



## Stronger together

From its first day, Threads of Life has shown that there's strength in numbers. We couldn't do our work without our partners, which include labour ministries and compensation boards in almost every jurisdiction in Canada,

other government ministries and agencies, safety associations, and companies from major multinationals to family-owned local businesses. In Timmins, some of our partners are working to build a Threads of Life memorial garden.

*See page 10 to read about other amazing things our partners are doing.*



### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Eleanor Westwood*

Six values are the foundation of Threads of Life's work (see them on the back cover). I think it's no accident that the values are bookended by "Caring" and "Passion". "Caring" is our first value; the heart of our organization. Caring for one another is our open door and it was so well reflected in the family forums

this fall in Edmonton, Saskatoon and Barrie. Participants, whose stories and backgrounds may be very different, greet one another with hugs and listen with tears and smiles. You can see the healing that grows from their caring. And secure in that caring atmosphere, those whose lives have been altered by workplace tragedy are able to demonstrate their passion for change. Maybe that's why "passion" is our sixth and last value – it's our next step; the one that takes us out into the world to help build safer workplaces and ensure that others don't have to experience what Threads of Life members have.

Threads of Life's partners share our values. They support our caring work and are passionate about changing safety cultures. Without our partners' support in funding, volunteering and spreading the word, Threads of Life's work wouldn't happen. Partners support us in big ways and small ways – you can see a few examples inside this newsletter.

As we come to the end of 2016, our board of directors would like to thank you – Threads of Life's members, volunteers and partners – for the many ways you have demonstrated both caring and passion this year.

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# THE INDESCRIBABLE LOVE OF YOUR CHILD

Tragedy just days before the end of his work season

by Dennice Schafer



Brian was a gentle person with an open heart

**A**utumn. A very beautiful time of year. Wednesday, October 5th, 2011, was just such a day. I woke up that morning thinking how things were finally starting to get better for my family. My husband was finally back to work, my daughter was finally getting the medical help she needed, my son Brian was almost done his season of work, and I had a much needed day off. Although the day was misty and cool, it seemed so beautiful with all the changing leaves. After enjoying my quiet day, I began supper preparations.

As I was pulling spices from the cupboard, I glanced out the window and noticed a police car slowly drive by our house, do a U-turn and park in front. With my box of spices still in my hand, I went to answer the door.

The officer asked me if Brian Schafer lived at this address and if I was a relative. Then came the words no one ever wants to hear... "I'm sorry to inform you that Brian was killed at his place of work at 3:30 this afternoon."

Disbelief... I looked at him and said, "Are you sure you got the right address?" When he confirmed the address, I closed my eyes and repeated over and over, "You're not real, you're not real."

This could not be happening. But it was. Brian was working for a paving company. Part of his job that day was to fuel the equipment, check the lime, and keep the conveyer belt running smoothly by taking care of any plug-ups that might occur as various components dispensed onto the conveyer belt from one of five surge bins. Plug-ups were dealt with by climbing up the side of the bin and using a shovel to dislodge whatever was causing the surge bin to plug.

“ I closed my eyes and repeated over and over, "You're not real, you're not real." ”

They discovered Brian inside a surge bin, buried under a ton of sand. In the control shack, the circuit board indicated that the equipment wasn't operating correctly, so the person watching the panel came out to investigate. What the worker discovered was Brian's leg protruding through the small opening at the bottom of the bin.

Immediately, men began trying to dig Brian out with shovels from the top, but this was pointless. Someone was sent to get a cutting torch. It took many precious minutes for the tool to arrive. The last time Brian was seen alive was approximately 15 minutes earlier, when he was fueling the equipment. By the time the cutting torch arrived and Brian was cut out of his metal casket, over a half hour had passed.

Brian never even had a chance.

My husband Tony and I went to the hospital to tell our daughter, Ashley, of her brother's death. Ashley was suffering from a depression disorder and we were greatly concerned about the effect this would have on her. The news was devastating for her and we were thankful she was already in the hospital.

My husband was my rock. I don't know how he survived those first few days. I walked around on auto-pilot. Tony took on the task of calling all our family. I can still picture him, sitting there repeating the same words over and over... "Brian has been killed in a work related accident." Later I found out that Tony had asked a friend to remove all the guns from our house. Suicide had crossed his mind, as it did mine many times over the next year or so.

Brian's Celebration of Life was held in our town where Brian lived all his life. Every inch of that town breathed of Brian.

Even though it was Thanksgiving weekend, attendance was high. Many of his friends and co-workers, and also people we didn't know, attended.

After Brian was laid to rest, my impulse to go dig him up was so intense. I just cannot believe my son is no longer here on earth...to hold, to touch, to talk to, to say I love you to. Secretly, I felt everyone was lying to me.

