

Rowing for a Cure

By Jenna Glatzer



Rick Shalvoy would like to quit rowing all over Long Island, N.Y.

It's not that he dislikes rowing; he's loved the sport for more than 30 years. But for the last four years, this East Islip father has been on a special, personal mission: a "Row For A Cure" to combat breast cancer. He's hoping there won't be any need for it in the future.

In 1992, a close friend of Shalvoy's died from breast cancer. In the next few years, it seemed everywhere he looked, people he knew were being diagnosed with the disease. He desperately wanted to help reverse that trend.

"I was out rowing one day, thinking about what might be a successful fundraiser, and it hit me: I'm a rower. That's what I can do."

Every summer since, Shalvoy has rowed 300 miles around all of Long Island in a custom-made, 19-foot lifeguard boat donated by 74-year-old Fred Scopinich, Jr. of Hampton Shipyards. The row takes about nine days, and Shalvoy often must battle bad weather and rough seas, loneliness, exhaustion, seasickness, dehydration, and injuries. Although he trains two hours a day all year, new challenges always await him at the annual event.

Besides fierce winds and scorching heat, this summer Shalvoy also sustained a sprained ankle, pulled muscles, and a knocked-out tooth. When asked if he ever feels like giving up during the row, Shalvoy says, "Every day. I row about 12 hours a day, and the last few are always very challenging."

Why, then, does he keep going?

"No matter how tough it gets, I know that when it's over, I can take several days off to recover, and then I'll be fine. Cancer patients don't have that reassurance. I want them to have that same feeling, to know they'll be OK."

Of many worthy causes, he is personally determined to help beat breast cancer because, "Women who suffer from this disease are so often innocent. They haven't done anything wrong. They eat right, exercise, they live healthy lives, and they don't know what they could have done differently to avoid this disease."

Beyond that, Shalvoy explains that breast cancer doesn't just affect the patients, but many other "innocents" as well, including spouses, relatives, friends, sons, and daughters.

"Anyone who's seen a child lose a mother to breast cancer has to be touched," he says.

Breast cancer is among the most treatable cancers if detected early. Unfortunately, there remains no fool-proof method for detection, and the disease often strikes women before they are considered "old enough" for doctors to recommend mammograms.

Shalvoy's row raised nearly \$60,000 this year through pledges, and the money will go to the New York College for Holistic Health Education and Research for clinical studies to combat breast cancer. The college and sponsors such as Genovese Drugs and KeySpan Energy are very active in promoting the row.

Shalvoy, however, calls it "a true grassroots event," since there are no major donations from sponsors. "The money comes in bits and pieces from individuals," he says.

In true community spirit, Shalvoy says that one of the "biggest thrills" of the event is seeing supporters make their way out to meet him. People row, paddle, swim, surf, or motorboat alongside him to ask questions, show appreciation for his efforts, and even hand him donations. As a part-time ocean lifeguard with the New York State Parks Department for the past 31 summers, which he fits in around a full-time job with a marketing research company, Shalvoy always is excited to see former co-workers on his rounds.

His family, including a son and three daughters, couldn't be more supportive. Thirteen-year-old daughter Meghan tells him, "Daddy, if you ever get too old to do the row, I'll take over for you."

Though touched by the offer, he doesn't think that will become necessary. "I think we're going to have this disease wrapped up by then,"

he says.

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