

The  
**GOLDEN THREAD**

Le  
**FIL D'OR**



**The Terry Fox Humanitarian  
Award Program Newsletter**

**Le journal du Programme du  
Prix Humanitaire Terry Fox**



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**Cover Image: Amanda Cheong participating in the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay (full story on page 7-8)**

**Spring 2010**

**And Much More....**

## The Journey

By Bonnie Schott

*Walk 4 miles in my shoes, and I will meet you there. Tell me if you think my high school life has been fair. Your journey will begin not far into my first high school year. Take in every moment and try not to shed a tear.*

When it happened, everything that I was worrying about before didn't matter. I didn't care about trying to get in with the in crowd at school, or what my social status was. It's an important thing it seems, when you enter a new school. The new thrill of being in Grade 9 was lost in a sudden darkness. Nothing mattered to me except what was going to happen to my Dad. We were sitting around the kitchen table having supper, and my mom broke the news. My Dad had a brain tumor, and he was having surgery in a week. I was numb. It was one of those moments when you thought that you were in someone else's story. It didn't make sense to me at all. It couldn't be right. My dad was one of the most intelligent people I knew. The irony of him having a brain tumor was almost laughable. My mind was racing but wasn't really going anywhere. We were told that it was probably a benign tumor, and that they were going to remove it. Everything was going to be fine, they said, and that people his age shouldn't have cancerous tumors. But that dangerous C-word was all that could be thought of, on the days leading up to the operation.

When the day of the surgery rolled around, there was an almost eerie sense of calmness as my parents left for the hospital. Again, it didn't seem real at all. It was like my dad was leaving on some trip, not going to have brain surgery. As they left, I felt almost ashamed at how much it seemed like we didn't care. It was treated as though their leaving was insignificant. I was in that kind of numb stage with no emotion attached to it all. I guess that I was trying to believe that nothing was really going to happen. Denial was probably the only hint of emotion in me. That day we stayed home from school and waited. I think that it probably would have been better if I was actually doing something, not just staying at home with my wandering thoughts. As the numbness melted away, fear took its place. Reality had finally hit and all I wanted to hear was the phone ring and my mom say that everything was going to be alright. When we finally got the call, a rush of relief came flooding towards me. Everything was going to go back to normal- I thought.

As we went into the hospital to see my dad I was worried at how different he would look, and how different he would be. When we got to him, my idea of things going all back to normal was at the forefront of my mind. My Dad was the same and nothing had changed. We were talking to him as if the past week had never occurred. Then we left and waited in the waiting room for the

doctor to tell our parents the results of the tumor they had just taken out. As they came into the room I knew that something was wrong. That moment my life truly changed forever. My sense of what was the norm has never come back to what it was just mere weeks beforehand. That dangerous C-word that was creeping around had finally settled and my dad officially had brain cancer.

From that day on came a series of treatments, the first being radiation. This was a 6 week marathon where he went in every weekday, even through Christmas. Eight weeks later we got the devastating news that the tumor had grown back and we were back to square one. They then started a new string of treatments. Meals consisted of a platter of pills with a side dish of food. He had chemo pills, blood pressure pills, steroids to keep the swelling down, stomach pills, and acne medication. One of the most amazing treatments was acne medication and even more amazing than that, this mixture of pills actually worked. For the next year and a half things were looking up. His tumor was actually shrinking. During all this, Dad was still Dad. To me, he hadn't changed. I quite frankly couldn't believe that there was actually anything wrong with him. A gem that at the time I took for granted.

As people tried to comfort me through "the good times" it was really hard to say how I was feeling. I guess denial and hope are the best emotions I can think of, looking back. I was always still clinging to the belief that things would go back to normal; that this was a horrible dream and with a good shake it would all be forgotten. Every time I had a burst of fear or uncertainty I would always push them away as quickly as they would come. I think that through these years, when Dad was still Dad, it was really easy for me to think this way and not accept what was really going on.

At the end of my Grade 10 year this bliss that we were enjoying came to a crashing halt. The new MRI results were in and the news was not positive. The treatments that were so good to us for so long had turned on us and had stopped working. My dad was to have another brain surgery. They had decided to stop the treatments that they were doing before and try some other kinds. It was after this that the cancer really began to show and Dad, as we knew him to be, was beginning to fade.

When I started my Grade 11 year, I made myself a promise not to let the summer's events diminish the goals my dad and I made for me for the year to come. He always encouraged me to do everything I could, and not let what was happening to him affect my plans. I was determined to get through this year, and make my dad proud.

I always took pride in being strong about what was going on. I never wanted to have people feel sorry for me or take pity on my life. When talking about my dad I had never shed a tear. I was always so proud of him and I guess I forced myself to look positively at what was happening. Then I broke for the first time around people other than my family. I was at Youth Parliament and doing my introduction speech when I began to talk about my dad. At the first mention of his name, a flood of tears came out of me and I could not turn them off throughout the whole speech. But I kept on going, even cracking a couple jokes. I was later on told that my speech was probably one of the strangest ones that they had heard. They didn't know whether to laugh or cry with me. When my dad heard about this, all he could say was how proud he was of me for being so strong. I remember looking at him thinking... "Compared to you...I don't know anything about being strong". I wish I would have told him that.

When I returned home from Youth Parliament, there was a definite change in him. He was losing a lot of weight and his character was completely different. For the next three months he was steadily getting worse and we all knew it. But no one wanted to say it out loud, as if it would jinx the whole thing. His balance was getting worse and his memory was slowly receding. This put a whole new level of strain on our family. Many times I would get so frustrated with him when he wouldn't understand something or needed to be retold things. I would constantly have to remind myself that it wasn't his fault, but it was always very hard. To see someone you have known all your life change right before your eyes was heartbreaking to watch. It came to the point where I would see one of two people when I got home from school. I would sometimes see the loving, caring father that I knew all my life; his name was Eric Schott, my Dad. Other times, I would see a confused, scared, sometimes angry person; his name was Cancer, my enemy.

In the middle of April things came to a sudden downhill drop. I was leaving to go to Ottawa and the results of the latest MRI were the same day. As I left on the plane for this once in a lifetime adventure, there was a huge part of me that wanted to stay and be with my family. I was completely torn on whether or not I wanted to know the results while I was there or wait until I came home. Half way through my trip my mom finally told me the results. They were stopping his chemo-they were stopping all treatments. I was devastated; I didn't know what to do with myself. It was really hard going through the rest of my trip, not knowing anyone and having no one to turn to. Before I left for Ottawa we took a picture of me and my Dad together. I never could have imagined that that would be the last picture of us taken STANDING together, side by side. When I returned, I came down the escalator to see my dad in a wheel chair. This shock of

seeing him sitting there was overwhelming. A man that had always been so strong in my eyes now sitting there looking so vulnerable was very upsetting. At first I thought that he was paralyzed, but that was something that I would have to face later on. My dad had become so weak that he could only get up with our help and he only could walk a little ways alone.

I was home only a week, still getting used to new changes in my Dad, when an ambulance took him to the hospital. That was when another chapter of my life, and the last chapter of my Dad's began..... (to be continued).



## **Anthony DeCicco, mon Petit Prince** *Ou Les enfants handicapés et moi*

*By Julie Hébert*

*Quand vous leur parlez d'un nouvel ami, elles ne vous questionnent jamais sur l'essentiel. Elles ne vous disent jamais: "Quel est le son de sa voix? Quels sont les jeux qu'il préfère? Est-ce qu'il collectionne les papillons?"*

*- Le Petit Prince, Antoine de St-Exupéry*

Anthony n'a pas été un professeur ou un amoureux. Et contrairement à ce que pourrait laisser croire ce titre, je ne l'ai pas connu longtemps, une dizaine de jours à peine. Mais ce fût amplement suffisant pour me changer.

