



Zuma's
Paw Prints

FAREWELL MY FRIEND

August 16, 2006

Hi Boys & Girls,

It is with a sad heart that I write to you about the passing of a very famous musher. Susan Butcher died on August 5, in a Seattle hospital after several months of battling Leukemia.

Susan was 51 years old and the mother of two daughters. Her husband, David Monson, said in a statement issued the following day:

"Susan left us at 3:25 pm August 5, 2006. It was peaceful, the rest after her greatest race. We told her we would be OK. That she had made us strong enough to carry on. When she was sure that we were ready, she was gone."

"Tonight the girls and I took a ferry to Bainbridge Island. It was a peaceful passage from the turmoil of the city to a quiet spot she loved. Tekla wore her mother's necklace and Chisana wore her rings. We sat silently near the shore and looked up. The sky was an explosion of stars. I asked Chisana which one she thought was her mom. She sat on my lap and studied the sky for a long time finally she pointed and said 'I think that one. But don't worry she is not alone.' Neither are we. She will be guiding us from that star."

I am going to miss her wonderful smile and her love of dogs, any and all dogs, but sled dogs in particular. She was a graduate veterinary technician but after studying a couple of years toward becoming a veterinarian, she gave it up to move to Alaska. She wanted to be with and to mush dogs. Susan was the first woman to finish in the top 20, the top 10 and the top 5. She was in the top five for all but five of the 17 races she started. She only scratched once and that was when her dogs were hurt by a moose attack in 1985. She was the first musher to win the race in three consecutive years (1986, 87, 88). This record wasn't broken until 2001 when Doug Swingley won the race for the third time. She and Joe Redington, Sr., Father of the Iditarod and an early mushing mentor of Susan's, are the only mushers to climb Mt. Denali (sometimes known as Mt. McKinley) with a dog team.

Susan was my friend. She was an incredible person, not just a musher. She was brave and didn't know how to quit; she was exciting and a wonderful friend to all dogs. I am proud to call her a friend and will tell future generations of pups about her and her famous lead dog, Granite.

As much as I'll miss her, I comfort myself thinking about how Susan



and Granite have been reunited on the other side of the Rainbow

Bridge. There they will mush the northern skies, shirting the shimmering Northern Lights in heavenly races. Godspeed my friend, you were a special friend and a special human being.

On Sunday, August 6, a bouquet of flowers, a copy of the Anchorage Daily News with the front page headline of Susan's passing and a single yellow rose appeared in front of the Joe Redington statue at the Iditarod offices in Wasilla. These arrived anonymously before the staff arrived for the day.



A memorial table was set up in front of the office with a guest book so that visitors who wanted to show their respects could do so by signing the book. Susan was beloved by people all over the world but she was loved and respected the most in her adopted state, Alaska. I'll miss her.

Until next time,



Lots of Tail Wags,
Zuma