

BOURNE IN OXFORD:

NATIVE SON HELPS BOLSTER HISTORIC MERGER

As rockets blasted across the border between Israel and Gaza late last year and peace in the Middle East seemed once again like a faraway fantasy, former US President Jimmy Carter slipped easily into the role of elder statesman, traveling to the war-ravaged area and beseeching both sides toward the negotiating table.

It was that unrelenting faith in the power of moral leadership that led one of Carter's oldest and dearest friends, Dr Peter Bourne, to urge him to make his first run for president.

Bourne plays down the role his 10-page missive played in history, but Carter, taking a short break from his still grueling travel schedule to chat about Bourne in February, says it absolutely formed the core of his successful 1976 bid.

"He was the first person to suggest I run for president, fall of 1972," Carter says. "It was from that memorandum that our campaign was based."

From that auspicious beginning grew a political collaboration and deep friendship that continues to this day. Despite their accomplishments — Bourne is a noted physician, biographer, author and international civil servant — you could just as easily catch the two men fishing for trout on Bourne's ancient Roman farm in Wales than discussing the latest public health initiative or

fragile cease-fire. Bourne's 1997 biography of Carter remains one of the more comprehensive takes on the second oldest-living US president and he works regularly with The Carter Center at Emory University in Atlanta, an institution where Bourne family connections run deep.

It's that shared commitment to social change that draws 69-year-old Bourne to a range of educational posts, most notably as Vice Chancellor Emeritus of St. George's University in Grenada, West Indies, Chairman of the Board of Medical Education Cooperation with Cuba (MEDICC) and as an Honorary Visiting Fellow at Green Templeton College, Oxford University. He began his relationship with the former Green College in 2003 and as the learning community grew — most notably with its 2008 merger with Templeton College — so has Bourne's role. He has signed on to serve as chair of the College's North American Alumni Council.

Speaking recently at his historic DuPont Circle home, a part of Washington, DC's so-called 'Old City',

and where he has made his American home base since 1976, Bourne said the Green-Templeton merger, a first for the University, was a unique opportunity for two communities to come together in a way where the sum would become greater than its individual parts. "You can sense that already," he says.

Returning full circle

Bourne's birth in Oxford in 1939 marked what would become a deep connection with the University. The son of a third-generation Australian, he was born at the now-closed Radcliffe Infirmary on campus. His father was working toward a doctorate in physiology at Oxford at the time. After World War II, the Bourne family left Oxford for London and then eventually the United Kingdom entirely, with Bourne who studied at the Dragon School in North Oxford and Whitgift College in Croydon following his family to the United States. In 1962 he earned a medical degree from Emory, where his father had become the chairman of the anatomy department.

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→ GTC Honorary Visiting Fellow Peter Bourne has had an outstanding career in politics



→
In conversation with
President Jimmy Carter
in the Oval Office

He received a master's degree in anthropology from Stanford University in 1969, also completing a residency in psychiatry there.

Bourne shares a passion for engaging the wider world with his wife Dr Mary E King, an award-winning author, professor, scholar and peace activist. They divide their time between DC, Oxford and Wales, where they run a successful llama breeding operation in Tregaron.

A slight and soft-spoken man, Bourne isn't outwardly boastful of his close relationship with Carter or the role of his fateful memo to a relatively unknown governor of Georgia.

But his profile quickly grew within the Carter camp, as did his political aspirations. He worked as a deputy campaign manager for Carter in Washington and set up Georgia's first statewide drug treatment program.

Once Carter was elected, Bourne was appointed Special Assistant to the President for Health Issues – and Director of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy – essentially the nation's first drug 'czar'. He resigned after a prescription drug controversy and in 1979 became an Assistant Secretary-General at the United Nations, where he established and ran the 'International Drinking Water Decade', which provided clean drinking water to 500 million people worldwide. He left for the private sector in 1982, but continued his interest in Third World development and the water issue. While at the UN Bourne had launched

a global campaign to eradicate Guinea worm, a major public health problem in Africa that comes from drinking water infected with the parasite, which matures into a worm inside the body and emerges through the skin, sometimes reaching lengths of three feet. In 1985 he convinced President Carter to put his prestige behind the eradication campaign.

Dr Anders Seim, the Harvard-educated head of the Norwegian non-governmental organization Health and Development International, says their efforts were helped enormously when Bourne agreed to sit on HDI's board, a position he still holds.

"We started with 3.5 million (infected) people" and now there are just "493 who have this disease outside of Ghana and Sudan," he says.

There was no magic bullet, no vaccine, Seim says. "It's organization. You aren't supposed to be able to do that stuff."

