

[HOME](#)[ARTS & LIFESTYLE](#)[Women](#)[Headlines Index](#)[Last 6 Days](#)[Search/Archives](#)[Shopping](#)[Career](#)**QUICK SEARCH**

## Women

# Taking Steps Together Thousands walk 60 miles in 3 days to raise money for breast cancer

By AMANDA GARDNER

**J**ay Cohen is walking for his wife, Franny, who died of breast cancer in July. Last year, they walked together.

Robin Torres is walking to make sure other women have access to mammograms, one of which helped save her life.

Karen Wellington is walking for her parents, who never got the right care for their medical problems. "You can't ignore your health," she says.

Camille Chin-Kee-Fatt signed up to walk the day of a friend's funeral. That friend died of breast cancer; now another friend is being treated for the same disease.



Maisel NEWS  
**Wendy Petties, a  
survivor of ovarian  
cancer, gets ready to  
walk.**

These are just a few of the 3,000 men and women who are participating in the Avon 3-Day Walk for Breast Cancer, starting tomorrow at Bear Mountain and ending Sunday in Manhattan's Morningside Park. Their individual reasons for participating may vary, but in the end it all comes down to the same thing: finding a cure for the disease that kills more than 43,000 women every year and, until then, making sure all women get the best treatment possible.

The Avon 3-Day is the largest of many such walks staged throughout October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It is not only multiday, but multilocation — with participants walking in seven cities. This is the second year that New York has had its own walk and response was so overwhelming that organizers had to close registration back in March.

Since the Avon 3-Day started in 1998, the event has generated net proceeds of \$50 million, which go to early detection and community outreach programs, support services for breast cancer patients and survivors, educational seminars and medical research.

Wendy Petties, 31, a survivor of ovarian cancer and one of this year's walkers, already has seen what this money can do. After signing up for the event, she asked her walking coach for a list of minority agencies being supported by Avon so she could contact them for culturally

relevant information. The African American Breast Cancer Alliance and the American Cancer Society Harlem Area office gave her breast-exam shower cards with brown (not white or pink) breasts, a video featuring women of color and a booklet with relevant minority statistics.

"Breast-cancer death rates are higher for black women than white women," notes Petties, "because more black women have their disease diagnosed after it has spread" — something that's true for other types of cancer as well. "I knew that if I was going to reach people, I had to find things targeting people who look like me and act like me."

Petties has been passing along information to family, friends and colleagues, and herself has raised \$3,000, which will go to similar programs.

But money is just one part of the picture. "There's an incredible difference in breast cancer from 10 years ago, an unbelievable difference on many different levels," says Fran Visco, a 13-year breast cancer survivor and president of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. "The way we're treating the disease, the involvement of activists, how we see ourselves as partners and collaborators with scientists and physicians. Women who've had the disease are really affecting change in the world for all women. That gives a sense of power to all women. It also gives them more information."

The rest has to do with solidarity, spirit and courage, as Petties can attest.

"I needed something to get me up. I needed to focus on something," she says. "Every day I look at [my] scar and say 'I can do this.'"

## **Profiles in Courage:**

### **Jill Levy**

Only 233 of the 3,000 walkers in this year's breast cancer event have had the disease. But it's their stories that inspire all participants.

When Jill Levy, 62, was first diagnosed with breast cancer 13 years ago, there was nothing like the level of support and access to information available today. She had had a baseline mammogram, at her doctor's recommendation, with negative results. A year later, she discovered a lump while soaping herself in the shower. Further tests turned up a 2-centimeter tumor as well as four positive lymph nodes, meaning the cancer had started to spread. There was almost no way a tumor that size could have grown so much in one year, so Levy insisted that her mammogram be examined again. Sure enough, the spot had been there a year earlier and the radiologist had missed it.

From that moment, Levy took charge of her own recovery, undergoing a modified radical mastectomy and deciding which course of chemotherapy to pursue. At the time, she says, there was only one chemo protocol available and it had only a 30% success rate. Levy started gathering information by word of mouth (there was no Internet in those days) and a few weeks later had found a clinical trial that seemed promising. She shopped around at different agencies conducting the trial until she was sure she would be placed in the most aggressive arm, then signed herself up. "It was a terrible, four-month

ordeal," says Levy, who was hospitalized several times with side effects, including a bacterial infection in her colon and pneumonia.

But in the end, she got well. Well enough to start looking for other women searching for information and treatment. It wasn't easy, but Levy eventually hooked up with groups in San Francisco and with the Healing Circle, an AIDS treatment and awareness group.

