



Photo by Tom Buchanan, Tom Buchanan Photographics

## Loss and mental health

Grief is not a mental illness – it’s a perfectly normal response to loss. But people coping with deep or complicated grief can be prone to mental health challenges like depression and addiction. In this issue, Threads of Life members bravely share some of their own experiences with mental health during their grief journeys.



### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Eleanor Westwood*

Mental health has been in the news a lot lately. You’ll no doubt have seen, heard or read stories, ads and conversations, and really it’s long overdue. Many are now bravely speaking out about these subjects long considered taboo. At Threads of Life, one of our values is health – in the broadest sense. Our values say “Health and safety begin in our heads, hearts and hands, in everyday actions”. Those coping with the effects of a work-related tragedy are often faced with depression, anxiety and other challenges – some of our Threads of Life members share their experiences in this issue of the newsletter. Meanwhile, mental illnesses are finally being recognized as work-related illnesses in their own right. The first week in May, in addition to being North American Occupational Safety and Health week, is also Mental Health week in Canada.

For that week, and every week, one of the best ways we can live out the Threads of Life value is by the everyday action of talking about mental illness; acknowledging and accepting those who are struggling.

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by Nicole  
Beck-Chisholm

# THE LIFE SENTENCE OF GRIEF

Father's workplace death casts a long shadow over the lives of his family



Ron Beck loved fishing and taught his daughters to fish too.

**A**pril 25, 2004: the day that I was forever changed as a mother, a daughter, sister, and wife. This is the day that my father Ronald William Beck was taken from this world in a senseless, preventable workplace incident.

Dad was an incredible man. He was the kind of man who welcomed people into his home, the kind of man that put the tea pot on and shared in conversations. He was the father who taught his daughters to fish, snare rabbits, skin deer, change tires and stand up for what they believe in. He was the grandfather who drank tea and ate cookies with his grandsons at the child-size table and always had time for them. He was the husband who kissed his wife before leaving for work, held her hand

in the mall and demonstrated daily his deep respect to the love of his life. He was a family man and our family has not been the same since the day he was taken from us.

I remember every detail of this day. How I was sitting at the kitchen table with my husband, son and sister in law. I remember what we were eating (chicken fajitas to be exact). The phone rang and it was mom. She wanted to speak to my then-husband Dave. My mind immediately went to my birthday only five days away. What were they planning? When my husband hung up the phone, he moved away from the table, saying he wasn't hungry any more. I knew instinctively that something was wrong. I sent my son off and

asked the question I know I didn't want the answer to. I'll never forget the look on his face: "there's been an accident, and it is your dad." I couldn't get all the questions out quick enough. "No Nick, he is not ok. I'm sorry... he died". Surely I couldn't be hearing right. I collapsed to the chair behind me. My dad, my hero, my strength, my provider, my protector... there is no way this could be true.

I held on to my eight and a half month pregnant belly and sobbed. Time seemed to stand still as I waited for my mother and sister to arrive. The three of us held each other and cried but what we did next still amazes me. We all piled into the car and drove to dad's workplace. I have no idea why this would be our choice at the time but it was. We cleaned out his locker, were embraced by his coworkers and I drove dad's car home as mom drove hers. Later I remember lying on the bed in mom's spare bedroom knowing she was at the other end of the hall alone in her room. I had the radio on and could hear about the tragic death of a Hants county man. They never said his name ...many would be shocked when they finally did.

Over the next couple of days people came and went but the pain never did. Some experiences are crystal clear in my memory, like helping to pick out a casket, shopping for something appropriate that would cover my belly to wear to the funeral, and explaining to Matthew, my five year old, that his grampy had a train accident and is now in heaven.

On the day of the funeral hundreds of people gathered outside the church – these were the people who could not fit inside. When the song "I hope you dance" played and the pallbearers started to carry out his casket, I wanted to yell 'stop' and fight them all away. I wanted to open that casket and have dad be just fine. I could not stand, so overcome with grief at the finality of it.

After the funeral we went to Whale Creek, a spot that was very dear to us as we camped and fished there our entire lives. We each took a rose to place in the ocean to say goodbye to dad. As we reached the water the heavens opened up and it poured – a sign, I believe, of how very sad the universe was. Calmness came over me. I felt a warm sensation throughout my body and it was what I needed in the moment to be able to go on and face the rest of that day.

