

threads of life

VOL.19, NO.4 WINTER 2021

PREVENTION

SUPPORT

PARTNERSHIP

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

One workplace tragedy and countless ripples. How do we know? We hear it all the time. We hear the pain from the immediate family, the aunts, uncles, cousins and close friends. But wait, it doesn't stop there. Each co-worker feels the ripples, as does the employer. And, it goes on – the emergency personnel who attend the scene, those providing care in hospitals. The ripples stay with the inspectors and if there is an inquest, with each member of the jury. The ripples come and go in each person's life at different times and in different ways, but they are always there and no one quite knows when a ripple will surface once again.

Photo by Askar Abayev at Pexels



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Bill Stunt

For most of us who are members of Threads of Life, a workplace tragedy has struck us or a close family member directly. But we know the ripples of these tragedies continue to roll outward. So many of the volunteers who work with Threads of Life have been rocked by these ripples – they may be safety professionals or community members who are not families of workplace tragedy, and yet feel the same passion and commitment, because of those ripples. We are incredibly grateful for all they contribute, as we work together to accomplish Threads of Life's vision of a world where such tragedies are eliminated.

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Missing Jamie

by Roger Hudson

I first heard of Jamie's death on the radio on my way home from work. They said that a young man from Lower Sackville had died on a jobsite in Cape Breton. I thought: wonder who that was and if I knew them ... never thinking that it could have been Jamie.

Jamie and I were best friends. We would celebrate our birthdays together as they were a few days apart. We were both Geminis ... twins!

Jamie loved going fishing, and we would go often. Many Friday or Saturday nights we would be out playing pool then heading out to a bar or two; other times we would just sit around his mother's kitchen with a case of beer and tell stories, and of course tease his mother.

An hour or so after that news report, Jamie's mother called our house. She was crying and could hardly speak, and she said that Jamie had died from an incident at work and to come to her place. My parents (who were very close with Jamie) drove me to his mother's house. Jamie's parents, sisters, girlfriend and a few other friends and family members were there as well. That night and the following few days are still a blur to me. I can't remember conversations or who I saw. I remember thinking 'how could this have happened to Jamie? He was tough guy, a fighter ... how could this have happened?'

Jamie was killed on the job on February 9, 2000. He was working for a marine construction company aboard a barge that was dredging in the harbour not far from Port Hawkesbury Nova Scotia. Jamie entered the hold of the barge, an airtight confined space that had no oxygen. Jamie lost consciousness and died.

As more details of the accident emerged I realized that this could have been prevented if Jamie had had the proper safety training and if the company had procedures in place for entering a confined space. As the years went on, my career progressed as a Gas Fitter. I continued to learn about safe work practices, safety training and employees'



Jamie (left) and Roger were best friends from childhood.

rights. Due to some health issues in 2009 I had to leave the gas fitting trade and was given the opportunity for retraining. I enrolled in the Occupational Health and Safety program offered at Nova Scotia Community College. I completed the course in 2011 and started my new career in OHS. I now have over 20 years of combined experience, between my time as a tradesperson and as an OHS professional. I keep a photo of Jamie on my desk at work, not as reminder of my lost friend but more as a guide or a driver to help me educate employers on their responsibilities to provide a safe and healthy workplace for their employees, and to coach the workforce on being safety leaders and having the courage to speak up if they have any safety concerns.

I remember thinking 'how could this have happened to Jamie? He was tough guy, a fighter ... how could this have happened?'

I lost another childhood friend a year and a half ago on a jobsite where I was a Safety Advisor. The incident occurred a couple of hours after I had left the site for the day. I found out about it the following morning when I returned to site, and that my friend of 30 years was badly injured. I immediately called his foreman who was also his good friend and mine as well. I could tell when he answered the phone that he didn't know about the incident as he was on vacation at his cottage. I told him there was an incident and that our friend was critically injured

and expected not to survive. Our friend passed away a few days later as a result of his injuries.

Both of these incidents could have been prevented if the required safety training was provided along with safe work procedures and if safety guards were in place.

Returning to the jobsite where my friend and co-worker died was very tough for me. I thought – as a safety advisor could I have prevented this incident from occurring? Did I overlook a safety concern? I still see some of his co-workers that were there with him the night of the incident. I always ask how they are doing and if there's anything that I can assist with, as being involved or a witness to a serious workplace incident can have lasting effects on co-workers. I walk past the location of the incident often. I say a little prayer for him each time.

