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Markham's Tobias family rides in mom's memory

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Karen Tobias is remembered every day by her family.

It has been just over two years since the 53-year-old Markham woman lost a five year-battle with breast cancer.

Husband Kal and sons Kris, 34, and Kirk, 31, grandchildren Isabel, Johan and Liberty miss her.

Karen and Kal, both from New York, met after graduating from high school. At the time of Karen's death, the couple had marked 35 years of marriage. Theirs was an especially good partnership. "We were happy," Kal said.

Before moving to Markham, the couple lived in New York, Scarborough and Pickering.

"But we lived in Markham for more 20 years," Kal said. "We raised our boys here."

While Karen visited hospital often for cancer treatment and chemotherapy, she managed to spend most of her last few years at home.

"Karen had wonderful care in and out of hospital," said Kal.

Karen Tobias had a fighting spirit and she displayed an intense interest in life. To her, quality of life mattered.

"And it mattered a great deal," Kal stressed.

Karen was always there for her family.

Kris recalled how his mother backed him in all his athletic endeavours. A competitive cyclist, Kris represented Canada at the 1997 World Mountain Bike Championships.

Shortly after his mother's death, Kris went on a bike ride. He



PHOTO/GRAHAM GURNEY

Kris (left), Kal and Kirk Tobias have designed two routes for this year's Ride-for-Karen fundraiser.

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wanted to be alone, to clear his head. Kris needed a quiet place to think of mom, of how very much she meant to him and the rest of the family.

It was during this ride Kris came up with the idea of doing something special in her memory.

Kris knew the best way to honour his mother was to make a difference in other people's lives.

Kris reminded himself when his mother underwent treatment in hospital, the nurses would place her beside other cancer patients.

It was Karen who would offer support. She cared about others.

Karen adopted a positive attitude when dealing with cancer and all other aspects of life, her husband pointed out.

Kris finished his ride, went home and talked his idea over with Kirk. Together, they came up with the concept of the Ride-for-Karen event.

Held in the fall, the first Ride-for-Karen raised \$40,000 for patient and family-based programs at North York General Hospital, where Karen was a patient.

It featured a 160-kilometre course starting in Maple and taking in Holland Marsh, Kleinburg, other parts of York Region and areas further afield such as Caledon.

This year's Ride-for-Karen is Oct. 5 and is a two-part fundraiser. One is the 160-kilometre course that will likely follow a similar course. The second part is 25 kilometres.

A route for that has yet to be chosen, though it will be entirely in York Region.

Last year, 60 cyclists took part.

This year, "I expect at least 120 will join us," Kal said. "Since we have a 25-kilometre course for the more recreational cyclist, it will attract more people. We also have a web page up and it helps promote the event. It is all very exciting."

Ride-for-Karen attracted interest community-wide last year, including support from businesses, friends and neighbours, Kris noted.

"Village Grocer gave us drinks to keep the cyclists going and we got gift certificates from Edelweiss Floral Design. Everyone was so kind," he said.

Ride-for-Karen is, indeed, a tribute to Karen Tobias. In many ways, the ride parallels the effort needed to fight cancer, Kris stressed.

"We picked an event that is challenging even for people who are fit. It helps mirror what people with cancer go through. It helps mirror what my mom went through. She'd understand."

Proceeds from this year's rides go to Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation Canada and Wellspring.

Both charities help cancer patients and their families deal with the disease, Kris explained. One thing is certain: Karen Tobias will always be remembered. She was truly loved.

The Ride-for-Karen website is www.rideforkaren.com It will be updated with information on this year's event by the beginning of September.

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