

## St. Jude Chicago Marathon Feature Story

As the sun rises over Lake Shore Drive in the early morning, on July 20th, 25,000 runners will be preparing for the run of a lifetime. Within those 25,000, the St. Jude Heroes will be gearing up to participate and chase a common goal. Saving lives.

The St. Jude Heroes are athletes that raise money while training and participating in marathon events across the country for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Mary Black has been a St. Jude Hero for eight years and has run 171.5 miles raising money for St. Jude in honor of her daughter, Bella, a childhood cancer survivor. "When Bella was diagnosed with leukemia in 2002 I was at a loss. I had no idea where to turn. St. Jude was there for me. From all of Bella's medical treatments, to giving us a place to stay when we had nowhere to go, St. Jude saw us through. I will forever be thankful for their support."

At the age of eight, Mary's daughter Bella was admitted to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Chicago IL, in 2003 with stage three leukemia. Mary's family lived in Indiana at the time and Mary couldn't drive back and forth from home to the hospital to be with Bella. St. Jude was able to provide Mary a place to stay so she could be close to her daughter and medical treatments all with no cost. After working with St. Jude for six years, Bella was put into remission and was finally able to live at home full time. "It was a bittersweet goodbye." Mary stated. "I was so happy to see Bella healthy again, but it was so sad to leave the doctors, nurses, and other parents I now consider my closest friends."

After Mary and her family settled down, Mary decided she wanted to give back to St. Jude. She had heard about the St. Jude Heroes a few years ago but never had the time to really look into participating. Mary started researching and training to run as a St. Jude Hero. Mary followed St. Jude's online training guide throughout the process of preparing for the 2011 St. Jude Memphis Marathon.

On the morning of December 3, 2011, Mary stepped up to the starting line with hundreds of other runners. She was nervous as a first-time marathon runner. She wanted to do well for her daughter and all of the other kids who will be helped by St. Jude in the future. Mary lifted her head as the announcer counted down until the start of the race. She looked around to see the red uniforms that matched hers. She was a hero. And she was ready to make a difference.

Almost 60,000 people run as a St. Jude Hero every year. Like Mary, they all have one common goal. Raising money for St. Jude's Hospital is a huge act of kindness as the organization provides medical treatment for severely ill children, allows the hospitals to afford the latest technologies, research labs, medical training, food and housing for patient's families. 75% of St. Jude's spending is fueled by donations.

Mary finished her first race in Memphis and never stopped running. Currently, she is training to run as a St. Jude Hero in Chicago's Humana Rock 'n' Roll Marathon series this summer at Grant Park in Chicago. Races will take place on July 20<sup>th</sup> and July 21<sup>st</sup> at Grant Park in Chicago IL. "I can't wait to come home and put on my uniform again." Mary stated. "I'm beyond excited for this adventure."

The St. Jude Hero's red colors will catch the eye as they race down Lake Shore Drive. They won't be running like the rest of the crowd. They will be flying high while making a difference and ending childhood cancer.