

Boston Marathon

The Boston Marathon is the one marathon that my family remembers watching when I was growing up. Running the marathon was not on my bucket list, but I could not pass up the chance to run it either. I am very happy that I participated. Unfortunately, 2013 experienced a very unfortunate event, now known as the Boston Bombing, that placed a black cloud over a very wonderful event.

My story, my adventure, started when my then boss, Tom Chesser, a tri-athlete and past marathon runner, suggested that anybody could run a half marathon, but a real challenge is the full marathon - 26.2 miles. I was marveling co-workers accomplishments in the local Lincoln half marathon. At the time, I had yet to run further than 6.2 miles (10K). I began training for my first half shortly thereafter, as a prelude to training for a full marathon. Heck, I needed experience in competitive running too. At the time, I had not run a organized race.

I spent late spring and summer training for my first marathon. I ran several local races to gain experience with the start process and organized racing. This included a half marathon, a couple 10Ks and a 5K. Training did not always go well as summer heat and lack of experience both in hydration management and logging miles caused me to finish a few long runs at a walk. But I persevered.

My first marathon was at the Quad Cities marathon in the fall of 2011 at the young age of 51. I started OK, perhaps doing the one thing the experts tell you not to do: I started too fast. When I hit the 20 mile mark, the cool (cold to me, then) morning was made worse with a cold downpour. The wind in my sail was gone. I finished with a run/walk determination. I missed qualifying for Boston by a few weeks using the older less stringent Qualifying times and by 27 seconds using the new times: 3:30:27.

I was in agony after that marathon, my calves were sore and tight. I ran lightly and signed up for a trail run to experience that type of running. The soreness, eventually, did go away.

Missing qualifying for Boston by so little, had me searching for another Marathon for another try. Tom had run the Myrtle Beach marathon indicating it was a fast flat course held in mid to late February. I signed up and started training again – through the winter which meant a mix of indoor and outdoor running depending on the weather.

Success. I sneaked under the qualifying time by 28 seconds with a time of 3:29:32. Surprisingly, my legs felt good after the second marathon. Yes, they were still sore and I used my time at the beach in South Carolina to walk a lot to keep my calves from cramping too much.

By the time I got home a week later, I was looking at running another marathon, just because. I was getting hooked on the long run. I signed up for the Illinois Marathon which was just 2 months after the Myrtle Beach marathon. I had a good run bettering my time by 7 minutes, a 3:22:28 – a time that would allow me to sign up for Boston at the end of the first week. Wow.

The plan for Boston was to make it a mini vacation, run and enjoy the race then tour all the historic sites and sounds of Boston afterwards. I invited my sister to join me, in part because a



vacation is more enjoyable when shared and in part because I expected to drive and wanted a co-driver. The big advantage of driving was the ability to detour on the way home to see her daughter Crystal, husband Josh and grandkids Ashleigh and Elliot in upper Fort Drum New York, on the way home; two trips in one.

The hotel I found, via the Boston Marathon site, offered free parking, was 4 miles from the start/finish area and proved to be a very nice hotel, a Holiday Inn. Boston mass transportation, subway “T”, was nearby and the recommended mode of transportation around downtown Boston.



Boston felt like I was always in a hurry up and wait mode. I hurried to get a qualifying time, then waited to register. I hurried to register than waited until race weekend. I hurried to Boston, then waited for race day. Hurried to the buses that took us to the start line getting up at 4:30 am to be at the buses by 6:00am. Then waited in the nicely provisioned Athlete’s village until 9:30 when it was time to walk to the starting corral, then waited some more for the start at 10.

The run was great! My fellow runners were great! The spectators lining the streets from start to finish, literally, were more than great, they were fantastic. The local crowds really get into this race. From bikers to colleges students to (local) families to just revelers, joined by friends and families of the runners, the crowd cheered, hollered and waved along the entire course from the Hopkinstville start to the Boston finish line. They requested and received high fives, and kisses, from the runners. I had a smile on my face for most of the run.

The coed students at Wesley College hollowed so loud and so continuously, that many racers jokingly placed they hands over their ears AFTER they completely passed the line of girls. The noise was almost deafening. But what a great sound. We absorbed every iota of those yells, cheers, and various other noise-making, not just from the Wesley students but ALL the spectators. I have never experienced that level of enthusiasm for runners. Wow.



I started at the rear of Corral 9 in wave 1 – my bib number 8935 - indicated I had 8,935th qualifying time for this year’s race. I was already proud of that accomplishment. 27,000 runners sign up for Boston. This year, 23,336 runners started. Due to the unfortunate event that ended the marathon early only 17,580 finished, many were within a mile of the finish line but safety meant they would have to wait for another year to enjoy the Boston finish line.

