I’m not talking about, ‘Peter the Great,’ who became
Tsar of Russia in 1682 at the age of ten years old, and ruled
until his death in 1725.

The Peter of this story moved next door to us here in
Arizona at Deer Creek Village. He and his wife, Sharon,
came from Payson, only thirteen miles away. Peter had been
in Payson for twenty years, and was previously from New
York.

Our previous neighbor had been less than social to us
and when they moved, we asked God to bring us good
neighbors that could be friends. God did just that. Peter and Sharon became close to us very fast
and an endearing friendship has been established.

Peter is an electrician by trade, and utilizes part time help sometimes to get his work done.
He had a helper that would finally be unable to be of assistance to him any longer. Peter asked me
in passing one day if I wanted to help him out on one occasion. That was three and a half years ago,
and I have been helping him constantly since.

I have always been on a ‘need to know’ basis, whereby Peter would call me around seven each
morning to say whether he needed me or not. So, I would arise around four to five o’clock, make
coffee and a lunch, and await his phone call.

Let me explain why I rise so early. I love mornings, and do not like to get up late and rush
around to get out the door with my breakfast still in my mouth. I determine ahead of time when I
must leave the house for work, and then get up three hours earlier. I then have three full hours for
a quiet time with my Lord, an adequate time to drink a couple cups of coffee and have breakfast
with my wife, and some time to do a few chores before leaving. That is my routine, and has been
for years.

I am equally happy to stay home if Peter has no work for me. I like my time at home with my
wife. We have a lovely garden and it is our delight to care for it together and I look forward to being
at home a lot more in the future.

The time for me to stop with the outside work is coming close. My body doesn’t respond to
requests to crawl through the attic trusses, or under houses, any more. I know this season of my life
is coming to an end and a new season is about to begin.

Electrical work is much about crawling through hot, dirty, tiny spaces to get wires to run
where they need to be. Crawling through an attic while making sure to put your body weight only
on the truss lumber that is only an inch and a half wide, to avoid stepping through the ceiling

Peter The Great
Written by Bill Williamson
Drywall and creating a disaster in someone’s living room, can be stressful to the human body over time.

Likewise, crawling under houses, that sometimes have only inches to push or pull your body through, while fighting spider webs, dead animals, and possibly live animals, and then working to drill holes for wires, and hammering staples in, can be equally stressful on the body.

Both the attic, and the crawl space under the house, require a face mask to keep the very contaminated dust particles out of your lungs. On occasion, the mask is forgotten, and the lungs are bombarded with undesirable particles, especially the insulation commonly found in both places.

I remember one mountain cabin where Peter and I were replacing much of the wiring underneath because rats had eaten the insulation off the wires. We were on our second day of crawling under the house and still had a lot of work to do. I always take a close look around under any house before crawling too far, scanning carefully with my flashlight. I have eliminated a number of Black Widow spiders by this caution.

On this particular day, I had just crawled out from underneath the cabin when a neighbor stopped along the dirt roadway and got out of his car. I greeted him and he asked what we were doing. I explained that we were replacing most of the wires under the cabin.

He said, ‘you better watch out for rattlesnakes, they like it under there.’ He went on to say, ‘last year I got a call from the lady who used to live here with her boy. She said there was always a noise under the floor when she walked in the kitchen.’

He continued, ‘I crawled under the cabin and discovered a large rattlesnake living under her kitchen.’

I had already thought about the possibility of rattlesnakes under the cabin, but this actual verification by a neighbor that rattlers had been under this particular cabin in the past, gave me the willies. And I must say that I looked even harder every time I went under after that. I was glad when that job was done.

I would have left this line of work had it not been for the relationship that was developing between Peter and me. Besides, he paid me well for my time. Peter is generous in many ways, often padding my cash on payday to give me a few extra bucks. He would say, ‘we did well on that job,’ or ‘that’s just a little extra hazardous duty pay.’

Peter, for the most part did not keep track of my time, he simply asked me how many hours I had that week. He trusted me, it seems.

Peter and Sharon were great neighbors. Often Peter showed up on our doorstep with a bag in his hand. When we answered the doorbell, Peter would exclaim, ‘I found this chicken out in the street.’

He would then hand the bag to one of us, and we would find it contained a hot roasted chicken from Basha’s Market, or maybe Wal Mart.

Often Peter, or Sharon, would show up with other food items as well. Sharon loves to cook and bless people with the dishes she prepares. The dishes are always nicely presented, generally with a note attached. She is a good cook and her dishes are always welcome in our home. My favorite is her bread pudding.

Sharon is a care giver and a nurse. She has held many a dying person in her arms over the years as they breathed their last in this world. She often spends days in the homes of older people in need of direct care on an hourly basis. She and Peter are greatly matched in their tenderheartedness.

Peter and I have labored hard on many projects over the years, sweating and persevering until
we reached the finish line. I was a greenhorn concerning electricity when I began helping Peter, having only done a few projects for my own home. I learned by working for Peter, just how little I did know. Peter has taught me much in my years with him.

I want to stop here for a moment and explain the title of this story, ‘Peter the Great.’

