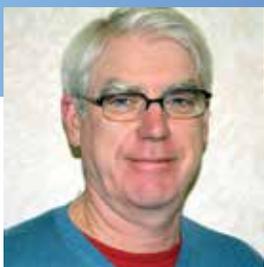




## Tears and smiles for the holidays

When everything has changed because of a workplace tragedy, it can be hard to face the holidays and other important days. Grieving families wonder how they will cope when all around them others are celebrating. But who would know the answer to that question better than families who have been there? Our members shared their experiences and advice through Your Voices (page 7). As one way to honour her son Greg, Geraldine Wheeler, from Cornerbrook NL launched a toy drive in Greg's memory. Here, Geraldine (right) is pictured with her niece Tina Buck and firefighter Alex Chaulk.

Wheeler toy drive.



### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Bill Stunt*

As Threads of Life members, when we hear in the news about an incident at a workplace, we know all too well that the few paragraphs in the newspaper or on the radio tell only the tiniest sliver of what that worker and his or her family have gone through. In this issue of Threads, we have two family stories which were covered extensively in

the news at the time – one, an explosion in a Nova Scotia coal mine, and the other, a highway collision. Read the real stories beyond the headlines.

We have terrific, loyal partners, and often their stories go untold as well. Don't miss learning about a number of fundraisers held this fall. This issue also features a profile of one of our longest partnerships, with the Ontario Ministry of Labour. The MOL are wonderful supporters, and have been since Threads of Life's earliest days.

Our family members have so much experience to offer each other! We have started a new feature called Your Voices which provides another way to share our journeys and hold one another up. On page 7, read ideas and suggestions on how to manage the difficult holiday season and make it meaningful. And get ready to participate in the next Your Voices question!

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February 24  
1979

# Explosion at Devco #26 Colliery

by *George Stubbert*



George Stubbert and his family, four years before the explosion.

## I worked for the

Cape Breton Development Corporation, which operated the coal mines for the federal government. The mine I worked in was called Number 26. It was a Friday night and I was on the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift, which was my shift for the week. My job was production supervisor on a 600-foot coal-producing wall face with another supervisor. We each had an entry way and half a wall face.

My section was the bottom intake level, plus 300 feet of coal face. The intake level also had the coal transportation (belt) system.

This week I started on Sunday night, so Friday was my last shift for the week. I left home around 10 p.m. for work. Upon arriving at the mine I checked barometer and water gauge readings, reports for the two shifts before – all was okay. After changing to work clothes, I entered the mine and

placed the crew, then we were on our way into our section. Travelling to this section took about an hour and 20 minutes, roughly. We arrived, the conveyors started, and we got to work.

I awoke in a strange place, not knowing where I was or what had happened. I could hear voices, but did not know who was there. My eyes were covered or I was blind. Later I found out they were covered to protect them because it was not known then if the eyes were damaged. A doctor told me I was in the Victoria General Hospital in Halifax – strapped down and not being able to see was scary!

Not knowing why I was here, even though I could not see I felt fine. A councilor came in later to try and explain what had happened. An explosion and fire, she said, in which I received some burns. So, I thought, a few scars, so what?

When the nurses would come in I could hear them talking for my eyes were still

covered. The doctors would soon take off the bandages. On this day they were satisfied that I could still see and so was I. I then got a look at my left hand, or what was left of it. All the bones in the hand and wrist could be seen. I soon realized that morphine was great stuff. After a period of time, my wife was allowed in to see me (imagine what she thought). She was instructed to look only into my eyes, because if she looked anywhere else, I would pick up on this and realize how it must be.

The day my father came for a visit, the look on his face told me what no one else was telling me – bad, bad shape. He did not visit me again, and I understood why. What father would want to see his son like this?

I did not think of it then, too much confusion, but now, how devastated my wife must have been because no one knew at this time if I was going to make it.

I was 32 when the explosion happened. I had been at the mine for 14 years, and had worked myself up the ladder to production supervisor in charge of coal production with 30 men working for me. My wife Hope and I had three daughters ranging in age from 12 down to four: Catherine, Georgina and Holly. It was a hard time for all of us.

As time went by and it looked like I would survive, the work to repair my body and mind began. They would take off the parts that could not be repaired, start operating and skin grafting. Before this started, however, I noticed one day the tie down straps had been left off by mistake. In the washroom there had to be a mirror, I thought, so I pushed myself over to the end of the bed and made it to the washroom. After looking in the mirror, I could not believe what I saw (devastated is the only way to describe it). My hair was gone, face singed, ears almost gone, no eye lids, no eye brows, skin below right eye drooped down almost to mouth, no skin on bridge of nose and this was only the face.

