

ROBBED OF THE FUTURE

by Paulette Raymond

I'm different now. I know it. No sense trying to hide it or putting on some kind of pretense. Losing my brother changed me right to the very core of my soul.

“ He died alone that night in September, without his big sister, without all the people that loved him. Alone. I feel in many ways that's the crux of the matter here. I'm terrified.

I was his oldest sister, the one who took care of him, the one that he looked up to.

I walked him to school, helped him with homework, tucked him in at night. This complicated my grieving. Still does. You see, I lost my brother but in many ways I feel like I lost my child too. The gut-wrenching pain I felt the night of that phone call will stay with me always. Most of my memories of my brother are childhood ones. Of us building tree houses, fishing on the pier, getting into trouble diving for coins in the fountain at The Public Gardens. Those memories get me through each day. They are like gold.

He died alone that night in September, without his big sister, without all the people that loved him. Alone. I feel in many ways that's the crux of the matter here. I'm terrified. That something will happen to one of my kids and I won't be able to get to them in time, and they will die alone too. For the first three years, this was my life.

Never wanting to be more than ten minutes away from my kids at all times. Imagine how well that went over with a teenage girl and two young adults.

I could no longer drive across the bridge, no longer go to appointments that were more than ten minutes from my kids, no longer live a normal life. I suffered from panic attacks when I couldn't find my children, never resting until I heard their voice and knew



Paulette is Tommy's oldest sister.

they were ok. Throughout this entire process though, I knew what was happening. I knew I just had to work through it and I would be okay. So I did, and I am. Almost.

Sometimes I truly miss the person I used to be. She didn't carry this weight, she didn't know this pain. She didn't have this gaping hole where her heart used to be.

Grief has a way of weighing you down. It becomes this silent partner that sits on your shoulder. It can literally eat you alive if you let it. Don't. Don't let it.

My heart hurts for all of the things he will never do. The future he was robbed of. The family members he will never know. The joy of watching his son become a man.

I'm a "fixer" and this one time...when I needed it most...I couldn't fix this.

I couldn't bring him back, I couldn't undo

the horror of that night, I couldn't take away my family's pain.

I feel like I failed at being his sister. His protector. His confidant. Even though logic tells me that I couldn't have saved him that night, my heart tells me that I should have.

Do you have a story to share?

If you've been personally affected by work-related tragedy, and would like to share your story in our newsletter, please email Susan Haldane at shaldane@threadsoflife.ca

Missing him every day

Tommy Raymond's family struggles after his death on a container pier

by Paulette Raymond



Tommy Raymond

ON September 13th, 2009, my brother, Tommy Peter Raymond went to work, and he never came home... I miss him every single day of my life.

I thought I knew what pain was. I thought I knew what heartache meant. I thought... I can do this. I can handle this. I can be strong — that's what he would want from me. I was wrong.

The air — it left my lungs that night in a giant whoosh as if it was sucked out of me by a huge vacuum. Everything went still; I couldn't breathe; then the pain hit my chest as I sank to the floor on my knees. It's not true...it can't be...what?? What did you say?? Tommy is gone? Gone where? God no; please don't be true. Please let me wake up. Why??? Why, God? I hung up the phone, wrapped my arms around myself, and rocked back and forth, back and forth. The tears started to fall then and I thought "I'm so sorry Tommy. I'm so sorry. I am your big sister. I was supposed to watch out for you just like when we were little. When did I stop doing my job?"

There are twelve in my family, five boys

and seven girls. Being the oldest girl, I would normally have a trail of children following me...everywhere. He was my little brother, full of mischief, full of laughter... full of life. When Tommy laughed, you couldn't help but join him. His grin could light up a room.

Being close in ages, my brother Gerard and Tommy and I hung out together. We had fun together, built forts, climbed trees, went fishing on the pier, and swam in the fountain at the Public Gardens (much to the security guard's dismay). We often would get into trouble together usually because of one of Gerard's latest schemes. Gerard and I would quickly learn that if we got caught and Tommy was with us then we were really in for it because Tommy would always break under the pressure, and sing like a bird. We laugh at that now — it wasn't so funny back then.

I miss so many things about my brother: his smile, his deep loud voice that shook with laughter when he was telling you a story, his willingness to always help out. No matter what you needed any time of the day or night, Tommy would be there. His many, many friends and family can attest to that. He was a son, a brother, an uncle, a nephew, but most of all he was a Dad; a great Dad to his son Mitchell. Mitch is a special little boy who needed a lot of care and attention, and I watched him grow up with my brother constantly at his side. If Tommy wasn't at work, he was with Mitch. They were inseparable. It warmed your heart to see the love between the two of them. The little boy I had grown up with had become such a great dad and I was so proud of him for that.

Our family will never be the same. We are all different people now. Losing him changed us all right to the very core of our souls. Time passed, life went on, but our hearts are still broken.

He was just an average guy who loved his family; who loved his son and his mom above all else. He was there for mom all the time, running her errands, calling her

and visiting every day to make sure she was ok. He was such a great son and my mom adored him. His death destroyed her and I believe with all my heart that the heartache from losing him would contribute to her death ten months later.

I tell myself that he's in a better place now. I tell myself these things because it makes it easier to go on without him. Most days I still can't believe it. I can't believe that I won't ever see him again. That he won't ever walk through my front door again; that I won't see him smile; hear him laugh.

Our family will never be the same. We are all different people now. Losing him changed us all right to the very core of our souls. Time passed, life went on but our hearts are still broken...shattered.

Tommy started working for Ceres, a container pier in Bedford, Nova Scotia, when he was 15 years old. Working his way up to foreman, he loved his job and loved his friends that worked with him. He was on his way to lock up the containers from the ships that evening in September, when he dropped a lock. It rolled underneath one of the tractor trailers. Trying to scoop out the lock with his foot, he lost his balance and fell. The driver of the tractor trailer got into his vehicle. Not knowing Tommy was back there, he started up his truck, pulling Tommy underneath its wheels in the process. There was an investigation, but no charges were laid — it was just considered to be a horrible accident. Transport drivers on the pier now have to do a walk-around to check their trucks before they start up, so that is one change for the better as a result of Tommy's death.

For our family, every day is a challenge. Tommy is permanently etched in our hearts and will be forever. I drive on the Bedford Highway, and I slow down each and every

time to count the big yellow cranes. One... two...three...there it is. That's where you died that horrible night, Tommy. That's where our lives changed forever; next to the third yellow crane, alone on that cold concrete, underneath the wheels of that tractor trailer. I torture myself with unanswered questions – was he in pain? Was he calling out for mom? Was he afraid? Did he know how much we loved him?

I torture myself with unanswered questions - was he in pain? Was he calling out for mom? Was he afraid? Did he know how much we loved him?

I would give anything...anything...to be able to go back and change the 13th of September 2009. To have him not answer the phone that night; have him say no to that extra shift; keep him safe. But I can't change that. This I have to learn to accept. I pray that someday I will.



Tommy and his son Mitchell were inseparable

A poem inspired by the Reflections Ceremony at the Western Canada Family Forum

These are our babies,
our sisters or brothers;
Or maybe they are our
fathers or mothers.

Perhaps they're our
cousins, nephews or nieces,
whose jobs' repercussions
left hearts broken in pieces.

Sadly we're bonded by
our grief journey's tears,
Gladly found others with
whom to share fears.

We gather together
free of our masks
and with helping Threads
proceed with "getting on" tasks.

...of carrying on in spite of our pain,
able to hope and smile once again.

by Gaye Montpetit



Need a pair of work boots? Consider Mark's.



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

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

Smart Clothes. Everyday Living. **Mark's**