I have received and have made that phone call saying that a loved one or good friend has died while at work – no one should ever have to make or receive that call!

The last time I spoke to Jamie was the Sunday night before he left home for work. He said 'I'll see you Friday night when I get home'. I saw him Friday night ... at his wake. We laid him to rest on Valentine's Day. I still visit his mother's house and she calls me on my birthday, but celebrating my birthday has never been the same and I haven't gone fishing since Jamie's death. I keep a picture of Jamie on my bar with an unopened beer beside it.

I got married in 2007. My best man, Corey, said in his speech that he was honoured to be my best man but that it should be Jamie giving the speech – not him. There wasn't a dry eye in the place after he said that. I missed Jamie a bit more on that day.

The many sides of a coin

by Liza Beaulieu



Liza Beaulieu is a certified translator and has been Threads of Life's translator for more than a decade. Aside from her background in translation, she is versed in theology (as a spiritual care provider) and in creative writing. She just won the 2021 OTTIAQ Short Story Contest for her piece *The Collective Voice*; <https://ottiaq.org/prix-et-distinctions/>.

Deaths, accidents, and injuries leading to disabilities can occur in shops, factories and plants, but in public venues as well. Even recreation facilities are workplaces for some, and when tragedy occurs, the poignant and vivid ripple effects can extend to all parties involved, whether it be workers, owners, the families or strangers, not to mention the victims.

When we flip a coin, we flip a perspective. Heads or tails? The only control we have upon tossing the piece is the motion of the hand and the thumb. That's it! Nothing else. Not even the height nor the speed. It's all up to the law of gravity, and whatever happens to make the coin land on one side or the other, well, who knows. Another law? Maybe. Probably. But one thing is for sure: the fate of the one who elected the winning side changes.

My fate changed at the age of 12, not on the flipping of a coin, but on the performing of a handstand. It was indeed a beautiful, warm sunny day at La Tuque's municipal campground. Each year my father would bring us here from Montreal. Pure joy. I still remember the freshness the water brought to my skin as I was playing in their swimming pool that morning. At one point, I took a look at my mother from afar, smiled and waved at her as she was standing in the shallow end, her back against the pool side while watching other people playing. She saw me and smiled back—a huge grin, an unforgettable grin. That's when I took a plunge and did my handstand. I loved the feeling of my body being held in vertical position by water, as if I were defying the law of gravity and wouldn't fall, couldn't fall. How thrilling the joy of being held! Once done, I sought my mother's gaze for approval at my performance, and finally caught sight of her floating on her back, gently. Horizontal position. As I approached, I took notice of her arms and feet pointing to the bottom, then saw her face and the frightening rictus, and I froze. It had been a powerful stroke. People around started realizing what had happened, and panic immediately followed. And, in that

moment, I knew my support was gone.

That was almost 50 years ago, and though some memories of the event have since faded, I do still remember the commotion that followed: people took my mother out of the pool, the lifeguard tried in vain reanimation procedures, the ambulance took forever to come, and a stranger took me under his wing when people finally realized I was the daughter. My father was in town—a four-hour drive away—working, and my nine-year-old brother, also in the pool, went missing. We found him 24 hours later, completely disoriented and in great need of help.

People around started realizing what had happened, and panic immediately followed. And, in that moment, I knew my support was gone.

In retrospect, on that day, we all needed help: my mother, my brother and I, and all witnesses to the event – onlookers, swimmers and staff – who were all exposed to a certain level of stress leading to potential ripple effects. The lifeguard couldn't make heads or tails of what was going on, and was shaken. The campground administration was ill fitted to deal with health and security issues of that nature, but reacted as quickly as they could to get the paramedics from the local hospital to

come. I ended up there later, and found myself sitting alone in a cold waiting room still in my wet bathing suit, in shock, while my mother was being admitted. She died later that night, and though no one is to blame, I felt helpless. Inadequate. It would take me years to shake off that feeling of inadequacy.

