A Compilation of Marathon Reports

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Abstract

A compilation of marathon reports is presented. The marathon is a true embodiment of the human spirit, and to each individual, the marathon is very much a personal triumph of crossing physical and mental boundaries which leaves it etched in one's memory for ever. When this experience is put into words by the marathoner, it becomes all the more inspirational. It is hoped that the reports contained herein will be enjoyed by other readers as well as be a source of information and motivation to those embarking on a marathon-journey.

1 Portland Marathon [September 28, 1997]

1.1 Karen Maas [Bib # 299], Newberg, OR

My first race report—do you all realize how much I want to say and tell about the Portland Marathon? I know this will be long, so I'll summarize before details ...

I was signed up as a marathon walker, and had been expecting to walk with my friend, Rhonda, that got me to sign up to walk it with her. But Rhonda couldn't come due to major blisters that she got last week, so I was on my own. I finished in under 6:51 (forgot to turn off my chrono right away), and met a new friend at mile 14 who had me jog and walk with her, and I RAN the last half mile! OK, Fernando, Im ready to rain for LA Marathon next March!

OK, some fun details. First, on Friday I did my "packet pickup," where I took my confirmation card to the basement of the Portland Hilton. Now, I live near Portland, but we rarely go there, so I parked at the first public parking garage I came to and we (my girls and me) walked in the rain to the Hilton. First time the girls got to see Portland city up close in the daytime, so we did a little sightseeing (but not too much, since parking was $3.50 an hour!).

Very crowded at pickup, but SO organized! Got some Power Gels and a shoe pocket for phone money while there. Hectic day, we dashed off for daughter's orthodontist appointment. While at the orthodontist office, was able to look through the packet. I was #299, and there was a separate map for the walkers, where after a certain time, they would be rerouted to finish the course for traffic safety reasons. So I went over the maps pretty carefully, expecting to walk all the way and have to change course. There was also a very good section that described each part of the course and what could be expected for different weather situations (didn't matter—we were blessed with a GLORIOUS day) and some pacing suggestions for the hills (which weren't bad hills to me but maybe for someone running all the way).

Saturday spent at in-laws in Salem with a foster brother's birthday party. Made mistake of having ice cream—phlegm problem for me, but it was a birthday. Won't do that before LA though.

Walked a slow 4 mile loop Saturday afternoon couldnt rest ALL day, praying and trying to find ways to not worry about all the little things that might go wrong . . .

Well, Sunday morning finally came—and came too quickly, for I didnt sleep well (does that happen to everybody?). Got dressed, ate bananas, OJ, and bagel, got the kids and Reg up, finally got out the door and on the road to Portland.

Reg found a great parking space at that early hour, though it was already crowded at 6:00 in the morning! Took my day pack to be checked in (they recommended bringing a change of clothes, but like I said, the glorious weather just made it something extra to carry later). Got my number pinned on, found the walkers start (separate from runners and race walkers, we merged with them later on the road—turned out to be good for getting started with over 5000 people at the start). I was about 30m back from the start line. The runners' start, just one block over, was where the announcer was, but they had up-beat music playing at both starts. It was about 50 degrees, so no way was I taking a sweatshirt. Jogged, rubbed our arms and hands, whatever to warm up while waiting. The national anthem was accapella by a great tenor voice form Portland Opera, but over at the walkers' start, we were giggling at the fact that on our end, they forgot to turn the bouncy music off till middle of the song. Finally, Mayor Vera Katz did the countdown (she did the wheelchair count one minute before the running count), and the cannon went off, and so did we!

OK, now I've learned that you don't expect to set a pace at the start! But no one stepped on my heels, and we all got going. Reg and girls were on federal building steps, but missed me in the crowds and I missed them in their crowds, so were even.

We walked through Chinatown (not as big as SF, but great gate to go under and same, uh, interesting smells as SF) then down to waterfront park (along Willamette River) and west, went up a short hill to next block and continued southwest, then looped around to come back along waterfront park going north on the other side of the road. THAT was fun, to see the runners and wheelchairs and walkers ahead of you. The part that wasn't fun was seeing everybody going by and thinking you were the last ones, till you made the turn and could see how far back the walkers really went!

The next several miles were another out-and-back section along the waterfront past the shipping and industrial areas, with docks on one side, and massive railroad lines on the other. Incredible what we got to see on foot—so much would be missed driving in a car! And that goes for the whole race!

Waved to my new runner friends, Julie and Pauline, who passed me on a long run (long walk for me), then turned out we met the next week when my daughter joined swim team—their kids are already on the team. Walked in the shade of the warehouse buildings as much as I could going NE along the river, for we could see the turnarounds would have us in the sun for several miles going back!

Then we started up gentle slope into residential neighborhoods heading out of the city on the north towards the St. John's Bridge, which was the highest elevation at 149 feet. At around mile 14, my new friend, Joyce, jogged up, and we were kindred spirits immediately. We were talking about life and love and jobs and dreams even before we exchanged names! Joyce was mixing walking and jogging because of a hurt knee, she couldn't do a lot of running. And, even though I had only planned to walk it, I jogged and walked with her, and felt great!

About mile 18, we left behind a man walking form the Loma Linda Lopers, a running club. He was in his early 70s, and he and his wife walk one marathon a month. How's that for a goal?!

Another mile or so later, a 7th grade boy, Greg, walked and jogged with us for a while. He was such a kick! Olympic material there, though I don't think he knows it yet. Joyce and he ducked into a little market and she bought him an ice cream cone. I walked on, since I didnt dare eat dairy on the road, and they said they'd catch up. Well, Joyce caught up, but Greg wanted to walk and eat his slowly, said he'd meet us at the end.

Those miles in the 20s were a real treat on the east side of Portland. Going through old residential section (with shade trees and people offering to spray you with hoses at gorgeous old houses), the university, being up on the ridge above the Willamette, with the buildings and bridges of the end in sight . . .

We were jogging over the Steel Bridge, coming to mile 25, then we walked for awhile (Joyce was desperate for portapotty, but didnt want to stop). I left her with her blessings and ran the finish.

Can't tell you (but I will, watch me) what a thrill it was to feel so good after walking and running the longest I've ever done in one day! Lots of cheers on the sides of the roads, such excitement hearing my name and where I was from, on the loudspeaker (and they pronounced my last name correctly, which I realized and was so pleased I didn't hear my time!) and the kids at the finish line hanging the medals around my neck (don't know which school they were from, but they were doing a great job!), and being given a rose. Then I remembered to turn off my watch—ha! I finished in better time than I thought, even with the extra seconds and the 20 minutes of portapotty lines (do runners have the same long lines as the walkers?)

The song that kept my walking pace was Tim McGraw's "I Like IT . . . I Love It" (figured that was a good one to keep in my ear for when I hit the wall—what wall?) Now I need to get a running pace song . . .

OK, enough from me. I'm ready to start training to RUN the marathon in LA!!!! Yes, Im feeling good (a little stiff, not sore, 1 blister that I didn't know I had till bedtime) but I know I'll sleep better tonight than last night—I think my adrenaline is finally back to normal!

Finish line hugs to anybody that read all of this!

2 Warsaw Marathon [October xx, 1997]

2.1 Scott

All day Saturday Id been praying for decent weather for Sundays race. It was my first marathon and my first race and it was taking place in Warsaw, Poland. I wanted everything to be perfect. In the end, my prayers proved futile.

Id started running a mere 8 months ago, had been training hard for the event, but had no idea what I was doing really. There had been no preliminary races to run in Poland and so I just had to hope that what Id read on RWs online forum would be enough to get me through. The best advice (among some very good advice) was to start out slowly and I tried to internalize it as best I could but first I had to start out at all. Sunday dawned cold and blustery. A light rain was falling and I cringed inwardly. Finally, despite the comfort of the down quilt I forced myself out of bed, made a light breakfast of toast and a sports drink and started to pack up. The race was to start 10am.

As I proceeded to the race headquarters a small gymnasium in the heart of Warsaws Old Town the weather worsened. The winds began to pick up and the rain began to fall more heavily. I continued to have second thoughts but felt that I had to at least try. It was one of those things. Not to have tried at all would have been failure.

Once in the gymnasium, the warmth, overpowering scent of Ben Gay and the tangible enthusiasm of some 600 runners started to dispel my feelings of gloom. I dont speak much Polish and so was unable to truly communicate but the feeling of camaraderie, of participating in something both as an individual and as a group of like minded people steeled my resolve. I changed my clothes amidst the throng and went outside to stretch. The steady rain of half an hour ago had become a light drizzle but the wind continued unabated.

The race began shortly after 10am just south of King Sigmunds column, a well known historic landmark at the beginning of Old Town, where some 700 hundred people had gathered. Most were in shorts and t-shirts or singlets though the temperature was now dipping into the 40s and the wind made it feel much colder. In fact, just before the pistol fired to start the race, the tethers of the overhead banner announcing the marathon snapped in the strengthening wind, creating the sound of a rifle report. Some people, thinking the race had begun, advanced a few yards before realizing their mistake.

Once everyone was back in line the countdown in Polish from 10 to start began. I could feel the adrenaline build in my chest as the count neared zero and warned myself for the upteenth time to start slowly. Bang! We were off.

The first three miles through the center of Warsaws most beautiful quarter took us from Old Town past the Presidents palace and then on towards Parliament and other ministerial buildings. It was a route Id run seldom since it is usually congested with cars and trucks. It was really pleasurable, but I noticed I was, of course, running too fast. I slowed just as I came to the sole hill of the course, a sharp downhill grade past the Presidents residence. From here on out it would be flat and endless.

Miles four through six were uneventful as the rain subsided momentarily and the wind died down considerably. I even allowed myself to entertain the pleasant notion that the weather might be improving. For the moment, the only problem was avoiding the fallen branches in the streets and keeping a sound footing on the slick, leave covered pavement. Already the crowd of runners had thinned considerably and what spectators there were were even more sparsely evident. I was running alone and feeling good. I was still enjoying it.

At the beginning of the seventh mile, the course runs past the Wilanow Palace, one of the few remaining Polish palaces to be restored to its former grandeur. It was also the last site of any historical interest on the course. After Wilanow the runners were directed to a wide bike path which runs (seemingly) endlessly along fields of cabbage and other vegetables. Its a route I knew well since Id done all my long runs during training along this the only bike path in Warsaw. But this time was different as the wind came back with a vengeance and finally began to take a toll. I first noticed how much energy Id been exerting to run into the wind whenever it abruptly ceased for a minute or two. At those wonderful moment, it would feel as if I was running down hill and Id have to consciously slow myself. I concentrated on making it out of the fields and into the small village where I knew the course turned back on itself. I knew the houses and other buildings would serve to blunt the force of the wind offering a temporary respite. Once through the village Id reached mile 10 and was heading back to Wilanow with the wind slightly at my back. I felt like I was flying.

As I moved into the 12th mile I realized how much tapering had helped me. I was still breathing easy and my legs were a bit fatigued by the wind but still running strong. In fact, despite the wind Id never felt so good in my training. My pace had settled now to about 8 minute and 30 second miles still too fast I thought but I couldnt seem to help it. Id eaten my first energy bar and was skipping every other aid station by nursing a half liter of Isotar. Runners were already starting to drop out in droves in front of me and the sky ahead looked threatening. Still, it never entered my head to stop at mile 13 where I noticed the official time read 1:48:49. It was the first time I really allowed myself to think that I was truly going to make it.

But then it happened. All hell broke loose in the form of a cyclone. Or at least it felt that way. Rain started to fall heavily and the wind turned into us again. Steady and strong, I would later read that it was gusting up to 35 mph. At times the rain was being driven horizontally into our faces. It was inescapable and as we were now running along the river back toward the finish there was nothing to shield us from its pounding. As the road began to pool with deep puddles, my shoes became sopping wet adding both actual and psychological weight. As the damp permeated my shoes and then socks, I could feel blisters form almost immediately. I felt it all but bowed my head and pushed on. "Do not stop," I yelled to myself out loud, knowing that if I did I would never start again. The Cyclone continued for three miles leaving the rest of the course drenched.

By this time Id lost track of the miles. I just kept going. I had had to take off my glasses because it was pointless to continue wearing them in the incessant rain and so the world past by in even more of blur. While I ran I ate my next power bar and put my brain on autopilot. Sometimes I would think of the Tom Petty lyrics that had kept me running during long training runs. Other times I would simply envision the finish and how good I would feel to be done, trying all the while to remember the success stories Id read on-line. I continued to console myself that if it werent for the damn wind this would be easy (and much more fun.) In this way, time and miles passed. I was still relaxed but I was also cold and wondered idly whether I was going to catch pneumonia. Psychologically I thought I was still good to go but was worried that my legs might stop moving. Somehow, they didnt. It was almost as if they were detached entirely from the rest of my body and had a will of their own.

The most difficult time in the race came after I glanced up to realize that I had unknowingly crashed through "the Wall" and was now well on my way to finishing. The reason was simple: I hadnt taken the time to really get to know the course thinking that knowing it might make it more difficult to complete it in the later stages. This was a mistake since the Warsaw Marathon, among its other peculiarities, forces runners to run past the finish line at mile 21. It was psychologically traumatizing: I knew that there were only a few miles left and could see other runners running back in towards the finish but didnt know exactly where the turnaround would come. Not wearing my glasses made the situation worse as I kept "seeing" the turnaround point only to find it was a mirage. For me that turnaround point became the Everest summit and I was in the Death Zone. It didnt help that my old nemesis the wind was back with such force that it was blowing me across the pavement. My only consolation was the belief that once Id reached the turnaround point and it HAD to be soon – the wind would be at my back for the last two or three miles.

Finally, somewhere out on this endless stretch of road, a small orange cone and a pea green VW bug signaled salvation. It was the turnaround point and I was on my way back to the finish. The wind (of course) immediately died but its altogether absence made me feel 20 pounds lighter. I felt like I was running fast now but I knew I was barely crawling. My shoes were still sloshing and my feet ached but the rain, too, had mercifully stopped. I targeted a couple runners ahead of me and determined to pass them. At the final aid station, I filled my now empty water bottle on the run and steeled myself for the final three miles. I was thinking about nothing but finishing now. I decided not to make the same mistake and, since the rain and wind had abruptly halted, I pulled my glasses back on and tried with each passing step to spot the finish line. This time the mirage turned out to be real and I "sprinted" toward the ticking clock. (Videotape would later reveal the reality.)

And so on Sunday, October 5, four hours, five minutes and 48 seconds into the race, I crossed the finish line of my first marathon. A certificate signed by the mayor, a finishers medal and a hot glass of hot and extremely sweet tea were my welcoming trophies. There, too, were my wife, Susan, and two boys, Alex, 3, and Ethan, 4 months. My wife hugged me and in the celebration/surrender of the moment I let out one single, solitary (but total) sob. My son Alex, looking up at the "gold" finishers medal that had just been put around my neck, asked me: "Daddy, did you win?" I answered him honestly when I said without hesitation yes, Alex, I won. . . .

3 LaSalle Banks Chicago Marathon [October 19, 1997]

3.1 N. Sukumar [Bib # 8506], Evanston, IL [Photos]

It was marathon race-weekend in Chicago, with the Expo on Friday & Saturday and the marathon on Sunday. After having just run once during the week (a 4-miler on Tuesday) in deference to my shin splints, I was looking forward to the marathon on Sunday. I visited the Expo on Saturday which was held at the Chicago Hilton and Towers Hotel on South Michigan Avenue. Picked up the race packet, as well as attended the RW pacing team clinic at the Expo. The pasta dinner ensued at 6pm. Around 3000 or so were on hand at the dinner. I seated myself in the company of a father-and-son from Quebec, Canada, a Costa Rican couple from NJ, and a brother-and-sister and their relatives from Florida. It did not take very long for us to start talking, with the conversation revolving in and around running itself. I was the sole marathon-uninitiated at the table. The friendliness of runners and the support they receive in their marathon-endeavor was most evident during the dinner. Frank Shorter, the guest speaker at the dinner, spoke for 15mins or so, and the raffle was held thereafter—I wasn't amongst the fortunate few who won prizes!

I got back home at 9:30pm on Saturday night from the dinner. Set out the race clothing for the next morning on a chair—T-shirt, shorts, shoes and socks, a throwaway sweat shirt and a pair of gloves, and also packed a bag with post-race clothing. Even pinned the bib number to the running shorts and inserted the Gu's inside the pockets. Had couple of excedrins as a results of a slight headache, and after a shower, I hit the bed at 10:30pm. I just couldn't buy any sleep, which was due to a combination of pre-first-marathon anxiety and the fact that I had slept for 10 hrs the previous night. I did manage to finally sleep at around midnight or so. Had set three different alarms for 4:30am—a clock radio, my watch, and also the telephone wake-up alarm. Well, I needn't have bothered to use such an over-cautious and foolproof approach for I opened my eyes at 3:00am, and could not go back to sleep. I whiled away time in chunks of 15 mins at a time until the alarms went off at 4:30am. Well, the much anticipated marathon-day had finally arrived!