After seeing this, the shock set in, and I fell to the floor, which the nurses heard and came running in to check on me and put me back in bed. Needless to say, straps were never off again.

I thought, what am I going to do? Depression set in right away. Why would I want to live? There were some dark days for about a week or two. I saw a lot of

doctors, psychologists, clergy, and family over the next weeks, trying to give me a reason to live.

Doctors came for a visit with a list of other problems:

1. Burns to left arm, left wrist and hand
2. Left leg needed skin grafts to front and back
3. Right leg needed grafts to front and back
4. Extensive skin grafts around face and reconstruction of hands and ears
5. Body was covered with first, second and third degree burns
6. Hair from back of head would be used for eye brows

After some of the grafts had taken on my legs, it was time to start getting on my feet.

It is hard to believe, but I had forgotten how to stand and walk. First, it was a walk around the ward with a walker, then the hallway, the bike and finally the stairway between floors. There was a social worker



George today with his grandson, a captain in the Canadian army

“ I met and began a conversation with a member of the forces who... was later diagnosed with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). As he told me of the symptoms that come with this, it kind of rang a bell for me. This was what I was dealing with: the nightmares, night terrors, mood swings and depression since the explosion.

called Nora and she saw that my wife and I were hurting and she took us under her wing.

After being laid up for months, I was going shack wacky. My doctor let me go home for two weeks, then I would go back and forth for the next several years.

Coming home was very traumatic for me, because of the way I looked now compared to the way I looked going to work in February. I had to wear compression bandages called tubes for the first year I was home. I was now having a lot of nightmares, night terrors, mood swings, did not want to be around people, and was drinking! My wife had to leave a number of times because I was losing control.

The manager and underground manager of the mine heard of my problems and came to see me. They said I should come back to work -- knowing I was still in bandages and would need to travel back and forth between Halifax and home many times more.

I decided to give it a try because I was planning my way from this world, which I had thought of many times. Going back to work may have saved me, even though a lot of people said I was crazy, and threw in a lot of negative comments. There were good days and bad.

I stayed back at work for another 16 years until they closed the coal mines.

My grandson is a captain in the Canadian army. While attending an information session in 2010 for family members who had relatives deployed to Afghanistan, I met and began a conversation with a member of the forces who had been deployed in many conflicts and had seen a lot. He was later diagnosed with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). As he told me of the symptoms that come with this, it kind of rang a bell for me. This was what I was dealing with: the nightmares, night terrors, mood swings and depression since the explosion.

I read all the information on PTSD that I could get, talked to my doctor and in turn she made an appointment with a psychologist. After seeing me for months she got me an appointment to see a psychiatrist who had no trouble to see I was suffering from PTSD and put me on medication. The nightmares, night terrors, mood swings and depression still haunt me, and will remain with me until the end.

There is no one ready for a life-altering injury. It takes a special person to accept what has happened and move on. You are different now, and looked upon that way. Don't let anyone kid you – it's TOUGH, but it can be done.



George and his wife Hope

# David Virgoe's story

## Road safety is everyone's responsibility

*This story was originally published in IHSA.ca Magazine, Volume 14 Issue 1. Reprinted with permission of the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association.*



David Virgoe was proud of his profession

On June 18, 2007, at 11:20 a.m., David Virgoe was killed when a street racer hit his transport truck and caused it to veer off Highway 400 near Highway 89. David's truck rolled over into a ditch, and he didn't survive the impact. David was a veteran truck driver who always followed health and safety rules. Unfortunately, not all drivers do. David's story highlights the fact that road safety is everyone's responsibility.

"Saturday mornings were great at our house," Debbie Virgoe said as she reminisced about family life with her husband, David. He was a commercial driver who worked for an Ontario trucking company. He hauled silica sand between Midland and Guelph to a glass plant. He was on the road every week from Sunday evening to Friday afternoon. Saturday was his day off. It was the one day a week that David and Debbie spent together with their three children and eventually their five grandchildren. "On Saturday mornings we would all sit out

on the deck and talk about the week," said Debbie. "This ritual was one of the first things that changed."

