

**Eulogy for Keith Laurie**  
**“Keith was Exuberantly Contagious”**  
**Peter Laurie**

There's a verse from the poem "The Old Astronomer" by Sarah Williams, that I find fitting:

Though my soul may set in darkness,  
It will rise in perfect light.  
I have loved the stars too fondly  
To be fearful of the night.

Few people know that astronomy was one of Keith's passions: but that ought not to surprise anyone.

Keith had an insatiable interest in everything under the sun. And in anything he took up, he soon emerged as a leader. Let me mention only a few:

archaeology ( he was involved in many digs both in St Kitts and Barbados);

the plight of poor countries (he was an Honorary Consul of Haiti for decades, devoting time, energy and money to that Caribbean country's welfare);

the breeding and showing of dogs (he was the president of the Barbados Kennel Club and the German Shepherd Dog Club);

the management and genetic improvement of the black belly sheep stock in Barbados (he headed the Barbados Sheep Farmers' Association and, as founder president of the Barbados Black Belly Sheep Association International, was instrumental in establishing the black belly sheep as a unique Barbadian breed);

the protection of our environment and sustainable development (he headed the Barbados Environmental Society, made a major NGO contribution to the 1994 Global Conference on Small Island Developing States; organized and led walks with Colin Hudson for many years to explore the Barbadian landscape, and his final fervour, permaculture, led him to become a founding member and first Chairman of the Caribbean Permaculture Research Institute located at Graeme Hall);

the preservation of our built heritage (he was president of the Barbados National Trust);

the sugar industry (he played a pioneering and innovative role as chemist, sugar technologist and international consultant in sugar industries in the Caribbean and worldwide);

the rum industry (he was an international consultant, a connoisseur who organized and judged local and regional rum tastings, and had one of the finest collections of rum);

and of course he had a deep and enduring love of agriculture in general (presiding over the Barbados Agricultural Society for many years as well as the Barbados Society of Technologists in Agriculture, and worked tirelessly for the diversification and modernization of agriculture in Barbados);

And Keith was also a Eucharistic minister and dynamic member of the congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary Church at Verdun, St. John.

I could go on. But if I did I would never end.

For his devotion to these and many other causes, Governor-General Dame Nita Barrow appointed him in 1992 to the Senate, where he served with distinction for 10 years.

He was also awarded the OBE in 2008 for his services to agriculture.

Early in his life, Keith found himself at a turning point. He was torn between two loves. At Harrison College he had been a brilliant cadet as well as a keen science student with an interest in agriculture. When he was eighteen, a British officer in the Barbados Regiment, noticing his outstanding abilities, secured a full scholarship for him to attend the famous Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. At the same time, Sir Donald Wiles, a great Barbadian visionary, recognizing his love of agriculture, got him a scholarship to attend the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad. Keith agonized, then opted for agriculture and never looked back, though his love of soldiering always stayed with him.

All his life Keith cared deeply about many things. Unlike most of us who can barely see beyond our noses, Keith was a visionary ahead of the times. But he was also a practical man, impatient to get things done.

Example: as an 8 handicap golfer, Keith discovered when he and his family moved to St Kitts, that there was no golf course. He did not sit around griping. He simply designed and built a golf course from scratch.

Keith overflowed with the joy of life. He found life 'fantastic!': his favorite word of approval. He also had an extraordinary love of people. He greeted every woman he met, intimate friend or total stranger, with a big hug and the words "ah, love of my life".

He infected everyone he met with his good spirits, humour, hope and unwavering determination, as all his many many friends scattered across the world can attest to. In his final years he dedicated himself to making at least six people smile every day.

Keith was exuberantly contagious.

The message for me, his youngest brother, was always loud and clear: be passionate, stand up for the things you believe in, and damn the consequences.

Keith spent much of his life tilting at windmills. The windmills of folly and abuse of power. He knew he'd lose almost every battle, sometimes at significant personal cost. But that never stopped him.

Fortunately he always had Marina and his children Andrew, Keithan, Rae and Veronica at his side to pour soothing balm on his bruises.

Keith's restless intellectual curiosity led him to become a notorious experimenter. And it only seemed natural and logical **to him** that his wife and children, his sister Norma and his brother, should be his guinea pigs. Every time he phoned me I would shudder when I heard the words, "Pete, I want you to taste something".