I took the 5:26am train from Evanston to downtown. One could see many other runners hopping-in at all stations along the way. Got off at Jackson station, and then walked over to Grant Park. Headed to the CARA training tent where I left my bag. At 7am, group photographs of runners in the CARA marathon training program were taken. Ran into Lynda at around 7:15am, and after stretching out, I spotted Barney too—the three of us planned on running together. We got to the starting line at 7:35am. It was already packed, what with the estimated 16,000 marathon runners in all. Placed ourselves at the rear-just beyond the 10min/mile mark. The weather was ideal, with the temperature in the early 40s with no wind whatsoever. The wheelchair racers took off at 7:40am and the marathon started soon thereafter (7:45am)—so I inferred based on the cheering. Well, it seemed like eternity before we could finally move. We crossed the starting line in about three and a half minutes and the first mile took us 15:20—a combination of walking and jogging. Felt a twinge in my right knee (unusual) in the first mile itself. Mile 2 was a tad-bit faster and we passed it at 26:30 or so. I discarded the sweat shirt as well as the gloves before the two mile mark. We wanted to maintain a 10min pace after mile 2, which included walking all the water stops. The running-crowd did not thin out as the miles went by, and one had to keep a constant eye on the runners in the immediate vicinity for fear of running into or tripping someone else. Hence for the most part, I just watched the roads and the cheering crowds along the way. The 10k mark was crossed at a shade over 67mins. It was very hard to maintain any sort of rhythm in the running due to the fact that we had to weave our way (even at our pedestrian 10min pace) through slower runners to open spots on the road. The H20 stops were also increasingly crowded and many were not ready with the cups of H20 and/or had run out of Gatorade—the rather unexpected large turnout for the marathon was taking its toll. We reached the half-way point at 2:18:10 and a sub-4:30 did still appear to be a possibility if all went well.

Apart from my own travails with knee discomfort which did not seem to abate, Lynda was having severe knee pain, which prompted Barney and I to slow down couple of times so that she could catch-up. At around the 14 mile mark she was again lagging behind; I ran 50m in the opposite direction to check on her. She was stretching out and it appeared the pain had exacerbated. I told her to just slow down and take it real easy which would enable her to finish the race. I hesitantly moved on with mixed emotions, hoping that she would be able to pull through the marathon—after all I did not know for sure how events would unfold for me. Barney was the only one amongst us who was feeling pretty good. We both ran for couple of miles at around 9–9:30min pace. By mile 15, the knee was not the only source of pain, for the muscle leading up to the groins as well as my thighs were also aching a lot. It was unchartered waters, since I had never experienced such pain in any of my long/short runs. I had even managed to run sub-9:00 min miles over the final few miles of the 20 mile training runs with no adverse effects. Hence the pain was all the more perplexing, and undoubtedly distressing to say the least. The shins were the sore (pun intended) point during the final month of the training but today they just felt great—probably the slower pace helped? At around the 16 mile mark, I saw the 4:30 RW group leader Cristina, and ran with her for a mile or so. At the next mile marker, in accordance with her plans for the group, I walked for a minute hoping that I might get some respite in the process. It wasn't to be, for by now the right knee as well as the muscular pain in the vicinity of the groins was very intense. My calves were also sore and it seemed as if any and all possible pain had invaded my legs on race day. I could barely jog thereafter, and could soon see Cristina's red hat and the distinctive red fan on top vanish from my line of sight. Barney too went ahead at about the same point. I think at or around mile 17 was the first instance when the pain was beginning to induce some doubts in me about finishing the marathon. I wasn't sure what the breaking point of pain (in)tolerance was nor was I keen on finding out, and hence did not want to even try to push the pace. Just getting through the marathon without further aggravating/breaking my legs was on top of my mind. From hereon, I ran from one mile marker to the next mile marker, totally oblivious of the surroundings. My upper body and arms felt great, so I could maintain good form, albeit at a very slow pace. I crossed the 20 mile mark at 3:25:10, and just moved along. Took every opportunity to high-five the cheering crowds for they provided much needed support, encouragement, and relief from the seemingly endless pain. Tried to stretch my calves at mile 22, which was met with rather unpleasant consequences-calves seemed to tighten even more and I could feel a shooting pain run through them. I realized the error in my ways and decided against any form of stretching thereafter. With a 5k left, I was at the 4:00hr mark, and had the sense that I would definitely finish. Do not recall many of the sights during the final eight miles- Comiskey park and the McCormick place tunnel are the only ones that come to mind. Was glad when I hit the 25 mile marker in 4:21, even though it did suggest that a sub-4:30 was out of the question. I took my first unplanned walking break of 2 mins up the final ramp, and then jogged through to the finish line. Was happy and relieved at the same instant for I did not have to run any more miles. The official finish time from the marathon web page reads 4:35:25. After the post-finish photograph was taken, I had some Gatorade and a banana. I did not feel like eating, and possibly suffered dehydration in spite of my regular water/Gatorade intake at the stops. An attempt at merely lying on the ground was an exercise in pain-control. Was soon prostrate on the ground with an aluminum foil wrapped around myself. I did not budge for the next 10 mins or so. I slowly got up and headed in the direction of the CARA tent. Put-on a sweat shirt and made my way back to Jackson station, enroute to Evanston. Barney finished in 4:26:10 while Lynda also did finish with a time of 4:59:46-so the story does have a happy ending:)

Today, the remnants of yesterday's marathon very much exist-right knee is still very painful and walking up or down stairs is no longer a simple exercise by any stretch of imagination. No running is on the cards for this week; hopefully I will be up to some after a week or so. I do look back at the marathon with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I did not run it the way I had planned/imagined it to be-the finish time notwithstanding, I would have been a lot happier and enjoyed it a lot more if it would have been a less painful experience. On the other hand, I take solace in the fact that in spite of the new circumstances and challenges I was confronted with, I was at least able to finish the marathon-a DNF would have been been extremely disappointing and hard to digest. A first-marathon is said to have a lot of surprises for one, and it sure did have its share for me. I look forward to taking the first marathon-experience in its entirety and moving on to the next one, whether it be a Spring marathon such as LA and/or possibly Chicago/NY next year. After all, there ain't anything like a second marathon, eh?:)

10465	7603	1478	BRUCE	RHOADES
10466	7604	1479	STEVEN	WAYNE
10498	7623	1480	DOMENIC	ROMANO
10505	7629	1481	BRIAN	MITCHELL
10522	7638	1482	GREGORY	SAXON
10537	7642	1483	JOHN	ALBARRACIN
10538	7643	1484	N	SUKUMAR
10557	7654	1485	SCOTT	MCMURRAY
10558	7655	1486	TIMOTHY	OBRIEN
10559	7656	1487	JOHN	SULLIVAN
10565	7659	1488	CHAD	BERBRICH
10586	7666	1489	PETER	SAINE
10594	7669	1490	TIMOTHY	BRANDHORST

Clipping from the Chicago marathon results web page—placed 10538 out of 14322 marathon finishers, and 1484 of 1781 in my age group

Post-Marathon Gratitude

Thanks to the many with whom I have exchanged information and training tid-bits over the past year. In particular, the CARA training group at Wilmette lead by Brian Piper—Barney, Catherine, and Lynda made the long runs an enjoyable and memorable experience to say the least. The many Internet acquaintances over the newsgroup rec.running, Runner's World running forums, and the Chicago marathon forum (especially), provided very useful marathon training information and were a valuable source of support and inspiration. Last, but not the least, I greatly enjoyed the many e-mail exchanges with Ben Yau, who's long-winded and detailed running-related messages made me feel secure about my sanity, for I was not the only one who was seemingly obsessed with this elusive object of desire—the marathon!:)

Take a look at Suku's marathon photos.

3.2 Ron Robisch [Bib # 14381], Monrovia, MD

As for my race, I have no mixed feelings: every time I think of the race I get a silly looking grin on my face. I ran with a friend of mine who lives in Evanston. We were basically shooting for 4:30, with the idea that we'd start very slow, then settle into a 9:50 to 10 min pace up until about 18 miles or so, and then just see how we felt at that point. Neither of us had ever done a marathon, so our primary goal was just to finish. My friend (Brad) and I had very different tactics as far as energy replenishment is concerned, and I'm convinced it made a big difference. Brad took no food with him; he counted on seeing his wife or sister at the 5 and 10 mile marks and receiving power bars from them. I, on the other hand, followed the advice of some of the runners in the Chicago Marathon Forum and safety pinned 3 Gu's and a small Power Bar to my shorts. Well, everything went according to plan up until mile 5—but then no sign of Brad's wife or sister (they got off at the wrong el stop!) We kept on pace, I ate a Gu, and I offered Brad one. But, being about the pickiest eater in the world, Brad refused because it was berry flavored! He also refused my Power Bar because it was wild berry!

As the miles went by, we were really enjoying the race—the fans, the runners, the weather—it was great! Mile 10 came along and still no sign of Brad's wife or sister. I kept eating, Brad didn't. (We both did a good job of drinking at every station.) Around mile 16 or so, I could tell Brad was starting to work hard. Up to this point most of our miles were between 9:30 and 10:00. Finally, at mile 18 by that Chinese dragon, Brad's sister appears out of nowhere with a Power Bar for each of us. If she didn't show up then, I really wonder if Brad would have finished. Anyway, we continue and gradually slowed a bit (I don't think we had anymore sub 10 miles after 19). I was getting gradually more sore, but Brad was really starting to labor. At Comiskey Park I really got rejuvinated—more food and the band there just started a rocking version of Helter Skelter. I forgot about how I felt and just let emotion carry me for about five minutes. I was enjoying myself!

During the last 10k, I occasionally felt some really weird twinges in some of my upper leg muscles. I was worried something was going to really spasm, but nothing serious ever happened. Other than that and the expected stiffness at this point, I really still felt pretty good. At about mile 22 Brad fell back a bit, but he kept fighting and about a mile later we were running together again. During that time in between I ran with Hal and the small group that seemed to be right with him. By mile 24 Brad had fallen back again, and I eventually got ahead of Hal. I think I saw Cristina around this time.

The tunnel under McCormick Place was a bit nervewracking to me. I kept my sunglasses on the whole time and was practically blind. OK, so that was stupid. I don't think the thought of taking them off ever even crossed my mind. I was with Hal's group at that time—a bit to his left.

The last 2 miles were the hardest work for me—about 10:20 or 10:30 pace, I think. However, I did manage to rip off a "blistering" 8:00 minute pace for the final .2 miles! I must have felt a dozen twinges in my upper legs during that little kick, but no damage. Officials clocked me at 4:30:11, my marathon proof has me at 4:30:07, but my watch says 4:26:07 (I started it at the startline). Brad finished unofficially at just over 4:30, officially over 4:34. He was forced to walk for about the last mile.

The calf injury which had plagued me twice during training was simply not an issue, even though it was my biggest worry going into the race. Post race soreness was pretty intense, but three days later I started to feel good again. I ran 4.5 miles each on the following Thursday and Friday. Strangely, my knees have felt better since the race than in the prior 2 months!

That's my take on the race. I did the Chicago Marathon, and I couldn't be happier! Tomorrow I run again!

3.3 Alan Marsden [Bib # 3388], Paris, France

I know this is a bit late but I have only just got back from the trip to the marathon and subsequent holiday so I just wanted to put a few thoughts down from the perspective of a British runner taking part in his first marathon.

Firstly, can I say how much I have enjoyed reading the posts on this web site. I am sure everybody has been through it but when you do your first marathon there is a tendency to have loads of worries etc and to read the experiences and advice of others made the whole thing a lot less daunting.

As for the marathon itself—what can I say? The weather was superb and the whole "American thing" from the singing of the National Anthem to the great crowd support was an experience to savour. I felt that the time literally flew by compared to the long training runs which had dominated the summer. There were a few complaints about the slow start but after doing the Great North Run several times in the UK (30,000 ish) it was no big deal. Also the course was fairly loopy just prior to midpoint which can be a bit boring and soul destroying when people on the other side of the road are about three miles in front. However a great advantage is that it permitted my "supporter" to get from mile 9 to 18 to give me two big waves and shouts. Only shame is she missed me at mile 26.2 !

As for the tunnel at the end, it was a bit weird and I had exactly the same experience as Tex with lots of little white things dancing in front of my eyes. I thought it was snowing in there.

So coming out into the daylight again I made it to the finish of marathon no. 1. I was a bit disappointed with the time (3:52:00 official) but a combination of running well within myself through fear of blowing up near the end and also sitting on a plane for 8.5 hours on the Friday means that I will hopefully go faster in no. 2.

After the post-race party at the Hard Rock I headed off to San Francisco for a holiday. Any post marathon stiffness was certainly exacerbated by those hills. I tried running up one just two days after the marathon—everybody collapsed laughing.

Anyway enough of my ramblings. Thanks again for many interesting visits to this website. I will be off next to Rotterdam, Holland in April after a hard (I hope) winter of training. After that perhaps I should think about putting at least one hill in my marathons but for the moment 26.2 on the flat is enough.

3.4 Rick Smith [Bib # 4342], Overland Park, KS [Photos]

The 1997 LaSalle Banks Chicago Marathon. My first marathon. Slept like a rock the night before and didn't feel nervous at all. Only semi-worry was to go out slow enough to avoid "the Wall."

Temperature at the start was a perfect 46 degrees (F). Brought along some gloves to wear and tossed them at the half-way point.

The race

Start—joined 16,299 of my closest friends at the starting line and lined up around the 3:40 Runner's World Pace Group. It took us 1:51 to get to the Starting Line, mostly at a walk. Doesn't look like going out slow enough will be a problem.

Mile 1—a really slow one, I crossed in 12:12, so my split was 10:17 ... already quite a bit slower than my 9:00 hopes, but I figure it's better to be too slow than too fast here. It's just too crowded through here ... we even had to slow to a walk over the first bridge. Noticing a lot of hats, gloves, sweatshirts, etc. that look pretty nice (some people's "throw-away" stuff is better than the stuff I wear).

Mile 2—another slow split, 10:17 again (at least I'm consistent). At this point, I'm just trying to enjoy the sights and not run over anyone's heels. Decide that it is not worth trying to push the pace until I can dodge other runners more easily and with less effort. Besides, I'm enjoying reading the backs of runners' t-shirts and some of the more creative signage along the way: "24.2 Miles to Beer + Men!" and "Wooden Shoes are Better than Nikes!"

Mile 3—pushed the pace a little better through here for an 8:48 split, and tried out our first water stop...learned that it will be better to cut over to the water tables at the latter stages of the water stop to avoid the congestion. I've got to admit that I'm not used to such lengthy water tables ... just another reflection of the magnificent job the race director, Carey Pinkowski, and his staff did the entire weekend. I walked through the water station, making sure that I got an entire cup of water down. I am too clumsy to drink while running, so I will walk through every water station throughout the day. It gives me a little bit of break, and it only takes me the amount of time it takes to drink one or two cups of water/Gatorade, so I don't really lose any significant time.

Mile 4—start to push the pace even a little more here, but we are still very congested, and I cannot get a good rhythm going. Have pretty much lost the 3:40 pacing group by now, but I am casually shooting for a 3:45 anyway (and mostly just trying to finish without bonking). Split for this mile was 8:32.

Miles 5 and 6—turned in a two-mile split of 17:12, and feel like I'm beginning to sort of loosen up, but still having trouble with some congestion. We hit the northernmost part of the course here, and the view coming back towards Downtown Chicago is great ... also seems like it didn't take too long to get there.

Miles 7 and 8—it wasn't until the latter part of this leg that I finally began to feel like I could get into a rhythm and run without shortening my stride to avoid anyone. The two-mile split for this one was 16:03 ... figured I would try to hit closer to 8:00 and no slower than 8:30 from here until I couldn't anymore. My math is not always very precise while running, so I concluded that with that goal, I would finish "close enough" to the 3:45 I was seeking.

Mile 9—the congestion has really loosened up by now, and I am enjoying a pretty nice rhythm. Run on the carpet while crossing the bridge onto Wacker Drive (just because it's there, and I think it is cool to get to run on carpet.) Run a 7:54 this mile, probably because of the newfound freedom, and start preparing for the Mile 10 water stop by the Sears tower where I will take a Lemon-Lime PowerGel, take in more water/Gatorade, and see my wife and her friend.

Mile 10—running along the right side of the street so they can find me (a suggestion from our neighbor back home for easier identification), I can see that there is quite a crowd. I begin to doubt that I'll see them as I am taking in the PowerGel and liquid. Then I hear my name and see them, camera-ready and cheering. I strike a pose with the PowerGel in one hand, and a Gatorade cup in the other ... it probably looks like I'm posing for an ad, not running in a marathon. Split for this mile is 8:00, and we leave the cheering masses at the Sears Tower to head west into the second of the three major sections of the course.

