

# threads

O F L I F E



VOL.13, NO.1 SPRING 2015

P R E V E N T I O N

S U P P O R T

P A R T N E R S H I P



## Volunteer guides offer “unwavering support”

Volunteer Family Guides have helped many Threads of Life family members find their way forward through grief and toward healing. In this issue’s Your Voices feature (page 7), a contributor wrote of her VFG: “I was able to get through this with her unwavering support.” VFGs are family members who train to become active and compassionate listeners supporting new family members. Over the winter, more than 20 VFGs gathered for our first-ever advanced training. A few of the faces are pictured at left — *see the whole group on page 8.*

Some of the participants at Advanced Volunteer Family Guide training



### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Bill Stunt*

I’m writing this message in the depths of winter, but looking ahead to spring – we know it’s coming, eventually. If only family members in the depths of grieving, could have the same hope of healing and light! In this issue’s stories, you will read about a mother’s great grief at the death of her son. In the face of this grief, though, the writer, Estella Hickey has become a member of the Threads of Life speakers bureau, to share her story and create safer workplaces. Heather Dahmer and her husband Jim have been long-time members of Threads of Life. In our second story, Heather writes of the glimmers of light and hope that eventually re-entered her life after Jim’s death.

Spring also means Steps for Life – and we can see hope growing there too! Walkers started to register the very day that online registration was announced. It’s our strongest start ever, and we look forward to the strides that will be made in awareness, as well as in fundraising support.

One of our board members, Lynda Kolly, reflects on the garden she created as a memorial for her son Burton. You are invited to share your own memorial gardens and special places, as part of our Your Voices feature. Spring is coming!

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# A life's journey cut short

Dream job ends in tragedy for "young spirit" Kyle Hickey

by Estella Hickey



Kyle with his mom Estella and Estella's best friend Michelle Macdonald

## January 27, 1986

was a happy day for me and my family. I gave birth to our second son Kyle. Our family was now complete; I had two little boys to love. Life wasn't going to be easy for Kyle. Right from the beginning he had to fight to survive. I remember waiting in my hospital room for Kyle. I could hear the nurses coming with the babies for their feedings, but at my door a team of doctors entered instead. At that moment I knew something was wrong. They informed me that Kyle had picked up a germ in his blood. I went to the neonatal to find him in an incubator, a needle in his head and tubes everywhere. Kyle was a fighter though, and he won that battle. It was so nice to bring Kyle home. His big brother Tony was so happy to have a little brother to take care of and was a real little helper.

Challenged again at two years of age, Kyle developed asthma. At age seven he was admitted to the ICU at the IWK

Children's Hospital. At home Kyle still remained a positive child even as he sat with a portable oxygen mask watching the neighbourhood children play outside his window. Shortly after this trip to the hospital Kyle was diagnosed with Henoch-Schonlein-Purpura (HSP). There is no real known cause for this disease but there is a link to the upper respiratory tract. HSP can be mild with just a rash or more severely it can affect the kidneys. Kyle ended up with kidney disease which he lived with right up until he died at the young age of 22. It is so sad that Kyle fought so many medical battles to have his life cut short by something that was preventable.

As a teenager and as a young adult Kyle was loved by all, young and old alike. Kyle loved to make people laugh and to be the centre of attention. I remember him leaving on his grade nine school trip. All the parents were seeing off their children when one of the ladies said someone was running around inside. All of a sudden the kid

stopped right in front of the window I was looking at, pointed at me and said I love you. It was my Kyle of course! Most kids at 14 wouldn't be seen with their parents. Not Kyle, he didn't mind hanging out with his parents, or his grandparents for that matter. Kyle and his grandfather had a special bond, more like friends than anything.

The month before Kyle died we got to spend a lot of time together because his father Paul and brother Tony, both in the navy, were out at sea. I have many memories of that month, one in particular of Kyle saying "I'll never leave you Mom, I'll never leave Timberlea." His girlfriend Amelia was from Timberlea as well, so I am sure they would have settled down in the local area. He was talking wedding plans just weeks before the terrible accident took his life.

I remember March 13, 2008 like it was yesterday. I guess it is forever etched in my mind. My husband and I were at the cottage with our son Tony, Tony's wife Chantel, and our grandson Tristan. Tony had just returned from the Persian Gulf on March 10. He arrived at the cottage two days later. We hadn't seen him since November so we were so happy to have him home. Life was good.

One phone call changed all that. I remember Paul answering the phone and he started to cry. I thought something happened to his dad. When he got off the phone he said there had been an explosion. I thought it had been on Paul's ship. That is when he said it was Kyle that had been injured in an explosion. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How could this be? Not my baby!

The drive back to the city is a little over an hour but on this day it seemed to take forever, even though we were probably going faster than we ever had before. I was holding two cell phones, one in each hand. Friends were calling as they heard about the accident in the news. I never thought things were as bad as they were until we arrived at the hospital. Kyle's friend Shane met us in the parking lot and told us everything was going to be okay. The doctors took us to a private room upon entering the hospital. They informed us they were doing all they could but things didn't look good. Nothing can prepare a parent

for seeing our son at that moment. I don't know how I managed to make it through that night. I still have nightmares. The doctors and nurses worked hard to save Kyle but he died the next morning. Kyle was tough; he was a fighter, battling medical issues all his life, but the injuries he suffered from the explosion proved to be too severe for him to overcome.

Kyle his glass was always half full. Kyle believed in always putting his best foot forward in everything he did. He played hard, he worked hard and he lived large. Tony always said, "Mom, Kyle packed more in 22 years than most people could in four times as much." Kyle lived life to the fullest and enjoyed every moment of his short stay.

I love my son Kyle more than words

happen, but nothing will ever be the same. I know they both miss Kyle and he is never far from our thoughts for he lives in our hearts forever.

Friends and family join us every year for the Steps for Life walk in memory of our beautiful boy. It is a journey I wish I didn't have to make but one that will open other people's eyes to the dangers that can occur in an unsafe workplace. As a result of the accident, the automotive company for which Kyle worked carried out mandatory checks and we hope continue to carry out checks to ensure that barrels in its facilities are properly grounded. All of us can now be armed with this knowledge to ensure that we ask questions not only of loved ones working in auto body shops like Kyle did, but also to ask employers and employees prior to any work commencing on your vehicle. We all need to use our individual knowledge of safe work environments to educate each other, to ask questions and to confront employers. Everyone should return home from a hard day of work and not fall victim to a preventable workplace accident.

“ Nothing can prepare a parent for seeing our son at that moment. I don't know how I managed to make it through that night. I still have nightmares.

Kyle worked in a Dartmouth auto body shop. The cause of the explosion is linked to an ungrounded barrel of solvent. It is believed that Kyle washed up his paint guns in the barrel of solvents and there may have been a spark that caused the explosion because the barrel was not grounded. Had it been grounded the explosion would never have happened. Kyle was obviously in close proximity to the explosion and suffered accordingly. It was one year after the explosion before charges against the automotive company were laid. Pleading guilty to just one of the five or six original charges, the automotive company faced a fine of just \$38,750 nearly three years after the accident. Threads of Life was to be given \$5000 as part of a creative sentencing awarded by the judge. In addition to this, the creative sentencing also assigned \$5000 to be used toward educational programs at the Nova Scotia Auto Dealers Association Conferences.

I was almost as happy as Kyle when he got his job at the auto body shop in Dartmouth. I was so proud of him to have just graduated from the Nova Scotia Community College and been able to land a full time job with such a well-known company. I knew now I could stop worrying as both my boys had found their dream jobs. I was especially happy that Kyle found a job with a good medical plan because the drugs to treat his kidney disease were expensive. Kyle loved his job. Whenever we got together it was all he ever talked about.

If I close my eyes I can still see him smiling because that's my boy, always smiling, a happy kid and a happy adult. Kyle was a young spirit who never lost the child inside of him. No matter what happened to

can describe. I am no longer the same person I was before Kyle's death. Paul has changed too. I have a difficult time imagining life without him. Nothing can prepare a parent for the death of their child. I do however have another son Tony and my husband Paul, both of whom I love with all my heart, so I must pick up the pieces and carry on. Life goes on, occasions still



Kyle holding his nephew Tristan

# My life since October 22, 2011

Letting the light back in after the death of a partner

by Heather Dahmer



As light returned to her life, Heather made a family visit to Scotland.

## On June 7, 2004

my husband, Jim Dahmer, was given six months to live, diagnosed with pleural mesothelioma, a cancer in the lining of the lungs caused by asbestos. We were devastated. After a long journey filled with tears, laughter, trauma and loss, Jim died October 22, 2011. He was such a fighter!

