

Grieving mom stands in for U of C student at graduation



VALERIE FORTNEY

Daughter was killed in car crash

When Dianne Kimmett took her seat earlier this month among the graduating class of the University of Calgary's faculty of medicine, it was a touching moment shared by the mother of three and a sea of fresh young faces around her.

"It was such an incredible, powerful experience," says Dianne, who received

a standing ovation as she shakily made her way across the stage. "It was difficult for everyone to stay composed."

Seeing a student triumph over adversity to receive that coveted post-secondary diploma will occur many times during the coming weeks, as the university graduates thousands of students in a wide variety of disciplines.

But the presence of Dianne Kimmett among the gown-wearing graduates will be one remembered for a long time to come. That's because Kimmett, who graduated from nursing 30 years ago, wasn't receiving a diploma for herself.

On May 14, the U of C's faculty of medicine granted a posthumous degree to Dianne's daughter, Lindsay Kimmett.

Lindsay, a high-achieving and popular student, died

15 months ago, when the car she was riding in rolled off the road just a few kilometres from her family's acreage near Cochrane.

After being notified of the posthumous degree — a rare occurrence — Dianne and her husband Kelly decided that mom should do the honours of standing in for Lindsay. But it wasn't an easy decision.

"It was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life," Dianne says Monday morning as we sit together in her beautiful home filled with framed photographs of Lindsay and her two brothers, Taylor and Reid.

"It brought a certain finality to things, which was really hard on all of us," agrees Kelly, a pharmacist in Cochrane.

"Lindsay should have been there, after all those years of hard work. She was the smartest person I'd ever

met."

Had she lived, Lindsay would certainly have been among the successful 2009 graduates of the U of C's department of medicine.

When she died Feb. 17, 2008, she was well into her second year of medical school.

From a young age, Lindsay was gifted not only with a sharp intelligence, but also wisdom beyond her years. The winner of a Governor General's medal for highest marks in her graduating year at Cochrane High School, the valedictorian for the class of 1999 devoted her address to an all-too-often overlooked virtue, humility.

After receiving a degree with distinction in kinesiology at the U of C in 2004, Lindsay committed to a medical career.

SEE FORTNEY, PAGE B7

FROM B1

FORTNEY: Unforgotten

"We never pushed one way or the other, because we know how challenging the medical field can be," says Dianne, "but once she made up her mind, we were happy for her."

Lindsay took life on with gusto. When she wasn't studying, she kept busy playing hockey and volunteering, and set a goal to see as many countries as her years. At her death at age 26, she had been to 25 countries, which included an ascent to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro.

"She really had a carpe diem attitude — a seize the day approach to life," says Kelly. "We're trying to remember that now, as we try and move forward."

Another way they are handling their grief is to help Lindsay leave a legacy, in the form of the Lindsay Leigh Kimmett Memorial Foundation (administered through the Calgary Foundation). Among other charitable local and international endeavours,

Lindsay Leigh Kimmett Prize in Emergency Medicine, to be given out annually to a qualified U of C student specializing in emergency medicine.

The heartbroken parents look to their ongoing charities in Lindsay's name (www.lindsaykimmett.com) as well as community support for solace as they continue to cope with their loss.

"One thing you learn is how good people can be," says Kelly. "We've been blessed by so much kindness."

At the May 14 graduation, says Dianne, "we saw that although they'd gone on with their lives, Lindsay's classmates hadn't forgotten her."

"If she's given them one gift in her passing, it's the gift of understanding the devastation of loss. And that is going to make them better doctors."