

## Tribute to Walter Wong MD



Walter Wong MD, 65, retired radiation oncologist of Brookfield Wisconsin, passed away with family by his side on September 16, 2021, at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center after a brief hospitalization. Walt spent his entire 31-year career working for the Radiation Oncology Associates group, with colleagues he truly loved, before retiring early in 2018, at age 62 following a bout of tongue cancer. Walter was diagnosed again with cancer (esophageal) in January 2021. Walt rallied to enjoy several months of quality time with his family before the disease became resistant. During Walt's treatment he embodied the optimism and determination he encouraged in his own patients, to keep treating the cancer until no options are left.

It saddened Walt when his cancer patients conceded defeat early. He felt his role was to allay people's fears, so they felt supported to deal with treatment side effects or pain and to never feel pressured to give up out of fear of 'inconveniencing' others, because he knew success was often difficult, but possible. Walter was his patients' partner in 'raging against the dying of the light'. Walt said he now understood why cancer patients say their treatment is a journey of challenges, emotions, and spirituality. Walter's family will be unpacking the gifts he gave us from his own journey for the rest of our lives.

Walter was born June 8, 1956, in Detroit Michigan to Chinese immigrants who escaped the Mao revolution after World War II. His father Git, actually traveled to America prior to WWII, with the plan to find work and then have his wife Whon Sill and infant son Lungchuck, who were waiting in China, join him for what they hoped to be a better life in America. Due to circumstances and Walt's father enlisting to fight for America during the war, the young Wong family was separated for ten years. Once reunited in Detroit, the family grew. Walter was the last born of Git and Whon Sill's six sons and one daughter. The ingenuity of Walt's parents to make ends meet with dignity and pride, on a waiter's salary, instilled a strong work ethic in Walter and his siblings. The fine culinary skills of Walter's parents inspired the Wong children's love of cooking and appreciation of how food signifies love.

Always a star pupil, Walter was awarded a full scholarship to the University of Michigan, where he graduated in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science in microbiology, and with a lifelong love of Michigan Wolverines football and basketball. Walter's dear friend John Heller (who passed away on Oct 31, 2018, the day Walter retired from ROA) encouraged Walt to apply to medical school. Walt graduated from Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit in 1983.

Walt remained close to his many friends he made during college and medical school, and met his future wife of 34 years, Janet Monteith, at his medical school's Halloween Dance in 1981.

Walter completed his radiation oncology residency at William Beaumont Hospital (where Janet worked as an RN) in Royal Oak, Michigan in June 1987. Then in the span of a month at 31 years old, Walt took his medical boards, married his wife Janet (on June 27<sup>th</sup>), honeymooned in Hawaii, moved from Michigan to Wisconsin, and started his new job with Radiation Oncology Associates, alongside Dr. Kenneth Klein, at the St. Catherine's Hospital - Senator Joseph F. Andrea's Regional Cancer Center, located on Lake Michigan at the time.

In 2001, Walter became the medical director of the radiation department at the newly opened Aurora Vince Lombardi Cancer Clinic, located in Kenosha on 118<sup>th</sup> Street. Walter was honored to work with oncology department head, Dr. Malik Bandealy, and Dr. Syed Haider, and his ROA partner Dr. Laura Ulmer at the Vince Lombardi Cancer Center until Walter's retirement in 2018. Walt enjoyed and was honored to work with the radiation therapists, nurses, and support staff during his years at the Senator Andreas and Vince Lombardi Cancer Clinics in Kenosha.

Though the pandemic interfered with Walter's dream to travel when he retired three years ago, he visited Mexico and toured Europe in the 1980's, traveled with his sons and wife to China in 2007 and Italy 2011, made numerous trips to New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Hawaii, Las Vegas, Detroit, Washington D.C., Toronto, Banff, and other destinations, including Alaska, and toured many states and parks across the U.S, plus traveled to Florida enough to seriously consider buying a second home there. Walt enjoyed fishing excursions with his brothers, and golfing and fishing with in-laws Bill and Mike in Florida and Cleveland. Plus, Walt never stopped talking about the indelible summer trip he took out west to Wind River Wyoming, Lake Tahoe, and San Francisco with his med school poker buddies. Most, including Walt, were not prepared for hiking, and camping in the snow-covered mountains of Wyoming in June! Yet Walt's memories of catching supper in clear streams and the beauty, colored the cold and sunburns of the trip, with fondness. Walter relished our family's trip to Banff and Jasper with his brother David's family. Our 2018 California trip to see Walt's brother Bill, niece Laura and new husband Azeddine, his sister Maree and husband Quentin, and Bill's late wife Maylynn's family, was a delight. We also enjoyed many medical conference trips together with ROA members families.

