



left: Participants gathered in a circle moments before the start of the Just 'Cause three-day breast cancer walk last May. below: Traced footprints of walkers are part of the banner that travels 60 miles.



PHOTOS BY BEN DIMARIO

Making a Difference One Step at a Time

After losing one of my dearest friends to breast cancer at the age of 48, I was determined to support breast cancer research by walking 60 miles in her memory. Finding a cure for this dreadful disease was of utmost importance to Meryl, and I wanted to carry on her mission.

Our friendship spanned three decades and, within that time, Meryl and I shared a deeply caring and uncomplicated relationship. We met freshman year in college and immediately became close friends after realizing how much we had in common. We both came from close-knit Jewish families, were one of three girls, had a passion for tennis, and a deep love of laughter.

Over the years our lives became very busy; Meryl settled on the upper east side of Manhattan while I moved back to Boston. The 200 miles between us did not make a difference, and we remained close as we entered the next chapter of our lives.

Meryl was diagnosed in the summer of 2009, and the following spring I traveled to New York City with my youngest daughter to be part of her team in a 3.5-mile Revlon walk supporting the fight

against women's cancers. We made our way through Central Park decked out in pink from head to toe, compliments of Meryl's creativity, generosity, and zest for life. In the midst of the walk, I realized that Meryl was not only in a battle for her life, but was passionately determined to help find a cure for others. That was so much like Meryl, always putting others before herself.

She put up an incredible fight in the hope of beating the disease, while keeping her life in motion and continuing her job as a beloved principal at a Manhattan special needs school until weeks before her death in early 2011.

Shortly after her death, I began my search for a 3-day, 60-mile walk where I could carry on her mission of finding a cure. I was somewhat familiar with the well-known national walks, but was skeptical about how much of the raised funds actually go to medical research and direct support of women with breast cancer. If I were to participate and solicit funds from family and friends, I wanted to be certain that 100 percent of the donations went to the cause.



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good works

For additional information please log on to:

- ★ www.justcausewalk.org
- ★ www.healinggarden.net
- ★ www.massgeneral.org/cancer

In preparation for the three-day journey, I joined a local gym to train for the walk, and while explaining to the owner why I joined, he told me that his wife was co-founder of the Just 'Cause Breast Cancer Walk – a privately formed walk with 100 percent

of raised funds going to the cause. I had found my walk of choice. When I met the founders, I immediately knew this was the walk for me.

Just 'Cause was established in 2002 by four women who had a vision of creating a 60-mile, three-day walk where all of the funds raised would go either to the Harvard, Massachusetts-based Virginia Thurston Healing Garden or the Massachusetts General Hospital's Gillette Center for Women's Cancers. Both of these organizations provide valuable services to women with breast cancer and their families.

Last spring, I joined the Just 'Cause walk with another college classmate. As we meandered through Bolton, Harvard, Boxboro, Acton, and Concord, it was a beautiful tribute to our friend, and we were honored to be part of the record-breaking team that would surpass the \$1 million donation mark.

I vividly recall our 39th mile. We crossed over Concord's Old North Bridge on our way to a reception at The Colonial Inn when a breast cancer survivor from out of town hugged us and thanked us for walking to raise research funds, saying that research is the key to finding a cure.

The 10th annual Just 'Cause walk will be held May 18-20, 2012 and, in addition to the 60-mile walk, will be offering a 10- or 20-mile option, along with a 3.5-mile walk on Saturday.

I feel confident that someday a cure will be found and my dear friend Meryl will be smiling down on us all. ★