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# Reader's Digest <sup>\$1.50</sup>

## HEROES FOR TODAY

Linda finished last in that 6.2-mile race—for she was born with cerebral palsy and can walk and run only on crutches.

"I guess I'll always finish last," she said. "But that's not the point."

The New York Marathon scheduled for that October intrigued Linda, and she began training by running down Fifth Avenue. Doormen rooted for her.

The 26.2-mile marathon, which winds through the five New York boroughs, began at 10:30 a.m., October 24, 1982, on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge between Staten Island and Brooklyn. Linda was in the back of the pack, and by the time she got over the bridge, no one else was in sight.

Moving the crutches like ski poles, and pushing off with her legs, Linda fell six times. But along the way, people cheered, and that made her feel good. A Hispanic family had driven over to meet her at the 20-mile banner, and they all stood around their car and clapped. A little boy shouted, "C'mon, you can make it!" Linda was numb with pain, but with that kind of support, she *had* to make it. And clomping down the street she went.

Many hours later, it was dark. Cleanup groups had begun taking down barricades along the streets. Then they discovered that the race



Linda Down

### "I'll Always Finish Last"

LINDA DOWN, a 26-year-old New Yorker, began an exercise program to lose weight. She started with sit-ups, and then began long walks. When she saw that there was a women's minimarathon in Central Park in May 1982, she decided to try it.

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was not over. Here came a lone woman, on aluminum crutches that glinted under the street lights.

Of the 15,876 runners entered, 13,610 finished. Linda, wearing No. W831 on the front of her purple sweatsuit, crossed the finish line shortly after 9:30 at night. She came in a full four hours after the next-to-last runner. Her time: 11 hours, 54 seconds. (Last year she ran again and cut her time to 8 hours, 45 minutes.)

Linda's arms were black and blue from the jarring of the crutches. Her body ached. She was sweaty and dizzy.

The next evening, President Reagan telephoned and invited Linda to lunch at the White House. She began receiving letters from people telling her how she had given them inspiration. A woman stopped her on the street and asked, "Aren't you the one who ran in the marathon?" Linda said yes. The woman said she had been suffering depression, but seeing Linda run gave her added drive to rise above it.

—Ira Berkow in *New York Times*