



## Steps for Life breaks the tape

More communities than ever before participated in Steps for Life 2014 this spring. Braving conditions that ranged from sun to sleet, participants joined 35 walks in nine provinces. By publication time, walkers and sponsors together had raised close to \$630,000 – a new record for Steps for Life!

*Read a few of the highlights from the walk on pages 8 and 9.*

Volunteers welcome Mayor Al McDonald to the North Bay Ontario Steps for Life walk

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR *Bill Stunt*



## Men and grief

Each of us approaches grief differently, but experts also tell us that men and women generally grieve in different ways. This issue of Threads has a focus on men and grief. Bereavement counsellor Roy Ellis, who has worked with Threads of Life for a number of years, writes about men, grief and anger, and we

have an article about post-traumatic stress disorder. While neither anger nor PTSD are uniquely male territory, they are certainly relevant to men's response to tragedy. And Wally Power, with whom I'm proud to serve on the Board of Directors, offers his experience of an injury that changed his life. Our second family story is from Wendy-Ellen Nittel who writes of her son's death while working in the oil and gas industry.

As of May, Threads of Life now serves more than 1800 family members – like Wally and Wendy-Ellen. And we couldn't do it without our premier fundraiser Steps for Life. This year's walk set another record, raising close to \$630,000 (and counting)! Read more about the walk highlights in this issue. We appreciate all our sponsors, committee members, other volunteers and walkers who made it all happen again this year.

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# My life in three parts

**Accomplished woodworker reflects on injury that changed his life**

by Wally Power



Wally Power with his family

**Wally Power** is a family member of *Threads of Life*, and a member of the board of directors. He has also served as a board member for the Workers Compensation Board in Nova Scotia. Wally thinks of his personal story as three chapters: life before his injury, the injury and immediately afterward, and the last 50 years.

Since the accident happened before I turned 25, you would expect that my life to that point had run to an expected schedule. Early years were mostly consumed with the expected things: school, some close friends, growing up in a large family - typical things for a young man growing up in rural Nova Scotia. As there was no opportunity for a university education, the options for employment were limited and probably also somewhat predictable. My first job after school was working in the local fish plant. From there, I moved to deep sea fishing. The boat, if you could call it that, was the least seaworthy vessel I had

ever been in. Years after, I recall hearing that the boat sank off Sable Island - losing all its crew in the process. In retrospect, when you consider I literally grew up on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean, it makes sense that the early jobs were based around the sea and the catches within them. I caught the fish, processed them in the local plant and finally moved to long-haul truck driving, most often, running lobster to Boston on a regular schedule.

Resiliency is often a trait people

**Around that time, there was a new pulp mill starting up nearby. I applied for a job and was hired. I was there for 1.5 years before the accident and worked in the wood room.**

broadly apply to natives of small, rural areas who 'scrape a living from the barren rock'. It wasn't quite as bad as all that, but it wasn't easy either. I grew up in a family of nine children. My father worked the railroad and worked hard every day of his life. My mother made do with what she had and kept eleven mouths fed. My father was

diagnosed with a degenerative eye disease that left him almost completely blind by the end of his working days. He probably worked longer than he should have considering the quality of his vision. But he kept on, driven by his sense of responsibility to providing for his family.

Around that time, there was a new pulp mill starting up nearby. I applied for a job and was hired. I was there for 1.5 years before the accident and worked in the wood room. This was where large logs were brought in, stripped of their bark and prepared for pulping. The accident occurred when I was changing blades on a peeling mechanism. A co-worker accidentally started up the machine and in the process, my arm was amputated right at the elbow. At that time, safety was not a big concern of the companies.

I arrived at the local hospital, St. Martha's in Antigonish on that Saturday night during visiting hours. I can only imagine that I made quite an impression on a quiet Saturday night in July in a sleepy university town hospital. The length of my stay was 18 days. I'm sure that it would be a lot shorter nowadays. The downside was that I was getting needles for pain in my butt every 3-4 hours. The upside was that I was getting backrubs every four hours from the beautiful nurses who were working on the floor. From that perspective, I didn't really want to go home - especially so for one nurse.

After I returned home to live with my parents, reality began to set in. And there were no beautiful nurses with regular backrubs. I had to adjust to living with one arm.

Pain medications continued for about two months. Imagine living your life as normally as anyone and now you need to re-learn how to do virtually every small mundane task all over again. Getting dressed presented whole new challenges for me. Try to tie your shoelaces with one hand in your pocket and you'll get a glimpse of what my

life was like every day. The greatest asset I had at my disposal was my attitude. I couldn't control the rest of the world and I couldn't bring my arm back. I was in pain, but wasn't going to let the accident or the injury define who I was in a negative way. I decided that the accident was not going to hold me back in my life.

## What the eye can conceive, and the mind can believe, the hand(s) can achieve.

That is not to say I didn't have many, many painful and frustrating days. But I was determined to succeed. I always had a car in those days. Back then, vehicles were not the reliable and efficient machines we are familiar with today. Less than a year after losing my arm, I took the transmission out of my car in the backyard. That was a challenge. I think at one point I got so frustrated that I just about beat the fender of the car with my hammer. There were lots of days like that.

