Farming accident devastates small Alberta community

"Myles was everything to me," says Darlena, pictured here with her husband.

He was 47 years old.

It was not the first time he had been hurt on the job, Darlena says, but she could not have imagined it would be his last.

Died in a trench collapse

Darlena still lives in the house the couple shared, on farmland owned by Myles’s employer. She still goes to the shop where he kept all his tools and equipment. It’s just as he left it the day he died—meticulous, with a place for everything and everything in its place.

Myles, a mechanic, was working to repair a broken water line feeding a herd of buffalo when he entered an eight-foot trench. It collapsed around him, killing him.

Remembering Myles’s legacy

In the days and weeks that followed, that support eventually lessened, as happens after death, leaving Darlena time alone with her thoughts, and her grief. They had been married on Dec. 27, and his death came just weeks ahead of their 23rd wedding anniversary.

“Was always tenacious, determined

Perhaps his most visible legacy is the 100-foot tower that looms over their house. He built it himself so they could boost their cell service and Internet coverage, which was sporadic and unpredictable.

“The Internet provider he talked to said they would need to get a line of sight of at least a hundred feet,” says Darlena. “They told Myles: ‘Put a tower up and we’ll come.’ I don’t think they expected to hear from him again, but they were wrong.”

“My husband always did what he set out to do. He was a hard worker, and he always finished the job.”

woodworker. He had performed major renovations on their home. He had built a “buffalo catcher” for his employer, retrofitting a vehicle with bionic arms designed to catch wayward animals.

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Had been injured at work before

“My husband would get hurt, he would get patched up, and just move on,” Darlena says. “He was never fazed by it. When he died and I got the phone call, the girl in the office said: ‘Are you sitting down? Myles just passed away on the worksite.’

“I didn’t believe her; I was stunned.”

Myles had deep roots where he worked, in Silver Valley, a rural community a couple of hours northwest of Grande Prairie. It was no surprise, then, that the Savanna Agricultural Society Rec Plex was at capacity for his funeral service.

“Everybody pulled together when Myles passed,” says Darlena. “There was so much support. He knew everyone and everyone knew him. His death had a big impact on the people here.”

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“It was always our time of year, to do something special together,” says Darlena. “We would celebrate Christmas with family, and then go away for a few days together. The last few years we were doing well, financially, and were able to travel with really close friends.

“We were supposed to go to Hawaii,” she says, her voice trailing away. She tries hard to remember what was, and not what could have been. She sees her husband’s legacy in their children, of course, but it’s reflected in other ways, too. He was always a man with a project on the go. He was a skilled