The elite runners – those you see on TV crossing the finish line first are running against the gun, the official start time. It took me 6 minutes to get to the start line. Thankfully, modern technology uses chips embedded in every runners bib (race number). For those not familiar with chip timing, it is similar to the timing devices used by race cars on the track that let you know their lap times down to hundredth of a second.

I managed to finish the race by the gun clock in 3 hours 31 minutes and change. My chip time, my official time for my age group timing, was 3 hours 25 minutes and 13 seconds, 3:25:13. The time was good enough to qualify me for next year’s Boston Marathon. I finished 7160th when I last checked the results page. I was very happy with the time.

I smelled hickory barbeque smoke cooking hamburgers, brats, and other tail-gating food along the route so many times, that by the time I reached the finish line, a grilled cheeseburger

was really on my mind. My sister could have Boston seafood, but, by golly, I was having a thick, juicy cheeseburger. That was going to be my victory dinner.

I wound myself through the post race lines – grabbing first some water to replenish lost fluids, then received my finishers medal, a mylar blanket to ward off the chill from the wind and some light food to replenish all the calories I had burnt getting to that point.

Surprisingly, I was able to meet my sister, Debbie, in the “family meeting area” relatively easily. Considering the crowds, runners, families, friends, finding her so quickly was amazing in itself. Debbie had staked out the corner spot on top of a curb earlier in the day in the designated family meeting area. She simply refused to move, even when several male runners using her as a screen as they changed into dry clothes. Runners tend not to be humble especially after a long tiring run.

We left shortly after meeting up, getting information to the nearest “T” station that would take us back to the hotel. The Boston Marathon organizers have info stations all over the place which was really helpful as I easily got lost trying to find the subway stations. My Sister on the other hand, managed to do so on her lonesome. Proud of her. I followed an Irish couple in the morning (from Ireland, yes). I also met three people from London, one from Litchfield near my hometown of Springfield, one from Lincoln NE and several from Dallas. Those are the locations I remembered, runners come to Boston from around the US and the world.

While we were on the subway, the unfortunate blasts, referred to as the Boston Bombing, occurred, or shortly after we made it back to the hotel. We turned on the TV to watch the local coverage of the Marathon which had started early in the day. Debbie watched the start on TV before venturing to the finish line. The TV coverage was scheduled to run until the close, then repeat later in the evening.

The “Breaking News” flashing across the screen was not a good sign. The rest of the evening was spent watching the news, texting, emailing, and calling friends and family to let them know we were OK. I was even tracked down by my local newspaper, the State Journal-Register, who was trying to report on Springfield area runners – all were OK. A local news radio station also reached me in the hotel room and recorded an interview which I understand aired several times over the next day as part of the local, Springfield, reporting of the day’s event.

We did take a break from the news and correspondence to walk down to the hotel restaurant. A trip to any other location just became a non option after the bad news. I got my cheeseburger and my sister settled for one too. It was delicious.

We had eaten at the hotel restaurant the night before as they had a great pasta dinner for the Marathon runners. Runners load up on carbs before long races and pasta is one, if not the, favorite food for that purpose. The restaurant had great service and very good food. The chef, Nicole, prepped our pasta dinner using a selection of ingredients, choice of sauce and type of noodle, in a hot skillet in front of us. We talked to Nicole after the race, she had cousins/friends affected by the blasts, exactly how I do not recall. They were OK, too.

Like many, we cut our trip short opting to visit the grand-kids at Fort Drum two days early versus trying to sight-see the next day or two. The hotel was very accommodating in that



regard. And it was good to see the kids. Watching the news over the next several days, it proved we would not have gotten much sightseeing done after the race because of the unfortunate event. I was happy we drove to Boston which allowed us the flexibility to leave early.

I was very fortunate in Boston. I was out of harms way after the race and I had arrived early on Sunday. This gave me time to get my bib with the imbedded timing chip, other race materials, experience the Boston race expo and still had time to do some light



sight-seeing. We went and saw the USS Constitution, probably the number one item on my list for the trip, after the race itself. That was a great tour. I really like those old wooden ships. We also walked up to Bunker Hill to see it and its museum: Impressive. We did opt not to climb the stairs – I didn't need to wear myself out that much before the race and Debbie's asthma would have stopped her long before the last step. We did miss out on the other big item on the to-do list – a whale sight-seeing cruise. Maybe next time, after I tour "old ironships" again.

Will I return to Boston? Yes. Will I run the race again? Yes. Runners, like many others, are known for helping each other – Providing encouragement for a runner that is struggling to finish which ranges from a clap on the back to actually running with the other runner. We train together, we provide tips and hints and guidelines. Boston was no different – runners helped runners. This time, however, help included using one's shirt as a bandage, donating blood and deep emotional support.

The 2013 Boston Marathon bombing at 2:50 EDT will be remembered for a long time. My prayers are to all the families affected by this bad chain of events that ruined an otherwise great day and great event. – It was still a great day and great event, it just had a unfortunately sad ending. God Speed. Peace.

