



SEVEN OAKS
EDUCATION FOUNDATION INC.

Foundation

NEWS

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Toby Cracknell 1957-2004: Honouring His Memory by Encouraging Others

Most people would agree that life isn't about how much money you make or how many things you own, but about the type of person you are.

People remember Toby Cracknell as a person with a deep love of family, unwavering work ethic and strength of character that made a lasting impression on everyone who knew him.

To encourage these qualities in others, his family has established the annual Toby Cracknell Award. A principal sum was donated to the Seven Oaks Education Foundation. It will be held at the Winnipeg Foundation, in a separate Toby Cracknell Award account, and the yearly interest will be used for the award. Past rates of return indicate an annual award of approximately \$500 would be available to distribute in perpetuity.

To be eligible for the award, a student must:

- Be a graduating student from Seven Oaks School Division
- Have a significant intellectual learning disability
- Be considered a hard worker.

The recipient will receive a memento (such an engraved plaque or paperweight) as well as the money,



which is to be used for further training, whether in art, music, sports or further post-secondary education.

Toby himself grew up with significant learning disabilities as well as severe physical challenges due to disabling arthritis among other problems. But his mother says it was his character and his attitude, not his disabilities, which defined him.

"The award is not just about honouring Toby's memory," says Margaret Cracknell. "It's about recognizing effort and character in people with special

needs who are working just as hard as other students."

Toby was well-known for his effort and devotion to hard work. Born in 1957, the third of four children, he was diagnosed with a learning disability at a very young age. His family moved to West Kildonan in 1964, so that he could attend special needs classes, which were not then readily available in other school divisions. He was enrolled in a "Slow Learners" classroom, which was the preferred term at the time.

It was at Victory School that Toby's teacher, Mrs. Trevenen, taught Toby how to read and write. Though Toby struggled, he embraced what he learned and would be a voracious reader his entire life.

"When he learned to read and write, it was like a whole world opened up," says Toby's sister, Judith Campbell. "He loved to read, especially books with lots of pictures like *The Adventures of Tintin* series."

But Toby learned more than just reading and writing. His family credits Mrs. Trevenen and his early education as being a big part of what shaped Toby's positive attitude toward life and learning.

"We're all very grateful for his elementary school education which instilled a sense of pride and community in him," says Judith. "It would have been easy for him to get discouraged. But that wasn't what he learned."

As Toby got older, the challenges mounted. He was moved into a regular classroom that, because of the times, lacked the strong educational supports available to special needs students today. When Toby was eventually transferred to a janitorial services vocational program at R. B. Russell Vocational High School, his severe arthritis made the physically demanding work very difficult.

But Toby was not deterred. He found assembly jobs through various supported workplace facilities such as Skills Unlimited and Versatech. In his later years, he worked at

Zeller's stockroom with vocational support from what is now Equal Opportunities West. He was known there for taking pride in his work and for his sense of responsibility.

"They were very impressed with his work ethic - he never missed work," recalls his mother. "In fact, they have an award named after him and we are asked to go and present the plaque each year. We were very touched that they would do that." Toby was always keen to return to work – even, for example, after lengthy hospitalization for a broken leg followed by a broken hip.

Toby lived his last years at Shalom Residences in a supported living house. This group home gave him the opportunity to explore his independence in everyday things like taking walks, riding the bus to work, shopping and going to see movies.

"He really loved it there," remembers Margaret. "They said the house would be so quiet, then the moment he came in the door, the place came alive with conversation and laughter."

Whether he was at work, enjoying tea with his family, playing with the cats or accompanying his mother on trips all over the world (from Alaska to Hawaii to the Caribbean), Toby found a lot of joy in life.

After Toby passed away in 2004, his family gave a great deal of thought about the best way to remember him. They decided the best way would be to recognize other Special Needs students who displayed the same qualities of character and determination Toby displayed throughout his life.

The family hopes that the Toby Cracknell Award will inspire other students with disabilities to find joy in their lives, to keep learning and doing, and to take pride in their accomplishments...the same way Toby did.

For more information on the Toby Cracknell Award, other SOEF awards or to make a donation, contact Wayne Shimizu at Wayne.Shimizu@7oaks.org



Toby and his family enjoying a little time together in the great outdoors.