



The Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society held its 17th annual Burn Survivor gathering on October 24 and 25, 2014 at the Canad Inns Polo Park Hotel. The theme this year was “**Turn your Demons into Diamonds**”.

The 2-day conference was attended by 116 burn survivors, their family members, Burn Unit staff, and firefighters from Manitoba and beyond.

Keynote speaker **Spencer Beach** started the conference by sharing his story of struggles and triumphs after sustaining a 95 % body surface area burn approximately 11 years ago. Spencer was a 3rd generation flooring installer and among the best in his field when he endured a horrific flash fire that left him permanently and severely scarred. After spending 14 months in the hospital and a year after that of intense rehabilitation, he has gone on to carve out a new path for his life. He has now achieved such designations as a Construction Safety Officer through the Alberta Construction Safety Association, as well completed the University of Alberta’s, Faculty of Extensions, Occupational Health & Safety Certificate program. Spencer explained how he turned his personal demons into diamonds - instead of letting his anger at his situation get the better of him, he used it to motivate himself to regain and happy, healthy and safe life. Spencer was engaging and inspired many of the conference attendees to understand what true success looks like and to always look forward in recovery.



A group of local survivors were asked to speak on a panel to share their individual journeys since sustaining a burn injury, and explain how they had each turned their own demons into diamonds. This session generated a lot of excellent questions from the audience.

We also had a medical presentation on “The Benefits of Counseling” by **Dr. Andrea Piotrowski**, a clinical psychologist and Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba. **Sulaye Thakrar**, PhD candidate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Manitoba, presented an update on his burn research focusing on how burn

survivors experience, make future plans in, and find meaning while healing from a burn injury particularly through societal pressures and influences such as their gendered socialization.



In order to help those who are interested in journaling or use writing as a therapeutic tool, **Donna Besel** of the Manitoba Writers Guild led a session “How to use your Pen to Find Meaning”. Donna offered great tips and examples of how creative writing can empower people to heal from trauma and enhance their relationships.

Survivors were free to share their journeys with each other in several sharing circles, which are considered a most valuable healing experience. Family and friends of the survivors also had a chance to share with each other.

The Mamingwey Burn Survivor Society would like to thank our sponsors: The **Firefighters Burn Fund**, the **HSC Foundation**, as well as **Manitoba Hydro**, **Canad Inns**, **United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg Local 867**, the **Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba**, **Dr Greg Stewart** of St Anne’s Road Chiropractic, **Wieler and Wieler Certified General Accountants**, the **United Steelworkers Local 6166**, **Marie Alkana** and the **HSC Executive** for their generous contributions that made this event possible.

We are already busy at work planning the 18th annual Mamingwey Burn Survivor conference for October of 2014. For more information, please visit our website at www.mamingwey.ca or email chair-person Barbara-Anne Hodge at bahodge@shaw.ca

