



### **Terminally ill Victoria woman asks for donations to Ovarian Cancer Canada in lieu of gifts for her 60th birthday**

Victoria, BC is known for its picturesque parkland, drawing many to the region to enjoy outdoor activities – and Kathleen Ward is no exception. “It’s like living in a chocolate box out here. There are so many treats to discover,” she says.

An avid adventurer, the 59 year old says she has always lived a healthy lifestyle, so a diagnosis of ovarian cancer came as a shock. “I’m the granola-eating, yoga-doing, hiking and mountain-biking woman – cancer was not a thing that was going to happen to me,” she says. “I was completely blown away.”

Diagnosed with Stage IIIc ovarian cancer in August, 2015, Ms. Ward had a hysterectomy and 18 rounds of chemotherapy. It was daunting but she believes that being active in the outdoors promotes healing and is a boost to your mental health. She went out for a walk daily, no matter how poorly she felt.

In early 2016, her doctors said her cancer was in remission, so Ms. Ward and her husband bought an RV and hit the road. “I started doing my bucket list,” she says. “We went to canoe the Yukon River, then hiked the Chilkoot Trail.”



*Kathleen Ward hiking, August, 2016*

The Chilkoot Trail is a 53km trail through the Coast Mountains between Dyea, Alaska and Bennett, BC. One day on their hike, Ms. Ward came across another group of hikers who were also medical students. “Amazingly, they told me they were studying immunology, and ovarian cancer,” she says. They had never met anyone with ovarian cancer before – and Ms. Ward had never met anyone studying the disease.

In Canada, 2,800 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer every year, and 56% of those do not survive five years past their diagnosis. Survival rates for women with ovarian cancer have not improved significantly in 50 years, partly because research funding for the disease is scarce. "I told those researchers to get back to university as soon as possible because they might just save my life one day," Ms. Ward says.

For their next adventure, Ms. Ward and her husband travelled to the Okanagan Valley, BC, last winter to cross-country ski more than 1,000 kilometres. "The endorphins from the fresh air and exercising with friends made me feel much better and I started to hope that cancer had been nothing more than a speed bump in my life," she says.



*Kathleen Ward doing what she loves,  
skiing in the Okanagan Valley, BC in April 2017*

But her next health check-up in March brought difficult news, as Ms. Ward learned her cancer had metastasized to vital organs including her lungs and liver. "It just totally floored me," she says.

It was then that Ms. Ward heard about the Ovarian Cancer Canada Walk of Hope and decided to get involved. "When you've got lemons, you make lemonade" she says. "The Walk is a perfect match for my love of walking outdoors and my strong belief in the benefits of walking to help you feel better through cancer. So I thought I would set myself a challenge and try to help other people."

With her 60th birthday approaching, Ms. Ward thought that in lieu of gifts, she would ask people to donate \$60 to Ovarian Cancer Canada, and formed a Walk of Hope team called "Kathleen's \$60 for Sixty" with a goal of raising \$10,000.

“At first it was scary to think of making such a public statement. I wasn’t sure I wanted to put my story out there,” she says. But then she decided this was an opportunity to have something good come of her diagnosis, so she sent a letter to her family, friends and colleagues telling them why she decided to be involved in the Walk. “I finally got the courage - found the “ladyballs” - wrote my story and hit send,” she says.



*Kathleen Ward showing off her “ladyballs”  
in chemotherapy treatment, July 2017*

The response has been amazing. “I couldn’t believe the deluge of emails I got,” she says. Ms. Ward has already surpassed her fundraising goal. “That email is still making the rounds, and I can’t believe how generous people have been. I am truly grateful to those people who’ve donated and the many planning to join me on Walk day.”

The Ovarian Cancer Canada Walk of Hope is the only Walk in Canada to direct all attention and fundraising towards overcoming ovarian cancer. It will take place on September 10 at Royal Roads University in Victoria, and in more than 35 communities across the country. To register or donate, visit [ovariancancerwalkofhope.ca](http://ovariancancerwalkofhope.ca).