



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Eleanor Westwood*

Ours has become a society of sharing – and even “over-sharing”, some people suggest. But some of the ways we share of ourselves are more meaningful and purposeful than others. “Sharing” is one of the core values at Threads of Life. We believe that “sharing our personal losses will lead to healing and preventing future devastating work-related losses.” At events like our family forums, and through relationships with volunteer family guides, we encourage people to speak up and talk about what they’ve been through. In order to do that, they need to feel that they are accepted and understood. And that’s when the healing can begin. In this issue of the newsletter, we talk about how Threads of Life welcomes those who come looking for help, and the important role our sponsors play in supporting family forums. Two of our Threads of Life family members share their own stories of loss, in the hope not only of promoting healing for themselves and others, but that somehow through their sharing they can protect others from similar pain. Telling our stories to one another – whether here in the newsletter or in our three forums coming up this fall or just in one on one conversation – is sharing for all the right reasons.

## A safe place to land

Every year, more than 200 new family members come to Threads of Life looking for hope and comfort after a work-related tragedy. Thanks to our volunteers and partners, Threads of Life is able to give them a safe place to land.

*Read more about how we welcome new members on page 8, and how our sponsors support family forums on page 10.*

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# NO CURE FOR THE HEARTBREAK

Train conductor dies in derailment on isolated siding

by Katie Giesbrecht



Bryan Giesbrecht.

**N**ovember 28, 2012 was a normal, average everyday kind of day. My husband Randy and I went to work, my son went to school, the snow kept falling and at 10:30 p.m. we went to bed. I have four children. Bryan is my oldest son; he is married to Kasey and has two beautiful daughters. Nicole is next; she's married to Kenzie and has a step-son and a daughter. Derek is my third born. At the time in 2012 he was not married. He is now, with a baby on the way. Then there is Jackson. He is now a 15-year-old, grade ten student.

Around 11:30 that night, I was woken by hearing the door open and something in the entry. I thought my two dogs were coming in. You see, if the door wasn't tightly shut, the

dogs would push against it and come inside. I got up to go put them back out and close the door tight. I looked down the stairs and saw Ken, my son's father-in-law. He said to me "Katie, is Randy home?"

I went to get my husband, and when I started back down the stairs I saw my daughter-in-law Kasey. I asked "Kasey, what is going on?" She couldn't look at me. I asked again but this time yelled it. I saw two other guys standing in the entry and they told me they were from CN. That is when Ken told me that Bryan was gone. I said "what? What are you talking about?" One of the CN guys said that Bryan had passed away at work. I didn't cry or yell. I was confused. "No," I said. As if

they were wrong. That is when Randy came down the stairs towards me. I turned to him and said, "Randy, they said Bryan died". Why would they say that? Why would they come into my home and tell me something so terrible? I was in a weird, confused, dream-like state. They told me that the train had derailed and Bryan was killed in Gutah Siding. I asked stupid questions about Gutah siding; how did it derail; were they sure he was gone. I could not comprehend this. I went outside on the deck for air and then I cried. It was not a cry I recognized. I didn't even know it was me. It was this deep guttural noise. Some sound completely foreign to me. What the hell are these people doing here telling me this? What is going on? I don't understand. Was I crazy? I had always told people that if anything ever happened to one of my kids they would have to put me in an institution because I would go crazy.

I had children I needed to tell. Derek was at work at a gas plant about half an hour away, and Nicole was at home in Grande Prairie about two hours away. Jackson was still sleeping upstairs. I was pretty sure I couldn't drive and I knew Randy couldn't so I called our best friends and that is when I lost it. I had to say it...I had to say, "Bryan died!" I said it over and over.

