

# OPINION

The Okanagan Sunday, September 4, 2011



A birthday  
to remember



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**A**ug. 10 is a special day in our home. Our youngest daughter, Emma, was born that day and this year turned 23. As with all our children's birthdays, we make a big deal of it, by starting the day as they arrive at the breakfast table with photos reflecting their lives.

They can have whatever they want, their favourite meal, for breakfast or dinner. We all gather as a family and celebrate their memories and aspirations over their birthday dinner.

This year, Emma decided she wanted to invite friends, family, godparents and cousins as well as some new friends to her birthday celebration. She decided we should have a pool party and barbecue with home-made barbecue sauce accenting her favourite free-range chicken, home-made Caesar salad, organic corn and a yummy (not home-made) chocolate cake for the 20 guests.

Most of us think our kids are "special," which indeed they are. My gran used to say, "Children don't ask to be born, so it's up to every family to bring them up with the best possible conditions - we must look after them."

In Emma's case, right from the start, we were told things would be a bit different as she was born with Down syndrome.

We were told to anticipate more challenges to help her learn the baby basics of sitting up, rolling over, walking and talking. It didn't seem that huge an amount of work to us, but she did have an amazing array of specialists in her life.

Last year, Emma experienced her first birthday without her father. He passed away the Christmas before.

As many of us have experienced, the first year after a loved one dies is tough because there are so many firsts.

I hoped that this birthday would bring new happiness to Emma as a mature young woman who was planning her own celebration.

We feel that her father is among us most days. I think he was indeed in spirit on Aug. 10 this year.

He was Emma's hero.

Interesting that just as my father was the first "hero" in my life, her father was hers. He always made sure that "Emma Charlotte, his little starlet" felt special every day and safe, just as he did with all the other kids.

He told her he would always look after her, and he has. Emma still speaks to him almost daily through prayer and word, and he is still her first "hero."

The term hero originated in Greece in the 14th century, meaning someone who was "godlike and an icon." I think that has evolved a bit over the years. There are many everyday heroes among us.

I began thinking of people who have been inspirational icons in my life. Off the top of my head, I can think of a few, starting with my father, granny, my husband, Jack Acres, of course, and several family members.

So what made them heroes to me?

The forecast called for rain on Emma's birthday, which quickly escalated to a rainstorm that night as we moved the guests upstairs from the pool area in anticipation of rain accompanying our barbecue. This took a bit of time as there were quite a few guests, including one in a wheelchair, which took some manoeuvring to get up the stairs.

We all piled into the sunroom off the deck as the rain and wind swept into the neighbourhood, which was apparently one of the hardest hit.

As dinner was being served, it became evident the storm was not

going to give up. One of the guests, (who reminds Emma of her father and is a great father and husband himself), started going through the first floor of the house to check for leaks around the doors.

The driveway leading to Emma's suite on the first level has a drain in it that was starting to back up.

Her siblings started to help move items as water started coming in. I was so proud of them helping each other and taking direction to clear out the entire floor of the house, which contained many items filled with memories.

It became clear to those on the main floor pretty quickly that this birthday dinner was going to be memorable and perhaps they should head home to check on their own abodes.

It also became evident that we either needed a miracle or a very large pump to remove the water converging on our home through Emma's suite. We needed a hero to champion this effort with my children and son in law that night, and we had one.

I wonder what makes people able to be the first person on the scene at an accident or incident? How do they jump in to save someone and handle the immediacy? Never thinking twice about performing mouth to mouth, calling 911, they stay calm, comfort those who need it and humbly help others kick into action.

To me, someone who selflessly gives to others before thinking of themselves is an everyday hero. They are humble, always helping someone else, not as a martyr but because they want to. If asked, they will tell you "It's the right thing to do."

Emma tells me that Jerry was her hero that night. She feels he helped save her suite from devastation even though it was flooded.

She says a hero is someone who protects you through many things, someone you can count on, someone who is always there through thick and thin - like her father, her family and, now, like Jerry Scherle.

I wonder if a hero lives within each of us?

If we think about all the amazing people we experience in our lives, who have helped us, held us, listened to us or saved us, perhaps that is true.

We can aspire to be someone else's hero by putting others before ourselves, by helping selflessly, by jumping in because it is the right thing to do, by risking being the first person to help instead of watching from the sidelines. If we wake up thinking of how we are able to help those who are unable to help themselves, who need a hand, a hug, some comfort in their storm, and deliver it with respect, dignity and equality, what a great community we will be.

I can name many heroes in my life, starting with my father, my grandmother, my husband, my family, sometimes my children and son in law. I bet you can as well.

For different reasons, I feel I had the honour to work for and with amazing local heroes like Ross Gorman, Tom Capozzi, Matt Cameron and now Jerry Scherle, to name a few.

All of these people have a strong work ethic, a strong sense of family and community and always have time to help others. They are all amazingly humble. These are the kind of people we want with us when the next storm hits.

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*Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?*