Peter is great! He is great to work for. He always gives me tasks to do and then leaves me to do them. He doesn’t hover over my shoulder to coach my every move. He always examined my work in the early months of my learning and that was to be expected. But, he would usually do so after I finished the task. He allowed me to complete the task, risking a mistake as part of my learning. And sometimes I would have to redo a task to get the required standard Peter was after.

And that is something else that makes Peter great. He strives for perfection on his wiring jobs and his customers always get excellent quality work. I learned that ‘pretty-good’ wasn’t good enough. We would redo the job if it was not ‘good, and right.’ Peter is not into cutting corners, and he is highly thought of by his many customers because of that fact.

One lady called and asked Peter to do some work, and in the course of her call she said that Peter was number one on Yelp.com. Neither of us was familiar with Yelp, but that night I googled it and found it to be a legitimate website to check how good a contractor may be in his field, and sure enough there was Peter right at the top of the list.

Peter is great at making things right too. We had only one small tiff in our work relationship over the years. I was offended at the end of a long hot day by something Peter said, or did. I don’t really remember the details now, but when it became obvious to Peter that I was upset, he said, ‘I wouldn’t hurt you for anything.’ Peter was quick to deal with the situation. The issue was resolved right there on the spot. I never encountered another instance like that with Peter.

This is a good place to explain how I feel about ‘being offended.’ I don’t believe someone can ‘give me an offense.’ I have to ‘pick it up and take it for myself.’ So, when I am offended, it is my own fault for taking it. Just as it was in this case with Peter. The problem came when I ‘took offense.’

Peter is a great conversationalist. He knows how to listen as well as talk. We’ve always had good discussion on a variety of topics, ranging from politics to walking with Jesus. He always knows his topic very well because he does the research to get the whole story. I often just skim the headlines and get part of the story, but Peter goes much deeper. He isn’t satisfied with only part of the story.

The mention of Jesus brings up another point.

Peter is great at bringing God into our work day. While he lived in Deer Creek as my neighbor, we would make the thirteen-mile drive up the hill into Payson to our work site for the day, and Peter often utilized that time to pray for family, country, and issues of the day. I was happy about that.

We never eat a lunch without stopping for a prayer to thank God for the food, whether sitting in his van or in a public restaurant. We generally pray for the work opportunities we have, and other items that may need prayer as well. Peter is no stranger to the Bible, and has a good knowledge of what it says. It is great that Peter is a godly man.

Peter is great about asking me what I think about particular aspects of a job we are doing. He is open to ideas and often uses suggestions that I have. He is the expert, but isn’t above asking what I think, even though I am the flunky.

But, one of the things that is greatest about Peter, is, ‘The Look.’ ‘The Look’ comes at special times, and is in itself, special. My wife, Maureen, and I love
‘The Look.’ Peter has a way of making emphasis at a certain point in a tale where he tips his head slightly forward, and while not turning his head in your direction, turns his eyes up and toward you while raising his eyebrows, and simply waiting for the reaction to his point. Sometimes he shrugs his shoulders slightly and raises his hands at the same time for added emphasis.

‘The Look’ is great. Peter said ‘The Look’ came from a Jimmy Stewart movie many years ago, and even lent us a VCR of the movie to watch. But, I have to say, Peter has greatly improved ‘Jimmy’s Look.’ It’s quite irresistible and makes people smile.

Peter is great at empathy. I’ve seen him many times, when a customer wasn’t flush with money, shave a lot off of the bill. I knew the normal cost of the job and his figure for them was a fraction of that. Often the person would be older and their inability to pay was evident in their surroundings. Peter is very aware and responds with a tender heart. Sometimes he just says, ‘no charge for that.’

So, you have just seen a few of the reasons I refer to Peter, as great.

Another benefit of working with Peter over the years is in the people we meet. This world is full of people with stories to tell. In fact, everyone has a story, but not all are willing to share them with others.

There are too many stories to tell here, but I will mention a couple of them.

Hugo is one story. Hugo, a citizen of Chile, grew up in a well-to-do home with a father who was a munitions expert. Hugo grew up exploding things, and was himself, into munitions.

While on a visit to the United States, Hugo, was conscripted into the US Army in very unusual circumstances. He was trained in specialty areas and often swept off in the middle of the night to some other training. He learned more about munitions, jumped out of airplanes, and had jungle training. Because of his munitions experience, he was used to aid in training of others.

He was then sent to Viet Nam. He and forty-five others were sent out ahead of enemy lines to act as forward observers and advisors. They were not allowed to have weapons, other than handguns, so that they would not appear aggressive. They were attacked many times and they eventually found it necessary to take up arms and defend themselves, even though unauthorized.

Over time, they were all captured or killed. Hugo was captured with many others. The Viet Cong would take one prisoner a day and stand him before his fellow soldiers. They would then begin the slow torture that led to death. Hugo, and the others, would have to watch the entire scene play out. If they closed their eyes, or refused to look, there were severe consequences.

Many of these soldiers tried to escape and were eventually recaptured and died at the hands of the Cong.