I was sinking and it was taking all my husband's strength to keep us both afloat. Our world was now in limbo. Days went by and we were barely functioning. My husband became unemployed, my daughter remained in the hospital, medicated, and under supervision. And I spent my time crying and staring at Brian's empty chair. The only time I cared to leave the house was when we went on our nightly visits to Brian's grave.

What was once four, is now three. My perfect family no longer exists. From an early age I wanted a husband and two children: one boy, one girl. Boy first, so he could be the big strong protector of his little sister.

Brian adored his sister. From the beginning they shared a special bond. They wrestled together, played video games and even as they grew older, continued to spend time together. When she graduated from high school, Ashley asked Brian to be her escort. Brian was terrified of walking across that stage, but he was willing to do it for his sister.

Brian's father tried hard to teach Brian that nothing came free in life and that he would have to work hard. Brian and Tony worked together, building fence, siding the house, cutting grass, or building or fixing things in the garage. Because he was taught a good work ethic, Brian began his first job at age 15 and kept that job for five years.

Brian and his father also shared a love of car races, monster trucks and fishing. Together with at least five other friends and their fathers, they began an annual fishing trip to the Big River area. They always came home with a whopper of a tale. The other guys have continued the fishing trips and last year, they invited Tony along. It was an emotional trip for Tony, but he was honoured that Brian's friends invited him.

The biggest thing I miss about Brian is that he loved me unconditionally. You can have the love of your girlfriend, your boyfriend, or even your spouse, but the love of your own child is indescribable. His hugs engulfed me, and made me feel whole and down to earth.

After one rough day at work, I came home to an empty house and was feeling low. In an instant, my day changed when I opened the fridge to find a small cake with a note saying "I Love You MOM". As a small child, he would bring me dandelion bouquets. As a young adult, he would bring me flowers, such as the yellow rose in the unique glass vase he presented to me, for no reason, on his last weekend home.

We were so thankful for that last weekend. Brian had lost some weight and went shopping with a friend for clothes to fit his more muscular frame. He finally went out on a first date with a girl he had known for a few years, and had never had courage to ask out before. He'd visited the local police station, and filled out forms towards becoming a police officer. He found time to spend with a childhood friend. And he had a family BBQ with us. Brian had plans for the future and was happy.

Brian was a gentle person with an open heart. He was eager to please and he treated people with great consideration. At Brian's Celebration of Life ceremony, many commented that he was one of the politest people they had ever met. He was quiet and spoke

mainly when he had something important to say. Often you would see him gently rubbing the small slightly-raised freckle on his nose, like he was deep in thought or contemplating something.

When Brian turned 21, we encouraged him to look for a job that would give him more income and allow for advancement. At first, when he started with the paving company, we

disappointed with the amount of the fine. The only comfort was that the company was willing to take responsibility for Brian's death and pleaded guilty. I tried to look at the fine as a deterrent. There is no way to put a price on a human life, especially my son's life. But I felt the fine could easily be paid and the company could wash their hands and walk away. In time, all could be forgotten.

“ The company revamped its equipment and created a safer environment for its employees. It is a comfort to know that others may not have to endure what our family has.

didn't think he'd be able to manage, but with every visit home, we noticed a change in him. He was becoming stronger, more mature, and independent. He was becoming a man.

Unfortunately we also noticed more and more things that seemed not quite right at his work. Brian told us of burns on his skin from the lime, electrical shocks from an improperly insulated power source, and mold in the trailer where he lived. We became uneasy about Brian leaving for work after each visit. One of the last things we always said to him was, "Be careful." We were glad that the season was almost over and encouraged him to look elsewhere for work.

There was an investigation into Brian's death, but we were not privy to many of the details. My husband contacted the Coroner's Office and we were sent a copy of Brian's autopsy. Brian died from compression asphyxia and smothering. When he was buried under the gravel, his chest was compressed by the weight and he was not able to take a breath. With this type of death, your brain begins to shut down in seconds but he still could have been aware of what was happening to him at first. Brian would likely have died within moments after being buried. Although it explained the details of his death, it didn't answer why.

It took a bit over a year for the investigation to be finalized and court proceedings to begin. There were many delays, but finally the day arrived... three years and 19 days after our son's death. The company was charged with nine infractions, but eight were dropped. I felt cheated for Brian and for myself and

The company did make changes. More care is paid to how employees are trained, and the company revamped its equipment and created a safer environment for its employees. It is a comfort to know that others may not have to endure what our family has.

As parents, we feel a certain amount of guilt that we allowed our inexperienced young adult son to adventure into an occupation that ultimately took his life. Forever there will be a sadness, a great weakness in my heart, and an emptiness that follows me. My dreams are haunted of my son struggling for breath as he is buried alive. Sometimes, everyday occurrences provoke memories or tears. But slowly, with the love of my family, and the help of Threads of Life, I am learning to live life with this "new normal".



