

Marc Van Riper Runs with Hope for a Cure



Marc and Kathy Van Riper

On their first date, Marc Van Riper and his wife, Kathy, ran seven miles together. At the time, Marc, a US Coast Guard search-and-rescue worker, considered himself a competent runner—until he met Kathy, a distance-running star at Sonoma Valley High School who dazzled him with her phenomenal speed and endurance.

Marc credits his wife of 13 years with transforming him into a serious runner who now runs 30 to 40 miles weekly. For the past eight years, Marc also has been running as a way of honoring Kathy's tenacity and resilience as she fights breast cancer —hoofing the 12 miles from their Cotati home to Kaiser Santa Rosa whenever she receives chemotherapy.

Why did you start running on Kathy's treatment days? It's almost indescribable what she has to deal with every day, but at the same time, we are running in this struggle together. We've always used running analogies, and the hour and 40 minutes I run to rendezvous with her at the hospital is a personal expression of love and solidarity as Kathy "runs her race."

When was Kathy diagnosed with breast cancer? Eight years ago, when she was 30. She went through treatment at the time, but it reoccurred four years ago, and she's been on chemo constantly since then.

Is running still a big part of your family life? Our kids run with Kathy, and we run together in local races. Running is in Kathy's blood. On a good day, she'll run three to four miles, but whether the treatments are easier or harder, she's out there running around the neighborhood every day.

Can you describe what it's like living with cancer in your family? Sometimes the decisions we make to try and stay ahead of the cancer means living life in six-week increments between Kathy's tests, because the treatment or diagnosis could change. Emotions are the most difficult part. You've got to put them away somewhere to handle the demands of daily life. Our kids don't know anything different. When Kathy was diagnosed, Jillian was three, and Ian had just been born. For them, it's natural for mom to be in and out of the hospital.

Are you involved in activities outside of work and family commitments? Yes. Both of our kids are on Class I soccer teams, and I'm involved at church and on the boards of two community groups—plus, we're starting Kathy's Camp (see below). These activities have become diversions and distractions that help keep me sane.

Are there any "positives" resulting from this experience? There are many blessings around this cancer experience. I could moan or groan that my life isn't what I would've chosen it to be, but I make a conscious decision every day to think positively. Our faith is a big part of being positive, and over the last seven years, we've become surrounded by incredible people—including coworkers, friends from church, family, and neighbors.

What would you most like to tell other families living with cancer? Don't get hung up on statistics, because everyone is different—and don't go it alone. As hard as it may be to rely on others, you may need to lean on people around you. We've learned to be humble.

Kathy's Camp



Family friend Val Sell joins the Van Ripers at the Kaiser Santa Rosa Infusion Center with a quilt made of Kathy's race T-shirts— some dating back 20 years! The quilt was made by Cathy McCool, former Kaiser Santa Rosa director of Nursing Practice who retired earlier this year.

Marc and Kathy Van Riper are launching [Kathy's Camp](#), a nonprofit organization that offers activities, support, and encouragement for children whose parents have been diagnosed with cancer. "We've discovered numerous programs for children who have cancer, but there isn't much available for kids whose parents have the illness", Marc explained. "Cancer is a family affair that affects everyone close to the ill person. Some forms of cancer are now very treatable, even in the metastatic stage, and family members have to deal with the emotional impact for years".

Kathy's Camp will partner with local businesses and organizations to organize fun outings that can lead to friendships and supportive networking opportunities for tykes-through-teens and their parents.