

REMEMBERING SILVIA GONZALES (1956 -2021)

Calgary is a fabulous city to live for outdoor enthusiasts. When we moved here twenty years ago, we couldn't wait to explore the beautiful wilderness of the foothills and Rocky Mountains. My husband Cornelis' voracious appetite for hiking was larger than mine, which is why I encouraged him to join a hiking club. He decided to join the Rocky Mountain Ramblers. In his Rambler outings, he explored all sorts of trails and soon I became a member too. On my first social gathering with the Ramblers, a potluck dinner, I noticed a striking woman, with intense dark eyes. She was wearing a bright red sweater, a plaid skirt and a tuque with an equally red pompom. She introduced herself in a measured and melodious voice as *Silvia Gonzales*.



Bernie and *Silvia* hiking up the Lake O'Hara Fire Road, March 31, 2006

I soon found out *Silvia* was a fixture in Rambler meetings and hikes. I got to know her, because Cornelis struck up a friendship with her husband, Bernie Fritz. Bernie taught Cornelis the first principles of avalanche awareness, how to use transponders and to hike on a glacier. We shared our Dutch tradition of eating pea soup in wintertime. I remember a fun day, when Bernie built snow quinzhee huts for my kids, and we picnicked with pea soup in the bright winter day.

Of course, Silvia was there too. She always took a lot of pictures with her old-fashioned instant camera. She had her films developed at London Drugs, where she also worked. She often talked about her job at London Drugs, which she seemed to enjoy.



With Sílvia and Bernie at the Bow Hut, February 19, 2006.

Another memorable outing with Bernie and Sílvia was a two-night stay at the Mountain Hut on the Bow Glacier. We all hiked in and the next day, when Cornelis and Bernie were off to explore the glacier, Sílvia and I stayed behind. This is when I got to know her better and heard about her life story. She was born in Argentina and had a lot of interest in zoology and the biological sciences. She was studying at the University and got an opportunity to go on exchange to Canada. It was there that her life took a very different turn. While in Vancouver, she experienced a life-threatening car accident with serious injuries. It put an end to her academic career. She never went back to Argentina but stayed in Canada and eventually moved to Calgary, where she became Bernie's second wife.

Bernie took good care of her, as she also battled mental illness. When Bernie himself got sick and fragile, she took good care of him too. Participation in Rambler events dwindled, but when Bernie passed away, Sílvia asked Cornelis to organise a hike into the mountains, with other Rambler friends, to scatter Bernie's ashes in his beloved mountains.

Sílvia kept in touch with us, requesting Cornelis to contact family and friends in Argentina, in case something would happen to her. We exchanged Christmas cards and she always called on Cornelis's birthday to wish him well. So, she called again this past spring. She did not tell us that she was terminally ill. We discovered this mid-April 2021, when we heard from Tom Flanagan, a former Rambler president, that she had passed away at home. Neighbours called the police after they did not see her for a week. She was 65 years old. The walls of her home were plastered with all the hundreds of pictures she took of her beloved Rocky Mountains.



Bernie and Sílvia, snowshoeing up Opabin Prospect, April 1st, 2006

The Ramblers were an important part of her life, so it is fitting that we remember her as a passionate and faithful member of our organization. I hope she is at peace.

Eveline Kolijn