

Renee Ozee Profile

Making private grief public to promote safety

Renee Ozee is making public her private grief as a mother whose 23-year-old son died three years ago in an industrial incident. She's sharing that personal experience at this year's Day of Mourning ceremony to honour B.C. workers who lost their lives in 2011.

"I want to speak for my son, Scott. I want people to understand how important it is to keep job sites safe, to keep working men and women alive," Ozee says.

Her son was electrocuted while working on the roof of a house when the gutter pipe he was carrying touched a high-voltage line.

"Describing what happened takes so few words, but there is no way to really explain what Scott's death has meant to me, to his 11-year-old brother Liam, to Scott's life partner Krista and to his friends on and off the job."

Ozee got the news at a police station and, with Krista, had to tell Liam. "That was the hardest thing because he and Scott were so close. At the funeral, Liam said Scott was like a dad to him, and I know that Liam was Scott's life.

"There's not a day now that Liam doesn't talk about his brother. He tries everything that Scott did and liked. It's as if Liam is trying to be Scott.

"I think about Scott all the time, too. I visit him at the cemetery every week, and on special holidays and his birthday."

She hears people express their sympathy by saying that they know what she's going through, "but most of them have no idea, not a clue. It's as hard for me now as it was that first afternoon."

A single mother, Ozee wants greater attention paid to workplace safety, declaring that "everyone needs to do more to stop young workers losing their lives.

"Employers need to meet their responsibility to prevent injuries. Workers need to take some responsibility for their own safety, exercising the legal right to refuse work they think is dangerous. WorkSafeBC needs to get the message out that losing your life is easy, much too easy."

That is Ozee's message for the Day of Mourning, "in spite of my being uncomfortable with public speaking, and certainly with talking about life without Scott.

"This needs to be said, so no other family goes through what mine has."

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