



KELLY DOODY

# PageSix

## Norma Bastidas saw hope in running miles around the world for her son


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Truly life-changing interviews don't come along all that often. I'm talking about the kind that leave you wondering whether you could ever have an impact on the world that would compare to the person you're speaking with.

It begins with the ending, in an Internet café in Italy, the place *Page Six* caught up with a lady we'd like to proclaim the Calgarian of the Decade, if we may.

Her name is **Norma Bastidas**. You may remember her as the local mom who was setting out on a series of long runs a few months ago to raise funds towards fighting her 13-year-old son **Karl's** degenerative eye condition called Cone Rod Dystrophy — a devastating diagnosis for which there is currently no cure.

As it turns out, Bastidas didn't just go for a few runs, and she didn't just raise a few dollars. As of Saturday, she became the second person in history to have successfully completed seven gruelling ultra marathons on all seven of the world's continents in seven months.

And so far, she has also managed to raise close to \$140,000 in support of Operation Eyesight Universal, CNIB and Foundation Fighting Blindness.

Far from unfamiliar with hardship, Bastidas was born in Mazatlan, Mexico, became a 20-something daytime TV star in Japan, escaped an abusive marriage in the U.S., landed in Canada in 1993 with her two sons in tow and hasn't looked back since.

The single mom on a mission dealt with the emotional stress of her son's diagnosis two years ago by starting to run. And once she started running, well, she never stopped.

Too humble to ever call herself an athlete, Bastidas registered for her first 'ultra' in 2007 with only one half and one full marathon under her belt.

It was a gruelling 125-km trek with 17,000 feet of elevation change over three mountain summits that left her hypothermic on a mountain-top and unable to finish.

But it also managed to plant the question in



DARREN MAKOWICHUK/SUNMEDIA

Norma Bastidas, with her son Karl who has an eye condition she's raising funds to fight.

her mind: If she could run 94 km without any real training, how far was she capable of going with a little preparation?

Everywhere from the thickest tropical jungles

to the windiest tundra plains to the driest deserts in the world, as it turns out, all in support of the blind and visually impaired.

An instrumental player in getting Bastidas' 777 Run for Sight mission off the ground was Calgary businessman **Brett Wilson**.

At the time she took off for race number one, the two were dating. Today the pair share a friendship that runs a lot deeper than most, including a sense of accomplishment in one truly remarkable fundraising feat.

"What she set out to do was change the world in terms of awareness around blindness related causes," Wilson told *Page Six* following Norma's final race on Saturday.

"She's done her part, and she's done an amazing job. Now it's up to the viral world to step up."

A great deal of the money raised to date came from Wilson's recent Garden Party — a 600-person affair in his Mount Royal backyard featuring **Sarah McLachlan**, who treated guests to a performance so intimate and uplifting it left the girls teary and the boys gape-jawed.

"We raised double what I had expected," said the *Dragon's Den* star. "Some said it had to do with Sarah, but it was entirely Norma

and her cause."

While Wilson did his part to call on friends and colleagues to take note of the cause, it was The Bolt Supply House and owner **John McCann** who's been Norma's key sponsor from day one.

"Bolt Supply sponsored my series not because they wanted to convince people to buy their fancy products, but for the simple fact that they believe in investing in the community," said Bastidas.

Thanks to the sponsorship, she was able to properly train to complete the feat. And by train, we're talking running a marathon or two a day.

Lililime Boutique co-owner **Denise Browne-Vervloet** counts herself among the legions of Bastidas mega-fans across Calgary.

"What she's doing is letting everyone know that in order to beat this disease for her son, she's fighting it with her heart."

[kelly.doody@sunmedia.ca](mailto:kelly.doody@sunmedia.ca)

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