

---

# The Gagne Gazette

---

Snapshots from My Life, *Deanne Gagne, PIC (Person In Charge)* June 1, 1972... and on

---

## AN ADVOCATE IS BORN!



**CLAIRE GAGNE  
GIVES BIRTH TO TWINS-**

Darlene Eva and Deanne Elaine were born only moments apart on June 1, 1972. The doctors said neither twin was expected to live.

Darlene had a congenital heart defect and survived for only five months. Deanne was born with cerebral palsy. At the most, doctors said she would not walk, talk, or have any use of her limbs.

28 years later, Deanne lives in her own apartment in Johnston, RI. She leads a busy life as a world traveler, public speaker, advocate and part-time college student.

Guess those doctors were **WRONG!**  
Read on to find out more!

## READY TO ROLL

I began to speak up for myself early in life. I was the first person to request and receive a customized pink wheelchair. It happened when I was just 10 years old.

After finding out that I'd be receiving a new wheelchair, I was disappointed to learn that the company did not make them in my favorite color. Rather than take "no" for an answer, I wrote a letter to the company president.

### **Pawtucket**



*Deanne with her new chair  
in the local newspaper!*

*"I am getting a new electric wheelchair from your company. I would like a pink one, but you do not have pink. Would you please get pink? I am sure other little girls would also like pink. You have blue for boys. We girls would like pink."*

My request was unheard of, but the firm, Invacare Corp. of Ohio, listened. I got my pink chair! It just goes to show you what can happen when you speak up for the things you really want in life!

## CHILDHOODSTAR and HOT DATE FOR THE PROM!

1979 was a special year for me. I had been going to Meeting Street School since I was six years old. They taught me how to talk, crawl, and even walk by using crutches! I will always be grateful!

In 1979 I was chosen as their “poster child”. That meant that I was on their telethon and I helped raise money for the school.



I left Meeting Street later that year to attend a public school. I was afraid at first, but soon learned that I was not different than any of the other kids there. Once they got to know me, my chair didn't matter.

Years later I found that was still the case! People think just because I use a wheelchair, my boy-friends will also have a disability. My dates for both the junior and senior prom proved this wrong - and we have a *GREAT* time!

## HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

*In high school I had three dreams:*

- ☺ I wanted to graduate and walk across the stage to get my diploma
- ☺ I wanted to go to college
- ☺ I wanted to study and become a social worker

In June of 1991 I was thrilled to see my dreams come true as I walked across the stage to get my diploma. I had to use crutches to do it, but when I heard the audience give me a standing ovation I felt like I could have just floated across!



After high school I was accepted at the Community College of Rhode Island. I'm working on my Associates Degree. Guess what? My degree will be in Social Work!

## A FEW OF THE HIGHLIGHTS

I'm THRILLED to be leading a very busy and rewarding life!  
Here are a few of the things I'm proud to have accomplished:



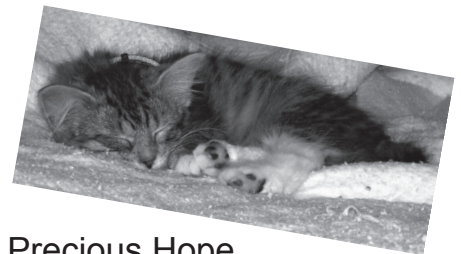
- I am a 1996 graduate of Partners in Policymaking-RI
- I work as a Co-Coordinator for Advocates in Action, 1996-present
- I was part of a team that represented Rhode Island at the 4th National Self-Advocacy Conference in Oklahoma in 1994. We returned home having won the bid to host the year 2000 National Conference in Providence.
- I helped coordinate the National Self-Advocacy Conference in Providence in 2000
- I attend various conferences and meetings around the country and across the globe. These have included trips to Ohio, New York, Washington DC, Alaska and Holland!
- I visit elementary schools to teach children about having a disability and respecting each other.
- I graduated with an Associates Degree from CCRI in 2001 and BA in Social Work from Rhode Island College.

### MY FAMILY MADE THE DIFFERENCE!

I've heard stories about people whose parents sent them away because they had a disability. Every time I hear one it makes me love my family even more. I never felt "special" growing up, I was just Deanne. I was loved by my parents, encouraged by my grandparents, and harrassed by my stepbrothers (like any other family member!)



*My Mom and Stepdad*



Lucky and Precious Hope  
"My Babies"



*My Grandparents*

I don't think parents put their kids into an institution by choice. I think they just don't have enough information and support. I wouldn't blame any parent for the choices they had to make. I would just encourage people to help each other and be creative. Look for the best in life! ... And I would share the lessons I've learned from my family!



*My Dad and I*

## MY LIFE!!

25 years ago, the doctors told my mom I would either die or I'd be a "vegetable". In fact, I'm the only one of my four siblings to have survived, and I'm still going strong!

I want to thank my mom for everything she has done. Thank you, mom, for believing in me and standing by me when others turned aside.



*Thank you, Mom!!*



*At the International SA Conference in Alaska*

Today I can't believe how busy my life has become! I work for Advocates in Action. That is Rhode Island's statewide Self-Advocacy organization. I travel throughout the state, across the country and even around the world to share my life's story. I also speak about issues that affect people who have a disability and things that we can do about them.

I've learned so much! To everyone who reads this that does not have a disability, remember that we are all the same inside. If you can see past my wheelchair, you might just find a friend for life!

To everyone who reads this who has a disability, remember to keep on dreaming! Dream the biggest best dream that you can! Then go ahead and press on to make it become real!! It's your life - don't let people talk you out of it!

And to *everyone* who reads this, remember that we are all in this together!



*Winning the National Conference Bid in Oklahoma*



*With AinA Co-Coordinator  
Kevin McHale  
At Ride the Wave 2000*



*Sharing My Story  
in Holland, 1998*

*Material developed by*

**Advocates in Action  
Box 41528  
Providence, RI 02940-1528**

**Phone: 401-785-2028**

[deannegagne@advocatesinaction.org](mailto:deannegagne@advocatesinaction.org)  
[www.advocatesinaction.org](http://www.advocatesinaction.org)