

# threads of life

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PREVENTION | SUPPORT | PARTNERSHIP

## Anniversaries and milestones

Following a tragedy, everything changes, including how you think about important days like holidays, birthdays and big events. And the anniversary date of the accident or diagnosis is one more tricky date on the calendar. There's no perfect answer, but in this issue read about how other family members have coped.

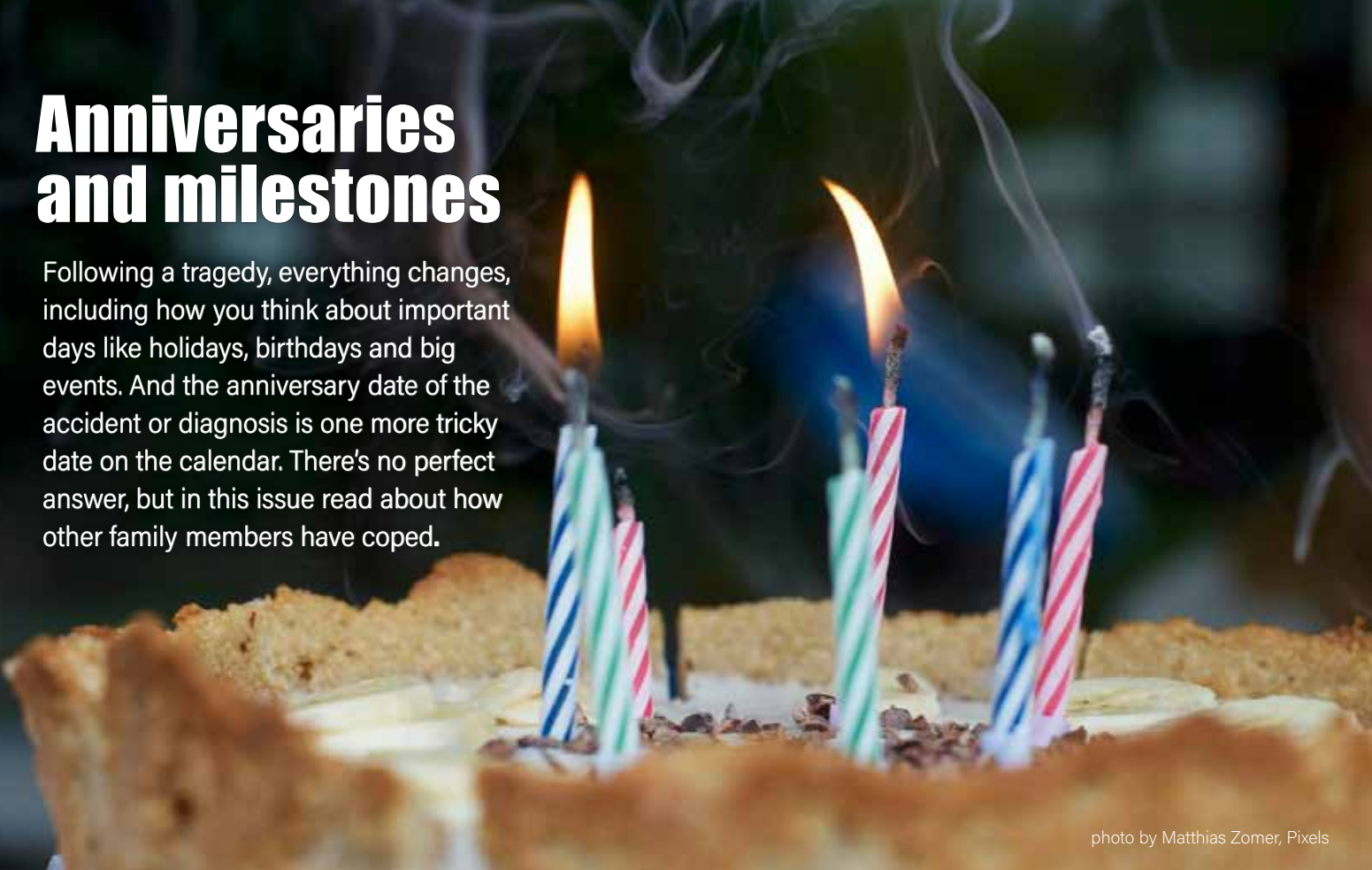


photo by Matthias Zomer, Pixels

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Peter Deines



This is my first message to Threads of Life family members and supporters as the chair of the Threads of Life board of directors. I am proud to take on this role after 13 years involved with Threads of Life, and ten years as a director on the board. The trust this organization and its members have placed in me means a great deal to me. Working with

my fellow board members, I will do everything I can to continue to build Threads of Life so it remains a strong support for the current and future families who need it. I also want to extend massive appreciation to every member of the Threads of Life team—volunteers, staff, management, and board members—for all their contributions. It is everyone's collective efforts that empower this organization and its impact—thank you.

