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2020 Vision

Oh, 2020. We're all tired of the word "unprecedented". But the year has posed challenges for our family members trying to cope with change and more change, for our partners, and for Threads of Life itself. Many people have asked how the organization is doing – Executive Director Shirley Hickman answers that question in this issue.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Bill Stunt



They say it's good to try new things. This fall, during our virtual Reflection Ceremony, was the first time I've shared my son's story as an online presentation. I've been a volunteer speaker for many years, yet this was a strange experience, sitting alone, speaking to a computer. Online isn't perfect, but it's what

we've got. And so many people reached out to let me know they'd been touched by Karl's story. It was a moving reminder for me, of what a close-knit and supportive family Threads of Life is – a family that includes our members affected by workplace tragedy, plus our Threads of Life staff, partners and sponsors. On behalf of our board of directors, thank you to all of you for supporting one another, and supporting Threads of Life this year.

This is the story of Thomas Harroun

His wife and
daughters made up
Tommy's "Core-4"

by **Shawna Harroun**



Shawna and Tommy Harroun

Tommy and I met in November of 1993. Within a few months of meeting Tommy, I knew this was the man I was going to spend my life with. We had our first daughter, Hope, in April 1995 and our second, Haley, July 1998. Tommy and I married August 2008.

We had worked together at the same company for 15 years. People would ask, 'how do you spend that much time together?' and I would say it was easy. I could not imagine not working with him. We were best friends. There are not many couples who could spend as much time as we did together. I used to not be able to bear the thought of living without him.

Tommy was a huge family man and hard worker. He would do anything for his family. He enjoyed spending time with his kids while he was not working. We had season's tickets to the Oil Kings. He loved watching junior hockey and he loved our vacations in British Columbia. He loved the mountains. Tommy always made me laugh and his 'Core 4' as he liked to call the four of us, was his number one priority in life.

Tommy started working for a PVC plastic factory January 8, 1991 at the age of 21. He first started having shortness of breath in the beginning of 1998. After a few visits to the emergency room they decided to look further into the issue and do a biopsy of his lymph nodes/lung. They diagnosed Tommy with sarcoidosis. He was 27 years old.

Tommy had been working as a blender, where he was exposed to a lot of dust and chemicals. Safety back then was not a priority as it is today. There were no masks, respirators or good ventilation. He was told by the occupational doctor reviewing his medical history

that it was not work-related, so Tommy continued working at the same company. Tommy stayed stable until June 2010, when he started getting real short of breath on exertion. He had lost a lot of weight and was very fatigued, and Tommy explained it was like a switch went off. We made an appointment with the doctor he had seen in 1998, and he was referred to a pulmonologist, who ordered more tests and determined that one day Tommy would need a lung transplant as his lungs were damaged and would continue to deteriorate. He was seen by this doctor every three months for the next seven years.

Tommy was in surgery for eight hours and he did amazing. Twenty-four hours later I watched my husband take his first breath with his new lungs

During this time Tommy was also referred to another occupational doctor who looked further into his medical history and his place of employment. They deemed Tommy's illness was actually work related. His place of employment put Tommy on modified duties, doing administrative and office work. Tommy was a huge asset to the company as he knew how to run that department inside and out. Tommy continued to work full time until he physically couldn't.

In May 2012 oxygen was first introduced. Tommy felt very self conscious when he wore

oxygen as he was still young – he was only 42 and he always felt people would stare at him. With lung disease there is always that stigma with smoking and Tommy did smoke when he was younger. The pathologist who studied Tommy's lungs let us know smoking did not play a part in his lung disease.

From 2014 till May 2017 Tommy's lung disease was stable, however it was getting harder on him by the day. He continued working full time and never complained about his struggles every day to breathe. Tommy's day consisted of working eight hours or more, then coming home to bed as he was exhausted. There were a lot of things he missed on the weekends as he was tired from his busy week of work.

In May 2017, Tommy's pulmonologist decided a lung volume reduction surgery may help with his struggles to breathe. After the operation Tommy no longer needed oxygen and he had a little more energy. He finally took some time off work to recover.

