

# threads of life

VOL.20, NO.3 FALL 2022

PREVENTION | SUPPORT | PARTNERSHIP

## A strong foundation

The members and volunteers of Threads of Life built this organization, and you continue to build it and strengthen it every day. Whether it's through sharing your story in the newsletter, volunteering to support others, or donating, you help to ensure all families feel less alone, and to prevent future tragedies. Read about all the ways you're helping to build a strong foundation for Threads of Life.

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### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Bill Stunt

The idea of community is the foundation of Threads of Life. It's nice to be alone sometimes, but people need connection and community, especially when things go wrong. There are so many ways that Threads of Life becomes a community – by sharing our emotions, fears and experiences

with one another; by being there to listen and guide; and by giving our time, energy and money to sustain programs and services for others. Our mission statement refers to it as a “community of support” and that is so important not only in the early days following a tragedy, but as the years go on. Our contribution to the community evolves, but it is still vital as you'll see reflected on each page of this newsletter.

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# The story of Emily and Cliff

“He was a faithful worker who worked in difficult conditions”

by **Emily Grimes**

I was born and raised in Toronto and Cliff was born in Nipawin and raised in various places in Saskatchewan. Surprisingly, Cliff and I met in Toronto, dated and married in 1958. He was big and strong, very capable and just a nice guy. He was used to Saskatchewan temperatures, and I remember when we were dating in Toronto in the winter, he would come and pick me up just wearing a light jacket. He would say it wasn't cold yet!

In the fall of 1966, Cliff and I and our two children decided to make a big move from Toronto, Ontario to Kamloops, B.C., but Kamloops did not meet our expectations. Cliff said “I always wanted to try my hand at farming”. So, we turned around and ended up in Carrot River, Saskatchewan, where Cliff had lived for many years in his youth. The part we liked about Carrot River were the winters (beautiful sparkling white snow). We farmed for many years and then at different times both Cliff and I obtained employment at the local mill. Cliff first ran the de-barker, including debarking timber



Cliff

burned in a forest fire, and later became a welder and millwright.

Now, this is my story about my husband's occupational disease. As I understand, it usually takes a long time to realize that a disease happened at work. In our case we felt his problem had to do with age.

In approximately 1995 the company my husband was working for made a major change to the mill. Cliff was 60 years old at that time. The changes in the mill were going to require Cliff to go up and down many stairs to get to the area he would have to work in. Cliff said to me he didn't know how he was going to continue to work there

as he wouldn't be able to climb all the stairs. Just before the changes came into effect, the company offered an early retirement package. My husband accepted the offer and I decided to retire early as well. We moved up to

**Cliff was not a person who complained, so we continued with our life as normally as we could.**

Lower Fishing Lake. Cliff and I became very involved in snowmobiling in the winter and ATVing in the summer. Cliff also loved jumping into his boat and going fishing. We enjoyed many good meals of fish. This gave us many good years together. Around 2008 we moved back to Carrot River because Cliff was having to go to the doctor a lot.

**It was not until 2009 that Cliff ended up in the hospital with severe breathing problems. This was the first time that Cliff ever mentioned to me that he had worked with asbestos.**

Cliff started to have problems walking short distances. It was not until 2009 that Cliff ended up in the hospital with severe breathing problems. This was the first time that Cliff ever mentioned to me that he had worked with asbestos. When he was welding, asbestos was sometimes used to slowly cool the material being welded. I happened to meet up with Cliff's former foreman, and I asked him if Cliff had ever worked with asbestos. His reply was yes. So, I said (insisted) to Cliff that he should apply for Worker's Compensation.

I am going to quote a paragraph from Cliff's specialist's report. "Mr. Grimes did smoke for approximately 30 years, but also had extensive, apparently uncontrolled exposures in the forest industry, particularly black charred wood dust. It is difficult to

separate out the effects of his exposures. However, he was a faithful worker who worked in difficult conditions in which the environment was not controlled for many years. I believe there is a significant likelihood that the environmental exposures have been a significant component of the genesis of his serious disease." You will notice that Cliff did not mention that using asbestos was part of his job.

