

Columnist Returns To Stouffville Roots

By Kate Gilderdale
Stouffville Free Press

On Oct. 17, Free Press columnist Luke Anderson returned to Stouffville District Secondary School for the first time since he graduated in 1997.

Carole Stitt, who teaches English at SDSS, invited Luke to give a talk to a group of her Grade Nine students. "We have been talking about people who have dealt with adversity in their lives and Luke Anderson immediately came to mind," she said.

In 2002, after graduating from the University of Waterloo with a degree in civil engineering, Luke moved to Rossland, B.C. where he spent the summer learning how to build timber frame houses and indulging his passion for mountain biking. He explained how, in late October, 2002, he and his friend Johnny decided to take on the challenge of jumping over a 25 foot gap on a biking trail outside Nelson.

"Johnny went first; I filmed him," Luke told the students. Then Luke took a few preparatory runs before making his final attempt. "After the fifth try I took off and left my life as I knew it." He missed the landing and broke his neck at the C4/5 vertebrae level. "There are seven vertebrae; the C4/5 nerves control your upper body," he explained.

When his condition stabilized, he was flown home to begin a long period of rehabilitation before moving into an apartment in midtown Toronto. He has since moved again; this time to Queen St. West. "I'm living down there, loving city life, but I miss Stouffville and it's always good to come back and visit with my family and good friends."

Luke has been working with a consulting company in the city, and is an ambassador for the Rick Hansen Foundation. "My job is to raise awareness about people with spinal cord injury and related disabilities, and to raise funds to find a cure for people like

myself."

He has become an accomplished artist, using his mouth to hold the brush, and his good friend Steve has helped him rig up his digital camera so that he can take photographs. He has also been working on a documentary about his daily life through the National Film Board.

During his presentation Luke showed a series of slides, and explained how he uses voice recognition software to write newspaper columns and design projects on his computer. Articulate and witty, Luke quickly won over his audience with his grit, determination and refusal to give up on his fight for a truly accessible world.



On a visit to his old almer mater, SDSS, on Oct. 17, Free Press columnist Luke Anderson showed students an example of his artistic talents in this painting of the Anderson family cottage.

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