Unbeknownst to us, January 8, 2018 was his last day of work. His oxygen saturation levels were very low. Tommy spent five days in hospital where they figured he had picked up an infection. He was now on full time oxygen again and spent the next couple of weeks at home trying to recover. However, on January 28 he was admitted once again and by January 30, 2018 Tommy was in ICU. The doctors let me know it did not look good. Tommy was sent by ambulance to the university hospital ICU unit on January 31 to be seen by the transplant doctors. We were told he was at the end stage of his lung disease and he would be starting the workup for the

transplant. February 2 was overwhelming. Tommy went for several tests (ultrasounds, blood work, angiogram of his heart). Social workers came to talk to us. It was a very scary time not knowing what was going to happen. But the very next day, February 3, our prayers were answered. Tommy received a new set of lungs!

Tommy always had so much anxiety about losing his job and not being able to take care of us, that he worked literally 'til he could no longer.

Tommy was in surgery for eight hours and he did amazing. Twenty-four hours later I watched my husband take his first breath with his new lungs. Tommy was so grateful for this second chance, as we all were. He spent 18 days in hospital after the transplant and I remember after he was woken up, one of the first things he said was he would now be able to see his girls get married and meet his grandbabies. He was so grateful to be alive. Tommy and I spent the next three months going back and forth to the hospital doing twice a week meetings with the transplant team, twice a week blood work, five days a week of physio and a lot of medication daily. Through it all he never complained once. Tommy was excited about the future he was now going to have. He amazed me every day with the strong will he had to live. Thirty-three days after the transplant Tommy and I got the opportunity to see his old lungs. It put a lot in perspective. The pathologist was amazed he still worked and did what he did with these very diseased lungs.

On May 17 Tommy did a five-km walk for the Alberta transplant association. The girls and I were sure he was never going to be able to complete it but he did. It was definitely an emotional day as there is no way he would have been able to do that in the past. Our future looked so much brighter. He was going to be able to do these things with the girls and I. He would have the energy once again and not be short of breath.

Things can change in a moment. On June 1, 2018 Tommy was admitted back in hospital. He had not been feeling the best and had a high temperature. They took an x-ray of the lungs that night and found nodules on them. The following day they did a cat scan of the whole body to find some nodules also on the

liver and kidneys. They rushed a liver biopsy and we were told he was full of cancer.

My world turned black. My best friend of 25 years was told he had months to weeks to live. The medication that was supposed to keep my husband alive did the opposite. They figure he may have had a small tumor on the bladder. Once Tommy started taking the anti-rejection drugs for his new lungs, the cancer spread quickly as he had no immune system to fight it. There were so many emotions: how was I going to live without him? How were we going to tell our girls that their dad was going to die after we all had so much hope for our future? The four of us were devastated. We spent the next 10 days in the hospital but the morning of June 14, 2018 I watched my husband take his last breath. The lung disease won and my best friend; Hope and Haley's dad passed away at the age of 48.

If it was not for the organ donor and the donor's family, we would not have had those four months with Tommy. Their selfless act gave Tommy the gift to be able to run and walk and what we all take for granted: breathe. Tommy was so thankful and swore he was going to take care of those lungs. Given the chance, anyone that knew Tommy knows he would have. The girls and I are so thankful to the family and donor for giving him that second chance because if anyone deserved it, it was him.

We meet a lot of great people in this journey and I am hoping some good will come out of Tommy's death. The Alberta Lung Association have an annual walk/run in memory of Tommy, called Tommy's Run and all the proceeds raised will go to Breathing Space, a recovery house for lung transplant recipients and their caregivers. This will help so many patients and families.

If I have learned anything, life is definitely short and can be taken in a second. I want to

tell Tommy's story so others don't have to go through what the four of us as a family have had to go through. At the end of the day, BE SAFE. Tommy always had so much anxiety about losing his job and not being able to take care of us, that he worked literally 'til he could no longer. Now I'm left without my best friend trying to figure out how to live without him as he was all I have ever known. I moved in with Tommy right after high school, so now I'm trying to figure out how to survive and live life the best I can without him.

Our oldest daughter has chosen respiratory therapy as a career choice and is in her second year, our youngest has chosen human resources as her career choice and is in her third year. As hard as it is, I keep going for them as I know Tommy would want me to. His kids and I were his life, so my goal now is to do what I can to help others and to tell Tommy's story and keep his memory alive. I hope as you read this story you will decide to put on that mask or PPE, even if you only need it for two minutes. There are still people in our workplace who decide not to protect themselves, which is crazy to me. However there are employees who never take those masks off and there are people who have quit smoking after Tommy's death. I chose to go back to the same place Tommy and I worked together, so that has been tough, but when I'm having bad days they understand why.

