

apple

*My life changed
the day I...*

featuring
Sheldon Kennedy

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My life changed the day i...

A life-changing moment can arrive in a flash, like a lightning strike—or it can take years of hard work to get there.

Sometimes the moments are small, but they have the power to shift the direction someone is moving in, and transform a life forever.

Four Albertans shared with writer **Jacqueline Louie** how life changed the day they...

Put more vegetables on my plate

James Strachan



Photo: Jerry Gerling

James Strachan knew the new way he was eating was working the morning he got up, put on his trousers—and while he was reaching for his belt, his pants fell down.

“I remember standing there thinking, ‘I can’t wear these,’” says Strachan, 79, who ended up buying a whole new wardrobe.

A Ponoka resident, Strachan started putting more vegetables on his plate in the mid-2000s, after realizing he had to change his food choices after gaining weight gradually over a number of years.

He weighed 99 kilograms (217 pounds) when he started. After changing his lifestyle, which started with exercising more and eating more vegetables and fruits, he dropped to 73 kg (160 lb.).

“The life change that was the hardest, was the mental change of what I’ve had to give up and leave behind,” he says. “There is a real sense of loss in that. Once you’ve made the mental shift to changing your eating habits, it’s easy.”

Strachan makes sure half of what goes on his plate is vegetables and includes a a serving of protein

(meat or a meat alternative) and a small amount of carbohydrates from grains.

“Now there is rarely an evening meal that goes by that we don’t have a good healthy salad.”

Strachan and his wife Beatrix now eat mostly chicken, fish, beans and a lot of vegetables. They include vegetarian dishes in their diet, “not out of any conviction about vegetarianism, but because the recipes are so good,” Strachan says. “I feel a whole lot better.” He also finds it easier to be more active: he walks every morning, and works out at the pool regularly.

For former NHL hockey player Sheldon Kennedy, speaking out about being sexually abused was the start of a long journey back to health and wholeness.

“Yes, my life changed, but not instantly,” says Kennedy, who played for the Boston Bruins, the Detroit Red Wings and the Calgary Flames.

“When somebody asks for help, we think it’s over. But it almost gets worse before it starts getting better, because we’ve now disclosed a secret.”

Kennedy was a 14-year-old junior player in the Western Hockey League when his coach, Graham James, began sexually abusing him. It continued for the next four years and Kennedy waited until he was 28 before asking for help.

“That’s fairly normal. A lot of times, people don’t come to grips with it,” says Kennedy, now 44.

“It was a lot of hard work. It took me about 10 years to get to a place where I felt confident enough that I had come through the dark tunnel, and got a little bit of my own power back.”

Kennedy went through two different alcohol and drug treatment programs and says his healing took time, patience, consistency and a willingness to change.

“A lot of it is acceptance, and not blaming yourself,” he notes.

“We can’t expect others to fix us. It wasn’t until I accepted the fact that I needed to do my part in helping myself, before I could start moving on. I attend AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings—for me, that has been critical. It’s also committing to exercise, to eating better and sleeping better—all those things that are going to make me feel better and help me heal.”

Kennedy is now an advocate for children and a board member of the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre, which helps children heal



Photo: Ewan Nicholson

after physical and sexual abuse.

“I want to show people there is a way out, and you can get your life back. We need to give people hope that there is a way out of the craziness.”

Many children who have been sexually abused don’t speak out about it until they’re adults. Inspired

by Kennedy’s leadership, the Canadian Centre for Male Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (cc4ms) in Calgary was formed to help adult male survivors of child sexual abuse.

“There is a lot of need, especially around men, to deal with this in their lives,” Kennedy says, adding “cc4ms is a great extension for what we do.”

Shelley Schierman and

her husband Greg read to their five boys from the time they were small. And it sparked a deep curiosity in their children about seeing the wider world for themselves.

“We said ‘yes’ to our kids, and it changed our lives forever,” she says.

Their adventures began when their eldest was 16 and their youngest was nearly six. The Schiermans, who live on a cattle ranch just east of Innisfail, bought the biggest world map they could find. They laid it out on the living room floor, and talked about

where everyone wanted to go.

The couple matched the money their sons had saved from their 4H steer projects and part-time jobs, and used it to travel throughout Europe. They’ll make their fifth family trip this summer.

“The trip we planned so many years ago has evolved into something amazing,” says Schierman, whose sons are now 27, 23, 21, 19 and 17. “Our kids really reach for anything they dream about, no matter how unattainable it seems, and they find great success.”

Travel has broadened their sons’ world view. “They are so accepting. They have such a wide variety of friends. They have an interest in world politics and the environment, and they are very grateful.”

While supporting their sons in following their dreams, the Schiermans also encouraged them to give back. Over the years, their sons have volunteered for a wide range of organizations, including homeless shelters and the Alberta Children’s Hospital.



Photo: Jerry Gerling

Moved into my own home

Bob Patrick

For Calgarian Bob Patrick, life changed the day he moved into his own home.

After being diagnosed in 2002 with depression, anxiety and paranoia, Patrick bounced from job to job for years. In 2009, fired yet again, he was living in an apartment he describes as “a slum existence” and facing eviction.

His life turned around when his sister stepped in to get him the help he needed, including a new home with Horizon Housing Society, an affordable housing provider in Calgary. (Horizon Housing Society is a partner in RESOLVE, a campaign nine local agencies are raising money for to create more affordable housing in Calgary).



Photo: Grant Black

Patrick applied for and received a disability benefit, and sought help from the Canadian Mental Health Association, his family physician, a psychiatrist and a psychologist. And he moved into a bachelor’s apartment with Horizon Housing.

“Although I don’t own the apartment, I look on it as my own,” says Patrick, 54. “It’s a really nice showpiece of an apartment. I take great pride in keeping it clean and

presentable, and I can have friends over. It’s my home.”

If there’s one thing he has found useful in facing and overcoming his challenges, it’s that “it’s OK to get help.”

“My health is very good right now. I’m in a very positive frame of mind. Today, I am given the chance to live a good life, to have my freedom to come and go—and to be a better Bob.” **a**