

## **Welcome**

Good afternoon everyone and welcome. On behalf of Kate, my fiancé and the family, I'm very honoured to start this celebration of life for a very special young man, Corey O'Brien.

## **Who is here**

Many of you have travelled from far away to share this day. Corey's loving Grandmother Helen O'Brien is here from New Brunswick. Corey's uncles are here today as well. Gary has also made the trip from New Brunswick, Len is here from Washington D.C. and Ron is here with his wife Judy, they live in Victoria. We are so delighted to have Corey's half-sister Tracy with us at this difficult time. Tracy and her husband Jessie live in Toronto.

As I look around this room I see Corey's friends, teachers, mentors, Kate's friends, my friends, our families, all coming together in remembering this big, sweet, lovable guy. It is a great comfort to Kate to see that Corey was important to all of you too.

## **Celebration**

While Corey left us at a very young age and we will all miss him terribly, Kate truly wants this afternoon to be a celebration for Corey. A chance for family and friends to talk and laugh and reminisce and to celebrate good memories. She wants you share some of the things Corey loved, look at the photos collected here, remember how he impacted your life. So this afternoon will be a celebration... a party really and yes it's ok to cry at a party if you need to.

## **Here's how it will work...**

I'm going to take a little time to share my observations about Corey's life over the past while, talk about his early years and the joy he brought to Kate. Then we are most fortunate to have Bill Henderson with us today. He was Corey's mentor and teacher in high school. I believe he was the man Corey most respected in his life. Bill helped and watched Corey develop his creative skills and also had the opportunity to see him be just one of the guys. Bill has a visual presentation for us.

After that we invite everyone to stay a time, to chat and peruse the photos and other things on display around the room. There will be a light buffet and refreshments just outside in the corridor; you can help yourself at your leisure. Please stay a while and enjoy this celebration.

### **About Corey's Passing**

Whenever suicide is involved in someone's death, there is much speculation and many questions. We want you to have accurate information in that regard. Corey suffered from schizophrenia and took his own life on Saturday, November 25th. He jumped from the Granville Street bridge that morning and passed away at 3:30 that afternoon without regaining consciousness. How did it come to this?

Let me provide some information from the B.C. Schizophrenia Society.

Let's start with what schizophrenia is not...

- > it is not a split personality
- > it is not caused by childhood trauma
- > it is not the result of any actions or personal failures of the individual

## It is...

- > a medical illness. **Period**
- > youth's greatest disabler - usual age of onset 16–25
- > a brain disease, the result of physical and biochemical changes in the brain
- > More common than you think - affects 1 in 100 worldwide
- > 40-50% of people with the disease attempt suicide
  - 12% are successful
- > 8% of hospital beds are occupied by people with schizophrenia more than by suffers of any other medical condition
- > if not diagnosed, people with schizophrenia may be rejected by friends and family who simply do not understand the difficulties they are experiencing
- > with proper medical treatment, many with the disease can lead rewarding, satisfactory lives. But many will require life-long support
- > symptoms of schizophrenia include disordered thinking, delusions, paranoia, hallucinations, changes in emotions and behaviour.

This is the disease that stripped Corey of a very promising future. This is the disease that took away his confidence, made him unable to work or study, isolated him from his friends, made him hear voices, see things, imagine things, and be frightened. He was alone in his torment. He couldn't focus or make good decisions to help himself. Not that there weren't good people, compassionate people, trying to help him, save him. Let's start with his mom, Kate, the more he needed love, the more she provided, she never hesitated, never faltered. No matter what the crisis, he could count on her, she would be there to be his voice, a very powerful voice. I can't imagine one more thing she could have done to ease Corey's pain. Her bravery and strength are unparalleled in these past 6 years. We are all familiar with the problems in the health care sector, but our experience was of caring, dedicated professionals working against overwhelming odds to try and keep Corey safe. We are grateful for their kindness. We thank every one of you.

From the time Corey was a small boy he always wanted to be a good person. During his illness he would confide in me that he was trying so hard to do the right thing, to be kind and considerate, not be bad or do things that he felt would reflect poorly on him. He didn't blame his illness, he blamed himself. Finally it was all too much for him to manage, and he left us.

