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“I grew up north of Boston. Boston’s my city, so I’m not afraid,” said Jarrod Clowery of Stoneham, who suffered severe burns from the second bomb. “I’m not going to live in fear.”

By **Bella English and Sarah Schweitzer**

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 30, 2014

Heather Abbott wears high heels. She always has. It's harder now with the prosthetic she needs after losing her left leg in the Marathon bombing. But she will not yield.

The same reasoning goes for this year's Marathon. Since last April, she's known she wanted to be back on Boylston Street on race day. If the bombing had never happened, she might have skipped a year. Now it feels like a place she has to be.

"I don't want anything to be taken away from me. I don't want there to be anything I can't do, that I have to give up," said the 39-year-old human resources manager for Raytheon.

On April 21, thousands will return to the largest crime scene in Boston's history to witness the same event where one year earlier the bombs claimed three lives and injured more than 260 people.

Inevitably the race will be a crucible of memories, both good and horrific, making the decision to attend this year's Marathon a complex one for many, and all the more so for victims and their families.



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Photos: Victims speak on whether to go to the Marathon



For some, like Abbott, returning to the Marathon is a matter of realizing a personal triumph. Driven by a mix of resolve and defiance, they will walk on prosthetics, thank first responders who saved lives, and connect with fellow survivors and victims' families.

But for others, the decision is complicated by worries of a new violent act, reluctance to resurrect traumatic memories, and eagerness to move past the Marathon.

"I'll be far from there, behind closed doors," said Liz Norden, the mother of two sons, J.P. and Paul, who each lost a leg. "I find it hard to be in a place where my kids' lives changed forever."

Norden has been back to Boylston Street. The family held a fund-raiser in November at the Forum, the restaurant closest to the second bomb. But it was painful to be so close to the site of the disaster. This April, she says, it will be better for her to be at the Marathon only in spirit, cheering the runners from afar.

Her own kids might be there, or they might not. J.P. is leaning against going, while Paul wants to be there to support his ICU nurse from Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, who is running. Neither have firmed up their plans, she said.

Carol Downing of Monkton, Md., a 57-year-old mother of two daughters, both badly injured as they watched

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'I don't want there to be anything I can't do, that I have to give up.'

Heather Abbott, who plans to watch next month's Marathon

her run her first Boston Marathon, is taking a different tack. She will return to Boston and once again will run — finishing this year what she didn't last year.

“I feel like it's incomplete. I don't think I'll be happy if I don't go back, to start the anniversary year off on a different note,” she said.

Her daughters, Nicole Gross, 32, who suffered serious leg injuries and ear drum damage, and Erika Brannock, 30, who lost her left leg above the knee, will be there, too. In fact, Downing said, it was their urging that committed her to the race.

“I wasn't sure but they said, ‘Yes, Mom, you have to go back.’ ”

Downing expects her run will be filled with concern about her girls.

“I'm not worried about me. I just want my family to be safe. Until I get to the finish line, it's going to be one big, ‘Oh my gosh, are they okay?’ ”

Marc Fucarile, a roofer from Stoneham who lost a leg and still struggles with pain in the other, said attending the Marathon this year will not give him a sense of completion — or “closure,” the word he hears too often in association with the upcoming anniversary.

“I have closure every day waking up to no leg. That's closure,” said Fucarile, who will marry his girlfriend of eight years on April 17. He still hasn't decided whether he will attend the Marathon.

For victims, the logistics of the day, too, are a concern.

John Odom, 66, of Redondo Beach, Calif., suffered two severed arteries and a severed sciatic nerve, and lost so much blood that twice his heart stopped beating. He can now balance on his left leg, which at one point was paralyzed, but he wears a brace on it.

He and his wife, Karen, are returning to the Marathon this year. Their daughter Nicole won't be running, as she did last year. “Emotionally it's too much for her,” Odom said. But they plan to stand at the halfway mark in Wellesley where Nicole stopped briefly last year to meet them. Nicole's best friend is running the Marathon, wearing an “Odom Strong” T-shirt.

They are not afraid of a reprise, but Karen feels nervous about the crowds. John is concerned about getting bumped and falling.

Marathon organizers and One Fund Boston officials said they are doing what they can to accommodate victims and their families. Dot Joyce, a spokeswoman for the One Fund, said the fund is designating areas where victims can view the marathon and “quiet spaces for some social gatherings.”

She declined to give specifics, saying she didn't want to draw a media horde to those spots. The fund will also have a space available that will offer victims and their families a place to relax and have volunteers available to guide them or answer questions.

The Boston Athletic Association has also offered Marathon bib numbers to survivors who have been recognized by One Fund Boston; the bibs may be used at their discretion.

Among those using the slots are the Yepez and Hern families.

Luis Yepez and Alan Hern were roommates at the US Naval Academy more than 20 years ago. The Herns live in Martinez, Calif., and the Yepez family in Andover.

Both families, including their sons, Aaron Hern and David Yepez, gathered at the finish line last year to watch Katherine Hern complete her first Boston Marathon.

