

**C**ait Pomeroy stared out across the open lake swelling with 3-foot whitecaps and rippling chop. Seated in her yellow kayak a sloppy 4 miles from shore, she knew she had only one choice—to keep paddling. Pomeroy tightened her grip on the steel bar stretched across her chest and put one achy arm in front of the other, slicing forward with cramped fingers and burning wrists. An hour later, the then 56-year-old retired journalist and retail owner from Pasadena, Texas, secured her boat, said so-long to trainer Tony Dial, who had paddled the 16 miles with her that day, collapsed into her car, and started to sob.

After her first long race, Pomeroy was tired, yes. But she was also ecstatic. “I cried all the way home,” she recalls. “I simply could not believe I’d done something like that. Me, a complete nonathlete with two artificial knees.”

Pomeroy had fought the current to get there.

Growing up, Pomeroy was taught, “Southern ladies don’t sweat; they glow.” But as the numbers on the scale rose along with her years, she decided to make a change. Despite two titanium knee replacements—the result of a brutal fall down the stairs in the 1970s—she was determined to become active. In 2005, she purchased two memberships to Pasadena Active 24 Hour Fitness and slipped them into a Valentine’s Day card for her husband—a gift for herself as well as for

herself swapping out Snickers for whole-grain bagels with peanut butter. “I knew if I ate the wrong things, I’d feel awful the next day,” says Pomeroy, “which usually entailed being on the water with Tony at 7 A.M.”

After 9 months of conditioning, in September 2006, Pomeroy and Dial pushed in their paddles for the grueling century ride. “I felt like my muscles were shredding, like they were coming apart,” Dial says of the experience. “And after 8 hours, they just went numb.” Nearly 23 hours after starting, the duo finished.

Pomeroy, her hands a moonscape of broken blisters, felt invincible.

Two weeks later, she would need that feeling when a routine mammogram revealed a lump the size of a pencil eraser in her right breast, and her next challenge—breast cancer. Had she not recently lost so much weight—she was 160 pounds at that point, down from 193 since joining the gym—the doctors told her the cancer might have gone undetected. Pomeroy underwent a lumpectomy and 6 weeks of radiation.

Meeting with her doctors for the first time, Pomeroy handed over a photo of herself in a kayak and asked that it be taped to the front of her file. “I’m a kayaker who just happens to have breast cancer,” she told them, “and if we can work together on that, let’s go for it.” Both sides kept up their ends of the bargain.

Pomeroy kept paddling until the radiation caused her skin

# FIGHTING THE

**Bum knees and a bout with breast cancer didn't stop Cait Pomeroy from transforming herself into a hard-charging athlete—one who would go on to race 100 miles in her kayak. Twice.**

By Amanda Tust • Photography by Jon Liu

him. She met Dial her first week at the gym. They were kayaking together a mere 4 months later.