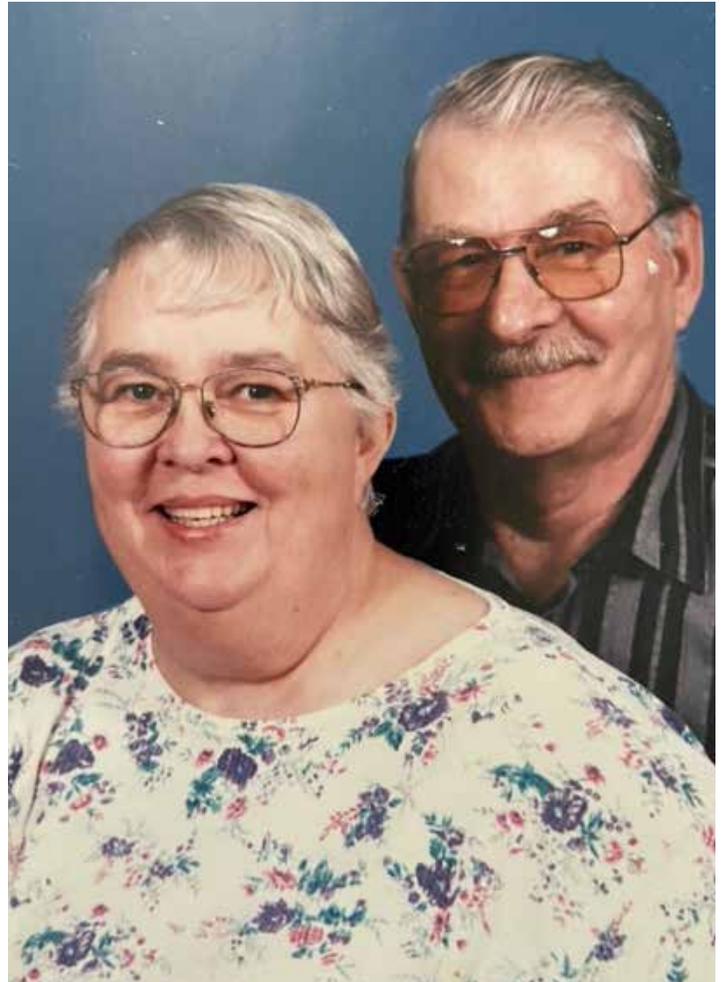
Cliff was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

So, Cliff applied for Saskatchewan Workers Compensation (SWCB). Upon speaking to SWCB I told them that Cliff no longer worked at the mill and the mill had been sold. SWCB's reply to me was that they had handled those type of problems before. Cliff's claim was accepted. From that time on, Cliff's oxygen, equipment, medical prescriptions and travel expenses were covered. Cliff was not a person who complained, so we continued with our life as normally as we could. We continued to travel a bit and enjoy other activities. On October 2014 Cliff passed away at the age of 79. Through this period of time, we

were always treated well.

In 2015 I moved to my daughter and son-in-law's home. This move made my life more comfortable. Also, I am not alone. This was a good move. I keep myself busy making special crafts and crocheting.

It was SWCB that informed us about Threads of Life. My faith in God, and Threads of Life have helped me in dealing with grieving. I always enjoyed taking part in the annual family forums. I'm very happy that the conferences can now be in person again and I plan to be there this fall.



Emily and Cliff

**Threads of Life believes sharing your experience of workplace tragedy helps you heal.**

**Are you ready to share?** You could write a reflection on one idea, write a poem, draft a post for our blog ([threadsoflife.ca/news](https://threadsoflife.ca/news)), or share your full story as a family member did in this issue. To learn more, email: Susan at [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca).



# Forty years does not lessen the heartache

## The lifelong impacts of an explosion underground

by **Cathy McNeil**

**O**n February 24, 1979, 16 miners entered No. 26 Colliery in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, to begin their shift. They were working the night shift 11pm to 7am. They descended five and a half miles into the No. 12 South wall of the mine, almost 2500 feet below the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. The No. 26 Colliery was the biggest coal producer in the local area for many years and was owned by the Cape Breton Development Corporation, also known as DEVCO.

Around 4:10 a.m., a miner on the surface felt what seemed like the concussion of an explosion in the mine. He immediately notified mine management and by 4:50 a.m., the Draeger (or mine rescue) team arrived at the mine surface, followed by two doctors and a local priest. They entered the mine and were taken to site of the explosion. The men working on the North wall knew something was wrong by the change in the air and were already on site at the South wall. Despite the conditions where the explosion occurred, they immediately began the search. Men arriving for the dayshift were also recruited to go into the mine to bring the men out. Soon they found the 16 miners who were all located in the general area of the No. 12 South wall of the mine. Ten of the miners were killed almost immediately, succumbing to the effects of the explosion and noxious gases that filled the wall section after the blast. Six miners were found alive, although their injuries and burns were severe.

By 7:00 a.m., the six injured miners were on the mine surface and ready to be transported



by ambulances to the local hospital. The plan was to stabilize the injured miners and then fly them by helicopter to Victoria General Hospital in Halifax to the burn unit. Freezing rain and fog, and winter weather warnings prevented any air travel so the miners were transported by ambulance, a five-hour drive, in treacherous road conditions. The rescue mission at the No. 26 Colliery was now a recovery effort. The bodies of the ten miners killed in the explosion were carefully gathered and taken to the mine surface. By 12:00 p.m. on Saturday, February 24, 1979, all of the bodies had been removed from the mine.

