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We are an alliance of brain tumour support, advocacy and information groups around the world, including brain tumour patients and caregivers, researchers, scientists, clinicians and allied health professionals who work in the field.

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MEDIA RELEASE

Katja's Walk Around the World for Brain Tumour Awareness, October 11 - November 1, 2008 – Report by Mike Ferguson.

Katja Viventsova, an environmental scientist and artist (known as Kat Viva), and her partner Mike Ferguson from Canada, came up with a novel way to raise awareness and support for brain tumours, and to gather miles for the International Brain Tumour Alliance's (IBTA) 2008 Walk Around the World for Brain Tumours.



*Katja with her brother Alexey from Russia
at Mink Falls in northwestern Ontario, Canada, November 2008*

Diagnosed in May 2007, Katja is an 18+month survivor of brain tumours (Glioblastoma multiforme or GBM, grade IV). She has had three brain surgeries, and has received several types of treatments. After her third surgery, her condition was especially poor during July-August 2008. By August, her tumour had regrown and two more had appeared. In mid-August,

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she started Avastin and Irinotecan treatments. Although Avastin is not yet an approved treatment for GBM and thus not covered by either Cancer Care Ontario or Canadian medical insurance (e.g., the Public Service Health Care Plan), her tumours have shrunk and her condition is much improved.

To support the mission and goals of the IBTA, the goal for Katja's Walk was to get as many people as possible to literally walk around the world, or at least in as many places as possible, using electronic word of mouth.

So by e-mail on October 11, 2008, Katja and Mike contacted friends, colleagues and family members around the world to undertake their own walks by themselves or with family and friends, at least one kilometre in length, by the end of the IBTA's International Brain Tumour Awareness Week on 1 November 2008. Katja and Mike have lived and worked in several countries, especially in the Arctic. They hoped to generate a wonderful display of international solidarity that could be shared with all brain tumour survivors and their caregivers!

The response was overwhelming! Much greater than Katja and Mike had even imagined!!

From October 11 to November 1, a total of 189 people participated in Katja's Walk Around the World for brain tumour awareness on five continents, Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America. These wonderful people walked in 92 different cities, towns and rural areas in 26 different countries. In total, they walked an amazing 1,841 km in only three weeks.

In their e-mails, many described their motivations to encourage Katja and other brain tumour survivors to carry on their fight with this disease. Many expressed their shock at how brain tumours seem to attack people at random, many knowing how well Katja had taken care of her health.

Katja has dedicated her scientific career to understanding impacts that humans have had on the Arctic environment, and to train young researchers to develop stronger interdisciplinary understandings for the future, so that solutions to environmental problems may be found. Katja's art depicts the beauty and joy that she sees in nature and people.

By e-mail, several participants shared their personal understandings of the hardships faced by brain tumour survivors and their caregivers through their own stories of loved ones who had suffered from brain tumours, other cancers, severe injuries, and various tragedies. Some spread the word of Katja's Walk to others whom Mike and Katja did not know, but who shared the same goals.

As a result, people walked as far north as 70°N in Hjemmeluft, Norway, and as far south as 38°S in Melbourne, Australia. In terms of going east-west around the world, participants covered 280 of the globe's 360 degrees, from places like Khabarovsk Territory in the Far East of Russia west to Whitehorse, Yukon in northern Canada. For a map showing all the places where participants walked, go to:

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?t=h&hl=en&ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=115242401607649437587.00045cf578b07629038aa&z=2>

Katja wants governments, foundations and institutions to place higher priority on brain tumour research. In 2005, a British study found that, of all cancers, primary brain tumours cause the greatest impact on the lives of survivors, with an average of 20 years of life lost.

Through Katja's own experience, many oncologists and physicians should change their way of treating brain tumour survivors. Medical professionals should strive to keep each survivor alive

until a cure is found if possible, instead of treating them all as a class of terminal palliative cases. With more research, clinical trials available in remote areas, and individualized treatments, this cancer will also join the growing list of curable diseases.

Katja thanks all the participants in Katja's Walk Around the World who have encouraged her and filled her with the spirit of their individual efforts. She also thanks her dynamic, dedicated medical team and others who have done so much for her.

Katja and Mike share the efforts of these 189 walkers with all brain tumour survivors and their caregivers. As David M. Bailey, a 10-year GBM survivor, sings "Keep on walking!"

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Denis Strangman, Chair, International Brain Tumour Alliance (IBTA), Email: chair@theibta.org said: "Katja's Walk represented a unique contribution to the IBTA's Walk Around the World for Brain Tumours, which involved 48,706 people in 31 countries walking 223,088 kms (five times around the Earth at the Equator) and who collectively raised USD \$9,588,816 for local brain tumour research and support (none of the funds raised go to the IBTA)."

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