

Gary Whitehill, 44

Gary Whitehill, 44, of Kirby, died peacefully Friday morning, June 10, 2005, at NVRH with his sister Donna by his side. Gary was born June 23, 1960. His mother had to be hospitalized for a time after his birth, and he was tenderly cared for by his dear Aunt Isabel and Uncle Dwight in Orleans. With a hint of the 6-foot, 5-inch height he would eventually attain, Gary outgrew his bassinet in two weeks. Gary always loved sports. As a child, he spent endless hours shooting hoops or punting a football. His practice served him well and he excelled at high school sports. Gary was chosen for the 1978 Vermont Shrine Maple Sugar Bowl team. His father, Bernie, was very proud of all his accomplishments and never missed a game. Gary loved the south and after graduation from Lyndon Institute in 1978, he attended Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Ala. He graduated in 1982 and began work in the travel industry. His work took him all over the United States and Europe and he logged up to 500,000 air miles a year. In 1988, Gary was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and began a courageous fight with this debilitating disease. While MS would gradually rob Gary of his physical abilities, his decency, character and courage only grew. Fiercely independent, Gary lived on his own and worked as long as was humanly possible. He even did a stint of modeling while he was in Florida. In 1994, he transferred to Salt Lake City, Utah, to work in his company's Western Division. He had a cot in his office so he could rest a bit, then get back to work. Gary's mother Trudy was his strong and true partner in his efforts to live as fully as he could. She cared for him in Florida and helped him move out west where she learned to navigate his large handicapped-accessible van throughout the busy streets and mountain roads of Utah. They also traveled to a clinic in Germany to see a specialist, and had a trip to Hawaii where they flew in a helicopter into the valleys of Maui and watched whales in the Pacific Ocean. Gary continually challenged himself and tried whatever he could while he was able. While in Utah, he got involved in an adaptive sports program and went skydiving (something he would keep from his mother for a few months!), hang gliding, parasailing and dog sledding. He took bobsled runs at 75 mph with the

U.S. Olympic Bobsled team in Park City. One of his projects was a video he put together of his various exploits. He edited the film, narrated it and chose music to accompany it. Gary kept his mind sharp by teaching himself Spanish, learning how to use computers and keeping informed on current events. His memory was wonderful and many times his family would go to him for such pertinent information as who coached the Chicago Bears in 1975. He always had the answers. In 1998, Gary returned to his family home in Kirby, where he was devotedly cared for by his mother and the rest of his family. His courage and humor inspired everyone around him. He enjoyed a good joke, music, a fine cigar and the beauty of nature. He loved horses, watching birds come to his windowsill feeder and had a special affinity for wolves. His wheelchair was fitted with an apparatus so Gary could propel himself with head controls and he could often be found venturing out to visit with the Willey's cows across the street. He drove his chair the day before his hospitalization with pneumonia and managed to hide in a lilac bush as a prank on his mother. He was an avid sports fan and enjoyed football games, Triple Crown races and, most recently, was a true Red Sox fan. Gary never felt sorry for himself and always had compassion and consideration for others. He was a gift to us all, and the lessons he taught us by example will never be forgotten. There will be a celebration of Gary's life at the family home on North Kirby Road on Sunday, June 26, from 2-5 p.m.