He describes Bourne as the early leader of efforts against the disease and someone who smartly used his role at the UN to make a real difference. "It's a non-sexy, low-profile disease – no one wants to hear about it... Yet we've done it. He's a good thinker, with a lot of good ideas," Seim says of Bourne.

Travels near and far

Bourne's international efforts have long extended from public health advocacy into direct diplomacy.

In 1995, as an Advisor on Foreign Policy to former presidential candidate and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, Bourne accompanied him to Baghdad to win the release of two American aerospace workers who had mistakenly wandered into Iraq from Kuwait under Saddam Hussein's reign.

Bourne details some of their adventures on his web site, www.petergbourne.co.uk. Richardson, fresh from the unexpected withdrawal of his name for consideration for US Commerce Secretary, declined requests for an interview.

Buoyed by success in negotiating the release of two US helicopter pilots from North Korea, Bourne writes, Richardson called to ask for help in negotiating the release of the two Americans in Iraq, David Daliberti and Bill Barloon, who were being detained in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. Bourne's wife had been executive director of the US-Iraq Business Forum prior to the first Gulf War and Richardson thought those connections might help.

Discussions dragged but Saddam Hussein eventually proffered a deal – but only if Richardson came in person with a formal request.

"We flew to Amman and then drove nine hours across the desert to Baghdad (there was a no-fly zone in southern Iraq). We met that evening with Tariq Aziz, the deputy prime minister and someone Mary and I had also known for several years.



↑
Peter Bourne at home
in DuPont Circle,
Washington DC

At ten o'clock the next morning we were driven to one of the presidential palaces and ushered past an array of guards and sentries dressed in flamboyant traditional Iraqi costumes."

All was going well, Bourne writes, until Saddam noticed Richardson's casual style of seating, with one arm over the back of the chair and legs crossed.

"Suddenly Saddam got up and left the room. A nervous aide quickly explained that this was a formal audience. Bill's lounging posture was disrespectful and unacceptable," he writes.

A shift in posture and plenty of charm helped smooth things over and discussions continued, with one notable moment – in the midst of a talk on US-Iraqi relations, Saddam came perilously close to saying his invasion of Kuwait had been a mistake, he writes.

"At the crucial moment," Bourne writes, "he stopped and said 'Well, that's another story.'"

Bourne is nothing if not a prolific writer, authoring over a hundred articles and writing or editing ten books – including two efforts that have become academic standards in the effects of combat stress. He is a decorated veteran himself, having spent a year in Vietnam as part of an Army psychiatric research team.

Among all those achievements, his skill as a wordsmith is often overlooked, Carter says. "Peter, first of all, is a superb writer," Carter says. "When he is writing a book he writes almost a final version as a first draft."

Something that is particularly useful when it comes to the unfettered medium of blogging, to which Bourne has taken with the enthusiasm of a digital native.

His site can read at times like a spy thriller, which he winks to as he briefly analyzes his potential as the true-life inspiration for the Bourne series, the Robert Ludlum books and movie franchise. Bourne's father happened to meet Ludlum and asked him directly, at which point Ludlum credited what "he had read and heard about me in the news media," Bourne writes. "Sadly there is no way to copyright your name."

Passing the torch

There is no medium, it seems, that Bourne hasn't found as an intellectual outlet for his passions, but his heart clearly belongs on the Brema Farms, his breeding operation in Wales.

His only regret as he gets older, he says, is that it's tougher to devote enough time or energy to the farm, which has produced more than 200 animals over 20 years.

Yet he continues to draw a reserve of energy from his efforts around medical education, particularly those in Cuba. He was an executive producer of the 2006 documentary film '¡Salud! The

Film: Cuba and the Quest for Global Health', a look at the near-miraculous Cuban medical education system, which churns out highly-trained doctors with a fraction of the resources of wealthy nations.

That same commitment to transforming public health is shared by Green Templeton, which by merging two colleges creates a powerful nexus between their former singular strengths of medicine and business.

Bourne is particularly proud of the goal of bringing an interdisciplinary focus to human welfare and development to its 500 students, all post-graduates.

Students around the world have long recognized the advantage of interdisciplinary graduate degrees, particularly when it comes to medicine, but that vision isn't always fostered on the highest levels.

"Students themselves have always taken that initiative," Bourne says, but now, at Green Templeton, you have the institution taking the lead.

There is great potential, he says, in the types of students drawn to Green Templeton, long-appreciated for its diversity.

"The student body is so international. It's a very cosmopolitan place," he said. "I find it just wonderful when I'm there."

Peter Bourne was interviewed at his Washington DC home by freelance journalist Kathleen Ryan O'Connor