Walt met and became life-long friends with Dr. John Heller and the lively crowd who all lived on the same dorm floor during their first year at the University of Michigan. Second year, Walt, John Heller, and many of their 'college poker buddies' from this dorm floor, moved off campus together, and all pursuing medical school paths. Walt continued to room with John Heller, and Scott Edwards, in Hamtramck during medical school. While a resident at Beaumont, Walt lived with brothers John and Terry Buday, in one of their retired parent's homes in Troy. Janet became close to Lorraine Buday, their mother. (It took Janet 25 years to finish the sculpture she started of 'Lorraine's Head' before she got married. See Lorraine's sculpture in Walt's TributeArchive.com webpage photos). John Heller was Walt's best man at our wedding. Dr. John Heller practiced anesthesiology in Chicago until he retired and passed away in 2018.

Walt dearly loved his friends from college, medical school, and residency, including Dr. Kathleen Kennedy and husband Gerald O'Brien (Kathleen - congratulations on certifying your dual citizenship and getting your Irish passport! Irish blessings were poured upon my family, when you and Walt became friends while in the medical school work-study program together. It is impossible to thank you enough for being the primary care physician for my parents and my siblings for years until your career move. You LITERALLY saved my dad's life by connecting him with rheumatologist, Dr. Desmond O'Duffy, who retired from Mayo Clinic and set up practice in Sarasota), Dr. Dennis Shelle and wife Denise (So many fun visits and memories we made with your family. How wonderful, we got to see you in Florida just before Covid.), Dr. John Buday and wife Pat (John and Pat - your dear family is an *enormous* part of Walter's and my life. ...), and Dr. Munther Ajlouni and wife Dr. Beth Ajlouni (We spent many fond times with your family and Walt loved seeing you both during conferences), Dr. Rob Welch and wife Terry (Rob – the architect of the Wyoming camping trip memories, which no one can or wants to forget!), and all the friends Walt enjoyed keeping up with over the years with calls, visits, golf trips, Christmas cards: Dr. George Diehl (always a sweetheart), Dr. Richard Pratley and wife Beverly (your family's love of nature and animals -Bev's hermit crabs? - inspired us to do more outdoor things with our boys, and is probably why I let our son Eric get a pet rat!), Dr. Mark Bruni and wife Sherri (I still remember your wedding), Margaret (Sorah) Gheldof and husband Tom (Margaret - John Heller was blessed by your special bond); and Beaumont radiation oncology residency friends Dr. Jacquelyn Watson and husband Rick (constant world travelers, you inspired us!), brothers Dr Greg and Dr. Gary Gustafson, Dr. Fred Little, Dr. John Robertson 'JR', and Dr. Frank Vicini, and program head Dr. Alvaro Martinez and instructor Dr. Rich Matter - true mentors and friends who guided Walter's path to join ROA.

Walt was hoping to travel more during retirement, and in his thorough manner he planned, explored, collected catalogues, and asked travelers like Marcia and Don, about destination options. His dream for retirement 20 years ago was touring the US in a bus-size RV. When Gail and Steve Harrison got their huge RV Walt was enthralled and we both loved hearing about their latest RV adventures! Walt weighted the logistics of RV travel - and the size of the RV Walt wanted kept getting smaller and smaller - until simply booking hotels sounded best to him when he retired! Walt loved spending hours planning details of our trips, or dreaming about new destinations, or entertaining the idea of a buying a second home - or RV! I told my cousin Martin, Walt delighted in the planning, as much, if not more than carrying out his ideas! In fact, he hated flying! The potential for deviations to his plans, unnerved him until we boarded the plane. What Walt enjoyed most is the daily rhythm of work, home life, and interacting with people he loved.

Gone before Walter Wong are his beloved parents Git and Whon Sill, and brothers Mickey, Chuck (Lungchuck), and Richard, and his in-laws Marie, LeRoy, Kathrine, Jack, Tom, and Maylynn and his dear friend Dr. John Heller.

Walter is survived and greatly missed by his loving wife Janet Lee Monteith-Wong and their dearly loved sons Bryon and Eric, his treasured mother-in law Ruth and her brother Bill, his cherished siblings - David, Bill and Maree, his much loved sister and brother in-laws - Betty, Wendy, Quentin, Michael, John, Kate and husband Peter, his adored nieces and nephews -

Leonard, Donna, Sanford and wife Amy, Brandon and wife Jasmine, Katherine and husband Tony, Melanie, Michael, Laura and husband Azeddine, Jacob and wife Crystal, Nathan, John and wife Kate, and his precious grand-nephews and niece - Brandon, Mason and baby Jade. Walt cherished the time he spent with all of you. Though, we ended up not going to Katherine's and Tony's September wedding, it was the perfect motivator for Walter, and he enjoyed working on the challenge to try to get himself there.