J'ai travaillé au Camp Papillon, un camp pour les enfants handicapés du Québec, les papillons à l'aile brisée comme on dit. Il fût mon premier coup de cœur estival, celui auquel je me suis le plus attachée, celui qui a su toucher mon cœur comme personne d'autre auparavant et d'une façon toute particulière. Il avait une maladie rare

mon jeune homme, une maladie dite « orpheline » comme la sphère médicale la nomme, car peu en souffrent, donc peu de recherches sont faites pour améliorer la situation.

J'ignore pourquoi je me suis sentie si chavirée par lui, par ses yeux, par ses mots qu'il fallait savoir deviner, car ils n'étaient pas prononcés. À peine quelques jours en sa compagnie que déjà je préférais tourner le dos à mes « pauses » pour profiter d'un moment supplémentaire avec Anthony.

À chaque fois que je le voyais aux prises avec un moment douloureux, c'est comme si j'entendais un crac à l'intérieur, comme si je sentais quelque chose se briser pour moi. Toute la naïve confiance que j'avais en la justice de la vie s'effritait peu à peu et s'envolait en fumée. Et malgré tout, ce n'est pas dans un moment similaire que j'ai été le plus ébranlée ; c'est quand je l'ai entendu rire pour la première fois. Celui qui a dit que le rire sincère est la plus belle chose au monde avait compris. Mais ce rire avait quelque chose de magique, un brin irréel. Ce devait être cela l'essentiel que décrivait Antoine St-Exupéry, un doux rire qui réchauffe le cœur et redonne un peu l'espoir...

Anthony a été repris par la vie peu après que nous ayons fait connaissance : il a laissé derrière lui ce corps qui lui faisait mal. Il avait vingt ans, l'âge que j'ai aujourd'hui. Ce n'est pas vieux vingt ans, on a encore la vie devant nous à vingt ans. Et pourtant, il s'est éteint à ce moment-là. Il m'a marqué d'une façon indélébile, vive. Il m'a permise de découvrir le monde des personnes ayant des handicaps, pour lequel j'ai dû laisser derrière ce trop encombrant manteau de préjugés. Il a redoublé mon envie d'être d'aider les gens qui ont eu peu de chance en pigeant la carte de la santé. Il m'a donné l'envie, le courage de travailler à devenir une meilleure personne.

Si un jour, une personne pensa que les personnes handicapées ne pouvaient rien apporter à ceux qui n'ont pas de handicap, je voudrais lui dire que je suis désolée pour elle. Avec cette mentalité, elle serait passée à côté d'Anthony. Moi, je m'en serais mordue les doigts. Et je ne serais pas la seule, car il a touché sans doute plus de cœurs en 20 ans que bien des gens ne pourront le faire dans toute leur vie.

*À Anthony,  
L'homme qui a changé ma vie.  
Et à Renaud, Jérémie, Célia, Pascal, Joanie et tous les autres qui continueront de m'apprendre à aimer, à jouer, à rire. À vivre.*

## Autism is not a Label

*By Meghan MacDonald*

Two summers ago I walked into the Community Autism Centre as a brand new, quite inexperienced summer employee. Little did I know that my entire outlook on life would change. My employment at the centre came about quite naturally—I had seen a posting at my local high school through the Youth Apprenticeship Program; I applied and I was accepted after an interview. My experience with autism and with kids was very limited in its entirety. I didn't know what to expect and little did I know that I was about to meet the most amazing individuals I have ever encountered in my life.

In my two summers at the Community Autism Centre, I have not only learned about the sometimes confusing, yet exceptionally brilliant world of kids with autism, but I have learned about life in general—about society, about fighting for what is right, and about living for others. I have learned that there is more to people than labels, and that the beauty of life comes from the struggles you overcome. I have learned that kids with autism are constantly pushed behind these labels—the diagnosis of autism seems to bring about the lifelong label of having “autism”. I've quickly come to understand that autism is so much more than a disorder, a label, or a name. Behind that word lays individuals—talented, beautiful people. The most important thing I have learned in my two summers at the autism centre is that kids with autism are still kids and they deserve to be treated as such.

Not only have the kids at the autism centre shown me how to live my life to the fullest, but they have shown me one of my greatest passions—learning from them. I've been asked, “How can you do that”? My answer has always been, “how couldn't I?” Without continuously growing, learning, and sharing with these kids, I would not quite know where my life would be right now. Their smiles remind me that life always turns out alright, their tears remind me to never stop fighting, and their challenges remind me that everyone has challenges to overcome. To see others judge kids with autism in ignorance encourages me to educate everyone I know on the subject and the sometimes harsh outlook of society reminds me there is still a long way to go in improving the stereotype of autism.

## Craig Kielburger presented Michael Kuijpers Easter Seals advocate, with his latest book *Me to We*.

By Michael Kuijpers

In spring 2009 I had the wonderful opportunity to meet Craig Kielburger, founder of "Free The Children" and recipient of the Children's Nobel Prize, at a small conference just before his 2-hour-long motivational speech at the Hilton Hotel in London, Ontario. I was very impressed with the genuine interest he showed for his young interviewers and his patience in answering their questions; all members of his small audience left the meeting room blissfully inspired by his words, biting at the bit to take action to change the world!

In the 2-hour-long motivational speech that followed, Craig Kielburger challenged all students, teachers, and schools to stop child exploitation and poverty by "Adopting a Village" in an impoverished country. In fact, he convinced his audience that today's generation has the ability to wipe out the world's worst poverty within the next 30 years!

Craig knows what he is talking about; he has set an amazing example of what children can do. At the young age of twelve he founded "Free The Children", a unique international development and youth empowerment organization, which in fourteen short years has built more than 500 schools in countries such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, impacting the lives of more than 50,000 boys and girls living in poverty. Today, "Free the Children" has grown into a membership of millions of children helping children, the world's leading youth-driven charity, inspiring an entire generation to stand up and have its voices heard.

When asked what inspired Craig fourteen years ago, he explained it had everything to do with the story about a 12-year-old Pakistani boy, Iqbal Masih, who was murdered by the so-called Carpet Mafia, after speaking out against child labour. At the age of four, Iqbal was sold into bonded labour by his parents to a carpet manufacturer, where he spent six years of his life tying tiny knots to make hand-made carpets for export, fourteen hours a day, six days a week. After escaping with the help of a local human rights organization, he began traveling the world and speaking out against child labour. By his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday Iqbal had helped free more than 3000 children. Sadly, he was never able to realize his impact, when in 1995 he was shot dead upon a return trip to Pakistan.

Iqbal's story changed Craig's life; the differences between his life and that of Iqbal shocked him. He knew he had to help and decided to embark on an ambitious fact-finding mission to South Asia. In a press conference held in

Delhi, India, 13-year-old Craig challenged the world to take notice of the stories and voices of child labourers everywhere. The media buzz that followed brought the issue of child labour to the forefront of global debate, assisting Craig to overcome his greatest challenge: breaking down the barrier of adult skepticism in the power of young people.

In addition to building schools, "Free The Children" has established more than 23,000 alternative income projects to assist women and their families in achieving sustainable income. Its latest initiative is a joint project with Oprah's Angel Network called "O Ambassadors", an unprecedented program, designed to educate and inspire more than one million young people across North America to become socially engaged and take action to help their underprivileged peers overseas. Craig is also the Co-founder and Director of "Me To We", which encourages ethical living and social responsibility, while also helping "Free The Children" achieve financial sustainability.

In spite of his busy life of humanitarian deeds, Craig has found the time to finish his degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Toronto and publish four books: he is the author of *Free the Children*, co-author of two national bestsellers *Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship*, and *Take More Action*, and most recently, the New York Times Best Seller *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*.

Craig has traveled to more than 50 countries, visiting underprivileged children and helping with humanitarian projects and development initiatives. For his work in the field of education and human rights, Craig received four honorary doctorates, along with the "Children's Nobel Prize".