Mile 11—while running along this section, we run by a building adorned with a 2-3 story high poster of adidas poster-child, Todd Williams. I have to wonder what it is like to be running in a race and have something like that hanging along the course for everyone in the lead pack to see and comment on. An 8:12 for this section, which also included a group of high school cheerleaders, a couple of non-marathoners out for some exercise, and a host of little kids for high-fiving.

Mile 12—Mile 12 is the first of three zigzags in this section of the course. Pick it up to counter the over 8:00 pace of the last mile for a perfect 7:48 split.

Mile 13—we cross over the Eisenhower Expressway on this mile and head in to the halfway point. Mile split was 8:07. Halfway split was 1:54:00 ... exactly the same time as the half-marathon training run I did three weeks ago back in Kansas City. I had felt really smooth during that run, and didn't have the slow start time, so my race pace thus far was only a couple minutes faster. Take off the gloves and stick them into the back of my shorts. Minutes later I forget that they're there and fling them onto the road behind me when I re-adjust my shirt. Oh, well.

Miles 14 and 15—knowing that I have run a 1:44 half-marathon in June, I feel like I have accomplished the goal of going out slow enough, and I'm feeling pretty strong. At the next zigzag, I'm looking for Jeff Galloway, the 3:40 pacing leader ... "maybe I can shoot for catching him right at the finish and pull in with a 3:40." Never do see him, though, and still don't know where he finished. Push it a little to turn in a two-mile split of 15:30.

Mile 16—at the Mile 16 marker, the time read 2:08:xx, and I asked a guy running next to me if he realized that somebody was probably finishing right now. Little did I know that the winner, Khalid Khannouchi, had already crossed the line a minute earlier. In other words, I got beat in a race by a distance longer than I had ever run before I started training for this marathon. Wow. Khannouchi and I are the same age and both running our first marathon. Obviously, the similarities end there. Mile 16 split was 7:40.

Mile 17—this mile was a little long for me, and I decided that a second PowerGel would be very nice to have about now. Fortunately, I knew that PowerBar would be handing them out "around mile 18." Unfortunately, upon arriving at the Mile 18 marker, there was no PowerGel to be found. I eventually got some Berry-flavored PowerGel later, but failed to realize at what mile it was. Split for this mile was 7:59.

Mile 18—got a little worried when my Mile 17 split was slower than the previous three miles had been, and picked it up to a 7:34 coming into the third, and final, major section of the course.

Mile 19—might have gotten the Berry-flavored PowerGel at the water station during this mile. My split slowed to an 8:09, but my energy returned as I tried to prepare for the "halfway mark" at Mile 20.

Mile 20—was pleased with how I felt at the 20-mile marker, but still was a little worried about the stories I had heard about how quickly it comes on between 20 and 22. Tried to push those thoughts out of my head as we went through the water stop by Comisky Park. Thought about how nice it would be if the course would also go by Wrigley. Really began to focus on finishing at this point, calculating possible finish times based on a 10 minute/mile final 10k pace. Mile 20 split was 7:31.

Mile 21—make our turnaround at the southernmost part of the course and head for the finish. I am convinced I am going to make it now, and continue to calculate 10 minute miles while turning in a 7:46 split.

Mile 22—I'm passing people with regularity right now as the 3:40, 3:30, and even a few 3:20 pace group members are slowing. Remind myself that I only have four miles to go and continue to calculate ridiculously slow times in my head that aren't even appropriate for my current pace ... I guess I'm just waiting to crash. Meanwhile, my split is a 7:13. During this stretch, someone had a boombox blaring "Smells Like Team Spirit" by the band Nirvana and a guy comments, "That's as close to nirvana as I'm going to get for about another four miles ..." As for me, I'm thrilled that I've gone out slow enough, and I'm not going to hit "The Wall."

Mile 23—the combination of the math and constant passing of other runners confuses me and I'm surprised to see the Mile 24 marker ahead and not the Mile 23 marker. In all this confusion, I realize I'm closer than I thought I was and record my fastest split of the day – 7:11. In addition, our second 180-degree turn gives me a chance to see who's ahead and behind me ... no sign of any of the pace leaders. I remember reading somewhere that anything I drink after Mile 22 will probably not be used. I, however, decide that my mouth could use a little moisture, so I get a little bit to drink here.

Mile 24—at the beginning of this mile is another water station. I skip it, but recognize that it is nice that they have one so soon after the last one. I'm sure that a number of the runners have found it to be extremely helpful at this point. As for me, I can now do the math well enough to realize that a consistent pace will bring me in around 3:35, even better than the 3:40 I'd calculated earlier. Still feeling strong, I'm picking off runners with pace group tags reading as low as 3:00 ... feel thankful I haven't blown up like that. Split for this mile slows to a 7:34.

Mile 25—seeing the 25-mile marker, I begin to smell the finish. At this point, I'm passing people, focusing on running smooth, and not really taking advantage of any of the scenery. The last part of Mile 25 is a trip through tunnel running under

McCormick Place, the main convention center in Chicago. I really enjoyed this part, as I felt like we were going “downhill.” My company was exhibiting in a trade show somewhere in McCormick Place, so “I may be running right under them,” I thought to myself. Since the race I have heard several complaints about the stretch under McCormick Place—mostly that it was too dark, but I found it to be a nice change and a little bit refreshing because it was cooler. My split for this mile was back down to a 7:14.

Mile 26—coming out of the McCormick Place tunnel was the Mile 26 marker. At this point, we make a left turn, go under the Lake Shore Drive overpass, and run onto Lake Shore Drive for the finish. I'm not certain, but we may also pass Soldier Field at this point . . . I was focusing too much on running smooth to even notice. Under the Lake Shore Drive overpass was a band (The web site map says they're called Tumbleed . . . kind of a cool name) playing. I don't remember what they were playing, but I remember liking it pretty well. Right after the band was another water stop as we headed onto Lake Shore Drive. I didn't stop for water, but I did soak up all the encouragement I could from the volunteers and spectators around it. Good thing, because the “climb” onto Lake Shore Drive seemed to take a long time. Shortly before we crest the on-ramp, a woman says, “You're almost there, the finish is at the balloons!” No offense to the lady, but the balloons only marked the 26-mile marker . . . a sizable discrepancy to a tired runner. Overall, I felt pretty strong here, passing other runners all along Lake Shore Drive for a 7:21 split.

Mile 26.2—coming into the final .2 miles, I suddenly begin to take notice of all of the spectators, sights, sounds, etc. again. I can see the finish and it is very wide with several finish lanes. Trying to bring it in strong, I start to lengthen my stride a little. Bad idea. My hamstring tightens, just short of cramping. New strategy: bring it in strong with shorter strides and higher turnover. Nearing the finish, I look at the clock, and it reads 3:33:xx . . . darn, not going to break 3:33. Decide to shoot for 3:33:33 (figure it'll be easy to remember). I move into the center of the road, picking out a wide-open area to finish (hey, you only get one first time, and I want a decent finish line photo . . .). Find a nice clear area and finish a little faster with a 3:33:27.

Finish—cross the finish line, stop my watch, and get into the nearest chute. As I hand my tear-off tag to the volunteer, I tell him, “Don't lose that.” Another volunteer places a nice 20th Anniversary finisher's medal around my neck. Next, I'm given a nice, aluminum foil thingy to wrap around me. Don't know that it's really holding in a lot of heat, but it looks cool, and I feel important. Move over the “free finish photos” area and get my picture after watching a few others comically struggle to make it up the two-step, step-stool without falling off the side. One common trait of everyone's picture, though, was the smile of satisfaction. After that, it was a trip through the goomies line where I couldn't carry much more than a drink and a bagel, and on to the gear check to collect some dry clothes from my very sturdy and handy gear check bag they issued us at packet pickup. I wander over to the Hilton Hotel to meet my wife and her friend, and to change into my dry clothes. Turns out they missed my finish because I had predicted too slow a time. My friend David then came by to offer congratulations and ask how things went. He himself finished 12th in the 5k (out of about 5,000 runners) and will probably qualify for the Olympic Trials someday in the marathon. Later in the evening, after a soak in the hot tub and shower, we enjoyed the post-race party at the Hard Rock Cafe with free Coors Light and snacks galore. I met the race director, and got a chance to tell him how well-organized the race was and thanked him for making my marathon debut an enjoyable experience.

Final Thoughts—an excellent experience for my first one. I was able to enjoy the sights, finish strong, and record a good time on a day with perfect weather ... you just can't ask for much more. I ran negative splits, 1:54:00 and 1:39:27, and my second half was a PR for a half-marathon (I had a running start, though:-)). I was sore for four days, but nothing is injured that I can tell. As for my future plans, I'm taking a wait-and-see attitude to find out if the marathon bug has bit me or not. If so, the next step would be a 3:10 to qualify for Boston—preferably in a smaller race that allows for a faster start than the 12-minute mile I started with in this race. If not, triathlons provide a little diversity. And if not that, I need to find another way to keep in shape, because that is truly the best aspect of this experience—the feeling that I'm doing something good for myself.

4 Cape Cod Marathon [October 26, 1997]

4.1 Derek Fong [Bib # 328], Falmouth, MA

My training: The **bare minimum** plan which I will definitely improve upon if I do another marathon. I had been running regularly (with a few 1 month hiatuses thrown in between due to miscellaneous injuries) for about 2 years. Up to the marathon training, which commenced after the Falmouth Road Race on August 17th, my longest prior run was 8-9 miles. I had done a couple 10-11 milers last summer but had some shin problems (bad shoes) and had cut back to mostly 6-7 mile weekend runs. I ran every other day, and had weekday runs of 4-5 miles. Anyway, I did the massive ramp up the week after the Falmouth Road Race of a 13 mile run. It was sort of an "ultimate" attempt at training for the marathon. If I could complete it, I would have a chance at training for the Cape Cod Marathon ... if not, I wouldn't but would then just try to maybe build up a little more gradually and try a half marathon or something. In any case, each long run would be a new milestone and accomplishment ... and if i could somehow make it up to 18+ miles, then the marathon might be worth a try.

Anyway, I digress. I completed the 13 mile run and it wasn't too hard ... I felt a little tired the last mile or so, but I was cruising 9:40s most of the way ... from then on I tried to alternate weekends with a long run and one half as long. On weekdays, I would maintain my 2 or 3 4-5 milers (I sort of was combining a bunch of marathon plans I had seen). I did a 15.5 miler and then "breakdown"—the following weekend on a 8 miler I developed an aching knee/quad. Per the advice of some experienced runners in the department, I took a week off from running (in spite of the injury feeling fine after only 2 days). The next weekend I resumed training with an 8 miler ... and mid week, I decided to test my luck and did an 18 mile run (trying to catch up with my original plan) ... it went fine although I found I was more tired at mile 15 than I had been at the end of the 15.5 mi long run. Ten days later (3 weeks before the marathon), I did a 20.5 miler ... felt really pretty good ... I got fatigued the last mile or so ... I shouldn't have stopped to get a water bottle at the end. I finished the main training with an 11 miler the following weekend which felt very easy and actually finished it with a couple of sub-9 minute miles. A few hours after that run, I started to feel these aches and twinges in my left ankle. These never really completely healed prior to marathon day, but fortunately, in the end, the ankle didn't give me problems during the race.

THE MARATHON

Weather: 50 F, sun for the first couple hours and then cooled and was overcast the rest of the way. Worst part: the course is designed that the hills are sheltered from the wind on Sippiwissett and there is tail wind for the first 5 miles and last 4 along the shore. However, the winds were opposite to the prevailing winds on race day; hence, head winds at the start and head winds at the end which were brutal when one is tired and getting cold.

Goals

1. Finishing.

2. Not destroying my body and injuring myself ... I was hoping my nagging ankle aches and twinges wouldn't stop me from running the race, but also planned that if it bothered me in any significant way before mile 20, I would be smart enough to drop out.

3. Start slow enough so that I can negative split the course (i.e., second 13.1 faster than the first in spite of the second half having a 9 mile hill section).

4. Time-wise: I thought a *very realistic* goal was to average 10 minute miles and finish in 4:22; all conversion formulas say that my recent 5k and 10k times indicate a 3:50-ish finish. But, since this was my first marathon and I felt, in a lot of ways that I was "undertrained," (i.e., I didn't do any pacework, speedwork, hillwork, etc.) I just wanted to finish and finish feeling decent (is that possible?) I had done my long run (including the 20.5 mile one) doing 9:50-10:00/mile (parts faster) on hilly terrain, so, I thought 10 min/mile would be very comfortable and easy.

Anyway, what happened?

- I met only goals (1) and (2) which is fine by me. I abandoned all time gaols at mile 14 (see below) I can't tell you how tempting it was to stop at mile 18 (right at our house where there would be a couch, ice, shower, food, etc.). I ended up finishing in 4:38 (10:38/mile) which is slower than I would have liked, but I am very proud that I actually kept going and got to the finish line.

Details

Except for the winds, everything early on went according to plan ... lined up at the very back of the starting line and did the first three miles averaging almost 11/mi to make sure my shins were loosened up and was not going to give me problems (if I start off hard, I have problems on the outside of my shins). My housemate Steve and I (we were hoping to run together for as long as possible) were almost in the back of the entire pack at this point, but that was ok, we got to joke around and laugh with a few other runners, etc.

After the water break at 2.5 mi, we got into a faster pace ... my shins were still a little tight, but responded well to dropping to a 10:05-10:10/mi pace, and by mile 6, we were both feeling a bit looser and mentally refreshed. As each mile passed, we slowly overtook people. My ankle felt "creaky" at times, but didn't really materialize beyond just an occasional "this ankle doesn't feel quite right." From miles 6-10, we settled into a very comfortable 9:45-9:50 pace and I felt smooth, running was effortless, and everything was great.

Somewhere along mile 11 or so, troubles started lurking, without any warning—a tightness shot up my left calf (i.e., a developing cramp). It didn't end up cramping, but felt very tight. Subconsciously, I suppose, we eased up in miles 11 and 12 to a 10:10 pace ... also possibly due to a few hills. Steve meanwhile couldn't get rid of a tight feeling in his knees. By the halfway point (which we hit at around 2:14), both my calves were feeling tight. At this point, Steve and I were pretty pessimistic. I think we were very unprepared emotionally for having problems this early on in the race. Our 18 and 20.5 mile runs had gone much more smoothly. I really didn't feel any significant problems (i.e., a slowdown) in these runs until the final mile or so (17 and 19 for those runs). I had thought that if problems/fatigue cropped up, they would have occurred around mile 20 or more (since we had trained on hills). No way was I prepared to have "issues" before the hills began at mile 15 (and don't end until mile 24!).

My friend Chris jogged along side us for a mile and half from mile 14 and it was nice to get distracted from all the difficulties; we had fallen off very quickly to a 10:40 pace and from that point on, I decided to not look at my watch. I hit splits every mile with the thoughts that it would be good to look at them afterwards, but not during the remainder of the race since they would just depress me.

Mile 16, the first hill mile, I started having an ache in my left quad (high on the thigh) for certain downhill stretches and started having the dark cloud of doom hanging over my head ... as it turns out, this was the slowest mile of the race (11:30 including a water stop). From then on, I was glad I had run the hilly portion of the course many times, and **at least** knew the nuances of each and every hill. Mile 18 was the hardest ... there is this steady incline for about 1/3 of a mile and then the course passes my house. At this point, I really thought of quitting. But somehow, I mustered the courage to grab the "Gu" (carbo gel) from our housemate Liz; and Steve and I trudged along ... while early on it was refreshing to continually pass people, it lost any "pick me up" as I saw these very tired faces and forms and wondered "Why in the world are we doing this?" Steve started fading (not that I wasn't hobbling along too) just before mile 20 where there is the steepest and longest hill near the golf course. He told me to go on ... not that I was going much faster, just that my hobble was just a little quicker than his. The tight calves maintained their condition after the big hill although they got a slight break (although then my left quad got the worse end) on the 1/2 mile downslope towards mile 21. There, my friend Sandra handed me another Gu packet which gave me a mild pick-me up and I continued on.

Then, rationale thought was lost for a moment as I passed into the Woods Hole village ... I had somehow forgotten that there was a hill in going from Woods Hole Road to Church St ... seeing that climb was disheartening, but I trudged on only to laugh along with another runner I caught up to. His wife was biking alongside asking questions: "Are you ok?" ... "No" ... "Want some water?" ... "No" ... "Want some food?" ... "No" ... "Can I do anything?" ... "How about a new pair of legs?" I said, "Hey if I promise to pay you back, can I have a pair too?."

