

OBITUARY

Firefighter remembered

Sensitive woman with gentle heart 'touched every soul she came in contact with'

BY TARA BRADBURY MULLOWNEY

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She may have been physically strong, but Debbie Rideout was also a sensitive woman with a gentle heart, say family and friends of the Conception Bay South Fire Department firefighter.

Rideout, 34, passed away at her home early Monday, after battling cancer for more than two years.

Rideout, one of the first female firefighters in the province, joined the C.B.S. Fire Department 12 years ago, and immediately knew she had found her calling in life, said Richard Murphy, her partner of 13 years.

"It was her passion. She lived it and breathed it," said Murphy, who's the C.B.S. fire chief.

"All she ever wanted to do was to be able to walk, eat and work," added Krista Parsons, Rideout's fellow firefighter and best friend.

Parsons first met Rideout when they were hired as instructors at the Marine Institute.

"She loved it so much, and she was so good at it," Parsons said, adding Rideout was one of the reasons she became a firefighter herself.

"She used to say, 'Oh, Krista, I don't have the same education you have,' and I was like, 'Are you kidding? I want to be like you,'" Parsons recalled.

"She never gave herself enough credit."

In 2003, Rideout was presented with the Arthur Johnson Memorial Citation for Outstanding Firefighter of the Year for her role in saving the life of a 15-year-old girl who had attempted suicide in the waters off Topsail Beach.

Rideout, who had been dispatched to the scene, jumped into the ocean and dragged the girl — who was panicked and suffering from hypothermia — to shore, where she was taken to hospital by ambulance.

Rideout was so humble, she didn't want to hang the plaque that was presented to her.

"Although she was proud of it, she never wanted to boast," Murphy said. "She wouldn't hang it up in the living



Debbie Rideout

room. It eventually went up in her art room instead."

Rideout had a love for art, and was an accomplished, self-taught artist and photographer, specializing in cartoons and flowers.

She also did volunteer work, and served on the board of the Avalon chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). She was instrumental in setting up the first provincial chapter of MADD in 1998.

Murphy, who lost his 20-year-old son, Richard Jr., eight years ago after he was struck by a drunk driver while crossing a street in Ontario, said Rideout was his biggest support.

"She was my pillar of strength. She stood by me and never once complained — never, never, never," he said, tears welling up in his eyes.

Parsons said she will remember her friend as a woman with a wonderful sense of humour.

"She was a funny person; really hilarious," Parsons said with a smile. "I was always cracking up at things she said — things that weren't even funny to her."

"She was also so thoughtful, caring and always worried about everyone. I remember one time, while she was

sick, I got the flu. She called me and said, 'Maybe I should make some soup and bring it up to you.'"

"She was like that up to the end," Murphy added. "One reason she wanted to be waked (in Kelligrews) and buried in Topsail, she wrote in her book, was because it was close for me and for her mom and dad."

"She touched every soul she came in contact with."

After Rideout took a leave of absence from the fire department when she became ill, Parsons was given her bunker gear.

"I always told her I had some big shoes to fill," Parsons said with a smile.

In addition to Murphy and Parsons, Rideout is survived by her parents, David and Diane Rideout; her brother Douglas and sister Donna; Murphy's son Michael and his grandsons Mitchell and Lucas. Visitation is being held at the James J. Hickey Memorial Funeral Home in Kelligrews today from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and 6-9 p.m.

The funeral service will take place at Topsail United Church on Friday at 2 p.m.

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