Tommy was an amazing husband and father. He is missed by so many. He had a great heart and deserved to be here on earth so much longer. I still struggle every day with why it was his time and what we could have done differently. Some days I can honestly say I'm not sure how I'm going to get through this. I miss him more than you could imagine. As for what my future holds, my motto is 'one day at a time' as clichéd as it sounds. I have chosen to move forward with my life, as I know that's what Tommy would want, for me to be happy.



Tommy along with his wife and their two daughters made up what Tommy called his 'Core 4'

Anger gradually gives way to healing

Nail gun causes death of fun-loving father and husband

by Cori Gervais

It was just like any day. Except it wasn't. Russell woke later than usual, burnt his breakfast on the stove and rushed out the door to get to work. But, not before kissing me on my cheek to tell me he loved me and trudging up the stairs with his big work boots on to kiss both our young daughters before they woke to get ready for school.

Little did I know that would be the last time I would see him alive.

No one ever thinks it will happen to their family. I was one of those people. I was a good mom, a good wife, friend and daughter. I worked hard as a registered nurse and I had compassion and care for everyone who entered my life. Things weren't perfect, but things were pretty good. I was happy to have built a life with my husband whom I met when I was 18.

When we first met, he was visiting from Scotland and working as an extra (actor) for a television movie in the small town where lived. We became friends first, goofing around and enjoying each other's company. I knew there was something special about him: his warmth, his beautiful accent, his kindness and strength. He came back to visit me the following year and we kept in touch. I eventually moved to Scotland to be with him. Later, I came back to Canada to go to school and then he followed me. We married on a frigid cold day in January. That following September we had a big wedding with all our friends and family. Many came from Scotland to help us celebrate our marriage.

We welcomed our first daughter in 2005, then another daughter in 2011. We moved back to the small town we had met in, as



Russell and Cori

we thought it would be a better place than the city to raise our girls. We settled and things were good. It seemed like the right decision. My work was going well; Russell's was good, but nowhere near as lucrative as it had been in the big city. But we adjusted.

I recall Russell saying he didn't like doing it and felt uneasy at the location.

After his father passed away, we started talking more seriously about returning to Scotland and being closer to his family and friends. He finally admitted to me he missed his home (after years of me trying to persuade him to go to Scotland to raise our family). Scotland was a second home to me and I loved his family and friends. It seemed like the right time to make the leap. We weren't just talking about it; we were finalizing our girls' British passports and had just listed our house for sale.

However, little did we know that fateful day had arrived. Russell had worked as a carpenter and was self-employed most of his career after learning the trade. He had decided to switch to being an employee as he phased out his business and together, we started to plan for our move overseas. He eventually planned to get out of the profession altogether, at least the physical

aspect of it. He felt physically tired and his joints ached, particularly his shoulders. He met a guy he had known previously and liked his vision for sustainable, eco-efficient home building materials. Russell joined the crew.

He had started to help his new employer with some renovations on his own private home. I recall Russell saying he didn't like doing it and felt uneasy at the location. It was hard demolition work – they were tearing everything back to the studs/frame of the house. That day Russell worked hard and quickly, doing some demolition work but also nailing down strapping to the underside of a roof. We will never know what exactly happened, but he was working on a ladder using a pneumatic nail gun that used compressed air to shoot nails. He missed the wood, or the nail gun misfired, accidentally shooting the 3 ¼-inch nail into his chest. He stumbled off the ladder according to his employer, who watched him from a distance. He swore and walked off, then pulled the nail from his chest and carried on walking a few steps until he collapsed. His employer witnessed this. Unsure of what exactly had happened, he called 911.

Unfortunately, no one realized it but the nail had pierced a major artery in Russell's heart and he was bleeding internally. Russell slipped into shock quickly; his brain started to get starved of oxygen.