After passing him, it was a lonely trek for about 2 miles. I was missing having Steve or someone around to chat with and distract me from my tight legs which by now were feeling weary. Coupled to that was the feeling of dehydration (tingling hands) which was becoming prominent (started several miles back) ... at mile 23, Sandra passed me another Gu and I saw my friend Sheri cheering me on. She said: "Looking good. Good job"—my thoughts: "Thanks." [mind rationalizes ... "What a liar! I look horrible!=)"] At mile 24, I passed a wave of friends including three members of the student relay team (Jay, Dan and Francois) which had finished in just over 3 hours. They were kind enough to jog with me for the final 2 miles (finally flat roads again!). What a big boost ... someone to talk to and distract me from my battered legs and the brutal head wind which was becoming very prominent as the course lost all shelter along the beach.

I passed mile 25 and turned onto Walker St heading to the finish. At that point I finally realized that I would make it. Since mile 14, I had worried about my legs cramping and now thought ... at worst, I would collapse (imagine both legs cramping simultaneously), stretch them out, and hopefully walk to the finish. But ... no cramping, and I actually manage to pick up the pace (just a little) and have some sort of kick build up as I crossed mile 26 and headed to the finish line for the final 0.2 miles. A lot of friends were there cheering me on, and it was gratifying to feel that medal put over my head. Steve crossed the line six minutes later and that was another gratifying moment. We both had overcome a huge amount of adversity and completed our first marathons!

This marathon was one of the toughest things I've ever done in my life ... harder than any of those 100+ mile bike rides and certainly harder than all the short duration swimming races I did over the years. And in spite of the pain, it was worth it. And i think, I'd do it again. And if I do another marathon, I think I'll know how to improve over the training experiences of this time. And hopefully, next time will be a bit less "painful."

I am pleased with the effort despite the slow time. I can only think that the cramping/tightening in the calves can be chalked up as "a bad day." But somehow, I still finished in spite of the circumstances.

After math

I flipped through the splits on my watch this morning and actually was surprised: in spite of the slowdown at mile 14-15, I managed to maintain a steady pace (albeit at near 11 min/mi) from that point on. So, I take a little consolation that my slow, ambling pace ... I didn't really hit the infamous "Wall." The ankle seems ok in spite of the pounding ... my legs though are quite stiff (several different locations!). My calves are doing well and I can only imagine that I had to alter my stride the last 12 miles of the race and taxed some other muscles in compensation. Walking up and downstairs is an exercise in pain management. Sitting down for long periods of time also is a bit rough as I stiffen up. Hopefully, I'll be able to do a nice comfortable walk by the week's end. I'm planning on taking a full two weeks (maybe more) off from running to let my body recover ... hopefully, this ankle thing will completely heal.

5 Marine Corps Marathon [October 26, 1997]

5.1 Jim Fortner [Bib # 9812], Pasadena, MD

I'm sorry this report is so late, but I've had trouble getting my thoughts together to write it because this MCM weekend was one of such extreme highs and one very deep low.

The Team Runnersworld.com experience was unbelievably wonderful! Spending an afternoon with Billy and another full day with him and Jussara earlier in the week. Meeting the other marvelous members of the Team over the weekend. The resoundingly successful pizza party on Friday. The short run on Saturday with several Forum friends. An afternoon of sightseeing with Tim and Marianne. The Penguin dinner. The race. And, finally the after-race camaraderie at the hotel Sunday. It all added up to the most wonderful experience of my 15-year running life. It is still hard for me to believe that a group of such diverse people could come together and bond as readily and as rapidly as we did in such a short period of time. Of course, we weren't complete strangers, thanks to the RW Forums. We shared a common interest and mutual respect. But, this weekend we discovered so much more within each other. And we bonded friendships that will last a lifetime. We all owe Tim a huge "Thank You" for making it all happen for us.

I included the race as a "high"light. But, as you know from the posts of others, it was a bittersweet experience.

The "bitter" part was that I failed ... I didn't get Sarah to the finish. It was the only goal I set for the race as we stood in the starting area. Bob told me that he could not try to go all the way and entrusted Sarah to me. I tried. But we didn't make it. We would have ... if the race had started on time. The delayed start left us with approximately 5 hours to clear the 14th street bridge instead of 5-1/2 hours. We approached the buses parked at the last blind turn leading to the 22 mile marker and the bridge just beyond it as the first runners, who had been turned around at the bridge, were walking back to the buses. We were within 5 minutes of reaching the bridge when it closed to runners. I doubt that we would have made it if we had tried to pick up the pace earlier than we did. We probably would have just slowed more in the later miles. We will never know since we didn't try. That was my mistake. I have missed goals in races before, including in three other MCM's, but none ever hurt like this one did. Sarah deserved better. From the race organizers and from me. We both failed her.

The "sweet" part of the race was running with Bob and Sarah. Bob set the race goal, started the race with us and ran as far as he could ... it was as long as he has run in 5 months. He was a trooper.

Sarah was amazing. She ran an excellent race ... despite the effects of jet lag and a five hour time change ... despite weather conditions that JC described as among the worst for a race that he has seen ... despite anxiety concerning what she was about to undertake. She ran a determined, courageous race. And she would have finished, if not stopped by circumstances beyond her control. She should not have experienced the disappointment and hurt that she did.

I learned a lot yesterday about the runner and person who is called "Lady Sarah" by her friends on the Forum. Not only is she a sweet lady, but is also of very strong character. During the bus ride to finish area at the memorial, she quickly determined that she will reach her goal. She will complete a marathon ... and, preferably, MCM. She is a winner. Mikey recognized that by presenting her with his MCM finisher's medal ... a class act, Mikey.

In a post a few weeks ago, Sarah called running "The Dance of Life Itself." Yesterday, I learned the true meaning of her very poetic analogy. Thank you, Sarah, for the honor of dancing with you for 5 hours and 4 minutes. We were forced to leave our dance unfinished. We will dance together again in MCM 99 ... and we will complete the dance.

5.2 Sarah Cheffins [Bib # 14108], Huddersfield, England

This story doesn't exactly have a happy ending—you have been warned!

We met up with everyone at the Carillon—Terrie was there too but left to get a place at the race start—good job she did! Jim2 and MrBob were with me when the gun went, and the rain started as if on cue! I had my first experience of actually passing other runners AND running with people (I train on my own). After four miles my calves and quads were already tightening which doesn't usually happen to me at that point. By eight miles I realised I was running slower than I should be and put it down to the cold setting in as we were dripping wet by now. At ten miles MrBob called it a day and went to meet his son. That left Jim2 and me and we had also picked up Jack on the way. I tried to pick up the pace and started to feel sick. All the sports drink had run out so we just had water. Drinking when you are so wet is difficult too. I started walking breaks to try and untighten my muscles and a few stretches.

Jim then said he was worried about the bridge being closed to runners at 2pm—if the race had started on time we would have had around 15-20mins to spare, but the race started 30 mins late and it took us 8 minutes to cross the line—he suddenly admitted that he was a little worried. He thought they should keep the bridge open to accommodate the late start—they didn't.

At mile 18 Jim said we were going to be cutting it very fine. At this point we lost Jack who went to try and find his dad who was walking. I told Jim to set the pace and I would try to keep up. This was turning out to be a very bad run for me—I hurt, my feet were dragging, I was very cold. BUT I went for it—I put every ounce of energy into following Jim. I could just see his heels in front of me through the rain dripping of my hat and I kept those in my sights. The golf course goes on forever, at mile 21 after running nearly four miles on borrowed energy, I feel my strength giving out. We can see the bridge, then a bus comes past us, then another. Jim says we might make it. We reach the bridge, but the runners are coming the other way and getting on the bus. Jim goes to ask if they did this by choice—they didn't. He comes up to me and puts his arm round me and tells me the race is over—we are on the bus. I burst into tears and start cursing. I had put all the effort I had into getting to this point faster than I have ever run in this state and we still didn't beat the bus.

I can't climb the steps onto the bus and have to be pushed on. It is full of demoralized runners but I seem to be the only one crying. Everyone is wet and shivering. The bus is moving—that's it, no MCM medal for me and we were only four miles short. The smell of bengay hits me and I barf on the floor.

We go to pick up my bag and my legs have gone concrete; the mud is feet deep around the finish. The marines keep turning us back. We struggle up to the road and Jim has a quick look to see if anyone at the finish line—he can't see anyone so we limp back to the hotel.

I drip all over the hotel lobby—Jim points me at the restroom and tells me to get changed while he finds the others. I can't get my clothes off—I am too stiff and too numb. My shoes are so muddy I am surprised they didn't throw us out. Most of my stuff is dry but I wore the leggings I should have changed into out on the course because of the cold.

I find Jim, he has found Tim and they park me on a chair with a Gatorade I can hardly lift. Jim has run the whole way in singlet and shorts—he must be freezing. Through the next hours the team straggle in all proudly wearing medals. I am too tired to care about not having one. Tim disappears and comes back with a US souvenir medal which he presents to me. When Mikey comes in he gives me his finishers medal—on loan he says—until the day I complete the race and have to send it back to him.

Jim2 comes in after showering and changing. I keep hugging him. Nurse Kratchett arrives with dry clothes and hugs. She will keep me going for the next day until I get back on the plane home. She is also a star.

I have been overwhelmed by everyone's support and kindness over the last few days—but particularly the 26th.

During the run, Jim told me he has qualified for Boston twice—yet he ran with me at snails pace the entire distance (bar the last four of course). That, to me, is making a supreme sacrifice. It is the first MCM he hasn't finished. He was upset for not having pushed me faster earlier. He thinks we missed the bridge by less than five minutes. Without that, we would both be sitting here with medals. But, I have to say, he pushed me to pick up speed and proved to me I was capable of it. If he hadn't been there I would have been walking at mile 18.

Sorry Jim if this embarrasses you—but I am truly honoured to have 'raced' with you. Your spirit of self-sacrifice should be commended and I will never ever forget it. You spoke of maybe tackling Boston soon—I want you to do it for me and I want a picture of you with that medal round your neck.

When I started posting on these forums I could never have dreamt what it would get me doing—and more, who I would meet. It has surpassed even my wildest dreams—especially my trip to hell yesterday.

Don't anyone be upset for me not finishing. It has just made my resolve stronger to complete a marathon—I KNOW I can, we just got unlucky yesterday and the decision to quit was NOT ours.

I have an application in for the London Marathon in April— I will find out in December whether or not I am in. I will keep training for the marathon goal and I now have the necessary kick in the pants to get me through the winter.

In October '99 I aim to be back in Washington on the start line to complete the race I wasn't allowed to finish! Cheers to everyone—but particularly Jim2—the All American Hero!
P.S. Well done Terrie. You did it!

5.3 Mike Ross [Bib # 3376], Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Well it is just 3 short days ago I was there and now I am here. My race was fairly uneventful but here goes anyway:

We stood at the start unaware of the tragedy that had occured, personally I thought we were late because the politician kept yabbering. Then the rain started, then we started.

Miles 1–4 slowly build my heart rate (planned to keep it at low150's)Around the Pentagon, saw Jay (he was looking strong).

Back out towards the start line, the spectators were great. Acrossthe Key bridge feel pretty good HR 153 taking on water at every stop. Enjoy the crowds, the runners, the scenery. Passed 10 miles in 86 mins.

Along the mall things are going quite well. My injured knee is giving me no problem. I go by 1/2 in 1:52:55 very pleased. Around the capitol back along the Mall, past 16 miles I don't really feel great. Saw Elizabeth and Jim. Thanks guys the cheering was great.

Seventeen comes and goes, I really do not feel very good; my HR has dropped to 148 but I can't seem to pick it up. We are now heading towards the Jefferson Memorial, and the dreaded Haines point and I frankly am feeling like SH.. Why, then I realise, on my long runs I have always had something to eat at 1/2 way. Now what do I do, then there, ahead a vision. Powerbars, Powerjel. I grab a hand full. I am down to a walk, but I am moving forward. Please let this be the answer. Past a water station, wash down the power bars, another mile, I realise I actually am starting to feel better.

At this point I am starting to pick things up. I am starting to move past people. I pass a guy who looks ready to walk, "come on stay with me" and he does; turns out he is a Marine (Chris) "Thank you Sir!," he says. "I am not a sir, I'm Mike, please call me Mike." "Thank You, Sir"—What can ya' do. So the two of us are starting to move quite well. We pass 22, "So Chris we are going to break 4:00hrs". "You think so Si... Mike." "I sure do."

I am feeling really good again, and I still have a power gel for the 24 mile water station. Here it comes, feed, drink, move along, HR at 160 but we are doing great. More people walking now; try to get people to join us. No takers though. Now the crowds are really vocal.

Pass DebA's family, the boys give me a high-five (thanks guys). Can see the Netherlands Carrilon. Ya-hoo we are almost home; Chris is hanging in! Up the hill and the crowds are fantastic; I got goose bumps and a s..t house grin.

"Hey Chris, only the Marines could be sadistic enough to finish a marathon on this hill." "Yep" and there it is, the finish, as someone said before, no I don't want this to end. If it does I have to return to my real life, leave these new found friends (leave them, never forget them). My watch says 3:54:01, I am very content, not that long ago I swore I would never do another marathon, yet here I am wet, cold, starting to shiver thinking so where to next.

The rest of the day has been told, so I will not rehash it. If you will bear with me I would just like to finish with a quote by Sydney Smith:

> It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can.

5.4 John Costigan [Bib # ?], [City], [State]

The Army has an infantry saying what happened yesterday in the MCM marathon ... It's called an L-Shaped ambush.

First, my race. I ran very well and competitively yesterday posting a 3:29:55 (haven't looked up the official time but pretty close to that). Ran even splits, plus or minus 15 seconds. I would have preferred a 3:29 (under 8 minutes a mile) or 3:25 (qualifying for '99 Boston marathon...already qualified for '98 marathon), but it was only a training run! Brian W ... Time for my speedwork!

A number of first ... First time I ran an official race FOR TRAINING!!! (Note ... I usually run 6-8 marathon distance (26.2–30 miles) runs a year for training). First time I ran 24 miles for training without stopping. And, first time I trained over

25 miles in the rain. I still have a number of things to do before my planned 100 miler like run at night and run over 20 miles at night, so I'm still pretty immature at that level. In all honesty, I did not push it and when my calf started getting stiff, I walked if off at the 24 mile marker and on (Remember … Training, NOT to get hurt). I have to admit, that it took all of my mental energies to keep this run a training run versus a race. It took all of my Army Ranger training to ignore the wet conditions and cold.

Now, the bad news.

For first time runners, this was a terrible marathon. The weather conditions were not conducive to anything. These weather conditions were for survival runs. The heavy rains at the beginning took too much of a toll on runners. At the 20 mile marker, I was passing people by the hundreds (why they were in front of me in the first place I'll never know). As my wife and I drove off to go home at 4 hours into the the race, I was embarrassed that so many fine runners were still running and would still be running for another few hours. I was embarrassed because I could not be there to help them (the place was an utterly disgusting pile of mud at the end for spectators). Although not close to hyperthermia or exhaustion myself, I was forced to retire to my warm car so that I could be well to run another day (and, shortly too, as my marathon schedule has many marathons and an ultra in the next 8 weeks).

To all my running friends, we will relive this marathon forever. To all who finished, my hats off. To all that tried, my hats are off.

I will discuss the social features of this weekend in another thread (and, we had a Great Time!!!) but one thing I wanted to say: I attended a Penguin Dinner/RW Forum dinner Saturday night and the guest speaker (someone that had run 21 straight MCM marathons said that "We all have the same level of fitness going into this marathon," or something to that effect. He was wrong but sort of right. No level of physical fitness for a first marathon could prepare you for the mental agony that entailed this marathon. I had a decided edge of most runners in that I was able to block out the physical conditions the same way I blocked out the torture of the cold water during the Alcatraz triathlon or the 8th hour of a survival 50 mile race.

God bless everyone that tried this race, especially for 1st time runners.

5.5 Dan Wesier [Bib # 13067], Lancaster, PA

It is difficult to express what a fantastic experience it was not only running the MCM but meeting so many wonderful forum people.

The Friday pizza party was a perfect informal way to see everyone. Saturday morning's run (Tim … that really was more than 2-miles) was lots of fun … and finally the dinner with the Penguin's worked out nicely.

I could spend lots of time telling you about each of these people, but what was really best was how well everyone got along. It was easy to make conversation and fascinating to listen to others. And, you should see slc's pictures of where she runs, not to mention the beautiful pictures of her children.

Unfortunately, I decided to take the Metro (the subway) to the race this morning (I grabbed the first one train at 7am) ... normally the 35-minute trip turned into an hour ... I rushed to get my belongings stashed and finally reached the start line at 8:25 ... five minutes before the race was scheduled to start ... no warm-ups no stretching ... and I missed the pre-race get together with the others.

The race started about 15-20minutes late—so I got a few stretches in, but nothing significant in the way of warming up. The rain started about 5-minutes before the howitzer blasted to get us going. It rained practically the entire race. I wore a plastic bag for the first 25-miles (got to look good at the end, you know).

