

Disabled ski champion Jill Kinmont Boothe dies at 75

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

Jill Kinmont Boothe was the national women's slalom champion and on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* when she set out to win a 1955 race that would help put her on the U.S. Olympic ski team. As she sped down a Utah mountain slope, she lost control on an icy bump, struck a spectator, crashed and tumbled into a tree.

When she finally came to a stop, she couldn't feel anything. This must be death, she later recalled thinking. Her neck broken, she was paralyzed below her shoulders, her promising career as a skier over at 18.

But Kinmont Boothe became a role model of a different sort, the subject of a book and two Hollywood films, a teacher and a painter who refused to let her crippling injuries turn her into a different person.

She died Thursday at a hospital in Carson City, said Ruth Rhines of the local coroner's office. Rhines could not confirm reports that Kinmont Boothe died of complications related to surgery. She was 75.

A Los Angeles native, she was born Feb. 16, 1936, and in her early teens moved with her family to the Owens Valley, where her father ran a dude ranch in Bishop in the shadow of the Eastern Sierra. She learned to ski at nearby Mammoth Mountain and in 1954 won both the national junior and senior slalom championships

Adding to her appeal, she was, in the words of 1950s press accounts, a "plucky, pretty" blue-eyed blond – the mid-century ideal of young womanhood.

“Everybody that I knew at that age thought Jill was about the cutest thing around; she really was a beautiful young lady and a phenomenal skier,” said Alan Engen, a former U.S. ski competitor and ski historian who met Kinmont Boothe as a young racer. “At the time that she had her accident, she was probably the premier up-and-comer women’s U.S. skier.”

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