

The Incredible Journey, Book 6

San Diego

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

And the journey continues...

The 2008 Incredible Journey began early March when I registered for the Komen 3Day Breast Cancer Walk in San Diego November 21 – 23. Although I had registered to do the walk sans teammates, I ultimately ended up joining a team – Diva Walkers. Diva Walkers was captained by Darleen, one of my external business consultants in Houston, and 4 of her friends – Vicki, Cecile (also a breast cancer survivor), Tory, and Bert. In addition, one of my fellow employees, Beth, at Frontier's Cheyenne refinery, participated in this walk.

My "official" training for the walk began Mid-May with outdoor and treadmill walks. It takes a lot of discipline to train alone but I forged on. For the most part, I trained at least 5 days a week. As fall rolled around, it didn't get light outside until 7:00 – 8:00 a.m. so most of my training was done at the health club on the treadmill beginning at 4:00 a.m. On the weekends, I would walk 4 hours on the treadmill each Saturday and Sunday. I can't even begin to tell you how boring that was! To minimize the boredom, I read lots and lots of books – usually 2 each Saturday and Sunday. During the week I would read an additional 2 – 3 books. I think I read every Danielle Steel, Nora Roberts, Sandra Brown, and Linda Howard books. I did have some challenges, if you will, along the way with my training. As I mentioned in my donation request letter, I tested positive for the breast cancer gene, BRCA-1, in March. A positive BRCA-1 means a higher risk of recurrence of breast cancer as well as a high risk of ovarian cancer, the silent killer. I chose to take a prophylactic approach to my health and had two surgeries prior to the Walk to ensure I would remain cancer-free.

Before I knew it, the third week in November arrived and it was off to San Diego. Carl joined me in this adventure as my #1 supporter, chauffeur and photographer. We met up with the other Diva Walkers Thursday night to "carbo-load" at a delicious northern Italian restaurant in La Jolla. Friday morning, Day 1 – I awoke at 4:30 a.m., arriving at opening ceremony about 5:15. Carl arrived at Opening Ceremony to cheer us on and take lots of pictures. One of the most touching moments is the Circle of Survivors, an honor to 8 breast cancer survivors who represent all who have persevered breast cancer and those who have lost the fight. Tears were shed but there began the camaraderie among the walkers. I am reminded during this poignant ceremony just how grateful I am to be a survivor and that I must do all I can to stop this disease. Need I say more? We were there with one goal in mind – find a cure for breast cancer. Following opening ceremony, the route was opened about 7:30 a.m. but due to the 5000 participants, essentially there was a traffic jam of walkers and we didn't actually beginning walking until 8:30.

Day 1 began as a chilly, overcast morning at the Del Mar fairgrounds. The route featured many memorable highlights, including lunch in Kellogg Park at La Jolla Shores, the pink balloon arch at La Jolla Shores Hotel, and the seals at La Jolla Cove. I never really thought much about San Diego being hilly but I certainly have a different prospective now! Early in the route we climbed a fairly long incline with a magnificent view of the Pacific Ocean. We also walked along the perimeter of the very famous Torrey Pines Golf Course. I looked for Carl but didn't see him on any of the tee boxes or greens! Along the route there were many grab & go's and pit stops with plenty of water, Gatorade, snacks, and most important, Port-a Potties! Our first day lunch was a yummy chicken breast sandwich, pasta salad, chips, fruit and a cookie. After lunch off we went to finish the first day of walking. Because we got somewhat of a late start in the day for the walk dusk set in as we approached the camp at Crown Point Shores in Mission Bay Park. We walked and walked and walked and finally came upon about 2500 bright pink tents... at last, the sign of camp. Mission Bay Park was a phenomenal setting to settle in for the night for those walkers who camped.

Each year that I have participated in the walk, I threatened that I wouldn't camp. This year that came to fruition! No camping for me. Carl picked me up at the end of each day for a lovely "camping experience" on a pillow top mattress, long bath, hot shower, etc, at a Hilton hotel then drove me back in the morning to where the walkers began the walk. I must

admit that soaking in a hot bath was the perfect finish to the first day. We essentially were on our feet 12+ hours the first day and I had a few aches and pains!

After a great night's sleep, I joined the Diva Walkers for breakfast at the camp site to begin Day 2. Our day began with a fantastic hot breakfast of eggs, oatmeal, hash browns, bacon, biscuit and yogurt. I was anxious to get on the road so I headed out on my own at 6:15. I witnessed a magnificent sunrise along the bay. Walking by myself provided me with the opportunity to meet other walkers and chat along the way. I even had the opportunity to walk with Beth, who is an absolute speed demon. My short, squatty-body legs couldn't even begin to walk at her pace for very long. I enjoyed the route on Day 2 even more than Day 1. The majority of the day was spent walking along or near the ocean. It was spectacular. In particular, I loved the walk along Sunset Cliffs, Ocean Beach and Pacific Beach. Part of the walk was along a dog beach so it was fun to watch the dogs frolicking in the ocean. The supporters lined the walk and cheered us on. In fact, not only were the supporters passing out candy, water, snacks, Gatorade, etc., there was a group of ladies who set up a sidewalk stand – The Ta Ta Tavern - with shots of tequila and beer! Oh, yeah! Our lunch on this day was at Bonita Cove and included appearances from Miss Teen USA and the University of California – Davis marching band. Lunch was a teriyaki chicken wrap and, I must say, it wasn't my favorite! I must have cruised along because I finished my 20 mile walk at 2:15! When I called Carl to ask that he pick me up, he was still on the golf course! Not only did he pick me up, but he made 2 other trips back to the camp to pick up the rest of the Diva Walkers to shuttle them to a hotel. They decided that one night of camping was enough for them!! Carl and I went into Little Italy and had a fantastic dinner of lasagna and Chianti!