Inadequacy, the state of feeling incompetent, can cripple you. That was my main ripple effect, and getting rid of it needed work. How did I do it? Well, by becoming a lifeguard. Stepping into the shoes, so to speak, of a lifeguard helped me flip the coin to my advantage, see the other side of things. What kind of health and safety training must a lifeguard go through? How are challenging issues to be faced and met? I got so much involved in the process that I received the Red Cross highest certification within a few years, and started working in public swimming pools, which paid for my studies. Peace finally started settling in. I knew more about safety.

The bottom line is... I turned the table on a situation by looking at it from another standpoint, and I'm grateful for all the help I received along that path to greater consciousness. Water safety became my focus, even though my mother didn't drown or suffer from water sports injuries. Ironically, my mother had always been fearful of water, for as long as I can remember. And, at times, when I feel the ripple effect rising back to the surface, I quiet myself down to meditate and explore all sides of the coin carefully, especially its edge, the "thickness" of the problem. That's how I can overcome the fear, and move forward. So, heads or tails? You decide.

Living with the memories

by Alex A. Power

My first fatality that I was indirectly involved with happened in January. I had been with the OH&S Division six months. I was conducting inspections in my area on Friday, January 5, when I happened across two individuals working at height with no fall protection, in a new residential subdivision. As usual, I stopped, got out of my vehicle, and called both workers off the roof of the building. I introduced myself and explained the legislative requirements for working at height. The two gentlemen showed me what they had on site for fall protection. Everything met the requirements for fall protection equipment. Finally I asked to see their anchor point device, a piece of equipment used to anchor workers to the physical structure. Neither worker had such a device with them, so a Stop Work Order was issued. I told them no further work was permitted to be undertaken at this location until the devices were on site and a follow-up inspection was conducted by myself or another officer to verify the devices met the legislative requirements.

Monday, January 8 at around 9:00 a.m. one of the men was dead. Every detail of that, and the other incidents I've been involved with over the years, are as clear in my memory today as it was on the day of each of the incidents.

I had come from a background of Architectural Drafting (CAD) with the Department of Transportation and Works and was well versed in the workings of construction sites, how things evolved into a finished project, the relationships between trades and specialties involved in various projects. It was on those sites that I learned the nuances of getting the project done, on time, on budget, no matter the cost. Everyone accepted this as industry standard, and learned to work within the system. Accident numbers that were reported were high; untold numbers were never reported due to high insurance costs, project delays, project shutdowns and penalties.



Alex Power is a retired Occupational Health and Safety Officer in Newfoundland and Labrador. He welcomes anyone who may want to talk to him about his experiences to reach out to him on Facebook Messenger or via email at: newfoundlandscout@hotmail.com

I decided to attend Algonquin College, Occupational Health and Safety Program and graduated with an Honours Certificate, an achievement I am very proud of to this day! Upon graduation I applied for an internal position as an Occupational Health and Safety Officer 1, basically a training position. Like every newbie I was paired with several of the senior officers to learn the art of being an OH&S Officer. At first it was pretty low key, residential construction, road work, excavation sites, learning who the players were, how to deal with clients, employees, union representatives and government department management and staff. After six months or so I was finally sent off into the world of workplaces and told to keep myself and everyone I came in contact with as safe as I possibly could, and keep my monthly inspection numbers above expectations given the workload

I may encounter, and the complexities of the files I may end up dealing with.

Every detail of that, and the other incidents I've been involved with over the years, are as clear in my memory today as it was on the day of each of the incidents.

After that first fatality, a fellow officer with far more experience and expertise was assigned to investigate, but I was left wondering

if I had done everything I could have to prevent this tragic and preventable loss of life. As an officer you know you actually did what you could and were required to do but, you are still left wondering. Wondering about the tragic loss of life, the family of the person you'd spoken to only a few short days prior, realizing, this person is never coming home again, will never share another birthday, anniversary, or Christmas, will never hold his wife, children or grandchildren again and how senseless this tragedy and others like it are.

Following a workplace accident/incident or fatality, Occupational Health and Safety Officers are assigned to the file, tasked with finding out what happened from a causation perspective and determine if there is enough evidence to bring charges against a company or individual under the Occupational Health

and Safety Act and Regulations. The officer will arrive on site, meet with witnesses, take photographs and measurements, confiscate tools and equipment as evidence if needed, obtain records from the employer, such as policies, procedures, training records, equipment documentation if required, and put together a comprehensive file before presenting it to her/his manager. These officers, like myself, will remember the worksite conditions, the locations of tools and equipment, the people on site at the time, their states of emotion; they will remember the weather conditions, the temperature, and a thousand other little details. But first and foremost they will remember they are there because someone will not be going home at the end of their shift today.