The Schafer family

# “HELLO, AND GOODBYE.....”

In the blink of an eye

by Judy and Joe Micieli



Nick Micieli

**N**icky was our cherished son, our only child. He was a very special blessing. You see, it took some time before I was able to have a child; then, later in my pregnancy I developed toxemia and needed to be hospitalized. The concern was that Nicky might be born premature due to the toxicity, resulting in the possibility of his lungs not being fully developed (among other concerns). After 30 days of being hospitalized, in the early morning hours of May 24, 1990 I hemorrhaged and an emergency C-section needed to be performed. Thankfully, we both survived the trauma. Nicholas Joseph Micieli was born healthy, lungs fully developed. I knew he was a very special gift right from the start.

As a little boy, Nicky was his mother's son (yes, a mama's boy). He was quiet and loved to be cuddled and held. It seemed that he was always holding my hand, and tugging on my sleeve. He was my shadow, followed me everywhere. We were as close as a mother and son could possibly be, and that never changed.

One Mother's Day, Nick couldn't wait to give me "something." The Saturday before, he called me to his room, took me by the hand and sat me on his bed, handing me a small box. The look on his face was priceless – it brings me to tears just remembering the love and pride that beamed from his eyes, having bought his mom such a beautiful and special gift: a gold necklace with a small, delicate cross. A few weeks later, we were at one of Nick's soccer games, and the necklace broke off my neck. I was in tears, on my hands and knees, combing the grass in search of it. Other moms tried to help. I never did retrieve it, and I felt so bad. Nick was upset on the drive home, but later that

afternoon he playfully started wrestling with me to get me laughing. He knew how badly I felt.

Nicky loved to hang out with dad, too, working on his little bubble lawn mower and following daddy around the back yard, handing him his tools and helping him wash the car.

For Nick's fifth birthday we bought him a battery-operated jeep. He would only allow one person to ride with him in that jeep, and that was his friend, Danielle, who also was five. We joked that this is when he started dating, as he used to drive the jeep from our house to hers (just four doors down), park it in the driveway, walk to the door and "pick her up", and take her for a ride to the neighborhood park or our backyard. But if another child came running because he or she wanted a ride, Nick would get in his jeep and "drive away."

As Nick grew older, mom was the one who taught him about life, faith, God, relationships, friendship, selfless love, forgiveness

and all those very important life lessons. I helped him with homework, too, often chatting about what he might like to pursue in life, career, etc. He and dad shared the practical things in daily life: employment, saving money, cars, future goals, etc.

As Nick grew into manhood, as any parent probably does I often wondered if all of those life lessons that we discussed; if all of those stern and sometimes heated conversations we'd had for his own good actually sunk in. By the time Nick died at the young and untimely age of 22, I was certain that he had listened, and listened well.

Nick's heart was genuine, gentle, compassionate and selfless. His life was full of passion and purpose, yet so simple. To love and be loved was his deepest desire. Though he could be stubborn and temperamental, he was soft-spoken and kind. He was passionate in maintaining his convictions, and stood up for what he felt was right. He was proud of his Italian Canadian heritage and maintained a wonderful sense of humor.

Just a few weeks before Nick died, he purchased a sporty Infinity coupe. I co-signed for the loan. When we picked it up, I opened my arms to get a hug ... he opened his arms, walked right by me, and HUGGED THE SPORTS CAR!

Nick was quick to forgive, and he believed in second chance – countless chances. He wore his heart on his sleeve. We are so proud of the young man he had become.

I was at work that Monday morning. The sky was clear, the air was warm, there was no breeze, and the sun was shining brightly. I had been having a decent day so far. I remember glancing at my wristwatch on the way to having a bite to eat. It was 11:58 am on June 18th. My phone rang. The display read "urgent." (I felt this wave of PEACE come over me, as though God was with me.) It was my husband, Joe. He told me that he'd just received a phone call from Nick's boss saying that Nick was involved in a serious accident, and that he was on his way to Sunnybrook Hospital. I quickly hustled out of the building, and drove myself home to meet my husband. God must have been with me, because I managed to control my emotions as I drove. By the time I got to the house, the police had arrived. First, the officers said that Nick was being airlifted to Sunnybrook, then that he was being rerouted to Etobicoke General.

It seemed as though it took us an eternity to get to the hospital. When we arrived, we were literally pulled into a private room until moments later, when the attending physician came in to tell us that Nick had passed away. Of course, at this point, I completely lost control of my emotions, and I began crying out bible verses to draw comfort. I asked to see a pastor. This wonderful, caring person cried with us as we openly prayed the 23rd Psalm.

