

Dreams to Memories for Paddicks

Family spends four days,
three nights in Falls
thanks to Fort Erie group

BY ALISON BELL
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For the Paddick family, four days and three nights at Great Wolf Lodge was more than a dream come true.

In fact, the January vacation may have been the last one the family of five — Kristen, 11, Bailey, 9, Michaela, 8, mom, Judy and dad, Wally — will enjoy as one.

After a trip to the doctor last May for what he thought was strep throat, Wally was diagnosed with extensive supraglottic carcinoma, a form of cancer.

"The treatment would have been very rough and the result not great," said Judy. "He would have been left living on feeding tubes and not talking. He didn't want to exist that way. He decided not to have the treatment and spend time with the kids."

In September, doctors gave Wally six to 12 months to live. He lost his voice box, but is able to communicate through whispering.

"He was PSW (personal support worker) and he has dealt with it," said Judy.

From the beginning, Wally and Judy have been up front with the children about Wally's serious condition.

"We were quite forward with them. We told them how it was. If someone says something on the street I'd rather them know first hand. We didn't leave anything out," said Judy.

Judy said the children are "doing okay" knowing their trip to Niagara Falls will probably be the last one with their father. Each have seen a support worker at school and are enjoying quality time with dad.

The family spent four nights at Great Wolf Lodge in Niagara Falls and enjoyed sightseeing, a trip to Ripley's museum and movie theatre, and haunted houses on Clifton Hill.

Fort Erie-based Dreams to Memories made the trip possible. The organization assists terminally ill young parents with



The Paddick family — Bailey, 9, Michaela, 8, dad, Wally, Kristen, 11 and mom, Judy (not pictured) enjoyed a vacation at Great Wolf Lodge in Niagara Falls recently thanks to Fort Erie-based Dreams to Memories. Wally is battling cancer.

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children living in the same home with an opportunity to have a last wish experience. Families from across the province, like the Paddicks which drove five hours from Arden, Ont., north of Napanee and near Bon Echo Provincial Park, are eligible.

Although the primary recipient is an adult, each dream involves their young children at such a sensitive time in their lives.

"(Dreams to Memories) even arranged to have tokens for the kids for the arcade," said Judy.

"It was great. The kids still go on about how it was the best trip they've ever had."

For her birthday on Jan. 5, Michaela ended up giving her father a gift. She was in the rest room with her mother when she told a fellow traveller, yet total stranger, about her dad's condition. The woman from the rest room persuaded management of a souvenir shop to allow the eight-year-old to pick a gift, free of charge, for her father. She

chose a T-shirt and goggles.

"I'm happy they (Dreams to Memories) made it possible," whispered Wally.

"I think they're wonderful," said Judy. "I'm happy my sister found it on the Internet. The trip wouldn't have been possible without them."

In addition to bringing the Paddick family to Niagara Falls, the organization has also recently made it possible for a mother of a six year child to go to Disney World.

Patt Sinclair, Dreams to Memories foundation co-ordinator, said some of the family's stories near break her heart but providing an opportunity for the family to build a memory is worth it.

"It's very gratifying — talking to the people and giving the family a chance to build a memory," she said. "A lot of these people haven't had a chance to go anywhere."

Sinclair said one of the foundation's main obstacles is awareness — not only across Ontario, but particularly at home in Fort Erie.

She said the organization has assisted Fort Erie residents in the past, but would like to do more in the future.

"Most people don't know about us. Everything we do we tell people to spread the word," she said.

Dreams to Memories was founded by Ann and Bob Richardson. After hearing of a father diagnosed with a terminal illness, a friend wanted to create the chance for the family to experience their "dream vacation." The dream came true and the joy and appreciation of the family led the Richardsons to envision enabling other parents in similar situations to also turn their "dreams to memories." The foundation was launched in May 1999.

Wish-recipient families gather annually in Sugar Bowl Park for a memorial grove dedication held by Dreams to Memories. Trees are planted and dedicated to recipients of wishes granted.

Volunteers are what makes Dreams to Memories tick. The organization has no paid staff and welcome volunteers or financial assistance. For more information, call 905-994-9777 or visit www.dreams2memories.org.

Passed away October 2008

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