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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.

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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