



The Amazing Incredible Journey, Book 7

Denver

By

Penny Newmark

The Incredible Journey, Book 1 – 2001, Fort Collins to Boulder, Colorado

The Incredible Journey, Book 2 – 2002, Boulder to Denver, Colorado

The Incredible Journey, Book 3 – 2004, Scottsdale to Tempe Arizona

The Incredible Journey, Book 4 – 2005, Denver, Colorado Roundtrip

The Incredible Journey, Book 5 – 2007, Gilbert to Phoenix Arizona

The Incredible Journey, Book 6 – 2008, San Diego, California Roundtrip

And the journey continues...

The finish is not the end, but rather, it's only the beginning. Let me then "begin" by thanking each and every one of you for your never ending support and love. First and foremost, thank you to the 3 incredible men in my life – Carl, Chad and Brett. Thank you to my other family members. Thank you Team Triple D – Dames Do Denver; La Donna and Bernice, thank you with all my heart for sharing this journey with me. Thank you dear friends, fellow employees at Frontier Oil, and business associates. Thank you to my doctors; without them I'd likely not be here to write this story. I am so blessed to have all of you in my life.

After last year's journey I knew I had to do something really special for journey #7 in 2009 since 2009 would mark my 20th anniversary as a breast cancer survivor. How perfect that Komen added Denver as one of its new cities for the 2009 3Day. I would be able to walk in my hometown and celebrate my 20 years of being a breast cancer survivor with friends and family. So, with this in mind, I set out to prepare for this 7th journey and I set my fundraising goal at \$20,000. This 7th Journey, the Denver 3Day Breast Cancer Walk, was the most amazing ever.

I'm not sure I really ever stopped training from #6 but I officially began the 2009 training in March. I primarily spent weekdays at the health club training at 4:00 a.m. Honestly, it's just no fun to walk on the treadmill mile after mile! La Donna and I trained together on the weekends and occasionally during the week. We found lots of ways to have fun – looking at flowers and houses, petting every dog we passed, and eating many scrumptious delights at Starbucks, Panera Bread, and Duffy Rolls. Bernice kept us apprised of her training in the heat and humidity of Houston!

Although I know I did lots of complaining during the 6 months of training and, after logging over 600 training miles, August 28th arrived quickly. We arrived at Colorado Mills Mall in west Denver (Lakewood) at 5:30 a.m. for opening ceremony. I received a very special honor (thank you Erin) and was asked to be in the Circle of Survivors during opening and closing ceremonies. The opening ceremony is the emotional kickoff to The Walk. The Circle of Survivors represents the individuals who have not survived their fight against breast cancer. We carried special flags; the flag assigned to me was HOPE. As always, the opening ceremony was very moving and I cried. Soon, opening ceremony ended and we were off for our first 20 miles. Along with me for the 60 miles, were pictures that I carried in my fanny pack of Linda, Mary, Stephanie and Patsy – four breast cancer survivors. I walked with them, as well as Julie and Paula, in my heart.

We traveled through many quaint neighborhoods throughout Lakewood and Littleton. It was a beautiful sunny day with great views of our spectacular Rocky Mountains. We stopped at a lovely park for our lunch of chicken breast sandwiches, fruit, chips and cookies. Of course, along the way there were pit stops to provide water and Gatorade and lots and lots of snacks. Most important, there were lots and lots of very clean port-a-potties. The port-a-potties become a welcome site and our best friends! My two highlights of the day included a special cheering station set up by Vicki, one of my teammates from last year's San Diego walk. She and several of her girlfriends set up a "paradise" cheering station and passed out freshly baked cookies and popsicles. Yum! As I was enjoying this cheering station and visiting with Vicki I heard a car horn honking and someone yelling my name. It was Marla, my dear next door neighbor and teammate for Walk #5 in Phoenix. She tracked me down among the 700 walkers and came out to give me a big hug and a dozen roses. I carried those roses the rest of the day. I felt like a queen and loved every moment of the attention!

We walked and anxiously awaited the first glimpse of camp at Clement Park. For those of you not familiar with Denver, this is a beautiful park in Southwest Denver. It may best be known as the site for the memorial for the Columbine High School students that were killed several years ago. The location was lovely overlooking a lake and our majestic mountains.

I must digress for just a moment. Most of you know that I've sworn off camping during The Walk, preferring to be in the comfort of a box springs and mattress. This year was to be no different. However, a special reward awaits the top fundraiser when she gets to camp. She gets a really big tent with a really big air mattress supplied by New Balance, one of the presenting sponsors of the Breast Cancer 3Day (thank you Kendra and New Balance). Do you see where I'm going with this? Well, that tent and air mattress had my name on it – actually a welcome sign – so how could I possibly say no to camping?!! La Donna agreed to be my tent mate and Bernice "camped" at my house; Carl shuttled her back and forth.

Now, I'll get back on track. La Donna and I got settled into our special digs and enjoyed the notoriety. We carbo-loaded at dinner with spaghetti and meat balls, then took our hot showers in the back of a semi trailer truck so we could get cleaned up for the evening's activities. Friday night at camp included Karaoke and recognition for the top fundraisers. Triple D – Dames Do Denver received the award for the #1 power team. Between the three of us, we raised nearly \$33,000! I received the top fundraiser honor and was awarded the key to my tent! We – you and me – raised \$19,200 toward the fight against breast cancer. 145 special friends and family contributed to this very worthy cause and I truly hope that one day we'll enjoy a world without breast cancer.