The drive home was solemn. We felt lonely and empty. We were completely broken, yet in shock. Our baby boy was gone.

Nick was attending college at the time, hoping to become a physiotherapist and work at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto, Ontario (he loved kids, and was great with them). Between semesters, Nick accepted a summer position with a company that placed and removed traffic counters on regional roads. This concerned me for obvious reasons. I'd questioned Nick whether the company had an HR department (no), health and safety training (no), and all possible and pertinent safety measures in place while he was working on the roads ("mom, you worry too much...I'm fine"). I was assured that Nick's cube van had flashing lights as bright as an ambulance, bright orange caution cones were quickly set up around the van when working on the roads, and employees wore brightly-colored shirts with a fluorescent green and orange reflective vest at all times.

Nick had only worked for this particular employer for about six or seven weeks. He was promoted to a supervisor position within that very short period... which, again, I didn't feel comfortable with at all. At that point, Nick was introduced to a new employee, his new partner. Nick was 22. His partner was slightly younger. Having only worked seven weeks, and now training a new employee, just didn't sit well with me and my husband. We learned this after the accident. What employer in his/her right mind would set this up? Joe and I were angry, yet helpless. What was done was done.

Nick had just pulled to one side of Trafalgar Road, near Britannia, in Milton, Ontario. Caution signals were on, orange safety cones in place, and proper protective equipment worn. He and his partner had just been out of the work van approximately two minutes, one on each side of the van, when the van was hit by a pickup truck driven by a 61-year-old gentleman using his cell phone! Yes, a distracted driver was on his cell phone with his dog's groomer.

Later we learned that although the company had been in business more than 16

years, it had never been inspected by the Ministry of Labour. There had never been anyone checking in on the safety and well-being of employees working on regional roads!! Why??? Why had it taken the horrific death of my precious son? When I learned this, I began to shake, and sob and voiced what was in my heart at the time, and hung up the phone. I collapsed.

hearts to forgive those involved. However, moving forward, we trust that more stringent measures will and are being taken to reduce the probability of such a tragic end to a dear and valued life, and the devastation of yet another family.

Life is different now. Not only have we lost Nick, we've lost our identities, and our future. There will be no college graduation day, no

“ Not only have we lost Nick, we've lost our identities, and our future ... Time has stood still for us. It is difficult to move forward, but move forward we must.

Here we are, more than four years later, still struggling through this painful, never-ending journey of grief.

The company has since been charged and found guilty of failing to do everything they could have and should have done to ensure the safety and well-being of my Nick, his partner, and other employees. They were slapped with a "hefty" fine of \$125,000. They continue to be in business. However, it is now mandatory to have a second vehicle set up for safety purposes behind the work van, on roads with speed limits over 80 km/h.

The driver of the pickup was charged with careless driving and was placed on a driving curfew for about two years, and fined about \$2000.

I acknowledge that mistakes happen, and my husband and I have both found it in our

wedding day, no daughter-in-law, no grandchildren, no joyful pride in witnessing Nick as a loving, wonderful husband and dad. No more memories to be made. Time has stood still for us. It is difficult to move forward, but move forward we must.

Since 2013, Joe and I facilitate a bereavement support group for grieving parents known as "Walk with Me" in the Niagara area. Thankfully, it has proven to be a blessing to other moms and dads who are searching for help, yearning and longing for others to acknowledge that what they are feeling is "ok" ... and that they will be "ok." For us, we get more out of facilitating the group than we could ever give!

May God be with us as we try to live our lives purposefully, and in His strength.



Nick was a special gift right from the start



## Grief didn't know it was a holiday

by Shirley Hickman

Which holiday traditions do you want to keep? How can you work around the others?

There are various days during the year that society calls a 'holiday' – like the upcoming season, mostly called Christmas even by those who do not recognize it as a religious day. For many, the planning for this Christmas season seems to start even before Hallowe'en. I go to a store and there it is – all the stars and bangles and the music, row after row, telling me that some special day is happening.

It seems that there is so much attention to that special day. For some it's just 24 hours; for others it seems to be a week or more – taking us to a new year.

My first Christmas after Tim died, I was faced with many questions. How can this be? How will we make it through this first Christmas? With time and thought, I realized we would make it the same as we had made it through each other day. We would take it by the moment or in small chunks. It was going to happen, but what did we want it to look like? I asked myself several questions. It didn't take me long to realize that while our family had many traditions, each year we had also done some different things to celebrate. We had different people over for a meal, bought different gifts, ate mostly the same foods, did many of the same activities. What did I want to keep? What was most important?