Debbie first heard about the collision when she was at her job in Barrie. She worked in the receiving department of a Canadian Tire store. "We always had a radio playing," she said. "At about 11:30, we started hearing traffic reports that Highway 400 was closed because of a collision." Debbie remembers thinking to herself about how this incident would affect David's day on the road. She knew it

would add hours to his trip.

"I thought this was going to be a long day for him, so I thought I'd call him when I got home," she said.

Later that day, Debbie was at home with her son-in-law. He had heard about the incident on the highway as well. "I know," said Debbie. "I'm going to give David a call after dinner." She was thinking about how frustrating this must be for him. A week earlier, a similar traffic backup had meant that he had to work on Saturday. It never crossed her mind that David's truck might have been the one involved in the collision.

While Debbie and her son-in-law were talking in the kitchen, a police officer knocked on her door and asked if he could come in. "He asked me if my husband's name was David. I said yes. Then he told me that there had been an accident on the 400 earlier that day. I told him I'd heard about it. Then he said that he was sorry, but David had passed away. Everything stopped at that moment."

Later that evening, Debbie asked her daughter to turn on the news. "As soon as I saw the truck on the television I knew it really was David. I recognized his truck," she said.

David died the day after Father's Day. The whole family had gathered together, and David had been able to meet his newest grandson, Joshua. Four days after the fatal collision, David and Debbie were supposed to sign closing papers for the new house they'd bought in Angus. They were going to move from Innisfil, where they had lived for 21 years. Thankfully, with the help of some generous and supportive

“As soon as I saw the truck on the television I knew it really was David. I recognized his truck,” she said.

friends, Debbie eventually moved into the house. Unfortunately, David was never able to enjoy it.

Debbie couldn't believe that this had happened. She couldn't believe that after 32 years of driving without a preventable collision, David was gone. He started driving dump trucks when he was 16 years old for a family-run sewer and watermain

Since David's death, Debbie has been involved with Threads of Life, a national organization that provides support for those who have lost loved ones to a workplace tragedy. She is helping to educate people about road safety and what's at stake.

return home at the end of the day. For more information about Threads of Life, visit [threadsoflife.ca](http://threadsoflife.ca).

“ David's employer believes David did that [turned the steering wheel and flipped the truck] to prevent his truck from pushing through the guardrail into oncoming traffic, an action that saved many lives.

“ Tell us your story...

*We know your journey has been one of challenge and grief. At Threads of Life, we believe that telling your story helps you heal and can help prevent further tragedies. If you are interested in sharing your story and experiences, we have a number of different ways you can do it. Please email [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca) for more information.*

business. He eventually became a commercial transport driver. “Driving was his profession and he was very proud of it,” said Debbie. “He was very particular about how he kept his truck.”

It's everyone's responsibility to stay alert, follow the rules, and take driving seriously because everyone deserves to

Debbie didn't know the circumstances that led to the crash until later. Many of the details were revealed in court during the trial that followed. Debbie was told that three cars had been travelling north on the highway—suspected street racers. David was driving in the centre lane when one of the cars cut in front of him. The second one tried to do the same thing, but the driver lost control and hit the front axle of David's truck. The truck skidded into a jeep that was travelling on the inside lane and pinned the jeep to the guardrail.



David often spent time with his grandchildren at his home in Innisfil.

At that point, the weight of the truck was starting to push through the guardrail into the oncoming southbound traffic.

Witnesses told Debbie that David turned his steering wheel as far as he could, causing the trailer to swing around and flip over, rolling the truck into the ditch. David's employer believes David did that to prevent his truck from pushing through the guardrail into oncoming traffic, an action that saved many lives.



Getting behind the wheel was always a treat for David's grandchildren. Dave & Tristan in truck.

“When I first heard all of this, I wondered why he chose them instead of me,” said Debbie. “I wondered why he would choose to give up his life with us for these people, and then I realized that he did it simply because that's who he was. He did everything he could for everyone else.”

There were three separate trials—one for each of the drivers who were racing. Debbie attended each one. According to her, only one driver pleaded guilty; however, all three were convicted, were sentenced to two years plus a day, and lost their licences for several years. It gives Debbie some comfort that they were found guilty, but the punishment doesn't seem adequate.

## Grief and the holidays: a survival guide



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At some point in life, everyone will experience grief. During the holiday season, when everyone expects you to be happy or at least act happy and join in the festivities of the season, the added pressure and stress can make grieving even more difficult.

