

Runaway Bride: Couple don '96 wedding duds for \$10K victory lap



By Brock Weir

Aurora's Lynn Pearson was jittery on Friday as she fit herself into her wedding dress and made sure everything was in place for her big night.

The wedding dress was a perfect fit, the veil was ready to go, now the only worry she had left weighing on her mind was whether or not she would be jilted at the altar.

You see, the very presence of her beau, Bruce, showing up in his wedding tux was entirely dependent on the kindness of friends, family and strangers. Lynn had met her wedding goal, but by Friday morning Bruce still had a ways to go before he was sure he would be able to don his glad rags.

Neither Lynn or Bruce should have worried, both made it just under the wire to reach their fundraising goals for that evening's Newmarket-Aurora Relay for Life and people had to clear the tracks for Ms. Pearson's '1996 shoulder pads' as she made her promised 10 laps around the track.

This was the 10th year Ms. Pearson has participated in the local Relay for Life on a team which has grown to include three generations of her family, and tens of thousands of dollars raised for the Canadian Cancer Society.

A leading organizer of the event when Aurora still had a Relay to call its own, hosted on the lawns of Magna International, Ms. Pearson is no less enthusiastic about the cause, which she became involved in following the death of her father 10 years ago.

To mark the 10th anniversary, she and her mother decided to take on the Relay Challenge, setting a fundraising goal for herself and a unique way of reaching that target.

'Two years ago, I did a Throwback Thursday on Facebook with me and my opening-ceremonies-of-SkyDome costume and people made jokes saying, 'I'd like to see you do that again!' so I said, 'Get me to my goal and I will do it,' said Ms. Pearson while making doing some last-minute primping. 'This year, I wondered what I could to do raise interest again and said if I hit my goal, I am going to wear my wedding gown. Bruce is also on the team and when he hits his goal he is going to be wearing the tux. I'm there, he's not quite there, and we don't want to leave the bride standing at the altar!'

She wasn't jilted, and it was a great way to mark their 20-year marriage. Ms. Pearson also received a special award at Friday's ceremony to mark her significant fundraising for the cause.

"Two or three years ago, my brother was diagnosed with colon cancer and, for me, the good news in all of this was because of what the Canadian Cancer Society has done for research and information on the preventative side, it was caught early and removed, and he didn't have to have chemo or radiation. While my dad didn't survive, my brother didn't have to go through what a lot of other people would have had to go through 10 years ago because of the advancements."

Linda Smith knows the value of the Canadian Cancer Society all too well. Diagnosed with transitional cell carcinoma in December of 2014, Ms. Smith, who was named Honourary Survivor for the 2016 Relay, said the only information she received on her entire cancer journey was from the Society.

"When I went for my year follow-up, they found cancer in my bladder," said Ms. Smith, who had already lost a kidney to the cancer ahead of the follow-up. "I went and had another surgery this February and again the only information I received on bladder cancer was from the Canadian Cancer Society's website. The cancer I had doesn't respond to chemo or radiation, so I wasn't receiving treatment and surgery was my only option. They didn't bother to [give me the information] because I wasn't receiving treatment."

"It sure did. I even asked my surgeon about it and he said it is because it is a lesser-known cancer, it is not publicized, so that was the main reason I decided to do this, to raise awareness. Everyone knows about breast cancer and prostate cancer, but not a lot of people know about kidney cancer and bladder cancer."

Before she delivered her speech to inspire Relay participants, Ms. Smith, a Georgina resident, was enjoying being able to get out and work in her garden for the first time since she embarked on her journey. She says she's now feeling great and, despite the "shock" of being asked to lead this year's survivors, she was keen to have the opportunity to raise awareness.

"The reason I agreed to speak today for the lesser known cancer like kidney and bladder," she said. "If you see blood in your urine, tell your doctor right away. Don't ignore it, don't put it off. It may save your life. The more research [the Society] can do, the more lives they can save, the more resources they can offer."

Ms. Pearson was in agreement. While she said there is nothing funny about cancer, you can have fun along the fundraising journey.

"Everybody [is at Relay] for the same reason," she said. "You can get on the track with a couple of hundred other people that you have never met before and just look at each other, smile, and be comfortable in your tears. It lets you feel what you need to feel and celebrate the successes of survivors. You see the survivors there in their yellow shirts you see, okay, it is helping, and yet when you're looking at the luminaries and see 'in memory of' and not 'in honour of' we remember why we started this and why we continue."