

RI NEWSMAKERS

Tori Lynn Andreozzi's life of courage and determination inspired others

Rhode Island woman left a quadriplegic after a drunk driver hit her, remembered for her courage and perseverance

By [Amanda Milkovits](#) Globe Staff
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NARRAGANSETT, R.I. — She was just 12 and already a champion martial artist, performing with a determined expression. She was the thoughtful little sister who emulated her big brother. She could kick over her head, perform splits, and dance. She was almost a teenager.

Then, on March 26, 2003, as the siblings got off a school bus and were walking to their home in West Warwick, a drunk driver roared up behind them. And the future that should have belonged to Tori Lynn Andreozzi was gone.

The crash caused permanent brain injuries that left Tori unable to move or speak, and needing continuous care for the rest of her



The 2003 crash left Tori Lynn Andreozzi a quadriplegic, yet Tori returned to ballroom dance, performing in her wheelchair at a National Fred Astaire Ballroom Dance competition. CATHY ANDREOZZI

life. The judge handed down one of the lengthiest drunk driving sentences at the time — 10 years — because he saw that the hit-and-run crash had left the little girl with her own life sentence.

Tori died early Tuesday, on All Saints' Day, 19 years and seven months after the crash. She was 32. In that time, she left a legacy for Rhode Islanders, about making the right choices, making a difference, and defying the odds.

“One of things that Tori would want people to know, that I want people to know, is that Tori lived, she really lived,” Tori’s mother, Cathy Andreozzi, told the Globe on Tuesday. “It’s not the life she should have had, but everything she could reach, she did.”

Tori wasn’t expected to survive, but she did. Doctors told her family to put her in an institution; instead, Andreozzi took her daughter their new home in Narragansett and cared for her full-time, and then found ways to bring the world to Tori.

The crash had left Tori a quadriplegic, yet Tori returned to ballroom dance, performing in her wheelchair at a National Fred Astaire Ballroom Dance competition. She took part in an obstacle course race on the beach in honor of her older brother, Robert, who died in 2018. She rode a horse again.

Her mother remembered how Tori’s eyes lit up and her body seemed to straighten in her wheelchair when the dance instructor escorted her out onto the floor in front of a cheering crowd. She remembered Tori’s tender gaze and how her raised eyebrows could express what she couldn’t say. How, after all the years of caregiving, there seemed to be no separation between mother and daughter. She often said it was hard to tell where the girl ended and the mother began.



Tori Lynn Andreozzi, at 12, was a blackbelt in karate. CATHY ANDREOZZI

She also learned which question mattered.

“As we all ask ourselves Why? and What if?, that’s paralyzing. I always ask, What now? Because we can’t go back,” Andreozzi said. “As a mom you want your kids to be happy and live a full life. ... [Tori’s life] was the same, but different. The bottom line is, you want them to be happy. I can truly say Tori had joy in her life.”

She established the [Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation](#) to work with national and state programs to educate young people about good decision-making, promote legislation to improve highway safety, draw awareness to traumatic brain injuries, and support families dealing with tragedy. The foundation also funds DanceAbility, a wheelchair ballroom dance program, developed with the Fred Astaire Dance Studios of Narragansett.

In 2018, Andreozzi spoke about the crash for the state Department of Transportation’s campaign against drunken driving, the “Ripple Effect.” In powerful videos, Andreozzi described how it devastated the family. (The drunk driver was released from prison

“RIDOT was saddened to learn of Tori’s passing today and our condolences go out to her mother Cathy and the entire Andreozzi family,” DOT spokesperson Charles St. Martin said. “We remain forever grateful for Cathy’s courage to come forward and share Tori’s story, inviting everyone into their lives to see the devastating consequences of impaired driving. In telling her story, we hope it moves people to make the right choice, to take responsibility for their actions and never drive while drunk or high.”

State Police Superintendent Col. Darnell S. Weaver said Tori was “a bright light to all who knew her.”

“Her life was a tribute to finding joy despite the tragedy she endured,” Weaver said Tuesday evening. “Our troopers work every day to prevent the kinds of senseless crashes that changed her life and the memory of Tori and other drunk driving victims motivates us to keep our roads safe by strictly enforcing impaired driving laws.”

Robert Garguilo, the executive director for Mothers Against Drunk Driving New England, said they were devastated by Tori’s death.

“We learned from Tori and her perseverance. Cathy would tell me she never met anyone stronger,” Garguilo said. “People need to know her story, because this is the real world, and this is happening.”

Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration are showing a rise in fatal crashes involving impairment, Garguilo said. In 2019 and 2020, even with fewer miles traveled, there were more fatal crashes involving alcohol, he said.

Rhode Island had the second highest percentage of fatal crashes with impaired drivers, at 40 percent; the national average is 28 percent.

“It can happen to us. It can happen to you or me,” Garguilo said. “As a culture, we have to realize this isn’t right.”

Attorney General Peter F. Neronha said he was saddened by the news of Tori’s death.

“Over the years, I have had the privilege to get to know Tori and her wonderful family. Theirs is a story of courage, inspiration, and ultimately, hope,” Neronha said in a statement Tuesday. “Tori’s family, and especially her mother Cathy, have taken a tragic occurrence and through Tori’s life, as well as the Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation, amplified a message of awareness to help prevent impaired driving and the trauma associated with it. She leaves behind a legacy that has touched, and will continue to touch, the lives of so many.”

Andreozzi said she will continue the foundation’s work. In [Tori’s obituary](#), she also asks people to honor Tori by “paying it forward” with random acts of kindness. She said it was something Tori loved.

Visiting hours are Friday, 4 to 8 p.m., at the Thomas & Walter Quinn Funeral Home, 2435 Warwick Ave., Warwick. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held Saturday at 11 a.m. at St. Kevin Church, 333 Sandy Lane, Warwick. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation, P.O. Box 3326, Narragansett, RI, 02882.