

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Drawing the Circle Wide

Series Peter Greene, interviewed

by Bill Locke

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BILL LOCKE:

Peter, thank you so much for joining me in our Drawing the Circle Wide interview series. First of all, why don't you tell us your full name?

PETER GREENE:

Peter William Oliver Greene. Actually, I was christened by my mother, Pierre Guillaume Olivier Greene - but it's been changed due to where I live, where the language is different.

BILL LOCKE:

That's interesting. Can you tell us a little about your background?

PETER GREENE:

I was born in Montreal, the greatest city in this country. Take that, Toronto! My mother was the first female correspondent hired by Radio-Canada, and my father was Chief Executive Officer of London Life. I didn't speak English until I was four.

BILL LOCKE:

So you grew up in Montreal?

PETER GREENE:

Not really. I grew up mainly in Europe, but the first place my mother was stationed was Rio de Janeiro. I've forgotten most of my Portuguese, but I still know where my school is, because I was in kindergarten there. And I've actually been in contact with two friends that I met there as a kid, 76 years ago. We moved on to Brussels, then Paris, and London, New York, and Los Angeles. I couldn't go to school at my mother's posting in Mexico City, because she couldn't find a decent high school, so I went to live with my great-grandmother in Pittsburgh. Then I went to the University of Windsor for my BA, and to McGill University for my Master's Degree in Urban Planning. I came here to Calgary three years ago after being 20 years in Vancouver. I've lived in all of the cities over a million in Canada, except Edmonton.

BILL LOCKE:

You have a very cosmopolitan background!

PETER GREENE:

Well, it's made me very tolerant. One of the reasons why I think this church is so wonderful - and it IS wonderful - is the inclusion that one finds here, and the diversity of the people who attend.

BILL LOCKE:

What would you say were some of the values that your family or your upbringing brought to you?

PETER GREENE:

Well, from my mother, very much a tolerant side. She worked hard against separatism though, in Quebec. She turned Anglican when she and my father married, because she was Roman Catholic, and my father was United Church. My father left the Anglican Church because his grandmother, my great-grandmother with whom I lived in Pittsburgh, was very much against their marriage because my mother was a Catholic at the time, and basically my father followed her. My great-grandmother was very much the strict head of his side of the family. My father was a great liberal, but he would have made a better conservative, I think.

BILL LOCKE:

I would guess you would get some of this interest in inclusion, in terms of a value, from your family.

PETER GREENE:

Yes, I really think that this country of ours is so admired in the world. I really admired Justin Trudeau for bringing in the one million refugees. We're almost 42 million Canadians now. We are the eighth, ninth, and tenth greatest economy in the world, depending on the way you measure it. We've surpassed Italy, and I think Carney is showing us that we're very much on the world stage and in league with Britain, France, and Germany – even though we're almost 42 million, and they're all well over 60 million. I think that's really something. I'm a very proud Canadian.

BILL LOCKE:

Were there any individuals outside your family who had a big influence on you?

PETER GREENE:

Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. When they entertained at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, my father was on the board of CNE. I got to meet them, and Roy Rogers sat me up on Trigger. Every horse I've had since – and I've had four in my lifetime – have all been palominos. Outside of that, I had a philosophy professor at the University of Windsor. Although he's in his 90s now, I still correspond with him. He is a great man.

BILL LOCKE:

So, what were some of the ideas or some of the values that he imparted, do you think?

PETER GREENE:

Well, the idea of reason, and to investigate reason. In governance, for example – I find Carney is very good at that. I know why Trump scares the daylights out of me. It's because there's a lack of reason. More than anything else, that's what I try to go after – reason, in virtually everything I do.

BILL LOCKE:

What are some of the things you've been involved with, and worked on?

PETER GREENE:

Well, presently, besides supporting two churches – one here and one in Invermere (to which I will return in the spring) – I also support Doctors Without Borders, and here in Calgary I support the Mustard Seed as well.

BILL LOCKE:

How about your work life, Peter?

PETER GREENE:

I taught in a high school for a long time, because after I graduated with my Master's in Urban Planning, nobody was hiring me unless I wanted to go to the southern United States, which I didn't want to do. So, I taught. I was head of nine departments at a high school, and because several of our principals were removed, I was made principal or vice-principal quite often. Then, all of a sudden, a position opened up at the University of British Columbia. I resigned from the high school and went to UBC, where I taught Urban Planning for 20 years. It makes me appreciate Calgary so much! Calgary is a fairly well-planned city, big parks in every neighborhood for families, wonderful trails all over the city to get traffic moving, including the expressways ... although the traffic lights on the Crowchild – they've got to go.

BILL LOCKE:

So, for those of us who don't know anything about urban planning, what sort of things does it cover? And what were the things that you were especially interested in?

