

# altered lives project

## Tamara's story

Tamara lives on an island in a small city situated on the Lake of the Woods in Northwestern Ontario. She travels to work by boat during the summer and on the ice roads during the winter.

For the past 33 years, Tamara has worked at one of the city's most popular grocery stores. She has enjoyed her employment there and she recalls memories fondly of working in the store in her youth, singing out the price of each item as it went through her checkout.

If you landed a job at this store, you were considered one of the lucky ones. Management was tough but fair with their student employees like Tamara, requiring them to provide proof of good grades to maintain employment. It was, and is, considered a great place to work.

Being located in a city often frequented by tourists, the work environment by default became fast and friendly where workers wanted to provide customers a gratifying experience including 'above and beyond' service like loading their cars and boats with groceries, if requested. However, there is a downside to this idyllic workplace.

Her injuries started when her right wrist started to fall asleep and tingle before it gradually progressed to numbness and then pain as it became worse. Tamara suffered Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs) to both her arms and wrists as a result of such fast-paced and repetitive work. These injuries have forever altered her family and working life and she worries that one day she will not have use of her hands at all.

Due to these injuries "it feels like I am 20 years older than I am," she shared. Tamara describes being uncharacteristically miserable from persistent pain combined with the inability to enjoy hobbies. Her horse Freckles brings her great joy. Before her injuries, she rode Freckles whenever she could



but now is heartbroken that she can only bear to ride him on 'good' days – at best one to two times per week.

Before her injuries, Tamara also enjoyed water-skiing, kayaking, and fishing, but she had to give up these pleasures as well due to pain, along with her fear of making things worse. Recently, Tamara held her friend's new baby and realized her arms could not take it. Being a mother of three sons, Tamara grieves the likelihood that she will not be able to hold her future grandchildren.

When asked what her message to other workers would be, Tamara said: "Even though you are young when you are starting... think about the future. Try and do something in an easier, safer way. Don't think you have anything to prove."

## Injury prevention is a responsibility shared by workers, employers, co-workers, unions and the community.