

The Mid-Packer's Guide to the Universe

More running stories with a view from the middle

By

Christopher J. Russell

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Introductory comments

Sequel City?

This work is the sequel – or more appropriately the ongoing script of my running stories. My first book of running stories; “The Mid-Packer’s Lament” was published in 2006. It can be found at Amazon.com by searching for the title. You can also find a link at my website www.runrunlive.com.

Why an e-book? The e-book fits my needs and yours. Although there is something tactile and comforting in a block of dead tree, it’s not really worth the effort. I’d rather kick my little fledglings out of the nest to you quickly and easily. Consider it “Green”.

It also means that 100% of the revenue goes to me and my running charities as opposed to lining the pockets of a publisher with 2/3’s of the cover price.

Why more running stories? Why not something grander like a cohesive story line and well defined characters? Why not the great American novel? I’ll get around to that someday, but this is what I have the time for now.

This is not what I do to keep bread on the table at the Russell house. I hold down a fairly time-intensive, accountable job that requires some attention.

In the odd early morning or airplane ride or lonely night in a hotel some story will push its way to the front and demand to be written down. Who am I to deny the muses?

I slowed down writing as much in 2008 as I launched the RunRunLive Podcast – a running podcast where I interview runners and try to promote the sport as best I can.

Some of these stories first appeared on the pages of www.coolrunning.com – but some have never seen the light before.

These stories are sorted by date of creation – oldest to newest to give you some sense of the timeline within which they were born.

Please enjoy them and let me know what you think!

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And all the other social networking sites...

I'll see you out there!

Chris,

Dedications and inspirations

“A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold.”

~Ogden Nash

The CYKT in my online user name stands for Chris, Yvonne, Katie and Teresa. In that sense they are with me every day. Once more I thank them and ask for their patience as I scurry about doing my running things and churlishly avoiding familial responsibility. Like the dandelions in my front yard – they seem to be thriving from my benign neglect. I think they’re super – and give thanks for them every day.

Thanks to my mom and dad who always came to my races when no one else would! Thanks to Jody, Mary Lou and Dave for being there and giving me a place to recycle my old shoes and shirts!

In addition my thanks go out to:

- My mates at [CoolRunning](#) who gave me the opportunity to appear in print; thanks to Kevin, Dave and Steve.
- The [Squannacook River Runners](#) and the Groton Road Race, a great club and a great bunch of people.
- Alan Murray who finally helped me whack a website together, enabling my podcast.
- All the disembodied voices at www.runningpodcasts.org

Thanks folks – “love ya muchly!”

The Theme Music for Our Lives

iPod, uPod we all Pod for iPod's

"It's hard to remember what I did before the iPod. iPod is more than just a music player, it's an extension of your personality and a great way to take your favorite music with you everywhere you go." ~Mary J. Blige, GRAMMY Award-winning singer

Somewhere around the '04 Boston Marathon I began to notice a strange phenomenon. You'd pull up behind someone and they'd have little wires coming out of their heads connected to what looked like small cigarette cases strapped to their biceps.

There would be a certain happy, oblivious rhythm to their stride. Their hips would be hinting at the slightest Ricky Martin shimmy. Their arms would be making strange twitching motions like a barely controlled air-drum solo. When you passed them, they wouldn't notice you. They would be making small strangled noises in their throats, to themselves. They seemed happy. I was on the front lines of the iPod invasion.

I've always been a big fan of acoustic distraction on my long solo runs. Don't send hate mail. I know some of you feel running with head phones is dangerous. While I do hope everyone out there is careful, I have to disagree. I've never had any problems running and listening. I think boredom is way more dangerous. Maybe...if you go and get yourself killed wearing headphones the gene pool has been upgraded and evolution is benevolently at work for the rest of us...but I digress...

Like I was saying, I've always liked running with acoustic distraction. I had those big AM/FM headphones with the 12 inch antenna that looked like something you'd wear to land jets on an aircraft carrier. I remember the antenna used to

get caught on low hanging branches and rip my hat off. Big icicles would form on them in the winter.

I had one of the first AM/FM cassette Walkmans. I would carry a handful of books-on-tape with me while marathon training. I even tried the CD Walkman, but it always skipped. My favorite was the small FM Walkman sports radio. It was light, I could clip it into my waist band and it wouldn't bounce.

It was great, but it had flaws. The primary flaw was that you were at the mercy of the radio station's choice of entertainment and only randomly would you hear something good interspersed with the same commercials over and over and over. Arrgh! Out in the burbs, where I live, reception is iffy. Someone up there has a sense of humor, because typically only the stations I hated had strong enough signals to listen to.

On early Sunday mornings, when I did most of my long, marathon training runs, they would put on the programming that no one wanted to listen to. It was mostly awful public service talk shows. "Today I'm talking with Herb Blatt of the Save an Artichoke Foundation..." I'm an NPR geek, but I have my limits. Sometimes it was interesting, but not for running.

Eventually I'd sweat them to death. I don't know what 'sport' they were designed for, but it didn't involve being immersed in my toxic body fluids for hours on end. I found I could prolong their suffering by swaddling them in intricate plastic baggie arrangements, but eventually they would succumb. First the stereo would go and then they would start cutting in and out. I have a box full of sweat crippled sports radios.

Thus, I was leery about the iPod revolution. Did I really want to fork out \$200+ for this thing I would surely kill? I held off for a long time, until recently. I wanted to ramp up my mileage for a qualifying campaign and I needed something to keep me company. I said to my wife, "I need an iPod."

"You'll just kill it."

“I NEED an iPod.”

“It’s too much money.”

I did what any husband of 20 years would and, in a fit of pique, drove to N.H. the next day and bought one.

That weekend we were down at the Cape and I snuck out early for a 2.5 hour trot on the rail trail with my new friend. I left them sleeping so they wouldn’t see my secret. It was good. Somehow it was easier to run. Good songs would come on and I’d find myself picking up the pace a little with a jump and be-bop in my step.

Then it happened. I had it on shuffle and it shuffled to a Tony Robbins book and froze. No sound. Dead. My worst fears were realized. I had sweated it to death in a new record of 2 hours and 15 minutes. The worst part was that it was gone now at the end of my run where I needed it most. I had to struggle back with no theme music and it was not good.

I came into the house and my wife, eyes like a hawk, said, “I see you bought yourself an iPod.”

“Yeah, and I think I killed it.”

“I told you you’d kill it.”

My kids were convinced that it had had a terminal reaction to Tony Robbins. They reasoned that they always felt like dying when I harangued them with positive affirmations and released my inner power in their direction. “I don’t want to master my emotions, Dad, I’m trying to watch T.V. Go unleash your personal power on the dog.”

Luckily I had the manual and was able to reboot it back to life. From then on I have switched to the popular arm band mount that seems to keep it out of the toxic cocktail that is me.

I have discovered that the iPod is cool. It is good. Ask any runner who has one and they will tell you that they love it.

Somehow we are reduced to 13 year old girls when gushing over our techno toys. I had the following conversation this last weekend at the Fred Brown relay.

“Don’t you just love your iPod?”

“Ohmygawd, yes!!! I love it!”

“Like, when it plays the perfect song at the perfect moment and stuff?”

“Ohmygawd, that’s exactly what I was going to say!”

“And I have a special playlists for different length runs!”

“Me too! See? Look here; ‘Running 1’, ‘Running 2’ and ‘the ½’”

“Oooooo! I love it!”

Sheesh! We are devolving. As I write this I have my Mozart on so I can concentrate and tune out the people in the adjacent hotel room watching insipid reality T.V. This is part of the coolness of the iPod. You can create your own pod; your own space filled with your own happy music and it keeps the rest of the world at bay. The iPod brings with it insulation from the world when you need it.

Trapped between two obese people in the middle seat on the airplane with a screaming baby in front and a kicking toddler with a nervous disorder behind? No problem! Queue up the old J. Geils “Live Full House”, crank it up and it is all good.

Not only are the insulating properties outstanding but the iPod is a performance booster as well. The night after I got it I brought it to the weekly 3.6 M Westford race. I dialed in some old Nirvana and was gone like a grunge fueled rocket. Those angst ridden screams rode me to my best time of the season!

It’s great for biking too. How about a little Barber of Seville like in that movie Breaking Away?

The only race I haven't worn it in since was a couple weeks ago at the Pisgah Mountain 23k trail race. I just didn't think I had any appropriate music for that. What would be a good fit for 2 hours in the N.H. woods? Theme to Deliverance? Copeland's New World Symphony? Vivaldi's Four Seasons? (I ended up singing 'Amazing Grace' out loud in the high miles and it really freaked the other runners out)

Another cool thing is the propensity for epiphanies. You'll be doing something banal somewhere and all of a sudden the music you are listening to will mesh perfectly with what is going on around you. For example, I was walking through the airport, just off a long, late flight and my iPod randomly shuffled to the beginning of Bolero. It was perfectly in rhythm with the march of the weary travelers and I was uplifted. I transcended the moment and saw the great ironies. Transported to some other mystical universe, I smiled. That's the power of the tunes.

I keep forgetting to program it and have to listen to the first album in the stack because I don't want to stop my run to monkey with it. I'm getting sick of the Alman Brothers. (I don't have any Abba or AC/DC!) Although the 13 minute live version of "Whipping Post" is fairly appropriate towards the end of a 20 miler. It turns out you can listen to all of London Calling by the Clash and Alman Brothers Live at Fillmore East in exactly two hours and forty seven minutes.

Do you know how the iPod got invented? It happened late one night when Steve Jobs was furiously typing away, trying to hack the Microsoft Office site and broke a fingernail. He had a flash of inspiration and IM'ed one of his engineers that they should invent a mouse that also gave manicures. It being the 1990's, they took him seriously and came up with the eMan sonic manicure mouse and ePed sonic pedicure mouse prototypes.

Then the internet bubble burst and no one had time to work on silly stuff anymore. The prototypes were tossed into a dusty box. Those same engineers were furious to discover that a bored Cal Poly intern had found them and converted

one to play music. They were about to crush his idealism until a lost Marketing VP stumbled upon them and the rest is history.

Have I just created an urban legend? Hmmm....

Now if all this wasn't proof enough that there is something powerful going on here, I'll give you one more example. My wife, who always hated running, has now started to borrow my iPod and go to hit the treadmill and bike at the gym! It's scary. This may be an alien invasion. Are we all becoming Pod People?

I don't know, and I don't own any Apple stock and they aren't paying me any money, (if they want to give me money, that's ok too), but I can state with a clear conscience that I love my iPod. When is someone going to convert the Doors Weird Scenes Inside the Goldmine to digital?

Tri Tri Tri again

How to be mediocre at 3 sports!

“Train, Race, Recover, Repeat...”~Anthony

Even old running dogs can learn new tricks. I spent this past spring and summer, since the Boston Marathon, triathlon training. It gave me something new to obsess about. As usual, it was not entirely what I expected.

Triathlons have a scary reputation as being really hard. When you say the ‘T’ word people think “Ironman”. They conjure up painful mental pictures of wobbly zombies and athletic skeletons crawling across lava fields to expire a foot from the finish in Hawaii.

Everybody knows a triathlete. They’ll share with you their best stories about this furtive skinny guy who keeps strange hours and works out 4 times a day. When telling you this, their tone is a mixture of awe and pity. It is akin to Shao-lin warrior training crossed with Forest Gump in the popular mythos. “When you can snatch the Gu from my hand...you are ready to leave the monastery”.

I competed in two sprint tri’s. What’s a sprint tri? It is a ½ mile swim followed by a 10-12 mile bike and capped off with a 5k race. As a runner you might want to think of it as an excellent way to take all the fun out of a 5k.

The truth is, these sprint tri’s aren’t that hard. I raced them as hard as I could and on a pain scale of 1 – 10 they’re probably a 4. I’m sure the long ones are quite painful, but the sprints are just a sampling of the sport. You’re only out on the course for ~80 minutes. It’s an excellent marketing coup by someone. It gives the weekend warriors something to feel studly about while parting them from 60 – 80 bucks.

For me, it doesn’t have the punishing nature of a qualifying marathon or even the expended effort level of a hard 10k. I was never miserable or even close to hitting the wall. At the same time, the combination of events is a tactical challenge. You have to figure out how much of your ‘sprint’ capital to

spend on each event to get a strong balanced effort. The transitions add an element of unknown that makes it interesting and challenging. Plus you get to compete against swimmers and bikers.

My conclusion is that the races were too short, and a trifle anticlimactic after all that training. They seem to be designed easy for inclusiveness. The training was by far the best part. Like most other things in our lives, I discovered here that the true value was in the journey, not the destination.

The training was awesome. Best thing I've done since I've turned 40! Let me go on the record right now and state that you won't find too many bad looking triathletes. Even at the sprint level these folks all had nicely put together bodies. The combination of swim-bike-run sculpts the physique very nicely.

The folks standing around at the start of the events I attended were lean like runners but not as scrawny. They also had well muscled pectorals, thighs and glutes. Some of these folks had gladiator bodies! We're talking calendar



Me (half naked) and Fuji-san (the red bike) before the race.

material here! These are not the Americans that they show on TV. This is some well proportioned subspecies. Even the slightly overweight swimmer types were well

rounded and healthy looking.

Part of it is that you don't get to eat much when you're trying to squeeze in 9 workouts a week. Being well toned is particularly important because the first thing they do is squeeze themselves into wetsuits, and nobody looks good in a wet suit.

It wasn't long after I started in on the schedule that I noticed the training effect on my own old frame. I lost an additional 5-10 pounds AFTER training for Boston all spring. The training time is about the same, but the effect of combining back-to-back-to-back run-swim-bike workouts is to amplify the calorie burn by 'turning on' a bunch more major muscle groups than running alone does. Your whole body becomes a perpetual furnace. It's really cool. The bottom line is that you are burning way more calories than one sport alone does.

I felt great while I was training. It was a little overwhelming having to squeeze all that stuff into a week, but not so bad once you get into a rhythm. I was on a 9 workout per week schedule. Monday - swim, Tuesday - hard bike ride with a run - Wednesday - swim - Thursday - hard run and a bike - Friday - easy run - Saturday - Swim - Sunday long run or bike. The hardest part was wrapping my head around running only 15 - 18 miles a week.

Then I realized, (light bulb over head), that not only was I retaining my conditioning, but all my aches and pains from those high mileage weeks leading up to the marathon had gone away. I threw myself into this schedule immediately after the marathon and it allowed me to decompress without losing my conditioning and avoid that post marathon slump.

My conclusion, if you haven't figured it out yet, was that tri training gets you into killer shape. I haven't felt that strong since the wrestling team in high school. Therefore, if you have a high school reunion coming up and want to squeeze into a cocktail dress, don't waste your money on Jenny Craig; tri train for a couple months.

When you have 9 workouts a week you necessarily have to combine two disciplines in the same day. They call this a "brick". The metaphor is that if you lay enough bricks

together, you will end up with a solid foundation for your event. Bricks also give you an opportunity to design fun work outs that you otherwise could not. For example; I used to bike to the beach down the Cape, run the beach, and swim in the ocean and bike home. Way cool.

I did a practice swim-bike-run down at my town beach (where the actual tri was to be held). I had my bike shorts on and was shirtless. I passed a group of our young suburban toughs that hang out down at the beach, smoking cigarettes, wearing their pants around their ankles and baseball caps backwards. They were goofing on me; as is to be expected. Then one of them yells "Nice Ass!" just as I'm pushing hard to finish my run. I don't like conflict, but since I was done I went over to them.

"Nice Ass? That's the best you could come up with?"

We had a good laugh about it. They're just kids.

When I started training for this, I thought for sure that biking would be my weak sport. I've been running my whole life and I've always loved to swim, so the bike was the odd sport for me. Since I had never competed or trained on the bike I figured I'd suck at it. Well, I was wrong. It turns out that swimming is my weak link.

This mystifies me. I've always been a strong and fearless swimmer. I was a certified SCUBA diver at age 16. I was the kid who used to freak out the life guards by playing dead and holding my breath for 2 minutes at the bottom of the pool. You could drop me in the middle of the Atlantic and I'd swim to shore. However, none of this means a hill of beans when you have to go fast. I'm slow.

It's not like running where you can just train harder and get faster. If you have bad mechanics, doing swim intervals just makes you tired. I hit the pool three times a week and swam at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, and while I was never at risk for drowning, I didn't get any faster.

I knew I was in trouble when people were passing me without using their hands. Here I am busting a gut and a swim team teen would cruise past me doing the breast stroke. Maybe

I'm not built for it, it takes a lot of work to move that much water!

The pool is nice but I loose count on the laps when my mind starts to wander. I like the open water better. I had some serene long swims in the ocean over the summer, down on the Cape.

One interesting training effect from swimming was the collection of water in some secret sinus passage in my head. Sometimes after a long swim, I'd bend over at just the right angle and this secret sinus chamber would let loose a gush of water out of my nose. This could be socially detrimental in the work environment. "Excuse me while I have a water hemorrhage!" As if everybody didn't already think I'm an alien...

On the other hand, I discovered that I really like biking, and I'm pretty good at it. Maybe I'm built for it. Aren't some of those professional riders big guys too?

I was predetermined not to like riding. I admit it; I was scornful and biased against the bike. To me it wasn't a real sport. It wasn't hard like running. I always saw these guys out on the weekends around my house, dressed up in their bizarre Italian "look at me" logo-wear with all kinds of fancy equipment, and I'd think, "What's the point? Why do you have to get all dressed up for an easy sport like that? Why not just go for a run and get a real work out?" I guess I saw these weekend warriors as riding their bikes and spending their money in order to avoid exercise.

I fully admit that I was wrong. Once you get into shape, biking is a killer work out. I particularly like hill climbing. I just love the drama of it. You see that hill coming; you take a mental deep breath, just as you get to base of the hill you up shift into a higher gear and get up in the saddle, driving your thighs like great meat pistons into the beast. With a warrior's shout you let loose like a berserker up the slope until at the top, muscles failing, you collapse into an exultant downhill.

I thought there would be lots of strategy in which gears to use. Once I got in shape that turned out to be a moot point. I only ever needed to use the top two gears. Even on the hills, I could just adjust the effort to match the terrain. It was great, mindless striving. I loved it.

I still don't own any logo-wear, but I do understand why you might want to wear one of those tight wind shirts. The main reason is so you don't suck hornets into your shirt. At least, that's what I discovered one day flying down a hill at 35 MPH wearing a running singlet. The wind pulls down the front of your shirt and turns it into a big bug scoop.

All of a sudden I felt like I got shot in the chest. There was a hornet down there and he wasn't happy. I quickly took a hand off the handle bar and clutched him through the shirt. Now I've got an angry hornet in my grasp and I'm still screaming downhill. I finally managed to slow down and stop without crashing. He got away and I got a nice hornet-juice-adrenalin boost for the remainder of my hill workout. Hoo-Hah!

I didn't buy any of those padded shorts either, which in retrospect was a bad decision. There are some parts of your body that can use padding. I was sure I had given myself a testicular tumor at one point but was relieved to find out that it was just an inconvenient boil caused by an ingrown hair. Yikes! It's best not to think about such things.

What about the actual triathlons?

The first one I did was my first ever, and true to my modus operandi, I was way over trained and over prepared. I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect. My whole family came down to watch, like they used to when I first started marathons. This was right in my hometown at the town beach, so there were some bragging rights on the line.

I had all my stuff. I got there early and got the best outside position on the bike rack. I had my running shoes tied just right so I could slip them on without lacing. I had my trusty steel steed Fuji-san cleaned up and I had criminally over pumped the tires for speed. I had a tub for foot washing and

my towel, just right, for transition expediency. I had my special Gatorade mixture and Powerbars at just the right time.

Before the race my 10 year old daughter sang the national anthem for the assembled throng, bringing tears of pride to my eyes. They can't chuck everyone into the water at once. It would cause too much of an imbroglio. They sort the



runners out into smaller groups by waves. They give you a different color bathing cap depending on what wave you're in. This would mark the first time in my life I'd ever worn a bathing cap! They started me in the last wave, which was good. I got to watch the first 3

waves hit the water. The noise made by 50-60 swimmers hitting a placid lake at 8:00AM is amazing. It's like the water explodes.

Even though I was in the last wave, I still lined up at the back of my little pack of oldsters. I had heard horror stories about people getting bloody noses and such vying for position. I decided to let them fight it out and I would start in the back where it was safe. If I was going to have any issues, it would happen during the swim. I was entering into unknown territory as I waded into the mud and weeds and began my clumsy crawl.

It worked out great. I had people I could follow who were also slow. It was surreal. Like an aquatic dreamscape. Looking around under the water and seeing all those disembodied arms and legs and torsos thrashing around. You don't need much space to swim, maybe 12-14 inches for a lane; same size as a seat at Fenway. I remember breathing at the same time as a guy right next to me and getting his foul morning breath in my face only a couple inches away. Very strange.

We actually overtook some of the 3rd wave women swimmers at the end and that caused our little swimming pelaton to break apart and run into each other like a school of frightened fish avoiding an obstacle. Some of the women were doing the breaststroke and were essentially dead in the water. I felt great and came out of the water feeling that I should have pushed harder. My sister was there to help me out of my wetsuit and I was off.

Turns out I'm not too bad at biking. My trusty steel framed steed, Fuji-san, and I can move right along. Having started all the way in the back, plus being a slow swimmer, I was harvesting people the whole time in the bike. "On your left! Coming through! Heads Up!" And, yes, I particularly enjoy passing those guys on the \$7,000 bikes with all the logo-wear. I didn't wear a shirt, because I don't own one.

The bike course was very hilly with lots of tight 90 degree turns. Fortunately for me it was also my home turf. I had trained on the course. I knew exactly what to do when. It was a huge advantage. I was trying to help people as I passed them, "Hard right coming up! Almost there, hard left at the top! Last hill, this is it!" In retrospect I was probably just annoying.

I probably passed 100 people on the bike in 10 miles. I hit it hard, but still held some back for the run. My sport. My course. My turn to shine, right?

The 5K run after all this other madness is very interesting. Your legs are dead and your body has built up some lactic acid for you. All the blood is in the wrong muscles. I felt terrible. Like my legs were made of lead. I thought for sure my time would be awful, but it was ok. You can still run, it just isn't fun.

Jumping into my shoes and hitting the pavement I continued to harvest. There seem to be a good many of these weekend triathletes who consider running a chore. When I got to the run the people were just shuffling, like the end of marathon on a hot day. It was strange. It wasn't inspirational like passing people in a race usually is. These people weren't

running they were trying to survive their most hated leg. I guess it's best to have your strong sport last.

The 5k crisscrossed some rolling hills through circa 1950 neighborhoods and then headed into the woods for a single path scramble. The non-runners all crashed at the merest hint of an uphill. I knew the woods were coming so I tried to get as many of these pylons behind me as I could. "On your right! Excuse me, Pardon, nice day, huh?"

Up a hill through broken single path. Rocks, roots, mud and stone walls. Many of the triathletes complain about this part of the course. Not me! I love trails and I love hilly trails even more. I had to take to the bush a couple times to get by the rolling roadblocks, but I kept harvesting.

At one point I passed a 12 year old in the woods and he said, "You can do it!" like I needed some sort of encouragement to finish a 5K. I felt like smacking him, "Thanks sonny!"

A steep short downhill followed by a steep short uphill eliminated a handful more pedestrians and we popped back out on the road. I wasn't actually sure where the course went from here to get back to the beach. It turns out the course went straight down Birch Road, where I bought my first little house out of college and settled in with my young bride some twenty years ago.

I wasn't thinking about those halcyon days as I passed my old house. I was thinking that there was less than a mile to the finish and this was a very steep downhill. I spread out my wings, stretched out my stride and let my 180 pounds fly towards the bottom.

The runners I was passing now were more of my speed and were looking at the back of my leg as I passed. In this race they had your age written on the back of your calf. This is a great idea, so you can see who is in your age group. I was battling some guy who was 46 and put him away with a strong finish.

As a final omen, when I was chatting with some folks after the race, there was a loud "bang!" Fuji-san had, with an act

of finality, to put a cap on the summer of training, given up the ghost. My back tire had blown due to the over filling.

I had a blast and I'm going to keep swimming through the fall/winter. Maybe I'll get some lessons and get faster. Maybe I'll buy an expensive bike and a logo shirt. Maybe I'll move up to the Ironman! No, probably not...but I will probably be back to try some more tris next summer.

If you want to experience something fun and interesting, train for and compete in a sprint tri. Stringing these sports together will teach you a lot about yourself. It is also a great body shaping program. Forget the fad diets and the thigh-master, do a few bricks a week to exhaustion!

Take some advice from me; try a tri if you haven't yet. It's not that hard and the payback far outweighs the investment. Just don't get in my way!

Ahoy Mateys

Yarmouth Seaside Festival 10K is a rainsquall taper on the Cape.

“In October, when the weather is not intolerably cold, and the landscape wears its autumnal tints, such as, methinks, only a Cape Cod landscape ever wears, especially if you have a storm during your stay,—that I am convinced is the best time to visit this shore.” ~Henry David Thoreau

I almost missed the race. I was driving around in circles through Yarmouth and Dennis looking for it in the pouring rain. I finally called Yarmouth Police Dispatch on my cell phone and acted contrite. I had already pulled over and asked for directions from the convenience store guy. (See ladies? We do it when you're not in the car with us.) I had figured that it wouldn't be too hard to find the Festival. Wouldn't there be signs? Wouldn't I see other runners milling about in great nervous crowds at the starting line? No I wouldn't. It seems the rain put a bit of a damper, literally, on the whole festival thing.

I finally found it and ran into the school building to register. It was 20 minutes before the gun and I was #62. Hmm. Looks like a small crowd. Plenty of T-shirts available. No lines at the toilets. Good for me, but I'm sure not so good for the 27th Yarmouth Seaside Road Race 10K. Anyone who's been involved in a race knows what happens when you get the crappy, rainy weather. It was probably worst for these folks because the weather-people had been tracking this storm up the coast for a week.

It was also a 10K. Your casual runners have so many races to choose from in the fall, the longer races don't get the pull that they used to 27 years ago. There are lots of family friendly 5K's with kid runs to compete with.

I was looking for a 10K. I like 10Ks. I saw this one on CoolRunning and knew I was going to be 'on Cape' this weekend. It seemed like good Karma. I also have a

marathon next weekend and needed a long taper run at race pace. Luckily I've been doing this long enough to know that a hard run 10K is as good as a tempo 13 miler. I don't keep a log and I'm pretty flexible about distance and time. I lived on Compulsive Lane for a couple years and I know it's not a fun place. I just have a general training framework and fit opportunities into it as they come up. It's easier on the head that way.

I looked around at the start. Not too many folks. I saw some fast looking kid speaking French. I saw a bunch of guys my age; old that is. They looked like veterans. Skinny, gnarly guys with club singlets. A 1999 Stus' sweatshirt. A 2004 Martha's Vineyard 20 miler shirt. A couple Boston '05 hats, (like mine). Even in a small, rained out race, my age group is always overloaded with veterans. Quite a few of them were putting in long warm up runs, obviously turning the 10K into something longer as part of a fall marathon campaign. Me and the rest of the classic rock generation climbing out of a warm bed to run in the rain on a Sunday morning.

The start was a balmy 65 degrees with the remnants of tropical storm Tammy whipping around rain with petulant gusts. I lined up. It was sparse. There was no crowding or elbows needed here. Before you know it the race director said some words, one of which was "Go!" And we were off.

I used my excellent pacing skills (not) and tucked into the back of the lead pack of four, knowing full well that I could never hold that pace, but too amped up and too stupid, even after all these years, to hold back. I was surprised to find myself still hanging on after a ½ mile. The leaders were only running 6:15's or so.

Soon enough I let them go and tried to settle into something more sustainable. Around 2 miles I was still all alone in 4th. I have never been that close to the lead in a race of any length before. I'm thinking to myself that the French guy was definitely in his 20's, so worst case; I'm 3rd in my age class.

The police escort of the lead pack was out of sight by now. Then the first pursuer caught me. I asked him how old he was. 47. I told him I couldn't let him pass me because he was in my age group. He didn't think that was funny and passed me anyway.

Then another guy, definitely in my age group, sauntered by. Out by the 3rd mile two more guys, running together, grey haired, cruised past. Damn. Is everybody who races these days 40-49? Ok. It was a training run anyway, just relax and save it for after mile 5.

The weather was actually perfect for racing. 60-65 degrees with a light drizzle and not too much standing water. No problems with heat or dehydration today! I felt pretty good. I had run the Pisgah 23k, the long leg of the Fred Brown relay and a fast 22 mile training run in the weekends before. I had plenty of strength, but as usual, not too much speed.

I turned into a long straightaway by the ocean. The squall winds hit me head on and I heard foot steps closing from behind. Does it ever end? I looked over and it was the F1 catching me. Of course I said "You're definitely not in my age group."

The course continued right along the ocean front and we had those killer ocean gusts hammering us from the front. I told her she could draft me. The wind slowed us down. We ran together, or more accurately, I followed her for the next 2 miles. I could still see the guys up ahead on the straightaways and somewhere in the back of my mind a little voice was calling me a wimp for not making a move to catch them.

The F1, Karen, and I were looking for the 5 mile mark when we turned a corner and the 4 guys who had passed me were running straight at us. Was this an out and back? No they took a wrong turn. We yelled and they turned around. We all ran through a deep puddle straddling the road. In the confusion I missed the 5 mile mark and lost Karen, but those 4 guys were now only 20-30 yards ahead.

At the next turn the Gods stepped in again and the 4 guys all turned left as the volunteer pointed straight. I yelled at them but kept going. All of a sudden I was in 4th place again. Looking at my watch I knew there was less than a mile left, but didn't know the course.

First one, then a second runner re-took me. Then, like Sea Biscuit, I decided I was going to race. Some racing God was definitely trying to get me to place in this race. I might not be able to beat these guys behind me to the tape, but I could discourage them and might be able to put on a good enough show to dissuade the pursuit. If I looked strong they might decide it wasn't worth the effort.

I don't have a finish line sprint, I never have. I'm slow of foot in the 100, but I've raced hundreds of races and know a few wily-old-mid-pack-veteran tricks. I knew that if I was going to hold these guys it was going to have to be here where I had a chance, not with a 100 yard to go. I stretched out my stride. I pumped my arms. I used every pacing trick I had to make it look like I was going faster than I was and looking stronger than I was.

With about a ½ a mile to go we ran through a weird weather front. The barometric pressure plummeted and the air temperature dropped 10-15 degrees in one step. Another sign from the Gods?

I saw the turn-in for the school. The volunteers, miserable in their wet coats, pointed to the finish. I didn't want to look back. It didn't really matter if there was anyone there or not. This was one of those 'moment of truth' times and I was committed. I did my best impression of the 100 yard gasping-Clydesdale-fish-out-of-water sprint. I took a quick peak over the shoulder with 30 feet to go and I was all alone. I crashed across the finish, took my medal and doubled over with dry heaves for a few minutes. So much for the easy training run!

I waited around for the results. I finished 6th overall and 3rd in my age group. Go figure. Less than a month away from

my 44th birthday and that is the highest I ever finished in any race in my life. Not the fastest by far, but the highest place. I'm going to have to hunt down more of these small, rained out 10K's and see if I can win a toaster or something!

One comical moment was a woman who read the race flyer wrong and thought she was running a 5K until she got to the 3 mile mark and there was no finish line. She just kept going. Which is good advice for all of us. Just keep moving.

I would like to thank race director Deanna for putting on the 27th annual Yarmouth Seaside Festival Road Race. It may have gotten rained out, but it meant the world to me and I'll put it on my calendar for next year!

Take my advice. Go find a small, local race and run the race of your life!

Look for me at BayState next week!

Blown away at BayState.

The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind...

"Run like hell and get the agony over with." ~Clarence DeMar

I knew I was ready for the marathon last week when my mother-in-law told me I looked awful. "Chris, what's the matter with you? You look awful."

Ah... Always can count on the encouragement! But, what she really meant was that I had that skinny, lean and haunted look that comes from 3 hour long runs and too much time on the treadmill.

As a matter of fact, I felt great. I never felt better. I was healthy and reasonably well trained. I had made the decision to tackle my old friend the BayState. I was pushed over the edge after my last long run, two weeks ago. I ran our local rail trail end-to-end-to-end for 21+ miles in 3:00 even and had a nice strong kick at the end. The knee wasn't complaining. The Achilles weren't too upset and the old body recovered pretty well. Seemed like a 'go'.

Life is funny that way. I couldn't run a step 9 months ago after the car crash ate my patella and here I was going to jump back into it again. Turn, turn, turn. The human body is an amazingly adaptable thing if you give it a chance.

Last time I ran the BayState in '01 at 39 years young I smoked an easy qualifier at 3:10 and change. It's a forgiving and fun course. I've always done well there. It's in my back yard, less than 20 miles from where I grew up. Not a race to be feared, for me it is truly an old friend.

2001 seems like a long time ago. Since then I've worked through some challenges. A ruptured Achilles in '02 and wrapping my truck around a telephone pole in '04 have kept me busy. I'm happy just to be moving forward. I managed to sneak in a 3:21:07 at Hyannis in early '04 before Mr. Telephone Pole whacked me. That was enough to carry me

through two sloppy Boston's in '04 and '05. Truth be told, I haven't run a comfortable 26.2 in almost 5 years. It was setting up like a show down - that the 2005 BayState would tell me what my status really was.

I tried something different this time around. I doubted my knee or my Achilles would hold up for the traditional 50+ mile week training program. Instead I opted for the 3 day a week program that has become popular over the last couple years. Basically you only run the hard stuff. Tuesday speed, Thursday Tempo and Saturday Long. In addition you must cross train on 3 of the off days.

This is not that huge a departure from a "normal" marathon conditioning plan. For me all it meant was replacing my easy run days with swimming. It keeps you from getting those creaky little injuries and tendonitis that are common at the end of a 12 - 16 week ramp up. You know what I mean; you are in great shape but can't stand up or bend over without wincing? You've been there. It's the marathon irony. How can I be in such great shape and such pain at the same time? With the 3-day program you don't get that. Your body gets to heal and there is no tendon pain. At least I had none. The combination with the swimming creates a great healthy balance.

But I digress...

I decided it was time to "take the plane for a test flight", and BayState was it. The weather was rotten all week leading up to the race. We had torrential rain that made the national hysterical news highlights for 8 straight days. When the clouds broke on Sunday morning for the race, the passing front manifested gusting, swirling 40 mph winds. That was to be our lot on the course.

I wasn't that freaked out by the weather. It was a test drive for me anyway and I only needed a 3:20 (or to be exact 3:20:59:59). Anybody can run 7:30's, right? Wind is bad, but the BayState always has a little breeze on some sections. I've never had a problem with it. There have always been

unsuspecting victims to practice nefarious drafting on, especially the ½ marathoners who tend to run in support groups and create nice deep envelopes to hide in. Besides, on a loop course the wind can only be in your face some of the time, right? It's got to be a tail wind too, right?

I had forgotten Murphy's laws of running. It's always uphill and the wind is always in your face.

At 8:30 AM on Sunday a few hundred of us stood in the corral waiting for the gun. The sun was out, but it wasn't hot, especially with the head wind evaporating sweat off you. We joked about how you can never understand what the race director is saying at the beginning of these things. They could be warning of Tyrannosaurs on the course, we'd never know. The ½ marathoners started earlier. We wouldn't be sharing the road with them and wouldn't be able to use them as human windshields.

I opted for a thin pair of tights. My theory was that these would provide less wind drag than my bare hairy legs and there wasn't much chance of overheating in the wind. So, yes, that was me the chatty bearded guy in the sky blue tights, red Boston '04 shirt, white Boston '05 hat, blue sunglasses and iPod. (My first marathon with the iPod)

The wind was in our faces all the way out, non-stop to the Tyngsboro Bridge at mile 8. Not just a steady drag, but a gusting, stand-you-up head wind that had us huddling together in packs, taking turns at the lead. At the bridge I had assumed it would be a tail wind along the east side of the river, the other side of the loop, but I was wrong. Somehow it was still a head wind until the little turn by the Rourke Bridge. The net result was that of the 26.2 miles, about 22-23 of them were into the wind.

The course was well policed and the water stops were plentiful and energetic. Especially my friends from the Squannacook club who set up a sound system to encourage runners by name at the 7.4 and 17.x mile marks. My folks,

my wife and my kids were there handing out water in the gale. My kids love the water stop duty.

The battle with the wind led to a certain camaraderie that always forms under battle conditions. Like sharing a fox-hole with someone. We worked together to draft and fight the gusts. Still, by the second loop there started to be casualties.

It appeared to me that even though the wind took some energy to fight, more importantly, it changed people's mechanics, and that is what got to them in the end. Long stride heel strikers like me were forced to lean forward and shorten the steps. Forward leaning Chi-runner types were stood up by the wind. The end result being that the strange mechanics caused some muscle group to cramp that normally would not.

For me it manifested all up the back of my legs. The wind was like running with a drag chute on. I'm a big guy and I move a lot of air. I tried to draft, but that meant running someone else's pace and stride. I tried to visualize and let the wind flow around me without fighting it. "Don't fight it" I kept saying to myself. I visualized myself as a big ship cleaving effortlessly through the ocean waves. I joked to a couple ladies that we should have sprayed ourselves with Pam cooking oil for slipperiness.

In the end I didn't crash, but I missed my time. I think the wind was worth 3-5 minutes. I saw more than a few folks walking or off to the side stretching and massaging cramps. I'm willing to bet there were some disappointed runners out there.

I never did the death shuffle. It was more like the wind sanded off just enough pace through miles 16-20. When I finally got that tail wind for the last 3 miles the back of my legs were too tight to stretch out and take advantage of it.

Somehow I feel that I should be upset about not meeting my goal, but I'm not. I'm happy to be out there running. There

is always another race and you can't control the weather. I almost feel guilty that I'm not upset about it...how conflicted is that?

The BayState is still a great race after all these years. It provides a qualifying opportunity for locals at just the right time. I like the new finish in the ball park, although I was too beat up to appreciate it. I really liked the free massage that made it possible for me to walk back to my truck. The massage lady said to me, "You need to stretch more."

To which I replied, "Now, or in general?" Those are my new marching orders. "Stretch more." Simple enough.

I'm figuring to look for another qualifier or two this fall since I'm healthy and already in shape. Got any suggestions? Next on the calendar, I'll see you at the Groton Town Forest Race this weekend. Maybe it will snow! Wouldn't that be a hoot?

Post Card Perfect at the Cape Cod Marathon

There's a reason they call this one of the most scenic races in the USA and today bore that out!

"I've flown to Guatemala and Belize in the south; Point Barrow, Alaska, in the north; and out to Cape Cod, ... It just goes to show you don't need a Lear Jet to travel around a lot."
~ Charles Curtis

Even though this race kicked my butt again, it was gorgeous. It was 55 degrees and not a cloud in the sky at race start. It was 63 and still sunny at the finish. There was a slight, but kindly, zephyr of a sea breeze, but nothing with any impact. The Atlantic Ocean was as flat and calm as a bathtub. The boats and houses oozed scenic Cape Cod.

The crowds were warm and happy, cheerfully cheering the racers on, obviously buoyant at being finally released from the rainiest October since they started keeping records in Massachusetts. The support and water stop volunteers took their jobs seriously and executed with a poised expertise of 28 years of practice. Now if they could flatten out those little hills a bit...



arm. But that geographical metaphor has no bearing on

The Cape Cod Marathon, or CCM, (that is the diminutive that is painted on the mile marks), is in its 28th year. It starts and ends in Falmouth. If you look at a map of the Cape, it's shaped like an extended arm with P-Town at the hand, Harwich and Chatham are at the elbow, Hyannis is under the bicep and Falmouth...well Falmouth is close to the

the actual beauty of the place. See this 1890 map by H. D. Thoreau. Read his Cape Cod journals if you get a chance, they're way funnier than Walden.

To get to Falmouth, you go straight down 495, over the Bourne Bridge, straight down route 28 and your there.

Falmouth is where we gather in February to take the ferry out of Woods Hole over to Martha's Vineyard for that 20 miler.

The whole area is one of hidden bays along the crenulated coastline, light houses and fishing villages. Just like in the post cards.

Really, I would recommend running this as a destination race. Spend the weekend eating seafood and walking on the beach with your honey. There is something about the Cape that just sucks the stress out of you.

I would also more than recommend taking a team down for the Dunkin Donuts marathon relay. Those folks looked like they were having blast. They were running in costume and cheering teams of supporters hooted at each of the exchanges. After every exchange a new wave of fresh legged participants would happily bounce by us trudging marathoners. That's the way to do it. That's what I'm doing next time.

Running it as a qualifier is a little challenging. It's a tough course. Not crazy tough, but tough on the unsuspecting and meekly trained. The first bit of it is a nice flat-to-downhill run, and like Boston, makes rookies run stupid-fast. The miles from 13 to 23 are rolling hills, nothing huge, not like Derry hills, but they keep coming at you like ocean waves.

If you are drawn out by the siren song of the fast start you will find yourself dashed on the rocks of hubris. It's a choice between the Scylla of fast start and the Charybdis of unrelenting hills. I should have stayed home and chewed lotus flowers on the couch!

I ran my race and was disciplined, but I had not trained any hills. My target race was BayState and that has no hills. If I was training to qualify for CCM I would throw a series of 10-20 100 yard hill charges in with my speed work.

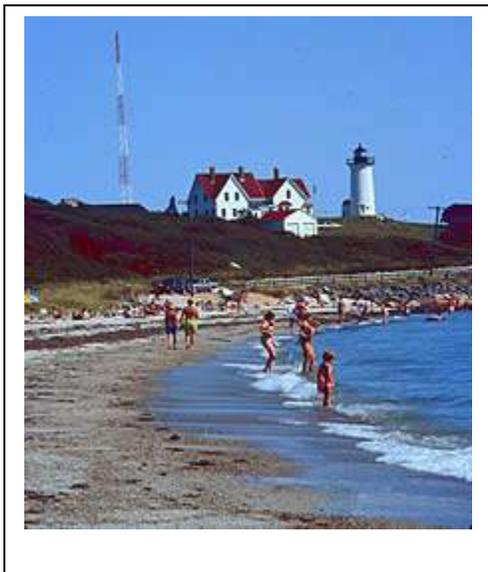
There were people around me who took the bait. I didn't let myself get more than 15 seconds away from my 7:30 target splits but I was surrounded by people who had no intention of running that fast. They were chatting away as if on Sunday morning 10k lark. I had physically restrain myself to stay on pace.

Part of it was the beautiful weather and the great company. We had some great conversations going, and then we'd pass a mile mark and let out a collective "OOPS", and try to slow down.

The first part of the course runs through back country Cape roads with a protective canopy of trees, like you're running through a tunnel. Most of the leaves were down from the aforementioned rainy spell, but some of the sugar maples were still displaying their fall bounty.

I held it great until the big hill around mile 15 and basically hit the wall running up that sucker. I got to the top and said to myself, "OK, looks like another fun run from here on, I'm toast!" Then I got a second wind on the ensuing down hills and put in enough to get back on schedule. I was chugging up those little hills like an asthmatic octogenarian, then flying down the back sides to make it up. It worked for awhile, but the next big hill at 20 knocked me out for good.

I walked a little and settled into a slow finishing trot to save my legs and take in the scenery. Hey, I'm too old to be a martyr, and I had a weird couple weeks; it's ok. I'd rather mail it in than be hobbling around for the next week. Missing my time by 1 minute or 10 minutes is all the same to me. It was a probably a combination of my legs not recovered enough from BayState a couple weeks ago and the medication I was on.



The last few miles right along the ocean were really nice. As I hit the ocean front the breeze brought that musty, salty ocean smell to me. Looking to the right the high sun shimmered off a peaceful, rippling Atlantic. The last hill of any size is up to Nobska Light House perched on the coast around 23 miles.

By this time there was a whole crew of us 'jogging'.

Probably 10-12 people doing a run-walk. No one was staggering. They still had their wits about them and a sense of humor, but their legs were gone. It's hard to hate a race this pretty.

So much for the race, let me tell you about my weird week running up to it. It's a comic Caper.

It was a beautiful fall night. I was well rested and well trained, confident and sure...Wait, that was how it was supposed to be the night before the CCM, but that was definitely NOT how it was...

How it was for me before the CCM this year was like some comic book End-of-Days scenario.

Talk about your whacky New England weather. October for us in Massachusetts blew away all the rainfall records for the last 100 years. I wasn't going to be surprised if it started raining frogs on race day. Driving down to the Cape Saturday night it alternated hard drizzle and wet snow. Snow! In October! We definitely have to cut back on the fossil fuels or I'm going to be running in tsunamis and volcanoes next year.

This was the fourth straight weekend of bizarre weather races for me. First was the Yarmouth Seaside 10k in rain and flood. Next was the BayState Marathon with those stand-you-up 40 MPH gusting winds. Then last weekend I waded through a rainy Groton Town Forest 9.5, (although trail races and mud are an excellent mix). Here it was 12 hours before the race and it was snowing!

As they say in the 3:00 AM infomercials; "But wait, there's more!" Somehow this week my dog gave me the gift of an awful case of poison ivy! I got it on my hands, between my fingers, on my face and another place that I won't discuss in polite company. (Stop your snickering!)

I've always been hyper-allergic to poison ivy. I go out of my way to avoid it. All week it spread and got worse. I've been waking up at 3:00 AM with my hands screaming on fire like they've been dipped in lava. I've been working all week with cotton running gloves on to keep it from oozing on the keyboard! I get up, go downstairs and stick them in a pot filled with ice. Picture the comic steam rising. It's like that. Ahhhhhh.....

Around Wednesday I couldn't take it anymore and started eating Benadryl just to do something. Poison Ivy usually it runs its course in 3-5 days and if you can tough it out, by the 6th day it's getting better. I ate the Benadryl even though I knew it doesn't really help. Instead of being itchy, you're dopy, tired and itchy, but it helps you sleep.

I still got my work outs in. I managed a couple of speed 6 minute 1600's on the treadmill Tuesday and a handful of strong tempo 1600's at 6:30 down at the track Thursday night, high on Benadryl, in the dark.

By Friday I threw in the towel and went to the doctor. He gave me a choice of some cream or these nasty little steroid pills. I went for the nuclear option. Even though he said they *weren't those kind of steroids*, it sounded good to me. They have some excellent side effects. They make you sick to your stomach, dehydrate you and mess up your digestive

process. They also rev you up. I was so hyper my eyes felt like pin balls and my heart was doing that freaky arrhythmic thing. Geez, just how you want to feel the night before a marathon!

Good thing they weren't doing drug testing! I told my daughter, who was my support crew, that if I keeled over, to remember that I died doing what I loved. She was great. I hear people complaining about their teenagers, but I like this age. They are actual people with interesting things to say, (when they are not hating everything). She was great company and a real help. 4 year-olds are cute, but you can't hand them \$40 bucks and a cell phone and say, "See ya in 3 and a half hours. If I don't show up, call your mother."

"But wait! There's more!"

We swung by the Expo to pick up my number and some essentials. I procured some of that "Espresso Love" GU, that stuff is my new favorite rocket fuel. Like a vente Starbucks at mile 10! Are you supposed to mix that with steroids? I'll have to ask a baseball player.

Thinking our journey almost complete, we headed out into the slush storm up Route 28 towards the Mid-Cape and my house in Harwich. (I have a house in Harwich!) When we arrived, after much splashing about, we found the power out! Some one of the last series of storms had fouled the lines and left us in the dark.

There we are, her using up my laptop battery and me writing by candle light like Abe Lincoln waiting for the N-star guy to come. It was so chilly in the dining room that I could see my breath. I figured we'd have to trek back down to Hyannis and crash in one of those dumpy turista motels. However, my luck was turning. The N-Star guy came right over, did some twiddling up in the bucket in the pouring rain and "let there be light!"

Things were getting better. Time to take another pill and try to get some sleep so I can wake up screaming at 3:00 AM, which will really be 2:00 AM with the time change, I think...

The morning dawned sunny and calm, like the day after the apocalypse, and things were looking up. Of course we took a wrong turn and got lost on the way. I had to jog to the start and was sitting on my backside stretching when the cannon fired. That doesn't really matter when you have the chip.

It turned out to be a really nice day with some great people. I had a blast even though I tanked my qualifying time by 10 minutes. I would recommend that you run this race. Approach it like the work of art that it is and don't bring your watch.

After the race we drove over to Old Silver Beach and I stuck my legs, (and hands), in the icy surf. We stopped at Sandy's by the rotary for some lovely chowdah and fish & chips.

To finish up the day high on the weirdness scale we got trapped behind a burning Winnebago on 495. A bunch of dopy 30-something Patriot fan guys watching their camper incinerate at the Foxboro exit. Boy do those things burn well. It got exciting when the propane and gas tanks exploded. It took the firemen 45 minutes to put it out and there was nothing left but a pile of black goop and some steel girders. Makes you wonder about your next camping trip...

Next up is the Maryland Trail Marathon. See you out there and please, come over and say "Hi".

Third Time's a Charm!

The Miracle in Maryland or Chris and Ted's Excellent Adventure.