The investigation was long and difficult.

As a railway conductor, Dad's job was to set off the cars and secure them. He did this job as he had done for 33 years but on this day, he didn't know many of the cars he was moving had faulty brakes and had been earlier ordered off the tracks. The rail company had not made their employees aware of the safety hazard when handling rail cars which had potential problems with brake levers and rods that limited the efficiency of the braking system.

“ I was changed and I didn't know how to become the woman I was before this tragedy. I didn't think I deserved to be happy when mom lost her happiness; it wouldn't be fair.

The investigation found dad at fault because he jumped up on the train to set the emergency brakes and they deemed him to have put himself in an unsafe place. I can't even begin to describe how this has affected me, and I still cannot agree with the final report of the investigation. Yes, he did jump up to set the emergency brakes but he did it because the brakes failed, because the cars were still on the track after the company was asked to remove them. It seems so absurd that my dad, winner of many safety awards, the man who placed many safety grievances and refused to transport trains in the past because of safety concerns, would lose his life by being crushed between two rail cars that had faulty brakes. My dad would never have done that job if he had known of the safety issue.

Losing my dad has forever changed me. Just a couple of weeks after his death I gave birth to his fifth grandson. The birth was such a hard process. I actually remember saying to the doctor “Just get it out”. What a horrible thing to say in a moment that is supposed to be joyful. I wish I could take that back. When I looked into the eyes of my newborn all I could feel was the loss of my dad. In some ways I felt like I had to lose dad to get Riley and thinking is it worth it? Although I was happy that Riley William Ronald Chisholm was born a happy healthy boy, it was so hard not having my dad there to welcome my baby into the world. I remember feeling grief, loss and sadness and going back to the idea that babies can feel what you feel. I was terrified of affecting my baby because of my grief. I think I will always wonder if my inability to protect Riley from my feelings and to be the best mom ever in those early months contributed to the mental health issues he faces now.

Life continued on, as it does even when

you are grieving and struggling to make sense of the world. I questioned a lot of things – probably most strongly my faith. No matter how I played it out in my head, I could not find any scenario that justified God taking my dad home to heaven so early in his life. I used to think perhaps dad lost his life to bring awareness and protect all the other men who go to work each day. However, the results of the investigation made me feel like his death was in

vain because no action was taken against the corporation and it seemed likely other lives would be at risk. Everyone deserves to go to work with a certainty that they will return home to their family. Along with my loss in faith, I had overwhelming guilt whenever happiness had the chance to enter my life. I was very cognisant of the fact that my mother had lost the love of her life, her soul mate. I felt guilty for having a happy marriage. As time went on I shut down with my husband and to the joys life had to offer. I would lie in bed at night and he would hold me as I cried but I could never share with him how I was feeling. This was something very new to me as he had always been my best friend. I was changed and I didn't know how to become the woman I was before this tragedy. I didn't think I deserved to be happy when mom lost her happiness; it wouldn't be fair.

As the years went on I found myself in a depression. I said “I love you” less, shared my true feelings less and became in many ways a roommate to my husband. I became very sad,

distant and robotic. I felt such terrible guilt to have a happy life so I unconsciously ensured I didn't have one. Then in November 2011, my husband told me he wanted a divorce. The pain I felt on that day was comparable to the pain I felt on April 25, 2004. I realized in that moment how I failed him as a wife and that the end of my marriage was a side effect of living with the grief of losing my dad. The realization that not only did my kids lose their grumpy but now they also were losing their intact family, broke my heart and filled me with rage.

I was so furious with the world, angry with everyone in it and mostly angry at myself for hurting my children. It was difficult for me to figure out where to direct this rage. Ultimately who was I angry with? It resulted in me being a bitter, angry person which was so far from the woman I used to be. I miss my old self terribly and hope one day she will resurface. I understand I will be forever changed but wish to be that kind, fun loving, genuinely happy woman I once was. I wish I knew how to let the anger, hurt, grief, sadness go. I am one of many examples of how deeply a family is affected by workplace tragedy. I feel like I am living a life sentence for the workplace incident that caused my father's death.

