

AMAC MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

PETER JEDICK

A Legacy of Grit and Grace



For many Americans, the late 19th century seems like a distant part of our history, more familiar to us through recent shows like *The Gilded Age* than through the stories of family folklore. But it's not as far-removed as we often think. For many Baby Boomers, of which there are more than 76 million in the United States, their grandparents were born before the turn of the 20th century. AMAC member Peter Jedick, named after his grandfather, is among them.

His grandmother, Mary Gracon, was born on a Pennsylvania farm in 1891. When she was 16, her father sent her back to Poland to find a husband. She married Peter Jedick, a school teacher, who took a job in a Pennsylvania coal mine to make it in America. Later, they moved to Cleveland, where he shoveled coal into the train engine's furnace.

Peter and Mary had nine children, all of whom were born on the kitchen table. Two babies, twins, died at birth. The family lived in a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house on the west side of Cleveland. They never owned a car. In their matchbox backyard,

they had a garden and chickens, which kept the family from starving during the Great Depression.

All the boys served in World War Two, including their son, Peter II, who parachuted into France on D-Day. He ended up in a prisoner-of-war camp and returned to America weighing only 90 pounds. He married his sweetheart, Anne, and moved to LA, where he used the GI Bill to study art at the University of Southern California. He had a job lined up at Disney as a cartoon artist upon graduation. But before he finished his degree, Anne learned she was pregnant, so they moved back to Cleveland to be closer to family.

"I should have been an abortion," says Peter III, whose father took a job at an auto factory to provide for the family. Eventually, his dad used his artistic talents to design greeting cards at American Greetings.

Growing up in a working-class neighborhood in Cleveland, Peter learned discipline from the nuns at St. Patrick's grade school. "Everyone

listened," says Peter. "No one messed around, otherwise the ruler came out."

He was a gifted student, and he earned a scholarship to St. Ignatius High School, but his dad turned down the offer because he couldn't afford the cost of books: \$200. Instead, Peter was admitted to West Tech, a prestigious technical high school that trained thousands of students for well-paying jobs.

Peter wrote for the school paper, and he fell in love with journalism. He was a natural, winning a coveted scholarship to study journalism at Kent State University. Between his scholarship, which covered about \$1,000 a year, and his summer job working on the railroad as a "gandy dancer" maintaining the tracks, Peter paid his way through college without any student loans.

On May 4, 1970, Peter was a junior when four students were tragically killed when the National Guard fired



into a crowd of protestors at Kent State. Peter was friends with one of the young women, Sandy Scheuer, who was simply walking to class when she was shot and killed.

After college, Peter worked for several Ohio newspapers before getting married and having six kids of his own. He got a job as a Cleveland firefighter. The pay was decent, the benefits were good, and he loved his

squad. Every day he felt lucky that he helped save lives and livelihoods.

As Peter puts it, "It's the best job in the world." He served as a firefighter for 32 years, also helping to open a museum for the department and a memorial for fallen firefighters. The sculpture stands right outside the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, where nearly a million people a year are reminded of the sacrifice of Cleveland's firefighters.

Much like his father and grandfather before him, Peter always worked double time. In addition to full-time firefighting, he worked as a substitute teacher and freelance journalist, among many side hustles.

Not one to be idle, Peter now drives for Uber part time. "I like talking to people. I like hearing their stories," he says.

A lifelong reader, Peter is always making his way through history books, and he's always working on his next book or article.

His kids are now grown and are doing well. One is a doctor. Another is a full-time mom. His youngest is still in college. Peter is proud to be a grandfather of six grandchildren so far.

Reflecting on his life, Peter often thinks of the values his parents and grandparents taught him: hard work and perseverance, responsibility and respect for others, kindness and decency towards all, love for family and reverence for God. These are the values that shaped his conservative values, and these are the principles he hopes to impart on future generations.

"I've had a blessed life and wouldn't trade it with anyone in the world," says Peter. ★

Brittany Baldwin

Brittany Baldwin serves as a senior advisor to AMAC. She previously served in the White House as a senior speechwriter to President Trump, and prior to that, she worked for Sen. Ted Cruz. She holds a BA in American Studies from Hillsdale College.



Peter Jedick at the Cleveland Fire Fighters Memorial.