I retired from the Department of Service NL,

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador after 32 years, the last 13 years or so as an OH&S Officer II. The fatalities and serious injuries I investigated are a sad testament that play heavily on an officer. Every time the file is opened, all the memories come flooding back. You spend countless hours reviewing every detail hoping you haven't missed anything that can lead to resolving what happened. You know someone's family is relying on you to give some kind of closure to the tragedy that has befallen their daughter, son, wife, husband, mother, father, grandmother or grandfather and that corrective action can be implemented to prevent the same thing from happening again to some other innocent worker. It's a responsibility that weighs heavily on an Occupational Health and Safety Officer and everyone involved in workplace fatality.

Help us help other families

We want to make sure every Canadian family that could benefit from Threads of Life's programs and services, is able to find us. You can play a vital role in making this happen! Here's what you can do:

1. Follow and share: Follow us on social media and share our posts – you never know who among your network might be in need of a listening ear or a shoulder to lean on.
2. Distribute information: If you're a safety professional, or an affected family member, or a labour inspector, or a social services worker, or a bereavement counsellor or a dozen other roles, you can pass along information to people who may need it. We can provide brochures or wallet cards, or you could simply offer people the link to the Threads of Life web site.
3. Promote Steps for Life: The more buzz we can create around this important event each year, the more people will be able to find the hope and healing they need.
4. Talk it up: Don't be afraid to tell others what you know about Threads of Life. Thousands of people have discovered that they're not alone in their grief and questioning. Let's make sure Threads of Life is not Canada's best kept secret!

HOW MUCH I'VE LOVED YOU

*Is it possible, I wonder
For your brain to shield your heart?
For it to only let in memories that
We've shared right from the start
It neatly packed up all the pain
And put it in a drawer
Never to be opened
Tightly closed for evermore.*

*Run far away, don't look back!
You'll stumble and you'll fall.
It's then, the cracks will all appear.
You won't make it through at all.
Close those fists! stand so strong!
It hurts! It hurts! You say
Block it, block it now
So you can live to see another day.*

*I always thought there'd be more time
To find that path back to your heart
Sister, will you look at me and remember
How much I've loved you from the start.*

by Paulette Raymond

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), or share your full story as two family members have in this issue. To learn more, email: Susan at shaldane@threadsoflife.ca.



What I've learned about the ripple effects

How the ripples form

by Wynny Sillito

When faced with a traumatic event, we each respond differently, based on factors as unique to us as our DNA or fingerprints. This can include everything from past experiences or competencies to family dynamics and medical history. Understanding these differences can play a vital role in the management of any emergency situation.

Everyone can imagine a panicked parent putting themselves in danger to get to their child, a spouse pacing around the room panicking while their partner delivers their child, or how the anxiety and panic of any loved one could negatively impact the condition of a patient. In these situations, if the loved one can be supported to manage their own emotions, they can rapidly change from a potential hazard to being of help. In these scenarios, there are multiple people in distress as the result of the same emergency. Their pain was not triggered by the same mechanism, but by a secondary impact of that mechanism. You could consider it a ripple of the initial impact. Imagine the first impact happens when a child falls from a tree, hitting their head. The second is the panic attack experienced by someone who witnesses the fall. Workplace tragedy can be viewed through a similar lens. Constant ripples from the initial point of impact, spread far beyond the scene of the incident, long past the day of the emergency, impacting the lives of people with varying connections to the initial incident or tragedy.

How the ripples have affected me

I have a unique experience with workplace tragedy, having seen these tragedies through the intimate lens of a first responder, an injured worker, a safety specialist, the sibling of an injured worker, and having felt the heartbreak caused by workplace fatality. I felt each of these impacts very differently, and my view of each incident was seen through a very different lens. This is not unique to me or my situation -- we each respond to trauma differently, as each ripple that follows the initial incident flows through us.