Jim enjoyed family, friends, sports and fun in any order. Drafted by the NHL, he played for the Hamilton Red Wings before family and his smaller height changed his career direction. He endured a brain aneurysm at 33, the loss of his wife at 35, never giving up. Jim became a plumber/steam-fitter after his hockey career and worked with asbestos for many years, long before safety equipment was required. We met at work, after Jim had been married twice and

myself once. We married in 1996 and became a family. We enjoyed golf, Jim still played recreational hockey and I was still raising my daughters, Jim often threatening to become “Uncle Buck” with his convertible and bathrobe if they got out of line! We were married eight years when illness began to slowly erode the life we had created and the energy and fun we had always known. Our lives became seemingly endless procedures, treatments, decisions, loss. One of the brightest lights in the darkness was being introduced to the Threads of Life family. We found support, energy, and love from these wonderful people who had endured such loss themselves. I don’t know how we managed – I guess because you have to.

I was in a black hole of sadness and loss after Jim passed away – some good

days, mostly bad ones and definitely nothing I could identify with or understand. At first, struggling to get up every day, then gradually laughter, fun and sunshine slowly crept back in. It is not easy to lose your best friend. He was such a wonderful man – husband, father, grandpa and friend, larger than life, more charisma than any one person should be allowed, and a sense of fun like nobody else.

I did not know how I was going to fill the void that had opened up since his death. I had not only lost my best friend but also my job. For almost eight years, looking after him was my job. Now I had to find out who I was and my new place in life. How do you do that?? Ask anyone who is suddenly on their own and they will tell you it is the toughest thing to become one instead of a couple.

Sleep and hide were all I wanted to do. Friends and family gathered me in the warmth and safety of their love and let me grow again. I tried to continue with the good things: time with them, golf, travel, looking after myself and just seeing what happened. I saw a counselor throughout Jim’s illness and it helped when I found myself on my own with no one to look after anymore. The scary things we had discussed were actually happening. Everyone struggled and suffered together. First baby steps then longer strides as I began to make my way.

I started with getting out the door – so difficult! It was hard to believe I went out the door a zillion times a day before. The Tuesday after the funeral, girlfriends insisted I golf, so I did. I don’t remember much of it; found it very hard to go into the golf club but I did it. A very small step. Many followed.

Then the anniversaries: one week, one month, two months. The holidays. Christmas was the most difficult time I had ever had – no Jim to argue about the true meaning of Christmas and how much I spent and putting the lights on the tree (What tree?? I wasn’t having a tree... I had a tree.)

The kids told me to go to Florida. I couldn’t see myself going where we had so much fun, but I found myself, after much self-talk, packing the car and heading south. Just the dog and I... and a companion who

suddenly showed up to help us through the mountains, with the dog looking all over the place and barking. Driving and hoping what you're feeling around you isn't real; that the visitor you feel in the seat beside you isn't really happening, but it did. I'm sure I had a safer trip because of it. I found I could drive down by myself and that friends and family were right there helping me find my way and raising one to Jim whenever we were all together.

We held a memorial at his favourite bar, the Bamboo in Madeira Beach, with his favourite entertainer. So many friends and family were there to help ease the pain and to share our loss together. We had sliders, martinis, shared stories and laughs. It doesn't get much better.

Back home to reality in the spring, I tried to keep moving forward. Not as many bad days now. In summer, finally, some light came to the tunnel; actual true light – a glimmer of something that wasn't grief. It was still black and dark in some places but not as heavy. A family invitation to Scotland came, so I went – the most amazing, terrific family holiday ever. Visits to Haliburton, girlfriends at Wasaga, golf and more travel. An incredible happy hour in the summer when the kids came back for the internment – “the planting” we called it – Jim's idea. So much laughter in the face of our grief. Jim would've enjoyed that.

His birthday was very difficult – speaking with all the kids to touch base. Reflection and thought; tears and laughter. It was also time to think of resuming my career. WSIB would assist with retraining.

The Threads of Life family has been so wonderful. I don't know what I would've done without them, venturing out in September for my first family forum alone. No scooter to manage, no oxygen to haul, no short visits for him to his workshops – I missed it all. His presence was keenly missed by everyone. It was an extremely emotional time for me and for all of us.

The anniversary of his death was very hard. We talked, laughed and remembered; cried and smiled, sang the Pips and held our thumbs up that we were ok. I kept a Carepage blog while Jim was sick and this was my last entry, October 23, 2012:

After the emotional turmoil that was yesterday, today all I wanted was to wake up and do some housework. Honest...believe it or not!

