

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate Class Inc.

Ontario

Women in business

Profile: **Diane Craig**

Out of despair grows hope



Photo by Miriam Morris

"Sandrine's death had to have a purpose for me and helping others was the best way I knew how to do this." **Diane Craig**

They say a mother's love is the most powerful. The hope is when you love your child enough you can protect them from everything in the world that might possibly hurt them. No mother expects to live through the heart wrenching experience of losing her beloved child, but what do you do when it happens? How do you continue on? It's pure survival according to Diane Craig.

Diane's 11-year-old daughter, Sandrine, did what most girls her age do on a school day; she went out to meet the school bus. A few minutes after sitting with her friends, on the fateful day, May 25, 1999, the bus was stuck by a pickup truck. Having run through a stop sign, the truck crashed into the front corner of the bus, flipping it over several times before it finally landed on its side. The kids were sitting and chatting with their friends one minute and the next were thrown from one side of the bus to the other with Sandrine unconscious at the site. The driver of the pickup truck was declared dead immediately.

As owner of Corporate Class Inc., and image and etiquette coaching company based in Toronto, Diane was away on business when she received the dreaded call saying that Sandrine had been in an accident. Heading immediately to the airport and taking the first flight home, Diane rushed immediately to the ICU to see her precious daughter, "Sandrine looked beautiful," states Diane. "Her porcelain skin was without a mark." However, Diane was told that her young daughter had severe brain trauma and the next day Sandrine was declared brain dead.

With her son Kenny at her side, Diane made the difficult decision to donate her daughter's organs and tissue. "Sandrine's death had to have a purpose for me and helping others was the best way I knew how to do this." This wasn't an easy decision for Diane. Having lost her husband Shawn four years earlier to cancer, Diane and Sandrine became extremely close as a way of coping.

"Kenny was away in Calgary competing at the International Junior Cup Championship when Shawn died," says Diane, "so Sandrine and I were each other's support." Rituals and schedules became important to both. In fact, a new ritual called *"talking time"* was created to ease the transition from day into night. *"At eight o'clock we would cuddle together, read a book and then head off to bed."*

Most nights the pair would sleep together in Diane's bed but one night Sandrine offered some fortuitous advice. At bedtime she was sitting on her own bed and listening to music on her Discman, when her mother asked if she was coming to bed. Sandrine looked up at her mother and said, "You know, Mommy, very soon you will have to learn to sleep alone." Little did Diane know how soon that day would come.

As a single mom with two young children Diane was faced with the daunting task of making her business a success as the sole provider for the family. The feeling of guilt often associated with a working mother frequently rose in Diane as she was called away due to her work. But Sandrine was always supportive of her mom and what she was doing.

"Sandrine was a social butterfly and understood the need to help." For this reason Diane threw herself wholeheartedly into the business after Sandrine's death. She also created the Sandrine Gift of Life campaign (sandrinesgiftoflife.com) to help increase organ and tissue donation awareness. *"It was a way to still be close to her."*

Out of despair grows hope. Many in the community rallied around the cause and provided \$350,000 in contributions. As well, members of the community offered to help with the promotion of the campaign by videotaping, advertising and providing graphic design.

"It was devastating to everyone who read heard about it because it could have happened to anyone," Diane says about the tragedy.

For her tireless efforts related to this cause Diane has received much deserved acclaim. From Governor General Adrienne Clarkson she received the Meritorious Service Decoration, an award for individuals whose specific achievements have brought honour to Canada. Diane has also been appointed to the board of the Trillium Gift of Life Network, a not-for-profit agency of the Government of Ontario responsible for planning, promoting, coordinating and supporting organ and tissue donation across the province. She has also worked with national associations including the United Way of Canada, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, the Canadian Healthcare Association, the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. Diane was also a member of the Canadian Council for Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation and was appointed to the Premier's Advisory Board, set up to evaluate and make recommendations to restructure the transplantation system in Ontario.

All the while, Diane was focusing on her company and raising her oldest child Kenny. "When Shawn died, Kenny was at the World Cup in Calgary and when I called him about Sandrine, he was again in Calgary," says Diane. Sadly, Kenny never returned to skiing after that. "I needed to survive for him." And survive she did.

The increased awareness of organ and tissue donations has helped ease the pain felt from the loss of Sandrine. Nothing will ever bring her little girl back, but Diane has learned that she has to keep moving forward. Even after eight years Diane still feels a mother's grief, something that will never go away. But through her work with organ and tissue donations and the help of her son she has survived.

This article has been edited and condensed