

Woman rappels Cougar Cliffs on the four-year anniversary of traumatic fall



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Written by Rick Graf

ST. GEORGE, Utah — It's been exactly four years since Brittany Anne Fisher fell from Cougar Cliffs while rappelling during a 2012 spring break trip. Saturday, Fisher, now 24 years old and paraplegic, returned to face the rocks that changed her life.

Cougar Cliffs is a popular rock-climbing area off state Route 18 in Washington County. On March 12, 2012, Fisher fell 60-80 feet off the cliffs in a near-fatal accident that damaged her spinal cord.

Fisher triumphed Saturday morning as she rappelled down the face of the red rocks in a safety harness shadowed by Washington County Sheriff's search and rescue high-angle rope rescue team captain Rob Girouard. "You must claim your experiences," she said with a broad "Don't let them claim you."

Fisher said that as one who loved to run and compete in track, the loss of her legs and mobility became a heavy burden for her to lie down. She also lacks normal feeling in her hands due to rope burns she sustained in the fall.

In the years since the fall, Brittany Fisher has journaled her life experience. In a recent blog post, she wrote: “It is also March now, which means the 4-year anniversary of my accident is coming up next week. So this chapter holds special meaning around this time of the year. Across the margins of my scriptures in this chapter, I have written: Justice & Mercy.”

Fisher endured arduous physical therapy sessions and overcame painful battles of mental depression.

When asked Saturday what sustained her, she said without hesitation: “My faith.” She’s healed in every way except for her legs, she said.

After rappelling Cougar Cliffs with Girouard at her side, Fisher said she felt scared and nervous at the top edge but OK once she cleared it.

Her return to Cougar Cliffs was not just a triumph but a reunion of sorts. So many of those who had been with Fisher or come to her aid on March 12, 2012, came back to support her as she stared down the rock.

Registered nurse Jan Call, now retired from Intermountain Healthcare’s Dixie Regional Medical Center after 40 years of service, came. Washington County Sheriff’s high angle rope team volunteer, search and rescue commander Mike Thomas, who carried her out on

his back in 2012, not only came but organized Saturday’s event.

Intermountain Healthcare’s Life Flight helicopter and crew flew in. Washington County Sheriff’s Deputy Darrell Cashin and search and rescue team volunteers Jonathan and Jerod Hummel, Merrill Campbell, Lloyd Leavitt, and Joe McCarther came.

Then there were friends and family. Among them are Fisher’s boyfriend, Trevor Frank; her parents, Bryan and Kaaren Fisher; sister Laura Clayton with husband, Christian Clayton; and longtime high school friend Alyssa Stevens.

Not the least of those in attendance was Brittany Fisher’s now vital companion Cooper, or “Coop,” a standard golden doodle yet in training.

Brittany Fisher expressed her thanks to everyone on hand who helped her accomplish what she came to do Saturday. “Conquer it,” she said.

And conquer seems to be something that Brittany Fisher does. She has a future planned, having applied for work as an elementary education teacher, she said. She has replaced running with sit skiing, mountain boarding, and cross-country skiing. And here’s the kicker: She is training for the 2018 Winter Paralympics.

Story by Rick Graf
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Brittany Fisher arrives at Cougar Cliffs. with Cooper, her golden doodle companion dog.



Brittany with retired RN Jan Call, who was on the scene on the day of accident



Brittany Fisher goes over the edge with high-angle rope rescue team Captain Rob Girouard.



Brittany down safely with high angle team members & getting piggy back ride. Members are Lloyd Leavitt, Rob Girouard, Mike Thomas and Jonathan Hummel.



Brittany down safely. She sits in the RZR® for a return ride to the top.