Bryan, my oldest child, my first born, was gone. He was an amazing big brother to his three siblings. He loved his life and he lived it with as much excitement as he could. He hated to be bored. He skydived, cliff jumped, swam the Great Barrier Reef, spent a year as an exchange student in Australia, and backpacked across Europe. As a teenager he became a lifeguard and swim instructor and as an adult he volunteered his spare time to coach a kids' ball hockey team. He loved working with youth. Bryan was my God-sent life saviour. I had him when I was 19. My husband, Randy, and I lived in a remote area of BC. We had no phone, power or plumbing. I was alone for three weeks at a time as Randy worked up in the north on oil rigs. I was so lonely. I made the decision to have a baby in order to keep my sanity. Bryan was my gift from God. He was the sweetest child. He wasn't ever mean spirited. He always included others in play. In his mind, everyone needed to be having fun and he didn't allow anyone to sit on the sidelines. He was funny, he loved jokes (really bad ones most of the time), caring and fair in

everything he did. Bryan would bound into a room like Tigger and let everyone know he was there. He loved to be a part of the team. In hockey and baseball, he loved to win but it was more important to him to have fun. He won many sportsmanship awards in sports. I had always told him they were the most important ones to win. It shows character and his was obvious. I remember that he was 12 years old and would still come to me for a goodnight kiss and hug. People would comment on his ability to show affection even as a young teen. I miss his hugs so much.

## **“ This site has changed since Bryan died there, but it seems too little, too late for me and my family.**

The next while was just one long day after another. I took six weeks of stress leave from work. During this time I found out as much as I could about the incident that took my son's life. I asked a lot of questions about Gutah siding, trying to find out what it may have looked like. Why did Bryan not set the derail? What was he thinking? I managed to get a copy of the page in Bryan's manual that told him about Gutah siding – what was on the site and where to find it. It was what Bryan knew about the site.

Gutah siding is about 150 km north of Fort Saint John BC. There was an occupied station, a camp of sorts, where the crew was to stop for a rest and a meal after leaving Fort Saint John. There was a camp cook and a couple of workers there. The only other people were Bryan, who was the conductor of the train and the train engineer. After travelling for eight hours they were coming upon Gutah. They had been given a work order that morning to switch out the fuel car. The one that fuels the generator that runs the camp electricity was running low. Bryan and the engineer decided to do this job before they went into the camp to eat. It was already dark and lightly snowing. Part of the rails had been cleared on the siding, but it was a short siding so it shouldn't be a problem. Bryan's job was to get out and unhook some cars. The engineer would drive ahead; Bryan would go and set the switch and the derail. A derail is a mechanical device put on the track that will derail railway cars passing over it. The derail was put on the siding to stop rogue trains from going down the siding and causing damage or death to those in the camp. The derail is by the switch. It has to be flipped to "off" so the train can go by and down the siding. Bryan radioed the engineer that the switch was set and

so was the derail. The engineer started backing down the siding. Bryan let the engineer know how far to go before stopping to hook up to the empty fuel car. He did have a flashlight, but I can only imagine that it would be like turning high beams on in a snow storm. There was a second derail, more than 500 feet from the first one. The courts could not determine whether Bryan was aware of the second derail. The sign marking the derail was not a standard CN sign and it was not retroreflective.

The engineer hears something on the radio, but does not know what was said. He feels the

cars do something, maybe a jarring, and he pulls on the brakes. He cannot make radio contact with Bryan; he is 17 cars ahead of the one that Bryan was riding on. He walks down the tracks and sees the mess: two cars have gone off the track, over a small embankment. Bryan was found in the snow, crushed by the rolled-over fuel car.

CN was charged based on the investigation by BC OH&S: two counts of failing to ensure health and safety of one of their employees, and two counts of failing to ensure that Bryan was aware of the health and safety hazards on the site.

We spent many days in court listening to lawyers, going over every piece of documentation and at the end of two years, the judge gave his decision.

### **CN issued a press release:**

"On June 2, 2016, CN was found guilty of breaching section 124 of the Canada Labour Code and thereby committed an offence under S 148(1) of the Canada Labour Code, and on March 24, 2016 was ordered to pay the maximum fine of \$100,000 in connection with an incident that occurred on a CN siding track on Nov. 28, 2012 at Gutah, British Columbia. The court ruled CN failed to ensure the health and safety of its employee, Bryan Giesbrecht, when it did not give proper notice of a safety device known as a derail located on a siding track at Gutah because the sign was not retroreflective as required by company engineering standards."

