

Cancer survivor places second in world triathlon championship

By [Kait Shea](#) on March 8, 2013 in [Community](#), [Features](#) · [0 Comments](#)



After beating cancer, Old Greenwich resident Karen Newman won't be scared off by a grueling race and has competed all over the world in triathlons, including, at left, in China.

As if triathlons were not challenging enough, Old Greenwich resident Karen Newman has been competing in them for years, all the while battling breast cancer as she did it.

After placing second in the world for sprints in last October's world triathlon championships, Ms. Newman completed her seventh race for the championship, achieving what she called an "amazing comeback." And lest you think this race is a simple sprint down a track, a triathlon is a grueling race that involves running, cycling and swimming in immediate succession. It is considered one of the most challenging races to engage in.

Always a fitness fanatic, with no family history of cancer, Ms. Newman said she was shocked by her diagnosis in 2008. Even more jarring, she said, was the discovery that her illness had been misdiagnosed for three years, meaning the cancer was far advanced when she finally started treatment.

Fortunately, she said, her friends, family and community were there to see her through. Community members even left a “blessing box” outside Ms. Newman’s home, where individuals could drop her notes of encouragement without causing her the exertion of having to entertain them.

According to Ms. Newman, one of the most incredible things to happen to her throughout her battle with cancer was a moment of clarity she had shortly after beginning painful chemotherapy treatments. When one of her sons asked her if she was going to die, it was the first time she truly broke down, she said.

“It’s just the hardest thing to have to witness your children worrying about you,” she said. “I was just heaving crying ... for what they had to go through, not even for myself.”

Later that day, while alone, Ms. Newman told the *Post* in an interview, she heard a voice in her head she believed to be God’s, saying, “Karen, I’m taking you to the valley and I’m going to put you on a mountain top and you’re going to be singing.”

Flash forward to the 2012 world championships in Auckland, New Zealand. Each step of the way, Ms. Newman said, she felt someone was on her side and that nothing would stop her. Later, while competing in the swimming leg of the competition, Ms. Newman realized that exactly four years prior, almost to the hour, she was in surgery having a mastectomy. And just before reaching the finish line in what she called “the race of my life,” Ms. Newman heard someone shout at her “second in the world,” proving cancer hadn’t stopped her, she said.

Feeling an “incredible urge” to see her family after crossing the finish line, Ms. Newman said, she was astonished to hear Josh Groban’s song *You Raise Me Up* playing when she encountered her family in a nearby tent. The first lyrics she heard, she said, were “You raise me up so I can stand on mountains; you raise me up to walk on stormy seas” — a message she said was strikingly similar to the one she had heard in her head four years before.

“I just fell on my knees and said, ‘Thank you, God, thank you for this journey and for keeping your promise to put me on a mountain and singing,’” Ms. Newman said. “For me, the mountain was the podium that night.”

Upon her return from the championships, Ms. Newman saw her oncologist for a checkup. Above all odds, he told her, she was finally free of cancer.

“I really am a miracle walking,” she said. “I’m so blessed.”

Ms. Newman’s journey, however, is far from over. She will compete in the Senior Olympics this year, after beating out every man and woman who competed in the qualifying race. She has additionally been asked to compete in the next world triathlon championships, this time on the aquathon team, along with the sprints team. After that, Ms. Newman said, it’s time to retire from competitions, but her experiences will live on.

Ms. Newman will continue working with cancer patients and giving lectures about her experiences and new-found appreciation for life. She also plans to release a book in the next year or two about her life, entitled *Loved Into Life*, in hope of inspiring others to achieve their dreams, despite the obstacles they face.

“Take every day as a gift, whatever you’re given,” Ms. Newman said. “Your great trials in your life are your great opportunities to change your life, to live a life that you never dreamed possible, to give back in ways you never dreamed possible.”

Ms. Newman’s struggles and triumphs over the last five years, however, have not been hers alone, she said.

“Your journey changes your whole family, and it also changes those around you,” she said. “I think it’s changed a lot of people who have walked this journey with me and helped me along.”

And though her children struggled to cope with a sick parent, they also learned that even the greatest challenges can be overcome, she said.

“I feel like cancer isn’t a death sentence, it’s really a life sentence,” Ms. Newman said. “You can say, “Wow, I have this gift now that my life is precious ... I’m going to live it differently.”

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