

Going the Extra Mile

Lisa Caltabiano stepped out of her comfort zone to show love and support for her mother, Betty DeCesaris. That one step led to a two-mile walk in Central Park that raised more than \$50,000 to make a difference for Betty and others suffering from Parkinson's disease.

As one of the youngest of nine children, Lisa says she grew up following, not leading. Then she received a mailing about the annual Parkinson's Unity Walk in New York's Central Park. "I felt a strong need for us to participate as a family in that walk," says Lisa, an Independent Sales Director from Lothian, Md. "My mother, Betty, has suffered the devastating effects of Parkinson's for the past 17 years. In that time, all of my siblings and I have contributed individually to Parkinson's charities. Now I felt God was telling me to go the extra mile — right out of my comfort zone — to organize my family and friends to walk as a group."

Lisa credits her Mary Kay experience of 14 years with giving her the courage to tackle such a huge undertaking. "Before my Mary Kay career, I would have talked myself out of it. But Mary Kay taught me that if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. Nothing will change until somebody, somewhere does something!"

And do something she did! Lisa organized Betty's Bunch — a group of 53 family members and friends — to participate with her in the Parkinson's Unity Walk. Betty's Bunch joined nearly 6,000 participants in the walk last April, which raised more than \$1 million for research. Lisa's group alone raised more than \$50,000. And in doing so, they set two Unity Walk records: one for the largest group and one for the most money ever raised by a single group in the walk's eight-year history.


Lisa admits that coming from such a large, close-knit family made getting the big group together a whole lot easier. Her dad, Sonny, chartered a bus to take them all — siblings, their spouses and children — to New York, where they joined some friends who had traveled from Pennsylvania to walk with them. Lisa's brother outfitted everyone with red Betty's Bunch T-shirts. Betty, who participated in her wheelchair, wore a shirt that said, "I'm Betty, and This is My Bunch!"

The record-setting achievement of Betty's Bunch was recognized at a special Unity Walk Thank-You reception and is featured on the Unity Walk Web site (www.unitywalk.org). Lisa and her husband, Nello, accompanied by her parents, attended the Thank-You reception at New York's City Hall to accept a special plaque on behalf of their group. "I sat behind Michael J. Fox on the dais. They whisked him in and out so fast, I didn't actually get to meet him. But I feel like I did!" recalls Lisa.

From beginning to end, the entire walk was a positive experience for Lisa, who was very hesitant at first to ask people for donations. "I sent a letter to people who know me and my family. I invited them to walk with us, or, if they couldn't, to make a donation." Lisa made it easier for them by enclosing a return envelope in the mailing. She was shocked by the response that poured in. "It was exciting to get the mail every day! Not only did our friends send donations, they also sent lovely, touching notes regarding how much they cared about my mom."

Lisa gets a little choked up when talking about what a special woman her mother, Betty, is. "I could not have chosen better parents or a better upbringing. I love my Mary Kay business because it embodies and continually reinforces the same positive values my parents worked so hard to instill in me and my siblings."

Impressed by Lisa's efforts, Unity Walk organizers invited her to help them put together their 2003 walk. "It's quite flattering but also would be quite a commitment. Still, it seems that everyone I know has been touched in some way by Parkinson's disease. So whether I take that next step or not, I'll always be doing something to further Parkinson's research. It's my hope that others who read this will be inspired to venture out of their comfort zones and join with us in the fight against this debilitating disease."

A photograph of two women, Lisa Caltabiano and her mother Betty DeCesaris, standing together in a room. Lisa is on the right, wearing a grey blazer and skirt, with her arm around her mother. Betty is on the left, wearing a red jacket and skirt, and glasses. They are both smiling. In the background, there is a large window and a vase with yellow flowers on a table.

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Lisa Caltabiano with her mother, Betty DeCesaris