After a few months I was fitted with a prosthesis provided through workers' compensation. The few hours it took to show me how to use this new arm were the extent of the therapy I received for my injury.

I was off work for about six months. When I returned to work, I went to work in the lab at the mill and stayed there until retirement. Often we needed to rethink how to execute the tests that were done to accommodate for the missing arm. Sometimes I had the help and support of the company and my co-workers to do this; other times I had to come up with new solutions on my own.

In the years that passed, I married. It seems when I was in the hospital, I took a turn for the nurse. Mary was one of the lovely nurses that provided the backrubs. We had our children together and built our life in Port Hawkesbury. I did the things that most husbands and father do. When the house needed fixing, I fixed it. Sometimes it took a little longer with one hand, but I always managed to figure out a way to do the job. I enjoyed woodworking, some of which you will see here. Some of the more intricate work took time also. On one of the clocks I built, I designed the top to look a certain way. Had I had two hands to work with, I could have figured out the solution in a couple of minutes. But knowing that I only had one hand to do the work meant it

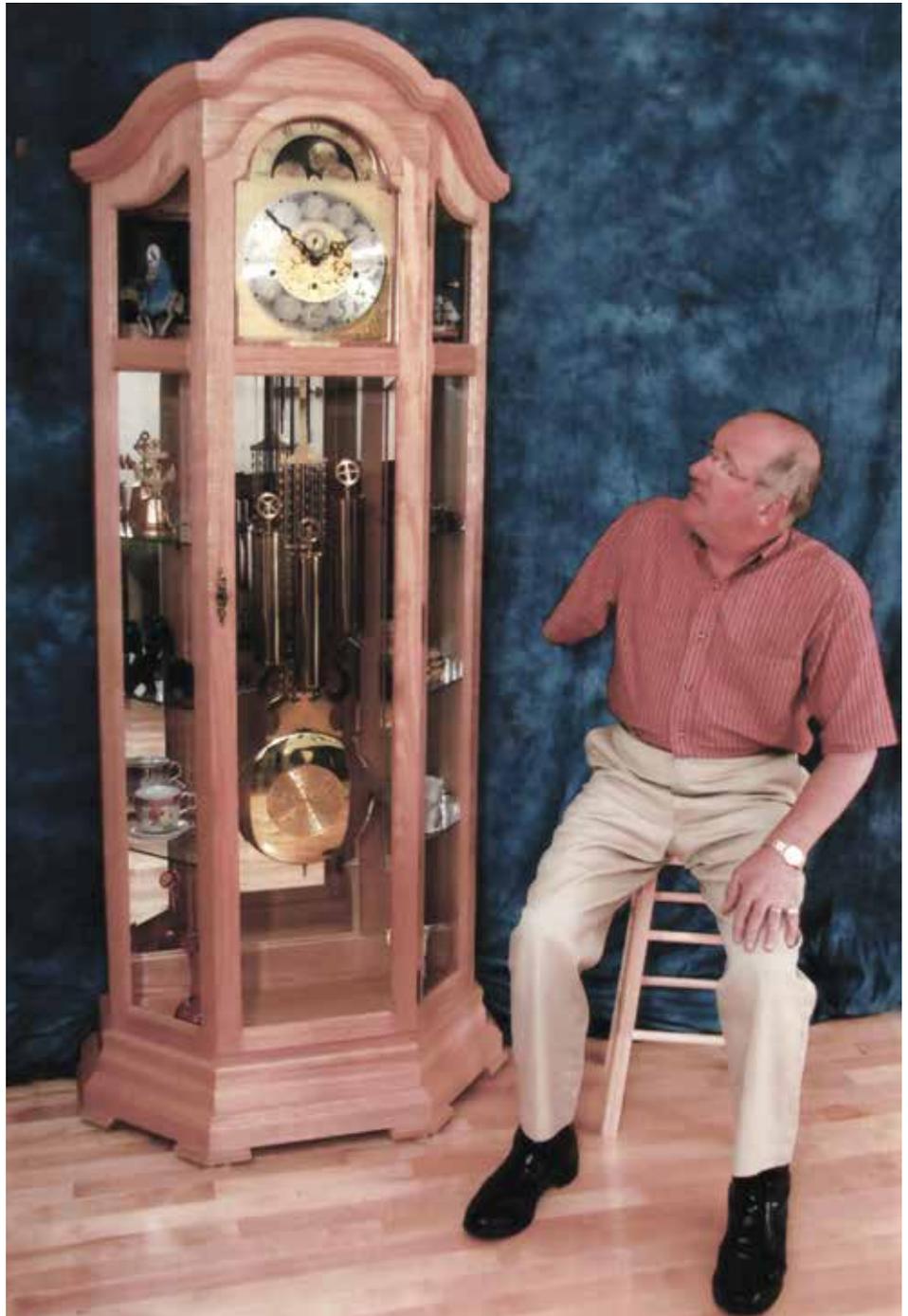
took half a day to figure out the process to execute the cuts correctly and safely.

