

[ACTION]

Rocking the World

The Love Hope Strength Foundation mixes music with adventure to improve cancer care all over the world.

Kelly Carpenter couldn't see more than two feet in front of her. A dense fog had rolled into the camp early that morning, adding a dangerous element to a trek that was already considered the crux of a Kilimanjaro summit attempt. If she and her team safely reached their final campsite, at the crater just below the summit, they'd be set for a short easy hike to the top the next morning. If they didn't, well, Kelly didn't want to think about that.

Nor did she want to think about what would happen if she lost sight of the climber in front of her. She scurried to stay close, tired from the six hours of hiking, and laboring to breathe normally at 18,000 feet.

At that point, the videographer approached her. "Why are you here, why are you doing this?" he asked, pointing the camera in her face. "Because I can," she said.

Kelly meant it literally. Diagnosed with colon cancer at age 28, she knew what it felt like to not be able to complete even ordinary tasks, let alone summit the highest peak in Africa. She'd spent the last six months undergoing two rounds of aggressive chemotherapy, fighting the disease that took her mother's life in 2003.

Summiting Kilimanjaro had become a symbol of Kelly's battle, a celebration of her life, and a way for her to give back by raising money so others could have the same quality of cancer care that had saved her life. The trek was a fundraiser for the rock n' roll cancer charity, the Love Hope Strength Foundation. Two other cancer survivors, along with 15 people whose lives had been touched by cancer and seven musicians, made it to the summit with Kelly the next day.

Participants had paid their own airfare, covered \$5,000 in ground costs, and raised a minimum of \$9,000 for cancer care on top of that. The price was high, but the reward for Kelly's time, money, and effort was the summit experience, with a private concert atop Kilimanjaro immediately following. The musicians included Robin Wilson from the Gin Blossoms and Slim Jim Phantom from The Stray Cats. They'd also raised the required \$14,000 to cover their expenses and help build a children's cancer care center in Tanzania.

The idea of bringing musicians and "cancer thrivers" together for peak bagging and private, mountain-top concerts is the brainchild of American James Chippendale, a leukemia survivor, and two-time cancer survivor Mike Peters, who's also the lead singer and songwriter of the Welsh rock band, The Alarm. During his cancer recovery, Peters had a view of



A Love Hope Strength Foundation concert in Kathmandu, Nepal

3,560-foot Mount Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales, and staring at it from his bed, Peters promised himself that if he lived, he would climb it. Because he could. And, he would bring along the hospital staff that had saved him in appreciation of their care and expertise.

In 2007, Peters mentioned his idea to Chippendale, who suggested that if Peters really wanted to show the world what cancer survivors could do, he'd tackle Everest and then celebrate with a rock concert. The Love Hope Strength Foundation was born.

LHSF held its first climb and concert combo on a peak just beyond Everest Base Camp that same year. It was, at the time, the highest rock concert ever performed, earning a Guinness record to prove it. Then they headed down to Katmandu and held a free concert for 15,000 locals, opening up their celebration to the community. The "Everest Rocks" documentary is now airing on MTV's High Def Channel, Palladia.

The money raised by that concert paid for the first mammography machine in Nepal, as well as the first internal radiation machine—a nucletron brachytherapy afterloader. Chippendale and Peters agreed early on that they didn't want to use money raised by LHSF to fund cancer research. They contend that the technology to save lives exists right now, it's just not available everywhere. LHSF's mission is to build cancer centers and deliver medical equipment and supplies to countries, towns, and cities where it's lacking.

In the U.S., LHSF also utilizes existing cancer care technology in saving lives. The nonprofit focuses on building the bone marrow donor list by soliciting concert-goers at music festivals such as Lollapalooza nationwide, and at venues like Red Rocks Amphitheater in their home state of Colorado. Last year, LHSF had a presence at 101 shows, adding 4,000 donors to the bone marrow database.

Meanwhile, their international musical pilgrimages now include all seven continents and the top of the Empire State Building, the Inca ruins in Machu Picchu, Colorado's Pikes Peak, Philadelphia Art Museum's "Rocky Steps," Mount Fuji, and, penned in for 2011, Siberia.

Executive Director Shannon Foley explains the thought behind the peak-bagging fundraisers, drawing on her own personal experience. Her brother is a cancer survivor, and her sister did the Livestrong Challenge as a result. "I wanted to do something, too, but I don't like walk-a-thons, I'm not a cyclist, and I don't do black tie dinners. When I found out about Love Hope Strength, something finally resonated with me—music and mountains. We were doing fundraisers that no one else did."

Shannon also points out that organizations like the Susan G. Komen Foundation didn't exist outside the United States when LHSF first started, creating a discrepancy between the United States and the rest of the world with regards to cancer care and awareness. "They weren't wearing Livestrong bracelets in Katmandu," she says.

LHSF strives to bridge that gap between cancer awareness in the U.S. and in other countries, from Peru to Wales to Tanzania. This means that for LHSF, it's not about showing up with folks who've raised funds, going on a trek, holding a concert, and leaving. "We want to leave a mark," Shannon says. "When we left Nepal, people were talking about cancer in a place where they don't talk about it." Though 90 percent of the organization's work, including planning its international projects, is based in the United States, they hope to be doing bone marrow drives on all seven continents within the next five years.

LHSF's ability to improve cancer care conditions and raise awareness both inside and outside the U.S. couldn't have come at a better time. This year, cancer overtook heart disease as the leading cause of death. Worldwide, cancer causes more deaths than AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined. In most of the developing world, cancer is viewed as a death sentence. "But we've come so much further than that," Shannon says. "Right now, we have the medical means to save tens of thousands of people all over the world. And we're doing it—one concert, one cancer care center at a time."

—Jayme Otto



Mike Peters, two time cancer survivor and co-founder of LHSF



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