

HOCKEY

‘I Have No Idea How to Tell This Horror Story’

NOV. 21, 2017

John Branch, a sports reporter at The New York Times, has been in sporadic contact via text messaging and email with Walter Peat since writing about him and his son Stephen, a former N.H.L. player.

At the time of [the article](#), June 2016, Stephen Peat was 36 and experiencing debilitating headaches and violent mood swings. Peat was primarily an enforcer, a player designated to drop his gloves and square off in fist-to-fist combat with an opponent. The Peats presumed that Stephen’s problems were rooted in brain trauma sustained on the ice in so many fights.

Walter Peat, the head saw filer at a lumber mill in a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia, gave The Times permission to publish the texts and emails he had sent John over the previous 18 months. Some have been trimmed for concision.

JUNE 7, 2016

Again, we thank you for doing our story, which hasn’t ended yet. I just hope Stephen can get some help, going forward. We had a great day yesterday, as just the 2 of us went boating for the day. Beautiful day, making memories together.

DEC. 30, 2016: John is copied on an email to a doctor with the N.H.L. Players’ Association.

Dr. Rizos,

We are at a critical point in Stephen’s health. I am afraid, Stephen may become another statistic in NHL players whose life is ended due to brain injuries suffered from playing.

We are desperate for help, as we have run out of resources and energy to cope with this. The NHL has offered zero help. I am sorry we haven't contacted you sooner, but Stephen is stubborn, and proud. It has gone past that, and hope someone will help. He is suffering badly from memory loss, depression, extreme headaches, and at times suicide thoughts. Along with this, tough when he get frustrated and anger comes out. He has got violent a couple times, and at times I am afraid for my life. I love my son very much, and you have no idea how much this hurts to see him like this. Please help.

JUNE 1, 2017

Just an update on Stephen, not sure if the NHL might want to know, but Stephen is in lockup, been arrested 2 times in the last week for parole violation. May spend the next 6 months in jail, he is real bad shape, and like I said before, I don't have the resources or the knowledge to deal with this. I saw him yesterday, looks horrible, he is homeless. I know one can lead a horse to water theory, but I am afraid this could be very close to his end. At times he has no idea who he is or where he is.

Stephen needs special medical attention badly, as I also believe he has gone back to self-medicating, not sure, but you can't imagine what bad shape he is in. I fear he may not make it out of lock up, but there is nothing I can do, or don't know what to do. The system is flawed.

He is in lock up now, most likely won't get released now. Only violation is not seeing his parole officer, but he forgets, a complete mess right now. Probably the safest place for him, but he won't get fixed in a cement cell.

JUNE 7, 2017

I will be honest, my health has suffered thru this, and I am at a financial crisis as Stephen has gone through \$120,000 since getting out of rehab. And he is demanding more every day, to a point if I continue this, I will be on the street. Stephen can't comprehend my financial stress he has put on me.

I went to meet him at Clover Towing the other day, Stephen looked in real bad shape, as he didn't even know I was there. I had to leave, and stop in a parking lot next door and just broke down. The police were called by the towing company and they took him to jail. He should be in a hospital, not a jail, we can talk more about this. I will say I have had to get a no contact order as I fear for my safety now. If he is in a state where he doesn't know who I am, it scares me.

JUNE 14, 2017

John, sorry for not getting back to you. It has been a real shit show with Stephen this last few days. I have been overwhelmed with just trying to deal with him. I will try to contact you when it settles down here. Tks for your concern and interest.

NOV. 7, 2017: Walter sends John an email that he sent to Stephen's probation officer in June, asking for a no-contact order against his son.

I think it best we do not have any contact at all, and if he needs to contact me, maybe a mediator, or thru you if possible.

I need to step away, and allow my son to hit bottom on his own.

I DO NOT WANT ANY CONTACT AT ALL, FROM THIS DAY FORWARD.

: Walter sends John his response to a query from Stephen's probation officer.

I am not sure what there is to discuss. It seems no one wants to help, just rubber stamp things until my son dies. He has had no help from the NHL, and from what I can assume, no help from the government, or law authorities. It is well document that my son suffers from concussion issues, and he is treated like a common criminal. Yes, he is breaking the law, but, what is the root cause. His doctors say he is doing drugs, maybe he is, but why, again the root cause.