Over the years we've been subjected to taste tests of varying degrees of revoltingness: assorted bush teas, deep fried prickly cactus, beef so well aged you had to stab it with a knife to stop it crawling off the plate, and, of course, his culinary masterpiece: the dreaded Giant African Snail. When the Ministry of Agriculture was wringing its collective hands over the fact that this invasive species had no natural predators in Barbados, along came Keith, thus proving the Ministry of Agriculture once again wrong - something he took a perverse delight in doing.

He once thought it might be possible to age rum instantly in a microwave and save years of laying it down in oak barrels. So one evening, he invited his family to witness the finely tuned experiment and do some taste testing. I'm sorry to report that **this** experiment was a failure.

But it was one hell of a fun evening.

Keith was also a dangerously skillful negotiator. Some years ago I discovered that an importing agency was selling off cases of Guinness Draft Stout in the bottle, reduced from 72 dollars a case to 28, because the 'buy before' date was fast approaching. I bought a case and took it to Keith. We agreed it was excellent.

So Keith said, "OK little brother, leave it to me; I'll negotiate that price down." Next day he phoned to tell me we could now buy it at 5 dollars a case. "Fantastic!" I said. "How did you manage that?" "Oh, I told them it was clearly unfit for human consumption, but if I could get it for 5 dollars a case I could feed it to my pigs. The only condition is that we have to take all that's left off their hands." "No problem", I said eagerly, "How many cases are there?" "684".

The Laurie family the next few years doing some serious rediscovering of our Irish roots.

Several years ago, Keith acquired land at Chalky Mount, and fell immediately in love with the area. So much so that his last request was that his ashes be scattered there. He spent most weekends there in his makeshift hut with family and friends feasting on roasted sweet potatoes, yams, and breadfruit stuffed with pigtail.

But Keith soon applied his enquiring mind to the geology of the Scotland District. In his research, he came across a report by an English geologist in the 1930s suggesting there may be gold at Chalky Mount. What the geologist actually wrote was that scatterings of gold dust **might** be located adjacent to manjak deposits, because - and I quote - "the petrographic relationships with chemosynthetic diagenetic carbonates may have led to a buoyancy-enhanced diapirism of the accretionary prism".

Obviously the quack who wrote such gibberish had been suffering from sun stroke, or had been imbibing too much rum, or had been smoking manjak. Or all three. In any event he obviously thought it would be fun to encourage some future eccentric, sorry scientist, to scour the hills for gold.

Well he succeeded. And, as usual, my brother roped me in. And I, not to be outdone, roped in our then 18 year old son, Chris, who, on the way down to Chalky Mount to meet Keith to go prospecting, said,

“Dad, I know there is no gold at Chalky Mount. You know there is no gold at Chalky Mount. Uncle Keith knows there is no gold at Chalky Mount. So why are we doing this?”

Why do children ask such questions?

Anyway, after two hours of fruitless panning for gold in in a stream running down a gully, we sensibly gave up and made our way to one of Keith’s favorite haunts, the Sand Dunes’ Bar on the East Coast road, where Curtis served us up bowls of steaming breadfruit cou cou and ice-cold beer.

After taking a deep pull of my beer, I said to Chris: “Son, in answer to your earlier question, life is not, as many people imagine, about the arrival; it’s about the journey.”

“My God”, he snorted, "you're beginning to sound just like Uncle Keith!"

Keith was exuberantly contagious.

The truth is that Keith marched to the beat of a different drummer: a drummer only he could hear, and a beat that led him down paths that only the brave and foolhardy would venture.

Living with someone that marches to the beat of a different drummer is not always easy. But Marina, remarkably, miraculously, was always there for Keith. Keith could no more have survived without Marina than a fire without oxygen. They were a perfect fit.

He was a loving husband, father, brother and grandfather. His beloved grandchildren, Andrew, Ben and Robyn, came from Canada to say farewell.

He was a warm, loyal, generous, and perpetually surprising human being who revelled in life and its wonders.

He loved life deeply and accepted death stoically as the impostor it is.

Let me close with the final verse of "The Old Astronomer":

I must say Good-bye, my pupil, for I cannot longer speak;  
Draw the curtain back for Venus, ere my vision grows too weak:  
It is strange the pearly planet should look red as fiery Mars,—  
God will mercifully guide me on my way amongst the stars.

Keith, we shall all miss you dearly. You leave a big hole in our lives that can never be filled. Thank you for being you.

Rest easy, my brother.