Well, it is not to be. Woke up this morning to no heat. Thermostat: 68F..house: 65F. I think this is Jim's way of sending

one more zinger! So, Mr. Heating and Ventilating Guy, I checked the reset, made sure it was plugged in and turned on, checked the thermostat and made sure it was calling for heat. No fan activity. I could only laugh, very hard. No fans, indeed....

“ Sleep and hide were all I wanted to do. Friends and family gathered me in the warmth and safety of their love and let me grow again.

Service guy coming this afternoon. Good thing housework keeps you warm and I have plenty of coffee. Thanks for doing it now instead of in January when I'm not here.

I know everybody panicked when you got near any tools but really...making sure I haven't forgotten how to manage when things don't blow hot and cold is a bit much...

Thanks for the laugh and I hope you don't cost me tons of money because that would really be stepping out of character...

My world continued slowly moving forward. Our family hosted our first Worker's Memorial Golf Tournament in August 2013 with the proceeds going to Threads of Life. I was asked out by Larry, an old friend of ours, and was very slowly, tentatively exploring the dating world again – a scary place you never think you'll be. I also wanted to finish my interrupted fundraising degree at Ryerson. Unfortunately, it had been too many years and I would have to start over. Caregiving was a second choice: I might be able to help another family. I took online courses and became qualified then matched with a family with a special needs son, for periodic relief. I enjoyed the challenge. I also did light office work for the family business. It was a healing time for me, giving back, although the age difference between a 10-year-old and myself soon seemed to be increasing daily. Then I took on seasonal work at a local family-owned trailer park, who have asked me back. In May 2014, we held a Steps for Life Walk in Lindsay.

Lest you think things were finally settling down, an old friend had also approached me with an interest in buying my house. I had been thinking of selling in a year's time, to downsize and go south each winter. It could be great ... except they wanted it now. The stuff of several lifetimes

lived in my basement. Opportunity was knocking. Purge, pick, pack and work three jobs became my life. Larry, friends and family helped again and on August 31, 2014, I moved out of the house that had shared laughter and sadness, our marriage,

raised my children and where I learned to live on my own. It was time, and opportunity was sent to push me along. I gave up the two jobs and kept the seasonal work. I looked upward and said “thank you”. Things do happen for a reason. It is also truly possible to find love, caring and understanding again after loss. Larry, the man I had been seeing for almost two years, and I decided to move forward and are staying in his house with plans to buy a home together. All the kids are onside and we are all finding our way together.

I have now also decided that I am finally ready to take the Volunteer Family Guide Training course offered through Threads of Life. We received so much support from our Threads of Life family that it was always our hope that I would carry on in this way after Jim was gone. I wasn't ready until now and I hope I am able to support other families the way I have been supported.



Jim and Heather Dahmer on their wedding day in 1996.



## Accepting the reality of loss

*After the funeral, when everyone went home to their normal lives, I was so lost,” says Sherry Smith. “I didn’t have a normal life any longer and I didn’t know what to do, so I went back to work two weeks after Blaine died. I barely functioned, just went to work and home every day. I couldn’t sleep or eat and didn’t want to talk to anyone. Day and night, for months, I sat in the dark in Blaine’s favorite chair in the living room. Finally I took some time off work, returning gradually after a few weeks. In some ways it was better at work – at least there was something to keep my mind busy.”*

Grief is a completely normal and predictable part of life. But many people are still caught off-guard by the huge and lasting impact grief can have on everything from appetite to spiritual beliefs. Psychologists and others have studied grief and come up with ways to understand what people go through when they are grieving. In the next few issues, Threads newsletter will look at one common way of understanding grief.

William Worden is a professor of psychology who first published his “four tasks of mourning” in 1982, and has updated his ideas several times. Worden argues

that grieving is a process, and the mourner “needs to take action and can do something” to move through the process.

His four tasks are numbered, but people may not experience them in order, and most people will go back and forth between the different tasks. In the most recent edition of his book *Grief Counselling And Grief Therapy*, Worden named the four tasks:

- To accept the reality of the loss
- To process the pain of grief
- To adjust to a world without the deceased
- To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

Threads of Life’s Resource Manual for Volunteer Family Guides takes a closer look at the first task:

### Accepting the reality of the loss

Accepting the reality of the loss means acceptance on all levels. These levels are emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive.