PETER GREENE:

First of all, planning has got to be done with the idea of the people who live in the urban area. Too often, homes are torn down for some grand ideas, which is very, very sad. I was a little concerned with the last city government here when they decided to have more open planning. I've seen in certain areas where single-family homes are being torn down and people's lives therefore uprooted for the sake of new condos or rental apartments or townhouses. I've always, throughout my life, felt that the idea of a single-family home was a symbol of strong community and family life. I do love skyscrapers – I think they're absolutely wonderful for condos. They're the best environmental solution to our problems today. I live in one now, but I also have a two-bedroom house in Windermere, part of Invermere, on the waterfront there.

BILL LOCKE:

Can you tell me a little bit more about your family?

PETER GREENE:

There were four boys in my family. I'm eight years older than the two that are still living. Richard, who was two years younger than I, died three years ago. Richard had a very sad life. My father was very severe with him, and he got into drugs, and divorced his first wife. The second wife was a nudist, so the two of them became nudists. They lived only five minutes from our home, and whenever my mother was going to visit them, she would phone them up from the car and say, "I'm five minutes away; get your clothes on." My other siblings are twins, who are eight years younger than I am. My father, due to alcoholism, had to leave London Life. He took all his customers with him, and started his own company, which my nephew now runs. I own a third of that company. My nephew just opened up an office in the Lancaster Building downtown, above Simon's Clothing store. I know very little about insurance, but I go in once a week to make sure the cleaning lady is doing her job.

BILL LOCKE:

Tell me more about your immediate family.

PETER GREENE:

Well, my daughter is a teacher. She loves teaching grade fives, and she teaches history, geography, social science and citizenship part of the day, although she's taught math and science as well. My oldest granddaughter wants to go into business, which started at Ernest Manning High School, where she took her first business course. One of the subjects I used to teach was Marketing and Business Administration, so I'm all behind her. The younger one until recently wanted to be a

veterinarian, but now she's thinking about household design because she loves that show "Love It or List It Vancouver" on TV, so I think *good for her!* I took her to see the College of Art and Design, near where the Bow Trail ends. We've been there three times now, and she's more interested than ever.

BILL LOCKE:

When did you start coming to St. Stephen's? And how do you feel about the church?

PETER GREENE:

Well, as I already mentioned, I've lived in all of the big cities in this country except Edmonton. As far as I'm concerned, when I move to a new city, I'm not going to meet new people at a bar. I meet them in an Anglican Church, and I've been very lucky that way. I did live in Victoria for a while, and everybody who lives there are all too grand for the royal family. I didn't find Victoria very friendly compared to the other cities that I've lived in. St. Stephen's is my community church - I live down the road on 15th; I came in and I was very, very well received by Nicole and Jake and the members of the choir. I sing loudly. They all thought I should join the choir. I can't because my oldest granddaughter has a dancing lesson on Thursday night, so I can't show up for the practice. I miss Liz and Brian, but they're in a really nice place. Picton, in Ontario, is one of the best fishing places going. So, anyway, I've made some very good friends at St. Stephen's. It's wonderful; absolutely wonderful.

BILL LOCKE

So, how would you characterize St. Stephen's if you were going to tell a person who'd never walked in the doors?

PETER GREENE:

It's highly inclusive. And it has a choir so good that I'm sure they could end up in Las Vegas. I think they're really wonderful. The people here have been very, very supportive. Most of them understand my disability with my right knee, but I can still get up on a horse three times a week and ride. My present horse, which I share with my daughter, is a Palomino.

BILL LOCKE:

What are some of the activities at church that you're most passionate about?

PETER GREENE:

Well, I'm very passionate about the garden. That's why I work pretty hard on it. I'd asked Jennifer's son and Felix to help me. Felix showed up a couple of days early, so we got it all done, and I've never seen a young man work so hard as he did. Evelyn came along to supervise, and her biggest wish, besides taking out that awful Manitoba maple bush, was to also remove all of the side roots. Some of them were about 25 feet long, and Felix just did it. Everyone was amazing. I have plans for the little corner where the sign is. It all makes the place a little more beautiful.

BILL LOCKE:

Wonderful. Do you have any final words or thoughts, Peter?

PETER GREENE:

I hope Nicole and Jake stay forever as a wonderful young family. They're a model for all of us, and their kids are great. I've talked to all of them. That's my main thing – we want to keep the young people going. And I hope the rest of us who attend live forever. I think I'm the second oldest person in the church. Evelyn beats me by a couple of weeks.

BILL LOCKE:

You're close to the record. I hope you're here for a long time too, Peter.

PETER GREENE:

Well, you know, people are surprised that I still ride my horse, and I say, "Her late Majesty the Queen rode until she was 95, so I've got 14 more years!"

BILL LOCKE:

Thanks very much for this, Peter. It's been a great pleasure.

PETER GREENE:

Thank you! And now, I'm off to the stable.