“Once I took a bus from my home in Maryland to Philadelphia to live on the streets with some musicians for a few weeks, and then my parents sent me to boarding school at Andover to shape me up.” ~Olivia Wilde

I'm not old! I was worried for awhile. I just turned 43 and missed my qualifying time for Boston by two and a half minutes at my target race. Sure there were horrible winds and we could all justify it, but I used to run those 7:30's by accident, without even trying. Was that it?

Were my days at Boston to be snuffed at 8 tries? Would I have to, God forbid, take a charity number? I do so enjoy getting my butt whipped by that unforgiving B*tch of a race every April.

Not today. Today WE kicked butt at the North Central Trail Marathon.

Missing your target marathon is unsettling. It's like that dream where you show up for some important event naked. It just leaves you out there hanging. You spent your capital and didn't get the cupie doll. What do you do? Well in my case...that would be the “moronic compulsive” old guy case ...or as I like to say; the “hopeful positive thinking” case...anyway, in my case you immediately sign up for another marathon in two weeks. The theory here being that you've already trained and you might as well use it. Jump back on the bike that threw you. Strike while the iron is hot.

The counterpoint to this theory comes in the form of people telling you that you're crazy and/or stupid and you're just going to hurt yourself and you're not getting any younger. (especially the people who you are married to.)

It was something I've done before. In '99 I DNF'ed on the old Baystate course and doubled down at Cape Cod only to get

massacred on the hills. Knee tendonitis had shortened my training. Then I turned around and qualified by a whisker at the old Ocean State Marathon in Rhode Island. (Great course; Warwick to Providence – downhill with a tail wind – RIP) It all ended well with great celebration.

History was repeating itself in 2005. Again I signed up for Cape Cod after getting thrashed by the wind at Baystate. Unfortunately, again I got massacred by the hills and some awful medication I was on for poison ivy. But was it really the poison ivy? Or was I done with qualifying? Was I too old? Did that car accident eat my qualifiers forever? As much as I don't care anymore, you know it still bothered me.

It used to be I would find out around 20 miles whether the wheels were falling off, but during these two marathons I knew early. I felt it start to slip away around 15-17. Worse than that; I gave up too easily. It started to slip away and instead of bearing down I let it go. When it started to hurt I gave in. I let my big brain get away with those negative mantras and rationalizations. That evil little voice, you know the one. It tells you that it's ok to walk. It tells you that it's not your fault, it's not your day and the wind is really bad. It has your focusing on coming up with good excuses instead of focusing on the race.

Not today. Today I was a stand-up guy.

Then Ted calls with a brilliant idea. Let's drive to Maryland and run this trail marathon. Of course, I'm in with both feet. Driving 7 hours to run a marathon in the woods might seem like an unlikely thing to do, but it made perfect sense to me.

Of course in the intervening 4 weeks after Cape Cod and before the trail marathon I had an intricate training plan that was going to reverse my fortunes in one last great gasp at fame. I was going to do hard speed work and long tempo. I was going to throw in some aggressive 20 milers. I was going to suffer. This was it. Last chance.

Then about 7 days after the Cape, I was just getting ready to start beating my body up with a Spartan regimen, I was running easy up a hill and it felt like someone shot me in the right butt cheek. I had to stop and stretch. I hobbled home. I'd like to think I'm getting smarter as I get older. Instead of ignoring it and trying to run through it I stopped running and immediately made an appointment to go see a hip doctor.

I have never had any hip problems before and I had no experience to know whether I just tweaked something or twisted the end off of my femur. I was not really surprised when she said, "You've been running too much and you've given yourself tendonitis at the attach points of your (unpronounceable tendon)"

"I've got a marathon in three weeks, is that a problem?"

"You probably shouldn't do that."

"It's a trail marathon. It will be nice and soft..."

"It's up to you, but you're not getting any younger. You're not going to recover as fast."

Don't you just love doctors? They like to err on the safe side. My super human training plan was out the window. Instead I spent 3 days a week running easy with the dog in the woods, trying to stretch, loading up on "Vitamin 'I'" and trying not to put on weight. It was good for the dog, but it left me feeling more and more unprepared, sliding down the knife's edge away from that goal race pinnacle.

Ironically enough, Ted was recovering from a spate of injuries that started last year with a hip stress fracture. He and I had been following the same training program. It has different names, but we can refer to it here as the "fragile-old-guy training program." The way it works is that you only run 3 days a week. Speed, tempo and fast long. That's it. No more 50 mile weeks. On the off days we swim. It's a great program. I've never felt healthier. Unfortunately it had been leaving me about 6 miles short of my goal.

At the Thanksgiving morning 5K I ran, (yup, 2 days before the marathon, and I placed in my age group), a running buddy asked, "Are you ready?"

I answered honestly and without hesitation. "No way! It would take a miracle for me to qualify this weekend." Nevertheless, the day after Thanksgiving Ted and I were in the rental car heading south. My wife was diving headlong into her holiday shopping frenzy and I was bailing out to go run a race.

It was a nippy 27 degrees Friday night and we were stressing over what to wear. We were checking the weather every 10 minutes. It was supposed to be 33 at race time. Fuzzy hat? Sweater? What to wear? Before I left the house I had dug deep into my lucky stuff pile and un-retired one of my old Ronzoni hats. There's magic in those hats. I hoped I would get to wear it.

On the way down we talked strategy.

"Whatever happens, I'm not leaving anything out there."

"Me neither, I'd like to break 3 hours and run negative splits."

"You're nuts. You've only been training for 5 weeks."

"So? This is your 3rd marathon in 6 weeks. Who's nuts?"

"Doesn't matter. I'm not giving up tomorrow. If I have to hop in on one good leg dragging a bloody stump..."

And so on... Not so much strategy, more locker room banter. Our dinner was Power Bars, Gatorade and a loaf of sour dough bread from the super market. We watched a really bad movie on cable called Resident Evil 2. There's nothing more entertaining than leather clad women kicking the crap out of zombies. (It's a guy thing).

The day dawned crispy and 30ish. We made our way over to the start early to get a good stretch in. This is where being veterans helped. We found a quiet alcove in the school and

prepped. Ted procured some trash bags to wear for the start. I went with the Ronzoni hat. I figured frostbite for good karma was a decent trade. It turned out to be a good choice. We were plenty warm once we got racing.

Around 9:30 we were off. Let me stop right here and say this was a great course and a great race. If I could have found the race director I would have kissed him and every member of the Baltimore Running Club, on the lips. Awesome course. The whole thing, except for a couple miles at the start and the finish, is along a rail trail. It runs alongside a beautiful river with waterfalls through mostly oak woods. The surface is crushed rock, but it's well beaten down. It's more like a very firm dirt road. Soft enough for saving the legs, but firm enough to get a good grip and no ruts, potholes or puddles. Just perfect.

There were around 400 marathoners and 80 ½ marathon relay teams. The rail grade is imperceptively uphill going out. It is just enough to keep you from going too fast, but not enough to notice. When you make the turn at the half (there's a cone in the trail), it turns into a wonderful 1% down grade. This works out great. Just when you are hitting the wall and at that delicate point where the race hangs in the balance, it's all easy downhill on a soft trail. Instead of worrying you can just lean back, stretch it out and ride through the difficult bits. In comparison, imagine having a nice soft downhill instead of Heartbreak Hill. You get the picture.

And we kicked some ass! Ted finished 5th with a 2:54. It was his best marathon in a decade. I finished 41st and I qualified with 3 minutes to spare.

The course starts at an elementary school and is supposed to run 1.8 miles out on some rolling down hill roads to the trail. At the finish it is supposed to take a slightly different 1.5 mile rolling uphill route back to the school. We weren't too worried about this because a) a little uphill after 25 miles of flat-as-a-pancake would probably be a welcome change and b) you can deal with anything if you can smell the finish line.

It was a great way to start with that first mile downhill. I probably entered the trail already 1:30 in the green, but, as we discovered there was no way to know for sure.

The police screwed up the first turn and sent us out the 1.5. This really didn't matter. Essentially we just ran the course backwards. It did however make all of the mile marks incorrect. Whichever volunteer spent the night walking the course and stapling up mile markers did it all for naught. The only thing we knew for sure about the mile marks was that they were approximately a mile apart. This way we could still pace, and we knew approximately where we were, give or take a ½ a mile. In a way it was liberating. It forced you to look at the big picture and focus on splits instead of milestones.

On the way out we could hear hunters shooting in the woods. There was a group of bird watchers around 5 miles out. That looks like a fun sport. Let's spend Saturday standing around staring into the woods with a telephoto lens. I asked them if they were having any luck and apologized for scaring off the yellow-bellied sap suckers.

As we ran between stone outcroppings the icicles were melting and breaking away in the morning sun making small crashes in the leaves. The river was crystal clear. It was cold enough that we didn't sweat much. I only went through maybe 35 - 40 ounces of fluids and was fine. I also continued my love affair with espresso Gu. Great stuff if you can stomach it. Sugar and caffeine! Boo-Hah!

Ted flew past in the other direction as I was approaching the turn around. "You're number 11!" I yelled. He was flying. He hunted down five more victims on the long slow descent into the finish before he was done. Negative splits - 2:54 - and the bastard is in my age group next year!

The first time I knew a mile for sure was at the half. They had a clock. I had a full 5 minutes in the bank at the 1/2. I was pacing a 3:16 on the uphill and now I was taking this safety margin into the down grade. There was a slight head

wind and it intensified as it funneled in the narrow gorges. As I usually do, I found a nice gentleman to draft. He was wearing one of those GPS pacing watches and had us doing 7:27's. I could tell he wasn't going to make his 3:15 target by the way he was taking short strides and fighting it. It was his first marathon. I told him to breathe and stretch and relax. Then I left him to fight his own demons.

I thought that if I could just cruise to 20 I could make it in. I was slowing down but not much. I started picking off stragglers and walking crash victims. It hurt and I was red lining, but I was focused and working through it. 26 miles is supposed to hurt. One guy I passed said, "Hey, you're looking good." Uncharacteristically, I couldn't think of anything to respond and couldn't spare the energy to do so. Not getting any response, he continued, "Actually, you look terrible, but you're running well."

There was a sign that said "5 Miles Left" and I wanted to believe it. My sciatic was screaming and I thought, "No problem it's only a nerve." My back started to hurt and I thought, "Too bad, straighten up, keep moving." My breathing was short and gaspy and my heart rate was bad. I closed my eyes and forced it all back into place. I had no idea what the mile was and didn't really care. I just focused on moving forward, I knew I had a good margin and all I had to do was keep moving.

When I hit the road my right foot started to go numb, "Too f-ing bad", I thought, "Keep moving." There were some sharp up hills on the road, it had bad camber and I struggled. Then there was a nice steep downhill and it shook everything loose. The last three little hills weren't too bad, but I was red lining and making funny faces, I crashed across the finish and had to be held up by the volunteers. Once I caught my breath I was looking for a race director to kiss.

What a race! What a day! That's why we do it my friends, for days like today. Today we owned that race! Today we ruled the roads and the trails. Today I'm not finished and I'm not old!

Let's review:

Chris -

Train 3 days a week...

Run 3 marathons in 6 weeks...

Get whipped by the first two...

Tweak the hip...

Don't train at all for a month...

Race a 5k in a snow storm 2 days before...

Drive 7 hours to run in the woods...

Ronzoni hat - Qualified!

Ted -

Stress fracture and Achilles tendonitis...

Train 3 days a week...

5 week training program from scratch

Drive 7 hours to run in the woods...

Sour dough and silly movie

2:54 - 6th place - negative splits - hand carved choo-choo train trophy...

That about sums it up...

See you in Hopkinton!

Tabloid Training

Run a qualifying marathon - training only 3 days a week!

"I make it a point not to buy certain magazines, not because I am against tabloids or things like that, but I want to fill my mind with valid issues in the world." ~Angelina Jolie

No it's not a late night info-commercial for the latest fitness program. Nor have I sunk to the depths of yellow journalism. There's actually some truth to this one. We did it and you can too.

I'm going to pass on my personal experience with the 'train 3 days a week' program. My running buddy, (we'll refer to him as 'Ted'), and I both used a 3-day a week program this fall to qualify. I'll attempt to give a practitioner's rendition of the pros and cons of it. I'll talk about what we would do differently and how effective it was.

As always, this is free advice and worth every penny! Be warned that neither of us followed the proscribed plan religiously. We changed it to suit ourselves, but I think there are some inferences that while not scientifically rigorous are still valid.

We both started in the same place. That place would be needing to train but feeling old, tired and broken. I was still recovering from my car crash last year and Ted was coming back from a hip fracture. Both of us were fairly afraid of piling on the miles for a fall marathon campaign. Setting forth on a 6 day a week, high mileage program would be about as effective as throwing ourselves down a long flight of stairs. Guaranteed to pull or break something.

In the early summer we read this article about the 3-day-a-week program in that famous running magazine. I won't name names, but this particular publication recently changed its format from a "runner's" magazine to what I would describe as the "Glamour Magazine" of the sport. They've bulked up on multi-page glossy national advertising and

changed to what I believe to be a 3 point font. I can't be sure, because the scanning electron microscope I was using to read it is on the fritz.

Did I miss something? Do we really need Viagra ads? As runners we have lots of issues, but I don't think poor circulation is one of them... But, hey, it's a business. If they have to make a devil's compact with pharmaceutical companies and make me squint to take a profit, I say 'more power to them'. Besides, I graduated from prep school with the owner of the publishing company and we alumni have to stick together, (omnibus lucet!)

Returning from rant to narrative...Ted and I both read the article and decided to give it a try. The concept is not that different from any quality marathon training plans we would have run in our youth. We would always focus on 3 quality workouts a week. Speed, Tempo and Long. (If you need refresher on what these terms mean, reference some of the handy training plans and associated articles on CoolRunning)

This is, and always has been, the recipe for anyone who wants to dramatically improve their times from the 10k on up. You have to spend some time in your 'discomfort zone'. It's valid for competitive runners like Ted as well as broken down plow horses like me. Just piling on more slow miles doesn't improve your finish time. It will give you the distance, but won't help your time.

We had always worked on a 12-16 week marathon plan built around speed, tempo and long. Our traditional plans also had another 20 -30 miles of 'easy' or 'recovery' base mileage as well. The theory was that you needed a base of miles to build your quality workouts on top of. For me as an amateur mid-packer this meant running 6 days a week. The common perception was that this base mileage was the minimum ante to get into the game.

We've all heard stories about the elite marathoners training 120 or more miles a week for their peak performance. The more miles the better, right? More miles make you stronger,

right? I guess if you're a 25 year old elite it's all good, but for me, especially since I turned 40, more miles means more injuries and I'm constantly trying to find the line where I get enough to make my time but don't make the cranky tendons angry.

Even when I was younger I noticed that by the end of a hard training program I would be in great shape but something was always sore. I could hit my qualifying time with ease, but I couldn't stand up out of a chair without wincing. It was the old "no pain, no gain" game.

The difference with the 3-day a week program is, (obviously), you only run 3 days a week. That's it. You only run the hard stuff. No easy mileage or recovery runs, just quality workouts.

Before I tell you whether I think it works or not I have to explain the fine print. You still have to work out 6 times a week. It won't work if you just do the running, you have to do some sort of quality aerobic cross training on 2-3 other days. Ted and I mostly did swimming.

The other fine print is that your long runs have to be pretty fast. You can't amble along at a snail's pace. You have to stay within 30 seconds of your goal pace, and that can be a challenge. Essentially your long run becomes another long tempo workout.

An example week might be a swim M-W-F and run T-TH-S.
(and on the seventh day he rested)

Monday - 30 minutes of laps in the pool

Tuesday - speed workout

Wednesday - 30 minutes of laps in the pool

Thursday - Tempo workout

Friday - 30 minutes of laps in the pool

Saturday or Sunday – Long run at 15-30 seconds slower than race pace.

Like all good marathon programs it runs in 3 week waves of increasing difficulty and is capped with a 2 week taper.

This is the plan that was in the magazine:

Week	Tuesday Speed	Thursday Tempo	Saturday Long
1	4 X 400	3	10
2	8 X 400	3	10
3	4 X 1200	5	12
4	6 X 800	7	13
5	3 X 1600	3	10
6	10 X 400	5	14
7	5 X 1200	5	15
8	7 X 800	8	17
9	3 X 1600	10	13
10	12 X 400	3	18
11	8 X 800	5	15

12	4 X 1600	8	20
13	12 X 400	5	15
14	6 X 1200	5	20
15	7 X 800	4	15
16	3 X 1600	8	10
17	5 X 50 Sec	20 minutes easy	
18			26.2

What were the results you ask? Actually the results were pretty good. I made my qualifying time and Ted ran his best marathon in 10 years. It is definitely a valid training plan. Like I said before, our results are not 100% valid because neither of us followed the plan religiously.

I jumped into the plan at the 6th week and swapped some of the longer tempo runs for shorter races. I was in pretty good shape already from triathlon training. Ted only followed the last 5 weeks of the program and also swapped out some of the workouts with races.

What worked? What worked very well was how healthy we felt. We not only stayed injury free but we felt great with no aches and pains. Swapping the recovery runs with cross training is amazingly synergistic and holistic for your body. Psychologically it keeps you from getting burnt out on running. It also gives you more flexibility to move workouts around. If you miss a day, you can make it up without screwing up the whole plan.

What didn't work? Ted and I both felt that the pacing and the distances for the speed work were too easy in the program. I

did the math the way they instructed and felt like I was running my speed work 10-30 seconds per mile too slow. (Of course I didn't complain at the time) We both felt the speed work was too short. The marathon isn't a track meet and you'd be better served working up to 1600's as quickly as possible and staying at that distance. It hurts more, but you're not going to get as much aerobic benefit from 400's late in a marathon plan.

We also thought the long runs could peak out a little higher than 20. That really left me without much juice at the end of the race. Ted actually snuck in a 30 miler one week and I ended up running two warm-up marathons. You're cutting it close with the long runs that they have in the plan. If you run into weather or some other problem you won't have much of a reserve to make up for it. (I guess that might just be the old "more miles is better" syndrome manifesting from our subconscious.)

We would also recommend swapping out a few of the tempo runs for races. That's what we did. It will allow you to get out and test yourself and still get a good workout in. I'll take a 5 mile race over an 8 mile tempo run any day.

Most importantly, I think the biggest drawback is that you never get to 'just go for a run'. It made my dog very depressed that I was hitting the track and the treadmill instead of heading out into the woods for a fun run with him.

That's our story and we're sticking to it. I'm going to use this as the base for my run up to Boston this year. It's very clean and efficient. Only running 3 days a week keeps this Clydesdale from pulling up lame.

The Fat Economy!

It's a new world order and I've got it all figured out.

"I have a great diet. You're allowed to eat anything you want, but you must eat it with naked fat people."

Has America's "addiction to foreign oil" got you all bummed out? Well, all the yammering intellectuals on NPR were in a major tizzy this week over Mr. Bush's use of that phrase in his State of the Union speech. I was listening to a bunch of the professional pontificators hashing it over this morning as I drove to my long run start.

Being a yammering pseudo-intellectual myself, it got me to thinking. As usual, it all hit me and coalesced into a semi-rational thought process during my damp 20 mile training run. Isn't it funny how that happens? Is this the same phenomena that makes you wake up at night with those 'ah-hah' solutions? You write them down and then there is nothing but gibberish in the morning? Or when you are out at the local watering hole and you're convinced you've got the world's problems figured out? Then you wake up in your clothes with a headache and your tongue stuck to the roof your mouth and have no idea what the big deal was?

I don't know, but all my really good ideas come to me when I'm out running. It makes me want to run with a tape recorder. Hey, wait! There's another good idea; the running Dictaphone! You guys can have that one for free; just send me a commission check when you get around to it.

The host/inquisitor on the NPR program asked his guest, "So what would happen if we just went 'cold turkey' and stopped using foreign oil?"

To which the guest replied, after a fair amount of stammering, "I guess we'd have to ride horses."

Well, there you go. Now, is it too much of a leap to assume that in this new world we long distance runners would

instantly become the master race? It gives new meaning to "Honey can you run down to the store for me?" That's right, 95% of the American working class would be stuck in the living room fighting over the last TV dinner while we'd still be able to get to work, right? Ten, twenty miles? No problem, I'll be there in a couple hours. More than that? I've got my bike!

I don't know about you, but my family already does it to me. When we go to the beach and have to park two miles away, is it a problem? No sweat, Dad can drop us off and run down. He likes it. And when we're done he can run back to the car and pick us up!

Think of the possibilities! Maybe it would get the other 95% of our fair country off of the couch. If we grounded the SUV's, there'd be plenty of road for walking, riding and other such healthy forms of individual perambulation.

However, I'm no Pollyanna. I'm a yammering realist. I do believe this utopia is probably out of reach. Except in Colorado and San Diego where they already live that way. Heck, in Boulder they climb up the outsides of the buildings to get to work. But, I'm under no illusions about the heartland. Joe six-pack doesn't want to change. Americans don't like lifestyle changes; especially radical ones that involve exercise. No, I don't think cold turkey is the answer.

Americans believe that there is a technological solution to everything. We are a herd of inventors and entrepreneurs. The NPR speakers went on to discuss various technical solutions to make our cars burn less oil and our populace more efficient energy consumers.

I've got my own technical solution. It came to me the other night when I was at the gym finishing up my work out. I had done a wonderful set of five intervals. One mile each at a peppy 6:30 pace with a 3 minute recovery in between and a couple warm up - cool down miles. I have to confess, I was beat. My heart was pounding, my lungs were yearning and I

was, much to the chagrin of the other gym rats, ankle deep in sweat. To summarize; I felt great!

The treadmill, which thinks itself so smart, announced to me that I had just burned around a thousand calories. I would have been happy not knowing this, but it always feels a need to report after I finish my work out. (I think it has low self esteem and is looking for attention.) I'm thinking to myself, "A thousand calories? That's half a Big Mac. Geez, I'm never going to lose any weight..."

The human body is a very efficient engine. We should harness that energy. Looking around at the other gym patrons all cycling, jogging, lifting, elliptical-ing and other creative forms of physical flagellation, I wondered why we don't hook them all up to the power grid? Sure! Wire up all those machines with a power take off and hook them up to the grid! Instead of that annoying calorie counting, my treadmill friend could show my electric bill with the digits counting down! Now that would inspire me to run faster.

I think we could figure out a way to rig all the machines. I haven't got the swimming figured out yet, but most of the people I run with are engineers. I'm sure they'd love to invent some cockamamie rig for it. Think of the gigawatts generated by twenty thousand people running from Hopkinton to Boston in a single day! The mind boggles at the possibilities.

Think about it. Instead of having to go work out, now you're powering the economy! You're strengthening the country! You are no longer a strange anemic person running in circles, you are a patriot! That's a great solution, but it probably only gets us half way there.

Soon every house would have those Fred Flintstone treadmills. I can't wait for the time when I can turn to my teenager and say "You want to use the internet? Start peddling." Talk about your pay-for-use program. No more freeloading. Can you picture a bunch of guys on converted

exercise bikes watching the big game? “Put down that beer and start peddling AI, it’s sudden death!”

Then the NPR nabobs were going on about hydrogen and the coming hydrogen economy. Of course they hadn’t quite figured out how that was all going to work, but they were hopeful. That’s how we Americans are, hopeful. I’m hopeful too.

Hydrogen sounds interesting, but, why stop there? What untapped energy resource do we have more of than any other country in the world? Wait for it... Body Fat! Yes that’s right; we see it on the news every day. Why not take that obesity crisis and put it to use? Instead of a great national weakness, let’s think of it as a natural resource. They say we don’t save? Of course we do, we save it all in our beer bellies and our wide-glide hips. We’re not being gluttonous. We are, in fact, being strategic. In the coming Fat Economy, I’m going to be a rich man!

Now, how do we tap this resource? We could chain people to treadmills and use the methods I’ve outlined above, but I don’t think that would fly. We need some direct method. I think some of my engineer friends have to come up with a direct coupling of some sort so we can just plug our adipose into the wall. Just like those hydrogen burning things.

Think about the ramifications! This is a great solution. Let’s face it, eating is already our national pastime whether we want to admit it or not. Now instead of being ashamed and depressed about those 10 fudge brownies you just ate, you can be proud! You just filled the car tank for tomorrow’s commute! What other solution allows us to so thoroughly leverage our strengths?

We don’t really build stuff anymore, but we do make the best darn fattening junk food on the planet. In the Fat Economy the tables will be turned. The rest of the world will be petitioning us for our strategic Doritos recipe. We could turn around and tell those Middle Easterners “We don’t need your stinking crude! We’ve got Slim Jims!”

Of course it would cause some cultural shifts. No longer would the skinny people hold positions of desirous role models. Let's face it, I couldn't run my electric razor off Calista Flockhart. We'd all be looking to hook up with well-filled, meaty mates. Talk about really keeping you warm at night! It's brilliant!

All that wasted effort that depressed, chubby people spend on those crazy infomercial exercise programs would disappear. No more ab-busters and bun-whackers. Just plug it into the wall. The whole self-hate propelled diet industry would implode. Is Spring coming and you need to get into that bathing suit? Just run the dishwasher a little longer. Got to drop 20 pounds for that high school reunion? Turn the thermostat up a few notches. That body fat would just burn away!

I guess we'd have to figure a way to deal with all that extra skin. People would be looking like deflated balloons for awhile. Those are details I'll leave to the engineers and technicians. I'm an idea man.

These are just a couple of the brilliant ideas that hit me when I'm out pounding the pavement or squelching through the muddy woods. You should really consider yourselves thankful that you don't have to run with me! I think I've actually caused people to run faster just to get outside my prognostication perimeter.

This week's advice to you (free and worth every penny!) is to get out there, let your brain baste in those happy running chemicals and help me solve the world's problems!

Your name here!

I'm fully available for sponsorship opportunities!

"At this stage of our development, we don't have rhyme or reason to our sponsorships." ~Carl Gilman, Snapple Natural Beverage Co

I got an e-mail from one of the guys in my running club last week about a candy company that is launching a new energy bar and they were looking for athletes to sponsor it. They would give you lots of free logo-wear and in return you dress up in the gear whilst promoting positive platitudes about the product.

I went ahead and started filling out the application because free stuff is one of my favorite things. It would please my wife to have me cut down on my running-related overhead. Shoes, clothes, race fees, mileage, goop, pictures, doctors' fees, therapy...it all adds up for such a simple sport.

They asked questions like "What were your major accomplishments last year?" I answered truthfully enough that I pulled off a couple 3rd place age group finishes, managed to qualify for Boston and got out of bed almost every day.

It struck me that I was probably not what they were looking for. They were probably looking for real athletes, not mid-pack Clydesdales. And this struck me as a tragic marketing error on their part because I've got a lot to offer!

First, let's talk about real estate. How much advertising can you put on one of those scrawny little elites? It's like writing on a grain of rice. Me on the other hand, I've got acres of surface area! You've got plenty of room to really express those detailed and subtle marketing messages that require a grand palette. The opportunities are darn near endless. If you want small results stick with your current plan, if you want big returns come scribble your brilliance on my grand

tableau! The pun is fully intended when I tell you that we are looking at a huge bottom line!

In addition to the wide open spaces, I've got contrast. These competitive athletes spend all their time outside training and competing. I'm lucky to squeeze in a workout early in the morning or late at night. I have an inside job. My body hardly ever sees the sun. As a result, I've got that opalescent, Gollum skin-tone that will make your logos really stand out! Yes, your reds will be redder and your blues will be magnificent. Finally, here is a surface that will bring the subtle and elegant nuances of your message into stark contrast.

Except for all that hair. But I'm willing to take one for the team there. We can turn it into a positive and rent my back space to Gillette, Schick or Nair. Think of the possibilities! Frankly, I'm not worried about exposure. You can tattoo me all over. I wear a suit to work so no one's going to see it.

While we're on the topic of surface area, I've got a huge head too! My kids say it is square. I prefer majestic. There's a big opportunity for your message on my swim cap at my next triathlon. Failing that, I'm willing to shave it too. I don't think there will be much hair left soon anyway. I'm a living breathing billboard for your success!

The viewing audience gets to see your product longer with me too. Those elites flash by at a sub-5 pace. I'm going to be trundling by at a much more viewer friendly speed and I've been known to stop occasionally to catch my breath. That's more eyes for more time for you! I'm not kidding when I tell you that when I come out of the water in my Speedo, everyone stares. All in all it's a much better return on your investment.

These other elite athletes are going to be harder to work with than I am. They need the money, I just want free stuff. I have a job. You don't have to worry about catching me doing something stupid with a starlet in Vegas. I hardly ever do anything except workout, eat, work and sleep. I'm low risk

for a scandal. Unless that's what you want...I'm willing to work with you!

I'm well spoken too! You ever see these commercials with those elite athletes? They have great pounding music. They show the elite athlete in various airborne athletic poses. Powerful MTV camera angles and cuts. They have the announcer voice over something intense. But, they hardly ever let the stud talk! If they do it's some monosyllabic utterance like "Cool". Even then the delivery is shaky.

Not me, I'm in sales! I spend all day trying to talk people out of money. I have to present to boards of directors and executives of companies. Nothing you could throw at me could possibly compare to those groups of angry, tightfisted people. I'm your spokes-model baby! Plug me in! Give me a quota! We can do business! It's a win-win!

Now let's talk about expanding your exposure across your whole product line. What do your elite athletes use? One pair of racing flats and a singlet? Have you checked the sales volumes lately? You don't sell that many pairs of racing flats. You sell lots of those cushiony trainers. And who do you sell them to? Mid-packers like me! With me you'll have an opportunity to showcase your bread and butter products, not just those fringe offerings.

I'm a biking-swimming-running cornucopia of product placement opportunities! I dress in layers! Bring it on! I'll wear it all and carry the rest. It doesn't matter if you slow me down; I'm not going to win anyhow. I train in New England. I need all the clothes you can give me. I'll run in a space suit if you've got one.

Which brings me to my next point. What about all those great curative products you guys push? Who buys that stuff? Not the elites, they have trainers. This is another huge product opportunity for you. I'm constantly injured so I can hawk all those creams and wraps and splints for you. I've already got a closet full of your junk. I'm an expert! I'm

willing to take some more of those expensive personal care products off your hands and share them with the public.

As a quick aside, another product that I'm an expert at is the whole portable sanitation business. I can pontificate without end on the pros and cons of all manners of Port-Johns. Go ahead, slap my action photo right there on the door! "When the experts need to go, they choose Sani-Go brand hand sanitizers!" Put me in coach, I'm ready!

Here's another great opportunity. I've been fighting the battle of the bulge my entire adult life and I'm here to assure you that (for a nominal endorsement fee) I will stand up and claim I've finally found success with your weight loss products. Who are John and Jane Q. Public going to believe; me or a 130 pound speedster? I think we both know the answer!

While we are on the subject, why limit the endorsements to sports related paraphernalia? I'm a great buy for advertising your food products too! I'm not just talking about PowerBars and Gu. I'm talking about Hot Dogs, Pizza and mixed nuts. How many of those elites are willing to eat a plate of Italian Sausage prior to the race? I am! Bring it on! Then I'll hold up your stomach curatives as I'm coughing them up at the 10 mile mark! It's an excellent, well rounded marketing strategy? Don't you think?

I know what you're thinking. You think these elites are well known and get all the spotlights, whereas nobody knows who I am. That's where you're wrong. I'm extremely well known. I hear people talking about me at all the races. Things like; "Here comes that guy who never shuts up, let's move." And "Oh crap, it's Chris!" For the right deal I can give you access to that star power, Mr. Sponsor.

If you're still not convinced I've got one last deal sweetener. If you give me your endorsement I'll commit to throwing some sort of fit in front of the cameras at Boston this year. And while I'm writhing on the ground I'll stare into the lens,

hold up your product and say “If it wasn’t for (your name here) I might have died!”

How can you pass? I’ll be waiting for your calls and watching the fax machine for offers. By the way, I could use a new bike.

The Mid-Packer's Lament

Middling runners of the world unite!

"The world, as a rule, does not live on beaches and in country clubs." ~F. Scott Fitzgerald

Are you a member of the mid-pack? You may ask "How do I know?" Here's a quick rule of thumb. Look at the results of the last big local 5k that you ran. Throw out the top 10% of each age group. Then, throw out the slowest 10%. Are you still there? Then you're one of us!

Welcome to the club. Welcome to the tribe. Welcome to the secret society of "serious, but average" runners who fill out the midsection of our sport.

Have you been with us long? Or are you just joining? I've got a life-time membership. Come on in and let me show you around. Come out for a run with us. We are a friendly and talkative bunch. We enjoy what we are doing. We laugh a lot. We laugh at ourselves and each other.

Our victories come in local triumphs over ourselves. We may not hang around to see who gets the trophies, because we know that we won't. Only occasionally, through perseverance, luck or the vagaries of local demographics is one of our members accidentally thrust into the limelight.

You may find us clustered in the parking lot sharing a warm conversation or a cold beer. We will be taking turns recounting some exaggerated incident or racing tall-tail. You can join us. All you need to bring is your smile and your stories. We will take liberties with your geniality and rehash your race with you. We will add you to the human stew of our never ending running story.

We don't own anything, nor do we act with any propriety. There is nothing to hide and no power to share. We are all threads of varying lengths and color in the common tapestry

of shared experience. We have no membership rules, dues or application processes in the mid-pack. (Although there may be some hazing!) You don't even have to run. All we ask is that you jump into the mélange of experience.

We are a varied group in the mid-pack. Our membership rolls contain the names of has-been's, never-were's and a few will-be's.

Some of our members used to wear the laurel wreath in high school or college. They have since been demoted by age or injury to our ranks. In the middle corrals with the rest of us, they no longer break the tape. For the most part they have made peace. They have made the hard mental and physical transition. They are not sad or to be pitied. They hold onto their love of the sport through participation and interaction.

They are the sages, mentors and seasoned administrators of our company. They get joy from the rest of us and occasional glimpses of past glory out on the course. Perhaps it is out dueling a foe, a strong kick or a crafty move that keeps them coming back to run with us, even though they will not attain again the performances of their peak.

They share their experience with an easy smile that belies experience and an inner strength that whispers "If you only knew the things I've done." They help the newbies with simple advice and caution. They don't overbear; they shepherd, they assuage and parent.

Then there are those of us who have always been here. We may have competed in school, but even then we were in the fat part of the pack. The coaches had to fill out the rosters and we were there. We have big hearts but little inherited talent.

We train as hard as the others. We put in the lonely miles and suffer the hard training injuries with a determined stoicism. We tell great stories and laugh too loudly. We pay our way. We have shoe boxes full of bib numbers and finishers' medals. We have all the professional gear and

gewgaws like the elites. But, for all this, we seldom find ourselves on the platform, nor do we expect to.

We are the full time residents, the long time members of the mid-pack. If we were race horses we would have been rendered for glue and cheap dog food years ago. We are the proletariat of the sport. We are the economic engine, we are the assets, we are Das Kapital, and we are the means of production.

There are new members always entering the mid-pack who have no prior experience with our sport. They are brought into the fold every day.

They get to a certain point in their lives and turn somehow to running. Maybe it starts as a resolution to get in shape or lose weight. Maybe the ravages of bourgeois careers and baby making have left them one belt loop or dress size beyond their tolerance. Their youth is no longer in the mirror and they wander to us looking for it. With us they discover a hidden hero – an inner athlete. We get to vicariously warm ourselves in the glow of their early successes and discovered joys. We celebrate their rapid progress.

We feed their growing desire.

We tell them the old stories that we've all heard before. How about that time we ran through the floods and hail? Wasn't that goofy? And that time Bob tripped over the dog and took out the water stop table? Wasn't that a hoot?

Like a homo sapiens tribe passing down its magic incantations and hunting-myths as they gorge on buffalo at the cave entrance, it's our tribal knowledge and the races are our campfires that we huddle around for warmth. We help the new members of the mid-pack through their first follies of over training and injury. Our collective knowledge of injury and cure dwarfs the physician's reference desk manual.

We also accept the wandering castoffs of other sports, other tribes. Ex-football, soccer, lacrosse, wrestlers and sprinters come to us with their damaged knees and want to run. They want to taste again the sweat of life in their mouths and feel the fire in their bellies. They add to the community pile with allusions of grandeur. They sweeten our soup with their experience.

The tribe gathers for races on misty mornings. We gather like a pile of unmatched socks. We are there to be stronger together. For the next 20 minutes or 4 hours we are part of something bigger. We are working cells in a larger organism. Without us it would be a sparse and different beast.

Our motley club of mid-pack fools has a collective competitiveness and joy that really makes no rational sense to the outside observer. But we know the secret handshake. We've all cracked the code. All we need is our burning lungs, aching legs and pounding hearts to tell us why.

At the end of the day there are no trophies in our hutch, but there is pride of accomplishment none the less. There is pride and self satisfaction in our hearts in such great heaps that it dwarfs us. It fuels our lives in ways that outsiders will never quite understand. It is the large stone dropped in the center of our pool that sends ripples to the edges.

This is the mid-packer's lament. We are working class heroes in our own dramas. We are mythic stars of our own sagas. We have taken a lover that will never fully satisfy us, but that we cannot leave.

I salute you my friends. The next time you are standing in the middle of the pack at the starting line, turn and talk to those about you. Smile and say, "Thanks for coming out today. Without you all we wouldn't have a race. You look great! We are going to have some fun!"

We'll smile back and tell you an old story about this race that may make you laugh.

Olde Towne – New Course

Groton turns over a new leaf while turning the corner on its 15th year.

“The area was known as Petapawag, an Indian name for swampy land” ~townofgroton.org

It's that time of year again. I'm getting psyched up for my favorite race. The race that I run every April, that I look forward to every year. Did you think I was going to say the Boston Marathon? Yeah there's that too, but my big race has always been my hometown race; the Groton Road Race.

Who says old dogs can't learn new tricks? I wasn't quite sure how I would feel about my hometown race changing its 10K course after 14 years. When I started running seriously again in the early 90's The Groton Road Race started with me and we have shared that old course with each other every April since I turned 29. But I'm ok with it now, especially after test running the new course. It's a beauty. Combine that beautiful course with a great organization and you have a winner.

My hometown, Groton, Massachusetts is a sleepy New England jewel about 40 miles North West of Boston. Just outside 495. Last year my hometown turned 350 years old. You read that correctly, some dysfunctional English put down stakes in 1655. That's a bunch of history.

My hometown race is having its 15th consecutive go on April 29th. That's a bunch of history too, by road race standards, and I've been at them all. Sometimes I set PR's, sometimes I limped on injuries, but, God willing, I have run and will run every Groton 10k until I can no longer move forward.

For most of its existence Groton has been a prosperous farming community. The great rolling green hills and old farm houses still inspire. There is not much commercial farming going on these days but the vistas are still there,

along with a few cows, horses and hay fields. It's post card perfect New England small town.

For all of its existence the Groton Road race has been quite successful by local 10k standards. We have been getting over 2,000 participants across all the races fairly consistently. We have had lots of great races and great days over the years. We have seen the highly competitive set records while at the same time we have become the de facto family gathering spot for the area towns.

Groton was a great place to grow up. In the 70's Groton was still outside the reach of the sprawl. It was technically the suburbs, but in reality it was the sticks. As kids we had lots of space to roam and frolic in. Since then the town has had some build up with the neo-mansions of the new landed gentry, but the townspeople have managed to do an excellent job of preserving the rural aspect. Groton has a large amount of open space, parks and conservation land retained. It is honeycombed with deep forest trails and meadows. After all these years I still haven't explored them all and I still get lost.

The road race runs through the center of the olde towne. It passes buildings from across the years. You can see the old town hall and imagine generations of self determined town government. You will run by the Prescott School, (where I used to get beat up in 6th grade). Then you'll turn left at our historic Inn that originated in 1678 and successfully avoided being burnt with the rest of the town during King Philippe's War in 1694. You'll pass through the ivy covered outskirts of my alma mater prep school, The Lawrence Academy, founded 1793. Along with the prestigious Groton School these two prep schools add to the town's campus-village flavor.

I used to explore these roads with my cross country team and then again to train for wrestling season. If you look left after LA, on the new course, you'll see on top of the hill, surrounded by Black Angus cattle, the remnants of what we always called "the castle". It was a fieldstone mansion and tuberculosis hospital that burned down before memory

leaving only the walls and castellated turret to watch over the lowing herds. It looms like an ancient knight's dwelling, and has excited the imagination of school boys past and present.

Groton has several lakes and ponds that we used to enjoy as kids. One of these is off the edge of the new course. Close by old stone walls and apple orchards you'll find the glacial hole of Baddacook Pond, rumored to be 90 feet deep and full of crafty trout. Keep your eyes open for noisy flocks of itinerant wild turkeys that always bustle at us when we run around this area.

The new course also comes close by the famous Ayer - Groton - Pepperell - Hollis rail trail, 11 miles of unbroken, smooth, flat trail for when you grow tired of the hills but not of the scenic beauty. Sunday mornings you'll find herds of wandering marathoners running it end-to-end-to-end for an easy 22 miler.

Everyone should have a hometown race. If you don't, come to Groton and share mine. Step back in time to a Norman Rockwell visage of rural charm. Come on by and see us this year. It's two whole weeks after Boston and most of us will be walking again. I'll be out there. I'll be enjoying the crowd, listening to the bands and shaking hands with old friends. I'll be helping out with the kids and trying to answer questions and point new comers in the right direction.

I'll cheer the kids in the Tot's Trot. I'll shout encouragement to my nephews and nieces in the 2 miler and 5K. Then I'll lace up my size 12's for my 15th trip down memory lane and head out to enjoy the new course.

Marathon Metaphors

What can we learn about ourselves from all this marathon stuff?

“The difference between the mile and the marathon is the difference between burning your fingers with a match and being slowly roasted over hot coals” ~Hal Higdon

With the 109th running of the Boston Marathon coming up it's interesting to look into the new face of distance running. There has been a big demographic shift in the sport. There's a whole new crop of people running. It's no longer a fringe sport. It's become democratized and mass marketed.

Some of us old-timers might have the knee jerk reaction that this somehow cheapens the sport, but I think it's wonderful that so many new people are getting outside their physical boundaries and learning the secrets that running and training have to offer. Maybe it helps to think of it as a type of outreach. Maybe we can be missionaries for running?

I started running in the 70's and then came back to it in the 90's. I guess that gives me a good perspective for casual commentary. The 2006 runner looks much different than the 1970's runner. They are better equipped, they are slower, they are older and they are more than half female.

Why is the participation growing? Could it be that everyone else is discovering what I have known since I started running cross country (back when Jimmy Carter was President)? Maybe these masses of people have discovered that running is a democratic and efficient way to gain and maintain great physical and mental health? Or that distance running, even for us mid-packers, teaches us things about ourselves that we would otherwise not have the privilege to know?

According to USA Running this year there will be close to 500,000 marathon finishers. This number is meaningless until you realize that there were only 25,000 marathon

finishers in 1977 at the height of the 'running boom' and 120,000 in 1980.

You don't have to be that old to remember a time before New York, Chicago and any Rock & Roll marathons. A time when you said "marathon" and everyone knew you were referring to Boston because that was the only one. Compare that to today where it is estimated that there will be over 375 marathons in the US this year alone.

Good news for the sporting goods purveyors who track this stuff is that there are estimated to be over 37 million (yes million) runners in the US. That's a bunch of shoes and socks! Pat yourself on the back because you are supporting a multi-billion dollar industry.

I know why I ran my first marathon and what I learned from it. As I stare down another Boston adventure this year I think it would be timely and useful to share with you these metaphors I discovered. This will give you something to think about, or if you're lucky to have company, talk about on your next long training run.

Here's the topic: "The marathon as a metaphor for life."

For me it wasn't my first marathon that changed me or inspired me. Or maybe it was. Because that first 26.2 that I ran on a whim kicked my butt so thoroughly that it altered me. It must be true that our greatest learning comes from our greatest failures. I didn't learn much about what I was capable of that day, but I did learn the respect that comes from a good ass whipping.

Many people would have been happy to finish, but I was horrified by my amateurish performance. I crashed. I let myself get hypothermic, dehydrated and beaten. I shuffled. I walked. I bled. It did not fit my self-image as an experienced runner. I knew I could do better. I thought I could qualify. I wasn't concerned about failing but I was really angry at myself for not trying.

Isn't that what we tell our kids? If you're going to do something, give it your all. Give it your best shot. That's the true failure. Not living up to what you're capable of.

That is the first marathon metaphor. How do you know what you're capable of? What is holding people back? It's a mental trap. They don't think they can do it! Most lay people I talk to about marathons are quick to say, "I could never do that!" Of course they're wrong, anybody can do it. The biggest road block is that first step; committing to try. Making a decision to think, "Yeah, I can do that." Once you're past that stumbling block the rest is relatively easy.

The first marathon metaphor is deciding to try. I guess the old saying is accurate - "There are two kinds of people in the world. Those who think they can and those who think they can't...And they are both right!" If you fail to try, you have already failed. Isn't this a great metaphor for life?

The second metaphor for life is that you have to have a goal, a plan and you have to break it up into small achievable steps. I was so angry after that first marathon that once I could walk again I decided to qualify in 4 months. I started training. I wrote the qualifying time on the white board in my office and laid out a 14 week daily plan to get there.

Without a plan you won't know where you are going and you won't know when you get there either. If you could apply the same detailed daily planning to your job, career or relationship and execute on it every day for 14 weeks, what do you think would happen? Think about it. Maybe it's time to stop letting life push you along and set yourself some goals, eh?

Which leads us to the third marathon metaphor. It's only partly about achieving your goal. The real learning will come from the journey towards the goal. I nailed my qualifying time in that second race within a minute of my carefully calculated race plan but by that point it didn't really matter. I was a changed person. If I had ended up in a ditch the lessons of that training program would still be with me.

Knowledge comes from the journey – the striving. Life is not a destination, it is a long trip and the process of that trip is what you learn the most from.

The fourth marathon metaphor has to do with stretching yourself and making yourself uncomfortable. If my training that summer had only consisted of long slow runs I would not have been able to shave 40 minutes off of my race time. I had to spend some time in my discomfort zone. I had to commit to hitting the track and doing some really painful speed work. By purposely operating beyond my comfort zone a couple times a week I was able to improve rapidly.

In your life are you spending any time outside your comfort zone? Are you pushing yourself? Or are you just going with the flow? Think about what you can do to stress yourself just a little bit today. Apply this metaphor to your life. What is your life analog for speed work? If you don't push yourself, you can't grow.

The fifth metaphor is to focus on small achievable things and not to get overwhelmed.

One of the most valuable things that marathons have taught me is not to focus on the finish line or the entire 42k. You need to chunk the race up into small pieces that your brain can handle. Sometimes this means concentrating on the next telephone pole.

I see so many people in my work life that are so stressed out and overwhelmed that they can no longer move. They just sit and stare with an overload catatonic trance or they flit from one critical task to the next never finishing anything or adding any real value. Letting yourself get overwhelmed is a choice.

How many times have I had to give myself a mental slap towards the end of a long race when those whiny depressed voices start with their fatalistic chants? Then I make a mental choice to say 'no' and focus on the next mile mark or the next telephone pole. Take it one step at a time and keep

knocking off the feet, yards and meters. Before you know it you will be turning the corner and see the finish line.

Keep it simple. Don't be so hard on yourself. Set up your own triage process for those overwhelming tasks so you can get the important stuff done and don't sweat the rest.

The sixth marathon metaphor I have for you has to do getting stuck in a rut. After a few years maybe that constant training starts to wear on you? Maybe you're getting older and you have to push more and sacrifice more just to stay close? Maybe you start to hate your training runs and feel oppressed by the responsibility of it all? Maybe you are stuck in a rut?

How many times in life do you look around and think that the same old routine is just getting boring? You want to try something new? What's stopping you? Go for it. Don't let yourself get stuck in a rut. Why not throw some cross training into your relationship or job today and see if it makes you feel better? What would be the cross training equivalent in your life?

I'm lucky in that every time I get bored with training my body manufactures an injury to knock some sense into me. You can't always run faster or longer. It's easy to get stuck in a rut. Try something new. I started triathlons last year and love the cross training. I'm thinking about taking up yoga for flexibility or pilates. Whatever it is I'll keep it fresh. I put the community education circular in front of my wife last week and said "Pick something, we'll do it together." Basket weaving? Flower arranging? I'm game!

When I crossed the finish line of that second marathon, strong and qualified, I had an epiphany. If chubby old non-athletic me can do this tremendously difficult thing, what else can I do? What other assumptions about myself and about my life are preventing me from being fulfilled? Could it be that the only thing holding me back is myself?

Therefore my friends as Boston rolls around again this Patriot's Day take this marathon metaphor challenge. How can you take what we have learned from our adventures on the road and parley that into a more productive and fulfilling existence? What else is there that you don't think you can do? Maybe it is only waiting for you to make the decision to try.

I wonder what my evil twin is doing right now.

Doppelgangers in our midst...

“Accuracy is the twin brother of honesty; inaccuracy, of dishonesty.” ~Nathaniel Hawthorne

It had only been mildly annoying until this morning. Now my thoughts are clouded and dark. Who is this wanted man, this doppelganger of mine who has infiltrated my traveling serenity with his evil and unnerving presence?

I have been traveling without incident domestically and internationally for almost 20 years. Sure, my travel life has suffered the random events common to everyone who braves the airways on business. I'm sure my experiences are the same as any road warrior; the occasional long delay, emergency landing, strip search and food poisoning. It is all the routine travel stuff that is part and parcel to our trade while we ply the waters and air currents of commerce.