Nearly 13 years later here I am finally trying to tell my story as a way of healing. I think for the very selfish reason of hoping I can find peace in my life but also to bring awareness to workplace safety. The support I have felt with Threads of Life has been extraordinary. Very slowly, by being with people who truly know how I feel, I have been able to begin to heal. I am not there yet, and not sure I will ever make sense of this senseless act. However, I am open to letting myself feel the pain so that I can face it and find me, and give the best of me to my family.



“Grumpy” always had time for his grandkids.

# Living in silence after workplace sexual assault

Finding a new life as a survivor

by Tammy Lundgren-Costa



Tammy Lundgren-Costa

**F**or many people addiction, substance abuse and trauma go hand in hand. After I was sexually assaulted at work I struggled with addictive behaviours. I think for about the first few days I was numb; I had no concept of time or what day it was even. The fact that I had been sexually assaulted played like a constant horror movie in my mind. Those few minutes that it took to assault me would change my entire life forever.

No matter how tired I would become I found it impossible to fall asleep. I tried to close my eyes yet I couldn't clear my mind of what happened. I think two or three days had passed by when I first remember seeing a reflection of myself in the mirror. All I remember was rage, shame and disappointment in myself.

I was working as a counsellor in a residential treatment facility. I went to admit a client, and as I was leading him back up the stairs to the facility, he attacked me.

How could I have let this happen to me? I had years of training and I was always a great judge of character so how was it that I misjudged this person and what he was capable of doing to me?

Seeing my reflection in the mirror was

my first breaking point. I don't know how or why I did it but I started grabbing all kinds of things like Comet cleanser, toothpaste, vinegar and other things and I started to scrub it all over my face. I had so many mixed emotions that I just lost my mind, I guess. The only way I can describe it is like I was having an out-of-body experience that I had no control over. It was like I was someone other than myself. Someone I didn't know.

Maybe I thought somehow that if I could erase what I saw in the mirror I could erase the sexual assault from my life.

By the time I stopped I had a lot of abrasions on my face where I had been scrubbing really hard. The bathroom was a mess and I was sitting on the bathroom floor. I felt a calm come over me and I broke down crying. I remember I lay down on the bathroom floor as I covered myself with a bath towel. I have no idea how long I was lying there but I must have slept for hours.

When I got up I was cold and I felt so alone. I wanted to cry out and have someone there but I had no one I felt I could call.

I wanted to tell my husband but how could I tell him? He was working out of town for another four days so I was all alone. When I was 12 my mother was gang raped and when

she told my father he blamed her. Now I had been raped. Would my husband blame me?

I constantly struggled with suicidal ideation (thoughts of suicide). I would come so close and then something would happen that stopped me.

My husband came home days later and although I told him I had been raped he never asked me questions, nor did we ever discuss the details of what had happened that day.

I tried going for therapy on a weekly basis for about six years. I never found therapy to be helpful. All I really got out of therapy was a title; I was diagnosed with extreme PTSD, agoraphobia and manic depressive disorder. I just could never move beyond that day.

Whenever I had triggers I would resort to self-harm. I had been cutting myself and using bleach afterwards just so that I could feel physical pain. I knew that if I felt physical pain I wouldn't have to feel the emotional pain.

I was a mess. I was so fragile. I had turned from a confident positive woman who was a counsellor in a detox centre and in a residential treatment facility, to a broken down victim who locked herself in her basement not wanting to go anywhere or interact with anyone. I had traded my career that I had worked so hard to achieve for a retired life on permanent WCB.

I once helped to counsel victims of sexual assault who became addicted, most of whom were dependant on drugs or alcohol to help them through the toughest times. I knew from working in the field, how easily this could happen to one suffering extreme trauma. I was offered so many types of medication by my doctor, but I couldn't allow myself to go down that road and now I found myself struggling with suicidal ideation to live through the night.

It wasn't until I was sent a pamphlet about Threads of Life and the family forum that my life had hope. I wasn't going to attend at first but my WCB worker asked me, what did I have to lose? Maybe I had a lot to gain.

The first year I attended a Threads of Life family forum I was so scared I had no expectations of finding hope but what I found was amazing people who greeted me, protected me and became my new family. I could never have imagined the impact it would have on my life. I went there broken and wrapped so

tightly inside my cocoon made of glass. I was so guarded, not wanting anyone to get close.