The grieving person must deal with the reality of the loss again every time he or she forgets for an instant what has happened. Typical examples include:

- On first awakening in the morning
- When reaching for the telephone expecting to hear the loved one’s voice and
- When arriving home and waiting to call out the loved one’s name.

The grieving person is working on accepting the reality of the loss

- As he or she begins to come to terms with what the new normal means for daily life, for example when taking on tasks that the loved one normally did, or discovering gaps in information that the loved one could have filled
- Every time he or she tells the story to a volunteer family guide, or other willing listener.

Accepting the reality of the loss is particularly hard when it is sudden and unanticipated. In this case, everything that the grieving person believes in has changed. This change includes the belief that his or her world is stable and predictable.

“There are basic ways one can accept the reality of a loss,” adds Litsa Elizabeth Williams in her blog *What’s Your Grief*, “going through the rituals of a funeral or memorial, beginning to speak about (and think about) the person in past tense, etc. On a more complex level, there is accepting the reality of the significance of the loss. For example, one may speak of someone in the past tense and accept their death, but may downplay the significance of their relationship with that person, denying the impact the loss will have. On a basic level they may have accepted the reality of the loss, but on a deeper level they will not have accomplished this task until they have fully accepted the depth of the relationship and correlating impact.”

*In the next issue: Processing the pain of grief*



For this issue, we asked our members: “what did you learn from your Volunteer Family Guide?” The Volunteer Family Guide program pairs people who have experienced a workplace tragedy, with trained volunteers who have been through a similar experience.

“ My Volunteer Family Guide was an integral part in supporting me through my husband’s inquest. Her insight provided me with an outline of what would occur during an inquest, and most importantly, how my voice could be heard. Her wisdom, guidance and warm heart offered clarity in a confusing legal system made up of paper pushing and jargon. I was able to get through this with her unwavering support. Thank you Elizabeth!

-Fran deFillippis

“ When I was teamed up with my VFG, I didn’t even know he was a Volunteer Family Guide. I was new to Threads of Life and

knew very little about the organization or the programs it provides. I received a letter from the man I later learned was my VFG and he told me all about his son. It happened that our sons were both named Greg, they were both young men, both were engaged and both had a wonderful love of life. We corresponded for three years before meeting in person and when we did meet, I felt that I was hooking up with an old friend whom I hadn’t seen in a long time. We shared our stories and memories of our sons, realizing that we had so, so much in common. Gil helped me move forward and for that, I am eternally grateful.

-Geraldine Wheeler

“ For our next issue, tell us about your memorial garden. Write a few sentences to explain how you created it and what it means to you. Share a picture if you like. 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 and to post on our new blog.

## Burton’s Garden

by Lynda Kolly

*Over the last 10-plus years Threads of Life has helped many families, using the mission and vision statement as a guiding tool. What are we doing as individuals to find peace and balance in our own lives when we need to take the time to reflect and regroup? Are we applying these same tools of caring and support for ourselves and do we take the time that is necessary to practice self-care? When we grieve the loss of someone or something are we taking time to fully be present in our grief? Are you getting the support that you need?*

My place to find peace and reflect on the loss of my son Burton is at the family cottage. This is a place that he truly loved and where he is now buried. In my attempts to make “Burton’s Garden” special I have planted many flowers and shrubs and tended to them regularly over the summer months. Over the years my quest was to make the garden even more special. This led to gathering stones of different sizes and placing them all around the headstone and growing plants. For me this was a place to tend to his garden and work with my thoughts of Burton.

After the first few years that the rocks were added to the garden, my mother complained about how hard the garden was to take care of, finding it hard to work in the garden because of these stones I had laboriously put in place. She was right. The stones increased the effort needed to keep the weeds out of this very sacred place. I found it manageable and didn’t mind the added effort and time it took. This is my healing time. Time that I needed.

This past summer I saw the garden from my mother’s eyes. She also needed the quiet reflection that comes from working in “Burton’s Garden” but was unable to do so because of the stones. So I removed the stones and replaced them with fresh new soil: soil that is easy to work with and makes it easier to remove the unwanted weeds that are relentless in their quest to make this garden their home.

It has been more than 15 years since the workplace fatality of my



young son Burton and his garden will always remain a healing place for me. The stones that were removed are no longer required for me to find my peace in this space.

Time has passed and our family will forever mourn the loss of our beloved Burton. The healing continues and with the guidance of Threads of Life we can provide support to other families who have also suffered a devastating loss.