Craig believes children can change the world "one child at a time". His favourite quote is by Mother Teresa: "We cannot do *great* things, but we can do *small things with great love!*"



## **They Are Changing My Life**

*By Jocelyn Swentek*

This summer a community in my city was labeled the number one unreached area for social supports. In response to this a group of young adults from my church (myself included) decided to start an outreach program. Every Wednesday we went to a park in the center of the complexes and set up soccer nets and brought snacks. The turn out was incredible. We had up to 40 children show up ranging in age from preschool to high school. When the weather got colder we partnered with a church down the street that let us use their building. We now have access to a kitchen and a gym. We've been doing cooking classes, crafts, and sports with these amazing kids.

Just over a month ago I had a life changing experience. A little 6 year old girl that had been clinging to me all night looked up at me and said "you're the best mommy in the world" followed by "you are a mommy right?". It touched my heart that she would think that I was a mother based solely on how I interacted with her. Then, this past week, the city buses went on strike. This especially affects neighborhoods like this one that are poverty stricken where many people do not have access to transportation. There is a 17 year old girl that comes to our drop in almost every week. She does not speak by choice because of the abuse she has endured in her life. This past week I was talking to her (a sequence of questions and consequent nods, shrugs, and the occasional one word whisper) I discovered that she was walking an hour to school and missing many classes due to the bus strike. I handed her my number and told her if she needed a ride to contact me. I did not think she would actually call me due to her lack of verbal communication and not wanting to ask for help. But the next day I received a call from her 4 year old sibling speaking on her behalf and asking for a ride. It was especially challenging to communicate in this manor but it was so rewarding knowing that she was reaching out. The next day I was able to give her a ride to school and on the way I stopped and bought her Tim Horton's. She was so happy to be able to get milk which is a precious treat in the community as it is considered an extra not a necessity.

The more time I spend with these kids, the more compassion I have for them and the more I realize how blessed I am. They teach so much about courage. One night after our program it was dark and a tough little 6 year old boy told me he could walk home on his own but I told him myself and another male volunteer would walk him home. He seemed very relieved. I held his hand and followed his directions through four dimly lit

catwalks and a park. Throughout the walk there were frightening people and stray animals. I could not imagine this young boy making this walk on his own since I as an adult was uncomfortable. He stopped at the back door of his home where he had to stand and knock until someone came to unlock the door for him. Every time I hear about one of the challenges they are facing I just want to take them home and adopt them. These children have so many qualities that make them an inspiration. Many see a group of high needs, rough, troubled children; but I see some very strong, smart, and brave kids that just want to be loved.

## **The Heartbreak that Changed my Life**

*By Chelsea Harder*

My grade eleven year was one that was going to change my life in a very dramatic way. I didn't know exactly what I was going to experience when I signed up for a mission trip to Vancouver that year. I was excited; however, I didn't have any idea that this experience was going to change my outlook on life and direct me to my life calling. I anticipated the trip for months. Finally the day arrived and we were on our way driving through the mountains. What a beautiful sight mountains are. One thing I appreciate about Canada is the diversity in both culture and landscape. I remember thinking about what a wonderful experience it must have been for Terry Fox as he ran across Canada being able to see all the diversity.

We were told to be prepared for our hearts to break. I was not prepared for how intensely this was actually going to happen to me. The first day out on the streets was an incredibly stretching day for me. In groups of three, we were put out onto the street and told to go meet people. We were dropped off by Oppenheimer Park on the downtown east side of Vancouver. The downtown east side was the area we were to explore for the day. The sights I saw were very discomfoting and stretching. The "little Saskatchewan town" scenery that I was used to was no where in sight. Fear was very prominent in my mind, for I had never been taken this far out of my comfort zone. We were told by many people on the street to leave, and that we were stupid for being down there by ourselves. At first I spent my time walking at a fast pace and hanging around shops where lots of people were. The first lesson I needed to learn was about to happen very quickly. Lesson number one on the schedule was the fact that the people of the street were nothing like what I'd been told they were like. As I got more comfortable, I started talking to the people who made their home right there on the streets.

I found out how easy it was to have a conversation with them, for they were extremely friendly. They gave me advice on safety while being on the street, and they told me so many miraculous stories of how they ended up there.

That day was the day my heart was broken for the better. I became so sad when I saw people starving, shaking, and alone wrapped up in filthy sleeping bags on the cement. Upon hearing the stories these people had to tell, I became even more heartbroken. These were people who had experienced so much pain in their lives, and had no one to turn to. Some had lost their jobs, their spouses, their families, and some felt rejected by the world. I connected with these people on a deep level as I too have experienced pain in my life. When two people have lost a family member, they can connect on a much deeper level. Lesson number two was learned that day: We all need a shoulder to lean on, and we all need love. We all go through pain, and we can help each other by simply listening and connecting to the pain we have had.

I had packed an extra lunch with me to share with someone I met while on the streets. I was surprised to see so many people show up when I brought out my food. I felt terrible because I had only enough lunch for someone else and myself. When I gave away the first lunch I was so touched to see the man I had given the lunch to had taken it apart and was sharing the different articles with others. This touched me because someone who looked so hungry was still sharing with others. I too broke apart my lunch and shared it with a few people. I was so surprised at how grateful people were for one half of a sandwich, or a single apple. These people had so little, and yet they were so willing to show kindness. They also were so thankful for a small act of kindness shown to them. At that moment I learned lesson number three. This lesson was that it doesn't take a lot to make a difference in someone's life.

The rest of the trip was full of wonderful people, experiences, and lessons. I think the people on the street helped me more than I helped them. I have gone back to Vancouver three times since that. Lesson number four that I've learned: Pain is everywhere and the world needs our help. I will never forget the faces that showed me what kind of a person I want to be. I want to be the kind of person who anyone can lean on and experience love. I believe it is love that can change people. I found my life calling as a counsellor on that trip. I have seen the power that a listening ear can have on someone. Life can be a beautiful thing if people can learn to love before they judge. I am determined to help spread love around in the world, to everyone, and I will be forever thankful to the people of the Vancouver streets for showing me just how much love can effect someone.

## Live Like You Were Dying

*By Stephanie Foote*

This past weekend, as a friend and I were driving home for the weekend, we were laughing away at good old high school memories and reminiscing of the good times. The city lights were just beginning to disappear in the distance as we cruised along the seemingly-endless highway when Tim McGraw's "Live Like You Were Dying" started to play on the radio. While singing along, I started to think about the whole concept of how you should live everyday like it is your last. The song made me think of my "100 Things To Do Before I Die" list that I had written way back in Grade 12, just prior to graduation. Had I gone on that road trip out to BC with friends yet? Had I made a point of going on another snowboard trip out to the mountains with my two brothers? Had I gone cliff-jumping or sky-diving yet? Had I participated in that triathlon or half-marathon that I had always wanted to train for?

Although I am only twenty years old and may have many years ahead of me, I was quite disappointed in myself for taking "someday" for granted. My friend and I began to reflect on the countless times that we had told ourselves that we would do something "later", "when I can afford it", "when I'm done university", or "when I have the time". Despite all these excuses, I couldn't help but wonder, "What's our excuse going to be once we're done school and have the money?". Life is surely not going to slow down after we graduate from university and begin to establish our careers; after we fall in love, get married and start a family; and etcetera. What were we waiting for?!

We are constantly reminded of how short and unpredictable life is and how it should never be taken for granted. Everyday, the news channels flash reports of people dying in car accidents, plane crashes, natural disasters, or from sickness. Never mind the "100 Things To Do Before I Die" List – had I simply taken the time to tell my family and friends how much I love them and how proud I am to have them in my life? Had I taken the time to hang out with my mom, dad, or brothers despite our crazy schedules? Had I picked up the phone and called my long-time best friend, who lives 3 provinces away, just to catch up on each other's life?

