

Dear Kanawanian

It might seem a little strange that here I am in front of you and I am giving you a letter. Here is why.

When I was told that the Y.M.C.A was giving me an award for my volunteer work with disabled people I felt this is a great honour, but also a responsibility. It has been thirty years since I have been at camp.

So long in fact that the only person here now who was here in my day was a little Junior camper. It would be easy to miss his name was Shawn Bay and he's now the Camp Director I hear.

But I found a very special place to leave my name so that everyone who goes here knows who I am. It's not in the Hike and Trip it's not in the Lodge it's not even on a plaque in the Dining Hall, it's on a song. A song which still captures the spirit of the Kanawana experience.

And here's the part about responsibility. Because on this tiny part of the planet which we refer to as Kanawana I am a legend as the guy who wrote that special song. I hope that if I have something important to say people at camp will listen.

Well I have something to say that may save your life. I want you to be my ambassadors of safety and give this same information to all the important people in your lives and change their behaviour so that they don't become my next disabled friends.

There is a foundation called Think First that has carefully researched accidents. They give us expert advice on what to do in our behaviour particularly to avoid spinal injuries and Traumatic Brain Injury. WWW.THINKFIRST.CA on Natalie Anclair
1550-422-0737

Things I must always do

Don't dive anywhere but on an approved board at a public pool. ○

Wear an approved helmet for the sport I'm doing.

skiing cycling rollerblading. ○

Always wear a seatbelt if the vehicle you're thinking of riding doesn't have a seatbelt it's not a safe way to travel. ○

Here is the reason I feel it's important to know about Think First.

About a year ago on July 26, I was returning from my work as an Electrician at the Cote St. Luc Railyards, using roads near Blue Bonnets Racetrack. I had flashing lights on the front and back of my bicycle and 3m retro reflective tape on my bike as well. I wore a retro reflective vest and of course a cycling helmet.

My co-workers had always told me I was very visible and they saw me every night.

I had used a bicycle or public transit to get to work most of the time in my twenty-six years as an electrician for the railway.

As I traveled through an intersection which witnesses say was clearly green in my favour I was hit by a driver who burnt a red light at 50 km/h. I flew in the air my right femur already shattered in countless pieces. But the biggest problem was my brain had hit the inside of my skull so hard that I was in a coma from which I wouldn't emerge until three weeks later.

If one was going to choose the best place and time to have such an accident; Montreal that night at that place was it. A driver who had witnessed the whole thing immediately called 911. An ambulance stationed nearby responded so quickly that my friends from work saw me being taken care of but had no idea that was me until they read the Journal de Montreal at breakfast.

Who are my friends at camp

I was rushed to The Montreal General Hospital. At this point my blood pressure was so low it couldn't be measured.

Thank goodness there are people who despite years of training and hard work at University are still willing to be awake and alert and work hard for days on end to save the life of someone they've never met.

Doctors called a big meeting with my wife, my sister and my brother. This was to tell them they had taken pictures of my brain and they could see so much damage that I couldn't breathe without the machine which was breathing for me. They also said it would be unreasonable to expect me to ever talk or walk again.

The next few months I remember as the most wonderful in my life. I've relearned every small movement I do now. Even to the point of taking a drink of water.

Please take the time to consult the website of Think First, and understand it.

It's you who are going to model new behaviour that is going to save injuries and lives.

Your friend

Richard Kerr