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# Coping with anniversaries and milestones

by **Karen Lapierre Pitts**, Manager Family Support

*Coping with grief and loss is possibly the hardest work we will ever do. Every person grieving a significant loss related to injury, illness or death, will struggle with emotions when life starts to press on...*

The anticipation of birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries can also intensify certain emotions no matter if it has been six months, 10 years, or more since the tragedy.

Here are a few tips to get you through those days when it seems impossible to gain some control over your grief.

- **Cultivate** your own garden of positive feelings. Steep yourself in the things you love or plant things around you which bring you joy. It's okay to infuse or borrow "feel good" vibes.
- **Listen** to your inner voice to find balance between keeping busy and knowing when you may need some downtime. Grief requires a lot of emotional and physical energy.
- **Find an outlet.** Express your grief through writing, music or art. Focusing your attention on a mindful

activity can help regulate and release some of the intensity around emotions.

- **Spend time** with people who bring you comfort.
- **Plan an activity** that will help gain some control over a difficult day on the horizon. Go for a walk, check something off your to do list, or "get out of dodge" for a few hours. A change in scenery even if it is only for a short while can lift you up.
- **Push through** by taking time out to care for yourself. Getting rest, eating well and exercise are all good self care starting points. Don't forget to nurture your soul with compassion & understanding too.

While it is important to acknowledge that grief is a normal response to loss, it is just as important to remember that we can't ever minimize the complexity of our own experience. The loss of a loved one, a serious injury or illness --changes everything. Grief is painful but it also means you are coping in some way with how it is affecting your life. Remember it takes time to heal.

## The Passage of Time and the Rose

by **Lynda Kolly**

**I**t is hard to believe that this October will mark 25 years since the tragic workplace fatality of our 17 year-old son, Burton Reimer. It seems like only yesterday we received the call to tell us that he had died while commercial fishing for the first time on Lake Winnipeg.

Over the last 25 years I have worked hard to find healthy ways to deal with the unimaginable loss of my son, Burton.

One of the things that I love to do and I find brings me comfort is, when the weather permits, working in the garden. There is something about this tactile experience that brings me joy.



Last year, during the summer, I was working in the garden and spread a new layer of compost over the rose bushes. I had moved one of my rose bushes, because it was not doing very well, into a new location in hopes of saving this plant.

While working in the yard my mind often wanders to days gone by and memories of the past.

Burton was a young man at the time of his passing and was living with his father. He had moved back to the small town of Gimli, MB, on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, to finish grade 12 with his childhood friends and decide his future from there. My husband and I lived in the city and Burton wanted to live in the country. This is where his heart belonged as he loved the great outdoors and the beauty of living close to the lake.

I clearly remember that day 25 years ago. It was unseasonably warm for October and I remember how we could be outside without a warm jacket on and not wanting this beautiful day to end. Later that day, we met with good friends and this is when we received the phone call to tell us the terrible news.

Burton had been offered a job on a commercial fishing boat. It was the final day of the fall commercial fishing season and he was young, strong and eager to work. He had purchased his first car and now wanted to buy a used snowmobile from a friend. It was only one day of work, but still, it was an opportunity for him to make some money.

Burton had spent many years growing up around boats and water out at the family cottage and this is where he spent the summer months for the past 17 years. He had been trained on safety procedures on the water and to have a healthy respect for his safety. This part makes it hard to understand because the boat Burton was working on had no safety

equipment. There were no life jackets (as is required) and no means of communication in the event of an emergency. The only other person in the boat was another inexperienced fisherman who had very little training. We were told that—due to human error—their fishing boat took on water and had sunk six miles out from shore. The two men held on to gas cans as they struggled to stay afloat in the freezing water.

**Twenty-five years of missing Burton have passed and I think of him every day. I am also grateful to have had him in my life for each and every one of those days in his short 17 years of life.**

When another fishing boat on the water noticed that their boat was missing, they moved closer to the area and the other fisherman was quickly rescued. But they could not find Burton.

It was nine months after Burton's death, in the following July, when the coastguards recovered his body and we were finally able to bury his ashes.

During this time and years afterwards, we were left to suffer in our grief as everyone else's lives seemed to go on in a normal way and we were left to find our new normal moving forward in life.

The days, months and years passed as we tried to make sense of how this could have happened and how no one ever took responsibility for Burton's death or were held accountable in any way.

Throughout the years, I have found many different ways to bring meaning back into my life including volunteering for Threads of Life and

working in the garden.