The black box expert at the trial determined that the brakes were never touched as the train backed down the siding and it was going twice as fast as recommended. No one knows for sure, but it is believed that Bryan may have been running down the tracks to deactivate the second derail but could not outrun the train.

This site has changed since Bryan died there, but it seems too little, too late for me and my family.

We continue to mourn for Bryan. We talk about him all the time. He is still, and always will be, a huge part of our lives. We still eat spaghetti and meatballs on his birthday because this is what he always asked for. There is no cure for our heartbreak, no getting over it, but our memories keep us going. Life does go on and we continue to move forward, but the loss of my son has forever changed who I am and will ever be.



Bryan liked to have fun and to make sure everyone else was having fun too

# COPING IN THE WAKE OF TRAGEDY

Young paramedic finds help to deal with PTSD

by Michael Johnston



Mike today with wife Dawn and daughter Ainsley.

If you had asked me what I wanted to do after graduation it was a quick answer. I wanted to be a paramedic. Little did I know this decision would change my life in ways I could never imagine, for better and worse.

As a teenager I did anything I could to prepare myself for this career. I volunteered with the St. John Ambulance and the Canadian Ski Patrol. Here I was getting great experience and training, with the satisfaction of helping people in their time of need. However, during this time I realized that there was one area of my chosen path that I was not comfortable with, that being death.

So what better way to fix my fear of death, than to work at a funeral home! I worked as assistant and completed duties such as removal and transportation of deceased from hospitals and accident scenes. I had probably seen more death by the time I was 20 than most do in a lifetime. But I felt more prepared.

I was accepted to a paramedic program in the fall of 1998. I was too young to enter the program which had a minimum age of 19; however persistence paid off and they accepted me.

If I was to introduce myself to you back then I was Mike a Paramedic, as if you could not have guessed that from bumper stickers,

sweatshirts and certificates. I was immensely proud of my accomplishment and started my career in Nova Scotia. It was different now; I was the one responsible for what happened in the back of the ambulance. This was a lot of responsibility for a 19 year old who lived a relatively sheltered life. I saw some terrible things that challenged me professionally, including a child hit by a car and a love story with a tragic ending on the Trans-Canada highway.

**“ It was dead quiet and all I could smell was freshly-turned topsoil caused by the horses running around. I had never felt so afraid and out of control since the day I stepped through the windshield of that bus.**

Then it finally happened: a job offer in my hometown of Saint John NB!

I was settling in well, and when I thought it couldn't get any better, a shift with Mike who mentored me before I even started my career. We were working in Sussex and it was an early spring night shift.

April 27th 2001 around 05:30 a.m. our pagers went off. Respond to a motor vehicle accident near the Roachville Exit. More information came in that we were responding to a single vehicle that had rolled over and was on its side; didn't think anyone was inside. This area was a terrible spot for accidents due to the configuration of the exit. Having been to calls there before, we assumed it was a drunk driver who went off the road and ran.

I remember it was foggy and cool and very dark. I remember the terrible feeling when we realized the 'single vehicle' was a bus. As we exited our ambulance you could not hear anything. The cool foggy air was silent and we were met by the smell of freshly-turned topsoil that had been disturbed by the crash.

Armed with a stethoscope, bag and a pen light I made my way down the bank to the bus, still on its side. My chest felt heavy and I started to breathe fast as I took the first step through the hole where the windshield used to be. It was completely dark, my feet were covered in mud and I was slipping on the windows trying to walk to the back of the vehicle. I was met by a man looking for his glasses, who told me there were people trapped at the rear. My mind and body were saying turn around and run away; my gut feeling telling me that what I was about to see was not good.

I found a young male with his arm trapped under the bus. He was awake and must have been terrified but was holding it together remarkably well. Little did he know he was helping me as much as I was helping him. Directly behind him was a pile of bod-

ies, three people. I did a quick check and determined that we could not help them and continued to care for the trapped male. It seemed like forever before the fire department arrived and used air bags to lift the bus. We talked about everything from baseball, to where he was going on his trip. I recruited the

guy who lost his glasses to hold my light and equipment (thought it was perfect he couldn't see). We were also visited several times by a woman who was frantically looking for her daughter. Although I was not sure, I was afraid I knew exactly where she was.