The Diva Walkers and I met back at camp for breakfast on Day 3. Again, we had a yummy breakfast of eggs, blintzes, sausage, biscuits, and yogurt. We hit the road with excitement at 6:15 for our final day. Day 3 route took us through Mission Bay and Old Town and ultimately to Petco Park. One of the Mexican restaurants in Old Town set up an outdoor table and served freshly-cooked chicken quesadillas to the walkers. They were delicious. Our walk out of Old Town took us up Juan Street Hill. The homes along this hill were lovely but the hill was unbelievable. There were lots of supporters along the hill to encourage us. The route was shorter on the third day to ensure that all the walkers could finish in time for closing ceremony. Therefore, so that we wouldn't get to the holding area of the closing ceremony with a lot of time to kill, we found a delightful Mexican restaurant along the route. We stopped to have lunch – quesadillas and margaritas. Wow! It was a lot of fun to stop and have a leisurely lunch, unwind and enjoy a little libation! We even stopped to have a Starbuck's frappuccino! The absolute highlight of the walk and most emotional moment for me occurred during the "home stretch" of the walk. The final leg of the walk was jam-packed with supporters; this was absolutely overwhelming. We had come to a stop at an intersection to wait for a red light to turn green. I'm so grateful the light was red. As we waited, we turned around and the Francis Parker Lower School Chorus began to sing the most beautiful song. The song was "How Could Anyone". The combination of the children singing in their sweet voices plus the words of the song touched my heart in a way I can't explain. The words of the song are: "How could anyone ever tell you/You were anything less than beautiful/How could anyone ever tell/You were less than whole?/How could anyone fail to notice/That your loving is a miracle?/How deeply you're connected to my soul." I was overwhelmed with emotion and the tears flowed. One of the girls in the choir ran to get me a Kleenex and one of the boys gave me a handful of Tootsie Rolls! One of the bicycle policemen from San Jose who was sitting on his bike next to me opened his arms and gave me a big hug. If that wasn't enough, we walked a few more blocks to finding Carl waiting for us with congratulatory balloons and stuffed animals. Again, another teary moment!

As we approached the closing ceremony location, it seemed as though there were thousands of people lining the streets cheering us on for our last few steps. The Diva Walkers crossed the finish line and embraced. Yes, we finished the walk but until there's a "finish" for breast cancer, our work will not be done. We had a little time to unwind and relax and reflect on just how special the event was for us. The closing ceremony was spectacular. I was in awe when it came to the number of survivors in their pink shirts. Next to me on one side was a young survivor caught up in the emotion of it all. I asked the woman how long she had been a survivor and she indicated 1 year. It dawned on me then just how young she was and I asked her age. She was 22; at age 21 she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had had a double mastectomy. It was at that moment that I realized that breast cancer does not discriminate. I looked around me and witnessed survivors who were young and old, fat and thin, tall and short, and from all ethnicities. My heart broke for this 22 year old woman.

There were many moments of the walk that made me smile (and, in some cases, cry too) – the old gentleman who wore a sign that said "I'm a breast man", the 92 year old woman that held up a sign that she was a 36 year breast cancer survivor, the tee shirts that read "Save the Ta-Ta's" and "Protect Second Base", the cheerleaders at one of the pit stops that chanted "3, 2, 1 – walk until you're done/1, 2, 3 – shake those – boobies", the hundreds of girls scouts and brownies cheering us on, the bicycle policemen from San Jose who rode the route alongside the walkers to make sure we were safe, the Harley bikers who made sure we were safe when we crossed busy intersections, the "eye candy" Harley biker who wore his black

leather chaps with very black briefs underneath, the grandmother who was with her baby granddaughters along the route thanking us for walking in hopes her granddaughters won't ever have to face breast cancer, and the beautiful sandy beaches and ocean. The folks of San Diego came out en masse to cheer us on; their support was unwavering.

I didn't do this walk alone and feel compelled to say thank you to so many people. Carl, Chad, and Brett and my extended family, I love you and thank you for being my #1 supporters. Thanks to Darleen and the other Diva Walkers for allowing me to share this experience with them. Thank you to the 125 family members, dear friends and business associates who made a donation to the 3Day Breast Cancer Walk. Your donations totaled \$19,215 and, as a result, I was the #8 fundraiser out of 5000 walkers for the San Diego walk; cumulatively, my fundraising efforts during my six journeys exceed \$71,000. Bless you.

I'm already looking forward to August 28 - 30 when I will participate in my 7th long distance walk in the fight against breast cancer. Komen for the Cure is bringing the walk to Denver! I'll be walking with my good friend La Donna. La Donna shared The Incredible Journey #1 and #4 with me. I already know the event will be special.

Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart and blister-free feet for your financial and emotional support. Together we **WILL** find a cure for breast cancer.

With love and appreciation,

Penny

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

2009 3Day Breast Cancer Walk - Team 'Triple D's - Dames Do Denver'!

