

Back on Track

Runner resumes sport after recovering from bleeding brain aneurysm

When Brooke Sydnor Curran, then 50, finished the 43rd Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC, last fall, it was a crisp October afternoon and nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Her husband and three daughters were cheering her on, and, like the previous 116 marathons she had run since 2009, she felt good.

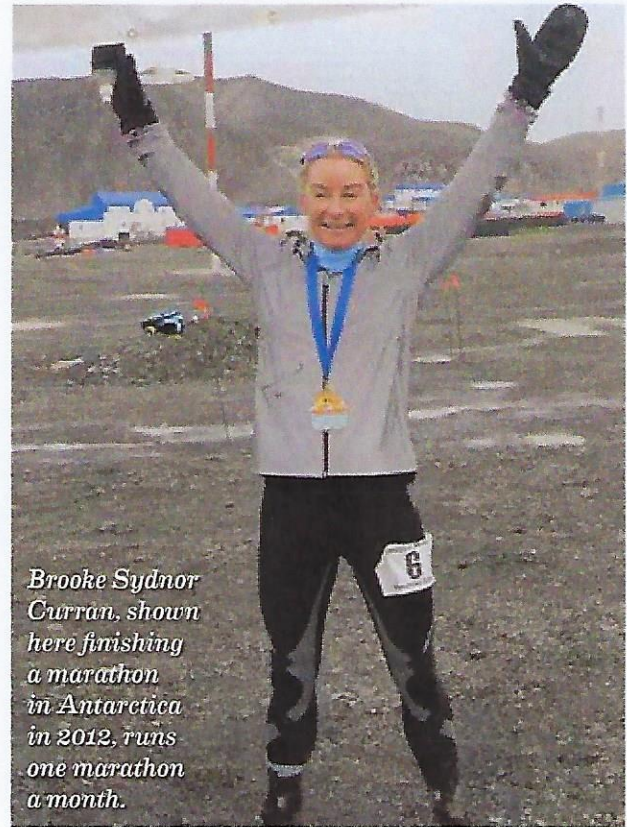
But as Brooke approached the finish line, she spotted a special face in the crowd and smiled. “It was the doctor who saved my life six months earlier,” she says.

Nilesh Vyas, MD, neurosurgeon and Director of Cerebrovascular Neurological Surgery at Inova Neuroscience and Spine Institute, first met Brooke on March 17, 2018.

Unexpected Emergency

That fateful day began as Brooke was ready to hit a trail for her morning run. Soon after starting, she had a sudden onset of a headache that felt like a sledgehammer hitting her head. By early afternoon, it had gone from bad to unbearable, so she and her husband headed to the Inova Alexandria Hospital (IAH) Emergency Room.

Once at the IAH ER, the doctors quickly determined that Brooke had suffered a subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH), a life-threatening type of stroke. Immediately, Brooke was transported by ambulance to Inova Fairfax Medical Campus — the only treatment center for brain aneurysms in Northern Virginia. Dr. Vyas was immediately called in to see her. “Most brain aneurysms have no symptoms and present no danger,” Dr. Vyas stresses. “Only if the aneurysm ruptures and bleeds into the brain does it become life-threatening. That’s what happened to Brooke.”



Brooke Sydnor Curran, shown here finishing a marathon in Antarctica in 2012, runs one marathon a month.

There was also concern of the tight location the aneurysm was in, he adds. Because it was small and in an unusual location, open surgery was necessary.

On the Run

Fortunately, the surgery was a success with an excellent prognosis for recovery. Brooke originally lost 25 pounds, experienced extreme muscle atrophy and even had to retrain her brain to walk. But after being in the hospital, she continued to improve at home and was soon cleared to run. “I was running short distances within one month of coming home,” she says. “It’s as if my body was saying, ‘OK! This is what we do.’ And I’ve been running one marathon a month since October 2018. I don’t plan to stop any time soon.”

BRAINS AT WORK

Watch a video of Brooke’s story at inova.org/BrookeCurran. Learn more about Inova Neuroscience and Spine Institute at inova.org/neuroscience.

Brooke’s organization, RunningBrooke, aims to get kids moving to spark academic achievement. Find out more at runningbrooke.org.