

In Memory of Susan Butcher

August 5, 2006

Four-time Iditarod champion Susan Butcher died Saturday in a Seattle hospital.

Susan was 51 years old and the mother of two young children when she lost her battle with leukemia.

Susan grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She came to Alaska and carved out a niche for herself in the bush of Alaska while in her early twenties.

She liked spending time alone and through her twenties she dedicated her life to running a dogsled team and pursuing the goal of winning the Iditarod.

She ran her first Iditarod in 1978 and spent a grueling eight more years training before she won her 1st Iditarod Race.

She married Dave Monson in 1985 and won the first of her four Iditarods the next year. She would go on to win three more in the next four years.

Soon, Alaska became known as the state "Where men are men and women win the Iditarod."

In 1996 Susan decided to retire from mushing. She still continued, though, to breed and sell sled dogs and she regularly assisted various news organizations as a color-commentator.

Susan gave tourists a taste of dogsledding by giving them a glimpse of her dog yard and visiting with them as they floated down the Yukon River on a boat from Fairbanks.

"We were fortunate enough to meet her a few years ago. She came out and visited with us, showed us her place and was very friendly and open with us", remembered one tourist.

Susan was a part of the fiber of Alaska. Her life and personality



gave Alaska a certain characteristic that adds to its uniqueness.

Many Alaskans thought that Butcher had beaten the leukemia.

People up here kept up with her fight via the radio and the television. Everyone was rooting and praying for her. No one really thought she would be beaten by the leukemia because, after all, she always came out on top, somehow.

She did seem to have beaten it for awhile. She came home from the Seattle hospital where she had received her treatments and Alaskans thought, boy that was close.

Then word came early this spring that Susan was back in Seattle undergoing more treatments.

People in Alaska began to worry that maybe this wasn't going to go the way it was suppose to go. Maybe 'our girl' really was up against something bigger than she could handle this time. Alaskans began to pray once again.

Her husband and their two daughters, Tekla, 10, and Chisana, 5, returned to Seattle with her.

Doctors began aggressive treatments to try to stop transplanted bone-marrow cells from destroying Butcher's digestive tract. She was often in excruciating pain from the disease and the treatments.

Doctors eventually managed to turn back the GVHD with a combination of steroids and experimental drugs.

"Then to our dismay and surprise, about a week ago, when we did a routine bone marrow test, we found that her leukemia had come back," Abkowitz said.

Butcher was given a tough choice: go home and die, or begin another round of painful and potentially deadly chemotherapy to drive the leukemia into remission in preparation for another bone-marrow transplant.

A mother of young children really has no choice, she must continue to fight.

She resumed chemotherapy, but on Friday her condition worsened.

She was moved into an intensive care unit. Her husband was at her side when she died Saturday.

News of her death hit hard in Alaska. "She was too young to die and we are too shocked to let go." one Alaskan stated.

She made a difference in Alaska, in the sport of mushing and in the lives she touched. She will be greatly missed.

Iditarod legacy

Susan Butcher was a four-time Iditarod champion who finished in the top 10 in all but two of her 17 races.

1978 19 th	1987 1 st
1979 9 th	1988 1 st
1980 5 th	1989 2 nd
1981 5 th	1990 1 st
1982 2 nd	1991 3 rd
1983 9 th	1992 2 nd
1984 2 nd	1993 4 th
1985 Scratch	1994 10 th
1986 1 st	

Mushhusky!

1-888-866-0156

mushhusky@acsalaska.net

www.mushhusky.com