Mary passed away in 2010 as a result of cancer and kidney failure. After years of having her for support, I now had another adjustment to make.

Even after all these years, challenges still present themselves every day. Recently, I replaced my mattress with a new one. Apparently I had become accustomed to the height of the old one, and used it as an assist to putting my socks on in the morning. The new one was about six inches higher, and proved to be too much

a stretch for me. At this point, I needed to figure out a new way to put on my socks.

Looking at some of the wood working projects, you need to understand that not all amputees have the same abilities. Not all people who experience life-altering injuries have the same abilities. But everyone has something to offer. I have a sign in my workshop: "What the eye can conceive, and the mind can believe, the hand(s) can achieve." It is the positive attitude that bridges the gap between desire and ability. I have an obvious disability. I am not handicapped.



Wally today, with one of his recent woodworking projects

# A gaping hole in the tapestry of family

**Blaine Nittel was to have been the fourth generation on the ranch**

by Wendy-Ellen Nittel



Blaine Nittel

**On July 2, 2012** *my husband and I joined an exclusive group. I hope that other parents don't join this club as the cost of membership is too great. This is our story:*

The phone rings as I am organizing our office. Our oldest son, Nathan, informs us that our younger son Blaine was in an accident at work. Blaine's service rig was doing a routine move to a well site near Manyberries, Alberta. Nathan tells me Larry Entz, Blaine's rig manager at Spirit West Energy Services, will phone to give me more info. My heart beats wildly as I have no idea what has happened! The phone rings again and it's Larry. He tells me Blaine rolled his pump truck and it doesn't look good. These calls start just before noon.

I drive to where my husband Bruce is fencing and tell him Blaine had an accident and it doesn't look good. I then drive home and wait... that's all I can do... is wait. Our daughter, Sharlynn, and her family are on their way home from Saskatchewan. I phone her husband, Ashley, to inform him of the news and tell him that I will keep him updated but not to tell Sharlynn as we don't want her driving in an emotional state.

Nathan phones again and tells me he and

Arlo (the boys' roommate and co-worker) are heading down to the accident site. I tell them to drive carefully as I don't need or want to hear about another accident.

Only minutes have passed... the phone calls become blurred in my memory. Nathan phones to say Blaine's pump truck has been yellow tarped. When Keith Russell, the site consultant, contacts me he says Blaine died at the scene and is still inside the truck. As Bruce drives into our yard I run out crying. He looks at me and knows it's bad. We cry in each other's arms and then slowly walk to the house. The hard times have only just begun. I contact Ashley to tell him Blaine has died. I request he wait until they arrive in Medicine Hat... another 90 minutes before he tells Sharlynn about Blaine. When they arrive at their condo, Ashley tells Sharlynn to phone me right away. This was the hardest conversation I've ever had with my daughter—to tell her that her younger brother had died.

More phone calls are made and received and the house begins to fill up with family, close friends and neighbours.

The president and owner of Spirit West Energy Services, Brian Thomas, phones to give his condolences and to ask what he can do for our family and if he can come out to the farm and meet us. Brian, along with two other managers, drive out to the farm. Curtis drives Blaine's truck so that Nathan and Arlo don't have to walk by it each time they enter or exit their house. Spirit West has become an extension of our family.

**As Bruce drives into our yard I run out crying. He looks at me and knows it's bad. We cry in each other's arms.**

No one knows why Blaine's pump truck entered the ditch on Highway #61 between Etzikom and Orion, Alberta. Derrick hand, Scott Moch, was following Blaine and this is how he describes the incident: "I had looked down at my gauges and looked back up and the pump truck was already in the ditch beginning to flip over. The vehicle pivoted on its front bumper and fell over onto the cab of the truck." As this was

considered a 'highway accident' there was no court case or labor inspection. We had almost no information from the RCMP. We were 'officially' informed of Blaine's death by his older brother, Nathan.

What do we know was happening when this tragedy occurred? The weather was fine; road conditions were dry and others didn't see any wildlife on or near the road at the time of the incident.

We do know Blaine had been texting his girlfriend earlier saying he was going to work. Sunflower seeds, candies, and juice were found in the cab of the pump truck. Blaine's mangled body was found behind the steering wheel. According to the autopsy report, the outline of Blaine's iPhone was imprinted on his left thigh. I personally don't believe Blaine was texting when he left the road, because of the autopsy. Was he trying to reach for his sunflower seeds, candies or juice found on the floor and seat of the up-turned truck? A question that will never be answered!

Spirit West has made some changes to work policy. All personal cell phones are to be locked in the dog house while rig crews are working. The company is also changing how the tanks are 'boomed' to their pump trucks. Hopefully, these steps will ensure this tragedy is not faced by another family.

