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FREAK DIVING ACCIDENT: Char White, 62

Char White was snorkeling in Mexico the weekend of Sept. 8 when a freak accident broke her spine. She died Sept. 13.

White, 62, a tour guide who ran her own company and organized the group diving trip about 25 miles off shore from Rocky Point, had just put on her mask to go underwater when the tragedy occurred, according to one of her good friends, coffee shop owner Bonnie Vining.

"She was adjusting her mask when a kid who worked on the boat came down the slide (from the boat to the water)," Vining said. "He landed right on her face, broke her neck and crushed her lungs."

Char's son Peter White rushed to help his mother and a power boat took them to shore, a 45 minute ride. Vining said once they got back to Rocky Point, it took another seven hours to get her to the hospital.

"She had to get a ride back to the U.S. and they wanted \$3,500," Vining said, "and it had to be cash." She said since it was the end of the weekend, not much cash was on hand and people were getting cash advances from their credit cards to amass the funds.

"The money was all in pesos, it was horrible ordeal, getting her home," she said. Vining added once Char was transported to Why, Ariz., a helicopter flew her to University Medical Center.

Char spent several days in UMC with a critical spinal cord injury, paralyzed from the neck down, but treatment was not enough. "An infection had settled into her lungs because of the long journey," Vining said.

"Farewell to a beautiful lady who touched so many of our lives," she said. Vining, owner of the Javalina's Coffee and Friends at 9136 E. Valencia, circulated many photos of Char in the Javalina's newsletter - Char at the microphone, Char hanging out with coffee shop pals, Char touring with friends, Char cutting cake.

All the photos were taken by Javalina's photographer Bob Block, who was also Char's close friend. In all photos, Char is absolutely beaming.

"If you've met Char, you've been touched by her grace and charm," Vining said. "Char has brought her beautiful smile, her listening ears and her gracious appreciation to many of our music shows." She was also one who listened intently, and intensely, to other people's problems.

Block first met White on a tour she headed to Douglas and San Bernardino Ranch. It turned out they had a lot in common. Both were the same age and originally from Chicago, growing up only a few miles apart.

Their friendship grew when her Green Valley home, which she shared with her 55-year-old brother, Michael Aksamit, was in need of repair.

Block helped her spruce up the place, from inner closets to the outer yard.

"It kind of looked like Disneyland at night," Block said.

While part of her heart was at home, the other part was definitely touring.

"Many people can talk to you on a tour and just show you something," Block said. "But she made it always special. She brought all kinds of things to add to the event."

An enthusiastic organizer, White's company, "Tour of the Month," took hundreds of local folks everywhere from Tombstone to an annual jaunt

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Day of the Dead

Many dead are last remembered as only a name and age. This blog serves to fill in the blanks, the details, about people who died in Tucson from homicide, car crashes, drownings and other unnatural or freak occurrences. Anyone who has input on the people listed, please either leave a comment or e-mail me direct at rynski@tucsoncitizen.com.

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