Whether you're grieving the loss of a loved one or are the friend, coworker, neighbor or family member of someone who's grieving, here are a few tips to get you through.

### For the boss/coworker/neighbor of someone who's grieving:

1. A little acknowledgement goes a long way – When confronted by a situation where a good friend, coworker or other such associate is grieving during the holiday season, a little acknowledgement can go a long way in an already alienating environment. Express your sympathy honestly and openly. And while someone who is grieving may choose not to attend, it's still important to extend the invitation to regular holiday activities like lunches and office parties.
2. Have a little faith in me – Trust in the decision of someone who's grieving. Despite their world being turned potentially upside down, it's critical that you trust their judgment and not push them to join in on the fun at an office party because YOU think "it will be good for him/her." Listen to them when they say, "Thanks, but I'm just not ready yet."
3. Use the deceased's name – Often there's a fear about saying the name of the person who's died; as if somehow saying the name will cause more pain. However, phrases like, "So sorry for your loss," and even using only pronouns like, "She was so wonderful," and "He will be truly missed," tend to negate the person's existence in the first place.

### For the person grieving:

1. You don't have to – If certain family traditions are making you uncomfortable this year, don't do them. For instance don't carve the turkey if you don't want to, or don't sing along if you don't want to. Be careful not to throw out all your traditions, but don't be afraid to drop some either. You can always pick them up again later.
2. Drop before you shop – Feeling overwhelmed by a long gift list – 12 days of Christmas, 8 days of Hanukkah, or everyone seems to have been born in the same month!! Simplify. This is a perfect time to give yourself the gift of simplicity and the joy that comes with it.
3. Checking it twice – Whether the holiday involves, cooking, shopping, cleaning or organizing, you have plenty of details to keep up with. Let a list do the work for you. If you are grieving, your memory may not be up to par, or you may be having trouble concentrating. That's "normal." Rely on your notes and lists, and keep them handy.

4. Do you remember? – Companionship, laughter, tenderness... what do you remember? The person you are grieving gave you all kinds of gifts – tangible and intangible during your time together. Write them down and keep them someplace special.
5. Where's the party? – Just because everyone always comes to your house for the holidays or special occasions doesn't mean they have to come this year. Feel free to try something else to give yourself the space you need to grieve. Too tired to whip up your famous recipe? That's okay. Let someone else prepare it to your specifications.
6. Surprise! – Be prepared for the holidays as well as birthdays and anniversaries and other special occasions to be an emotional time for you. Don't be surprised by tears and sadness, and don't fight them off. Instead carry tissues. Tell the people you are with that you probably will cry, and invite them to cry with you.
7. Just say no – If you are feeling pressured to participate in more than you're comfortable with try saying "no". "No thank you." You don't owe anyone an explanation. Be kind, but firm. People will want you to feel welcomed and included, but they will also understand that you need some time.
8. Share the love – Holidays and special occasions where gift giving is the custom may be hard in that no gift is being purchased for the deceased. Consider buying a gift for someone who would otherwise not have a gift or make a contribution to a charitable organization in that person's name.
9. Tell me again – Instead of trying to push back memories of the person you are grieving this holiday, ask friends and family members to share recollections of the person with you in photographs, stories, and mementos. Some families box, wrap and give each other memories. Trinkets that remind us of the family member or friend are especially enjoyed by, and helpful for, children.
10. Pay attention – Most importantly, pay attention to yourself. Listen when that little voice tells you you're tired, and need to take a break from holiday preparation. Give yourself the option of not attending another party or event. And be sure to let your friends and family members know what you're up for and what they can do to help.



We asked our members “How do you honour your loved one or get yourself through Christmas, Hanukkah or other special days?” Here are a few responses. Check our Facebook page for the full texts.

“ During the holidays is one of the occasions I miss my dad the most. Although he was not Catholic (I am) he always made a point to come to Christmas Eve mass with me. I have continued that tradition since his passing. I light a candle for him and wish him a Merry Christmas. Church seems to be the place I feel the closest and most connected to him, ironic because he’s not Catholic and only went to church because it meant so much to me.   
-Lisa Kadosa