It is so unfortunate that it often takes the sudden death or imminent death of a family member or close friend, whether it is Cancer, Alzheimer's, a heart attack, or a stroke, to emphasize how life is so precious, especially when disease and death can be so unexpected. A friend once shared a quote with me that I think says it best: "[Dream as if you'll live forever, live as if you'll die today](#)". Therefore, no matter how young or old you are, make unforgettable memories, accomplish all of the goals that you dream of, and most of all: Live Like You Were Dying

## The Grateful Flame

*By Amanda Cheong*

Of all the cultural symbols in the world, there is none as universal and enduring as the Olympic flame. It is also arguably one of the most controversial. As much as it is a border-transcending celebration of the human condition, many regard the Olympic torch relay as a propagandistic, politicized corporate spectacle meant to convince the masses that national pride can be conveniently purchased at The Bay in mitten form, or found at the bottom of a Coca-Cola bottle.

So naturally, it was with great ambivalence that I undertook the simultaneous honour and burden of carrying the torch during the 2010 Winter Games in my hometown of Vancouver. During the months after hearing the news and leading up to the arrival of the Games (accompanied by the scrutinizing eyes of the entire world), I couldn't help but wonder what the ethical implications of my participation in this event would be. We are all aware of the companies sponsoring the relay, but who was really paying for my shiny white uniform, for my short-lived stint as a "model," for my proverbial fifteen minutes of fame? Where was the due representation and justice for the marginalized people who are exploited every day in factories and plants in order for a nobody like me to bask in the artificial warmth of the Almighty Dollar? And, knowing my clumsy propensities, what if I dropped the darn thing?

That being said, I am not wholly against the Olympics. Rather, I am amazed at how the power of sport has the ability to unite and inspire a nation like it did this spring. The near-palpable spirit that overtook our home—our vast, varied, and stereotype-ridden Canada—was something completely and delightfully unexpected. The deliriously celebratory atmosphere pervaded our households through our television sets, sparked spontaneous renditions of our anthem on the streets, and allowed us to truly appropriate the maple leaf as a symbol of who we are as a people. Individuals from sea to sea, hitherto complete strangers, were brought together by the incandescent, centripetal force of the Olympic spirit.

These conflicting sentiments plagued my mind as I fought to clearly define my motivations for carrying the torch, as well as the statements I would inevitably be making by doing so. I got so caught up in my overly-anxious internal dialogue that one day I stopped to ruminate on how I even got here in the first place. And then I realized that this was not a solitary experience at all. By politicizing the ordeal (not to say that we shouldn't be aware of the broader implications of our individual actions—because it is so imperative that we do), I diverted attention away from those who helped

me get to where I am today, and who I wished a thousand times over had been in my place that afternoon. This honour and burden was never just about me. Rather, I was merely the corporeal vehicle embodying the joint accomplishments of the people I feel forever indebted to for having had faith in me while growing up. This was not my day—this was theirs. On February 10th, the run was my small way of saying thank you to the family and friends I had been running alongside my entire life.

To my little brother, David Cheong, who is the hardest working athlete I know: To have a sibling who is skilled in all the things that I am not, and who strives to constantly improve in his own way, is more than I could ever hope for. Thank you for being the responsible one, and for pushing your limits in sport and life. You are the best brother ever, and I am so proud of you!

To my father, Joseph Cheong, whose patience and diligence is indefatigable: Thank you for supporting me in my most off-the-wall endeavours, and for inspiring me to always recycle and use precious resources wisely. I have learned so much from your uncomplaining fidelity to your work, from your quiet benevolence, and cannot begin to pay back the sacrifices you have made in order for me and David to lead happy lives. But I will try to start by scoring Canucks tickets for us one day!

To my mother, Sarah Cheong, from whom I have unconsciously learned how to be a strong woman: Your honesty and frankness with me, and your own critical way of showing that you care, has allowed me to develop an unsatisfiable desire to push myself to become better in every facet of my being. Your passion for running, and insistence that I be independent in this big world, carried me forward with the torch. By the time you were the age I am right now, you were already forging a new life for yourself in Canada, and I thank you for according me with the trust and freedom to mould a space for myself in this world.

To Eric Hamber Secondary School's dragon boat team and its sponsor, Judy Chan: Ms. Chan, the dedication that you show, and sacrifices that you've made in order for our team to realize our dreams, is incomparable. Thank you for believing in the shy, self-conscious, chubby eighth grader who stumbled upon the beautiful dragon boating community so many years ago, and for helping her develop into the somewhat functional person who only occasionally (okay, constantly) spills food on herself today. Dragon boat literally saved my life. As I wrote in my short story that secured my nomination to become a torch bearer, dragon boat evokes superlative levels of passion and dedication from its participants, who can be Olympians, octogenarians, cancer survivors, and anyone else looking for alternative ways to adopt an active lifestyle. Paddling is indistinguishable

from my self-identity: I am who I am today because of the experiences I accumulated on this team. I would not trade the journey I had in the sport of dragon boat for all the gold medals in existence.

On February 10th at approximately 12:23PM, I had the honour, the burden, and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to express my gratitude to my family and community during the small biennial event known as the Olympic Games. We've all come a long way to run those three-hundred metres together.



## How Doing What You Love Can Change Lives

By Elizabeth von Rosenbach

For most people, community service is a daunting task. It is usually experienced as a total of 40 hours to be mindlessly plugged away at some dreary job in order to graduate high school. But what is community service really?

The dictionary defines it as “services volunteered by individuals or an organization to benefit a community or its institutions”.

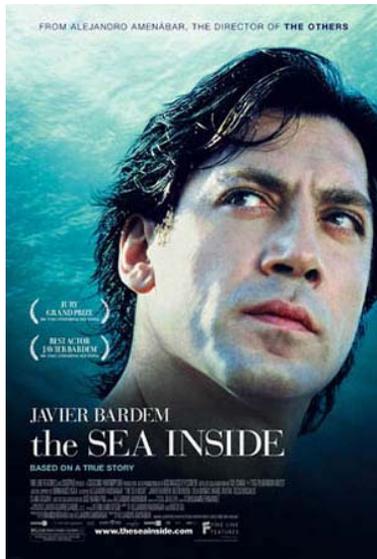
But what does community service mean really? It is something that is meant to bring the community together, give hope, light and joy to not only those people on the receiving end of the spectrum, but also to those on the giving end. So what then defines our community?

Communities are essentially integrated networks that socially revolve around you. They can take many forms, for example, a community could be simply your group of friends, a club you just joined, your school, town, municipality, country or even the global environment. You define your community, and your community defines you. But how you want to help, is up to you. Community service doesn't have to be collecting trash off the highway, it can be as simple as planting some flowers for the local nursing home, putting some salt on the sidewalk when it gets slippery out, or simply helping your next door neighbor take the groceries out of their car. What is important is that you are helping your community because it makes you happy, not because you are trying to complete a high school requirement. Maybe you are planting that flower garden at the nursing home not because you love gardening but because all your friends are there with you. The fact of the matter is that good things are happening because you are having fun with your friends.

Whatever job you are doing in life, happiness is the key ingredient for success. People are intuitive beings, and if they feel that you do not enjoy what you are doing, then they will be less likely to give back to you when you need it most. Community service is a reciprocal entity, we have all experienced it, whether we recognize it or not.

For me, I never realized how a piece of art could make such a difference in someone's life. This year I discovered that by auctioning off my art, I could buy someone a tent, or food or even provide the funding needed to keep my community art gallery operational. So the community service, really goes two ways: I get to do what I love, which is making art, and I get to make a

difference in my community. Now, community service no longer feels like a chore, I do it because I love it. What do you enjoy? Maybe you could have a Rockband tournament to raise money for a local charity; donate those old clothes you have been hanging on to; go to Africa, the Middle East, Asia and work in the field. Build houses, wells, distribute medicine; there are so so many ways to get involved.



