

threads

O F L I F E

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SUMMER 2004



Liam O'Rourke at the IAPA Walk, please turn to page 7 for more on this story.

Do you recall a day when you thought you would never smile again? Or perhaps some of you feel like this right now. I recall those days and those feelings, as I am sure many of you do also. Whether you can imagine it or not, with healing and time, we do regain the ability to smile again, perhaps not the same smile but a smile nevertheless. We regain the ability to participate in life's activities; to re-enter a new world that has been changed forever.

I am so grateful for smiles, because they convey a powerful emotion that we need in order to continue with life and show a positive outlook to our remaining loved ones.

A genuine smile begins in the heart with a warm feeling, proceeds to the eyes that then forces the ends of the mouth upward into a smile. Smiling at the beginning will take some effort; the more you do it, the more it may become easier.

Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.

– Mother Teresa

The journey to smile again will take time and Threads of Life can be there for you along the way.

Have a safe and wonderful summer.

Sharon Peat, Chair

*A smile is a language
even a baby understands.*

*A smile costs nothing,
but accomplishes much.*

*A smile enriches those who receive
it without impoverishing those
who give it.*

*In the course of the day, some of
your acquaintances may be too tired
to give you a smile.*

Give them one of yours anyway.

*A smile can happen in a flash,
but the memory of it may last forever.
None are so rich that they can get
along without a smile, and none so
poor that they will not be richer
for its benefits.*

*A smile is rest to the weary,
daylight to the discouraged,
and sunshine to the sad.*

*A smile cannot be begged, bought,
borrowed, or stolen,
for it is something
that is worth nothing to anyone
until it is given away.*

*Nobody needs a smile so much
as those who feel they have none left
to give. Be generous and share yours
with them.*



Sean Smith

By Jamie Smith

In Greek mythology, the Three Fates determine the thread of an individual's life. One sister spins the thread while another measures its length. The third cuts it off, terminating life.

For those of us who have endured a workplace fatality, the thread of our loved one's life was not cut off cleanly at the end of natural life. It was torn, ripped and yanked asunder leaving frayed particles dangling between the world we had, the world that now is, and the one that is to come. In many ways, our grieving process becomes "Threads of Life."

Personally, I am reminded constantly about the life that was. When I turn on my computer, I remember how much better Sean, our son who died, was at computing technology than I am. Now, I have no one to help me solve the innumerable conflicts that inevitably arise when running one of the programmes that made Bill Gates rich. Then, I open our garage and see the Big Green Machine, a 68 Ford Galaxie 500 that Sean totally re-built, hunched there. We changed its nickname from the Limousine because it was a limo that fell on our son squeezing the life out of him after it had been unsafely and unwisely given to him to repair at his workplace. I know that I should sell

BETTER COMFORT

his Ford now because I cannot fix it, but I am reluctant to do so.

Today it was a song on the radio. One moment I was working outside in the beautiful sunshine of early spring. The next I had tears streaming down my face and was wracked with sobs that seemed able to tear me apart. The words, "If tomorrow never comes" streamed over the air waves. I knew that for Sean, tomorrow had never come. Now he will spend his tomorrows in eternity and my heart aches to join him. The world that was pushes itself constantly into the realm in which we now live. I remember our son is gone and I weep unashamedly.

But there is hope. We who are still alive must never give up. Every day before we open our eyes to greet the day, we must be thankful for what we had, what we still have, and what is to come. We will never know how what we do affects others to give them hope and better comfort.

I have always been in love with words. I don't remember when I first read these lines from Shakespeare, but in hindsight they foreshadowed the present. The bard's character, Constance, echoes his feelings of grief over the loss of his own son, Hamnet, in his play King John.

*Grief fills up the room of
my absent child
Lies in his bed, walks up and
down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats
his words,
Remembers me of all his
gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments
with his form:*

*Then have I reason to be fond
of grief?
(King John 3:4 lines 94-99)*

The other characters in the play tell her that she needs to learn to live again and attempt to comfort her with typical platitudes that we tell the grieving. Phenomenally, what Shakespeare wrote centuries ago is still what people say to each other after a tragedy. Basically, the advice is get on with it. You've grieved enough. Life goes on. Death is part of the circle of life.