I ran well, felt strong for most of the time ... I paced well ... ran the second half faster than the first (negative splits) ... but I lost time getting water and doing the bushes thing ... if you know what I mean. Final time about 4:25.

I carried a small camera with me ... only took a few shots ... but I did stop in front of the U.S. Capitol and asked a bystander to snap a shot of me ... these kinds of things ... and the throngs of spectators made the race unforgettable.

The Marines were wonderful ... at the end of the race they even untied my shoes to remove the computer chip and then re-tied them!

Again I missed our group at the end ... and this was the tough part ... I was chilly and cold to the bone and had to walk about a mile to the Metro stop. NOT Fun ... but it made the hot shower later feel all that much better.

This was going to be a short post ... but as usual I got carried away ... since I didn't see the other guys today ... I can't wait to hear how they did.

Finally, thanks to everyone ... those who showed up and those of you thinking of us. I thought of you guys also ... and that gave me the strength to finish strong.

5.6 Karen Tomimatsu [Bib # 14194], Vienna, VA

Greetings Runners Forum! I ran my first (and probably last) marathon yesterday! More on that later. First of all, I met the Penguin Brigade for breakfast at Whitey's in Arlington on Saturday morning. It's amazing how pancakes can taste so good on a Saturday morning! It was soooo nice to put a face with a name! Meeting John and Karen Bingham was certainly a delight! Mark Will-Webber was also on hand to pen his book, "The Quotable Runner." What a wonderful group of people! Went home to just get some rest and drank about 5 liters of water! Got up on Sunday morning and had my usual banana and bagel and set out for the Pentagon North Parking Lot. It was kinda difficult to find at first; a number of folks were following me! They had parts of the lot blocked off, but I was able to get a decent space. Met up with the Penguin Brigade at the Bell Tower and chatted with them for a while. Took a quick potty break and we all set off for the starting line! The race officials added another 2,350 runners, making the total 18,350! I was amazed to see all the runners, as well as spectators!! My goal in this marathon was threefold:

1. Don't board the stragglers bus;

2. Have a good time, and
3. Just finish! (no matter what my time was)

When I filled out the application, I put my predicted time as 6 hours and 18 minutes. After about a 15–30 minute delay (a spectator had suffered a heart attack, don't know his condition ... one TV station report that he was OK, while another reported that he died). Just as we finished singing the National Anthem, it started to rain. Just sprinkles, but then it rained steadily throughout the race.

We were off around 9 am. There were lots of spectators that lined the streets, underneath the overpasses and along the bridges! I was amazed that they were out there cheering for us ... in the cold and rain!!! I decided to toss my long sleeve shirt and gloves around mile marker 3 (big mistake) ... then around Mile 4, I heard, "Hey Tomi" ... and it was Natalie and The Penguin gang!!! I was really happy to see them! I ran with them for about 4 miles and then lost them. (They were running a bit too fast for me). By this time, it was still raining, but I was determined to finish. At mile maker 10, this young Marine said to me, "You're doing well. You're almost done!" Can you believe it? I said to him "I have over 16 miles to go!!!" He said "Oops, I'm sorry." Around mile 15, I was thinking about bailing out, I had a bad cramp in my left calf, and my right foot was cramping, but I was determined to keep going, even if I had to walk! I thought about all the training I did this summer and how hard I worked and I thought if I "quit" now, I would have been a failure, so I drudge on ... I think what kept me going was thinking about all the support from my sister and my training group! I also said to myself, at this point "marathons aren't for me!" By mile marker 22, one of the Marines yelled out to me, "You're going to make it, you are well ahead of the bus", then another Marine yelled "you have one minute" ... And I just "kicked it" up that little hill, and another Marine said, "don't worry, you'll miss the bus." At this point, I walked and sometimes ran the rest of the way. To make a long story short, I made it! As the Marine put the medal around my neck, I asked him if I could hug him and he said "sure!" My sister was there to capture my moment! It may have taken my over 6 hours (6 hours and 15 minutes!:]) to finish, but I met my goals and am very happy! I realize, though, that marathons just "aren't" for me. I'm sticking with running, though ... shorter distances ... 5K–10K and perhaps a 10 miler or two. I congratulate everyone who ran this wonderful marathon (the Marines do a fabulous job!), and despite the weather, I had a pretty good time. I'm at work today ... wearing my MCM shirt with pride! I look forward to reading everyone's racing reports!

6 New York City Marathon [November 2, 1997]

6.1 Joyce McMahon [Bib # F7005], Lutherville, MD

Nothing about my second **consecutive** New York City Marathon was as I expected it to be. During the course of it, I completely lost touch with the reasons I was running it. It was a long hard day, and I'll be walking funny into mid-week at least. But as I sit here now, in comfortable, dry clothes, a space heater at my feet, a juice glass close at hand, it all seems like it was worth it. So I guess in the final analysis it was.

I was better trained this year than last, though still not up to Bob Glover's schedule. I was fully hydrated, ate a good light breakfast Sunday morning, hung out with positive fellow-runners the night before, and scammed some extra sleep by taking a cab from Central Park South to the starting line (about $10 apiece for the four of us) instead of waiting in line for the bus 2 hours and then spending 4 hours at the starting area. I kept ticking off these positives as I waited to head to my corral. I had gotten an e-mail from JL telling me what color cap she'd be wearing (lime green) and where she would try to be around 9 am. I wasn't able to meet her, because I arrived at 9 am and immediately got in line for a portapot. I don't remember it at last year's NYCM but there was a WOMEN'S ONLY area, for hanging out and portapotties, and I wound up over there: shorter lines, still not moving though. I figured I would catch JL during the run if not at the start. (Wrong). I'd forgotten what it's like to be surrounded by 30,000 runners crowded onto the Verrazano. There was excitement all around, people smiling. One very nice thing that happened as I stood there alone, separated from the other 5 people I knew who were red starts, was that the very nice older man next to me asked me what time it was. He didn't speak much English, as he was from Argentina. Just before the start, he surprised me by leaning over and kissing me on the cheek, saying, "Good luck." I knew I would have to hold onto that memory during tough parts of the race, and I did.

The race was so crowded that the first mile was all shuffled. The second mile was a light jog, punctuated by the occasional marathon-walker who'd started too far forward. I don't mind this, as it makes starting out too fast an impossibility. One of the articles in the NYCM goodie bag said that most people will know by mile 8 what kind of day they're gonna have. At mile 5, when I thought, "I shouldn't be feeling effort yet," I already knew. It was a worrying thought that I didn't try hard enough to get rid of. I was on good pace, looking ahead to known good landmarks, like the ten mile point, because Mr. Bob on master's had said he hadn't run in 6 months but managed to do 10 miles at MCM. So I knew I should be able to do that. Then 13, where the Sri Chimoy, God bless them, had PLENTY of food/candy for all runners (bananas and bagels as well as oreos and candy). I knew that mile 15 or 16 was the Queensborough Bridge, where last year I had such an emotional experience. Well, it's wrong to try to duplicate a great moment. Each moment has its own offering, but I was constantly waiting for last year to re-happen. The bridge turned out to be different in construction from my memory, and the great crowds, though screaming in the rain, were not a surprise and did not buoy me as they had last year. I did see two great t-shirts. One said, "BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY." The other said, "I'm Sergeant Erickson. Count on me." By mile 18 I was on First Avenue, and despite the RW Quote of the Week, I didn't feel anything but weakness and self-pity. First Avenue was packed with crowds, but it also is straight and goes on forever without seeming to bring you anywhere. I descended into negativity, without even trying to fight it. I started walking, even though I wasn't even to 20 miles and I'd done two 20 mile runs in preparation. People on the sides would yell, "You can do it!" And I would answer them inside, "But that's not the problem! Of COURSE I can do it. The problem is I don't WANT to! I'm deeply lazy! I can't believe I forgot that!" And on and on. Some of the little kids, or high-spirited grown-ups, would say stuff that was not 100state those were the things I kept. I'd run every once in a while, then look ahead and give up. One of a few times that I actually cried was when I was fairly close to Central Park. A man said to us as I walked aching by, "Only 3 more happy miles to go!" I buried my head in my hands, half-hysterical. It wasn't that I couldn't bear the thought of 3 more miles, it was that I no longer believed people when they said things like that. A lot of people will tell you "You've got 20 in the bag now!" and yet you run for a while before you see the 20 mile mark. Some guy next to me touched my arm and said, "Hey, you're coming with us. We're just going at a very easy pace, and when we get to the uphill into the park, I've promised him we can walk again." This pulled me along, although I truly did walk up every (small!) hill in the Park. It would have meant NOTHING to me to DNF even at mile 24. I had walked so much since mile 18 I was disgusted. It didn't seem worth it to finish. I'd been so moved by the MCMers, especially the first timers, yet at that moment I could not have cared less. Let them overcome! It meant nothing to me. I don't know why I didn't quit, except that I kept moving forward, and occasionally running. I'd start again when someone with an obvious injury jogged by, even though I don't believe in running with an injury. But it would stir me up. I decided to run the last 1.2 miles, almost in despair. I kept hoping for that sense of joy I got last year when I kept plugging away even knowing it was impossible ... but I really didn't get that. Walking down the chute at 5:16::xx the volunteer asked me, "Are you okay?" I could tell I looked like hell, and I felt like it too. Soaked to the skin by the rain, cold in my borrowed shorts, stinky and defeated. BUT, on the ride home, provided by a woman from our group who hadn't run, she kept telling me, "It's easy to finish when you're feeling good. It's hard to finish feeling bad." And smiling at other runners who had also finished, and eating the greasiest protein I could find an hour or two later, I started to feel grateful. This marathon was a gift which came on its own terms to me. I ran less of the way this year, and finished 18 minutes slower than last year. But for a perfectionist and a procrastinator like I am, it felt great to have reached the finish line, and be done with it. It's over, when's the next one ...

6.2 Jenet Levy [Bib # F7314], Brooklyn, N.Y.

A little background: I'm 40 years old, married 13 years, mother of 2 (ages 10 and 7), running about a year and a half and started training in earnest for this in the Spring. I live in NYC (Brooklyn) and volunteered at the NYC marathon last year in anticipation of possibly attempting it this year. When I decided to commit to doing it, in my mind I planned it as sort of my celebration of turning 40— showing myself I'm not old and that I can be in the best shape I've ever been. I was obsessing all week about the weather and what to wear. The outfit changed many times. They were predicting rain early in the week. The final weather report was around 60 at the start, going to almost 70 and no rain until into the afternoon (though I expected to be running well into the afternoon). At a pasta party the night before held at the apartment of the teacher of a running class I take, I was advised to go with shorts and a singlet. I wore a ratty old throwaway sweat suit on top, a cap, and brought two plastic bags and rubber bands to cover my sneakers and some large garbage bags for sitting on and wearing.

My local club had a bus going to the start leaving at 8:00 AM, a much more civilized time than the NYRRC buses that board at about 5:45 AM. So I arrived at 8:30 for a 10:00 line-up and a 10:35 start. At the staging area I hung out with several other women from my club. Beep Beep and I had posted back and forth a while last Spring about anticipation of whether we'd be accepted to NYC, and then about getting the acceptances. After some renewed Forum postings, we started e-mailing over the last month or so about plans for the weekend, race, etc. Unfortunately plans to meet just didn't work out.

Coming over the Verrazano Bridge, almost at the toll plaza, you can look out the window and see all the men lined up FACING US using the world's largest urinal. Very funny and of course lots of rowdy comments on the bus! Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island was very wet from Saturday's rain but they put down straw or hay everywhere which helped somewhat. I did the bags on my shoes. It started to rain prior to the line-up. Cruel trick after the final weather reports had assured this wouldn't happen. I put my garbage bag on. I started thinking that maybe this singlet was a bad idea, should have stayed with the second of my planned outfits. Oh well. We stayed under a very big tent which was very uncrowded. Someone said they thought it was the elite women's tent. But there were no signs saying so and no one looked like they were elite. Very short lines at the port-o-sans near the women's corrals. Only about 5 deep vs. the usual 25+ deep at all the other NYRRC events. And they restricted them to women as the men can use that enormous urinal (which does face away from everything when you are on the ground). Due to the rain, I wasn't going to leave the big tent until the last minute. So I kept my eye on my corral until it started to move up to the bridge. Tossed the sweatpants ran to my group and got to where they were marching us on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Listened to some opening remarks, Star Spangled Banner, etc, etc. Tossed the foot baggies, tossed the garbage bag, though I must say the little hood thing I had fashioned out of it allowing only the visor part to stick out was rather creative. The tossing procedure was announced as keep handing stuff to the left.

I am waiting for the thunderous roar of the canon going off. People are making nervous conversation. Poof. Was that the canon? That little sound? Are we moving. Yes, we are, that was it. We're already on the bridge, so where is the actual start to start my watch? There's no balloon arch or anything. We're going, I'm moving, so soon after the start. Impressive. I'm looking behind me. Oh, up on that part of the bridge itself is something that says start that I can only see looking behind me, so

I've passed it. I'm doing it now, I'm in the marathon!

I'm going over the Verranzano and trying to remember to hold back. It was a quick start, nothing like the long lumbering crawl I expected. I'm starting to feel hot in the sweatshirt. This is feeling hard, I can't get into the groove. Mile 1. Now the bridge has crested, we're going downhill. It still feels hard. Well, it always takes me a few miles to feel good. It's humid. No more rain but humid. And it's so foggy, the towers of the bridge aren't even visible. Mile 2. Off the bridge. A few turns. We're in Bay Ridge. Now we're on 4th Ave. Take off cap, toss sweatshirt. Hey, I actually got it in the garbage can. 3 points! By the way, that rain stopped right around the start. Oh, man. That hamstring thing is happening. Oh man, I know I overtrained in the end, but I tapered, I really tapered. Why is this thing acting up. Relax. People are passing me which is fine, but they are poking me here and there and feet are touching my feet and I don't like that. And from that point on it became a very, very different experience than what I expected. It became a very individual, solitary, from within experience. I was aware of all the spectators cheering, the runners around me, the bands playing here and there, but somehow I was unaffected by them. It was like I had blinders on. It was sort of surreal. I just knew that this had to come from within and that I was going to do whatever I had to do, dig as deep as I had to to do it, but that it was going to all come from within. The crowds, the noise, the mobs, the weather, none of it seemed to touch me from that point on—not the good, the bad, it all became irrelevant. I think I just felt I could not spare an ounce of energy on what was going on around me. I really felt like I was alone and wanted and needed to be. This is 180 degrees from what I expected. I expected to be so into the crowds and energized by them, and expected to be on an emotional rollercoaster of highs and lows but it just wasn't. Everything was irrelevant. I just moved forward. And my mind wasn't racing. It was part of that surreal thing, sort of a suspension of time and space. I was running. That was all that was happening. Now we're in Sunset Park. Soon we'll be in Park Slope. Okay, husband and kids will be on the right at 16th St. Two blocks, one block. There they are with the signs—high five to husband, son, daughter, friend, gone. Friend alert on 11th St. Move again to outside—hi, high five, over, move back to center. Friend alert on Carroll St. Where is she? Not there. Oh well. Hamstring hurting. Oh man, balls of feet feeling some friction. My feet never move in my shoes. Somewhere around mile 9 I sat on the curb and untied my tightly triple knotted wet shoelaces, took them off smoothed my socks, put them back on and made them tighter from the part near the toes all the way to where they are laced. I think the wetness is what made them feel too loose. Better to take time and do this now then suffer with blisters later on. Never had a shoe problem after that. Going again. Hamstring thing still happening. Two people are shouting Ben Gay. One has a jar, one has a tube. Stick my had in the jar and get some and reach up under lycra shorts and rub it on the hamstring. So much for don't try anything new. Eventually the hamstring thing died down. Maybe it was the Ben Gay. One foot hurts for a while, inside somewhere new. Stops. Other foot gets a similar thing. Stops. Moving along . . . rain at 10 miles. Eventually stops after a while. Rain again at 12 miles.

