

**Robert A. Fowler**  
**October 23, 1942 - July 21, 2006**

**By his wife with input from his parents**



Robert was a quiet, gentle and kind but determined and independent person with wide interests, a keen mind, good judgement and a strong sense of duty. He was a thinker and a perceptive observer of human nature. He made friends easily but was very private and rarely talked about himself or reminisced, so few people knew him really well. In both his professional and personal life, he was efficient, making difficult tasks seem easier. He respected others and never achieved his goals at someone else's expense. His generosity and faith in the basic goodness of human nature led some people to take advantage of him, but such incidents never made him bitter; he quietly put bad experiences behind him and continued to offer a helping hand whenever he saw a need. In the face of adversity, he pushed on with quiet, unwavering determination – sheer willpower usually won the day.

The oldest of three sons, Robert was born in Peterborough, England. He attended Peterborough Cathedral Grammar School where he received good marks in geography, English, math, music, art and technical drawing. He intended to go on to university, but when he saw an advertisement for training with the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain, he applied. After he was accepted, the headmaster tried to dissuade him, but Robert had made his mind up and, in typical fashion, nothing would steer him off his chosen course. After finishing training in field surveying, he was posted to Inverness and also worked on the Isle of Sky – he loved Scotland. Aerial surveying then took him to train in London where he got top marks and was offered a job, but turned it down when he learned that promotion would be slow as vacancies would be filled by retiring army officers. Instead, after seeing a job advertisement for a field surveyor in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, he decided to seek his fortune in Canada, which he had heard was a beautiful country, a land of opportunities. In his decisive fashion, he booked a flight to Halifax. When he informed his parents, he reassured them that he would always keep enough money to return home if things didn't work out.

In 1964, he arrived in Dartmouth and got the job with Atlantic Air Surveys. The company sent him to Ottawa to get experience with different instruments, after which he returned to work in Nova Scotia. The family with whom he lived took him on a trip around the Cabot Trail, the first of many trips Robert would make to explore various parts of Canada and the United States. After two years in eastern Canada, he heeded the call to go West. He took the train across the continent to Vancouver, a trip he found most interesting. He worked as a photogrammetrist for Cattermole Timber, a logging company. After buying his first car, a Mini, he began exploring western North America in his spare time.

In 1967 he took a job as a photogrammetrist with Lockwood Survey Corporation, and in 1972 he joined Canadian Aero Services (which soon became Kenting Earth Sciences) to work as a field surveyor and project manager. He held supervisory positions on numerous air, ground and hydrographic survey contracts. Although based in Ottawa, his work took him to many places in Africa, including the Congo, Zaire, Nigeria (where he assisted in establishing the photogrammetric section of Kenting Africa), Ivory Coast and Egypt. He often worked abroad for long periods at a time and took the opportunity to sightsee and socialize with the local people, learning about their culture and way of life. In the spring of 1979 he travelled along the Nile from Cairo to Luxor and the Aswân High Dam and visited the Antiquities, including the Great Pyramids.

He sometimes broke his journey home to see other parts of the world. On one trip, he stopped in the Seychelles; on another, in Hawaii; and on yet another, he went to Grand Caiman to visit a friend from surveying school in England. He went around the world twice, returning home via Australia where he spent time with his brother who had settled there and to visit parts of the continent, including the Great Barrier Reef, Alice Springs and Ayers Rock. Whenever possible, and usually every second year, he made it a point to go back to England to visit his parents. In alternate years, until they became too elderly to travel, his parents came to Canada and Robert often took them on road trips.

As he got older, Robert decided he had had enough of being away from home for a great deal of the time. In 1980, he took on the job of technical representative for Kenting and began working with clients and developing custom specifications for surveys and mapping. He managed Kenting's field survey department and later shifted into working with customers, doing cost estimates and preparing project proposals. He also served as editor and technical writer. Starting in the late 1980s, the company transitioned through Intera Kenting to Intera to Intermap Technologies. In 1999, after working for the company for over 25 years, Robert decided to join a small new company, Lasermap Image Plus, where he served as vice president for sales and marketing for the Americas.