“ After losing Jonathan...It took me two years before I decided to put up a Christmas tree. The first year I put on blue and silver decorations; blue was Jonathan’s favorite color. I started adding different coloured ornaments as the years went on. Of course my main ornament is a laminated picture of Jonathan on one side when he was a child on Santa’s knee and the other side is a pic of him as an adult. Jonathan loved holidays because he loved to eat a big feast. So we celebrate holidays not with gifts but with a big meal geared towards his favourites. I know he is with us when we sit to eat. I always tell others going through the same journey to do what they feel is right at the time. I did. Not everyone agreed but almost 10 years later I am who I am because of my son.   
-Arlene Vogler

“ The way I got through the first Christmas was to hold the Christmas celebration a couple days after the 25th and a friend of mine played Santa Claus to try and bring some sense of fun into that Christmas. I decorated a small artificial tree and placed it in my kitchen. I placed all the Christmas ornaments that I had given Brent every Christmas Eve, on this tree. I still do this every year. It is his tree and I feel a sense of closeness as there is one ornament that has his picture in it and the tree is close to my table.   
-Joanne Wade

“ Ever since Greg has been gone, the month of December has been quite difficult. Christmas was always one of Greg’s favorite times, just as it is one of mine but now preparing for Christmas, makes me sad. So, when it comes time to start decorating and making special preparations, I include a couple of little friends to help me. A child melts the heart and certainly helps me when nothing or no one else can. Also, eight years ago, I started Greg’s Spirit Lives On Toy Drive. Right after Halloween, I reach out to family and friends to donate a toy to my drive, and then take them to the Corner Brook Fire Dept. for distribution to children of less fortunate families. Doing this toy drive, knowing that I am making some little childrens’ Christmas a happy one, truly fills my heart with peace.   
-Geraldine Wheeler

“ To honour John: buy a gift I know John would have liked and give it to a charity; make his favourite dessert - blueberry pie!; a glass star with his name on it for our tree -made each year by the Brain Injury Association of Kitchener Waterloo - now we have quite a collection; speak at a Christmas celebration put on by our local funeral home.

To help ourselves and others: get shopping and food preparation done early - delegate to other family members who are willing to help; take time for ourselves - we don’t have to go to all the parties, etc. if we don’t feel up to it; participate in a community choir for a Christmas Eve service; try to get plenty of rest; do whatever brings us comfort whether it might seem a little unorthodox to others or not. Try to remember that the days leading up to holidays, anniversaries, etc. always seem to be more difficult than the actual days themselves.

-Marj and Brian Deyell

“ Our first holiday without Jim, our family made sure we spent time or talked together, talking about him, remembering his traditions and definitely raising a glass to the heavens in honour of what he gave us and shared with us. It didn’t make it less difficult to face without him, however, it gave us a chance to remember together and to keep him included in our family gathering.   
-Heather Harris Dahmer

“ Let’s face it. Holidays can be horrible when we are without the ones we love. But do they have to be? Holidays are the moments that we remember, the special times shared with family that we cherish. The first couple of Christmases without my brother were spent sad, lonely and tearful and so full of pain that I could barely breathe. The memories cut like a knife and brought nothing but pain and sorrow. Then. Time passed by and I noticed that my memories of him could sometimes make me smile instead of cry.

The memories now made me stronger. I could laugh again at the silly things he said or did. I could remember his voice and it now brought comfort instead of pain. Time will pass. You will hurt but I can promise you things will get better. Will you ever stop missing them? No. But I don’t think that’s what we all want anyway. We want to love and miss them. Just with smiles instead of tears.

-Paulette Raymond

*For our next issue, share your thoughts about “What I learned from my Volunteer Family Guide”. Write a few sentences. You can email them to [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca) or post at [facebook.com/threadsoflife](https://www.facebook.com/threadsoflife). We will compile some of your answers for the next newsletter.*

## Grief is a Bear

by *Jennifer Wohl*



Grief is a bear. A powerful, hungry bear. When you find yourself in bear country (i.e., when you are grieving), it helps to have some guidelines about how to move through the territory, not only to keep yourself safe, but also to enhance your well being. When the grief bear presents itself:

**Respect it:** Grief is a natural, formidable force more powerful than you are. If you try to run from it, ignore it, or fight it, you will lose and it will take you down. We are designed to grieve in the face of loss. Fully grieving a loss creates space for something new and can be life enhancing. Not fully grieving a loss can create a feeling of stagnation, depression, or emptiness. To grieve is to bear the pain of loss.

