

Helping Conquer MS by Conquering Africa's Tallest Mountain

"We made it to the top... It was mentally and physically the hardest thing I've ever done. My feet were frozen ... I thought I had frostbite. My stomach was somersaulting, head was pounding and I was beyond sleep deprived, but I made it! I was literally on top of the world."

Faith Jones, journal excerpt, Oct. 18, 2010

SOPHIE TOLIAS

In October 2010, Faith Jones climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to raise money for multiple sclerosis. It all started with a New Year's resolution.

"I wanted to have a New Year's resolution [...] that would change the world and change me for the better," Faith says. A week before Christmas 2009, the 26-year-old personal trainer received an email from a client describing MS Climb's Mount Kilimanjaro climb.



Faith Jones surrounded by the children in Arusha

It was all uphill from there. Faith had nine months to train and meet the minimum \$12,500 fundraising goal needed to go on the climb. For two hours a day, wearing boots and a weighted backpack, she walked on a stair climber, an inclined treadmill, or hiked.

She emailed everyone she knew for donations and held boot camps to raise money. The client that introduced Faith to the climb hosted a silent auction, and Faith's mother made a donation for every kilometer she cycled.

On October 11, Faith, along with three brothers and their friend from Western Canada, began the seven-day hike on the Rongai route and conquered Africa's highest mountain. Together the group raised \$87,000.

MS Climb, an adventure climb community created by Ralph Cochrane to raise money

for MS research, also offers climbs of Everest, Machu Picchu, and the Great Wall of China.

Minimum fundraising requirements for the climbs range from \$10,000 to \$14,000, with 75 percent going to the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and the rest to the cost of the ground trip.

After returning from a climb, Ralph, whose mother was diagnosed with MS in the mid-70s, realized the altitude sickness symptoms he suffered were similar to those of MS.

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Ralph says, "I figured if I could get through that — that's something my mom deals with every day — I could put together a program where people would challenge themselves, but also to challenge themselves to raise a lot of money for a really good cause."

Currently in its fourth year, the program has raised \$780,000 for the disease, of which Canada has one of the highest rates in the world. Every day, three more people in Canada are diagnosed with the neurological disease that affects vision, hearing, memory, balance, and mobility.

"I know now that one person can really make a difference and change the world," Faith says,



Faith Jones, far right, and her team at the top of Kilimanjaro

referring to Ralph starting the program. "I am so happy and feel blessed I had some involvement."

A trip they made a day after descending also left a lasting impression on Faith. The group delivered soccer balls and uniforms, money, and school supplies to a secondary school in Arusha.

"It really opened my eyes [...] to see how they appreciate everything and how much we take for granted here," she says. "And just seeing how happy the kids are with basically nothing."

When Faith returned, she says she wanted to give back in many more ways. She is currently working on collecting used soccer uniforms and children's clothing to send back to Arusha and is developing a program to encourage Toronto children to

be more active. She's also training the client who introduced her to MS Climb for her upcoming hike of the Great Wall of China and helping her fundraiser. "Kind of like a full circle," she says.

For more information on her current projects contact Faith at fjonestraining@yahoo.ca. For more information on MS Climb visit www.msclimb.ca.



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