Several weeks after moving the rose bush I noticed it had a single red rose growing on it. By then, it was fall, and I took this as a sign to say that my Burton was still with me, in spirit, all of these years later. He had sent me one single rose to remind me that there is always hope and to never forget the beauty that surrounds us. I truly believe that our loved ones are never really gone from our lives.

Twenty-five years of missing Burton have passed and I think of him every day. I am also grateful to have had him in my life for each and every one of those days in his short 17 years of life.

I am mindful of the gifts that I receive, such as the single red rose. It reminds me that he is never truly gone, and to always be aware of how precious each and every day is to us even if some of these days are harder than others.

The anniversary dates and some social gatherings can still bring up a sense of dread and heartache, but I find that if I acknowledge my grief and practice healthy self-care, they can be a time of personal growth and reflection.

Just like the new layer of compost, or a change of location, we all need to find what works best for ourselves. Only then will we begin to grow and thrive.

It may seem difficult in those early days of grief and despair to think about the future in any kind of positive way. Or it may seem impossible to imagine any happiness that life might bring, but I do find that it does get easier with the passing of time and when we find the supports that we need such as being a family member of Threads of Life or something as simple as working in the garden.



# Life after serious injury

by **Elwin Watts**  
(with thanks to Charles McKay  
for his friendship and support)

***September 21, 1994: A day that was supposed to be like all the others!***

Waking early to another beautiful September day on Prince Edward Island, I quickly readied for a long workday. Nothing out of the ordinary today...or so I blissfully thought. I was proud to be part of the crew building Prince Edward Island's shiny new Confederation Bridge to New Brunswick (the Fixed Link as it is known locally). This project was huge by PEI standards and presented many of us a good paying job and an exciting opportunity to contribute to the construction of the longest span bridge over open water in the world. Twenty-nine years old, I sprang up the stairs with ease, pain free, to the concrete plant control room, and proceeded to get it ready for another hectic, but energizing day.

Life was good! I was healthy, happy, gainfully and proudly employed. I was married to a loving wife (who was pregnant with our second child) and I was the father of a beautiful daughter. I enjoyed my coworkers. It was a special time, and all knew it.

I was an experienced driver so, same as hundreds of times previously, I jumped into a truck, loaded up, and headed down to one of the piers being poured. It was an extremely fast-paced and noisy environment. The hours were long, and you worked rain or shine, six or seven days a week.



Elwin in hospital in Halifax after his injury.

Dump trucks, rock trucks, concrete trucks, bulldozers and loaders were everywhere on the site, and all as big and heavy as the magnitude of the construction site required. The drones, whines and beeps soon became ordinary and after being exposed to them all day, every day, you almost didn't hear them anymore. At the beginning of my employment, I received a general site orientation, but it didn't cover any specifics. Looking back, I now realize it should have been much more in-depth.

While I waited for my turn to back into the pump truck, I hopped out of my truck to check the temperature of the load, which entailed climbing the ladder to the top of the drum. Back on the ground, I added details to the load log. Before getting back into the cab, I had a quick conversation with my co-worker. We were both standing to the side of my truck. Absolutely nothing unusual or out of the ordinary until...something was pushing me to the ground, face first! Turned out the "something" was a fully-loaded concrete truck weighing over 65,000 pounds! I must have been in the blind spot of the driver, although I don't remember that exactly. Then, and still today, I wonder how he didn't see me as I was fairly close to my own truck, and was wearing a safety helmet and vest. The truck ran completely over

me on my right side, from my ankle to my waist. The co-worker I had been chatting with, Dana, was able to keep the top half of my body away from the wheels as the truck rolled over me – he saved my life that day! Dana became the middle name for our son when he arrived six months later.

Somehow, I was able to roll over onto my back but that's all I could do as I lost all feeling in my legs. Another friend quickly appeared and kneeled beside me. He was crying and said "it isn't good buddy, but we're getting you help!" Perhaps it was shock, or perhaps just some sense of trying to gain control of something, anything, but at this precarious point I concluded that the best thing I could do was have a cigarette! Quite a sight, I'm sure, as I proceeded to have several cigarettes while waiting for medical help to arrive. Lying there, so many thoughts crowded my head, but foremost was wondering if I would ever see my daughter again. With my wife pregnant, would my kids grow up without a dad? After what seemed like an eternity, the ambulance arrived and off to the hospital in Summerside I went, still awake for the entire 30 minute drive.

In the Emergency Room, the scene was chaotic. I overheard a doctor say "we'll have to cut it off!" I was sure he was talking about my foot so, franti-



cally gesturing to a nurse, I urged her not to let this happen. She assured me, he was not talking about my foot, but rather my boot! Since I wasn't that attached to my boot, this was a great relief.

