Ellen Toll (1955 - 2015)

Obituary

Ellen Toll died in Anchorage, Alaska, on Monday, Jan. 19, 2015, from ovarian cancer. She was 59. A potluck celebration of her life will be held after the Sven Johannson Ski Race in the Kincaid Chalet on Saturday, Feb. 15, 2015. Celebrants are encouraged to race or cheer from the sidelines - a fitting tribute to Ellen as she excelled at both activities. Details can be found on the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage (NSAA) website (www.anchorageordnicski.com). Ellen was born on June 29, 1955, in Denver, Colo., to Henry and Lydica Toll. The third of five children, she grew up at a ski lodge, skiing, and involved in other winter sports. After high school, Ellen migrated east to Williams College, graduating in 1977 with a degree in geology. While at Williams, she nurtured a growing love for cross-country ski racing and became one of the first nationally known ski racers. Her stamina, strength, skill, and commitment to fair play and the sport qualified her to ski in the 1977 NCAA XC championships. After college, Ellen’s love for outdoor adventure led her to Peru, where she won the first descent of the Maranon River, one of the largest tributaries to the Amazon. In 1979, she married Dave Blanchet, who was in Denver for a temporary assignment from Alaska. Ellen resigned and, following a hiatus to focus on their family, moved to Anchorage to test the Alaska waters. Ellen fell in love not only with Dave, but with Alaska. In 1987, she began working for the State Attorney General’s office as a tax attorney. She was briefly fired in 1991, by Governor Hickel, for opposing state road construction on the Copper River, but quickly reinstated as public sentiment aligned against the Governor. Ellen and Dave took a “life time” job as they could spare from demanding jobs to hike, paddle, ski, and row in the wilds of Alaska. They were married in December 1989. In May 1997, Ellen gave birth to her daughter, Lydica, and unquestionably regarded this as her greatest life achievement. In 1999, she resigned her law job to follow her calling as a full-time mom. As with so many of her other endeavors, Ellen excelled at motherhood. She shared her passion for adventure with her daughter and husband through boating and backpacking expeditions in the Anchorage wilderness and trips to the American Southwest, Colorado, New England, Mexico, Europe, and South America. Through example, she showed Lydica how to navigate life with zest, determination, humility and compassion. As Lydica grew, Ellen took a larger and larger role in the Anchorage Nordic ski community. Ellen became Director of Anchorage Junior Nordic League in 2003, and over the next 11 years continually developed this landmark kid’s ski program. She became a staunch board member and secretary to NSAA and also served on the board of Cross Country Alaska. Ellen volunteered at countless school and citizen ski races, and for the last seven years worked with Dave to coordinate the Anchorage Middle School ski races. She has been an unassuming fan at almost all of her daughter’s races, encouraging everyone along the way. Ellen was driven by a strong sense of community and approached every task with energy, integrity and dedication. Ellen crafted gorgeous quilts that were an explosion of color. She loved creating them, but even more she delighted in giving them to others. Blueberries were rarely left unpicked if she was in the vicinity, and friends were not shy about begging for her trademark and infamously delicious “chocolate banana” cake. Ellen is survived by her husband, Dave Blanchet; daughter, Lydica Blanchet; mother, Lydia Toll; siblings, Wacky of New Mexico, Bill and Lois of Colorado, and Ned of Massachusetts, along with a large extended family and a wide network of friends. Ellen could not have been kinder, more loyal or accomplished. A worthy goal for those who will never stop missing her is to strive to live with the same grace and spirit. Donations in Ellen’s memory can be made to the Ellen Toll Trail Fund through the NSAA (203 W 15th Ave. #206, Anchorage, AK 99501).