

Dear Friends:

As many of you know I had the privilege of participating in a “Share the Road Ride” last summer in Sudbury with Olympian Devon Kershaw. Sadly, like our “Share the Road Ride For Greg Ride”, this was also in memoriam -- Devon and I have forged a bond as a result of the most unfortunate of circumstances. He lost his girlfriend Sophie nine years ago when he was just eighteen. They were on a training ride together when she was killed on her bike. Understandably it had a profound impact on this wonderful young man.

The story in the January 27, 2010 Star provides an account of Devon’s loss and his decision to make a difference. He is very passionate about the need to make our roads safer for all.

*Source: Toronto Star...*

## **Skier Devon Kershaw's long road back from girlfriend's death**



*It has taken a long time, but Canadian Olympian Kershaw is overcoming the death of Sofie Manarin*

*January 27, 2010 - Randy Starkman*

*Devon Kershaw inscribed the initials on every pair of his skis. DIFS: Do It For Sofie.*

*It was a tribute to his girlfriend and best friend, fellow cross-country skier Sofie Manarin, only 17 when she was killed on her bicycle after swerving into the side of a tractor-trailer.*

*The couple had ridden off together that summer morning in 2001, but were training separately in their hometown of Sudbury, Ont.*

*The image from the worst day of Kershaw's life remains seared in his brain and his soul: coming upon the accident scene, the commotion, the sirens, all the cars stopped. As he gets closer, he sees Manarin's bike lying on the road, completely mangled. "I know whose bike that is," he tells a policewoman in an anguished voice.*

*The days and months after that night were a mere blur. Kershaw moved to Canmore, Alta., to compete that winter, but he was a shell of himself. He was trying to race for two people when he didn't have the physical, mental or emotional reserves to even do it for one.*

*"Every time I'd be dying in a race, I wouldn't think about the fact I hadn't slept for five months or my training had been a disaster or I lost my best friend," Kershaw recalls. "I was beating myself up, saying, 'Pick up the pace, c'mon let's go!' I'm looking down, 'Do it for her, c'mon you got to. She would love to be here and she doesn't have that opportunity.' I did that for a whole year."*

*It was a difficult road back, one that in this Olympic season finally returned him to his hometown this past summer. Oh, he'd been back since the accident, but not in a real sense. He'd go home and visit his family and some close friends, but couldn't leave fast enough. The wounds were still too raw.*

*"It still hurt and I didn't want to hang out there very long," he said. "But there's a lot of people who meant a lot to me growing up and helped me a lot in life and in sport. I wouldn't connect with them when I was in Sudbury. It was almost as if I'd lost my hometown kind of thing."*

*He got it back last summer, in the most meaningful way.*

*Kershaw staged a bike ride with Share the Road, an advocacy group promoting the importance of sharing the road safely in order to prevent tragedies. He teamed up with the organization's founder, Eleanor McMahon, whose husband, OPP Sgt. Greg Stobbart, was killed while on a training ride on his bike in June 2006.*

*Kershaw was haunted that it might happen to someone else and that he'd have done nothing to improve the situation. He said the roads around his hometown can be unfriendly for cyclists and he's nervous riding there to this day.*

*Kershaw was supported on the ride by his girlfriend, Olympic cross-country ski champion Chandra Crawford, who was also a friend and teammate of Manarin.*

*“I’d been talking about it a lot. So Chandra said, ‘Why don’t you do something about it?’ ” said Kershaw.*

*“I have a hard time describing how much it meant. It was very, very moving and I feel very lucky to be involved in a community like that, that remembers first of all and wants to make a difference and wants to support stuff like that. It’s pretty amazing.” The major stop on the ride was the site where Manarin died. There’s a pretty little park near the bypass, called Sofie’s Park, where a monument was created with a marble rock and a picture of her skiing, made from Italian tiles from her father’s family’s home village.*

*John Manarin came out and spoke that night about his daughter to the 200-some riders. There is a bursary given out each year in her name by Cross Country Canada to assist up-and-coming skiers. She was a two-time Canadian junior gold medallist and the top-ranked North American at the 2001 world junior championships.*

*Kershaw has kept in touch with John Manarin, dropping in on his infrequent visits home. Manarin often sends a congratulatory email when Kershaw has performed well — he has three World Cup medals in his career and is regarded as the team’s top all-around skier heading into the Olympics.*

*The two men have never really discussed what happened that fateful day.*

*“I often thought it was harder on him because by the time I got to the accident everything was cleaned up,” Manarin said. “He came right upon it. I’m sure that affected him.” Not only did Kershaw arrive on the scene shortly after the accident, but the police took him to the hospital and had him go into Manarin’s room to identify her. He said he didn’t want to, but they insisted on it. The doctors told him she was brain dead, that he would see some vital signs but to not get his hopes up.*

*“That was the moment that my life changed completely,” Kershaw said. “I saw her. I’m not a religious person. I don’t go to church. But I will say when you see somebody who’s not there any more, it’s pretty crazy. She looked exactly like she looked the moment I left her, but there was an energy that was missing.*

*It was not there. It was pretty crushing.*

*“Before the accident, I was the classic kind of athletic teenager that thought you’re invincible and you’re going to live to 100. . . . You know like ‘Nothing bad’s ever happened to me.’ Then, all of a sudden, reality kind of hits.” And it hit hard. Kershaw moved to Canmore shortly after to start training with the national team, but his heart wasn’t in it and he thought about quitting. He was an insomniac.*

*He was afraid to sleep because of the nightmares he was sure would come.*

*It would be a full year before some of his passion for skiing was rekindled.*

*There was a young coach, Mike Cavalier, who took him under his wing on a trip with a group of older skiers in the spring of 2002.*

*“I raced and, for the first time, I didn’t look down at my skis,” Kershaw said. “I raced for me and I loved it, I truly loved what I was doing.*

*And all of a sudden I was like, ‘Man, skiing’s fun.’ And the results were amazing.*

*“Mike talked with me a lot. He said, ‘What you’re doing is counterproductive.*

*How can you expect to race for two people? You have to race for yourself if that’s what you want to do or you don’t race.’ “That’s kind of the decision I made during that spring series, that I was going to race for me again.”*

Devon and I did the ride together, and as we stopped at the site of Sophie’s memorial he embraced her family. I had the chance to meet them and we spent some time together. The feeling was all too familiar.

This is not the first time that Devon has decided to share his story, his commitment to our organization and his passion for making our roads safer. His decision to share a private and very painful time in his life is ultimately unselfish – he does so in the hopes of leveraging his status as an Olympian to raise awareness of the importance of sharing the road. He is turning a tragedy into something positive.

Both he and his girlfriend—and fellow Olympian – Chandra Crawford will represent our country at the Olympics. I hope you will follow their progress. I feel fortunate to know them both.

As always, thank you for your friendship and support.

With best regards,

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