

Stash

WHERE YOU FIND SPECIAL THINGS

and I, with friends Ann and Richard Brenton of Argenta guiding the way — then snowshoed and hiked to the peak. We've come to salute Allan Drury, but at the moment I'm tumbling through reverie. Allan is smiling, I trust, for he liked dreaming, too. Big kid dreams.

From here sweeps Shangri-La, the paradise known as Selkirk Wilderness Skiing, the seminal backcountry cat operation in the world, founded on a vision and a leap in 1975 by Allan and his wife, Brenda, who built it on desire, imagination, grit — and bountiful heaps of fluff. A thousand skiers have sampled its delights over time: the stunning scenery and pitch-perfect plunges through rolling cuts and quiet cathedrals, in wild song and mystical moments when light and motion and powder and people achieve states of grace in the passing whoosh and hiss. Up in the cat, down to the bottom, then back up again: trackless, empty, dreamy bowls, chutes and glades. In other words, in deep.

Many are guests who return year after year — couples, families, chums — drawn by the vibe, fellowship, exquisite food, fun. The Drurys first ran the business from an old farmhouse they renovated at the foot of Meadow Creek Road, then later constructed their beautiful lodge on the mountain, accessed only by cat and powered by its own hydro that Allan designed. They recall the early days as a struggle — remote location, long hours, broken gear — inventing, improvising, learning as they went, true pioneers. Yet their love for skiing, spirit of adventure, taste for hard work and sense of community won respect and loyalty from clients and neighbours alike, including the many locals who have worked at Selkirk over the years as guides, cooks, drivers, mechanics, housekeepers and managers, a testament to Brenda and Allan's generosity, passion and playfulness; while the business, in its own way, helped boost the local economy. The Drurys imagined, then created a remarkable culture: a way of life for themselves to share with others. Sometimes dreams conjure magic; in this case, it was gold, which became the standard.

Thus an industry blossomed and flourished.

So it was no surprise when on May 7, 2008, nearly 500 people from near and far gathered at Selkirk College in Nelson for a memorial service to celebrate the life of Allan Drury, who died last January after a two-year fight with cancer. In moving tributes to an extraordinary athlete, skier, husband, father, seeker, visionary, raconteur, mountain man and — to the great delight of those who knew him, a twinkle-eyed mischief-maker — family, friends and staff recounted some of his greatest gifts in stories and songs tender and deep, salty and sweet. Of many adjectives invoked about Allan that day, "infectious" surfaced most: his infectious laugh, outlook, kindness, spirit, drive, love of big air, love of life. Perhaps most touching was a slide show, set to Dylan, that daughters Rachel and Andrea assembled for their dad, who at 68 had passed much too soon — a joyful cavalcade of moments chronicling the Drurys' special lives together at the head of the lake, Allan gleefully whirling in the vortex, living the dream, loving his family, building a legacy, Meadow rising gracefully behind.

Up at the summit there's a small cairn in Allan's honour, placed for the moment, Ann and Richard note, during a private service held for family and friends shortly after he died last winter. A more permanent marker will eventually be built, they say. We snap a few pictures, say our farewells to Allan and start down. The view is astounding. I'm standing at the crest, knees bent, ready for the drop.

Great place for dreamers.

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EVERY DAY AFTER SCHOOL years ago in my New Jersey hometown, when conditions were right (meaning any three inches of snow would do), I would strap on my red wooden skis and, after skirting a wide bramble near a grove of trees behind our house, stand at the crest of a bank that sloped 100 feet into a gravel parking lot behind a local insurance agency run by a guy who knew my dad. I'd push off and take the drop and clatter onto the flat, practice hockey stops left and right, then herringbone back up, round trip after trip, until the people in the office, who I'd sometimes see watching me out the windows, left for the day, then I'd take a few more runs before going home myself at dark. Sometimes I would plant sticks from the woods for slalom gates (four), as seen on TV, and build a killer jump, a couple feet high, that would last the season. My skis had interlocking segmented metal edges, each section screwed into the base, and they would rip. So began the dreams.

I'm thinking about this atop Meadow Mountain, at the north end of Kootenay Lake, on a lovely spring afternoon, the magnificent jagged panorama of Selkirks and Purcells glazed in a meringue of ice and snow, royal dome above, sun warm on our faces, Duncan and the Lardeau far below. We've sledged up to Meadow's Areba Ridge — my daughter Abbey



Allan flies over Rolling Thunder, 1983

Beautiful Dreamer

Celebrating the life of Allan Drury

BY JOHN GATERUD