Heavier now. Halfway coming up. 13.1 split is 2:20. I'll take that. All along I was just doing a pace that felt comfortable and natural. Pulaski Bridge - Queens. Man, Long Island City is not pretty, all industrial and nothing like the part of Queens I grew up in. Making sharp turns to the ramp of the Queensboro Bridge (aka 59th St Bridge). A High School Band in something like a marching band uniform right at the awkward short turn onto the bridge—somehow they touched me—like these kids are here for me—a rare instant of connection, I don't know why then or there. On the bridge, lots of puddles, can't always avoid them. Uphill, uphill, man—when does this thing crest? Never. Uphill, uphill. Man, how long is this damn bridge already? Finally, going downhill. Thank you. Bridge, bridge, finally 1st Ave. Pouring! Ten miles to go and it is pouring. These drops are hitting my shoulders and arms hard. Lots of people out in the rain. I feel isolated from them. They all seem to be looking for their particular person. Now it's feeling hard. I'm in the 70's now. Maybe I'll give this crowd a chance. I move to the outer left. Here and there they call my name. Or the name of my club (I'm wearing a club singlet with my name pinned on above). Some mispronounce my name because of the odd spelling. Some get it right. But I do appreciate them now. It is helping me. Thunder! Absolutely soaking wet, raining like crazy, and then I pass—the table where they are handing out wet sponges. Why? I couldn't get any wetter. What is the point. And now there are hundreds, maybe thousands of wet sponges that I am trying to avoid stepping on. Above the East 90's few people are out. Finally at the Bridge into the Bronx. I know it's a short time there, but it seems longer than I expected. 20 miles. Where's the wall? No wall. Out of the Bronx. No wall. In Harlem. Where are those school kid banners I read about? Nowhere. Probably the rain? Here's a choir in beautiful blue and gold robes singing gospel. Cool. Thanks. 22. No wall. But that hamstring thing has been back awhile. Now my quads are getting a little painful. But the pace is not changing. And I am passing lots of people. I am not trying to and I am not speeding up but I am passing lots of people. 110th Street. Aren't we going in the park here. No. Enter at 102nd. Very uphill entrance. Coach of running class supposed to be here on the left. No show. Must be the rain. In the park. Quads HURT. I've run this park both directions, all distances. But man it never felt so uphill. All uphill, so steep, how can this be? Family will be by boathouse. 90's, 80's, legs hurt but pace is consistent. 70's, Boathouse should be coming up. Here they are—husband and kids with signs, high five, high five, high five. Where's mother in law? She's calling me. She's on the course. What's she doing, running with me? She was keeping dry under a tree on the other side and didn't want me to not see her. Now she goes back off. Quads hurt and now calves too. Pain. Walk a little, run again. 25 pain. Out of the park. Cruel. If I could stay on the path in the park . . . Very hard on 59th St. Walk a little. Tell myself I've given birth twice, so I can do this. It's only pain. Finally Columbus Circle. Back in the park. Mile 26. Calves screaming, quads screaming. Uphill to the finish. Cruel joke. There's the finish line. Go, go. 4:42:52. Not bad! Guy jumps ahead of me in the chute. Will change the order. So what? Official time next day in NY Times: 4:42:55.

6.3 Frank Webbe [Bib # X4210], Palm Bay, FL

I was looking for an exciting time and I got everything that I bargained for. My only goal was to enjoy the experience. Boy did I accomplish that! The most unexpected thing that happened was that at one point I was in the top 50 of the New York City Marathon. What a rush. Then the cannon went off and the race started.

The way the marathon start works is that all the NYC police and firemen who are running form a human chain at the front to allow the elite runners an unimpeded start. Well, yours truly got to be a member of the FDNY for the day. Through my daughter I know a NYC firefighter. He ran last year and arranged for me to run on the FDNY marathon team. It was first class all the way. We left on a special bus from the Mayflower Hotel and sped to Staten Island with flashers blinking and sirens screaming. They gave us bagels and other treats as well as a pep talk replete with firefighter analogies. The big goal was to beat the NYPD, which the fireman have done for 15 straight years. We arrived at Ft. Wadsworth and were ushered into a special tent. This was great because it had been rainng continuously and the whole area was muddy. We had our own port-a-johns, though not enough. About 40 minutes before the start we were led to the starting line - the actual starting line - to prepare for the invasion of the hordes of runners in the blue starting area. These are the fastest male runners. After about 15 minutes we linked arms and geared up to hold back the masses. With about ten minutes until the start, the elite runners appeared and did their warmups and strides. They lined up about 15 yds in front of me. Mayor Giuliani set off the cannon and bedlam ensued. All these 2:20 or better runners or wannabees shot out like they were in the cannon. I was buffetted for several minutes as people crashed through my shoulders going up the bridge.

My plan was to start very slow and work back up to a 10 min/mi pace. Nope. When poeple are zipping by at 5-6min pace, you tend to go faster than planned, if only in self defense. I kept consciously trying to slow down and thought that I had succeeded. The first mile split appeared at 8:30 and that was all uphill on the Verazzano Narrows bridge. Not good. I made a greater effort to slow up. the second mile split passed in 8:00, but this was all downhill. Still, not good. Finally, once I got into Brooklyn, I was able to gradually get back to pace by mile 5. I then set about looking for a comfort station. Finally found one at mile 8, and afterwards I was back on the original pace. I ran pretty consistently, if not comfortably thorugh mile 18. Oh, it was in the low 60's with 100humidity and occasional rain during this time. Certainly not ideal conditions. Nonetheless, the spectators were out in force. Fourth avenue in Brooklyn and First Avenue in Manhattan were packed 5-10 people deep on both sides. My only real disappointment was crossing the Queensboro (59th St.) bridge. I had had expectations that Simon and Garfunkel's 59th Street Bridge song would be playing, but alas, nothing. And that bridge is LONG. First avenue was cool. I saw my daughter and her boy friend at 73rd St., and some other friends at 93rd St. By mile 18, my left foot, site of the miserable plantar fasciitis that I have been fighting for the past two months, was sending out major pain signals. I must have altered my stride because my whole leg started rebelling. Rather than wait until

I couldn't move I started to walk for 3-4 min every 10. That gave enough relief so that I could finish without crawling. I went through the half in about 2:09 and finished in 4:59. The heavens let go in the Bronx, and water was streeaming through the streets with 6-8 inch deep puddles at many locations. The final miles through Central Park were demanding. The hills are not huge but they sure seemed that way. And they never seemed to go down.

After the finish line chute, I was ushered off to the side (that FDNY singlet and hat worked wonders) given my medal, blanket and water and directed back to the Mayflower to the firefighter's suite where my bag was waiting. My daughter was also waiting at the finsh line so we walked off into the rain together. I left my medal on for the rest of the day, and every place I went in New York, the people made a big fuss over me. New York sometimes gets a pretty bad rap, but for that day it was the biggest running city in the world.

So, that's the story of my most exciting run. It was a once in a lifetime exprience, and one that I will treasure always. I go to the podiatrist and the physical therapist today to see how much damage I did and get their recommendation for the next few weeks. Thanks for all the words of encouragement. And, Charlie, I said hello to your old neighborhood. About 10,000 people answered back!

7 Columbus Marathon [November 9, 1997]

7.1 Thomas Laux [Bib # 1035], Cincinnati, OH

Short version

This was my first marathon. Had goals of:

1. finish the race—I knew I could do this,
2. finish in under 4 hours—I thought I could do this, and
3. finish in under 3:45—I didn't know if I could do this or not.

In the end I reached goals 1. and 2. by shattering the 4 hour mark with a 3:59:27 finish time.

Long and drawn out version

Went to Columbus with two of my running friends who were not in the marathon. They were coming up strickly for support (and to drag my sorry butt home after the race:-)). Didn't get in until 6pm so I missed all the encounters going on. I didn't even see a single dead the entire race :-(We went straight to the expo to pick up my race number and for Steve and Jeff to register for the 5K being run 15 min. after the start of the marathon. Pretty small expo but they had lots of cool stuff really cheap. I picked up a Columbus Marathon sweatshirt for $9 and a long sleve coolmax shirt for $15. Both my friends found new shoes (last years Nikes and Sauconys) for $25. After the expo we went to Uno's for veggie pizza and a pre-race beer - just one.

Went back to the hotel where we played cards for a while and then I tried to sleep - a pretty fruitless effort.

Got up Sunday morning at 6, dressed and had bagels and cereal at the hotel. Headed downtown by 7:15 which turned out to be way earlier than we needed. There was no traffic out, parking was great and the race started right near the expo center so we could hang out inside till race start.

On to the race: I lined up with the 9 min pace people. The plan was to run a 9 min pace through mile 15 and then speed up as much as I could for the rest of the race. In reality I averaged about an 8:50 or so through 17 and then slowed down about 15 - 20 secs per mile. My race was really broken into three separate runs (and not the 10/10/6.2 I had envisioned). The first 17 miles were really a breeze. I ran a 10 min first mile (just bunched up in the starting crowd) and two other 10 min miles (each one included a pee break). All the other miles were mostly under 9 minutes. The course layout was a cloverleaf so I got to see my support team at miles 13, 23 and the finish. They said I looked like I had just started running when I saw them at mile 13 - and I felt that good too. Best part of the race happened around mile 5. I heard someone say they were from Cincinnati, so I moved up to talk to him. Turns out this guy lives 3 miles away from me and has been running most of the same training routes I do. He had just run Detroit three weeks ago in 4:35 and was looking to break 4 hours in this run. We stayed together the entire race (until he had some gas at 25 and beat me by two min). I don't think I could have managed the 4 hour goal without this new partner. Funny thing was we didn't even get each others names until after the finish line. Ain't running great! Back to the race: At 17 my legs, hips and feet really started to get sore and I felt my pace falling off. Someone told me that Advil can help later in the race so I brought some along. Took three of them at 17 and by mile 20 I was back under 9 min miles. Things weren't real easy to this point but we were still talking, yelling to the crowds and having a good time. At mile 23 you come back into downtown but have to head back out for the last 3 mile leaf of the course. This is where things really got tough for me. Mile splits didn't drop off too bad, but I was really hurting. New strategy was to walk an extra 15 or 20 secs at each water stop which gave me just enough juice to get to the finish. At mile 24 we could see the finish area but it seemed like an eternity away. The volunteers were tremdous though - they knew that if I could keep my legs moving I could break 4 hours and every one of them told me so. Even a cop yelled that I had four hours in the bag. Still, I felt like I was scraping my butt on the ground that last mile. A little past 26 I could make out the finish clock—3:59:08, and it seemed like I was forever away! Dug as deep as I could and managed to get my legs moving just a little faster and finished with an astonishing, crowd pleasing 3:59:27—an entire 33 seconds under my goal! I was a happy camper!!! I immediately felt the 45 degree temps that I hadn't noticed a min earlier. The volunteers wrapped me in two heat blankets and after about five mins I felt ok. Met up with my support team and we walked all of two blocks back to the expo center (where it was *warm*) and had a light lunch. Man what an experience! What a great course to run your first marathon on! This

morning walking down steps is an experience of an entirely different sort ;-)
Announcer: Tom, now that you've firmly established yourself as a middle of the pack marathoner with your stunning 3:59:27 time, beating everyone in back of you, what are you going to do?
Tom: I'm going to Walt Disney World on January 11 to run the WDW marathon of course ;-)

My mile splits (just in case anyone other than me care about these things) follows:

Table 1: Mile splits

1–10:00	2–8:52	3–9.06	4–8:49	5–10:00	6–8:56
7–8:54	8–8:45	9–8.55	10–8:49	11–8:47	12–8:50
13–9:57	14–8:45	15–8.52	16–8:31	17–9:00	18–9:20
19–9:24	20–8:40	21–8.55	22–9:29	23–9:23	24–9:13
25–9:37	26–9:26	26.2–2.00			

8 LaSalle Banks Chicago Marathon [October 24, 1999]

8.1 Lee Potter, Chicago, IL

It had been a long haul working through the 18-week training program coming up to the marathon, and on October 22, 2 days before the race, I felt uneasy and not real confident about what was ahead. Yes, I'd done all the training runs as prescribed, but that seemed like such a long time ago. The tapering and rest the last few weeks seemed to rob me of my confidence. The longest run we had done in training was 20 miles and that had been 3 weeks ago. Besides, I had to go 6 miles beyond that, and that was scary.

The Friday night before the big event was a tough night. The training manual had said to be sure to get a good night sleep since you probably won't sleep well the night before the race. Well, I tossed and turned all night. I got up early the next day anyway to get to the expo to pick-up my race packet before the crowds got thick. I arrived there at 9 AM as it opened and walked right up to pick up my packet. Then, I headed for the expo floor to check out the sponsors' booths. I tried a lot of the various types of PowerBars and equivalents. At the American Cancer Society table, I signed up and made a donation to run in memory of my bother, Eric. He passed away from a brain tumor and cancer exactly 5 years to the day of the marathon. They gave me a ribbon to wear on my back saying I was running in his memory and they also had me write his name on a "brick" (actually a square magnet) that they were displaying on a wall at the event. On Eric's I wrote - "Eric Potter—lost his fight 5 years ago today October 24. We miss you."

As the crowds started to build-up at the expo, I decided to head back home. On my way out of the convention center, I realized they had a line to test your chip - the timing device we were to wear on our shoe for accurate individual timing of the race. The line hadn't been there when I arrived. I got in it. Line-ups were what I had tried to avoid by being early - and here I was in one! And, of course, when I made my way to the front, my chip didn't work. So, another line – the line for people with chip problems - oh boy! At the counter, they promised me it would be programmed and ready to go by the race, but unfortunately there would be no way of testing prior to the Start. I headed home.

In addition to getting a good night sleep on Friday night, the training guide also suggested staying off your feet on Saturday. Well, I had just spent two hours wandering the expo and standing in lines. At home, my dog, Goliath, of course wanted to go for a walk! So we did. Then I put him in the car and headed to the airport to pick up my brother, Dean, who was flying in from Toronto to see the race. Thankfully at O'hare, Air Canada had a gate close to the main concourse, so I didn't have to walk very far. Dean's flight was late, so I took the opportunity to nap a bit in a chair by the gate.

When we got home, we snacked and then headed out for a *walk* on Michigan Ave. Hmm... that staying off my feet-thing just didn't seem to be happening. We wandered until dinnertime. I was struggling with what to eat before the race, but we settled on Houston's Restaurant where I could have a salad. Afterward, we walked home. Dean agreed to walk the dog while I organized my clothing and bag for the race the next day. I struggled with whether or not to wear some new shorts with pockets that I had just purchased, but in the end I opted to go with the "tried and true" - my black shorts and purple tank top. I pinned my number on and attached Eric's In-Memory ribbon. All set!

Heading to bed, I was a bit apprehensive about sleep. When I'm worried about getting to sleep it is usually even more difficult. Maybe it was all the activity of the day, but I was exhausted and went right to sleep and didn't wake up until my alarm went off at 5:15 AM the next morning.

Although the morning seemed to go well, I somehow ended up behind schedule and found myself, along with my brother, hurrying almost frantically to Grant Park for the race. I was to meet Gaby and Suku, my training friends from the Chicago Area Runner's Association (CARA), in the CARA tent at 7 AM. I arrived about 10 minutes after.

Following a few laps of the interior of the tent, I became very nervous that I wasn't going to find them. Unfortunately, at that point I had more important things to deal with – I hurried to the washroom line-up and scrambled through the flower garden to find a short line. That accomplished, I swung back to the tent for one more look for my friends. By now the loud speakers were announcing that the race would start in 4 and a half minutes. My heart sank. I tried to resign myself to the terrifying fact that I wasn't going to find them. I'd never run that kind of distance on my own, and as the race started, I felt sad and scared.

It was cold at the start, but I knew I would warm-up, so I handed Dean, my long sleeve T-shirt, leaving me with only a tank top and shorts for the race. Everyone around me was in sweatshirts and warmer clothing - I think it's my thick Canadian blood that seems to enable me to handle the cold when I run. I did, however, wear the nice little knit gloves (apparently meant to be disposable) given to us by the Marathon organizers in the race packet, and actually ended up wearing them right up to the end of the race.

The first mile was fine - we ran back the way I had just walked from home. Since I was late getting to the starting line after looking for Suku and Gaby, I jumped in somewhere around the 7 or 8 minute per mile mark, which needless to say, is much faster than I run. Knowing this, I tried to stay to the side and out of the way. But with the crowds, people weren't moving at any blistering speeds anyway. Clothes quickly became thrown along the route as people warmed-up.

The best thing about running with other people, and specifically my running buddies, is that we chat and the light conversation makes the time go by faster and it keeps our spirits high. The three of us are also very good at pacing one another. We run a very similar pace and together we stay steady and consistent. On my own, I was nervous about my pace and whether I would be lazy and tend to hold back for fear of over exerting myself. My first mile actually turned out to be a fairly quick one (for me given the distance) at 9:15 minutes. A bit shocked by this, I slowed right down for the next mile. And, as per usual, I needed to take a bathroom break at the first water stop. This brought mile two up to 10:45 minutes. Okay, I realized I needed to be able to find somewhere in between.

Whether it was nerves or perhaps I drank too much water before the start (I hadn't had anything for 2 hours prior to the gun as the book had suggested), I had to make another washroom stop just before mile 6. As I stood in line for the washroom, I watched the runners pass – and with them went any hope of finding my friends. Surely they were way ahead of me by now...

Back on the route, I ran with a gentleman from South Africa for a bit. It was his second marathon. He was hoping to have a 4 hour and 15 minute finish. His breathing seemed very labored and I wondered to myself if he'd pull it off. I lost him at the next water stop in the crowds.

