

Breaking the taboos

AMELIA & RIA'S HEALING STEPS

The *Shorty* stars put in a marathon effort

When Amelia Reid-Meredith and Ria Vandervis say they've been training hard together for their upcoming half-marathon, what they really mean is they've been drinking a lot of sauvignon blanc.

The *Shortland Street* stars giggle as they confess their preparation has not exactly gone to plan since late last year, when they decided to compete in next month's Saint Clair Half Marathon in Marlborough.

But don't think for a second that their lack of training means the pair – best friends since they met on the set of the TVNZ 2 soap five years ago – don't care about the race. In fact, they're taking part to support a cause

very dear to their hearts.

In May 2017, Amelia's mum Robyn Reid lost her five-year battle with bowel cancer and this year's marathon – which raises funds for the charity Beat Bowel Cancer – will take place almost a year to the day she passed away.

"We're doing it in honour of Mum and however we finish, we'll be thinking about

her journey each step of the way," says Amelia, 31, who left *Shorty* in 2016 to nurse her dying mother. "It's going to be a really hard, emotional run, but this is just a tiny thing we can do to honour her memory."

"The timing of it all was really serendipitous," says Ria, 33, who counts herself as an "honorary daughter" of the Reid whanau.

Amelia nods, "Because it was Mum's anniversary coming up, this seemed the most amazing thing for the family to come together and

do something positive to honour her."

Behind lung cancer, bowel cancer is the second deadliest form of the disease in New Zealand, but unlike many forms of cancer, it can be treated successfully if caught early enough.

"We're honouring a charity that just doesn't get enough support," says Amelia. "I'm really proud to stand by them because Mum did catch it early and I got her for an extra five years, which were so precious to us all. But there are many people who don't.

"Mum was so hilarious about it. She was such a great spokeswoman because she'd be at a party and she'd just bring up her bowel cancer, asking people if they'd had their checks."

Friend in need

Watching Amelia and Ria sharing memories on our shoot, there is no doubt they're thick as thieves. In fact, when Amelia returned to Auckland after Robyn died in Nelson, she moved in with Ria. And when she shifted out again six months later, the actress only moved across the street.

The pair will be side by side as they begin the half marathon amid the vines of Marlborough and there is no doubt in their minds that Robyn will be there in spirit, cheering them on. "She's a force," laughs Ria.

Although they are nervous about the 21.1 km distance, the besties are excited about supporting a cause that will forever be in their hearts. With

These besties will see each other through the hard yards!



Shorty favourites: Amelia played lovable receptionist Bella, while Ria stars as Harper.

Shorty **exclusive**



Amelia lost her mum Robyn (above) to bowel cancer last year.

a confident smile, Amelia insists, "It won't be too hard because nothing will be as hard as what last year was. We will breeze it."

If anything, the biggest struggle has been fitting training into their busy lives. Ria spends long days on the *Shorty* set as Dr Harper Whitley, as well as running printed apparel and promo products company Construct, and working as a celebrant.

Meanwhile, Amelia – who played receptionist Bella Durville on the soap – has found it hard to get in much-needed exercise between her full-time job at professional actors agency Gail Cowan Management and being a mother to two-year-old son Arlo.

The grief she still feels at her mother's passing also hasn't helped. "I am only nine months into losing Mum, so exercise is actually the last thing on my mind, although when I do get out there, it's a really positive outlet to deal with it."

Both Amelia and Ria have completed half-marathons before, but they aren't worried about their times, in fact, they're not even concerned if they finish. For them, it's about using their public profiles to promote a good cause.

"It's so taboo to talk about bowel cancer – people get embarrassed," says Amelia. "But Mum talked about it a lot, so I'm following in her footsteps by making it a public conversation."

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Sisters in arms: Amelia (left) and Ria are raising funds and awareness about bowel cancer, the second deadliest form of cancer in New Zealand.