## **Reflections on 'The Sea Inside'**

By Kayla Atkey

Every couple of months, the University of Alberta rents out an old theatre close to campus for *Science and the Cinema*. This is a free event, aimed at exploring the relationship between science and society. In mid-March, the event showcased an independent film called *The Sea Inside*, based on

the true story of Ramón Sampedro, a sea captain who became a quadriplegic after a tragic diving accident. The movie tells the story of Ramón's campaign to end his life and, essentially, examines questions surrounding the right to die.

For me, the movie was particularly striking in relation to a new field of volunteer work I have recently become involved with. After registering in a Community-Service Learning class, I was paired with the Alberta Caregivers Association, an organization devoted to education, support, and advocacy for the benefit of Alberta family caregivers. Prior to this, I had not really considered the role that caregivers play in our society. In particular, I was astonished to learn that over 3 million Canadians are currently in a care-giving position, providing support for a chronically ill family member or a friend. Ultimately, watching *The Sea Inside* with my volunteer work in mind made me deeply aware of the relationship between Ramón and his family. Although caring for him was at times an incredibly stressful and demanding experience, his family was always there, providing him with support.

After the movie, two professors from the School of Public Health gave a lecture on spinal cord injuries. Among other things, they asked "How do we navigate the question of what makes a life worth living?" Of course,

there are no easy answers to this question. I, for one, could not even begin to determine which side of the debate I fall on. Nevertheless, one of the researchers stressed the point that something we can do in these situations is make sure that an individual's despair is not the product of a failure of the society around them.

As a University student, full of ambition and a hard work ethic, I often have my head in the clouds, trying to determine what direction I want to take my life and where, exactly, I want to call home. However, more and more, experiences such as my work at the ACGA have made me re-evaluate, or at least better understand, what I value most in life.

Following the movie and lecture, I went out for dinner with a group of friends. Upon discussing the outcome of the film, it was soon apparent that everyone, more or less, experienced a different set of emotions in relation to Ramón's story. While, for me, the movie seemed to reaffirm my growing appreciation for close family relations, others walked away with a greater sense of individual freedom. This ability, to give rise to many different perspectives is, I think, what makes the film so appealing.

## **A Little Taste of the Good Life**

By Emma Bellini-Rutledge

A great life lesson that I have learned; when you are presented with an opportunity that you feel you can't miss out on, you must take it. In my grade ten year of high school I attended a presentation describing the benefits of participating in an international student exchange. The whole idea seemed perfect to me from the moment I heard the presenter speak. All day I waited just to go home and present the exciting news to my family and to tell them all about this amazing journey that I hoped to embark on. Luckily, my parents were just as enthusiastic as I was about the idea and I immediately began to apply for a student exchange to France.

The waiting time flew by, suddenly it was the summer between grade ten and eleven and I had a stranger from France living in my house. Léa, from Poitiers France, and I spent an amazing three months together at my home in Ontario, Canada. The three months from the time Léa left to the time I left for France felt like years, but soon enough I was headed to France.

Having never visited anywhere in Europe before, I had no idea what to expect on my arrival in Paris. My first thoughts after entering the airport in Paris were something along the lines of, "Boy it really smells like

cigarette smoke in here.” Coming from Ontario where smoking in public buildings is against the law, my first impressions of France was that there was way too much cigarette smoke.

After leaving the airport and spending the afternoon touring around the main attractions in Paris with 20 other 16 year olds I started to form a better impression of the country. Paris was nothing like anything I had seen before. Standing in front of the Eiffel Tower looking up to the top is to this day one of the most amazing things I have seen. Walking through the streets of Paris, hearing French spoken around me, I felt like I had been sent back in time. The buildings were not tall like the sky scrapers in Toronto; they were old, had magnificent architecture and were beautiful. The streets were not old black pavement with yellow dotted lines, but they were made from brick or stone and were painted with crisp white lines. The people were not pushing and yelling, the cars were not screeching and honking, everything was peaceful.

Still in awe from the beauty I had seen in Paris, I then met with my exchange partner Léa and the family I would spend the next three months with, soon we were off to Poitiers France in the family car. Poitiers was amazing; even more ancient and beautiful than Paris. For three months of my life, (which felt like three weeks the time flew by so fast), I would be living in this paradise.

As I sit here eating my Nutella on toast, I am filled with vivid memories of the foods that I enjoyed while living in France. Every morning there was no doubt that my exchange sister and I would rip off a piece of baguette or croissant and stuff a piece of gourmet chocolate in the middle to eat on the way to school. While at school we'd take a two hour break from classes, join the long line into the cafeteria and enjoy and three course meal. The cheeses, the chocolate, the bread, every bit of food in France tasted amazing!

Along with the gorgeous sites and the food being fantastic, so were the weather and the social scene. Leaving a Canadian winter in the middle of February to spend the rest of it in plus 10 or more weather was more than I could ask for! Then to top it all off every person I met was friendly and there was always something for us teenagers to do.

Returning to Canada was a shock, life is so different here. However, my experience had been so amazing that I knew I had to encourage others to take advantage of an exchange. I had been a pioneer in my school; I was the first student in my school to participate in an international student exchange. On my return, I prepared a presentation on the experience and the life opportunity that travel promotes. Since my pioneering experience, many students in my former high school have been inspired to participate, including my younger sister who is

currently living in the Canary Islands in Spain where she too is having the experience of her life.

People have asked me, would I do it over again? Live away from friends and family, miss three months of school, live with strangers, wasn't it scary? Yes of course it was scary, and yes I missed my family and friends, but the benefits of the experience clearly outweighed any disadvantages. Simply put, my advice to anyone reading this is take advantage of the world you live in, travel as much as you can, meet new people and enjoy new cultures. My appreciation for others and for the world I live in will be forever changed because of this simple trip.

The three months that I spent in the paradise of Poitiers, France were to me, a taste of the good life. I learned so much while I was living there, including their language and how to cook! Someday, I'll return to have another little taste of the good life.

## **Get Outside Your Comfort Zone**

*By Ryan Sloan*

Throughout my four years in high school and my first term at St. Francis Xavier University I have come to the realization that opportunities present themselves when you begin to step outside your comfort zone. Growing up I was always involved in my school and community, whether it be in student's council or playing/coaching Timbit's soccer on Saturday mornings. Though I was always involved, there were certain situations that created feelings of discomfort or nervousness and stepping outside of my comfort zone created lifelong benefits.

Grade six was the big year as it was the transition from elementary school to middle school. Activities that I participated in at school also changed. For instance, "Students council" was a term that I had been hearing often, not only at school, but from my parents who taught me that it is important to have a say in what is happening around the school and community. After a couple weeks of contemplation, I decided I would fill out a form and run for Vice President of the student body. Election Day was on the horizon and I was becoming increasingly more nervous. I had never had to speak in front of such a large crowd and was beginning to have second thoughts about all this "being involved" people were talking about. When the day finally arrived I was at the peak of my nervousness. I was chosen to do my speech last which heightened my anxiety. To this day I do not know how I ever stood up and did my speech but am extremely grateful that I did step outside my comfort zone. I ended up winning the election and becoming the Vice President of student's council. Although this may seem as a minor situation I believe it sparked my initiative to stay involved

in student's council and also join other clubs and committees. Being on council also gave me the opportunity to meet many new people in my first year at middle school.

French class was a time of the day that I learned to hate with a passion. Our teacher never let us speak English, in turn, not leaving me with very much to say. In grade nine, my first year at Northumberland Regional High School I decided to stay involved with the French extended core program even though I struggled with the language and detested almost every second of class. French class, as it turns out, had many benefits for a young teenage boy. In the middle of the term our teacher announced to the class we have the chance to go on a trip to France and Spain to "sharpen" our French skills. After returning home from the Europe trip the following year I began thinking to myself what I would have missed out on if I decided to just give up on the French language. Not only can I now speak French at a moderate level but I have gained experiences of different life cultures that many people never have the chance to experience.