**Feed it:** Grief wants something from you. Find out what it is. If you feed it solitude when it wants company, it will still be hungry. If you feed it company when it wants solitude, same thing. The only way to know what it wants is to ask it. It may want your tears, it may want you to sleep, it may want people to know about it (“mourning,” by the way, is the outward expression of your inner grief). The answer may be different from day to day, and it may be different from what you expect. When you feed the grief bear what it wants, it does not have to devour you.

**Give it space:** Long walks, time for remembering and reflecting, unscheduled time, a hot bath. Finding space and time for grieving in a busy world is challenging. Our culture does not generally support giving grief space, so you may have to make space. Find people who can support you in this. If you don’t currently have such people in your life, a bereavement group may help.

**Get to know it:** Your grieving has unique habits, desires, dislikes, and eccentricities. What are they? Does your grief like to show up at night? At work? On certain dates? Or is your grief more spontaneous and unpredictable? Get to know it. Approach it with curiosity and interest.

Much as you might like, this bear isn’t going away. You may never “get over” your loss. But you can learn to live a healthy, productive life that includes both you and your bear. Respect it, feed it, give it space, and get to know it. You may eventually find it to be a rewarding relationship.

*Jennifer Wohl is a licensed councilor and therapist practicing in the U.S. Grief is a Bear originally appeared on Jennifer’s blog at her web site [www.jenniferwohl.com](http://www.jenniferwohl.com).*

## To Our Fallen Angels



Renee wrote this poem in memory of her father-in-law, Bob King. Renee and husband Shaun King made a donation to Threads of Life in lieu of favours for guests at their wedding this fall. Copies of Renee’s poem were placed on the tables.

We invited family and friends to celebrate our special day,  
But for some unknown reason, Heaven is where you stay.

I will keep memories of you close to my heart,  
Knowing not long ago, you played a large part.

You were a role model, providing care when I needed,  
And instilled values in me that will always be heeded.

You taught me lessons to learn right from wrong,  
Loving me unconditionally, and making me strong.  
Without you in my life, who knows where I would be,

I hope you are proud, and are watching over me.

Our lives are beginning as husband and wife,  
May you continue to guide us, in good times and strife.

Words cannot express the depth of my love,  
One day we will meet you in your world up above.

by *Renee Haugh*

## Karen Pitts

by Kevin Bonnis, *Regional Development Coordinator, Atlantic Canada*

Some volunteers' efforts are clearly seen and appreciated by all. Some volunteers' efforts are more behind the scenes. Karen Pitts is one of those volunteers that fall into both categories. I'm not sure that the word 'volunteer' is fair; Karen is much more of a fixture in the Threads of Life family.

Karen's life was forever changed the day her brother entered an oxygen-deprived confined space at work. Jaime Lapierre lost consciousness and died at the very young age of 21.

Karen first met Shirley Hickman way back when the LifeQuilt was being displayed for the first time, before Threads of Life was established. A few years later Karen received an invitation to the Central Canada Family Forum through the Workers Compensation Board of Nova Scotia. Karen was happy to attend, accompanied by her mother. This cemented Karen as a member of the Threads of Life family.

In 2008 Karen took the plunge and became a Threads of Life volunteer. That year she took the Speaker's Bureau training and became a strong voice in the promotion of safe work practices in Nova Scotia. Karen is still an active speaker today.

The next year Karen jumped in with both feet and took Volunteer Family Guide training. Exposing and sharing your own pain and grief while trying to help someone else along their journey of healing is a difficult thing to do. This is what Karen chose to do back in 2009 and continues to do today.

In 2014 Karen volunteered to help organize the Halifax Steps for Life walk. It was a rebuilding year for the Halifax walk committee, but this didn't faze Karen at all; in true fashion she jumped



in feet first helping to make the Halifax walk a success. Karen is looking forward to the 2015 Halifax Steps for Life Walk and doing her part in making it an even bigger success.

Karen's behind the scenes work on the Atlantic Canada Family Forum is a bit of an untold story. All the beforehand prep work that needs to be done in Halifax before the Threads of Life staff rode into town is done by Karen. After all is said and done, Karen simply asks if we are sure there is not more she can do.

Why does Karen volunteer for Threads of Life? I think it's best said by Karen herself. "I volunteer with Threads of Life because it is near to my heart. My brother Jamie died on the job on February 9, 2000 after entering a confined space. It was a moment in my life that I never saw coming. It was preventable. So in honour of his memory and all the other families that are affected by workplace injuries, I do what I can to educate and promote safety in the workplace."

