

## **Reflections on Paul Ruwoldt**

**Reader: Wilma Gormley, Paul's friend and co-worker at TRG, Inc.**

**Author: Jim McCaffery, Paul's friend and co-worker at TRG, Inc.**

**Date: January 28<sup>th</sup> & February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

I am writing this from Kenya, and wish very much that I could be there in person. Needless to say, I am so much saddened by Paul's passing. I know there will be many who pay tribute to Paul's courage, persistent optimism, energy, humor and humanity in the face of a terrible disease. There will be thoughts shared about Natalie and the terrific support she provided for Paul, and they provided for each other in this roller coaster year. There will be other feelings shared about Paul's mother and father and brothers and their support far and near, and the difficulty of having such a tragedy unfolding when people literally live on different continents. I agree with them all...and more. But here I wish to share three personal observations:

\* Even though I had only known Paul for a short period of time (relatively speaking of course), I realize that I have grown to feel very close to him — chemistry, our work together, a similar sense of humor, energy, crazy Australian stuff like Fosters, a can-do spirit, whatever, it happened. It is almost like I came to regard him like the younger brother I never had (I being the youngest of three). As such, there will be a significant hole in my life, more than just as a colleague or a friend. I am terrifically sad...but also realize my life has been enriched by our experience together.

\* While the last year has had its serious ups and downs (what an understatement), it is important to remember that at least he had a 'last year', that he didn't leave us in 4 months (which is one statistic of stage 4 melanoma diagnosis). And during that year, he did have some good times — even in the face of disappointment, pain and uncertainty. And some of those good — even better — times came when his parents were here. I still remember the laughter we had at NIH when Paul and his parents were trying to explain the finer points of cricket to me (I still don't know what a sticky wicket is, or even more important, what it means to be stumped!), or the wonderful barbecue we had at Steve and Joan's place when we were all there. Paul referred to those times in conversations with me, and sooo much appreciated his parents coming.

\* Finally, there was one recent shared activity that will always remain in my memory. Over the years, Paul and I had had a few 'discussions' about Australian and US football — comparisons, descriptions, which one was 'real' football. Stuff like that. But he had never been to a game in the US. In late October or early November, I came by two tickets to the Redskins, and called him to ask if felt like going. As he was feeling good at the time, he accepted — and added that he had a handicapped parking permit, and would help at the stadium? Now, I was *really* glad I had invited him! Those of you who have fought the traffic and taken hours to get in will understand. Anyway, we met on Sunday

about 2pm for this 4 o'clock game, Paul complete with parking pass and looking in good health. Oddly enough, it took only 20 minutes to drive to the stadium and Paul suggested just driving straight towards it and seeing how far we could get. So we did.

And, about 400 yards from the stadium, amidst the chaos of thousands of people and cars and horns, we ran into our first roadblock. A very stern parking person stopped us, and leaned in the window and said 'Where ya going?' I said, 'to the handicapped parking lot – could you tell us where it is'? She looked at both of us, horns honking behind us and said, 'It's full, and besides, who is handicapped here?'

I pointed at Paul and said, 'He is'. And then I looked at Paul – who unfortunately (at this moment anyway) was leaning forward and looked very energetic and good and was trying that charming Paul Ruwoldt I-am-an-Australian smile, surely you will come under my influence and let us go.

She snorted, 'Forget it, its full anyway, you got to turn around'. Aaargghh. No mean feat, as every other vehicle was coming into the stadium. She told us to go to the next roadblock and turn around there.

Paul immediately said, 'hey mate, let's give it another try'. I told him he had to look more handicapped, sit back, not look engaging. This time, the person looked in, Paul was more in role, and he told us the lot was full, but – somewhat hesitatingly – said we could try. We whipped in, got as far from the attendants as possible, and found a place. We arrived 50 yards from the stadium an hour early. This is what friends are for...

Anyway, we made our way slowly into the stadium – it was a perfect day, sun out, brilliant blue sky, warm. The game was good – we watched, drank beer, talked about lots of things, laughed. It couldn't have been better. And then, at one point, he turned and said, 'Damn, it sure is great to do something normal, to sit here in the sun, have a beer, to talk, to watch a game. Not to have a doc looking over my shoulder'.

For me, that incandescent moment will always be frozen in time – the sun had sunk over the lip of the upper deck of the stadium and its remaining rays were fanning out in something that seemed almost a tribute, Paul looked great, we were having a fine time after having conspired to elude Danny Snyder and the stadium guards, and for a moment at least the pain and uncertainty and constant medical treatments subsided into the background.

I could go on with other memories, but I think you get the picture.

I shall miss him.