The first day of university is such an overwhelming day from the moment you pull into the parking lot to register. Before you even get out of your vehicle there are students jumping around, singing and chanting and you can do nothing but smile and laugh. When I got out of the car the second and third year students were funneling the frosh kids through the middle of their loud and boisterous cheer. As a bystander and participant I found that the students who embraced the lively and entertaining atmosphere ultimately enjoyed themselves more than the students who were laid back and nervous to join in with the dancing and singing. So, when it was my turn to run through the swarm of people I went with my arms raised and singing along (and my father following in similar fashion). Getting outside my comfort zone on my first day of university and having a event filled day gave me the incentive to continue to do so in the future.

I have learned through experience that stepping outside your comfort zone truly does entail benefits such as meeting new people and making new friends. It is a way of jumping into something that is new and fresh and running with it. For me, this one action, or way of thinking, has helped to mold and shape me as an individual and has made me a better person. If I had not done my speech in grade six I might not have not stayed involved with my school or met the people I did through my involvement. If I had discontinued French I would not have had the opportunity of taking a trip to Europe and witnessing firsthand the different cultures and way of life. Finally, if I did not jump in with the festivities of frosh week I would have missed out on all of the fun and exciting experiences that come with somebody's first week of university.

This year, the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics were a reminder of how individuals with a dream can often inspire a whole nation. In honor of people following their dreams, I wrote this poem.

## **Golden dreams**

*By Sajjid Hossain*

Watch out world  
I am going for gold  
Going for that golden moment  
When you tell yourself that it was all worth it  
When the sacrifices, sweat and tears  
Are replaced by smiles, applause and cheers  
The countless hours spent preparing  
Now prove to be ever so rewarding

There are moments when you doubt  
But step by step you climb a mountain  
I captured each day I was given  
Steadfast to my chosen route  
Sights set for that golden moment  
When I pour my heart into that single instant  
And tell myself that for that split second  
I would go through the adversities all over again

After I have given my final push  
Remaining are the raw emotions  
That I have stirred in the next generation  
Realizing that it can be done  
You don't need to be superhuman  
You just need a dream  
And run with it to make it fly high like a kite  
You just need to have hope  
And make it shine like a beam of light  
You simply need to believe  
And there is no limit to what you can achieve

## Himalayan Medicine

*By Colin Matheson*

This past fall, I travelled to Nepal to work as a medical volunteer. I spent a lot of my time in a small community hospital in Kathmandu. I also got to participate in a medical trek through a rural mountain area of the country to help run temporary clinics in villages that usually have no access to medical care. This was an unbelievable experience!

It all began with a long and gruelling bus ride that took about nine hours. We really didn't travel that far (only 120 kilometers), but most of the way was on dirt roads. The nepali dirt roads are not like in Canada; they are peppered with legitimate boulders and ruts. The bus needs to travel at a very slow speed to get by. Despite this, there are usually locals who choose to ride on top of the bus. It is difficult enough to avoid crashing against the walls while in the bus, I can't imagine how they avoid being thrown off. The roads are also so narrow that in Canada, they would be deemed unsafe for even one lane of traffic. The steep drop off is often inches away from the tires and when looking out the window, all that can be seen is the distant valley floor.

After the tiring day of bus travel, we began the trek. There were about nine doctors from the Atlanta region and nine nursing students from Victoria, BC. We alternated, one day of trekking to the new town, and then the next day running a medical clinic for the villagers and surrounding peoples. These towns were very small, all less than 400 people, and very traditional. They were only accessible on foot. Most of the people in the areas turned up for the clinics. Many people had the same predictable complaints: severely cut or burnt hands (from daily chores), sore eyes (from the dust and sun), stomach irritation (from the water), abscesses or infections (from lack of hygiene), and tooth pain (from lack of tooth care). Unfortunately, the majority of work that was done for the people are only temporary solutions and it is likely that they will encounter the same issues down the

road. Everyone was given about a month's supply of vitamins as well as a de-worming tablet. Many rotten teeth were pulled though, which should provide more lasting relief. Medicine is so advanced and sophisticated in many ways, but it is amazing how primitive it still can be. It was quite something to watch the dentists inject a willing mouth with one or two shots of local anaesthetic, wait about 30 seconds, and then begin to pull laboriously with pliers and other brute force tools.

Observing the clinics was a humbling experience. There were many visitors for which little or nothing could be done. With limited time, equipment, and resources, the level of medical care delivered was quite different than what the doctors and nurses were used to. Despite this, a lot of good was done. Many patients were relieved of pain and suffering, at least for the time being. Who knows, perhaps a life was saved.

Besides the interesting medical scenarios, the trekking was a wonderful source of exercise! On the first day I had to shake out a few kinks (and adjust to the new altitude), but I soon found my stride and was fully enjoying the strenuous hikes. The views were spectacular as well! I took many pictures in hopes of capturing some of the beauty, but I knew that they would do no justice to the experience. It was interesting to get out of the city and experience what many consider to be the "real Nepal". The dress and culture was more traditional. There is influence from the Nepali as well as



the Tibetan heritage as the area is very close to the boarder. We frequently were able to see Tibetan mountains.

Some other highlights were taking a dip in the natural hot springs of Tatopani. These were very warm and refreshing after several days without a shower. We also got to try Roxy, which is the local drink. Apparently the doctors, who started the trek a day before we did, noticed an unknown container of liquid that the locals used to start a bonfire. As soon as the flammable liquid ignited the flames, the locals began to drink it and offered it to the doctors. It is a clear liquid that is quite strong, to say the least!

The trek ended under interesting circumstances. Those who were organizing the trek, and who were receiving periodic updates from the city, had heard that the upcoming Maoist party insurgency had been intensifying and that some rumours were hinting that there may be a shutdown of all transportation in a few days. The prospect of being stuck out of the city for days, weeks, or even a month was enough for us to decide to cut the trek one day short and head back to Kathmandu while we still could. It is difficult to predict everything there. All information is speculative and no one seems to know anything for sure. For me, this added to the charm and excitement of the experience.

I am very privileged to have had the opportunity to experience a different part of the world and a different culture in this intimate way. I will never forget my time in the mountains of Nepal and I can't wait for my next adventure, where ever it may be.

### iPeople

By Matthew Dyck

How many of you have ever owned an iPod?

Apple, the company which developed the iPod, has sold over 200 million of these digital music players worldwide, making the iPod by far the best-selling music player in history. When I first started high school, it seemed that only a few privileged students owned one; just a few years later the trademark white headphones are a common sight nearly everywhere. In fact, many of you are probably listening to your iPods while reading this article! Undoubtedly, the iPod has been a turning point in the way this generation listens to music.



For the Terry Fox Scholars who are currently working hard at their post-secondary studies, it is my hope that as we envision the future we will all see visions of success—not the shallow type of success measured by credit cards, business deals, and supermodel looks, for if that's all we seek, we'll miss out on something far better. Apple is changing the world of music through iPods; but I believe we can change our worlds by being iPeople!

There are hallmarks characteristics of individuals whom I call "iPeople."

The first "i" trait is *integrity*. According to Oprah Winfrey, "Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not." We live in a world where a lack of integrity routinely distances friends, divides marriages, and leads to the downfall of many corporations—it is a world crying out for us to be authentic, transparent people who seek what's right and do it, regardless of whether we receive credit.

The second characteristic of an iPerson is *imagination*. As our generation becomes the emerging leaders of the business, scientific, and political world, we will all encounter many exciting challenges requiring complex solutions. We will need an abundance of imagination to solve these problems. Albert Einstein alleged, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." By working hard at post-secondary education, we have proven that we are gaining knowledge, and we will certainly continue to learn for the rest of our lives. But it is by developing our imaginations, discussing issues, brainstorming solutions, and actively implementing them that we will improve the lives of our fellow human beings on both a local and global level.

