

thank you friends, family  
I'm so lucky for you all  
someone is watching

yet another part  
of me is gone to be filled  
with other life joys

life is good friends  
cherish it now – live today  
don't wait – have fun

in last words from me  
play it up live large and be  
A – L – I – V – E

thanks for coming to  
my party, I am sure I loved  
now go home friends!



Kara Kei-Ling Aya-Welland



<http://kayawelland.wordpress.com>. Even during the most trying moments of her treatment, Kara inspired those around her with her willpower, her determination to live, and her generous, passionate, and adventurous spirit.

Kara passed away at home late on the night of Monday, July 13, 2009, surrounded by her family. She is survived by her college sweetheart and husband of 14 years, Ruben Aya-Welland, and her loving and devoted parents and parents-in-law, Mei Chen Welland and Grant Welland, and Alejandro and Annikki Aya; her sister, brother-in-law, and nephew, Sasha, James, and Lino, all of Seattle; as well as Ruben's sister and brother, Christina and Andres Aya of Chicago.

Throughout her illness, Kara received top-notch medical care, guidance, and advocacy from the outstanding doctors and nurses at the Siteman Cancer Center, Barnes Jewish Hospital, and Washington University Physicians in St. Louis. Her family will always remember their never-ending belief in Kara's bravery, strength, will, and determination.

In her final weeks, Kara was graced with the wonderful specialized care of the nursing staff of Vitas Hospice. Due to their extraordinary assistance and caring, Kara lived out the remainder of her days free of pain and at peace. Her family is incredibly thankful for that final gift. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation in memory of Kara Aya-Welland to Vitas Hospice Charitable Fund, 1807 Park 270 Drive, Suite 110, St. Louis, MO 63146.

Kara Kei-Ling Aya-Welland was born in a hurry, thirty minutes after her mother arrived at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis on November 29, 1972. She and her parents left the hospital to join her sister Sasha at home during the dedication of Queeny Tower at Barnes.

Kara attended Merry-Go-Round Nursery School, and Jefferson, Glenridge, and Captain Elementary Schools, all in St. Louis, as well as kindergarten in Riverside, California. She was among the first in St. Louis to see *Star Wars* on opening night; was picked from the audience by Blackstone The Magician to join him on stage and left with the rabbit he pulled out of a hat; and developed an early and long-lasting love for Curious George, Fleetwood Mac, Hello Kitty, macaroni and cheese, and games of all sorts.

Kara took her first skating class at the age of seven at the Brentwood Rink and soon progressed from a little speed demon on the ice to a dedicated and talented competitive figure skater. For years she (and her parents) woke up before the crack of dawn so that she could train before school, and then again after school. She also pursued ballet as a student at the Alexandra School of Ballet and was chosen to dance in *The Nutcracker* with the State Ballet of Missouri at the Fox Theater. She skated for two summers in southern California, and after graduating from Wydown Junior High and attending Clayton High School for two years, she moved to Littleton, Colorado to continue her figure skating training at a higher level and attended Arapaho High School, where she graduated in 1991. Kara achieved triple gold medal standing with the United States Figure Skating Association in figures, freestyle, and dance. She eventually transitioned out of the world of competitive figure skating to focus on her undergraduate studies at Washington University but remained active on the ice for several years as a professional coach. Years later, at the urging of friends' children, she would skate for them, surprising skaters at Steinberg Rink in Forest Park and elsewhere as she wove her way among them to pick up speed for spins and jumps. She was free and graceful and full of joy on the ice.

Kara took her first skiing class at the age of eight in Breckenridge, Colorado, and it was love at first run. As the many friends and

family members with whom she skied can attest, she was fearless on the slopes and gorgeous to watch as she slalomed her way down a gentle green run or a mogul-filled black one. Her innate athleticism also led her to complete several marathons and triathlons and to pull her friends into action-packed wilderness backpacking adventures. Even after the toll that her battle with cancer had taken on her body, she refused to give up the feeling of wind rushing through her hair or of shushing through the snow. On the last day of 2008, she ate cheesy fries at the Breckenridge lodge and skied a double black diamond run with Ruben.

That Ruben now flies down the most challenging slopes is a testament to Kara's ability as his ski instructor, an avocation she adopted during her sophomore year at Washington University in St. Louis, where she met the love of her life and earned dual degrees in 1995: a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the Olin School of Business and a degree in Spanish from the College of Arts and Sciences. While at Wash U, Kara became a member of the Delta Gamma Fraternity, traveled abroad for a semester-long business school internship in London, got engaged to Ruben, and forged a lifelong friendship with a close group of college "suitemates" that continued until the very end of her life. On July 1, 1995, Kara Welland and Ruben Aya were married at the Central Presbyterian Church in Clayton; from that point forward, they became known as Kara and Ruben Aya-Welland. After college, Kara and Ruben remained in St. Louis, and she worked as an analyst at Andersen Consulting with clients such as Metal Container.

In 1996, Kara and Ruben relocated to Seattle, where she joined Deloitte and Touche Consulting as a business analyst. During her tenure at Deloitte, Kara further developed her business savvy and skill set on major consulting projects for such clients as Kaiser Permanente Health Care in Pasadena, and Puget Sound Energy in Seattle. Before leaving the Pacific Northwest, Kara and Ruben took an unforgettable summer adventure to Alaska, where they spent their time backpacking, camping, kayaking, and exploring the wilderness of Denali and Glacier Bay National Parks, and where Kara also served as Ruben's Florence Nightingale after a treacherous escape from a herd of moose-impersonating caribou.

In 1998, Kara and Ruben moved to Chicago, where she attended Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. While attending graduate school, Kara excelled in her studies and became a trusted peer, tutor, and mentor. Her passion for nature led her to take part in the annual Kellogg Outdoor Adventures, where she co-led a camping excursion for new students to Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada. During this time, Kara also earned a position as a summer intern at Goldman Sachs, where she tested her skills at the Sales and Trading desks of lower Manhattan.

Kara was a master of all trades in the sports and business worlds, but at home Lucy, Niko, Luna, and Shadow ruled the roost. She always loved pets, and when she and Ruben moved back to St. Louis, Kara was able to combine her passion for dogs and cats with her enthusiasm for business analysis, marketing, and advertising by landing an ideal job at the Nestle Purina PetCare Company, after a short tenure at Express Scripts. At Nestle Purina, Kara quickly became known as a consumer insight and brand building expert. She entered as a Marketing Assistant and rose to the position of Brand Director, making valuable contributions to several brands, including Beneful. Kara also helped create the Chef Michaels brand and product line, which is being introduced this year.

In late May of 2003, Kara was diagnosed with a very rare cancer, a neuroendocrine atypical carcinoid. Although she had a statistically poor prognosis from the very beginning, due to distant metastases, Kara approached her struggle with cancer like she did everything else in her life—with zeal, determination, courage, and character. Over these six long years, Kara endured surgeries to her lung, neck, brain, back, chest, and other locations. She underwent several periods of both intravenous and oral chemotherapy, as well as radiation therapy to her chest, head, neck, back, and leg. Kara also went through multiple Gamma Knife radiosurgeries to her brain. But throughout her entire cancer battle, Kara's overriding concern was to get on with her life as quickly as possible. She only stopped working when she was in the hospital or literally unable to get out of bed at home. Kara chronicled her journey in a remarkable series of haiku poems, which can be read on her blog: