

Good Conditioning

Helps Bonnie Weber Stumpo

Survive Aneurysm

By David Block

February 26, 2004 is a date that Bonnie Weber Stumpo of King of Prussia will never forget, because on that fateful day, she almost died, due to an aneurysm. It happened while she was exercising on the elliptical machine at Bally Total Fitness in King of Prussia.



"I had a ticking time bomb in my head and didn't even know it," said Stumpo, who was thirty years old at the time. "I was always in shape; I never had health problems." However, several months before the attack, she started getting headaches. "I thought it was odd because I was not one to get headaches. Plus, they were in strange locations of my skull. They weren't the usual tension headache in the forehead." But those headaches were so mild and infrequent that she ignored them. She thought that everything was fine, even on that February 26th, when she stepped onto the elliptical machine.

"While I was on the elliptical machine, I heard something pop in my head. My friend working out next to me asked if I was okay and I said, 'No.' I got off the machine, laid on the ground and passed out. It was a good thing this didn't happen while I was driving because I could have been killed."

She received brain surgery at Thomas Jefferson Hospital. "The doctors told me that I had a one percent chance of surviving," said Stumpo. "They told me that being fit saved my life." She

explained that people around her age have less of a chance of surviving aneurysms than older people: "Your brain shrinks when you get older, so if an older person gets an aneurysm, there is more room for the blood to travel."

She hates to imagine the repercussions had she been out of shape, or overweight or suffering from high blood pressure. Stumpo knew people in similar predicaments who were less fortunate. Stumpo said, "Recently, a dear friend died from a brain aneurysm. I like to encourage people to get checked if they have strange headaches. That can save their lives."

Fortunately, Stumpo was always in shape, from childhood through adulthood, and at age twenty, her desire to be fit increased while working as a nursing-assistant. "It was really depressing because I was having patients die on me. I decided to be a personal trainer."

She was certified through the American Council on Exercise (ACE) at Camden County Community College. Then she earned a full comprehensive certification certificate from Pilates and More in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

Her conditioning, not only saved her from an aneurysm, it also quickened her recovery time. "I was out of the hospital

two and a half weeks later, and the day I was discharged, I was using the treadmill—there was no residue, I didn't need speech therapy, PT or medication," things, which are quite common for recovering aneurysm patients. But she wasn't back to normal immediately; for the first six months, she wasn't allowed to lift anything heavier than a fork.

When asked if any good came from her ordeal, she said that she learned not to take life for granted or to sweat the small stuff. In addition, she has said that she is in the best shape of her life. She used to run thirty miles a week, and now she's increased the weekly mileage to forty. She does more advanced Pilate's workouts and now she runs races. "Before, I had no desire to race." Last year she ran the Thomas Jefferson Philadelphia Distance Run to honor two special people: Dr. Erol Veznedaroglu who performed the surgery on her, and her father Earl Weber, who died in 2005.

Today, she still works as a personal trainer where she has twenty to twenty-five clients. She is also a Pilate's instructor, and currently has thirty-five to forty clients. For more information about receiving training from her, call (610) 667-7074.



David Block is passionate about educating the public and raising awareness about the challenges, abilities and accomplishments of blind and other disabled athletes. He promotes this in part by teaching Goalball, the international team sport for blind athletes, to sighted people. He is an inspiration to disabled youth in sharing ways he and others have overcome adversity. He has produced several documentaries, which illuminate the talents, strengths, and challenges of the blind athlete, the injured hero, and the forgotten veteran.

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