The final trait of an iPerson is *inspiration*. Inspiration isn't something that comes passively—it must be actively pursued. In order to spur our imaginations and live as people of integrity, we need to build relationships with individuals who will inspire us to hold true to what's right, and distance ourselves from those who do the opposite. I have found that a personal relationship with God has been an invaluable source of inspiration and has guided me each day in the choices I make. Do your hobbies, your music, and your role models inspire you to make a positive difference with your life? Does your life inspire others to reach their maximum potential?

It's not what we say but what we *do* that shows integrity. It's not *limitations* but *potential* that drives imagination. It's not *passiveness* but *purposefulness* that fuels inspiration.

So the next time you crank up the tunes on your iPod, remember what it means to live like iPeople!

## Bleeding Green

By Ashley Major

Coming from Saskatchewan, I have grown accustomed to the many jokes made at our expense. There is the delightful claim that a person can see a dog running for days, because our land is so flat. Others claim that everyone in the province is related and that the majority of our vehicles start with John and end with Deere. However, one thing said about us Saskatchewan folk rings completely true: We Bleed Green. The Roughriders are our only professional sports team. Sure, we hop on the bandwagon and cheer for the Flames in hockey and the Jays in baseball. But there is something so comforting in being able to say "Saskatchewan: Home of the Riders".

For as long as I can remember, my family has had Rider fever. I had the privilege of "adopting" a grandfather into my life when I was fifteen. He was one of the biggest Rider fans I had ever met, never missing a game on television. He often spoke of the many games he had attended both as an RCMP officer and as a fan. In the summer of 2009, the Riders were on a hot streak, winning games left and right and coming off of a high of winning the Grey Cup in '07. My grandpa, on the other hand was diagnosed with cancer. He remained incredibly upbeat and followed the team faithfully, refusing to let cancer interfere with his intense dedication to the team.

I waitressed at Earls this summer and was delighted to find that our restaurant was a popular hangout for the players. They were there so often that I got to know a few of them quite well. As my grandpa deteriorated in health I wanted to do something special for him. I approached a few of the Riders and asked them if they would be willing to visit my grandpa. I gave the time and place, and waited patiently to see who, if anyone, would show up. I told my grandmother about the surprise, because I had visions of just how she would react if incredibly tall, strange men showed up at her house. The two of us could hardly contain ourselves because we knew how excited my grandpa would be. When the doorbell rang at six o'clock I was shocked to find Fantuz, Cates, Congi and Lucas at our door. I had no idea four of them would be coming! My grandpa was so excited. He joked with the boys and talked

football for almost an hour. I smiled as he gave them advice and cited statistics from decades before. I tried not to cry as they left, because while they had no idea how huge their gesture was, I did.

For the next hour, my grandpa was on the phone calling everyone he knew, telling them about his incredible visit. He spoke of the visit every day and positively glowed. Two weeks later, he died. Now as we move on without him, I think of how privileged I was to be able to give that final gift to him. The Riders made the last two weeks of my grandfather's life something special. After the years my grandfather spent focusing on the Riders, they took time the time to focus on him. Rider fans are known as the craziest fans in the CFL, and it is true. But maybe the reason why we support our team so diligently is we know that they will take the time to support us right back. That is how I feel, anyway. We may be a small province.

We may be flat. We may know everyone who lives here by a couple degrees of separation. But we are a community. I do not know too many places where one can walk up to professional athletes at a restaurant one night, ask them to visit a family member, and have them arrive the next day, recruiting others before they come. That one hour of that one day was one of those life-changing moments for me. It was small and it was subtle, but that moment made me realize a few very important things. It showed me the importance of family. It showed me just how little effort it takes to make a large impact on someone's life. Finally, it showed me why I should be proud to be from Saskatchewan. I know that no matter where I go and where I choose to live in this world, I will always bleed green.



## Putting in the Miles

*By Richard Boulding*

Ever since I was young I, like many individuals, have always idolized my father. Whether working together around the farm, sitting around the kitchen table, or enjoying a quiet ride in the semi; he always seems to find a way to make light of any situation. I suppose what I admire most about my dad is his quick wit and bountiful humor, which on more than one occasion, he has used to spark a frenzy of laughter among those around him. However, despite how highly I have always thought of him I have never truly sat down and thought about the monumental amount of work he has had to perform in order to provide for his family.

Recently while spending a day from university with my dad in the semi I began to think about the thirty-five years that my father has driven a semi. I sat riding co-pilot down another Saskatchewan highway beside my dad trying to figure out how many miles he would cover in a day, a week or a month. Miles starting piling onto miles until it got to a point that I was certain my father had easily driven around the world by now, a feat that is by no means something not to be in awe of. I started to picture my dad the first day he drove a semi many years ago as if flipping through a photo album in my mind. At first he was a spring chicken bursting with energy, working to pay his way through life and support his aging mother whose picture was visible on his visor. As time passed my grandmother's picture was accompanied by one of my mother as the two dated and in time their wedding photo. The next image that came to mind was a bay carrier sitting beside my dad as he would often take my sisters and I in the semi with him. I want to note that I attribute my love of the smell of diesel and animal feed to spending endless hours with my dad in the semi. The smells that trigger a flood of good memories at a moments notice. As I made these mental pictures of my dad hard at work I started to imagine a family picture being added to the visor, a testament to his being a proud father.

The more I thought about my dad the more pictures kept being added to the visor from Christmas concerts, awards nights, and graduations. All of which, my father would have to work like a dog in order to find the time to make it to. But sure enough whenever there was a major event for any of his kids our dad would always be there even if it meant parking the semi on the edge of town and coming to see us between his loads. Thinking about all the things that dad used to go through for us and all the programs we were able to partake in got me thinking about how my dad has worked to support our family financially for all these years. I again started to

think of all the miles he had driven to be able to support us and how even though we are by no means a wealthy family, we have always been able to get by.

Miles and miles kept finding their way into my head, a constant reminder of why I appreciate my dad and have come to idolize him over the years. I started to think of my dad still sitting in his semi years from now continuing to put in the miles in order to support his family. I was thinking of how my dad always says that he simply will not be financially able to retire one day. This made me picture in my mind of the happy father driving his semi with a family picture on the visor turn into an older gentleman handcuffed to his steering wheel. This image shook me to the core, the thought that the same semi that had allowed my dad to work to keep our family afloat would turn into a heavy burden pulling him under the waters surface. Thinking of my father being forced to drive that semi for the rest of his life started to make those miles in my head at this point grow longer and longer, each of them stretching beyond the horizon.

It was at this time that I started to realize that soon I would be done my degree and be able to start working as a geologist and that I like my father before me, would be able to help support my parents. In the future I may not have a visor like my father but I will surely have a picture of my parents with me as a reminder of what I choose to work for in life. I realize that as time passes I too will add pictures to my collection as my father has, each photo reminding me of where I came from and where I want to go in my life. This is the reason why I have decided that I want to work to allow my parents to retire, I want to put in those miles on my dad's behalf so that he and my mother will be able to relax and enjoy their golden years.

My father is my idol. He is a man that can boast not only having driven around the world but having married the love of his life and raising three successful children. I believe that every mile on my father's odometer has been a happy one. Each mile bringing him closer to the life he now has and a family that loves him dearly. Personally, I can not wait for my chance to start working to help support my parents and finally be able to take on a few miles for my dad. I want to be able to wish him a happy retirement and tell him that it is my turn to put in the miles. I may do it in my own way as a geologist but I will never forget just how far my dad had to go to get me where I am today.

I love you dad.