Four miners survived the explosion that day and returned to their families. Two have since passed away; two remain and one is my dad, George Stubbert. My dad worked in the coal mines since he was 17 years old. This was a job he loved. He was also a member of the Draeger team, the rescue team. He had competed in many Draeger team competitions with his fellow miners. He was trained to rescue in case of an underground accident or explosion and he was very proud of this.

On Feb 24, 1979 Dad left the house to work an overtime shift. This was the dedication of a young miner with a wife and three young daughters to support. I was 12 years old with two younger sisters, 11 and 4. He was 33 years old; "Handsome George" was his nickname in the pit, as he always showered after work and fixed his blonde hair just so, no going home with dirty pit clothes for this guy.

I remember the awful sound of the sirens

howling on the morning of February 24. Everyone knew what they meant, there was a mine accident. They seemed to screech all day, such an eerie feeling and forever etched in my mind. Then the priest showed up at the door with a couple of other men. My mother, Hope, was inconsolable. I remember silently standing by her as she fell to the floor.

We were told very early on that his chance for survival was slim. Eighty percent of his body was third and fourth degree burns, he was in shock, in a drug-induced coma and the burns were so severe he was unidentifiable from the other three miners. He had sustained an excessive amount of damage to his lungs from the fire and smoke of the explosion. When he did start to wake up, we were never allowed to visit him in the hospital, as this was his wish, always protecting "his girls". There would be multiple reconstructive surgeries, skin grafts, and wound care to facilitate healing. Treatments were excruciating and for every tear he cried a nurse cried right alongside him – this he will always remember, and often speaks of. The medical team of the Victoria General Hospital, Burn Unit, in Halifax, NS became part his family and his strength. Surgeries and treatments would continue for many years to come.

When he arrived home from the hospital months later, he was a stranger. He did not look like my dad. The scars on his face and his hands looked sore and the compression mask and gloves he had to wear were scary. The big apparatus on his hand and fingers looked

similar to a torture contraption. His interactions were minimal and he was very reserved. I wanted to hug him, to talk to him but I was afraid. He was very thin. Before me appeared a shell of the man I knew as my father.

My youngest sister Holly was four years old. She did not discriminate; this was her Daddy. She ran to him and showered him with affection and love. She was too young to remember the before and after. She loved openly and freely with lots of hugs. She had lots of questions but the innocence of a child made them easy and safe for him to answer. This little girl was instrumental in initiating the emotional healing for our dad. I'm sure she is very unaware, even today, of the magnitude of the impact her love and innocence played in his healing.

It was difficult to watch my father struggle. He secluded himself, not wanting the public stares. People were so inconsiderate with their curiosity about someone who looks different. My dad was 33 years old when the explosion occurred. "Handsome George" now sees pain and sorrow when he looks in the mirror. He will forever remember all of the losses he has suffered. When he decided it was time to share his story, educate people, explain what happened, and address the stares, we knew he was on his way back to us. His fight continues daily, every day and night with nightmares and sleepless nights. Dad has since been diagnosed with PTSD but not until many years after the explosion. There was no help back in 1979 – when you were healed physically then you were healed. The injuries from this explosion were far deeper than the physical. As a family we all suffered. Every day has challenges. We are all very aware when someone goes out that door they may not come back or life may never be the same. The fretfulness and anxiety never goes away.

Dad eventually did return to work for Devco. This looked different for him now. He spent some time teaching at the University College of Cape Breton, training miners in safety. He enjoyed this very much and it reconnected him to society, to his peers. Following this he made the decision to return to the coal mine to work on the surface in the monitor room. The comradery he always enjoyed with his fellow miners was so important in his transition back to the pit. He remained at Prince mine until he retired.

My dad's greatest sadness has been my mother's passing in 2010. For so long she had been his strength. She was there through it all with him and was until she passed away. He has often said when he was lying in the hospital after the explosion, he had the option

to leave this world at any time. He chose to fight to stay alive for his family, his children, to raise and protect "his girls" and he always has. The pain and suffering he has endured is not lost on us.

He still keeps a pretty low profile in the community. It's hard to be one of two surviving miners of such a tragic accident. This explosion rocked our little community to its core, no one will ever forget that day. In 2021 the Miner's Museum erected a monument to the 12 miners who lost their lives in the 1979 explosion, lunch cans with each miner's name engraved, and a plaque engraved with the names of the survivors.