Some may think that suicide is the easy way out, we know it took great courage for Corey to make his decision. He just wanted peace. We all deserve that much.

### **First met Corey**

When I first met Corey he was a bright eyed, energetic 14 year old happy to show an old graphics guy the website he had just designed. He was so proud of it. This kid had it goin' on. You just kinda liked him right away, his positive spirit was inspiring.

It was that happy, warm attitude that people saw in Corey from the time he was a small boy.

## **The early years**

Corey was born in Moncton, New Brunswick on November 16th, 1981. He was a great delight to Kate and the two of them loved going to Grandma's cottage and swimming in the warm waters Northumberland Strait. Everyone enjoyed having this charming little guy around the place.

When Corey was 8 years old Kate thought there would be more opportunity and better skiing for both of them in B.C. so they made the journey west, way west.

## **First - Mission**

Kate was right, Mission offered up a good place to live, a new career, better weather and great slopes for skiing. It was here that Corey would develop a love for sports and he became quite an athlete. First he discovered Soccer, playing all over the lower mainland for a variety of rep and Metro teams. Soccer even took him on a trip to England when he was fourteen. Did I mention Baseball. Yes. he was keen on that too, the moment Soccer was over for the season, out came the ball glove. Then there was

swimming with Mom in the summer, just like it had been at the cottage. After work, off they would go to Silvermere or Cultus Lake to cool off after a long day at the office and school. Weekends in the winter would see these two pals slip away to the slopes at Hemlock Valley. They had managed to build a very nice little life together in B.C. A life to be proud of. Corey was a dream, easy to raise, warm and loving, everyone's favorite

### **Abbotsford - and a creative life**

It was when Corey was 9 or 10 years old that his creative side started to reveal itself. He got a keyboard for a gift and promptly taught himself to play, no lessons, just read books and started to play music, then compose music. His love of music never left him.

Corey & Kate moved to Abbotsford when Corey was starting high school, to improve educational opportunities. It was to be a very good move. Corey flourished at Bateman High School, he developed friendships with a wonderful group of classmates, it was a time of great happiness in his life. It was here that he

would get the opportunity to become a creative soul with the help of Bill Henderson. He embraced technology and it became a passion in his life. He even formed his own web development business in high school, using his own initials for the name of the company. It was called CEO Design, for Corey Earl O'Brien, he thought that was pretty clever. He was so positive, so excited, motivated, he couldn't get enough. The whole group of them were exceptional, fun, vibrant. He competed along side this group in Skills Canada Competitions, and they won.

He taught others how to use the internet and later would teach animation at Van Arts in the evenings. He was going places.

The only concern Kate had at this time was his discovery of a new sport - rugby. How could her son want to give up the gentlemen's game of soccer for a no-holds-barred brawl called rugby. But he loved that game and the camaraderie that surrounded it. Rugby took him to Europe for a second time in 1999. The crew visited England, Ireland and Wales. We aren't sure which they enjoyed more on that trip, the beer or the rugby. But we know Corey had a ball and always mentioned that trip.

Corey had what he wanted, good friends, sports, music and a bright future that would take him to Electronic Arts to do the work he had only dreamt of.

## **Summary**

For some reason kids loved Corey. They were drawn to him. They trusted this kind, gentle giant as they saw him, he could do anything. He could play any sport with them, teach them tricks on a skate board, show them how to draw on the computer. And he liked kids, they were honest, interested, he admired those qualities in people. All Kate's friends thought she had the greatest, loving son a mother could ever dream of. They were right.

In the last five years as Corey struggled with his illness he still remained very proud and independent. He always maintained that close bond with his Mom no matter what happened.

We were lucky to have him stay with us at Lindell Beach on many occasions - sometimes for a short visit, other times for months.

He pattered in the garden with us, swam in the lake with Kate, visited with our friends and family, and was there for every Christmas.

## **In Closing**

We've talked about Corey's illness openly in the hope that awareness may help someone you know in the future. It could be someone you work with, a family member, a friend, someone who may start to act a little out of character.

If you recognize these changes you could assist that person to get help. Stand with them, be their strength and advocate. They will need you.

Schizophrenia does not discriminate striking young men and women in equal numbers.