



Not Fade Away

By Laurence Shames
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Introduction

Some people are born to lead and destined to teach by the example of living life to the fullest, and facing death with uncommon honesty and courage. Peter Barton was that kind of person.

Driven by the ideals that sparked a generation, he became an overachieving Everyman, a risk-taker who showed others what was possible. Then, in the prime of his life -- hugely successful, happily married, and the father of three children -- Peter faced the greatest of all challenges. Diagnosed with cancer, he began a journey that was not only frightening and appalling but also full of wonder and discovery.

With unflinching candor and even surprising humor, *Not Fade Away* finds meaning and solace in Peter's confrontation with mortality. Celebrating life as it dares to stare down death, Peter's story addresses universal hopes and fears, and redefines the quietly heroic tasks of seeking clarity in the midst of pain, of breaking through to personal faith, and of achieving peace after bold and sincere questioning.

Questions for Discussion

1. In his preface, Laurence Shames admits that he initially resisted writing *Not Fade Away* with Peter Barton, who was dying from terminal stomach cancer. Why do you think Shames felt this way? How did he overcome his resistance? To what extent is Shames's reaction part of our culture's larger discomfort with death?
2. Peter Barton discusses his skepticism for organized religion and contemporary spirituality in his introduction. How does he choose to inhabit his spiritual side? Do his attitudes change in any way by the end of the book, as the end of his life draws near?
3. What role does music play in Peter Barton's life? Discuss some of the figures from the music world (Sha-Na-Na, Frank Sinatra, Eric Clapton, Rolling Stones) that Peter Barton encounters, and how they impact his life.
4. In what way does the title, *Not Fade Away*, reflect on Peter's connection with music?
5. Throughout *Not Fade Away*, Peter Barton makes connections between the story of his life and the story of his illness. What does each of these journeys have in common? How are the three phases of life -- childhood, adolescence, and adulthood -- reflected in Barton's denial and acceptance of his illness?
6. What did you think about Barton's decision to tell his family and colleagues that he had an ulcer after his diagnosis of cancer? What motives might be behind such an impulse?
7. What are Peter Barton's views on taking risks in life? What risks has he taken, and what were some of the outcomes of those risks?
8. Laurence Shames describes himself as "a friend for [Peter's] dying." Are there friends you have had at various points of your life who have known an entirely different side of you? What elements of Barton's personality during the last months of his life does Shames witness?
9. How does Peter's sense of time change at the end of his life? How does he come to appreciate the present tense? What did you think of this transformation, and do you think it connects to his acceptance of his death in any way?
10. When Peter Barton writes that he did his best, what do you think that means to him? What do you think sustained him in his final days?
11. What messages did you take away from his story that you will apply to your own life?

About the authors

Laurence Shames, formerly the Ethics columnist for *Esquire*, is a critically acclaimed novelist and essayist, and was the ghostwriter of the *New York Times* bestseller *Boss of Bosses*. He lives in Ojai, California.

Peter Barton was a founder and CEO of Liberty Media and a passionate advocate for such innovative programming as the Discovery Channel, Fox Sports Net, Black Entertainment Television, and QVC. After leaving Liberty in 1997, he devoted himself to philanthropy and education. He taught a graduate business course in entrepreneurship at the University of Denver and founded the nonprofit Privacy Foundation. He died in September 2002.