For those of us who have lost a loved one tragically, these are hollow, empty words filled with as little consolation for us as they held for Constance. She tells her tormenters:

*had you such a loss as I,
I could give better comfort than you do.
(Ibid lines 100-101, emphasis mine)*

Herein, then, is the paradox of it all. Because we have suffered, we are better able to help those around us who are suffering. Now this is a gift I would far rather have done without but, nevertheless, it is one that I will endeavor to use to the best of my ability.

"What can I do?" you may ask. "How can I help someone else when I can't even help myself?"

The good news is that each of us can. The even better news is that when we do so, somehow we give ourselves comfort as well.

In the aftermath of a tragedy, people are just there. With them they bring food, flowers, and other tokens of their caring. But the best thing each one brings is himself or herself. Just being

there to cry and to grieve with another is the absolute greatest gift one can give at times like this. But, unfortunately, this period is over all too soon and the bereaved are left on their own to fill up the empty hours, especially at night, with their grief.

It is here we can begin. If you look, you will find countless people who can use your support, your hope, your positive attitude and, above all, your love. The fundamental principle that we follow is to take our cue from those grieving, trying to set aside our own feelings in order to come to grips with how others are doing. If they want to weep, cry with them. If they want to talk, be a good listener, commenting only when you have words of encouragement or something helpful to offer. If they wish to pray, pray with them even if they are not from the same faith as you. If they want to sit quietly and stare, just be with them. If they want to be held and reassured, enfold them in your arms. Love is the only weapon we have. There is no substitute for it and no alternative will suffice.

As time goes on, the bereaved find themselves even more detached from the new life that has emerged after a tragedy. Now is the time that we can really help. Simple, every day things help to keep the rocky ship of life on an even keel. Invite them for supper.

Take them to a show. Share some special event with them. Send a consolation card on the anniversary date of the event that so radically changed their lives. Go over and cut the grass or work with them as they complete the normal tasks of life.

For me, help came from places that I least expected it. As a musician, I know that music can soothe your soul. But this only happens if you can get to it. C.S. Lewis tells us that after the death of his wife he was unable to participate in either the receptive (reading, listening, etc.) or the expressive (writing, making music, art, etc.) tasks because of his great grief. He had to learn to do so again.

And it was true for me also. Musicians I know began to call me inviting me to “play some tunes”. Though nothing was said and we concentrated on our music, we all knew what was happening. They were there when I needed them. I received “better comfort” and am eternally grateful for their support.

The Fates have dealt us a tremendous blow. As the threads of our lives continue to unravel, let us resolve to honour the life of our lost loved one. Do not forget your own needs, but whenever possible, think about how you can provide better comfort to someone you know. In so doing, we can help ensure that the best is yet to be.

PLEASE LET US KNOW

- If you would rather not receive further newsletters or further updates
- If you know families or organizations who would like to be added to the mailing list
- If you would prefer a French edition
- If you would like to contribute an article, photo or poem
- If you have suggestions to make this newsletter better and more useful

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ABOUT threads OF LIFE

MISSION

Our mission is to help families heal through a community of support and to promote the elimination of life altering workplace injuries, illness and deaths.

VISION

Threads of Life will lead and inspire a culture shift as a result of which work related injuries and illnesses are morally, socially and economically unacceptable.

VALUES

We believe that:

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 honored and respected.

Health: Health and safety begin in our heads, hearts and hands, in everyday actions.

Passion: Passionate individuals can change the world.

SUMMER VACATIONS

By Diana Hammock

Summertime is quickly drawing near and with it you may be planning a vacation. If you have recently or even not so recently suffered the death of your child, that first vacation can be very difficult. I would like to share with you our experience the first time we took a vacation and to help you plan around your grief.

Our son Paul died in November from leukemia, he had been ill for eight years. The last couple of years were very hard for us and we were not able to go on any vacations because of his illness.

