

Steps for Life Speech

May 1st, 2016

Burnaby, BC

Good morning!

My name is Maryanne Pope and I am very honoured to have been asked by *Threads of Life* to represent the face behind a workplace tragedy.

We are here today to raise awareness about the *many* faces behind a traumatic fatality, life-altering injury or those who are dealing with the outcome of an occupational disease.

You may have heard the statistics. But from where I stand, ONE injury, one industrial illness and certainly one fatality is one too many.

I am here today in memory of my husband, John Petropoulos.

John was a police officer with the Calgary Police Service. On Sept 29th, 2000, John went into a warehouse to investigate a break and enter complaint.

He was searching the mezzanine level when he stepped from a safe surface onto an unsafe one – which was an unmarked false ceiling. The suspended ceiling couldn't hold his weight and he fell a mere nine feet into lunchroom below. But the back of his head hit the ground with such a force that he died of brain injuries within hours. He was 32.

We both were.

The subsequent investigation revealed that according to provincial legislation there should have been a safety railing in place to warn him – or anyone else – of the danger. And it ended up there was no intruder in the building...it was a false alarm. So John gave his life protecting a premise that did not need protecting.

The purpose of today's *Steps for Life* walk is two-fold. We are here to raise awareness about the fact that the vast majority of workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses *are* preventable. In John's case, if there had been a simple safety railing in place, he would still be here today.

The other purpose for today's walk is to raise community awareness about the absolutely *devastating* impact that a workplace tragedy has on a family, a workplace and within an entire community.

Unfortunately, as some of you here today know all too well, when a loved one dies as the result of a workplace fatality, or is severely injured on the job, or is suffering from an occupational disease, the road ahead is an extremely difficult one: emotionally, psychologically, practically and financially.

Threads of Life provides much-needed support programs and services to help families navigate this heartbreakingly difficult and often overwhelming road.

So all funds raised today will go towards those important family support programs and services. Unfortunately, there are *thousands* of Canadians coping with the aftermath of a workplace fatality, injury or work-related illness.

On that note, in addition to all of us walking here in Burnaby today – there are also more than 30 other walks happening in 9 provinces across Canada.

So I want to thank you for coming out today.

And thank you to *Threads of Life* for doing what you do. You will never know the full impact of your programs and services...but I can tell you from personal experience that what you are doing does make a *huge* difference in helping make a horrific experience just a little bit easier.