

Obituary

Peter Greaves 1931– 2021

A UN campaigner who saved many children's lives

Peter Greaves, born in Cardiff, was the son of Methodist missionaries, and spent much of his childhood in Kenya. A degree in bio-chemistry in Cambridge, where, in an adjoining lab Watson and Crick were busy cracking the DNA code, was followed by a PhD at the University of London – and a crash course in tank-driving during national service in Germany.

While working at the Royal Free, he attended a “Sherry Party” of Welsh poetry where he met his future wife, Chloe Morgan, an up-and-coming young actress. They got married in Peckham Rye, and a short honeymoon in Cornwall was followed by a stint in Mwanza, on Lake Victoria, in Tanzania, working on a UN project.

Back in England, Peter started work at the British Nutrition Foundation and they settled in a flat in Shooters Hill, before moving to Blackheath: but not for long. Peter Greaves then joined the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the FAO relocated him first to Cairo, and then to Delhi, via Beirut. It was India that he left the FAO to join UNICEF, and it was with UNICEF that he spent the rest of his working life.

With UNICEF he became a strong and early advocate of low-cost interventions including immunisation, oral rehydration and breast-feeding, which could prevent or treat a very significant proportion of illnesses and deaths among the world's children – policies that were taken up in a big way by UNICEF.

In India he became a friend of the BBC's Mark Tully, and went riding at the Delhi Polo Club. This led to his stint as a British Cavalry Officer extra in Satajit Ray's film *The Chess Players*. Peter and Chloe developed a deep love, understanding, and knowledge of India's history and culture.

As the 70s drew to a close, Peter left Delhi to become head of UNICEF's Regional Office for South America in Brazil. There he set up a programme for street children in Rio, providing them with education, 'safe' part-time work, a safe place to sleep, and a hot meal. It was a far more successful approach than the correctional institutions operated by the Brazilian Government, and later spread across the whole country.

He also launched a highly successful Breastfeeding programme. In 1983 he and Roger Shrimpton developed and implemented a primary health care plan to tackle the appalling infant mortality rate in the poorest Brazilian state, Maranhão, resulting in a 33% reduction in infant mortality. The programme expanded into several other Brazilian states and, eventually, worked along with the Brazilian government. All who worked in UNICEF Brazil during the three years he served there said that they were among the best years in their working lives.

1984 saw a move to the HQ of UNICEF in New York where Greaves made many important contributions to UNICEF and child health policy. His colleague Margaret Kyenya-Isabityere recalls, “He was the backbone, the glue, that held the nutrition section together.” Most notably in 1990 he was one of the “Innocenti” team instrumental in creating *The Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*: he was the master-diplomat who managed to get UNICEF and WHO to agree on the final draft. This document became a global standard that helped transform maternal care policies.

Peter Greaves' commitment to good causes did not stop on his retirement. He joined the United Nations Association, and played an active part in the local branch in Blackheath and Greenwich. With UNA he campaigned on many issues – nuclear disarmament, the arms trade, global inequality, Baby Milk Action, and refugees. Natalie Samarasinghe recalls having many “late night discussions on urgency motions with him” to put before conference. He was greatly exercised by climate change and wrote regularly to national newspapers (and the local *Westcombe News*), and was a strong supporter of Greta Thunberg.

His interest in these global issues did not prevent him from fully participating in the local community, where he was a regular attendee at St Margaret's Church. He was a devoted husband, father and grandfather, and much loved by his wide circle of friends. In the words of his son, Tim: “He is undoubtedly one of those rare people who has left this world a better, a more generous and kinder place than he found it.”

Peter Greaves died on 24th December 2021 after a short illness. The funeral took place at St Margaret's Church, Lee, on January 5th. Deepest condolences to his wife, Chloe, son Tim, daughter Kate, daughter-in-law Noreen, son-in-law Mitch and grandchildren Ciara, Conor, Tim & Ben.

N.G.