They were just a few feet away from where 8-year-old Martin Richard was killed.

Aaron, then 11, suffered shrapnel injuries from "hip to ankles," in his mother's words, and David, who was 15, suffered a torn ear drum, second-degree burns to his arms, and a three-inch piece of shrapnel embedded in his leg.

This year the boys, who are doing well, will be cheering on the four parents, who will all run the Marathon.

"It's something that we had on our list that we would love to do," said Luis Yepez, David's dad. "But as much as we love to run, we couldn't qualify."

Returning to the Marathon, Yepez said, is a part of the healing process. "Though we recognize that we'll never be like we were before, we're trying to get back to normal."

Still, for some, the prospect of returning to the site is overwhelming, a potent mix of anxiety and sadness that they aren't eager to let loose.

Ron and Karen Brassard, both 52, of Epsom, N.H., were seriously injured, and their daughter Krystara was also hurt. They were there with their close friends, Celeste and Kevin Corcoran, to watch Celeste's sister run. Today Ron is able to walk without a crutch or cane and Karen wears braces on her ankle for long walks.

When they returned to the site to watch the Red Sox parade after the World Series win, they were taken aback by a wave of emotions. "It was very sad for me to be standing there. I was surprised at the overwhelming sadness that came upon me."

They didn't think of returning to the Marathon this year until Celeste's sister, Carmen Accabo, decided to run again. They want to be there for her, and for the two men who helped save Ron's life: Rob Wheeler and

Everett Spain, who had finished the race, took off their jerseys and tied them around Ron's leg in a tourniquet. Both men are running again.

"We're trying not to be too committed to it because we have no idea what our emotions are going to be," Karen Brassard said. "I think it's a day by day decision-making process for us."

Celeste Corcoran and her daughter Sydney, both of whom were severely injured, also plan to be at the finish line.

Others are approaching the day by not overthinking.

"I'm not scared," said Jeff Bauman, who lost both his legs in the bomb and will attend the Marathon with Carlos Arredondo, the man who saved his life. "Wherever he goes, I'll go."

"I grew up north of Boston. Boston's my city, so I'm not afraid," said Jarrod Clowery of Stoneham, who suffered severe burns from the second bomb. "I'm not going to live in fear."

In a measure of how the Marathon has changed, Steve Fiola will not be there.

Fiola is an Army National Guard first lieutenant who last year marched the Marathon route with fellow guardsmen to honor fallen comrades. The men carried rucksacks loaded with survival gear meant to mimic what soldiers carry on training marches.

Fiola was at the finish line waiting for his men when the bombs went off. He was among those who pulled the scaffolding away from the sidewalks, allowing first responders to reach the injured.

This year, new rules ban rucksacks on the Marathon route. Fiola and his men will ruck instead in Concord, beginning at the base of the North Bridge and marching the Battle Road Trail, going back and forth until they've reached 26.2 miles.

"I think it's a shame, but I understand the safety and security issues," said Fiola, who lives in Fitchburg.

The Marathon will not be Abbott's first trip back to Boylston Street. She returned for the first time last August to attend the reopening party at Forum. She was nervous about going back, but she brought her friends. The night allowed her to fill in gaps in her memory, she says, and she created new memories of something good.

For Marathon Monday, Abbott plans to return to Forum, where she and her friends have always gone on that day. Not everything will be the same, of course.

They may not go to Fenway to attend the Red Sox game before heading to Boylston Street, because Heather isn't sure she can manage the walk from Fenway to the finish line.

Though she has made great progress over the year — she currently does yoga, attends a weight-training class, and runs on a treadmill two or three times a week — her stamina is still not back to what it was.

As Marathon day draws nearer, Abbott isn't sure how she'll react to being there again. Her friendships with other survivors add emotional weight to the anniversary.

“It's so much more than me now,” she says. “It's something that hurt all these people I care about.”

“It probably is going to be a hard day,” she says. “But I don't want to not be there.”

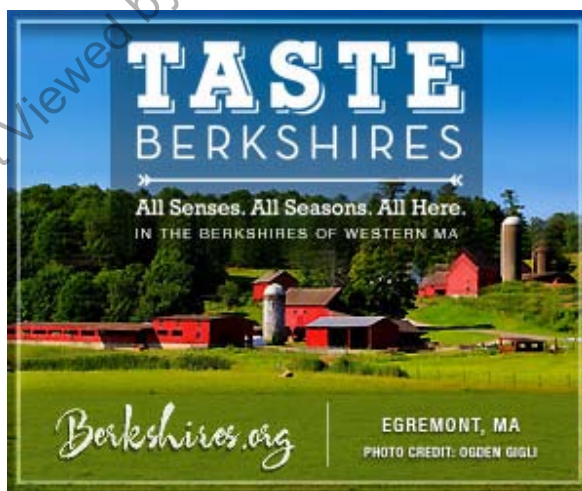
Jenna Russell, Patricia Wen, and John Thumacki of the Globe staff contributed to this report.



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