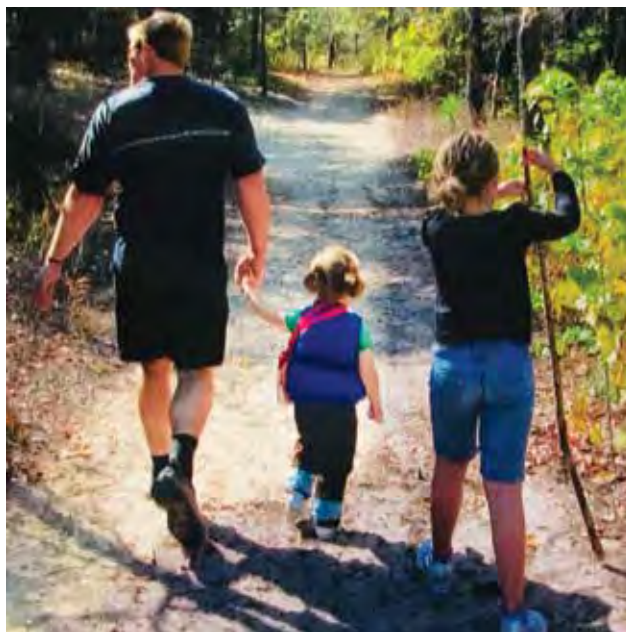
Medical staff at the small local hospital were able to diagnose that he was suffering from cardiac tamponade and blood was leaking into the small thin sac around the heart. The pressure of the blood stopped his heart from pumping and his heart stopped. The doctors and nurses worked swiftly to perform a procedure they likely hadn't performed since their medical training – pericardiocentesis. They were able to drain the blood away from his heart and his heart started to pump again. They resuscitated him, stabilized him and he was transferred to a larger hospital equipped to deal with his injuries.

Meanwhile, I was blissfully unaware of what was happening. I was heading to pick up my youngest daughter at her summer camp. My eldest daughter, aged 11, had for the first time walked home on her own that afternoon from a library program. She had a cell phone and texted me when she got home. I would be there within the hour. Shortly after she got home, I received another text message from her that read, “mommy, mommy, mommy...there is a police officer at the door.” As soon as I saw the text, I knew something was wrong.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason the police had been unable to reach me and the officer at the door thought I had already been notified. Thankfully, the officer did not disclose directly to my daughter why she was at the house. My daughter handed her phone to the police officer who informed me that my husband had been gravely injured and his chances of survival were not hopeful. She explained that she was there to escort me with sirens blaring and lights flashing the one-hour drive to the hospital. My nightmare had just begun and life as I knew it was about to change dramatically.

I quickly went onto action, calling a friend to go and be with my eldest daughter until I could get to the house (I was still in transit). I made arrangements for my youngest to be picked up. I contacted my parents to meet me at the hospital. And I called overseas, reaching my sister-in-law and brother-in-law to tell them of Russell's accident. Everything felt so surreal and chaotic, I was numb as I sat in the police car flying down the highway. Eventually we made it to the ER where my parents found me. We were whisked away to a private room and told very little information.

We sat waiting for hours. All we were told was that Russell was in surgery. Later we were led into his room in ICU, where I saw him hooked up to many machines all making beeping noises. The nurse carefully explained what she had been told happened to him, and this was the first time we were made aware that he had suffered a heart attack and was resuscitated. The nurse also explained that he was in an induced coma to cool his body temperature to help prevent any brain damage (this is commonly done with heart attack patients). Although we were shocked and devastated, it seemed like the worst was over. The nurse explained that he was still not in stable condition, but we were somewhat hopeful. My parents went home and the hospital offered me a little room to stay in, though I barely left Russell's side.



Russell was a fun-loving father to his two girls

Once morning came, I noticed Russell had started to twitch very slightly. On the doctor's rounds he pulled me aside. He told me he had “seen this neurological response before (twitching) and it is indicative of a severe brain injury.” He told me of course they would have to do further testing to confirm this. I clearly remember asking him whether Russell's mother, who had just been over to Canada visiting us a couple of weeks earlier, needed to travel back. He told me that yes, his family needed to be here. My heart sank and I think simultaneously broke and shattered into a million little pieces. I knew then he was not going to make it and my world collapsed.

As I sat waiting for family to arrive from

Scotland I tried to sort out the myriad of emotions I was feeling. I thought how I was going to tell my children the news of their father's devastating injury. They were with friends and family and knew that their father had been injured, however, were not aware of how serious it was. I questioned God, I begged and pleaded for a miracle, but as the test results came in, Russell's prognosis looked less and less promising. I was angry at the universe, at the world for letting something like this happen. We were good people; why did this have to happen? I started to think of the silver lining to this tragedy ... what good has come from this accident I asked myself? It took me a while and through a lot of tears and anger I was able to recognize, that unlike many other families who have gone through similar tragedies, I was at least able to sit by my

husband's side and hold his hand and let him know that we were all there. He never regained consciousness, but I believe he knew we were there. Some families get that fateful knock on the door from the police and learn that their loved one has been killed and never get the chance to say goodbye. Looking at this tragedy from this perspective has helped me immensely in my grieving. Nothing can ever bring back my husband. My daughters are growing up without their fun-loving father and our future without him is sad, but we are trying to live our best lives and know he would be proud of us.

