

David Woodland, OLS# 1475
March 3, 1951 – October 16, 2016



Surveying, I heard said, is not for the faint of heart. It's a tough job that requires hard work and long hours with steely eyes and ice water in their veins.

Well, gather close 'cause I have a tale to tell, 'bout a man goes by name o' David Woodland, come from the Rock ... where ships are tall and life is harsh ... where the wind blows so hard, sometimes the train can't run for fear of blowin' off the track.

Back in March of '51 it was ... A black, moonless night with a howlin' wind ...

David came into the world kickin' and screamin', all pink and tough like, already a look of defiance in his eye. He spent those first few years runnin' with the local lads, jiggin' cod and causin' trouble.

Well his Pa was offered a job in Oshawa December '54. So he said Ma, gather up the kids, we're movin' to the mainland! Well, his Pa havin' a bit of the wanderlust in him, said enough of this town and in '59 moved the family to Ottawa.

But that frequent shuffling around from city to city weren't enough of a Gypsy life for David, so one day after his sixteenth birthday, he says, Ma, Pa, I'm goin' walkabout. I'm off to see this land! I'm hikin' coast to coast to see what she's about. Well, all the way to the other side of Vancouver Isle, he hiked. Then back again... not once but twice!

Then in '70 David found himself back home with his sweetheart. I missed you, Kathy, he says, but I want to work the land. It's a big country and I've learned to love her, so I'm joinin' the survey crew.

Ryerson University was his choice in '71, not only for the reputation, but also for the experience. Cards were David's game, you see, and one night the pot had grown to a sizeable sum. David had raised that pot right down to his last dollar. He glared out over his cards with a hard stare. The feller on his left reached to his pocket with a trembling hand but David slowly and deliberately turned to him. I fold, says the feller quietly, thinking better of it. The other fellers followed suit and David gathered up the pot. Lads, the next round's on me, he says. So what did you have? Says the feller on his left. Well now, says David, you want to see them cards, you gotta put up that cash. And that was the night David earned enough to buy his school books with a pair o' Jakes.

After graduating in '75, David went to work for a couple of local lads go by name o' Charlie Fairhall and Harland Moffatt. He articed with Charlie, got his commission in '79 and no sooner had he started when, I got some bad news, says the doc. It was an old man's cancer ... Hodgkins. It was a raw deal and the lads he worked for took a likin' to David so they helped him through it, financial wise.

Well, he stared down that cancer just like he stared down them lads at poker. I got a job o' work to do, he says and my time ain't come yet if I have anything to say. You see, the pipeline was comin' through, and David, well he decided he was equal to the challenge.

Scary stuff, it was, because the surveyin' part comes first and when that siren goes, you'd best skidaddle because that shot rock gets heaved by the blast so it ends up in the tops of trees, boulders as big as fridges, they were. It's hard work, says the feller on his left. It'll be long days, says the feller in the middle. Maybe even work weekends says the feller on the right. Boys, says David slammin' his hand on the table, let's get 'er done. Rent some ATV's, he says to the feller on his left. Buy enough equipment for five more crews, he says to the feller in the middle. Hire some lads, he says to the feller on the right, and make sure they have broad shoulders and strong backs. There's gonna be a lot of carryin' and the line's gonna be long and cut right through the middle of the roughest country this side of the shield. Well, he made his new partners proud, Charlie and Harland. Many miles and many months later, that liquid gas was flowin' and everyone in the land got a little richer.

David's wild ways were soon tamed by his sweetheart though and they tied the knot in '76. It was a good time at the local watering hole where we partied in back after the ceremony. She bore him a couple of babes, Katharine did. Shona and later, Thomas.

Thomas being a complete surprise considering the radiation. The docs had burned at that cancer from his chin to his toes. Doc said, your pup sirin' days are over, son. But David fooled them docs. Yes sir. A "millionaire's family" he called it. Well, family can certainly make you feel like a million when you share those good times.

David settled down to work that business. Made partner in '84. He ran a tight ship. When you're a surveyor, people have to trust what you tell 'em on a count of, you're always caught between two fellers tryin' to figure out where that fence goes, and sometimes they're feudin'.

And David was no slouch when it came to lendin' a hand up. He liked the idea of giving back to the community and the company did the surveying for Roger's House, another poor feller, Roger Nielson, on the coaching staff of the Ottawa Senators Hockey Club, succumbed to cancer but built a legacy for the kids who need a place while they're in town fightin' their own cancer.

Hockey was one David's favourite pastimes. That and golf. The skills and toughness them fellers have in hockey is humbling. Golf is just humiliating, but David liked to participate in all them charity events. He took lessons one year. Did it work? Did you see him on the tour? Still, it's a game for those of us who won't give up and David's favourite word was 'persevere'. It must have been 'cause he used all variations of it for his passwords.

Then, damn it all if David wasn't laid to bed again. Like that Grim Reaper had it in for him. A heart attack in 2004 and another in 2013. Docs say it was that radiation he got as a young lad. But ol' David wasn't gonna sit still for that nonsense. He fought both of them off and got back in the saddle.

It was an inspiration to the rest of us, but in 2016 he got the news from the docs again. They say I got maybe a year, he says. That damn cancer. Managed to squeeze out another forty, but I guess you can cheat the Reaper so many times. He gave a long hug goodbye. Even the toughest of us have a soft side.

David didn't have anything close to a year. But I know damn well, even with his last breath he would have been starin' down that Reaper. And if the cancer hadn't taken all his strength, he would have cheated the Reaper one more time.

Submitted by Shona Woodland