We got the young man out and into a waiting ambulance – he was nearly the last to leave. The bus was a tour bus full of children going to Nova Scotia for a band competition. Luckily there were not many severe injuries; you were basically fine or dead.

Once I had passed on my patient I remember stepping behind the fire truck with my partner to decompress for a moment, as the scene was now a buzz with investigators, police, fire departments and even a CNN satellite truck. Then we returned to the hospital, cleaned up and completed shift change.

I went home and had something to eat and remember seeing the incident on the news; it looked like it was a world away but in reality it was just down the road and I was there. I went to bed and got a couple hours' sleep to get ready for my next shift. My supervisor offered me the night off but of course I was having nothing to do with that.

Life and work went on. We received an award for EMS Call of the Year from the NB Ambulance Operators Association. This seemed bittersweet. Although it was nice to be recognized by my peers, it also brought up the memories of that day.

And then there was the anniversary and the story was in the media again. My partner and I visited the scene and found remnants of the accident still there a year later. Pieces of glass and sheet music that flew from the bus as it rolled over.

This became one route out of Sussex that I didn't like to take anymore. I remember driving by and instantly feeling sick and sweaty with my heart racing in my chest.

I moved on and grew in my career and life was good, however every spring like clockwork I would experience trouble sleeping. I went to my family doctor a couple years in a row and got sleeping medication, and tried speaking to a counsellor too. This type of therapy didn't seem to work well for me – 'close your eyes and take me back to the day'; WHAT?!?! Are you kidding me?!?! That is what I am trying to forget.

I coped by leaving the light on at night and leaving my uniform – my suit of armour – in my locker with all the hurt at the end of the day. I didn't talk to anyone about what I was going through – I didn't want anyone to think I was weak and I also didn't want to burden them. The problem was that, more than not

talking about this subject, I was withdrawing from as many social interactions as possible.

June 18th 2005 I married the love of my life, Dawn. Our dreams were coming true as we built a horse farm on 60 acres of land with a million dollar view. It was her horse that brought us together and we had a mutual love for them.

**“ My years as a paramedic have changed me forever, good and bad. It is a job that I was extremely proud to do**

I was focusing on this new and exciting beginning, which was all fantastic until spring time came along. I literally thought I was dying when I stepped into the dark, cold, foggy aisle of the barn. It was dead quiet and all I could smell was freshly-turned topsoil caused by the horses running around. I had never felt so afraid and out of control since the day I stepped through the windshield of that bus.

I found that a couple of drinks before bed worked wonders for me, just enough to take the edge off. I would switch between whiskey and red wine. I still was not talking about this, so my new wife had a partner who was not willing to help out with the barn, drank and did not communicate with her.

I had moments where I would come home alone and be paralyzed with fear in the car; I could not even walk into my house that was in darkness. My self-medication increased to three or four drinks before bed, plus Gravol to settle the nausea.

Being a husband and father I knew I had to do something to get well. I went to my family doctor again for sleeping pills. This is when my doctor said 'you have the symptoms of PTSD and we need to help you.' I am sighing again as I write this – thank you; finally.

Since then I have started on two different medications, an anti-depressant and another that controls adrenalin spikes. This was a good start on the road to wellness.

I attended a conference put on by Safety Services New Brunswick. I had no idea how much one of the sessions would change my life. Dr. Joan Wright's explanation of PTSD really stuck with me and soon I was sitting in her office.

In just a few sessions Dr. Wright was able to walk me through the incident and what was happening to me. I couldn't believe that something I had been suffering with since 2001 could be helped with the right medication and the right doctor! Although I am not cured I am coping much better. My next challenge is to get back to eating right and exercising.