Miner's Memorial Day 2022, a special service was held to remember these men at the museum, and the people of Glace Bay and surrounding towns showed up with standing room only. Dad did not attend even after multiple reminders; some things are hard to remember. I sat with many other townspeople and families and listened to "Big Jim MacLellan" recount the story of February 24, 1979. Jim was the mine manager on duty that fateful night. The town cried this day as they did the day of the explosion. He praised my dad for kicking into Draeger mode the day of the accident, stepping up and doing everything he was trained to do in rescue. He talked of how my dad remained calm and collected and knew what he had to do -- unfortunately the explosion was making its way down No. 12 South wall to where my father was located.

Dad continues to love, support and encourage us still today, and we are so proud to call him our Dad. This tragic workplace accident has shaped us into the adults we are today. I am a Registered Nurse, currently employed as the Manager of Clinical Services in a long-term care facility. My middle sister, Georgina is a Continuing Care Assistant with a background in Mental Health in Assistive Living and the baby Holly is a loving/mentoring teacher and guidance counsellor in

Manitoba. We are the caregivers, the nurturers, both in our professions and with our families. Our successes in life have been the result of this strong, supportive, loving man we call "Dad", who never gave up on himself or us.

The official report of the Commission of Inquiry into The Explosion in the No. 26 Colliery, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, February 24, 1979, has determined the explosion was likely caused by "sparking produced by the action of the shearers' steel pick ... into a high ignition type of quartzitic sandstone. These sparks ignited a pocket of methane released from the coal during mining. The ensuing explosion was magnified when it ignited loose coal dust in the mine." Despite the determination by the Commission of Inquiry that the explosion involved float coal dust and over the objection of the miners that ventilation was inadequate and rock dusting was not sufficiently applied to the mine surfaces, the company was not held liable. In fact, the Commission specifically noted that, "Overall safety precautions were lax, allowing the explosion to occur, however, Devco was not solely responsible for this." This determination made it possible for the company to successfully defend itself against accusations of any wrongdoing.

The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Secretary-Treasurer Levi Allen stated, "The explosion at the No. 26 Colliery was a tragedy, the likes of which Glace Bay had not experienced in over 70 years." He said "It was, like mine disasters before it, an event that could have been prevented. Proper ventilation and adequate rock dust would have eliminated the ignition sources that permitted this explosion to occur, but like almost every other mine disaster we have seen, management's first priority was production over safety. Then to have an official government body acknowledge these problems while absolving the company of responsibility, only added to the grief and pain of those left behind. The fact that 40 years has passed does not lessen that heartache."



George with "his girls"

# Writing your story for healing and sharing

by Susan Haldane

## I have a confession: as a writer, I get a little sick of the word “share”.

We use it all the time, after all – we’re always encouraging family members to share their stories. It’s right there in our Threads of Life values! It’s also core to our programs – family members share their stories when they’re paired with a volunteer family guide; they’re encouraged to share experiences at family forums, and there’s always an opportunity for personal sharing during our FamiliesConnect workshops.

## But why does Threads of Life think sharing your story is so important?

Solitude is great (ask an introvert!) but people are built for community. In their book “Opening Up by Writing it Down”, doctors James Pennebaker and Joshua Smyth write about the health benefits of disclosing trauma and other personal experiences, whether verbally or in writing.

“Talking about a trauma is a natural human response,” they write. “When this need to disclose is blocked or inhibited, stress and illness result.”

By contrast, there’s lots of research showing the benefits to health and mental wellbeing from sharing personal experiences. These include real concrete improvements like reduced blood pressure and reduced doctor visits. One specialist in traumatic bereavement, Maureen Pollard with GriefStories.org, notes that writing about grief and trauma can improve mood, improve working memory, and reduce intrusive thoughts and avoidance symptoms.

Many people find comfort in keeping a journal, and there are benefits to simply writing, getting your feelings and thoughts down on paper. But when you actually share that with someone else, the benefits increase. Often, people who have experienced grief and trauma need to tell and re-tell that story, in order to reconstruct the narrative of who they are – that process is critical to the healing journey. But sometimes family and close friends get tired of hearing that story, or you feel you need to protect them, so you’re reluctant to share your experience. As Karyn Arnold at Grief in Common says, that’s where finding our peers becomes important:

“In loss, it’s about finding those with whom we have our grief in common. It’s about finding those who will listen to our grief story



Photo by Greta Hoffman, Pexels

and show us that we’re not alone. We’re not ‘crazy’. This loss happened and every day we’re trying to figure out how to process it. Sharing our story can help.”

Fortunately, Threads of Life provides that ready-made, understanding peer group. In addition to the programs which encourage verbal sharing, there are opportunities to write for our newsletter and blog. You’ll find an empathetic readership – people who truly “get it” and have been through a similar experience. In addition, you can be assured that you’re helping someone else who reads your words, know that they too are not alone.