La Donna and I turned out the lights (well, it was a lantern) at about 8:30 but sleep evaded us. We really don't remember sleeping much the first night. We got up many times for a stroll to the port-a-potties, tossed and turned in the tent, and did our fair amount of giggling. Yikes, 5:00 a.m. sure arrived quickly.

Thank goodness for the nice hot breakfast of oatmeal, eggs, bacon, potatoes, and biscuits. We were still feeling very sleepy. Bernice met us at our tent at about 6:00 so we could head out for the day. Saturday's journey began with a beautiful sunrise and a view of hot air balloons flying over the mountains. McDonald's set up a table along the route and had coffee and tea for the walkers. As we traveled through the neighborhoods, trails and parks of Littleton and Centennial lots of supporters came out to cheer us on, including Mary Ellen. One of our biggest supporters, Glenn - La Donna's husband - was there to greet us as we were close to our lunch stop. Glenn kept us company during lunch and took lots of great pictures. We had a delicious lunch – chicken caesar wraps, chips, fruit, and cookies. One more trip to the port-a-potties and off we went for our return to camp. As we walked through downtown Littleton an Elvis wannabe serenaded us and we were greeted by the Energizer bunny at one of the pit stops. We certainly weren't disappointed when the camp came into view. Yeah, another 20 miles completed. Once we got back to camp, we enjoyed foot and leg massages as well as a chair massage! Oh yes.

Again, I'll digress for just a moment. Carl was on his way to the camp to pick up Bernice when the unexpected happened. The battery in the car died and, to make a long story short, Bernice kept us company while we showered and had dinner of baked chicken and rice. (We ate a lot of chicken during the 3 days of The Walk!) Bernice was able to join in the Saturday night activities and I'm glad she was there. Again, I had another special honor (thank you Melina). I was asked to be one of two speakers to talk to the walkers and crew members. Hopefully, they found my speech motivating. I know I was honored to have been selected and did my best not to turn into a blubbering idiot by crying hysterically! Carl arrived to pick up Bernice after the final performance of the Karaoke finals!

We slept a little better the second night but I can't honestly say I felt well rested. It got pretty chilly during the night and we made lots of trips to the port-a-potties after consuming about 16 – 18 glasses of water and Gatorade during the day.

We awoke at 5:00 a.m. in anticipation of our last day of the 3Day Walk. I was sad to think that this journey was almost over. Again, we had a yummy breakfast. One of the crew members serving breakfast was a sorority sister who I hadn't seen in 34 years and we recognized each other! (Do you supposed that means that neither one of us has aged?!!) The weather Sunday was cool and overcast. We actually had to wear long sleeve shirts. We walked through some beautiful neighborhoods with exquisite landscaping. We loved looking at the flowers. One of our cheering stations was at the University of Denver. I was surprised and thrilled to see my friend Pat among the supporters. After a short visit, we headed out to our lunch stop. I can't say we were hungry but we ate lunch at 10:00. Lunch was really good; we had a turkey sandwich on delicious bread, chips, fruit and cookies. We took our merry sweet time at lunch as there was no rush to get to closing ceremony. We were way ahead of schedule. After lunch we worked our way to a Starbuck's that was packed with fellow walkers.

After a leisurely lunch we walked along the Cherry Creek bike path inching toward our final destination. One of our pit stops was at a park where there were hundred and hundreds of beautiful flowers. That was so refreshing! Nearly reaching the home stretch, we stopped to "refresh, refuel and relieve" at Civic Center Park in Downtown Denver. The energy at that pit stop was amazing. I forgot to mention that as we approached this pit stop a lady on the street came up to us and asked to make a donation to The Walk. With that, she wrote out a check.

The end was soon in sight as we walked the drive up to City Park, the location of our closing ceremony. Fellow walkers, crew members and supporters cheered us on as we finished The Walk. It was euphoric. Carl found us

in the walkers' holding area and greeting us with pink stuffed animals. The site of the closing ceremony was breathtaking framed by the Denver skyline and City Park Lake. Soon we lined up to walk into the closing ceremony – crew members, walkers, survivors, and the Circle of Survivors. The ceremony was beautiful with a final reminder why we were there and what we accomplished. We walked because Everyone Deserves a Lifetime. I cried. Actually, I cried a lot.

There were so many things that touched my heart during the walk.... all the supporters that came out with food, drink, and noise makers, the older gentleman whose wife of 60 years had died of cancer, the adorable kids cheering on the walkers, our Cabana boy Scott, the Harley bikers dressed in pink (there was no question about their masculinity!!) who volunteered to make sure the walkers were safe, the 4 teenage girls who dressed up in different outfits every day to encourage us. I may never see these people again but they left a lasting impression on me. La Donna - you touched my heart for "coming out of retirement" to celebrate my 20 year cancer anniversary and participating in your third walk with me. Bernice – you touched my heart for embracing your first long distance walk in the fight against breast cancer with such determination and traveling to Denver to participate.

Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart and blister-free feet for your financial and emotional support. The 700 Denver walkers raised \$1.8 million toward the fight against breast cancer. My cumulative fund raising efforts are totaling nearly \$92,000 and I'm not done yet. Together we **WILL** find a cure for breast cancer.

With love and appreciation,

Renny

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

2010 3Day Breast Cancer Walk - stay tuned! The journey **WILL** continue.