After that weekend, it seemed like my cocoon started to open and some of the pieces of glass slowly started to break away. It was like I had found some underground hidden world that no one knows about until you need them.

“ After that weekend, it seemed like my cocoon started to open and some of the pieces of glass slowly started to break away.

I've been connected with Threads of Life now for four years and they will forever be my extended family. I found that breaking through the stigma of my addiction and actually speaking to others about my pain was what helped me to heal. I no longer have the need to self-harm. I know now that I can speak to others about my emotions. I have realized that I can spread open my wings; there was no more glass cocoon holding them back any more.

I feel like I have a new life. I create goals and I have dreams that come true. I am no longer a victim.

Today, I am a survivor. May God be with us as we try to live our lives purposefully, and in His strength.

## Grief

Grief

One word.

Used to describe so many emotions.

Hollowness, pain, anger, guilt,

Hurting, sadness, lonely,

Do I need to say more.

One word, Grief.

Don't say you have been there,

You may have lost someone, something,  
but your grief is not the same as mine.

Grief, does not explain how I feel

-Claire Abbott



Tammy Lundgren-Costa... today

## Where to look for help

The following information is from the Canadian Mental Health Association ([www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca))

A support team can help you on your way—no one should ever have to follow their journey entirely on their own. A team of carers and supports can guide you, provide help and assistance, celebrate your victories, and back you up when you need it.

### Building your team

The first steps may be the toughest, but knowing where to look for help is a good start. Here are good places to begin building your team:

- Talk with supportive friends and family. Share your feelings with them and let them be part of your team.
- Talk to your family doctor. They are a great resource and can link you to other professionals, if needed.
- Connect with community mental health clinics or organizations like the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) for information, support, and services.
- Call a help line. Some organizations offer support online or through text messaging.
- Learn more about mental health. You can find useful books, website and other resources through your provincial or territorial government and community agencies.
- Connect with others who have personal experience with a mental illness and learn more about their recovery journey.
- Attend workshops and education sessions hosted at community centres, agencies, schools, colleges or universities.
- Talk with a member or leader you trust from your faith or cultural group.

## Are you in crisis?

If you or someone you know is in crisis and needs immediate assistance, go to the nearest hospital or call 911.



# Finding a path to mental wellness

by Jasmine Fisher

Destructive coping mechanisms became an endless and vicious cycle

Mental health has been a long and complicated road for me since the death of my brother, Micheal, in January of 2006. When I was growing up, mental health wasn't something that was talked about openly or discussed with children, and so when I lost my brother at age 13 I wasn't equipped with the coping mechanisms or tools that might have helped me avoid a lot of pain and confusion.

I was going through puberty, transitioning into high school, and dealing both with the grief of losing Micheal and a developing case of generalized anxiety. I was told over and over again to be strong, to keep my chin up, and to take care of my mother. All this experience within the first few months of living without my brother showed me one thing – to a lot of people, strength is associated with stoicism. Putting on a brave face and not outwardly showing emotions were applauded, and being vulnerable meant being weak. If I had felt comfortable venting my emotions and hadn't been expected to take care of others while still intensely grieving, things might have been different for me. Instead, I turned any grief and sadness into anger and frustration, most often directed at myself and only expressed while alone. I felt constant anxiety that I was going to lose someone else. My emotions were pent up to a boiling point, until I was overcome with feelings that I didn't know how to sort through. This, of course, was on top of the turmoil of just being a teenager.

I felt overwhelmed during these years, and I turned to unhealthy methods just to feel in control again. I tried to control my weight through unhealthy eating habits, and I practiced frequent self-harm.

For a few years, it was the only way that I felt I could keep things “under control” – when I felt unmanageable emotional pain or anxiety, I would cut or burn myself in inconspicuous areas and the physical pain would distract me. Having something concrete and physical to focus on took my mind away from thinking about Micheal, or from how I felt sidelined and horribly alone in the face of my mother's grief for her child. It came to a point where any time I felt a negative emotion, I had the overwhelming urge to cause myself physical pain, and felt instant relief when I did so. It kept me from turning to the more common addiction of substance abuse in my teen years, but it was still a destructive and dangerous coping mechanism. I tried different methods for more and more pain to block out the anger and sadness that I felt at myself for feeling weak due to grief, and it became an endless and vicious cycle that left me with many physical and emotional scars.