I compare it to the waves that follow an explosion. In an explosion, each injury can be caused by a different force or mechanism, and the severity of each patient's injuries depends on their proximity to the explosion and their surrounding environment. Primary injuries are caused by the initial blast wave, followed by secondary injuries caused by debris and fragments. Tertiary injuries are the result of the



Wynny Sillito is a Safety Specialist and retired first responder, who has a unique and intimate experience with workplace tragedy. A strong advocate for workplace safety, she seeks to motivate and inspire others by sharing the lessons she has learned throughout her journey dealing with the effects of occupational trauma. You can read her personal story in the Spring 2020 issue of this newsletter.

individual being propelled by the blast wind, impacting stationary objects. Finally come all other physical and psychological explosion-related injuries, illnesses or diseases. When you think about a single explosion and the damage it could cause, a workplace tragedy can leave just as much carnage in its path, affecting family, co-workers, community, witnesses, responders, and on and on. Each could be considered another ripple. This realization was very important for me to learn. It allowed me to see the differences in the way others were impacted by the tragedies I had experienced, particularly my mom's experience.

How Threads of Life helps

Threads of Life offers a community of support that is inclusive and safe, which is critical when there are so many people impacted by workplace tragedy who are navigating a world of pain that can be very isolating. When it came time to attend my first Family Forum, I was struggling with an overwhelming sense of survivor's guilt. I was unsure if I belonged in a seat at the table with others who had lost their entire sense of self, or the person they loved the most, when I ultimately made it home from my tragedy. It was at that family forum where I first felt my pain truly acknowledged, when Shirley Hickman reminded everyone in the room that no one story or experience is more important than another, no experience should be valued or seen as of greater significance. These words, shared by someone who had experienced what I saw as the ultimate workplace loss, confirmed for me that I was exactly where I belonged, and allowed me to see that not all ripples are negative. I have been fortunate to share what I have learned about workplace tragedy to reduce future workplace tragedy, and with the hope of changing the future ripple pattern. I have watched as the Threads of Life family continues to grow, welcoming new families anchored by trauma, whose hearts have been broken by tragedy, those shattered by new incidents, propelled through their grief by each new ripple. Every new family, as with each before, is welcomed with open arms and an army of support to guide them to safer waters.



Plan to connect in 2022

We know that human connection is vital to our health. The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that a lack of connection can be more harmful to our health than obesity, smoking or high blood pressure. Living in the aftermath of a tragedy can make you feel especially isolated. Our series of monthly online workshops are designed to help Threads of Life members connect with one another, and at the same time learn a little about coping with tragedy.

Check out the first six amazing topics for FamiliesConnect next year:

- **Mindful Eating**, A Journey to a Healthier You
- **Introduction to Expressive Arts** with Story Cards and Poetry
- **Sharing the Healing**: How to Help Others Find Threads of Life
- **Dreams, Signs, and Coincidences**: Ways our Loved Ones Stay Connected
- **Increase Your Sense of Awareness** of True Kindness and True Friendship
- **Tragic Optimist or Cynical Pessimist**

Other topics planned for the year include mindfulness, guilt, family dynamics, tears and healing, writing your story, and music, expectations and letting go.

HELP US PLAN FOR 2022 And become a Family Forum insider!

It's so hard to plan events these days! We intend to hold our three regional Family Forums in person in 2022, but it would sure help if we knew how many people to expect! Our Family Forum venues may not be able to accommodate as many participants as in the past. If you're hoping to attend a Family Forum in the coming year, you can help by pre-registering. Then when the date for your forum gets close, you'll have the first chance to confirm your attendance and choose your sessions. **Pre-registration will open on the Threads of Life web site in January.** Visit threadsoflife.ca/programs or call our office at 888-567-9490.

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

WHAT IS A VOLUNTEER FAMILY GUIDE?

I never imagined I would have my world turned upside down like this. How am I supposed to get through this? No one truly understands what is happening here. I need to talk with someone who actually gets it.

by **Karen Lapierre Pitts**

When your life has been turned upside down by a workplace injury, illness, or fatality, it can often feel like no one truly understands where you're at or what you're facing. That's where a Volunteer Family Guide can be of most benefit. They've experienced a similar loss — and they have also experienced the realities that come with a workplace tragedy: coping with grief, government investigations and inquests, and how to move forward.

