



A message of hope

the Ferguson Memorial Walk. by Lisa Post

On September 12th, 2009, the trajectory of their lives changed in an instant when a domestic dispute claimed the life of their daughter, Heidi Ferguson. Heidi was 39 years young, a business owner, and the mother of two great kids. She was described as being a kind soul with a great love of life. She and her husband, Hugh, had been estranged for just over a year when tragedy struck. Hugh took his own life as well, leaving their families, their children, their friends, and the entire community heartbroken and shocked.

Following my very emotional interview with Penny and Gus, I got into my car and wept. I wasn't crying because I was sad; although, I still can't wrap my head or my heart around the amount of pain they must have endured, and still endure, with the loss of their daughter. Instead, I was crying because my heart was filled with hope. How is it that after such a raw, emotional, no-holds-barred interview, I could feel that way? So hopeful. In fact, I was more hopeful than I had been in a long time.

I spoke with Penny one-on-one at first, as Gus was away. She shared with me her emotions from the days and weeks following Heidi's death. Penny spoke candidly about her grandchildren, Courtney and Connor, and about her pain and her anger. But, that wasn't the focus of what she told me. That was solely for me to understand the background, as an exercise in information. What stuck with me was that as she told me about those initial minutes, hours, days, and weeks following Heidi's death, the emotion Penny left me with was hope. She spoke such precious words of kindness when telling me about Courtney and Connor's friends and their friends' parents who opened their arms and hearts wide to include them as part of their families. She spoke inspiring words about the months and years that followed, and while unimaginably difficult, she spoke about how each of those moments gave her hope.

"When Heidi died, a part of me died with her," Penny explained. Penny had been an artist for decades, and after losing Heidi so tragically, she just couldn't find that passion anymore. Only recently, almost six years after losing Heidi, Penny has picked up a brush again and rediscovered her love of beautiful watercolours. She says it is in great part thanks to words of wisdom from Connor, her grandson and Heidi's son, who said "Painting isn't what you do, Nana. It's who you are."

Connor was only 14 when he spoke those wise and insightful words, and years later, those words still play over and over in Penny's heart and mind.

I walked into my second interview with the Bogners, and had the pleasure of meeting Penny's husband, Gus. They have been together for almost 50 years, and I could feel the love they share. Gus is an avid hiker and lover of the outdoors, and his eyes lit up when he shared stories with me of his recent hiking trip to Austria. Gus has recently become a MENTor, and we shared a lot of laughs as he told me about his first adventure wearing high heels at the recent MENTors walk to raise awareness for violence against women.

Gus speaks eloquently and passionately about the Ferguson Memorial Walk, and is overcome with emotion as he tells me stories about how people have helped bring this walk together over the years. After leaving my second visit with the Bogners, I left with that same feeling of hope. In fact, I was overcome with it.

In the wake of this tragedy, Gus and Penny founded The Ferguson Memorial Walk. This isn't just another foundation or fundraiser. This is a legacy. And it's not just a legacy for Heidi; this is a legacy for women and families everywhere. The walk is in its fourth year, and has already raised over \$40,000 for Family Transition Place, as well as having raised awareness about domestic violence and violence against women. Gus and Penny have successfully turned their tragedy into something hopeful by having recruited over 50 volunteers, along with tons of local sponsors who all share the same passion—that together, we can make a difference. When asked why they do this and what the funds raised are used for, the response from both, almost simultaneously, was "education." To Penny and Gus, the most important thing that can come from money raised at the walk is bringing programs into schools and communities so that people of all ages can be taught about healthy, respectful relationships without violence.

This year's 5-km walk takes place at Island Lake Conservation Area on Sunday, September 27th, and Penny and Gus are hoping to raise \$20,000 for Family Transition Place. To register, please visit www.fergusonmemorialwalk.com. Walk with your family. Walk with your neighbours. Walk with your friends. Walk with the Bogners, and share their message of hope.