The following August we decided to go on a big trip to Hawaii like we has always wanted to do. We made our plans and we felt at the same time that our grief was far enough along that we could enjoy ourselves. It was a very difficult vacation for our whole family. Each of us seemed unable to have a good time. We talked a lot about Paul – he was everywhere – in our thoughts and minds. We all knew how much he would have loved the beauty of Hawaii, the ocean with all its beautiful waves just right for surfing, and all of the sea life we saw when we went diving. It was very hard to have a good time and I soon realized we were all having problems coping with Paul's absence.

As I look back and remember our vacation some six years later, I know

that even though we did not have a great time, our vacation did serve a purpose in our grief. We were together as a family in strange surrounding and we were grieving. We started working very hard on our grief during that vacation and I know now it was a good vacation. If planning a vacation, here are some suggestions that might help:

- Be gentle with yourself. Don't expect too much on your first few vacations. Remember as bereaved parents the first few times we do anything without our kids is tough (vacations, shopping, movies, etc.).
- Plan to do some grief work because you will – planned or not. Give yourself time enough on the trip. If you have a bad day, you can just do what you feel like doing.
- Know that your child will be on your mind day and night just like he or she is at home. Grief goes with us.
- Plan a vacation that is restful. You need all the rest you can get.
- Plan to do something that your child would have loved to do, but didn't get the chance to. Do this in his or her memory.
- If you plan to visit relatives for the first time since your child's death, remember they mean well, even if they seem insensitive with their remarks. They

have not lost a child and can't see through your eyes.

- If you have other children, remember them. They are also having a hard time coping on this holiday.
- Be careful to communicate with your spouse. Plan a vacation that is suitable for both your needs.
- If you have been maintaining your child's grave and feel guilty leaving it unattended, get a friend or family member to see to it while you are away. It could fill a need for one of your family members.

You will have a memorable vacation even though it will be difficult. You will look back on it as I have done and see it as another grieving experience as you find your way through the grief work of a bereaved family.

(reprinted with permission from Bereaved Families of Ontario – Southwest Region, June 2004 Newsletter)



FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

*By Shirley Hickman,
Project Manager*

Threads of Life will develop to become a diverse organization capable to help many people and organizations deal with the effects of workplace trauma. Ultimately we will become part of the 'cure'.

My personal commitment to Threads of Life is to support and develop a model of Family support. For me, this means that when a family is faced with a workplace tragedy they would be able to be connected to another family for mutual support, sharing of ideas, and comfort.

For our family it was a workplace traumatic death that took the life of our loving son Tim at the age of 20. For some of the families that I have met in the past eight years, a 'workplace tragedy' has left them with missing loved ones from traumatic injuries, occupational diseases and other families living with the outcomes of very serious, life-altering injuries.

There is more than one common statement expressed by these families, but one at the top of the list is 'how do we make it to tomorrow'. We all know there is no easy answer. One thing we all agreed on was that we need a listening ear of someone on a similar journey to provide us with the support and encouragement and also someone to turn to when we don't want to share or burden our family members or our friends. Many of

these opportunities have turned into friendships and we can now lean on these friends during a difficult time.

My vision is that Threads of Life will develop a 'peer support' model to help families be able to connect to each other. A family from British Columbia facing the outcomes of a mining incident could then be connected to a family from any other part of Canada for mutual support and sharing. A family of a worker who lost his legs at work, could talk with another family to share their experiences and perhaps find out how that family is coping, where did they find relevant information to adapt their living environment, transportation, and such.

Where to start? This question keeps coming up. We have started on an informal basis, family members started to seek me out in order that I could try to share our family's experience. Threads of Life's next steps are well under way. We have partners and are developing a training model. Unfortunately our next step is also one more challenge. We need to train family members who are interested in supporting other families. These families do not need to be trained in how they cope with the outcomes of workplace trauma – but to be equipped with tools for best methods to support others. The challenge we currently face is that the funding we hoped would be in place by now to help with this training is not. But we are a resilient group and this lack of training funding may slow us down – but will not deter us.

'One small baby step at a time' is how I have encouraged this current group of volunteers during the past few years. We have taken many small baby steps – and that has created one very large step towards the goal. Our next step will happen. Our goal is not for Ontario alone, but for every family in this country. Like all projects we need to do this right. We do want to have the pilot started in Ontario and will then share with any other province.

