

# PETER

## A Stewart Brothers' Documentary

### *Project Description:*

An intimate and often funny portrait of Peter, a charismatic man with Hydrocephalus, who has overcome great obstacles on the way to becoming the resident personality of New Canaan, CT.

Peter shares his abounding warmth and charm with all those he encounters, giving an inviting face to this exclusive, country club suburb.

Diagnosed with Hydrocephalus at birth, a rare brain defect considered untreatable at the time, Peter was given only five years to live. The doctors rendered him a 'vegetable' and had him institutionalized. Fifty years later, Peter celebrates his independence and is on a first name basis with almost everyone in town.

Although many people know Peter's face and have laughed at Peter's sharp sense of humor, very few realize the obstacles that Peter has overcome.

Peter continues to be an inspiration to anyone who has faced challenges in life.

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### Director's Statement:

The inspiration and the focus of our documentary is Peter Lewis, who selflessly opened his home and heart to us. Peter's world has always been closely connected to our own. So much so that we never realized what a remarkable story Peter had to tell. Peter's presence has become so ubiquitous in the small town of New Canaan, CT, that it's hard to imagine New Canaan without him. Peter shares his abounding warmth and charm with all those he encounters, giving an inviting face to this exclusive, country club suburb.

Diagnosed with Hydrocephalus at birth, a rare brain defect considered untreatable at the time, Peter was given only five years to live. The doctors rendered him a 'vegetable' and had him institutionalized. Fifty years later, Peter celebrates his independence and is on a first name basis with almost everyone in town. Although many people know Peter's face and have laughed at Peter's sharp sense of humor, very few realize the obstacles that Peter has overcome. He continues to be an inspiration to anyone who has faced challenges in life. The process of making "Peter " was extremely rewarding. We feel it provides an honest look into the life of someone who truly illustrates the power of the human heart.

*Doug Stewart*

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Biography:

*Doug Stewart*

*[Director, Producer, Editor, Cinematographer]*

Doug Stewart is a graduate of Lawrence University in Wisconsin and has studied film at SUNY Purchase and the School of Visual Arts in New York. He has written and directed various short movies and is currently writing his second feature screenplay as well as writing and directing a narrative short. A Manhattan-resident, he also works as an editor, a graphic designer and a web designer.

*Patrick Stewart*

*[Director, Cinematographer, Composer (a.k.a. Ken Oceanseed)]*

Patrick Stewart is a graduate of Kenyon College in Ohio. While at Kenyon, he co-founded the college's first and only student-run film organization, providing technical and creative support for projects, and organizing annual festivals. Patrick currently resides in Baltimore, where he works in community development. He also writes and produces independent music, and is currently developing a feature screenplay.

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THE "PETER" PRINCIPLES

(From left: Patrick Stewart, Peter, & Doug Stewart)

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NEW CANAAN, CONNECTICUT, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1978

### New Canaan Neighbors

## A Penny In His Pocket

By NANCY K. MALLING

Peter Lewis is a very special person and he makes a lot of other people feel special too. He bags groceries at Walter Stewart's, but that's only a scant description of his role at the store.

His favorite customers are the kids. Some of the little ones think he owns the store. He remembers every one by name and always has a penny in his pocket for the gumball machine. One day when he was giving a small friend a penny for gum, a mother jokingly asked, "And do you give dollars to grown-ups?" Afraid not.

Peter also knows the regular customers by name and greets them all personally. How does he remember everyone's name?

"It's easy," he says. "I just enjoy people very much. Everyone knows my name and so when they say, 'Peter, how are you?' I feel embarrassed if I do not know their names. And knowing everyone just makes the job more enjoyable."

"I just love working at Walter Stewart's. It means a great deal to me. You cannot have a job more



— Bukovcik Photo

Peter Lewis . . at the source of supply

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TUESDAY, OFFICIALLY, WAS PETER LEWIS' DAY

NEW CANAAN ADVERTISER, NEW CANAAN, CONN., THURSDAY JULY 18, 2002.

By Wendy Van Parys



**PETER'S DAY --** First Selectman, Richard P. Bond proclaims Tuesday, July 16, 2002, "Peter Lewis Day" in New Canaan in honor of Mr. Lewis' 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Mr. Lewis is a long-time employee at Walter Stewart's Market, 229 Elm Street. From left are Mr. Bond, Mr. Lewis and Bailey Stewart, president of the Walter Stewart Company.

NEW CANAAN, CT.

Tuesday, July 16, was "Peter Lewis Day" in New Canaan, marking the 50th birthday of a gentleman who has become something of a town icon, and whose old-fashioned courtesy, honesty and kindness have brought daily pleasure to those around him for half a century.

Mr. Lewis was born on July 16, 1952 in Elmira, N.Y., the son of Maryann and John Sheldon Lewis, Sr. The family (which included four other children) also lived in Virginia and Ohio before moving to New Canaan in 1967; Mr. Lewis was 15 at the time. He joined the public schools' special education program and graduated from New Canaan High School in 1972.

After graduation, Mr. Lewis was employed briefly by a firm in Stamford.

He subsequently became associated with STAR (the Society to Advance the Retarded), where he learned various skills through on the job training.