I decided I couldn't write out Christmas cards – so instead I typed a note on the computer that was easy to personalize or send as a thank you for support and a quick update. Then that year, I typed our names – it seemed easier than handwriting and being unable to include Tim's name on the list of signatures. That has changed over the years, as have other things I found helpful that first year.

I always made fruit cake – you know, the traditional dark and also the light cake, with raisins, nuts, cherries, etc. We gave away much of it as gifts. I didn't have any interest in making the cake that year. However, I knew that there would be many people missing it – those same people who had been so supportive during our darkest days. So I made it. I made it with love and gave most of it away and everyone was pleased.

Did you decorate the tree yet? Well, I have heard that question from so many of our Threads of Life family members. That first year, I just couldn't, but I knew we needed a tree. I got the ornaments out, I invited guests over for dinner and then they all decorated the tree, while I was cleaning up. That happened for a few years. The first time I actually put on a decoration, was when our first granddaughter was a baby and I helped her put on an ornament.

During all the season of Christmas, just like every other holiday during the year, my grief didn't take a vacation. My grief doesn't understand what a holiday is. I had to learn how to live with my grief, as my love for my family member did not die with him.

The day after the 25th of December will bring new challenges, and you will be able to take a breath and realize how well you handled that holiday. It will equip you to handle the next holiday, the beginning of a new year. If you live with a life-altering injury or occupational illness, it is the same – you don't suddenly become well for the day. Learning how to pace yourself, value what is important to you, honour yourself – these are the tools you need to handle your grief journey.

# Trish Penny

by Lorna Catrambone

*There is a wonderful quotation that says: “Volunteers don’t necessarily have the time, they just have the heart”. At Threads of Life, we certainly know this to be true. Threads of Life exists today because of volunteers giving of themselves with all their heart. A shining example of this can be found in Trish Penny.*

Trish first learned of Threads of Life after her big brother, Luke, died. Luke was part of a construction crew working on the foundation of a garage. The trench he was working in collapsed, causing a concrete wall to fall on top of him. Trish and her family learned about the Steps for Life walk and Threads of Life, through a friend of Luke’s. Trish says “we decided to go for it and ended up having a full team. We fundraised and really surprised ourselves with the amount of support we received. After the walk, we decided to attend a Family Forum and the rest is history”.

Trish decided to start volunteering for Threads of Life in 2014, and soon after, she trained to become a member of the Speaker’s Bureau. As a volunteer with the Speaker’s Bureau, Trish willingly and bravely shares with others the story of Luke’s death, and the impact that it had on her and her family. She does this to raise awareness of the importance of injury prevention, and the devastating effects of a workplace fatality.

While Trish has delivered many presentations, one in particular stands out in her mind. “My favourite memory of my volunteer work was travelling to Nalcor Energy in Churchill Falls, Labrador. The travelling alone was amazing! A couple of plane rides to get there, finished off with an hour long helicopter ride! The location was unbelievable. A tiny company-owned town with no more than 300 people who live and work for Nalcor. The hospitality was second to none as I was invited into the homes and lives of the organizer.”

Trish has a number of reasons for volunteering for Threads of Life. “I volunteer for Threads of Life because it provides the forum for me to speak about what I’m truly passionate about. It allows me to network with amazing people both internally and those we volunteer for. This has helped me develop my own personal and professional skills of public speaking, networking, and getting over my introverted ways!”

Trish is so passionate about health and safety, she chose to make a career of it and now works as a health and safety representative for a global engineering and professional services firm.

It takes an infinite amount of heart and courage to speak publicly about a tragedy in the hopes that others may learn from it, be inspired by it, and perhaps even change their behaviour because of it. Trish’s courage and heart is evident in every presentation.



Trish Penny shares her story at a recent health and safety event

## Share your passion – volunteer with Threads of Life!

Threads of Life is supported by hundreds of dedicated volunteers. Some have been personally affected by a workplace tragedy, while others simply share the belief that injuries in the workplace are predictable, preventable and unacceptable.