Today it got personal. Today it got weird in a creepy George Orwell “1999’ way. Today I began to suffer the realization that I was no longer an anonymous mote in the great travel ocean, blithely flitting about in my frequent flyer hubris.

I like traveling. It provides comfy beds and clean sheets on someone else's nickel. It provides long airplane rides with good books. It brings me to strange places with interesting people. It gives me just a little adventure. It is ever more fulfilling than nine-to-five with dinner at six and sitcoms at seven.

Like all good, seasoned business travelers, I have it wired. It's been years since I've checked a bag. I'm a card carrying member of all the perk producing programs; an online, electronic and never in line with the commoners and cattle kind of guy.

It has gotten a bit more wearisome with the ever-devolving airline service levels, constantly shrinking seats and an angry

workforce. It has become particularly cumbersome since that awful thing happened and the TSA erected their barriers.

Shortly after that I began having problems at check in. At first it was a bit scary. The counter agent would bring up my reservation to see what the problem was and become visibly frightened. I can only imagine the pop-up message on their computer terminals. "Code Red- Alpha 1 Alert! <With flashing cursor and vibrant underscoring for emphasis> potentially dangerous individual - call the TSA hotline." Then the agent would begin acting uncomfortably nonchalant and disappear with my passport into a back room like some cold war scene.

After a few weeks we all got used to the routine. Eventually one helpful soul explained to me that I was on the "no-fly" list.

"Why?" I asked, scenarios racing through my head. Was it my frequent travel patterns that routinely and wantonly crossed international borders with disturbing frequency? I imagined the great computer overlord in Reston, VA had me algorithmically profiled as a courier for an international spy ring.

No, they explained, it was that I had a similar name as someone who was on the "no-fly" list. Some other bad guy, some, dare I say it? "Terrorist"

That explanation satisfied me. It made me feel like a responsible citizen suffering my petty inconveniences for the greater good. I was, in a sense, on the front lines, helping to protect my country. I was smug in my good citizenship and patriotism. This pattern of delayed check in continued along unabated until one day a helpful agent gave me the number of the place I could call to ask that my name be removed from the list.

As soon as it was convenient I made the call. A nice recorded voice directed me to the TSA website. There I was encouraged to download the identity verification form.

The instructions told me that I needed to fill out the form, assemble three official government issued identification documents, have them copied and notarized, kit all this together and send it back to them. Then they would consider taking me off the list.

But this task being of so little inconvenience and so large a bureaucratic effort fell immediately to the bottom of my to-do list and languished there.

It wasn't until a nearly missed morning flight that I was spurred into action. Actually, it was the fact that all this check in difficulty meant I had to get up a half hour earlier. That pushed me over the edge. Sleep deprivation ranks very high on my pain list.

Dutifully I prepared the form. Stoically I gathered my well worn passport, driver's license and voter registration card. Purposely I took them to my lawyer and had them stamped, pressed and signed. Eagerly I packed it all up and sent it certified mail to TSA HQ to be inspected thoroughly by a committee of highly skilled professional federal agents.

I could picture them sitting around a modern conference table in their hysteria provisioned edifice. They would be all severely dressed in navy blue suits, white shirts, black ties and thoughtful, officious scowls. They would lift my application dossier with pudgy latex clad fingers by the edges like some foul smelling dead thing. There my life would hang in the balance. The paperwork would fall into one of three piles: 'accept', 'reject' or "further review" (the bureaucratic purgatory of decisions). A quick mouse click, keystroke, a beep and a nicely formatted form letter on heavy official bond would be returned in my direction.

You remember how you felt when you were waiting for those acceptance letters from colleges? You'd get the letters but be afraid to open them for fear of rejection; for fear of some unknown authority weighing you in the balance and finding you not worthy? That's how I felt when the letter showed up. But open it I did. With great excitement I discovered that I

was officially on Santa's 'nice' list. They assured me everything would be fixed and everybody's files would be notated to reflect my benediction.

I was ecstatic at the prospect of hassle free check in. Unfortunately I made the mistake of thinking rationally whereas I should have been thinking like Yosarian. There seemed to be a catch.

The truth is, since the time I was certified through proper channels as not a threat to national security absolutely nothing has changed. I still get flagged at check in and seldom make it through the process unscathed.

This morning it got surreal. I didn't have the energy at 5:00 AM to walk the counter agent through my sad story (for the hundredth time, <mental sigh here>) I just let it run its course. The she said something that made the hair stand up in the back of my neck. With a look of incredulity she said, "There is someone on the watch list with your exact name and birth date."

I tried to be helpful and correct her, "No it must be a different middle name or something..."

"No, the exact same - first, middle and last with the same date of birth"

Wham! Good morning! My simple George F. Babbit existence had been shattered. My peaceful citizen's life had been somehow assigned an evil shadow. What could possibly be the explanation for this?

The first and most rational explanation is that the counter-wench had been merely discombobulated. It was very early in the morning and she was obviously unfamiliar with the routine. She could have read it wrong.

Alternatively, the "big bureaucratic mistake" scenario might be at work here. Maybe that blue suited specialist hit the

wrong button and created a bad-guy copy of me in some alternate universe - cyberspace - federal database?

What makes my insides feel all strange and squirrely is the worst case scenario. The truth may be that there really is another me out there; some bizarro-world me that is actively plotting mayhem and anarchy. Queue up Rod Serling; my life just crossed over.

What's next? Will a cohort of black Suburbans with tinted windows be waiting for me when I get home? Will I be accosted, drugged and dragged off to Guantanamo for interrogation?

A heavily accented voice demands, "Is it safe?"

Me, terrified, "Is what safe?"

Will Embassy operatives try to surreptitiously swap laptop bags with me in Starbucks?

I feel violated somehow. Violated by the evil other who has stolen some of my decency by his existence real or imagined. I feel violated by the process that took such great pains to bring all this to my attention. They have taken something from me today. They have taken some of my individuality. They have shown me to be not in control of my basic core identity. They have taken some of me with a bland bureaucratic precision. They have cracked the illusions of control and self determination that defines me as human. I have been subtly dehumanized today.

The truly disturbing aspect of this is that this is a story that has no conclusion, no tidy end. It has shown me my vulnerability to randomness in a connected world. It has scratched the surface of a reality that I didn't want to know about. I don't know where it goes from here. The Pandora's Box of total identity loss is open. What is my evil twin scheming right now? Does he know I exist and does he covet my citizenship? Will we meet someday and I will be forced to defend, to test my good against his evil?

Ben Franklin warned us in 1759, “They that can give up essential liberty for a little safety deserve neither liberty or safety”. My travel, once an occupation, may now be an occupational hazard. How many frequent flyer miles can I get in exchange for my identity and my freedom?

Boston '06 - Brilliant!

Once in a decade weather makes for a perfect Boston.

“Congratulate yourself. This is the Olympic marathon for most marathoners. So pick out the spot where you’re going to celebrate with your friends that night.” ~Bill Rodgers

That’s what I like about the Boston Marathon; it never ceases to surprise me. Just when I had reconciled myself to being miserable every Patriot’s Day we get a beauty of a race. It wasn’t the fastest of my 9 Boston’s but it was the most fun I’ve had in years. It was a great day. The weather was darn near perfect. The new changes that McGillivray and crew made this year worked well, and the elites broke the course record. If you ran Monday, you hit the lottery.



It really hit home when I was resetting my watch to go for a swim at lunch on Tuesday. The chrono was stopped at almost exactly my chip time. I cannot remember ever crossing the finish line at

Boston and having the cognitive ability or desire to actually stop my watch. Usually it is stopped at some random time during the race or four or five hours later when I come out of my funk. I’m usually so focused on staying conscious and vertical that stopping my watch never occurs to me.

All this pleasantness was not what I was expecting. I was very afraid of this marathon. I had not trained well. I pulled up lame in March and had to take three weeks off right

smack dab in the meat of my training. The last decent long run I got in was Martha's Vineyard. This lack of miles coupled with my history of going out too fast at Boston had me thinking 'DNF' thoughts. But, true to the adventure that is marathoning, it all turned out differently than I expected.

I guess Boston owed me one after all those times I trained well and ended up shuffling, bleeding and woozy on Boylston Street. I'm becoming an avid connoisseur of irony.



The day dawned partly cloudy and cool. It was in the 40's and I could see my breath when we left Littleton around 8:00 AM. My wife had stuff to do this day so she dropped us off at the Hopkinton exit early. The shuttle bus from EMC into Hopkinton was stuffed with runners, volunteers,

workers and fans. A lady on the bus called out to see if anyone had any extra tickets to the race after-party. Four or five of us dug into our red plastic BAA laundry bags and produced the desired booty for her. I've never been to an after-party and wasn't planning on using them.

We all got funneled into the 'athletes' village' which is like a cross between a camp meeting and a detention center. Brian and I were early so we found a nice big patch of lawn and staked out a space blanket. There were probably 1,000 runners or so already in attendance. Some runners had actually pitched tents. The 'big tent' was already full and people were queued up for the free stuff being given away in the infield.

This year they tried to split the runners up into two groups. 10,000 and lower were blue bibs and above 10,000 were red bibs. Faster runners and slower runners. Speed of course being relative, there were thousands of fast-for-their-age-

group-qualified runners in the 2nd wave. Ostensibly the faster runners were supposed to go on one side of the field



and slower on the other. In reality there was some segregation, but a fair amount of happy osmosis as well.

On our little oasis of calm the tide was coming in. Unwittingly we

had homesteaded in the path of the port-john lines and by 10:00 we were subsumed in a sea of legs. (We were a good 100ft away, but the lines fill fast.) Someone unwittingly stepped on my banana. Bananas in general don't travel well! The smell of wintergreen from sports rub was in the air and I chatted up all those who were unwise enough to meet my gaze. As usual there were people from all over the States and plenty of Canadians and Koreans. You could tell them apart, because the Canadians were usually taller than the Koreans.

I forgot my sunscreen, so I bummed some off a more organized person from Michigan. The sun came out intermittently and it warmed up to 50ish. We relaxed and stretched there on our blanket in a sea of legs with the smell of sunscreen - like a day at the beach.

Looking around our side of the beach there were team colors, disposable sweat shirts and trash bags. There wasn't as much BAA-wear as on the other side of the field. On our side were many veterans; runners who had qualified before and probably would be back in the future - Boston Marathon groupies - like me. There was some stress in the air but

mostly calm expectation. I heard the same old strategies about hills and pacing floating through the air.

The announcers had some 'American Idol' themed entertainment going on, but we had our iPods and tuned them out. There were helicopters circling and planes dragging banners around the sky. It should have been surreal, but it wasn't. I read the newspaper and did some email on my Blackberry while munching power bars, stretching and welcoming sundry athletic tourists to Massachusetts in my usual garrulous foolishness.



Around 11:15 they called the first wave of 10,000. I made one last trip to you-know-where and headed up around 11:25. I said so-long to Brian, who was in the other wave, and told him to abandon the blanket and everything else when he left.

On the way I passed a couple groups of bandits. They looked to be college kids, which partially explains the neuro-chemical imbalance necessary to jump into the Boston Marathon on a whim. I didn't nag at them. I just told them to take it easy, drink and eat, and don't be afraid to go to the med tent. Poor dumb bastards - gym shorts, cotton sweats and basketball shoes. What I wouldn't give to be 19 and immortal!

I slipped into the back of the 7,000 corral around 11:50. The officials did a really good job of fencing in the runners this year and I honestly did not see a single bush or tree getting blasphemed in Hopkinton. It was still partly cloudy and 50ish. The announcers did their Macy's Parade chatter. The

jets flew over and we walked - jogged- stopped - walked - jogged - ran. I've got no complaints about getting free of the crowd at the start. It took 5 minutes to get to the mats but after that we were running free.

As usual the crowds were incredible and everybody was high on adrenaline as we set off downhill out of Hopkinton. They've got a couple marathon related statues along the route, but they should erect a bronze porta-potty alongside that first patch of woods on the left. I'm surprised any trees even grow there after all these years.



I had a strategy this year that worked out surprisingly well. Actually it was a collection of tactics that I employed when I got hurt in March. First, I fell back on my triathlon skills and

started cross training like a madman. Swimming, biking and weightlifting, sometimes twice a day while I wasn't running. Secondly, (and this was a stroke of genius), I immediately cut back the carbs and went on a strict diet. In the 3 weeks I took off from running, I lost around 15 pounds. It gave me something to focus on instead of feeling sorry for myself.

The result was that even though I didn't have the miles, I had some aerobic strength and I felt pretty good about myself. I managed to get back up to running 10k easy 3 times a week. This still left me fairly terrified of Boston. We all know this race's ability to humble the best trained athlete and here I was going in with 18 miles a week and my last long run in February.

This led me to my final desperate tactic...walking. I figured I'd force myself to take walking breaks, and even if I had the old Boston-bonk, I'd still get in before the sun went down. Having no experience in walking on purpose, I wondered how much walking should I do? I'm from the classic "run hard for 20 miles and gut it out" school, but knew this would be

suicide on my training base, especially if we got a hot day like 2004. I settled arbitrarily on “five and five with Gu on 10k”. That is, run to each five mile mark, walk for five minutes and eat a gel every 10k.



One other unique innovation this year is that I brought along my spy-camera. This is a tiny digital key-chain camera that I can put in my shorts pocket. It's got no flash, no focus and horrible resolution – just like me! No, seriously, I randomly held it up and took 99 low resolution pictures

along the way. Since the shutter speed wasn't designed for this, it produced a bunch of warped pictures of people, buildings and trees that look like something Salvador Dali would paint high on psilocybin mushrooms.

I'm astonished at how mature I'm getting in my old age. When I got to the 5 mile mark I actually stopped and walked. I couldn't do the whole five minutes, but I got a good three in. You know what? When I started running again I felt fantastic. At the 10 mile mark I stopped again and, because I decided to wait and use the porta-potty, I got a good 5+ minute break. And when I started running again, I felt great.

The real breakthrough was at the 15 and 20 mile walk breaks. Each time I started running again I was right back on my pace, comfortable and strong, right through the finish. I had one of those epiphanies. It wasn't a qualifying time, but it was way better than I should have done given my training, and certainly more enjoyable! I guess I found my inner penguin? Look at the finish photo above. I'm unscathed. I got one little blister from my new Loco's, but that's it.

There are some interesting side effects to this walking break thing. The most uncomfortable is that the fans think you have given up and barrage you with alternating encouragement, pity or abuse, depending on their blood

alcohol level. You actually find yourself trying to explain to spectators, “No, it’s OK, it’s a strategy..., honest!”

Another interesting thing is that you pass the same people 4 or 5 times. There was this one guy who had “Belgium” on the back of his singlet that I kept passing and some Korean runner named “Ju-Ju”. I kept thinking of the Hitchhiker’s



Guide where “Belgium” is an intergalactic curse word. Interestingly, by comparison, the last time I passed them, late in the race, they didn’t look so peppy, but I was still lucid and bopping along because of my breaks.

By choosing the 5 mile marks, I also got a nice break right before Heartbreak. It was another instance of, “was that the hill?” Then it was an easy trot down to the Pru.

The weather stayed perfect for the whole race. 50ish, partly cloudy and a light cooling breeze. It made a big difference. I don’t have any facts, but it looked to me like there were many fewer casualties this year. The volunteers at the finish line were standing around for lack of people to assist.

Throughout the day everyone seemed in a much nicer mood because of the nice weather. They were much more willing to talk to me than the last two years. My stupidest question of the race was when I pulled up beside some stud all decked out in his triathlon uniform. I asked him, “So, what’s your strongest event?” He looked at me like I was stupid and said, “Umm, running?” That doesn’t compare to last year’s stupidest which was when I started trying to talk to a group of Koreans in Japanese. Oops. .

I was actually the recipient of a fairly inane comment. I was chatting up a heavily accented gentleman, and asked him. “Where are you from?”

He replied; "I'm from Hungary, but you wouldn't know where that is."

Ok, just because I'm an American doesn't mean I have no knowledge of other countries. I'll have you know I scored in the 800 percentile on the European history exam. And, besides that, everybody knows Hungary is the best know semi-autonomous, gold producing region in South Africa.

Wellesley College was amazing as always and I could have torn a rotator cup high-fiving coeds. There were a good half dozen girls holding up "Kiss Me!" and "Hug Me!" signs. I didn't attempt either, but I know some who did! For the right price I won't mention any names... Looking around, all the guys and women had big ear to ear grins for that ½ mile tunnel of scream-fest. You have to experience it to believe it.

I synched my iPod and had a bunch of strange stuff creep into my play list for race day. Coming off my mile 15 walk break I somehow had Buster Poindexter singing "Hot, Hot, Hot!" and found myself sort of dancing while I was running and the crowd went wild!

You have to remember that there are spectators along the entire length of the course on both sides of the road. They are experienced spectators; you might say that they are the closest thing to professional marathon spectators that you



will find. They look forward to the race as much as we do. It's an event with history and tradition for them too. When you play to the crowd they love it

Somewhere around Newton they let us know that the race

was already over and a Kenyan had won. Then they let us know that the Red Sox won. I didn't see too many costumes running the race this year, but I did pass an Elvis early on.

The two wave start worked well. I was back in the 7000 block and almost ended up running in 'the gap' between waves. It was much lighter traffic than previous years. I didn't see any red bibs making it up into our block, although I'm sure they were there. The wait time at the finish was shorter to get your medal and to get your bag, which is a big benefit.

The little trough under Mass Ave. was nothing. It actually broke up that uncomfortable stretch where you're looking ahead, trying to find the Hereford turn. Instead, you dip down into a little underpass and when you pop out, the turn is right there.

As I turned onto Boylston, my iPod shuffled to Beethoven's 9th "Molto Vivace" and, having one of those strange iPod moments, I strode purposefully, and as the character in Clockwork Orange says, "uplifted on angel's wings", through the finish.

As we were all being wrapped up like baked potatoes, everyone was in pretty good shape and happy. Unlike previous years, no one was practicing reverse peristalsis (ralphing). There were a few folks in wheel chairs, but it was mostly uneventful. There did seem to be some issue with the gear bags this year. I saw a bunch of them exploded and gutted, leaving the poor runner to clutch their belongings



haphazardly. My own sprang a few rips and was perilously close to failure.

We had a room at the Radisson for snacks, showers and massage, and then I hopped the train home. On the

plane Tuesday there were a dozen or so runners limping around my flight to Atlanta. I wore my medal. My personal rule is that I get to wear it for 48 hours. The medals had a nice blue inlaid glaze background this year.

“Did you run the marathon?”

Me smiling, “Why yes, I did!”

Everyone had those posters from the Expo with all the runners’ names on them. It’s a very cool souvenir. I took my daughters in this year. My 14 year old brought 2 of her chatty teenager friends and we had a fine time touring around Town Saturday afternoon.

I’m here to tell you that this year’s Boston Marathon did NOT kick my ass. I had a blast from start to finish and I think most everybody else did too. This changes everything. Think of the possibilities if I can remove the whole “intense suffering:” aspect from my marathons! Next year, God willing, will be my 10th. We’ll have to have a big party!

Oklahoma!

Business trips and the “Cement Shuffle”.

"No state except possibly Oklahoma has a history so bursting with wackiness and furor." -- Inside U.S.A. -John Gunther

I woke up in Oklahoma City this morning and went for a run. The online almanac said the sunrise was at 5:30 AM local time, but someone forgot to tell the sun about that because it was not in evidence when I left my room and shuffled down to the lobby.

I had a ‘poolside’ room. This being a ground level bungalow type arrangement with my door opening up into a courtyard with one of those kidney shaped pools in it.

I had decided against trying to swim laps in the pool the previous night. It didn’t really look like it was open for swimming season quite yet and I hadn’t packed a wet suit. I put on my workout clothes and went down to the “exercise room” instead. In many business hotels these days the work out facilities are top drawer. This trend has evidently not made it to the OK City Airport Crowne Plaza! It was, on inspection, the standard hotel layout; a treadmill, a stationary bike, some sort of stair thingy, an old Universal Gym and some dumbbells.

I had had a great travel day. I had been kind to old people and helpful to women and children. I was in a swell mood and trading in my swim for a little weightlifting wasn’t going to change that. But I do wonder how they can go to all the trouble of putting mints on my pillow and be clueless to other things more important.

A great trivia question is that Oklahoma was one of the last states to join the union. Oklahoma became the 46th state in 1907. Before that it was Indian Territory. I once had the privilege to do some business with the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah and got to see the Trail of Tears presentation. It’s an interesting place. I wish I had more leeway on my trips to

go to the interesting places, but I'm usually sneaking in a run around the hotel somewhere before meeting a client.

There was a nice woman walking on the treadmill who informed me that the bike was broken. It wasn't really broken, but it only had one pedal-arm. I suppose you could work out one leg. The treadmill was one of those hard-narrow track versions that I refer to as "hamstring eaters". But, you can't screw up dumbbells and I got a great workout in. I committed to myself to get out of bed the next morning (this morning) and go for a run.

You have to be versatile when you travel and you have to have a sense of humor. It helps to have a childlike sense of wonder and adventure too. You don't want to be like those cranky American tourists who wander around Tokyo complaining that they can't get a decent hamburger. You can't have rigid workout requirements. You have to flow like water and conform to the local landscape. I've simplified it to; "Exercise every day." If you can do that then you are successful. Let the local environs fill in the details. Sometimes it's an epiphany. Sometimes it's 20 minutes on a broken bicycle.

Getting up at 5:00 this morning was not hard because I was still on Eastern Time. It was really 6:00 on my body clock. If you're traveling and crossing time zones don't expect to be able to work out at the same quality or intensity you would at home. You will find you are at 60% capacity depending on your jet lag, and if you force a workout you'll just hurt yourself. Keep it simple "exercise every day".

The guys at the front desk were as useful as the guys at the front desk ever are when you ask them for a good place to go running. Having repeated this scene in hotels all over the country and world I know the answers before I ask. The typical answer is "Most people just run around the parking lot behind the hotel." This is not true. No one runs around the parking lot behind the hotel, but they are in the customer service business and feel like they have to manufacture an answer. You can see them thinking, "What's the best thing I

can tell this idiot so he won't go out on the highway and get himself killed?"

I did what I always do in a strange place. I picked a direction and started running. The weather was warm and a little muggy. If the sun was up you would see that it was overcast and threatening rain. I didn't have my reflective stuff and tried to run defensively to stay out of harm's way. It would appear that OK City hasn't discovered urban traffic yet as there was nary a car to be seen.

I made my way through the parking lots and came to a Home Depot store where the early employees were just showing up. The birds were gathered at the doors waiting patiently to get in and squawking their morning sounds. I don't know if you've seen this or not, but the sparrows have figured out how to operate the automatic doors at the Home Depot by hovering in front of the motion sensor. They live inside the stores and let themselves in and out as needed. I shuffled by the landscaping area chock full of trees and shrubs, ready for the spring rush.

I came to a reasonable highway for running. I like to find a straight road and just run out and back by my watch. This makes it less likely for me to get lost. If I have to remember too many turns I get befuddled and may miss my meetings! This one wasn't a freeway. It was a separated highway with two lanes in each direction. There were no sidewalks, but there was a nice poofy grass shoulder to run on. In the mornings all the automatic sprinkler systems are on and the grass tends to be wet and squishy.

There were strip malls interspersed with residential and even some trees. It was mostly pancake flat with one little roll at the beginning. At one point a strong wind gusted and I could help but thinking "...where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain!" I thought I might be treated to one of the wonderful plains storms where the whole sky darkens like Armageddon, but it passed without incident.

I got out about 20 minutes and turned around. I was soaked and decided to take my shirt off. There was still no sun and still no cars. The sun was starting to peek just a little in the horizon. I passed many stores and things but what really stood out were the garden centers. Great full tables of red begonias, yellow marigolds, purple ageratum, white alyssum and multi-hued pansies and impatiens crowded to the roadside expectantly in the dark dawn.

Another unfortunate byproduct of travel is that it screws up your internal rhythms. I was forced to put my wet shirt back on, pull into a 24 hour gas station and charm the attendant into letting me rest. I've found that you don't really need to explain to people you just need to smile. The information is secondary to the emotional envelope you wrap it in.

A few blocks further down I was treated to an interesting tableau. I saw a car straddling the cement barrier in front of the KFC while a policeman talked to the driver. If this was a painting it might be called "cop and drunk at KFC". I bet that was a great story, but it makes me shiver to think of all the times that cars have violated the sidewalks that I run on. Hopefully my wanderings will never intersect with theirs.

Back at the hotel I stretched in the brightening day in front of my room by the pool. There was a mallard duck floating aimlessly in the pool, preening himself and wondering why this particular pond had no tasty things in it.

I hung up my wet stuff as best I could and showered for the day. Upon returning tonight I discovered that my running shirt had lent a pungent air of diseased goat to my room while I was gone. I snuck out and dunked it in the pool, hoping the chlorine would win the battle with the B.O. It didn't help. I opted instead to rinse it in the sink with the complimentary mouthwash.

I'm on to Tucson tomorrow where I'm speaking at a conference, (always fun). I hope to find some mesas, dry washes and arroyos to explore. Maybe I'll see some spring flowering cacti. Maybe the hotel will have a functional bike

to ride. If you're out and about the southwest and pass a runner smelling of mint and old goat, say 'hi'.

A fig to thee oh tourista!

Arizona adventures in Tucson.

“And at five o'clock in the morning we left to drive to Old Tucson, and I sat with my mouth open in the van. I was stunned by the beauty of that country.” ~Erika Slezak

Traveling on business can be an adventure if you seize the day. My business life took me southwest last week and I carved out a fantastic run up the side of a mountain. It was a long week. I started with two days in OK



city and on Wednesday flew against the time zones to Tucson. I got my run in and it was awesome.

I was a speaker at a conference. The conference was in a palatial golf

resort nestled hard up against the Catalinas. In the cab, with my new friend Gene the cabbie, coming in from the airport it was still daylight. I'm well traveled, but the high desert country is alien to a Boston boy. At home they were suffering through 14 straight days of rain that was driving docile New England rivers out of their beds and into the basements of fretful Yankees. Here it was hot, dry



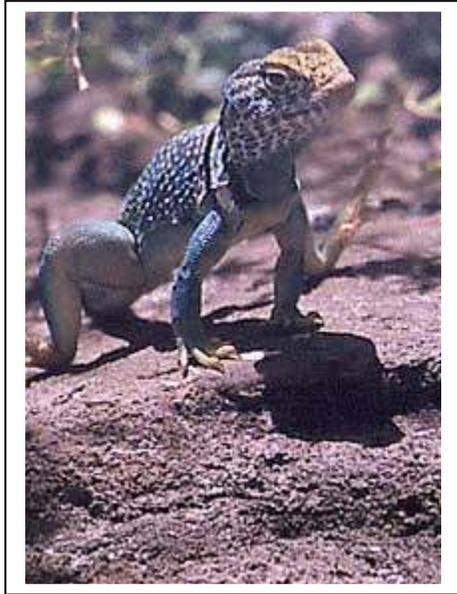
and sunny. The most alien thing to me is the total lack of trees. I'm sure a Tucsonite dropped into the great green tunnels of my back yard would feel just as out of place.

Chatting up the cabbie – a lifelong local – I got the basic weather expectations and lay of the land. Looking out the window I saw rocky, scrub covered mountains heaving grey-blue against the afternoon sun. One thought came to mind. "I've got to get out there and run!" My particular form of insanity runs deep.

Upon arrival at the resort I was checked in and whisked away by golf cart to a very nice room. (Probably too nice for a mid-packer) I'm not really comfortable with luxury, but my nice room was conveniently adjacent to the "health spa". Oh boy! No rusty universal here. They had a full weight room, a full cardio room and a lap pool. I got my Speedo and made a break for it before someone discovered I had arrived. Unfortunately, there was some charity function going on at the lap pool area. I told the attendant that I didn't mind and it could be considered entertainment. Why not cocktails, cheese and some big, un-tanned New Englander thrashing about? They could throw me fish or something. They weren't amused.

I had to backtrack, get my other workout stuff and head for the cardio room. The place was geared to a swanky clientele. The rich and famous set. The locker room had secret-code keypad entry and secret code electronic locks on the lockers. It was all chrome and leather with more gratis personal care products than a compulsive hairdresser. All that was missing was the little old guy in a suit to hand you towels and gesture uncomfortably for a tip. Must have been his night off.

The cardio room was full of nice, new, high-end equipment.



Each machine had a personal flat screen monitor with cable T.V. I mounted a recumbent bike and cranked it up for a 40 minute random work out. In my experience 'random' actually means 'random hills'. I had my iPod on so I wasn't really into the T.V. but scanned the channels to see if I could find something that didn't require audio, like a soccer game on the Spanish channel.

I became fixated on an old black and white movie from the 30's. I think it might have been a young Angela Lansbury as the courtesan of a young doctor. The actors, not that far removed from silent films, painted emotions clearly with their faces. I don't know what the movie was really about, but they were all very troubled about whatever it was. It was fascinating and intersected weirdly with the Pink Floyd on my head set. Maybe there was some Peyote growing in the air conditioning system, who knows?

I got my workout in but missed dinner and had to dig into my emergency cache of power bars and sunflower seeds. The night was clear and cool - in the 50's with a bright moon over the mountains. Not a cloud in the sky, but plenty of stars sprayed across the heavenly mean. There were rustlings in the desert bushes, geckos and birds nesting in the night.

The next morning I rolled out of bed wide awake at 5 AM. The 3 hour time change



played to my advantage vanquishing sleep deprivation with adrenaline. I had a couple cups of coffee in the room and reviewed my presentation. The sun rose before I did in a clear, dry bright blue desert sky.

At 5:30 I made my way back over to the pool to see if I could finally get a swim in. Although the temperature was only in the 50's, the pool was heated. I was thinking that it must make life simpler when the weather forecast is the same every day. Checking the sign in book I could see that there were half a dozen people already at the door of the spa when it opened at 5:30. Demographics are changing. More business people try to get their exercise in every day. It's becoming part of the culture and not an aberration anymore. Executives are more and more coming to understand the relationship between training the mind and body as a success enabler.



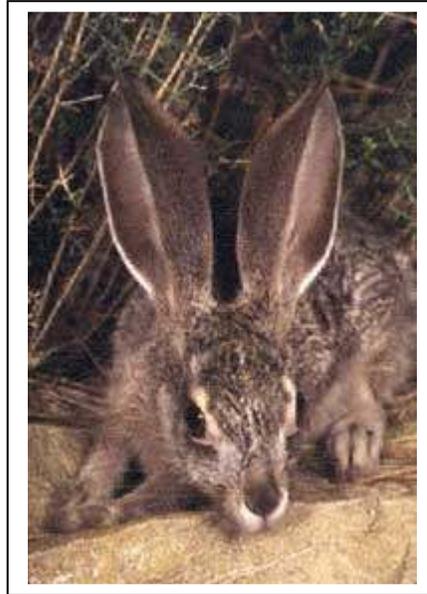
I spent the next half hour doing what I refer to as swimming. The more I train the worse I get. They're going to find me at the bottom of that pool one of these days. How is it possible that I can run 26 miles but end up gasping like a sick sturgeon after a few laps? Life is full of opportunities!

Walking back to the room my plan for running up the mountain was becoming a fixation. There it was. A couple miles away. Beckoning and wild. This is the stuff that great stories are made of. What kind of person would I be if I let this mountain get away? There were Jack rabbits bouncing around in the agaves acting skittish. Somewhere close by a great horned owl hunted with the signature "Who-Who-Whooooo!" Mourning doves mourned vociferously in the underbrush. I think I saw a road-runner. This resort compound was teeming with life.

I had actually tried to plan ahead by contacting the local running club for good runs in the vicinity. They told me I

was in luck; there was a good wash nearby. I told them I wasn't looking for a laundry; I was looking for a trail run. Seriously, they were helpful, but not really specific enough for an executable plan with a high probability of success.

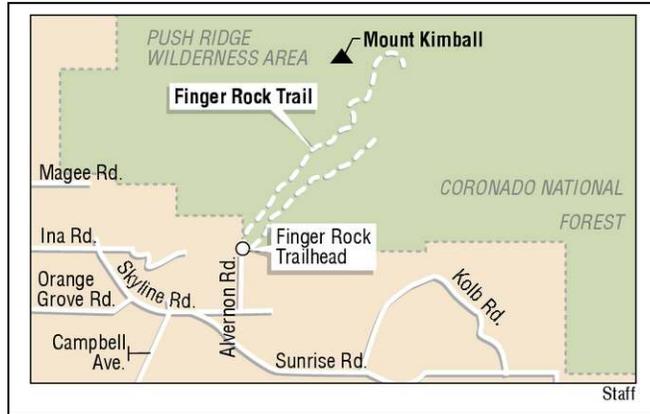
I went to the concierge fully expecting the "jogging path around the parking lot" answer. I was surprised. This wasn't your run-of-the-mill roadside motel. They knew their stuff. When asked if I could 'run up that mountain', she immediately produced two maps and three copies of trail reviews from the local papers. There were three options within reach. The first was a place called Sabina Canyon which was billed as a well used family hike. The second was something slightly more challenging in the form of a ridge hike. The third was Finger Rock Trail. This last was advertised as a difficult trail with 5,000 ft of elevation gain. You can guess which one I set as my goal.



The Finger Rock is a prominent geographic feature on the Catalinas. It is an 80 ft column of rock jutting up from the top of the mountain. In a politically correct way the guides describe it as like an index finger proclaiming "we're #1". To my sardonic temperament it is the mountain flipping me the bird and daring me to assault it! "A fig to thee Mr. Tourist! Bring it on!"

Feeling extremely excited about my impending adventure I wanted to share my good fortune. I went to the conference organizers and told them I was willing to organize a 'run up the mountain' the next morning at 5 AM if they thought anyone was interested. She looked at me like I was insane and mumbled some deprecating assurances. Oh well, I tried!

I bet if they made the announcement there would have been a couple other crazies who would join me!



I did my speech and sat on my panel of experts. It all went swimmingly. My plans were coming together. I wouldn't have to get to the airport until

midmorning and would have a good 2 hours to explore that mountain.

My resolve hung in the balance as we were spirited away on buses to an 'old west adventure' ranch. My co-workers were surprised to see me loading up a huge plate of southwestern goodies from the dinner buffet.

"Geez, Chris I've never seen you eat this much..."

"I'm going to run up that mountain in the morning!"

"Ummm..., sure you are..."

"Where's the pecan pie?"



We played black jack and inhaled second hand cigar smoke until late. The buses didn't drop us off until midnight. I set my alarm for 5:00 AM and thought longingly of my mountain. No one wanted to join me for my 5:00 AM jaunt up to finger rock.

I got up; had some coffee and a power bar. The trail head looked to be due north. I did some internet mapping and satellite reconnaissance – don't you just love technology? I did what I had to do to prevent unnecessary surprises later in the run. I filled a 1 liter water bottle with



water and forced down a few glasses to prime the pump. My experience with desert running is that I never have enough water. I had my old trail shoes, some basic running stuff and a hat for sun protection. I threw the latch and headed out.

I immediately ran into a woman walking on the cart path. I commented to her on how improbable it was that the only two people awake on this early Friday morning would cross paths. She said that she had just been frightened by a herd of Javalinas, which look like pigs, but are actually some sort of giant rodent or something. I wished I had seen some. It was sunny and in the 50's again.

I headed north towards the finger rock. I crossed a highway and wandered into a gated community. I ran through the gated community but couldn't get out the back because it was surrounded by a wall. Eventually I just scrambled over the wall and found myself on another highway looking at a sign with an arrow pointing up a road that said "Finger Rock Trail Head". Cool, how lucky is that? The road went up, up, up at a nice steady 3% grade for about 3/4 mile of tarmac. The mountains screened off the direct sunlight when I got close.

At the trailhead there were warnings about endangered bighorn sheep. I didn't see any. Actually I didn't see much wildlife at all once I left the resort. The trail followed a canyon up to the top of the mountain. The write up said it was around 5-6 miles to the top with a 5,000+ ft elevation gain and great views.

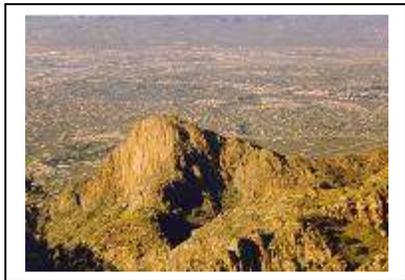


The trail started out on an easy incline up broken rocks and gravel through thickets of native vegetation. The running wasn't that bad. I couldn't have pushed the pace even if I wanted to because of the uneven surface and

twisting and turning of the narrow trail. The vegetation was pure Southwest and magnificent. Large multi-armed saguaro cacti in full flower. Clumps of beaver tail cacti also flowering. The thing about desert plants is they all bite. I picked up more than a few scratches and imbedded thorns just by brushing up against things on the trail.

It was actually quite comfortable with the sun still hidden behind the mountain throwing the higher crags into sharp relief. After about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile the trail got serious and proceeded to turn into a series of steep switch backs that climbed the canyon wall. Parts of it were untenable and I had to use my hands to climb. As I climbed up-up-up the canyon dropped away in a sheer cliff on one side and a sheer wall of rock on the other.

After about 37minutes of this I couldn't run anymore and switched to a power-hike-run mode with my heart working



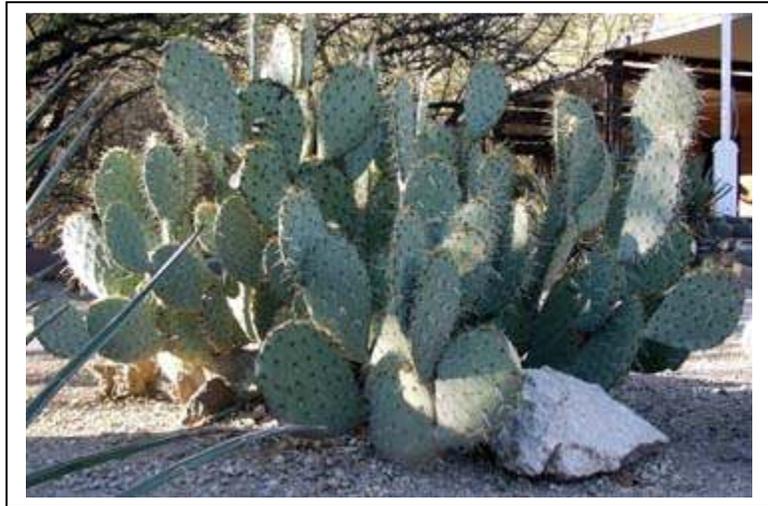
hard and my liter of water disappearing fast. There were shallow caves carved into the cliff face and I thought I might see some coyote or sheep, but I did not. I checked my watch and made an adult decision to stop at an hour in.

I would have loved to push on to the top, but I wasn't outfitted for it. I had less than half my water left and the sun

was threatening to come out with all its fury from behind the mountain. To make it to the top I would need a camelback and some food. I sat on a lookout rock and soaked in the fine view of the Tucson plain that spread out from the bottom of the canyon. I stacked up some little rocks and built a cairn. Some sort of atavistic offering. I could probably find the right person nearby to perform the proper healing ritual for me, but this would have to suffice.

I figured I made it in about 3 miles and maybe up 3000 feet or so. It was magnificent. I could have gone on, but the adult decision was to head back. I was fairly well soaked with sweat from the ascent so I took off the stinky shirt and turned around.

As is always the case in rough, steep mountain trails going down was just as taxing as going up if not more. I really worked my quads to keep from careening out of control as I skipped from rock to rock



down the switchbacks. I looked over the edge and wondered how long it would take them to find me if I missed a turn and ended up in the bottom of the canyon. I figured they could narrow it down to a handful of guys by the combination of my Boston '05 hat, my ES20 tech shirt and my Canadian MEC shorts. Those CSI guys should be able to pinpoint me from that information alone even if the coyotes ate my face off.

Scene opens. Police tape outlines a badly mauled body on the canyon floor. The CSI team hunches over, inspecting.

Catherine: "I.D. is going to be difficult, the coyotes a have really torn him up."

Grissom: "Yes, they're drawn to carrion with high adipose content. It gives them more energy for mating season."

Catherine: "Geez, what a mess, how are we going to figure out who it...was?"

Grissom: "Follow the evidence. What do you make of the hat?"

Nick: "It's the 2005 Boston Marathon. For a 40 something year old guy that only narrows it down to about 4,000 potentials..."

Grissom: "And the shirt?"

Nick: "Well if he ran the Eastern States 20 miler in 2005 as well it probably gets us to under 50 probables when we cross reference..."

Grissom: "And the shorts..."

Nick: "MEC, what is that some sort of club?"

Grissom: "Mountain Equipment Company, a Canadian based sporting goods co-op that you have to have a membership to buy."

Nick: "So, we cross reference a 40- something guy with Boston '05, ES20 '05 who shops in Canada and we've got him?"

Grissom: "Simple deduction."

Scene cuts to morgue. Coroner and Grissom.

Grissom: "So what have you got on our friend here?"

Coroner: Well he's got high levels of certain well-being enhancing chemicals in his blood stream. Do you think he was a dooper?"

Grissom: No that's common with endurance athletes."

Coroner: "Gil, I've autopsied this guy, and he wasn't much of an athlete..."

Grissom: (scowling thoughtfully) "I believe they call them 'mid-packers'. Even though they have little athleticism they still try to run up mountains, it's not an uncommon psychosis."

Coroner: "Well, the other strange thing is that he was carrying a lot of extra weight around the middle for an endurance athlete."

Grissom: "The irony is, if he could have pushed back from the burrito buffet he might have been able to make that turn on the switchback."

Phone rings - Grissom answers - tight cut to Greg

Greg: "Hey, I analyzed his iPod and found some weirdness."

Grissom: "Greg, just the facts please."

Greg: "Well this dude had bizarre mix of music from classical to punk rock"

Grissom: Probably a borderline schizophrenic, might have been having an episode on the mountain. Anything else?"

Greg: "Can I keep the shoes? ASICS trail shoes are cool."

Scene fades, music comes up.

Midway down I met some hikers going up who kindly made way for me. I must have been quite an apparition with my New England tan hopping down the trail full throttle and slightly out of control. Before long I was at the trailhead

again and feeling fantastic. Those dopes hanging out by the pool didn't know what they missed. What a great run! Talk about a healing ritual! There is nothing like running up a mountain in a strange place to bring you closer to God, and you can quote me on that.

I got a little lost on the way back, hopping walls and sprinting across the meticulously manicured Jack Nicklaus golf course, hoping not to get hit by an errant drive. I found my room eventually and packed up for the 14 hour plane ride home. I could face it with ease now because I ran up that mountain. My quest was fulfilled. On the way to the airport Gene the cabbie told me it was going to be over 100 that day. Good thing I turned back.

I paid for it over the weekend. My quads were sorer from fighting that mountain than they were from the hills at Boston on Patriot's Day. But it was a good hurt that reminded me of my mountain every time I bent over or stood up.

Go find your mountain. Tell the real world to take a hike and wander off into wild places. You might not ever be here again. Today it is just you and your mountain. Embrace it.

Rest in peace?

How is it supposed to end?

"Have the courage to live. Anyone can die." ~Robert Cody

I've been thinking a lot about death today. Nothing morbid or suicidal. - just coincidentally contemplating the end point.

A delayed flight from Boston robbed me of my sleep and any chance of a morning workout, (I draw the line at 4 hours of sleep). The Atlanta commute this morning was light with holiday traffic. I was scanning the rental car radio stations for something interesting to perk me up on my way to Starbucks (mandatory). The team of perky talking heads was riffing on the recent Peachtree Road Race. This monster of a local event briefly captures the press once a year around here by cramming 50 odd thousand lucky runners through the streets of Atlanta.

They were interviewing a man who died at the race. Which I found interesting as much as they found it absurdly funny and fodder for their morning yucks. They seemed to revel in the irony that one of these crazy runners would succumb to exercise. It was like some sort of revenge for them, the non-athletes getting to say "I told you so". Like a NASCAR racer crashing his wife's SUV or a marriage counselor filing for divorce. Comedy of the absurd, that what the listeners want, it's their bread and circus.

I guess the weather was Africa-hot for the race, as it often is in Atlanta in July. As you all can relate to, I'm sure, to put it clinically, running in soupy-hot weather sucks. It puts a bunch of stress on your body. It is especially so if your body, like mine, was designed for digging ditches in peat bogs outside County Clare, where the sun seldom shines and is never hot.

There were two men who dropped from cardiac arrest during the race. The second one, the one they interviewed, died.

And, even though death is always a noteworthy occurrence, his was quite dramatic. He evidently ran a strong race, careened across the finish and dropped. You may have already guessed that the race officials and emergency personnel felt compelled to intervene in this drama and brought him back from the long tunnel, the bright light, etc. I know this, because they also interviewed the ladies who kept his brain oxygenated with CPR until the EMTs arrived and performed their Lazarus tricks.

Death on the radio is not an uncommon theme, especially if you listen to NPR, but this struck close to home for a number of reasons. The first one being that this is not my first brush with this scenario. The second is that I've been feeling pretty old lately. The third is that I've always marveled at the hubris of athletes, and runners in particular who think that they can absolve all their genetic and lifestyle flaws with a good workout.

It's actually not uncommon for folks to have their hearts give out at a road race. (Also in the news this week, coincidentally, was Ken Lay's cheating the jailers' grasp by having his heart fail at his resort home in Vale. Evaporating 65 billion dollars in net worth is, it would seem, about as stressful as a 10k in the hot sun.) If you read the fine print on your next entry form you'll discover that you understand long distance running is a stressful activity that can result in injury or death. Race directors tend to downplay the significance of it, but it happens. Remember Jim Fixx? The messiah of the first running boom, Jim ignored family history of heart disease and warning signs. Running didn't kill him, but it made for great irony in the media.

I'm not suggesting that everyone give up racing. I think if that bullet has your name on it you probably can't hide from it by staying on the couch. The irony is that this gentleman who kicked the bucket briefly in Atlanta was probably in excellent shape. He was in his 60's and had been a life-long runner. He did not have any symptoms or history of heart trouble. He did however have heart disease and a family history of heart disease. It begs the question - would he

have dropped walking to the car in his 50's if he wasn't a runner?

I think, from what I've read that running in general lowers your risk of heart disease. At the same time running raises your probability of having it hit you while you're in the middle of a race. I've also read that when it does hit runners in a race it typically puts them down for the count. It seems we're damned if we do and damned if we don't! Incidentally, he told the interviewers that he intended to keep running. That a boy! My kind of runner! Cheat death and then give it the finger in the exit interview! There's a special circle of Dante's hereafter for us!

My personal experience with death in a race was on the other end of the weather spectrum. We had just finished running a popular, hilly 16 miler on an arctic 3 degree morning. I guess the cold weather and hills of N.H. in February rival the hot hilly south in July for heart stress. We were chatting in the chute when that runner hit the ground in front of us. He looked to be in decent shape. He was in his mid-30's. There was a cardiac surgeon with us who immediately started CPR. We got on the cell phone and had the ambulance there within 5 minutes, but he didn't make it. You hear about death a lot, but in our modern America you rarely see it up close.

I was thinking back on that day this morning with the talk of mortality on the radio. I've felt really crappy the last two weeks in my weekly Thursday night 3.4 miler in Westford. I've been trying to figure out why. I actually had to stop and walk one night. The hot weather? The cycling I've been trying to cram in? The weird head cold I've been fighting? The lack of a compelling goal or race? The low mileage this year and lack of committed training? Or am I just old? Is this how it goes? You just don't feel good anymore? Maybe I have Lyme disease?

As usual I figured it was just me trying to short my training so I picked it up a little. Running some hill charges in Atlanta, working in some speed work in the baking sun down the Cape over the 4th and stumbling through a 2+ hour long

run over the weekend. Somehow in my pre-human sub-brain this is the best solution. I always assumed that I'd just keep running into my 80's like a slow version of Johnny Kelly.

After more contemplation and the introspection of this morning I'm going to take some time out of my busy schedule to find a qualified doctor and get the 50,000 mile check up. You know the one I'm talking about. The one where they check all the fluids and grease all the fittings (yikes!). I recently had a physical for life insurance and my resting pulse before coffee was 35. I might already qualify for clinically dead. Like it or not I don't think I'm a competent specialist in this regard and I should probably take the time now instead of staring at the bright light at the end of the long tunnel where my grandparents wait for me.

This brings us to the final point. What is it about runners that they think a hard work out erases all effects of other lifestyle egresses? Why do we think a hard interval workout completely ameliorates the effects of a dozen hot wings with curly fries? Or that a 3 hour long run perfectly balances the ill-acquired 12 pack on Friday night?

From the editorials this morning, one thing is quite clear; heart disease is genetic and lifestyle based. Runners are a bit more protected from it then others because they exercise that pumping muscle but they are not immunized to grease and predestination. Bottom line - exercise does not buy immortality. We are like medieval flagellants whipping away our sins to become pure again through suffering. It's funny if you think about it.

I told my daughter, half jokingly, before embarking on a marathon last fall, "If I die, call your Mom and tell her I went doing what I love." There's some truth to that. Maybe it's not as heroic a death as we would write in our perfect script, but I'd much rather croak in front of the cameras on Hereford Street than in the toilet. As the early American Puritan poet Edward Taylor intoned, "A Fig for thee Oh! Death" from his bed after a life well lived.