Karen's favorite memory in regards to her volunteer work is one that is shared by many Threads of Life volunteers. Karen says, "My favourite part about volunteering with Threads is that I get to talk to so many people with diverse backgrounds but who share the loss of a loved one, or who are living with the outcome of an illness or injury. I am inspired by those individuals I meet."

Karen's volunteer work is not limited to Threads of Life. She also volunteers with Feed Nova Scotia, Salvation Army Center of Hope Halifax, Metro Turning Point shelter, and the Alex's Safe Harbour bereavement support program. It is volunteers like Karen that make Threads of Life possible.

**Each year, Threads of Life recognizes a few of the individuals and organizations who help to make our work possible. For 2014, volunteer awards were presented to:**

A board member of Threads of Life	Fred Fretz
A person who has donated time and expertise to Threads of Life for a minimum of two years	Roy Ellis Paul Huston
A Partner of Threads of Life	Mark's
A Friend of Threads of Life	Kerri Stewart and the Durham District School Board
Program Advancement - Family Support	Lisa Shirley
Program Advancement - Partnership	CSST
Program Advancement - Community Action	Tom Buchanan

**2014  
Volunteer  
Awards**

Lisa Shirley receives her award at the Western Canada Family Forum in October.



## Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy

May 2/3, 2015

Check: [www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca) for the walk date in your community!

### Get ready to walk... across the country

Once again this spring, Steps for Life walkers will be hitting the trails from coast to coast to raise funds and promote workplace health and safety. For 2015, walks are scheduled in 36 communities, stretching from Victoria in the west to St. John's in the east. Two new communities will join Steps for Life: Regina Saskatchewan, and Peace Region/Grande Prairie Alberta.

Walkers can start registering and raising money online February 1, through the web site at [StepsforLife.ca](http://StepsforLife.ca).

### Rise to the Corporate Challenge!

A new challenge might be just the thing to spark a company's health and safety program, get workers engaged – and make a difference in the lives of families. The Corporate Challenge is designed for companies committed to a strong safety culture, and willing to demonstrate that commitment in public by getting involved in Steps for Life.

Steps for Life – Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy is the primary fundraiser for Threads of Life, and an important way to boost awareness of health and safety in the community. The Corporate Challenge offers companies a chance to join in friendly competition both within the company, and with other challengers across the country.

#### Who is a Corporate Challenger?

Each Corporate Challenge team includes three to ten members who commit to raise a minimum of \$100 each. Teams across Canada compete to see who can raise the most funds for Threads of Life. Last year's Corporate Challenge winning team raised more than \$11,800!

A prize package will be awarded to the team that raises the most in personal donations (excluding sponsorship). There will also be prizes for the top team of each region; plus an honourable mention to be determined by Threads of Life staff, and a random draw for team captains. Last year's winning teams included Alta-Fab 5 from Edmonton, Willbros Angels from Fort McMurray, PCL Intracon from Edmonton, and Enbridge from Ontario.

#### How do you join the Corporate Challenge?

- Assemble your team of 3 to 10 people. If you have more than 10, form a second team and compete against each other!
- Register your team online ([www.stepsforlife.ca/locations](http://www.stepsforlife.ca/locations)), choose your community and proceed to register as a Corporate Challenger via secure site) or by fax, mail or email. Please register no later than Wednesday, April 29, 2015.
- Commit to raising at least \$100 per team member in addition to the registration fee – use our online fundraising pages to gain donations from family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Watch the thermometer on your personal page rise as the pledges come in! Many teams raise funds with bake sales, dress-down days, barbecues and other corporate events. Get the whole company involved!
- Rally as a team to participate in the walk on the first weekend of May, 2015. Check [www.stepsforlife.ca/locations](http://www.stepsforlife.ca/locations) for your date and location.

Visit: [www.stepsforlife.ca/register-to-walk/corporate-challenger/](http://www.stepsforlife.ca/register-to-walk/corporate-challenger/) to get started or contact Threads of Life at 1-888-567-9490 or [steps@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:steps@threadsoflife.ca)



## Ontario Ministry of Labour

From the very beginning, Ontario's Ministry of Labour has been a key partner, walking side by side with Threads of Life. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, which is funded through the Ministry of Labour, was one of three organizations providing seed money to get Threads of Life off the ground in 2003. The Ministry has been a major funder for the work of Threads of Life ever since.