One man alone survived all the madness and lived to tell his story. That man was Hugo. I was pleased that I was able to meet Hugo and hear his story. I thanked him for all that he went through for the USA, and for us Americans.

US officials denied that Hugo had been through any of this, and his reception home was nonexistent.

Hugo was a hero without honor, without recognition.

Hugo did not let his bad experience in Nam dampen his desire to succeed, however. He and his wife became two very sought after Airline Mechanics. They were specialists in the large Boeing 747, and the large Douglas Craft airplanes. They traveled worldwide to instruct and aid others in this field of expertise.

Another man was, Jim. Jim had also fought in Viet Nam, and flew F-4 Jets during his two tours. His plane was shot down twice and he suffered many injuries as a result. Jim has a metal
plate in one leg, and an artificial ankle. Jim flew battle missions, leaflet dropping missions, and even flew as part of an intelligence team. He was a valuable asset to America.

Finally Jim’s day to come home arrived. His plane landed, taxied, and parked some distance from the airport at San Francisco. Jim departed the plane by the staircase that had been moved to the plane. He was so happy to be back on American soil that he stooped and actually kissed the ground. He was home!

Jim made his way toward the terminal and as he approached he noticed a crowd of people, whom he thought were waiting to greet someone. As he drew close, he could now understand their words.

‘Baby-killer! Baby-Killer!’ they shouted over and over at him. They spit at him and ridiculed him to his face.

This was his welcome home committee.

A police officer took him aside and suggested that he go into the terminal and get out of his uniform as fast as possible. Jim did just that.

My heart went out to Jim as he shared this part of his story. I had extended my hand to him even before hearing the story and thanked him for his service in Nam. I am truly grateful for his service and the many who were just like him. I am sorry that he had to endure this kind of reception in the home he loved and fought for.

Jim didn’t let his circumstances dictate his lifestyle from that point forward though, like many did. Jim worked for, and attained a PHD in the field of Psychiatry. He has been able to counsel many soldiers from that war-torn era. He tells me that many of the soldiers have a legitimate complaint and truly wanted help. They received the help and benefitted from it. But, others really didn’t want help, they used their circumstances as an excuse to continue in drugs, and wallow in their own self-pity.

Because of Hugo and Jim, I have a better understanding of the agonizing let down the Viet Nam veterans went through, and why the Viet Nam war has such a bad stench in the nostrils of many. It isn’t because of the battles, the war. It is because of our total disregard of our boys who gave up everything, risking life and limb, to go fight in those jungles so very far from home.

God help us!

Peter and I worked on a wide variety of electrical jobs. Some were fun, some were challenging, and others were just plain hard.

One such project was located in the mountains above Payson, and was above the winter snow zone level.

We began the project with a drive to check it out. We returned with a tractor with a bucket and hoe attachment to blade snow from the road, and to dig a hole for a new power pole. We spent subsequent days sliding and spinning our tires trying to get into the project.

Days passed and the project was a miserable one. Our hands and feet would get so cold it was hard to hold onto tools, or do the simplest task. We worked daily until light would fade away into darkness, only to return to a fresh new ground cover of snow the next day.

Finally our last day came, but the light gave out before we were finished. We lay on the cold ground under the house in the dark with a flashlight in hand, Peter wiring the last wires of the furnace that was attached to the floor joists under the house.

My toes and fingers were numb as we picked up the last of the tools. Soon we had the power back on and light flowed from the house windows, the furnace was churning away, and we drove away knowing we had done over and above what was required in that situation.
There were many jobs in extreme heat conditions. Arizona summers can be hard to exist in sometimes, not to mention climbing through a hot attic, or digging a hole in the direct sunlight to put a power pole in the ground.

Peter is always grateful for the effort I make. Recently, he asked my hours and I told him. He counted out one-hundred dollar bills and handed them to me saying, ‘that’s close enough.’ I had earned seven hundred forty dollars, but he gave me eight hundred.

It is often said ‘All good things must come to an end.’ Well, I doubt that is true, but my work relationship is coming to an end with Peter. My body is telling me it is time to shift gears into the next adventure in life that comes from serving Jesus Christ. I’m not sure what that will look like, but I do know that after much prayer I am to bring the Peter/Bill team to an end.

I will miss Peter greatly. Our time together was more than work. Good friends were spending time together.

I’ll be pulling the pin tomorrow on my work for Peter. I am looking forward to more writing time at home, more time in the garden with my wife, more picnic times with her in the mountains, more day trips to places we have not seen yet, and shop projects when I have an idea that needs to be built, and maybe a few afternoon naps.

Peter tells people that I am retiring, but I don’t see it that way at all. I am simply going to do something different. One part that will be different is that I will be trusting the Lord for enough finances to make mortgage and other necessities. But then, Jesus is trustworthy and will provide for all our needs. He always has, and always will.

Peter too, is winding down. He retired his electrical license last fall and is now working as a handy man, doing electrical projects for people. Peter has a new camper trailer that he and Sharon have used a few times locally for camp outs.

They are taking a two-month break after Labor Day and traveling with the camper to New York, taking the slow route along the back roads of America.

I wish Peter well, he’s great . . .