

Robert Edwin Labbanche, 56, died peacefully in his sleep at his home on Northview Road in East Montpelier, Vermont on Sunday August 24th. He was at the end of a year long relationship with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS, or more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. He once joked that if he had to have a terminal disease, then it might as well be named after a famous NY Yankee, his favorite team from childhood. That remark exemplified his humor and courage, and his other three observations about the disease were that at least he knew what was going to end his life, that his mind would remain intact, and that he would have a known period of time to say goodbye, and for those reasons, "it wasn't all bad."

He was born on July 10, 1952 in South Norwalk, Connecticut and spent his childhood years in Fairfield, Connecticut. He graduated from Roger Ludlowe High School in 1970 where filmmaking and writing became strong passions. He entered Bates College in Lewiston, Maine that same fall, graduating with a degree in Art in 1974. He was drawn to studio art classes, but photography was his major focus, and he devoted himself to large format photography. At Bates, he was a radio announcer at the college radio station, and his interest in radio and music continued after graduation. He worked at WBLM radio, and then at No Tomatoes Restaurant in Auburn, Maine as a waiter and bartender, and it was there that he met Kathie, a fellow Bates graduate ('73).

Kathie and Bob moved to Stockbridge, Vermont together in September 1975, and spent 22 idyllic years on Stony Brook Road, gardening, snowshoeing, going to rock concerts whenever possible, seeing movies, cooking great food, hanging out at the brook, playing board games and croquet - Bob called the beginning of this era "the Leisure Years" and many rich memories remain. After a 7 year sentence in food service at Killington, he decided to open his own restaurant, and 108 Chelsea St. in South Royalton was his creation from 1982-86. It was a legendary place, with eclectic food and music, and his fresh pasta and warm personality soon won over the locals and law students alike. Kathie worked there with him, and it was during this time that they decided to grow up and get married, which they did, at their home in Stockbridge, on May 26, 1985. But the real cornerstone of their life together was the adoption of their children, Griffin and Simone, born in Calcutta, India. The family moved to East Montpelier in 1997, and has enjoyed all that central Vermont has to offer ever since.

Bob's love of the game of golf turned from a weekend pastime into a profession over the years. He was a nationally recognized golf writer and historian who authored 17 books, edited numerous golf-related publications and wrote countless articles during his career covering topics ranging from golf architecture to players and courses. Early in his career he wrote about area golf courses and covered the Masters tournament for the Valley News and other Vermont newspapers. Labbanche co-authored guide books to the golf courses of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. For 11 years he was editor of

Vermont Golf magazine, as well as related annual state magazines covering New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey. He was also a professional photographer--his work appeared in national golf publications including Golf Magazine and Golf Digest--and traveled extensively around New England and nationally to photograph the people and courses being covered. He served as editor, and later as golf editor, for Turf Magazine and Superintendent Magazine, covering golf course maintenance issues. He was well known to golf course superintendents around the country and co-authored a history book of greenkeeping for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. He also authored and co-authored nine centennial history books for golf clubs in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Bob also served for many years as editor of The Bulletin, the newsletter of the Golf Collectors Society, a national organization of which he was a long-time member. This role allowed him to share his knowledge of collecting golf memorabilia--he had a collection of more than 3,000 golf books--and golf history. He was also a member of the Museum Committee of the United States Golf Association. He was a tireless researcher who insisted on the historical accuracy of his work and a much sought-after speaker and presenter on a wide range of issues. He enjoyed bringing to life historical figures from golf's past, and wrote several biographical books profiling early American players and golf architects. He was a friend and professional mentor to many people and was always willing to share his knowledge and passion for the game of golf.

It was while on assignment on August 31, 2004 that he slipped off a small bridge into a creek on a course in southern NH and suffered a severe contusion of his cervical spine, resulting in temporary paralysis and nearly 7 weeks in a rehab facility. He was able to walk out after defying the odds, with neurological deficits but a strong positive spirit and gratitude for the second chance he was given. He was able to resume his life and career, but in the spring of 2007 he began to experience difficulty in walking. Both Bob and the medical community misinterpreted the early signs of ALS, thinking it was related to his spinal cord injury, and his diagnosis was not certain until December 2007. His decline was steady and unforgiving, but because of his grace and courage, he attracted a huge group of friends, supporters and caregivers and opened his heart and home to everyone. He was fortunate to have received so much love and recognition during both of these episodes, and he gave back every ounce of what he absorbed.

He leaves his wife and best friend of the past 34 years, Kathie Hickman, his magnificent children, Griffin and Simone Labbanca, and furry friends Gretta and Irma, all of East Montpelier, Vermont. He was predeceased by both of his parents, Frank J. Labbanca and Helen M. Labbanca, as well as father-in-law James B. Hickman. He is survived by his mother-in-law, Virginia S. Hickman of Brevard, NC, brother and sister-in-law Jeff and Jenice Hickman of Apex, NC, nieces Dawn Blom and Debbie Barrigas of Thomaston, CT, nephew Abe

Redcloud, wife Kasi and baby Owen of Santa Cruz, CA, and Dogan Bora of Marietta, GA.

A memorial service is planned for October 11th, and a Friends of Bob Labbance team of walkers at the Walk to Defeat ALS event in Burlington, VT will be raising funds for ALS cure research on September 28th. Donations toward this event can be made at the www.alsanne.org website. Another donation suggestion is Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice, 600 Granger Rd., Barre, VT 05641.

Barber & Lanier Funeral and Cremation Services of Montpelier are in charge of arrangements.