

## WORDS OF INSPIRATION

Classes are in full swing, extra-curricular activities are on their way, routines are set, and calendars are filling up. How are you holding up?

If you haven't seen in the news or social media the inspirational story of Tyler Smith, I encourage you to search him up. Tyler is one of the survivors of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash in April 2018. On September 15, 2019 he shared his heart wrenching experience with "Unsinkable", a story-sharing platform hosted by Olympic Rower Silken Laumann. Unsinkable's mission is to empower Canadians to achieve better mental, physical and spiritual health through sharing of stories. Please check out this wonderful site: [www.weareunsinkable.com](http://www.weareunsinkable.com)

I heard Tyler speak at Roger's Hometown Hockey in Leduc last February, at the Midget Provincials opening ceremonies in Whitecourt in the spring and again on Global News last week. Tyler's story has been shared throughout social media thousands of times. He gladly gave me permission to share it with you in this article, telling me that if he could give others that hope, than he feels he is doing something right.

Tyler wrote candidly and authentically with hopeful insight. He shared frankly that he will never completely heal mentally from the tragedy. He knows there is power in opening up and that it is truly **okay to not be okay**. He wrote that "if you're not doing so hot, you need to be willing to talk about it. Take advantage of the time you have and be grateful for the ones around you who care about you. When going through dark times," he writes, "it is one step at a time, one day at a time, one lesson at a time."

Whoever may think that youth do not have wisdom to share or cannot change the world is mistaken. This is a young man, at 21 years old, who is using his horrific experience to inspire and give strength to others.

There is strength in vulnerability. I do not know anyone who is not touched by hardship, struggles or tragedy. Why do we think that we need to always put on a brave face and pretend all is fine? Yes, yes, I know that we need to be professional, we have jobs to do and have to be mature parents (most of the time!). I realize that we cannot come all undone much of the time, or complain about our problems nonstop. Let's be real, that would be a downer, and people would eventually avoid us like the plague.

Is it possible to find a way to say "Hey, I am not okay right now" and say "thanks for supporting me" or "thanks for being my friend and my inspiration"? Can we allow ourselves to be a little more transparent: "I am still here, doing my job, or taking care of my kids, but wow, today is a tough day"? Perhaps when we share our experiences and how we have risen above it, we may also be an inspiration for others to keep fighting the good fight.

This brings to mind a very dear friend with childhood trauma, single parenting and ongoing health issues. She is so precious with her openness, and not only that, she is optimistic and encouraging. Sharing her stories and the strategies she uses to triumph is a gift to others.

We are all on the same side and we are all stronger together. Your story matters and it needs to be told. When you are REAL and authentic, others listen. Your light, your story just may be the light that shines in the darkness for others.

I leave you with these words: **Time** and **pressure** turn caterpillars into butterflies, sand into pearls and coal into diamonds, imagine what it is doing in you. **It really is okay to not be okay.**

*This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. Tammy advocates for students and parents, providing a link to other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for over 20 years and is a mother to 4 children, 3 of which are teenagers.*