Back on my own, I tried to look at the scenery, watch the cheering spectators that lined the street, read their signs, and listen and enjoy the bands that played along the route. I had heard that people who run marathons often miss all the sights and sounds they pass along the way because they are concentrating on getting through the race. I didn't want that to happen - I wanted the full experience (although I must admit, after the race I heard we had run through China town, but for the life of me, I don't remember seeing it). Then, I thought about my brother, Dean, who had planned to go out for breakfast after he saw me off at the Start. I pictured him warm and cozy, drinking coffee. He was then supposed to meet some of my girlfriends and Randy (the X-husband) back at my place around 9:30 AM. Together they planned to try to find me along the route and cheer me on. I pictured them meeting-up and opting to go out to eat rather than standing in the cold and attempting to find me in the crowds.

Just before mile seven, as I was reading the signs spectators were holding along the route, when I caught sight of a runner standing on the sidewalk. She was leaning on a light post and struggling with a small plastic bag. It was Gaby!! I cut across in front of the stream of runners to get over to the side of the street - I must have almost scared her to death when I ran up screaming "Oh, my god, I thought I'd never find you!!" I gave her a big hug. What were the chances with all those people that we would meet up?! Especially, since I was so far off my usual pace with my two unscheduled washroom stops.

As we started running I heard how, with the crowds, Gaby wasn't even able to find the CARA tent where we had agreed to meet before the race. She was feeling as lost as I was without our group. And, she was running slower than her usual pace too because she had been having some knee soreness that was slowing her down. She had stopped on the side of the road to take some Advil when I saw her. She said she had been watching for me at the washroom line-ups knowing that I normally have to make a few stops at the beginning of my runs.

All this time, I had assumed she and Suku were together. It had never even dawned on me that they were not able to find each other either.

Together, we fell into our usual stride – a nice consistent pace around 10 minutes/mile. She continued to have knee pain throughout the race and as we neared the halfway point my legs and knees began to ache too. We had trained along paths on the lakefront during our long runs, so seldom had we run such a long distance on roads and pavement. Luckily, Gaby had a Ziploc with 12 Advil. We rationed them between us for the rest of the race – high-5'ing each other at one point and calling ourselves "Team Advil".

At halfway, as we passed through the arch that had been built of balloons, our spirits were high. Gaby continued to have pain, but we were keeping a healthy pace. Chatting as we went we watched the scenery and people along the route. We suggested to each other that next year we would make signs and pay people to cheer and wave them at us along the way. We walked through most of the water stops and about every 5 miles took a break to stretch and take in the energy GU packets we had with us.

The sun was out and it remained cool the whole race. The streets were stilled lined with spectators even as we continued further into the south side of the city. Someone had told me to be sure to high-5 children along the route, which I did. It too helped to keep my spirits high. The runners had not thinned out much either, so we had to watch at all times for people in front and be prepared to dodge slower runners.

Just past the baseball stadium (White Sox), we attempted to take our last two Advil each. Both of us by this time were having various forms of leg, foot and knee problems. As I was taking the Advil out of the bag, I dropped one. Although I quickly bent down to pick it up, another runner behind me stepped on it! We continued running. I told Gaby I was desperate enough that I would have still taken it off the ground and swallowed it if he hadn't stepped on it. We laughed about being Advil-junkies and crawling around the ground for pills. Luckily, I had a couple of Tylenol with me that I used to supplement the Advil.

Just past mile 22, someone ran up beside me and said something about the race (I don't even remember what it was), I looked over and saw it was Randy! He jogged along with us for a while. Ahead, he pointed out Jayanthi and Debbie cheering and waving a sign (GO LEE), then Dean with a camera taking pictures. They said we looked surprisingly good for having run 20 miles - I corrected them that it was 22. What a great boost! We had been feeling like the only ones in the race without a support group - not true!

After we left them, we were feeling good - still sore, but breathing well, lots of energy and high spirits. Another extra boost came when we crossed over the Dan Ryan Expressway and started heading back north towards downtown and the Finish line. Until that point, it seemed like we had been going south for most of the race.

By now, we had about 5K left. The last few miles we had been trying to visualize where we would have been along our usual training route on the lake front if we had the same mileage to go. We knew we were close now and really started to pick it up – passing by water stops and working our way though the other runners we pushed toward the finish. By now, most people were really slowing down and getting around them became a real chore. I started calling out "excuse me" as we pushed our way past. Finding the energy to get through the crowds of runners that were now walking was not easy, so they either moved out of the way, or we pushed our way through.

The last few miles were surprisingly hilly for Chicago (for those of you not familiar with Chicago, we really don't have hills). We had 3 or 4 hills (more like overpasses) which we "attacked" and talked each other through. I could feel that Gaby had a lot more left in her than me - I encouraged her to go ahead. She stayed back with me for some time, then finally as the Finish came into view she went ahead. I was able to keep her in sight right up to the line. I pushed hard going in. I knew my goal of coming in under 4 and a half hours was really close. My watch said 4:29:02 - but I also knew I had started my watch a little late at the Start. Turns out it was about 32 seconds late. My actual chip time turned out to be 4:29:34 - just made it!

After we finished, the crowds were incredible getting through the shoot, past the food and out to the meeting area. At the designated location, we were able to meet up with Gaby's boyfriend, Dave. Then, we fought the crowds over toward the CARA tent where I had told Dean I would meet him after the race. And surprise! We ran into Suku on our way over there! He had a good race and ended up running with some friends he had driven with downtown from Evanston.

Arriving at the CARA tent, there was no sign of Dean and my friends. So, I stood as he and I had agreed under the "Fools" sign (somehow appropriate) waiting for him. About 2 minutes before they showed up, my stomach started to take a turn for the worse. I think it was all the Advil making me nauseous. I took the PowerBar out of my pocket and took a big bite to try to get something in my stomach. Dean and the group arrived at that point (they had walked back from the point where I had seen them at mile 22) - me with my mouth full and feeling sick to my stomach. After a few photos, we went in the tent and sat down. Sitting along with getting something on my stomach really helped.

After a good rest, we walked back to my place, about a mile, and then on to the restaurant for breakfast. And, boy, oh boy, did I eat!

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Now that the race is well behind me and I look back, the marathon didn't seemed to take the physical and mental effort that I thought it would – perhaps I didn't run it hard enough. In some ways I think the training was tougher to get through than the race. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't easy, but I think by going out slow and having so much energy left at the end, made it much more of a pleasant experience - like getting out for a run with a friend on a sunny and cool fall day. And, don't let me understate the importance of the "friend" either – without whose company, this would have been a much different story.

Now, the question has already been asked, "Will I do another?" ... Probably, but I think I'm going to take a bit of a rest first.

8.2 N. Sukumar, Evanston, IL

Ran the Chicago marathon on Sunday. A short report follows. I had three goals for this years marathon:

1. Enjoy the marathon
2. Run it pain-free, with a good final 10K
3. Run it in sub-4:15

I accomplished goals 1 and 2, but fell short of #3: I finished in 4:22 [4:21:59 to be precise:)], and did manage to break the 10:00min barrier. My first marathon [Chicago '97] was a very painful experience [4:35], and it took me nearly two months to recover from it— nagging shin splints and a wide-range of injuries caught-up with me on marathon day. Was keen that such an experience did not recur, and hence was over-cautious this time around. Just ran three times a week, and did only one 20-miler. Was undergoing treatment with a physical therapist for shin problems and also an adductor strain.

I trained with the CARA training group for the marathon [10:00 pace group], with long runs on Saturday in Irving Park. Ran with Gabrielle (Gaby) and Lee during the long runs—we all ran at or around the same pace and Gaby's penchant for talking kept the miles ticking:) We had decided to meet at the CARA tent at 7am on race day morning. Unfortunately, we missed each other at the CARA tent on race day. Gaby did not find the tent, whereas Lee and I did not cross paths in the tent—it was rather disappointing not to have met them for we had run the long runs together and exchanged many a e-mails leading upto the marathon.

I got a ride to the starting point (Buckingham fountain) from Jennifer (rather her parents), a member of the Evanston running club. We picked-up Jim from dowtown Evanston; it was the first marathon for both of them. Cathy [from ERC] too started with us, but she lost us in the very first mile itself. We started slow and easy, and kept at it for the most part. We lost Jennifer at the mile 3/4 water stop, and tried invain to spot her amidst the sea of runners. Jim and I started running on the sidewalk for a while (elevated), fancying our chances to see her. Finally, at or around the 9mile mark, we saw her. From thereon, we managed to stay together. We got through the halfway point in about 2:16. All of us were doing great, although Jennifer at times, seemed to indicate otherwise:) Made it to the 20mi mark, and I was still feeling good. We walked through all the water stops and hydrated well with water and gatorade. I had 4 Gu's at miles 5, 10, 15, and 20 (plus or minus a mile). There were no signs of any serious pain whatsoever: it felt unreal to have run 20mi and to still feel so good, which was in stark contrast to my first marathon experience. Some of the training runs with the CARA training group along the lakefront in Chicago have also been good—even picked-up the pace (8:30-9:00) in the final 2-3 miles of the run. I knew Jennifer would make it, and hence Jim and I moved ahead after the 20mi mark. We stayed together till the 23mi mark, before I moved on. Got calf cramps at around mile 24, but it did not impede my progress—I was too close to the finish. Took no breaks from mile 22 onwards and I managed to sprint the final 0.2mi to just break the 10:00min/mile barrier. With negative splits: 2:16 and 2:06 in the marathon, and a relatively pain-free race, I am not at all disappointed to have missed the sub-4:15 goal. This marathon was in many ways how I perceived an ideal first-marathon to be ... it just so happened to take place the second time around.

Today [28th], four days after the marathon, I feel pretty good. With only slight remnants of the cramps still present and no other soreness/pain, I am planning on heading out for a short run tomorrow. I look forward to training for an early Spring marathon (February/March) next year, and possibly incorporate strength training and speed-work into my regimen, so as to possibly shoot for a sub-4hr time. Any suggestions on marathons I should consider?

9 UPMC City of Pittsburgh Marathon [May 7, 2000]

9.1 N. Sukumar, Evanston, IL

I planned and registered for Pittsburgh marathon on only May 3, for I had an interview scheduled in the area on May 8. I wanted the run to be a nice and easy training run; had never run on hills [barring the odd ramp in the Chicago area], and long runs have been in the 10mile or so range for the past 2-3 months [did run a 20miler around 7 weeks ago]. Anyway, I was far from well-trained, and hence wanted to just finish the race without bonking; also had an interview the next day which was to be kept in mind. Here's my take on the marathon [pre- and post].

Got into Pitt. on Sat night at 8pm, and made it to Meadowlands [a suburb, which is around 20-25miles South West (I think) of downtown]. Driving from the airport I c'd see hills all around, and c'd very well imagine that the marathon route would not be all that pleasant. Got to the hotel at around 9pm, and asked the receptionist to find me a cab to downtown–planned to leave at 6am the next morning for I had to pick-up my race packet too. Settled down in my hotel room, and after 2 or 3 calls back and forth with the receptionist she finally managed to find me a cab [not many operate in that area I was told] at 10:30pm. Had pasta and marinara sauce + orange juice for dinner in my room—pretty tasty! Indulged myself with some bread + butter [throwing caution to the wind] too! I set out my race clothes + 4 Gus + some band-aids before hitting the bed. Fell asleep at around midnight only!

Up at 5am on Sunday morning, and I stepped out of the hotel at 6am sharp. The cab-driver had to be rudely awakened; did get to downtown (County building) in about 30minutes. I was way too early. Just a few odd runners c'd be seen, and most of the support staff were still in the process of setting-up things in the parking lot. After walking around for 20mins or so, I picked-up my race packet. Walked around a bit in downtown; picked up couple of Bagels from Bruegers [did not eat them]. Saw the Olympic qualifiers take-off, and thereafter did some stretches and took care of potty-related necessities before the start. The weather was turning hotter by the minute [or so I felt].

Race started at 8:50am. Was lined-up with the 4:45 pace group. In the early going, I stuck with the group [Daris was the leader], and we held a close to the reqd pace [10:50 or so] as I recall. Stopped and walked the water stops. Stuck to water the entire marathon, for I did not wan't to try out All Sport drinks [never had it during my training runs]. The pace was very easy and comfortable for the first 7-8miles—I tended to slow down a bit even on ramps/inclines [to me these were hills!]. Problems with my feet started to surface at around mile 9—blisters in both feet and my big toe nail was starting to bother me. The first really big hill at mile 12 leading into Oakland was my first must-walk [per force] experience. Lost Daris and the group at this point. Must have walked for a good 5-7mins to reach the top of the hill. Met with a guy from DC [Tracy] and we struck up a conversation; he too intended to walk most of the hills and much like me, was in no hurry to reach the finish:) We crossed the half-way point in 2:25 or so, and I was not feeling too good [esp. the blisters and toe nails]. I got the distinct feeling that "I should not be doing this and felt I did not belong here."

Nonetheless, I decided to plod along and see how things shape out. All hills [real-ones, ramps, grades] were a reason to walk from hereon —I got the sense that I c'd cramp real badly and bonk if I was adventurous on the grades. So, we stuck to the plan and just tried to go mile-to-mile. Reaching 16mi was a landmark of sorts. The volunteers did a great job, and I was pouring water on my head and also drinking water at every aid station and also sometimes in-between when spectators offered some. Had two and a half Gu's [felt a tad-queasy when having the third one] during the 'thon. It felt blazin' hot [max. temperature was in the upper 80s in the afternoon]. Got to the 20mi mark in 3:51 or so, and it was both, relief, but at the same time at that point six more miles seemed a long way to go. Anyway, I figured if I go slow enough and take enough walking breaks, I'll survive! So, I just did that. We walked all the "hills" [any stretch which was not table- top flat], and gently ambled along otherwise. By now, my shoes were rather soggy, and my blisters and toe-nail were ready to explode:) The mile 22 hill was just another walk, and the steep downhill thereafter was a welcome break—was cautiously slow on the downhill stretch too. Made it to mile 25 and for once I felt the marathon is a done deal! So, from there till the end I managed to jog without stopping, and crossed the finish line with a chip time of 5:09:25.

After the race, I was soon lying down on the grass with no intentions of getting-up soon. Was offered some oranges which I accepted [and also liked]. After 10mins I picked-up my medal and got the chip off my shoes. I picked-up some more oranges, and had some water. Removed my right shoe and in the process my calf stretched—it was met with a shooting pain that ran through my calves. I yelled out to a guy who was walking-by who called a medical staff. It was the most horrifying experience in terms of cramps I have ever had–lasted for a minute or so, and by the time the med. staff came-by I was OK. The blisters were pretty bad, but more than that my left big toe was hurting a lot [had turned blue-ish] which made walking all the more difficult. Other than my feet problems and the post-race cramps, I wasn't too bad:) Made my way to the massage tent—after a long 30-40min wait I did get a much-needed massage. The calf-cramps did not go away, but it was a lot more bearable. Got my photo taken, and by the time I wanted to leave it was already 3:30pm. I was to meet couple of folks from the company [Monday was the interview] for dinner at 5pm and hence had to get back. Luckily, I got a cab at the Hilton which took me back to Meadowlands—my cab fare to and fro from the hotel was a cool $120 for the day!

Well, I did make it for the dinner appt, and had a great interview the next day too [hobbling a bit for my toe nail was aching]. Was a busy Monday in the interviewing visit, for I was tied-up from 8:30am to 7pm. Took the 8:30pm flight out of Pitt and was in Chicago at 9:15pm and in Evanston by 10:15pm. All in all, a great weekend. I think I ran the marathon well [it was more than I bargained for though], and enjoyed [if pain can be cause for enjoyment] the trip to Pittsburgh in more ways than one. Today, couple of days after the marathon, other than pain in my big toe-nail, I feel pretty good— quads and calves held-up during the marathon. Hopefully, now, Chicago marathon will be a breeze and a sub-4hr goal won't look all that intimidating!

10 Pikes Peak Marathon [August 20, 2000]

10.1 Bill Wright, CO

Here's Bill's marathon story. See his running page for more on his running adventures.

11 Top of Utah Marathon [September 23, 2000]

11.1 Brad Merrill [Bib # 849] [Photos]

Marathon Day: short version: cold,snow ,wind,slow times ! Temp—34 deg., wind 5-6 mph, wind chill factor—22 deg., light snow falling!
Friday afternoon: Left the house in what should have been plenty of time to make the planned 4pm Olive Garden encounter (RW forums) in plenty of time. (Carl Tenpas & wife Joann from Grand Junction, CO, Barbara Hanan & friend Betty from Big Sky, MT, Becky Burnett and husband Rick from Farmington, UT, Kimberly Ziebarth from Layton, UT as well as myself and my wife Cyndee. We missed Dan Head from Washington state & Jackie Woods from Bountiful, UT.

