

Eulogy for Peter Ryan Buck Shea

Peter Ryan Buck Shea was born the youngest of three boys into an Irish Catholic family. Growing up, the Shea brothers were like three bear cubs, always playing together, wrestling and hunting for adventure. We pushed each other to be better, fiercely competitive, never backing down, taking on all challengers. We thought we were invincible. As the third boy, Buck had to keep up, but he always did. He was gifted with an abnormal BAM BAM like strength, the fierce focus and determination of a Hawk on the hunt, the ancient wisdom of an old soul with a heart of gold. He was the peacemaker in the family, always dissolving conflict by jumping in between, or with his incredible sense of humor and wit.

As he grew, Buck's magnanimous spirit attracted many friends who called him their best. Wherever he went people were drawn to his playful energy, his calming presence, his ability to hear you with his famous bear hugs.

Towards the end of his Senior Year, Buck showed up to our house with nearly the whole football team to hang out and swim in the pool. A boy walked into the kitchen my mother didn't recognize and she asked him what position he played. "I'm not on the team," he said, "But your son is responsible for me having the best year of my life." My mom was speechless and asked, "How in the world did he do that?" He said,

"Well, back in September, I was sitting on the steps of the quad, crying, and Pete stopped and asked me why. I told him I didn't have any friends and I hated school. Pete, told me, I'm your friend. And to stand up and go to class. And when Pete tells you to do something, you do it . He also told me tonight I want you to come to a party. And if they don't let you in tell them you're Pete Shea's friend." So, he showed up to the house where the party was and knocked on the door. Someone answered and said sorry it's a private party, and the boy said, no I was invited by Pete Shea. And they let him in and that changed his life. The football team accepted him, and he became their friend. Buck always led through his deeds.

There's a famous story of when Buck was in college at Arizona State and taking a break from the many hours, he spent cramming to graduate with his Psychology degree, he was out at a bar in Scottsdale his senior year. And as the story goes, he was apparently making someone's girlfriend laugh too much at the bar. So, the hothead boyfriend challenged him to a duel, a fight in the parking lot out back and the whole bar was worked up into a frenzy and they marched out to watch chanting, "fight, fight, fight ... " Well only Buck could take that situation, surrounded by a blood thirsty horde and unfazed, look in the eyes of the broken soul across from him and empathize with him; seethe pain of a man searching for recognition from the mob and Buck seeing his fear offered to hug it out, and used his wit and his Polar Bear Hug to defuse the potential disaster. They embraced and realized they could be friends instead - much to the chagrin of the horde.

Buck had an uncanny ability to defuse the biggest egos with a comment, or in some cases his vulnerability.

But dealing with those egos in the world left him seeking peace elsewhere eventually.

He was most happy in Nature, pursuing adventure with those he loved. Pete and I rock climbed many of the classic lines in the West, in Yosemite, Joshua Tree, Tahquitz, Mt Lemmon, Granite MT ... and so on. We used to say the moment you doubt you fall. He never doubted himself. He knew he was worthy. He pushed me to my extremes by witnessing his incredible willpower. He innately understood that a man can't reach his true potential without challenging his fears.

On a skiing trip with some friends in college, he got bored and convinced me to ride to the top of the mountain to ski the double black diamonds with him. Even though he always challenged me, I couldn't let him do it alone. When we stepped off the chairlift, I started putting my skis on and he said, "Hey throw 'em' on your shoulder, we're hiking." "Hiking? Where?" He pointed up the cornice, and said, "up there." We hiked for some 20 minutes and then I went over to the edge to study the landing. And as I was looking down plotting on where to land, I turned back to give him my assessment just as he went flying by - full speed, over the edge landing perfectly, well down the slope. As if to say, playing it safe was futile.

