

Cancer survivors HOW WE

REAL LIVES



RAN FOR OUR LIVES

These courageous ladies took on two of their greatest challenges ever

During her gruelling chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment, Jodie Scantlebury was so weak she could barely climb the stairs of her home, let alone conquer the 5164 steps of the Great Wall of China.

Overcoming breast cancer in 2006 has left the 43-year-old mum acutely aware that life is short, so when she was asked to do the Great Wall Marathon – one of the most challenging running events in the world – she couldn't say no.

'When you've been through breast cancer, you live for each day and you want to push the envelope a bit more,' she says. 'And if you can get through chemo and radiotherapy, you can get through anything.'

Similarly, medical researcher Judith Ansell, 53, couldn't have imagined running a marathon of this magnitude. But being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 and subsequently enduring chemo, a mastectomy and breast reconstruction made her realise her own strength.

'It was the first anniversary of my last chemo, so I was having a bit of a strange day, wondering, "What does this mean? What am I going to do now?"' Judith says. 'And then the phone rang, and it was Lou.'

Lou James, 34, was the motivating force behind Team Run For Your Life, which completed the gruelling marathon last month in a bid to raise money for women with breast cancer.

Big ideas are Lou's forte. In 2006, the physiotherapist and clinical pilates instructor founded Pink Pilates, a rehabilitation and strength-building programme for women undergoing breast cancer treatment. Both Jodie and Judith found the Pink Pilates – which is funded by the Breast Cancer

Foundation and offers classes nationwide for just \$10 – to be hugely beneficial. They were both eager to help raise money by running the adventure marathon.

'I haven't had breast cancer, but through my work I know how important it is for women with breast cancer to exercise. I thought this would be a great way to encourage them to get out there,' says Lou, who is married to former All Black Steve Devine. 'We were blown away by the level of support we received.'

Breaking down walls

These three inspirational women raised an impressive \$20,000 for the New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation, earmarked for Pink Pilates.

'It was a really neat opportunity to give something back to Pink Pilates because that programme, and Lou's input, had been an important part of me getting through breast cancer,' Judith says.

Jodie agrees, saying, 'It was nice that we were not just doing it for a personal goal – to be raising money for women who have breast cancer, or are about to find out they have it. It can be quite scary at the start – you feel like it's a death sentence, but it's actually not anymore. There's a life beyond breast cancer.'

Although Lou had completed triathlons in the past, Judith and Jodie, while moderately fit, had no such experience. However, in just 15 weeks these gutsy gals, who each have two children, put themselves through punishing training regimens to face an event so tough that many of its competitors succumb to heat and exhaustion.

In this area of rural China, facilities are rudimentary, and the marathon takes place in 30-degree temperatures with only limited opportunities to hydrate. The terrain is very steep and some sections of the marathon are so narrow that competitors actually have to haul themselves up by clinging to a rope. But quitting was not an option.

'It's not about running but about keeping going,' Judith says. 'When you reach 15km and you're exhausted, there's only one way home, so you might as well keep going. Running is a metaphor for life, really.'

While all three women completed the marathon, they stress that it was never about beating the clock. All had a point to prove to themselves and to other women. For Judith and Jodie, it's important to be able to face the future without regrets.

'I want to look back on life and think, "I did everything I could and I've enjoyed it,"' Jodie affirms. 'I don't want to look back and think, "I wish..."' **NI**

By Trudie McConnochie

• Pink Pilates is currently looking for a corporate sponsor. For more information, or to find classes near you, visit www.pinkpilates.co.nz.



Lou now hopes to get a team of ladies to next year's New York City Marathon.

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