If you see me stumble and fall clutching my chest and foaming at the mouth, by all means, do your best to keep me on this side of the curtain. And let's make a pact, you and I that we'll go see the man (or woman) and have our chassis checked out for soundness before the summer is over. Because, as slow as I am, I love the sport and there are things I have yet to do. Besides, who'd run with Buddy the Wonder Dog if I was to pack it in?

A crash into the past

Summer triathlon training breaks up more than the monotony!

"If you worried about falling off the bike, you'd never get on."

~Lance Armstrong

I was spinning up a shallow up hill on my familiar loop course. I was head down, contemplating the serene peacefulness of my skinny French tire spinning with metronome perfection. The road slipping by in the background was mesmerizing against the blur of the spokes.

The road was recently renovated from a rut strewn cart path to a high, smooth, shiny, black asphalt runway. No bumps or holes to avoid, just the whir and click of my machine beyond the rhythm of my iPod. I like to eat this sleepy, unpopulated section of road, without too many cars to compete with, for lunch.

Then, in this exercise trance, my front tire drifted too close to the edge. The new tar dropped off 8 inches into a soft sand and pine needle bed. I was sucked in before I could recover. The front tire bound in the sand and, unable to steer, I felt myself falling on my left side. It came to me in a long, slow motion 'oh shit'.

Reactions burnt in from childhood biking kick in and I move to 'lay it down', but these days my feet are locked in and there is no way to break the momentum. I bounce. Shoulder, iPod, elbow, hip and left pedal all hitting the tar at the same time. 2000 foot pounds of energy inelastically transferred in a Newtonian crunch. It's all over in a flash.

The force knocks my feet out of the Speed Plays. I bounce up full of adrenaline and pain. Oww! I dance around in a little impromptu pain jig. Simultaneously I'm checking various body parts for permanent damage. I've got some chinks in the armor, but nothing structural. A couple patches of bloody road rash where the epidermis has been

sanded off to reveal the inner me. There will be some blood and bruising, but I'm ok.

I've got an interesting linear bruise on my outer bicep where I bounced on my iPod. The iPod itself, a mini, skipped on impact to a new ironic song, ("Burned" by Neil Young), but otherwise is unharmed in its silicone armor.

What about my poor bike, Fuji-san? Is this the end for my old friend of eight years? The tired-but-rugged racing bike has been showing its age. It has been due for a tune up for awhile, but it is the only bike I own. I've got a race in two weeks and can't afford to take a week off.

Once I stopped hopping around in pain I assessed the damage. The handle bars are askew, but other than that everything seems intact. I straighten out the handle bars with a tug and a twist and remount to ride the shaky miles home. I've definitely got to bring it in now. I can't ride it until it's checked out. I think to myself, "Crap! - How am I going to train this week?"

The bike shop lady tries to talk me into a new bike every time I come in. She's a dealer in the suburbs who preys on confused affluence. Call me miserly, but I have a hard time spending \$2000+ for a new bike. The one I have works fine and is plenty fast for the sprint triathlons and 50 - 60 miles a week I ride. Bikes are expensive. Every time I bring it in there it cost \$200 or more. It's like owning a horse or a yacht; the payment never stops.

As I peddle gingerly home dripping blood on the pavement I consider the alternatives. I could swap my peddles over to my piece-of-crap Peugeot combo bike, no that won't do. I could bite the bullet and buy the new bike, relegating Fuji-san to a winter bike. I suppose I could go out onto the internet and get a 'good deal' by piecing together my own bike or buying some serious rider's castoff bike at a discount. I don't really know enough about the intricacies of the sport for this, and I need to train again within the next 2 days.

In my town we have to take our trash to the dump. The old dump has been closed for 15 years. It's really a transfer station with dumpsters to throw the trash in and recycling stations. People leave used, but serviceable items out for any takers. I've been looking for a castoff bike for my teenage daughter. I wanted to find one of those women's style 10 speeds we had when we were kids because she hates the combo bike we bought her. (In a fit of teenage pique she rode it once and named it "I hate you.")

Most of the bikes that are left off at my dump are from the "cheap-crap" era of mass produced, low quality junk that dominated the 80's through today. It's cheaper for people to buy their kid a new bike than repack a bearing or fix a brake cable. They get tossed into the scrap metal pile to be barged back to China to make more cheap bikes.

On this day, shortly after crashing Fuji-san, I'm at the dump and taking a quick scan of the junk. There are several bikes in there so I wander over to take a closer look. Most are junkers, pulled out of the back yard or out from under the porch after years of being a nature habitat for ants and earwigs.

One is not. It is a classic Raleigh. I extricate it for a closer look. Rubbing the dust off the name plate I can see it is an original Raleigh Grand Prix, and it's in great shape. The tires have no rot. The brake pads aren't dried out. The derailleur works fine. Someone loved this bike. It has the classic "Made in Nottingham England" stamp.

This was a state of the art racing bicycle, brand new while Nixon was in office. Someone parted with the obscene amount of close to \$200 for this baby. This was from the zenith of Raleigh's production before cheap competition forced them off shore. I take it home.

After dropping Fuji-san off at the bike shop for a new tire, chain and cassette I triage my new Raleigh racing bike. Halleluia! My Speed Play peddles fit right in. The tires are in great shape. They are not the original Dunlop tires. They

are a high quality Japanese replacement. They pump right up to 90 PSI and hold firm.

It's a major relief not to have to struggle with the adapter for the little French tires. The British used a standard tire inflation stem, no adaptor necessary. I squirt a little oil into the squeaky bits, that's right, Oil, not high tech silicon fluid, good old 10W40. A couple of test rides around the neighborhood, a few brake and wheel adjustments and I'm ready to go.

The Raleigh has a couple layers of license stickers from Washington DC. Whoever you are out there who left your beloved commuting bike to the fates, rest assured it has fallen into good hands.

Out on the course it handles like an old truck compared to Fuji-san. It makes rattling and squeaky noises when I'm up in the saddle. It doesn't seem to have as much top end, but it's hard to tell. If I had to guess, I'd say I'm 10-20% slower. It's heavy. My friend Francois the competitive biker jokes that the front wheel weighs more than his bike. I don't care, I'm getting a great work out and I'm thinking about a simpler time.

It's strange to look down and see those big tires, or should I say 'tyres' as I'm spinning along. It gives me flashes of the art deco Pirelli posters you see hanging in pretentious coffee shops. I'm a retro racer. I need one of those leather flying-helmets. I find myself humming Rossini and thinking back to sequences from the "Breaking Away" movie. I'm not worried about sand and puddles. I'm not frantic to avoid hitting pointy rocks that menace those fickle skinny French tires. This thing can take it. It's impervious. It's a tank.

When this bike was made I was myself a young teenager. I remember cobbling together my own ten-speed from the discarded bikes left by my older siblings. I remember riding for miles and miles. It wasn't for exercise. It was for freedom. It was the key to transport a 12 year old where he

needed to go. Where he needed to go was everywhere and anywhere.

After a week I went and retrieved Fuji-san. Training for a week on the Raleigh was like running with weighted shoes. Fuji-san is an easy ride now and I remember the thrill of when we first rode together. The power up the hills is so fluid it makes you feel like Zeus and the unimaginable speed down like Mercury.

Sir Walter has been relegated to the background now with the race approaching. I'll leave the Raleigh down at the vacation house. Perhaps the renters can mount the past and enjoy the freedom of their youths too.

In this world where everything goes very fast perhaps there is room for things that are merely solid. In reclaiming an old horse you can make time stand still and step out of the current for awhile. Take my advice and go retro for a couple weeks, you'll learn something old about yourself.

Northern Heights!

Running up Mount Royal in Montreal...

“If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.” ~Ernest Hemingway

Ah...Paris in springtime...when a young mid-packer's thoughts turn to love. The outdoors cafes in the cobbled streets are decorated with beautiful women lounging with their aperitifs... The sun hangs about insolently long into the evening forcing upon the populace a serious lack of urgency in their affairs. Sweet music mingles with sweet cooking smells and small restaurants throw open their doors invitingly to the street.

Actually, it was Montreal, not Paris, but, heck, it was a reasonable facsimile for me when a management meeting pulled me north from my New England abode. It's an easy 5 hour drive from Massachusetts and a pretty one. I cut across New Hampshire and bang a right in Vermont, up past Burlington, and before you know it your crossing the Pont Champlain to Montreal.

I never know if I'm going to be able to work out on these business trips, but I bring my shoes and Speedo and wing it. I wanted to get a run in before I left, but it had been pouring rain for 2 weeks straight in Massachusetts. Conditions were at flood stage. Buddy the Wonder Dog was giving me those eyes, watching me pack. I'm a sucker for the puppy-eyes guilt trip. The dog was getting a beer gut from lying around while I've been gratuitously traveling about. He likes to run in the rain. Wherever Border Collies are from it must rain all the time. I submitted to his furry-pathetic-brow beating and dug out the old trail shoes to tackle the great swamp that our woods had become.

The trail wasn't too bad. It was a little squishy, with puddles in the low parts. It was pouring rain. There was no hiding

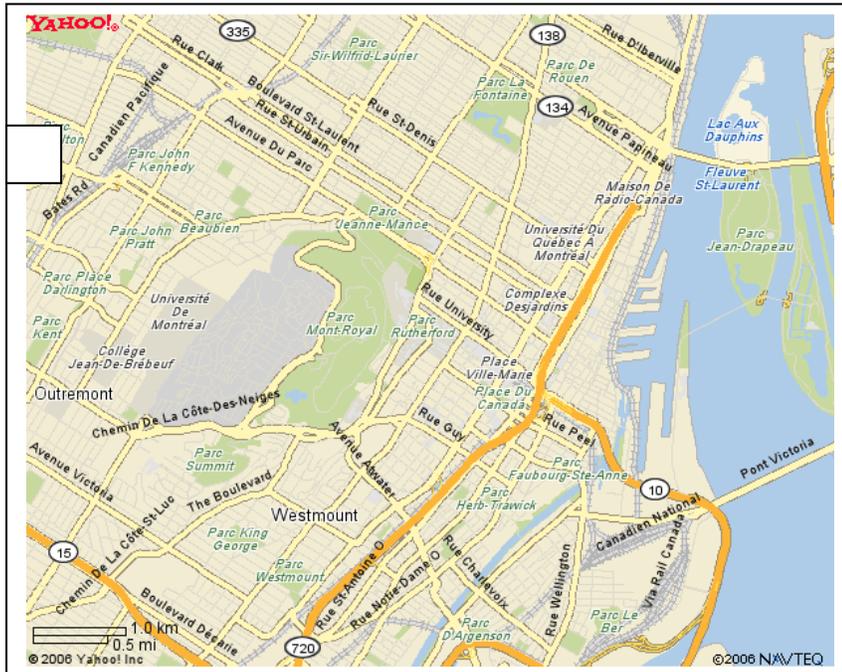
from it. In the woods the downpour was filtered through the tree canopy and fell in big, greasy, tropical globs, smacking my hat with great juicy plops. The dog was ecstatic with joy. That's what I like about dogs; every time we go out he acts like it's the best thing that has EVER happened to him.

The little stream that I have engineered a bridge across by splitting a white pine log lengthwise with a maul is a rushing torrent. My pine log bridge has been subsumed and transported downstream. Buddy and I just jump in and wade across. There's no point in trying to stay dry. Even the well-engineered bridge the boy scouts put over Beaver Brook, my next crossing, is under 2 feet of water. But it's not cold and we splash through. By the time we are headed back from this 10k jaunt I've got my shirt off and am steaming. The dog looks like some dirty refugee from a hurricane. It's a great workout and I'm glad I've done it because it loosens up some of the kinks I retained from running up that mountain in Tucson the previous Friday morning.

My wife is not going to be pleased that I've left her a wet, exhausted dog and jumped in to the rental car to head north.

I'm starting to have an effect on the management team. I don't evangelize, but I let them know that they should bring their shoes with them because I am more than likely going to end up running some mornings if they should want to come along. The CFO Francois is a mad cyclist and likes to go out on jogs with me to augment his training.

I get up early the next day and ride the exercise bike for 40 minutes before the meetings start. I figure I'll try to get a run in the second morning. I've never been up to the top of Montreal's signature mountain; Mount Royal, a.k.a. "Mont Royal". I usually stay down in the old city, by the St Lawrence River and run the bike trail there. This time we're staying higher on the hill and the mountain is within a mile or so uphill from the Novotel.



Montreal was established as far up stream as the early explorers could get. Jacques Cartier named it in 1535. Here they hit the Lachine rapids (Translates to “the Chinese Rapids” because back then they figured China must be only a couple more kilometers further west) and could go no further. This is the largest city in French Canada with somewhere around 65% of the population speaking French. It’s a great place to be in the summer. The outdoor café life on St. Catherine Street is amazing.

In the winter time it’s a different story. I have come close to succumbing to frostbite in February there just trying to walk 2 blocks. It was -26 F plus the wind chill. If you go up there in the winter pack for an Everest assault. I remember marveling that there were still bicycle messengers out shooting around the city in that deep freeze.

This is why they fall into such a wild celebratory fit when springtime comes and the ice leaves the river. It’s a beautiful little city, close by and very romantic.

But...I was there on business.

Francois surprised me towards the end of the day by suggesting that we go challenge Mont Royal before dinner. You have to be open to surprises and you have to be opportunistic. If you wait for all your runs to fit a schedule, you'll miss some good ones. Even though I had run hard in aqua-world the previous day, even though my quads were still complaining about that mountain in Tucson, even though I had biked that morning and even though I'd been fighting an upset stomach all day, I readily agreed to a little jaunt up the mountain. What's the worst that could happen? I've run with Francois before and he would humiliate me on a bike ride, but he's not going to hurt me running.



Then, an amazing thing happened. The Engineering manager, Serge said he'd like to come to. I figure this is good news, because although I've never run with Serge he looks fairly non-athletic. This means we'll probably go really slow and stop to

rest a bunch, which is ok with me.

Looking up the hill from the hotel towards the Mont, it doesn't look that bad. The top seems maybe 2-3k away at most. I'm thinking a nice, relaxing little 30 minute jog. As usual I'm dead wrong.

I meet them in the lobby and we head outside. Serge is off like a shot up the hill. He's running just shy of a strong tempo pace for me and I'm wondering, "What the heck is this? Beat up the marathoner day?"

I hope he's just inexperienced and going out too fast and tuck in on his heels to wait for the collapse. Up, up, up we

go crossing little streets and climbing wooden stairs through courtyards. Thankfully we have to stop for a couple crossing signals and I can let the blood move around my legs a little. I wish I'd know it was going to be a race, I would have stretched.

Somewhere on University we cut through a fence and emerge on a cinder access road that wraps around the mountain in an easy ascent. Serge is still flying. I'm starting to loosen up, I can still talk, but we are passing the other joggers and Francois has fallen behind. There are a few dozen people on the road. Bikers, hikers, walkers, pram-pushers and joggers. The cinder surface is nice and soft, rather sticky from the recent rain. It's still overcast and threatening drizzle.

On the uphill side the mountain is alternately dense woods and dripping rock face. On the downhill side there are parks and pine groves with little ponds. After about 2k we come to a little open area just below the observatory. It's got a grassy park with a pond and a bunch of modern sculpture



that looks to me like squashed metal turds, but I know I'm a cretin. Serge wants to stop and go look for a bathroom. I'm thinking to myself, "Thank God!"

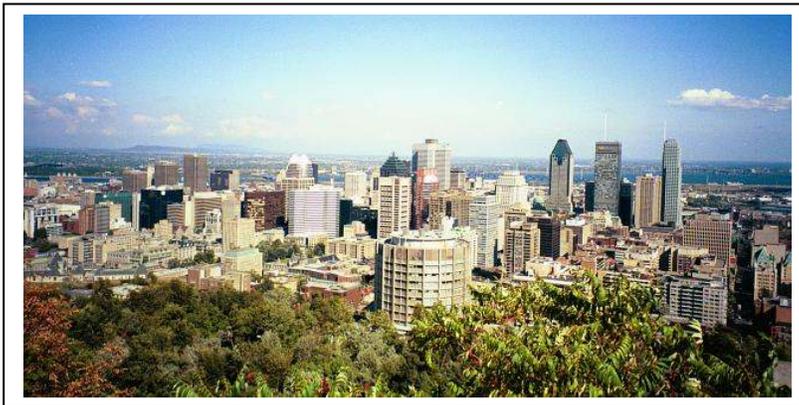
We jog in circles for a couple minutes waiting for Francois to catch up then continue up the road to the observatory. The observatory is a building with a great stone promenade overlooking the city. We stop at the edge with the rest of the tourist and look down into Montreal extending out to the mighty St. Lawrence. We are about eye level with the tops of the tallest buildings, maybe 1,000 feet of elevation gain.

Having sated ourselves on the scenic views we venture off to find the top of the Mont. Again Serge is off like a rabbit and I'm chasing. Up to the peak we fly. There is nothing on the peak. There are the remnants of some building with one cement bit that looks like the cover of the "Who's next?" album by the Who with a cell phone tower strapped to it. Maybe some more government subsidized art?

From here we descend a couple hundred feet to a giant cross that is built with steel girders like a big erector set. Like the Eiffel Tower. It has light bulbs on it and proclaims the historical piety of the city at night. Montreal was at one time a very Roman Catholic place.

We cut through a trail and back on to the cinder road. Serge wants to push the pace and I'm good with that. I'm warmed up now and downhill is where the old Clydesdale shines. Gravity is my strongest feature.

The cinder road is a beautiful and forgiving surface as we circle down the Mont. We are in a state of ecstatic free fall, passing everyone, flying. We speed by a group of people who are doing some sort of modified Tai Chi with exercise mats in bundles on their backs. We know that the bottom is less than 1k away and it's all downhill to the hotel so we free-wheel with delicious abandon spending our energy wantonly in anticipation.



We are so wrapped up in our free fall that we miss the turn back to the hotel. After a while we

start wonder where we are. We finally emerge from the woods to find that we have overshot our planned exit by a

mile and a half. The worst part is we are now well downhill of the hotel. Spent and chagrined we begin to trudge back up the flanks of Mont Royal to the hotel. The last bit is a steep uphill and it's grueling. I've got my mile 25 face on and keep grinding away and Serge finally starts to fall behind.

By the time we crest the hill and careen down the final blocks to the hotel we've managed to turn a 30 minute easy jog into a 72 minute mountain tempo run. I finally got to see the view from the top of Mont Royal and got a great workout in.

The unexpected irony came a couple days later when I was back home. I post entered a local five miler that I'd never run before. Brian, who had test run the course, revealed that the first 2.5 was uphill and the last 2.5 was down hill. Hmm....Interesting...

Out on the course I found myself moving up through the pack on the uphill, comfortable and strong. The downhill came just in time and I ended up finishing strong, 3rd place in my age group, thanks in no small part to chasing Serge up and down the mountain 3 days earlier.

Am I just lucky? All my runs turn into adventures and great workouts. Every time I come out the other side of one of these adventures it makes me happy that I'm not missing out on all the mountains and valleys and deserts. Why would anyone choose an extra hour of sleep over exploring a new city by foot? Why do people rot in front of TVs and sit moldering in smoky bars when there are mountains to run?

I've seen business travel eat people alive, but when I wake up in strange place it's like Christmas morning and there's some river or mountain waiting to be unwrapped. You and I may not win races but we mid-packers are privilege to the joy inherent in a run.

I'll be coming to your city soon. Come one out and help me explore!

Rattle Snakes and Ski Hills

Poking around in the Poconos

“Jan: I am here to tell you that we are closing the Scranton branch.

Michael Scott: I don't understand.

Jan: The board voted last night to close your branch.

Michael Scott: On whom's authority?

Jan: The boards.” ~The Office

“You have to watch out for the rattlesnakes.” She said it matter-of-factly, like it was common knowledge, like it was a common statement, like “There’s butter in the fridge.” I saw no such lassitude in this statement. “Rattlesnakes? In Scranton?”

She continued conciliatory, “They used to be really bad in this area, but the development has driven most of them out.”

I knew the area was overrun with deer, but this rattlesnake revelation was news to me.

This startling revelation at dinner was not going to dissuade me if I could find a trail to run on the following morning. I was at the tail end of a month long Business-Travel-Lapoloosa-Fest. OK City, Tucson, Montreal, Atlanta and now Scranton. I’d be damned if I was going to let some shifty serpents keep me from exploring these green hills and valleys.

I had gotten in early from Boston that day and went in search of the pool. I had four hours before dinner with the clients. Much to my disappointment I found that the pool was a 20 X 25 foot box. Even if I swam diagonally I wouldn’t be able to do laps.

It took some mental fortitude to go for a swim anyway and ignore the cramped layout. I figured swimming in tiny circles was better than a day without a workout. It turned out that I could traverse the pool lengthwise in 3.2 strokes. It was

fairly comical. After 20 minutes of this foolishness, I gave up and went to do some work in the room and prepare for some family style Italian food.

In the morning I rolled out at 5:00 AM, drank some coffee, ate a Power Bar and ventured out to do battle with the snakes like Saint Patrick.

Scene one, act two, "The front desk".

A man in running shorts, t-shirt, hat and running shoes approaches, smiling.

"Excuse me, where's a good place to run around here?"

Front desk lady; puzzled, tired, confused.

"Well, there's really no place around here...You could drive to the park."

Man; smiling, hopeful.

"Are there any trails?"

Woman; resigned.

"No, there are some parking lots..."

Man; persistent, cheerful.

"I thought I saw a ski hill close by when I came in. Is that near here?"

Woman; patronizing.

"It's a couple miles away, but it's all up hill."

Man; cheery and optimistic.

"That's ok, I like hills. Besides, where there's an uphill, there has to be a downhill, right?"

Woman, resigned and weary.

“Ok, just go out and head up hill.”

End scene – man exits.

It can't be that bad, can it? Non-runners always overreact when it comes to distance and hills. I can see the ski slope. It's a series of light green strips in the otherwise dense green foliage. It looks to be about 2 miles away 'crow fly'...but alas, I'm not a crow.

As I crest the first little hill I find I've run myself into a horseshoe shaped road behind the hotel and it is turning 180 degrees back towards the highway – away from the target ski area. I can see it, but I can't get to it. This actually happens to me a lot when I'm exploring new places. I once almost expired from the heat trying to get back to a hotel in Vegas that I could see perfectly clearly and was only 2 blocks away.

It is a gray, humid, misty morning in Scranton. The clouds hang low over the verdant hills. Everything is green and lush with the wet of spring. There is that pungent smell of wet dirt in the air that I love. It is the smell of recent thunder storms churning up life in the soil. Many of the trees and bushes are flowering and the smell of honeysuckle drifts in the thick air.

I don't see any rattlesnakes, or deer, or moose, or bobcats, or coyote. My wheezing up the hill has probably frightened them over into New York State. I do see a steady stream of early-morning, domesticated cubicle monkeys turning into parking lots to begin a shift of voluntary servitude.

The road has now turned 180 degrees away from the ski hill and is heading down hill. I'm fairly sure something in my direction is amiss. I pull over and startle a semi-wild construction worker.

Scene two, act 1 – “the construction site”

Man in jeans adjusting tool belt next to large pickup truck.
Backdrop is work site with foundation poured and

construction materials. Sweaty guy in running shoes approaches, smiling.

“Good Morning! How do I get to that ski area?” Sweaty man points yonder.

“Well, you got to go down here and turn right.” Pausing, assessing. “But it’s all uphill.”

“Great, thanks!” Sweaty man exits.

End scene

And it was indeed all uphill. I’d guess about 2 + miles up, up, up. Not quite the Mt. Washington auto road that Mr. Dunham waxes poetically about, but my own little slice of Scranton elevation gain pain none the less. I put my head down and dig through the fog up the hill. Sometimes it’s steep, sometimes it’s shallower. There are not too many cars because this road only goes to the ski area and not too much is going on there on a Tuesday in June.

I finally crest the hill into the gravel parking lot at the ski area. I gaze upon the mountain. The ski slopes disappear up into the fog in a couple hundred feet. I had set out with a vague ambition to run up the slope and have a look around, but I’m out of time. I have a presentation to a room full of folks later and I have to get back.

The run back down was, as it always is, easier. It gave me the opportunity to look around. The sun was coming up somewhere behind the mist and it was getting muggy. It was going to be a steamy day.

The hills around Scranton are like a great set of wrinkles in the land. Like a giant rug got caught in the door and bunched up. They accordion up ancient sediment layers that you can see profiled in the cuts along the road. These layered bluffs are unsteady and you see the “Falling Rock” caution signs. I’m not sure what you’re supposed to do with that

information, but there were bread loaf sized chunks of rock perched dangerously all along the shoulder.

I imagine fossilized dinosaur jaws jutting from the cliff face. The smile of ancient triceratops and hidden reptilian footprints squeezed between the layers of shale. The stone walls here are made with these flat, table-top rocks and not the odd shaped granite ovoids that I pry from my New England glacial till at home.

It's all good. Down, down, and down I cruise through the soupy dawn. I roll into the hotel wet and shirtless only to come face to face with clients having continental breakfast in the lobby. Oops! That will leave a memorable impression.

Uphill, downhill, hot or cold, it's all good. Don't get all wrapped up in your training. Don't obsess over your workouts. Steal away and find peace of mind where you are and when you can. It doesn't matter where in this world you wake up tomorrow. Every day is a gift. Treat yourself to a work out. Get out and explore.

Especially don't listen to the people who try to scare you. There's always going to be someone with tales of rattlesnakes and scorpions. Don't let them infect you and take your power away. Don't hide timid and quaking in the corner. Be "the man the arena" that Teddy Roosevelt expounded. What's the worst that could happen? You get bitten by a rattler? Now that would make a great running story!

The Hills of Atlanta

Old or just lazy?

I'm sitting on top of a dryer, sweating. I'm in a Holiday Inn Express. It seems strange to me that for some reason they have put the washer and dryer on the smoking floor. The end result is that even though my running stuff will not have that acrid stink of old goat, it will have an acrid stink of old smoke. There's nothing comparable to either of those fragrance bouquets.

I'm not just sweating because the dryer is hot. I'm still sweating from some hill charges I ran an hour ago. Plus I think I'm running a fever.

I came out of the weekend super-organized and energized. I had my goals and to-do lists. I was going to get so much work and quality training done this week. Superman may have the strength of ten men, but I can do the work of 3.5 bureaucrats with proper planning and the correct brand of coffee.

I was committed, or re-committed, (or maybe even should be committed), to reinvigorating my sagging training. My mileage has been low and my quality has been crappy. I've been missing workouts and not feeling all that guilty about it. Other than an end of summer sprint tri and a vague "run a bunch of marathons in the fall" ambition, my goals are uninspiring and loosey-goosey. I've got no real execution plan to get there.

I had to stop and walk in a 5K last week. I went out fast (duh) and couldn't breathe in the heat. Of course I had bolted out with the leaders, but what else is new? In the old days I might have toughed it out, gritted my teeth, wheezed away and maybe barfed. But it just didn't seem that important. It felt like I was giving up. Why do we set our internal self-standards so psychotically high?

The unhealthy question I asked myself was; are you just lazy or are you getting old? And if so, what's the cure? (A healthier question might have been; what do you love about running? What do you have to do to love it?) Sometimes the right questions don't come! Thus I continued down my unhealthy analytical tree. You've been running your whole life, I said to myself. Maybe this is just the running equivalent of the 7-year itch? "I'm sorry; I just don't love you anymore." Or, the ego retorted, maybe you're just a mopey dumb-ass?

Last year when I was coming off my knee injury I had a fling with triathlons. I felt a brief lusty invigoration in my relationship with exercise. But, if staying fit by running is hard to work into our busy lives, staying fit for triathlons is a second career! Don't get me started on all the expensive gadgets that need to be acquired and maintained!

Predictably, my irrational-rational analysis came up with the obvious solution; I'm just not working out enough. (dumb-ass) This week I resolved to knuckle down, seize myself by the lapels and get some quality workouts in!

Thus the week began. Sunday I had to settle for a soggy run in the rain with Buddy the Wonder Dog in the park. Monday a decent swim. This day, (the one that ends with me sitting on the dryer), I had decided to get up at 5:00 AM and charge these hills! A courageous plan. I couldn't get up. I didn't rack out until 1:00. I need at least 5 hours of sleep to function.

I've caught this gnarly cold that's going around. Probably mold poisoning from the perpetual swamp that is New England this spring. It started as a stuffed up head and bloomed this morning into a bizarre auditory condition. I can't hear out of my right ear. It feels like the world is talking to me through a plastic bottle - all muffled and echoes. My equilibrium is weird and I feel unbalanced. So, I slept in and blew off my workout.

I told myself I'd get out at lunch. A lunch meeting intervened. I told myself I'd head out right after work. At 7:00 I was still sitting staring stupidly at the laptop, still in the office.

I fought to buck the trend. I dug deep into my history of overcoming inertia. I thought of those times I sprang from bed at the crack of dawn, with very little sleep, and dashed about in athletic excess.

Psychologically victorious I went to the office gym and did some stationary bike and weights. This was nice, but not the acid test. I had created in my mind a rule that said in order to be successful this day; I had to run those hills. I couldn't get the monkey off my back unless I ran those damn, awful hills.

I follow the following formula for hill charges. I look for the perfect hill. The perfect hill, in my mind, is similar to Heartbreak. The perfect hill is about .5 miles long, not too steep and not too shallow. It should have 3 sections or thirds. The first section should be shallow-ish allowing you to run easily at race pace. The second section should get steeper forcing you to struggle to maintain pace. The third section should be short and steep. You enter this final section close to maximum effort and this is where the fun begins. This final section should make you wish you never put on running shoes. This is an awesome quality workout and simulates race conditions.

You attack it strong, hold it and then spend yourself, leaving nothing. You end bent over double and gasping like a large sweaty fish at the top. This, my friends, is the ultimate penance for the lazy runner.

I found a hill with a reasonable profile right behind the hotel. I measured it off with the rental car to my .5 mile perfection. It was, by all appearances, a quiet side road, but there is no such thing in Atlanta where municipal ordinances require that all residents must, when not working, careen about at high speed in their SUV's.

I sure I looked like a lunatic attacking my hill with my wobbly sinus condition, dodging cars, jumping in and out of the kudzu between gut-busting surges. But, I do feel less lazy and maybe less old sitting here, sweating on the dryer. (I took a cold shower, but it just won't stop)

As a postscript I decided to wash my workout clothes because they'll be traveling to a new city with me tomorrow. It is a distinct possibility that they would set off a Hazmat alert after being locked wet in the trunk of the car all day in the Birmingham sun.

Sleep is impossible anyway. Hill charges and sinus pills have pumped a unique adrenaline cocktail into my brain. I might as well de-stink the dank-stank.

I know I shouldn't be so hard on myself, but I hate to see my conditioning be less than it could be, even though it was never better than mid-pack mediocre. Why don't we just decide to be happy we are alive and running? Why drive ourselves so mercilessly?

The clock strikes midnight and the clothes are dry. I don't think I'll be getting up at 5:00 AM to swim! I will feel stronger in next week's 5K because today I conquered my hills and tomorrow my luggage won't stink. I have invested 30 minutes to become stronger and \$2.50 in quarters to become fresher too!

The answer to the correct question; "What do I love about running?" is that it provides a keel for my boat. I love, with a first-love-infatuation-euphoria the feeling I get flying down a ridge in the oak shaded New England summer with my four-legged pal in hot pursuit.

Have you seen the movie "St. Ralph"? In one scene he does his final long tempo workout at night in a park. He is in shape and throwing himself physically and mentally into the toughest run he has yet done. At one point in the final rep he feels his legs lift off the ground and he is flying; soaring through the air. He has transcended the physical. That's

what I love about running. That moment, call it the runner's high if you want, where all is clarity and euphoria.

And that, my friends is why I train and race, so I can give myself the opportunity to soar.

9 Travel tips from a veteran road warrior

Done right travel and training can be a marriage made in heaven

I'm talking about business travel, not vacation or destination races on the long weekend. I'm talking about having to be somewhere in front of a client in a conference room after a long flight.

I've been traveling extensively for business over the last 20 years and I've learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. I like to treat running and training on a business trip as an adventure and try to make one plus one equal three. If you do it right it can be wonderful. I have run on business trips all over the North America. I have also had some great outings in Japan, Australia, India and England. Your running shoes are an incredible asset; they are literally your passport to explore and discover. It's another great example of how universal, portable and rewarding our sport is.

On the other hand travel workouts hold a certain amount of risk and it is very easy to set yourself up for failure. What follows are some tips - gleaned from years of roadwork while simultaneously playing at consultant, sales person and executive. I hope you find them useful. Shoot me an e-mail with the tips that pop into your mind when you review mine. I'd be interested to hear those great travel stories.

As I think back there are a few epiphanies and vignettes that stand out.

There was the morning I got up to jog the hills of Tokyo and they had incongruous bird song piped into the hotel simulating the natural sounds of sunrise inside the artificial environment. It just struck me as so Japanese to work this sort of simulated detail into the hotel. It was a bit surreal.

...Running the beaches in Sydney and being overwhelmed by the swimwear - or lack thereof - that was totally incongruent

to a New England boy. It was Christmas at home and summer in Sydney. Wow!

...When I first was getting back into running and was training for a 10K. The style in those days was high-cut, brightly colored shorts. I had my favorite Tingley-hot-pink short shorts on and was out exploring the suburbs somewhere in Ohio when I was heckled by some rednecks in a pickup truck.

...Getting lost in winter somewhere in Ontario. Underdressed and wet, I was starting to worry and had to knock on a door to get directions back to the hotel.

...Running speed intervals on the roof of a hotel in Denver.

...Going for a run during a convention in pre-Katrina New Orleans. At 5:00 AM the cobbles on Bourbon Street were slick with spilled drinks, the smell of stale beer in the air and drunks still wandering about.

...Tiny, tight laps around the deck a cruise ship.

...Catching up with random runners out on the road and talking inevitably about the Boston Marathon.

...Running in my Hawaiian print shorts in India and having the people of Bangalore staring at me with open mouthed gapes as if to say "Good Lord! What *IS* that?"

...Doing the strip in Vegas in the morning and having to dodge the people still gambling at sunrise.

...Hurdling the homeless lying on the sidewalks in the heart of San Fran.

It's always something new. You have to treat it as an adventure and have an open mind.

Tip #1 - Don't expect to train at 100%.

If you're in the middle of a marathon run up or other strict, difficult program don't expect to be able to train at the same

level on the road. Travel beats you down whether you know it or not. Your sleep patterns get messed up. The air quality can be bad. You're always dehydrated. Your nutrition is bad. You're under stress both physically and mentally. You may be at a different elevation. You spend hours at altitude cramped in an airplane. It all conspires to sap your energy and hinder your ability.

Set your expectations low. Expect to be at best 60-80% of your normal strength. Try to focus on just getting out and getting something done. Try to schedule long easy exploration runs instead of quality workouts. Give yourself extra time to warm up.

Be prepared to settle for 20 minutes on the exercise bike in the hotel rather than the 5 mile tempo run on your schedule. It's more important to do something than to try to stay on schedule and kill yourself.

The issue is that we get into the rhythm of a training program and it becomes routine and habit. You don't have that routine on the road. You're in a strange place - not your home course. You're out of place and out of sorts so it adds logistical and mental challenges to something you wouldn't even have to think about at home. Don't expect to take your routine on the road. Cut yourself some slack and leave room for the effects of travel.

Tip #2 - Get lost

You can explore a good part of many cities with a 10 mile run. Just point your toes in a direction and go. Run by your watch and the sun. I've always found my way back (even with the icy fingers of hypothermia in Ontario!) Try to run in a big circle, taking rights and lefts and when you get tired, turn around and run back in the general direction of the hotel.

I got sent to London on an emergency business trip one time with 2 days notice. I was in the middle of training for Chicago. I ended up doing a pleasant long run of maybe 20 miles. I covered Kensington, Buckingham Palace, Parliament

and the Trafalgar Square area – all the tourist bits while running. It was great!

More often than not I end up getting a superior long run in where I might only have stayed out for 40 minutes. Another variation of this is to pick a landmark you can see; a mountain or the Golden Gate and run towards it. I ultimately find some unexpected sites and some really interesting stuff along the way. 10 miles will more than cover all the interesting bits of most cities. Go ahead, head out and get lost.

I got lost in Toronto one time and was going to be late for a dinner appointment, so I picked up the pace once I figured out where I was and was heading back. I was flying down Yonge Street through the crowds of tourist and shoppers. It's all a long straight shallow downhill and I was just flying. It was such a cool outing after a rough day at work.

Note: I would be neglectful not to warn you to also be safe. Know the areas you are running in and, especially you ladies, be careful. I'm sure I've run in places that I shouldn't have, but I've been lucky enough to never have any issues. You've got to take care of yourselves. Lone joggers in the middle of nowhere can be targets.

Tip #3 – Pack your clothing intelligently

You already know this, but pack technical clothes that don't take up much space and dry quickly. Go for clothes that are dual use and can be worn in different combinations or layers. You don't have to have your whole kit. I've run, on occasion in dress socks or no socks or a dress shirt.

Hats and gloves are usually enough to make up for being underdressed. If you can keep your head warm, you can usually tough it out. A balaclava is small and will keep you warm in any weather.

Go small. You don't need all your stuff and you don't want to have to drag it around with you. In the summer all you

really need is shoes, shorts and a tee shirt. Bike shorts or tube shorts are good because you can swim and bike in them too.

Check the weather before you go. The weather can be totally different 300 miles from home. With the internet there's no excuse to show up unprepared. Don't forget some sort of reflective clothing for running in the dark. A blinking light or an illuminite hat work well and are small to pack.

Bring a good pair of multipurpose shoes. Bring shoes that will work on roads and trails because you don't know what the surface is going to be like. Be prepared and don't be afraid to improvise.

Tip #4 - Ask the locals

There's no place you can go where there aren't already runners. If you have the foresight - which I seldom do- you can drop a line to the local running clubs for suggestions or scheduled runs.

You can ask the folks you're visiting for good places to run too. You can ask the people in the hotel, but this is usually fruitless. If you ask around enough you may find someone to run with you. You will definitely get some options by asking. It's your choice whether you want to exercise those options or strike out on your own.

I found the Chattahoochee River running parks outside Atlanta this way and the Silver Comet bike trail. The locals will steer you in the right direction and it will strengthen your bond with them.

Tip #5 - Tell your work mates to bring their shoes

As much as I like running, I don't try to convert people at work. But if the management team is all headed somewhere I'll tell them to bring their shoes and we'll go for a jog. It's all voluntary - there's no harassment involved. I've run with

bosses, coworkers and subordinates in many different roles. It's a great way to interact with coworkers on neutral turf.

The caveat here is that you're going to run up against different skill levels. You'll have to hold up and slow down for people and not be a jerk. Sometimes there will be some of that good old worker rivalry and people will want to 'take you on'. You have to leave your ego in the hotel and just have fun. Let them come to you. Let them 'win' if they have to. Teach them a lesson if you really have to!

Tip #6 - Google a track

The great thing about 400 meter tracks is that they are so easy to find from the air. If you look out the airplane window you'll see them. If you plug your work, city or hotel address into Google Maps and set it to satellite mode, you can zoom out until you see an oval. Then, in hybrid mode, you can trace the route between where you are and the track.

You'll be surprised at the density of running tracks. Most high schools and colleges have them. They are usually wrapped around a football field. A low tech way to find them is to just drive around looking for stadium lights, which are usually the tallest things around. Where you find stadium lights, you'll find a football field and chances are it's got a 400 meter oval wrapped around it.

Finding the track is sometimes just the beginning. Getting into the track may be a challenge. I'll climb the fence if I have to. What are they going to do? Arrest me? Many times I'll share the track with some team. It's ok, just smile, act like you belong there and stay out of the way!

Tip#7 - Go early

If you wait until after work your chances of getting your workout in are greatly diminished. Like many of you, I hate running in the wee hours of the morning, especially if it's a hard workout. But I hate not running more.

You have to go out before everyone else gets up. Once you're caught up in the work day it gets really hard. Chances are someone will want to have a big working lunch or pizza in the conference room to save time. Then the meetings will inevitably run late and there will be a dinner to attend. You'll end up bloated, tired and dragging into the hotel at midnight. You're not going to want to run.

If need be, do less but get it done in the morning. It will change your whole day by starting out with a win. The people I work with will inevitably ask me, "Did you get a run in this morning?" Somehow my pre-dawn rambles have become part of the company culture.

Tip #8 - Pack food

Planes and trains and meetings are not good places to find nutrition. What's the average fare? Sticky pastries and coffee, pizza and sandwiches, steaks and wine. It might be 'good', but it's not good fuel. The worst part is that the nutrition will tend to come in large starchy bunches separated by hours of nutritional wasteland. It whipsaws your energy level and burns you out while adding unwanted girth. By the time food shows up in the meeting room, you're so hungry you binge!

I bring my own food. I pack stuff that is small and high energy. Power bars are great if you're trying to train. Nuts are compact and full of energy. Dried fruit is awesome and portable. You can fill a baggie with Gatorade powder and squirrel it away somewhere. Individual servings of instant oatmeal are good too - you can just mix with hot water in your room.

I also try to load up on any fruit that may be available at the hotel in the morning. If they've got a bowl of apples or bananas, take 5, it's a long day and these snacks will help you span the long hours of nothingness while you debate the budget.

You will get caught in travel hell. You will find yourself trapped for hours in an airport or an airplane with nothing to eat. You need to be ready. You need to provide for yourself.

Try to plan ahead. If you're comfortable with the venue, maybe you can ask for salad or fruit to be made available. Believe it or not, no one is going to give you a hard time for snacking during the meeting. Instead they will want some! One of my favorite tricks – and they all think I'm being thoughtful – is to swing by the store and provide a big bag of trail mix for the meeting. I pour it into a bowl for everyone to nibble at during those long hours in the afternoon between lunch and the late dinner. I get to keep my energy up and everyone loves it.

If I'm ever crash landed on a desert island, I'm going to be very popular because I'll have a couple days of food hidden somewhere in my belongings. You can count on it.

You also have to hoard water. Go easy on fizzy drinks and alcohol or you're going to be miserable. Good old H₂O will ease jet lag and keep you feeling right as rain. Traveling is notoriously dry work and you will tend to get dehydrated. Whenever you have a chance get some bottled water and bring it along with you.

Save the bottle when you empty it. Even if it's a Pepsi bottle you can rinse it out and fill it back up with water. If you've got a workout to do you'll be thankful to have a bottle of water with you.

Tip #9 – Steal a run

Many times the people you are working with will think your running addiction is a social disorder and will do their level best to keep you from your fun. In their world view they are saving you from yourself. Don't be afraid to steal a run. "I'm sorry, I'll be a little late for dinner I have an appointment, you go ahead to the bar and I'll meet you there later."

Stick up for yourself. It's something you need to do to feel good. It's something that will make you more effective and clear your head. Screw them if they don't get it. Sneak out and run.

In conclusion...

That's it. Those are my travel tips for runners. My challenge for you is to run on your next business trip. Whether dodging taxis in Manhattan or rows of corn in Nebraska make time for a run. Have an adventure. Lace up your shoes, pick a direction and get lost.

There are majestic purple mountains in Colorado and amber waves of grain in Iowa that are waiting for you. Go find them.

And I'll see you out there...I'll be the guy getting whistled at by truck drivers, "Is them leotards y'all is wearin boy?"

From the ashes

A twist and turn – fate plants its foot.

The trees are thick with heavy green leaves. “Green Mansions” an author called them. The air is thick with humidity and insect sounds. Cicadas saw at their violas in the canopy. Late afternoon sun rarely stabs unhindered through the chlorophyll crush. It mostly falls in mottled pools among the rocks and on the trunks of oaks and pines. Green mansions indeed! With long dark green hallways decorated tastefully with rocks and underbrush.

The trail reels towards me like a video racing game. Buddy’s white tail flags along with his curly black butt bouncing ahead of me on the ridge. He lopez along, tongue lolling in the heat, no doubt wondering if there just might be a couple sheep to herd around the next corner, a hundred years of border collie inbreeding has given him a boundless, compulsive sense of hope. We’re in our element. This is what running is all about – to live by leaping headlong up broken ridges - to breathe – to fly – to exalt.

I was in pretty good shape at the end of August. Then I rolled my ankle.

You could say I was trying to do too much, but more accurately I was trying, (like everyone else in this cluttered American life), to do too many things at the same time. It was going to be a good caper until fate stepped in.

I was working with a handful of kids and moms over the summer trying to extend the momentum from soccer season into a 10-12 week ‘learn to run’ program. You know, give something back, and share the running love, throw my little pebble of hope into the pond of obesity, yadda, yadda, yadda...

I figured, on this fine August afternoon, that I could combine a bunch of tasks by taking the crew over to a local park for a run. In time management this is called doing tasks in

parallel. Like many of you dudes and dudettes I was aiming for that elusive master stroke of multi-task consolidation. The self perpetuating myth being that there is some holy grail of efficiency where transcendence happens.

In this plan, I would simultaneously a) coach my crew about hill and trail running, b) spend some time with my daughter, c) get the dog some exercise and d) as the master in over-reaching, get a tempo run in. (Yeah, I'm one of those guys that does intervals around the soccer field during practice or brings my bike to the game - much to the mortification of my children.)

This particular park is a great slice of New England geography. Its name describes its nature; "Oak Ridge". It is just that; a tree covered glacial hump that was too hard to turn into house lots.

The trail rises steeply, around 1200 feet in $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, up a ridge. At the top a big mound of naked granite squats as a promontory from which you can gaze out on the hellish highways and green boroughs of Northeast Massachusetts. The ridge drops away below the precipice. I've been known to go there with a notebook to just to sit and ponder.

As a run it's got a great difficulty factor but is a little short. If you continue down the back of the ridge and run the entire periphery, you can squeeze maybe 2.5 miles in before you're back where you started. I schemed that I could point the herd in the right direction and then make a game of trying to catch them on the second lap.

This park crams a number of micro-climates into a small area. When you come off the back of the ridge it descends to a fern carpeted moist forest, like something you might find in the wilds of Oregon. A little further, on the flat bit, there is a mature cedar stand with the old farmer walls, quiet, fragrant and serene.

If you continue on there is a section called the 'chasm' that my kids refer to as 'the mosquito infested swamp' in memory

of one poorly planned hiking expedition. You don't go there unless you're an entomologist in hip waders. Throughout the run the surface alternates leafy trail, rock and some washed gravel roads. What it lacks in distance it makes up for in variety and difficulty.

Off we went! Buddy (the Wonder Dog) and I churned up the ridge at a tempo pace with the others following. The Budster and I cooked along, having a blast. August in Mass is hot and sticky, but not too bad in the woods. The deer flies are waning and the mosquitoes only get you if you slow down. In that great New England irony, by the end of August we're used to it...then the bottom drops out with an exponentially rapid October descent into darkness and frost...that our heat acclimation makes all the more 'refreshing'.

At around 1.5 miles we came upon my daughter running in the opposite direction. They had taken a wrong turn somewhere before they crested the ridge. Buddy decided this was an excellent opportunity to exchange running partners, not being thrilled with my hard pace on this hot day, preferring Teresa's more leisurely approach. The nerve! Go ahead, abandon the alpha dog! Defeatist! Slacker!

I continued back up the ridge, figuring I'd loop around and catch them. The happy-in-shape-exercise chemicals were bathing my cerebrum in a warm cocoon of self satisfaction. I was flying and it felt great! I was going full tempo, breathing hard and slinging sweat. Coming down the ridge again, flying along, I planted my right foot and something went 'click'. I didn't step on a rock or a root or stumble, the ankle just rolled before I could catch it. In retrospect I had been spending most of my time at the track with the crew and not on the trails I usually haunt.

I didn't fall down, but it really, really hurt and I was hopping around on one foot going "Ow! Ow!" like some comic character that has dropped the anvil on his toe. I think there might have been some stronger language used as well, but if an old guy curses in the forest, does it make any noise?

I've rolled my ankles dozens of times in runs and races. It's never been a big deal. It happens. I waited for the pain to ebb and limped off down the trail to find the others. And where was that stupid dog when I needed him? Lassie wouldn't have left Timmy alone in the woods with a hurt ankle!

After a couple minutes I could jog a little and went off to continue my search. Eventually I found them. "You guys took a wrong turn."

"We just followed Teresa. What's wrong with you?"

"I rolled my ankle, I'll be ok."

Looking down at the offending appendage, "It's swollen; you'd better go home and put some ice on it."

"Yeah, I'll be ok; It's just a rolled ankle."

My first thoughts were predictable. It will ring familiar to all you old and scarred road warriors. "Darn, I was having such a great run." And "Crap, I didn't finish my workout and I'm going to be behind on my plan." It never occurred to me that I might have hurt myself.

By the time we were in the truck and driving home it was really starting to swell and ache. I stopped and sent Teresa into the grocery store for some frozen peas. There is nothing better than frozen peas for an ice wrap. I could tell by now that I was going to need them!

I took a handful of "Vitamin I", packed it in frozen produce and reclined on the couch to wait it out. When my wife came home we had the following discussion:

"Oh my God! Look at that! What have you done now? I'm taking you to the emergency room. C'mon let's go."

