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Mark Chamberlin Fought ALS And Gained An Artist's Eye

By Sarah M. Earle
Concord Monitor staff

Reprinted from the Concord Monitor
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As Mark Chamberlin slowly lost the ability to walk, he gained something unexpected. The photos he'd been taking since he hiked the Appalachian Trail 30 years earlier began to evolve – to grow more focused, more intimate, somehow more real.

"When he was walking, he was doing more landscape photos, the stuff you'd see on postcards," said Chamberlin's brother, Sam, sitting by Mark's bedside at the Merrimack County Nursing Home in Boscawen. "His photos have gotten exponentially better since he had to slow down. ... The more recent ones just seem to jump out at you. They're more art."

That art has followed Chamberlin, 51, to the nursing home where, after a long battle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), he's been placed in hospice care. His girlfriend, Debra Rattee, and his brother have put up a small display of his favorite photos in the lobby. Some show the brilliant colors of New Hampshire's countryside cropped in unexpected ways, while others contemplate and elevate the mundane. Many show a gorgeous scene in reverse, reflected in a pond or swirled and distorted by a moving stream.

"That's one of his favorites," said Rattee, pointing to a shot of brown leaves and pine needles floating on the surface of some unknown pond or puddle. "And I thought, 'I didn't know dead leaves could look so good.' ... I love his photos. I would never have noticed some of the things he takes pictures of."

Before being diagnosed with ALS in 2001, Chamberlin might not have noticed such things either. He loved the outdoors, but he was always on the go – hiking, hunting, mining, gardening. Born and raised in Salisbury, he served in the Marines and on the Salisbury Fire Department, as well as working in real estate.

As the disease began to rob Cham-

berlin of muscle function, he turned more and more to photography, driving to his favorite places and taking pictures through his car window with a zoom lens. Thanks to a car equipped with hand controls, he was able to keep driving until about five months ago. During that time, he also co-authored a book on the rangeways of New Hampshire (those old roads that often provoke heated discussions at town meetings) and worked with an energy healer to put together a book of photos and poems.

"How has the photography helped you?" Rattee asked Chamberlin, who lay watching the Red Sox on a television set flanked by two large framed prints – one of a stone wall in the snow, the other of a wagon on a hill. Chamberlin, who can no longer talk but whose brain functions as well as ever, slowly raised one hand and made a short, downward sweep.

"Calmed you down?" asked Sam Chamberlin.

Chamberlin nodded, then asked for a pen to write on a notebook he held on his lap. With slow, childlike strokes he wrote one word: "Perspective."

(A small display of Mark Chamberlin's photos can be viewed in the lobby of the Merrimack County Nursing Home. His prints are also for sale on his Web site, MarkChamberlinPhotos.com.)

Postscript Published April 11

Mark Chamberlin, whose photographs were featured on yesterday's Arts & Entertainment page, died Wednesday night [April 9], ending a seven-year battle with Lou Gehrig's disease.

The 51-year-old Salisbury native, who served in the Marines and as an EMT for the Salisbury Fire Department, had been placed in hospice care at the Merrimack County Nursing Home last week.

His girlfriend, Debra Rattee, said he wrote her a note Wednesday, the day after being interviewed by the *Monitor*, telling her it was time to go. She believes he may have been waiting to tell his story before he passed away.

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Peter "PJ" Miner Wounded In Iraq

WMUR reported on April 8 that Sergeant Peter Miner of Salisbury was one of five New Hampshire National Guard military police officers wounded in southeastern Baghdad on April 6. On April 9 the *Concord Monitor* reported that Peter had returned to duty.

Tina Cotton remembers Peter, or "PJ," as an active Cub Scout and Boy Scout with Andover's Pack and Troop 489. His dad, who also served in Iraq, was a Scout leader. PJ attended MVHS and worked at the Franklin Hannaford before getting a scholarship for college.

90th Birthday Party for Katherine Barton

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