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College Park resident finds purpose in walking

by Alex Wexelman on May 5, 2015 in [Community Spotlight](#) [Leave a comment](#)



When Mercedes Albert first began walking it was merely a form of exercise for her physical health. But as her own physical health improved, that of her younger sister, Maria Mesa, worsened.



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Mesa was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme, a rare form of brain cancer, December 17, 2010.

“They gave her one year with treatment, and six months without. She was so strong, so faithful, that she lasted three years and seven months,” Albert said.

Mesa was 60 when she passed, and Albert has dedicated her walking to a new purpose: joining 5K walks for cancer.

Most recently Albert was the team captain of a walk in West Palm Beach organized by Accelerate Brain Cancer Cure, a nonprofit organization founded by a man who had the same type of cancer as her sister.

Albert’s team name was “I Did It My Way—In Loving Memory of Maria Mesa,” and the team raised \$16,825 for cancer research.

On May 3, Albert will be joining Team BT in the Race for Hope in Washington, D.C. The team captain, BethAnn Telford, has been a brain cancer survivor for 10 years.

“[Telford] was recognized as a brain survivor and the organizer of the 5K wanted me to meet her because she’s done so much. She’s like my mentor now,” Albert said.

Albert is turning to members of the College Park community for support. She wants to spread awareness and asks anyone who can to donate money to her team.

“We need everyone else to help. Who wants to have cancer? Once they find the brain cancer cure, they’re going to find everything else because the brain, which I learned with my sister, has a lining that [makes] it very difficult for the medication to go through it and that’s why brain cancer is so deadly,” Albert said.

Mesa was 13 when she and her family arrived in the U.S. after leaving Cuba to escape Fidel Castro’s politics. Albert, who is three and a half years older than her sister, remembers spending whole summers on the beach with friends and family when they lived in their home country.

After her university graduation, Mesa moved to College Park in 1975 and remained a resident until her death. She worked at the health department in town and was a daily customer at Christo’s Café.

“My sister was like my mom, she was everybody’s mom, and she loved to take care of everyone. She was wonderful, always helping people, always helping everyone around. That’s what she liked to do, and her profession was to help people,” Albert said.

Albert cried while describing her sister’s personality. She said she misses everything about Mesa: she was like a mother to her even though she was her younger sister.

“She was a very happy person, always laughing and supporting you whatever you did. What I want to do is help others because God has been so good to me,” Albert said.

While she was sick, Mesa would always say, “I’m going to beat this beast.” Her tenacity is evident in her sister’s attitude as well.

“I’m just looking forward to keep doing this for as long as I can until we find the cure,” Albert said.

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