

A family affair – an odyssey that started with a life-changing trauma

Over \$30,000 was raised in one night for the Brain Injury Association of Canada.

By Howard Brown

It's tough to know where to start the story of the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey. Some think it started last January when 150 brain injury supporters showed up for the first Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey at Toronto's Miller Tavern. (In one night, we raised over \$30000 for the Brain Injury Association of Canada (BIAC), the most successful fundraiser in recent Canadian history for any brain injury association.)

In many ways, the story of the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey started almost 30 years ago.

Cousin suffered injury

I had just finished university and was traveling in Europe when I got a letter from my family back home in Canada. They

informed me that one of my first cousins, Steve Sieber, a University of Toronto student, was in a coma. He had been struck by a car while crossing the street to catch a bus. When he came out of the coma three and a half months later, a brain injury left him unable to walk or stand. He had blurred vision, slurred speech and emotional issues.

Years later, because of my interest in Steve's life, I was asked to serve as a Board of Director for the Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA).

Steve was often a sounding board for me regarding brain injury issues. He died in

2001 at the age of 46 as a result of the injury, after being confined to a wheelchair for 25 years. It's coincidental that brain injury is the leading cause of death for

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Miller Tavern president, Rick Montgomery with Canada's Minister of Public Health, Carolyn Bennett at BIAC's first Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey in Toronto



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Canadians under the age of 45.

Six months after Steve's death, I was asked by the Ontario board to help form BIAC.

Tavern agreed to donate everything

As BIAC's first Co-Chair of Finance, one of my mandates was to raise funds for the Association. Luckily, I had a friend and former colleague named Rick Montgomery who owned an historic Toronto restaurant called "The Miller Tavern."

I told him that my mother-in-law had suggested his restaurant would be a great location for a fundraiser for BIAC. Rick readily agreed. Each guest donated \$150 for the event. Rick donated food, drink, staff, decorations and location. He had been planning to do a Hawaiian month in the restaurant, and we wanted a focus on his restaurant's fabulous oysters. Rick used these elements to come up with the title of the event.

We were privileged to have the participation of Canadian Olympic swimmers Mark Tewksbury and Liz Warden, Canada's Minister of State for Public Health Carolyn Bennett, as well as Members of Provincial Parliament, City Councillors, a School Trustee, and even the Russian Consul-General. Sponsors included RBC Financial, Glaxo Smith Kline, London Life and the Posluns Family Foundation.

Volunteer run

What made the evening particularly successful was that the event was 100% volunteer run. We were privileged to have as part of our team as a Co-Chair, Bonnie



Left to right: Mireille Provost, BIAC president, Yvan Teasdale, BIAC past president Peter Beck, President of Swift Trade, Sonda Splatt, Peter's wife, Howard Brown, Co-chair, Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey, Shelly Wieser, BIAC Secretary and President, Alberta Brain Injury Association

Crombie. A close friend of mine who had recently moved back to Toronto with her family from Vancouver, Bonnie accepted my offer to join the OBIA Board. She had been the Fund Development Chair for OBIA, and she was a great help in making the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey a success.

BIAC board members traveled great distances to take part, including President Mireille Provost and Past President Yvan Teasdale from Gatineau, Quebec and BIAC Secretary and President of the Alberta Brain Injury Association, Shelly Wieser.

Amongst the guest speakers of the evening was Madelaine Welton, a friend of Bonnie's. Madelaine is a 41 year old mother and brain injury survivor. She was not only a key member of the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey Host Committee, but she also touched everyone with her story of recovery.

After hearing her story, event attendee Derrick Moran remarked that Maddie's story compelled him to volunteer his time.

More across Canada

Buoyed by the success of the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey, Brain Injury Associations across the country are preparing to host similar events. And next year, we will host Toronto's Second Annual Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey at Rick Montgomery's Miller Tavern.

At the last BIAC Board meeting, it was agreed to recognize Rick as "an outstanding friend of the Brain Injury Association of Canada." A plaque is being prepared that Rick has agreed will be hung in the lobby of the restaurant. (Both the Globe & Mail and Sunwing Vacations have already offered to be part of next year's sponsor team.)

My cousin would be proud.

(See back page for four survivor stories that were published in the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey Program.)