We all need to find that special place or person that provides us with comfort when it is needed and sometimes that changes. And sometimes we just need to listen to ourselves and find out what is right and what works for us because at times we all need support and self-caring.

That is what Threads of Life is about and it is my honor to work with Threads of Life in supporting family members as a volunteer guide and speaker.

## Advanced VFG training a journey of change

by Bob Quarrell



A large group of volunteer family guides gathered in November for advanced training, an experience of positive change.

I recently attended the advanced training for Volunteer Family Guides – a deeply-felt honour. In all honesty none of us want to be a member of Threads of Life; the qualifications are too high and painful but if we are going to be a member what greater honour than to help ease the pain, in some way of others who are suffering? When I attended the first training session, one of the greatest men I have met, Roy Ellis who is a Grief and Loss Specialist and works as the Bereavement Coordinator at Capital Health in Halifax, told us that we cannot help others until we take care of our own healing. And how right he was. Our journey of self-discovery and healing was intense.

When I arrived for the advanced training I was pleased to see how many trainees there were and how many of my first group were in attendance, because it showed me how deeply involved they were also in helping others heal. While the training wasn't as intense, the level of healing was.

The one greatest “thing” achieved from our training is CHANGE. Not just from the time we attended the first training session but the change we experienced while in attendance for the advanced training. Positive change in ourselves, in how we deal with and handle our pain; positive change in how we are now able to live our “new normal” lives and positive change in how we will be able to help others deal with their pain.

As I reflect on our time there, I realize that personal change is what the training is all about. How could we possibly have been of any help to others the way we were prior to attending the sessions? Some of us are going to be great VFGs because of the personal change we have experienced as a direct result of the training.

If you are considering becoming a VFG please do so because the personal growth and positive change you will experience will allow you to help others through their journey of healing.

As we adjust to our new normal lives there is no better feeling than realizing that you have helped to ease the pain and suffering of another along their journey.

### *An Open Window* by Paulette Raymond

She sits alone  
On a rock that juts out into the water  
Her pain wrapped around her,  
Like a snugly cloak on a cold winters day.

The water brings her peace  
The waves wash over her soul  
Clearing out all the pain in their path.

This is where she dreams  
Where she lets herself believe  
In love, in laughter, in hugs and kisses  
In the joy she sees through the windows  
Of the houses on her street.

This is where she wonders  
What it would feel like  
To have someone love her  
To have someone care.

She knows shes not worthy of those things.  
Those things do not belong to her.  
She heads back to the place they call a home.  
Carefully along the darkened path.

Hoping she remembered to leave the window open  
So she can climb back inside...

## Joanne Wade

by Kevin Bonnis

Joanne Wade was early for her speech. She was to talk to a group of 300 grade 10 students, at an all-day event. She stood with the organizer, watching the students joke and jostle over their pizza, thinking ‘how am I going to get their attention?’

She got more and more nervous, and was sure she wouldn’t be able to connect with these teenagers. But as they settled into their seats after lunch, she simply told them “when I look at you, I see my son as he was at your age.” Then she went on to tell the story of Brent, and how he died after the dump truck he was driving was hit by a train at a level crossing. The room was silent and Joanne could see some of the students were crying. After her presentation, four students – three of them boys – came to tell her how touched they were by her story.

“That experience has never left me,” Joanne says. “That was life and death. If I changed just one person’s ideas, then Brent’s life and death made a difference.”

Joanne was in the first group of speakers trained for Threads of Life’s speakers bureau. She had already joined the first group of Volunteer Family Guides (VFG) to be trained in 2005, motivated by a desire to help ease the suffering of other grieving family members. While driving down to the training session, she remembers thinking “what am I doing, and what am I getting into?” She was anxious and self-conscious, but within the first couple of



hours, she realized she was in the right place. When her son died in 1999, Threads of Life didn’t exist and there was no support for families after a workplace tragedy. But she quickly realized this new group understood.

“Once you started sharing, you realized that we all were feeling the same way, and we weren’t alone,” she says.

Her first match as a VFG was a couple whose son had died on the job. They connected and have stayed in touch ever since.

“I know I helped them,” Joanne says, “and I know I grew myself.”

“You learn more about yourself with every experience, and the more you learn about yourself, the more you’re able to cope, and heal, and grow.”

As one of Threads of Life’s most long-term volunteers, Joanne has also laced up her sneakers for Steps for Life every year, and has represented the association at trade shows and other events. She says she will continue to go, whenever and wherever she is called on.