**Blaine Bruce Nittel:** the final thread to complete our family tapestry was born June 27, 1989. His birth announcement read: "Bruce and Wendy-Ellen are pleased to announce the birth of their farmhand Blaine Bruce. Blaine will be assisting Nathan and Sharlynn as they 'help' Dad do the chores." Blaine spent quite a bit of his spare time helping his dad. We bought a new calf table in the spring of 2012 and Blaine helped Bruce place it in the branding pen. Blaine was planning to be the fourth generation on our family farm. (Or as Blaine liked to call it—The Ranch.) Bruce and Blaine talked about plans for the future. Plans for when Blaine would become the next generation making a living off the land.

Blaine was fun-loving! His older cousins reminisce and share stories of how Blaine took a huge interest in their kids. He played with them; made them feel important and loved them. Family life was important to Blaine—he rarely missed attending family gatherings, he wouldn't miss these for the world.

Blaine loved to make others laugh!

Especially his nephew, Hayden who was Blaine's little shadow. When the two of them were together there was much laughter. Many relatives and friends called Hayden Blaine's "Mini Me". They look alike and did many things the same way. As we watch Hayden grow he reminds us of Blaine when he was a toddler.

After Blaine died, Hayden would walk around the house looking for his "Unc Bay"! My heart bled for my loss and also for Hayden's loss—he would grow up without an uncle who greatly enjoyed his company. It was also very hard to watch my confused grandson—at the age of two, death has no meaning. A hole has been torn in the fabric of our family which cannot be mended!

My husband Bruce blames himself for Blaine's death. Many times he's blamed himself for not making Blaine quit his job—a job he loved—to come home to work alongside his dad. "We could have made it work somehow!" became his mantra. Blaine's siblings have also had a hard time dealing with Blaine's death. I watch them suffer and I don't know how to help them.

Blaine loved sports. He played mixed slo-pitch with his siblings, cousins and friends. A 'Memorial Bursary' at his high school was initiated with monies raised from a Memorial Slo-Pitch Tournament. Through a generous donation from Spirit West and monetary gifts from family and friends we also have a 4-H bursary in Blaine's honour.

4-H played a very important role in Blaine's life and more recently so did his Christian Faith. Father Cris Bouvette summed it up best with his homily as he related the 4-H pledge to Blaine's life.

I pledge...

My head to clearer thinking,  
My heart to greater loyalty,  
My hands to larger service,  
And my health to better living,  
For my club, my community and  
my country.

Father Cris stated the way of Christian discipleship is fostering loyal hearts and serving hands. That truth comes through a clear-thinking head and life is a commitment to healthy living. All things one needs to come home at the end of a work-day!

Following Father Cris' example, I too am using the pledge to hopefully stop other parents from joining my exclusive club:

- Hopefully people will use their heads to think more carefully as they go about their job and employers will think through the task they have given their employee.

- Hopefully business owners will place themselves in their workers' shoes and provide the most safe work environment possible. Would they want their loved one to work in the environment in which they expect their employees to perform?
  - Hopefully, both workers and employers will commit themselves to a healthy lifestyle and healthy work environment.
  - Hopefully employers and employees will work for the betterment of themselves, their businesses and their communities.
- Our family tapestry is missing a crucial

Houff, made a memorial frame for Blaine's picture and wood-burned words that described our son who was taken from this earth far too soon.

I carry my deceased loved ones wherever I go. (Always in my heart and usually on my right hand.) When my mother was alive she gifted me her original diamond engagement ring and wedding band. After my mother-in-law passed away my father-in-law honored me with her opal engagement ring and original wedding band: rings I proudly wear.



Blaine with his nephew Hayden

element. Time passes and we are unable to fix the gaping hole. We are blessed with friends who are helping us on our grief journey. Our close family friend, Steve Clark, made a barbed wire cross. A lightning strike on his ranch fence line welded the wire together. Berries and foliage were gathered from the prairie where Blaine spent many hours helping to gather cattle. Our "4-H daughter" and "sister" to our children, Heather Ehnes, made a memory quilt from Blaine's Spirit West coverall logo and his t-shirts. Blaine's uncle, Don

I added another ring after Blaine tragically died---his high school graduation ring. A ring that a mother should never wear in remembrance of her youngest child.

We placed a cross at Blaine's fatal accident site on the first anniversary of his death. Friends and family gathered for a BBQ at the farm. It was a time of reminiscing and laughter. We have started a memorial garden on our farm site: a place to sit and contemplate our life without Blaine. A place to plan our life as we go forward without Blaine. A place to just be...

## Witnessing the value of peer support in action

by Kate Kennington



Kate Kennington hugs one of the newest Volunteer Family Guides at the recent family forum

This spring, I had the opportunity to attend the First National Conference on Peer Support in Halifax. It was tremendous to see the value and impact of peer support being recognized and increasingly utilized in both the health care and social welfare systems across Canada. Since Threads of Life began, peer support has been at its core and truly was what brought the founding members together as they offered support to one another and the other families who had connected to them.