An associate at STAR recommended him for a position at Walter Stewart's Market, and he began working at the Elm Street store in January, 1975.

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“Peter has been an outstanding employee, with contributions to our customer service program that go well beyond those in his job description,” said Bailey Stewart, president of the Walter Stewart Company and grandson of the store’s founder.

At Stewart’s he pitches in to bag groceries, help customers, load the bags in their cars, and retrieve grocery carts from the parking lot. In the process, he manages to brighten each customer’s day with conversation and humor.

“His unexpected gestures of thoughtfulness and courtesy are a genuine expression of his feeling for the people who shop at the store. When I shop at Stewart’s Peter brightens my day,” Nancy Malling wrote in a 1978 feature story in the *New Canaan Advertiser*.

“Peter enjoys people and takes great pride in remembering most of his customers by name,” Mr. Stewart said. “He has a wonderful warmth for our customers’ children, and gets genuine pleasure in watching them grow up.”

“Shortly after he started working here we began the ‘Peter’s Stocking’ holiday tradition at Stewart’s,” Mr. Stewart continued. “Each December Peter and my wife, Gail, shop for toys, as well as a toy musical instrument, since he enjoys music so much himself. One of our store’s youngest customers usually wins its contents in the drawing that we hold just before Christmas, although one year a grandmother won it and distributed the contents to her grandchildren,” he said.

Mr. Lewis has resided at the Schoolhouse Apartments since his father moved to Florida several years ago. His late mother, a Realtor, served as selectman for New Canaan (elected as a member of the Democratic party).

In addition to music -- he has a large collection of CDs covering a wide range of music styles -- Mr. Lewis enjoys walking and visiting with friends, and frequently can be seen strolling through town.

“Throughout his life adult life, Peter has exemplified how successful people who are challenged by disabilities can be when the given chance. We could all learn some important lessons from him,” Mr. Stewart said.

The proclamation, signed by First Selectman Richard P. Bond, reads:

“Whereas Peter Lewis will celebrate his fiftieth birthday on July 16, 2002,

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“Whereas Peter Lewis, through his daily contributions of warmth and kindness towards all with whom he comes in contact, has provided a reservoir of joy and good will for the people of New Canaan, especially the town’s children,

“Whereas Peter Lewis has exemplified the traditional American values of honesty, reliability and hard work through more than a quarter century of employment at Walter Stewart’s Market,

“Whereas Peter Lewis’ smile and good humor provide sunshine on even the gloomiest day,

“Whereas Peter Lewis, through his example, offers a beacon of hope to all, who face obstacles in life, as well as to many individuals, nonprofit organizations and government agencies that provide support to those who need extra help,

I hereby proclaim July 16, 2002 as “Peter Lewis Day in New Canaan.”

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NEW CANAAN ADVERTISER, NEW CANAAN, CONN., THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 2004

### Documentary film captures local personality

"You can't go around the world without running into someone from New Canaan — or somebody will say you live in New Canaan, you must know Peter Lewis ..." Peter Lewis said in the documentary "Peter," scheduled to premiere at the fourth annual Vision Fest Film Festival in New York City, which runs June 23-27.

In the film, local filmmakers Doug and Patrick Stewart take an intimate look into the life of one of New Canaan's most familiar faces.

"Peter is synonymous with our memories of growing up in New Canaan, but we only knew Peter in the context of our family business. This documentary was an attempt to learn more about Peter and as we quickly found out he really has lived a remarkable life," Doug Stewart said.

Doug and Patrick are the great-grandchildren of Walter Stewart, the original owner of Walter Stewart's Market on Elm Street.

The film not only illustrates how New Canaan has impacted Peter, but also how Peter has impacted New Canaan.

Peter arrived in New Canaan in 1967, graduated from New Canaan High School in 1972 and has been an employee at Walter Stewart's Market for nearly 30 years. One memorable scene documents the Town's official recognition of Peter's contributions and inspiration to New Canaan with the declaration of "Peter Lewis Day" on his 50th birthday. Peter reads the proclamation, signed by First Selectman Richard P. Bond:

"Whereas Peter Lewis has exemplified the traditional American values of honesty, reliability and hard work through more than a quarter century of employment at Walter Stewart's Market. Whereas Peter Lewis's smile and good humor provide sunshine on even the gloomiest day. Whereas Peter Lewis through his example offers a beacon of hope to all who face obstacles in life, as well as to many individuals, nonprofit organizations and government agencies that support those who need extra help. I hereby proclaim July 16, 2002 as 'Peter Lewis Day' in New Canaan."

"Peter" will be screened at the Vision Fest Film Festival (VF04) Independent Vision Showcase at noon Saturday, June 26, at the Cantor Film Center (in the heart of the NYU campus), 36 East Eighth Street, Manhattan. "Peter" is playing in Program 6-Upper Level Screening Room 200.

Vision Fest was started in the summer of 2001.

Any additional questions can be directed to Doug Stewart at [doug@brokinpictures.com](mailto:doug@brokinpictures.com).



**PERSONALITY PROFILE** — Peter Lewis (center) is the subject of a new documentary by local filmmakers Patrick Stewart (left) and Doug Stewart (right).

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