What finally broke this cycle was the pain that it caused others in my life. Eventually my close friends and family realized how much pain I was in, and they encouraged me (and sometimes pushed me) to find other methods. I went to group therapy with other teenagers who had been through similar experiences, with whom I could share my thoughts without feeling weak. I learned ways to cope both with the urges to self-harm and the feelings that drove me to do it in the first place. I spent more time with people who were patient with me and understood that grieving openly is natural and healthy. I try to talk openly about my experience and destigmatize mental health, and I work with Threads of Life as a volunteer family guide and speaker to try to help young people dealing with loss avoid the same mistakes that I made. I still struggle daily with my mental health and coping methods to manage my grief and generalized anxiety, but now I have the knowledge that soldiering through alone isn't the strong thing to do. In my experience, the strong thing to do is to grieve fully, be mindful of the mental health of yourself and the people around you, acknowledge any need for outside help, and surround yourself with people who feel the same way.

# For grieving families, addiction can be another loss

by Kate Kennington

When lost in the depths of grief it can seem impossible to go on, to get through another day let alone the next hour. Even the next five minutes. Somehow we have to push through, to keep going, to manage. We have to cope. Somehow.

There are many things we can do to cope and some are healthy while others are not. Like with habits, bad coping can be much less effort than good coping. It may even bring a moment of feeling good, albeit short-lived. Grief work is one of the hardest things you will ever have to do in life and those emotions can be overwhelming and frightening. It is no wonder that many people will do almost anything to avoid facing their grief.

Society places a lot of pressure on families impacted by a workplace tragedy. Our mainstream culture is one that is grief and death avoidant. There is an expectation for you to be happy again, to 'get over it', to return to being your 'normal' self. It does feel good to laugh again, to remember earlier days when life was different and sometimes substances or behaviours seem to bring that relief. However the progression from occasional recreational use of substances or activities as a reward or social time through to more frequent use to 'take the edge off' can soon lead to a loss of choice as the desire becomes a compulsion.

Addictions take many forms and some may surprise you. They can be a substance, like alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, prescription medications or caffeine. Addictions can also be an activity, such as exercise, gambling, sex, self-harm, food, shopping, work, the internet and yes, even Facebook. The end result is the same, short-term pleasure that provides an escape from the pain. Over time it becomes a need not a want. The urge for the activity or substance becomes more and more powerful as a way to not have to face what is happening. It will interfere with their ability to look after ordinary responsibilities. Often the person is not truly aware that a line has been crossed. That they have become an addict.

Considering that the addict may not be aware of their addiction, family members may not realize it either. Signs of addiction vary greatly and can be physical, behavioural or psychological. They may include changes in behaviour, relationship difficulties, challenges with daily functions, weight gain or loss, sleep difficulties, isolation, mood swings, unusual need for money or lack of concern for personal appearance and hygiene.

Because addiction is considered a taboo subject it is still not talked about openly and is a cause of shame and guilt for both the addict and their family. This needs to change. We need to be able to talk about it. The more you know the better you can understand.

Ultimately, the only person who can change and stop the addictive behaviours is the addict themselves. They need to recognize what they are doing and make a choice. Not family, friends or professionals



can force this on anyone. If the addict doesn't believe that there is a problem then change will not happen. Truly they are the only one who can cure themselves.

For families who are already grieving, dealing with addictions is like another loss and complicates relationships and the ability to heal from the initial loss. And that just delays healing. Addictions can tear apart a family already reeling.

Our Volunteer Family Guides are not trained counsellors meant to deal with addiction issues. They are peers who are able to offer a compassionate ear and willing to stay in the 'messy places' with you to talk and explore those strong and sometimes scary emotions. Those feelings are overwhelming but less so with a companion who gets it. (If you'd like to be paired with a Volunteer Family Guide, contact me at [kkennington@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:kkennington@threadsoflife.ca)).

But there may be times when having someone to listen is not enough, when further support or intervention is needed. Fortunately there is help available. Making that ask may be the first step to recovery.

