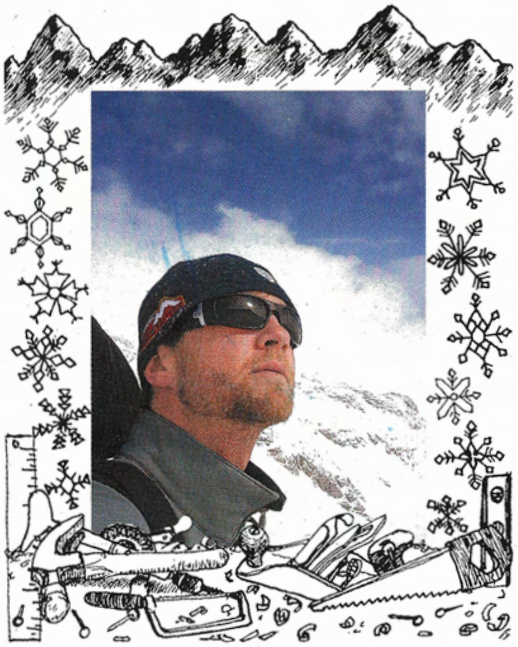
CHRISTOPHER GRAHAM BAINES

1974-2007

'Mom, I want you to know I love my life. I am so happy with my friends, with what I am able to do.'

Christopher Graham Baines was born on Oct. 23, 1974 in Pointe-Claire, Que. He was a big baby—9 lb., 4 oz. His mother, Linda, remembers the doctor at Lakeshore General Hospital holding him high in the air "like the cub in *The Lion King*." The family lived in Dollard-des-Ormeaux, a suburb of Montreal, where Linda, a homemaker, and Chris's father, Peter, an elevator mechanic, raised their three children. Jason was 2½ years older than Chris, and Kelly was three years younger. When Chris was three, his parents divorced. Linda met and married businessman Bruce Schorer, and they blended their families—his two children, Jim and Jennifer, and Linda's three—and moved into a home in Pincourt. With so many kids, camping became a favourite family outing. "That was the thing Chris really latched onto," Bruce says. "He loved nature." Bruce taught Chris to skate and to cross-country ski at a Cub Scout retreat, Camp Jackson Dodds, in the Laurentian Mountains. "He was a little clumsy," Bruce says. "But in the end he became the perfect athlete."



Chris was also good in school. His teachers called him enthusiastic, Linda says, even though he was very talkative. "They said he could learn some self-control." He loved make-believe and dressing up, especially in the cowboy regalia he once paraded around in at a western theme park on a family vacation. He also liked reading and his pet cat, Minou. "I would say, 'Christopher, come and do the dishes,' " Linda recalls, "and he would say, 'I can't. Minou is on my lap.' " Still, Bruce says, "he never gave us a problem. He always had a great disposition." After attending several different grade schools, Chris went to Macdonald High in Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue where, in Grade 9, he met D'Arcy McLeish, a boy who would later describe himself as Chris's "heterosexual life partner."

In 1992, Bruce was transferred to Maryland and Chris found work at Camp David as a gardener. "They thought very highly of him," Bruce says. But he wasn't happy in the U.S. "He was a Canadian boy," Linda says. After one of his friends moved to the resort town of Whistler, B.C., Chris went on a holiday and decided to stay. "He wrote me a letter three days later and said that he loved the mountains so much, and how it was meant to be," Linda says. "All the chips just fell into place." In fact, she says, as he was getting off the bus, Chris looked up and saw two friends from Montreal. That same day, he found a place to stay and a bartending job at the Longhorn Saloon and Grill. Eventually, he met up with D'Arcy, another west Montreal island émigré, and the two became roommates.

In the Whistler area, Chris also worked as a carpenter for part of the year, helping to build log homes; then he'd travel to India or Europe or South America in the fall. He would also sometimes do a stint as a doorman at local bars. He could talk drunk patrons into leaving peacefully because he had that sunny demeanour, Bruce says. People felt comfortable and calm around him. He became a voracious reader, a good cook and a wine aficionado. "He was very particular," Bruce says. "He was adamant about what oil was used to cook the vegetables. For me, it was a little bit of a pain in the butt." But Bruce, a workaholic, admired Chris's chosen life. "He never fell for the corporate rat race," Bruce says. "He found his own space, he found his own speed, and he wove himself into nature like a snake going into the grass."

Six feet tall and strong, Chris began to spend more and more of his time on the mountains. "He started mountain biking and skiing and he became super proficient at both," D'Arcy says. "Then he began mountain climbing." He also practised yoga—Ashtanga, Bikram and Hatha—at Whistler's NeoAlpine Yoga studio. "Over the past year his body completely changed," says owner Kristin Campbell. "His practice became so agile, so light. His body held a lot of power."

Last summer, Chris went on a family trek, spending time with all of his relatives "almost like he was making peace with everybody," Linda says. At her Mt. Airy, Md., home, she says, "he actually sat across from me and said, 'Mom, I want you to know I love my life. I am so happy with where I live, with my friends, with what I am able to do.' He was reassuring me." When Chris decided to become a member of the Whistler-Blackcomb ski patrol like D'Arcy, Bruce was proud. This season was his first as a volunteer-in-training.

On the morning of Sunday, Dec. 16, Chris and D'Arcy went skiing on Blackcomb Mountain. "It was snowing, but the visibility was good," D'Arcy says. They took a run called Rock and Roll that Chris had skied 100 times. "Nothing difficult," D'Arcy says. On the way down, he briefly lost sight of Chris. Then he spotted a lone ski in the snow before coming upon him lying in the woods on his back. "For a split second, I thought he was kidding," D'Arcy remembers. Chris had apparently hit a tree. His heart was beating, but he wasn't breathing. D'Arcy called in a Code 3, meaning, he says, "s—t's hit the fan: send everything you have!" For five minutes, he performed CPR on his friend until help arrived. Chris was airlifted to the Vancouver General Hospital where he died hours later with D'Arcy by his side. On Tuesday, Dec. 18, Chris's class at NeoAlpine chanted his favourite mantras, and cried. He was 33.

BY NANCY MACDONALD AND BARBARA RIGHTON

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