

## Celebrating PETE SANDERS, 1951–2022



Pete Sanders had been living on borrowed time for some years since a massive heart attack in 2015 had left him somewhat incapacitated. Nonetheless, his sudden death on 5 February this year came as a great shock, and for many it was probably the first they knew that Pete had been struggling with health difficulties for some considerable time. In the public arena he continued to lecture, to conduct workshops, to write articles, to edit books and to be active on the social media. There were few who knew the cost he paid for these activities, the level of exhaustion he experienced, the recovery time he needed and the phenomenal will-power he exercised in order to keep going at all. He was, however, a man with a mission, and such people do not yield easily to factors which would condemn most to an impoverished or even resentful existence.

Pete is known to thousands as a prolific writer and a major influence in the international world of person-centred and experiential therapy. His book *First Steps in Counselling* has probably impacted on more trainees than any other text ever published. It has run into many editions and, more recently, has been joined by *The Person-centred Counselling Primer*. For me, it was a great privilege to be joined by Pete in the production of the third edition of my study of Carl Rogers, in which he provided a magisterial final chapter on the ‘Overall Influence of

Rogers’ and demonstrated his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Person-centred approach world-wide, and of the latest research endeavours. Everything that Pete wrote was buttressed by his earlier experience as a counsellor, trainer, supervisor and his leadership of no fewer than three British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)-recognised courses. His writings carried the powerful authority of the seasoned practitioner.

Pete was a risk-taker, and perhaps the greatest risk he ever took was to co-found with his wife, Maggie, a new publishing house, PCCS Books. The man with a mission was determined to promulgate as widely as possible the life-affirming message of the Person-centred philosophy and of Humanistic Psychology more generally. He was also fired by a deep concern for societal evolution and by a passionate commitment to the well-being of outsiders, the disadvantaged of all kinds and, more particularly, the mentally distressed. He and Maggie reasoned that an influential publishing house might be an ideal vehicle for the furthering of these causes, and they threw themselves into the new venture despite all the obstacles and possibilities of failure.

Their courage was hugely vindicated. From the early days when everything depended on the founders’ own intuition and unremitting labour,

PCCS Books has become a beacon of excellence and a leading pioneer in the publication of books that challenge accepted orthodoxies and continue to give voice to those who refuse to capitulate to the dehumanising influences in so many contemporary professions and institutions. In the final years of his life, Pete became dedicated to the de-medicalisation of distress, and was increasingly convinced that mental health services are in urgent need of radical reformation, a belief much reinforced by the alarming revelations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This man who was a mover and shaker of his generation was the most genial companion. He was seldom without a humorous anecdote and an engaging smile. Unlike many passionate people, he harnessed his passion with almost classical discipline and, as a result, was the

more persuasive. He did not profess a spiritual or transcendent belief, but his philosophical and political convictions served to undergird a profound love for flawed humanity, and an active compassion for suffering individuals and communities. His essential humility, sometimes cloaked by an argumentative spirit, will ensure a wry grin, should he now find himself in the company of the angels.

I am so very glad to have enjoyed his friendship and to have at least a small share in the grief of Maggie, his family and his closest colleagues. He leaves a legacy which will assuredly endure.

**BRIAN THORNE**  
Norwich, Norfolk  
February 2022

**SOME HUMANISTIC WISDOM**

“I realize that, if I were stable, prudent, and static, I would live in death. Therefore, I accept confusion, uncertainty, fear, and emotional ups and downs. Because that is the price I am willing to pay for a fluid, perplexing, and exciting life.”

**Carl R. Rogers (1902–1987)**