



### **Peter Marshall Johnson (1949 - 2009)**



Peter Marshall Johnson was born in 1949 to Marshall and Grace Johnson. In a couple of years, his sister, Diantha, joined him. These two children had something very, very special in their backyard, although its important significance to their family would not be revealed until after Marshall's death in 2004.

Peter's early years included swimming and fishing in the Deerfield River, numerous visits to Arms Library for well-loved books, playing baseball, and chores on the family farm. A special day in the Johnson household was the weekly trip to Shelburne Falls in the truck to get grain for the cows as well as shopping at the First National (grocery store). When Marshall backed the truck up to the loading dock at the Eastern States building in Buckland (yes, it's the same building that currently houses the Shelburne Falls Trolley Museum), Peter and Diantha would scramble out and spend their time climbing on the grain bags and were even allowed in the box cars, much to their delight.

Back home, the two would continue adventures on their own "train." Trolley Car #10, from the Shelburne Falls & Colrain Street Railway Line, was rescued from destruction by Peter's grandfather, Frank Johnson, and brought to the family farm in 1928. Practically, it stored garden tools and root vegetables as well as Grace's chickens. But for Peter and Diantha, it was a playhouse. No one else could play "cops and robbers" or cowboys and Indians" with such authenticity. And no one else had the opportunity to "drive" a train with a "who-who" whistle.

His love for acting began with his senior play at Charlemont High School, where he played the part of Luigi, an Italian ghost. Throughout his life, he donned many costumes, but perhaps his most enjoyable role was playing Santa Claus for different groups and especially Diantha's children. Even Grace sat on Santa's lap! For fun, he and his niece, Betsy, dressed in appropriate costumes, depicted "The Great Train Robbery" on Trolley Car #10. It again became the scene of a "holdup" as it had when sitting at the Johnson homestead.

In 1991, the non-profit corporation, the Shelburne Falls Trolley Museum, became a reality. During the negotiations to acquire Trolley Car #10 from the Johnson family, Peter quickly became involved as the Johnson family member on the Board of Directors. In the summer of 1993, he organized a walk-a-thon that raised over \$1300 for the museum. It was a rainy Saturday in September, but brave souls Lincoln Shaw, Dave Bartlett, Betsy Wholey, Brian and Kathleen Carr, Edward and Valma Stowe, Dan Moscato, and Tony Jewell began the trek from Water Street in Shelburne Falls to Colrain Village. An HO-scale brass model of Trolley #10, the prize for the most money raised, went to Lincoln Shaw, a long-time neighbor of the Johnson's. Dave Bartlett served as the historic guide. (Transfer, May 10, 1994) To quote Tony Jewell, the first President of the Trolley Museum, "I remember that I enjoyed meeting Betsy, was sorry that I didn't get the brass model, the museum made money, and Peter made it happen."

After leaving the farm in July 1993, Trolley #10 made its re-entry into Shelburne Falls on October 19, 1996, and work began to restore the car. It was indeed a day of celebration when restored Trolley #10 moved its way down the track toward the Salmon Falls Marketplace building. Peter, as a member of the Johnson family, was able to witness the culmination of 5 years of dedication to a vision.

Peter served on the Board of Directors, was its Treasurer, and volunteered in the Museum Gift Shop. He directed his energies toward acquiring pictures and setting up displays at the Amherst Railway's Society weekends at the Big E in West Springfield, promoting the Museum whenever he could. At Moonlight Madness, his love of the holiday spirit was evident as he decorated the gift shop.

In 2001, Peter was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia, a form of cancer that is treatable, but not curable.