

The Story of Peter (1953-2004)

Peter Allen Witthoeft was an amazing, wonderful man, an inspiration to all who knew him (young and old) throughout his life - an loving soul; a "braveheart" to the end.

Peter, the youngest of 8 children of Rose and Henry Witthoeft, was born on October 24, 1953 in Huntington, Quebec, Canada; a small rural town about 60 miles southwest of Montreal. When he was about 4, his family moved to the West Island of Montreal where Peter grew up. Being the youngest of 8 children, there were always chores to do and Peter did his share. As the older children grew up and moved away, the younger ones stepped up to take over their chores. There was lots of love and harmony in the home but also friendly tussles between siblings. Peter, although the youngest, was sometimes the instigator in some of these with his brother David who was 2 years older. Inevitably, Peter got the worst of it. But that's all part of growing up.

When Peter was 18, he joined the Army and while serving his country, spent 6 months in Cyprus as part of the United Nations peacekeeping force. Peter was trained as a paratrooper, one of the many endeavors he volunteered for - he always loved a challenge.

After the Army, Peter made his home in Lacolle, Quebec where he met his future wife, Thelma. Together they bought a home there, where they lived with Thelma's sons and Pete's step-sons, Jason, Kevin, Brian and Craig. He was an inspiration to and excellent role model for them all throughout their 18 years together. He spent time with them and, by his example, demonstrated his love of life giving them the understanding that life is to be lived to the fullest at all times.

To Peter, his family and friends were everything. He was a very family-oriented man and could always be counted on to lend a hand when needed - he always put the needs of others before his own. If someone was moving, he'd be the first to say "I'll be there with my truck". About two months before Peter died, his mother became bed-ridden and died 6 weeks later. Peter and his wife, Thel moved into Mom's home to be there every day. And even though Peter was suffering from his own disease, he was at Mom's side brushing her hair, and putting lotion on her hands and feet - doing whatever he could. He would take his daily naps at her bedside to be there for any need she might have.

Peter was a loyal and valued employee at Pratt & Whitney - working for 15 years at their Longueuil, Quebec plant. His work ethic was remarkable - never asking for favors - often doing more than his share.

Peter will be remembered, not only for his love of and loyalty to family and friends, but also for his remarkable mind. For someone who claimed he read little, there was no

subject he could not speak knowledgeably about. He must have remembered everything he ever read or heard throughout his life.

Peter and Thelma loved to spend the summers at their Lac Leon cottage, where beach volleyball was played regularly with friends and, in the winter, he loved to ski with family and friends. Peter was an avid football fan of both Canadian and American football; the Oakland Raiders and the Hamilton Tiger Cats were his favorite teams.

Early in 2002, Peter was experiencing extreme pain in his abdominal area - so extreme that at times he was unable to work. In February, he went for testing to a hospital in St. Jean sur Richelieu near his home. The pain remained and numerous tests were run - the doctors told him that they could find nothing wrong - "it was not serious" - after a week, the pain went away and Peter went home. However, these tests did, in fact, reveal a "mass" but the doctors failed to inform him at that time (each one assumed the other one had; so they informed us later). It was only when Peter's wife had requested records of all tests for insurance purposes did they learn of the mass.

After a few weeks, the extreme pain returned and Peter, with copies of the test results in hand, returned to the hospital for additional testing. Extensive testing finally indicated it was a carcinoid tumor. Surgery was finally scheduled for the end of August at the hospital in St. Jean sur Richelieu to remove the tumor in the intestinal area. After surgery, it was confirmed that it was carcinoid syndrome, and it had, in fact, already spread to his liver. It wasn't long afterward that we learned it had also spread to his bones.

At that point, Peter's family began searching for doctors who were specialists in this disease. After a phone call to the Canadian Cancer Society, we were referred to the Dr. Juan Rivera, an Endocrinologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital, a world renowned hospital affiliated with McGill University in Montreal.

Dr. Rivera began treating Peter with sandostatin injections. After about a year, Peter decided to discontinue this treatment because there were no signs that it was benefiting him. During this time, he was on dilaudid for pain and eventually was also on fentanyl patches.

As Peter's pain increased, his pain medication increased proportionately.

Peter was 5'10" and his normal weight was 170 lbs - after his surgery in August 2002, his weight was about 147 - by February 2003, it had dropped to 124 lbs, which was his lowest. Once steroids were added, his weight began to increase and leveled off at about 135 lbs.

Peter received two liver embolizations at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal,

Quebec. These embolizations helped to block the main artery to the liver which feeds the tumors.

Concurrently, Peter was also working with doctors at the Jewish General Hospital in Montreal. There he received numerous radiation treatments on various part of his body to help control his pain. The first series in December 2002 was to his lower lumbar area and spinal column, and partial chest area as well. The second series in the summer of 2003 was to different areas of the chest, and the third in the spring of 2004 was to his head and brain.

In March 2003, Peter began having trouble with walking - he was having difficulty getting up from a sitting position and when walking, was unsteady. This condition worsened as his disease progressed. We were told that one day, he may lose his ability to walk altogether, but this never happened. Peter was determined to stay on his feet and stay mobile. As his legs became numb, he learned to alter his walk for balance - he also walked with a cane.

Peter's memory was affected only towards the end of his life. The last 2 to 3 weeks, he was sometimes confused about information he received - he would relate events that were not related.

Throughout his illness, when Peter went to his medical appointments, his doctors were always astonished when they saw how well he continued to function and how courageously he was handling his disease. Everything about this disease as it pertained to Peter was rare. Although the nuclear medicine test that he had taken indicated the disease had not spread to other areas in his body, it had in fact done so. It was already in his liver and soon spread to his spine and other bones as well. And within a few months, we learned that it had also spread to his skull and brain. In Peter's case, this disease was spreading quickly throughout his body.

Peter never complained about his situation - he never asked "why me". He always said that we should enjoy every day, and be thankful and appreciate everyone and everything around us. While he was sick, he appreciated all the care given to him by his loving wife Thelma, family and friends. He was grateful for their love and support. Many people loved him, took care of him and stood by him to the end.

When Peter realized the scope and seriousness of this disease and what was happening to him, he knew that he was on a mission. Peter had decided at a very young age that he wanted to give his body to science. So early on in his illness he asked Dr. Rivera how he could donate his tumors and/or tissues for research. With the information provided by Dr. Rivera, Peter was able to sign the necessary paperwork ahead of time to accomplish this. After Peter's death, an autopsy was done and tissues were removed and stored for research purposes.

We, as a family, have decided to create, through the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, a **Foundation for carcinoid research** in Peter's name so that his mission can be realized. Through analysis of these rare carcinoid tumors and tissues and, hopefully, tissues of others donated in the future, researchers will have an opportunity to expand their work. Through the Foundation, his family will be raising funds for continued research into this rare disease, and to help increase awareness of the importance of donating tissues and money so that one day all questions about carcinoid syndrome will be answered; and all patients with this horrible disease will be helped. Hopefully, a cure for this disease will be found soon.

So if we all do our part, no matter how small, together we can make a difference.

With all our love for Pete!

Thelma Buker (Mrs. Peter Witthoeft)
and
The Witthoeft Family