In 2005 the very first training of Volunteer Family Guides (VFGs) took place. Developing the program, training and resources was a significant undertaking. I am always proud to share that our program was the first of its kind in the world and has since been replicated in other countries. An incredible testament to all that Threads of Life and our volunteers have accomplished!

There have now been seven trainings and we currently have 37 active VFGs plus several others who are still willing to be matched if needed. I am honoured to work with these volunteers and am continually amazed by the resilience of the human spirit and the willingness of the VFGs to give so generously of themselves. One of the presenters at the conference referred to peer support as 'deep love for free'. There is a photo we often use in our materials of two family members meeting and embracing at a family forum. When someone referred to their tight grasp as a 'death grip' I was compelled to correct them. They were holding on with a life grip.

I have had the privilege of speaking with both the family guides and the family members to whom they offer an empathetic, compassionate listening ear. It is a life line given so freely; a form of deep love born from pain and loss that ultimately is able to heal and provide hope.

At each family forum, new families are matched with a returning family so that they are able to answer any questions about the forum or Threads of Life and provide a warm welcome. At the Atlantic Canada Family Forum this May there were ten new families. Without hesitation, returning families opened their hearts and made everyone feel safe and welcome.

Marilyn D'Entremont is one those returnees and she shares her experiences over the years at the family forum: "As a returning participant to the Atlantic Canada Family Forum I have had the opportunity (or blessing) of meeting such amazing people. And often, we get to talk to people who have gone through similar tragedies to our own. This year will mark the 10th anniversary of my husband's death.

At this forum, a recent widow approached me and asked "How long will it be until I get better? How did you survive?" I found myself going back in time to when I had asked those very same questions. How does a person answer that? When we lose someone we love, we lose part of the person we once were; that loss is never regained. We have to learn a new way of coping. Coping with broken hearts is never easy. I was trying to remember what 'someone' might have told me those few years ago. Or was it simply that I knew I was surrounded with people who could, in their own ways, understand a bit of what I was feeling. I remember feeling safe and understood in my early days at the family forums. I remember I felt that I had been given the permission to tell my story. Permission to grieve. I hope that this new widow feels the same, and maybe I did make a difference in her life, if only for a moment. I also hope and wish and pray that one of these years everyone will return safely home. Welcome to all the new people to your new Threads family. May you know in your heart that we care."

## Young lives interrupted: the stories of the LifeQuilt

In honour of Threads of Life's tenth anniversary year, the LifeQuilt was featured at the 2014 Partners in Prevention conference in April.

Visit the new web site, [www.lifequilt.ca](http://www.lifequilt.ca) to find stories for use in training, add your story and post your commitment to work safely.



## PTSD: When traumatic loss leads to illness

*Vince Savoia was working as a paramedic in Toronto when he sustained an injury that would change his life forever – an injury invisible to almost everyone, and one that Vince himself didn't recognize for months.*

*As a first responder, Vince had witnessed some horrifying scenes. When he and his partner walked into the apartment where a young woman had been assaulted and murdered, it could have been just one more awful scene. What shook Vince was that the young woman looked like his fiancé and for that brief moment, he thought it was her.*



Vince Savoia now heads The Tema Conter Memorial Trust, named after the murdered young woman. Known as Heroes are Human, the trust supports emergency and military personnel dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

After that call to Tema Conter's apartment, Savoia had flashbacks, crying, shaking and sweating. He couldn't get the scene out of his head. He went to a psychologist, but eventually had to leave his chosen profession.

The Canadian Mental Health Association defines PTSD as a mental illness related to exposure to trauma involving death or the threat of death, serious injury or sexual violence. Vince Savoia adds other factors, including a situation that is abnormal or unexpected, and over which the individual has no control. Cumulative trauma or stress may also be a factor.

As a mental illness, PTSD is different from grief, and even from complicated grief, which some people may experience after a sudden or traumatic loss. A PTSD sufferer may experience flashbacks and recurrent nightmares, and a dramatic change in personality. He or she may become hyper-vigilant, reacting to the slightest noise or movement.

In Vince's case, he says "I used to come home from work and lock myself away in the basement. I didn't want to be with anyone." He was hyper-aware, constantly on-guard and was also extremely protective of his wife, barely able to let her out of his sight.

PTSD is best-known among military veterans, police, fire and ambulance personnel. But it could affect others. The American Psychiatric Association in its diagnostic manual, explains the stressor leading to PTSD could include exposure to trauma "indirectly, by learning that a close relative or close friend was exposed to trauma." The trauma would have been violent or accidental.

Family members, co-workers and friends would certainly fit this definition following a traumatic workplace fatality or injury. But only a minority of people exposed to trauma will develop PTSD. And Dr. Jeffrey Morley, a psychologist who works closely with the Tema Conter Foundation, stresses that it's important to distinguish between grief, which is a normal response to tragedy, and

more debilitating reactions like PTSD.

"It's important not to pathologize grief," Dr. Morley says. "Grief is a perfectly normal and healthy reaction to loss." And in fact, while acute grief may have a "life cycle" of months or years, "mourning is our life sentence. We will always mourn that person."