Throughout his professional work, he was eager to learn and evolve with changing technology. When personal computers came on the scene, he quickly embraced them and then became familiar with GIS, lidar and other mapping technologies. Never satisfied with merely learning just enough to do his job, he delved into new technologies until he understood them thoroughly. He combined his interest in promoting the mapping business with his writing talents. For numerous years, he edited and contributed to *Survey* (Kenting's magazine), *Northpoint* (a Canadian survey and mapping magazine) and various company publications, newsletters, manuals, reports, proposals and product documentation. He also wrote articles for several North American and European technical journals (either for free or in exchange for advertising for his employer), presented papers on various aspects of mapping at conferences, and was the principle author of a chapter on topographic lidar in *Digital Elevation Model Technologies and Applications: The DEM Users Manual*. He received several awards for his work.

His writing was not confined to technical publications. He took a creative writing course, and during the 1970s, wrote numerous articles on a wide variety of topics as a special correspondent for *The Ottawa Citizen*. He also contributed articles, opinion pieces and letters to the editor for *The Equity*, a Pontiac weekly, and enjoyed writing short stories.

He was an avid reader, had an extensive home library, and devouring books in a wide range of genres and a huge span of subjects. He loved music and had considerable record and video collections – musicals were his favourite movie genre. He also enjoyed comedies, documentaries, politics and going to concerts, art exhibits and plays. For many years, he held seasons' tickets to the Ottawa Little Theatre.

When he decided to do less work-related travel, he also decided to make a permanent home. He bought a century-old log farmhouse along with a solid barn and some dilapidated outbuildings on 100 acres of land in Bristol, Quebec, in the Ottawa Valley, a one-hour commute to work. He began renovations, doing much of the work himself with occasional help from his parents and neighbours. He soon bought a ram and several ewes and raised a small flock of pure-bred Suffolk sheep. He plowed and seeded fields and cut his own hay. He loved dogs, having two at any given time – one of them was always a Border Collie. He added honeybees, chickens and ducks, planted a one-acre orchard of various fruit trees, and had a vegetable garden. Soon, in addition to his full-time job in the city, he had a working "hobby" farm. Some of his produce won prizes at the Shawville fair. He could whip up a good meal entirely from home-grown ingredients, and was not afraid to improvise or try new recipes.

Despite his professional work, upkeep of the house and farm, and all the extra-curricular activities, Robert always found time to talk with people, lend a helping hand, socialize with neighbours, go to community events, or spend evenings reading or watching TV. He also believed in giving back to the community. He supported organizations such as Rare Breeds Canada and several societies and nature conservation organizations. In 1985, when the threat of turning a local open pit mine into a megadump loomed over Bristol, he attended the first public meeting to voice his concerns with the project. He was a founding member and vice-president, and then president, of the Concerned Citizens' Committee of Bristol, a group which, against great odds and a promoter backed by a large multinational company, kept their opposition up for over ten years and prevented the megadump from becoming reality. Robert's quiet brand of reasonable, effective leadership was recognized by both the community and the local mayor. In 1992 he was appointed chairman of Bristol's planning committee and served in that capacity until he died. He served as president of the Bristol Community Association (1998-2003), deciding not to seek re-election when he became too ill. He was also a member of the Millennium Committee.

Robert met his future wife Theresa at the first ant-dump meeting. They were married in the fall of 1997. Only several days after their second wedding anniversary, they learned that Robert had cancer. It was his dogged determination that kept Robert courageously fighting the disease for almost seven difficult, painful years. He last travelled to see his parents in England in the summer of 2004. During 2005-2006, he spent numerous hours of his

own time and managed to complete updating the lidar chapter for the second edition of *Digital Elevation Model Technologies and Applications: The DEM Users Manual*. In the spring of 2006, he still put in the vegetable garden but did not live to enjoy the harvest. He continued to work for Lasermap as well as to chair the Bristol planning committee till he was hospitalized a few weeks before his death. He kept up the valiant fight against cancer for as long as possible, but in the end, he ran out of options as the cancer developed resistance to one chemotherapy drug after another. Cancer was the one adversity he sadly was unable to beat.