My years as a paramedic have changed me forever, good and bad. It is a job that I was extremely proud to do. I will never forget driving to work one snowy day when I saw a car off the highway on its roof. I pulled over and was met by a young woman in shoes and short sleeves carrying a baby. I barely got the words 'I am a paramedic' out of my mouth when she handed over her most precious possession. Although I had many bad memories this is one that still makes me feel proud to have been part of this profession.

I am not telling you this story for attention or sympathy. I am telling you so that you or someone you love can find help when they need it. If you are finding it hard to cope or notice that a loved one is, please reach out for help. It took me over ten years to get the right help at the right time and those are years of my life that I can never get back. Don't waste another minute. Get help and be well.

## 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



Michael Johnston



## What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

*This information is reprinted from the Canadian Mental Health Association. For more information, visit the web site at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)*

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness. It often involves exposure to trauma from single events that involve death or the threat of death or serious injury. PTSD may also be linked to ongoing emotional trauma, such as abuse in a relationship.

Something is traumatic when it is very frightening, overwhelming and causes a lot of distress. Trauma is often unexpected, and many people say that they felt powerless to stop or change the event. Traumatic events may include crimes, natural disasters, accidents, war or conflict, sexual violence or other threats to life or safety. It could be an event or situation that you experience yourself or something that happens to others, including loved ones.

PTSD causes intrusive symptoms such as re-experiencing the traumatic event. Many people have vivid nightmares, flashbacks, or thoughts of the event that seem to come from nowhere. They often avoid things that remind them of the event—for example, someone who was hurt in a car crash might avoid driving.

PTSD can make people feel very nervous or ‘on edge’ all the time. Many feel startled very easily, have a hard time concentrating, feel irritable, or have problems sleeping well. They may often feel like something terrible is about to happen, even when they are safe. Some people feel very numb and detached. They may feel like things around them aren’t real, feel disconnected from their body or thoughts, or have a hard time feeling emotions.

People also experience a change in their thoughts and mood related to the traumatic event. For some people, alcohol or other drugs can be a way to cope with PTSD.

### **Who does it affect?**

While most people experience trauma at some point in their life, not all traumatic experiences lead to PTSD. We aren’t sure why trauma causes PTSD in some people but not others, but it’s likely linked to many different factors. This includes the length of time the trauma lasted, the number of other traumatic experiences in a person’s life, their reaction to the event, and the kind of support they received after the event.

Some jobs or occupations put people in dangerous situations. Military personnel, first responders (police, firefighters, and paramedics), doctors, and nurses experience higher rates of PTSD than other professions.

Trauma is not always a single event in the past. Some trauma, particularly repeated acts like abuse or trauma during wartime, can impact a person’s life far beyond the symptoms of PTSD. Some use other terms like ‘complex PTSD’ to describe these experiences.

### **What can I do about it?**

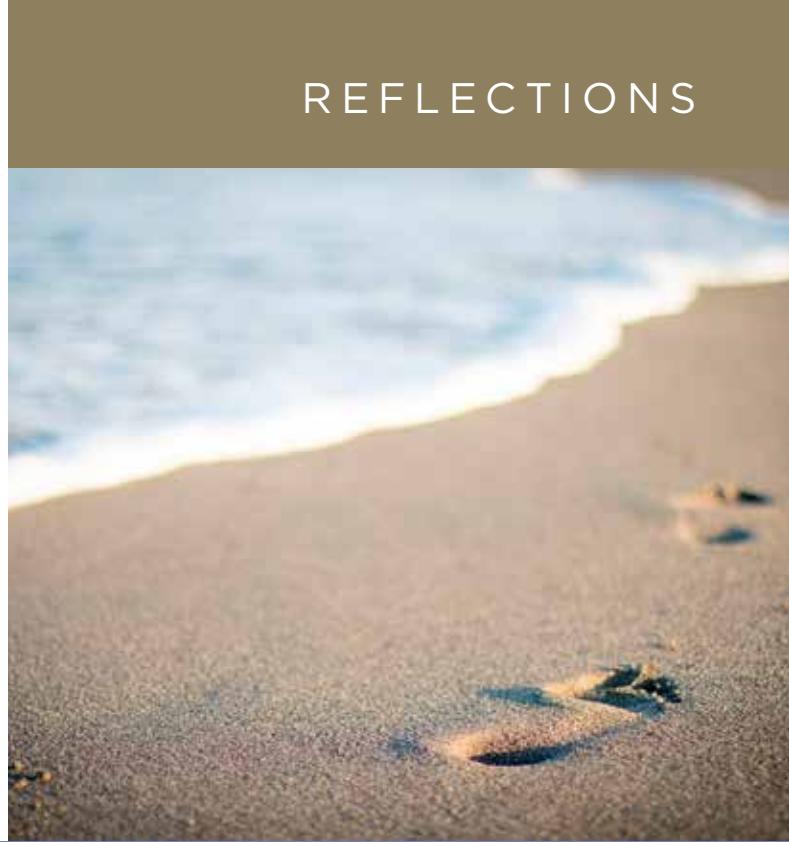
Many people feel a lot of guilt or shame around PTSD because we’re often told that we should just get over difficult experiences. Others may feel embarrassed talking with others. Some people even feel like it’s somehow their own fault. Trauma is hurtful. If you experience problems in your life related to trauma, it’s important to take your feelings seriously and talk to a health care professional.