PTSD could be considered "unprocessed grief", he adds. If symptoms start to impair a person's life over time, or destructive behaviors like substance abuse, severe insomnia or suicidal thoughts develop, it is time to seek help.

Options for relieving PTSD, according to the CMHA, including counseling, medication and support groups. Vince Savoia suggests families can help by being patient, trying not to take behavior personally, and opening up lines of communication. Offer to go with the individual to seek help.

"When a person is in crisis, all they're really asking for is to be seen and heard," he says.

In Vince's case, his wife finally issued an ultimatum – get help for his PTSD, or else. "That might not work for everyone," he cautions. "It worked for me."

*Heroes are Human is crossing Canada this summer on a tour to raise awareness about PTSD. Learn more about dates and locations at [www.2014heroestour.ca](http://www.2014heroestour.ca).*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is complex and controversial. For more information, visit [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) or the U.S. PTSD Association at [www.ptsdassociation.com](http://www.ptsdassociation.com).*

### Would you like to tell your story?

Threads of Life believes sharing our stories can help promote healing and prevention of further tragedies. If you're ready to tell your story of workplace fatality, life-altering injury or occupational illness, please contact Susan Haldane, [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca)



## Steps for Life breaks the tape on 2014 walk

Threads of Life supporters and volunteers broke records again this year at Steps for Life – Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy. More communities than ever before took part in the walk, and more money was raised – just under \$630,000 at press time. Returns from each of the 35 walk communities are still being confirmed, so the final tally may change.

Funds raised through Steps for Life are used to support Threads of Life’s programs and services, like Volunteer Family Guides and the Speakers Bureau. The walk is also an opportunity for companies and communities to show their commitment to health and safety – and they did that in force! Companies sponsored local walks, allowed their employees to volunteer, and entered teams. Individuals raised money and came out despite rain, snow and sleet in some regions to complete their 5 km.

Steps for Life has another benefit as well – through the participation and publicity around the walk, more families learn about Threads of Life and are able to come to us for support. So far this year, roughly 120 new family members have contacted Threads of Life.

“We all wish there were no more families who need our help,” says Threads of Life Executive Director Shirley Hickman, “but it is comforting for our family members to witness the support for them through the walk, and the commitment to health and safety in so many communities.”



**Steps for Life** L to R / Top to Bottom: St. Johns, Timmins, Lethbridge, Corner Brook, Hamilton, Toronto, St. Johns, Lloydminster



## Steps for Life highlights

- New communities: 4 new walk communities brought the total to 35 – Lloydminster AB, Lindsay ON, Sydney NS and Churchill Falls NL. Sydney and Churchill Falls graduated from mini-walks to full-scale Steps for Life events.
- Sponsorship superstar: Dave Steadman from Hamilton ON walk committee – doubled the sponsorship amounts from 2013!
- Best mascot: Steve the snowman from Red Deer AB.
- Small but mighty: Lindsay ON shared the Threads of Life message plus held a very successful golf tourney last summer to fundraise for the event.
- Big and mighty: Once again Lethbridge AB showed its colours (yellow!) with the biggest walk – more than 1000 participants.
- Most Canadian weather: Several communities had foul weather but St. John’s NL walkers braved a snowstorm and still met their fundraising target of \$35,000!
- Most Canadian potential hazard: Despite reports of an angry beaver terrorizing the town, Steps for Life in Miramichi NB went ahead as planned.



**Three-peat for Alta-Fab in 2014 Corporate Challenge!**

Alberta’s Alta-Fab 5 team took their own corporate safety vision to heart this year, fundraising their way to a first-place finish for the third year in a row, in the Steps for Life corporate challenge. In fact, Alberta teams swept the challenge again, with Willbros Angels of Fort McMurray a close second, and PCL Intracon in third. Honourable mention goes to the Enbridge team from Ontario.

Alta-Fab’s safety vision for 2014 is “Create it - Believe it – Embrace it - Live it” and the team certainly accomplished that, organizing a bake sale, three different prize draws and even a dunk tank (“Splash for Safety”) as part of their fundraising efforts.

“Our shop has almost 300 employees and some have had events in their lives that made an impact on them,” says team captain Millie Lovel. “When you hear their stories you cannot help but get involved in programs that give aid and educate. Alta-Fab is all for prevention. The goal is at the end of the day everyone goes home safe.”

The Corporate Challenge is an opportunity for companies from across Canada to support families affected by workplace tragedy, show their commitment to health and safety, and have a little fun in the process.



**Thank you to all our 2014 Corporate Challenge Teams!**

- 1st place** Alta-Fab 5, Edmonton
- 2nd place** Willbros Angels, Fort McMurray
- 3rd place** PCL Intracon, Edmonton
- Honourable mention** Enbridge, Ontario

**Thank you to our sponsors!** See insert for complete sponsor list.



## Men, Grief and Anger

by Roy Ellis

We like our men strong and we like them heroic and they need to be able to take a lot of abuse before they shatter.

