

2007 STEPS COMMUNITY HEROES AWARDS PROGRAM
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MARCELLA MORTON'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO

MARCELLA MORTON: Thank you. It's truly an honor to be here today accepting this award. First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my great tribe and about half of them are here. That is the great Cherokee nation of Oklahoma. And I also want to thank them for their nomination. In fact, whenever I got the email telling me that I had been nominated, I quickly wrote back and said, "I think you made a mistake. I'm not the person that deserves this award." But the answer came back yes, you're the one we selected. So I was thrilled.

The Cherokee Nation has given me the opportunity to share my story with so many people. And that story means quite a lot to me. It's the story that I tell to people to let them realize that they can do anything in their life if they just set their mind to it. I have to be honest with you that at one time in my life, I was sixty pounds overweight. I never exercised. In fact my idea of exercising was to walk up stairs and get the dirty clothes hamper from my daughter's room and she could take it back. I got it down to the washer. I lived on junk food and Pepsi pumped through my veins. The healthy lifestyle that I lead today came to me because of a tragic event in my life. Everything I am today and what I stand for and what I've accomplished in the last ten years is because of one person. That person is Janet Franklin and she was my very very best friend from elementary school.

We did everything together. We went to high school together. We were cheerleaders together. We just remained very close friends throughout our married years and when we had our children. In Janet's mid-forties, she got breast cancer. We fought this breast cancer together and we won that first battle. She remained cancer free for approximately three years before it came back. The second time the cancer came back it was different and it was extremely hard to fight. I always felt like the second time I fought harder than she did because it was out of selfishness because I did not want to lose her as my best friend. She finally decided she had fought too long and I could tell she was giving up. One of the days, near the end, I was sitting with her and we were looking through the old high school yearbook and wondering what those jocks were doing then. And of course the cheerleaders still were a little chunky, but we looked okay. And we were discussing people in the yearbook. She tapped me on the shoulder and she said, "I need to talk to you about something. I want you to make me a promise." So we made a promise that was to change my entire life. Before she told me what she wanted me to promise her, she held up her hand and - she was at the point then that she just trembled - she put up her little finger like this and she said, "You have to pinky swear with me." So the pinky swear to us, as a kid, was a symbol of a sacred promise. So I put that pinky up and we did our little pinky swear. And the promise I made that day was that I would try to do something to change my health. She said, "You need to promise me that you'll exercise and you'll eat right because I don't want you to have cancer like me." So I made that promise. Two weeks later she was taken from my life.

I gave little thought to that promise until one night, a few weeks after she was gone, I was standing at the kitchen washing dishes and a voice said, "You promised me." And I thought...that's Janet's voice. And once again it said, "You promised me." I finished the dishes, I went to the closet and I picked out the only pair of tennis shoes that I owned. They had green all over the toe because they were my lawn mowing shoes. I put those tennis shoes on and I went outside and I walked for fifteen minutes - to me that seemed like a long time. I continued to do that for two or three evenings and my family was just like, "What's going on with mom? She never goes out and she's acting like she's trying to exercise.

What's going on with her?" And they were really confused. But I didn't share this story with them. You know I knew she would just really haunt me and bug me about this promise, so I had to do this. I went from that first fifteen minutes of walking to twenty and then thirty and forty-five minutes and I began to make other just little small changes in my life. Just steps. Like we're here today with the Steps Program. I started drinking water and I was not a water drinker. That Pepsi I loved. But I started drinking water and I started replacing junk food with more nutritious choices. I was the mother you see in the grocery store saying, "No we're not getting that fruit. It's too expensive. Go get me a box of Twinkies." But I did make those changes. As I progressed I would check with her because, that first day, I had gone out and walked that first fifteen minutes and at the end of it, I remember looking up and saying, "Is that okay?" "Is that good enough?" Because I really didn't know what she wanted. She didn't set any restrictions. But every now and then I would check in with her and say, "Hey am I doing okay?" "Is this good enough?"

My walking eventually turned into a running program and it wasn't long before I got a crazy idea that I could run a marathon. What better tribute to my friend Janet than to run a marathon? So I decided I would try. I ran that first marathon and I finished in an upright position and I knew who I was. So to me that was success. I read about this other marathon later and it seemed like it was an extremely important one. But you know, I was relishing in the glory of completing my first marathon. But I kept going back to this one marathon that all the runners seemed to be really hung up on. It was called The Boston Marathon. Well you have to run a qualifying time to run Boston. But I decided, with Janet always talking to me and encouraging me, that maybe I could run the Boston marathon. So my husband says, "Well you know you have to qualify for that." I was like, "Yeah. And I believe I can do it."

So that first time that I tried I went to Dallas out in White Rock and I ran as hard as I could. And when I crossed the finish line, I had missed my qualifying time by seven minutes and fifty-four seconds. So to me I just thought...well that was a practice. I'll have to go back again next year and try again. I went back the next year and I changed my strategy. The first time I tried to qualify I went alone. I had no one at the finish line waiting on me. The second time I went back I took my two daughters. They were there waiting at the finish line. I lined myself up differently this time. I had learned a lot from that first experience. And anytime I got tired during that run I would think, oh my gosh, my two daughters were waiting for me at the finish line. They're going to be sick of me saying I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this and never accomplishing my goals. And so I neared the finish line and I could see the balloons and I'm looking at the watch and I'm thinking, I think I've done it. And my daughter, who's here with me today, stepped out onto the pavement and said, "You better run mom. You're not going to make it. You're not going to qualify. You better hurry." And so I looked at my watch and I thought she must be looking at something different than me, but I'm not going to take any chances. So I ran so hard. I crossed that finish line and when I looked up at the clock, I had three minutes to spare. I just started saying, "I just qualified for Boston. I just qualified for Boston." And people were like, "Oh yeah she's delirious, let her go." So on April 21, 2003, I ran the Boston Marathon along with a wonderful spirit who carried me to the finish line. And that spirit was Janet.

She's always with me. She's with me when I do not want to go to my Weight Watchers meetings because I'm up a little. She's with me on my long distance run when I need to sort things out in my head. She's with me today. And as ironic as it seems, she passed away ten years ago on this very day. So she's here today giving back to me as I accept this award in her honor. And once again I have to look up and say, "How am I doing? Is this enough?" Thank you.

END OF SPEECH