- Alcoholics Anonymous ([www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org))
- Narcotics Anonymous ([www.na.org](http://www.na.org))
- Al-Anon Family Groups ([www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org))
- Gambling ([www.gamblingselfrecovery.ca/resources](http://www.gamblingselfrecovery.ca/resources))
- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse ([www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca))

# Bruce and Wendy-Ellen Nittel

by Shirley Hickman

*“On July 2, 2012, my husband, Bruce and I joined an exclusive group. I hope others don’t join this club as the cost of membership is too great.”*



Photo by Tom Buchanan, Tom Buchanan Photographics

After their son Blaine died in a pump truck rollover, Wendy-Ellen and Bruce Nittel had a visit from Blaine’s employer, who wanted to help them in some way. As well as driving Blaine’s pick-up home, the company’s staff gave the Nittels an envelope of information from Alberta Occupational Health and Safety, including a brochure from Threads of Life.

Soon after, Bruce and Wendy-Ellen reached out for more information and decided to attend a family forum. It was very early in their grief journey; however, they both say it was the right place for them to be and the family forums became a significant part of their healing. For Wendy-Ellen, her mothering instincts kicked in and she knew that she wanted to be part of prevention.

Through the speaker’s bureau she shares Blaine’s story with the hope that through awareness, there would not be so many new members to this club. Bruce’s role in the beginning was to be a support person to ensure that Wendy-Ellen got safely to and from her presentations. In time he found himself standing next to her, sharing the Threads of Life messages to managers at the TriWest partner event and then at health and safety conferences. He found his role is to help people understand the culture change. He relates to people that the safety change is their responsibility – in everyday life, not just at work. Safety attitudes need to be a part of our daily lives. As a rancher, he often found himself doing things independently, that he now knows he needs to wait and find a second pair of hands. He shares everyday scenarios with people, such as when driving a highway with a posted speed limit of 110k/hr, be sure the road conditions actually make that safe.

In the earlier years of ranching, Bruce handled pesticides and herbicides as all ranchers and farmers did. They didn’t have the information they now have on how to handle these products safely and as such is living with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia. In 2014, while doing his farm chores, he slipped on ice and dislocated his shoulder. At trade shows and conferences, Bruce and Wendy-Ellen are able to use these examples as they help others to understand the need for the culture change.

Wendy-Ellen shares her life experience as a teacher and a strong volunteer with 4 H clubs in Alberta as a Board of Director with Threads of Life. Her role is to ensure that voice for family is always part of the decisions that are made. Bruce, ensures she always has transportation to and from her flights.

At their very first family forum, Wendy-Ellen’s caring attitude for others was evident. Soon after she took the Volunteer Family Guide training. She not only listens as others share their very personal story, but realizes that though that caring, she is helping others. Bruce and Wendy-Ellen share that Threads of Life is part of their life-line, their safety net. At the same time, when they attend the family forum they ensure that participants hear ‘it is good to shed tears’. They enjoy the people they meet and when someone reaches that ‘ah-ha’ moment – they know they made a difference.

Together they share of themselves to care for others, help others to be aware of hazards in the workplace and their love for Blaine gives them the courage to do so.

# Remembering Michael Bonvie and a preventable workplace tragedy

by Lisa M. MacDonald, CAO and Debbie Greencorn, co-chairs of JOHS Committee, and Kim Dickson, Director of Marketing & Communications for the Town of New Glasgow Nova Scotia

On October 26, 2006, Town of New Glasgow Public Works employee Michael Bonvie died at the scene of a preventable workplace accident on Foxbrook Road, Westville, NS at 9:30am. On that fateful day, Michael lost his life while working on a construction site when a trench collapsed. Another town employee also sustained minor physical injury. Several other employees were on site and witnessed this tragedy. It is a day that no one will ever forget as so many lives were changed forever. Michael was a devoted son, a loving father, a loyal friend, and a good family person who deserved to return home to his family at the end of the work day. Michael's father is a retired Public Works employee with the Town of New Glasgow and Michael had been very proud to be following in his father's footsteps. The loss to his family was unspeakable and will be etched in their hearts forever. Those who were employed with the Town of New Glasgow at that time, still remember the day with shock and sadness. It was a grave loss and its impact is still being felt today.