I invite you to consider if you would like to be trained as a Family Support guide to contact me. Contact information for Threads of Life is included in this newsletter.

There are many other opportunities for volunteers in Ontario and every other province in Canada. Together we can make a difference. You are welcome to volunteer. We can keep you informed through newsletters, mailings, emails, teleconference meetings and telephone.

HOW TO REACH US

Threads of Life
519- 685-4276
Toll Free: 1-888-567-9490

Shirley Hickman
hickman@execulink.com
www.threadsoflife.ca

LIFE QUILT JOURNEY MOVES AHEAD



Siân Gibson, Michelle Isaacs, and Shirley Hickman; Threads of Life members.

By Adrienne Gordon

The Canadian Life Quilt is successfully delivering its important health and safety message as it continues on its incredible journey to workplaces and communities across the country.

The largest event this spring was IAPA's annual Health & Safety Conference & Trade Show in Toronto, where the Life Quilt was on display for over 6,000 participants and 300 exhibitors. IAPA is grateful for the support of Threads of Life volunteers who assisted at the event and responded to inquiries from attendees.

The Life Quilt has also participated in numerous other events recently, including a visit during North American Occupational Safety & Health Week to Charlottetown, PEI, where the Life Quilt was front and centre at the Confederation Centre of the

Arts, and back to Toronto for other events including the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and also Education Safety Association conferences. Additionally, the Life Quilt attended many community events across Ontario.

Looking ahead, the Life Quilt is expected to reach many more families and friends in the next few months as we respond to invitations from across Canada, including: Alberta (Edmonton), Ontario (Hamilton, Ottawa, Sudbury) Saskatchewan (Saskatoon) and Yukon (Whitehorse).

Plans and dates are still being finalized for these events as we work in partnership with local communities and government. However, if you are interested in viewing the Life Quilt in one of the communities listed, please contact Adrienne Gordon at agordon@iapa.ca or 416-506-8888 ext 306 for more information.

BOOK REVIEW

By Shirley Hickman

The last few times I visited our local pharmacy I have noticed a little book titled *The Meaning of Life*. It has this cute frog on the cover and I thought one day I will have to review this book or buy it for myself. Well, the other day I was attending an event and I won the door prize. Guess what? It was the little book "The Meaning of Life" by Bradley Greive! I could hardly believe it. I knew it must contain a message that I would be able to share with each of you. Eager to open it – the first page read "Halt! Whoa! Stop right there! Before you read any further there's something you really should know. You may have opened this little book expecting it to be filled with answers, but (surprise, surprise) it's actually a book about questions." The book continues with pictures of playful animals giving a perspective on how things look differently, includes some humour and encouraging thoughts. I am sure on some of my darker days, that I will pick up this book and contemplate the message again and again.

THREADS OF LIFE IN SPRING 2004



Shirley Hickman, Threads of Life member; Maureen Shaw, President and CEO, IAPA and Co-Chair of Friends of the LifeQuilt Committee; Peter Fonesca, P.A. to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

By Siân Gibson

Threads of Life has been extremely busy this spring and has had the opportunity to speak to a number of people first hand who have been personally touched by a workplace tragedy. At the end of April, Threads of Life was invited to participate in the largest health and safety tradeshow in Canada. The three-day conference was held in Toronto Ontario and was hosted by one of our key supporters, the Industrial Accident Prevention Association (IAPA). We were given a high profile space in front of the Canadian Life Quilt and were able to talk to employers, workers, students, teachers and other friends about our unique role in supporting Canadian families. It was rejuvenating to talk to people who have been touched by a workplace tragedy and to listen to why they were participating in the conference and trying to make their own difference. One man came to the Life Quilt looking for his uncle who had died over fifty years ago and was commemorated in one of the fabric

plaques – no explanation, but needed some assurance that his uncle’s memory and story lived on. We had the opportunity to talk to a front line representative from the Ministry of Labour who in his eight years as an inspector had to deal with 38 workplace tragedies. He seemed weary and burdened over his role as the first contact between the family and the “system” but after talking to him he gathered some hope after hearing how Threads

of Life will soon be helping families along their journey of healing by helping organizations such as the Ministry of Labour in supporting families more effectively with the development of the “For Families” booklet.