Grief and loss can strip away even the strongest man's inner resources. William Shakespeare, considered universally as a guy whose insight can be counted on, said about grief: "Every man can master a grief but he that has it." Even the greatest man cannot master grief. When it is in our lives, grief is the master. Getting lost in anger can provide men with a buffer between their loss and their pain. In other words, anger is a way of coping. It stalls and numbs our pain.

Jerry's anger was helping him avoid the powerful overwhelming reality of his loss. This is not only true for men who have lost loved-ones, but can also be true for men who have experienced serious physical trauma at work. Any loss can trigger men to get angry. It is the protective function coming alive. The angry voice inside starts shouting: "What have you done? You should have been safer. How could you let this happen? You let everyone down." A man's great trick is to take this anger at self and turn it into anger at the world. Most angry men are angry at themselves. I know this because I've worked with thousands of angry men. It's a fact, undeniable and true.

It is well known that men don't grieve like women. Men often process strong feeling through actions and activities. They like to build and fix and renovate and do things. This is different from women who more often express their feelings through conversation, crying and bodily sensations. It is also generally understood that women have much to gain by learning to activate their grief as men do, and that men can become fuller persons when they explore their feelings.

### **Anger is a by-product of sadness and loss. It is like the crust of the earth over the molten core.**

My work with Jerry was to help him see through his anger to the sadness and hurt which was fuelling it. Anger is a by-product of sadness and loss. It is like the crust of the earth over the molten core. When we plunge through anger, we find a vast sea of sadness. When Jerry was able to put his anger aside and concentrate, not on doctors and diagnoses, but on his wife and her death, a volcano of sadness erupted out of his heart. Secretly, Jerry feared anyone seeing him vulnerable and weak. Jerry mistook his army persona for his personality. Deep inside, Jerry was devastated and he felt totally ill-equipped to express it.

Anger isn't wrong. It's a healthy response to loss. But we can get stuck in anger and forget that we are also sad and in pain. Being vulnerable is not easy for men. But if we want to be mature and well rounded, exploring our feelings and our vulnerability is essential, and brings great relief and healing.

*Roy Ellis is a writer, grief counsellor, speaker and educator. He is the Bereavement Coordinator for Capital Health Integrated Palliative Care Service in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Roy is proud to have been working in partnership with Threads of Life for six years.*

Jerry arrived at my counselling office angry and trembling. As I shut the door and sat down across from him, I could see he was livid. As he began to talk, it became clear that he had a bone to pick with the medical system of which I was a part. Melody, Jerry's wife of thirty-five years, had suffered an aggressive form of cancer which the doctors had not immediately diagnosed. Following diagnosis, the couple experienced a string of medical gaffs and missteps that now, six months after her death, had become the focus of Jerry's emotions. Actually, anger had pretty much taken over his life.

I asked Jerry to imagine the anger coming out of the top of his head. I then asked him how large a room he would need to hold it all. Jerry sat for a moment, grimaced and said, "a football stadium." Jerry evidently had a significant resource of anger inside of him.

Anger is a common response to grief, especially in men who have a protective function built right into their DNA. Not only was Jerry angry that he had not protected Melody from the medical system, but as an ex-Military man, responding to threat was Jerry's vocation. Jerry watched his wife die and he could not save her. This violated everything in his personal code and his vocational code. Jerry was angry at the world, but he was also angry at himself. To his mind, he let her die.

By the time I met Jerry, his anger had turned to rage. It took me a good half-hour to calm him down and get him in the room with me. It occurred to me that Jerry was hanging onto his rage like a small child holds onto a blanket. Jerry did not want to stop being angry. He did not want to let go of anger. I began to wonder if there was more to Jerry's strong reaction than just a righteous rage.

Anger in men has another function when it comes to grief. It sometimes becomes a perfect and permissible distraction from pain and sadness. In other words, it is often easier for men to give themselves permission to be angry than to be sad. This is, in fact, exactly how many of us men are trained by society. Because protection and provision are so important to us, we are taught that tears and weakness are liabilities to our central role as protectors. The image of the unbreakable man is well-known in comic books and movies.



Lisa Kadosa and daughter

## Lisa Kadosa

*Lisa Kadosa was attending an inquest when she first heard of Threads of Life. Her father had been killed while working in an underground mine in Sudbury Ontario in 2006. Back in Sudbury to attend the inquest in 2009, she met a safety rep who told her about the Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support.*

*As soon as she was home in Ottawa, Lisa called and spoke with Threads of Life executive director Shirley Hickman. A month later, Lisa was attending Steps for Life planning meetings, and a year after that was chairing the Ottawa walk. In 2010 she also joined the speakers bureau.*

*“I needed to do something – I was really at rock bottom at that point,” Lisa says. “The organization had given me so much; supported me through one of the most difficult parts of my life.”*

As a speaker, her first booking was before 500 people at a Day of Mourning ceremony in Ottawa. Most recently, she flew to Labrador where she made four presentations to staff of Nalcor Energy at their site in Churchill Falls, and also helped to host the Churchill Falls Steps for Life walk. But one of Lisa’s most memorable moments as a Threads of Life volunteer came while she was telling her story to miners in Red Lake Ontario.