In Our Words: Adrienne and Marsha

In the end, the power of such a supportive connection is really best explained by a family member connected with a Volunteer Family Guide. Adrienne asked to be connected with a Volunteer Family Guide following the death of her spouse on September 8, 2020 while working for a recycling company as a truck operator. On this day the truck rolled over and crashed. Unfortunately Greg did not survive. He was 47 years young. Adrienne was paired with Volunteer Family Guide Marsha, whose spouse Lindsay was working as a pelleter at a feedmill when a piece of machinery malfunctioned and he was struck by a metal rod. Lindsay died February 5, 2013. He was 68.

What does this connection mean to you?

Adrienne: "I found it very helpful, and oddly comforting to know that there are others who understand how you feel about how your loved one became ill, injured or — as in my case — passed away. We are part of a club nobody wants to belong to!"

Marsha: "I am here and willing to be a support for other women whose husbands die at work. Our circumstances may not be the same,

BUT the end result is — our man didn't come home from work that day! I can relate to that and walk alongside my family member. I don't have all the answers."

What has this relationship done for you?

Adrienne: "Marsha has helped me through the one-year anniversary of the loss of my husband. In our particular pairing, I have found another friend who understands the shock and pain of what sometimes seems to be an unbearable loss. I truly think this is a relationship that works together to help each other and I am truly thankful for it!"

Marsha: "We share a common thread. It's our new reality but that thread sews/binds us together in a way we would never have known otherwise — whether we are around the corner or across the country. Would we have wanted to meet under different circumstances? Absolutely! But sharing, listening, mentoring, laughing, crying together, saying things we feel we can't share with others; just knowing that someone really does understand our pain and loss like no one else can — these threads are our common bond.

We are now part of a family, but not in the usual way. Each new family member needs someone who understands some of what they are going through. Yes, we each have friends and family who have lost someone through illness or injury, but they still don't have the depth of understanding that we have. Each family member has their story and needs to know that the volunteer they are speaking to gets them."

This article is an excerpt – read the full article about how the Volunteer Guide Program works on our website at [threadsoflife.ca/news](https://www.threadsoflife.ca/news).

LIVING THE 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.

We're so lucky, at Threads of Life, to have volunteers who are deeply committed to helping other families and to preventing future tragedies. We asked a few volunteers to share their reasons for being part of Threads of Life.



Grant Barnsley:

What I hope to accomplish by being a volunteer, I hope to help people understand that your life isn't over and it's ok to ask for help. If you need to let your emotions out, hey that's ok! I've been in their shoes and I get it. I reflect back to myself after my injury and how much I enjoyed people stopping by and having a visit or speaking with someone else who had an amputation. Having those conversations really helped to ease the worry of what's coming down the line. Acceptance is so important and helping others to see that will ease some hurdles along the way.



Jackie Manuel:

Prior to joining the team at the NLCSA, I had worked with the OHS enforcement Division of the provincial government. During my time in this role, I had the responsibility to review the incident investigation reports prepared by the OHS enforcement officers. On occasion, particularly where the incident involved a workplace tragedy, I also had the opportunity and responsibility to meet with families. Often, I was limited in terms of what I was able to share with the family members at that stage of the investigation and I know that it was difficult for families to understand. Volunteering provides me with an opportunity to help ensure all families impacted by a workplace tragedy are aware of the support and resources available to them through Threads of Life. I wish I had known this at the time.



Lisa Kadosa:

I volunteer for Threads of Life as I strongly believe in their work, to promote the importance of occupational safety and health. Most do not realise this until they lose someone they love. As a member of the Speakers Bureau, I strive to vocalise its importance, including the ripple effect, reporting of near misses, ensuring they clearly understand, prior to learning it the hard way, by burying their father, mother, husband, wife, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, best friend, etc. If I can prevent just one fatality, occupational disease or injury, then my father's death will not have been in vain. As a Volunteer Family Guide (VFG), I am blessed to support family members who are suffering from a similar tragedy. I wish I had known about Threads of Life when I lost my father. Being in the dark, not knowing where to look or who to contact for support can be a challenge. In my role as a VFG, I hope that I can lift that darkness...if only a little.