"I'm not going to the emergency room. I just rolled my ankle. It'll be fine."

“It’s not fine. It’s all swollen. You’d better have it looked at.”

“No, all they’ll do is tell me to take anti-inflammatories, put ice on it, stay off it and elevate it...Which is what I’m doing.”

“Look at it. It’s probably broken.”

“I’m not going to the emergency room at 9:00 PM on a Friday night in August. It’ll be a zoo. We’ll be there all night.”

“I don’t know. It looks bad. You should go.”

“I’m ok; if it’s worse in the morning we’ll go. It will probably be fine tomorrow.”



The next morning, with my foot the size of a football and purplish-green, my wife supported me as I hopped on one leg into the emergency room. The verdict was a bad sprain with an ‘evulsion’ where the ligament tore off a piece of bone. I hate it when

she’s right.

I got some crutches that my daughter promptly confiscated to play with – jockeying laps around the house as I lay on the couch. I got a bottle of Vicodin that I didn’t use (make me an offer). I got a pretty green gel-splint to stabilize it and be my official totem of injury for a couple weeks.

I discovered over the next month that when traveling through airports you can meet interesting people by wearing open sandals with your business suit. It also makes security a breeze. I made many new friends.

But, alas, I had to go through the injury cycle of letting go. Letting my fall races go. Letting my conditioning go. Giving ground tenaciously, but giving ground nonetheless. With

each failed and painful effort at running and each ice pack the weeks stretched until I let it all go and resigned myself to the sport of focused overeating and self pity!

I did one session of physical therapy. I don't like physical therapy. I'll take the one meeting to get the diagnosis and recommended exercise and stretching routine, but once I've sucked them dry of their clinical knowledge I can do the rest myself.

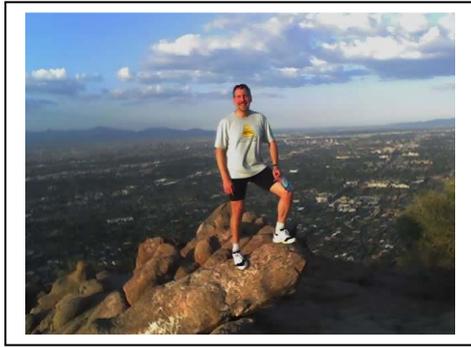
The guy I got was great. He knew his stuff and understood my need to rehab myself. He scared me a little when he squirted a big glob of lube into his hands and came at me. I did not get 'the happy ending', but I can honestly say I did get the best ankle massage I've ever had.

He taught me something as well. When you stretch out those ankle ligaments it really screws up your balance. (I had been wondering why I was walking into more walls than usual.) It's not so much a question of pain - it's that the control system that I've been using for 44 years every time I plant my right foot is now calibrated differently. I've got to re-program all the wiring from the ankle to the brain. Old dogs must re-learn old tricks or fall down.

I believe in happy endings. I'm not there yet, I'm actually just starting, like a baby taking their first smiling, tentative stumbles. It's strangely refreshing to shuck the conditioning mind set and molt into a recovery psyche. It reminds you of all the gifts that you have been given.

Tomorrow will be 3 months and the fall season has been erased. I've found 10 pounds and lost my base. I ran a 5k with Teresa (and that dog) Sunday, (giving me 3.1 miles for the week!) I was muscle-sore on Monday! But the ankle is ok.

Here's the happy ending...



I was out in Phoenix this week. The guys said “Join us for a hike up Camelback in the morning.”

Somewhere my orthopedic surgeon is shaking his head and cringing while the physical therapist is wringing his hands and “tsk tsking”.

Of course, I said “Great!”

What a glorious morning in Phoenix with the sun just up and the cool dry air. We attacked that red rocky slope. Hey, hadn’t the therapist told me I needed to exercise the ankle? Help the tendon re-learn? Surely this would be excellent ankle exercise.

No I didn’t end up in the hospital. (Although reports said someone had fallen off the previous week and died) We had a great hike and my legs and joints felt super. Just as I had given up on this thing ever healing enough for me to run comfortably it surprises me by feeling better. Isn’t that the way it always works? Just when you let go – the gift is given?

Ironically I guess I have just about the right amount of time to go from a zero base to Boston in April! See how the gifts keep coming? Who’s with me?

What do you take for granted? Are there times when you’re out on the road, fighting gravity, felling miserable and thinking “this just sucks”? When that happens, I counsel you to do what I do; relax and let it go. It may be drizzly and cold and you may feel like crap, but you’re out running! You’re living and enjoying a great gift and you should glory in that. Even if you have to stop every once in a while and take a breath, each wobbly footfall is a gift to you. And that, as I tell the kids, is good.

Lubricate well before use...

Now that winter is here, let's review a few sticking points...

In my 'real job' many of my customers and prospects are Lubricants Distributors. While this makes my teenagers howl with smirks of double entendre it makes me think of topics less amorous and more painful. I don't know about you, but this time of year I am compelled to dwell on ways to keep my epidermis inviolate.

It wasn't until I caught the marathon bug that abrasion became a compelling topic. Any old 5 mile dash doesn't require defensive technology. I used to leave the house in the dead of a January eve wrapped in long johns and many layers of cotton sweats. It didn't matter because I'd be back in front of the wood stove in 40 minutes before any damage was done.

Mr. Marathon and his cohort of long, multi-hour training runs soon cured me of the sweat pants and cotton t-shirt habit. Sweat, when mixed with cotton and rubbed repeatedly over the same spot becomes an excellent whetting agent. That all-purpose sweatshirt you've been wearing every day since 1984 becomes as efficient as a rotary sander (with 100 grit sand paper). I'm sure I speak for the majority here when I say there is nothing quite as 'enlightening' as that moment you discover, typically in a hot shower, that you have removed a layer of skin from one or many pointy places. "Honey, are you alright? I heard a terrible scream!?"

When you get past a certain point in the race, blister and rash pain becomes secondary to the great and wonderful pain of effort. It's not until later that the damage becomes particularly uncomfortable.

Technical garments are a boon to our generation. Besides the cool shoes with more engineering than a jet-fighter, we get all kinds of high tech fabrics that coddle our corporeal shells allowing us to shuffle off indefinitely without damaging our mortal coils.

On the coldest of New England race days all I need is a pair of thick tights, a long sleeve technical shirt and my trusty fleece sweater. All the nasty sweat is wicked away from the tender skin. On very cold days the body-water freezes in the fleece like a hard candy shell around a soft vanilla center. I do not suffer from chills as the winter winds howl and buffet like paper dragons. I cinch up my hood, pull down my fuzzy hat and soldier on.

Even with this shell of technical impenetrability there are chinks in the armor. At issue is the repetitive rubbing. Even the smallest rub can become like the glassed string of a Middle Eastern kite fighter when spread over a few thousand footfalls.

What are the hot spots? Yours may be different but my hot-list of abrasive bodily locales begins with the nipples. These pointy little bits always stand ready for the abrasive abuse of a few thousand footfalls. I've got excellent finish line photos replete with bloody shirts courtesy of Mr. Nipple. It's not so much that it hurts, it's just nasty. I've had these little injuries begin secondary eruptions that have ruined business shirts and disturbed business partners days after the race.

The next spot for me is the inner thighs. Now many of my 'real runner' friends don't have this problem because they are so skinny that you can see daylight right up to their episiotomy scars. If you're like me, and, I would imagine, the majority of mid-packers, your thighs are "more muscular" and rub together. This is problem is more prevalent when wearing shorts and is mostly abated by bike shorts and tights. Still, no one wants to be walking like a bow-legged cow herd for a week while the skin on the inside of their legs re-grows. It is very uncomfortable.

The next bit that requires lubrication, especially when wearing tights, is technically referred to as the perineum. Think of that part of the body most in contact with a bicycle seat. For those of us with Neanderthal heritage there may be some hair tangling issues mixed in with this one too.

The last major culprit of skin distress is, as Austin Powers would say, “the wedding tackle”. Depending on your particular body type there are some extremely sensitive pointy bits in this category. Abrasion here can be miserable. It can turn the post race celebratory to post race celibacy.

Finally there are a couple lesser areas of rubbing that can be hit if you truly want to end up unscathed. Many people get a red strip right behind the armpit where the swinging arm meets the latissimus dorsi. On rare occasions I’ve also given myself a stubble burn from forgoing a shave before a race. That’s my list. I’m sure you have yours. How do you prevent it?

Early on I applied the ubiquitous Vaseline or other petroleum jelly. This works fine for about an hour and a half, then it degenerates and becomes useless if not reapplied. At some point the degraded petroleum jelly seems to make matters worse. This is why you will sometimes see volunteers offering tongue depressors with gobs of petroleum jelly in the latter miles of some long races. Those are not energy treats. They are for refreshing your abrasion defense if Vaseline is your weapon of choice. I wonder how many disoriented runners have actually eaten these offerings?

There are lubricants now that are engineered specifically for runners and they work well. A product called Aquafor was given away liberally at races and expos over the last couple years. It works great and stands up to the full 26.2. Besides the fact that it works great, the sample size tube they give out fits right into a key pocket. There is a generic equivalent at your favorite pharmacy chain that seems to do the trick too.

The other runner favorite is Body Glide that comes in a speed-stick for easy application. From experience I can honestly say that these two lubes are far superior to petroleum jelly and will get you through your long runs unscathed. Apply a finger-full of these lubes to your hot-spots and your skin will love you for it at the post race party. You can also rub a little on your face to prevent windburn.

The only caveat is that these products can be messy. They may permanently stain some of your technical shirts and will definitely stain a cotton shirt. I suppose all that nipple blood would stain the shirts too, so it's probably an easy choice.

Band-Aids don't work on nipples. To clarify, they don't work on my nipples. Two reasons, first is that I sweat them off in less than 10 minutes of running. Second is that I've got an abundance of fur that prevents them from getting a good grip for adhesion. It's probably a good thing because getting them off would be like a body wax experience.

One of my 'real runner' friends swears by Nip-guards. He says that they work perfectly and he can reuse them for multiple applications. These are little adhesive donuts that surround the pointy bit and protect it directly.

I made a grave mistake in this regard at the Chicago Marathon in 1999. I was wandering the pre-race expo and came across a booth offering free samples of a product to protect skin. This product was a mole-skin type adhesive patch that could be cut into the appropriate shape and stuck on top of the places where rubbing was imminent. While chatting with the booth people I remarked how Band-Aids were useless and fell off as soon as I started sweating. They assured me that this product would not fall off.

I took the free sample and shaped a little oval patch for each nipple. I applied my improvised pasties in the morning. Sure enough they didn't fall off. As a matter of fact I finally had to cut them off three days later with much skin and hair loss. Be careful what you wish for.

The bottom line is that there is no honor or glory in self mutilation through distance running. As gnarly as those bloody finish line photos are, all that suffering is quite unnecessary. Good technical clothes and the right salve will keep your skin on your body where it belongs. A little preparation will allow you to just say 'no' to the post race shower from hell.

Find the proper lubricant, grease yourself up and meet me at the starting line.

The stinky shirt intervention.

It lurks in your closet waiting to get you.

It's early Sunday morning and I'm perusing my running closet for what to wear. Actually it's more like a rack above the washer and dryer – banished to the recesses of the laundry room. It's decorated by the flotsam and jetsam of the sport. There are many pairs of dirty shoes and miscellaneous articles of clothing.

I've got to go run 16 miles up hill and dale, over mount and vale on the infamous Derry course. It's January and the forecast is cold. I fish through my stuff to find another layer. I need something technical and tightly woven to cut the wind under my fleece.

It's always a challenge trying to figure out what to wear on these winter days. It might warm up by race time and you don't want to be hot or get all wet from too many coverings. A couple degrees either way can buy a boatload of misery.

Most of us try to under-dress and then balance the difference with our hats, gloves and zippers. These can be removed for venting if things heat up. We pack our bags like inexperienced travelers, throwing in two of everything just in case. We spend the minutes before the gun like nervous hens trying to decide the right combination.

Pushing through the hangers I discover, among the loosely woven give-away technical race T's, an old Reebok training shirt. It's nice and thick and wicks very well. I remember the hundreds of miles I've run in it fondly. Somewhere in the back of my mind a little voice warns me that this is one of those shirts with a pernicious odor problem. I don't dwell on it. It's a 16 mile road race in the freezing cold for goodness sakes! Who's going to notice a little residual stench? Especially under a couple layers of fleece? I'm sure there will be plenty of muskiness to go around...

I dress without further thought. I drink my coffee. I eat my oatmeal. I stretch and rub spicy sauce on my old muscles. I jump in the truck for the ride up 93. I begin to notice the familiar vapors creeping up through the fleece. I tell myself it will be fine.

It's not like the shirt is dirty. It's not. I've washed it. I've soaked it. I've pre-treated and double-washed it. The musk prevails. I've bleached it. I've recited medieval exorcism spells over it. I think I even left it floating in a hotel pool once. I've bundled it with 'freshening' dryer sheets.

It comes out of the dryer not-stinky. Not 'fresh' but not evil. I don't know what it is about that shirt. Maybe it's the tight weave and the thickness, but even after all the domestic cleaning product assaults as soon as I put it on it begins to live. It has burned in 'stench memory'.

I'm not a particularly odiferous person. I'm quite conscientious about hygiene. Heck, if I'm in training I sometimes take three showers a day! Somehow this shirt has a snapshot of me on my worse day burned into it. It smells in Technicolor once it gets going. It's like having a long distance event at the garlic convention.

I'm in the gymnasium greasing up my pointy bits in defense of the cold and engaging in some pre-race banter when inevitably the topic turns to "What are you planning to wear?" I lift my fleece to reveal the evil-stinky shirt. At this point I have Frank to thank for an impromptu 'stinky-shirt' intervention. Friends don't let friends run stinky.

"I like this shirt, but it stinks a little..."

"You're not wearing that shirt."

"I like this shirt; it's nice and thick..."

"It stinks, throw it away right now!"

"I paid a lot for this..."

“THROW IT AWAY!”

“But I...”

“RIGHT NOW!”

“ok...”

In this way my old Reebok shirt ended up on the heap with the empty Gu packets and paper cups. I donned the race T they were handing out, which was pretty nice and did not smell bad. Thank you Frank, for the guidance. Sometimes I'm weak.

What is it about certain garments that manifest in a proclivity for exaggerated rankness? I have other shirts that I've had just as long as that one and they don't have the same problem. It must be some sort of evil possession. The spirit of an ogre trapped in the shirt. Why that shirt and not another?

How do you get that stink out? I don't mean cover it with another sweeter fragrance or replace it with something antiseptic. How do you return one of these haunted shirts to its previous unobtrusiveness? Beats me, but I'm sure you, dear reader, must have some whacky home-baked solutions to share with me...

Bury it in the front yard?

Soak it in mare's urine (like the Romans)?

Burn candles?

Sink it in the pond for a couple days?

Prayers to St. Garlicus?

What works?

Revenge of the stinky shirt!

I was getting dressed this morning and it was quite cold out - single digits with a gusty wind. Digging through my drawers for something warm I chanced upon an old Nike Running shirt. I thought to myself, "This will make an excellent under-garment for such a cold day!" When it's cold, you dress in layers.

I remember the shirt fondly. It was the second shirt I bought when I started training for marathons. I had gotten to the point where those cotton T's were alternately rubbing all the skin of my chest and giving me chills. I remember buying that shirt off the rack in the Super-Sporting-Goods Store because it said "Nike Running" on the front. I figured, at the time, this made it a running shirt. This shirt turned out not to be exactly 'technical'. I would kindly call it "mostly synthetic". But it gave service for a few long campaigns and here it was once again to keep me nostalgically warm on this blustery day.

I thought nothing more of it as I worked the morning and made my way inevitably to the airport for a flight to Houston. Then the long walk from Central Parking in my overcoat brought my heart rate up a little and turned the furnace on, so to speak. I noticed a wee bit of a goat-like fragrance emanating from the layers. Hmmm...

Through security it was getting worse. Finally as I was uncomfortably ensconced in the back of the plane it was reaching China syndrome levels of toxicity. That's when it hit me. This was another one of those stinky shirts. Even after languishing unworn in the bottom of a laundry pile for 2 years all it needed was a little body heat and it had come to life like some evil undead in a George E. Romero movie.

I tried to keep a low profile as the plane nosed up. Something had to be done. Then I heard Frank's voice like a cinematic flash back; "Throw it away right now!"

As soon as it was appropriate I made my way to the lavatory. Once securely locked in I removed all my layers and stuffed the evil stinky shirt down into the little waste canister.

Fade to black.

Scene opens:

Somewhere in the USA there is a 737 cleaning crew puzzling over why there would be a perfectly good Nike Running shirt in the trash. She takes it from the trash. She'll wash it and give it to her son. Cue the creepy, ominous music and evil laughter. The End?

I'll see you out there, but don't get too close.

The long road to Boston.

Are you ready?

That's a loaded question. Everyone is ready. It's more a question of what you're ready for. I'm ready for my 9th Boston. Maybe you're ready (or are worried about) your first Boston. Maybe you're amped up for a qualifying try or a sub-3 wonder. Maybe you're like me and have given yourself permission to not sweat the race. I think that's the best strategy because this venerable old race tends to beat up those who take it too seriously.

Well we've officially made it through the 'pain' phase and are into the taper. With a successful trot down the coast at the Eastern States last week I'm done with long stuff. As sick as it sounds, I really enjoyed my training this year. It's as if Boston the event slowly shrinks in significance when compared to the striving that surrounds it.

I love the process. It's like a 3-6 month relationship. You sit down with yourself at the beginning. You come up with a plan. You make the commitment. You get on the bus and make the journey. The journey has its ups and downs. Its aches and pains. Its moments of terror and depression. It's wonderful triumphs and rebirthing.

This year I went with a moderate Yasso plan that involved all running. 5 days a week with Monday and Saturday off. One workout midweek and a long run on Sunday. My longest run was 20 miles. I did three of those. My biggest workouts were a set of 10 ½'s on the inside track and some long tempo. I wrapped as many long runs around the great New England races of the season as I could.

I chose this moderate plan because I knew with my travel schedule that I'd be kidding myself to think I could get more than one quality workout in during the week. Also I knew with my ankle still achy from severe sprain and evulsion in August, plus my advancing age related decrepitude...I didn't think my body would hold up under an advanced plan.

The only kicker was that I had to give myself permission to be slower. It's not as easy as it sounds. I had to give back 30 seconds on my tempo pace and speed. Probably one of the best decisions I've made ever. Never being particularly competitive or speedy to begin with it only moves me back a little in the midpack, but it's psychologically hard and physically hard to do. Your body doesn't like finding a new pace and somehow you don't feel sated.

My triumph of brains over testosterone has resulted in a marvelously enjoyable training season.

I completed the official 'badge of courage' series this year. For me it started on January 1st with the Hangover Classic 10k in Salisbury, MA with that invigorating ocean plunge at the end to get my commemorative glass. Ah tradition!

Then I set my sites on the infamous Derry Boston Prep 16 miler. With its wonderful hills and cataclysmic weather, this is a compulsive runner's dream (or nightmare). I challenged it and found myself healthy and worthy to continue.

Next I packed up my stuff and took the ferry over to Martha's Vineyard for that mid-February 20 mile trot. This was a bit of a challenge. I went out too fast, as I usually do, and ended up dragging my tired Clydesdale carcass for the last 3-4 miles. Not ready yet.

I don't know about you, but by the end of February, my training has officially entered the "Pain in the ass" phase. (Both figuratively and literally) There are no more easy runs and we're about 30 days away from the succor of our taper. Am I wrong? Was "inspirational" the word that popped to mind when you had to roll out of a warm bed and go trot around in the snow for 2-3 hours on those mornings?

Next I woke up one sunny morning and drove west for the punishing hills of Stu's 30k. Again with the "too fast" start resulting in the mile 15-16 power outage, but I shot a Gu and finished strong. At Stu's finishing strong means running the last mile uphill into a snow squall. This race is challenging.

It has lots of rolling hills and is good training for Boston. I saw Stu himself at the start.

I was hoping to run better because I had invested in a great massage the day before. I had somehow convinced myself that a good massage would remove much of the old-age from my system and allow my inner marathoner to break free. Stu's is such a tough course that it was probably a bad benchmark for this type of daydream.

A first for me this year; I ran the "Run to the Beach" free 30k. It starts in North Andover and runs to the Winner's Circle. This is where I started to finally feel like a marathoner. This race is designed for me. It has all the big hills in the first half so I can vent my "go out too fast" energy and the last few miles are down-ish where my great 190lbs of mass can be profitably deployed.

Since this is a free race there are no numbers or timing and no traffic control. It was interesting having to play tailgate tag with the cars coming off 95 North in the middle of my mile 18 kick! I like this race - more like a loosely organized long run.

Then the final test.

As I was going out the door one Sunday my teenager said, "Have fun!" To which I grumpily replied, "Fun? It's not about fun. It's about commitment, focus and perseverance!" Immediately I thought to myself, "Wow, what an a-hole I am." 2 -3 or hours later I was back, shoes full of road salt and relatively unscathed, so why the attitude?

Unfortunately - you just get sick of running. I found myself thinking this morning, "Thank goodness I've ONLY got a 15 mile run on Sunday." What's up with that? One of the first timers in my club concurred the other night. "It just takes up so much time!" she said.

You get to this point and you're either trying to get psyched up for a tough workout or your trying to recover from one! I

always thought it ironic that you're probably in the best shape you've been in all year, but it hurts to stand up out of a chair!

You might draw the corollary that this is the 20 mile mark of your training. You're tired, your body aches and you're starting to wonder whether this was a good idea anyway.

How do you handle this last push to the finish? How do you keep your head in the game? How do you keep from hurting yourself? How do you end up happy and healthy in Hopkinton? Let me share my mid-pack strategies for surviving the next 6 weeks.

Do: Stick to your training plan.

Don't: Beat yourself up too much.

Having a good written training plan is a great way to stay on track in these last few weeks. A written training plan - as long as it's a sensible one for you - will allow you to stop worrying and focus on the day's task. Stop thinking about the long race you have in two weeks or the humongous workout you have the Wednesday. Just focus on completing today's workout. That's it. It works for another organization and it will work for you..."One day at a time". Narrow your focus and you can enjoy the ride and stop worrying about the tsunami of running that is chasing you.

Stick to the plan! If the plan says to run 10 miles today, but you feel great and want to run 20, don't do it! The experts who wrote these plans, assuming you're following one of the available ones, know what they are doing and each mileage has a purpose. Now's not a good time to start winging it!

That being said don't be so hard on yourself. There is a perfectly acceptable margin of error in all these plans. I can remember when I first started training and I'd run an extra lap around the neighborhood after a long run just to make the mileage exact to the plan. Do you think that extra kilometer made any difference in my race? Probably not.

Now I'm more likely to run based on effort level and time than distance. You know best how your body is working on any given day - rounding up, or rounding down won't kill you.

If you've been following a plan, then by this point in your training you've gotten at least one 20 miler in. Guess what? You are in shape to run a marathon. Yup, that's right, you could stop training today and start your taper and you'd be just fine in the marathon.

I did it last year. I pulled up with a strain with 6 weeks to go and only Martha's Vineyard under my belt. I certainly wasn't in shape to race, but I finished comfortably and all I did was 18 miles a week in the woods with the dog for those last 6 weeks. Essentially, all the big runs and hard workouts you're doing now are fine-tuning. They are probably more for psychological strength than conditioning!

Do Train to race Boston

Don't Race Boston

Boston '07 – Wet, windy and wild!

Don't believe the news - Best racing weather in 10 years!

It was an interesting race last week. It played well to my affinity for a quixotic adventure. Of course I was on a business trip in the Midwest as the weekend approached with its media-driven, hysterical foreboding of meteorological Armageddon. It has become tradition for me to be flying home on Friday from parts unknown and I usually have to squeeze my aching butt back into an airline seat on Monday night! Who says the universe has no sense of humor.

Wednesday night I got my first hysterical email. “Do you think the race will be cancelled?” It asked. (This being my 9th Boston I’m evidently perceived as having some useful input on these matters.) I usually can be counted on for input, not so sure about the useful part. I responded that I doubted it would be cancelled.

After all we’ve been going about this for over 100 years now. We’re New Englanders. We’re supposed to be a miserable and stoic bunch. Go out to Gloucester and read the monument under the bronze fisherman. We’ve cheerfully sent 5,000 of our scions to the briny depths in search of Cod; a little rain shouldn’t stop us from a 26 mile jog.

Just to be sure, I sent an e-mail of to Dave McGillivray – that compulsive race director and runner of races. I was guessing he’d be too busy to answer, it being 4 days before the big event, but compulsion runs deep! I had the following encouraging correspondence from a hotel room in Milwaukee as I watched a heavy wet snow fall on the rental cars and thought about skipping my last tempo workout in the morning.

...

From: Chris Russell

Sent: Wednesday, April 11, 2007 7:27 PM

To: Dave McGillivray

Subject: Dave - any inside scoop?

*What's the inside scoop on the swirling rumors of
cancellation and postponement?*

Thanks,

Chris,

...

From: Dave McGillivray

Sent: Wed 4/11/2007 9:27 PM

To: Chris Russell

Subject: RE: Dave - any inside scoop?

*False, false, false and false.....and false. I know I'm
running...the other 24,000 need to decide for themselves!*

dm

...

From: Chris Russell

Sent: Wednesday, April 11, 2007 9:48 PM

To: Dave McGillivray

Subject: RE: Dave - any inside scoop?

Ha! Bunch o' wimps...

C-

...

From: Dave McGillivray

Sent: Wed 4/11/2007 9:52 PM

To: Chris Russell

Subject: RE: Dave - any inside scoop?

Exactly.

...

With that settled we were left with having to put up with the senseless apoplexy of the network news. As un-American as it sounds, I'm much happier when I don't watch those folks.

Back at home Friday I took Buddy the Wonder Dog for a final short prance as is my habit, and settled myself mentally for a weekend of relative inactivity and forecast watching.

It was raining pretty hard and any hope of beginning the spring sports season for the kids was squashed as all the fields were closed and all the games were cancelled. It rains in Boston in April. That's why they talk about 'April showers'. It's our version of the monsoon. In Vermont they call it 'mud season'. It still doesn't stop our civic minded and over-scheduled populace from stewing about it.

Saturday the girls and I took the train into the Hynes to get some free food and posters. An interesting outgrowth to my relative marathon longevity is that my kids have grown up with tramping into Boston every spring on the Saturday before Patriots Day. To them it's a grand adventure. They know all the food vendors at the expo and have even begun inviting their friends to join along in the fun. As they turn into teenagers I'm just an adjunct in this whole process, a curiosity and an appendage - a means to an end with a wallet.

One of my strange traditions is to wear the previous year's race shirt to the expo. I suppose it started the second year as I wanted to show them all that I belonged among the hardy few, that I was one of their hale companions. After this year I gave all my race shirts to my Mom to see if she can make me a quilt! My personal marathon shrine in the laundry room was getting a little crowded and a tad creepy!

The expo was way crowded, probably because the weather drove everyone inside. I bought a pair of shorts for race day. I tried to buy a hat but they were sold out. The long sleeve windbreakers were a hot item as people began to panic. One of the charity runners from my club was leaving frantic messages on my phones. "What do we do? What should we

wear? Will they cancel the race?" To which I replied, in a nod to Douglas Adams, "Don't Panic".

In my own strange little world I was starting to hatch a plan, because, believe it or not, the weather looked pretty good to me. My PR at Boston was in 1998 on the last blustery day. This is the kind of weather that an albino Clydesdale thrives on. It's usually way too hot for me - like in 2004 when it was 88 degrees and sunny - now that was a miserable race. But, mid-40's and drizzly? That's my optimum racing weather.

The only wildcard was the wind. The forecasters had started to use the Nor'Easter phraseology. As the name implies, a Nor'Easter blows north east. Not as bad as a hurricane, but winds gusting up to 30-40 mph are still a little tough to run directly into for 26 miles.

It was only logical and equitable. We had escaped cataclysmic weather events at all the spring races. Derry, Martha's, Stus' Eastern States - all good. We were due for some meteorological weirdness.

The night before I lay awake and listened to the roar of the storm as gusting winds drove the rain in angry sheets against the house. Torrents of water gurgled through the gutters and out the drain pipes. The last remnants of dirty snow melted into the ground.

Monday broke cold, mid 30's, and rainy, but the wind wasn't too bad. I figured that at least this year would be interesting. I put dry socks, shoes, gloves and my Gu in a plastic bag. I put on thin tights and a couple shirts and threw my new shorts in the bag. I got out a large black plastic trash bag and had my daughter tailor it into a tunic of sorts, replete with smiley faces. (One year I had her draw flames on my shoes with crayon...)

I wasn't stressed because I didn't really have anything riding on the race. I was going to finish. I turn 45 next year and they've given me the gift of ten whole minutes on my qualifying time. It might not be enough, but it didn't matter.

I trained ok, but not too seriously this spring. I knew with my travel schedule and the fact that I broke my ankle in August I wouldn't be able to train hard. If I did, I'd just be miserable and probably injured. I trained well instead. I adjusted my targets to my new old-guy qualifying standard and followed a moderate Yasso program. My strategy was, as it has been for a few years, to train enough for the race to not be miserable, but run it for fun.

If I can offer up any Boston recommendations for my mid-pack friends, the primary one would be "Don't race this race, run it for fun." I tell people to train and qualify in the fall, but train and enjoy Boston. It's too much of a spectacle to waste staring at a 3 foot square patch of pavement for 3 hours. Lighten up. High five the kids. Hug the girls. Have some fun. Think of all the folks who never get here.

I leaned on our great support community of mid-packers up here throughout the spring. I worked the majority of my long runs around local races. Why go out and slog about by yourself for hours when you can slog about with some likeminded folks?

We kicked off the campaign on January 1st, ironically enough in the pouring rain, at the Hangover Classic 10k, and I did take my ocean plunge for the mug! Next we gathered up our mountain climbing gear and had a strong outing at the Derry Boston Prep 16 Miler.

Onto the ferry and out to Martha's Vineyard in February for a 20 mile jaunt with the islanders, (where I discovered that I had 17 miles worth of the race in me!) Then I woke up one sunny day and decide to go west for the grueling Stu's 30k - an excellent training run for Boston and, as is traditional, it was snowing when I crossed the finish line.

The free Run to the Beach 30k was next with a killer hill set early in the run, but a nice downhill ride after mile 15, a mini-simulation of the Boston course. Finally we toed the line in Kittery for the Eastern States 20 miler. I was feeling strong and injury free. Not the best shape I've ever been in, but

what the heck, on paper I was all set to go. New England is a great place to be a runner.

Through the whole process I traveled non-stop for business. Some of my training highlights include running up Camelback and Squaw Peak in Phoenix in lieu of tempo workouts. Ambling through the still destroyed rubble of New Orleans - (why aren't we doing more to help our own?) Cruising the length of Hollywood Blvd to the pier and dipping my fingers in the Pacific and Atlantic in the same day. Daybreak loops in the Galleria in Houston, and countless other generic treadmills, sidewalks and parking lots. It all blended together, but I usually got my runs in. Not the best training, but a still moving forward.

As I drank my coffee and rubbed the Flexall into my legs on Monday morning I began to think, "Why let this splendid cool weather go to waste?" If I could stay out of the wind and keep my feet relatively dry this was a day for racing. You have to be patient and respect the distance, but I figured I'd at least put myself in the position to race if it turned out to "be my day".

We made our way out to Hopkinton in the intermittent showers and it was warming up. I quickly got naked and switched to my new shorts and a long sleeve technical shirt. It was raining. We took some pictures, cracked the same old jokes and hit the porta-potties. We boarded the buses and talked to all the folks from all over the states and the world, all ages, all sizes, veterans and newbies.

For some reason this year the buses took the long route getting back on 495 and going down another exit instead of taking us into town. With the rain and the traffic we ended up spending a good 30-45 minutes on the bus, but we were warm and dry.

Unloading at the high school it was raining hard and the wind was gusting 20-30 mph. It was too late to make it down to the lower field. We got in line for a last pit-stop. I amused

my friends by screaming at the tempest, "Is this all you've got?!?...You call this rain?!?"

There were folks in all kinds of waterproof clothing. Some of it was sophisticated - full white hazmat get ups. Most of it was impromptu like my glad-bag tunic. Folks had their feet wrapped and taped up in swaths of plastic grocery bags. Many had those one-use rain ponchos like they give out at the ball games.

Hopkinton is getting all new sod this year. They'll have to, because any patch of grass was quickly trampled into a sucking quagmire of mud. I had been telling the newbies to stay away from the fields because there just wouldn't be enough tents for everybody - like life boats on the Titanic. In the end it didn't matter because by the time I was relieved - we were being called for the start.

Listen as I'm politically correct so I don't get verbally harassed like I did last year...

This year they started some of us with 10,000 numbers and lower at 10:00 AM and a ½ hour before those other runners with higher numbers who trained just as hard and are just as serious and proud wonderful people in their own rights...Actually I firmly believe the folks in the back corrals are morally superior individuals and I hope they are nice to me next year when I might join them.

So...anyhow...we had to hustle to get to the corrals. They were singing the national anthem as I got there. No time to stretch. I un-wrapped my plastic package and put on my dry green Locos, dry hat and fresh gloves. I stripped off and tossed away my sweats - adding my castoff clothing to the grand pile of leavings there on the sidewalk. The corral was full. I couldn't get in until they pulled the ropes.

And then it stopped raining. The weather becalmed itself like some atavistic miracle bending to our collective wills. If you were to look at the weather map for the day you would

see an isolated patch of nothing between the rain bands that would hold for us through the day.

I tore off my plastic bag, said a prayer of thanks and decided it would be a fine day for racing.

It took us 10+ minutes to gain the start mat, but after that things cleared out almost immediately and I was quickly on pace. The inclement start seemed to have bled off the typical early jitters. Everyone was running easy. No one was doing the usual useless trying to break through or lane changing. As a result we were off easy and clean through the early miles.

My plan was to hold a good pace to the top of Heartbreak. Stay out of the wind and save energy. My race would be decided in the last 10k. In this way the first 20 miles are an exercise in patience and the last six are an exercise in courage. The more patience you have, the less courage you need. You never know what's going to happen after 20. You just have to give yourself a chance, to set yourself up for the ultimate challenge, the thing that we all love, the final test where it is just us against ourselves.

I try to pace so that I hit 20 miles with 5 minutes in the safety deposit. That way if I crash I can still make my time – maybe. At the five mile water stop I was already 4 minutes up, steadfastly ignoring my big brain's call for reserve. My big-brain put its foot down and pulled the car over to walk the water stop and stunt the growth of some shrubbery.

Then a deep breath and back on the road at a slightly more sensible pace. The wind was gusty and right at us most of the time. Everyone was running great; nice and steady. It made drafting easy.

People asked me all week, "Wasn't the wind bad?"

"Not where I was!" I can draft an underfed 8-year-old. At one point we actually had a tail wind for a little bit. With my strategy and the wind I was trying to put away a Gu and walk

a water stop every 5 miles. I figured I'd need the strength when we dropped down the slump into Kenmore and there was no protection. It made me a little sick, but that was ok, it slowed me down.

I met the typical medley of nice folks from all over, and had some good laughs. There seems to be a waning of the iPod craze. Maybe it was the weather or the harsh warnings from USATF, but not everyone was in their own music video this year. It made it easier to talk to folks.

As the miles rolled on I noticed that the clothing crisis continued. There was stuff everywhere. The plastic bags were a wee bit treacherous as they rolled like tumbleweeds in the wind amidst the runners legs. If I had some way to carry it I could have gotten a full wardrobe of running stuff. Nice stuff too, technical hats, gloves, windbreakers - you name it.

At the same time there were people running in full warm up clothes like they were going on a snowmobile trip. People wore their plastic bags the whole race! I saw guys in the high miles with the shreds of plastic grocery bags safety-pinned to their shoes like they were homeless people fleeing an apocalypse. They must have been too tired to take the stuff off.

The DNF's were almost nonexistent compared to previous years. People were walking in the hills, but not wrecked like in previous races. The cool weather kept them in it. After the final accounting I believe only 300 odd people hit the med-tents compared to over 1,000 in '04. The newscasters didn't let the facts blur their strong emotional leads of how brave and courageous everyone was to be out there. I can tell you it was awesome running weather - at least for me.

The crowds were still out. These are professional spectators. They can't be stopped. The girls were out at Wellesley. Their screaming was once again a mad animal howl that can be heard 2 miles before you get there. All the old guys perk up their paces and slap enough hands to qualify as level 3 sex offenders. I'm smiling just thinking about it - thanks ladies!

In the middle miles my new shorts started to chafe. Ever hear that advice about not wearing anything new for the race? Luckily I had thought ahead and had a small tube of Aquafor in my key pocket. I splurged it on but dropped the cap, so I had to toss it.

One amusing anecdote... I finally got my answer as to whether anyone eats the Vaseline they offer out in great gobs on tongue depressors just before Newton Lower Falls. Frank saw some gentleman from the Far East take one and eat it. Must have thought it was clear Gu! That's got to be hard to swallow.

I found a nice Canadian couple to follow through the hills. They were setting a great pace. Finally the guy turns around on Heartbreak and says, "What the hell is wrong with you? You've been following us for miles!" I shrugged and moved on. I wasn't stalking you Dudley Dooright, I just liked your pace.

At mile 20, I was scheduled to walk the water stop and shoot a Gu, but I just didn't want to give up the momentum. At the top of Heartbreak I had 6 minutes in the bank and felt fresh. Hoo-hah! I picked up another minute on the back side in the next 2 miles. A perfectly executed tactical marathon, now all I had to do was keep my hands on the wheel and my eyes on the road.

I don't know about you, but I start playing a math game with my banked miles that goes like this... "I've got five 6 minutes so I could run all 9 minute miles in and still get my time..." Then "I could walk the last 3..." And if you stay on pace the numbers just keep getting rosier.

As you get closer to the city the boys have had a few too many beers and heckle the walkers in a good natured way. They bend to the task with boozy "C'm'on you can do it! Get moving! Let's go!" The Green line trams tempt us all to take the last couple miles for free.

For awhile I was near a guy running with a life preserver on. The crowd was yelling "Stay afloat!" - so he must have had that written on him somewhere. Again in the interest of harmony I'll say that I'm sure whatever charity or website you were running for is a wonderful thing. Next year I'm thinking of running in a leopard-print thong to raise awareness for old guys with back hair.

My marathon photo proofs came in the mail and it shows me smiling as I cross the finish line. A big happy grin as I easily beat my target time by 8 minutes. I feel like the cool weather allowed me to steal one!

All in all it was a fantastic day. I think I have one more in me - at least.

Mountain Man Madness

Why, oh why?

When was the last time you ran a 4 mile race a full 2:15 per mile slower than your 10K race pace and felt good about it? When was the last time you were terrified at the starting line of a 10 miler? This year I've blithely stumbled into the alternate universe of mountain races.

On the slopes of Wachusett, 1 mile in, my heart and breathing redline. Where's the pace? What the heck? I don't think I can run any slower. And I'm certainly not going to start walking. That's just not going to happen. I don't have a set of tools in my tactics bag for this. For the first time in years I'm performing without a net and have no idea what's going to happen next. I'm saved when "Indestructible" by Rancid, attacks me through my iPod. I choke down the nausea and smile.

And I know I'm indestructible!

And I know I'm indestructible!

Tonight!

Yeah baby, bring it on.

I turn to the guy next to me, a good looking dude, sort of Daniel-Day-Lewis-esqe, shirtless, flowing locks, you get the picture; "Dude, better check your brakes, hills ahead!"

He smiles, "This isn't bad. It starts to get steep at the end."

Yikes! 3.5 miles to go and it's going to get steep! Oh boy, if anything convinces me to lose those last 20 pounds, this would be it. I'm feeling seriously handicapped (in the horse racing sense).

Grinding up the last mile of the Pack Monadnock 10 miler. The website said something about most scenic views in New England. All I can see is about 10 feet of drizzle and a patch

of tar in front of me. I don't want to look up. Every time I do all I see is the road disappearing into the mist up ahead. Still going up, up and up with no end in sight.

I've found a pace I can hold. This one is not about heart rate; it's all about leg muscles. I've got a nice slow trudge going, but I'm not walking. Then, out of the clouds from behind me, a dude power walks right past me as I'm 'running'. I'm definitely not in Kansas anymore.

It started as most of my adventures do. Not with a carefully laid out training plan. Not with a detailed schedule of personal goals. Rather on an ill-conceived whim, and, as usual, with an evil friend.

"Hey, run Wachusett Mountain with me!"

"Sure, why not." The dumb-ass responds. Here's the irony; he never showed up! Now I'm hooked in a Mountain race series.

It's my own fault. I did a poor job of planning a response to the Boston post-partum syndrome. You know what I mean. You train from January to April and then the day after Patriots day you're a bit at loose ends with no real compelling events on the horizon.

My experience is that you should always schedule something challenging for the summer to keep you honest. The fall is too far away. Otherwise you wake up on the fourth of July with an extra 15 pounds and a serious lack of motivation.

The last couple years I have focused on a couple triathlons over the sultry months. It's a nice change and really is very healthy after all that road running. This year I couldn't talk myself into it. I let my swim club membership lapse. Frankly until they perfect the underwater iPod, I'm sick of the pool. Been there, done that. Sorry, it's not as much fun as running.

Combine this with the fact that I ran a great Boston and was therefore filled with that self-righteousness of accomplishment; you've got a formula for athletic entropy. A fertile Petri dish for the subliminal suggestions of evil friends. Sideways I slid down the slippery slope into a mountain race.

You might ask, "Chris, with all the running you've done in New England, surely you've run a mountain race before now? What about Mount Washington? Isn't that on every runner's 'do before you die' list?"

To which I would answer. "No, I hate running up hills." I never had the slightest desire to trudge up the side of Washington. Sure, I run plenty of races with big hills in them, but that's way different than the race *being a big hill*. I've always hated doing hill repeats, even though I appreciate their value. I've always much preferred running down the hills.

Frankly I'm not designed for running up hills. I'm a Clydesdale. Pushing the scales at a not-so-lean 190+ pounds means I've got to drag all those donuts and buffalo wings up the hills with me. Have you seen the guys (and gals) who dominate the mountain circuit? Not a whole lot of extra fat there. Little elfin creatures who sprightly bound up the mountains with nary a pause or heavy breath.

I put Wachusett on my calendar.

Then I began what I thought was a reasonable training program. While trapped in hotels on the road I attacked the stairwells, at one point doing an 18 story stair repeat. That's like a mountain, right? Then I'd do the hill program on the bike. That's all quads, right? Sure... Besides scaring the heck out of a couple bell-boys I can't say that either of these activities prepared me in any way for a real mountain.

I also threw in some long runs up and down all the hills I could find, charging up them to exhaustion. I tried to find a comfortable, sustainable uphill pace. I practiced lifting my

knees and kicking my stride while staying within an acceptable heart rate band. Excellent exercise, for sure, but not going to help you on the mountain.

Here's the rub. All of my hill training in the past was designed basically to help me get to the top of the hill with enough gas to run the race. The hills were a temporary event interspersed in the race. You either attacked them so you could recover on the back side or you survived them to save energy for the next part of the race. Guess what? On a mountain there is no top to the hill. There is no other part of the race. There is the hill and that's it.

Standing around on a sunny morning at Wachusset Mountain, looking for a non-existent evil friend, it occurred to me that this was not your father's weekend 5K. This wasn't the sweat-shirt and sneakers crowd. Most of these folks looked pretty gnarly. There were lots of old veterans. Well, heck I'm an old veteran. I trained. It's only 4.3 miles. What's the worst that can happen?

I started off fast, comfortable that I had trained a little and could figure it out. I was a bit worried that I was moving up through the pack rather quickly. What did all these folks with serious faces and short, rapid strides know that I didn't? Then, Wham! Redline!

Ok, I'll just slow down and recover...wait I'm running up the side of a hill there's no place to recover...umm...yikes!

Ok, a mile into the race I'm doing a pace comparable to the mile-25-death-shuffle I deploy when I've failed to respect the marathon. Lord I just don't want to walk!

I was like a kid driving a standard car for the first time. All herky-jerky on the peddles and grinding the gears. More gas! No wait, brakes! No wait, slow down! Speed Up! Holy Crap Batman! The gauges were spinning like a trip through the Bermuda triangle. First the heart rate and breathing redline. I got that under control and the quads start to

complain. I got through that and I'm overheating in the sun and feeling nauseous. Is that a 'check engine' light?

Wow! I thought I knew everything about my body and what it could do. Here I am working the controls like I'm trying to land a crippled jet on a rolling aircraft carrier in high seas.

It's about then I decided to do all the mountain races; the whole Mountain Goat Series. It's been a long time since I felt out of control in a race. Here, I thought, was an untapped vein to be mined in that never ending journey of self-discovery that is running. I would do this thing because it was hard! I would do this thing because I was bad at it! I would do this thing because I still had so much to learn! That, my friend, is the stuff that keeps us alive.

After surviving Wachusett I ran down the mountain. That was much more fun. I ran down with an interesting character named Zuess Estrada who was training for the Western States. I felt good. I had conquered something. I had done something new.

On to Pack. The Pack Monadnock 10 miler scared the heck out of me. Here a measly 4.3 miler had beaten me up and I was going to double down? My quads were marathon-sore for 3 days and I was going to mount up for twice as much with less than a week's rest? People who had run it before were encouraging: "Oh yeah, Wachusett is the easiest. Pack is one of the hard ones." Yikes.

I ask, "How do you train for this stuff?" and they have no answers. They just roll their eyes and look at me like I'm a lost puppy.

Here's the interesting thing about mountain races. Only Washington is 100% uphill. Most of the rest have significant flat, shallow and even downhill sections. Pack was like this. There were some beautiful rolling dirt roads. If you throw out the first 1.5 and the last 1.5 it's downright enjoyable. But that last 1.5 is up, up and away!

Having learned from the previous outing I went out slow, slowed down and then tapered. Knowing this course would have been a big advantage. I was afraid to push, not knowing what kind of monster hill might be around the next bend. I could have pushed it more on the flat bits and the shallow hills because it wouldn't have mattered at the end. None of us mid-packers were saving a sprint for that last section. I didn't walk! I ran really slowly, but I didn't walk!

Next week is Northfield Mountain. A trail race. More my style. Should be fun. I'm not afraid anymore and I'm learning new skills!

Jaded with your marathons and 10k's? Stuck in a blasé rut with your training? Meet me at the bottom of a mountain and I'll race you to the top!

Today is a good day

Or how to rationalize sleeping on the floor in an airport.

Today is a good day. Although the concept of 'day' is a bit ambiguous to me. Across time zones it all blends into a mish-mash of hotel rooms and airports.

It is a good day for a large inventory of reasons, primary of which is the fact that I got a silver dime in my change this week. The dime in consideration is from 1963. It has the telltale heft and black oxygenation of a time when they made currency from actual precious metals and not industrial alloy sandwiches. It glows in my pocket with a pale luminance that makes me wistful. I can't wait to show it to my kids.

Another reason it's a good day is that I feel good. I thought sleeping on the cold linoleum terminal floor might encourage my chest cold to morph into some avenging daemon of wrath. But instead of spitting blood, I sit here sipping a wonderful hot coffee; rich and strong, filling the voids of my soul with each wonderful gulp.

I can feel the age of my life seeping into my bones and I wonder sometimes why I cheerfully ride out these self-abusive adventures. As another tough wizened old New Englander said - "A fig to thee O Death!" The reaper is going to find you whether you're sitting in your boudoir sipping Piña Coladas or out on the road chasing Benjamins.

I've got a couple hours now of youth from the caffeinated goodness of these foreign beans before the cumulative effects of sleep deprivation brings me to ground like a lean and mangy lioness. And that's good to. It's an altered state of sorts. Like Castaneda and his desert lotuses I've got my coffee and red-eyes. I've got the self-confidence of a man who slept standing up and came away laughing!

Like all looking glass lives it worries me that I draw energy from the weirdness. It's a fantasy world that I stumble through with guilty pleasure, playing some sort of Walter

Mitty corporate pirate. Like a mole in deep cover the lines blur between normal and your play life – that way leads the slippery slope of addiction. How long before I'm living out of a studio apartment in Vegas with exotic dancers and insomniac bartenders?

Maybe, listening to my tale, you think it's just sad that this is something I celebrate in my deprivation of purpose. In the spirit of self-defense, self-deference and ego I'm forced to disagree. It's my private Zen and the Art of Business Travel. They are always telling us to enjoy the ride and not stress the destination, right? Maybe I'm just being literal.

The shipping cranes of the Newark port stand like idle spider monsters against the rising sun. Soon the squat industrial ranks of NYC will slide by my window as I make my way home to Boston. Out the window of my commute I see the world. I see all the wonders of nature and the turnings of man. In the planes and terminals I see all the faces of life.

This morning started as the sun was beginning to wake, in the flat concrete of a Houston dawn. I tied my running shoes and headed out. It's the best way to start a day on the road. It's the only way to stay in control of the body and the mind – the great machine – this interesting pile of carbon atoms – that I've inherited from the cosmos and get to ride around in for a few brief decades.

