

# Hirshberg Training Team Participant Spotlight – Running with a Purpose. Racing towards a Cure

By Adam Pollack

On March 9, I was joined by thousands of fellow runners at the LA Marathon to do something big: run a marathon. We were all there with different goals in mind: to win, to complete the distance, and others to raise funds and awareness for a charity of choice. If we spoke a few years ago, I would have told you that I run marathons to beat my best time. This time was different.

This past November, my father was diagnosed with Stage 3 pancreatic cancer. Living across the country meant that there wasn't much I could do on a daily basis, and I desperately wanted to be able to do something. I felt scared and hopeless.

I turned to a personal passion, marathon running. I quickly signed up for the Hirshberg Training Team (HTT), they registered me for the LA Marathon, and I hopped into training. I knew at that point my goal was different. *"I wasn't going to try to be the fastest or the strongest, but rather to increase awareness of pancreatic cancer and to fund research to find better treatment options and an eventual cure."* I felt proud every time I walked out the door for a training run wearing my purple HTT shirt. I felt a real sense of purpose.

Of course, training had its challenges. You have to make sacrifices: run when you don't feel like it, go to bed early



# Participant Spotlight – Running Changed My Life

By Alicia Easter

When I decided to join the crazy club of people who run marathons, I thought, “Why not run in my new hometown of Los Angeles?” At first I didn’t realize that the LA Marathon was on my mother’s birthday weekend, but once I did, I knew I had made the right decision. I was going to run my first marathon in honor and memory of my beautiful mother who lost her battle to pancreatic cancer twelve years ago. It is important to me to find creative ways to heal from her loss, and I am able to find that in running.

Training for the marathon humbled me time and time again. It’s a challenge because sometimes you just don’t want to go on a training run, but you know you’ll regret it. Signing up for a marathon makes you accountable and raising funds reminds you why you decided to run. I dedicated 8 months of my life to raising money and training hard (even when I didn’t want to) in order to be able to run my best race on marathon Sunday. I couldn’t have done it without the support from my amazing family; they understand my need to give back and leave the world a better place. I also recently lost my chosen big brother, Hayden Blanchard, to cancer and his battle motivated me to never give up.

Running the LA Marathon changed my life. By raising funds and committing to this experience, I saw how much I could inspire others to do the same and that felt incredible. I cried at the finish line because it was such an emotional day. I had just completed something I never thought I would do! It was a magical day filled with love, support, hope and determination. I made

new friends and had a lot of fun running the streets of LA. Most importantly, I learned a lot about what I am capable of and believe that this is only the beginning!

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# **Event Spotlight – 2nd Annual Manhattan Beach Run/Walk for Bill**

By Jan Dunbar

On Saturday, March 2, 2014 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Run/Walk for Bill raised \$10,000 for pancreatic cancer research! This was our 2nd year honoring the memory of Bill Dunbar, a husband & father, friend, an avid runner, and member of the Manhattan Beach community for 14 years. Family, friends and community came out to the Manhattan Beach Pier to enjoy a 5k overlooking the ocean along the beach side path. It was a beautiful morning, fantastic turnout, an amazing day to raise awareness.

My husband Bill enjoyed running and was happily recruited many years ago to join an early morning exercise group. He bonded with his fellow runners and formed many great friendships. When he was diagnosed with cancer in July 2012, running became a thing of the past. But the many stories of triumphs over injuries, aging and each other lived on.

Bill's journey with cancer was a short one. After many rounds of chemo, transfusions, and countless medications he passed away from pancreatic cancer at home in February 2013. Despite doing

all I could to provide love, support, and comfort, there was the overwhelming feeling of helplessness in the face of a deadly disease.

Shortly after Bill passed, a dear friend and fellow runner organized the first run/walk in his honor. Hundreds of loving friends came out to pay their respects. It was very heartwarming, and a fitting tribute to a wonderful man. When Ross asked to perpetuate the event this March, I was thrilled. It occurred to me that I may have found a way to combat the helplessness.

I had been spinning a lot and met Jon Hirshberg in class. I read about his story and the history of the Foundation. I knew immediately that supporting the Hirshberg Foundation would be our way of helping others fight cancer. The turnout at this year's event showed that many others felt as strongly about supporting efforts to combat cancer while honoring those who have passed. For me and my kids, this event has turned our personal tragedy into a cause for good.

And what a great day it was!!! Friends and supporters came out of the woodwork for a beautiful stroll on The Strand. We shared hugs and stories; we laughed and we cried. And it all felt right. I hope to continue this tradition for years to come, to raise awareness and funds to make death from pancreatic cancer a thing of the past.

