



# Lori Wikdahl

(1959 - )

*You don't have to travel around the world to find the milk of human kindness, spectacular things to write home about, think about or dream about. You just have to have open eyes. That's all, and I'm just very grateful that God opened my eyes.*

Lori Wikdahl has gone from being the "Queen of Double-Dutch skipping" in elementary school to being the only disabled woman who has walked across Canada. In between, there has been adversity and determination, negativity and accomplishment. Winnipeg was her birthplace, and when she bought property in Mission in 1990, she liked the Fraser Valley because it reminded her of home.

Lori has repeatedly challenged herself in order to avoid validating a negative self-image. Although she became a parent at a young age, she says that raising her daughter Barbara (28) and son Mike (25) gave her the greatest memories of her life. In preparation for parenthood, she took a course in Early Childhood Development. Then at age 22, she opened a daycare for special needs children, including hearing children of deaf parents, in order to provide them with an interactive hearing experience. Her dedication to children in general has clearly been a major theme during her adult years. Her two grandchildren now play a big role in Lori's life, and she says, *Being a Gramma is your reward for being a parent.*

In 1994, noticing that half of her son's Abbotsford football team members were from Mission, Lori founded Mission Minor Football, and includes this as one of her proudest achievements. Between 1994 and 1998, she was simultaneously Head Coach of the Bantam Division 9ers Football Association, President of the Mission Minor Football Association, Director of the Valley Community Football Association and for the last year, 1998, Secretary of the BC Community Football Association. Coaching taught her that being involved in team sports provides an opportunity to give parents and their children a common ground on which to interact and bond.

A diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis in 1996 completely changed her life. Lori originally resented MS, but then saw it gave her new eyes, a new perspective, and a new sense of self and new priorities.

According to Lori, her biggest personal accomplishment was her trek across Canada. It all began with a trip to the local store for dog food. Lori had arranged a ride to the store, but not home. It took hours to walk the 3.5 kilometres – the most activity she'd had in months. She waited for the sickness that she had experienced with other types of exercise. It didn't come. She gradually increased the distance until the spring of 2002 when she was able to walk in the Super Cities Walk for MS in Abbotsford. Approaching the finish line, she realized there was nothing to make her continue to go out every day after that, no matter what. Out tumbled these words: *God, if you let me go a year without a relapse, I'm going to walk across Canada for myself and for everyone who has MS.*

The trek began in May 2003. Averaging 32 kilometres per day, 6 days per week, Lori walked 6,430 kilometres from Northumberland Strait in New Brunswick to English Bay. Her journey was very challenging and yet fulfilling. She kept a detailed record of her experiences, recalling in 2006: *My walk defined me and destroyed me at the same time. It was the most awful, awesome adventure of my life.* Following in the footsteps of other heroic individuals like Terry Fox and Rick Hansen, she had raised awareness and much-needed funding to help find a cure for a devastating disease that affects over 100,000 Canadians.

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