On August 28, 2016, my best friend and father of our two daughters, Russell, passed away in the intensive care unit. I was by his side while he transitioned from this life to the other.

Many people have been injured and killed by using nail guns, however, they continue to be used and manufactured. There was no court case and no one person was to blame for Russell's accident as he was seen as an experienced carpenter. The nail gun was found to be working fine. The investigation took many twists and turns but the result was the details of that fateful day will never truly be known. The coroner's inquest came up with some good suggestions, but sadly these suggestions are not law. My wish is to educate people working in the trades as well as people who have these tools in their home about the dangers of nail guns and how to safely use them. No job is ever worth losing your life over.



Vision 2020, and envisioning 2021

by Shirley Hickman

VISION 2020: a term to express visual acuity (the clarity or sharpness of vision). In 2019 our staff team thought the theme of ‘2020’ would be a fun one for the coming year. Our staff meeting in January 2020 held out all kinds of possibilities, including fun activities as we finalized our plans for the year. Our over-arching theme was the challenge: how do we reach 300 new family members each year? Steps for Life was ready to launch in another week. Little did we know the storm that was about to challenge us.

The wind swung our sails in the middle of March, but didn’t stop us or you from ensuring Steps for Life happened in your community. You know the value of that event in providing support for family members, and equally in spreading the message of workplace injury awareness. And you did that. You took to social media and shared your why and your way. The event was a success. Yes, our income from that fundraiser was significantly impacted, but you surpassed in other ways. Sponsors, partners and the community participated.

Also cancelled were our other avenues for fundraising and spreading the prevention message. You couldn’t hold in-person events, so no health and safety training or conferences to bring in a family member spokesperson sharing their story. There were no fundraising events as you couldn’t hold your golf and ball tournaments, barbeques, etc. Your family life had changed, your work-life likely

changed, our environment changed from what we knew. What would the year bring?

I reflect back to 2003 when a small group of family members and partners saw the need for family members to have support and be a voice for the prevention message. We had zero funds. The WSIB then provided our first grant. Soon community partners across Canada embraced the mission and vision of Threads of Life. We started small and hired and grew within our means – both human and financially. Several years in the past decade, we were fortunate to receive unexpected donations near the year-end and we established a reserve fund – funds we tucked away for a rainy day. Actually, most of our financial donations are hoped for, but of course never a for-sure thing. That is the way it is with charities.

The pandemic has caused many charities to close their doors forever, but at this point Threads of Life continues to be on a sound financial footing, because of the commitment of our funders and the foresight of our board of directors. In 2020 some of our major expenses have been curtailed, including, sadly, the in-person family forums which were not able to happen. We have been able to make use of the government’s COVID-19 financial assistance programs. Those, along with our committed sponsors and partners with multi-year grant agreements, your donations and support for Threads of Life have all helped.

Looking ahead, we are well aware that some of our partners and sponsors will have financial challenges due to the pandemic, while others are doing well. At this time, we are anticipating a budget deficit in 2021. We will likely be pulling from our rainy day funds so that we can continue to retain our staff and deliver all of our programs. While we are fortunate to have that reserve fund to draw on, we can’t be sure what the

next months and years will bring. We will count on each of you.

Each of our board and staff meetings opens with a reflection on our mission and vision. It is an important step for us. It keeps us grounded. Each meeting we also talk about our goal of reaching 300 new family members each year. You can help with this. You can have some brochures on hand and pass them around. Everyone has someone in their network who has been affected by a workplace life-altering injury or illness, or knows of a family where a worker has died.

Let us look forward to a future where volunteer speakers will be back in person at your workplace and at schools sharing the prevention message. Once again, you will be able to host your workplace fundraisers and events to bring employees together and build their commitment to health and safety. In so many ways, each of these events will help new family members to find a listening ear, care and comfort from Threads of Life. They too will be part of the important vision to bring all workers home safely.



FAMILY FORUM Reflections Ceremony: *Sharing the Journey*

National Virtual Family Forum – October 17 - November 21, 2020

by Joanne Wade

I have belonged to Threads of Life since it began in 2003 and have always looked forward to our annual Family Forums. Each year the Forum begins with our Reflection Ceremony. This year, due to COVID-19, our ceremony had to be virtual.