Somehow, I was still conscious when my wife, Heather, appeared. She stood at the bedside, four months pregnant, as beautiful as ever in a red dress. I was beginning to think I might never see our daughter, Alyssa, again, or our unborn baby. My injuries were even more severe than was originally thought. I would have to be moved ASAP to PEI's largest referral hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Charlottetown. I was still lucid but was starting to lose consciousness.

My foot and ankle were totally crushed, I had a tear in my bowel and my pelvis was crushed. When I arrived at the QEH, emergency surgery was performed to close the bowel tear, resulting in my having a colostomy, and to stabilize my foot and pelvis. During the next week, my family was prepared for what could happen as I had internal bleeding and also developed pneumonia. However, my stubbornness was never more apparent, and I was eventually stable enough to travel to Halifax for further assessment and several more surgeries on my ankle, foot and pelvis.

After a very lengthy stay in hospital, I was able to return home, and this is where I think the hardest part of my journey began – reality was setting in and I had many long hours with only my thoughts, which got darker and darker. One of the worst things was that I thought I had let my family down. I was no longer the provider – I had to ask people for help for EVERYTHING and that was so difficult! Initially, because I was so happy to be alive, I didn't mind, but eventually, because I had no idea what the future had in store, I didn't want to see anyone or talk to anyone, and

I always felt like I was “that guy who was stupid enough to get run over by a concrete truck”. Social outings were dreaded for a long time as ultimately, someone who didn't know me or my circumstances would ask “what do you do?” – because I wasn't working, I felt like a complete failure.

**I got to the point where I had to make a choice: either get help for my mental health, or it might be the end of my life. These feelings are very hard to express and understand, unless you've experienced a difficult trauma, and they don't easily go away.**

Other things I couldn't do, like skate with my kids, physically play with them, golf, or simply go for a walk with my wife, wreaked havoc in my mind. For a long time I was so angry! Angry with myself for not getting out of the way of the truck. Angry with the driver of that truck – why didn't he see me? Angry with the rest of the world for being able to do things that I no longer could, and for seemingly not understanding how difficult life was for me. I got to the point where I had to make a choice: either get help for my mental health, or it might be the end of my life. These feelings are very hard to express and understand, unless you've experienced a difficult trauma, and they don't easily go away.

I did get help, and after some time, I began to think I could return to work, although it was difficult to know what that work would be. I eventually obtained a diploma in Health and Safety Management, undoubtedly driven by the trauma and recovery from my workplace accident

and the desire to contribute to lowering the probability of workplace accidents. I have been in the safety field for the past 20 years, and I strive to convey the importance of safe work practices ALWAYS and tell my colleagues that the best thing a person can do at work is arrive home safely at the end of day.

Over the decades, I endured multiple surgeries, numerous sessions of rehabilitation and physiotherapy. Many times I questioned why I didn't die. Why did this have to happen? I still ask myself these questions sometimes and I suppose I always will. I return, however, to the belief that there is life after injury from a serious workplace accident.

My motivation for sharing my story is to illustrate the complexity of serious workplace accidents and, in some cases, the reality that a worker will not fully recover or make up for time lost. What can happen, however, is emotional and physical recovery to a point that your life can regain a semblance of your former self with meaning and focus resurrected.

With an open mind, faith in health care providers, loving support from family and friends, an incredible life is still within reach...but you must be willing to reach (and do the hard work rehabilitating both emotionally and physically) – I'm glad I did!



Elwin with family in 2021

# A daughter's story; love and great loss

by **Emily Stoneman**

**Dad:** one who loves, supports, guides, encourages and inspires his child. My dad was all those things and more. My Dad was not just a parent; he was my guiding light, my source of strength, and my unwavering support. My dad never missed any milestone in my life, he congratulated me when I got accepted into university and then four years later when I was accepted into my masters, he was in the crowd at every graduation and celebrated with me every birthday. He was with me during every high and comforted me during every low.

His name was Bryn Stoneman. He was an ordinary man with an extraordinary presence. In a crowd, he might not catch your eye—unless you noticed his arms, filled with tattoos that told their own stories. He loved dogs, camping, fishing, hiking, tinkering with vehicles he found for cheap on Facebook Marketplace or Kijiji, and spending hours in his garage. He was a family man through and through, the kind who would drop everything at any hour to help someone he loved, including his friends. He received multiple "Dad, my car is making a weird noise" calls, day or night, and he always answered, ready to help. My dad loved deeply and napped even deeper. If he didn't answer your call, it was probably because he had fallen asleep on the couch while watching one of his favourite shows. My dad was a man of adventure, he had dreams of moving to the east coast to live a life by the water with his best friend, his dog Lemmy. My dad also loved to spend



Emily and her dad

time in the mountains, and traveling to destinations that allowed him to lie on the beach for hours on end. After his passing, I spent weeks receiving messages from his friends on Facebook, each sharing stories of how much they adored him. Most of the stories were about how selfless he was when they were in a time of need.