Pete went on many adventures all over the world. Just out of college he spent 6 months in Costa Rica, living in a secluded jungle near some epic surf breaks where he got to be known as Rubio by the locals for his long blonde hair. He would get to know the touring surfers that came through and showed them the secret breaks. He would later travel the world with Brown Cannon as his B role photographer for National Geographic capturing the Great Barrier Reef to the Alaskan Northern Lights and everything in between. Recently Brown got a call from an old surfing friend who said he had noticed the tribute Brown posted to his page and recognized Buck as the cool surfer they ran into in Costa Rica 25 years ago, who showed them where the breaks were and taught them how to surf and drank their tequila.

I got an unexpected call from him as he was returning from his surfing adventures in Central America telling me to pick him up at the border in Tijuana - tomorrow. I cleared my schedule and drove down to the border and waited and watched looking for him through the throngs of people coming across. He stood out immediately, with his long blonde hair, his ripped tanned physique only wearing a leather vest, his board shorts, a shark tooth necklace, leather flip flops and carrying his surfboard and with a big smile on his face. For me, the sight of him juxtaposed against the busy Tijuana border was reassuring. That he had broken the code and maybe I could break away someday and do it as well.

But one of my favorite stories happened the following summer, when he called me up and asked me to drop him off to hike the John Muir Trail, by himself. Which in the guide it says it's not recommended to go solo. For those who don't know the John Muir Trail, it's part of the Pacific Crest trail from Mt Whitney to Tuolumne Valley, 214 miles, with a total elevation gain of 47,000 feet, in the high Sierra back country and wilderness, the trek is almost entirely above 8000 feet. Just another summer adventure for Buck. But he suggested or challenged me to

climb Mt. Whitney with him for the first few days of the trail and I wasn't going to pass up the opportunity to knock off the highest peak in the lower 48 with him.

We got a late start that first evening after parking our car in the Bishop parking lot. Per his mo., Buck had borrowed a pair of old hiking boots from a friend, that he swore were built for this trail. We jammed up to 8000 ft to make camp before the sun went down and he was grunting the whole way up with his 100-pound pack on. By the time we made it into camp, and he took off his borrowed boots - his feet were completely blistered. Of course, as his older brother, I started questioning his preparation. He told me not to worry, as he slapped mole skin on his heels and hung his food for the night. I got out my headlamp and as always, I brought a classic for the evening reading, Sam Shepard's, True West. A true American classic play about the sibling rivalry of two estranged brothers who have reconnected at their mother's house on the outskirts of LA; one a college educated writer trying to make it as a screen writer in Hollywood and the other a petty criminal who decides if his brother can make it in Hollywood as a writer then why can't he. It's a dark comedy that is written with incredibly witty banter. There's a great line towards the end where the brother who was less conventional says to the uptight one, in the heat of an argument, "Why don't you get yourself another 7UP boy, I ain't the one you gotta be worrying about around here." We laughed ourselves to sleep.

And then in the middle of the night, Buck jumps up saying there's a bear in our camp! And sure, enough, he's climbing up the tree, going for Buck's 2-month food supply. As he starts to unzip the tent, I ask him what the heck he thinks he's doing, and before you know it, he's laying out the most guttural Native American Yelp you've ever heard and the bear freaks out, falls out of the tree from 20 feet, sprinting away, never to be seen or heard from again. I felt for that bear.

The next morning, Buck announces he's had an epiphany and that he's going to ditch his borrowed hiking boots and do the rest of the trail in his leather flip flops and proceeds to duct tape them around his feet to reduce the slippage.

That day we hiked to 12,000 ft to acclimatize, before making the final push to the summit at 14,500 feet. That night I attempted, unsuccessfully once again, to talk him off this trip. I was concerned he wasn't prepared, and my proof was that he's hiking in flip flops. His rebuttal was that, according to the stories he's heard from me, the sherpas in Peru, wore flip flops when they hiked Machu Pichu. And then he laughed at the look on my face. He always had a comeback that ended all arguments; usually using my own words against me.

