fantastic legacy and tribute to them both that group has become. Their performances have become the yardstick by which all junior groups are judged or which they aspire to. Many are here today including many more having grown up and joined CAODS or in so many cases gone on to achieve success at many levels in all aspects of professional theatre, including an Olivier nomination and another actually presenting a BBC Panorama programme this very evening as an investigative journalist . Peter was so proud of them all at every level not because of what he had founded but simply because of what they had all become and the level of enjoyment they had got from

their membership and performing experiences. I know he will still feel the same about Young Gen in the future as he has always done and I know they won't let him down. As Peter so aptly put it "Young Gen really are something to sing and dance about." No wonder they made him their President. Follow that!!

Then in 1974 having guested in a production of Annie Get Your Gun for Brentwood Operatic Society, Peter worked under and then introduced to CAODS a new Director – Ray Jeffery.

Ray has now been with us for 38 years and in that time our financial status – especially compared with so many other societies who are either struggling or closing down – is a lot to do with the strength of the performances which he has given us.

I'm sure a large number of you here today have no idea of all the roles Peter has played for CAODS and how he has become a firm favourite with our regular patrons. Suffice it to say that for the past 60 years Peter has grown to be one of the most important people ever to belong to CAODS both on and off the stage. He just missed his 100th show as I believe Fiddler on the Roof in 2010 was his 98th and last show on stage with CAODS. I'd love to be wrong. He'll probably correct me on that too! But including all the other groups he worked with – well over 100 in total.

I was going to list some of his leading roles but I soon realised that we'd still be here tomorrow if I started so – in no particular order as they say - just a few very – selfishly - of my favourites:

Fagin in Oliver

Kipps in Half a Sixpence

Colonel Pickering in My Fair Lady

Honore in Gigi

Hajj in Kismet

Og in Finian's Rainbow

Marcellus Washburn in the Music Man

Herr Schultz in Cabaret

Percival Browne in the Boyfriend

And my all-time favourite - the two of us working together in A Funny Thing Happened on the way to the Forum when Peter won the award for best supporting actor as Hysterium at the Waterford International Music Festival. An education in how to be brilliantly funny with no effort. Just pure natural talent and – xxxxx - timing.

Talking of working together reminds me that in the "old days" two places were sacrosanct in the men's dressing rooms at the Civic Theatre. Middle room - me by the window and

Peter at the front – we felt it would be bad luck to put on our make up anywhere else – so we never did! How childish! And of course I shall never forget that Peter Smith look on stage in later years which only meant one thing – what on earth comes next!

How many people realise the amount of work he puts in to making props and flowers, painting scenery, painting the HQ - one of the first amateurs to show his skill at rag-rolling when few of us had seen it outside of Interiors magazines - helping with wigs and make-up, helping his fellow performers both at CAODS and Young Gen. And of course not forgetting his role in getting the HQ in 1985 for Young Gen and for all of us to share. How many other societies can boast such premises? All this came from that little thought after Oliver 44 years ago. And while talking about all those enormous contributions that Peter made to the success of our two societies it would be remiss of me not to mention the huge unpaid but so skilful work put into making costumes by his sister Nora.

Let's just talk about the man and not the performer. I recently received a few comments about Peter which I'd like to share with you. All received from a cross section of people who had reason to comment on his passing.

"A very talented and very kind person"

"Our dear friend Smudger will be sadly missed"

"I too will miss Peter. What he did for amateur theatre in Chelmsford is incalculable. A real gentleman too. Always had time for a word with everybody."

"What a sad loss. Many happy memories of a dear man."

"So sad. A lovely man."

"It was a pleasure to have known such a talented man."

"Peter was a truly remarkable man and touched so many people's lives."

"Peter was such a gentleman and will be sadly missed.

A lovely guy who always encouraged you. If he said you were good – you were good. Keep on dancing up there Peter."

Interesting words weren't they? (Quote the underlined again). They really do sum him up perfectly.

And from one name I will mention, Peter's best and most loyal friend in the society, Pat Day, when she joined in 18.- sorry Pat - 1959.

He took her under his wing from the very moment she arrived and right up to 2 days before he died he was still asking her how CAODS and Young Gen were doing. However she was sad, but pleased, to think she would no longer receive any 7.30am phone calls from Peter as he was always bright and full of ideas that time of the morning.

When I spoke at Peter's 80th birthday party, just 2 years ago, I said – "It wasn't meant to be a homage of praise to you and certainly not a retirement speech! You certainly aren't anywhere near finished yet! But it's impossible to talk about your life at CAODS + Young Gen without paying you so many compliments and in fact - that, and the love, friendship and respect we all have for you, is why we are all here today."

How true and prophetic those words were.

I'm sure there are so many other memories that you all have of Peter. I've just tried to highlight some of his talents and contributions to our theatrical lives.

I would sum Peter up in these few sentences;

He was always totally honest in his comments.

He said nothing to the wrong people

He told the truth to the right people.

He always meant every word he said.

He was a real gentleman in both looks and behaviour

We are all missing you Peter and will always miss you more than you would probably ever have realised.

Peter in the words of the show in which you have most often appeared – Fiddler on the Roof - L'chaim! To your life!