I received that dreaded call on a Monday morning. My now-husband, Justin, and I were unpacking the house that my dad had helped us move into just three days prior. The call came from my grandma, who told me my dad had been in an accident at work. She said Justin should drive me to the hospital an hour away, but in my stubbornness, I decided to drive myself. The drive, one I had done countless times from the city I lived in to the city I grew up in, felt never-ending. My mind raced with thoughts during the drive -- I had no idea what "accident at work" meant. Was he hurt? Did he have a broken leg? A broken back? The possibility of him being dead was far from my mind because that just couldn't be possible. I

remember thinking that I would walk into the hospital room and find him in bed, and I would joke, "They made me speed here for a broken leg?"

Unfortunately, I was wrong. I parked and walked to the front of the hospital, where I was met by my family, all with tears streaming down their faces. I greeted them and sat down on a bench. When I asked, "Where is he?" the reply was, "He's not here." At that moment, my entire world collapsed. What did they mean he wasn't there? Where was he? It was then I connected the dots—my dad never made it to the hospital because he was no longer alive. He had died instantly in the accident at work. I immediately called my mom and Justin, and through my sobs, I told them my dad was dead. I still think about this today—the utter despair they must have heard in my voice, through my broken sobs repeating, "He's dead, my dad is dead."

My dad had multiple jobs throughout his life, but his favorite was driving a transport truck. When COVID-19 hit, he struggled to find a trucking job with the world shut down. For-

tunately, he was offered a position at a company he had worked for in the past. The company was going out of business, and my dad was hired to help tear down the machinery inside the factory.

Desperate for a job, he gladly accepted the position, with the added bonus of working alongside his brother. On August 17th, 2020 he and my uncle were tasked with a job to go to the roof to remove the air piping supports and vent stack. They were not given any safety gear. When on the roof, he stepped on a skylight that was disguised by rust from the roof and fell 25 feet to his death, his brother witnessing the whole tragedy. My uncle rushed down to try to do CPR where he spent 15 minutes trying to revive him, but it was too late. My dad's workplace was charged for failing to ensure fall protection was used.

I only got to live my life for 26 years before losing my dad. Growing up, I always imagined my father standing proudly beside me during some of life's most significant milestones. I missed out on calling my dad when I got engaged and hearing him congratulate me. My dad should have been walking me down the aisle at my wedding to marry the love of my life, dressed in a suit reminding me how much he loved me. I should have been able to watch his eyes light up in happiness and pride sitting in the front row watching his only child get married, but I was faced with the harsh reality that all I had was a picture of him sitting in the seat he should have been in. No milestones since his death have felt the same. Celebrating things that should bring joy such as birthdays, passing my board certification exam, buying a new car or getting a new job feel wrong to celebrate without him. It's not just the milestones of the past that he has missed, it's the future milestones both mine and his, the ones that I had al-

ways assumed he would be there for, that now weigh heavily on my heart. He will never have the opportunity to hold his future grandchildren in his arms, to share stories of his own childhood with them, to watch them grow and flourish. He'll never get to live out his dream of moving out east. He'll never get to celebrate his retirement or accomplish any crazy dreams that he had. He didn't get to see his 50th birthday, nor will he see any other milestone birthdays. I feel the loss of my dad in every milestone, every achievement, and every moment of joy that I experience.

**Each year, as the date approaches, I find myself reflecting on the memories we shared and the moments we will never experience together, the milestones that pass with every year.**

Over the years, I have tried different ways to honor his memory on August 17th. Sometimes, I visit his favorite spot or engage in an activity we used to enjoy together. Other times, I gather with family and friends to share stories and reminisce about his life and the impact he had on us all. Each year, as the date approaches, I find myself reflecting on the memories we shared and the moments we will never experience together, the milestones that pass with every year. I think about the laughter, the advice, and the unconditional love he provided. On this day, I allow myself to fully feel the pain of his absence, but I also make space for gratitude for the time we had together.

Grief never goes away, you just learn how to deal with it. August 17th has forever transformed for me. It

went from being a normal day in the middle of summer to a day that will forever remind me of when my dad died, the day my life changed forever. This date brings sorrow, longing, and reflection. Death anniversaries bring forward many emotions; for some, these are days full of sadness, and for others, they are days of celebrating their loved ones' lives. The fourth death anniversary of my dad has recently come and gone, and the one thing I have learned is that there's no wrong way to observe this day. It's about finding what feels right for you and allowing yourself to grieve, remember, and heal in your own way. What matters is that the day is acknowledged in a way that feels the most meaningful and comforting to you.

My dad deserved better. To my dad's workplace, he was just another employee and as time goes by will fade in their memory but for me, I'll spend the rest of my life missing my dad. If I could leave everyone with one important message, it would be to always refuse unsafe work. It's not worth your life.