“I’ve always known my dad was a really special person and had touched lots of people,” she says. In Red Lake, she met someone who had worked with her dad and knew all her dad’s stories. The gentleman told Lisa she had really captured her father in her speech.

“My whole focus is to hope that you’ve made one person work safer,” she says. “I could have cared less about health and safety eight years ago. But I don’t want someone else to have to lose their

loved one to know about health and safety.”

In fact, health and safety became such a driving force that Lisa centred her career on it – she is now a chief for occupational health and safety within the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

For her volunteer work – both professionally and with Threads of Life – Lisa recently received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. She credits the support of husband Joe for making her volunteering possible.

“My dad always said if you’re going to do something, do it 150 per cent. I knew when I started with Threads of Life, I was going to do it 150 per cent,” Lisa adds. “That’s what keeps me going, keeping his memory alive and trying to make sure no one else has to go through this.”

## Ball hockey tourney goes topshelf!



**Scores!** The 3rd annual Day of Mourning Ball Hockey Tournament in Spruce Grove Alberta smashed its scoring record this spring, raising \$7,611.40 for Threads of Life. Sixteen teams competed, and many more volunteers and spectators came to contribute. Funds raised came from a silent auction, donations, and a WestJet ticket raffle.

Thanks to all who participated and donated!

## Threads of Life and Safe Saskatchewan work together for injury prevention



Threads of Life is pleased to announce a new partnership with Safe Saskatchewan which will improve services to families who have experienced a workplace tragedy, and contribute to prevention efforts in that province.

Safe Saskatchewan is a not-for-profit organization which raises awareness about unintentional injury in Saskatchewan, and coordinates injury prevention efforts. It includes government bodies, private corporations and non-profit organizations focused on safety and health. The organization's vision is "an injury free Saskatchewan where safe lifestyles influence how we live, work and play."

As part of the partnership, Safe Saskatchewan will inform its members about Threads of Life, and will play a key role in promoting Steps for Life-Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy in Saskatchewan.

Share your most creative moments. Sometimes writing can capture our thoughts and feelings the way no other means of expression can. Sharing these expressions can help you heal, help others understand and help them on their own journey. We welcome your stories, essays and poems.

Send your contributions to [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca).

## Coming Events

Please let us know if you'd like more information or would like to get involved!

### September 26-28

Central Canada Family Forum,  
Kempenfelt Centre, Barrie ON,  
more information at  
[http://threadsoflife.ca/  
upcoming-regional-family-forums/](http://threadsoflife.ca/upcoming-regional-family-forums/)

### October 24-26

Western Canada Family Forum,  
Delta Bessborough, Saskatoon SK,  
more information at  
[http://threadsoflife.ca/upcoming-  
regional-family-forums/](http://threadsoflife.ca/upcoming-regional-family-forums/)

### November 20-23

Advanced Family Guide training,  
Kempenfelt Centre, Barrie ON, for  
information contact [kkennington@  
threadsoflife.ca](mailto:kkennington@threadsoflife.ca)

### January 2015

Speakers Bureau training  
for more information contact  
[shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca)

### February 2015:

Volunteer Family Guide training,  
Kempenfelt Centre, Barrie ON, more  
information at [http://threadsoflife.ca/  
for-families/volunteer-family-guides](http://threadsoflife.ca/for-families/volunteer-family-guides)

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The Standards Program Trustmark is a mark of  
Imagine Canada used under licence  
by Threads of Life.



*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 that:

**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.

### HOW TO REACH US

Toll-free: 1-888-567-9490

Fax: 1-519-685-1104

Association for Workplace Tragedy  
Family Support – Threads of Life

P.O. Box 9066

1795 Ernest Ave.

London, ON N6E 2V0

[contact@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:contact@threadsoflife.ca)

[www.threadsoflife.ca](http://www.threadsoflife.ca)

[www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca)

# Thanks to our Steps for Life sponsors!

We added two new national sponsors this year to our long-time loyal walk sponsors: Stantec, and Canadian Occupational Safety Magazine. Thank you to all our sponsors for making a difference in the lives of families affected by workplace tragedy.



Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support

## CHAMPIONS:

Alberta Construction Safety Association  
Bruce Power  
CSSE - Hamilton Chapter  
Home Depot of Canada  
Infrastructure Health and Safety Association  
KGHM International  
Lethbridge Regional Safety Committee  
Levitt-Safety  
NL Workplace Health Safety and Compensation Commission  
NS Labour & Advanced Education -OHS  
Ontario Power Generation  
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## Community Leaders:

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Zare Paralegal Services P.C.

## Community Advocates:

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BCT Structures Inc  
Bin There Dump That – Durham  
Black & McDonald Limited - Power Generation  
Brookfield Renewable Energy Group  
Canadian Linen and Uniform Service  
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