That next day we hiked all the way to the summit. And in the summit log Pete wrote, "Did it in flip flops, Pete Shea." That night we spent down at guitar lake on the other side of Whitney. We finished Sam Shepherd's True West laughing ourselves to sleep. The next morning, I gave him my new trail runners saying, if the Sherpas in Peru can hike in flip flops, then I should be able to make it back to my car in them. He appreciated the upgrade. Packed up his stuff and said goodbye. I watched him walk about 50 yards and yelled, "Stay golden pony boy." And without missing a beat he said, "why don't you get yourself another 7UP boy, I ain't the one you gotta be

worried about around here." We both laughed. He turned and walked up the trail and I watched until he disappeared. And then misty eyed the whole way I hiked out praying to God he would be OK.

Once Buck was determined to do something there was nothing you could do to convince him otherwise. He needed to push the limits, he needed to challenge himself. There was no back off in him.

We would learn later that Buck would return some prayer St Christopher medals he would find along the trail to a Pastor who had lost them. The pastor was so moved by the experience he would write a story about it in his local newspaper calling it minor miracle. And his new girlfriend and soulmate Melanie would join him in Mammoth, and they would finish the trail together. The beginning of many epic adventures they would have together.

Melanie and he would eventually settle down and made the seaside town of Gearheart their home. Buck trained Brogan and Sierra to be just like him; fearless expert watermen with hearts of gold. Buck's entire focus turned to his children. So much so that the local surfing kids, known as the Groms, would all pile in his van when the surf was up, seeking the best break that day because they trusted Buck would find it. He became known locally as the Grom Father and the envy of all the other fathers.

Buck constantly pursued "la Pura Vida", the pure life as he called it. He was incessantly focused on riding that next great wave, climbing that classic epic route, flying fishing in his favorite rivers. It was in that zone, where he communed with the all-knowing, where he felt at home.

On May 30th, he was suddenly taken from us - when he was doing what he loved with those he loved. As his brother, the only way I can reconcile Buck going out the way he did, is because God needed him on a higher level.

But even though we can no longer see him, we feel him. We feel him in our aching hearts. We feel his presence in the ocean, in the waves and in the river.

This level of tragedy invokes pain like no other suffering. To lose a best friend, a brother, a husband, a father, a son, a soulmate, this early in the journey, is devastating. That hole in our hearts will never go away. But the wisest of the ancient spiritual traditions tell us to fill it with the inspiration of Pete.

His passing has opened all our eyes and our hearts. We realize through this suffering what is truly important in life. Pete is now unconstrained. His magnanimous spirit is among us. He is with us when we sit quietly in stillness, when we are fishing the McKenzie, hiking in the Sierras, when you are beyond the break waiting for that next set at short sands beach, it's in those moments we will commune with him again.

He is now our guardian angel, our protector. When we close our eyes and envision his presence wrapping us in a bear hug telling us everything is okay. I hear him saying:

Keep charging, live without fear, leave no doubt on the field of life, love with reckless abandonment. And of course, "Why don't you get yourself another 7up boy, I ain't the one you gotta be worrying about around here."

It is our responsibility to take up the mantel now and live like Pete:

We must see the best in others; Pursue our adventure, our purpose in life with passion; Love unconditionally; Be a peacemaker; Leave the petty worries in life behind. As he did.

Pete used to pray every time he paddled out beyond the break. He prayed for his family and friends. So today we pray for him:

God, we ask that you take Peter Ryan Buck Shea into your arms. We know you need him for something greater - that we do not understand. We are grateful for the memories, adventures, and life you gave us with him. We ask that we will have the wisdom to open our hearts and still our minds so that we may receive healing. We ask that you bless Melanie, Brogan and Sierra with healing, love, and wisdom. And that you do the same to the Shea family and everyone here. We pray that Buck may be our spiritual guide - our guardian angel.

Brother, I know you are riding the greatest of all waves now and you are watching over us, loving us and blessing us, constantly reminding us to live for today.

God bless you brother. I look forward to your embrace again in the next life. I love you and will always honor your courageous heart.

We pray for this in Jesus's name, Amen.