

Home as castle a simple myth

Unlike the myth of the Sasquatch or Bigfoot, there is another myth in Canada that most Canadians believe in and that is actually bad for your health.

Most Canadians ascribe to the belief that should they be struck with a catastrophic illness, they will not lose their homes as a result.

But it has become increasingly evident to me that despite our high taxes, despite paying into such programs as Employment Insurance and CPP for our entire working lives, Canadians are often just one illness away from homelessness.

The story of Danny Choy of Calgary is proof. The 32-year-old died Tuesday after grueling battles with cancer and with Human Resources Development Canada — the department best known for the “billion-dollar boondoggle” scandal — which administers the Canada Pension Plan disability program.

Danny, a self-employed, hard-working master electrician, was the sole breadwinner for his gorgeous family — his wife Susan, 30, and their three children, Zachary, 9, Zoe, 7, and 18-month-old William. Danny said that he was always a healthy and fit individual.

But in the fall of 1999, just two months after putting the finishing touches on his family's modest, though lovely, dream home in Calgary, he found himself getting winded halfway up the stairs, he had a headache he couldn't shake off and bruises all over his body. He sought help when one evening he started bleeding profusely from his gums.

He and his alarmed wife rushed off to the emergency room of Peter Lougheed Hospital on Nov. 9, 1999, and it was then that he learned why he was bleeding from his gums. There was a blood clot in his brain and when it started draining it did so through his gums.

But the news got worse. The reason for the blood clot was he was suffering from acute adult lymphoblastic leukemia. He was immediately admitted to hospital where, for the next month, he underwent intensive chemo-



LICIA CORBELLA

therapy.

After that, he spent many more months in and out of hospital where he had two bone marrow transplants from his brother Kelvin, who was a perfect match, as well as radiation. He suffered from massive infections and Bell's Palsy — which caused the paralysis to the left side of his face.

Shortly after Christmas came the worst news of all. He was told the cancer had come back — this time masses were found next to his heart, in his liver — everywhere.

Two weeks ago, he was given nine weeks to live. It was a much too generous prognosis.

And despite the gravity of his situation, this utterly decent man did never seeing one solitary cent from the CPP disability fund.

I met Danny a week ago Friday. The next day a column I wrote about his battles with his disease and his government appeared in the Calgary Sun. Two days later — on Monday — after 15 months of never receiving the courtesy of even one telephone call from any public servant, someone from CPP phoned to tell him that \$7,000 would be deposited in his account by the end of the week.

Danny died the next day.

The assurance from CPP that his family would be okay was an enormous relief to Danny, but it was wrong that he had to undergo the stress of fighting for his money — money he paid into the system his entire working life — when what he should have been fighting was his illness.

A spokesperson for HRDC said the government must ensure “only the people who need it” receive the money. Surely someone fighting for his very life against a deadly disease qualifies? If not, then who?

Danny and Susan say had it not been for the generosity and support of their families, they would have lost everything as a result of the leukemia and would have wound up on the streets.

As it stands, Canada Customs and Revenue still has a lien against the Choy residence, because Danny was unable to pay his income taxes.

As it stands, Canadians aren't afraid, but they should be. Self-employed Canadians, such as Danny Choy, and other workers who don't have private insurance plans are at risk of losing everything should they fall ill — and the Choy's would have had it not been for their extended families' help.

Danny wanted to warn Canadians about the myth he once believed in. He died vowing to change the system. Let's help him do it.

Licia Corbella is a columnist for Sun Media Newspapers.