Chirping morning fowl. Early commuters. Municipal busses with their stoic riders. Strip malls with closed stores. Deserted, darkened, peaceful streets. Rank dumpsters leaking vile fluids.

I was startled from my reveries by a man sleeping on the sidewalk. His face was creased brown with exposure to the elements. Here was a traveler probably about my age.

Later I wondered if he, like me, reveled in his adventures. As I passed him all I could think about was the discomfort of a cement bed and sharing the Houston night with rats and mosquitoes.

In my dreams a loudspeaker voice repeatedly apologizes for “The Maintenance” that the train will only run every 15 minutes. My inner clock senses the emerging daylight through the shirt I have covered my eyes with.

I snap awake, entering the world fully formed. It’s not like emerging from fuzzy sleep. It is like a switch being thrown on or the pause button being disengaged.

For the first time I realize that the corner nest I have chosen is on full display of the passing trams. Do they wonder about the discomfiture of my cement bed? Now I am that itinerant worker.

I have been stretched on my back in the corner of a walkway between the terminal and the tram. My head is pillowed on my carry-on duffel and my legs propped by my laptop bag. My suit coat cloaks to my chin like a short grey blanket.

Sometimes people will wonder to me how one can sleep in noisy, awkward and strange places. It’s not hard. It is an exercise in mind/body control. I find it helpful to visualize my corpus encased in a capsule. The noise and awakening distractions are mentally placed on the outside and I am snuggled away on the inside, peacefully ensconced and protected.

Outside my window white-water-surf-frill reefs around the harbor islands as we descend into Boston. Home. Everything is green in the Joie de vivre of late spring. It’s a good day. I’m not careening through life in a rudderless sonambulance. Xenophon, Odysseys, Marco Polo, Darwin, Lewis and Clark – I’m sure they all slept in their share of airports. I’m sure.

Starbucks Jabberwocky 2/5/05

The vorpal jet calumphed slideways,

Into a slorth of swantle mist,

A hard rain of prackness pirtled the wings,

The aviator gorted hard the morly sticks,
And ground the Fortny to a stop.

Revenge of the old folks – respect your elders!

I have had a couple experiences lately that have caused me to respect my elders, that give me hope for the future and that validate the running lifestyle.

The first was when I was looking at the finishers of the Mountain Goat races and saw that there was a 70-year-old guy that ran all the races. These were not easy races folks. This was not your weekend 5K around the local high school parking lot. If I can drag my wrinkly butt up and down Mt. Cranmore 3 times when I'm 70 I will have led a good life. There was also a 70+ female who trucked up Mt. Ascutney with us. Then I cracked the USATF track and field magazine to see, among other things, an 85+-guy pole-vaulting 8 feet.

And...Here's one from the "make you smile" file. I was talking with my teenager and she referred to someone as "that old guy". I reminded her that I'm that same age. She said, "Yeah, but your different, you exercise and stuff..."

It got me to thinking how the assumptions we make limit us. How much of our falloff in activity and performance is just because we assume it's got to happen?

There is definitively an advantage to being a veteran. Even a veteran mid-packer. When you show up for a race you're not worried. You're not nervous. Why? Because you have done it before and most of the time you're prepared, (or at least you understand your level of preparedness). That's what makes you veterans successful.

You've stood on that starting line many times before. You know some races are difficult, some are easy and some are wonderful. All are part of the mosaic of experience that defines and prepares you.

You also know your limits. You know them because you have tested them and found them. You know that if you go out too fast that you will probably pay for it. But you've been *there* before too and if the wheels fall off late in the race, you

know that you possess that element of stoic courage and reserve to muddle through.

You know that each race and each distance deserves respect. Some deserve more than others. Some races can be vengeful mistresses if they are disrespected. They will extract their toll.

You know, because you have done it, that the best way to disrespect a race is to not train for it. More specifically, when you try to run the race in a way that your training does not entitle you.

You know your engine. You know your machine. And you know how to coax those extra seconds out of it. You know where the bad bearings are and the weak belts and wheedle that performance you need because and despite their protestations.

Training does not remove the necessity or underlying tension of executing the race that day to the best of your ability. Training sets the upper and lower bounds of your expectations. Experience; that great pile of experience, stands behind you with one hand on your shoulder, calming you and steadying you.

When you scan the crowd at the starting line, back in the mid-pack where you stand, you will see many faces. You will see many body types. You will see many attitudes. All of this is very deceiving because it discounts the value of being a veteran.

If a stranger were to reach in with a giant hand and pluck the ten closest people from the crowd, sort them by projected finish time based solely on their appearance, on their attitudes, they would probably be mostly be wrong. They would sort the older folks with the worn clothing and limping strides to the back. They would be tempted to sort the young and fresh to the front.

They'd be wrong. The more difficult the race, the more wrong they'd be. Hard races are where the veterans shine. Hard races are where experience and a steady hand prevail over freshness.

You'd do well to look at the eyes. There you might see the placid calm of experience. You might see the comfortable joy of thorough preparation within one's means. In a sense, this race is the one that these veterans have spent a lifetime preparing for; as well as the next one, and the next...

Sure, a few of the young studs would win in their bottle rocket glory of youth, but the majority of the next wave would be veterans, doing what they do, running within themselves and running with joy. Answering the question 'Is there life after youth?' with a smiling "Yes, and it's full of joy."

Don't write off those old folks with the weird shaped bodies and hitch in their strides. Don't be taken in by their studied frailty. They may shuffle by you on that really steep hill at the end of the race. They have conquered similar hills thousands of times. I know because they routinely shuffle by me. Sometimes I'll reel in that flustered 20-something on the stretch into the finish, because they lose faith when the storm tossed seas of a hard race besiege their tiny boat.

Did you know that we appraise you youngsters before we pass? We are not assessing your physical strength. We are assessing your mental courage. That will determine whether you will put up a fight when we shuffle by. The brightest flame is not the hottest.

Being old is good. Being a veteran has its benefits. I wonder how we would react if some wild-eyed scientist found a way to put us back into our 20-year-old bodies. Would power corrupt? Would we abuse our bodies like we did when we owned it? Running hard every day? Eating and drinking to excess? Not stretching, warming up or strengthening our core? We could again become kings and queens of disrespect!

Having an older body is more like a Stradivarius. It takes studied maintenance and focused care. It's a delicate, tested machine that you can massage great performances from. These performances may not be great in their speed or volume, but they are great in their worthiness and character.

In some sense you could make the case that we are just jaded and desensitized to pain. That's not true. If anything we are hyper-sensitized to pain. We have trained ourselves to surf the pain, to embrace its energy. We have learned the tune of the mind-body connection where pain is just another source of power.

More than that, we have also sensitized ourselves to joy in the mind body connection. Like so many hours of meditation our constant rhythm of exercise melds the body and mind together in a flowering of energy. This type of thing takes practice. It takes time. It takes many miles and many hours. Like any deep relationship it needs to be constantly cultivated and grown into.

I want to encourage you old folks to keep it up. Keep shuffling. You are the finely aged wine of the sport. You give us all hope and faith in the future. You validate that we have chosen a worthy path.

It should also be a shout out to those who think they are too old to start. You are never too old to start. The journey of life has no destination and it matters not the departure time. Come join us in the mid-pack and make the *rest* of your life fulfilling.

We are all just Methuselaha's in the making and everyday dawns new as an opportunity to move forward.

Can you operate in your “Discomfort Zone”?

Yes you can if you want to get stronger

We all know what it feels like to be in our ‘comfort zone’. Whether in sports, business or speaking behind the podium, these are the times when everything comes easily. You’ve done it before one hundred times. You are confident and comfortable in your endeavor. You glow with leadership and confidence.

It is a great feeling; to have things come easily, but how much time do you spend in your ‘discomfort zone’? These are the things in life that you struggle with. You are not confident. It does not come easily. It feels like work! You have to practice, focus and concentrate just to get by!

Here’s the rub; if you don’t purposely spend time in your discomfort zone you can never improve or get better. The bottom line is that you may love to operate in the comfort of familiar things and ways, but in reality you are not moving forward in your life and may actually be slipping.

I was thinking about this yesterday when I was down at the local running track working out. As part of my ongoing training for marathons and other running events, once or twice a week I have to do some painful and difficult workout. I rue these workouts.

Whether it is running fast laps on the track or hill charges – it hurts. I have a hard time convincing myself to do these workouts because my brain’s natural response is; “if it hurts, don’t do it!” I’ve made an art of procrastination to avoid these workouts. I have to trick myself like you would to get a 5-year-old to bed.

As I get to the track or the hills I am filled with a sense of dread and foreboding, even after years of doing this. Once I start it becomes easier because the ice is broken. The dread turns to mechanical challenge and competitive drive as the workout unfolds.

At the end of the workout the predominant emotion is triumph. I am fully self-satisfied for not only having beaten the workout, but also for having beaten back those procrastinating inner voices and having gotten it done. These become little victories built into the fabric of my world that I can take with me.

Sometimes the workout beats me. There are days when I cannot finish. Some days you just don't have the energy or drive to get it done. Maybe it's a strain or you just don't feel well from work stress or lack of sleep. Perhaps I'll do 2 laps instead of 4. Even on these days showing up is the victory. Making the try. Pushing the envelope.

Why does an old guy like me attempt these workouts? I don't have to. I do it because in order to get better you have to spend some time in your discomfort zone. You can only learn what you are capable of when you push yourself into your discomfort zone. That is true at any age and in any circumstance.

Whether it's a good day or a bad day I learn something about myself. Even if the workout beats me I have learned about my limits and my capabilities by pushing myself outside of my comfort zone. If you don't push yourself you attain a state of stasis and gradually lose your edge. Standing still is actually moving backwards.

My second example is from Toastmasters. Like many advanced Toastmasters I am comfortable speaking at the podium. I'm confident and I've done it a hundred times. I have my comfort zone. If it is a topic that I know or a situation I have done before I can execute without even thinking about it. That is my comfort zone.

Was I always confident? No, of course not. My first few presentations were fear-filled sweaty adventures that I had to force myself to do. Fortunately I was privileged to have a vocation that required speaking skills. I honed my presentations throughout my career. I purposely took on jobs that required presentation skills and did the work in

order to master them. At the time it was way outside my comfort zone.

Recently I have been trying to push outside my speaking comfort level. I have been trying dialog, characters, pantomime, using the three-dimensional stage, comedy and other advanced skills. It's frustrating. I consider myself a good speaker and many of these efforts produce mediocre results. I put in the practice, but like all first timers, I stumble.

I am learning. It's not easy to convince myself to keep trying new things. Why not give that great presentation that I know I can nail? If I do that then I am not learning. If I stop moving forward, I move backwards. I am protecting my self-image at the expense of self-development.

My last example comes from business. There is one thing in business that 99% of people hate to do. I think people fear this thing more than the thought of public speaking. This thing is the 'cold call'. What is a cold call? That's when you have to call someone you don't know, interrupt them and try to get their attention long enough to consider buying something from you.

I am part of the 99% that hates, loathes and fears cold calling. I recently overcame this fear and have actually started to enjoy the process. I've come into a position where I have to reach out to other executives. Sometimes they are brusque and the call goes off like everyone's nightmare scenario. Most of the times, if you do it right, you get to connect with some wonderfully fascinating people and engage them in important discussions.

Are you operating in your comfort zone? Do you know what you are really capable of? Are there things that you are certain that you can't do? How do you know? Have you tried?

I challenge to think of the thing that you dread most and make yourself do it. Chances are this is a huge barrier to

your success and self-fulfillment. The 80/20 rule says that removing this one negative from your life, adding this one skill could be overwhelmingly positive and lead to even greater successes. Why not do it?

Clearly if it was that easy you would have already done it. Therefore, I will give you a process to follow.

Learn,

Try,

Do!

First; you learn. We like to think of ourselves as rational beings. Our big brains need to have reasons and fact. The first step to tackling your big bogeyman thing is to learn about it. Study this thing. Find people who do it well and study them. Talk to them. Learn everything you can. Read articles and books. Research the web. Part of the fear is a fear of the unknown. Once you know how to do this thing much of that fear will drain out of the specific action.

If it is a real fear for you get help with that. Talk to people who deal with phobia. Understand the mechanics of your fear and the strategies for dealing with it. Focus on it and it will get better.

Second; you try. Even after you have practiced and learned and know what you want to do there is no instantaneous leap to proficiency. You have to practice. You need to find a safe place to practice so that those first few rough goes don't become debilitating.

It is better to practice fighting through exhaustion at the track than in a race. I can test what different foods to eat or not without risking an 'episode' in a marathon. Learn what to expect, so that when it happens for real you can deal with it.

Toastmasters allows you to try things in a safe place. Everyone is there to learn and to help each other get better.

When I test my new speaking skills I start there, not in front of a ballroom full of people!

I wrote my cold call script as if it were a presentation. I practiced it over and over until I internalized it. I could give the information in a casual, friendly, positive way without it sounding like a cold call. I practiced getting myself in a good mental place.

I initially made my calls early in the morning when I knew the executives would not be in. This way I could leave a voicemail and not have to be worried about the interaction. After 20-30 of these calls I started to enjoy the interaction. Now this is one of my skill sets.

Third; you do. There is no substitute for just doing it. If you have done your research and practiced your new skill, then there is no reason you should not pass the big test when it comes. Sure there may be some rough spots and 'learning experiences', but they will be just that; learning experiences not 'horrible personal failures'. After a few rounds of doing it you will start to enjoy that thing you feared and you will wonder why you never tried earlier.

Don't be satisfied with operating in your comfort zone. Seek out your discomfort zone. Find those things that push you and stress you. This is the quickest path to revolutionary self-growth.

There is a popular saying among coaches when they are badgering their players to work harder; "Pain is just the weakness coming out of your body!" You don't have to be a pain monger to try new things. You just have to know that even if you 'fail' you have won, because you have tried, you have learned something and you have grown. As another old saying goes; "Success is a journey, not a destination."

The iPod conflict brews in racing

There's a growing conflict between the running establishment and the iPod wearers. More and more races are vigorously enforcing their 'no-iPod' rules. A half marathon I was at recently wouldn't start the race until everyone turned in his or her headphones.

iPod pros and cons

The two sides officially line up this way. On one side you have the USATF and race officials. Any USATF race disqualifies headphone-wearing entrants. Meaning that if you were fast enough to win something but had worn your iPod, you would be disqualified. Your results expunged from the official record.

Race officials are forced by their liability insurance policies to publicly state in the rules that no headphones are allowed. Historically this has been a bit of a 'don't ask, don't tell' rule, and they turn a blind eye.

On the other side you have your iPod-wearing participants. They love their music and it is an integral part of their running, training and racing experience. They will tell you that they couldn't train without it. It is more than a distraction. It is a psychologically integrated part of their whole life process.

They feel that what they listen to is their own business and since they're not hurting anyone, what difference does it make? The more militant among users will say this is a personal rights issue. In the "First our iPod, then our guns and homes!" genre.

It has really become an issue because at any given race 60-70% of the participants are wired for sound. Even at the race where they physically enforced the ban 2-3% snuck them in somehow. It was an interesting microcosm of human politics. That 2-3% went to the effort to smuggle their sets onto the course, and other participants were stopping at the

water stops to turn them in! “Number 449 has an iPod and is laughing about it...”

Like any other personal issue there are absurd polarities.

The race directors and USATF officials are notoriously dogmatic. They will quickly tell you it's a liability issue, but when pressed no one can back up those liability assertions with any hard facts or statistics. They will instead give allusions to incidents where some hapless iPod wearing runner wandered into the path of an oncoming semi.

Of course their first reaction is to ban the use, but as the RRCA has learned, you can't stop these types of revolutions by decree and fiat.

The personal rights crowd can't really explain why not wearing the headset is such an intrusion. Where in the constitution does it say you have a right to listen to AC/DC in a 10k? What's the harm of leaving it at home for those 45 minutes?

If it is dangerous to society to race with an iPod then surely it's dangerous to walk around a city, ride the subway and go shopping with them right? (I'm sure the activist socialists in my home country of the People's Republic of Massachusetts are already working on a ban in public places. Soon to be followed by California.) Where is the line drawn? Is it a slippery slope?

What's the reality?

My personal experience has been innocuous enough. The negatives are when people can't hear you and won't get out of your way or are startled when you pass them. There are those stories about people causing pile-ups or injuries by not being aware of their surroundings, but I haven't seen it. You can put the volume such that it is more of background music and you can still hear everything around you.

One of my buddies and I have made up a game based on the iPod. When we pull up behind someone wearing an iPod we try to guess what they are listening by looking at them. Then we get their attention and ask them.

I have seen people remaining relatively happy in longer races by having their own entertainment with them. You pass them and they are singing off-key to themselves and have a little boogie in their step.

I have run a few races, short and long with the iPod. I've had good and bad experiences. In one short race the pounding Nirvana music that I had selected was a huge boost to my energy and focus. I've also worn it at marathons. When I hit the wall it was just a big pain in the ass. It was just one more thing to worry about. I've worn it in marathons that I was running for fun and have had some nice epiphanies.

I don't wear it that much anymore because I like to talk to the people in the race. That has become harder to do with everyone wired up in his or her own worlds. In that sense I would say this trend has moved to isolate people further in an already individualistic sport.

My official position so far has been one of social Darwinism. I say let them wear whatever they want. If they get hit by a car, that's the choice they made. I'm sure the whole insurance liability thing could be solved with a waiver of some sort.

This is not the end of the issue. This is the tip of the iceberg. With the advance of technology there are stranger conundrums coming with new technology. What about cell phones in races? What about devices that network runners together? Video devices? Where does it stop?

Let's face it folks, whether you're for it or against it we have to come up with some sort of détente that allows everyone their space, freedom and safety.

What do you think?

The Run up to Boston – “The Badge of Courage Series”

Got plans to run Boston this spring? Join us mid-packer veterans in a series of traditional races that will get you ready.

So you qualified to run Boston? Or you found some nice charity to give you a number? However you did it, you got your ticket punched, and you pulled the sword from the stone; now you have to train for it. I'm going to share my spring race calendar/training ritual with you.

Why run these races? Why not trudge alone in the slush or on the treadmill? The primary reason is that you can bond with a whole crew of long-distance running misfits like yourself, but there are practical and tactical reasons too.

These races were specifically designed by the old-timers to fall appropriately on the training plan to help you in your quest. There's no substitute for a long road race for specificity. You get to practice your pacing (or lack of) skills, your fluid and nutrition and your race tactics. There are water tables and support stations so you don't have to stash bottles, etc. You give money to a local club and they are your support crew for the day.

There really is no substitute for the rational lessons these races will teach you about your conditioning. Most of these races are far more difficult in terms of topography and weather than Boston. They will beat you up and leave you humble, which is exactly how you want to approach the marathon – with respect. They will also give you confidence. When you graduate out the other end of this series you will know what you are capable of.

Here's what you already know, or will soon find out; life's a journey, not a destination. The same is true for that little-'ol 26.2 trot in Hopkinton next spring. It's an event, but if you do it right it is part of a holistic progression of events that emerges as a whole. It's a 5 month journey salted with

emotional water stops peopled with crazy running characters. Get on the bus. It's about to leave.

If you're from around here - (New England) - training can be a challenge. Not all of us look forward to crawling out of a warm bed and into the teeth of a winter gale for a 3 hour long run. The rest of the populace hunkers down for 6 months of slush and sunlight deprivation, but we've got to train!

I've been indoctrinated into a series of mid-to-long races that lead up to Boston in harmony with the training. I'll probably get hissed and booed by the old-timers and locals for revealing these secrets, but what the hell! You'll find me out there - give me a shout when you pass.

Like swallows to Capistrano veteran New Englanders flock to the same old races as they get ready for the marathon. Each of us has his or her personal traditions. You can build yours. Here are mine. I've been lucky enough to run 9 Boston's, this year will be my tenth, but what I really look forward to is getting out in the depths of winter for these great races.

Warning: Running Geek Alert! *{Be forewarned that starting from scratch on January 1st is probably not enough time to get ready for a Patriot's Day marathon. You want to have a 25-30 mile weekly base, preferably with a 10-12 mile long run and some sort of pace workout once a week.}*

First stop - the Atlantic Ocean!

I typically kick off my campaign with an event worthy of a Dionysian (or Bacchanalian) rite. The Hangover Classic 10k. What do I like about this race? It's a nice little flat 10k along the beach road in Salisbury with an alcohol abuse theme, but bottom line: you get to swim in the Atlantic Ocean on January 1st!

What could be a more fitting test to whether or not you're committed to 5 months of slogging around in the cold? The way I figure it, if I can survive the Hangover Classic ocean

plunge, I'm ready to take on the harsh training coming up. Likewise, if one of these years my poor old heart stops while I'm struggling in the Atlantic surf, then I'll know I'm done!

[I heard this was a hilly course?](#)

Next up is the wonderfully challenging Derry Boston Prep 16 miler. This race is typically the 3rd week in January. (This year - Jan. 27th) I have run it in an ice storm, a couple snow storms and -3 degree F. It's a cult classic. The course has a series of difficult hilly sections that will test those who have not been training honestly.

You might question why anyone would want to run this difficult course with a history of catastrophic weather events. Let me remind you that you are a long distance runner living in New England. By definition you're a little off your rocker. Why not give in and take it all the way?

Seriously there is a reason the race is called the "Boston Prep". This race is timed on the calendar to send you a message. With Boston 3 months away, you should be able to comfortably navigate a 16 mile course. If you can't, then it's time to get your money back on that Boston hotel room or get serious about your training.

This race has knocked me out twice. Both times I was nursing injuries and hoping to train through. The Derry 16 Miler curtly informed me that I was kidding myself. And that, my friends, is exactly what I needed.

[Ahh...Island life!](#)

Coming into February your mileage is starting to get up there and the Martha's Vineyard 20 Miler is what you need to test your ability at this distance. This year the race will be held on February 16th. Since it is an island, you will need to take the Ferry across. This is a small race with a great homey feel and an awesome course.

Besides the occasional challenge of mid-winter gales, snow storms and below zero temperatures, you will be lovingly caressed by a boisterous sea breeze as you make your way down the coast and back up the bike trail. The scenery is fantastic. The people are the best. Believe it or not, there is a large and active running community on the island. After all the rich people leave for warmer climes the “Islanders” come out to run.

Perhaps as important, this race allows you to test yourself at race pace for 20 miles. The course is relatively flat and is a great opportunity to test your pacing strategies. More often than not I discover that I only have 17 or so in me. That’s what I need to know. I can screw up my pacing here, suffer for it and move on. It’s a practice race for the big event and it’s timed perfectly.

Then we peak – Pick 2 or 3...

In March there are a number of great local testers with good traditions. The weather is getting better and you should be too! Depending on the year, some of these races will overlap and you’ll have to make a choice.

Early in March you can drive west to take on the venerable Stu’s 30k course. This is a fairly difficult course with rolling hills and a long uphill finish. Like Derry, Stu’s will give you a good idea of where your conditioning is at. This is where all those CMS people live. It’s a well run race and a good challenge at just the right time on the calendar. If you can run your target pace at Stu’s, you should have no problem running it at Boston. And, yes, Stu will be there!

Sometime in March there is another anonymous 30k known as the “Run to the Beach”. This is a race with no race numbers, no results, no awards and no entry fee. However, it does have water stops and the infamous Winner’s Circle Pub at the finish line. The course is a nice Boston analog. There are some killer hills in the middle and a long downhill to the finish. I ran it for the first time last year and really liked it. You can’t beat the price!

Also at this time you have one last chance to qualify at the Hyannis Marathon or use its ½ Marathon as a tune up. It's a decent race with a great tradition, but I found that most of the runners are in the ½ nowadays. I qualified there one year (barely!) and it was pretty lonely in those last 13.1 miles. Nevertheless, depending on where you in your schedule the ½ marathon here may mesh perfectly with one of your short weeks and you can use it as a race pace tune up.

Speaking of alcohol abuse, let's not forget the plethora of local St. Patrick's Day races that are run mid-March. If you're looking for a good tempo workout, you can move your workout calendar around to run hard at one of these. There is nothing that attracts a good crowd of colorful New England runners like a pub race! Come on...you can be that person in the race with the shamrock painted on your belly.

The pros head to the New Bedford ½ Marathon for fish sandwiches and speed work. If you want to rub elbows with the crème de la crème of Boston racing, you'll find them tuning up at New Bedford. This is a tactically interesting seaside course that will allow you to practice running at race pace downhill, uphill and will particularly test your drafting skills with a famous late-race head wind. It's got a little bit of everything and is a top-notch organization. This year marks the 31st running of this classic.

Last long run!

As a last long run before your taper try out the Eastern States 20 Miler. I've always liked this race. You start in Kittery Maine, run the entire length of the New Hampshire coast line and finish in Massachusetts. It's fairly flat and a good low-hassle 20 mile run to top off your marathon tank. There's just something cool about the bragging rights you get from running across 3 states in one day.

Wrapping it up!

Assuming you've survived this grueling race schedule, think about what you've accomplished. You've got a hard, hilly 16

miler, a couple difficult 30k's, a couple 20 milers at pace and maybe some faster tune ups. That's plenty of running for a marathon. You're ready! And the great news is that you really didn't have to train that much alone. You spent all this time out chatting with the local runnerati collecting tee-shirts and medals.

One last tip. If you're one of those people who insist on racing at Boston, remember that the weather is random in New England and all your training can get negated when you toe the line in Hopkinton. Out of my ten races I would say that only two have been great racing weather. Two or three have been too hot and the rest have been passable. What some of my buddies do is to sign up for a marathon two or three weeks after Boston, like Vermont. This way, when the weather is bad in Boston you can treat it as a training run and save yourself for another battle.

I hope you'll join me for the Badge of Courage Series this spring. Most of these races will sell out early so pay attention. I'll see you out there. I'll be the guy chipping ice off the Gatorade on Telegraph Hill in Derry! This year I have to worry about running Mt. Washington too, but that's another story...

Diagnosis D_N_F

What is the script for pulling up at the 15 mile mark of a marathon when you're 3+ minutes ahead of pace?

It was a management decision. I thought about toughing it out and I probably would have made my time. I definitely would have qualified again. There is no doubt that I would have finished. But I didn't think it was the right thing to do. I already have my qualifying time for this year and there was nothing but pride riding on the race. It didn't seem like a smart thing to do for pride alone.

It still gnaws at you. Nobody likes to quit. Ironically I'd probably feel better and more heroic dragging myself across the finish bloody and bruised in a great pyrrhic loss. I'd be telling stories of how courageous and tough I am. Spinning grisly yarns of hemorrhage and stagger. My favorite kind of story to tell about myself. "Yeah, I looked down and my shoe was all red from the blood..."

I know my body. I made the easy call - that sometimes is the hardest call!

It wasn't that bad but the gauges indicated it was headed in that direction. I had run fairly smart for the first half. I had made sure to draft well in the windy bits and conserve my energy. I had a couple fast miles in the beginning to burn off the adrenaline, but nothing outrageous and I let it go early to settle back into the safe zone. I didn't chase the ½ marathoners as they ran erratically. I stayed in the pack and focused on keeping my head down. I ate my PowerGel and sipped my Gatorade.

In spite of all this I just didn't feel good. The wind was a struggle the hills were a pain and my stride felt short and tight. I was working way too hard. I'm no rookie. I know that marathons are supposed to be hard, but the hard part isn't supposed to start until the end. The first half is supposed to be conversational.

At the half I knew it was going to be a long day, but decided to keep going. The marathon is a long race and things can change. You can feel crappy and then snap out of it. Then I started losing altitude. After being consistently 5 - 10 seconds above my target pace I was starting to slow. Mile 15 is too early to be losing altitude.

Mile 12 was 6 seconds off target pace. Mile 13 was 8 seconds off. Mile 14 was 12 seconds off. Even with so much time in the bank I saw where this was headed. I was going to be like the B17 in the movie "Memphis Bell" - 10 miles from the airfield, 3 engines on fire and out of gas. I've been there before.

So I pulled the plug. I turned around and walked back to the ½. I put a little limp in my gait so the oncoming pack wouldn't yell encouragement. I turned my chip in and they gave me a medal. I felt like a chump. I skipped the buffet, grabbed my bag and fled tail between my legs. Live to fight another day.

What Happened?

Let's break it down. How did I get to that spot? Why did I feel I should pull the plug, turn around and walk back in?

[Shoe Sabotage...](#)

I don't know what I was thinking. As the race approached this week I had the brilliant idea to wear my 'faster' shoes instead of the bullet-proof Asics I'd been training in. I'm injury free and figured I could get by with less support and would benefit from the lighter shoe.

I've logged a good number of miles in these 'faster' shoes because I use them for my speed and tempo workouts on the track and treadmill. Around mile 7 I felt the blisters. Damn. Blisters won't kill you, but they certainly are an inconvenience. After a few miles they basically go numb and it's only a problem the next day when you want to walk. Even so I knew what I was biting off here - 7 miles is early in

the race to get blisters – my feet were going to be hamburger at the end.

Death by chocolate...

How is it possible that I can log 50 miles a week and gain weight? In a word: “Chocolate”. I’ve never had a sweet tooth. Candy is not one of my vices. Unfortunately over the course of the last couple months in my real job we successfully signed Hershey and Nestle as customers.

Even as I was training I was doing “professional research” on various bars of high-end chocolate. Every meeting we had there were piles of Reese’s cups, truffles and chocolate eggs. I figured, “Hey, I’m training for a marathon. I can eat whatever I want!” It appears that chocolate defies that rule. Usually that last 5-10 lbs melts away in the final hard weeks. This time it didn’t and I was running heavy. That’s why I thought lighter shoes might help! Oh, what a wicked web we weave!

Train in vain - Bad Plan...

It probably was a fine plan, just bad for me. I ran a Hal Higdon Advanced 1. I try different training plans to test them out and stay out of a rut. This one had the miles but had a couple quirks that I think were wrong for me.

First quirk was that it had me doing long pace runs on Saturday followed by long runs on Sunday. I think I may be too old for back-to-back hard workouts like this. I ended up running too hard on Saturdays and then having low quality long runs on Sundays.

The second thing was that I would have liked more speed work. I felt slow. Stamina is great, but it doesn’t help if you can’t keep up. On the positive side I have no doubt that I had the distance no problem.

The final thing I didn’t like was a 3 week uber-taper that had me running barely 18 miles with no quality work in the final

week. It made me feel sluggish and I'm sure it exasperated my weight issue.

[There's snow place like home - Bad Weather...](#)

We got so much snow this winter. I had to spend too much time on the treadmill. I don't think the treadmill is a good substitute for the track. The treadmill is an analog for running, but it's not perfect. It's not the same. I think you lose something in the translation.

My local track has been snow covered since October. It forced me to do my pace runs on the open road and I'm sure I ran them too fast, more like tempo. It's more than mechanics. I find the track comforting because it's so discrete and measurable. If I can't verify my training on the track I lose mental rigor.

My home 10k trail was all buried too. I did some sloppy snow slogging and some snowshoe cross training. It's a great workout but not the same mechanics as running on the clear ground. It's also an analog and loses something in the translation.

[A good carpenter doesn't blame the tools - Wrong race...](#)

I'm not going to name names. That wouldn't be fair to blame the course for me having a crappy day. I'm sure this is a wonderful course for others, but it's bad for me.

There seemed to a head wind on 75+% of the loop course. The ½ marathon is huge and starts at the same time as the marathon. It's a double loop. All these people start picking up the pace near their finish and it makes you feel a bit like a slug being passed so much. Then they turn off and you're all alone to face the wind and hills again.

But - the truth is the course had me psyched out. I've run it before and struggled last time. I talked myself into struggling again. Certain courses have the 'voodoo' on me. This is one of them. I'm not going to run it anymore.

Let me check my calendar - Too much going on...

Why do I try to 'squeeze in' a marathon? A "fast" attempt is not something you can shoehorn in between dropping the kids off at practice and picking up your dry cleaning. You have to clean the slate so you can focus on the race. All I did was make my family miserable with stress attacks all weekend.

Now I'm on a plane headed to Orlando for a conference. If everything went right I'd be able to towel off, jump in my truck and get to the airport. Sorry - no showers. The thought of being ass-kicked and bloody limping through Logan airport, simmering in my own salt was not an appealing award for a job well done.

This falls into the 'setting yourself up to fail' category. My wife told me I was nuts. Hey - she's been telling me that for 24 years! Next time I make a serious run at something I'm taking Friday AND Monday off and I'm making my family go with me. Screw work - you can't train for 6 months and then rush about like over-caffeinated idiot.

If I had a support crew and a day to recover I probably would have gone for the 'train wreck finish' option - guts and glory.

Que Será Será- Not my day...

When you get to the bottom line, sometimes it just isn't your day. Do what you will; you will have good days and bad days. Sometimes you'll train right and have a bad day. Sometimes you'll doing everything wrong and have a great day. That's what makes the marathon a worthwhile hard thing. The marathon has the ability to humble us. That's why we do it. It's our great white whale.

I ask you, from the bottom of my conflicted psyche, is it better to cash it in and walk when things aren't going your way? Or is it better to harpoon the beast and be dragged raging to the depths? Maybe today I'm the saner and rational

man, but I feel beaten. Even the greats DNF, but I bet they feel crappy about it too.

I can take comfort in being mature enough to “know when to fold ‘em”. I did get a nice 15 mile pace run in. The sun rises again tomorrow. I’ll be back. I’ll learn from my mistakes. It is a good thing that the race can still teach me after all these years and all these miles.

C’est la vie...

Next up I get back on the training bus for Boston and Mt Washington. This will be my tenth Boston and I’ll be in great shape for it. Maybe I’ll race it. I’ve got enough time for some quality speed work and a couple more 20 milers.

I’ve never run Mt. Washington before and the training is going to be a bitch. I figure I’ll set the treadmill elevation on ‘comically steep’ once a week and churn away. That and the speed work should be an interesting give and take! The track should be melting over the next couple weeks and I’ll be back on more comfortable terra firma.

That’s the ticket. Look forward. Put the day behind. Learn from it. File it. Move on to the next thing.

Keep your chin up - summer is almost here!

The Yellow Sweater

The things we grow fond of in our running lives are talismans...

Those of you who have suffered the circle of Heck that is a long run with me chattering away, especially in the winter, will be sad to hear of the death of the Yellow Sweater. Today on a casual mud run with Buddy (The Wonder Dog) the Yellow Sweater gave up the ghost.

You could always find me among the throng of competitors at the start of a New England long run resplendent in this oversized fleece of bumble bee yellow and black. There among the high end technical race-wear of Gore-Tex, CoolMax and Spandex I would bounce in my fuzzy yellow generic.

How many miles have I run in the Yellow Sweater? At least 5,000 - maybe more. I can remember forging across more than one finish line, head down, the hood cinched up tight and frozen stiff with sweat and my aching hands pulled up into its voluminous sleeves. It wasn't super at cutting the wind but it was a nice warm blanket and wicked like a champ in the below zero runs.

I think my mom bought it for me about 9 years ago. Mom's do that sort of thing. She undoubtedly found it at Bradlees in the slightly irregular pile for under \$15. But it worked for me. I'm not much on fashion - and, yes, I'm cheap. High-tech fabric isn't what is keeping me off the winner's podium. Mostly genetics is!

It was oversized for my big Clydesdale frame. You could fit one or two technical shirts under it and it was still loose. It was perfect for New England running where the weather can change several times in the course of a long run or race.

It was a multi-purpose tool. If it got hot I could pull the half zipper down the front to let the air in. If it got even hotter I could even roll up the loose sleeves to show more skin.

When the tide turned and the winds howled the sleeves could be rolled down to cover the hands. The hood could be pulled up and cinched with an elastic pull-cord to lock in the heat and lock out the cruel winter wind.

What is it about our favorite running things that turns them from tools of the trade into personal totems? Could it be that we get comfortable with the things that we spend so much time with? They begin to absorb from us some of our spirit or essence? Like my own personal Shroud of Turin. Is it the shared experience, the highest highs and lowest lows of long distance running that burns the animate into the inanimate?

It's the same phenomena that manifests when your dad shows you a picture of a younger version of himself standing next to an old coupe and says, "Man, I really loved that car..." Years from now I'll be saying "You remember that Yellow Sweater?"

It's some sort of Karma that we gravitate towards and form relationships with things that truly do match our 'real' selves. Was not the Yellow Sweater a little too loud and grasping for attention? Was it not just a little shabby and carelessly under prepared? It fit me, like my old truck fits me. Like running in the muddy woods with my dog and my friends fits me.

I'm pretty sure you won't come across me at the next race wrapped in some tight, expensive logo-wear. Unless it's free! Then I'll gladly shill for any sportswear marketer. (Your name here) I'm pretty sure you'll find me wearing a give-away from some characteristically difficult winter long-run race.

So - I'm sure you share my great sorrow at the passing of the Yellow Sweater. I come here today to praise and bury it. A moment of silence for all the miles, the torn tights, the worn out shoes and the unparalleled blessing and joy of the sport.

Maybe I can knit a new one of Border collie hair? It would be a fashionable black and white. It would smell horrible in the

rain. Lord knows I've got enough it lying around my house
and truck to build several dogs. C'est la vie!

Perfect 10 at Boston '08?

This year will mark my tenth Boston Marathon – is it a big deal?

Well – here we are, you and I, 2008! Who would have ever thought we'd be having *this* conversation? Yup, I'll be dragging my old achy-breaky butt off the couch to drive out to Hopkinton for everyone's favorite trot for the 10th time this Patriot's Day. Well maybe not everyone's favorite...but most of the runeratti that populate my little slice of the world.

Is it a big deal? I guess so, but not as big a deal as you might think. What's the difference between 9 and 10? Or 10 and 11? If it wasn't for some anal-retentive Roman bureaucrats and the success of the cohort in battle we might be working off of a base 7 numbering system and I could have done this article 3 years ago!

What do you think of when you hear "10"? Maybe if you're an old guy like me you think of Bo Derek running on the beach! Do you think Dudley Moore could run a marathon? Not in those sweat pants...

In comparison I 'celebrated' my 24th wedding anniversary this year – that was way more work than training for any race! In the grand scheme of things 10 years of Boston is somewhere between cool and super-cool, but I'm not losing sleep over it. We humans construct these types of serial milestones to stay engaged – to keep our heads in the game.

We like whole numbers. We like decades, centuries and bi-centennials. Reality is that life is an analog continuum and not digital or discrete. We just make these things up to create a perceived layer of order on the inherent chaos of the universe. Which is why I like running – it brings order to the chaos. It feeds the muses while stifling the daemons.

Hey – the Greeks knew the story. The death of Pheidippides fit snugly into the framework of the classic hero. To struggle and die in service of Greece was the highest honor.

Nothing's changed. You'll hear the same metaphors every year. That's one thing that doesn't change. All of us jaded novelists will brush off our pseudo-intellectual clap-trap about Socrates and Achilles...

It will be my 10th, but not 10 in a row. I took a couple years off for injuries. Even so, a 10 year streak at Boston won't even put you in the top 40% of participant longevity. I think Dave McGilvary has run 90 Bostons in a row. The current record holder is a gentleman from Cambridge who ran his first Boston while fleeing from the Red Coats at the battle of Concord in 1772 and never stopped. He'll be running his 237th in a row this year.

Ok, Johnny Kelly isn't running anymore, so there's a chance. Every year they run that "streaker" story in the Globe and if you're not over 30 years straight you won't even be in contention. Most of these folks started when they were young, like McGilvary who started at 17. By contrast I ran my first Boston at 34.

So, in the absence of miracle Methuselah cures or some sort of temporal distortion I don't think I have a shot at the record books. I'll have to call the BAA and see if I get some sort of prize. A gold watch? (Ironman preferably) Or maybe \$10 off? Come on! At least a coupon for a new pair of shoes!

Yes - I started late. I ran my whole life but never thought much about the marathon - one way or the other. Around here - growing up in the suburbs of Boston - the marathon was always big news. It was big news in the sense that it was another sporting event for the local sports-news guys to get feverish over. For one weekend a year the Marathon got as much coverage as a Red Sox game.

Like all good traditions, each year they drag out the marathon dressings. Like Christmas decorations from the attic. Each year you see the same shtick - but it is comforting, and it is tradition. I grew up with it.

Every year there was/is a great young hope touted that invariably fails to perform. I can't remember any pundit ever calling the race correctly. But, still they'd climb into their ungainly flatbed 'news-trucks' and follow the whole race. Yes we had a televised Boston Marathon in the 70's and that was pre-cable when there were only 3 channels.

That is one of the great things about Boston, anything could happen. The weather was always random and the results were always in doubt until the very end. It was drama. It was Greek in the true sense of the heroic. How is it possible that after 26 miles of running the whole race could come down to one last impassioned, gutty sprint? It was great.

All the contenders in long distance running had to pass through the cauldron of the Boston Marathon and we got to see them each year. Many times our race kicked their asses and took them down a notch. "Sure, he won the Olympics, but he DNF'ed on Heartbreak".

I remember Bill Rodgers, Amby Burfoot and Joan Benoit, among other luminaries giving celebrity performances and lighting up the local sports scene for a couple months. I remember when the pretender cheated and took the olive wreath from Jacqueline Gareau.

The first one I ran was a big deal for me. The first time I qualified was a huge deal for me. The intervening years have become less and less of a big deal. It's more like a springtime ritual - Like having dinner with Grandma on Easter after church. This year it will be more like a club run.

Whoever set up the qualifying standard had me in mind. They put the prize just within reach of my ability. I had to really come out of my comfort zone to get those bib numbers. Still - it's achievable, I had to work my butt off and focus, but I didn't have to quit my job and move to Kenya.

I set my marathon PR at Boston on my second try - that was kind of a big deal, although I didn't think so at the time. At the time I thought I'd just keep getting faster. It's been a

good ride and I owe a lot to what the Boston Marathon has taught me.

Here's what I liked about my 'first' 10 Bostons:

- You need to respect the race and the distance – it has the ability to humble you.
- Just run it, don't *race* Boston if you're a mid-packer. Enjoy the race. It's too cool to waste staring at the pavement.
- I love the structure and intensity of training for a marathon.
- I love getting down to my track late at night and running in circles (ovals).
- I love doing long runs in the woods with my dog.
- I love the subtle mix of engineering and art that goes into a successful race plan.
- I love the purpose and rigor that the training brings into my life.
- I love the connection to God, the clarity and meditative healing that a long run brings.
- I love the folks from all over the world that I get to meet and talk to.
- I love the hyper-ennui of accomplishment at the end.
- I love the heft of that medal on my chest.
- There's no better feeling in the world than that first hot shower after the race!

- I love treading in the footsteps of, and running with the spirits of all those Boston Marathon greats.

That's it. 10 years down. Now I have to decide if I'll do it again next year. I'll have to qualify. I know how to do that. I'll probably need some new shoes too.

If you need some tips about the race – I've got a basketful. If you need someone to keep you company for about 3 hours and 30 minutes drop me a line. There's nothing like a chatty old guy to make the time fly by.

Thanks for a good 10 years Boston.

Boston Marathon 2008 – Back to Work.

The 112th BAA Boston Marathon – Reporting from the Mid-Pack.

I kept looking down at my legs. I knew what I wanted them to do, but they wouldn't move. It was like they were stuck in mud, or cement. With great effort I pitched forward and began to crawl and drag myself towards the finish. Then I woke up...

What's with the nightmares? I've run this race nine times before and never had nightmares. My subconscious must be working overtime trying to sublimate some sort of hairy fear of inadequacy. I've had these types of dreams before but they usually involve being chased by something scary. Maybe this year's Boston had my subconscious antsy? What would Freud say?

"Tell me about your relationship with your parents?"

"Well they don't come to watch anymore, but they signed my race shirt..."

Patriot's Day in Massachusetts dawned grey and chilly. Like a day on the Scottish moors. Low cloud ceiling and a damp clinging mist. Good running weather for a New Englander.

The weather prognosticators called for "partly cloudy". What the heck does that mean? "Partly Cloudy". These guys get paid for this? I'll try that on my board of directors. "Good news! We're going to be partly profitable this quarter..."

I hitched a ride with some club-mates out to Hopkinton. More precisely to the Hopkinton exit on 495 where they load you into buses. There were two buses. One was shuttling people down to the "Athletes Village" and the other was taking spectators down town.

We went downtown with the spectators because the line was shorter and I wanted to show the new runners the corrals and

porta-johns at the start. It takes some of the mystery out of it if you know where you are going. Rumor had it that there would be a crush of 25,000+ runners for the 112th. It can get a wee bit crazy if you don't know where to go in the melee.

We meandered up to the high school and found a patch of grass to hangout on. People looked grim. You'd think that after all the hard work they'd be happy to be so close to race time. Athletes shuffled in silent nervousness in the porta-john line. Others lay as grim as the overcast day meditating on their pending doom - like the metaphorical prisoners awaiting execution.

Not me. I was being my usual goofy self. I was working on my right hamstring that had been complaining all spring. I was smiling, cracking bad jokes and asking everyone who's eye I could catch where they were from and how many Boston's they had run.

With darn little provocation I would tell them that this was my 10th Boston, that I was a local boy and that they were welcome to the beautiful state of Massachusetts. Being miserable isn't going to change your race - might as well enjoy it.

When they called the first wave I got up and executed to plan. I stuffed my gear bag like a big sausage. I passed it to the kids working the baggage buses and thanked them for helping out. I gave directions to as many confused people as I encountered, and we all sauntered forward to the corrals.

If you get your timing just right you can stop at the porta-johns downtown for that last happy relief before the gun. Boston always starts on time. Today's timing was going well. I got in line with 20 minutes to go and chatted up a nice guy from Atlanta.

Just then we were treated to an interesting if not comic rendition of the new reality show "Cops - Hopkinton". As usual there were some runners who just couldn't wait and were watering a couple bushes in the parking lot. The police

came over to roust them. I don't know if they actually arrest them, but I think they get a ticket and get disqualified.

Evidently this one runner didn't want to show them his number and a comic foot chase around the parking lot ensued. I think if he got some open ground the runner would have won, but in the confines of the parking lot he gave up and let the inevitable sword of justice fall on him. Another dangerous felon removed from polite society.

I made my way to my corral. Everything was unwinding like clockwork. Just then the Boston Marathon proved it could still trick me after all these years. The cloud ceiling disappeared and the sun came out. Great.

Where was that sun screen? In the bag with the rest of my 'un-needed' sundries. "How's that long sleeve shirt feel now Chris?" Perfect. Somewhere the marathon gods chuckled - a knowing and churlish chuckle. They just love their petty tortures.

I found a quiet spot at the back of the corral. There's no real advantage to getting to the corral early, or trying to push to the rope. We all have chips and we are all going the same way on the same road.

With a roar and a bang, off we surge to Boston. Now everyone was smiling and hooting and celebratory. The race was on.

For my tenth Boston I had everyone I knew sign a long sleeve white shirt. I emblazoned a large "Chris" across the front and my daughter wrote "My 10th Boston" across the back. The rest of the shirt was filled in with multi-colored text from well-wishers. It was my power shirt.

Those of you who have run marathons know that advertising your name, or anything for that matter, on the front of your shirt is a tricky proposition. It can be great to have the crowds cheer your name. It can give you energy. The problem is when you want to be anonymous, like when

you're doing the death shuffle though Kenmore - they still know your name.

The crowds this year were the best I've seen at Boston. The weather was crowd friendly and they were having a blast. One snippet from Wellesley cracked me up. I heard my name in perfect diction and female WASP pronunciation, "Chris, you are doing very well." It was like she was commenting on the tennis match over cucumber sandwiches. Contrast that to the "Chris! You lazy bastahd! Pick it up! Have a beah!" that I would get in a couple hours.

The other interesting thing is that, at least where I was in the mid-pack, the iPod wave has crested and waned. I don't wear it anymore and a rough guess would put music -runners at less than 5% - compared to at least 50% in previous years. Boston is too much of a sensory event to waste.

As usual in the early miles I made plenty of acquaintances. Another prominent trend that continues is the number of Canadians in the race. There's something about ("about") Boston that makes those folks in Ontario migrate by the thousands, like geese, south to Massachusetts on Patriots day. I love them. They are, as a rule, a good natured and friendly lot - always willing to chat.

There is also a solid phalanx of Koreans in the race. They are noticeable because they approach it like some sort of religious pilgrimage. They run in little groups carrying flags and have support crew with them along the course holding up signs and flying more flags. It suggests a level of organization of a military campaign. Nice folks, very colorful and obviously committed to the sport.

The race officials said that 70% of this year's field was first timers. If the dollar keeps falling we'll be seeing more international color in the mid-pack. That's great. Keeps it interesting.

Lance Armstrong ran this year. There are always some celebrities running Boston. Lance finished around 2:50.

That's a great time, but I think the course beat him up. Those of us who bear the scars know that Boston is different. It's harder than it looks. Those early steep downhill sections beat you up, especially us big guys.

There was a crew of Red Sox wives running for charity again this year. I saw them interviewed at a game earlier in the week. We were joking that they could have been clones. One of my buddies said, tongue in cheek, that when you get to the majors one of the things you get issued is a blonde athletic wife. More power to them for taking the time and effort to do something positive with their influence.

How was my race? I'd have to say "typical".

I didn't really train for this specific race. That's no to say I didn't train. I did train for a marathon in late February that I ended up pulling out of at the 15 mile mark. Since then I'd switched my training over to strength and hills. Mountains specifically. I'd been doing a lot of long uphill grinds in early preparation for the Mt. Washington Road Race.