It was a different experience as there was no physical or visual contact with our members. Yet to me it was still very meaningful and emotional.

It takes time, effort and energy to reflect. It is hard to confront those things that are so painful and difficult but as we, the members of the Threads of Life have come to realize, we have grown and continue to grow through our pain and it is in part due to our Reflection Ceremony.

By reflecting we are giving our brains an opportunity to pause amidst the chaos of our day-to-day living, untangle and sort through our emotions, and try to create some type of meaning to this new norm we are living.

In reflecting we are honouring our loved ones, remembering the life as it was and the life that it now is. In this respect, we are giving evidence of their existence as they were, and the way we were.

There is such power in being together physically, sharing in our common denominator of loss, be it fatality, life-altering injury or occupational disease. At the Reflection Ceremonies in the past we have been able to reach out to one another, offer a shoulder to lean on or cry on. Normally we would be together in one room, people from all different walks of life, different nationalities, different cultural and social backgrounds and yet we soon feel compassion and familiarity with one another because of our losses. This is the bond that glues us together. Even though loss is what we all have in common, we realize that each one's journey is unique. It is the sharing and caring that is felt at our Reflection Ceremony and Forum that is so special to this organization.

For those who are fresh into their grief journey, being at the most weakened and vulnerable time of their life, because our ceremony had to be virtual, they would not be able to feel the usual atmosphere that

surrounds them, one of love, trust and of being safe to just be where they are at, to just "BE". I hope somehow they know and understand the love and support others felt for them, even if they couldn't see our faces or feel our arms around them.

As I was reflecting on each individual loss with the slide show of photos during our virtual Reflection Ceremony, I could still feel their loss but these families could not feel or see the compassion and understanding I had for them. To me it was a shocking realization of just how very important being physically together, caring and sharing emotions are to our healing. When physically together, those of us that have been travelling the journey of grief for a number of years can see the earth-shattering expressions of those fresh into their grief journey and reflect on the hopelessness and helplessness we felt. I can remember being there just as if it was yesterday. It helps me see how far I have come. Once thinking I would never feel joy again, I have grown through my pain and have learned to make a new norm.

For those new to Threads of Life, myself and our older members are living proof that there is hope and life; a different life, but life after tragedies. I worry that, virtually, the new members could not see our growth to give them that feeling of hope instead of desperation. I would love to reassure them: it is the strength of love and understanding of this organization's members that empowers each and every one of us. I pray that next year we are able to come together as we have in the past.

COVID has caused many challenges and changes in people's lives. However, I am very grateful for the online tools which have made it possible to partake in our 2020 National Forum. Thank you to all those who made this possible and organized the Forum program in these very difficult times. "The meaning of life is to give meaning to life, and love is the ultimate force that connects all living beings." I feel this is what Threads of Life does for each of us.

In memory of my son Brent Wade, April 12, 1977-November 9, 1999. Forever in our hearts.



NVFF – Where do we go from here?

by **Karen Lapierre Pitts**

The National Virtual Family Forum was a huge learning curve for all of us! Threads of Life staff learned how to coordinate a big online event, with sessions spread over weeks. Facilitators learned how to engage participants virtually. Family members learned how to connect at a distance. And we all learned a lot about technology – good and bad.

We are so thankful – for the opportunity to bring information, knowledge, coping skills and connection to all our family members in spite of the pandemic. We are thankful for the patience everyone showed with this new experience. We are thankful to our partners for continuing to support our work.

While it's not the same as being together in person, meeting online does mean that almost anyone, in any region, can join in, and the costs are minimal. We've been talking since before the pandemic, about virtual sessions as a way to sustain our network of healing in between family forums. We are at work now on plans for a continuing series of online workshops for family members. If you have ideas about topics you'd like us to tackle, please let me know!

In the meantime, please continue to stay in touch with Threads of Life and with one another. Check out our Facebook page, where lots of family members share their thoughts. Pick up the phone or send an email to someone you met at a family forum. Through this winter, we all need to be there for each other.

Diving into Grief and Loss

When you throw a boomerang, it comes right back to you every time. “Boomerang grief” comes back to you too, and it's one of the types of grief very common to those who've experienced a serious injury, illness or a death related to work.

Boomerang grief was one of the eight types of grief and loss facilitator

Darrin Parkin outlined during the Diving into Grief and Loss session at the National Virtual Family Forum. Darrin is the Spiritual Care Clinician at the High River General Hospital in Alberta, and has served as a chaplain, college instructor and conference speaker.

