

Abby Rieger

Service has always been an important part of my life. I have served my parish and school as a liturgy server, Peer Tutor, Bus Buddy, and festival and youth volunteer. Through Girl Scouts, I have worked at Ronald McDonald House cooking meals, played bingo at nursing homes, and helped coordinate the Giving Tree project this past Christmas for our parish to many local charities. For my Girl Scout Bronze Award, we organized SPCA educational programs at St. Ignatius and the Harrison Public Library, as well as a donation drive of pet supplies for the SPCA. For my Girl Scout Marian Medal, I have completed over fifty hours of service in many different areas. I volunteered at Kid's Café in Camp Washington, helping the children with reading, making art projects, playing soccer and learning about non-violence. Also, I worked on an African Mission Project to collect enough school and personal supplies to make and fill 250 bags for orphans in Nigeria. In my free time, I also volunteer at the Harrison Branch Library assisting during children's programs. I enjoy doing service because of the feeling I get knowing that this work benefits someone or a group of people. Through the opportunities that I have had, I have seen that even someone my age can make a difference both at their church or school, their community and across the globe. But, I have found that helping someone close to me makes it even more special and rewarding.

One service I have been involved with since 2005 is the Light the Night Walk for Leukemia and Lymphoma. The walk takes place at Sawyer Point every September for one night to pull together and raise money for research and to create resources for the people with these horrible blood cancer diseases. In past years I had walked in honor of Rachel Farfing, and I was able to raise about \$300 which I thought was great! But last summer, my cousin, Jimmy Wood, who had been suffering from Burkitt's Lymphoma lost his life on Father's Day, June 21, 2009, leaving behind his wife and two kids. Seeing how this affected my family and me made me realize that cancer can come on so fast and affect everyone in a family. Soon after he had passed, the time came to sign up for the walk again. Instead of signing up as a single walker, I decided to start a team in Jimmy's honor. I had no idea how this one thought was going to grow.

I called my team PAX Walkers, in honor of the way Jimmy used to sign all his letters with PAX, which means peace. I set my team up with three members to start off with and a goal of \$600. Within the first three days, I had already received many more members and had reached almost half our goal. Everyday brought new members and more money donated in memory of Jimmy. Within a few weeks, I had raised more than my goal and made the decision to raise my goal to \$1000, although I had serious doubts that I would raise that much. One of my relatives even had his employer, Take 5 restaurant, to have a special night where the profits of the night would be set aside and donated to my team in honor of Jimmy. I designed a t-shirt that had a tree on the back that had the word for peace in every language in it. The team grew to forty-five members and raised \$2000 before the day of the walk.

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The night of the walk it was pouring down rain, but all forty-five members of PAX Walkers still came out that night. There were tears, but there was also laughter and stories as we all walked with our lit balloons. Seeing how much of a difference I made with one single idea has really inspired me to do more for my community. I plan to do the PAX Walkers team again in 2010 in honor of Jimmy and will try to raise even more money for research and for patients. I know that the walk was a turning point for my entire family and something that everyone is looking forward to next year.

I know that with the money I helped raise, people's lives have been saved and their outlooks on life have been restored. More important, I know that one idea can make a difference. Thank you for taking the time to read my essay, and I would love to make a difference with the Aubrey Rose Foundation.