

GREAT STRIDES, GREAT STORIES.

Lace Up. Walk. Cure Cystic Fibrosis.



MARISSA BENCHEA, 2016 GREAT STRIDES AMBASSADOR



I am fortunate to say that my childhood was blessed and idyllic, despite the fact that I had to battle cystic fibrosis from the time I was a baby. I really credit my parents for helping me stay as healthy as one can be in the face of this disease and for helping me be happy growing up.

My mother passed away the same year that I started my own Great Strides team and, unfortunately, I lost my father a few years later. Losing your parents at a young age is life-changing for anyone, but for me it also meant the loss of my emotional support system and the people who

helped me maintain as normal of a life as possible.

I stride every year to remember my parents and how far they have helped me come in life. I will continue to walk to honor their memory and everything they did to give me a full life.

MY FAVORITE PART OF BEING A GREAT STRIDES AMBASSADOR

Great Strides is the largest, strongest fundraiser that the CF Foundation has. There is no other event that brings together so many incredible



people from our community. It's become this big rally that celebrates life, our momentum and milestones toward finding a cure. Great Strides is one of the few events where I can actually see more than one person with CF -- because of the infection control policy in place -- so it holds a special place in my heart. Being asked to represent the adult CF community as a Great Strides Ambassador at one of my favorite Foundation events is a huge honor.

HOW I FUNDRAISE

I mainly use social media channels to fundraise, with Facebook as the key platform and a little bit of Twitter, LinkedIn and email sprinkled into the mix. I have even started an Instagram account, @kissoffcf, to document more of my life with CF and my yearly campaign. Great Strides is my favorite CF Foundation event and I want to do my part in helping to make it a success.

I am hoping to start a passion fundraising event this year or next. A passion fundraising event involves fundraising around a hobby of yours. Next year I am turning 40 and would like to combine a Marissa's Kisses fundraising event with a birthday celebration! I want to do something funky and off the wall, like maybe hosting an old movie night with everyone dressed in caftans, lounging around on chaises with cats roaming everywhere. I love celebrating birthdays and 40 is a major milestone, especially for someone with CF. I would not be here without the Foundation, and I am super excited to plan this once-in-a-lifetime event!

WHAT THE CF FOUNDATION MEANS TO ME

The CF Foundation has given me a sense of purpose. Since I am no longer able to work, volunteering and advocating with the Foundation makes me feel like I am a part of something bigger. I initially became more involved by first volunteering on a committee at my local chapter. Over time, this led to various speaking engagements at Foundation events and joining the Tennessee Chapter Board, which I eventually chaired in 2011.

I became involved with advocacy as the Tennessee state advocacy co-chair, served on the CF Foundation Adult Task Force and Adult Advisory Council. Doing this kind of volunteer work really enriches my life.

The CF Foundation also represents family to me. This community makes me feel like I am not alone and doing this all by myself. When I am in the hospital and not able to do my part, I know that there are thousands of others out there still fighting for me and everyone else with CF. There are all of these foot soldiers out there who never stop working. I feel as if I have a million people behind me and that's what inspires me to keep on going.

To join Marissa and the 125,000 other walkers making Great Strides towards a cure, sign up today: www.cff.org/greatstrides