When I look up the definition of “share” in my dictionary, I find “give away part of; benefit from or possess or use or endure jointly with others...” So it turns out “share” is a tiny, perfect word full of meaning. Writing or telling your story to others is a chance to give away some of that pain and grief, and to endure it jointly with others – an ideal description of what Threads of Life is all about.

*If you’re interested in sharing your story here in our newsletter, on our blog or in another way, please contact me at [shaldane@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:shaldane@threadsoflife.ca) or 888-567-9490 ext. 105.*

# One more way families are helping other families

by Karen Lapierre Pitts, Manager Family Support

I've seen the expression "Be the kind of friend you wish you'd had", and that idea is behind a new resource Threads of Life has prepared, a tip-sheet on how to support someone after a workplace tragedy.

We know our family members are passionate about helping other families, and who knows better the kinds of support needed, than someone who has been through that experience? Last summer we launched a survey asking you to share what was helpful for you following the tragedy that affected your life. More than 30 family members responded with their observations about short-term and long-term support after a tragedy and their advice on the best ways to be there for someone following a serious injury, death or occupational illness.

The main findings in our report based on the survey will be no surprise to those who have walked this road:

1. Significant gaps in support exist for most families.
2. The impacts of lack of support can be devastating.
3. Individuals may not ask for help or support (but they may still need it).
4. There are many forms of helpful support following a tragedy.

Drawing from the survey comments and report, we created a tip sheet which is now available for anyone to download from the Threads of Life website ([threadsoflife.ca/howtosupport](http://threadsoflife.ca/howtosupport)). It offers suggestions and recommendations for both practical and emotional supports a friend, neighbour, coworkers or relative can offer. Our hope is that with this information, more families will have the kind of help that will lift them up and enable them to heal throughout their journey. Thank you to those who took the time to participate in the survey.

## Connect with community this fall

No matter how old we are, fall still feels like back to school time. If you're craving that chance to start something new, meet new friends, try out one of the amazing line-up of online workshops we're offering through FamiliesConnect. It's easy to connect through Zoom and if you're nervous, there's lots of help. Register at [threadsoflife.ca/familiesconnect](http://threadsoflife.ca/familiesconnect). Here's the fall line-up:

### Family Dynamics and its Role in our Healing Journey – October 19

Grief is a very personal journey and we often feel disconnected from those around us. The link to friends, family and community is vital for

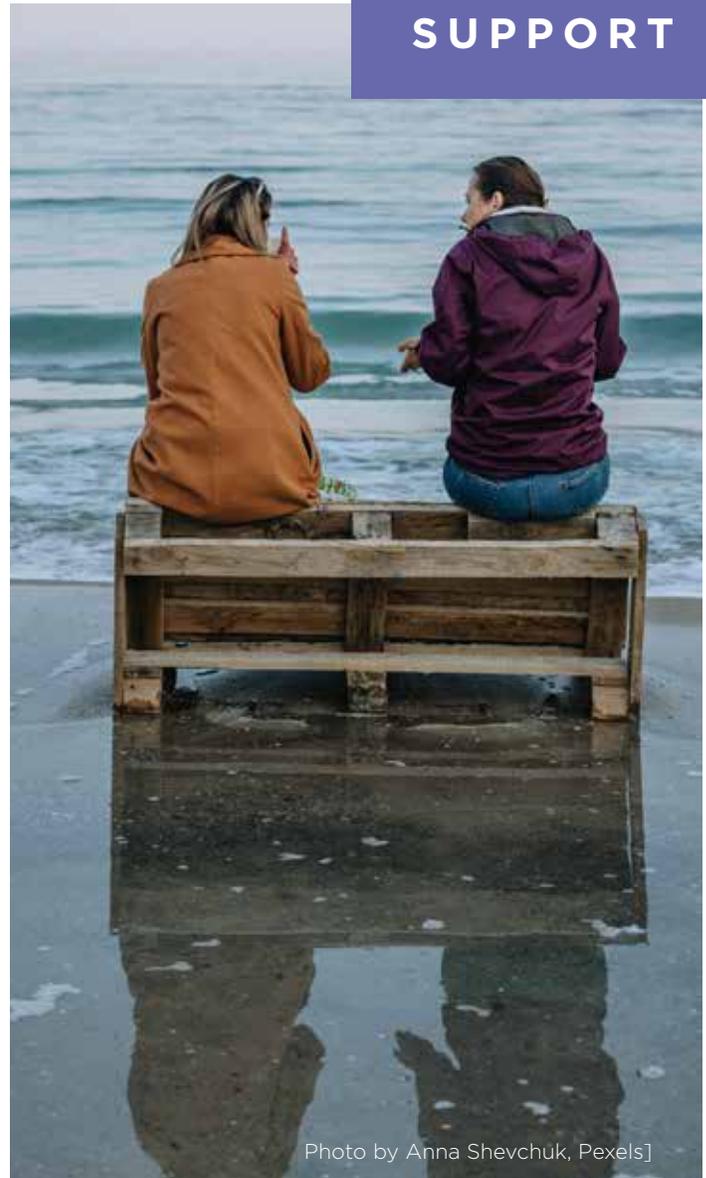


Photo by Anna Shevchuk, Pexels]

a sense of well-being and connection. In our time together we will explore the nuances of family, their role in our healing and helpful suggestions for healthy relationships.

