

Ned was a generously warm and insightful person who used humor to keep life in perspective. Certainly, he will be remembered for his imaginative exploration of wild and remote regions. But more satisfying to him, and more enduring, was his ability to energize and inspire each of us to push beyond our self-imposed limits, and to live life with vitality and commitment, determined to excel in whatever venture we've chosen. His family and his friends will always love, remember, and miss him.

DEBORAH GILLETTE LAW *and members of Ned's family*

FRANCYS DISTEFANO-ARSENTIEV

1958-1998

SERGUEI ANATOLIEVICH ARSENTIEV

1958-1998

About five years ago, Francys Distefano, a long-time member of the Telluride community and a rapidly improving high-altitude climber, arrived home with Serguei, her guide on a Russian climbing expedition. Serg, a native of St. Petersburg, had a long resume that included many years of difficult climbing on high Soviet peaks and 8000-meter summits in the Himalaya with Russian teams. Almost as interesting, he boasted a list of careers that included electrical engineer, rocket scientist, logger, and steeplejack. Serg started working with us as a carpenter and took a whirlwind tour of the American Dream: Coca Cola, an old Chevy pick-up truck, Carharts, a motorcycle, new teeth, and an Audi. He quickly learned English and, eventually, our measuring system. Serg was the carpenter everyone relied on to handle tough jobs. Single-handedly, with only some help from Fran, Serg built a beautiful home in Norwood, Colorado. They also took annual expeditions to Russia or Alaska. When Fran asked me about refinancing their house to go on an Everest climb, I realized that living the American Dream wasn't going to totally contain their intellect—not with the Himalaya beckoning.

I should have extracted more stories from Serg when I could, instead of planning to talk more when we were both 80, lounging in our rockers at the old folks' home. I keep expecting to see him arrive at a construction site and to tell him, "Serg, cut the sentimental bullshit and get your nail-belt on."

CHUCK KROGER

Serguei and Francys Arsentiev died on Mount Everest last spring. The Arsentievs are the only husband-and-wife team to attain Everest without the use of supplemental oxygen.

Sergei, one of the foremost Russian alpinists of this century, will be remembered perhaps more for his gentle, unassuming demeanor. In St. Petersburg, Serguei studied at the Leningrad Electrotechnical Institute and later worked in a factory that manufactured spy satellites, "looking on the U.S.," he once explained amusedly. He came up with the concept of using magnetism at the Earth's poles to keep satellites from spinning in orbit so that they could focus continuously on America.

Besides being a rocket scientist, Serguei proved his physical mettle in climbing. A man of remarkable focus, intelligence, and strength, with a natural ability to acclimatize quickly, Serguei completed more than 100 routes in the Caucasus and the former Soviet ranges, Tien Shan and the Pamirs. To his credit are the first winter ascents of Peak Korzhenevskaya (7105m) and Peak Lenin (7134m), and a 20-hour round-trip climb of Khan Tengri Peak (6995m). "One would have to go back to that era to understand the stature of these achievements," said

Serguei's friend, Antoine Savelli. "Serguei's nonchalance disguised his greatness."

Serguei earned the honorary name of Snow Leopard for climbing the five highest mountains in the Soviet Union. At the age of 30, he was awarded Master of Sport with Honors. As such, Serguei was an important team member in some of the most lauded Soviet expeditions, like the 1989 Kangchenjunga traverse when he summited all "Three Tops." On May 7, 1990, Serguei became the first Russian to climb Everest without bottled oxygen. The achievement came on the Everest Peace Climb, a joint U.S.-Chinese-Russian expedition conceived and led by American Jim Whittaker. For this, Serguei was presented the National Friendship Medal by President Gorbachev and became a national hero.

In 1991, Serguei met Francys Distefano in the Himalaya. Fran, an American and young mother from Telluride, Colorado, had grown up skiing in the U.S. and Switzerland and had recently taken to mountaineering. As the story goes, she went to Nepal with a boyfriend and summited the 6000-meter Loboche, Island, Pokalde and Mera peaks, then crossed the Khumbu Glacier to Serguei's tent. That fall, she accompanied Serguei on a Russian expedition to Annapurna I and climbed as far as Camp II. Serguei and a Russian partner made short work of the 8000-meter peak, ascending the north face with light packs and no oxygen in typical Russian style. A year later, Fran and Serguei registered their marriage in the Soviet Consulate of Kathmandu, and the couple went on to climb Elbrus's east and west tops. Fran skied from the West Top to the foot of Elbrus, becoming the first American woman to do so.

In the summer of 1992, Fran brought Serguei to Telluride (after Serguei convinced the Politburo that he would not divulge Russia's spy satellite secrets in the United States). While I was working for a Telluride newspaper, Serguei and Fran asked me to write an article about their mountain-guiding business, *Trek Around the World*. Describing his achievements to me (Serguei was just learning English), Fran was in awe of Serguei, her blue eyes gleaming in rapture.

Serguei was shy, enigmatic and instantly a friend. That winter, Serguei and I, both illegal aliens, landed jobs shoveling snow for cash. We waved our shovels in greeting on many dark mornings as we cleared sidewalks on opposite sides of Main Street.

*Trek Around the World* never matured as a business, but Serguei and Fran returned to Russia each year to climb Korzhenevskaya, Lenin, Communism (7495m), Vorobyov (5691m), and Peak of Four (6299m). In 1994, they made a first ascent of Peak 5800m, which they named Peak Goodwill, located in the remote Muzkol Range of the East Pamirs, and also summited Chottukay Peak (5823m). In 1995, they successfully summited Denali via the West Buttress. Serguei, meanwhile, had become a proficient carpenter, working for a Telluride construction company owned by climber Chuck Kroger and his wife, Kathy Green, and had built a house for himself and Fran in Norwood, a neighboring mesa town. He was known by his co-workers as "the gentle giant." Despite her passion for mountaineering adventures, Fran was devoted to her son, Paul, from a previous marriage.

Kroger recalled first meeting Fran in 1984 when she was new to Telluride and to climbing; even then she expressed a desire to climb Everest. As testimony to her determination, Fran is the first American woman and the second woman in the world to verifiably summit Everest without the use of supplemental oxygen. Why she and Serguei kept climbing for the summit after they had fallen way behind the mid-day turn-around that Everest mandates, we confound ourselves asking. To borrow from Reinhold Messner, "...the same questions are unanswered as yesterday, and as in the beginning. And every answer is a new question for those who are left behind."

Serguei is survived by his teen-aged daughter, Alevtina, who lives in Russia. Fran is survived by Paul Distefano, who lives with his father in Telluride.