

Author and businessman chose life

A father of three wrote an autobiographical book that he hopes will serve as an inspiration to readers.

BY TROY LANDREVILLE, LANGLEY ADVANCE JUNE 16, 2011



It took about two years for author Tom Watson to complete his autobiographical book, *Man Shoes*, which is described as “the journey to becoming a better man, husband, and father.”

Photograph by: submitted, for Langley Advance

One summer’s day 20 years ago, Tom Watson’s life was at a crossroads.

And he chose to go on living.

After first wife, Darlene, passed away from leukemia, Watson drowned in despair.

“That was a very difficult time in my life and I had to surround myself with people who could help me through that,” he said.

The thought of life without Darlene, who died in 1991, just days before her 28th birthday, left the suddenly single father contemplating suicide.

“The boys would be better off and I would be with my Darlene. I lay in bed and, in my oppressive cocoon of darkness, I started planning how and when I would end my life,” Watson wrote in his autobiographical book *Man Shoes*.

His plan: speed down the highway towards a river, purposely miss the bridge entrance, and crash

down the embankment to certain death.

Then, simple yet heartfelt words from his then four-year-old son Brad evoked Watson's moment of clarity.

"We watched a movie together, All Dogs Go To Heaven, and at the end, Charlie, the dog, dies and goes to heaven," Watson recounted. "Bradley cried and said, 'Daddy, please don't die and go to heaven.'"

Brad may not have known it at the time, but his words helped convince his dad that life was worth living.

A survivor of child abuse, upheaval, and 13 foster homes, Watson learned at an early age to overcome adversity.

Rescued at age five by the Watson family, he found family support that helped heal his physical and emotional wounds.

Skip ahead to the present day and Watson is a Founder of Your Better Life, an online company that empowers people to achieve greater success, and the owner and president of Recreation Excellence, a recreation services and facility management company.

The married father of three sons – 24-year-old Brad, 21-year-old Kelly, and 17-year-old Jordan – is also, officially, a published author.

Watson launched Man Shoes at a May 14 soiree in his honour at Eaglequest Golf & Country Club. A member of the Rotary Club of Langley Sunrise, Watson is donating a portion of book sales to Rotary International.

It took Watson about two years to complete the book, a deeply personal account of his life's journey, so far.

"Quite the process, but it's here and I'm very excited about that," he said. "Man Shoes is about learning how to grow into and become the person that you are called to be."

Man Shoes is described as a book that helps readers understand what it takes to become a better man, husband, and father.

It is a true story about young Tommy who lived in uncaring foster homes before he was rescued by the Watson family. It is the personal account of someone who overcame five years of suffering as an abused child, growing up to become a father who planned his own suicide after losing his wife to cancer.

"This book was actually a journal for my boys," Watson explained. "I had no intention of writing a book."

He was inspired to write about his life after suffering a stroke seven years ago.

“I wondered, if I died, what would my boys remember of me? Would they remember my history, would they remember my story... and what would they remember?” Watson shared. “I keep a journal for each boy, and I read their journals and I thought, I should write my own journal about me.”

A close friend read Watson’s journal and urged him to try to publish it.

“He said, ‘Tom, I finished your journal and that is the best book I’ve ever read,’” Watson said. “He said, ‘You have to send this to a publisher.’”

Sharing his story with complete strangers wasn’t easy, but after talking it over with his wife Kathy, Watson decided to send a draft to publishing houses.

For most, life is in a constant state of flux, which is the basic concept behind Man Shoes.

“When I was 18 years old, I thought I knew everything I needed to know,” Watson said. “And then I left the Watsons’ home, and I realized I didn’t know as much as I needed to know.”

The metaphor behind Man Shoes is it takes years to fit into your “shoes.”

“Remember when our parents used to check our shoes and there was always a gap? The idea of Man Shoes is, at 18, I thought my feet fit perfectly into my shoes,” he said.

Since he left the Watsons’ home, his “feet” grew.

“My responsibilities have grown, but my feet have always been behind that,” Watson explained. “So there’s always been this gap, which I didn’t know [about]. That’s really what the book’s about: this idea of mentors bringing mentors into your life to help you through these gaps.”

Even a child can mentor you because they have a different perspective, Watson said.

“They see life in a different way than you see it,” Watson said.

The hardcover book is available at all online book retailers. A portion of book sales will be donated to Rotary International to help the needy at home and abroad. For more, visit: www.manshoes.net.

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