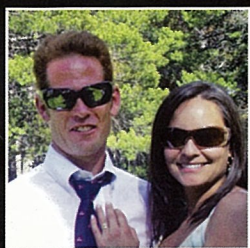




mike
janelle



Mike with wife Maribel



Alejandra Aldunate



One of the Good Guys

by H.E. Sappenfield

In the early hours of Nov. 23, 2007, Mike Janelle's heart said, No more.

It just stopped.

At 40 years old, he was in the prime of his cycling career and his new wife, Maribel, carried their son, due in March. His unexpected death shook not only this region's and the nation's cycling communities but also people who had never met him or never cranked a pedal.



Janelle's passing and his reputation made folks pause during their busy days to consider the poignancy of life and the importance of living well. It was a reflection of the respect he earned in his community and how one person's zest for life can be a model for the rest of us muddling through our days.

Janelle's memorial service on Nov. 26, at Beaver Creek's Vilar Center, was standing-room-only and a Who's Who of cycling in the Rocky Mountain region. A silent auction fundraiser held afterward at Bob's Place, an Avon restaurant of long-time friend and riding partner Chris Doyle, brought together current and retired luminaries. In three days, local businesses donated more than \$20,000 worth of merchandise for the auction.

"The Vail Valley has always been supportive with things like this," Doyle says, "and they really stepped up for Mike."

Born June 7, 1967, in Chickasha, Okla., Michael Paul Janelle was proud to be part Kiowa and Choctaw, and his Native American heritage helped create his lean, tanned appearance that made girls swoon. At 17, he came to live in the Vail Valley. His father, Jack, a pro cyclist, taught Mike the ropes of road racing, and in 1988, he began his professional cycling career.

In 1996, Janelle premiered on the mountain biking scene and in recent years focused on endurance events in both disciplines. In road racing, his most recent achievement came as part of four-person Team Beaver Creek-Caitlin, which won 2007's Race Across America (RAAM). In 2005 and 2006, Janelle had been on RAAM winning teams, then known as Beaver Creek/Vail. He arrived in 2005 as a replacement after the tragic loss of Bret Malin, killed during the event by a semi-truck on a lonely stretch of New Mexico highway.

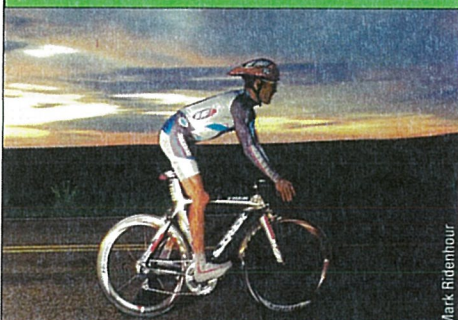
Teammate Adam Palmer recalls Janelle's contribution despite battling strep throat throughout the race.

"He was all swollen up, like marshmallow man, especially in his neck, but he pushed through and really pulled it out at the end," Palmer says. "The Action Sports guys would pass us, and we'd get down, but he'd stay stoked and positive."

Off road, Janelle's endurance was



Janelle and his teammates on the podium at the Race Across America.



The sun sets but the riding never stopped as Janelle headed into another RAAM night.



Carving a nice line in that sand, Janelle speeds through another lap at the 24 Hours of Moab.



Janelle enjoyed many a cross race in Eagle, Colo.

also formidable. In July 2007, he finished fifth at the USA Cycling National Mountain Bike Marathon Championships in Breckenridge. Later that same month, he finished a close second at the National Ultra-Endurance Series Round No. 4, the Breckenridge 100. In October, he and RAAM teammate Nat Ross won

the Pro Duo division at a relentlessly sandy 24 Hours of Moab. Earlier in 2005, Janelle and teammate Jay Henry not only won the Pro Duo division, but they established the course record, finishing 21 laps in 24 hours, 41 minutes and 35 seconds.

Henry remembers Moab as Janelle's race.

"I raced with Mike five times in Moab, on four-person teams and duo, and it was always a given that he'd get stronger as the race went on," he says. "He was one of the most fun guys and at the same time unbelievably strong in a race like that."

Locally Janelle, Henry and Jimi Mortenson would duke it out in the Vail Recreation District race series. Brian Doyon, series director, remembers Janelle well.

"These were training races for Mike, so he was always out there for the joy of racing," Doyon laughs. "My best memory of him is the Four Eagle race. There's a drainage ditch that we'd diverted racers around, but Janelle said he could ride it if he popped a wheelie. After the first lap, he came through covered head-to-toe in mud. It made the cover of the Vail Daily."

Impressive statistics were not why the Vilar Center was filled to the gills on November 26 or why people gave so generously at the fundraiser afterwards. At the start of RAMM, Janelle was that guy decked in a speed suit and surreal aerodynamic helmet, who always had time for a grin and wishing fellow competitors luck. He was the guy who loved to ride so much he'd be out in zero-degree weather negotiating his bike through Avon's treacherous roundabouts on his way to work as a ski and snowboard instructor at Beaver Creek. He was the guy who'd politely lap you during a race and say, "Hey," or "Good job." He was the guy tuning his bike in the back of the Kind Cyclist in Edwards who'd pipe into a conversation as you paid at the cash register like you and he were comfortable, old friends.

Tokyo Joe's team manager Heather Szabo remembers Janelle's good attitude and love of cycling.

"I'd get emails with race updates from Mike, and he'd write about how he was leading the race and then he'd taken a wrong turn, ridden five miles out of



Larry Grossman

Janelle gives Floyd Landis something to laugh about before dropping the hammer on him during the 2007 Teva Mountain Games.

his way and then gotten back on course and still managed to make it on the podium,” Szabo says. “We’d joke that if he could just stay on course, he’d win. But he never complained. He always enjoyed being on the bike.”

Tokyo Joe’s has embodied Janelle’s can-do attitude in this year’s team jersey, which sports a caricature of Mike’s face and reads “Live Like Mike” on the sleeve.

“Anyone who ever saw Mike riding would instantly recognize the drawing,” Szabo says.

Tokyo Joe’s will also be selling these Live Like Mike jerseys via their website tokyojoes.com. All proceeds will go into a trust established for Janelle’s wife and child.

“We wanted to bridge the monetary gap created by Mike’s absence,” says Larry Leith, founder and owner of Tokyo Joe’s. “We’re also creating livelikemike.org, a website that will sell fun swag like T-shirts and bumper stickers. Mike would get a kick out of it.”

There aren’t enough folks like Mike Janelle out there, and

we all know it. So when he died, not only did we mourn for the abrupt end of his life, and for his wife and son, but we also selfishly mourned for ourselves and how we’d lost one of the good guys. 🍷

Every essence of Mike Janelle, every memory I have of him involves his unquenched enthusiasm for life. From seeing him pass me at 2 a.m. during the first 24 Hours of Moab, when I couldn’t fathom his pace after so many hours of racing, to more recent memories, he was always emitting good spirits.

Mike has graced the pages of Mountain Flyer many times. Not because I wanted to run photos of a friend but because he seemed to be everywhere. I’d show up to photograph a race or a photographer would submit a photo or story to me and there he was. Whether it was at a mountain bike race or road race or some crazy endurance race across the country, he was always mixing it up. He couldn’t get enough of riding his bike. I’ll miss that inspiration. Keep pedaling, Mike. – B. Riepe