With support, people can recover from PTSD and the effects of trauma. Recovery is good for the entire family, especially for young people who are still learning how to interact with the world. A loved one’s recovery is a chance for everyone to learn the skills that support wellness.

## Hubbard's Beach

Today I took a walk on Hubbard's Beach.  
 Oh how you loved this place...this place of peace...  
 I look up to the cottages on the path  
 I can almost see you in the doorway  
 Watching the kids swim  
 Remember how you etched your name in the post?  
 It's peaceful here along the water  
 I can see why you loved it so much.  
 I come here when I miss you most  
 And sit along the shore  
 Dreaming dreams of a yesterday  
 When you aren't in Heaven anymore.  
 The waves are angry tonight  
 Like they know why I'm here  
 The sounds of the water soothe my soul  
 I brush off the sand and smile  
 I can leave now.

by Paulette Raymond



## Memorial garden in Timmins is blooming



After many months of work, volunteers in Timmins Ontario held an official unveiling this summer for the Timmins Family Garden.

# Welcoming newcomers to the Threads of Life family

*No one wants to join the Threads of Life club – as board member Wendy Ellen Nittel puts it when she shares her own story, “the cost of membership is just too high”. But when new people do come to the organization, both staff and volunteers take pride in making sure they feel welcome and supported. Here’s how that happens.*

Each of the past few years, more than 200 new members have come to Threads of Life – 212 in 2016. In an average year, about half are referred by their compensation board or labour ministry, while others find the organization through Steps for Life, media coverage, other family members or an internet search.

Threads of Life doesn’t reach out to new families directly – we wait until they contact us, at the time that’s right for them. Most people first approach us with a phone call or an email. Kate Kennington, as Threads of Life’s manager of family support, responds to offer support, mails out a package of information about our programs and services, and adds the person to the mail list for this newsletter.



Threads of Life volunteers specialize in making others feel welcome and safe.

From that point, different people take different paths. Some will ask to be connected to a Volunteer Family Guide, our one-to-one peer support program. Many will start by attending their first family forum – in 2016, 18 new families, or about 36 members attended a family forum for the first time. For a few, just receiving mailings and reading about others’ experiences fills their need.

For lots of members, once they are further along their own journey of healing, they are keen to play a role in helping others – and they become part of the welcome. They may train to be a VFG or speaker, help organize their local Steps for Life walk, or simply be a friendly face for newcomers at family forums.

We all work for the day when there are no more workplace tragedies, and Threads of Life is no longer needed. But in the meantime, the Threads of Life family continues to grow – and we know new members feel welcome, thanks to you!

Need a pair of work boots?

