

Following the tragic death of an infant, the emotional downturn and then death of his wife, Cliff receives support and counselling and manages to rebuild his life and take care of his two children.

When I first walked into the Health Centre, only cracking sounds would come out of my mouth when I tried to speak. After several tries, tears were running down my cheeks by the time I got out the words "I think I need some help". The receptionist, realizing my distress, immediately came out from behind the desk and took me by the arm up to see the Nurse practitioner. After composing myself, I began to tell her my story.

I had just come from an appointment to apply for family benefits. While I was gathering up my documentation, I began to shake and then started to cry when I picked up my wife's death certificate. In the past weeks I had had to fax copies of it to various creditors to prove that she was dead. With everything else it just became impossible to maintain my stoic facade. I had a 3 year old daughter and a 12 year old son who depended on me and I could not afford to become unraveled if only for their sake.

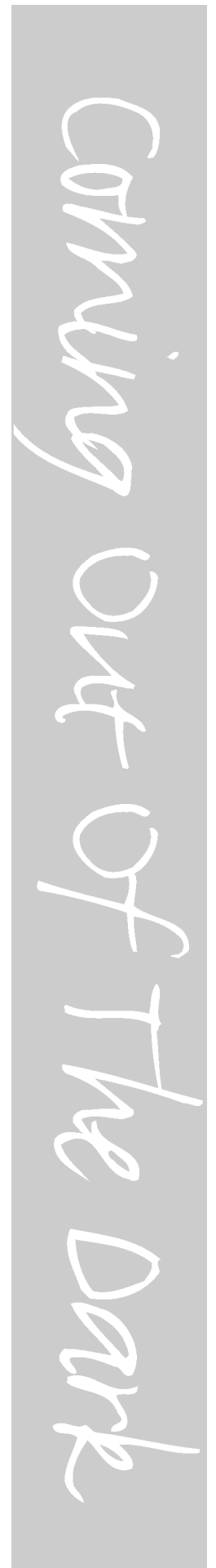
When she died over a year before this in a fall while drinking, their mother had not been living with us regularly for about 7 years following the death of our second child, a daughter aged 6 weeks to SIDS. She would come home sometimes for a few days occasionally for a couple of weeks, usually to escape a physically abusive boyfriend. It was during one of these short stays that our youngest daughter was conceived.

*"All my complaints were caused by stress and depression..."*

Her death happened to coincide with the discussion of my employer to shut down the program I was working on and because my son was having a hard time adjusting to what had happened. I thought it best to be at home for my kids. While focusing my attention on their needs, I, over time became cut off from almost all but the most superficial contact with other adults. I also developed a variety of physical ailments and was in almost constant pain but didn't seek any medical help. I just kept everything to myself.

The Nurse referred me to a Doctor and a Counselor at the CHC. The Doctor determined that all my complaints were caused by stress and depression and put me on a course of treatment. The Counselor arranged to have a homemaker come in to help me sort through all the belongings that my wife had left at our house; something I found extremely hard to do on my own and they also provided help with basic housekeeping. The Counselor also helped in getting us on a priority list for public housing since not only was our housing substandard, but the memories associated with the place were a contributing factor in my problems.

The regular counseling sessions I attended not only helped me verbalize a lot of the things I had locked up inside, but the genuine interest the Counselor showed in subjects in which I had extensive knowledge helped begin to rebuild my sense of self-worth. One of these subjects was food and cooking, and with her encouragement, I became involved with the



Community Kitchen program as a way to rebuild my social skills. To this day I still continue to participate in the Community Kitchen.

Not long after moving into public housing, the government announced its plans to sell off its housing stock. This led me to attend meeting coordinated by Community Development Workers from the Health Centre and I began to offer my ideas and opinions on the issue. The C.D. workers encouraged me to take an ever increasing role in my community and within a few months, I was elected president of our tenants association. This in turn got me involved in a number of other issues of concern to the members of my association including community health concerns and not long after I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Health Centre itself. Since then I have found myself in much demand to attend meetings on a wide range of issues and to sit on numerous committees.

As a result, I now sit on a Committee for the Housing Corporation that oversees the use of community space and chair another committee that is addressing communications problems between housing staff and tenants. In my own housing community, I've been able to help get a number of initiatives underway to encourage a greater sense of real community including a gardening project to grow and share food as well as an ongoing Child to Child program that gives young people the opportunity to change things that they see as problems in their neighbourhood.

*"I shudder to think of what could have happened to me and my kids if I hadn't forced out my plea for help"*

At my daughter's school, I am a volunteer one morning a week in her kindergarten class and sit on the school's Parent Council. At the Health Centre, I now chair the Health and Social Issues Committee of which I had been a member and was elected by the board of Directors to fill a vacancy on the Executive. I have also had the honour of representing the 13 Health and Resource Centres in our area in a presentation on funding before the local government.

Through my continued involvement with the Community Kitchen, I have helped start and cooked for a project wherein members of the C.K. offer a meal to those attending the monthly board meetings and more recently cooked with the C.K. a community lunch which brought together in an informal setting, community members, Health Centre staff and representatives of government and other agencies with which our Centre interacts.

Although I still suffer on occasion from the pain of things I've gone through and from self-doubts about my worth, sometimes thinking that those who value my contribution must have pretty low standards; I shudder to think of what could have happened to me and as a result my kids if I hadn't forced out my plea for help to that receptionist at the Health Centre just over 2 years ago. It has made a world of difference.