“I believe in our cause,” she says. “I still want to make a difference. I want Brent’s life to make a difference; to mean something.”

Threads of Life is one of a number of charities around the world to benefit from the commitment of BHP Billiton Ltd and its employees. BHP Billiton’s Health, Safety, Environment and Community (HSEC) Awards showcase innovative projects from across the company that enhance commitment to health, safety, the environment and the communities that host the company’s operations.

BHP Billiton is a resource company, among the world’s largest producers of aluminum, coal, copper, iron ore, manganese, nickel, silver, uranium and other commodities; and holds substantial interests in oil and gas. Nathalie Robert from the Jansen Potash project in Saskatchewan was the Excellence recipient in the Safety category, for the project ‘Prevention through Design Program for the Jansen Potash Project.’ Nathalie developed a database which recorded ideas for safety improvements, resulting in the elimination of 13 risks which could result in fatalities.

Nathalie chose Threads of Life to receive a donation in recognition of her award. Recipients of the Excellence, Highly Commended and Merit Awards received US\$20,000, US\$10,000 and US\$5,000 respectively to donate to a not-for-profit organization of their choice. In total, BHP Billiton will be donating US\$220,000 to a range of charities globally.

## BHP Billiton safety project benefits Threads of Life family members



At the awards ceremony left to right: Eric Gaspe – Senior Engineer, Andrew Mackenzie – CEO, Peter Boggis – Graduate Engineer and Nathalie Robert – Principal Engineer



# Come for a walk with us...



Feel like you need some fresh air? May is a great month to get out for a walk – especially if you can support workplace health and safety at the same time! Steps for Life walks take place this spring in more communities than ever before– check the web site at [www.stepsforlife.ca/locations](http://www.stepsforlife.ca/locations) to find your local walk.

Participating in Steps for Life is a chance to spread the word about the importance of health and safety in the workplace. It's also the premier fundraiser for Threads of Life, helping to keep services running for families affected by workplace fatalities, life-altering injuries and occupational disease.

Register online at <http://stepsforlife.ca/register-to-walk/> online, or if you can't be there in person, make a donation to support one of the walkers or teams in your community. With your help, we can make Canada's workplaces safer, and create hope for those affected by workplace tragedies.

## Sponsors from sea to sea

In 2014, more than 50 different companies showed leadership by sponsoring Steps for Life in their communities and regions from the Atlantic to the Pacific. For this year's walk, four champions have again stepped out in front, adopting Steps for Life nationally, as silver sponsors.



CannAmm Occupational Testing Services offers employment drug testing, occupational health services including medical and physical evaluations, functional fitness testing, training to improve occupational health programs, and assistance for employers developing drug control policies. CannAmm has numerous locations in Ontario, Alberta and BC.



PCL offers construction services in the commercial, civil infrastructure, and heavy industrial markets. The century-old company has offices across Canada, and also operates in the United States, Australia and the Carribean.



Stantec's services include professional consulting in planning, engineering, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, surveying, environmental sciences, project management, and project economics. More than 15,000 employees work in over 250 locations in Canada and around the world.



Vale mines nickel, copper, potash and other minerals in Ontario, Manitoba and Newfoundland and refines nickel in Port Colborne Ontario. Vale is the world's largest producer of iron ore, and the second-largest producer of nickel.



*Are you new to Steps for Life fundraising? Or just looking to take your efforts up a notch? We asked two of Threads of Life's fundraising whizzes to offer their advice. Rose and George Wilson's son Justin was killed on the job in 2013. While working on a flat roof, Justin fell 48 feet through a small hole while employed at a graphite mine north of Huntsville.*

The Wilsons' Steps for Life team "Relax Guys" was named after their son Justin's favourite expression.

**Q: What motivated you to raise funds through Steps for Life?**

**A:** I had just lost my 29-year-old son Justin, in June 2013 to a workplace accident. I wanted to try and raise as much money as possible, because I know that every dollar raised was going to Threads of Life's family support program to help families of workplace tragedies, illness or injury along their journey of healing.

