

Steve Will

Contributed by Sentinel Staff Writer
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A memorial for Steve Will, Raven Radio program director, will be held 6 p.m. Oct. 30 at Centennial Hall.

Steve died Oct. 5 in Seattle from injuries sustained in a bicycle accident here Aug. 29. He was 54.

George Steven Will was born June 5, 1954, in Bismarck, N.D., the son of George Francis and Evelyn (Prostel) Will. He was the fourth generation of the family that founded the Oscar H. Will Seed Company.

He graduated from high school in 1972 and spent the next months hitchhiking and backpacking before attending the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, in 1973-74, studying geology and German.

He loved the outdoors, and understanding the history and geology of places he felt deep emotional connections to -- especially the upper Great Plains, the Teton Mountains and the Missouri River.

In the summer of 1974 he worked for the U.S. Forest Service in the Dubois, Wyo., area -- and loved it. He wrote recently that it was a place that "arguably shaped me."

He had been turned on to climbing by his Grandpa Prostel, and continued for most of his life.

In early 1975 he joined his sister Susan in Fairbanks and was part of the climbing community while attending the University of Alaska Fairbanks. His brother Paul and sister Mars also moved to Fairbanks, joining Steve and his first wife Laurel Burns. In Fairbanks he worked in a variety of jobs that allowed him to be outside.

Steve spent over a decade doing as much serious climbing as possible, including ice climbing. He also took climbing trips to the Tetons and China. In 1984 he and three companions made the first ascent of the Fairbanks Spur of 13,832-foot Mt. Hayes in the eastern Alaska Range.

He graduated cum laude in May 1981 from UAF with a bachelor of arts degree in foreign languages (German and Chinese) and a minor in geology. He also attended university in Besancon, France, and Taipei, Taiwan, where he was an assistant professor of English at Soochow University.

He and Elizabeth Bailly were married in Fairbanks in 1983, and they had two daughters, Alexis and Clea; he was a stay-at-home papa when each was small. The family moved to Sitka in the fall of 1986, and he went to work for Raven Radio in 1987. Over the years he was a reporter, volunteer trainer, anchor, news director -- "If you heard it from three people, it's news," he would say.

He also worked for KTOO-FM in Juneau, was Coast Alaska regional correspondent and a reporter for the Daily Sitka Sentinel. He left Raven Radio in 2003, and was a paralegal and investigator for the Law Office of Michael Jude Pate, Law Office of Pate and Voluck, and then the State of Alaska Public Defender Agency.

He returned to Raven Radio, which he loved, in 2006, and was program director at the time of his death.

His Raven Radio shows included Air Traffic Control (he was the host, Xeno), Xeno and the Kid, Bathtub Jazz, Radio Isolation and, most recently, Break the Rack.

"Steve's intellect and compassion were equaled by his creative spark," said Ken Fate, his friend and colleague. "Xeno, Oscar, an ornery vacuum cleaner and a whole host of other radio theater characters came to life through Steve. His intimate and engaging radio presence was a source of comfort to many, and will inspire radio producers for years to come."

Steve won several honors for his work: Alaska Press Club awards for Best Reporting on the Environment, first place, 2001; Reporting on Education award, third place, 1990; and Best Use of Medium, first place.

Alaska Broadcasters Association awards included Best Radio Public Service Announcement, 1995; and Best Public Affairs Program, 1991.

He won the Silver Award for Local-Regional News from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting; and a Public Radio News Directors Association documentary award.

One of his last radio shows featured interviews and Czech music in a reflection on the Prague Spring of 1968. To prepare for another show, he had asked listeners to send in titles of songs with bad lyrics.

"He viewed radio as a way to have fun and broaden community connections," his family said.

His other favorite interests included making sourdough bread -- his sourdough originated from a call to Raven's Muskeg Message service asking for someone to share sourdough -- going kayaking with friends and family, playing pool, disk golfing, camping, listening to and playing music, gardening, working with the earth, climbing, and whichever NBA team was being coached by fellow North Dakotan Phil Jackson.

"Surfing his kayak on following seas was sure to trigger some of his biggest smiles," Fate said. "A fast paddler, he would sprint ahead ... but never too far ahead; he was always careful to stop and let the group raft up and rest."

In 2003 he helped found the Glorious Youth Parade, playing guitar and writing songs.

"Steve stood center stage as the lead guitarist," Fate said. Songs he penned include "Sitka Girl," "Eggs" "Dinosaur Red," and "Hula Hoop."

"He was a confident, kind and caring man," Fate said. "He was that rare caliber of man that could wear a top hat -- and did."

He married Cathy Poulson Feb. 2, 1999, in Sitka. Their daughter is Ariadne.

Steve especially loved little kids, and adored his three daughters, trying to foster in them a love of outdoors and interest in science, history and how the world works.

Fairly quiet by nature, Steve made friends with his patient listening and infectious grin, his family said.

He hated injustice and always strove to do the right thing.

"At times he seemed irreverent, but that stemmed from his honesty and his intellectual opposition to pretension," his family wrote. "He was never one to honor authority for authority's sake."

“While capable of being a world-class curmudgeon, he also possessed a generous capacity to express love and support with kind words and great hugs,” Fate said.

Survivors include his wife, Cathy Poulson, Sitka; daughters Alexis Will of Boulder, Colo., Clea Will, who is attending James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va., and Ariadne, Sitka; sisters Susan Will of Fairbanks and Mars Datura and husband James Baron of Aurora, Colo.; brother Paul Will, his wife, Beth, and their children, daughter Mika and son Forrest, of Aurora, Colo.; aunts Susan (Will) Arman of Minneapolis, Minn., and Helga (Prostel) and her husband Darryl Bindschadler of Cheyenne, Wyo.; cousins; and many, many valued friends.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to Raven Radio at ravenradio.org.