Darrin talked about the many unique ways that people grieve, whether their loss is the death of a loved one, the loss of the person you knew when someone is changed by injury or illness, or the loss of the life you expected.

Read more about Darrin's workshop and the other NVFF sessions on our blog at [threadsoflife.ca/news](https://www.threadsoflife.ca/news).



Types of Grief

- Darrin Parkin,
Diving into Grief and Loss at the NVFF

- **Normal grief** – the process of reacting to a loss
- **Anticipatory grief** – normal process when expecting a loss
- **Grief** resulting from the death of a loved one
- **Bereavement** – the state of having suffered a loss
- **Mourning** – the external expression of grief
- **Complicated bereavement** – grief that becomes chronic; a debilitating mental health condition
- **Living bereavement** – grieving the loss of someone still alive
- **Boomerang grief** – grief process complicated by a recurring presentation of the trauma



Volunteer Profile – Donna Van Bruggen

by Lynn Danbrook

Donna Van Bruggen's life was shattered on October 17, 2012 when her son David was killed at work. Donna began a journey to heal her own personal grief and ultimately became a champion to help others living with the aftermath of a workplace tragedy. Donna is a dedicated volunteer and impactful speaker delivering presentations about workplace safety and injury prevention. She is a kind and compassionate human being and this profile shares a little bit about her.

How did you first come to know about Threads of Life?

I remember standing in my living room after I returned from my son David's funeral. I wondered how I would face this deep grief alone and how to begin my journey to healing. Some months later I found out about Threads of Life and was invited to attend the next Family Forum in Edmonton. When I arrived at the Family Forum, I was a little anxious about being with a group of people I had never met before. When I left the Family Forum two days later, I had found a second family. It was the first time I had been able to verbally express how David's death affected me as his mother. Previously, when friends and acquaintances would ask about the tragedy, their questions were always about how David's wife and 4 young children were doing. No one asked how I was doing. My Threads of Life family changed that and I finally felt heard and supported.

When did you start volunteering?

Volunteering has been a part of my life since I was in my teens. In high school I volunteered to sell tickets and snacks at football and basketball games. I looked after young children so their parents could spend time together and attend an activity. I helped decorate the gym for dances. Throughout my life, I have had ample volunteer activities through my church. That could be anything from having a community food drive to refill Food Bank shelves, help people move,

clean their homes and do yard work, prepare meals for someone who was ill, visit the lonely and whatever else needed doing. I have taught classes at church to women's and children's and youth groups.

Why do you volunteer for Threads of Life?

I volunteer with Threads of Life because I believe that I can make a difference to at least one family – that their loved one will be able to come home safe each and every day. I have a dream that one day no other family will ever receive that phone call or that knock on the door and find out their loved one will never come home again or has been seriously injured. But until that day, there is much work to be done. And I am honored and humbled to be a part of this great Threads of Life work. One of my favorite sayings is "Be not weary in well doing. For out of small things comes that which is great".

What's your favourite memory about your work as a volunteer?

I have so many wonderful memories, particularly with the speaker's bureau. I would say my most favorite memory has happened three times. After I have finished my presentation about my son David, there's a first group of people who come up to me right away to say thank you and offer condolences. And they quickly leave. Then there's a second group who hang back a little until the first group has gone. This second group needs to speak to me a little longer either about something that happened in their lives around workplace safety or to ask me a question about my presentation. Then there's the third group. They tend to be more quiet and shy and they patiently wait alone at the back of the room until everyone else has spoken with me and then left the room. As I walk to the back and get ready to leave, the quiet, shy ones (who so far have been large males) give me a heartfelt hug and say "David would be so proud of you." Their remarks bring instant tears to my eyes.

Thank you!



WCB Alberta has been diligent throughout the pandemic and before, in using their social media channels to raise awareness and helps Threads of Life reach out to new families in Alberta.

Our partners' support comes in so many different forms! We are always grateful for all your gifts and contributions, but our gratitude overflows when we think how you reached out during such a difficult year. Here are just a few examples:



In February Safe-Tech Training asked its clients for a donation to Threads of Life in lieu of standard program registration fees. The pandemic interfered with their training calendar and fundraising plans, but they still raised over \$350 and it was a great way to spread awareness.

The Workers Compensation Board of PEI made donations to Threads of Life to honour retiring board members, and donated \$500 saved on printing holiday cards.