Candy Palumbo:

Threads of Life trained me as a Volunteer Family Guide with an amazing group of people from across the country. I also had a very caring helpful guide in the early days of grieving myself. Those people and experiences are the good parts of my mind and spirit. I hope being sincerely present for someone as they heal and need to be heard will become positive reflections, part of a reserve of strength for them on their journey. I hope and believe our various roles that form our collective response to workplace tragedy will help better job design and toughen all features of safety to stop such profound losses where we work.

MAUREEN SHAW: Stepping forward for health and safety

by Shirley Hickman

Life is a series of steps: first the baby steps, and then each phase of our lives grows from those first steps, those foundational steps.

In the early stages of Maureen Shaw's life, she would hear the screeching sirens from the local forestry mill. Everyone would wait with quiet breath for word on who was injured or who had died. Those early steps in her younger life, led Maureen to be a champion for occupational health and safety.

Her career offered opportunities to lead change in Alberta, where she was appointed to the Tripartite Occupational Health and Safety Council of Alberta. Later Maureen was appointed by the federal government to chair the Council of Governors of the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety, before her next step in becoming the CEO of the Industrial Accident Prevention Association (IAPA) in Toronto.

It was while Maureen was in this leadership position that I first met her. In the late 1990s organizations across Canada became focused on a common workplace concern: young workers were being injured or dying as a result of finding their first job. What could be done to eliminate these injuries and deaths? Ministries of Labour and Ministries of Education across Canada were working together. In Ontario, Maureen chaired the Youth Stakeholder committee and as a family member, I was invited to attend. After our son Tim, died in 1996, our family had made a commitment to add our voice to anything that would help prevent further deaths, and suffering to families like ours.

The world of occupational health and safety was very new to me. The concept of safety for my family was not new – our family had those safety conversations regularly. All I knew was one step at a time. On the Youth Stakeholder committee my views were welcomed and Maureen became my mentor. Over the next few years, there were a number of initiatives to decrease injuries in particular to young workers. Our family was pleased to see that organizations seemed to be working together. Occupational health and safety lessons came into high school and college curriculums. Over the next decade, it seemed deaths of young workers were decreasing, although we all know that one is too many – be that young or older.

One day I listened as Maureen was presenting a session and she shared the day she got a call – a call that no one wants to receive. There had been an explosion. Maureen's son Marc was being air lifted from the oil field and on his way to the hospital. The agony of waiting for word of how he was; the weeks of waiting to see if his legs would heal, only to hear that his right leg would have to be amputated. Imagine: she had dedicated her working career to promote occupational health and safety and now she was living the minute-by-minute, day-to-day reality of a workplace tragedy. What would the future for Marc look like? There was the whirl of medical decisions, treatments, re-hab and investigations. Marc recovered physically, retrained as an electronic technician and rehabilitated to become a member of Canada's Paralympic Sailing team. Maureen was pleased with his healing and proud



Three of the Threads of Life founding members, Maureen Shaw, Shirley Hickman and Sharon Freeman, gathered for the organization's 10th anniversary in 2013.

of his accomplishments, but as she told the audience at that session, her family was forever marked by this tragedy.

I was invited to take leadership of a new organization, Threads of Life. While I was very familiar with charities and working with volunteers, I hesitated because I did not have a business background. Maureen said, "you have all you need – everything else will be provided". Those words have stayed with me and are one of my guiding principles. The past 20 years, Threads of Life has grown – one baby step at a time. Maureen has always been journeying with this organization. She travelled across the country as our spokesperson to celebrate our 10th anniversary.

About ten years ago, Maureen retired and moved to Victoria, Vancouver Island, near where her family are and her historical roots. She has a wide range of culture interests also – theater, music, gardening, entertaining. Her steps in the years of retirement have kept her very busy. There is a saying, if you need something done, ask a busy person. Maureen is that busy person. She shows her commitment to her new community by giving back. Being a member of the Victoria Police Board is an opportunity to provide leadership focus on mental health at the local level and the broader community of policing and first responders. She is regularly invited to present sessions on mental health in Canada and around the world at conferences and events. Occupational health and safety has never taken a step back in her priorities.

