

Roxanne Patrylak is the ultimate mother for her family, Edwardsville distance crew

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE – Each Mother’s Day, **Roxanne Patrylak** gets a salute from not only her two children and her husband, **George**, the head cross country and distance coach for the track team, but also all the athletes.

For Roxanne and George, their marriage was built from the start around running. Even to this date, the two still both can be found on the trails of Edwardsville, jogging. Both were four-year runners at SIUE for the cross country and track teams.

The woman’s voice that can be heard above all others and sometimes is on the infield of the track encouraging them is Roxanne, the ultimate support factor and the epitome of a mother for the distance crew.

“Our whole relationship revolved around running in the beginning,” her husband, George, said. “It was a common interest; we actually started training together while I was in college. I was trying to get some extra mileage and needing a training partner. It is funny how life leads us to bigger things.”

George said watching the Edwardsville kids compete and grow as people today is one of the highlights of Roxanne’s life along with raising her family.

Roxanne and George have two children, Kira and Geordan.

Eli Sweatt, an outstanding cross country and distance runner in track for EHS, who graduated in 2009, said the thing about cross country and distances in track at EHS is that they say you get to meet friends, have fun and get faster with a hilarious coach.

“What they don’t tell you is that you’ll basically end up with a second mother. Someone who’ll drive states away to watch you run, even after you graduate. No matter how disappointed you were with your race, she seemed to always know what to say to make you feel better.

“Even later in life she will still be there to talk if you ever need someone. She is a strong, caring, loyal, and loud person. Rox is the definition of a good person. That is why even people ask me who she is, the best answer I could ever come up with was that she is my second mom.”

Allie Sweatt, now a cross country and track runner at SIUE, said she has been blessed to have one amazing mom in Valerie Livesay, but also another in Roxanne Patrylak.

“My first memories of Roxanne Patrylak was when she was racing the Mud Mountain 5K while pushing a stroller that had her daughter, Kira, and son, Geordan, in it while her husband, Coach George Patrylak was helping run this huge fundraiser. I think she might have won the female division of Mud Mountain that year too.

“I always saw Roxanne running around like crazy and screaming her head off at cross country and track meets. I don’t remember when or how exactly our relationship got to where it is now, but Roxanne and Coach P make it a priority to let all the Edwardsville cross country athletes know that we are a family. Roxanne would cheer at my races until she went hoarse. Our relationship began with me asking Roxanne for advice or venting to her about a race or practice.

“Eventually, it became me talking to her, not just to discuss running, but to talk about all sorts of things such as boy troubles, religion, school, my future, friends, etc. I could and still do talk to her about everything. Even after I graduated from high school I will still find Roxanne telling (sometimes yelling) me words of encouragement during my collegiate races. My first collegiate cross country race my mom could not make it. So I got the next best thing and Roxanne drove all the way down to Carbondale to watch my race.

“When I was told I was racing my first 10K this past April at Wash U, she not only came but somehow got on the infield of the track. For every lap of the 25-lap race, she did not only cheer for me but she ran across the field.”

Allie said the Patrylak's and Sweatt's have known each other for about 14 years.

"Coach P has coached every Sweatt kid, starting with Willie Sweatt. Next being Eli Sweatt, then Garrett Sweatt and me, the baby girl," Allie said. "They have helped us all face obstacles and have helped us overcome them. They were there when my parents got a divorce, they were there when we were all picking colleges and future career paths, they have invited us into their home on Christmas day to play board games, they made my brother, Garrett, a die-hard Blues fan, and they made one of my wildest dreams come true by letting me take their daughter, Kira, to a Taylor Swift concert and they continue to be an active part of our lives."

Tyler Cann was a 2009 EHS graduate. He said he has known Coach George and Roxanne since he was 11 years old in sixth grade.

"I babysat for Kira and Geordan all through high school and even after," he said. "They are just as much family to me as my own. Rox, as I am sure you will hear, was much more than just the coaches' wife. Rox was involved in our lives from day one in the Edwardsville cross-country program. To this day I couldn't ask for a better experience in the program."

Cann said the Patrylaks both were and still are a huge part of his life.

"I still text Rox when I have something to vent about or something big happens in my life or I need advice," Cann said. "I love her more than she knows and she has touched every one of us who ran for Coach P. She is a huge part of the success of the program, by standing by coach and being that role model for all the runners with her incredible commitment to the program. She is a second mom to me and I'm sure every athlete from the program you talk to would say the same."

Charlie Vance, part of the 2007 track and cross country runners, said Rox is one of the most caring, selfless people he had ever had the pleasure of knowing.

"As coach Patrylak was my cross country/track coach all through middle school and high school, Roxanne was our adoptive team mom. Her passion for not only the sport of running, but every single teammates' individual growth and success is truly amazing and unforgettable. In many ways, she is the glue that binds the EHS cross country family together. Happy Mother's Day, Rox!"

Eric Johannigmeier ran cross country and track at EHS, and he described Roxanne as "the official mom for Edwardsville Cross Country."

“During a race, we can always hear you give us your all in support because you care so much for us,” he said. “Thanks for always being there and we all love you very much. Happy Mother’s Day.”

EHS sophomore Joe Paolucci said he believes it is “incredible” how Roxanne supports the cross country and track team.

“In cross country and track she runs across the courses and cheers so loudly and really inspires you to run harder and strive for achieving greatness,” he said. “And back in cross country whenever the courses would get difficult, she would be right there on top of the hill, yelling and encouraging. She really helped me work to run my best. In track she has helped several of my teammates run PRs and place in races.”

Edwardsville assistant track and cross country coach Dustin Davis, who focuses on the distances, said he thinks Roxanne has always been his biggest fan.

“I have so many memories of Roxanne being there to lift me up after a bad race, and to celebrate with me after a good race. Her passion for running is second to none and her ability to connect with the runners and be a surrogate mother to them is just fantastic. Even now, she still comes to some of my races and I’m over 10 years out of high school. She is the mother of our cross-country family.”

Lizzy Lynn, who graduated last year from the girls cross country and track teams, said what is amazing about Rox is that she always believes in us even when we don’t believe in ourselves.

“It was always at that point of the race when my legs burned and I doubted whether I could continue that Rox’s reassurances reminded me that I could. I think every Edwardsville cross-country runner will agree that no one cheers louder or better than Rox. She would cheer for us at an early point in the race, then dart to another point of the cross-country course and cheer for us again. And again, Rox, standing at the sidelines, was always there for us when we needed a word of encouragement.

“And she was there for us after the race too. If I ever felt down about a bad race, she would be first to sense my disappointment – always the first to give me a word of encouragement. Rox’s love for running goes deep, but her love for the Edwardsville High School cross-country team goes even deeper. And that type of devotion does not go unnoticed. Although she was never technically my coach, the role she played in my high school cross country career cannot be overstated, because she was in a way, the mother of my team: always there for us, always cheering. I will be forever grateful.”

