

## THE FINAL JOURNEY

On Sunday, October 19 as planned, I ran the Columbus Marathon. I have to admit that today I am glad that this journey is over. Not because I don't love running and not because I haven't thoroughly enjoyed writing these journal entries but simply because I think I need a really long nap! So, here is a little bit of a recap of how the day went.

First, I have to confess. I did a lot of things the few days prior to this race that we always tell you not to do. I probably shouldn't admit this -- but I've been all about full disclosure so far. I went to bed way too late the few nights before, I worked all day on Saturday (even stood on my feet the whole time), I had pizza and Mountain Dew for my pre-race lunch (no water at all that afternoon) and then I committed one of the most awful running sins out there -- I ran in a pair of shoes that I had never run in before. Now that I've got that off my chest, I can move on.

As those of you who joined me in Columbus know, it was a little bit of a chilly beginning to the morning. Thanks to a good friend (thank you Beth) I did bring a pair of capri pants along -- just in case. Without good friends, I'm not sure how this story would have ended! It turned out to be a beautiful morning and a great day for running (or walking) a marathon.

When I started this journey, my real plan was just to run this thing -- no goals other than to finish. For a short period of time (and I'm talking quite short) I harbored dreams of qualifying for Boston before I turned forty! A girl can dream, can't she?

Well, when I got to the starting line on Sunday, I knew that the plan was just about finishing and just about feeling relatively good the entire way. It was also about making sure that I had something to write about today (no pressure there).

I was fortunate to have a couple of friends who agreed to keep me company. My friend Debbie (and a Fleet Feet employee) ran with me for the first half. We hit an easy rhythm, took in the crowds and followed the plan to run with walk breaks. She was great -- she carried my water, took my extra clothes for me when we split up at Mile 13, went along with whatever pace I decided to keep and just generally kept me going.

The plan was then to meet Karen at Mile 14. When approximately 7,000 runners and walkers disappeared from the course at Mile 13 it became almost imperative to find Karen -- or run literally and figuratively alone the rest of the race. I got to Mile 14 and no Karen. I have to admit that for a few minutes I contemplated turning around and heading to the 1/2 Marathon Finish. But, then of course I remembered that I would have to tell all of you that I did that so, I continued on.

Karen was up ahead at Mile 14.5. What an amazing feeling of relief this was. At the same time, we connected with Rachel from the Fleet Feet training program and the three of us were off to finish the race. There were some high moments and of course some very low moments. Slow and steady, however, won the race. Without these two women I would probably still be making my way to the finish!

During past marathons the thing that always kept me going was thinking about the food that I would treat myself to when I finished. Ice cream sundaes, decadent deserts and lots of grease were always the incentives that I needed.

This time around though it wasn't food that kept me going (which still amazes me). The truth is that it was getting to cross the finish line with my kids. I knew that Eli and Gabe (and of course Jeremy) would be waiting. I also realized that this was the true sign that over time life changes and that family becomes the driving forces in our lives -- whether we recognize this or not.

This journey has been all about trying to find balance (note the word trying). It was the balance of working, training and trying to be a super mom at the same time. I never really found the balance -- the kids or work usually won out over the training. But somewhere between Miles 20 and 26.2 I realized that that is okay. Not to mention the fact that there really were no hopes of an Olympic appearance ever in my lifetime as an athlete!

So, Karen and Jeremy spoke by phone at Mile 24 or Mile 25 (no comments on the phone please) and I knew that Jeremy, Eli and Gabe were right at the Mile 26 point. So, I kept one foot in front of the other and made it to Mile 26. I decided that Eli, Gabe and myself should finish this race together (they really started this whole thing anyway).

So, the three of us ran the last 2 tenths of a mile together. Gabe had no idea why he was suddenly bouncing up and down. Eli was

amazingly supportive for a 5 year old. He thought this was incredibly fun and what a great medal he got at the end!

I, on the other hand, realized that I had just added 20 pounds to each step and had a moment of wondering if oxygen deprivation from running too far had depleted my ability to make reasonable, rational decisions. Clearly there was nothing rational about this decision!

The best part of all though was hearing several cheers of "you go mom" as the three of us crossed the finish line together. Each step, each early morning run, each painful moment was all worth it! It was several minutes of my life with my kids that I will never forget.

I didn't set any world breaking records. I didn't even come close to any type of personal best time. I have been more sore the past two days than I can ever remember being after completing a marathon (or ultra marathon). I feel like I could sleep for the next week and still be tired. Hmm...aren't marathons great!

But, I did it. I did it with your help and support. I did it so that I could show my kids what it means to live a fit and healthy lifestyle. I did it to inspire myself and I did it to prove to myself that a girl can do it all if she wants to.

I'm not sure yet where the next road will lead. it might be shorter or longer -- I haven't really decided yet. I'll keep you posted. Until then, I'll see you on the streets of Cincinnati!