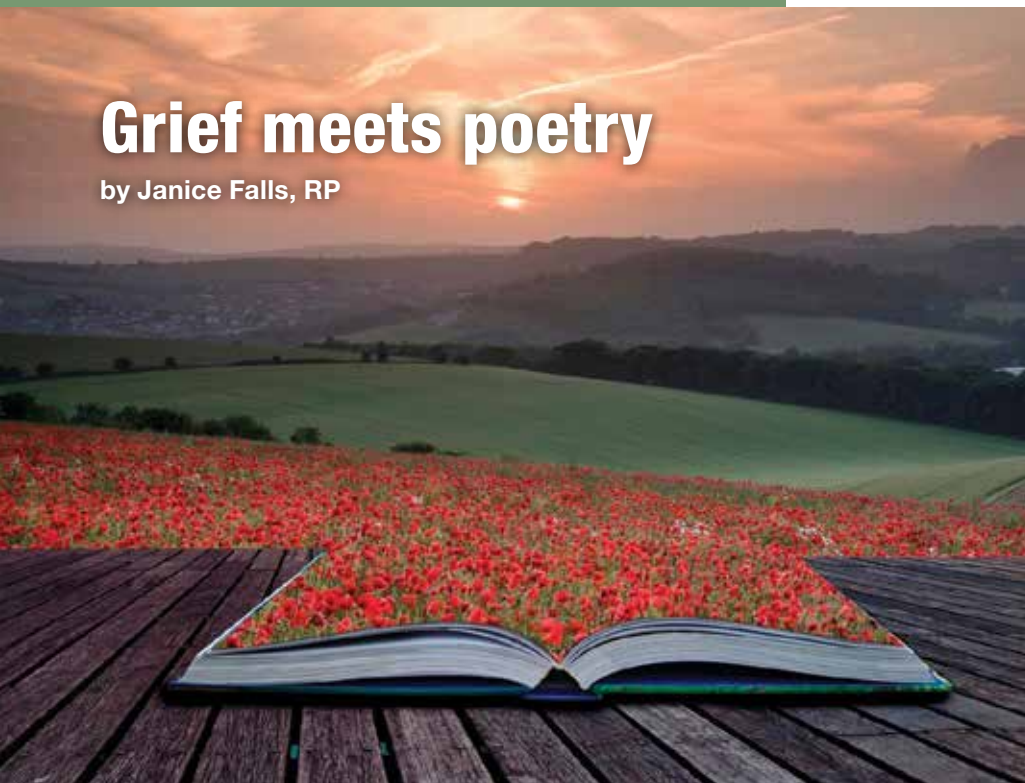
If you’d like to put your passion to work, helping families affected by workplace tragedies and preventing future tragedies, become a Threads of Life volunteer. Some of our volunteer roles are only open to those who have directly experienced a workplace tragedy, while others are open to anyone. To get involved, go to [threadsoflife.ca/for-families/volunteer/](http://threadsoflife.ca/for-families/volunteer/) and click to submit a volunteer form.

### Here are some ways you can be part of the change:

- Help your local community and families organize your local Steps for Life Walk
- Walk and fundraise in Steps for Life
- Hold your own fundraiser for Threads of Life (bake sale anyone?)
- Be a Volunteer Family Guide (Threads of Life members)
- Share your story and journey through public speaking with our Speakers Bureau (Threads of Life members)
- Write an article or poem for the Threads newsletter or Threads of Life blog

# Grief meets poetry

by Janice Falls, RP



"I have noticed how all the poems I am drawn to about grief are also about joy"

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you  
like a homeless dog  
who comes to the back door  
for a crust, for a meatless bone  
I should trust you.

-Denise Levertov, "Talking to Grief" (1-5)

We don't really know how to trust so raw an emotion as grief. It may have appeared in your life suddenly after a workplace tragedy, the dog at your back door looking for a home you don't want to give. In our culture, we tend to perceive grief as something that happens to someone else, something to avoid, to get through as quickly as possible and 'move on'. But there is another way. I have learned at Threads of Life that there is a caring, listening, respectful way of being that is more in tune with coming to trust grief.

One way I have learned to trust is through poetry. Certain poems bring me solace because they speak words I cannot myself find in the moment. They allow me to feel understood and they show me that the person writing has survived their sorrow. They become a kind of pathway, a guide to experiencing and expressing this pain without trying to take it away.

In my world view, grief is part of living a meaningful life. Without it, we cannot fully comprehend what it is to be human. I want to share with people that we need not be afraid of sadness and death so that they can fully open themselves to joy. The more deeply you love, the more you will hurt when that person you love dies or is suffering. So, if you don't want to feel the anguish of grief, you must not let yourself

feel the joy of loving fully. It is clear in this community of support that that is not a choice people are willing to make.

Poetry may seem an odd companion to learning about grief and loss but, in fact, it has been both necessary and healing for me. This has led me to believe that poems are one of the few things we can offer ourselves or others when we are grieving.

Being human, I have had my own share of death and loss in my life, as we all have had or will have – it is a universal experience. As I struggled to make some sense of each loss, I looked to the shared experiences of others, as you are doing in this Threads of Life newsletter. And I began to explore the words of the poets who so eloquently expressed my own grieving heart in ways that I could not myself articulate.

It is not the weight you carry  
but how you carry it- books,  
bricks, grief – it's all in the way  
you embrace it, balance it,  
carry it when you cannot, and  
would not, put it down.