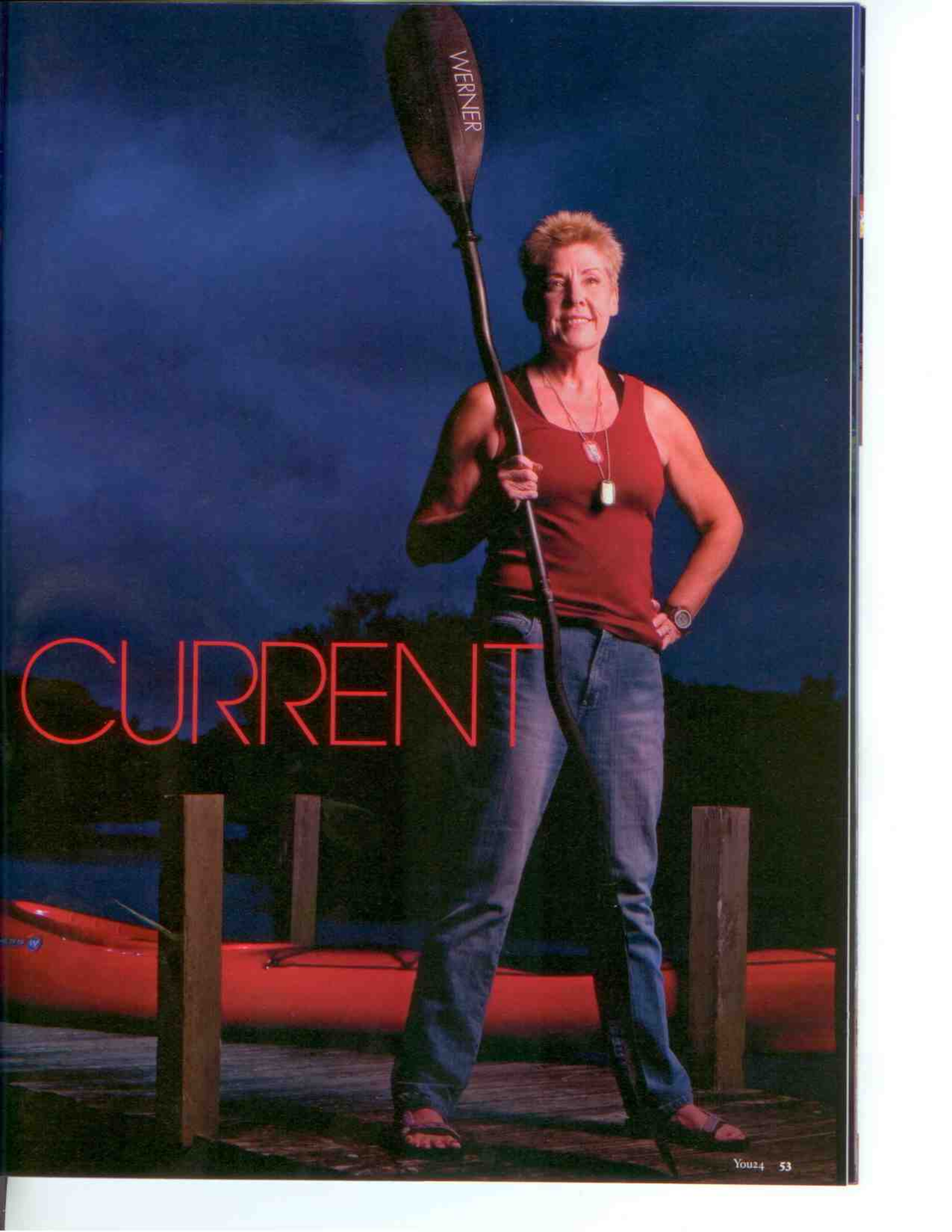
“If someone had ever put together a schedule of things to do in my life, never once would I have envisioned kayaking,” she says. But after working out at the gym 6 days a week for a month, Dial encouraged Pomeroy to find an outdoor activity to help keep her motivated. With limited bending in her knees, she had to find an upper-body option. Kayaking, a sport Dial had recently taken up, fit the bill. Soon, they were paddling together on a nearby lake several times a week.

It was Pomeroy’s idea to raise the stakes, and in December 2005, after just 5 months of kayaking, she decided to train for the Colorado River 100, a 100-mile race. She and Dial began kayaking in tandem 3 days a week, and Pomeroy spent 3 days in the gym sweating through intense upper-body and core workouts. She dropped from a size 18 to an 8 and found

to bubble open, making the bacteria in the water too risky. But her cancer didn’t spread. When her skin healed, she headed back into the water to train for her second Colorado River 100, which she completed with Dial on Labor Day weekend in 2007. The duo knocked 7 hours off their previous time.

Now down to 145 pounds, Pomeroy has moved on to new goals: She aims to start Paddle for the Cure, patterned after the popular Race for the Cure runs to support breast cancer research. And she plans to try a 67-mile race through the Everglades as prep for a real challenge—a 300-mile race from Tampa, Florida, through the Gulf of Mexico and the Everglades to Key Largo. She’s even added a pin to her race hat: pink boxing gloves emblazoned with the slogan, “Fight like a girl.” And no, Pomeroy doesn’t just mean the current. ●

Amanda Tust is an assistant editor at *You24*.



# CURRENT