If I was training for Boston I would have been doing much more long tempo and some road 20 milers. So I wasn't really sure what to expect. I had pulled something in my right hammy on a final long run and had spent the last 3-4 weeks trying to run easy, switching in some stationary bike and upper body weight lifting to stay strong. So I wasn't really sure what to expect...

Evidently not knowing what to expect was something that made my subconscious a little wary. Hence the nightmare! Here's a question. Why do people you haven't heard from for a long time call you the day before the race and ask, "Are you ready?"

"No! I'm glad you called! I had completely forgotten to train! I gotta go get some miles in!"

Am I ready? What Freaking difference does it make? It's too late now!

My goal was to go out, see how I felt, run a qualifying time if possible and try not to hurt myself too badly.

There I was, running along in the first mile chatting up Canadians when I realize I forgot to start my watch. Now I have to ask everyone I meet, like a lost tourist, what time do you have? The issue this raises is that now it's going to be difficult for me to know where I am relative to my target finish time.

Like a naïve first-timer I let myself get lost in the moment and go with the flow. Trusting my body and the tens of thousands of miles of experience to find a pace. I start taking splits after the first mile and some of them seem a little fast, but I feel ok.

The sun is out but it's not uncomfortable because of a nice dry 5-10 mph head wind. Still, I notice the water dripping from the brim of my hat and make a mental note that I'm losing fluids faster than it feels. I execute a walk break and stuff a Gu down my throat at the 5 mile mark. Experience tells me that I'll be glad I kept fueling the furnace.

By mile 10 I'm working pretty hard, but everything is cool. The crowds are loving my shirt and yelling my name. I take another quick walk break and shoot another GU. I can feel the dehydration and try to keep the fluids coming.

From mile 10 on it starts to feel like work. My left quad without warning starts to send pain signals. That's interesting - never had any problems with that one before. I focus on keeping my form strong and upright. I try to "keep my feet under me". I'm picturing the form of the runner on the cover of "Chi Running". That is my mantra for the day. "Keep your feet under you."

At the ½ I ask a guy next to me what his time is and have a bit of an "Oh Crap!" epiphany. Doing the math I'm about 10 minutes faster than my target pace. This is when the race takes on its clarity and definition for me on this day. The prognosis is that it's not going to be easy. I'm going to have

to be mature and give some of that time back gracefully. If I don't, the race will take it back.

Mile 15 seems to take a long time to arrive. I'm working hard. I take a nice long walk break and force another Gu and a lot of fluid. My stomach protests with nausea and cramps as I pick it back up. My left quad is still sending a pain strobe and my right hammy is tight as I wheel down into Newton Lower Falls and into the hills.

The crowds are great. They're yelling my name like a moving wave of "Go Chris". I'm not struggling. I'm just working hard. Maybe 9 years ago I might be panicking with the hills in front and 10 grim miles to trudge, but it doesn't bother me. It's like work that needs to be done. You just do it. You commit yourself, do the best you can and get on with it. "Keep your feet under you".

As we hit the hills a minor miracle occurs. My body feels the hill and instantly recognizes it. The training effect from my Mt. Washington work kicks in. Instead of the hill being a coup de grace to my battered body it is a welcome and easy pace. That's a first for me - the hills of Boston being a respite. The change of form loosens up the kinks and I'm back in the groove.

Just before Heartbreak, at the 20 mile mark I take another walk break, force a Gu and some fluids. I'm back in the pack. This late in the race people start losing their balance and some guy cuts me off, kicking me in the process. He apologizes. But then a few minutes later he swerves again and nails me in the solar plexus with an elbow. I tell him if he falls on Heartbreak I'm going to run right over his back. He jokes about a restraining order.

On the back of Heartbreak a crowd of college kids starts chanting my name. I start to tear up. I'm emotionally overwhelmed. All these years, all these people, all those messages on my race shirt, and now I'm headed back down into Boston again and I've still got my feet under me.

After Heartbreak the course is easy for a bit, pulling you down into the flats of Boston. I think back to the years I've been in this same spot walking the death march, hoping to die and make a mental note to keep my feet under me.

In my humble opinion miles 22-24 are the worst. You're still far enough away from the finish that you can't feel its emotional pull. Your body is trashed. The course is flat and those two miles seem endless.

The throb in my left quad was back. I told it to "shut the @\$% up" because I wasn't listening. I felt really dehydrated and thanked the deities that I had been smart enough to force fluids and fuel during the race. I knew I was down a couple quarts, but also knew it was too late to worry about it. All the strategy and tactics are mute at the 22 mile mark. Now it's mental and you play the hand you're dealt.

There weren't that many folks walking in the late miles. All-in-all people seemed to be having strong races. The crowds were still strong and lively. The sun was still out and the head wind was cool and dry. The new start times make a huge difference. I can remember rolling into Boston mid-afternoon and suffering from the cold. This is much better.

Once you get to mile 24 time starts to collapse. Things move faster. Your brain is a bit foggy and reality comes in short takes like a music video. The gravity of the finish line starts to pull you. By the time you see the sign that says "1 mile to the finish" you're on auto pilot. Crossing the actual finish line is a bit anti-climatic after wrestling the bear for 26 miles.

Everyone I knew finished the race. The new runners and the veterans were all accounted for one way or another.

My buddy Frank finally got his 3-hour Boston. He stopped at mile 23, looked at his watch and made a choice. He told me that as he was coming down Boylston the world started to go grey and fuzzy - like looking down a long tunnel. And the tunnel got narrower and dimmer as the finish line got closer. He never made it to the second mat. He crossed the first one

and was out – down for the count – off to the med tent. God love him.

How was my race? I'd have to go with "workman-like". In retrospect I probably went out a little fast. I worked very hard in this race. I fought it like giving line to a wild marlin the whole way. I beat my qualifying time by a good four minutes. Any Boston Marathon you walk away from is a good one.

I can think back to my first Boston. The weather was similar. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't fuel well. I don't remember much after Newton. Flashes of a long grim death march are all I've got for memories. I can remember returning well trained and setting my PR the next year – how strong and young I was.

It's been a good ride, my ten years at Boston. Well worth the time and effort to qualify each year. It's a little slice of drama and adventure in my everyday suburban life that I wouldn't give back. Even the awful years like '04.

For those of you who joined me – thanks for the run. For those of you looking to run Boston – come on down! Anyone can do it. You just have to make the choice and keep your feet under you.

Running Podcasts - My local billion-member running club

Running Podcasts -The new running community phenomenon – coming to an ear bud near you.

A couple years back I spoke to you about the explosion of the [iPod trend in running](#). Now I bring you tidings of a new iPod related wave sweeping our sport. In an amazing outgrowth of communalism the worldwide running community has become sentient and it wants to run with you. As usual I thought I was doing something unique with [my own efforts](#) in this new venue only to find out I was joining a grand new community that is open to us all and growing fast!

The other day I ran with a gentleman named Krister as he took me on his favorite 8k loop along the farms and narrow paths of Sweden. We chatted about his wife and kids and his dreams. We were joined by a young married couple from Fall River MA, an engineer from Oxford MA, mutual friend from Staffordshire UK, another friend from the small island of Tiree off the Scottish Coast, a volunteer firefighter from BC Canada and a semi-mystic from Florida.

We all ran together.

We run together often. We share our personal stories. We converse together about the wondrous pain, mystery and revelation that is running. We commiserate. We share tips and tactics. We plan races and events. We know each other intimately. We are comforted by each other's acts and voices. Our conversation encompasses everything that a good running club brings to the table.

We've never met.

This is the phenomena of [running podcasts](#) that is sweeping the running community. Like most things that our community births, it is inclusive and nurturing. This running club opens its arms to new comers and welcomes new voices

to sit around the running club table and jump in to the conversation. It is a club vibrant, active and enthusiastic.

What the heck am I talking about? How can I run with these folks and share the intimacies of their lives without ever meeting them? For that matter, you may ask, “What is a [running podcast](#)?” and “Why is it a phenomenon?”

In the simplest terms it is runners, of every stripe projecting themselves audibly into the universe. In the grander sense it is the coalescence of a running mastermind.

Here’s a [quick definition](#) from the new media encyclopedia Wikipedia...

*A **podcast** is a series of [digital-media files](#), which are distributed over the [Internet](#) using [syndication feeds](#) for playback on [portable media players](#) and [computers](#). The term *podcast*, like [broadcast](#), can refer either to the series of content itself or to the method by which it is syndicated; the latter is also called **podcasting**. The [host](#) or [author](#) of a podcast is often called a **podcaster**.*

Mechanically it manifests as a runner recording their thoughts in audio, perhaps in a ‘radio show’ format and setting those shows free on the internet. Many use iTunes in particular and spread the love through syndication.

Podcasts were made available by the great success of the Apple iPod and the now ubiquitous MP3 players. Whether you love or hate the entrance of personal digital audio players into our sport – they are here to stay. Tens of millions of runners all around the world strap on their MP3 listening device every day the same way they strap on their shoes.

Why this is important is that running uniquely lends itself to podcasting. Running has both an opportunity and ‘fit’ with podcasting. Running has advantages in both the listening and the creation of podcast content.

On the listening side we already know what the fit is. We've seen iPods for the last 3-4 years take over the mid-pack of the sport. The simple fact of being a mid-pack marathoner is that you will spend hours and hours of time alone with yourself on the road and trails training. From the beginning of the iPod introduction runners have filled these long hours with the audio distractions available to their ear buds. It's a custom-made opportunity for undisturbed listening. We are a fertile field because there is so much dead space to be filled.

At first we filled these long hours with our favorite music. Soon we became jaded with our old music files. How many times can you listen to the White Album? The medium began to naturally produce books on tape and spoken audio.

At some point lightning struck. Some technically savvy running geek (of which there are many for some reason) decided to take a digital recorder with them on their run. They thought it might be cool to try and capture those wisps of perfect thoughts and inspiration that come to us on our runs. A new genre was born and with it a community.

As runners we have long known that inspiration and epiphany come to us while we are out on our runs. What if we could share this inspiration and epiphany? What if we could record our thoughts in situ, in the moment they take fanciful flight from our subconscious as those happy running chemicals sauté our brains?

What if you could take someone with you on your lonely long runs? Someone who really *knows* the great joys of running? Someone who shares your passions, shares your challenges and can counsel you in your hour of need? The combination of these attributes has made running podcasts (or "runcasts") a run-away success.

What makes this generation of technology-enabled long distance community different? Haven't runners been building remote communities on the internet for years?

Yes it is true that this is an extension of the internet enabled worldwide running community. The main difference is the intimacy. It is intimate because you are hearing that person's voice and all the emotive content in that voice. It is different when that voice comes to you while you are running and was recorded when they were running. It is a perfect storm of running intimacy.

You know from your experience as a runner that going for a run with someone makes them an instant friend. This thing you share on that run creates a strong bond. You may otherwise never have met or befriended this person but through running together you have become linked in your shared humanity. That is what the running podcast brings.

At this point in its development the wave is driven by amateurs. They record and publish because they love the sport and the people in it. This gives the running podcasts that fresh authenticity that is so lacking in our world. It's real - in a good way. The charm is the way they laugh with you - at themselves.

These podcasters are just having fun, but they are changing the world one new runner at a time. They chide and inspire non-runners to leave the couch. They support those new to the sport and keep them with it. They inspire through deed, thought and spoken word. They leave a trail of hope in the wake of their disembodied voices.

The reach of this good news; this ministry of the mid-pack is global. The internet knows no bounds. Recently a few of the podcasters put together a [series of virtual races](#). So far there are over 700 people signed up from 33 different countries. They have signed up to run a race that only exists in our minds! (and on the internet) the tag line is "Think Global, Run Local".

I'm sure it won't be long before our favorite behemoth running shoe company or running magazine publisher seizes control of this phenomenon and injects it with corporate blandness. Until that time go check out a running podcast

and join the new revolution or pick up your microphone and jump in. We're all here and we'd love to have you.

My Podcast is available by searching on RunRunLive in the iTunes store or go browse www.runningpodcasts.org for the whole basket of fruitful flavors!

Hot Puppies and Little Girls...

What do you learn?

Buddy the Wonder Dog was quite uncomfortable on our run this morning. In typical New England fashion the weather flipped this week from comfortable to heat-wave and humid. The poor little guy can't adjust that fast. I can take my shirt off. He can't.

Which leads to my next million dollar idea - "back hair is the next big thing!" Think about it...All the boomers are entering that man-sweater phase of their lives. How about a line of personal care products to enhance those hairy backs? No old guy is going to shave or wax or any of that other silly girly stuff, but maybe you could talk them into Harley Davidson weave pattern? Maybe little dreadlocks? Golden beads in the shape of bat wings? I'm telling you - it's the next big thing.

We had to walk a little today to keep the poor quadruped from expiring in the heat. He and I had a high-mileage week - probably around 50. We skipped the Deerfield Mountain race to do a long run in the woods. I've got Mt. Washington in two weeks and I wanted to get one more hard week in before I taper a bit. Then I'm transitioning into ultra-marathon training. Lots and lots of long slow running. Should be fun.

This weekend ended a ten-year run of coaching soccer each spring and fall. I got to watch a generation of little girls grow up into fine female athletes. It's really a privilege. If you've never done it you should - they can teach you plenty.

I learned two key things from them that we can all use in our lives. The first is that no matter how serious the coaches and parents get the kids still think it's a game. They always have fun if you give them the chance.

We had some seasons when we won every game and some where we lost every game. Along the way those girls managed to play a game. It wasn't work. You could see the

flashes of pure joy in them when something worked. I challenge you take that lesson and keep your training fun. Find the joy in it. It's not supposed to be work. Sure, sometimes it's hard, but even that can be joyous.

The second thing I learned is that there are the seeds of greatness in each of them. They can do anything they want in life and it's amazing to watch that potential rise. All you have to do is encourage them and give them room to grow. I have no fear for the future because I have seen the seeds of greatness on the soccer field every Saturday.

Take this as a lesson too. You have the seeds of greatness in you as well. Every time you strap on your running shoes you're reaching for that potential. You're pushing back against the chaos and moving forward into your own personal manifestation of success. Sometimes you just have to get out of your own way and let the greatness come to you.

Dim Bulbs and Ultras

Set your own rules

It was just Buddy the Wonder Dog and I pounding the trail in the dark. The angry remnants of a weather front buffeted the treetops overhead sifting down clouds of flotsam in the spring night air. My eyes reflexively squinted as the swirling motes passed illuminated through my headlamp beam.

Why would anyone dash out of the house at 9:30 in the evening to run a trail 10k in the dark? Because Buddy and I love to run – it brings us joy, and we refuse to be denied our joy by the strictures of a busy life.

The same winds had whipped down from Western Canada earlier in the week. The front flattened a couple trailer parks on its way across the country before gracing New England with a late afternoon tempest. Angry red splotches racing across the weather map with their darkened deluge. Now these animistic god-forces were shaking our night world on their way to the Maritimes.

There was no moon. At 9:00 the sun had set and at 9:30 it was dark. My headlamp was running low – emitting only a pallid pool of luminescence. I have been meaning to replace the batteries. Last time I could only find one AAA. Isn't that always the way? When you need AA's you can only find 9-volts, etc.? It's like how you can always find a Band-Aid in the house...unless you're bleeding.

Even though I've got to be out of bed at 4:00 AM to make an appointment with an Airbus out of Logan – Buddy and I are getting it done. Buddy stays close at night, knowing he is violating the implicit compact with the wild animals to stay out of their domain after sundown. He takes some comfort in my proximity and I follow the white flag of his tail to stay on the trail, stutter stepping and mincing to avoid the roots and rocks as they appear.

I signed up for the Vermont 50 Miler today. If I can pull it off, it will be my first step up to the Ultra distance. After my 10th Boston I'm scheduled to run Mt. Washington in a month and then I'll need something to do, some new goal.

Before you groan at my compulsions – I did think through it. I did do some research. The training is a good fit for me. The first thing they said was the training was a series of 3-4 hour runs on the weekends – hey that describes a qualifying marathon for me! You also get Mondays and Fridays off – which I already take. The general idea is a bucket load of long slow miles with walking mixed in. That pretty much describes my current training already!

I know I can do it and I'm pretty sure I can do well. It will be a fun trip and hopefully I'll learn something. I remember that the real key to any of these things is deciding to do it. Don't follow conventional wisdom. You are capable of anything at any time.

Here's your lesson for today: It's ok to attempt out-of-the-box things. It's ok to run at strange hours. I've had some of my favorite outings at the crack of dawn or late at night. I've been known to disappear from the office in the middle of the work day to sneak in a run.

Who made up the rule that you can only exercise at lunch or just after work? There is no such rule – and if you think there is, you probably made it up. And you can break it. Give yourself permission to be weird with your training and racing. The world is your oyster and only you make up your rules.

You can do like me and make up some new rules like "I run anytime I feel like it!" I take my cue from Buddy – He's always ready to go!

What do you folks think? Are you putting your running in a box?

Mangy Mutts and sexual prowess...

Let's get physical...

Poor Buddy the Wonder Dog has developed a little spot of some sort of mangy bit. It's probably all the swimming he was doing over the weekend, combined with the warm weather. He's designed for herding sheep across the chilly moors, not swimming in the Squannacook River.

I'll herd him down to the vet tomorrow. Maybe he'll have to wear one of those head-cones. That's the ultimate in dog humiliation. All the other dogs are going to laugh at him. I know how you feel Buddy - My mom made me wear a leisure suit to school in 8th grade...

I'm feeling a bit achy this morning. Not achy-bad, achy-good. I had my last big workout for Mt. Washington yesterday. A real learning experience this training has been! I asked some mountain veterans "How do you train for a 7.6 mile race with an average 14% grade?" They told me there is just no way around it; you have to do the "long grind" workouts.

So...Yesterday I set the treadmill on 14% and did the long grind for 90 minutes. Good God that's a miserable workout! I hope the mountain is easier! I varied the pace to keep moving forward - as the ultra-runners say CFM (continuous forward movement).

My "running pace" varied between 5 and 6 miles per hour. Yeah, that's right 10-12 Min/Mile and I still had to power walk about half the time. At the end I felt like I had run a marathon. I was totally fragged and soaked to the point of dripping rivulets all over the gym.

The normal folks were looking at me warily like I might have some sort of imbalance they should be concerned about. Who is this strange panting, dripping old guy on the treadmill? Should we call the building management? Bring the guys with the white coats! Make sure they bring some towels and ibuprofen with them!

One thing about mountain training is it gives you well-defined and bulgy quad muscles. I've got legs like a rhino right now! I can climb stairs like a champ! My suit pants are a little snug in the thighs. It feels good!

Then Buddy and I hooked up with the boys for a 10k headlamp run last night. (Yeah I double up on some Thursdays) As boys do, we got on the topic of running and sex. My sense would be that being long distance runner could cut both ways. Certainly you've got superior blood flow and are in better physical shape on the 'ability' side, but I've also heard that too much training stifles the 'drive'. (Now, having married my high-school sweet-heart over 24 years ago, I've got no personal empirical data to add to the discussion.)

Someone mentioned the "Rocky" factor. Remember when Mick says "Rock, stay away from the women...weakens the legs..." Meaning that sex before a race could somehow sap your strength.

Someone else chimed in with a pseudo-factoid "Sex the night before a race is comparable to a 50 yard dash". (Or maybe more like a 10 yard dash for some of us!)

Who knows? The jury is out. Can someone with some personal story or evidence send me a note?

Running with Shears

What do you bring with you on your run?

Buddy the Wonder Dog and I have been getting some decent 10k trail runs this week. We've got a nice hilly loop in the conservation land behind my house. A mixture of single path and old farm roads. We cross a road and cut through an AT&T facility where many moons ago they constructed a communications tower at the top of the highest hill around.

The phone company still contracts someone to mow the line trail every few weeks in the summer. That helps us keep out feet dry and poison ivy free. It also cuts down on the ticks. After crossing the road and climbing the hill we cut across an open hay field - where someone also manages to mow a path once in a while - then down around the lake/pond.

We're quite lucky, Buddy and I, to have this soft, mostly covered trail system accessible at the back door. Buddy can be off-leash most of the time and has some nice swim and wallow stops along the way to stay cooler. I get soft surfaces for my old body and some good challenging terrain. No cars. Peace and quiet if we need it.

There's one spot on the edge of the AT&T property, where it connects to the field that we have to cut through a gap in the hedgerow. Like getting off the beachhead in Normandy, you can't just waltz through anywhere along the line of separation on an old New England field. There is a dense snarl of angry vegetation wrapped and coiled ten-foot high around a Stonehenge-like farm wall.

All of your popular New England cash-crops thrive in the divide. Beautiful, lush poison ivy, great stands of biting raspberry and wild rose. Chaotic hammocks of happy Concord grapes twine through it all. Bottom line: a barely dressed human is not getting through except at the man-made gap.

The problem is that nature abhors a vacuum. This year the wild rose bush and grapes have decided that the gap needs to be closed. Each night it has gotten a little tougher for me to shoot the gap without drawing blood. It's like a high speed contortionist limbo tournament. And each time I squeeze through I make a mental note to come back with some sort of tool to exercise my manifest destiny on this hedge. Then I promptly forget – until the next time the wild roses remove a layer of skin from my legs and arms.

This week I was doing two loops – so I remembered. I considered what was the best tool to bring? The gap herein described is about 1.5 miles into my run. Whatever tool I chose, I'd have to run with. I'd need to juggle the dog's leash, my water bottle and the tool.

Normally this would be a job for my favorite suburban tool. That unholy piece of equipment that I enjoy exercising my will on all manner of errant shrubbery with – the machete. If you don't have a machete, you should. There's nothing more fulfilling than spending a few hours in the yard swinging a large knife. In this case I thought running down the road with an 18 inch knife in my hand might be the tipping point for the community that already puts up with my eccentricities.

Instead I took a pair of hand shears. Yup – cliché proven out – I was literally 'running with scissors'. Now my gap in the hedge is much wider and that part of my run is less stressful. Now if we could just do something about the poison ivy I'd be psyched. Could we figure out a way to eat it or burn it in our cars? Come on – where's your Yankee ingenuity?

What's the strangest thing you've ever run with? Something really dangerous? Like one of those cartoon bombs with the fuse burning? Let us know.



Up-up and away at the Mt. Washington Road Race

It really wasn't that hard...

If you look at the picture of me at the summit in the clouds you can see that I'm quite happy with myself. I never wanted to run up Mount Washington. Ever. When my running buddies were training for it as one of those "must do" races I said "not for me". Then I got hooked. I'm here to tell you that it was a blast.

Let's face it; I tip the scales at close to 190 lbs on a skinny day in my skivvies. I have no love of defying gravity on a large scale. I'm not one to poke fate in the eye. Sometimes circumstance takes over and takes the decision out of your hands. I blame Gordon.

It was spring of 2007 and I was at loose ends having just completed a very solid Boston in the Nor'Easter and having nothing significant or compelling to train for. Gordon said "Hey I'll meet you at Mt. Wachusett, we'll run the 4 mile race." He never showed up. But, then again, he always was smarter than me. I ran it anyhow and it kicked my butt.

We're talking abject humiliation. This little hill made a mockery of my race-pacing skills. I was so far into the red line I thought I was going to burn a gasket. Then I had one of those "AHA!" moments. "Here", I said to myself that day, "is something new about running that I know nothing about." "Here is an opportunity to roll back the jaded tedium of training and learn something new!"

Now, once more my life had purpose. I would run the entire La Sportiva mountain series. I would learn how to challenge the mountains and not get beaten like an old rug. I would become a Mountain Goat. And that, my friends, is how I ended up on top of Mt. Washington last weekend with that goofy smile on my face.

You have to have a strategy to run the big mountains. I saw some people running by their watches. They would run for a set period of time, and then walk for a set period of time and in this way hold a steady pace up the 13% slope. "Only one hill!" Dunham, you're an alien. But, thank you anyway. It was worth it. A beautiful day.

My strategy was a 12 step cadence. Run 12 paces and power walk 12 paces. By the steep dirt part around 5 miles I was passing people who didn't have strategies. It was a good day. I trained all winter once a week on the treadmill in the office gym. People must have thought I was a psycho. I'd set the treadmill on 14% and just go. Run, walk, crawl - whatever I could do to keep moving forward.

My hats off to all you old Mountain Goats. Your sport is a similar - but different form of running. It has a beautiful hard symmetry of its own that shouldn't be missed.

Are you running any mountains this year? Why not?

Web 2.0 Running

Does anyone really care what you think?

Running is such an intimate act that I'm surprised we haven't seen Hollywood find a way to wrap an awful C-list celebrity reality show around it. Maybe they have and I just don't watch enough TV to know.

The logistical problem for the aspiring Spielberg's is that all you would see from the outside is some sweaty old guy plodding down the road for hours on end with a spacey look in his eyes.

Where's the turmoil? The angst? Where's all this striving and falling short of the [man in the arena](#) that you runners are always on about? Apart from the occasional collapse, regurgitation or ungainly dash behind a bush it's all going on inside the head (and bodies) of us - the participants.

That's what makes it so hard to capture visually. That's why the raw emotive power of a run lends itself much better to the written form. It's an inner world with its own funky architecture of towering spires and murky bogs. It's a fantastical [Suessical](#) of our own making. It's that undiscovered country beyond the doors of perception that we get to glimpse into every time those happy running chemicals start to seep into our meninges. Think [Borroughs Naked Lunch](#) or [Castenaga's Don Juan](#).

We used to write books and articles, but now we [blog](#). That is the bite sized chunk of hyperlinked text that more and more runners are using to adequately describe the emotional journey of "my first marathon" etc. I think that's great - it makes the sport even more inclusive.

Getting under the covers; letting the participants use the paint brush of a wordscape to share the powerful emotional impact of that "first marathon" is a further democratization of our sport. Of course it creates a chaos of mediocrity tempered by the glow of authenticity. Out of this chaos,

perchance a sparkling gem of a thought or phrase or story will arise through the genetic selection that is the internet.

We get to ride along and tap that unfiltered emotion of a hard run in the pouring rain with Joe Runner.

It's hard to make a movie about such things imagined or real as played across the inner screens of our minds, but how about an audio recording? I've been sampling the running [podcasts](#) recently and some of this 'raw feed' of running is out there to be listened to on your commute to work.

Like any new medium it's got good and bad. Let me start with the top 5 reasons running podcasts are good.

1. **Entertainment.** Podcasts can be entertaining as well as informative (think [Car Talk](#)).
2. **Multi-task.** You can dual task and listen while you're working out or driving.
3. **Direct and immediate.** They allow us to tap directly into the emotions of that runner at the point of the activity - no waiting - no filter.
4. **Communication of mode specific info.** There are certain things that are just easier to describe by speaking, like trying to describe what a tempo pace should feel like to a new runner.
5. **Intimacy.** It feels many degrees more intimate and emotional content is easier to convey.

Now for the bad news. Here are some bits that didn't work for me from some of the Podcasts.

1. **Listening to you run is a bit creepy.** One of the most common things was that the podcasters would just carry a recorder with them when they went out for a

run. It sounds good in theory but I found all that heavy breathing and rhythmic footfall a bit porno-soundtrack weird.

2. **Stop being preachy.** Hand people a microphone and all of a sudden they step into the pulpit. This is one area where the written word works much better. I know it's harder but find a way to tell me how good it is without telling me how good it is.
3. **It's not about you.** You know, at the end of the day, we really only care about you in the context of what it means to us. I only care about your race or training run if you can build a bridge to me. Try to answer the question, "Why do I care?"
4. **I don't have all day.** Maybe I'm just lucky but I only have a 40 minute commute to work. Who can listen to a Podcast that is 1:20 long? Come on folks! That means I'm going to more than likely only listen to 40 minutes of it and then just worry that I missed something good.
5. **Infomercials.** This is a problem with podcasts in general that at some point they turn into an [infomercial](#). Refreshingly enough none of the running podcasts I've sampled so far have this problem.
6. **Give me content!** That's what I want! Valuable advice, entertaining stories, interesting people wonderful ideas - give me content!

Look what you've made me do! I'm 300 words over my self-imposed blog limit and still going. Go on out and sample the available sound [imbroglio](#) at [iTunes](#) or [RunningPodcasts.org](#). Tell me what you think.

7 Hot weather running tips from the mid-pack

Where we sweat a lot...

According to the Smithsonian Magazine I just read we all originated in Africa. The weather there a couple hundred thousand years ago was hot and humid. Somewhere our common ancestor slogged through a daily run in the hot and humid jungle. So you'd think we'd be used to it.

Unfortunately I think my more recent ancestors were digging in peat bogs somewhere in Northern Europe. I don't perform well athletically in the heat. Neither does my Border Collie Buddy. Give us a couple inches of crusty snow and a driving sideways freezing rain and we're right at home. Drop us into your standard Fourth of July race with full sun and 85 degrees and we wilt.

What can you do to mitigate the effects of the sun and the heat? First of all there's no real reason we can't have a good run on a hot day. Humans are designed to cope with the hot. Understanding the changes that your body goes through in response to the stress of heat will help you to come up with strategies to co-exist.

Failing a course of heat preconditioning I would recommend the following tactics to stay cooler.

1. Avoid the sun and heat as much as possible pre-race. Keep your core temp down. Stay in the shade until race time.
2. Don't eat anything for a couple hours before the race. I've seen some gruesome finish lines from people who 'fueled up' before the hot race.
3. Manually rub/spray/squirt water on your large patches of exposed skin while you're racing. I carry a water bottle and I'll squirt water on my exposed arms and

thighs in a race to maximize the evaporation potential over these large surface areas.

4. Get a good hat. Something light, light colored and vented. Lots of heat escapes through the top of your head – don't trap it in.
5. Less clothing is better – maximize the surface area of skin exposed to the wind.
6. Lube up to prevent chaffing. When your clothing gets soaked with sweat it will rub more. Sweat becomes a [whetting agent](#).
7. Help your body by visualizing. Picture the heat flowing from inside your core and out to the skin to be whisked away by evaporating water. Sounds hokey, but it helps.

What happens in your body when it's hot out? Your body has a core operating temperature range that it likes to stay within. When you rev up the engine on a hot day through exercise your core temperature starts to rise and your body initiates response mechanisms to deal with it.

You start to sweat. Your body coats the available surface with a glistening sheen of water. Why? Because water has some amazing chemical properties (you may remember this from 8th grade science). Water evaporates. When it evaporates it changes chemical state from a liquid to a gas. This process requires a whole bunch of energy. It sucks this energy from the environment in the form of heat.

When you round that corner and feel that welcoming breeze in your local 5K you are feeling thousand of water molecules changing state and absorbing heat. Feels good doesn't it? It's the same concept as the radiator in your car.

Why is the radiator in your car so big? It is trying to present a large surface area to the wind to maximize the cooling. Your skin is your radiator. The more of it that you can expose to the wind the more efficient it is going to be at removing heat through evaporation.

As you continue to exercise your body starts to move more blood towards the radiator – your skin. The small capillaries in your skin will dilate to handle more fluid exchange – moving more blood away from your core and into your radiator. Your heart (the pump) will have to work harder to push this blood out to a larger surface area.

Ever feel nauseous in a hot race? That may be because your body has decided to reprioritize blood away from your non-essential core systems to get more out to the radiator. Our body thinks we must be being chased by a hungry lion and reprioritizes blood away from the GI tract and head to the muscles and skin. You become dizzy and sick to your stomach.

At some point systems start shutting down and if you tough it out long enough you can trigger a cascade of system failure that will end your racing career by putting you six-feet-under in a pine box.

What can a simple mid-packer do about it? It really depends on how long you intend to be running. In longer races you're going to need to focus on staying hydrated and getting the proper electrolyte balance, but the only real answer is to back off.

You can condition yourself to run in the heat by training in it. One of the hottest Boston Marathons on record was won by a furnace tender from Nashua N.H. who spent his working days shoveling coal into a blazing fire. All the other runners collapsed, but for him it was just another day at the office.

You may not have the option of shoveling coal every day, but you can take in some training runs in the heat and practice

your water rubbing and heat exchange visualization. You may find that you enjoy working up a good sweat.

Be safe. Be careful. Unfortunately in our despoiled modern world many of the hot days also have bad air quality. Check the weather and use your head to stay cool.

Blogging from the Elbow of America

Each long run is a journey. Each journey is an adventure.

This was an easy week in my Ultra Marathon training schedule. 90 minutes on Saturday then 2 hours on Sunday. A calm before the storm. A deep relaxing inhalation to let me enjoy the training effect thus far before things get weird. Soon I will be climbing the ladder into uncharted territory. The terra incognita of back to back 4 and 5 hour runs. Yes, this weekend was a holiday. How appropriate that it fell on the Fourth of July long weekend.

I slept in because it was raining. I ate my oatmeal and bananas. I drank strong black coffee. I showered. The kids got up and began the relentless verbal fencing with my wife. I don't think any of them like bickering with each other - it's just habit. When things started to clear around 11:00 AM I became restless. I knew what I want to do. The wanderlust of the long distance runner is far stronger than the loneliness.

I told them I'm going to the beach to run and that they should come. They don't want to. They need to finish their ritual mother-daughter interactions. I can't stop them any more than Sisyphus can chock that stone to keep it from rolling back down the hill. But, I can control my feet and I pointed them out the door. Don't get me wrong, I'm not playing the martyr. It's just that Buddy and I are two running dogs in a house full of females and we seldom know what's going on.

I drove my old truck over to Chatham. I have run the distance between my house in Harwich and Chatham before. It's about 10 miles to the beach I like at Chatham Light. I don't want to waste all my running in transit. That's a 3:20 run - not a 2 hour run. When I was Tri training I would ride my bike to the beach, do my run and go for a swim - that was a great workout. Today I drove.

Since it was overcast I got a prime parking spot in the public parking below Main Street. Chatham has a public park with bathrooms and running water. It is one of my well used Oases. I trotted the mile or so to Chatham Light. Unless it's 5 AM or February 1st you're not going to get a parking spot there.

If you stop by your local kitsch seafood joint and check out the placemat, you'll be able to locate where I was today. Cape Cod juts like a flexed arm into the Atlantic. There at the outer tip of the elbow lies Chatham Massachusetts. There's a Coast Guard station with a light house and miles and miles of white beautiful beach.

I wore a running hat, my Reebok shorts, my size twelve Saucony Trail shoes and my slant pack with two bottles. One with half strength Gatorade and one with water. No shirt - just the 'racing sweater'.

I had a Hammer Gel for the turnaround point. I chewed down a PowerBar before I left the truck. I'm down to the Vanilla Crisp flavor. I buy the big boxes at Costco - but my kids always eat the peanut butter and chocolate ones and leave me with the Vanilla Crisp. Another petty Dad-grievance in the balance.

There are no dogs allowed on the Chatham beaches. Buddy had to stay at home. Besides, 2 hours at midday is probably outside his limit. Although he would have loved the water. It's hard for me to carry enough fluid for the both of us on these long outings in the hot.

I made my way down the stairs to the beach and out through the lighter than usual crowd of beachgoers. I worked across the soft sand to the edge of the water where the sand is packed and hard and good for running.

I have made this run in bare feet and although it is liberating for sure, anything more than a couple miles chews up your feet. There are pointy pebbles and random broken shells

that slice like Ginsu through the unsuspecting foot. My feet are gnarly enough from all this trail running.

It's just a little after low tide. This leaves a wide expanse of packed sand for me to plod along. The sand is soft and forgiving. My pace is easy and recreational. Before long I'm free of the blankets and paddle ball. I try to smile and avoid looking at the girls in bikinis.

In about 1000 meters the beach comes to a point and turns South West. There is a sand bar island here where the tourists congregate to ogle the harbor seals. I'm always amazed at how the beach here reconfigures itself and is different every time I run. Today, at low tide the sand bar is disconnected and the seals bob in the surf. A few intrepid beachgoers cross the gap to wade in the rip.

The beach patrol guys are there in their little golf cart thing. I stop and chat them up to see if anything of significance is going on. I head on down the beach. The people are scarce now. The ones I do pass seem to be fitter than the ones hanging around the stairs. They are on long solitary or partnered walks. I guess these would be those 'long walks on the beach' that they always talk about in personals, huh?

After 20-30 minutes there are only a couple foot print paths left. One with bare feet, walking. The other a small set of women's shoes running. I'd have to guess Nike size 5. The surf line is on my left and there seems to have been some storm activity recently. There are clam shells the size of dinner plates and snail shells the size of my fist. There are polished stones and pebbles that would look just fine worked into pirate jewelry and hung around the neck of a tanned lad. There is the occasional ravaged lobster trap. Alas, no pieces of eight.

The seals bob in the surf 10-20 feet from the shore, disinterested in my progress. I pass a family in lawn chairs and wonder how they got way out here. The father says hi and tells me to stay out of the surf because he just saw a shark take out a seal. He seems quite pleased with this bit of

maritime gossip. I guess if anyone looks like a fur seal, it's me.

After this there is not another soul. It's just me, the seals, the seagulls, the Atlantic and acres of flat white sand. I stay just above the surf line. Occasionally having to move sideways a bit to avoid an encroaching finger of a wave as the tide comes back in. The Earth is breathing and I am here at the edge of America in the misty humid poignancy of it all.

My watch hits one hour. I'm not tired. The sea breeze feels good. I stop and walk while fishing out my Hammer Gel. I suck it down with some water, re-secure my pack and turn around. It is now that I realize the little prevailing breeze I'd been running into was holding a swarm of vicious greenhead flies at bay. They pester me like evil harpies - making strafing runs against my back and legs, forcing me to run with a twitch like a horse. Adding to my grief the tide has come up the beach leaving me only the softer sand to run in and I can't get going fast enough to outdistance the pests.

Without the head wind I start to get soaked with sweat - looking to casual beach combers like I just emerged from the surf. But, I'm ok. It's all good.

I come upon the shark family again and they report gleefully that they have seen another shark attack. I stop for a bit and ask the wife "How did you guys get out here? Is your husband one of those compulsive guys that drags you 2 miles down the beach to find the perfect spot?"

"Well, yes he is like that..." she replies "but we took the boat over here from the harbor side."

Mystery solved.

There are more people now that I'm making my way closer to civilization. There is a couple fishing with their poles stuck in the sand. I ask the obligatory "Any luck?" and am treated to a shrug and a smile.

I come back to the turn and ask the beach patrol guy if he's interested in shark attacks. He interrogates me on the whereabouts of this family. I tell him they are the last family on the beach. He asks me how far. I respond with maybe a couple miles? I have no idea. I could be running 15 minute miles in this thick sand.

Back through the crowd at the stairs which is thicker now that the sun has poked through. I'm dripping. There's a confused looking couple on the stairs with a camera. I offer to take their picture. The wife accepts. I say something stupid like "sorry about all the sweat..." I can see she's a little aghast. I guess she must have thought I just came out of the water. It's ok, they're from California.

I take their picture, strip off my pack and shoes and jog back down for an ocean plunge. The surf is cool but not freezing; a warmish 70 degrees. It's refreshing.

I wipe my sandy feet in the lawn of the Coast Guard Station and make one of those decisions. Anyone who runs with me knows about these decisions. It goes something like, "Hey should we go back the way we came? Or explore this new road?" It turns out ok with the ocean on my left and Chatham center somewhere on my right I can't get too lost.

I arrive back to the truck with 2:14 on the IronMan. A good day. No pain. No exhaustion. Just a long introspective stroll with myself down that beach. It's times like this that I know why a run and I know why I'm always looking for something new. Time will tell if the ultra beats me, but I have a suspicion it's just another in a long line of everyday adventures.

Ultra-Dude – the undiscovered country.

As the miles grow mind-boggling mental barriers start to fall.

I remember when I trained for my first marathon. I remember the thrill and fear of each Sunday long run when I realized that I would be running longer than I had ever run before in my life. Each new week brought a new distance barrier broken – but more importantly a mental barrier fell.

As hard to believe as it is I started to relish these extensions of distance, not a trials or chores but as adventures. I saw them as travelers always see the new unexplored country. To me it was a place of unknowns. It was un-trodden ground. Terra incognita. Virgin territory. The new frontier.

How many times in our day to day existence can we find this new thing? I don't know about you, but my life is fairly pedestrian. My life is so chock full of things I have done before and things I need to get done that there is no room for undiscovered country. Curse upon the man who has been everywhere and done everything!

Now, once again, I find the prow of my galleon pointed into no-man's land. Thanks to the Ultra-marathon training plan I have embarked on. Either this week or next I will run more miles than I have ever run either at one time or in a week.

It is a little scary reading the plan, but it is also exciting. It's not so much a challenge or a goal as something new to be learned. Already I'm learning new things. I first thought that this would be just like marathon training – just more. Yet it is different and nuanced and I love that. Viva la difference! So sweet is the newly tasted fruit of knowledge.

My first learning is that going slower isn't necessarily easier. My common sense told me that running a slow pace for 4 hours would be easier than racing a marathon in 3+ hours. Not so. I have a new appreciation for you back of the pack

marathoners. It turns out that 4 hours of running is 4 hours of running no matter what the pace is and it's hard!

My second learning is that I'm going to have to figure out some new eating habits. I'm struggling to get enough protein and I'm losing weight and I haven't even gotten to the hard part of the plan. I can't wait to see what my body has in store for me. Is this just an adjustment phase or am I going to have to take corrective pizza consumption action?

My third learning is that I'm going to have to find a way to get more sleep. My body is rebelling at the 5-6 hour a night plan. It wants to take naps now in the middle of the day. This extra time on my feet is going to require extra time on my back! Again, I'll have to figure this out or I'm going to get in trouble.

Now I'm entering the 'fat' part of the training plan. I am nervous/excited about back to back 4-5 hour runs on Saturday and Sunday. Wow! We'll see how it goes. As Hunter S. Thompson said, "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro..."

What's on the other side of the wall?

More wall!

I remember training for my first marathon. Somewhere around 70-90 minutes into those first long runs my body would crash. All energy would leave in a rush. My legs would feel like lead and my brain would start reviewing the top ten good reasons for walking home.

It was 'the wall'. Unused to the process, my body was very bad at making the transition from free glycogen for fuel to burning deeper reserves. Instead of switching to the next available fuel source as the glycogen tank ran dry, it would just stop instead.

Each subsequent long run the wall got smaller and smaller as my body adapted and became very good at making a seamless transition. Eventually I didn't even notice it anymore. I realized that I could use my big brain to manage the way my body reacted. I'd just say "oh that's the wall" and keep running. After a couple minutes the reserve tank would kick in and I'd be back on track.

Then there was that other wall. The one that hits like a sledge hammer around the 18 - 20 mile mark of a hard raced marathon. This wall wasn't so much about exhausting available energy stores. This wall was the end result of running too hard into your lactic threshold for too long. Your muscles essentially becoming incapable of processing the fuel. The engine shuts down. More like when your car engine runs out of oil. Lots of black smoke and a seized engine - all the parts incapable of movement.

Well - I've found another wall. This past weekend I entered the 'ultra' phase of my ultra marathon training. Saturday morning I 'ran' for 3 hours and 37 minutes. Not so bad. Then my wife decided we should take down some trees in the back yard - so load on 4-5 hours of sawing, chopping and hauling. Sunday morning I set out early for another 3 hour

run. Towards the end of this one my energy stores were definitely flashing red.

The trick it seems is to find a pace that you can run indefinitely, one that is in balance with energy consumption and energy output. I'm still figuring it out, but it means keeping your heart rate low and stuffing all sorts of high calorie food down your throat before, during and after your runs.

The challenge here is that I hit my energy reserve wall sometime on Saturday morning and then kept moving forward for another 5 hours or so. It's all wall. There is no other side. You just have to learn to run in the wall.

It's not quite the lactic death shuffle – but it sure is slow. Your body keeps sending messages up from the engine room, “Hey dude, we're out of gas down here, you should pull over!” But you and your big brain override those sensible suggestions and keep moving forward.

This wall is a strange one. My legs aren't really sore and it's not a huge effort to spend that much time on my feet – but I feel like I haven't slept in days. I'm curious to see if my body stabilizes and learns to live with this wall of exhaustion.

I actually feel the lack of carbohydrates in my system. Just like that feeling you get on the 'zone' diet.

Live and learn.

Ultra-undiscovered country part II

What wall?

I had a great run this morning. Here are the stats:

- 3:58 (yeah that's right three hours and fifty eight minutes)
- Between 24-25 miles
- ~160 Ounces of fluid (Including one 20 ounce bottle of Heed)
- 1 PoweBar, 2 Hammer Gels, 4 "Anthony's Energy Treats".

I don't believe I have ever intentionally run for four hours straight before. Perhaps my first marathon got close – but I don't really remember anything after the 18 mile mark. Thinking back, my distance record is still only a mere 26.2 – so at some point in this training that barrier will fall too. I'm definitely close to my miles per week record.

You know what? I feel fine. I've got another 3 hours on the schedule for tomorrow – we'll see how that goes, but right now I think I've turned some sort of corner. I was definitely tired coming in on the last lap, but I think I could have gone for at least another hour.

I managed to drag my tired butt out of bed at 5:30 and get on the trail by 6ish. Good thing too because it's a cooker today. Humid and in the 90's. I got back before the big heat came. I didn't suffer from it. This late in the summer you get used to it.

I learned a few new things today. First thing I learned is that the bug spray is only good for 2 hours, especially if you're an efficient perspirer! Second thing I learned is that if you leave any gaps where the bandana attaches to your bug-hat the deer-flies will find it and bite you in the head. Third thing I

learned, and this is a bit disturbing, Anthony's Energy Balls dissolve tinfoil. But, mostly I learned that I can run for 4 hours and live to talk about it.

I took Buddy the Wonder Dog with me for the first loop. I back up against some conservation land. I have a nice 10k loop that I can run. It's topographically interesting with a good ridge in the middle that I have to cross on the way out and the way back, so I get my hills. It is mostly single track trails with some 17th century farmer roads and some fields. It's pretty, quiet, challenging and nice on the legs.

By the second lap I was soaked. My whole body covered in Chris-slime like some sort of Creature from the Black Lagoon. I had my Go-lite slant bottle pack with two 20 ounce bottles. I'm getting quite used to running with two full bottles in the pack. I included my house in the loop so I could fill my bottles on each lap.

I left Buddy after the first loop. I don't want to kill the poor little guy. He's not so good in the heat. The usual mud holes that he wallows in have dried up. His opportunities for immersion are limited. I have been coming back and picking him up for the last lap, but today I saw how hot the day was getting and tried to leave him.

It's amazing how smart dogs are. He was expecting me to pick him up for the last lap. When I headed back into the woods for number four after filling my bottles at the outside hose spigot I could hear the whiny frantic barking coming from the house. He was screaming at me "Hey, dude you forgot me!"

I kept going. I'm the parent here! It was too hot and humid. I didn't need to be carrying him back - especially if things went south for me and I had to struggle in. But, a few minutes later I hear his hoof beats pounding the trail behind me. He got one of the kids to let him out and escaped. That dog loves to run.

I think having a power bar and a cup of coffee before heading out are a key jump start. It's good to have that initial blast of carbo's and caffeine working.

I'm a wee bit concerned about fluid logistics. I don't know how I'm going to keep hydrated in a 9 hour race if I'm going through 40+ ounces an hour. We'll have to see what the opportunities for water are on the course. I may have to get a bigger pack. I suppose I could drink out of the pond. Do ultra-runners do that? I could carry those little purification pills like I had when I went to India. Hmmmm....

No chaffing! I bought the big container of Aquafor and am applying it liberally to all protruding surfaces. So far, so good. That stuff is wonderful. No toenail problems either. Although I have started precautionary taping of the big toe as the distance climbs.

I have concerns about my wet pruned feet. I think another few hours in those wet shoes I would have had some problems. The issue is that when I go out in the morning there is just no way to keep my feet dry. I have a couple fields I have to cross and the grass is wet. There is nothing I can do about it. Maybe in the race it will be different. Maybe I'll be able to keep my feet dry. Maybe I'll have to have dry socks or extra shoes strategically (or tactically) positioned along the course.

The body is holding up ok. I have a little Achilles protestation this week. It's my own fault I spent too many hours on the asphalt. No worries - I'll just do my stretches and wear the Achilles splint at night. I know all about Achilles. The piriformis is complaining as well - but I know how to stretch that.

To summarize - Week six of the training plan seems to have been completed successfully. I continue to amaze myself. If everything goes to schedule I'll be giving myself a 50 miler PR for a 47th birthday present!

Running is green, right?

Or is it?

I'm being barraged with 'Green' this and 'Green' that these days. It got me to thinking about our sport and how green it is. Let's do a quick walk through of it, you and I, and see what we come up with. Maybe we qualify for carbon credits? Great! We can trade those for new shoes on the commodity exchange.

In general runners are probably one of, if not the most concerned-with-the-environment demographics. Seriously; take a look around at your next race. These are people who are heavily into a healthy life style. They are personally accountable and responsible for their health. I'm sure that cascades into the rest of their lifestyle. I'm sure as a population we reduce, re-use and recycle.

I'll bet us runners have a lot to be proud of on the environmental responsibility front. Let's see if we can do a quick comparison of the good and bad effects we have on our small planet. Just for fun - as it were...

What about eating habits and lifestyle?