## **An Inspiration: Continuing to Defy Odds**

*By Ben Diplock*

Throughout the first six minutes of the birthing process, Nicole Turner had to fight for her own existence. The umbilical cord which once provided her nourishment, growth and life had wrapped itself around Nicole's neck, making it almost impossible for her to breathe. Through the assistance of the physicians and her own strength, she made it through those six minutes allowing her to take her first full breaths in the new world. This is one of many testaments to Nicole's strength and drive to succeed, defying whatever challenges are placed in front of her.

Shortly after birth Nicole was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, a disorder created as a result of the wrapping of the umbilical cord around her neck. This disorder can occur to the newborn prior to or at birth, creating a lack of oxygen to the brain. This in turn can cause major neurological deficits and brain malformations affecting the development of the individual throughout their life. The physician's verdict on Nicole's case was that she would not be able to talk and moreover would be in a vegetative state for the rest of her life.

Just as Nicole has overcome the challenge set forth at the onset of her life, she has been defying the odds ever since. Against the doctor's medical judgment, Nicole pushed on learning how to talk fluently. Although she has spastic motor movements and a lack of coordination and balance which requires her to use a wheelchair, she is very much physically, socially and intellectually able. She exemplifies to everyone around her that hard work, motivation and a positive outlook on life allows people to move mountains.

Throughout her childhood Nicole had the strong support and motivation of her mother Michele, who as Nicole said, "Treated me like any other kid". This gave her drive and courage to obtain what she wanted most, which was to be treated equally. Nicole was also told in elementary school that she would not be able to take part in music class, as this class was located upstairs; which was wheelchair inaccessible, and her abilities were not believed to be sufficient. Being a music lover, Nicole and her mother advocated for her right to be incorporated and Nicole started to learn musical theory, being taught by the educational assistant on the main floor. In grade 8, Nicole was learning at a grade 11 theory level and since then she has found a creative and unique method to overcome her physical disabilities; playing drums with the use of her head in her very own band.

Since this time Nicole has been flying, succeeding in almost everything that she sets her mind to. She has

been involved in sports such as wheel-chair hockey, soccer, running (in a rocker mobility device), shot-put and coaching high school Special Olympics. She has also been involved in a great number of volunteering activities, including; Thames Valley Children Center camp councillor, peer mentor and music teacher for disabled individuals, talking in front of schools and communities about disability awareness and advocacy, as well as charity based fundraisers. Through the community volunteering, musical innovation and uncountable challenges Nicole has overcome, she was awarded the Millennium Excellence Award Scholarship this past year.



Presently nineteen year old Nicole is at Kings College, a branch of Western University studying in the General Social Science program, with the hope of working with children and youth in the community and educational system. Nicole told me that her general experience has been amazing and the people she has met have been very embracing, treating her with the respect and equality that she desires and deserves. Though there is one issue Nicole is having with the Disability Services at the university; that being the ability to get free services for toiletry assistance and also free note taking.

Previously Nicole had to use a free service outside of the University that was very "old school" as she put it. They would not listen to any suggestions she, her mother or her occupational therapist had about how to approach the service. Their method and the method that Nicole had to suffer through for the first portion of her term was being strapped into a sling and carried through the middle of the cafeteria, for everyone around her to see. Not only was this embarrassing to her but it was also

painful and dangerous, as the spastic movements in her arms would unhook the straps creating the potential for her to fall off. Nicole could not handle the inhumane dealings with this organization and had to spend a few weeks without using the washroom all day as an alternative. At the present time, Nicole has to pay for a student outside of the Disability Services to assist her in using the washrooms at the university. This student helps Nicole perform a pivot transfer technique, which is very simple for both parties and has been recommended by her occupational therapist. Nicole and her mother Michele have talked with disability services, along with her OT about getting a free service to accommodate this seemingly easy action. At this time however the services group has not attempted to accommodate her. Also, unlike the majority of universities across Canada, Western University does not offer free note taking services, something that is imperative for Nicole as she cannot write.

These are the only obstacles Nicole has not been able to overcome justly so far in her life, and the sad fact is that these services should be a right and not a privilege in the first place. To put an individual through pain and embarrassment as an associated condition with using the washroom is just plain and simply wrong. It is just as wrong to make someone pay for a service that is provided to others for free.

I had the huge privilege of getting to know and meet Nicole for a short period of time at a Millennium Regional Leadership Conference last fall. Hearing her story is something which has inspired me greatly. She is a bubbly individual who has an optimistic glow about her, impacting everyone around her in a positive manner. She has a determination and drive that I have never seen in one individual before and it makes me want to be the best person I can. Personally she reinforced in me the idea that whatever you put your mind to you can accomplish, independent of disabilities. I can speak with confidence for myself and all others that she meets; she is an inspiration to all and is a testimony to the drive of great Canadian's such as Terry Fox.

## **My Pride and Joy**

*By: Jessica Benjamin*

One of my pride and joys is my sister, Tamara. Tamara has Downs Syndrome and even though she is physically twenty-five years old she has the mental capacity of a six to eight year old. As the story that my mother always loved telling goes, my parents tried for many years to have a child. They finally decided to adopt my sister but a week after the adoption was finalized they found out they were pregnant with me. Embarrassingly enough, I wasn't always as accepting of my sister as I am today since no child wants to be known as different and having a special needs sibling set me apart from the rest of my friends. Thankfully, as I got older and more mature I came to accept and love my sister as though she were related to me by blood.

These days, we have a lot in common from enjoying a good meal together to sharing a funny joke to racing to the car to see who gets to sit in the front seat (oddly enough she always seems to beat me). We are also different in many ways. She can walk into a room filled with one hundred strangers and within ten minutes she's best friends with them all. I, on the other hand would immediately make my way to the corner or the food table and slowly start to talk to people as I got more comfortable as I'm much shyer than she will ever be. She also loves going shopping for clothes, makeup, jewelry, etc. Pretty much anything girly and shiny that enters into her line of vision, she must have it. Whereas I couldn't care less about what I wear as long as it somewhat matches and is clean. Whenever we go shopping together I'm always threatening to bring a foldable chair to the store as she takes a very long time going through all of her options, trying them all on, and finally making the painstaking decision of which ones I should buy for her.

Even though I am the mental and emotional "older" sister, Tamara has still taught me a lot of life lessons over the years such as how to be physically emotional with loved ones in terms of big hugs and kisses. She's taught me how to be care free and how to be friendly when meeting strangers for the first time. Most importantly, she's taught me how to love since whenever someone she loves gets in a fight she always puts her head down and starts to cry because she hates seeing people she cares so much about angry at each other. Even though some people don't consider her "normal", she has and always will be my extraordinary kiddo that I love unconditionally.

■ LETTER OF THE DAY

# A Christmas 'angel'

During the weeks leading up to Christmas, an angel walked the halls of Royal Victoria Hospital, bringing smiles to the faces of our patients. This angel had no wings, no halo and no white gown, but instead wore the uniform of a pre-service firefighting student from Georgian College.

His name is Johnny Corner.

As a child, Corner spent much time in hospital and is all too familiar with spending holidays away from home.

He also knew how a visit, a small gift or a song could make a huge difference in the life of a patient in hospital. This was his year to do for others what he experienced as a child.

With the help of his friend Jessica Gibson, and fellow students in the pre-service firefighter program, more than six van-loads of toys were collected and given to RVH patients in the cancer care program, in our emergency department and to children admitted to paediatrics. These toys were collected from 25 local businesses.

We at RVH wish to thank the business owners for their generosity. And to Mr. Corner and his colleagues — "WOW".

Those of us at RVH who witnessed the joy you brought to our patients want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You reminded us all that it really is better to give than receive. We were truly overwhelmed by your hard work and dedication to spreading some Christmas cheer.

You are an awesome angel.

Donna Danyluk  
Corporate Communications  
Royal Victoria Hospital



Submitted

Johnny Corner, a Georgian College pre-service firefighting student, recently paid a visit to Gavin Robinson, 8, a patient at Royal Victoria Hospital.

From the Barrie Examiner, Tuesday December 29th 2009