The Ministry of Labour is responsible for occupational health and safety, employment rights and responsibilities, and labour relations. Through its Prevention Division, established in 2012, it has established an integrated occupational health and safety strategy for the province. The Ministry funds the health and safety associations, and also provides grants to organizations like Threads of Life which share its mission.

But the relationship between the two organizations goes much deeper than funding alone. Over the years, family members of

Threads of Life have been able to provide input into MOL programs and messaging. Threads of Life speakers have had the opportunity to talk to Ministry staff, and are regularly invited to share their stories with new inspectors during their orientation.

In turn, the Ministry takes a close interest in the programs Threads of Life offers – both in family support and in prevention. MOL staff promote Threads of Life events, and many are active participants and organizers for the annual Steps for Life walks throughout Ontario. Ministry inspectors are a key part of the outreach to new families, spreading the word about Threads of Life programs as they meet with workers and employers following a workplace tragedy.

“The Ministry of Labour has always been a strong supporter of Threads of Life’s mission to help families in their journey of healing after a workplace tragedy,” said Minister Kevin Flynn. “Whether we’re walking alongside each other during the annual Steps of Life or providing timely assistance to survivors, our partnership remains vital to ensuring families are connected to the services they need at difficult times. As Minister of Labour, I believe that all workplace fatalities are preventable, and that one workplace injury is one too many. Our common vision remains the same: that all workers are able to go home safe and sound to their loved ones at the end of the day.”



### Ontario Petroleum Contractors Association

OPCA members participated in their first annual golf tournament in October, raising more than \$7000 for Threads of Life!

OPCA executive director Michelle Rae (left) presents a cheque to Threads of Life volunteer Johanna Leroux. Thank you to OPCA members!



### Enform

Enform, the safety association for Canada's upstream oil and gas industry, chose Threads of Life to benefit from its annual golf tournament in Calgary, contributing \$10,000 to support families affected by workplace tragedy.

From left to right are: Wally Dumont, Enform President Cameron MacGillivray, Carol Howes and Keith Greenaway. Thank you, Enform members!



### TriWest Capital Partners

For the second year, TriWest Capital Partners and the sponsors of its annual forum have provided a huge boost to Threads of Life. The golf tournament and leadership forum held in Banff Alberta were blessed with beautiful early fall weather. The group donated more than \$100,000 from their annual forum in 2013.

Left to right are Scott McKay, Director of Fundraising and Partnerships, Board and Speakers Bureau Member Lynda Kolley and Executive Director Shirley Hickman.

*Thank you to TriWest and all your partner companies!*

## Welcome aboard!

Threads of Life is pleased to welcome two new staff members. Sharon Freeman has taken the lead on coordinating the Toronto Steps for Life walk. The Toronto walk was the first location for Steps for Life, and is considered the flagship walk. Sharon is a founding member of Threads of Life and has been active as a Volunteer Family Guide, a member of the Speakers Bureau and a committee member and walker in Steps for Life. She brings extensive experience as an administrator, as well as much energy and many ideas to this part-time position.

Wendy Benedetti will be working part-time to plan a national tour for the LifeQuilt ([www.lifequilt.ca](http://www.lifequilt.ca)). Wendy comes to Threads of Life with a background in occupational health and safety, as well as having worked to plan Steps for Life events as a volunteer. Wendy will be coordinating a national committee to oversee the tour, scheduled to begin in 2016. She will also be seeking partners and sponsors for the tour.

*Welcome to Threads of Life, Sharon and Wendy!*

## The picture of support

Employees at Alta-Fab will have a year-long reminder of health and safety, and of their support for Threads of Life in 2015. The Alberta company, a huge supporter of the Steps for Life walk, has come up with a new way to raise funds for Threads of Life and also to keep the safety message fresh for its employees. Alta-Fab hosted a safety poster contest among the children of its staff. The posters are being transformed into a 2015 calendar which employees can purchase. Once printing costs are covered, all proceeds will go to Threads of Life.

*Thanks Alta-Fab! What a great idea!*

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!

### January 29-February 1

Speakers Bureau training –  
For more information contact  
Susan Haldane, Program Manager  
– Communication and Marketing at  
[shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca) or phone  
1-888-567-9490

### February 19 - 24

Volunteer Family Guide training,  
For more information email Kate  
Kennington, Program Manager –  
Family Support, at [kkennington@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:kkennington@threadsoflife.ca) or  
phone 1-888-567-9490



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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.

### 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  
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London, ON N6E 2V0

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