

altered lives project

Donna & Len's Story

Len worked for many years in a plastics manufacturing facility in central Ontario. While still recuperating from a prior groin injury, he slipped and fell on ice in the employer parking lot when walking to his vehicle.

February 1 is a day that Donna, Len's spouse, will never forget. It was the day their lives took a complete 180 degree turn. That day, Donna went to the hospital and found Len on a gurney with his femur bone protruding from his leg.

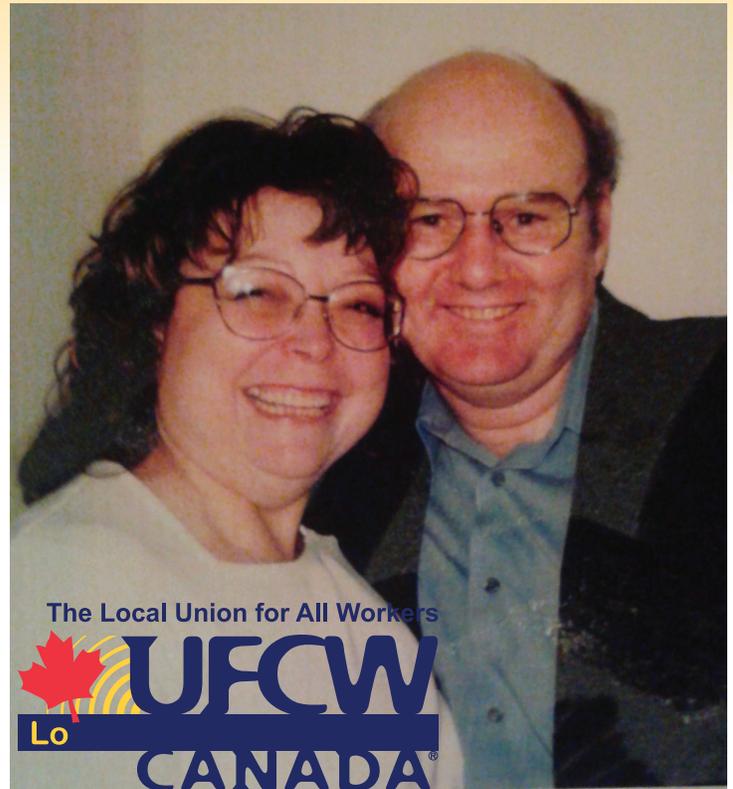
When the hospital discharged Len, he was confined to the main floor of the home. Unfortunately the bathroom was not accessible because it was two flights up. He coped with a make shift bed and a Porta Potty.

Donna would leave him food and drink for the day and clean up when she returned home from her job. Eventually, Len was able to navigate the stairs with the aid of crutches. His leg healed but Len was left with one leg longer than the other, a cane, and an altered gait. He developed a frozen shoulder from the use of ill-fitting crutches as well.

Len received accommodation back at work in a make-work position and later participated in work trials for a permanent work accommodation. These trials failed and Len was referred to the WSIB. WSIB determined he was capable of finding work in a different job classification with a small amount of training.

Once the training was complete, WSIB reduced Len's compensation by more than \$400 a week, even though he did not have a new job yet.

This all-too-frequent WSIB practice is called 'deeming.'



Donna has continued to fight this decision.

Donna and Len had already started to search for a new home that better suited Len's functional capabilities. This further loss of income meant they would need to downsize their search and re-evaluate their budget. Len continued to seek employment in this new field without any luck. Len passed away within the year due to an unrelated illness.

Since then, Donna has reflected on this period in her life and noted how Len's physical limitations from the injury changed their relationship and their relationship with others. Donna took charge of the household chores and it was more difficult for them to get out and do things, especially in the winter. They were very family oriented and spent a lot of quality time in the company of their extended family.

Although restricted physically, Len remained a great story-teller at these gatherings. Donna realized how protective Len was of her throughout the ordeal. "He was always positive," she said. "I think it was his way of encouraging me to stay strong. He was an 'old school' man who hid the pain and frustration, and protected me."

Donna's message: "Life is precious and short. Embrace it. Stick together and draw on your strengths. Keep fighting for the future. Don't give up."