Walter leaves behind numerous close friends who he loved and enjoyed very much. Your wonderful friendships enriched Walt's and his whole family's life with traveling, golfing, weddings, graduations, sharing meals - Walt just loved being with you. We share many fond memories with our dear friends Mahmood and Kathleen Shaikh and their children Armaan and Surya, going to Devon Street in Chicago and golf trips (during one trip an alligator jumped out when Walt tried to retrieve his ball in a pond!). Our wonderful friendship with Dr. Malcolm Hatfield - after discovering our families both settled in Racine Wisconsin after med school and our houses were a just a walk away across our pretty wooded ravine. Golfing, tennis, parties, travel, and my 'birthday lunches' with the wives of the doctors and neighbors' filled our life in Racine with friendships that continue today: Vivian's, Murphy's, Landsverk's, Hatfield's, Wisniewski's, Roehrich's, Trybula's, Wagner's, and Foleys. Then Walt had tons of fun with Dr. Dexter Rebanco and his "golf buddies" in Brookfield and so did Janet! Going to golf buddies Bong and Donald's 50th Birthday party at the end of August was a wonderful anticipation for Walt, and a joy for him to go, even in his plaid wheelchair! Dexter's offer to drive Walt to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Cross touched Walter's heart. Walt felt bad to decline, but his strength to even eat lunch with his dear friends was fading. He asked Janet to be sure to thank Dexter. When I looked up the Shrine - it made me sob to see the landscape stone and plantings of the Shrine gardens resembled our own...

Walter's children were so precious to him. We were fortunate both our sons Bryon and Eric were home to spend time with Walt this past year. Due to the pandemic our son Eric had to do a number of medical school rotations virtually, which allowed Eric to be home for several months over the summer before Walt got sick. Then Eric finished his rotations early last winter and was able to spend several more months at home with Walt before the whole family helped Eric move to Dayton Ohio at the end of June to start his family practice residency. Walt even helped with a lot with the driving for the trip. Our oldest son Bryon, being here with us, made it possible to manage Walter's care at home until Walter's final few days. Bryon and Eric, you were dearly loved by your father and his memories are gifts he left to guide you.

When Walt knew he might not be around for our sons' future, he made special efforts over the past months to instill in our sons some of his wisdom about financial matters. Understanding investing was one of Walt's favorite interests, and it was a very pragmatic, and satisfying hobby for him. He encouraged everyone to read Morningstar! He gave it away as gifts and read it cover-to-cover for years. Walt felt financial health was important - and creating financial stability an act of love. He often discussed investment strategies with friends and family and enjoyed sharing and gleaned tips from Frank and Alice, his siblings, and in-laws, especially his mother-in-law Ruth! Walt delighted in comparing investment notes with our CLA accountant Mike Burzynski and Greg and Mandee at Fidelity. He took his participation on the ROA and

Badger Billing retirement planning committee very seriously, because he cared about his partners and BBS employees and their families. Janet is grateful Walt helped her built knowledge to manage on her own.

Walt truly considered his ROA colleagues and Kenosha clinic staff family. He loved going to colleagues and staff members weddings, bar mitzvahs, holiday parties, and work celebrations. He cared deeply about all of you. Walt was thrilled to be invited on Facebook to watch your families grow after he retired. Jim Taylor's delayed-due-to-Covid retirement party this summer lit Walt up in anticipation. He reveled in seeing everyone and talking to his beloved colleagues. Walt enjoyed the follow-up meals and conversations with Bill, Lily, and Laura at Golden Fortune, with Don and Marcia at Outback Steak House to help Walt use up all those gift cards Janet gave him over the years, and lunch at our house with Jim and Susan Taylor who took us on a virtual wild adventure of their Dominican Republic condo life. Walt savored these gatherings.

To everyone who sent cards, well wishes, flowers, food, texts, emails, religious materials, calls of support and prayers, and extended invitations (Ken and Eileen, it was so heartwarming for us to be invited to your farm), and all who visited Walter at St. Luke's radiation department and at his bedside at the end – please know how very much you comforted Walt and his family.

Walter's working relationships with other doctors often turned into warm friendships he cherished. Janet wants to thank Dr. Syed Haider, Dr. Tony Ruggeri, and ROA partner Dr. Perry Gould for helping Walter rally. This gave Walt several wonderful months of quality time with his family. Walt truly appreciated your support to make that happen. Jackie, the nurse from Aurora at Home and Hospice Care, deserves a *huge* hug for telling Walter about 'Thick-it'! This literally allowed Walt to live longer by vastly improving his ability to drink fluids. In lieu of flowers please donate to your favorite charity or to Aurora at Home and Hospice Care.

As most of you know Walt really, really, enjoyed watching sports (!), but it was time spent with his family and work family, relatives, friends, and neighbors he valued and cherished the most. Walter wished he had more time to be with all of us, and he was willing to work very hard to do that. His family is forever grateful for the precious time we had together.

In loving memory of Walter,

From Janet Lee Monteith Wong

Walter's Celebration of Life Service will be held on:

Saturday - October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

10AM to 11AM (CST) Gathering of family and friends

11AM (CST) Memorial Service - with lunch repast to follow

Becker Ritter Funeral Home

14075 W. North Ave.

Brookfield, WI 53005

\*Please note Service will be live streamed on October 16, 2021, at 11am CST, and then available to view anytime from Walter's tribute webpage at: [BeckerRitter.com](http://BeckerRitter.com) or [TributeArchive.com](http://TributeArchive.com) .

\*Video clips tributes, written memories, and photos posted by Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021, on Walt's tribute webpage at [TributeArchive.com](http://TributeArchive.com), will be incorporated in the service on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2021, and will be comforting and much appreciated by Walter's family.