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SL: TOASTPETEQU: JODARN-CUL HJ: FM: FG: xcu
BY: JODARN;10/13,14:04 OP: JODARN;10/13,14:04 FR: JODARN-CUL;10/13,14:04
NOTE: PRINTED: 15:52 13-OCT-03

Frankly, I'm caught off guard by this celebration. But nevertheless, I thought I'd make a few spontaneous remarks (pull out speech)

Actually, it was Peter who taught me to compose a toast and read it aloud. He did that at a 60th birthday party for me some time back -- it's a little off-putting to realize he's younger than I am -- and it impressed me as a means to say with precision what you really want to say.

My toast is entitled: 'Why I admire Peter.' The title is tentative, because if I were to take it in a literal, all-inclusive sense, we'd be here quite a spell. So I'll touch on only a few points.

One reason -- and it's by far the most superficial -- is the breadth and depth of Peter's knowledge. He's a man of the world. He's been around the block. He knows the score. It took me years to realize that in all those countries he knows so much about he didn't actually serve as the Post's resident correspondent. He's on intimate terms with the movers and shakers. It seems he's published most of the Presidents, the ex-Presidents, the future Presidents, along with their wives. Now, all this means that discussions with Peter can be disconcerting. He is apt to counter a beautiful array of emotional arguments with actual facts and figures, which in my family is regarded as something of a low blow.

I admire Peter's loyalty. As a younger man he chose his mentors well and years later he enshrined his gratitude by incorporating their names in the logo of his publishing house: I. F Stone, Ben Bradley and Robert Bernstein. That's a pretty powerful trinity -- like, him, they are people of vision and integrity and charisma. The one element they have in common is that they created or commanded enterprises of print and transformed them into institutions vital to the national discourse. Which is exactly what Peter has done with PublicAffairs.

His loyalty washes over his authors. Each new book is the best book ever written on the subject and each author is the most knowledgeable author and this holds true for every book Peter's ever published -- with the possible exception of Donald Trump, whom Peter criticizes with a condemnatory silence. For fun sometime, try attacking one of Peter's authors to his face: you will see a rising crimson anger moving up from his neck into his temples.

When I look back at Peter's career I see that he's followed the old gambler's advice -- 'you've got to know when to hold them and when to fold them.' He was, as we all know, an excellent reporter, newspaper editor and foreign correspondent. But one day as London bureau chief -- if you recall the

*he had a moment of blinding
insight - what Pascal called*

passing storm over Soviet subs harassing Swedish ships for a bit of cold war training -- he found himself at the end of a pier in Stockholm, next to a junior wire service reporter, staring out at the choppy waters for a glimpse of a periscope. And he had the moment of self-realization we all dread: summed up, inadequately, by the thought: what the hell kind of thing is this for a grown man? Within months, he was off in an entirely new direction, churning out books of merit for Random House. And years later, when the house changed hands and what counted more than anything else was not the title line but the bottom line, damned if he didn't leave and up and start his own publishing house. That's a bit like abandoning your old car in a ditch and opening a factory to build a new one. Now he has achieved the almost impossible balancing act -- he's maximized the impact of his intellectual reach and minimized dependence on someone else's payroll. You've got to know when to hold them and when to fold them.

Finally, I admire Peter because he has arranged his life as if it were an art object. It's too ideal to be an accident. Look what he's ended up with. He has the perfect mate in Susan, someone who is as loyal and supportive to him as he is to her. They have a neat division of labor: it reminds me of my late father-in-law, who said he and his wife had struck up an arrangement: 'I make all the big decisions -- who should run the country, how to achieve world peace, what to do about the recession. She makes all the little ones: where we're going to live, what we're going to spend our money on, where the children go to school.' Peter paints on the big canvas: he's the one you go to when you want to know who should be president or how we're going to settle the Middle East. Susan takes on the small stuff: how to get a prisoner of conscience out of jail, how to help a friend, how to raise a loving and sane family in a morally deteriorating world.

Over the years Nina and I have spent a fair amount of time with Peter and Susan -- we've stayed at their house, they've stayed at ours. We've heard them talk to each other in cooing, itchy-bitsy baby voices, but never, never, in all that time have we heard them raise their voices in argument. It's downright spooky, how well they get along.

And of course Peter and Susan have two ideal children, one daughter, one son, whose minor blemishes, if there are any, only serve to underline their overall perfection. They are well launched in their lives. And someday Peter will be able to sit back in the rocking chair on the porch of his grand house in Greenwich and bounce his grandchildren on his knee and look back on a full, rewarding, vital life. He'll probably still even have all his hair.

So, Peter, for all you've done, for all you've overcome, for all you will do, we salute you tonight and wish you much happiness on your 60th.

So tonight, we salute you

with much admiration,
(END)