

Hirshberg Training Team 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!

Hirshberg Training Team Participant Spotlight – Teaming up with Mom to Run the LA Marathon

My dad is the kind of person who takes care of his family and friends first. On July 23, 2012 he was diagnosed with metastatic pancreatic adenocarcinoma and started treatment three weeks later.

Hirshberg Training Team Participant Spotlight – Why I Started Running

I came to understand the devastating and tragic effects of pancreatic cancer when my first wife, Eugenie, lost her brave

battle with the disease in 2003.

Hirshberg Training Team Spotlight – Mayor’s Midnight Sun Alaska Marathon

Nine members of the Hirshberg Foundation Marathon Team journeyed from Los Angeles to Alaska this past June to participate in the Mayor’s Midnight Sun Marathon and raised over \$26,000 for the Foundation.

Team members Kari Richardson, Amy Reiss, Heather Cohen, Michelle Eskenazi, Ernae Mothershed, Veronica Herrera, Agi Hirshberg, Lisa Manheim, and David Manheim joined an estimated 3,000 runners, representing 50 states.

Each team member committed to raise at least \$3,000 for the Foundation and in return received round trip airfare, four nights at a hotel, and entry into the Marathon. They were also treated to a pre-race pasta party at the Anchorage Museum of Art and a celebration dinner after the race.

Hirshberg Foundation Director Lisa Manheim noted that the marathoners raised money in a variety of different ways. Michelle Eskenazi, who participated in last year’s Kona Marathon, participated with her friend Ernae Mothershed, to organize Art for Life, an art auction and boutique. Ernae, who was the top pledge earner with over \$5,000 in donations, also hosted a Cajun Dinner Party, while Michelle held a yard sale, gathering contributions from friends and co-workers. Kari

Richardson, an architect from Venice, hosted a birthday dinner party at her home and asked her friends for donations in lieu of gifts. She also donated her car through the Foundation's Car Donation Program. Other team members conducted successful letter-writing campaigns.

Everyone was invited to participate in a 21-week training program held on Saturday mornings in Marina del Rey by Robert Mills, one of the area's premiere marathon training coaches and Director of Club 26.2. Prior to Alaska, only one team member had ever participated in a long-distance running event. In fact, most of the team had never run at all. Yet, the eight half-marathoners and one marathoner on the team all successfully completed the race.

During a marathon, many runners get so tired they feel they can't even put one foot in front of another anymore. This urge to stop running is known as "hitting the wall." Team member Amy Reiss, whose mother lost her battle with pancreatic cancer on June 28, 2002, exactly 51 weeks prior to the start of the race, explains why this wasn't a problem in Alaska.

"On the bus on our way to the starting line, I felt my mom's presence. She didn't just show up casually, her energy was everywhere. It happened suddenly and dramatically, and I found myself moved to tears. Even though I had done the training with Robert, I worried that I wouldn't have the strength to complete the half marathon. But once we started running I realized that feeling her all around me actually gave me the energy I needed."

Other runners received their inspiration from a more natural, but no less extraordinary source. Hirshberg Foundation Director Lisa Manheim recalls what happened.

"We were running on a picturesque coastal trail, thick with lush green trees, when my mom, Agi, who was running a few paces

behind us, yelled out, “Lisa, a moose!” Sure enough, there was a huge moose staring at us from about 20 feet away. We all stopped and stared, hardly believing that we were actually in the presence of such an incredible creature.”

“My mom said laughing at that moose was the highlight of the day. ‘Maybe they (all of the people for whom we were running in memory of) sent the moose, to let us know they were up there, cheering us on,’ she told me. I think she’s right. That’s just the sort of thing my stepdad would do.”

Michelle & Ernae Never Gives Up!

Art for Life raised over \$3,000 for the Hirshberg Foundation and guaranteed Michelle and Ernae a trip to Alaska with our Marathon Team. The fun and creative event raised awareness and helped motivate Michelle and Ernae to reach the finish line together and never give up!

Hirshberg Training Team Spotlight – Kona Marathon

Four women from the Hirshberg Foundation Marathon Team in Los Angeles made the trip to the Big Island of Hawaii this past June

to participate in the Kona Marathon and Family Fun Run to raise money for the Hirshberg Pancreatic Cancer Center at UCLA.

The women joined an estimated 2,000 runners of all ages and abilities as they competed for prize money and raised funds for a number of charities. Team members committed to raise at least \$3,300 for the Foundation and in return they received free airfare, four nights at a hotel, and entry into the Marathon. They were also invited to participate in a weekly training program held in Marina del Rey by Robert Mills, Director of Club 26.2, one of the area's premiere marathon training coaches.

Lisa Hirshberg, who lost her father Ronnie in 1997, and her friend Mandy De Souza finished the $\frac{1}{2}$ marathon in 2:57:43. Mandy raised the most money, collecting over \$3,800. Allison Kaplan, an employee of the John Wayne Cancer Institute, lost her father to pancreatic cancer a few years ago. She ran the 10k in 1:57:54, a miraculous time in her eyes given that, prior to the training program, she never exercised. "When I crossed the finish line, Lisa and I just burst into tears thinking about our dads up there watching us and rooting us on. My dad kept me going for all 6 miles," stated Allison.

Michelle Eskenazi, who ran the $\frac{1}{2}$ marathon in 3:17:34, was also touched by the experience and is looking forward to the next event. "Being part of something that has unified nearly 2,000 people, all with different reasons and motivations for being involved, was truly amazing. On a personal level, I was able to accomplish something I never thought I would be able to do. I can't wait to do it again next June in Anchorage, Alaska!"

Hirshberg Foundation Director Lisa Manheim noted that the women raised money in a variety of different ways. "Allison hosted a fundraising night at the Pizza Cookery, inviting friends, family, and co-workers, while Michelle held a garage sale and

hosted a fundraising dinner at Fresh Choice restaurant. They all really went the distance.”

Citing the success of the event and the team’s efforts, Manheim went on to explain, “The Hirshberg Foundation encourages people to join our Marathon Training Program for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it helps raise money for pancreatic cancer research. But it’s also great exercise, an amazing experience and a fun vacation as well.”