### Tears Are Welcome – November 16

At Threads of Life events, tissues will be available and you will hear that tears are ok. Crying provides an emotional release and tears can help to heal your loss. In this interactive session we will discuss the different types of tears, the health benefits and some ideas of how to comfort someone who is crying. Come prepared to share your 'go-to movie' when you need a good cry.

### Music: Expectations and Letting Go – December 7

Sometimes the letting-go process feels really empowering. And sometimes, we want to hold on (grip, cuddle, cling) to things. There are times to get amped up and "just let that stuff go." But letting go usually involves other people, or hopes that we've carried a long time. Healthy letting go requires mindfulness. In this session, you will be guided through a process of releasing (accompanied by intentionally curated music) what you've been holding onto and exploring some expectations you have of yourself and other people.

# VOLUNTEER PROFILE: Eugene Gutierrez

by **Lorna Catrambone**, Regional Development Coordinator and Manager Volunteer Resources

In 2017, Eugene Gutierrez and his family experienced an unimaginable tragedy when Eugene's father Eulogio "Bot" Gutierrez, a veteran mining survey technician, on the verge of retirement, died after being struck by a piece of mobile equipment in an underground mine.

Eugene first learned about Threads of Life following his dad's passing. He and his family were searching for a charity that family and friends could donate to in lieu of sending flowers. "Threads of Life seemed relevant since they were a charity geared towards helping families that had been impacted by a work-related tragedy and also focused on workplace injury prevention."

Eugene was reminded of Threads of Life by his WSIB case worker when he was looking for additional support in the aftermath of his father's death. Eugene contacted Threads of Life and was paired with a Volunteer Family Guide.

It was through his Volunteer Family Guide that Eugene learned about Steps for Life. "I wanted to learn more and meet other family members," he recalls. "After attending my first walk in 2018 and seeing the impact of the event, I knew I wanted to get involved and contacted members of the planning committee to offer my help."

The next year, Eugene was asked to facilitate a session at the Central Family Forum. Knowing he still wanted to be more involved, he decided that he wanted to join the Speakers Bureau. "I attended the Speakers Bureau training at the end of February 2020," he recalls, "just before the world changed."

Later this year, Eugene will attend Volunteer Family Guide training, and will then be able to offer one on one peer support to others.

Eugene felt compelled to volunteer for Threads of Life. "My initial reason for volunteering was that I needed something that would allow me to find meaning in my dad's passing, so his death was not in vain. Supporting Threads of Life's mission helped meet that need."

Eugene has many fond memories from his work as a volunteer with Threads of Life, but one that stands out happened recently at Steps for Life. "I was taking photos of our participants at Springbank Park in London and randomly bumped into a friend who just happened to be at the park. She asked about the event and my involvement with it. I enthusiastically told her about Threads of Life and Steps for Life and was struck by her immediate reaction...the look of revelation on her face in learning that such an organization exists. Getting the word out there, informing people one by one, is important."

In addition to volunteering for Threads of Life, Eugene occasionally speaks to students in Western University's Information and Media



Eugene volunteering at Steps for Life London in 2022

Studies Program, and Fanshawe College's Interactive Media Design and Production Program. He is a graduate of both programs and speaks about his industry experience and career path. He is also called upon sometimes to mentor students.

Eugene is passionate about volunteering for Threads of Life. "There are no second chances when it comes to workplace safety. Supporting Threads of Life's mission to ensure that our loved ones come home safe, sound and alive should be important to everyone."



## Donors like you: Threads of Life staff

*When you think of all the people who donate to a charity, you probably don't consider its paid staff. But at Threads of Life, staff are among the many people committed to supporting the organization financially. In fact, Executive Director Shirley Hickman says, every single staff member at Threads of Life is also a donor.*

“Part of my job is working closely with Threads of Life’s partners, sponsors and fundraisers,” says Scott McKay, Director of Partnerships and Fundraising. “How could I suggest that others give to Threads of Life if I’m not willing to do that myself?”

Threads of Life’s newest staff member, Western Regional Development Coordinator Shari Hinz, agrees. “In my previous role I thoroughly enjoyed working with injury survivors and family members who displayed incredible courage and resilience in sharing their personal stories in an effort to raise awareness and instill a prevention mindset in others,” Shari says. “I found working with those individuals not only rewarding but incredibly inspiring. Having the opportunity to join Threads of Life and be able to contribute to further developing the programs that directly support individuals and families impacted by workplace tragedy is an honour.”

