Professor speaks about husband's battle with cancer

BY ASHLEY JOHNSON
Staff writer

After losing the war against her husband's cancer, University professor Kathryn Anthony keeps on fighting.

Anthony, a professor of architecture and women's studies, spoke about her husband, Barry Riccio, and his struggle with cancer at the Illini Union Bookstore Thursday afternoon. Before Riccio died, the couple documented their experience in the book, "Running for Our Lives," which Anthony signed after the talk.

"The book is about my relationship with Barry and our odyssey with cancer," Anthony said. "When faced with adversity, we mustered whatever strength we had and fought back."

Riccio was a history professor at Eastern Illinois University. Anthony said he was diagnosed with cancer in 1993 after she took him to the hospital because he felt faint at a party. He was 38 at the time. Riccio was pronounced "terminal" at 40, but lived until he was 46. Anthony attributed her husband's resilience to his participation in clinical trials.

Riccio gained national attention when medical teams used experimental cancer treatments on him. He appeared in Time, the Chicago Tribune, ABC Evening News, and NBC Nightly News.

Cancer took Riccio through five states, seven operations and about 400 blood transfusions, Anthony said. She described their struggle as "dogging bullets."

She said the strong sense of community in Champaign-Urbana helped them get through the ordeal.

"When bad things happen, Champaign-Urbana is a good place to be," she said. "People really do have angelic qualities around here."

Anthony said publishers declined to issue the book, telling her "the illness market is saturated."

So, she printed it herself.

"I'm still proud of the project I did, even though it was not done in the traditional way," she said. "I think it's important that people's stories are told. This book was really a labor of love for me."

Anthony brought pictures of her husband and her and one of his many Greek fisherman caps, which she said was her way of "having him here in spirit, if not in person."

"He felt like he was a warrior in this situation," Anthony said. "I think that was one of the hardest things for him — when he realized that this was the end of the line."