

Katelin Nielsen

## The Marathon of a Lifetime

I was never a big runner growing up. I actually used to hate the days in PE that we would have to run a timed mile. I was always one of the slower kids who had to run and then walk every so often to complete the whole thing. I was a tomboy growing up and played a lot of sports, but I never did a lot of endurance activities or running. It wasn't until I was older and moved to Austin that I got into fitness. I ran occasionally to get some good cardio in, but I never ran more than 2-3 miles at a time. I had always dreamed of running a marathon, but never gained the courage to go after it and try until last year.

The year before last, I had tried running with a marathon training group that meets on Saturdays for long runs here in Austin called Austin Fit. I really enjoyed it, but unfortunately I had to sit out most of the training season due to a minor knee injury. I only got up to a max of 7 miles with the group, which was the farthest I had ever run before. After talking with one of my girlfriends about wanting to try and go at it again, she took the initiative and signed both of us up to be assistant coaches with the group. Having never run more than 7 miles, needless to say I was a bit nervous to take on the job of pace coach. Fortunately, I got placed with one of the slower groups, and was able to run intervals with them for our long runs, which meant that we would run for a set time and walk for a set time as recovery.

I eventually got into my groove with my group. I only had two runners in my pace group that I would run with every Saturday. At first, I was a bit intimidated because both

of my runners had completed a marathon before, one had actually run 7 and was working on her 8th. I had never been a distance or endurance athlete before, and was incredibly nervous at the start. And once we got past the 7 mile run, I was hitting a new personal record for distance each time we ran on Saturday. Some runs were easier than others, and our long benchmark runs were particularly tough. The 22 mile benchmark was especially rough, and incredibly daunting. I had to cut the run short and ended up pulling out around mile 19 due to pain in my left knee and foot. The last thing I wanted to do was push through and injure myself, and I also had a 30K (18.6 miles) race the next weekend that I wanted to be prepared for.

The six months of training seemed to fly by, and before I knew it, it was marathon day. My nerves were on end the week leading up to the race. My anxiety on race day was incredibly overwhelming and I was so thankful to have my running group with me at the start line. We had trained for six months for this one day, and we were going to go out and conquer it. The race started off good. I plowed through the first half surprisingly well, but around mile 15, my left knee and foot starting acting up. The 30K that I ran was only 3 weeks before the marathon, and my knee and foot were giving me issues then and did not seem to be improving. Around mile 18 in the marathon, I hit a wall. The pain was so intense, every muscle in my legs was starting to seize up, and it was getting to the point to where it was almost more comfortable to run than it was to walk because I was so tight.

Thankfully, I had my family and friends there for support. My uncle, who has run in several marathons himself, joined me around mile 17 and stayed with me until the

finish. I am so thankful that I had everyone there with me, because if I didn't, I don't know that I would have finished the race. By mile 20, I was forced to walk. I was limping, and in so much pain I wanted to stop. I knew I had come to the point where it was mind over matter. I had to power through to the end. I walked the last 6+ miles, and finished the marathon in just over 7 hours. I crossed the finish line, received my medal, and immediately sat down and cried. I was so overcome with emotion that I could not contain myself. I had been physically and mentally stripped, and I came out of that marathon stronger and tougher than I was when I started.

They say that a marathon will teach you a lot about life, and yourself. I never thought this was true, just a regular cliché that is associated with the sport. Now I know just how true that is. I learned more about myself in those 6 months, and in those 7 hours, than I have in all of my 27 years of life. I learned, that you are always tougher than you think you are, and whether you think you can or you can't, your right. Every time I think I am not capable of doing something, I think back to that day, and how at one point, I thought there was no way I was going to finish, yet, I powered through and can now call myself a marathoner. I have all 4 of my race medals hanging up on my wall in my study to remind myself of what I accomplished that year, and to keep pushing myself to the limit that I thought I couldn't achieve. In the words of Bruce Lee, "if you always put limits on what you can do, physical or anything else, it'll spread over into the rest of your life. It'll spread into your work, into your morality, into your entire being. There are no limits. There are plateaus, but you must not stay there, you must go beyond them. If it kills you, it kills you. A man must constantly exceed his level."

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