

Fri, August 6, 2004

## **Life changed in seconds**

**By MARK BONOKOSKI**  
**Toronto Sun Columnist**

A SPLIT SECOND is all it took. Eight friends are sitting on a house balcony in the Beaches back in mid-July, waiting for the midnight hour and a trip to a downtown nightclub, when suddenly the deck gives way.

And, in that split second, a college cover girl named Chrissy Molnar -- academic achiever and award-winning cross-country runner -- went from life on the seemingly unstoppable fly to a life of being confined to a wheelchair.

That mass tumble from the collapsed second-floor balcony never made the newspapers the next morning, although, according to friends, it got a brief mention on a television newscast on a station that can no longer be recalled.

But not making the big-city newspapers did not change the fact that 25-year-old Christine Molnar, born and raised in North York, would be returning to her home in Kingston paralyzed from the waist down.

But first it was an ambulance ride to St. Mike's hospital and then, three hours later, another ambulance ride to the spinal unit at Toronto Western.

And there she stayed until last Thursday when doctors deemed it safe to transfer her by another ambulance back to the city where she lives with her fiance, Robert Tallack, 25, and where she was both a cover girl at St. Lawrence College, and a cross-country running sensation credited with top speeds as well as top marks.

"People always ask us if there was a warning before the deck collapsed," says Tallack. "But there was none.

"The floor simply exploded from under us. It dropped away like a trap door. And life changed."

In 2002, the year Chrissy Molnar was named St. Lawrence College's female athlete of the year, she also won five academic awards, including the award of excellence from the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association for her studies in veterinarian technology.

And now she has been told she will never walk again.

"I haven't really been able to wrap my brain around this yet," she says, speaking on her cellphone from her hospital bed at Kingston's St. Mary's-by-the-Lake rehab centre.

"I guess it really hasn't hit me yet. Friends say I am taking it like a trouper, so I suppose that's good.

"But I don't know. I really don't."

It is her love for martial arts specialist Robert Tallack, coupled with his love for her, that will see one of the world's top karate masters, Hamilton's Christopher DiLiberto, put on a seminar tomorrow in Oshawa to help raise money to help Chrissy Molnar with the struggles that lie ahead.

The event, organized by the Team Canada Black Belt Institute, located at the southeast corner of Thorton Rd. N. and Rossland, begins at 2:30 p.m.

Edward Comeau, 38, a third-degree black belt, is co-owner of the institute. He is also from Kingston.

One of his first karate instructors was Ken Tallack, the father of Robert Tallack, the young man at Chrissy Molnar's bedside.

And so the circle comes full.

"Having Christopher DiLiberto put on a demonstration should certainly draw a crowd," says Comeau. "The man's 53 and returned again to the tournament circuit three years ago -- and he clears out the house wherever he goes."

According to Comeau, the event will hopefully raise upwards of \$4,500 towards the long list of long-term needs that Chrissy Molnar will require -- from modifications to her home to treatments not covered by OHIP.

The list provided is daunting, but so too is the challenge Chrissy Molnar faces because a balcony gave way as eight friends gathered prior to a night on the town.

One second, all is well and, a split-second later, her world is changed forever -- the prognosis so blunt that someday walking has been medically ruled out.

"But both of us are fighters," says Tallack. "Neither of us gives up. If anyone call pull off a miracle, it's Chrissy. She will do whatever it takes to walk again."