At her wedding Emily could only include a photo of her dad]



# YOUR HEALING TOOLKIT



by Heidi Hunter, [www.untilnow.ca](http://www.untilnow.ca) and [www.runswithscissors.ca](http://www.runswithscissors.ca)

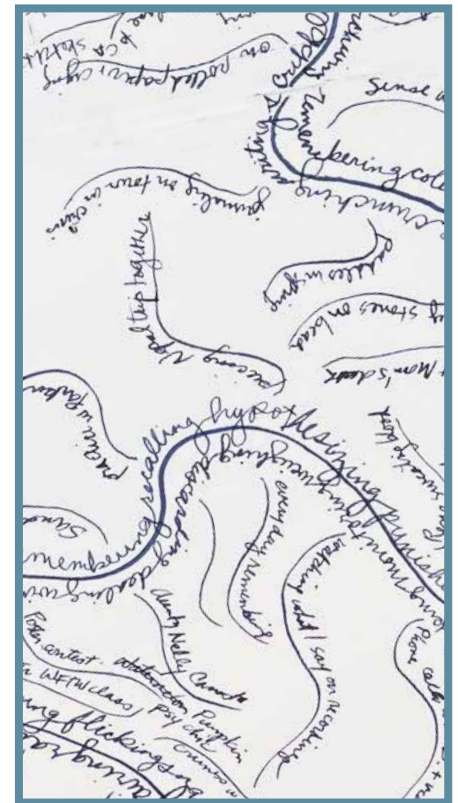
*I developed this writing practice to help ease into the process of journaling. It's an open invitation to start putting thoughts and memories onto a page without the pressure of going too deep, too fast.*

## Why is this tool helpful after a workplace tragedy?

River Writing is a powerful journaling technique that promotes emotional healing and self-discovery. After a workplace tragedy, it can provide a safe and supportive outlet for processing grief, finding clarity, and gaining inner strength. The gentle flow of writing helps to release pent-up emotions and offers a path toward acceptance and healing.

## How can I get started?

1. **Find a Quiet Space:** Choose a peaceful spot where you can write without interruptions. Comfort is key.
2. **Draw Your River:** On a blank page, draw a meandering line that represents a river. This symbolizes the flow of your thoughts.
3. **Write Along the Banks:** Along the drawn river, begin listing gerunds (action words ending in "-ing"). Let the words flow naturally. Examples include "flowing," "healing," "reflecting."
4. **Let Go of Expectations:** Allow your thoughts to wander freely. There is no right or wrong way to do this. Embrace whatever comes up.
5. **Create Tributaries:** As you reflect and reread your gerunds, notice the words that speak to you. Draw a wavy line from each significant word and write a few 'placeholder words' along this new "tributary." These represent the seeds of memory.
6. **Themes and Variations:** You can do river writing about a person, a place, or a time in life. Tune into the theme and list all the "-ing" words that come to you.
7. **Reflect:** After filling the banks with words, take a moment to read them. Notice any patterns or themes that emerge.
8. **Revisit:** Return to your river writing whenever you need to process emotions or find clarity. It's a continuous journey.



## Free Resources

- The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron: A classic guide to creative self-discovery.
- Writing Down Your Soul by Janet Conner: A deep dive into the practice of reflective journaling.
- Healing Through Words by Rupi Kaur: Healing Through Words is a guided tour on the journey back to the self, a cathartic and mindful exploration through writing.
- Writing the Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method for Finding Your Authentic Voice by Linda Trichter Metcalf Ph.D



# Introducing Thomas, Family Support Coordinator

**My name is Thomas Marsh**, and I am the newest Threads of Life team member. Over the past decade, I have travelled coast to coast. I am looking forward to planting roots in beautiful Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, with my family. In my previous role, I worked for an international non-profit. While there were vast responsibilities, my greatest joy happened when I had the opportunity to walk with others through grief and loss. I love hearing other people's stories.

In my free time, I "try" to keep up with my two children. Their free-spirited joy reminds me to enjoy every moment.

I love to drink good coffee and be by the ocean! The ebbs of the tide and the crashing waves create peace and tranquillity within me.

In the next few months, I hope to get to know you and our families better. I look forward to hearing your stories of hope and healing. I am grateful to be a part of this fantastic team and look forward to meeting you soon.



Welcome, Thomas, to the family support team!

## New cross-Canada options for **FAMILIESCONNECT** WORKSHOPS



It's a big country. For a national organization like Threads of Life, it can be challenging to schedule events to suit members in all the time zones from east to west. But starting this fall, we're adding new options to our online FamiliesConnect workshops to meet a wider range of schedules. Most sessions will now be offered twice, with earlier and later timing.

