



Brent Weigner finishes a race in Morocco, Africa, in 2000.

RUNNING

for his Life

BY MATT SCHUMAN

Nearly every day of Brent Weigner's life, the 55-year-old wakes up at 4 a.m. and runs 10 miles. The Cheyenne resident teaches geography at McCormick Junior High all day and then drives to Laramie to take night classes at the University of Wyoming.

It may seem like a lot for most people, but it is nothing like the bold challenges Weigner (BA-72) thrives on. Since 1968, he has run in 140 marathons and ultramarathons. (Marathons are 26.2 miles; anything longer is an ultramarathon.)

He has scaled mountains in the Himalayas, run the steep cliffs of the Andes Mountains while following the Inca Trail, and survived the bitter cold and snow of Antarctica, all in his quest to break the world record for the shortest time running ultramarathons on all seven continents.

Still, it is just as much what he is running away from that has kept Weigner pushing his body to its limits and reaching for every extreme challenge he can find.

Since he was 12, Weigner has overcome several bouts of cancer, running from it with the ferocity he brings to every challenge in his life.

"My wife tells me I am still running away from cancer, and I agree," Weigner says. "I said, 'Hell, yes, I am going to keep running so that it doesn't catch me.'"

He began running from cancer in the sixth grade, when doctors found he had malignant cancer of the lymph glands. Even after surgery to remove the glands and traveling every three months by train from Cheyenne to the University of Utah Medical Center for check-ups throughout most of his childhood, Weigner never suspected he had cancer.

"I was oblivious to all this," Weigner says. "I just thought I was sick because my parents never told me."

Being oblivious might have been the best medicine. Unfazed by it all, he began competing in several sports, including running at

Cancer survivor is an ultramarathon pioneer

Cheyenne Central High School, where he was a standout cross country and track athlete.

He earned a scholarship to UNC, where he competed under former coach Tom Benich on the track team and first-ever men's cross country team. He became one of the first two UNC athletes in school history to qualify for the NCAA Cross Country National Championships.

It was at UNC that Weigner first found out about his cancer. He was about to be commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force and went to take a physical at Warren Air Force base in Cheyenne, when his commanding officer informed him he was unfit for any branch of the military because his records showed he had cancer.

"I started laughing at the guy," Weigner says. "I said, 'Hey sir, that's a good one. That is the funniest one I have heard all day.' He got deadpanned serious and said, 'I am not kidding. You're not even supposed to be alive.' I was just shell shocked. I said, 'What are you talking about?'"

If anything, it made Weigner more determined to push himself as an athlete and become successful in all phases of his life. Ed Bingham, a Denver police captain and friend of Weigner's since the two first met as teammates at UNC, saw how much cancer affected his friend's life.

"I thought he was pretty laid back when he was in college," Bingham says. "But he had some setbacks in life, and I think that kind of changed his attitude about life."



CARA EATWOOD

Weigner talks in his McCormick Junior High School geography class about how global meridians intersect.

He had another bout with cancer of the salivary gland in 1984, in which the entire left side of his face was paralyzed for six months. Yet he still ran two 5K races while undergoing radiation therapy. It was then that his wife, Sue Hume, began to realize how important running was to him.

"When he had the cancer surgery in '84, he was up walking in the halls and doing laps the day after the surgery," Hume says. "So, I think I had a fairly good idea that it was important to him and that he wanted to stay fit."

COURTESY OF BRIAN WEIGNER

More than staying fit, Weigner wanted to see how far he could push himself. He ran out of challenges after running marathons in all 50 states, so he began organizing and running ultramarathons.

After starting the first ultramarathon in the Antarctic in 1999, he decided to seek a world record for running an ultramarathon on every continent in a calendar year. He did it in 267 days, discovering some of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of his life.

One of the most challenging was the 26.2-mile race around the South Pole in Antarctica. It took him more than nine hours. He ran in temperatures that were close to the limit of safety for a runner—almost 40 below zero with a crosswind of 10-15 mph.

"And we were running," Weigner says. "People were saying, 'What do you mean, you were running?' We were running, we weren't walking, we were just running slow."

In the Himalayas, he saw breathtaking scenery.

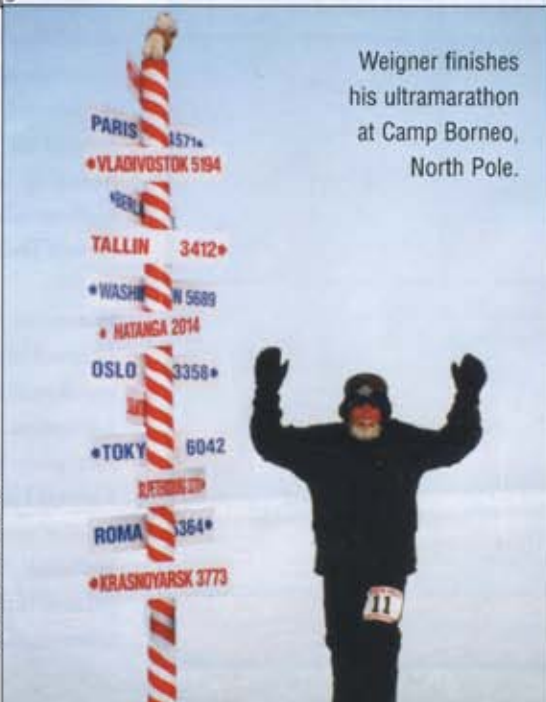
"When you're running along the ridge between Nepal and India, you could literally see four of the world's five highest mountains without turning your head. It looked like they were right in front of you, even though they were hundreds of miles away," he says.

While running the King of the Mountain 46-kilometer ultramarathon in Australia, he met a firefighter at a local pub who shared his passion for running, if not his diligence for fitness.

"I asked him how his training was going," Weigner says. "He held up a beer and said, 'This is my training, mate.'"

Today, Weigner continues to look for any challenge that will push him to his limits. He recently took up snowshoe racing and won the men's senior division at his first-ever National Snowshoe Championships. In 2006 he wants to compete in a 700-mile, three-month race from the North Pole to Ward Hunt Island in Canada.

Weigner finishes his ultramarathon at Camp Borneo, North Pole.



"As long as the good Lord is willing, because he is a man of faith as well, he will pursue the races that are extraordinary, the races that are challenging—the things that very few people on this earth pursue," says his friend Jim Woodard of Cheyenne.

His wife and his stepchildren, Russell and Scott Hume, know he will never quit running.

"Our boys have said, instead of putting him in a nursing home when he gets too decrepit, we'll just hand him a water bottle, take him out a far distance and say, 'Go,'" Sue says. "Just let him run off into the sunset."

MATT SCHUMAN (BA-86) IS A GREELEY SPORTS JOURNALIST.