I bet a fair amount of runners are vegetarians or at least love a good salad every now and then. I would have to give us a plus sign on the 'intent' here. Whether in practice we actually do a better job of taking care of ourselves is another story, but I'll credit us with knowing what to do and having good intentions.

I'd say on the whole we make better eating choices and as a population we make more sustainable choices that are better for our world.

On the other hand - the math is interesting...Let's say I run 50 miles a week. That's ~5000 calories I burn. Probably I consume 5-10% more calories than I would require if I weren't a compulsive running nut. Does this mean that I'm

taking 1,000 calories a day out of the available world calorie pool with my thoughtless dashing about in circles at the local track?

With the millions of us out there doesn't this mean that we are causing more acreage to be planted to support our out-sized appetites? Aren't we contributing to the rainforests being burned, the continents over fertilized, the water squandered, the genetic mutation of crops to keep up and all the other evils of over production? Are we basically all creating an unnecessary and artificial population boom?

Maybe we'd be less impactful staying home and doing meditation. Hmm... food for thought.

Doesn't our running and biking replace a bunch of carbon producing driving?

Surely there's a positive for us. We use our legs to get places not our gas guzzling SUV's, right? We ride our bikes to work, right? Clearly this is a plus on the carbon footprint. We are the reason there are sidewalks. We are fit and don't need our corpus transported everywhere through artificial means.

Hold on a second...How many of you have actually run to work instead of driving? How many of you have actually 'run errands' about town? I have, but not the majority of the time. It's a bit of a struggle to carry the dry cleaning and the groceries.

You may run at lunchtime at work. You're not actually replacing any driving time there are you? And you're taking an extra shower and creating some dirty laundry to boot! You, Mr. /Mrs. Runner are a resource drain!

When we run those races we're not actually replacing a driving activity either are we? Truthfully we are driving to that race. We are making an extra trip so we can run in a loop or worse a point-to-point with a diesel bus to bring us, or at least our bags, back.

While we're running that pointless marathon to nowhere the police are blocking and rerouting traffic. I'd guess tens of thousands of citizens idle or drive extra miles every year because we're tying up the road. Hmm...maybe we need to rethink that strategy...

What about our love of nature? What about our trail running and joyous communion with nature?

Only a trail runner truly appreciates the beauty of nature. Such joy, nay ecstasy, overwhelms us as we combine our love of running with the outdoors. That makes us all rabid environmentalists, right?

Runners absolutely have a positive impact here. We spearhead conservation support. Our trail races fund the maintenance of big chunks of real estate that might otherwise turn under the developer's blade. We are conservation activists. We protect the land. Right?

On the whole I'll give the nod to conservation on this point, even though we are trotting about on the endangered species and scaring the animals. We also are introducing lots of people to these places with our trail races and running that would not normally go there. We're adding to the fatigue of the very natural resources we love.

What about the gear?

Well, I don't know about you, but there's not much natural fiber in my running closet. I'm not running in rattan sandals, hemp shorts and an organic silk racing shirt. Most of what I'm wearing is definitely petro-chemical derived or worse. This doesn't even include the layers of petroleum based lube I spread on my pointy bits for long runs.

And the fuel? How about those all those little packets of goo and stuff? It's all in separate landfill choking plasticized packaging. Count up the thousands of plastic cups, bottles and cardboard boxes for doling out at your next half marathon!

Am I over-thinking it? I think running and we runners are extremely green in thought and action. I wonder if we could do more. What kind of activism is called for here? Should we only run races that recycle their water cups? Do our shoe providers need to think about the re-use / recycle of the 52 pairs of shoes we each have hidden in our closets? How do we make our actions match our words?

Here's my plan. I'm going to only eat food that creates bio-fuel. Like French fries, potato chips and buffalo wings. Tomorrow when I'm out in the woods I'm going to pay attention and make sure not to step on the endangered newts. That's the plan!

Running the long tail

Or – Why Google is so dang interesting...

I started my running podcast, ([RunRunLive](#)), for fun and created a running themed [website](#) to host it. I never dreamed I'd get the interesting, hilarious and troubling insight into the human brain that has cropped up. The internet is so cool in what it reveals about people and even more fascinating in what it hints at. So how did my little running podcast experiment give me insight this week?

Apparently there are naked runners with achy quads running the beaches of Cape Cod, swatting at green head flies. They are worried about whether taking a couple ibuprofen for their aches will ruin their sex life. That's a slice of humanity for you!

I've always been interested in the fractal nature of the web's logic. How it grew organically to represent the way our brains actually work. Random connections of thoughts and phrases produce associations that you might not have made, but when you see them you think, "OK, that's strange but interesting..."

I was futzing around on my hosting service ([seekdotnet](#)) and saw a link in my control panel called "Website Statistics". First I looked at the file downloads. I figured the number of people who downloaded my podcast would be interesting. I was curious to see how many and also which episode was most popular after one month.

The funny thing here is that we, the creators of the content, think we know what our best work is. In my experience writing for [coolrunning](#), I've discovered that my opinion is entirely useless as an indicator. I would put up an article that I had really poured my heart into and thought was fantastic, and I would get low interest. Alternatively I would slap up something that I thought was mediocre and it would really pull. There was no telling what the readers would grab onto.

Of course I learned there are some common elements to a story that 'pulls'. The readers tend to latch on to emotional issues and specific quick fixes. My biggest feedback articles were on running with an iPod, Running with my dog, the 2004 [Boston Marathon](#) (miserable hot year), running so you can eat more and training for a marathon on 3 days a week, in that order.

For my new running podcast, and this is only after a month, the most downloads were for episode 8 where I interview a friend of mine Gary who went from new runner to back-to-back sub-3 hour marathons in about 3 years. My suspicion is that the phrase "new runner to back-to-back sub-3 hour marathons in 3 years" in the title caught people's attention. The triumph of the yellow press!

So I guess I'll go change all the titles to "Free Sex Beer Now" or something...

The second thing about the downloads that I thought was interesting was that almost 200 people are already subscribing to my podcast. That's crazy in only about a month of production. This shows you that the internet is just beginning to blossom in its ability to connect random like thinkers.

I also looked at the page views. Those boys over at Google sure are busy beavers. They hit my brand new site with their indexer 1000-2000 times a week. It looks like their servers are based in Virginia and California. Either that or the CIA is on to me.

I've got fans in Canada and the UK - which is cool. I think those places are ahead of the curve when it comes to podcasting. There were also hits from Eastern Europe that were probably hackers looking for someone to rob or extort. When you open the door, anyone can come through.

The really interesting stuff was what people typed into search boxes to get to my fledgling site. Below is the list. Just from looking at this I can tell you that the search engines all but

ignore the tags you bake into the website itself, but they really care about the 'content' in the form of text and words and phrases. I'm going to collect all these and create a frequently asked questions section on RunRunLive.

Running Blogs and Running Podcasts search phrases:

First there were a bunch of what you would expect – people searching for running podcasts and blogs. In this case the search engines worked. Go to my website [RunRunLive](#) to see how to get my running podcast and running blog. Also visit Nigel's website www.runningpodcasts.org for a wider assortment and search Blogger for the best in blogs.

runrunlive, run run live, podcast runner, runnerati, podcast running, running "side of the trail" "another runner", running+podcast, run run long podcast, run & podcast

Running Questions

Then, believe it or not, there were other runners who searched for help with a specific running question and got directed to me because of my content. Again I'd say this was what the engines were designed for. I'll answer those questions here...

how far is a running track around

Answer: 98% will be 400 Meters but you may find some really old one's that are 440 yards or ¼ mile.

running; chemicals

Answer: natural ones produced by your body – cool. The unnatural one's introduced into their bodies by cheaters – bad.

achy quads running

Answer: Yeah, that happens sometimes, it's ok – try an ice bath after your next hard work out or long run...

how far before long run should you eat

Answer: Depends on what you're eating. I've gotten to the point where I can run after eating almost anything and eat while I'm running. For races or hard workouts I try to get a power bar down 90 minutes before the gun and a caffeinated Gu 30 minutes before the gun.

Cape Cod

It seems that there are a bunch of runners vacationing on Cape Cod in these summer months and my blogs from there drew some hits.

run in packed sand

Answer: Yeah but it will eat your feet after ½ hour if you're not used to it and watch out for the shells.

running the cape cod rail trail

Answer: Yeah, do it. 60 miles long from Dennis to P-Town.

running path cape cod

cape cod, running path

Answer: See above

green head flies Chatham, MA

green head flies chatham ma

sandy neck greenhead fly season

Answer: They suck.

Cape Cod running and racing

Answer: Check [CoolRunning](#) or contact a local club

How deep do beachgoers wade?

Answer: Deep enough.

Now for something completely different.

These were the search phrases that through me for a loop.

naked torso runner

Answer: Are you referring to me? The rule is that you have to have a hot body or be over 45.

run the beach bare

Answer: Whatever floats your boat.

ibuprofen and sexual prowess

Answer: Prowess has two s'

mantras to keep away the nightmares

Answer: Try "No more nightmares!"

the biker elephant man chris

Answer: Are you kidding me?

Interesting, huh? Hopefully everyone got their answers. I'll be looking over my shoulder for those streaking beach-waders next time I'm out on the beach!

5 tips for well meaning EVIL volunteers!

Some quick tips from those of us who know.

There is nothing better than volunteering for a race. I love working the water stops especially in the high miles of a ½ or full marathon where you get to see the grand tableau of the human comedy play itself out across the wet pavement.

I've been taking my kids out to the help at water stops since they could walk. They love it and all of the runners would rather grab a drink from a cute kid than an old warhorse like me. If you have never done it you should. It is one of the best ways to understand a race. Seeing a race from the inside, as a participant, is cool, but as a volunteer is cool too in a different way.

As a volunteer you get to see the whole race, from the blur of the leaders to the shuffling stoicism of the mid-packers. You get the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. You actually get to help people in distress and add value.

So it is in this spirit of gratefulness that I offer up a couple stories and tips for those of you who are out there on the front water stops or waving a flag at traffic.

1. Find something interesting to say to me. No I don't look good so stop telling me that because I know you're lying and it makes me feel like you're pandering. Runners in the high miles of a hard race are looking for a mantra – some scrap of emotional fodder that they can hang those final miles on. Do some research – come up with something good.
 - a. Here are a couple examples – When I see someone struggling I might give them my high-school coach impression. Lock eyes with them and state in a commanding voice “You can do

this! You trained hard! You deserve this?
You...CAN...DO...THIS!"

- b. Or I read a sign once that said "The warrior is within you!" on heartbreak hill - that's a good mantra.
 - c. But for heaven's sake don't say "Looking good!" or "Almost there!"
 - d. If I'm feeling churlish and someone says "looking good" to me in the high miles of a race I might respond "You think that's something...you should see me naked!"
2. If you don't know - don't say anything. Worse than the "almost there" crowd are the people who make up facts about the race. "Only a mile to go!" or "That's the last hill!" What the F*#\$ are they thinking? Do they know how emotionally crushing it is at the end of a long race to round the corner and see that, in fact, there is another hill and it's a big one? Runners are highly impressionable at this stage of a race and even if they know better will hang their hopes on whatever you tell them.
- a. Story #1: I had a volunteer tell me that I had less than a mile to go at the Hyannis marathon when in fact I had 1.4 miles to go. I missed my qualifying time by 21 seconds. If I knew could I have made it up? Maybe not, but it still had a negative impact when I saw the 26 mile marker and realized I was screwed.
 - b. Story #2: Some well meaning course marshal at the end of the Eastern States 20 Miler telling us that there was less than a mile to go. I had

driven the course before and knew he was off by .3 miles. But he was telling everyone the same thing. You may not believe it but .3 miles is HUGE at the end of a 20 miler.

On the other hand if you have specific course knowledge, by all means share it. “Two hundred yards to the finish – right up here on your left – kick now!” “Around this corner there’s a big uphill and then you’re clear to the finish”. But if you don’t know, don’t say anything.

3. Get the heck out of my way. If I want water I’ll let you know. Why do they persist in chasing me out into the road? It’s almost like they are going to give me that water whether I want it or not. Stay back kids, I’ll come to you.
4. Grip the cup by the edge so I can snatch it without baptizing both of us. Pinch the rim and hold it at arm’s length.
5. When I am approaching move with me a little so the cup doesn’t smash when I grab it. Again, I’ve already been baptized.

Thank you all for coming out and I really love you and your kids. Just remember at the end of a long race we are emotionally fragile and not too maneuverable. Give us the inspiration we need. Enable us to do our job – while you do your job.

Do the “Thank You” walk...

Take a deep breath. Don't forget how lucky you are.

If you're a runner or even if you're thinking of becoming a runner you've got to take the time to count your blessings. I come in contact with so many people every day who just want to complain. They just want to tell you how miserable they are and how awful everything is. I'm here to tell you we are lucky folks. We are living life. We are getting things right.

If you read, watch or listen to any of the major media streams it's all a contest to see who can tell the most awful stories. Death, destruction, infidelity and just plain stupidity are paraded in front of us endlessly. I try to set a good example and see the silver linings, but sometimes I get tired and it catches up with me.

Sometimes I'll be out on a run and will feel awful. My legs will be dead and the arrow on my energy meter will be bouncing on zero. It will be raining and dark. I'll have multiple important, urgent and unsavory tasks piled up on my desk.

At times like these I'll pull up and walk. I'll take a deep breath and give myself a mental slap. I'll remember how lucky I am to be out running. To be able to do this thing. To be given this gift. Slow or fast, joyous or hard work, I have something that 80+% of the rest of the human population will never have. Here am I gloriously alone on the woods with a happy dog. I'm at the center of the universe.

These are the moments when I tell myself to stop thinking about all those things that have gone wrong or could go wrong. To stop the creeping worry. To let go of the things that are out of my control and focus on those things I can control. To not fret about the 'what might have been' or 'what could be' but instead to become aware of what is. What is, is this moment and this dog and these legs and these lungs and this gift!

Here my friends is your assignment for today. I got this from the awesome little book "*The Energy Bus*" by Jon Gordon.

Take a "Thank you walk". That's right; go out and walk around your house and thank everyone and everything. Remember how thankful and blessed you are. Remember and dwell on all the gifts you have. Your health, your kids, your family, your job and yes even your dog.

Remember to say thank you and you will run a little lighter today.

Roots and Rocks

The 2008 Wapack Trail Race

It is 17.5 miles and you should expect to run your marathon time. It is a beautiful rugged trail that runs over the Wapack ridge from NH to MA and back again. In the process you'll climb and give back some 6,000 odd feet of roots and rocks. You'll crest bare granite summits with green-sea views of NH and Western MA.

75 other hardy souls, and me ran it this morning. When I say "ran" - I really mean walked-hiked-crawled- scrambled - clamored - jumped - fell - lurched and actually ran in sections.

It was a glorious day. Sunny and dry with a strong wind when you broke out into the mountain top clearings. No mud or standing water on the trail. No slippery bits. It got a little too hot in the late miles but perfectly fine in among the trees.

I love this trail. It reminds me of everything great about living in New England. Pine needle padded paths. Loose granite chunks. Enigmatic, lichen-covered, weathered stone walls - The hubris of some ancient sheep farmer who drove his flocks here.

The mountains. What can one say about these small granite bumps? Each one a simple 20 minute hike, but strung together a gauntlet of quad-wrenching assault. Starting out from the Windblown Ski Area in New Ipswich NH the course climbs and descends in succession Barrett Mt., New Ipswich Mt., Pratt Mt. and Watatic.

What a great day! I felt awesome. I hiked the crazy steep bits. I turned my left ankle. I feel pretty beat up - in a good way. I didn't fall. I can't remember running this race and not falling. It is par for this course to exit the woods dirty, torn and dripping blood. There are some sections that are a bit unforgiving if you catch a toe.

There were a number of insulted ankles among the throng, but no one got seriously hurt. No one got seriously lost and no one had to be carried or driven out. A very successful day by trail running standards!

The phraseology "Technical" is so non-descriptive. The experienced trail runners say it with a mischievous twinkle in their eyes. "Oh" they say. "Parts of this trail are a little technical." Like that could possibly give you a clear picture of the rugged, testing beauty of the Wapack.

What is technical? On a scale of 1 to ten, with 3 being a run on the beach, and 5 being a hilly dirt road, Wapack is about an 8. A 10 would require some ropes. The trail is mostly single path with some dirt roads and some ATV-type trails. The trail climbs and descends 4 small mountains. Two of these are quite steep and one side of Pratt Mountain is steep and rocky. Rocky in this case means a mixture of fixed and loose granite chunks cascading willy-nilly down the mountain trail.

If you are a 3:30 marathoner at Boston in decent shape you can expect to run somewhere around a 3:30 for the 17.5 miles of Wapack. I was quite happy with my time. I had intended just to coast and practice my ultra-stuff, but I felt too good and kept a strong pace. Not race-pace but respectable and a great workout.

I'm most happy about finishing strong. I passed 3-4 people walking on the last mile and they didn't even try to resist. They were toast. Even though my left ankle was strobe-light painful with each down-hill impact of my 190 pounds I still drove it home feeling good and looking good for the finish.

I think a big part of my comfort is knowing the course. It really helps to know what's coming next on the Wapack. Know where to walk and where to gun.

There you have it. Thanks to Paul Funch for resurrecting this fall classic for us. I can't remember enjoying a race so much.

The last long run...

Race campaigns blend together as part on your living fabric.

So - I have to get up early tomorrow and run for 6 hours. This might not be so daunting for you back-of-the-pack types but for me it represents the longest time, and distance, that I have ever run in my life. I'm not afraid or even pensive. I'm healthy and I'm 99.99% sure I can do it. Barring any cataclysm this is it. This is the last long run of this summer's Ultra-Marathon campaign.

Why do I feel like I have to run 36 or so miles tomorrow? Well, partly because that's what my plan says to do, but since I actually made up the plan it is also something I want to do. 3 months ago when I embarked on this journey I had no idea where it would lead.

That's the adventure part of running I love as much as the simple meditation of it all. You set a goal to do something you've never done before, you cook up a plan and then you take that first step. It's all about the journey and the adventure from there on out. Whether it's your first 5k or your next 100k the adventure is the same.

You are setting these goals to push you out of your comfort zone and by doing so you learn something. You gain something. You pull to yourself from the universe something more. You add to your core being a cladding of confidence. It is akin to that seasoned look in the eye of an old soldier that says "many horrors I have seen, many tests I have overcome, there is little in this world that scares me now".

These campaigns lend a flavor of seasons and cycles to our lives. From the spring time training for Boston and the hill training for Mt. Washington I cycle seamlessly into the long runs for my ultra and so on. These cycles are so comfortable to me now it is as if they are in sync with the world. The season change and I cycle through another goal set. On and up it goes like an endless adventure.

Now I embark on that taper period where the fitness of the training effect makes me feel like superman. Undoubtedly the Ultra will be a real tester but I'll pass that test, as I have passed all the others.

I've already started to think about what my next adventure should be. The seasons change. It all turns and flows. We glide through life in harmony with our selves.

I'll see you out there, my friends.

C-,

In the Ultra-Taper – It's not that scary...

Ultra-training is easier than training for a Boston qualifier.

I'm not an official bib-number carrying ultra-runner yet, but after Sunday's 36 mile training run I think it's in the bag. Training for this ultra-trail-marathon – The VT 50 Miler – has been one of the easiest training programs I've done when compared to your average Boston qualifying campaign.

I know it's a paradox, but ultra training is easy. Let me try to explain.

Like many of you mid-packers I started running again late in life to get healthier and caught the bug. The key difference being that I ran X-country in high school – so I knew how to run, I knew I could do it. I had no expectations beyond building up to 5 miles or so 3-4 times a week to keep my weight under control.

My big eye-opener was when some 'friend' said "hey, let's run the marathon!" (In Massachusetts you don't have to say "which marathon") Qualifying for Boston was an amazing learning experience and quite difficult. It involved tempo and speed and hills and long runs at pace – plenty of late, painful nights at the track doing mile repeats at the edge of my ability.

Even after 10 Bostons, qualifying is work for me. That's why it came as such a surprise that stepping up to the ultra would be so easy, both psychologically and physically. All the painful speed and tempo work is replaced with long-long-long slow run-hikes in the woods. After you break the barrier – you can run forever – it doesn't get worse.

Of course I'm coming off a base of training for Boston and Mt. Washington. That's quite different from starting from scratch, but if you're a solid marathoner, stepping up to an ultra distance is a piece of cake. The hardest thing is scheduling the 5-6 hour long runs, but it's no more difficult

than trying to schedule two high-quality midweek speed workouts.

Here are my 2009 predictions:

- Ultra-marathon distance events will explode in popularity and participation as mid-packers graduate from the marathon.
- Runner's World will run a saccharin piece on the explosion of ultras and some troubled person's quest to finish.
- Main stream media and some dopey celebrities will get ultra-involved for some dopey ego charity.
- 10-20 books will be published on "Zen and the art of the Ultra" and "The beginner's guide to Ultras", one of them will make Oprah.
- Related endurance events in swimming, biking, relays and adventure racing will also see double digit growth.
- Some old idiot like me will keel over spectacularly in one of the events and the national pundits will bash these events as 'bad for you'.
- I'll smile at the dog, pick up my feet and put them down, ignoring all the hoopla.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it - I'll see you out there (for 9+ hours).

Fur boys in the rain...

It is a busy time of year and you'd better get used to it...

This time of year, the beginning of school through Christmas is very busy for everyone. The kids get wrapped up in school and sports. Jobs get busy with the Q4 push and everyone coming back from holiday. Summer training programs come to fruition with Fall races.

It's best to remind yourself and all your personal stakeholders that things are going to get weird. Remind them to expect the heightened level of stress and activity. Some things aren't going to get done. Things are going to get dropped and missed and messed up. All we can do is center ourselves, turn up the dial and push onward. Soon enough we'll all wake up on January first with a spinning head and wonder what happened?

I took Saturday off. Felt like crap all week with some sort of low-level virus. I managed to give myself a little case of runner's knee by over training on the roads midweek. I finished the morning half of my 'honey-do' list, sat down on the couch and it was all over. A fitful three hour nap ensued.

I had brunch with the club yesterday. I did two-plus hours with the dog in the woods in the rain. I had to keep up with Devon who, at 20 years my junior, was pressing the pace. Felt a little sore this morning and the runner's knee required a couple Vitamin I.

I'm traveling to Denver tomorrow for an in-and-out. I've got to be back for a board meeting on Wednesday. I'll run in the morning with the dog. Then off to the airport. 12 hours of flying, 2 hours of meetings, 4 hours of driving, very little sleeping. It's going to be one of those weeks.

Thank goodness I'm in my taper. All systems are green for the Vt-50 ultra. It's anticlimactic after all the miles of training. Unless we get one of those random weather events it will be a non-event.

The cool fall weather is settling in on New England. Chance of snow in Maine this week! My dog is acting like a hyper-active puppy. Full of energy. Pulling at the leash. Throwing in several mindless fartleks chasing venison-on-the-hoof that he'll never catch. He's running like he enjoys it again. In the hotter weather Buddy runs like it's work.

Keep your heads up. It's going to get weirder before it gets better. Unpack your tights and fuzzy hats. Grease up the treadmill. Fill out your naughty and nice list. Once more into the breach that is Fall.

11 tips for your fall marathon

You've done all the work this summer, now how do you make the event everything you hoped it would be?

1. If you're concerned about your time or apprehensive go check out the course.

For some marathons, like Boston, you can learn the course from the immense body of knowledge that others have left for you on-line and in print. Other marathon courses don't quite get settled or suddenly change in the weeks before the race.

If you've got a lot riding on the race or are just a worrier go out and ride the course. Some people will do a trial run of the course as their last long run. Others will ride a bike or take their car.

Take note of the mile marks. Are there any noteworthy uphill or downhill sections? Tight turns? Bad roads? What are the significant landmarks? This allows you to parse up the course in your mind and run from landmark to landmark. It drains much of the leeriness from the troubled psyche.

2. Do your foot care early.

Don't wait until the night before to trim your toenails. Do your foot care 5-7 days ahead so if you cut something wrong it has a chance to heal.

3. Don't experiment with new products or food at the Expo.

Now's not a good time to see if you like Mongolian Barbeque (although I love it)

4. Don't try to catch up on your training in the last two weeks.

The die is cast. You have to live with your conditioning. You're not going to catch up. Throwing in one last long run or speed workout isn't going to help. However - I have found that a hard hill charge workout in place of a speed workout is ok in the last two weeks to build confidence for a hill in the course.

5. Don't over taper.

You're going to cut your mileage by 40-60% but don't stop running. Keep up your tempo and your speed. Keep up your stretching and strength. If you cut your mileage too precipitously you'll feel sluggish in the race.

6. Put down the rake and don't move any furniture.

People who have been training long hours for the marathon sometimes make stupid decisions when confronted with a bunch of free time. Don't do it. The hardest thing you should be doing is taking the dog for a walk. No raking leaves, gardening or painting the house. You'll regret it.

7. Eat some salads.

Cutting your mileage by 40-60% means that you're going to cut your calorie burn by 40-60%. All those cheese cakes and cookies you've been scarfing will catch up with you quickly when you put on the brakes. Plan ahead and get some fruit, water and salads queued up.

8. Carbo-loading and pasta dinners are an old wives tales.

Filling your gut with pasta the night before the race isn't a good idea. It has to go somewhere. You might find it inconveniences your early morning marathon.

If I'm racing I'll swear off solid food around 3:00 in the afternoon the day before. I'll eat like a toddler with an intestinal flu - lots of electrolyte fluid, maybe a power bar or banana. The morning of the race I find it's better to

have an empty stomach. I eat my Powerbar 90 minutes before the gun and shoot a Gu 30 minutes before.

9. Get in line early.

Whether you have to go or not get in the porta-john line 20-30 minutes before the gun. By the time you get to the front you may have changed your mind.

10. Visualize the race.

The pros do it and you should too. Close your eyes and picture yourself at different points in the race and visualize what you're going to do. I know when I get to mile 20 I'm going to feel tired and I picture myself pushing through and running strong. Practice it. Then when the real thing happens your mind will be preconditioned to do the right thing. Running is a mental sport.

11. Dress for success.

You really never can tell about the weather. Lay out 3 separate outfits for the potential high, low and perfect race temperatures and have them all ready to go in your drop bag. Pack a throw-away sweat shirt. Pack a big green trash bag you can use if things get weird.

Hope that helps. Good luck at your qualifying attempts. Remember your mantras. Mine are "Run Lightly" and "The warrior is within you!" If it gets really bad you can always go with "One, Two".

Sex Sex Sex

What is going on? And how do I get in on it?

I was a bit taken aback when Runner's World first changed their long-standing format a few years back. Maria Rodale took over the board of her family publishing house and brought in some modernization.

Dave Wiley took over from Amby Burfoot as editor of the Runner's World franchise and brought in some new ideas. Gone was the cultish magazine for hard core runners. In came the modern magazine. It was part of a portfolio of corporate publications that he could sell to a broader market.

No longer did they have to make do with selling ads to poor struggling race directors. Now they could sell glossy fold outs to big pharmaceutical companies and car concerns.

Overnight we old-timers saw our clubby little rag transmogrified into the "Woman's Day" of running. It became a massive ad-filled tome. The content became more general and, truth be told, more professional.

The font size dropped to 8 points and some of our favorite columnists were disappeared like Russian agitators. We were also treated to the "continued on page 123" syndrome where in order to finish the article you have to hunt for the last two paragraphs in the back, by the 1 inch ads. The front cover screamed things like "LOSE 20 POUNDS IN A WEEK!" You'd look for that article only to find that it was a single paragraph sidebar in some unrelated piece.

The writers and photographers were now actual writers and photographers, not runners who also wrote and took pictures. In that sense the journalistic quality went up, but something of the purity, honesty and authenticity was lost.

My biggest shock came when I discovered there, among the two-page hay fever pill ads, a full page spread for Viagra! Wow! What demographic was I now part of? I just assumed as runners we all have pretty good health and blood flow, so

to speak...but, I guess maybe some of the back-of-the-packers were down in the pecker.

I decided I was just being an old fart and fighting change. I renewed my subscription, started enjoying Kristen Armstrong's thoughts and ignored the pesky commercialism. They have a right to make money. If some company wants to cough up the bucks to misplace their ad-spend, why not put it towards spreading the word about running?

And thus we agreed, Runner's world and I, to a state of détente. They agreed to keep taking my money and I agreed to bitch about the stupider aspects of the publication. This comfortable arms length relationship has continued now for a few years. It must get to them though, having to write that same article on the "10 Weight Loss Tips" or whatever over and over.

It was with great surprise this week that I found something new in the magazine which spun me for a loop. I found myself reading an ad for Adam and Eve adult products in my favorite running magazine.

I thought I was pretty well tied in to the running community but it seems like I'm missing something. Is there a partner-swapping, fun group of runners out there looking to stock up on fuzzy hand cuffs and dildos? Wow, I'm going to be looking at my mates a little differently down at the Sunday morning club runs... And all this time I thought they were sore from speed work and long runs.

The only real thing this proves is that I'm a naïve dope. A famous philosopher said you should only write about what you know, so I'm going have to stop this discussion here and let someone else take over.

Looks like a cold rain for my 50 miler this weekend. That's like a cold shower right?

The Vermont 50 Mile Ultra-Marathon – Chris’ Race Report

Ultra-Marathon, Check!

The race report (from Hell)

Like the race itself – this is going to be a long one...

I’ve been putting off writing this race report for a couple not so good reasons. First is the typical post event ennui that overcomes me post-haste post-race. It’s a bit like postpartum depression, an aimless funk that is 5% physical and 95% mental.

It’s different each time. I remember after a few of my ‘big’ marathons I was high for a week before the inevitable turpitude set in. It’s worse when you ‘crater’ at an event, although sometimes failing horribly creates a spark of purpose fueled by anger – like the one that caused me to qualify for Boston. (It’s funny how sometimes failure is more inspirational than success.)

I also thought a little emotional distance (time) might not be a bad thing. Writing a race report before the neurons have stopped firing can sometimes result in a mish-mash of emotional stew that is unreadable.

The second big reason I’ve been ruing putting pinky to pixel is that I’ve got stakeholders who really care about me and want to see it! I feel like I owe those friends who have supported me through this campaign and in some odd psychotic way that really makes writing the race report feel like work!

Enough whining! On with the show! I must act today before the very events of the day slip into the murky fog of memory. I fig to thee oh funk! Get up and keep moving forward. It’s what we do. It’s our life metaphor, and handily enough the mantra for the ultra – CFM - continuous forward movement. Or as the poet Bon Scott put it “*Ride on...*”

“Running is the classical road to self-consciousness, self-awareness and self reliance. Independence is the outstanding characteristic of the runner. He learns the harsh reality of his physical and mental limitations when he runs. He learns personal commitment, sacrifice and determination are his only means to betterment. Runners only get promoted through self-conquest.” – Noel Carroll

The net result was a great race. I didn't crash at all. I loved it and had a blast. I did well. I think the official results were:

Class/Bib/Overall ... Time/Pace (my watch said 9:04)

11 921 33 CHRISTOPHER 45 LITTLETON MA
9:05:28 10:54

Looks like I was 33rd out of 162 finishers with ~16 DNF and ~20 Did not shows. That's not bad, is it? Notice the results only had my first name? That's because I'm so famous; like Elvis...

I've been asked how I trained to run an ultra-marathon. The truth is I've trained my whole life for that race. In microcosm I set myself up with a 16 week program, similar to any marathon plan. The difference was the very long long-runs and less speed work. I found spending lots of time in the woods very comfortable and comforting. All-in-all it was easy. Once you get past a certain point it doesn't get any worse.

I ran all 6 mountain races in the mountain goat series over the summer of '07 and learned all about running up and down mountains. I trained well for a February Marathon this spring that I DNF'ed at – it just didn't feel right. Then I ran a qualifier at Boston. At the same time I trained hard power walking at 14% stiff treadmill inclines for the Mount Washington Road Race where I turned in a respectful effort on that one hill in July.

It all ran together in a mishmash of miles and effort. I finished off my ultra program with a good showing at the difficult mountainous Wapack Trail race and a 36 mile training run, then a three week gradual taper. I was more than ready. I was so well trained and healthy that the race itself started to seem a non-event. (Until it started raining!)

In the end, I think my training was more than enough for the event. I could have taken significant time off of my finish with more long tempo work on long shallow up hills and long shallow down hills - but that's a mere refinement. I had plenty in the tank and was healthy as a horse on race day. I probably could have pushed harder in the early miles - but that's all Monday morning quarterbacking.

You never know how these things are going to turn out until you're in them up to your neck. That's what I love about endurance events. It's like being thrown in to the ocean. You figure out how to swim or you sink. It really simplifies life. It refines things to that awesome razor edge of animal choice. Just you against you. Mano a mano.

It wasn't the 16 weeks of (casual) training that made this race easy. I owe much of the ease to the countering maturity of 20 odd marathons and a handful of mountain races. When I stepped up to the start of this behemoth of a distance race it was with the steadying hand of experience on my shoulder.

The week leading up to the race was off the chart stress-wise (as they often are leading up to big races). That stress, whether real or imagined was propagated and amplified by my fearful anticipation of running farther than I ever had imagined I could, would or should. My old truck was diagnosed as close to death and I had to rent a car for the drive up to Ascutney. It started raining on Wednesday and two tropical storms veered out of the Caribbean towards New England. Prognosis was lots of mud. Stress was rampant. Like all red blooded males I suppressed it.

I felt for the first time in a long time that nervous energy of fear and trepidation that you get before a big race. A big

adventure. Something you know is going to hurt badly and test your physical and mental infrastructure. Your subconscious screams at you that only a fool would willingly walk into the maw of pain and struggle that waits. Your big brain assures you it's alright.

The truth is you don't know what's going to happen when you start something like this. That's what makes it cool. That's what makes it worth doing. There's a chance that you could end up shivering in a ditch, played out and beaten. In our jaded modern world of laptops and airplanes that is the grisly stuff of reality that makes you feel alive. The result is a nice *mélange* of nervous anticipation and dread.

My wife Yvonne came with me. She usually doesn't pay much attention to my long distance running addiction. She lives with it like any other stoic bride of addiction. I think she felt that this Ultra-thing was something she needed to tag along with to protect her investment. I told her I'd really appreciate her help because I was pretty sure I wouldn't be able to drive home comfortably.

I focused on trying to get 8 hours of sleep from Wednesday onwards.

I didn't start any detailed race planning until the day before. It's my habit not to worry about the details. Friday night I made one last large batch of chocolate energy balls. I collected a pile of Hammer gels (thanks Anthony). I made sure all my running stuff was clean and dry.

I looked at the forecast and puzzled over what to bring. How does one plan for a 10 hour trail race in a rain storm. Umbrella? Snorkel? I decided to un-retire two old pairs of trail shoes, package them with fresh sox, a change of clothes and a dry hat to be positioned at the drop stations along the course. Hermetically sealed in plastic bags of course in case of downpours.

Yvonne and I checked into our hotel in Springfield VT. The hotel was full of those mountain bikers who dominate the

scene at this race. I made a point of being friendly and commenting loudly to my wife how glad I was not to have to carry a bike for 50 miles in the mud!

On the way to the Ascutney Ski lodge to check in we drove by the Ascutney camping area. I can't imagine how much it must have sucked to have to sleep in a tent on the ground in the rain the night before a 50 mile race.

We checked in, dropped my drop-bags and wandered over to old-friend Dan's condo, helpfully positioned right by the start/finish lines. It was a nice night with some well done pasta and pesto. Dan and Tom (college chums from 26 years ago) had their bikes all cleaned up and ready for the assault. They are VT 50 veterans having biked 5 previous races. In anticipation of mud, Dan had rebuilt his bike to a single speed. They are hard core and obsessive with their sport like I am with mine. We respect each other for that.

My wife and I were tuckered out. Back to the hotel in the rental PT Cruiser. We each chose one of the double beds - Rob and Laura Petri like - and off to sleep.

I got up at 4:30. Made some coffee, ate a banana and a power bar, and put on the clothes and shoes I had laid out carefully the night before. Adrenaline was starting to pump. I was excited. This was something new. Something challenging. Something of the perfect audacious adventure that I love. I wanted to get to it. This was off the map.

The 5:30 check in meeting at the start was in the dark. It was overcast and a tropical 64 degrees. Lots of runners and bikers were milling around. I got some more coffee. I love coffee. I took care of the necessaries and chatted up some folks. I was impressed with the relatively large number of women running the race. I was also cheered to see some other 'husky' fellows besides myself. While initially during my training my weight had plummeted to 180 pounds, with judicious over eating I had managed to get it back up to 190. Alas, no Clydesdale division.

It was not like the beginning of a big marathon. No one was really nervous or overly weird. Everyone was laid back and the tone was easy. Most were smiling, like they were about to go on a canoe ride with friends. There was none of the gritted-teeth awkwardness of the mega-road race scene. More like a Ben & Jerry's revival.

Without much official fanfare, but a bunch of hooting and hollering, we were off. Everyone settled into a conversational pace. I soon fell in with race denizen Zeke who is an ultra-institution of sorts. He in turn attracted a number of other near-famous Ultra-runners.

It was like Sunday morning after church at the general store. They talked about old times, what others were up to, what their current projects were, almost everything except the race. A couple newbies chimed in and Zeke handed out sage advice.

The first 4.5 miles were dirt road. It felt more like a 10k than a 50 miler. I was running comfortably but worried that this was a good 2 minutes per mile faster than my goal pace. Was that ok? Then an aid station. Then into the woods and up the first mountain.

This is where we caught our first bikers. They had a head start on us and theoretically were faster, but we had the novices on the steep up-hills. We could move much faster than some poor sole pushing a bike. These were the end-of-the-pack bikers. After sharing the course with bikers I've become curious with this sport. I think I'm going to have to try it out. It looks like fun.

The trails were great. Mostly soft cushiony single track or ATV trails. The mud was negligible in the first 2/3 off the race. The few hundred bikes that preceded us made some deep ruts and there were some soft bits but the bad stuff was easily avoidable. The up-hills on the mountains were quite steep, but not technical. The down hills were also quite steep and also not technical. Very run-able.

This is where my mountain experience came into play. The Ultra racing mantra is “walk the up-hills and run the down-hills.” Make no doubt about it. I was racing. What started out as a ‘just finish’ was now a race. I was in my comfort zone. I was pushing, not 100%, but sustainable effort, not a casual stroll.

When we say ‘walk’ we don’t mean just walking, like you would walk the dog. We mean power walking. Not that silly guy in the track suit with the hand weights who swaggers around your neighborhood. Mountain power walking is learned art form and consists of a long sliding stride with a toe-off and hand swing. I can power walk up a 13% mountain at 3-4 miles per hour without maxing my heart rate. It’s a science. This saves your running legs and keeps you racing.

When we say run the down-hills we means race the down-hills. It is very important not to fight gravity. Stay light and have a rapid turnover. Try to ‘fly’ without hitting the ground too much or braking. On the extremely steep slopes you can do a shuffle-slide-skip to surf across the ground while still maintaining frequent contact points – lots of little brakes instead of digging in your heels. All this is done to preserve the quads.

Why do you care? If you don’t know how to walk the up-hills and run the down-hills the VT 50 will be a miserable race for you. It’s got 9,000 feet of elevation gain and another 9,000 on the way back down. Failure to manage this will kill you - especially the end of the race when the muscles in your thighs will have degenerated to the point where they don’t work anymore. That’s the secret of this course and most of the mountains I’ve run.

The first 18 miles went by in a blur. Somewhere around 18 miles I felt my body switch off of free glycogen and onto the reserves. It was a momentary energy trough that barely registered. My training has been such that my body now loves to run on the reserve tank. This is also where I passed Ted. He is so much faster than I, it’s a shame his insides were acting up and didn’t let him continue on this day.

I was running with some 20 year-old from the Connecticut Maritime Academy who decided to run the ultra on a whim. His longest run in training was a 10k. I don't know if he finished. I didn't see him after the 18.8 Mile aid station. I met and chatted up a number of people in these miles as everyone was chipper and the field was still closely bunched. At one point I paused to snap a photo with my mini spy camera and was passed by 8 runners and a bike. It was a scenic view!

I remember that young woman on the bike. She was hanging with us through these early sections. She'd pass us on the downs and we'd pass her on the ups. The last time I passed her she made a point of asking me how we would interact next time she passed me. At the time I thought that was a moot point - turns out I was right. That was the last time I saw her.

The lack of mud meant that I didn't need my mile 18.8 dry-clothes-care-package. I really didn't pause much at the aid stations, except to fill my two 20 ounce bottles. I was treating it more like a triathlon transition zone than an aid station. Some of the folks hung around at these stations, like it was a picnic, not a race.

The day continued to be overcast and muggy, but there was no rain. The mud was not an issue in the first 40 miles of the race. The overall dryness of the summer had soaked up the 4 days of rain. Every once in a while we'd emerge into a high mountain field with a stunning vista. The leaves had just started to change. They had not fallen, even with the rain, that was good because they did not obscure the course footing.

The course was so well marked. You'd have to be an idiot to get lost. I could see other competitors for the first 40 miles and never felt I didn't know where I was. The herd of bikers in front of us left a well beaten path to follow. It was easy.

The bikers were extremely friendly. They gladly let us pass and were kind on the down hills when they re-passed us. In

the end the up-hills were a curse for them. Although they may have re-passed me on the down-hills, none of the bikers I passed beat me to the finish line in the end. The last 10 miles were just too hard for them.

At the 25 mile aid station I again decided to stay with my current shoes and clothes. I did put on a fresh hat. I ate a Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich. I used the porta-potty for a pee – that’s a good sign. Surprisingly enough, even though I had to pull into the woods in almost all my training runs and was resigned to it in the race, something about the race environment produced a digestive miracle and I had no pit-stops. Isn’t it ironic how runners are like new parents examining and worrying over bowel movements?

I had great momentum through the 25 mile mark and was positively euphoric from 25 miles on. There were some downhill switch back sections where I was flying and laughing out loud with the joy of running. I got some of the others to sing the theme from Rawhide with me a few times for fun. Then I tried the “Hi Ho” song from Snow white. When I was finally alone I was singing a few broken choruses from Chariot by Gavin DeGraw “**Oh chariot** your golden waves are walking down upon this face...” No it’s not weird to talk and sing to yourself in a 9 hour race. I was running in the zone.

30 though 40 were great miles with lots of downhill and I passed many runners. I wouldn’t pass them like in a 10k where you see them and gun for them. I would simply hold my cadence and they would come to me slowly as they walked more than ran, and then, after trading places a few times they would slip away like the outgoing tide. I was passed by that famous Ultra guy, John something, who said he was planning to run across New Hampshire later in the year.

When I passed the bikers I tried to call back over my shoulder to warn them about bad sections. More than once I shouted a warning only to hear a scream and a curse and the sound of body on mud.

After the mile 35.6 aid station it started to feel a little like work. I was getting tired but still running strong. I was just getting weary from so much time on my feet in the woods. My legs and joints were fine. I had a little sharp stobe going on in my left quad that had been troubling me during training. The irony was that it only hurt on the easy bits. The shallow down hills that are usually my strength caused it to flap a little uncomfortably.

I determined to ignore it. I had gone into the race knowing that at my age and my weight something was bound to start hurting. I had pre-visualized myself ignoring it and moving on. It was a pain - but a predetermined non-issue.

The runners started to thin out and I passed some who were obviously cooked. I kept going. It was starting to be a race. The scenery might have been pretty, but I was heads-down grinding out the miles. The 36 mile aid station seemed to take a long time to come. I looked at my watch and determined that if I held this pace I could do 8:30. Another runner told me it got harder up ahead. I wondered where to spend my remaining energy?

Everything was holding together well as I entered into the unknown territory, beyond my 36 mile long training run. All lights were still green. No flashing warning lights. My head was clear. I was doing pace math and reading my watch without puzzlement.

This clarity was due to having trained well, yes, but also due to having fueled well. I was sticking to a schedule that had me taking some nutrition every 30 minutes. In the first 30 miles I alternated Hammer Gels and Energy Balls (homemade treats made from organic peanut butter, squished banana, and various forms of chocolate). In addition I was taking an Endurolyte electrolyte tablet (read "salt pill") every 20 minutes.

I sweat; sometimes in excess of 40 ounces an hour. This means I lose a tone of salt and I need to replace it.

The day before the race I decided my slant pack pocket was too small to hold all the stuff I needed to carry. I decided to bring along the spy camera and of course my Sony digital recorder for all those graphic audio race moments. To fit all this stuff in I requisitioned a camera case from my wife (without telling her) and attached it to the belt of my slant pack. This gave me a place to put the electronics.

My slant pack is one of those two bottle setups that sits on the back of the hips. I've got hips. In this race, because the aid stations were so plentiful, I only took two bottles. One I carried in my left hand, as I have been doing for years, and the other I holstered on my right hip. This setup is comfortable for me. Some of the runners in the race went with no bottle at all because of the preponderance of aid. I sweat too much for that.

Before the race they were giving away these big pill bottles with a quick-flip top to hold your Endurolytes. I took one and added this to my camera case. It was good, except that the hard plastic and all the jostling caused at least one capsule to break. I know this because when I tipped the bottle back to 'drink' a capsule I got a mouthful of salt powder. But it actually tasted pretty good. I guess I got a little extra powder or got an empty capsule at some point, but it evened out. It was way better than having to fish them out of a wet baggie.

The real fun started after the 40 mile mark. The aid stations seemed to start coming very slowly. I was definitely losing energy and ready to see the finish. I was still passing people every now and then with my strong walk-run cadence. I was relentless.

Then we got into some very muddy sections. Up to this point you could avoid getting totally wet. Now you had no choice except to toil through 6-inch deep oily slime that covered your shoes. It was still hilly. There were some field sections where we came out into the sun. It was definitely the most challenging 10 miles of the course. Some mud holes you

couldn't run through. You had to walk to keep from losing a shoe.

Right before the 45.5 Aid station I had to walk a little on a flat section, maybe 50 feet. I was tired. I turned it back on and ran into the last aid station. I only filled one bottle. What the hell - less than five miles to go. I was getting angry. I was getting my race face. There were a dozen or so bikers casually lounging at the aid station. That made me mad for some reason. I vaguely remember yelling at them.

"Come on! What are you standing around for? Let's do this bitch! Come on!"

Game face. I was still running but it was a slug fest. Nothing hurt, but I was tired of running. I got into a woods section and hadn't seen another competitor for awhile and I hadn't seen an arrow for awhile. I was still in the tire tracks but I started to wonder if I hadn't taken a turn off the course into some tributary of the main course. My mind was starting to play tricks on me. I almost turned back. Then I saw a runner far behind and biker passed up ahead somewhere.

There was one long greasy section through some trees and then I knew I was close. After what seemed like a century of running I saw the "one mile to go" sign. Prior to this, starting with a few miles left, someone had decorated the woods with Halloween items, like witches, pumpkins and ghosts. They had pinned papers with inspirational messages to the trees. For the life of me I can't remember what they said, but I kept trying to bring each one into focus hoping it would say "One Mile to Go".

I started feeling a little weird. I remember being light headed when I re-entered the dark forest from the bright sunlit field. I wondered whether it was possible to overdose on electrolytes.

Then with ½ mile to go I knew I had it. I pulled out my recorder to capture the moment. I stretched out my stride

and left what was left on the mountain in a furious wheeling free fall down the ski slope through the chute.

I was euphoric. It had indeed been a non-event. My wife and friends met me at the finish. They had biked the course in 6 hours and were well into the recreational beverages by the time I pounded across the finish. I got my medal and they led me back to the condo where there was a hose outside. I hosed off my shoes and legs.

I went inside and had a banana and some water. I was happy and spent. I took a long shower in the condo. Amazingly I had no chaffing and no blisters. My feet were pruned and achy from all the time in wet shoes, but nothing bad. Everything was still working, body-wise. I had to sit down in the tub to wash my feet because I didn't trust myself to bend over. I struggled a bit getting back upright.

I hit the free barbeque on the way out and my wife commenced to drive me home. We stopped and I got a Big Mac Meal. Got to eat. Very hungry. I didn't sleep in the car. I felt fine when we got home. I could not sleep that night. My legs were glowing like hot coals - it was a fitful night of rolling around.

I went to work the next day but I was useless. My body didn't feel overly sore but my electrical system was haywire and my brain knew something was wrong. It was like a general physical trauma, akin to shock. I ate many large comfort meals. I slept well.

Day 3, Wednesday, I was still sore but decided to try a 10k in the woods. This was a mistake. I felt joyful for the first ½ mile then it was awful and something hurt badly in my left foot. I gutted out the 10k, but now have not run since. It is Sunday night. I hope to begin running again tomorrow.

I was trained well enough that my major muscle groups were fine. I was a little quad-sore but nothing compared to the '07 Mount Cranmore race when I couldn't walk for a week. I was sore in some strange places. My deltoids (shoulders) were

sore from swinging my arms. The tops of my ankles were sore. I had no joint pain. My sciatic is acting up due to that tight piriformis.

In summary, it was a good race and a fine adventure. I'm not sure I have the time to take on ultra-running as a career, but it has been cool to try. It seemed much easier than it should have been. Perhaps that is just my skewed perspective since it came at the end of 18 or so months of non-specific training. I really like the training.

Don't be afraid to run an ultra. Train for it and respect it, but don't fear it.

About the Author

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