Freeway is backed up northbound, get off and head east on I-80 to 700 East. Wind around until we get back on I-15 at 600 N. Pull into Olive Garden parking lot at 4:20. Have a great meal with great friends. Stop for batteries for the camera in Brigham City, Carl & Joann pass us while getting them and then we pass them back in Sardine Canyon. Meet up at packet pickup. We discover Dan has already picked his up.

Cyndee & I are staying with (in laws) in Logan. I sleep well. Am at Merlin Olsen Park at about 4:45, right by where we board the buses. I never do hook up with everybody. About 5:35 I finally give up looking for the others and get on a bus.

About 1/3 of the way up the canyon or so I wipe the fog off the window and see the snow. After disembarking I hit the porta potty line then go looking for Carl, Z, Barb. Look in Visitors Center (the starting line is at an elk preserve-Hardware Ranch) I don't see them, run down to starting line area to warm up. Get into an area where I think I will probably end up time wise. (boy, was I wrong! Different weather, maybe)

I was wearing some old sweat pants over my shorts & a sweatshirt over a coolmax t (short sleeve). The sweat pants lasted until 10k, the sweatshirt all the way.

My watch time was 5:14:12 runnercard time: 5:14:19.3

Splits:

1. 11:17
2. 10:18/21:35
3. 10:13/31:49
4. 10:03/41:53
5. 9:56/51:49
6. 10:03/1:01:53 (10K 1:04.xx)
7. 11:26/1:13:19 (took a minute to get those sweats off)
8. 10:26/1:23:45
9. 9:55/1:33:41
10. 11:20/1:45:01
11. 10:52/1:55:53
12. 12:38/2:08:32 (first potty stop at beginning of this mile, at this point I lost Carl.)
13. 10:27/2:18:59 (13.1 2:20.xx)
14. 10:31/2:29:30
15. 11:19/2:40:50
16. 11:32/2:52:22
17. 12:05/3:04:27
18. 14:06/3:18:34 (I think this is where I stopped to remove some sand grains/rocks from my shoe. Also the last time I saw Z until after I finished.)
19. 15:35/3:34:10
20. 13:10/3:47:21 (I still felt good about making 4:30 or at least sub 5 at this point)
21. 15:52/4:03:14 (had to administer some Vaseline to some chafing at beginning of this mile & potty stop)
22. 15:38/4:18:52 (began walking much more)
23. 13:58/4:32:51
24. 13:56/4:46:47 My brother in law Brian ran with me just after the mile marker here (24) until after we passed the 26 mile marker. It sure helped.

25. 12:58/4:59:45

26. 12:20/5:12:06

27. 26.2 2:06/5:14:12

What a feeling! I don't know how to describe it except as a combination of euphoria and relief. Especially given the conditions. Cold weather, light snow, light breeze.

My father in law & his brother came around the corner in the last mile and high 5 ed me, lots of encouragement from the spectators, especially given conditions. My dad made it up, my in laws were there and a running friend who was volunteering got to give me my medal. COOL!

Today (Mon) & even yesterday (Sun), I was feeling pretty good. Not much in the way of soreness - except for the chafing. Thanks everybody for sharing my first with me.

See you on THE ROAD AHEAD!

12 LaSalle Banks Chicago Marathon [October 22, 2000]

12.1 N. Sukumar [Bib # 16194], Princeton, NJ [Photos]

Just got-in yesterday evening from Chicago, after the marathon on Sunday. A bit of marathon-history: this was my fourth marathon. Ran Chicago in 97 and 99, and also Pittsburgh in May of this year. Trained well for 1997 with two 20 milers but had a miserable race (4:35) with lots of aches and pains on race day. Did minimal training (3 days/week) and the novice program with one 20 miler in 1999 and I had a blast: ran a comfortable 4:22 with lots of walking breaks and did a 57min final 10K without even being close to the "wall". I ran Pittsburgh this year as a training run for I had not trained for it (5:09). It was unduly hot and hilly but I survived with minimal damage—lost my toenail, but was back on the road within 4-5 days. At Chicago this year, I was for the first time shooting for a time goal (sub-4hr). Followed a modification of Hal Higdon's Intermediate I program: ran two 20 milers and added speed-work on Wednesdays. Ran the Philly half in Sept. in 1:53 and felt pretty good at the end, and hence felt a sub-4 at Chicago was doable. Now that the race is over, to summarize my marathon experience: it was a tale of two very different halves; I managed to finish, but it was not pretty:-)

Got into Chicago on Friday night; stayed at the Inter-Continental hotel on Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago. Picked up my race packet at the expo the same night. Met some folks from the virtual training (Hal Higdon's program) group at Dave and Buster's on Clark Street for dinner at 7:30pm. On Saturday, I got a massage in the morning and then caught up with couple of friends from Evanston for lunch in downtown. Stayed indoors thereafter, with pasta dinner at the hotel itself—could not each much (too much cheese).

Moving to race-day. I started with the 4:00hour pace group (per my goal). Kelly and another guy were the pace leaders. We hit the start line in about 9 minutes (was about 5-10 seconds behind the pace leaders). I crossed the first mile in 9:07, and the second in around 9:50. Back on track with a 8:30 or so in mile 3. From thereon, I just stayed at a comfortable 100m or so behind the pace leaders. I was hitting the mile markers between 9:00-9:10 on a consistent basis by running within myself. Lost the pace group leaders from time to time, but I did not wan't to change the pace/strategy for I was right on pace (averaging 9:04). Was running alone for the most part, and the pace seemed comfortable enough to even chat. Problems surfaced at around mile 7 or so when my calves began to feel a bit uncomfortable. They were a tad tight even on Saturday when I got a massage (so the therapist indicated). Anyway, I thought it would pass. I hydrated very well at all stops (water/gatorade), with at least 2-3 cups. Jogged through all the water stops. Had a Gu at mile 4.75 and then one at mile 9. At the mile 9 stop, I dropped two of my Gu's, which left me with only one for rest of the way. From mile 10-13, my calves and quads started to act-up, and they were beginning to make their presence felt. I crossed the half-way point right on target: 1:58:36.

Miles 14 and 15 were about the same pace, and by that time it was decision-time. My calves and quads were hurting a lot and also cramping badly (new territory). I c'd have slowed down and aimed for a slower time, but I thought I should get to mile 20 on pace or thereabouts to give myself some semblance of a shot at a sub-4hr time. At that point a 4:05 or a 4:15 did not make much difference, so I decided to get to the 20mi mark and then take a decision one way or the other. When I started, I had a three hour time-goal at 20 miles. It was not going to be easy. I somehow stayed on track till mile 18 (2:41), and then I began to lose it:-) Had a little of my last Gu at that point. Slowed down (per force) over the next 2 miles to be at 3:03:30 at mile 20. From mile 15 to mile 20, I can only remember entering Chinatown (all else is a blur). I was a mess at that point: calves/quad were very sore, cramping, and the pain seemed unbearable. I quit any time goal, and planned on just finishing.

Miles 21-24 were agonizing to say the least. It was the first time in a marathon when I truly felt I would not finish. I did not stop or walk at all for I felt I would have not been able to re-start. I managed to stay on my feet, and jogged through all the stops eagerly looked forward to the next mile marker. It appeared as though the mile markers were placed more than a mile apart:-) At mile 23 or so I doused myself with lots of water and totally drenched my shoes. It was not a wise decision. At 4:00 hours I was at about mile 24.5 and I felt I w'd definitely finish and that too with possibly a PR. The ramps on mile 25 and 26 were unduly harsh on my calves/quads and I was just glad when I hit mile 26 with the balloons in sight. Tried to go a tad faster during the final 0.2 miles and made it to the finish line. Finish time was: 4:19:05—a PR (by only 3 minutes) but it was not fun! This was my first marathon where I did not walk or stop. Had to sit in the photo-line for I c'd not stand, and after removing my shoes I realized I had a few calluses with one which had a blister around it (blood had collected). I walked back to the Inter-Continental from the finish area. A mere 1.25-1.5 miles at most: it took me one hour to get back to my hotel.

Got back to Princeton yesterday evening, and got a massage last night. Even today my quads and calves are hurting/cramping and I can't bend my feet while walking. In retrospect, I wonder how I survived those final 10+ miles on Sunday. Thus far, my training and the results for a marathon have not been in-sink. I hope to correct that sometime in the near future. Had met with a podiatrist in September who indicated I need orthotics for arch support (not very pronounced): he mentiond it might get rid of the calluses/blisters and also the tightness I feel during the early part of my runs. Will look into it. Anyway, I am not thinking of running at this point; I would just like to walk without any pain sometime soon:-) Truly, the marathon is a humbling experience.

13 Philadelphia Marathon [November 19, 2000]

13.1 N. Sukumar [Bib # 5868], Princeton, NJ

I just got back from Philly a few hours ago after the marathon. To sum-up my Philly marathon experience in one word—"Awesome!" Drove to Philly on Saturday afternoon, and after picking-up Ellen, a friend, at the Amtrak station, we visited the race expo. I stayed at the Club Quarters in downtown Philly: a pretty good hotel for 1 person ($80-$100/night) if one is not too picky about room size. I was on a mega-hydration and potassium-intake program to combat cramps that plagued me in Chicago. Had 2 bananas/day and orange juice daily for the past 2 weeks. Also had at least a glass of gatorade per day on average. On Friday, I increased the frequency of water-consumption, and on Saturday I went overboard:) On Saturday., I had three bananas, 3 20oz bottles of gatorade, about 60oz or more of water, and a glass of water mixed with a carbohydrate supplement (Carbo Fuel, which was suggested by Ellen) at night. Had a fairly good pasta dinner in the hotel itself; tasty but the proportion was small and hence I added a bagel to the mix. Crashed at 10pm and woke-up at 1:30am and could not buy sleep thereafter. Had a banana, a bagel, and a glass of the carbo-supplement mixed with water at 5:45am, and then headed to the Art Museum at 7:00am.

The race started at 8:30am. Plan was to stick to a 9:30 or so average pace for the first half with a 2:05 or so first-half and hoped to finish in the 4:10-4:20 range. I just ran comfortably and the clocks tended to ring-in 9:15-9:45 minutes per mile for the most part, so I just went with the flow. Ran through the water stops and had 2-3 cups of water/gatorade at each. Couple of early mistakes. Did not visit the porta-potty just before the start, and hence had to relieve myself at mile 2 or so. I also got rid of my gloves at around mile 8—was not a wise-decision for the temperature hovered in the mid- to late-30's and was visibly chilly along the river. Donned a poncho (from Chicago marathon 2000) for the first 2 miles and from thereon went with a long-sleeved T-shirt (over my singlet) and shorts. Had six Gus on-hand; ended-up having four and a half at mile 5, mile 10, mile 15, mile 20, and mile 23.

Was at the half-way point at 2:03:53 and was feeling pretty good. In and around mile 14 was the finish area; the route from mile 14 to the finish was an out-and-back along the Schuykill river. Told myself not to speed-up. Mile 15 to Mile 20 was for the most part downhill, and in fact I slowed down. The fear of quad tightening and/or cramps (Chicago nightmare) was still very much part of the equation, and I did not wan't to take any chances for the way back was going to be uphill. Was careful and ran comfortably until mile 20, which brought us to Manayunk. Only problem that cropped-up was at mile 18 when my feet began to hurt. A small hill greeted us at Manayunk, and we re-traced out route. It was slightly uphill for the most part. I felt fine, but my legs began to feel like "lead" and hence my easy pace was now more like 10:15-10:30. At no point did I feel confident that I c'd speed-up without possibly cramping. Tried to speed-up a little during mile 26 (down to 10:00 probably), and finished the race smiling. Chip time was: 4:16:31 (gun time was 4:18:37), which was a PR (ran 4:19:05 in Chicago 2000). Even in my wildest dreams I could not have imagined feeling so good at the end, and more importantly, not be confronted with any serious pain during the race itself. I guess I needed some luck, and I got some and more.

Since it would be sacrilegious to not mention my mile splits, here they are:
9:21 (01), 9:31 (02), 9:45 (03), 9:05 (04), 9:43 (05), 8:49 (06), 9:09 (07), 9:28 (08), 9:09 (09), 9:55 (10), 9:34 (11), 9:30 (12), 9:37 (13), 8:38 (14), 9:46 (15), 9:43 (16), 10:00 (17), 10:02 (18), 10:29 (19), 10:29 (20), 10:21 (21), 10:24 (22), 10:22 (23), 10:19 (24), 10:17 (25), 12:15 (26.2)

After the race, I was immediately able to go to the gear-check and change into fresh clothes and shoes. No major calf or quad problems. Soreness is there, but I can walk properly:) Only damage was two blisters (next to both my big toes—usual sore-spot), and feet were aching. Took my finisher photo after I changed, and then after some refreshments, I walked back to the hotel. Picked-up my car, and made it back to Princeton in about an hour. Under the circumstances, I could not have asked for a better marathon-experience in Philly.

14 California International Marathon [December 3, 2000]

14.1 N. Sukumar [Bib # 3890], Princeton, NJ

I spent Thursday-Sunday at UC Davis and Sacramento before getting back this (Monday) morning via an overnight flight from SF. Spent Thursday and Friday at Davis, and then on Saturday I decided to check out the marathon expo at Hotel DoubleTree. The weather forecast was great for Sunday (35-55 deg.). Well, so I decided to register for the marathon. Crazy? Most definitely:-) After the Philly marathon on November

19th, I ran twice: 8miles last Sunday and 3miles on Friday morning (December 1) in Davis. Legs still felt rather fatigued, and I c'd not even try to go fast. Oh, Well, I just decided to run it. I'll skip the pre-race details and get to the race itself.

Race started in Folsom (North East of Sacramento) and the point-to-point route takes you to downtown Sacramento with the finish at the capital building. Drove to the marathon hotel at 4:30am; a 20mi or so ride from Davis. It was dark and foggy with very little visibility and I was not entirely sure when and where the exit (Business 80) would come about (missed it on Saturday). Made it to the hotel in one piece which was a triumph in itself. Took a bus from there to Folsom dam at around 5:30am. Weather was great (early 40's all the way and very foggy). Race started at 7am. After the first mile (9:50; took 25 seconds to get to the start), I somehow was not sure if this marathon was a good idea and if I c'd do it. Legs did not feel loose. Period. Well, I decided to take it mile-by-mile. It's a rolling course (upto the half-way point), so I just took it easy on the uphills and pushed a bit on the downhill. As luck may have it, I was clocking 9:22-9:26 for all the miles upto the mid-way point by sticking to my plan. Had Gu at miles 5, 10, 15 and 20; had couple of cups of All Sport early-on but stayed-away from it (am gatorade-inclined) after mile 10. Got to mile 10 in 1:33:45 and to the half-way point in 2:02:53. The half marathon was a landmark of sorts. Managed to stay on-pace till mile 18 or so (9:25 or so), and then the pace tended to slow down (10-10:30). Miles 18-21 were a tad hard for I was beginning to eagerly look forward to the next mile marker. No major problems (like cramps); aching feet and a blister or two seemed to be all I had to deal with. Got to mile 20 in 3:11:05 and I wanted to shoot for a sub-4:15 which w'd be a PR too. After mile 22, I suddenly felt a lot better—never felt this good in even past marathons! Got to mile 23 in 3:42:29 and felt a sub-4:15 was on the cards as long as I did not start hitting 11min miles. Made it to mile 25 in 4:03:19 without doing anything foolish, and then hit on the gas! Tried picking off folks over the last 1.2miles and did pass many a runners: felt as though I was running a 7min pace but it was just 9:30! With the finish in sight and about 50m to go, I saw 4:14:20 and knew I w'd make it. Finished the race in 4:14:42 which was a PR too (ran 4:16:25 in Philly two weeks ago), and did achieve my "goal during the race." I was one happy dude! My knees and feet (one blister too) were hurting when going down stairs (no calf/quad problems at all) but I could at least walk without any problems which was great in itself.

Took some after-race snaps, changed, had some refreshments, and took the bus back to the hotel. Had lunch at Olive Garden, before heading to the airport at 3pm. Dropped off the car, and took a 6pm flight to SF and then one at 10pm from SF to Newark. Managed to get 2-3 hours sleep on the flight (had three seats to myself); got into Newark at 6:30am and made it to work at around 10am this morning. Barring my sore knees and aching feet, I am surprised that I feel this good today. A pretty-good weekend I would say. However, two marathons two weeks apart, after running Chicago a month before the first, is not something I wan't to repeat anytime soon. For that matter, I'll stay away from running a marathon for awhile, for I'd like to run one after being well-rested and doing the requisite 3-4 months training for the same. W'd like to get faster at shorter distances: a sub-1:45 half-marathon is one of my goals for 2001. Couple of runners I met suggested the half-marathon in SF in Jan 2001; might consider it for I'll be in that area.

15 Acknowledgments

This compilation of marathon reports was made possible through the contribution of marathon reports from many a runners. Their help towards this end is gratefully acknowledged.