

Remembering Walter Gretzky

I recall, it was a chilly January evening in 2012 . . .

As the on-call Hyperbaric Physician at TGH, I was managing emergency cases requiring hyperbaric oxygen therapy, most commonly for patients suffering from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning due to exposure to partially combusted hydrocarbon fuel. The victim was stabilized and managed uneventfully.

While completing the several hour process, individuals accompanying the victim were given the opportunity to observe and enquire about this somewhat uncommon and technically complex form of medical treatment. Amongst these individuals was a face which seemed vaguely familiar to me. He found the “first in North America” technology fascinating and asked several probing questions about the equipment and how it was used.

He was polite and unassuming. When invited, he spoke calmly in a measured voice.

Subsequently, in conversation, he was quite entertaining, creating moments of comic relief (quite welcome in such situations of high anxiety for the patient and family).

I soon realized that this polite and unassuming man was familiar to me through the decades of his fame as the ever-supportive father of a Canadian sports hero engraved in my mind when I was a medical student in Edmonton given the occasional privilege of attending an Oilers game.

So here was Walter, taking the time to support his friend in times of hardship, as was his way. He left an enduring impression on me with his friendly, courteous, and genuine demeanour. These are qualities I have come to treasure and appreciate as a Canadian. I remain proud to have met Walter that winter evening.

I add my voice in celebrating this altruistic legend while sharing the sorrow of his passing with so many Canadians.

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P.S. I never managed to convert on Walters’ invitation to visit the trophy room
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjOSGYk8UQg&ab_channel=OfficialGretzky

March 4, 2021

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