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Mission Statement of the Brain Injury Association of Canada

To improve the quality of life for all Canadians effected by acquired brain injury and to promote its prevention.

Améliorer la qualité de vie des Canadiens ayant subi un traumatisme cranio-cérébral et de promouvoir la prévention de blessures neurologiques.



INCREDIBLE SURVIVOR STORIES



John Dignard, Age 51
Wetaskiwin, Alberta
 Husband, Father, Grandfather,
 Trainer of Memory Dogs
Injury & Symptoms: *Open head injury, short term memory loss, Grade five level comprehension*

John Dignard was five years old when he was hit by a car going 100 kilometres an hour.

When John was 20 years old two incredible things happen to him: he met his future wife Carolyn who said 'she read his heart not his mind', and he watched the film *Rin Tin Tin* and was inspired by the story of a WWI soldier's German Shepard. With patience and caring, John trained a German Shepard who quickly became the first certified memory dog.

Now when John goes for a walk he doesn't have to worry that he'll forget his way home- Goliath leads the way. Today John is training a dog for ten-year old Tyson, who was hit by a car last summer. Tyson's first word since his accident was 'dog'.

"I'm proud of my injury because I know that I can help other survivors."



Marie Mossey, Age 51
Souris, Prince Edward Island
 Wife, Mother, Grandmother,
 Member of the Brain Injury Association of Canada
Injury & Symptoms: *Short-term memory loss, cognitive damage, fatigue, blind in left eye, lost kidney*

On November 22nd, 1997 Marie Mossey and her husband were driving home from Charlottetown

to their home on the other side of PEI when they were hit by another car in the first winter weather of the year.

The car rolled several times and Marie was airlifted to a hospital in Moncton, where she spent three weeks in a near fatal coma. It was the second time a car accident devastated her family, her 18 year-old son died in a car accident five years earlier. Not only did the accident take one of her eyes, and one of her kidneys, but it took away her livelihood- her seaside Bed & Breakfast, The Nautical Nook.

Now Marie has a new goal, and focus: she's working hard to set up the Brain Injury Association of PEI and she's a grandmother.

"This is a life changing thing but how you handle it is up to you. You go from being a working progressive person to feeling like a liability. But I try to be really positive about it because everyday is the same length of time no matter how you spend it."



Fred Welling, Age 50
Oshawa, Ontario
 Husband, Father, Grandfather,
 Member of the Brain Injury Association of Canada
Injury & Symptoms: *Closed head injury, short term memory loss, cognitive brain damage*

Fred Welling was 34 years old when his life changed forever. As a long distance truck driver Fred

was about to make a short delivery from Oshawa to Toronto when a massive industrial paper roll weighing 1710 lbs. rolled onto him, pinning him between between two other rolls.

When Fred woke up on April 21st, 1989 he was a brain injury survivor. Sixteen years later, after having suffered damage to his left temporal lobe, Fred has short term memory loss and is still unable to work.

"I thought it would never happen to me, but it did. At 34 years old, I mean, that's a little to early to retire. I get a lot of my strength from my family and with my association and the volunteering that I do. This is what's happened, my brain has been altered, but I'm still a person, let me keep my dignity."



Madeleine Welton, Age 41
Mississauga, Ontario
 Wife, Mother, Sports Enthusiast
Injury & Symptoms: *Short term memory loss*

On October 7th, 1993, one week before her son Jack's second birthday Madeleine Welton was in a terrible car accident. Madeleine's head hit the window of her car, and she was air lifted to Toronto's

Sunnybrook hospital where she spent nearly a month in a near-fatal coma.

Since then, she has had to relearn every movement which once came so naturally to her. A former club-championship skier, and avid athlete with two young sons, Madeleine was determined to make a full recovery. With patience and hard work, Madeleine relearned to walk, ride a bike and eventually to run and ski.

"I spent two years on the bunny-hill learning to ski again, and it was seven or eight years before I could run, because running is such a complex movement."

In 2000 Madeleine ran a marathon for the Brain Injury Association of Halton-Peel, and this year she became certified as a personal trainer.

"In many ways, my injury was the best thing that could have happened to me. It brought my family closer together and it made me realize what's important in life."