The Town of New Glasgow initiated a new system for workplace occupational health and safety and has diligently worked to improve its workplace safety culture and programs over these past 10 years. A special place of remembrance and reflection was created in New Glasgow not far from the Public Works Department and was built by Michael's colleagues and friends. The monument includes a large rock that came from the quarry of SW Weeks Construction, a company Michael had worked with for many years prior to joining the Town of New Glasgow. There are park benches as well as trees planted to symbolize Michael's two daughters and recently a new tree planted this year for the 10th anniversary and in acknowledgment of Michael's new grandchild. On the first anniversary of Michael's death and the preventable workplace accident and every year since, the Town holds a special ceremony to remember and reflect. This ceremony is attended by town employees, town officials and members of the Bonvie family.

Ten years later, the loss is as real and as painful as it was in 2006. What has changed is the safety culture and commitment to ensure such a tragedy never happens again. In addition to the special annual event, there have been many improvements made to ensure safe work policies and practices that include an unwavering commitment toward workplace safety, a very active JOSH Committee, and comprehensive NAOSH Week activities. All departments and all employees work together conscientiously, diligently, and responsibly to help us ensure that as a municipality and as a workplace New Glasgow strives to be at the forefront of municipal workplace safety. We know that



Memorial site to honour worker Michael Bonvie in New Glasgow NS

workplace safety is a partnership between employee and employer.

The annual New Glasgow Workplace Safety Day has been a poignant reminder to each and every member of the Town of New Glasgow that workplace safety belongs individually to each of us and also collectively as team. Each Workplace Safety Day, New Glasgow also invites a representative of Threads of Life to share his or her personal story of workplace loss as a reminder of how so many people are impacted by these workplace injuries and deaths. The stories shared resonate with our employees and truly make a difference. A banner was also designed which features a photo of Michael and the hand written words of his young daughter as she grieved for her father and had to face her first Christmas without him. An annual proclamation is declared by the Mayor and the Town's Chief Administrative Officer. Images and messages from the annual Workplace Safety Day are shared through Town of New Glasgow social media platforms.

Only by working together can we assure there is workplace safety at every work site, on every work day. We will always remember Michael Bonvie and the loss endured by his family and friends. We will continue to make workplace safety a commitment for life.

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

A new Threads of Life report offers a best practice for companies in the aftermath of a fatality or serious injury to one of their employees. The report is based on a survey of families who've lived through a workplace tragedy. Download the report for free at the Threads of Life web site [www.threadsoflife.ca](http://www.threadsoflife.ca) (search for "crisis response") or email [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca).

## Step up and step out

It's time to get on your feet and make a difference – for health and safety, and for families affected by workplace tragedy.

We all want to make the world a better place, but it's not always easy to feel you're having an impact. When you participate in Steps for Life, you can be assured that your efforts will help raise awareness about workplace health and safety, and provide programs for people coping with the effects of a work-related fatality, serious injury or occupational disease.

Registration is open now for Steps for Life walks in 31 communities across Canada. Go online ([www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca)) to register, or donate to a walker or community. With Steps for Life, every walker makes a difference, and every dollar makes a difference

“ Being the spokesperson for the Winnipeg Steps for life walk gives me the opportunity to share my experience living with the loss of my husband due to a workplace fatality, and living and dealing with the aftermath that follows. We walk in honor of our loved ones, and to raise awareness about the importance of work safety. Steps for Life helps remind all of us that we need to be more conscious in preventing workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities. And most importantly to make sure that each and every one of us come back home safe to their families.

-Virginia Campeau

“ Every worker in Canada has the right to return home safely to their family at the end of the workday. Unfortunately, this wasn't our family's experience. Being the spokesperson for the Hamilton Steps for life walk allows me to share my family's experience with workplace tragedy, keep Adam's memory alive and honour all of the other families like ours who share this same reality. *Together, we can make a difference*

Elaine Keunen



## A helping hand for safety and healing

Our sponsors at the community and national level help to make Steps for Life events a success. If you'd like to show your commitment to health and safety in your community as a Steps for Life sponsor, contact the Regional Development Coordinator for your area:

- Western Canada (BC, AB, SK & MB): Lynn Danbrook, [ldanbrook@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:ldanbrook@threadsoflife.ca)
- Central Canada (ON): Lorna Catrambone, [lcatrambone@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:lcatrambone@threadsoflife.ca)
- Atlantic Canada & Quebec (NS, NB, NL, PE & QC): Kevin Bonnis, [kbonniss@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:kbonniss@threadsoflife.ca)

## A huge thank you to our seven national sponsors for Steps for Life 2017:



## Making it personal

Want to take your Steps for Life fundraising to a new level this year? The best way we know to do that is to share your personal story about why you walk.

