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Editorial: Eating strawberries from the top

I think I was one of Pat Murdock's last visitors.

I arrived at her home, that she shared with her husband Bob Murdock ? a retired police officer ? in Tottenham on May 18th in the early afternoon. It was a warm day, and the sun was in my eyes on my way down from Alliston.

I remember waiting to make a U-turn on Queen Street, so I didn't have to cross the busy road by the medical centre.

There were two steps up onto the front porch, and I could see into their home through the screen door. I knocked, and was greeted by Bob, who ushered me in. The purpose of the visit that day was to interview Pat, who was doing battle with colon cancer, and raise awareness for their Relay For Life team, ?It's Time For A Cure'.

I took a seat in a chair at the front of the room. Bob and Pat sat on separate couches, their arms dangling over the edge. Every one in a while I would see one of them, usually Bob, extend a finger and gently graze their partners arm. You could tell this couple was very much in love.

The Murdock's cats came to check me out. One of them took a seat in my lap as we began our interview.

Pat had been diagnosed with stage four colon cancer on December 23, 2011. Having previously survived breast cancer, Pat wasn't initially worried, but she would soon learn that the cancer had spread to her liver.

?No one ever mentioned time frames, but I knew it was serious,? Pat had said in her personal page for Relay.

Bob, Pat's biggest cheerleader, was confident in her recovery and told me that cancer treatments had grown by ?leaps and bounds? in recent years. The best thing you can do, Pat added, was stay positive.

?From the beginning of treatment, I have been positive and upbeat. I know the odds and statistics are only guides and I have seen and know enough people who have been successful in these battles, and sadly, others, who gave up far too early and are no longer with us,? Pat said in her blog.

Pat had undergone 18 months of bi-weekly chemo treatments (in two batches), as well as a partial liver and colon resectioning in November, 2012.

When I spoke with her on that day in May, her hair was growing back, and her energy level was good.

After the partial removal (right side) Pat's liver had regenerated itself to the point where she was well enough to undergo surgery to have the left side removed. On the day I visited her home, she had three days to go until her surgery (Tuesday May 21st).

The decision to undergo the eight hour operation was one that she and Bob had not taken lightly.

?At this point I am at a crossroads in my treatment,? Pat had written. ?The particular chemotherapy that worked so well in the beginning has stopped working and additional formula will bring increased side-effects and diminishing quality of life.? For Pat and Bob there was no question that they were doing the right thing ? have the remaining section of liver removed to get rid of the tumors without drugs and side effects.

?High risk solution for long-term gains is a risk I am eager to take,? she had said. Quoting family friend, Constable Dave O'Rourke she added, ?As long as you're eating strawberries from the top and not from the roots it's a great day!!?

Bob and Pat spoke very candidly with me about Pat's illness and her eagerness to return to work at Simcoe Manor. They also told me

that they knew at some point the cancer would return, as Pat's mother had died from lung cancer and her sister had battled breast cancer. The pair just wanted as much quality time together as possible in this lifetime.

Sadly, Pat suffered a massive heart attack while in surgery, and she did not survive.

Bob, devastated by the loss sent an e-mail to friends and family notifying them of Pat's passing.

?My beautiful wife and best friend passed away last night. Her battle with cancer was won, but the effect of the massive surgery weakened her heart and in the midst of recovery and looking like the battle was won, she had a devastating heart attack and passed,? he said.

Over 500 people signed the funeral register for Pat at Egan Funeral Home in Bolton and over 175 people attended her funeral mass in Tottenham.

?That certainly gives you an idea of the scope of respect that her community had for this amazing lady,? Bob told me.

Pat's campaign to help others did not end with her passing. She had signed her Organ Donor card and her eyes were used to give someone the gift of sight, something that Bob is extremely happy about.

Pat's fight with cancer may be over, but many many more people in our community and beyond are struggling with the devastating effects of this disease daily.

Relay For Life will go on without Pat Murdock this Friday night, June 14th, at the 8th Avenue field in Alliston. Perhaps it's in you to support Bob Murdock and his ?It's Time for A Cure Team' by donating to this over-night non-competitive relay that celebrates cancer survivors and pays tribute to loved ones.

Pat's final message on her Relay page reads: ?The love and support of my husband, son, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews and their families, my step-daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter, my step-son and his beautiful fiancé and all of my friends has been incredible...A special thanks to Gert Williams, Tex Critchlow, Jack and Mary Wilson, Mike and Jennifer Hodges and Bruce and Joy Proudfoot who have assisted me whenever I needed transportation to/from appointments and the literally dozens of others who have made sincere offers for any help whatsoever. Following my surgery in November, the Guardian Angels group from the Church of the Evangelists who made weekly dinners for us will never be forgotten.?

Although Pat was, ?really excited about participating in this year's Canadian Cancer Society Relay for Life, because every step...raises money to help the Canadian Cancer Society save lives,? Bob will complete the Relay this year without his wife and best friend.

Support ?It's Time For A Cure' online at
http://convio.cancer.ca/site/TR/RelayForLife/RFL_ON_odd_?team_id=278230&pg=team&fr_id=12385

By Wendy Soloduik