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Father and Daughter Race Against Time, Fulfill Marathon Dream

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- For Cedarville University senior Arielle Wenig (Pleasant HS/Marion, Ohio), running her first marathon this fall was more than a personal accomplishment. It was the completion of a father-daughter dream and the fulfillment of a race against time.

On September 18, after years of anticipation and months of training, Arielle and her dad, Bryan, completed the 26.2-mile run to celebrate Bryan's 60th birthday.

"It was always his goal to run a marathon with his daughter at 60, and I've always wanted to do it with him," said Arielle, a social work major.

The accomplishment was particularly special because Bryan was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in May.

Though the father-daughter duo was disappointed when the in-person U.S. Air Force Marathon at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, was canceled due to COVID-19, they decided to run it virtually.

"We'd already committed to the date," Arielle said. "We were trained and ready to run it."

At 7:30 a.m. on September 18, the pair left Kenton, Ohio, and set out along State Route 309. Six and a half hours and 26.2 miles later, they arrived in Marion, Ohio.

"It was incredibly difficult, sunny and around 84 degrees for most of the run," said Arielle. "Having my dad there helped me persist."

"I'd been training for this since April," Arielle continued, "but the farthest I'd run was 18 miles. Crossing the finish line was such a relief. We made it!"

Bryan's marathon with Arielle has been germinating since he last ran a marathon as a 43-year-old.

"When she was a toddler, I told her that I would love to run a marathon with her someday," Bryan said. "Now, my dream was coming true."

They began running longer distances together over Christmas break 2020 to work up to marathon distance. During this process, Bryan began declining in health. "The strange thing was, the harder I trained, the slower and weaker I felt, to the point that I went to the doctor and was diagnosed with Parkinson's," he explained.

Bryan's diagnosis added a sense of urgency to their goal.

"It meant the world to be able to run the marathon with Dad," Arielle said. "I took running for granted, but when Dad was diagnosed, that changed. This opportunity was only through God's grace.

"Dad's diagnosis was especially hard because I learned about it while at school," she added. "I only began to see his symptoms this summer. Running with him was comforting. I saw he was still able to do what he loved and was pressing on."

Even in the uncertainty of his diagnosis, Bryan remains at peace. "God created me to be able to handle today, and only today, and he will supply what I need," he said. "I know that God uses all things for good for those that love Him, and He can change despair and defeat into victory.

"I continually thank God for allowing me to be physically able to finish this marathon and fulfill this dream."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Brendan Rowland