

*In The*

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TLIGHT



*Michelle Anthony Class of 1981*

Michelle graduated from St. Rita School for the Deaf in 1981. Twenty-two years later she still says being a student at St. Rita was the best experience of her life. After spending several years at an oral school and two years at a public school, she decided to join her deaf friends at St. Rita in 1974. Those next seven years leading up to graduation were bittersweet for Michelle. They were filled with laughter, heartache, and wonderful friendships that still remain today. When she was a little girl she said all she wanted to be was “normal” like her hearing brother. But her destiny had a different path in store for her. Her experiences as a student at St. Rita and as an adult woman, didn’t pave way for normalcy. Today she is anything but ordinary. She is changing lives and doing everything she possibly can to strengthen the deaf community.

It seems Michelle has always been a leader. She was student council president, involved in the school plays, and joined just about every team sport at St. Rita. As a student, she learned how to be independent and to respect all people. She was told she could accomplish any goal that she set for herself. She lived in the dorm and remembers one mischievous time she and some of her girlfriends played a little joke on Sister Bernadette Marie. They just couldn’t imagine what Sister Bernadette Marie would look like without her conservative black habit. Their imaginations ran wild when it came to picturing what she wore to bed at night. So, they devised a plan to sneak a peek at her evening attire. A few strange noises from Michelle’s dorm room was enough to wake the curious, yet unsuspecting nun. Holding back their girly giggles, they ran to the door with nervous anticipation. It was experiences like these that built meaningful friendships for Michelle. They were friendships that helped her through some very difficult times in her life. They were friends that eventually became her family.

One of the pictures you see on this page is Michelle at her senior prom. While most of her classmates were looking forward to their lives after high school, Michelle’s world was turned upside down when her mother died just two months before her graduation. Overcome with sadness, she drew closer to her father and felt a need to spend a few special hours with him before she would depart from high school. Her dad seemed like the perfect date to prom, and he was. That night they danced and talked through their grief together. Thoughts of those father-daughter dances still bring a smile to her face today.



*Michelle at the Senior Prom*

After graduation Michelle spent two years at NTID (National Technical Institute for the Deaf). She wanted to continue with her studies but felt a strange longing to spend some time with her father back in Dayton. It was a month she will never forget. They were the

best and the last precious days she had with her loving father, who died suddenly a short time later. The friends she had made as a child quickly became her new family. With their help, she said she was able to make it through the toughest ten years of her life.



*Michelle thinks it was cake...*

Today, it is Michelle helping other people through life. She is determined to get her masters degree in social work and help deaf people improve their lives. She lives in Dayton with her two sons, Philip (eighteen) and Robert (fifteen), who are both hearing but use sign language to communicate with her. She is attending Sinclair Community College and works full-time at Community Services for the Deaf in Dayton. For seven years she worked as a case manager for CSD helping deaf people find the assistance they needed. Just recently, Michelle started a new job working as an early intervention specialist. She now helps young deaf children and their parents learn sign language and understand deaf culture. But her work doesn’t even begin to stop there. She also started Deaf Kid’s Club and Deaf Teen Club in Dayton, both of which offer deaf kids an opportunity to get together once a month for fun activities. In the summer she runs a deaf camp in Kettering, Ohio and still finds time to lead her deaf mud-volleyball team to victory. Michelle is also the President of the Dayton Deaf Club and the Secretary for St. Rita’s Alumni Association. To say she is busy is an understatement.

One of the last questions Michelle answered during our interview was, *who would you most like to meet, living or dead?* Without hesitation and with a sparkle in her eye, she said, “My mom and dad”. “I would tell them I love them and that I miss them”, she went on to say. It would be interesting to know what words Michelle’s mom and dad would share with her. One could only guess, that with admiring eyes they look to their daughter with pride for the struggles she has overcome and the determination she has for helping the deaf community.