

A story of a workplace tragedy

Remembering Dean Maguire.



Dean Maguire, a dedicated father, brother, and husband, died on March 27, 2018 while working on a construction project in Toronto. He was using a fall protection system that involved a self-retracting lanyard (SRL) attached to steel columns. As Dean shifted while working, the SRL fell from the structure, causing him to fall approximately 3.8 metres to the ground below. Despite prompt emergency response, Dean's injuries proved fatal.

The Maguire family—Dean's former wife Heather, daughters Connor and Mae, and brother Tim—shared with IHSA their experiences of grief over losing Dean, describing him as a kind and loving man. Heather met Dean when she was in university; he was taking night courses while working in sheet metal installation. They got married and had two children who were 21 and 12 years old when their father passed away.

"My dad was my best friend," Connor says. "He was one of my biggest supporters. He never missed track meets and hockey games. He was gentle and kind, and he was really easy to go to about stuff growing up."

"I don't think I've ever met someone who didn't like our dad," Mae says. "Every time we went even to a gas station, he would just be talking to a stranger. He was really friendly and kind."

Connor remembers talking to her dad on the phone the morning he died. A few hours later, instead of the return call she assumed was from her dad, Connor received devastating news from the police: her father had fallen at work and died instantly.

"I remember asking if it was a prank call," Connor says. "My dad was the safest person on the jobsite, and there was no way it was him who got hurt. I never thought it would be my dad who wouldn't come home." Deep in shock, Connor notified her mom, who promptly got in touch with the police.

"Mae was at school, and I wanted her to have one more normal day, so I didn't go get her," Heather says. "There's a lot of things I think you prepare for as a mom and especially with girls. But this, I don't think you can prepare for. I don't know how you talk to your children about these things, but that's what that day was like for me."

The grief of losing a loved one can be overwhelming; it was for the Maguire family. Dean's death has heightened their awareness of the preciousness of life, the grave importance of workplace safety, and the crucial need to address and eliminate complacency when it comes to safety. Complacency in the workplace, which can result in anything from small safety missteps to major oversights, is a hazard that puts lives in danger.

Help in a time of need

Threads of Life is a Canadian charity that helps families affected by work-related injuries and fatalities. It is devoted to raising awareness of workplace health and safety, with the core belief that on-the-job injuries, illnesses, and deaths are preventable.

Following Dean's death, a Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) representative introduced Heather and her family to Threads of Life. The organization has been present in the Maguires' lives ever since, offering information, support, and understanding while they grieved. Over the years, the family has attended Threads of Life conventions and participated in its fundraising walks.

"Because Dean and I had been separated when he died, I didn't know if I had the right to grieve or to be as sad as I was, and I didn't know where I belonged," Heather says. "When I reached out to Threads of Life, I belonged immediately. They just hold you and your family."

Heather has since trained as a volunteer Threads of Life speaker and now attends events to promote workplace safety and highlight the risks of complacency. Mae earned a Threads of Life scholarship to benefit her future education.

The Maguires are just one of the many families across Canada who've been positively impacted by Threads of Life. As of September 2024, the organization was providing supportive programs and services to more than 3,900 family members, friends, and co-workers of those affected by workplace tragedies.

If you see something, say something

Through Threads of Life, the Maguires are passionate advocates for improving workplace safety—and point out a variety of ways to protect workers by addressing systemic issues, including:

- **Talking about complacency:** There's no excuse for taking safety for granted, especially in construction and other high-risk sectors. It's important to emphasize the absolute need to follow every safety procedure before and while working, no matter how obvious or repetitive it may seem.
- **Breaking down barriers:** Every person on a jobsite should be empowered to speak up if they see unsafe practices, even if it involves another contractor or trade. If you see something, say something—it can save a life.
- **Improving collaboration:** Especially on large projects, different employers and trades can coordinate and share information with regard to health and safety checklists, site-specific rules, inspections, and reviews.
- **Enhancing work requirements:** At any workplace, it's possible to protect workers by improving safety protocols and making certain processes mandatory.

A legacy lives on

Dean Maguire contributed to building Toronto's Billy Bishop airport, Rogers Centre, and many other city landmarks. His life and tragic passing are reminders to prioritize the safety and well-being of all workers—so that no family has to go through the heartbreak of losing a loved one to a jobsite incident. Workplace safety should not just be a policy, but a personal promise each worker makes to themselves and their loved ones. Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility.

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The whole story



LISTEN to Episode 81 of the *IHSA Safety Podcast* to hear more about Dean Maguire directly from his family—Heather, Connor, Mae, and Tim: ihساسafetypodcast.ca



LEARN more about Threads of Life and how you can get involved: threadsoflife.ca