

Winnipeg - 2005

The first ever “Canadian Burn Survivor Conference” was held **May 4 to 7, 2005** in Winnipeg, Manitoba and was hosted by the **Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society**, with the support of the Phoenix Society.



The conference was attended by over 160 burn survivors, their families and friends, as well as health care workers and firefighters. Many came from across the country, from Victoria BC, all the way to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The conference featured two keynote speakers: Barbara Kammerer Quayle from Seal Beach, California, and Dennis Gardin of Detroit, Michigan.

Barbara shared her story of how she has coped with her burn and moved on to help others survivors in so many ways. She led the group for a session she calls “Tool Time” and encouraged everyone to be themselves and be proud of it! Barbara shared a plentiful supply of various tools to help burn survivors feel their best – positive self-image through positive self-talk, camouflage make-up for minimizing scars, books that encourage self-esteem, and a host of resources including materials and a chat room offered through the Phoenix Society.



Dennis also shared his story of recovery after being burned at the young age of 14. Dennis moderated several “Open Mikes”, an opportunity for all to share their feelings and stories, and moderated breakout sessions on family dynamics and coping skills after a family member is burned.

There were also presentations by Dr E. Buchel, head of Plastic Surgery at the Health Sciences Centre, and Dr R. Haydey, dermatologist. Other presentations were led by local survivors and included various themes such as industrial accidents, family coping, and complementary healing.

Perhaps the highlight of the event was the presentation by the panel on the last day. Four burn survivors shared their unique stories of coping and survival. Slade was injured in an electrical accident at the age of 21 and lost both of his arms. Today, he is back at work, married with 2 beautiful little girls, and spent his free time playing hockey over the winter. He inspired everyone by sharing that he will try golfing this summer. Pam was burned in a home cooking accident that left her depressed and hopeless as she could no longer spend the time on the details of her life – sewing all the family’s clothes, and making the perfect home. She has moved on in the 9 years since her injury to enjoy life, and spends more time with her children and extended family now than ever before. She says her burn injury helped her put the right perspective on life. Roland was injured in an explosion in the mine where he worked. He expressed regret at not being able to spend the time with his family as his recovery from a very serious burn left him focusing on physical therapy for years. This was Roland’s first experience at a burn survivor gathering of any kind, and he said he will never miss another opportunity to be with other burn survivors again.



Gwen told the group about her burn over 30 years ago. She and her husband both survived serious burns in a house fire, but their 3-year-old son and 8-day-old daughter did not. Gwen's winning spirit helped her and her husband to survive the tragedy and continue on with life. They are actively involved in Compassionate Friends, and are a testament to the courage it takes to move on.



Two evenings were spent enjoying each other's company and entertainment. "Men in Kilts" performed at the opening wine and cheese reception, and after Friday's banquet, everyone enjoyed a "Mini-Folklorama" with included dancing and entertainment by local native hoop dancers, a Portuguese dance group, and a Ukrainian dance group.

Something magical happens when so many burn survivors are together and the enthusiastic spirit of the group was palpable from the beginning of the conference. We are proud that the second Canadian Burn Survivor Conference will be hosted by the Nova Scotia Firefighters' Burn Treatment Society and the Nova Scotia Burn Support Group in Halifax in July of 2006, and we would encourage anyone whose life has been affected by a burn to attend.