Threads of Life staff get to observe close-up the impact the organization makes. As a result, all make financial contributions to the charity and many donate monthly.

“I’ve seen the difference these programs and services make in people’s lives,” Scott adds. “I can commit just a little bit every

month and make such an impact to improve the future for families right across the country – it just makes sense for me.”

*Threads of Life is honoured to have many loyal funders and donors. If you’d like to become a monthly donor, please visit [www.threadsoflife.ca/donate](http://www.threadsoflife.ca/donate) and click “monthly” under “frequency” or contact Scott McKay, Director of Partnerships and Fundraising – [smckay@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:smckay@threadsoflife.ca) or 888-567-9490 extension 104.*

## Threads of Life - 20 Years of Hope and Healing

Threads of Life will celebrate a major milestone in 2023, as this year marks our 20th Anniversary. It was in April of 2003 that The Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support was officially incorporated. At that time, with a very limited budget, all work was carried out by two volunteers - one of whom is our Executive Director and founder Shirley Hickman. Today, we have over 300 volunteers, a staff team of 12, and over those years have supported thousands of families on their journey of healing following a workplace tragedy.

Shirley reflects: “It’s hard for me to believe it’s been 20 years since we started this organization for families affected by workplace tragedies, like mine. Threads of Life started with volunteers and today it’s still volunteers who make our programs happen. Though our organization is 20 years old, I believe we are still building the foundation, and with your help will be able to reach even more Canadian family members who will learn they are not alone on their journey of grief and loss. Thank you for being part of our history and our future.”

We have a number of plans in mind to help recognize and celebrate our 20th anniversary and we look forward to sharing them with you in the coming months.



At the OPCA golf tournament: Jonathan Rae, Michelle Rae, Threads of Life speaker Bill Bowman and OPCA President Ken Jamieson

## Ontario Petroleum Contractors' Association: Sharing the message and the mission

The strongest partnerships are built on a foundation of shared values and goals. Threads of Life is lucky to have many such strong partnerships. We have been working with the Ontario Petroleum Contractors' Association (OPCA) for a decade, and are honoured to continue to build and strengthen this relationship. OPCA's executive director Michelle Rae shared a little bit about how the partnership began and what it means to OPCA.

**Q: OPCA has been supporting Threads of Life since at least 2012. Do you recall how you first heard about us, and what inspired OPCA to support Threads of Life?**

**Michelle:** The OPCA has a safety program geared specifically for our industry called Petroleum Oriented Safety Training (POST). POST holds an annual safety forum with a variety of speakers discussing many issues relevant to our industry from safety engagement and positive safety culture to proper use and care for safety equipment, all to provide some positive insight on everyone's commitment to safety. Our initial involvement with Threads of Life was through a member of OPCA who was already involved and recommended a speaker for one of our safety forums. Our first speaker was Eva Broughton whose son was killed in a workplace accident and her moving story left an impact with our members. We knew from that moment it was important to continue our relationship with Threads of Life.

**Q: Do you have a favourite moment or story from those years?**

All of the Threads of Life speakers have made an impact with our members. One that really hit home was Patti Penny whose son was killed in the workplace. Although Patti's son wasn't involved in our industry, her husband and other family members are well known throughout our member community. One of my favourite moments was the time I was invited to a Family Forum on behalf of the OPCA as we were presented with a Friends of Threads of Life award. It was such an honour to be a part of the event and meet so many of the

families taking part, but especially seeing the amazing work Threads of Life does for these families affected by workplace tragedies and all the resources they provide.

**Q: Threads of Life obviously gains huge amounts of awareness as well as the financial support from our partnership — what do you feel OPCA gains?**

The OPCA and Threads of Life share the same belief that the impact of an injury goes well beyond the physical trauma experienced by the injured party. It is important we ensure our contractor community implement a sound safety program in the execution of their tasks on their sites. Most of you reading this can recount a situation that you have personally experienced or been made aware of where an injury has had serious consequences well beyond the injury itself. We need to work towards achieving an injury free workplace by promoting and supporting safe work behavior. Both Threads of Life and the OPCA promote this philosophy and OPCA is proud to provide any support we can to help families deal with the trauma of a workplace injury or fatality. By supporting Threads of Life, we can put funds raised by our events such as our annual golf tournament to good use and are thrilled in the knowledge that this money goes to such a worthwhile cause. Our support also adds that additional layer for our industry to drive the message of promoting safety in the workplace.

**Q: Can you tell us a bit about the plans for this year's golf tournament?**

Our annual golf tournament is scheduled for September 23rd at the Innisbrook Golf Course in Barrie. Everyone is welcome to join us to help us support Threads of Life and we look forward to a fun day on the course. Details can be found on our website at [opcaonline.org](http://opcaonline.org).

