

In Memoriam: Peter Michael Chapman (1951–2017)

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The environmental science community mourns the loss of a truly remarkable and passionate environmental scientist and beloved father and husband. Peter Michael Chapman left us far too early on 26 September 2017 at his home in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Throughout his environmental science and consulting career, Peter never slowed down. He dedicated his career at top speed to questioning the status quo, proposing unique solutions, and spearheading research in the field of environmental science. He was a prolific writer and editor; his contributions included hundreds of scientific articles and book chapters, as well as leadership at countless technical meetings. He delivered engaging keynote talks worldwide that purposely challenged his audiences. He encouraged and mentored young scientists with enthusiasm. He inspired and supported colleagues and peers around the world with his incredible work ethic, his energy and his tremendous vigor.

Peter was born in 1951 in Hull, England, but spent a large portion of his childhood in Cuba (where he became fluent in Spanish), and later in the Philippines and South Florida, USA. Peter eventually found himself in the city of Victoria, Canada, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1979 in benthic ecology with an emphasis on ecotoxicology and risk assessment at the University of Victoria. Although he retained his British citizenship, Peter was proud to be a Canadian and would often remark, “The world needs more Canada.” He was passionate about British Columbia and made it his home for the rest of his life. His environmental consulting career began at EVS Environment Consultants in nearby Vancouver, where he became a partner. EVS was one of the earliest science-focused environmental consulting companies in North America and an influential part of the early careers of many successful environment professionals, leading to the formation of multiple ecology and risk consulting companies thereafter. Twenty-five years later, EVS merged with Golder Associates, where Peter would work another 10 years as a principal before retiring to his independent consulting practice in 2014.

At the core of Peter’s work was a fundamental faith in science. He challenged scientific information constantly throughout his career. He also challenged those who would rely, often blindly, on science for decision-making, urging them to adhere faithfully to principles fundamental to the scientific method—observe, measure, verify and improve. Peter abhorred bias of any sort. His strong conviction, that bridges were needed between science and problem-solving in society, was instrumental in shaping SETAC’s second peer-reviewed publication, *Integrated Environmental Assessment and Management* (IEAM), in 2004. The journal—so much like Peter—is dedicated to bridging the gap between scientific research and the use of science for management of the environment.

Peter will be remembered as a stalwart supporter of SETAC and a moving force behind the SETAC student/mentor program and the SETAC student/mentor dinner event at each annual meeting. Peter’s passion for scientific discourse inspired the “Learned Discourse” feature in the society’s early member newsletter, and later in IEAM; he edited the content continuously for 30 years. He was recognized for these and other contributions to the society with the SETAC Founders Award in 2001. He was named a SETAC Fellow in 2013. When I congratulated him on his Founders Award, Peter remarked that he considered the recognition—outside of his family—to be among his most treasured honors. Peter viewed his role as a SETAC Fellow as an obligation; an obligation to get the science right, to be honest, truthful and fair, to share one’s knowledge, and to have respect for the environment and everyone and everything with whom we share it. “Everyone,” Peter often noted, “has the potential and obligation to leave the world a better place than it was when they arrived.”



Peter will be remembered as an expert and leader in the field of ecological risk assessment and benthic ecology. He introduced the scientific and regulatory communities to methods for assessment of sediment quality that remain the state of the practice around the world. With Dr. Ed Long, Peter pioneered the “Sediment Quality Triad,” internationally recognized to this day as a sound approach for evaluation of sediment quality in streams, rivers and oceans. Peter was an equally powerful advocate for expanding triad concepts into weight of evidence approaches for all aspects of ecological risk assessment. He was a key contributor to the development of the science of evaluating the fate and effects of contaminants in sediment. He encouraged new paradigms for environmental monitoring and assessment, and for the development and use of quantitative tools for data analysis, and he had an early appreciation of the significance of climate change on ecosystems.

Regardless of how we might consider his professional accomplishments, the tremendous volume of work throughout his career never overshadowed what he considered his most important achievement, his family. Throughout his career, Peter had many callings, but the two that I know he valued more than all others were first and foremost husband and father. In between his many work travels and engagements, Peter was a swim team race timer, a downhill ski race official and an editor of several of his children’s sports team newsletters. Peter leaves behind the love of his life, Lori, and three gifted children and successful adults, Jennifer, Michael and Stefanie.

Peter lived a full life. I dare to say as we look back on Peter’s 66 years and the many adventures and honors that he enjoyed, few of us will achieve as much if we lived to 100. He was a leader, scholar, researcher, author, editor, educator, mentor, lecturer, entrepreneur, consultant and, of course to many of us, a valued colleague and dear friend. Peter moved among these roles with such élan. I suspect he would be happy with the moniker, “Peter Chapman: citizen of the world, husband, father and scientist.”

I am left with a memory of Peter’s infectious smile and that impish glint in his eye. It was the look of a gifted and wise person extoling the rest of us to move onward, always learning, and so we will. Peter will be greatly missed.

In honor of his devotion to the scientific and academic communities, an endowment has been created in Peter’s name at SETAC. You can make [contributions to the Peter Chapman Endowment Fund](#) online.

Acknowledgment

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