Over the three days of the conference, we proudly displayed our new Threads of Life armbands. The armbands were donated by a promotional agency “Carlton Promotions”. The President of Carlton Promotions had heard about Threads of Life through his wife who works for the Workers Health and Safety Centre in Ontario and wanted to “help us out in any way”. We also distributed over 2000 of our new information brochures. Threads of Life is slowly establishing itself as a presence within the Ontario health and safety system. We also made some initial contacts with key health and safety people in other provinces, which we will be following up with over the next few months.

Four days after the conference, on Sunday, May 2nd, we found ourselves on

Toronto’s Centre Island to participate in a Walk/Run in support of the North American Occupational Health and Safety (NAOSH) Week. Hosted again by our friend IAPA, the proceeds from this event went directly to Threads of Life, raising over \$4,000.00. Torrential downpours and below seasonal temperatures did nothing to dampen or freeze the spirit of the 100 participants who showed up in support of our worthy cause. Families participated in support of their missing loved one and friends of Threads of Life participated in support of us taking the next step.

Over thirty-five volunteers, two part-time staff and families too numerous to mention are working together to help Threads of Life gear up for the next six months. Fundraising, development of materials, and a training program for our Family Guides are key milestones that need to be met for 2004. A special thank you to IAPA for helping make our spring a very busy and productive one. A thank you to Carlton Promotions in helping us develop a subtle keepsake in memory of our families members who are not with us and a thank you to our volunteers who dedicated precious time in supporting us through the Conference and the Run/Walk. We’d also like to thank the event sponsors: Electrical & Utilities Safety Association, Health Care Health & Safety Association, Transportation Safety Association, and also The Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company of Canada for their generous support. Over the past two months, it has been gratifying to see so many people who have been touched by a workplace tragedy share their journey in the hope of preventing another family from experiencing similar pain and suffering.

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Compassionate Friends www.tcfcanada.net

The Compassionate Friends is an international, non-profit, non-denominational, self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, grief education and HOPE for the future to all families who have experienced the death of a child at any age, from any cause.

Bereaved Families of Ontario www.bereavedfamilies.net

Bereaved Families provides support for people who have lost an immediate family member – an infant, a child, an adult child, a parent, a brother or a sister, an adult sibling, a grandchild or a spouse. We

support parents, guardians or family members helping a child grieve. We support the unique circumstances faced by survivors of violent death, survivors of completed suicide, and families seeking pregnancy after loss.

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety www.ccohs.ca

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety works to promote health and safety in the workplace in Canada to facilitate: consultation and cooperation among federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions; participation by labour and management; to assist in the development and maintenance of policies and programs; and to serve as

a national centre for information relating to occupational health and safety.

Workers of Tomorrow - Manitoba www.workersoftomorrow.com

Workers of Tomorrow provides information to create awareness for a safe and healthy workplace in Manitoba.

Safe Communities Foundation www.safecommunities.ca

Safe Communities Foundation (SCF) is a national, not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to making Canada the safest country in the world to live, learn, work and play.

For Families is a booklet written because a family member has died as a result of a work-related accident or from a work-related disease. This booklet is to help new families with

a better understanding of the systems that they may be dealing with. In 2002 the WCB of British Columbia produced the first booklet. WSIB of Ontario is currently in the final stage of preparing a similar version to help Ontario families.

We are hoping the *For Families* booklet will be one tool to offer some assistance to a family when a new workplace incident occurs. Threads of Life extends a thank you to the WSIB for including us on this production team.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS EDITION:

Sharon Peat, Parent,
Chair of Board of Directors
Shirley Hickman, Parent,
Program Manager

Adrienne Gordon, Volunteer
Siân Gibson,
Communications Manager
Jamie Smith, Family Member

Diana Hammock, Bereaved Families
of Ontario, Southwest Region

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