Getting To Know You…
Featuring Peter Pih's Amazing Life
By Dick Slate

Peter Pih, who has been a bass singer in the PraiSingers, Tabernacle's senior adult choir, has for several months been residing at Carrollton Nursing and Rehabilitation Center on Hwy. 27 north.

Hearing Jean and Tommy Taylor report at PraiSingers choir rehearsal about their visits with Peter aroused my interest to know all about him. Peter has always been a mystery man to me, friendly, but reserved, whose inscrutable demeanor convinced me his story was worth telling.

I told fellow bass singer Frank Shoppe that I wanted to visit Peter and interview him for an in-depth feature for a brand-new newsletter I was going to develop which I planned to name PS: — short for PraiSingers.

Frank volunteered to drive us to the rehab center so I could dig out what I believed would be a very interesting story. The first three visits were to gather facts and more facts and verify them. The fourth visit was to share the final draft and make any needed corrections.

We begin in Anching, China, about 100 miles from Shanghai on Sept. 19, 1920, when Peter was born. He was one of seven children born to Pih Dong-Chiale, mother, and Pih Hao-Chun, father. (Note: In China the family name comes first.) The only survivors in addition to Peter are a younger brother, and two sisters, who live in China.

Peter's father was a man of some importance. In China before WWII he was one of three national administrators of mining. Coal and metal were the most important minerals being mined. Peter's father was graduated from Peiyang University in Tianjung after successfully completing studies in the school of mining and engineering.

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THE SURRENDER OF JAPAN

In 1945 allied armed forces were poised to begin the actual ground assault on Japan and other areas they occupied, most especially Vietnam. In south China troops of the Allied Southern Command were being entertained at a USO show when suddenly the lights came on. A sergeant came on stage and read an official announcement to baffled soldiers that Japan had surrendered after major cities were hit with atomic bombs dropped by U.S. planes.

Peter was in the audience and remembers all were completely surprised. They knew nothing of atomic bombs nor of their awesome, destructive power and certainly not that these bombs had been dropped on Japan. Speaking of military secrecy!

When the date for the signing of the surrender was announced, Major Peter Pih was in Allied Southern Command headquarters in south China. As soon as the plane was ready, Peter and a special team flew on the first allied plane to fly to Vietnam. The U.S. Army plane landed in Hanoi where Peter and the team were greeted by French troops who drove them to their quarters in the large, magnificent Metropol Hotel.

Allied forces established headquarters in the Governor's Mansion, the largest building in Hanoi, the same as the Japanese had done. The former Chinese governor of the province was now back as a general. Peter recalls seeing Japanese soldiers on Hanoi streets offering to sell pistols and ammunition for money to buy food.

The day after arriving in Hanoi, Peter asked a waiter in the Metropol Hotel to go out in the city, find and buy an American-style white suit for him. This was normal attire in Hanoi. It enabled Peter to blend in with the population and not be recognized as part of the allied forces.

However, on another day, Peter, wearing the uniform and rank of a Chinese major, entered a posh Hanoi restaurant filled with Japanese officers, some of whom had already been served or were preparing to order. Immediately, the highest ranking Japanese officer stood, saluted, and in his own language called all to attention and barked orders to leave the restaurant. This they did, perplexing Peter and causing him to wonder if he were safe. He decided to leave as well and headed for the large sprawling Chinatown section of Hanoi. He found a smaller, apparently safer-looking restaurant which served delightful Chinese food.

Soon, all Japanese soldiers in Hanoi and surrounding areas were rounded up, weapons surrendered and they were confined in the Citadel. Eventually, they were repatriated to Japan, transported by the U.S. 7th Fleet.
Making the decision to teach at West Georgia College found only Peter coming to Carrollton in 1969. Katherine was living in New York and working as a research at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute. She and Peter "agreed to disagree," a term my late wife Virginia often used to describe a pending split. Peter first lived in a motel on Dixie Street before finding an apartment across from the West Georgia campus. Within a week of his arrival Peter went looking for a Baptist church to visit. Bob White was Tabernacle's pastor when Peter moved his membership here from Corvallis FBC.

Jimmy was about 12 when he came to Carrollton. He was enrolled in public school until time to begin high school. Then Peter enrolled Jimmy at Oak Mountain Academy. After a year he returned to New York to live with Katherine while he attended high school in the Bronx. Peter says Jimmy was baptized at Tabernacle, and, was taught in Sunday school by Norma Cobble.

When Jimmy was graduated from high school he enrolled at Brandeis University in Boston. After getting his bachelor's degree he commuted to Philadelphia to the Wharton School of Finance where he received a master's degree in finance. Following this, he began work in international trading in Boston, New York, London and now in Edinburgh, Scotland.

During his teaching years at West Georgia, Peter married again. This time to a young Chinese student named Grace Feng. Peter says Grace became a member of Tabernacle. Following her West Georgia graduation she enrolled at the University of Georgia in Athens where she received a Ph.D. in child psychology. Grace moved to New York to work. She and Peter separated some years ago.

We can be proud of Peter. Drafted into China's army upon his graduation from the university, he was commissioned a second lieutenant. Because of his strengths, abilities and loyalty to China's needs, by war's end he had advanced to major.

Peter was a good soldier, a leader and an amazing man, then and now. Consider his valuable service rendered in his assignment representing China and the allied forces in Hanoi at the signing of surrender documents by Japanese forces in Vietnam. This, of course, was concurrent with the finally realized end of WWII and the major surrender by Japanese official to allied forces taking place in Tokyo harbor on the USS Missouri.

This brief accounting of Peter's life barely encompasses all of his amazing experiences. He often found himself in circumstances not always of his choosing, but which dramatically shaped his life. Peter has contributed much in China, in Oregon, in Chicago, in New York and yes, in Carrollton. Peter, like the ancient Chinese sage, never would brag of his accomplishments, but as in the poem of old, would choose to sit by the side of the road to observe the passing of mankind and time. — END

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR PETER:

Peter had two separate surgeries, first to remove a toe in which gangrene had infected, and later a second surgery to amputate a leg at the knee also with gangrene.

Peter never fully recovered and finally died early on Sunday morning, Oct. 4, 2009. The body was cremated and the remains are to be taken to China at a later date by son Jimmy.

Today's memorial service on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2009 at 11 a.m. was in the chapel at Tabernacle Baptist Church. Son Jimmy was here from Edinburgh, Scotland where he is employed and lives with wife, Martina, and their son, William.

Many church friends, as well as Chinese friends, were in attendance. The Tabernacle senior adult choir, The PraSingers, of which Peter was a member sang, as well as Tabernacle Minister of Music Alan Schantz. Dick Slate, a deacon, and a member of The PraSingers spoke about Peter. Tabernacle pianist Betty Sue Smith played the piano for the service. Pastor Dr. Jimmy Gentry read several scriptures and commented on Peter.