

# Remembering Tommy, one breath at a time

Shawna and her daughters keep Tommy's memory alive and hope it will help and inspire others



**S**hawna remembers that *gut-wrenching moment* when she helplessly watched her husband Tommy Harroun, gasping for air in his hospital bed before passing away. "It was not what he wanted," she said, as tears welled up in her eyes. "He thought he had more time."

Tommy was 27 when he first learned he had sarcoidosis, a lung disease caused by inhaling harmful chemicals at his place of work.

"At that time [25 years ago], there was not as much information as we have now about safety in the workplace," says Shawna.

## **A new pair of lungs gives Tommy a breath of fresh air**

As his breathing deteriorated over the years, the doctors informed Tommy that his only chance for recovery

would be a double lung transplant. Tommy was up for it, and when that surgery date finally came, Shawna remembers the joy of watching her husband draw his first unassisted breath in 15 years.

Tommy was so grateful for his new set of lungs that he vowed to take very good care of them, focused on eating well and taking his anti-rejection meds. His new lungs gave him a new lease on life — he even participated in a 5k walk for the Alberta Lung Association.

"It was definitely an emotional day," says Shawna, "there was no way he would have been able to do that in the past. Our future looked so much brighter."

Unfortunately, the anti-rejection medication Tommy was taking had an unexpected side effect that

compromised his immune system and caused cancer to spread quickly throughout his body. In a few short months after his transplant, Tommy struggled to breathe; his health deteriorated quickly before he passed away at the too-young age of 48.

## **Picking up the pieces**

Shawna and her two daughters, Hope and Haley, were broken. The 'core four', as Tommy lovingly referred to them, was no more. They wanted to find a way to honour Tommy's memory and they believed Tommy's experience could really help others.

Shawna and the girls decided they would fundraise in memory of Tommy at the Alberta Lung Association's 5k event where Tommy completed his walk. The annual walk was even renamed 'Tommy's Run' in his memory. Money raised will be used

to support the building of Alberta Lung Association's 'breathing space', which will be the first-ever lung health and recovery house of its kind in Canada. This facility will provide patients a space to 'catch their breath' and focus on healing without the financial burden and worries that can often hamper the transplant recovery process. As Shawna explains, the memorial walk "took a bad situation and turned it into something good."

Following the first walk, they raised just over \$25,000 and had 133 walkers/runners. "We surpassed our goal of \$15,000," says Shawna proudly. "Next year we will try to raise \$30,000."

"It's a struggle every day without him," says Shawna. "He was an amazing husband and provider. We miss him more than you could imagine."

