



The Rob Adlam Story

Written by Rob's wife, Julia

October 16, 2009 Rob Adlam at a young age of 61 succumbed to mesothelioma. In 2009 Rob was looking forward to the next phase of his life. He was recently retired, had started a part-time job and was thought to be in good health based on the results of his latest physical. All that changed in May when Rob developed a persistent cough and shortness of breath, which was the result of the mesothelioma, and within 5 months died from the disease.

When Rob passed away I wanted to request that in lieu of flowers, people make a donation towards research and treatment for mesothelioma. I contacted the Canadian Cancer Society assuming they would be aware of the disease and could provide me with information. The person I spoke to chuckled and said she'd never heard of mesothelioma. I found this to be disheartening and yet I was not surprised. When I explained to her what it was she said they do have a fund for lung cancer. So at that time I asked people to make their donation to the Canadian Cancer Society to go towards lung cancer. Going forward any donations made in Rob's name should now go to the CMF (Canadian mesothelioma Foundation), which deals specifically with mesothelioma. Your donation to CMF is appreciated by Rob's family.

Mesothelioma is caused by asbestos and is a cancer that has been around for a very long time yet the companies working with asbestos and the government would not openly admit the dangers associated with asbestos or were willing to talk about it which is why so many people have never heard of it. Asbestos will cause cancer to those who work with it and because it is an air-borne carcinogen it will cause cancer second hand to those who unknowingly come in contact with it which is how Rob was exposed to it. It is considered a small cell cancer and can metastasize quickly.

Most civilized countries have openly banned the production and export of asbestos except Canada. There is an asbestos plant in Quebec where the owner wants the Canadian Government to help fund the re-opening of the plant so that asbestos products can be produced and shipped to 3rd world countries. The owner states asbestos products can be produced safely in a controlled environment and re-opening the plant will generate 700 jobs. It might be controllable within the company but because it is an air-borne carcinogen how will it be controlled once outside the plant and how many more lives need to be sacrificed to save a few jobs. Just the thought of the government interacting with such a request shows the lack of respect for the hundreds of thousands of people who have died from this deadly substance. Workman's compensation will cover people who contract the disease from working with it but do not support the people who contract the disease second hand.

When Rob developed a persistent cough and shortness of breath his family doctor thought he had pneumonia so put him on antibiotics. After 5 days and no change Rob went back to the doctor who arranged for a chest x-ray and found his right lung was completely submerged in fluid. Rob was referred to another doctor who, using a large syringe, withdrew 2 litres of fluid from the pleura which is the membrane that envelops the lungs. Rob felt a bit better now that both lungs were functioning again. The fluid was analyzed and the doctor told Rob he was 90% sure it was mesothelioma but a biopsy would need to be done to confirm his diagnosis. Rob and I looked at each other confused because we'd never heard of mesothelioma let alone pronounce it or spell it. A biopsy was scheduled and done the end of June and it was confirmed Rob had mesothelioma.

He was then referred to an oncologist who told him he was in the late stages of mesothelioma and there was no treatment available for him. The doctor was very evasive as to how much time Rob had. Rob was sent home with very little information. It was as though Rob was given a death sentence but we weren't sure when it would happen. To help reduce the fluid buildup around the lung the doctor did a pleurodesis which is a procedure to help the membranes around the lung to stick together and prevent the buildup of fluid. In Rob's case the procedure did not work and he very often had to be taken to the hospital emergency to have the fluid drained. At one point a tube was installed at the bottom of the lung so the excess fluid could drain directly into a container which he carried around with him 24/7.

Rob did not work with asbestos; however, his father worked for Johns Manville an asbestos company located in Scarborough from 1950 to 1956. This would have been when Rob was between the ages of 2 to 8. Rob's exposure to asbestos was second hand. In 1994 Rob's mother was diagnosed with cancer of the pleural; however, in 1997 her diagnosis was changed and it was confirmed she had mesothelioma. She passed away in 1997. She would have contracted the disease second hand, yet at that time, no one in the medical profession raised any concern for her children. Yet if the mother caught the disease second hand, what about the children who resided in the home? Were they not susceptible too?

Rob was not aware his mother's diagnosis was changed to mesothelioma until he started doing research on the disease and was trying to determine how he might have contracted it. Rob's cancer surfaced 12 years after his mother died. Maybe if he had been put on a regular screening process he might have caught the disease earlier and maybe something could have been done to help extend his life. People who worked with asbestos are now being screened but, screening does not appear to be an option for the family members who may have been exposed to asbestos second hand.



After Rob was diagnosed he told his brothers and sister to contact their doctor to arrange for a CT scan to be done. Some of the family doctors were reluctant to schedule the test. While doing research on the internet he found that Princess Margaret Hospital was doing research on lung cancer and mesothelioma using mini CT scans so the radiation is less severe than a regular CT scan. Rob passed this information onto one of his brothers to look into. His brother contacted PMH and was told the only way he could participate in the trial was if he was already diagnosed with lung cancer or mesothelioma. I would have thought those at high risk should also be part of the research but it seems most of the funds, time and research are spent on how to treat the disease rather than how to prevent it or possibly finding it in its early stages.

Rob's oncologist did not provide us with much information so a lot of our research was done via the internet. At one point we were put in touch with someone who had brain and lung cancer and was going for treatments at a clinic located in Tijuana Mexico. We contacted the clinic and were told there was a three week treatment that could be done for mesothelioma. Information on the internet indicated someone in the late stages of the disease, which Rob was, could expect to live from 6 months up to 2 years. Since Rob was healthy other than the cancer, never smoked, and was not on any medication we thought maybe his life span could be 2 years. So, since there was no treatment for him in Canada he decided to go to Mexico for the three week treatment. He was hoping to extend his life, as well he wanted to see if there was anything available should his brothers and/or sister contact the disease. Rob was told he should not fly because of the fluid around his lung so we drove down. The trip to Mexico was not productive and Rob continued to deteriorate while in Mexico. Rob walked into the clinic but after the three weeks of treatment he was in a wheel chair and on oxygen. On the drive back Rob deteriorated so badly he had to be taken to a hospital in the States where he remained sedated in ICU for 19 days. Nine of the nineteen days were spent waiting for an ICU bed in Canada. Once an ICU bed became available Rob, still sedated, was taken home via ground and air ambulance. He passed away 2 days later.