The AIDS groups, she realized, were way ahead of the game when it came to getting services and attention. "I realized how far women had to get," she says. "Women didn't communicate with one another, and a lot of women weren't talking. They didn't network."

Levy's next step was to start a nonprofit women's health-education network to disseminate information and break the loneliness and isolation of breast cancer patients. The network was enormously successful — eventually going national — and Levy started looking for a new cause to champion. That's when an ad for the Avon 3-Day caught her eye. "It sort of reached out and grabbed me by the throat," she remembers.

That was 1999, and she completed the New York walk that year. This year, she's doing Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles and New York, and has raised a total of about \$20,000 from the five events. "I'm meeting other women, talking to other women. I've found it so exhilarating and meaningful to me," she says. "It's an opportunity to show women that there is life after breast cancer and if we take care of ourselves and are vigilant we will all live those long, wonderful lives."

### **Asha Clayton-Niederman**

For Asha Clayton-Niederman, the question was not so much where to find information and support, but how to turn the different possibilities to her advantage.

Clayton-Niederman had just turned 24 — in January 1999 — when she found the lump in her breast. "I thought it was something that older women got," she recalls. "I wasn't concerned at all."

Her doctor wasn't concerned either and it wasn't until almost a year later, in December, that a biopsy confirmed her worst fears: cancer. "I was just in complete shock," she says. "I was really scared. I just wanted it out."

Doctors at St. Vincent's Hospital performed a lumpectomy (removing the tumor but not the whole breast) the next day. Miraculously, her cancer had not spread, even though it was considered an aggressive form. Clayton-Niederman visited three doctors trying to determine her exact course of action and ultimately underwent three months of chemo followed by two months of daily radiation treatment.

When the treatment was completed, Clayton-Niederman decided to give up her job in public relations and follow her dream of becoming a full-time musician. She now plays the violin for two different bands.

Clayton-Niederman also has made a virtual second career out of promoting breast-cancer awareness. She's involved with the Young Survival Coalition ([www.youngsurvival.org](http://www.youngsurvival.org)), whose mission is to bring attention to issues surrounding breast cancer in young women. "Many younger women are detected a lot later than they should be just

because their doctors don't recognize it as a potential problem in younger women," she says from experience.

She has also launched her own Web site ([www.ashamevlana.com](http://www.ashamevlana.com)), which documents her struggle with cancer in words and photographs — including pictures of the hair-cutting party she held before starting chemo.

"I was extremely lucky. I almost felt like I got a second chance," says Clayton-Niederman. "I'm so excited about my life now. It personally gave me a whole new perspective on life. It just made me take a lot more risks."

## The Walk

Even for New Yorkers used to tramping the concrete jungle, walking 60 miles in three days is no joke. Participants will average 20 miles a day (8 to 10 hours of walking) and most of them have trained rigorously for the event. Asha Clayton-Niederman, for one, walks about 10 miles a day. Marsha Bonelli, manager of a Manhattan high-school physical education department, recently did a 7 1/2-hour walk as part of her training.

Rest stops will be positioned a minimum of every two miles along the route, and trucks carrying walkers' gear will follow the procession.

At night, participants will sleep in two-person tents under the stars, eat hot meals, take hot showers and have access to massage therapists, chiropractors and podiatrists.

If you haven't signed up for the walk but want to experience the sisterhood (and brotherhood) of the event, show up at Morningside Park in Manhattan for closing ceremonies this Sunday. Festivities start at 2:30 p.m., 110th St. and Manhattan Ave.

## Resources

- [www.avoncrusade.com](http://www.avoncrusade.com)
- [www.breastcancer3day.com](http://www.breastcancer3day.com)
- Call (888) 3DAY-AVON for more information about the New York 3-Day.
- National Breast Cancer Coalition  
[www.stopbreastcancer.org](http://www.stopbreastcancer.org)

Original Publication Date: 10/12/00

What do you think? Post your comments on our [Forums](#).

### Daily News Services

- ▶ FREE SHIPPING from [MYONLYCATALOG.COM](http://MYONLYCATALOG.COM)
- ▶ Shop at the [Daily News](#) Store.

Click on any service and enjoy shopping online!

get up to  
**120  
FREE  
MINUTES**  
NO MONTHLY FEE!  
**click for details!**



**Back to Top**



**DAILY  
NEWS**  
www.dailynews.com

**Click Here**

