



Photo: Gavin Fregona

Paddle 4 MS August 7th, 2010

- \$7,128.50 in funds raised for Multiple Sclerosis
- 7000 – Estimated calories burned
- 13 hours, 49 minutes, 52 seconds paddling
- 1 – Number of times pulled over by Marine Police
- 65 km from Hamilton to Toronto
- 1 – Unforgettable Day!!

Paddle 4 MS - August 7th, 2010

First of all I would like to thank everyone for their generous donations and support in helping Grant and I complete the Paddle 4 MS. I'd like to devote this newsletter to the background and story of the paddle for Multiple Sclerosis.

As many of you are aware, my sister Angela was definitively diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis this past New Year after a year or so of symptoms such as vertigo, loss of vision, numbness and extreme fatigue. Angela is an irreplaceable high school teacher (the kind you want to teach your children) that is still living like there is no tomorrow.

To understand why I did this paddle, I'd like to touch on Angela's character in the face of adversity and point out that if it wasn't for her, I'd likely not have set foot on a surfboard or stand up paddle board. Angela has always been a leader and an inspiration in my life. She has travelled extensively and she was the one who booked my first flight to Hawaii. I always remember her fearlessness, "Mike, leave Canada at home and go for it!" With that I took off for my first winter in Hawaii, learned to surf and quickly developed a passion for surfing that changed my life.

Angela's fearlessness has persevered through tough times. Last fall, Angela's vertigo was so bad she had difficulty walking without holding on to a railing or wall and could not drive to work. This went on for weeks, but did she ever call in sick? No, she got rides to work and put her best foot forward in the classroom. She currently is legally blind in one eye, but did that stop her from driving out to see us finish the paddle? And guess who just got back from two weeks of adventure in Australia?

When Angela's symptoms pointed to MS in January, I wanted to find a way that I could help. The previous summer I trained master's swimmer Colleen Shields. Colleen has swum across Lake Ontario from Niagara Falls to Toronto twice successfully and she was my inspiration for the paddle. Colleen's swim would take about 16 to 17 hours.

I thought perhaps I could paddle along the coastline from Hamilton to Toronto and connect the surf breaks of 'The Bridge' to 'Abay'. While out on a winter's paddle with Grant Kennedy, I told him my plan. Without hesitation, or without me even asking him if he'd consider joining me he said, "I'll go with you". Eight months of training later, the alarm went off at 4am and it was time to start the Paddle 4 MS.

The forecast for Saturday August 7th looked to be perfect, a high of 24 Celsius and light to moderate south west winds to help push us in the right direction. Fellow lake surfer and hearty volunteer Dave Hon woke up at 4am that day with an espresso and drove Grant and I from Toronto to Hamilton so we wouldn't have to pick up the van after the paddle. Dave might be one of the most stoked and genuine individuals you'll ever meet. We pulled up to the beach in Hamilton just before the sunrise and the horizon was beautiful. Dave has a knack for motivation, and when it was light enough to see the Toronto city skyline he remarked, "Whoa, the CN Tower looks like a tooth pick!" Fair enough Dave, we had a long journey ahead.

With enough food and water for the day Grant and I aimed for the tower with the cool wind at our backs wondering if this paddle was possible.



Grant and I were on the water by 6:15am and we were paddling at a good pace. Mid-morning we were fortunate enough to have a tug boat pass by to give us what we estimated to be a 2 foot swell to ride. It was in the wrong direction however, but it was a welcomed side track and got our imaginations running wild.

Our approximate halfway point was Jack Darling Provincial Park Beach and we were there right on schedule, if not ahead. My sister and parents were there to cheer us on which was extremely motivating. Admittedly, Grant and I got a bit cocky as we were about half way after 5 hours and figured we'd be at Ashbridge's Bay well ahead of time. I estimated the paddle would take between 12 and 16 hours, so we felt we were sitting pretty.

Unfortunately Mother Nature had a different plan for us and gave us a tough test of character. Our light to moderate tail breeze quickly became a strong south broadside wind whipping up white caps and dealt us the worst chop we have ever paddled in.

From 12pm to 5:30pm we battled heavy chop and strong south and even south east head wind! We paddled on one side the entire time just to keep going straight and relied on every muscle in our body to balance on our boards. After two hours straight in these conditions we paddled into a harbour to rest and grab a bite to eat. The Peel Marine Police had other plans and gave us a 'boat' check. We failed on numerous check points: Flashlight? No. Throw rope? No. Bailer? No. Life jackets? No. Whistle? Yes. Grant tried to charm them with his South African accent and told them we were on a charity paddle. We explained we had left from Hamilton nearly 8 hours ago and still had a fair distance to cover to get to Toronto. They let us off the hook and applauded us for our efforts thus far and explained that the next shift of officers wouldn't be as forgiving.

Because of the choppy conditions, we changed our route and paddled into the protected breakwall at Sunnyside Beach instead over going right around the Toronto Island. This breakwall runs all the way to the Toronto harbour and as we would find out, right through Exhibition Place. The calm water was a welcome relief where we could eat and regroup. At this stage the conditions had forced us behind schedule.



Our detour through the Toronto Harbour was a fun one and we were rewarded with relatively calm conditions, a close up view of the Island airport, Porter Airplanes flying directly overhead and great view of the city's skyline.

In the harbour with about 2 hours left of paddling, we could sense the finish line; however Grant was running out of steam. Close to Cherry Beach, we stopped to rest again for some food, water and my custom fuel triathlon heat blend. I had been drinking this electrolyte mix throughout the day and felt energized and fresh all day. Grant accepted my offer to try some at this stage and within 5 minutes he was ready to take on the world.

After slugging it out with broadside wind and waves for nearly six hours, the wind backed to south west for the remaining two hours of the paddle. We got to Cherry Beach and we were greeted with 3 foot rollers and a tail wind. We hooted and hollered as we rode the waves downwind toward Ashbridge's Bay.



About 30 minutes away, Grant and I could see the bay and we were energized by the anticipation of seeing our family and friends at the finish line. Closer yet, we could see our loved ones waving from the headlands. We were absolutely stoked to be nearly done, and riding waves all the way in was Mother Nature's reward for our mid day struggle.

On the beach we were extremely excited and grateful to see our family and friends. The pictures below describe the day better than words.





Grant and I are going to make this paddle an annual event and we invite everyone to join. We will be setting up 5km and 10 km paddle routes for those not interested in a 65km paddle. Please send me an email and get involved for next year's paddle. If you don't know how to stand up paddle I'll teach you! Thanks again for your remarkable support and encouragement and stay tuned for September's newsletter. Mike