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# **Teen Scientist Shares our Message of Hope**

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## **You Can H.E.L.P Spotlight – Pants Off Racing, Inc. Adopt- A-Family Program**

By D.R. Amato

My mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2006. In 2009 she travelled to Los Angeles from Ohio to participate in the Hirshberg Foundation's annual LA Cancer Challenge with 30 team members in tow. Comprised of friends and family from all over the US, Team Nancy Pants was named after our mother Nancy "Pants" Amato, because we all know who wears the pants in the Amato family! No one could have imagined the impact that day created with my family.

Soon after my mother's diagnosis in 2006 we all realized that this hardship was not just about us –there were a whole lot of people out there who cared about our family. It took some time, but we finally got to the point where we looked outside of ourselves and saw that there were many other families just like us, facing the exact same things we dealt with. We were lucky

that those around us and, unexpectedly, the local support from the community, were there for us no matter what. And, truly, that is what made the biggest impact on us as a family and our moms' fight with this disease.

Eventually my brother Pat and I created the non-profit Pants Off Racing, Inc, "POR" as a way to show our appreciation and give back all the love and support we have received as a family since our mothers' diagnosis. Combining our love for endurance sports, (ie. triathlons, marathons, 10k's, 5k's, etc) and our love for our mother, we have formed a powerful group of supporters throughout the country who are passionate about making a difference in someone else's life. Our greatest efforts revolve around the holiday season when POR – or the Meerkats as we like to be called – "adopts" local families that are dealing with the same hardships that we once experienced as a family.

We worked with the Hirshberg Foundation to get in touch with pancreatic cancer families that might be in need of holiday help. Knowing that it can be extremely difficult for parents to get into the holidays spirit, we decided we wanted to help. From trimming the tree, providing gifts, delivering holiday dinners and even lending a friendly "ear" for someone to talk to, POR is there so that families can just focus on spending time with each other. This past year, we "adopted" three local families coping with a recent pancreatic cancer diagnosis. We obtained a gift list from the families and distributed the lists to our POR Meerkats near and far. The amount of gifts contributed by those across the country was overwhelming.

Each holiday season we are reminded of the impact we are able to make in the local community by the families that we have adopted. The relationships formed through this program extend beyond the holiday season and it has been our goal to not only help and assist these families during the most difficult of

times, but to also be there for them when the initial shock and reality of this disease begins to dwindle. The POR Adopt-A-Family program only scratches the surface of the impact we are able to make on the lives of others to make a lasting connection with the pancreatic cancer community.

The Hirshberg Foundation motto, “You Can Hope or You Can HELP,” is something we take to heart and it is our goal to live and act within our means to help as many patients and families that are dealing with the same hardships we have seen in our own family. And that is the reason we have created the POR Adopt-a-Family program – to help and assist those families that we know we can help make a difference.

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## **LACC Participant Spotlight – Maggie’s First 5k**

By Matt Skinner

The LA Cancer Challenge has been a part of my family’s lives for the last 11 years. When our friend Mark was diagnosed in 2002 we raced in support. Since he succumbed to the disease, we’ve raced to remember. The race had become a proud yearly tradition. Slowly, we’ve become more involved and have gotten to know so many people in the Hirshberg organization. The 2013 event will forever hold a special place in my heart. The day after the 2012 LA Cancer Challenge my daughter Maggie decided to get into the race that she had watched from the sideline for the first 7 years of her life. I’m a runner – it is one thing I can say I’m good at doing. Now I was going to get a chance to run with my



daughter, what could be better? Obviously when thinking about an 8-year old, "running" is a little strong of a word. I expected her first 5k to involve running, walking and skipping. Before our first training session, I sat Maggie down and talked about her goals (and mine).

My rules were simple: 1) If anything hurts, stop! 2) Always have fun and 3) Go at your own pace.

That day we ran around the block ONCE. Over the next ten months, the mileage grew slightly (our longest run was 2.65 miles). We experimented with a few different motivational systems. We tried jelly beans, PEZ, mints... The memories from our training sessions are countless. The good, the bad and the ugly all blended together.

On race day I had no idea what would happen. Maggie never realized she would be running with thousands of other people, so she was a little intimidated. While I pushed her brother in the jog stroller on one side and she grabbed onto her mom's hand on the other, we started up the "big hill" from the starting line. Maggie kept it simple...left, right, left, right...inhale, exhale...repeat.

Mile 1 (still running): "you okay??" "Shhhh, Dad!"

Mile 2 (Still Running) : "want some water?" "It's too cold out for water!"

Mile 3 (STILL RUNNING!!): "I can see the finish!" "Me too, looks likes I'm gonna beat you"

We ended with an official time 34:51. Good enough for 3rd Place in the 0-9 girls division!!! Four days later the medal has finally come off. However, the memory will last forever and October, 26th 2014 can't come soon enough.