It is very well document that many of these players or people who suffer from concussion syndrome reach out for a solution, but end up with drugs off the street to solve their problem.

He was a young man who had thousands of fans cheering for him every time he dropped the gloves, fighting for the Langley Thunder Junior team, the Calgary Hitman, Red Deer Rebels, Tri City Americans.

Stephen played for the Washington Capitals, for 4 years, one time had 13 fights in 12 games, bare knuckle fights with big guys, some who are already dead now due to concussion related injuries. Yet, here we are, trying to put Stephen in jail because no one has any idea what to do with him. Yes, my brothers and I have asked for a no contact order, as we are concerned for our safety, but at the same time, we love him, and fear every phone call we get, it is someone to tell us he has died. I will tell you this, that John Branch wants to do a follow up story, NY Times, and this story will have an ending. Sad. How we write that ending is up to all of us, I have tried my best, and much like Stephen, have had the door closed in my face. I am 66 years old, sold my house to help, running out of funds, and really, my health has gone south because of this. I have avoided talking to John Branch as it is very difficult talking about a lost cause. Many night, I cry myself to sleep, trying to figure out a new plan. But, no matter what I do, I wake up to an endless problem.

His life is at stake, he used to be the most polite young man, straight "A" in school, and now, he can't remember why he gets up in the morning.

Sincerely

Walter Peat

NOV. 13, 2017

Hi John

Tks for replying. Not sure, but the fact Stephen is deteriorating fast, living on the street, has pretty much zero help from NHL, and my relationship with him had gone south. With his condition, he needs professional help, as I would suggest his mind set has gone off the rails.

I made arrangements for him to stay at my brothers, and both brothers are pretty much handicap, but ended up being removed by the police for threats, etc. his mind leaves him lost at times. Confused, aggressive, and I will be honest, he scares the shit out of me, and for that matter my brothers. It saddens me to seem helpless as Stephen has accused me of interfering in his affairs. I have no idea how to tell this horror story, but I am sure there are many living this nightmare. I am thinking that this may all come out one day, but my biggest fear is my son will not be with us, as he even talks about suicide at times. every time I get an email or an unknown number calling me, about him, I fear the worst news. The legal system, and the medical system hear only wants to paint him as a criminal or a drug addict. I would suggest both may be the case, as his situation has forced him to do what ever it takes to relieve the pain, anxiety etc, from the headaches.

Again, I am a normal person who loves hockey, but to see what the game has become, and the end result of the violence allowed on the ice. The worst is the fact, that most sports teams are still in the dark as far as recognizing the health risks associated with many sports. The rule book must be rewritten.

Right now, I am at a loss of what to do, and who to turn to for help. Many night, I lose countless hours of sleep, thinking of what will happen, and am I doing the right thing. There are so many people who prefer to put a paper bag over their head and ignore the fact that Stephen or so many players suffer from these injuries. But, the injuries just don't stop there, as the emotional, financial, and in some cases, physical injuries suffered by family members. I am living the nightmare of the movie "Concussion",

I honestly have no idea where to take this, other than keep trying to tell the story, and maybe others won't feel so lonely, like they are on a deserted island.

He is so mad at me, that it has come to yelling at me, making threats, etc., as really, I was/am the only person left in his life trying to help, as many just look at him, as just another person on the street, and bum dumpster diving for food.

John, I am open to anything that may bring this into the open, so people can see what hockey is breeding. And where many of its players end up. It is so sad that Stephen had his own cheering section in Washington, but now, many of his fans have no idea or care what he is doing.

Sincerely

Walter

NOV. 13, 2017: John asked for Walter's permission to publish the text and email messages he had sent about Stephen.

John,

I personally would not have a problem with that. Fact is, I feel like I am the one who has failed my son, as I feel I have the ability to fix anything. This is something I struggle with everyday. I will admit I have tears in my eyes as I respond to this, as Stephen is texting me right now, begging for money. Says he can hardly lift his arms, as he is so weak, starving, cold, but still blames me for all that has happened to him. Some days, I find this whole nightmare like a bad dream, wishing I could wake up, and it was all over.