



Joanne once wrote that life is less orderly than a river flow, because the human heart sometimes swims upstream. As family and friends will attest, Emma Joanne Wilke was one strong swimmer. From her birth in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on July 22, 1957, to her death from ovarian cancer in Bozeman, Montana, November 26, 2010, Joanne's zest for life made her known as the "spicy one" in her family. She was a proud and devoted mother, a record-setting runner, an award-winning writer, and a creative gardener.

Whenever Joanne found herself on a new patch of ground, it wasn't long before her hands were in the dirt. Squash sprawled beneath towering sunflowers and sweet peas shared space with green beans—a happy disorderliness that always had space for visitors and mirrored her life. One of her favorite refrigerator magnets said, "Make yourself at home. Clean my kitchen." Joanne delighted in being known as the Chicken Lady, as her Church Avenue backyard of many years bordered the Linear Park trail where passersby enjoyed watching her laying hens peck about.

Joanne met Rob Wilke at DeAnza Junior College (CA) in 1978. A runner for the school and in the San Jose track club the Cindergals, Joanne still holds DeAnza's record for the 800m. She received a cross-country scholarship to MSU and later became an editor at *Runner's World*. Joanne and Rob's life together deepened with their move to Montana, where they built a house on Trail Creek. Rob's photography business flourished, and in between waitress shifts, Joanne took time to write, ski, and have Max, her first child, at home in 1992. Her philosophy was that birth and death are part of living and that hospitals are an unnecessary alienation.

The Wilke family later moved to Church Avenue, where Elise was born in 1997, also at home. To know Joanne was to know her children, who were always foremost in her choices, and to know Max and Elise is to know Joanne.

Eventually Joanne's knees failed her for running, but she was a dedicated hiker, cross-country skier, and noontime swimmer at MSU, where she worked as an administrative assistant for the engineering department. Following her divorce, Joanne bought a house near campus, which she quickly surrounded with gardens and chickens. With great tenacity, she persevered in her writing, publishing columns, essays, and a historical-memoir, *Eight Women, Two Model Ts, and the American West*. Joanne, her mother Gert, brother David, and Elise went to Italy to visit Max, who was studying abroad on an academic scholarship. It was a joyful time, and gave the family a well of cherished memories and stories.

Joanne's friendship with photographer Bill Bilverstone led to many outdoor adventures as well as the epic pie quest Joanne wrote about in *Big Sky Journal*. Their friendship blossomed into a profound love, and Bill was an unwavering companion by her side until her last breath.

While Joanne wasn't one to tell others how to live, she was a glowing example of someone who never wanted much, and delighted in life's simple pleasures. To know her was a constant reminder that happiness could indeed be found in a perfect bowl of guacamole, or sipping homemade lemonade under a tree on a hot summer day.

Joanne was preceded in death by her father, James Shearer, and her special dog, Bones. In addition to Gert, Rob, Max, Elise, and Bill, Joanne is survived by her sister, Susan Lanzinger (Franz) of Sunnyvale, CA, her brother, David Shearer, of Mountain View, CA, and her beloved dog Ricky. Her family and friends extend deep gratitude to the people of MSU, especially the mechanical and industrial engineering department, for their generous donations of vacation days, time, money, and care during Joanne's illness.

A potluck celebration of Joanne's life will be held at the Beall Park Art Center on Sunday, December 12th, at 11:30. Please come with stories to share, food, and laughter. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to an education fund for Max and Elise Wilke. An account has been created at First Security Bank.