Why do you participate in Steps for Life every year? Why is health and safety important to you? Is there someone you have in mind when you're walking your 5 km? Use the tools on the Steps for Life web site and tell that story on your personal page and in the donation requests you send to your family, friends and co-workers. (Hint: Threads of Life staff accepted a challenge this year to personalize our own fundraising pages. Have a peek online to see how we did!)

“ Being a spokesperson for Steps of Life in Halifax allows me to put a face to workplace tragedy, to let survivors know that they do not walk alone in their struggle with grief caused by workplace injury or fatality and to honour my son Kyle's memory. Workplace health and safety is everyone's responsibility, we all find ourselves in situation that at times seem hopeless and we all have the choice to do something or take action. In order to eliminate the senseless and preventable loss of life or injury in the workplace ,workplace health and safety must always in the forefront we walk to make change one step at a time.

-Estella Hickey

## How to share your Steps for Life story:

1. Think about why Steps for Life is important to you – why did you first get involved? Write a few sentences to explain. Post them to your personal page on the Steps for Life web site ([www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca)) the link to your personal page will be emailed to you after you register.
2. Choose one of your own photos – a photo of you, your family, or your loved one – and post it on your page.
3. Spread the word! Send emails to your friends, co-workers and others in your network. In your message, don't forget to mention your personal reason for participating.



## Have it your way!



### No Steps for Life walk near you? Can't make it out the day of the walk?

There are still ways you can get involved! Sponsor a walk, donate to a walker, or participate in “Your Walk, Your Way”. The new initiative is a chance for companies to organize a fundraising event during work hours, or for those who live far away from the nearest community walk, to still be part of the action. Choose your own activity, and pick any day in May.

You can still register and use the Steps for Life online tools to raise money for your cause. Whether it's a walk through your community, a painting party or a dinner with friends, there are dozens of ways you can make a difference! For more information about Your Walk Your Way, visit [www.stepsforlife.ca](http://www.stepsforlife.ca) or contact our office at 1-888-567-9490.

## Coming Events

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

### 2017 Family Forums

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

Central Family Forum, Sep. 3 – 5, 2017, Barrie, ON

Prairie Family Forum, Sep. 29 – Oct. 1, 2017, Saskatoon, SK

Western Family Forum, Oct. 20 – 22, 2017, Calgary, AB

## SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER!

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



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## How to reach us

Toll-free: 1-888-567-9490

Fax: 1-519-685-1104

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Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support

Threads of Life is a registered charity dedicated to supporting families along their journey of healing who have suffered from a workplace fatality, life-altering illness or occupational disease. Threads of Life is the Charity of Choice for many workplace health and safety events. Charitable organization business #87524 8908 RR0001.

### MISSION

Our mission is to help families heal through a community of support and to promote the elimination of life-altering workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths.

### VISION

Threads of Life will lead and inspire a culture shift, as a result of which work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths are morally, socially and economically unacceptable

### VALUES

We believe that:

**Caring:** Caring helps and heals.

**Listening:** Listening can ease pain and suffering.

**Sharing:** Sharing our personal losses will lead to healing and preventing future devastating work-related losses.

**Respect:** Personal experiences of loss and grief need to be honoured and respected.

**Health:** Health and safety begins in our heads, hearts and hands, in everyday actions.

**Passion:** Passionate individuals can change the world.



# Yes I will, help bring hope and healing to families

## Gift Payment Options

- I'd like to make monthly gifts  
 \$25  \$50  \$100  \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- I'd prefer to make a one-time gift  
 \$25  \$50  \$100  \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- I've enclosed a void cheque to start direct withdrawal for monthly giving
- You may also donate to Threads of Life online at [www.threadsoflife.ca/donate](http://www.threadsoflife.ca/donate)
- Please send me updates about Threads of Life events via email at: \_\_\_\_\_

Visa  MasterCard

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PHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS (for income tax receipt) \_\_\_\_\_

Threads of Life, P.O. Box 9066 • 1795 Ernest Ave • London, ON N6E 2V0 1 888 567 9490 • [www.threadsoflife.ca](http://www.threadsoflife.ca)

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