**Q: How did you get started with your fundraising?**

**A:** I started first by registering online and set up my personalized fundraising page. I customized my page with pictures of Justin and by explaining the fundraiser and why we were trying to raise money. I made sure to explain where the funds were going and how they are being used. I then posted it on my Facebook page and sent emails out to other friends and family. The responses I started receiving from people were amazing! Friends, and friends of friends, started sharing my page and the word got out. Originally, my goal was to get 10 walkers to join my team and I was hoping that we could raise \$100 each for a total of \$1000. By the day of the walk, I had a total of 52 walkers that joined my team. The support from family and friends was unbelievable. Some people just came out that day and registered in support of Justin.

**Q: Did most of your donations come from family, friends, or others?**

**A:** Family, friends, Justin's friends, friends of friends and co-workers. They were so generous in helping us and being so supportive of what we were going through. My husband brought a pledge sheet to work and his boss posted it and the support that we got from his work alone, was unbelievable. Walkers who joined the team were working hard to get donations, and beating their own goals that they had originally set. Every day I kept seeing more and more people joining and donating. By the day of the walk, our team had raised \$9,500.00 dollars. I was also still receiving donations after the walk.

**Q: What do you think made people want to donate to your Steps for Life campaign?**

**A:** Justin had such an impact on people; he was liked by everyone. I believe that people were able to see and feel what we (Justin's family) were going through. I think that people just wanted to do anything they could to help out Justin's parents and sister to get the support needed to assist them along this journey of healing. Justin meant so much to so many different people, that everyone could understand, in some way or another what it was like to lose a friend. I believe that people just understood the grief that they were feeling and could only imagine the support that his family must need. Everyone was reaching out to help in any way they could. Also, the fundraiser is for such a great cause, since unfortunately, it affects all the families who have suffered workplace tragedies, illness or injury.

**Q: What advice do you have for other family members who are hoping to fundraise for this year's walk?**

**A:** Set up your personalized page about your loved one, and your goal amount and let people know what happened. Make it personal. Also, make sure to advise where the money is going and what it will be used for. If you have any kind of social media page, post it; email it out to everyone. Don't be afraid to ask your friends and family to come out that day and join you. Tell them to invite anyone they know that also might be interested in joining. Come one, come all! Remember, it's for such a great cause and every dollar adds up! 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.

## Advice from a fundraiser extraordinaire

Ann Grant is a Threads of Life speaker and has been a top personal fundraiser for several years. She offers her advice for others:

Our son, Evan, was killed on the worksite and we fundraise in his memory to support the programs and services of Threads of Life. We would not want another family or community to have to suffer as we have and we fundraise to help eliminate workplace deaths, injuries or illnesses. The intentions of the programs and services of Threads of Life are honourable and 100 per cent of the fundraising dollars support the programs and services provided to family members who have suffered a workplace tragedy.

Our tragedy occurred in September 2011 and we created the "Remembering Evan" team for the May 2012 walk. We initially started with family members who were extremely supportive and some created their own fundraising page. This is one way of honouring our son's life and our friends and relatives do the same. Everyone is saddened by our loss and want to contribute to honour Evan and support us. It's their way of letting us know that they remember and that they are thinking of us.

...continued on back page

## Knitters & weavers stay tuned...



Threads of Life is built on the idea that many threads together – stitched, woven or knitted – are stronger than one alone. That philosophy proved itself – very literally! – when a large basket of yarns and accessories arrived at our office this fall. The basket is donated by Spinrite, one of the largest yarn manufacturers in North America, based in Listowel Ontario. Spinrite made the gift as a recognition of the work of Threads of Life and its wonderful volunteers. The basket, with a value of \$200, will be used as a raffle in the future. Knitters and weavers, stay tuned!

### Advice from... (continued from pg 11)

Ann's advice to other family members planning to fundraise for Threads of Life: Consolidate all your charitable giving to make Threads of Life your main charity. Let your friends know that the Steps for Life walk is a way to honour and cherish the time spent with our loved ones who were tragically killed, injured or suffer from an illness caused by the workplace. I personally thank those who donate (or sign up to walk), with a personal email, even though the website sends a standard 'Thank You' email.

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!

**April 12-18, 2015**

National Volunteer Week

**May 2, 3 & 9, 2015**

Steps for Life – Join the movement in more than 35 communities across Canada!

Visit [www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca) to register!

**May 3 - 9, 2015**

North American Occupational Safety and Health week – See the web site [www.naosh.org](http://www.naosh.org)

to learn what it's all about.

**May 29-31, 2015**

Atlantic Canada Family Forum – Atlantica Hotel and Marina Oak Island.

For more information and to register, visit <http://threadsoflife.ca/upcoming-regional-family-forums>



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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

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