So whether you're in St. John's or Victoria, or anywhere in between, you should be able to find a workshop time that suits you. And the topics continue to be wide-ranging from serious to fun – see the list below of FamiliesConnect workshops this fall. If you haven't tried joining FamiliesConnect yet, it's time to give it a try! You'll find a welcoming community, a safe space and loads of useful information that will help you cope no matter your situation.

- **Benefits of a Book Club**

Sep 18 & 25

- **Widowed, and Grief with Children -**

Oct 16 & 30

- **Talking about grief,**

especially on a day when you are struggling  
Nov 13 & 16



## Volunteer Profile: Peter Deines

It may have started out as a work commitment, but for Peter Deines, the connection to Threads of Life quickly transcended work and became “part of the fabric of my life”. Peter has been involved with Threads of Life as a volunteer since 2011, a board member since 2014, and was elected chair of the board this summer.

Being involved with Threads of Life is “an opportunity to contribute to an important organization,” Peter says. “There is

always value in contributing to organizations that better society.”

Peter first came to Threads of Life through the Steps for Life walk. The company he worked with was focused on helping employers avoid workplace tragedies, so entering a team in Steps for Life seemed a natural fit. Within a year, he recommended the company adopt Threads of Life as its charity of choice and become a national sponsor for the walk. A few years later, he was invited to join the board of directors. Peter did his due diligence, speaking to other directors and reviewing the financial statements, and it was “kind of a slam dunk”. He has been active on the audit and risk committees and has served as vice-chair for several years.

While Peter is not a family member of Threads of Life, the combination of his work in health and safety, and his empathy make Threads of Life’s mission “very, very compelling” for him. Early in his involvement with Threads of Life, executive director Shirley Hickman came and shared her story at a conference his company hosted. Ever since, it’s been those personal experiences that stay in his heart and motivate him. “It’s the people,” he says. “It’s the people and stories.”

Often, flying home to Edmonton after a board meeting or family forum, he needs time to reflect and process the stories he’s heard, but they always reinforce how important the work of Threads of Life is in the lives of people who’ve experienced tragedy. Peter has introduced his wife, son and daughter to Steps for Life, and for the whole family the walk has become part of a long-standing commitment to volunteerism.

Peter’s intention is to remain as board chair only until there is a family member ready to step into that role – he believes someone with personal experience of tragedy is best placed to lead the board of directors and “safeguard the soul of the organization”. In the meantime, he is happy to invest his energy and skills somewhere he feels he can make a difference.

“I’d like to say thanks to all the people who have built the organization up over the years,” Peter adds. “I hope together we can set the stage for even more to contribute and be involved in the future.”



## A major change for Threads of Life

**Last year Threads of Life marked its 20th anniversary;** a time for both reflection and planning. After two decades building and leading the organization, Executive Director and founder of Threads of Life Shirley Hickman has announced she will retire. We have set up an online message board for anyone who would like to share a greeting, reflection and/or photo (<https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/yUazyMnE>). Shirley says, “I treasure the relationships with each one of our family members, volunteers and supporters. While it won’t be possible to respond to each message, I will read and enjoy every one.”

The search for a new Executive Director for Threads of Life began in August, with the plan to have the new leader in place in early 2025. Threads of Life would not exist without the contributions of family members, volunteers and partners. With that strong foundation under us, Shirley believes Threads of Life is in a good position to undertake this transition. Threads of Life’s Board of Directors, as part of their role overseeing the organization, have been engaged in succession planning for Threads of Life and have a comprehensive plan in place for the recruitment, selection and transition of a new executive director. We will keep you informed as this process unfolds.



# Why we all walk: Ana's story



We each have our own reason for participating in Steps for Life—Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy, whether we're involved as organizers, walkers, donors or sponsors. But for all of us, it's about caring and commitment: caring for others who've experienced a work-related tragedy, and commitment to end those tragedies in the future. Ana and her family participated in Steps for Life for the first time last spring, and their

story truly illustrates why Steps for Life is important, and the impact you have when you get involved.

"On August 31, 2023, I received the worst phone call—a call every wife dreads. My 49-year-old husband, the father of my children, had been in a workplace accident. A concrete wall had fallen on top of him. Although I did not know this when I received the call, I actually had no inkling of the severity of what had happened. I was told to come to the hospital, so I spoke to my children, who then decided they would accompany me to Toronto as it was over an hour's drive. I remember vividly that day. I recall the feeling of time passing so slowly. One minute felt like one hour. No matter how fast I drove, it felt as though it was still so far away.