-Mary Oliver, "Heavy" (16-22)

The more deeply I move into this life, the more certain I am that grief is as natural a part of living as joy. I have noticed how all the poems I am drawn to about grief are also about joy. They give voice to my deepest convictions and they create beauty in the world – the necessary and inevitable outcome when you mix sorrow with joy.

"I am so sad and everything is beautiful.  
This is how the heart makes a duet of  
wonder and grief."

Nepo, M. "Adrift"

What I have learned about the dark emotions, grief in particular, is that they can be trusted. When we mindfully pay attention to them, there is an innate wisdom that emerges, allowing for profound healing and a renewal of life. I believe that the underlying challenge we all face is to seek some balance between the exhilaration and beauty of life, and its counterpoint of darkness. As Jane Hirshfield writes in "The Weighing":

So few grains of happiness  
Measured against all the dark  
And still the scales balance.  
The world asks of us  
Only the strength we have and we give it.  
Then it asks more, and we give it. (15-20)



# Using music after a loss or difficult life experience

by Erin Montgomery, MEd, BMus, MTA,  
FAMI, CCC, RCT-C

I've been an accredited music therapist since 2004 and I've used music with many different people, to reach many therapeutic goals. Often, we move through our days with music around us. It may be on in the background, in the store, in the car – but are we really harnessing the power of music? I'd like to share a few ways in which you can choose and use music with intention.

## To motivate and uplift

When we are feeling low, it is often more difficult to motivate ourselves to move in the direction of things that will uplift us. Our energy and resources are drained. Experiment with listening to music that provides you with a sense of energy, or purpose. This might be music that has a particular rhythm (upbeat), or a soaring melody. Maybe the lyrics are inspiring. You can create a playlist of songs or pieces of music that all provide this similar feeling and then use it when waking to set a mood, or throughout the day when energy is lagging or motivation is lacking. It's also important to rest after a loss or difficult life experience.

## To make us feel understood and validated. To decrease feelings of isolation.

After a difficult life experience involving a loss, many people feel isolated. There are different reasons for this. Sometimes people don't have the social support they need previous to a difficult life event. For others, social support may be there, but they withdraw from social events and people after a loss. While this might allow us to avoid unpleasant interactions with people who don't understand what we are experiencing, people who remind us of the loss, or people who are insensitive, it also makes us feel increasingly alone. We all need a sense of belonging and connection - especially when we've had a difficult life experience.

Listening to music that matches the feelings you are having – even when they are difficult feelings – can help us feel validated and can decrease our feelings of isolation. When lyrics describe feelings or thoughts similar to those we are having, or instrumental music seems to match the experience we are having inside of us, we gain a sense of connection with others. Create a playlist to listen to when you are feeling alone and misunderstood.

## To support reminiscence

Music is part of many important life events and contains many



beautiful memories when we listen to it years later. If you have lost a loved one, you could support healthy grieving by thinking about some of the pieces that remind you of your loved one and the good times you shared together. Making a playlist of these pieces and organizing them in a way that is meaningful to you can be a healing project that you can listen to when you want to feel close to and remember your loved one.

## To comfort and soothe

Many people use food to comfort themselves. “Comfort eating” can be a great escape in the moment, but can cause further health issues. Consider using music as a comfort. Identify pieces that bring feelings of warmth, calm, peacefulness, joy, feeling hugged or nurtured in another way. Make a playlist and use this when you need a soothing sensory experience.

## To help you relax into sleep

Grief and difficult life experiences often impact our bodies. Sleep may become difficult. If you are having issues with sleeping or insomnia, consider using music that you find relaxing to help you unwind at night and settle into a good night's sleep. If you use it often enough and find that it is effective, you may become conditioned to fall asleep with certain pieces, so make sure you don't play these while driving or at other times when you need to be alert.

There are endless ways to use music intentionally. If you are someone who is able to sing or play an instrument you could also try playing the songs that fall under the above categories, or write a song for self expression. Experiment, be curious, and enjoy!

## Best wishes for your healing.

## Thanks to our partners from sea to sea

Support for Threads of Life stretches from sea to shining sea, and it takes many forms. While financial support is vital, that's not the only way our partners and friends help fulfill our mission and vision. They help increase awareness by spreading the word about our issues and work. They swell our volunteer base by joining Steps for Life committees and

representing Threads of Life at trade shows and events. They boost participation by joining our walk and other events. And they raise funds to provide hope and healing for those affected by workplace fatalities, life-altering injuries and disease. Here are just a few examples of contributions from 2016. Thanks to all our partners and supporters for your help!

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC Forest Safety Council published a full page article in Forest Safety News, read by more than 12,000, donated in lieu of thank you gifts at the Interior Safety Conference, and invited Threads of Life to display information at the Vancouver Island Safety Conference.

### QUEBEC

Unifor distributed information for people affected by workplace tragedies, at events in Trois Riviere and Montreal.

