

The ROAD TO THE COLUMBUS MARATHON

July 10, 2008 -- Journal Entry #8

The official title of this entry to The Road to Columbus should be "True Confessions." I promise that this will make sense in just a minute or two as you keep reading.

Well, it has been about four weeks or so since you have heard from me or had an update as the Road to Columbus gets a little bit shorter. Here is where the confession part comes in. Some of you might think that we just felt like taking a break from sending out the Fleet Feet E-Newsletter -- not a chance! The truth is that Jeremy and myself were fortunate enough to have taken a trip to South Africa.

While we were in South Africa (here is the actual confession part) I had the opportunity to run part of the Comrades Marathon (Just an FYI - Jeremy did too -- he might get a little testy if I don't mention this). I ran 35 miles from the start of the race to the Ethembeni School. As many of you may recall, the Ethembeni school has become near and dear to Fleet Feet Sports Cincinnati's heart as well as many other Fleet Feet stores across the country. If you want to learn more about the Comrades Marathon, here is the web site, www.comrades.co.za.

As usual, I am digressing. So, I ran/walked 35 miles and have to admit that it was by far one of the most incredible experiences that I have had. I went slow and easy the entire way (not that I could have gone fast and hard even if I had wanted to) and spent a lot of time absorbing everything around me.

The hills were like mountains (check out the actual event web site which will confirm that I'm not even exaggerating). The bags of water were impossible for me to open. I tried everything and failed miserably every time (and of course had water all of my face, etc. and very little actually in my mouth). The people could not have been more gracious and you cannot begin to imagine how supportive the crowd along the course was.

My goal was to make it to the Ethembeni School. Imagine running or walking 35 miles and then rounding a bend and seeing 300 children dressed in royal blue uniforms in wheel chairs, on crutches and standing waiting for you. Okay, so I wanted to believe that they were waiting for me but they were really waiting for each and every runner who came along.

But, when I stopped at the school I was greeted with hugs and swarmed with kids who wanted anything that I could give away -- my hat, my beaded necklace that I was wearing, my empty water bottles, my gels -- anything!! These are kids that have less than nothing and couldn't have been happier to get just a little something from this random American runner who happened along one day.

The even more amazing part was that I wasn't really tired (I just needed a bathroom), I wasn't really that sore and I wasn't even that hungry. I couldn't even begin to think about these things when there were all of these kids in front of me who had sat outside for at least 7 hours in the heat and sun and waited and waited.

How could I even begin to complain about how I might feel since I could easily replace my water bottles, my necklace and anything else that they wanted? I couldn't complain because I knew that they don't complain.

After this experience, I realized that running really is fun (not that i didn't think this before, I do own a running store). Running really does open new doors and new opportunities.

Don't get me wrong -- I am planning to go back to South Africa and the Ethembeni School but I don't need to run the race again. Once was enough on this one!

I am, however, more than energized to run the Columbus Marathon. I challenge each of you to find what motivates you. I'm still running for myself (aren't we all at some level). But I want to believe that I am also running in the spirit of the kids who waited for me at Mile 35. They will only have to wait for Mile 26.2 this time!

As a side note -- we will soon be launching an effort to Build a Field of Dreams -- a Therapeutic Accessible Play Area for the kids at the Ethembeni School. We'll have all of the details soon!