

Book Review – *The Life in Research* by Peter Bartram.

**Available to pre-order from Amazon and leading book retailers
ahead of its 12th April publication date.**

I once found myself in a meeting in Bogota, discussing the sampling methodology for a particular study in Colombia. The local fieldwork company bore the name of its owner, Napoleon Franco. He was in the room. A colleague remarked afterwards that the views of any man named after not one, but two dictators had to be taken very seriously.

It's perhaps no accident that many who have worked within market research have stories to tell. You can find yourself in situations that are unexpected, fascinating and amusing – sometimes simultaneously. '*The Life in Research*' aims to reflect these characteristics of the industry. It's essentially two books in one, targeted at different audiences: those familiar with the world of market research, and also those who might like to know more about it. In alluding to both, its title is well chosen.

In it, Peter Bartram blends tales contributed by many researchers about their experiences in the business with his own wisdom. He offers plenty of good advice for the researcher, or budding researcher, of today. As he writes, it's a working life which is varied, challenging, enjoyable, ethically beneficial and worthwhile. He sketches out a history of market research, describes how the industry works and explains its purposes. As well as being useful to readers who may be considering a career in the field, this macro-level view may prove interesting to those who work or have worked in market research. I hadn't appreciated how it evolved across different business sectors over several decades, for example.

Peter brings a fine eye for detail that speaks to the value of market research as a profession but also has curiosity value: such as the study into hypothermia amongst the elderly that required interviewers to administer a questionnaire but also take the participants' core body temperatures.

The book's structure, with the input from contributors clearly set out in inset boxes, gives the signposts that will allow readers to differentiate between the components. Peter has also sourced cartoons which will raise smiles. For those who have made a career in market research, much of the appeal will be in the recognition of types of behaviour, or perhaps even specific references, from the contributors' stories. There might be some fun in identifying or guessing at anonymised individuals.

Some contributions are both amusing and wise. There's a lovely tale of how Philip Mitchell, a former colleague of mine, dealt with a client objection about the sample size of TGI in Ireland. He unfolded his street map of Dublin, got the client to agree that it was accurate and reliable, and said: "The scale of this map is 1:1000, which is exactly the same ratio as the TGI sample size is to the population of Ireland!"

One of the beauties of market research is that its practice is a shared endeavour. Those engaged in it do not generally feel themselves to be in competition with each other. This generates a willingness to share learnings – be that at events and conferences, or simply in conversation. This spirit of openness and support underpins the ethos of the Archive of Market and Social Research. It's fitting that – from a book that both reflects and celebrates this ethos – Peter is donating the proceeds to the AMSR.

Geoff Wicken

A note about the Author: Peter Bartram has spent the last 50 years in research and marketing in the UK, Europe and the USA with research companies NOP, Harris and the City Research Group, and with client organisations The Sunday Times and American Express. He was MRS Chairman in 1989, with 41 others set up the Research Network in 2002, and currently is a Trustee of the AMSR.