

# TURNING “WHAT IF” INTO “WHAT WOULD”

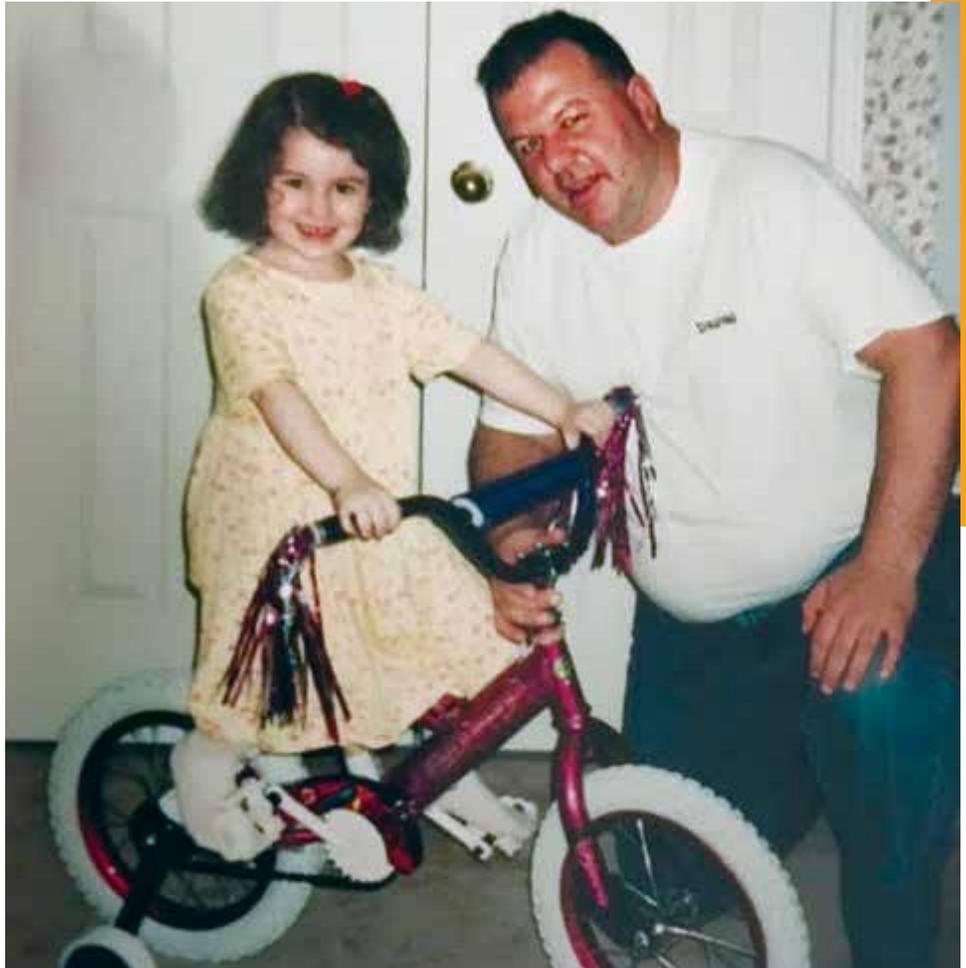
by Marleen Pitruzzella

**M**y story begins on July 13, 2009 with my mom picking me up from summer camp that afternoon. Just like any other day we were picked up, my brother and I would ask the same questions repeatedly, “what is for dinner? And when will daddy be home?” Unfortunately for us, one of those questions would never be answered.

Shortly after 6 p.m. a loud knock was heard at the door, and to my surprise my mom opened the door to a police officer. To this day I will never forget the feeling of what seemed like my heart dropping in my chest. Although I was 11 years old, the words “he was killed in an accident” had to be the most horrific sentence I would ever hear. My younger brother and I would spend the next few weeks trying to cope with the fact that our hero would never be returning home, and our family would never be complete again. It was already horrifying to know that we would never be able to see our father again, but to know that he was killed in an incident that could have been prevented was sickening.

From the moment I can remember, my father always loved what he did. Construction and paving were his passions which makes it difficult to hear that doing something he loved was the sole reason he would never be able to do it again. It was quite difficult, as an 11-year-old, to comprehend the fact that my father was helping his coworkers and in turn was crushed by a dump truck while performing his work duties. Even now, being 20 years old, the workplace fatality is a hard pill to swallow. Being older now, I have realized how much of his death could have been prevented if the company had followed simple safety precautions. If they had a backup camera on the truck, if they had the radio off, if they all had their safety equipment on maybe my dad would still be here and maybe I would not be writing this today.

For a few years that is all I could think about: what if? I would drive myself crazy asking myself all the ‘what if’ questions: what if he stayed home that day? What if the driver paid attention? Would he still be with me today? One day I finally came to the realization that I can play the ‘what if’ game all I want, but that was not going to bring him back and I would never be able to move on. The most special thing about my dad was he never let something set him back; he lived every day like it was his last. He inspired me



Marleen with her dad Leo

and continues to inspire me to reach for any goals I set my mind to. He would never have wanted me to put my life on hold or make my goals any less amazing only to sit around and wonder ‘what if’. So, from that day I buried the game of ‘what if’ and began a new one, ‘what would’. When I find myself in situations where I really need my dad, I ask myself “what would he have done?” or “what would he have said?” This brings me a sense of security and warmth knowing that I can still follow in his footsteps without him physically being here anymore. With my mother reaching out to Threads of Life, for family peer support, she, along with my brother and I were able to learn tools that helped us to cope with our unique situation and begin the healing process. The annual Steps for Life walk was my first introduction to the Threads of Life organization and helped me realize that we were not alone.

When my father died, I was entering grade 6 that year without him, but today I am enrolled in my third year of university

completing my degree in Justice Studies and my diploma in Police Foundations. My father would constantly embarrass me when I was younger, telling strangers how I am such a tough cookie and that one day I will be doing great things. Today I reflect on those words and have made them my ultimate goals in life, to do great things and be a tough cookie while doing it. The past nine years without him have been difficult. He has missed out on a lot, such as my valedictorian speech in grade 8, my awards that I was honoured with during my high school graduation, and most importantly, watching me be the first person in my family to get accepted into university. Usually the big events in life are easier to get through with all my family and friends supporting me, and it is the smaller events in my life that I miss him the most. But I know him and that contagious smile of his are looking down on my mom, my brother and me every day. I will forever strive to be half the person he was and continue to do great things in his honour.