

COMMUNITY

I did it! I completed all 31 miles of my first-ever 50K in 9 hours and 50 minutes. My secret goal was to finish under 10, so I'm very happy I accomplished that. The day before the race I had a lot of anxiety about whether or not I was going to be able to finish and if it would be a miserable and painful experience. I didn't want to let people down, especially my staff because everyone has been so supportive. There were a lot of text messages going back and forth the day before between Matt, Erick and me. I owe a great deal to Matt especially, who made sure I had everything I needed on race day, including things I hadn't thought of, like Band-Aids, extra socks and homemade blueberry pie for my drop bag. He showed me how to program my GPS watch so I could manage my pace. Logistically, I was set. It was all up to me.

We arrived at Malibu Creek State Park early Saturday morning. It was 38 degrees and still dark outside. As I was putting on my bib, I looked around and thought to myself, "I have no business being here." The athleticism around me – tree trunk legs, zero body fat, fancy gear. There was a man with a shirt that said "Quitting is A Choice." These were true athletes, and I was utterly intimidated - plus I was cold.

I started feeling more focused and even excited when we got to the start. At the beginning, I had to keep up a certain pace since it was a crowded group and the trail was narrow. I didn't want to be the bottleneck. At mile two I arrived at a creek crossing, which we'd been advised to just run through rather than cross on the rocks. I couldn't imagine going 29 more miles with wet shoes, so I decided to risk a rock crossing. I slipped and almost fell in, but was rescued by a fellow racer. It was a lighthearted moment that ended up epitomizing the comradery and support of the rest of the race.

The next five miles were really tough and the steepest part of the trail. There were a lot of boulders, and it was easy to slip due to lack of traction. I'd been dreading this section and started it with some anxiety. All I could think about was the first aid station at the top and that I needed to make it there. Along the way, my anxiety lifted. I'm not sure if it was because the steepness wasn't as difficult as I had remembered or because I felt strong. It might have been the support I felt around me. I realized that I was going to finish. I may not have a time I like, and I certainly won't break any records, but I knew I would cross that finish line. From that point on the race simply became fun.

One of the greatest things I felt was the support of the community throughout the race. I felt like my Guidance Center family was running with me. I had my phone with me and during the entire race it kept beeping because people were sending me text messages. I could hear the beeping, and I knew they were words of encouragement. That was so symbolic to me. What an amazing community we have!

And the aid stations were truly remarkable. The volunteers handed you food, refilled your water bottles, put ice inside your baseball hat to keep you cool, made sure you had enough salt, and more. There was one volunteer in particular whose name I wish I knew. It was at the 20 mile aid station where we'd left our drop bags, and my entire focus was on the blueberry pie I had stashed in there. I knew I had pie all over my face. Blueberry juice was dripping down my arms. I was wrestling with my hydration vest and dropped my jacket, but was not about to put down that pie. A young man came up to me and, without a word and with a smile on his face, he took my vest and filled my water bottles. He put the jackets in my drop bag, dressed me back in my vest, even buckled and tightened the straps for me. He wiped the pie off my face, patted me on the head and sent me on my way. Who takes care of a stranger like that? I discovered that the ultra-running community is a pretty wonderful one.

I loved that regardless of how skilled you were as a runner, every time someone passed you, they shouted words of encouragement. "Awesome job!" "Keep going!" "Great job!" "Are you doing okay?"

And I got into it too! It was such a positive, uplifting experience. Towards the end, I was tired and heading back down that very steep section toward the finish line, which turned out to be the hardest part of the race for me. People running the 100K were flying past me toward the end, but every one of them said “Good job! Keep going!” There was no competition, no shaming. It was a remarkable group of people.

Nearing the end, I could hear the finish line but couldn’t see it yet. The volunteers told me it was right around the corner. As I turned that corner, I started crying. I can’t define exactly what I was feeling, but there were certainly tears. Then I heard my name being called and saw Matt at the finish line. The tears disappeared and I was filled with such a sense of joy and accomplishment. All I could think was, I did it. I really did it. Within minutes, Cyndi came in behind me (of course she’d run 50 MILES not kilometers) and Erick soon after that. We’d all completed our journeys and got to savor the experience together.

One of the biggest takeaways for me was how much fun I’d had. I knew I’d feel a great sense of accomplishment at the end, but I frankly expected much of the race itself to be awful. I can honestly say it was hard, but I had fun the entire time. It was a life-changing sort of day. I credit a large part of that to the people I had around me.

Wouldn’t it be great if we could create that same culture of support in our larger communities? What kind of world would it be if we wiped the pie off a stranger’s face, made sure people had Band-Aids and all said “Great job” or asked “Are you doing okay?” It reminds me very much of the kind of culture and community we create at The Guidance Center. Our staff, volunteers and supporters all have a shared sense of mission and believe we are all stronger as we come together. We support each other professionally, personally, and more importantly, we support our clients. They may be having a harder time making it down that steep and rocky hill, but they can have real success when they get there. The connectedness within the runner community is a lovely parallel to The Guidance Center’s culture. It’s the kind of community we strive to create around us.

I thank you all for following me on this journey and for your words of encouragement and support. I give a special thank you to my Guidance Center family and my friends. Thank you to my sons Lucas and Zach, who tolerated all my training hours and preoccupation with running. Thank you to the very inspiring Cyndi, who made us believe we were capable of completing this race. And great thanks to Matt and Erick for being with me every step of the way.

Until the next race!



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To read my journey leading up to race day, visit our website here.