I finally arrived at Sunnybrook Hospital, still thinking it was a minor incident. The hospital's emergency department held a grim revelation: my husband had been crushed by a 10,000 pound concrete wall and he was in surgery. His cousin, who had met us on arrival, explained this all to me. I still truly had no idea of the extent of his injuries. At 4 a.m., after endless hours of pacing and waiting, the doctor delivered the devastating news: my husband had pulled through surgery but was in very critical condition. The next 48 hours would be crucial, and he may not survive. Those words shattered my heart. I entered the ICU, where my love lay—hooked up to monitors, medications, and a breathing machine. His fight for survival consumed us. For a month, we stood by his side, watching him battle relentlessly. Trying to come back to us. He fought so hard to make it past our middle child's birthday, (Sept 27) but on September 30, 2023 (just three days later), he grew very tired and took a turn for the worse. The doctors said there was nothing more they could do.

That day has forever changed our lives. My husband never made it home. Now, my children and I face life without him—the man who won't walk our daughters down the aisle, won't meet his grandchildren, won't offer fatherly advice to his children when they need it so desperately. I ache for his voice, his touch, his presence. Every day, I yearn for him to walk through our front door, as he always had and say, "Hello, I'm home." But he's gone, leaving an irreplaceable void. We lost an extraordinary man—a beacon of light and a quick-witted and

wise man. My children lost their hero, and I lost my best friend.

I originally heard about Threads of Life from WSIB. They highly recommended I get in contact with Threads of Life as they had a lot of services my family and I could benefit from. After contacting Threads of Life I was directed to the website where I learned about Steps for Life.

The decision to participate in Steps for Life wasn't easy. My husband had passed away six months earlier; it was very fresh and we were all still grieving in our own way. There were 10 to 12 of us and we felt that this walk was a great way to keep him alive in our hearts. We had no clue what to expect and yes we were all intimidated at first but not long after we felt extremely welcomed by everyone.

I spoke to Sharon, an amazing person who from day one made me feel very welcomed and accepted. Sharon assured me that my children and I were not alone and that this walk could help us grow, which it did. We met some remarkable families who have been through the worst tragedy a person could go through. We felt right at home.

On the day of the walk, I walked up to Sharon and introduced myself and my children. Sharon welcomed us with open arms and made us feel like we had just become part of a family that would help us along our journey. Walking in solidarity with all the families that have lost loved ones brought comfort and reassurance to me and my children.

I have not been able to participate in many Threads of Life programs as this is my first year but I do look forward to participating in many more after Danny's first year death date passes. I participated in one of the FamiliesConnect workshops online and found it to be very helpful talking and relating to others. I look forward to the family forum as well. I hope to be part of the story-telling in the years to come."

## STEPPING UP: Volunteer for Steps for Life!

Steps for Life is truly a community event. Each year, volunteers pull together to organize Steps for Life events coast to coast. There's a role for anyone on a Steps for Life committee, including you! There's training and lots of support for volunteers. A few examples:

- approach local sponsors
- promote the event in the community
- coordinate event logistics
- recruit day-of-event volunteers
- oversee day-of-event participant registration
- chair meetings and provide guidance to the committee



To learn more about Steps for Life volunteer opportunities, visit [stepsforlife.ca](https://stepsforlife.ca) or contact National Steps for Life Manager Heather Lyle at [hlyle@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:hlyle@threadsoflife.ca) or 888-567-9490.



## Upcoming Events

**Central Family Forum** Sept 27-29

**Western Family Forum** Oct 25-27

### Families Connect online workshops

[threadsoflife.ca/families-connect](http://threadsoflife.ca/families-connect)

- How can we help you? Intro to Threads of Life - check the website for date and time
- Benefits of a Book Club - Sep 18 & 25
- Widowed, and Grief with Children - Oct 16 & 30
- Talking about grief, especially on a day when you are struggling - Nov 13 & 16

### Canada's Safest Employer Awards



Threads of Life is honoured to be named the Charity Partner of the Canada's Safest Employer Awards for the second year. This opportunity began in 2023 and meant that our name and logo were featured on the promotional materials for the event. We also were invited to attend the event, where we were thrilled to meet so many of our existing supporters. We also receive the proceeds from the silent auction - funds that help support our programs and services.

The award ceremony is scheduled for Thursday October 10, 2024. For information about the nominees and the event details visit [www.safestemployers.com](http://www.safestemployers.com)

## 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 injury 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.

# Become a thread in our Tapestry of Hope!



If you'd like to become a Threads of Life monthly donor, please visit [www.threadsoflife.ca/donate](http://www.threadsoflife.ca/donate) or call our office at 888-567-9490.

The Tapestry of Hope is our new club for monthly donors. When you give monthly to Threads of Life, you provide sustainable, predictable funding to support those affected by workplace tragedy. It's not just a donation; it's a commitment to building a safety net of compassion and understanding, ensuring that no family has to face their journey alone.