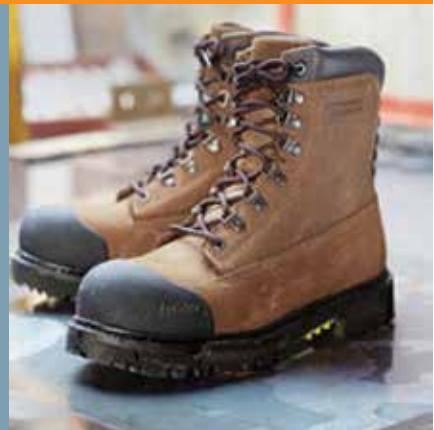
## Consider Mark's

If you’re looking for a pair of antislip footwear, you might want to consider checking out Mark’s. This large Canadian retailer will donate a portion of proceeds from the sales of the antislip Tarantula line of work boots. Look for our logo on the boot tag.

A portion of your boot purchase will be donated to Threads of Life.



# Mark's



# Tami Helgeson

Every summer, the gold mine where Tami Helgeson works hires students and new graduates. Every summer Tami tells them the story of her son Eric, who died in 1999 at his construction job after a crane tipped over, collapsing the building where Eric was working.

As a member of the Threads of Life speakers bureau, Tami says you can never really know who is affected when you speak, but one of her listeners stays with her. He was a young man, maybe only 18 years old, and had gone to school with Tami's younger son, Brock. After she shared Eric's story, the young man came to her, and made her a promise that he would work safely, because he had never realized how deeply Eric's death affected his family.

The effort it took for him to speak up proved his sincerity. He was deeply moved, Tami recalls, and she was moved by his commitment.

When she joined the speakers bureau in 2010, Tami admits it was shocking even to her "because I always hated doing speeches". She had learned about Threads of Life when the organization was first launched in 2002, and attended the first family forum. The experience was overwhelming.

"As I travelled home, I remember thinking that it was really hard to do, but also feeling that was the first time people really understood what I was feeling. I knew it would be part of how I was going to get better."

Tami attended the first-ever fundraising walk in Toronto, and Steps for Life Winnipeg has been her family's home walk since 2009. Despite the fact that it's a five-hour drive from their home, Tami and her family believe it's important to return to the city where Eric was living and working. They're joined annually by relatives from other communities, and by some of Eric's friends, now with families of their own. The goal every year for 'Team Helgy' is to raise \$5,000, and she's proud that they've always met or exceeded that target.

As one of Threads of Life's long-time family members, Tami has contributed to every program. In addition to the speakers bureau and Steps for Life, she is a trained Volunteer Family Guide, has written for



the blog, facilitates family forum sessions, and has even acted as the master of ceremonies for two family forums.

"Apparently I like to talk!" she jokes. But having come to know so many people across the country through her involvement with Threads of Life, she said in her role as MC and facilitator, "I want to make people feel as comfortable as I can."

Threads of Life "saved me," she adds. "I was very lost until I found them."

For all her wealth of volunteer skills and experiences, it's sharing Eric's story with others that Tami keeps coming back to.

"I think it helps me because it's something I can still do for Eric," Tami says. "I help my other kids all I can, but there's nothing I can really do for Eric, except tell his story" and try to prevent other tragedies.

"Like so many other family members, I want to do something to make such a horrible thing into something positive."

**How can an employer support the family after a tragedy?**

A **NEW** Threads of Life report offers a best practice for companies in the aftermath of a fatality or serious injury to one of their employees. The report is based on a survey of families who've lived through a workplace tragedy.

Download the report for free at the Threads of Life web site [www.threadsoflife.ca](http://www.threadsoflife.ca) (search for "crisis response") or email [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca).



### Family Forum sponsors help make healing happen

For many people attending a Threads of Life family forum, it may be the first time they've met anyone who's been through a similar experience of workplace tragedy. Many say it's the first time they've felt free to cry; some say it's the first time they've smiled or laughed in months. For all, the forum becomes a vital part of their healing.

It's thanks to a number of committed sponsor and partner organizations that four of these life-changing forums can take place in Canada each year. These companies and agencies feel a strong connection to Threads of Life families, and provide funding that covers the many costs of running a weekend-long event: renting the venue, travel, accommodations and meals for families and facilitators, materials for sessions, etc.

