



Friday, August 13, 2010

## Cycle for Survival, founded by Jennifer Goodman Linn, raises millions for cancer research

If you ever find yourself in a conversation with Jennifer Goodman Linn (CHI, FIR, NYO (99-02), don't be surprised if you end up feeling rather like an underachiever.

Jennifer, founder of Cycle for Survival, has already survived sarcoma – a rare form of cancer – six times. That translates into seven distinct courses of chemotherapy (some lasting as long as 16 months), five surgeries, and countless days spent focusing on recovery.

But simply surviving wasn't enough for Jennifer. Not content with repeatedly overcoming the disease, she has worked tirelessly to raise awareness – and millions of dollars in funding – for rare and underfunded cancers.

### **Modest hopes, big returns**

In 2004, Jennifer was diagnosed with MFH sarcoma, a rare soft-tissue cancer. An inveterate exerciser, she wasn't about to give up her workout regimen. Throughout her treatment at New York's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) over the past six years, she has maintained her active lifestyle and regular workouts. Her passion for cycling, and her belief in its ability to keep her strong and focused, led her to create a 50-team fundraising event in 2007. Three years later, Cycle for Survival is now an official MSKCC event, boasts close to 600 teams, and has become one of the fastest-growing cancer research fundraisers in the United States.

One of the factors that makes Cycle for Survival different is its indoor venue, which means its events are more accessible to people in fragile health. On a Cycle for Survival team, no commitment to a long race is necessary; you can simply get on a stationary bike and ride for as long as you want, or according to your abilities. And because the events take place in gyms, coordination efforts are cheaper.

Jennifer originally had modest hopes for the event. "This happened, frankly, out of a love and a need," she says. "I was sick, I like to cycle, I got some friends together. We thought we might raise \$10,000, and here we are, \$4.5 million later thanks to thousands of participants and over 25,000 unique donors."



Her background in marketing certainly didn't hurt. She spent two and a half years as a consultant in McKinsey's marketing practice, then went on to hold executive positions at WPP/The Geppetto Group, Ann Taylor, and Nickelodeon. These experiences honed her ability to make important decisions quickly, as the project began to grow. "I already had inherent training," she explains. "Even when I felt like I was flying by the seat of my pants, I made good calls and got it done. [I had to] jump in and figure out the right thing to do quickly. My instincts were based on everything that I learned at McKinsey in the marketing practice. I found an untapped niche, and interested consumers, and that has blossomed into something that is amazingly rewarding."

Her husband, fellow alum David Linn (CHI 95-98), helps with the event strategy. They're a good team, says Jennifer: "David is the hypothesis-driven, analytic one; I'm the creative marketing one." (David also shares her enthusiasm for fitness: while at McKinsey, he played professional soccer for six months of the year.)

As Cycle for Survival's horizons expanded, Jennifer realized that they needed a plan to use the money the most efficiently. A recent study, she says, shows that people who suffer from rare cancers – which, paradoxically, comprise half of all cancers – show commonalities with patients of more common cancers, and could therefore potentially take advantage of existing treatments. "We sat down with doctors, and asked them how we could funnel this money so that it best serves them," she explains. "Creating a [new] drug costs millions of dollars. We're not trying to do that. We're trying to fund research about rare cancers so that pharmaceutical companies see the opportunity to create new chemo cocktails, which cost just a few hundred thousand dollars."



The results speak for themselves. While most athletic fundraising events are down 10%+ given the economy, Cycle for Survival's funds have doubled year over year for the past four years, making it one of the fastest-growing fundraising events in the United States. With the money raised in 2009, Memorial Sloan-Kettering was able to fund three new drug trials as well as develop a new chemotherapy treatment.

Further, Cycle for Survival has enabled Memorial Sloan-Kettering to apply for specific government funding for rare cancer research, since MSK is able to show a recurring revenue stream. As a result of the funding generated by Cycle for Survival, one of MSK's doctors recently received a \$2 million federal grant that was given to only 100 institutions. "The doctor was able to show that, after the \$2 million runs out, Cycle for Survival funding will be able to keep the research going," Jennifer proudly explains.

Since Cycle for Survival became an official MSK event in 2009, it now has the Center's resources behind it. "100% of the money goes directly to MSK for research," Jennifer says. "If you make one donation to cancer research, make it to Cycle for Survival, because I guarantee that your money will go farther than it will anywhere else."

Cycle for Survival's founding sponsor is the fitness club, Equinox, which has gyms around the country. Many companies also donate the majority of food and water for events. "No one wants to say no," she says, with infectious good cheer. "Everyone wants to help."







## Spreading the word

Ringing the NYSE bell Jennifer's determination and irrepressible personality have guaranteed that Cycle for Survival has attracted a great deal of attention in the media. She's been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Self* magazine and *Redbook*, and Cycle for Survival even rang the NYSE and NASDAQ bells earlier this year. She says she is now focusing on how to use social media to spread the word.

Cycle for Survival has a Facebook page and a Twitter account, but she recognizes there is more they can do to get the word out. "There are still vast opportunities to get the word out within the cancer and cycling communities," she says.

Jennifer adds that she welcomes ideas from fellow alumni on how best to continue the event's expansion. "We're not so entrenched that we can't take new ideas," she smiles.

A boost recently came in the form of a nomination: Jennifer is one of ten finalists for the 2010 Energizer Keep Going Hall of Fame. The winner will be inducted into the Energizer Keep Going Hall of Fame in St. Louis, Missouri in September and will also be given \$10,000, plus an additional \$5,000 donation for their charity. (CLICK HERE to vote for Jen until August 20.)

## Get on your bikes and ride – or sit and cheer

Plans are currently gearing up for 2011's events in February, with registration opening in September. The event will take place in downtown Chicago on Saturday February 5 and in New York City and Long Island on February 12 and 13. You can visit <http://www.cycleforsurvival.org> to sign up and receive updates. Jennifer says that it's easy to participate, as there will be events across the U.S. If you don't live in a market with a planned event, you can create a satellite team and event (which you can also do year-round).

And if cycling isn't your thing, don't worry: Jennifer describes the event as 'the lazy man's triathlon.' "Anyone can do it," she says. "If someone says that they can't cycle, I tell them, 'you don't have to.'" Supporters can simply donate, or can help organize an event. And how participants define an event is largely up to them. You can bike indoors or outside; there is no set number for a team; you can ride as long as you like; and, for that matter, you don't even have to cycle. As the website states, "You can run, walk, swim, hike, knit, or do anything you want to support Cycle for Survival."

Participants can make it personal, too, she adds. "If there's someone you're fighting for, or someone in whose memory you'd like to plan an event, go to a local gym and get an instructor."

## Keeping on

Jennifer is grateful, she says, for the opportunity to give hope to others who are fighting similar battles, and that she is motivated by the knowledge that Cycle for Survival has directly benefited patients. "Cycle for Survival has already changed the way we're fighting rare cancers," she says.

When asked how she keeps up her strength to continue to be an integral part of the Cycle for Survival team while constantly battling illness, Jennifer's answer is simple: "It never feels like work," she says. She also maintains a typically sanguine attitude about her disease – "pesky, but manageable" is how she describes it.

She started Cycle for Survival as a small gesture of gratitude, and has ended up bringing a new way of thinking about rare cancers – and helping raise millions of dollars for their research.

Not to mention hope, Jennifer adds, with her signature smile. "A revenue stream is not only what we're raising."