Ontario Petroleum Contractors' Association held their annual golf tournament this fall, with some modifications. There was no cheque presentation at the event, but funds raised are donated to Threads of Life every year.



Saeplast Americas Inc. in Saint John NB arranged two Threads of Life speakers for a safety event in October, the first speaker presentations in six months! All protocols were in place to protect the volunteers and employees.



Workplace Safety and Prevention Services waived the fee for us to attend our first ever virtual health and safety trade show to help raise awareness of Threads of Life.

Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education donated to Threads of Life in lieu of speaker gifts at their fall online conference.



The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board approved a new three-year funding agreement, helping provide stability for programs and services to families.



Steps for Life brings Jennifer Wright (far left) and her family together to heal and remember

Why Steps for Life matters to our family

Jennifer Wright talks about what Steps for Life means to her and her family:

“The annual Steps for Life walk has been a way to bring my family together to honour my Dad’s memory. Everyone copes with loss in their own way and the Steps for Life walk has been our family’s “common ground”. I will never forget the impact of the memory lane sign to acknowledge my Dad’s experience along the walk for everyone in my family as they joined the walks. It brought a lot of tears along with a lot of healing at the walks and being surrounded by others who understand. Six years after my Dad’s workplace fatality, I knew we were all on the right path when my older brother said, “I can’t believe you can make this into a positive” for our family. Our healing has come so far with the support of the Threads of Life organization. We are grateful for all the funds raised to support Threads of Life and helping families to heal and keep moving forward after the effect of a workplace tragedy. I encourage others to join the annual Steps for Life walk as it is making a difference in spreading why workplace safety awareness matters and helping many families like mine.”

Steps for Life 2021 – Ready for anything!

In this country, Steps for Life season always means being prepared for sunny heat, snow, rain, sleet, or any combination. Now, in the COVID-19 era, it also means being ready for traditional in-person walks, small group gatherings, or do-it-yourself activities. And ready we are!

When registration opens February 1, you’ll see you can opt to sign up to join a community walk in the park, or to do your own walk at home. If you register to participate in the community walk, and then large gatherings are not permitted in your area, your local walk planners will adjust. Our terrific volunteers are primed and ready too!

Connecting with your community’s page on the Steps for Life web site is the best way to stay up to date on local plans. You can find the list of communities under “Walk Locations”. Even if your plan from Day One is to walk at home, when you register in your community, you help build momentum for your town’s efforts and fundraising totals. Wherever we walk, #WeWalkTogether!



SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER!

Pass it along or leave it in your lunchroom or lobby for others to read.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

If you've been personally affected by work-related tragedy, and would like to share your story in our newsletter, please email Susan Haldane at shaldane@threadsoflife.ca

How to reach us

Toll-free: 1-888-567-9490

Fax: 1-519-685-1104

Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support - Threads of Life

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contact@threadsoflife.ca
www.threadsoflife.ca
www.stepsforlife.ca



Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support

Threads of Life is a registered charity dedicated to supporting families along their journey of healing who have suffered from a workplace fatality, life-altering illness or occupational disease. Threads of Life is the Charity of Choice for many workplace health and safety events. Charitable organization business #87524 8908 RR0001.

MISSION

Our mission is to help families heal through a community of support and to promote the elimination of life-altering workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths.

VISION

Threads of Life will lead and inspire a culture shift, as a result of which work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths are morally, socially and economically unacceptable

VALUES

We believe in:

Caring: Caring helps and heals.

Listening: Listening can ease pain and suffering.

Sharing: Sharing our personal losses will lead to healing and preventing future devastating work-related losses.

Respect: Personal experiences of loss and grief need to be honoured and respected.

Health: Health and safety begins in our heads, hearts and hands, in everyday actions.

Passion: Passionate individuals can change the world.

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Yes I will, help bring hope and healing to families

Gift Payment Options

- I'd like to make monthly gifts
 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____
- I'd prefer to make a one-time gift
 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____
- I've enclosed a void cheque to start direct withdrawal for monthly giving
- You may also donate to Threads of Life online at www.threadsoflife.ca/donate
- Please send me updates about Threads of Life events via email at: _____

Visa MasterCard

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ADDRESS (for income tax receipt) _____

Threads of Life, P.O. Box 9066 • 1795 Ernest Ave • London, ON N6E 2V0 1 888 567 9490 • www.threadsoflife.ca

All donations are tax deductible. Charitable Registration Number #87524 8908 RR0001