

Fallen in the Line of Duty

Randilyn Dean made strides for female firefighters in life and in death

by Jenny Furniss



A lesbian Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue firefighter will be honored along with other firefighters who have fallen in the line of duty at a national memorial service next year.

Randilyn Dean's name will be included on the International Association of Fire Fighters' Fallen Fire Fighters Memorial in Colorado Springs, Colo. She will be the first female Oregonian to be included on the memorial—and the first lesbian from Oregon.

Unfortunately, Oregon's domestic partnership law didn't go into effect until February. Dean's cancer spread to her brain and she fell into a coma Feb. 6 and needed immediate brain surgery. Hornish did not have the power to make decisions for her partner because they had not yet been able to register. Thankfully, Dean's parents included Hornish in the medical decisions. After Dean underwent brain surgery and was discharged from the hospital, she and Hornish immediately registered as domestic partners.

"I hope it doesn't have to be that way for anybody else," said Hornish. "Get your protection in place."

On the job, Dean is remembered as a hard worker who always pulled her weight—a trait she strove for since the beginning of her career. When she first decided to become a firefighter, a college adviser told her she was too thin to complete the required physical duties. That smackdown just fueled her resolve.

"When she first went in to lift weights, she couldn't even bench press the bar," said Black. "But Randi went after things with such tenacity, you knew she would achieve what she wanted."

She graduated at the top of her class from the Fire Academy at Utah Valley State College and was one of the first of her class to be hired. She moved to Oregon and started working at Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue in 2000.

"You'd be hard-pressed to find someone within our district who didn't look up to her," said battalion chief Allen Kennedy, who described the close-knit bonds that form among firefighters on the job. During both of Dean's battles with cancer, her colleagues pulled together and donated two years' worth of leave to her.

Hornish and close friends say they will remember Dean's unquenchable spirit, but those she never met will benefit from the bridges she built for future lesbian and female firefighters who share her desire to be the one who answers the calls for help. **10**

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Krista Hornish (left) and Randilyn Dean share a moment at their wedding in Arch Cape.

Dean died of breast cancer Sept. 10 at the age of 36, her second battle with breast cancer since she was first diagnosed in 2003. Her death inspired the local International Association of Fire Fighters chapter to add breast cancer to the cancer presumption list. According to Rocky Hanes, president of the Tualatin Valley Firefighters Union, this is a list of cancers presumed to be caused by the carcinogenic nature of the job.

Dean's friends attest that, just by getting to know Dean, people's prejudices crumbled as respect for her grew.

"She changed a lot of people's opinions by being out," said Angela "Deedster" Black. "She put a very lovable face to the issue."

Dean's partner, Krista Hornish, added: "We shared such an incredible community of friends—both lesbian and straight. Randi was inclusive of everybody. She was the least judgmental person I've ever met."

An outdoors enthusiast, Dean loved surfing, hiking and even snowshoeing. In fact, she and Hornish fell in love on their first snowboarding trip in 2005.

"She was so upbeat and enthusiastic, and she was adorable in her little snow goggles," said Hornish, who lives in the St. Johns neighborhood of North Portland. "After that, we never spent time apart."

