

## Prologue

# A Day Unlike Any Other

April 20, 1980 begins as any other Sunday for Colette Bourgonje.<sup>1</sup> She has small plans for the day, and bigger plans for the rest of her life. Spring is in the air. It is the season of hope, renewal and rebirth.

Colette is excited and enthusiastic about what the future holds for her. At 18 years of age, she is almost finished high school. Graduation takes place in just two months. She has her whole life ahead of her and it looks exciting!

The Bourgonje home is already filled with Colette's trophies and medals. In particular, Colette has been widely recognized as an athlete with the potential to further excel nationally in track and distance running. Local newspaper clippings reveal a beaming, confident Colette, proud of her accomplishments in many sports including track and field, badminton, volleyball, basketball, hockey and football.

Colette is a small-town girl with big dreams and great determination. Everyone who knows her has a feeling that she will go far. The people in her hometown of Porcupine Plain, Saskatchewan (300 kilometres

northeast of the big city of Saskatoon) are proud of this young athlete and are anxiously watching to see what she will accomplish next. They can't wait until she puts their little town on the map. They are sure it will happen.

The early morning sun beams brightly into Colette's bedroom window and even though it is the weekend, she rises. Stifling a yawn and throwing back the covers, she jumps out of bed. She has made a running date with Joi Belyk. Although Joi is her teacher and high school track coach, Joi is only a few years older than Colette and the two enjoy training together.

They plan to run the trails through the hills and forests surrounding Porcupine Plain. It is a great workout and Colette is looking forward to it. This is what she lives for – to get out of bed each day and be not only active, but pushing forward toward her goal of being the best athlete she can be.

Eager to be off, Colette jumps into her running clothes, pulls on her running shoes and slips quietly out the door. She can eat later. Now, it's time to exercise.

In the early morning calm, it feels just like any other Sunday, full of the promise of a relaxed day. Colette doesn't know it yet, but this day will soon become a pivotal point in her young life. It will be a day of lasts...and a day of firsts.

For now, though, Colette is going for a run. The sun is shining and life is good.

The main street is deserted. Colette jogs easily past the closed stores and businesses, her dark hair bouncing on her shoulders. She can see Joi waiting for her at the corner and she feels adrenalin begin to pump through

## Chapter Four

# Overcoming Roadblocks

*“Just do it!” – Colette*

Soon after the accident, Colette was visited in the hospital by Barbara Dorsey, a professor in the College of Physical Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Colette was surprised by this visit from a woman she had never met.

Dorsey didn't know Colette but had heard about her from Bill Thon, one of Colette's high school teachers. Thon knew how devastated Colette must have been feeling and he searched for a way to provide her with some hope for the future. He decided to ask his friend, the university professor, to visit the young athlete in hospital.

“Bill said that there had been a terrible accident and that it wouldn't be easy to go see Colette,” Dorsey recalled. “He also said that Colette wanted to go into the College of Physical Education.”

When Dorsey visited Colette, she took a University of Saskatchewan calendar with her. “It was a very difficult visit,” Dorsey recalled. “I remember seeing her track shoes sitting in a corner of the room.” To Dorsey, it felt surreal, knowing that this young woman would never walk or run again.

Dorsey spent a long time talking to Colette about university and going through the university calendar with her that day. It was the distraction that Colette needed.

Focusing on something other than herself and her injuries was a brief respite from the realities confronting her. Colette was very interested in everything Dorsey had to say about university life and the College of Physical Education. Dorsey encouraged Colette to attend university and she promised to visit the young paraplegic again.

Colette latched onto the university calendar Dorsey brought her as though it was her life line. She then became more determined than ever that she would go to university in the fall, even though she was now confined to a wheelchair and had not yet completed Grade 12.

No one in Colette's immediate family had ever attended university. Her uncle Don was principal of the elementary school in Porcupine Plain and had been Colette's Grade 6 teacher, but none of her siblings or parents had ever attained a postsecondary education. If Colette went to university, she would be forging a new path for her nuclear family, in a wheelchair.

Dorsey didn't realize it then, but the short visit she paid to Colette that day was instrumental in altering the course of the young woman's life. Theirs became a symbiotic relationship. Dorsey provided Colette with the guidance, support and help she needed to seriously take on her next challenge in life. Although Dorsey thought she was just doing a friend a favour by paying a visit to this young woman, in Colette, Dorsey found a new friend and someone she could almost consider a