With her personal motivations – from childhood memories to her family's experience, through a life-time career promoting workplace health and safety – it seems natural that as she considers her legacy, Maureen has decided to leave a portion of her inheritance in her will to Threads of Life. Through this gift, she continues to provide leadership and to ensure the future of the organization that means so much to her. Threads of Life is very thankful to Maureen for her nurturing and mentoring through the past 20 years, and we hope to hear more of those encouraging thoughts from her over many more decades.

Maureen has shared her personal story in a new video – look for it at threadsoflife.ca/inmywill. If you are considering your own legacy and would like to support families of workplace tragedy through your will, please contact Scott McKay at: smckay@threadsoflife.ca or 888-567-9490

2

GREAT WAYS

To pay it forward



A logo on the walk t-shirts is one of the favourite benefits for our sponsors.

SPONSORSHIP

Becoming a Steps for Life sponsor – at the community, regional or national level – is a great way to showcase your commitment to health and safety, and to support those who've felt first-hand the effects of a work-related tragedy.

Steps for Life-Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy is a national health and safety event happening in communities across Canada and online. Sponsors contribute at levels starting with Stepping Forward sponsorship at \$250, and moving up through Advocate, Supporter, Leader and Champion levels. At every level, sponsors' contributions sustain the programs Threads of Life offers to help heal families struggling in the aftermath of workplace fatalities, life-altering injuries and occupational disease.

Steps for Life sponsors are recognized through signage, web and social media. It's a perfect way to pay it forward to your community, your employees, your clients, and to Canadian families.

Threads of Life families and volunteers, think about asking your employer or favourite local business to sponsor Steps for Life this year.

Already sponsoring Steps for Life? We thank you! Consider taking it up a notch this year and moving to the next sponsorship level!



Volunteers like Carolyn Sim, above, make Steps for Life happen in communities across Canada.

“I am a health and safety professional, so [through Steps for Life] I can give back directly to the community and help increase awareness of illness, injury, or fatality. The other side is the personal connections that I can build with family, friends, and co-workers. Meeting these people and talking to them, being able to help them even in a small way is great to see. I love the sea of yellow we can create but the monetary value in raising funds for those going through something terrible like workplace tragedy is just as great.”

- Veronica Suszynsky,
Winnipeg Steps for Life Chair

VOLUNTEER

Across Canada, all our Steps for Life walks are planned and organized by volunteer committees. You can help to make Steps for Life happen locally, and it's an ideal way to pay it back to your community or your industry.

Committee volunteers work to promote the event, secure sponsorships and donations, handle logistics, recruit day of event volunteers and more. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers, Threads of Life has raised nearly \$7 million to support the healing journey of families affected by workplace tragedy.

Steps for Life committee positions provide opportunities to network with health and safety professionals, enhance existing skills and learn new ones, and contribute to the success of a well-known event that is making a significant difference in the lives of families who have experienced a workplace tragedy.

Take your support for Steps for Life to the next level by joining your local planning committee. For more information about Steps for Life volunteer opportunities near you, please contact: steps@threadsoflife.ca or complete our online volunteer form and we will contact you.

Upcoming Events

FamiliesConnect online workshops
threadsoflife.ca/programs/families-connect-workshops

- **Mindful Eating, A Journey to a Healthier You** – January 26
- **Introduction to Expressive Arts with Story Cards and Poetry** – February 16
- **Sharing the Healing: How to Help Others Find Threads of Life** – March 9

SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER!

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



FAMILIESCONNECT
THREADS OF LIFE WORKSHOP SERIES

Threads of Life offers our series of online workshops, **FAMILIESCONNECT**.
<https://threadsoflife.ca/programs/>

Each month there's a new topic, led by knowledgeable facilitators and joined by a supportive community.

How to reach us

Toll-free: 1-888-567-9490
Fax: 1-519-685-1104

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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 illness 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.



Yes I will, help bring hope and healing to families

Gift Payment Options

- I'd like to make monthly gifts
 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____
- I'd prefer to make a one-time gift
 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____
- I've enclosed a void cheque to start direct withdrawal for monthly giving
- You may also donate to Threads of Life online at www.threadsoflife.ca/donate
- Please send me updates about Threads of Life events via email at: _____

Visa MasterCard

_____ account number _____ expiry

NAME ON CARD _____

SIGNATURE _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

ADDRESS (for income tax receipt) _____

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All donations are tax deductible. Charitable Registration Number #87524 8908 RR0001