### ALBERTA

Aon Risk Solutions distributed materials at their client golf tournament and held a 50/50 raffle. The winner of the raffle generously donated their share to Threads of Life, bringing the total donation to \$1,430.

### PEI

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association promoted Threads of Life and Steps for Life at its annual conference in Charlottetown.

### SASKATCHEWAN

The Sprackman Family from Hudson Bay, SK hosted a golf tournament to honour their son Cade. The event raised \$4,000 for Threads of Life and displayed materials to raise awareness.

### NOVA SCOTIA

Sobeys stores in the Halifax area to promote Steps for Life boot prints with their customers. Shoppers made a donation to purchase a boot print, put their name on it, and the print was posted in the store. The mosaic of boot prints made up a donation of close to \$5,000.

### MANITOBA

Employees at Palliser Furniture Upholstery and EQ3 in Winnipeg raffled two pieces of furniture with the proceeds donated to Threads of Life.

### NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick Construction Safety Association participated in Steps for Life Saint John, and continues to promote the walk through their social media and newsletter.

### ONTARIO

The Ottawa Regional Labour Management Health and Safety Committee hosted a mock trial where they displayed the LifeQuilt and donated all registration fees

### NEWFOUNDLAND

Workplace NL sent letters to clients affected by workplace tragedy, inviting them to the family forum, and welcomed Threads of Life to speak to staff about programs and services.

## Coming soon to a computer near you:

Online registration will open in February

It's the easiest way to get involved, and the easiest way to raise funds to help those coping with workplace tragedy and prevent tragedies in the future. Online registration for Steps for Life 2017 opens February 1st. Registering online saves you time on the day of the walk, and gives you all the tools to fundraise with your family, friends and co-workers. In February, all you need to do is:

- Go to [www.stepsforlife.ca/locations](http://www.stepsforlife.ca/locations) and find your walk community.
- Click to register yourself, to join a team, or to start a new team.
- Add some personality to your individual fundraising page, and share it with others

Most Steps for Life events occur the weekend of May 6 and 7, to coincide with North American Occupational Safety and Health week. Mark your calendar now, and stay tuned to [stepsforlife.ca](http://stepsforlife.ca) to check the time and place for your walk.

## Make a difference: Be a sponsor; ask a sponsor

Sponsors play a huge role in the success of Steps for Life – Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy. They not only help raise more dollars to support Threads of Life programs and services, but they also make sure the walk reaches deeper into the community with its prevention message. And sponsors benefit as well – they gain visibility and demonstrate their commitment to health and safety. Opportunities for sponsorship range from Stepping Forward at \$250 to the \$2000 Champion level. If you'd like to become a sponsor for your local Steps for Life walk, visit the web site at [www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca) for more information, or call 888-567-9490 and ask for one of the regional development coordinators.

Family members and other Threads of Life supporters can help with sponsorship too – if you know a company or organization you think would make a good sponsor, you can

- Ask them!
- Email them information about sponsorship of Steps for Life (<http://stepsforlife.ca/get-involved/become-a-partner/>)
- Suggest that your regional development coordinator contact the company:
  - **Western Canada (BC, AB, SK & MB)**  
Lynn Danbrook, [ldanbrook@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:ldanbrook@threadsoflife.ca)
  - **Central Canada (ON)**  
Lorna Catrambone, [lcatrambone@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:lcatrambone@threadsoflife.ca)
  - **Atlantic Canada & Quebec (NS, NB, NL, PE & QC)**  
Kevin Bonnis, [kbonniss@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:kbonniss@threadsoflife.ca)



## Your walk, your way

In 2017 there will be 30 walks in Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts. But if there is no Steps for Life walk in your community, you can still get involved! New for 2017, Steps for Life will offer those who do not have a walk nearby the opportunity to take part “your way, any day in May”. Plan to get your family or friends together and go for a nature walk or a stroll through your neighbourhood. You can still register online as a Steps for Life participant and use the Steps for Life web site for fundraising. Look for “Your Walk, Your Way” on [www.stepsforlife.ca/locations](http://www.stepsforlife.ca/locations)



## Coming Events

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

### 2017 Training

Volunteer Family Guide Beginner training – January 26-31, 2017, Barrie ON

Speaker training – February 24-27, 2017, Mississauga, ON

Atlantic Family Forum, May 26 – 28, 2017, South Shore, NS

Prairie Family Forum, September 29 – October 1, 2017, Saskatoon, SK

Western Family Forum, October 20 – 22, 2017, Calgary, AB

Central Family Forum, November 3 – 5, 2017, Barrie, ON

## SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER!

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



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## How to reach us

Toll-free: 1-888-567-9490

Fax: 1-519-685-1104

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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.



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

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