"We often work closely with workers and their families who experience workplace tragedy, and we see the pain they experience," says Stuart MacLean, Chief Executive Officer for WCB Nova Scotia. "Our support for the Atlantic Family Forum reflects our values of care and compassion. We're devoted to preventing workplace tragedies, but if they do occur, we do what we can to support those whose lives are impacted. Supporting the Family Forum is one of the ways we accomplish that."

Each year, sponsors and supporters of the forums have the opportunity to attend the opening Reflections ceremony and see first-hand the impact of their support. During the ceremony, each participant lights a candle in honour of a loved one or in recognition of his or her own injury or illness. The quiet but emotional evening is a powerful reminder of lives changed forever, and of the healing already taking place.

"We are honoured to assist with the Reflections ceremony at the Prairie Family Forum," says Ken Stephens, Assistant Director of Operations for the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board. "We firmly believe that even one injury, illness or death is one too many. Watching the families light their candles to remember their loved one is a reminder of the importance of Mission: Zero."

Three of the four annual family forums for 2017 occur in September and October. The Atlantic forum was held in late May. To learn more about the forums, and to see the full list of organizations which provide funding and support, please visit [www.threadsoflife.ca/programs](http://www.threadsoflife.ca/programs).

### Comments from family forum attendees:

"I arrived with a very heavy heart...over the course of that weekend I realized something that changed my outlook on many things. I realized I wasn't alone."

"Emotional and spiritual; powerful and necessary"

"It was an emotional, amazing, life-changing weekend"

"...we are all connected through the pain of our own experience, and knowing that we were listened to and made to feel valued."

# Taking steps to PAY IT FORWARD>>>

**“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It's not.”**

- Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

We've all been given a helping hand by someone, at some time in our lives – a parent, a teacher, a neighbor, a stranger. We can't always pay the favour back, but we can always pay it forward!

Paying it forward is the motivating force behind Steps for Life 2018 – Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy. It's a chance to help other families going through the pain of work-related fatalities, serious injuries and occupational disease; a chance to protect future generations of workers; a chance to promote safety in workplaces that may never have heard the message.

Steps for Life is the premier fundraising event supporting the programs and services Threads of Life offers, including peer support for people directly affected by workplace tragedy, and outreach to change workplace health and safety cultures. Steps for Life walks will happen in more than 30 communities across Canada, most on May 5-6 weekend.

You can get involved by walking, fundraising, volunteering or sponsoring. How will you pay it forward in 2018?



## Honouring 10+ years on the path



It all started in 2005, when a small group of people from across Canada gathered in Toronto to walk in honour of their loved ones and to raise money for this new organization called Threads of Life. After a couple of years of walking together, the first official "Steps for Life - Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy" branded walk happened in 2008 in Toronto, Hamilton, Sudbury and Thunder Bay. And Steps for Life just kept growing from there. This past spring, more than 5,600 people walked in communities across the country. In 2018, a number of communities will celebrate ten years and more of walking for families of workplace tragedy.

"Being involved with Steps for Life over the years has been very rewarding," says Geraldine Wheeler, a long-time organizer for Steps for Life in Corner Brook NL. "I've enjoyed the friendships I've made, what I've learned from those friends, and I've enjoyed giving back to Threads of Life. Threads of Life helped me when I felt beyond help and when I initially got involved in Steps for Life, I had no idea what I was doing. I went in blindfolded and felt my way along. It's had its challenges and frustrations but

each year, when all is said and done, it feels good to look back and say, I was part of this. I helped raise this money to help other families and I helped and continue to help raise workplace safety awareness."

Sharon Freeman has also been a Steps for Life volunteer since Day One, and now organizes the walk in Toronto. "Being involved with Steps for Life over 10 years has giving me a sense of reality," she says. "We move, we heal, we communicate safety and it gives me the opportunity to honour Amanda's life each year. From a few people coming to Toronto to walk, honour and raise awareness to thousands of participants shows the impact of Steps for Life across the country and how much it has grown and is needed."

**Thank you to all the volunteers who've given your time and inspiration to Steps for Life over the years!**

