

Experience is driving cross-country quest for Heart Association

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On the outside, Mycle Brandy doesn't look like someone who would attempt to traverse almost 3,000 miles across the country on foot.

He doesn't have a classical athlete's body, his need for the aid of a cane in his walk would seem to imply someone whose movements are labored, and the slow graying in his hair and mustache show the first signs of his 59 years.

But look inside, and you'll see the spirit, drive and inspiration that have propelled the four-time stroke survivor three-quarters of the way across the country during the past seven months to raise awareness and money for the American Heart and American Stroke associations.

"You can sit and cry the blues all you want," Brandy said. "And crying the blues, all it does is give death to you a little bit quicker."

When Brandy walks along U.S. 50 through Chillicothe this weekend as part of his trek from Irvine, Calif., to Washington, D.C., it will be a homecoming of sorts. As a child in the 1950s, he lived in Chillicothe and has many fond memories of the area. He also will get a chance to visit with an aunt he hasn't seen in about a half-century while here.

During his walk, which he started on his 59th birthday Feb. 14, Brandy has been speaking with media outlets and visiting with stroke patients in hospitals to get the word out and provide inspiration. He knows about the difficulties involved with recovering from a stroke, having done it for the first time in 1988 when much of his hearing was lost.

A stroke in 1997 was his harshest of the four, he said, costing him for a time a lot of his movement on the right side of his body. His most recent attack came in 2002.

He shares those experiences with stroke survivors in hospitals along the route and tries to lift the inevitable depression that often follows stroke. One 36-year-old patient he encountered in Tulsa, Okla., sticks in his memory and was typical of the approach he tries to take.

"He was really depressed," Brandy said. "I sat down next to him and said, 'Guy, I can tell you're depressed, and I'm going to be truthful with you, depression isn't going to get you where you need to go, so you need to try and pull yourself out of this as quickly as you can because if you sit here and be depressed, you're just going to get more depressed and you're not going to be able to do anything.'"

The idea to do the walk was a spur-of-the-moment one, Brandy said. The California resident said it came to him during an interview with a reporter who was talking with him about his preparations to run in his 10th marathon -- this one this Halloween in Athens, Greece.

Really wanting to give the reporter something good to write about, he decided on the spot to walk across the country. He then had to go home and tell his wife who, after not talking to him for a couple of days, has become his staunchest supporter, he said.

But she's not his only supporter. Through media coverage of his walk, his Facebook page and his website, Brandy has received messages of support from every continent except Antarctica and has been asked to walk across continents around the globe -- something he said he would consider if he had a sponsor to help pay for it.

He also has picked up assistance with overnight accommodations and transportation assistance after he's stopped for the evenings. As he approached the Chillicothe area, he was being accompanied by Shelley and James Brown, of Wisconsin. Brandy got to know Shelley through an online stroke support group, and the couple agreed to spend some time on the road helping him out.

He has a few goals remaining before reaching Washington, D.C., on Oct. 10. First and foremost is to raise \$10,000 for the American Heart Association -- he's collected about \$5,200 so far on the journey. Second is to inspire as many stroke survivors and others to fight through their difficulties and not surrender to the depression.

Finally, he's hoping to pick up a sponsor to help him make it to the 2,500th anniversary running of the Athens marathon. He has developed an untreatable liver disease tied to some of the medication taken for treatment of his multiple strokes and is not sure how many more opportunities he will have to attempt the annual event in Greece.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

To help with Mycle Brandy's fundraising for the Heart Association, visit www.walkingacrossamerica.org, click on the "how you can help" link and find the "donate now" button. There also are places on the site to offer other assistance in his quest.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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