# Steps for Life committees mark big successes and bigger plans

One of the inspiring aspects of each Steps for Life-Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy event is the volunteer committees which organize each local walk. These volunteers truly walk together, and work together too, to ensure the event comes off without a hitch. The committees are also great at helping one another – sharing their ideas, successes and what they learn from one year to another.

Sudbury Ontario is one of our oldest continuous Steps for Life walks, having started in 2007. This year the event more than doubled its fundraising goal, with a total close to \$27,500. The first Steps for Life walk in Vancouver took place in 2010, but the current committee formed in 2020, only to see their event go virtual for two years. 2022 was their first in-person walk and they too exceeded their goal, raising close to \$60,000. Both committees share a little of what worked so well for them in 2022, and their plans for next year.



The annual equipment display is a favourite for kids at Steps for Life Sudbury

## HOLLY BARIL, Chair, Sudbury Steps for Life

**In a word or two, how would you sum up Steps for Life-Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy event Sudbury 2022?**

Huge Success!

**How does your committee work together and what were the key factors in their success this year?**

Every committee member is given their responsibilities for the walk. We have frequent email exchange to ensure progress is being made. The key factor in this year's success is really the commitment of those individuals -- that ensured the day ran smoothly and was successful. The assurance that each person will fulfill their duties is required for the walk to succeed.

**Could you name one new thing you tried this year for Steps for Life that turned out really well?**

Team competition. We have been trying to get this going for a couple of years, and I guess after the pandemic everyone wanted to take part. Plenty of teams were created, and we made sure to announce each team this year to recognize their fundraising efforts.

**Any exciting plans for next year's walk that you could share?**

We are hoping to have a food vendor, and possibly a band to play music for the day. We will continue with our heavy equipment display for the kids. They love this part!



A rainy walk day couldn't hold back the Vancouver Steps for Life committee

## REBECCA HARRIS and DANIELLE MOUNTJOY, Co-Chairs Vancouver Steps for Life

**In a word or two, how would you sum up Steps for Life-Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy event Steps for Life Vancouver 2022?**  
Togetherness, Successful!

**How did your committee come together and what were the key factors in their success this year?**

We first heard of Threads of Life through a connection in the mining industry who has been a long supporter. Soon after, we learned Vancouver (and all of BC) didn't have a Steps for Life walk, so decided to co-chair a Vancouver committee. We reached out to friends and local Threads of Life connections to form the wonderful committee we have today.

One of the key factors of success this year was the ability to have our first in-person walk where we could connect with our walkers, VIP speakers, and sponsors. Another would be the diverse range of skill sets and wide networks on our dedicated committee. This allowed us to be prepared for whatever the day might throw at us and helped the event reach more people.

**Could you name one new thing you tried this year to promote Steps for Life that worked really well?**

We relied heavily on social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) for promoting our walk. We leveraged the fact that we had already built a following and some content on these platforms during our first two virtual walks in 2020 and 2021. Social media allowed us to reach all kinds of people and provide live updates as we approached walk day.

**Any exciting plans for next year's walk that you could share?**

Our focus is to balance increasing awareness, honouring the lost and injured loved ones, and having some fun! We will be improving our walker experience through stronger engagement with the speakers, more efficient logistics, and a greener event.

*If you're interested in joining your local Steps for Life committee, please visit <http://events.threadsoflife.ca/volunteer> to read more about the roles, or contact us for more information*

## Upcoming Events

- **Central Family Forum** - September 23-25, 2022
- **Western Family Forum** - October 28-30, 2022
- **Families Connect online workshops** - [threadsoflife.ca/programs/families-connect-workshops](http://threadsoflife.ca/programs/families-connect-workshops)
  - **Family Dynamics and its Role in our Healing Journey** - October 19
  - **Tears Are Welcome** - November 16
  - **Music: Expectations and Letting Go** - December 7



## SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER!

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

## How to reach us

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**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 injuries 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 in:

**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 you can help

Like you, we envision a world in which work-related tragedies no longer happen. But while we're working together towards that vision, there are families and individuals who need our help to cope with the pain and grief of a fatality, serious injury or occupational disease.

### Here's what you can do:

- **Spread the Word** – Tell someone who needs support about Threads of Life.
- **Volunteer** – Organize a fundraiser or join a Steps for Life planning committee.
- **Participate** – If you're a family member, come to a FamiliesConnect workshop or Family Forum. If you're a supporter, sign up for Steps for Life.
- **Donate** – A monthly gift of as little as \$13.46 will print and mail our newsletter to 20 families. Just \$26.66 per month could send one volunteer to speaker training for a day.

