

Scaling Mt Kilimanjaro for AOS

My name is Cindy Henry. I am a semi-retired, active 60 year old Londoner who has had a long standing dream to scale Mt Kilimanjaro. My friend and I began talking about the prospect about 8 years ago. While daunting, especially to someone who considers herself average at the most and certainly not an elite athlete, I continued to dream about the possibility and wondered if I was up to the challenge.

For various reasons, the ebbs and flows of life prevented me from seriously committing to doing it until this year, when my friend and I promised one another that we were going to do it! I began a serious and intense fitness regime and thoroughly researched how I would do the climb. I will be starting the climb in February of 2012 and while I am a bit apprehensive at times, I have done my best to prepare and am looking forward to it with great excitement.

While this joyous prospect has occupied my thoughts, another reality has also invaded my family's life in the last few years. My mother who had always enjoyed good health and a vigorous lifestyle began to show signs of dementia. Because she lived in another province it was some time before we realized the seriousness of her condition.

We decided to move my mom to London and in a very short time frame watched this funny, intelligent and engaging woman begin to retreat into a smaller world of forgetfulness and struggling to perform simple activities of daily living. We witnessed her confusion as she lost her way along routes to places that she had once known well and frequented often. The reality of my mom's condition has been heart wrenching. She has always been a deeply independent and vibrant woman, a caregiver who has always supported others throughout her life. Clearly, the tables have now turned and of course, family and friends have been wonderful in supporting my Mom in her time of need.

In looking for ways to keep her involved and content, we became aware (through CACC) of the McCormick Alzheimer Outreach Program, which we enrolled Mom in. Almost immediately a spark was ignited. My mom loved it! After the first visit where she and others enjoyed tea, conversation, song and dance, she couldn't wait to go back. Attending the program seemed to evoke memories for her of happy times and activities.

As I have watched her blossom in the glow that this program provides, I am filled with appreciation that Mom has a place to be where she can feel whole and enjoy the camaraderie of others. She can feel normal, without having to struggle to keep up with the demands of a world that has become overwhelming. The "Club" has become a place where she can laugh, sing, chat and feel engaged.

Because of the impact this program has had on the quality of Mom's life, I want to recognize and thank all of the amazing staff that work there. They have made my Mom's days a little brighter, a little less confusing and joyful.

I have also decided to dedicate my Kilimanjaro climb to fundraise for this worthy program and to raise awareness in the community of this debilitating disease.

