

Who was Joel Zucker?

Joel was looking for a new job and told Steve Pattillo that members of 'special groups' are invited to apply. He said he was a member of the special group of short, Jewish, tattooed, ultra-running librarians.

Each summer, Joel slept on our floor in Silverton for about 10 days prior to running the Hardrock Hundred Endurance Run. He was from upstate New York and kindly asked if he could stay with us. In 1998, at the age of 44, he bid us goodbye the morning after finishing his third consecutive run saying he felt the best ever. A few hours later he suffered a fatal aneurism while riding in a car to the Albuquerque airport with his pacer Brian Scott. Kristina Irvin remembers him suffering excruciating headaches during the last 20 miles she ran with him. Joel had extremely high blood pressure he didn't treat with medication. Sister Lisa claims it was because he felt that running would make him healthy.

After his death, girlfriend Gail wrote:

He embraced challenge and risk, and ultrarunning provided him with both. I expect that he is now running the next challenge. I had found a quote that I was going to give to him when he got back and I'll share it with you now: "Every man dies, but not every man truly lives." Joel lived life to the fullest.

During the winter, Joel sent us postcards from his dogs Bob and Congo. He really looked forward to coming to Silverton. Unlike many of the other runners who came early to train before race day, Joel did not join the trail-marking crew that went out daily to plant little orange flags along the 100+-mile course. Instead, he ran up Kendal Mountain in the mornings and then retired to a bench on Greene Street in the afternoons, enjoying the mountain views, eating ice cream and petting dogs. He always carried dog biscuits in his pockets.

Joel was a good houseguest. Despite his stutter, he made it clear to anyone entering that they had to take off their muddy shoes. He was obsessive-compulsive and stacked all his clothes and running gear in neat little piles on a folding card table under which he slept. One friend thought these items were for sale. Once, when husband Charlie Thorn moved something, he was visibly shaken.

Joel inspired many back-of-the-pack runners to attempt their first 100-mile event. Each year he finished the 48-hour Hardrock Hundred run with only minutes to spare. Some people joked that he wanted to get his money's worth, but he struggled to finish on time, crediting his pacers Brian Scott and Carolyn Erdman with getting him through.

Joel's death was a shock to the running community. Along with Joe Jurczyk, he co-founded the first Ultra List in the mid 1990s. Tributes poured into the website and people wanted to donate money in his memory. As a result, Charlie and I established the Joel Zucker Memorial Scholarship for Silverton high school graduates in 1999. Students that volunteer at aid stations and who reside in the San Juan Mountain communities that support the run, may also apply. Former winners are eligible for Continuing Education funds during their years in college.

Donations are solicited every year from Hardrock Hundred Endurance Run participants, volunteers and associates. The Community Foundation Serving Southwest Colorado in Durango handles the collection and distribution of funds. During the past 27 years, we've awarded over \$400,000 to 73 individuals. Joel would be humbled and proud.

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