

“We couldn’t believe that it could happen to him – but it did.”

- *Shannon Payne*



“How could this be? Is this real? Somebody please wake me up.” Those were the thoughts running through Shannon Payne’s mind after learning her husband Craig was killed in a trucking accident on a narrow logging road near Burns Lake, a small community in Northern B.C.

Craig’s death rocked the tight-knit community where Shannon and Craig were born and went to

school together. Married for over 13 years, the two shared a good life with their two boys, their many long-time friends, and family.

Often called upon by his friends to lend a hand because he could “build or fix anything,” Craig loved the outdoors, golfing, fishing, and hunting — but his greatest passion was spending time with his wife and sons.

“No matter how busy he was, Sunday was ours,” remembers Shannon. “Craig worked long hours in the truck, leaving the house as early as 3:00 a.m., and getting home as late as 6:00 p.m. But he was never in a bad mood and I respected him so much for that.”

Even though Craig worked long hours, Shannon never worried because he was a safe and conscientious driver. “Everyone around this area also knew that and couldn’t believe it could happen to him — but it did.”

When their nephew Matt called the morning of February 8, 2003 to ask if his uncle Craig was at home, Shannon didn’t give it a second thought, and told him she was expecting Craig at around 10:30 a.m. Matt had heard about a truck accident on one of the logging roads where Craig routinely hauled logs.

“Soon after Matt called, my brother Steven phoned and said he thought Craig had been in an accident, but he didn’t know for sure,” says Shannon. “I started to panic and tried Craig’s cell phone while the boys tried reaching him on the radio phone — but we couldn’t reach him.

“About 30 minutes later I got the call from Steven. I asked him if Craig was okay. He said, ‘No Shan, he’s not, he’s dead.’

“I can remember falling to the floor and looking over at my kids, then being lifted up by some other force and going to them. Little did I know that at the time of Matt’s call, Craig had already been taken from us. Just like that, I lost the love of my life — my one true soul mate — and my boys lost their dad.”

That fateful morning, Craig had been in radio contact with the other log-hauling truck driver headed towards him on the same road. They confirmed each other’s location along the road — or so they thought. With nowhere to manoeuvre, the two enormous trucks collided on a blind corner at the bottom of a hill. The force of the impact was so great that the massive load on the other truck crashed through the cab of Craig’s truck, killing him instantly.

Radio control (to announce your position on the road to other truckers) and line of sight are often the only methods of navigating the narrow logging roads Craig traveled for years as an independent trucker. “Craig was never a big fan of squeezing his 12-foot-wide truck through that particular narrow stretch of road (4.5 metre, about 14 ½ ft), but he knew he had a job to do,” says Shannon. “I guess if there’s any lesson in this tragedy, it’s that people should speak up if they know something’s dangerous.”

Today, Shannon and her boys take comfort among family and friends. At an annual gathering in Craig’s memory, they share a meal and remember a man who touched so many with his hearty smile and twinkly blue eyes. Into the heavens they release helium balloons filled with personal messages meant to get closer to the man they will always love and admire.

“I never dreamed I’d have to or be able to speak in front of a group of people, but I feel strongly about bringing husbands and wives home safely to their families. So I can and will do it. I’m always searching for just one more thing I can do for Craig and I know he would be so proud of me for doing this. If by sharing my story I can change just one person’s thinking for one second into taking the time to do things the right way — the safe way — it will be worth it. My message is this: Always be as safe as you can, never take life for granted, and if you love someone, don’t be afraid to tell them. Craig’s last words to me were, ‘I love you.’”

*Shannon Payne*