

OKLAHOMA CITY MARATHON – April 27, 2008

At 6:20 a.m. we huddled together in the drizzling rain and 49 degree temps amongst a group of thousands near the start wearing our trash bags and keeping close for warmth. As if there weren't enough doubts about the race in our heads already, unexpectedly we hear a very heavy woman standing next to us comment: "This is the marathon WALKERS side. The marathon RUNNERS side is "way over there" (she points across thousand of bodies packed together like cattle in a corral waiting to be slaughtered.) Great we thought, race starts in about 5 minutes. Then Lori and Mark reminded us that it didn't matter how far back we were anyway since our chip time started when we actually crossed the mat. Whew! What a relief... Momentarily they announce that the "Marathon Wheelchair" race would start in less than 2 minutes. Suddenly next to us, we hear "Let him through!" and this guy in his racing wheelchair is desperately trying to make it to the start line in time for what is now about a 60 seconds to the start.

I was ready for this marathon, ready to test out my "RUDY" in all caps, which I had decided to go with on my bib rather than the long and complicated "Melissa" that I used at WR. The plan for the race was to try to stay together since Mark, Marina, Lori, Kevin and I all run about the same pace. We never saw Kevin at the start (although we all had a pre-race breakfast together at the "Travel-Lodge"). The 4 of us succeeded in keeping to our plan for the first several miles. Lori was feeling good so she kept a steady pace from the start which was too much for the rest of us to keep up with. (All her speed work in training was definitely paying off, starting early on.) Marina was suddenly no longer with us but Mark and I continued on. The last time I saw Mark was mile 8 and gave up trying to find him after a few miles. I went on and ran my own race for a bit hoping that Mark and Marina would sync up. Soon I had caught up to Lori and we were both ecstatic to have a partner to run with. To this point, the rain had held out and we only had cloudy skies, cool temps and some strong winds to contend with.

For the race I always like to bring my own beverage and gel to ensure I don't have a bad experience with an unfamiliar item given out at the water stops. Daveed (my wonderful husband and only fan in my fan club) was kind enough to be my camel (now, "our camel") and ride the marathon course on his bicycle, just like he did at White Rock. Every time I needed a drink or encouragement, Daveed was there. He would ride next to us for a while then jaunt up the rode to a turn, where we'd see his familiar bright yellow rain jacket and black and white Fuji parked from the distance and ready to scurry out as we approached. He carried our Cytomax bottles from the start and juggled them on his bike as Lori and I needed a drink. If I needed to shed my rain jacket or gloves, Daveed would swoop in and take it from me so that I wouldn't have to have it flopping around from the Race Ready pockets in back. All the while he was taking photos and video of Lori and I running while keeping up along side us as well as capturing some of the unique sights along the course: the 70+ year old runner that passed us effortlessly, the blind runner attached to his guide by a bungee cord, the woman who ran in memory of a loved one with their picture on her back.

Side note: I was a little concerned about how Daveed would feel about riding the course with me as the previous day he had ridden his bicycle from Flower Mound, TX to Marietta, OK. (This is not a typo.) We synced up our times and cross points so that I would pick him up in route to OKC on Saturday. With a periodic text message stating his location, my worries soon subsided. Our timing couldn't have been more perfect and I arrived at the gas station where he waited within 5-10 minutes of arriving after his 120 mile jaunt. After toweling off with Handy-Wipes and a jug of spring water, we were on our way to OKC within minutes.

At mile 8 or so, Lori and I were in our zone and plugging along. Suddenly a tall (hot) guy wearing a tight white Under Armour shirt and do-rag on his head leaned in and said to me in a country voice, "Can you get that left sock pulled up at all? You have worn the skin right off the back." I looked down (not in any pain) and noticed my heel was bloody. I thanked the guy profusely and in a second he was gone. So I pulled off the road and fiddled with my sock a bit. I darted back out to catch up with Lori and got back into my zone. Hot sock guy: Pit stop #1.

Around mile 10 or 11, Kevin caught up with us and we ran merrily together enjoying each other's company around Lake Hefner and for most of the race after that. With the cooler temps and intake of fluids, nature began to call. Lori and I agreed to make a pit stop as long as we could find 2 empty port-a-pots together. After a couple of miles, we crossed the Half mats and there they were. Nature calls: Pit stop #2.

At this point we were getting close to mile 14. I had commented to Lori that "still" none of the spectators had "said my name" like they said hers at White Rock. I was really beginning to take this personally. As we continued on, we pass a guy and a girl walking the opposite direction from us. The crowd support at this race had been fabulous thus far except for no one here seemed to cheer for people using their names printed on their bibs. Within a few minutes of us finishing our conversation, the girl walking past us says, "Good job, Rudy" in a very quiet voice. She had just said my NAME! Once I heard that, I almost turned back to give her a big hug! I was so happy to hear my name and also to get back at Lori for having every single person at White Rock scream her name (and not mine.)

Kevin Brosi kept us (and many others) entertained for miles as usual, pointing out the pace signs along the lake that said we were on track for a 3:30 marathon. (ha!) By mile 16, the temps had warmed up tremendously and the sun had been shining for some time. At this time, I asked Kevin if he was planning on running a full marathon (again) in a trash bag. As Kevin realized he was still wearing a black Hefty in the sunny 60 degree temps, he decided to peel it off. He ran with bag wadded up in hand for about another mile until Daveed asked him if he planned on reusing his trash bag, and then kindly disposed of the bag for Kevin.

Lori was feeling really good the entire day and never really had any delays. She and Kevin were on a roll. I, on another note, started feeling a little sluggish and dropped back

a bit around mile 20 or 21. Just when I thought I would shed my long sleeve top, I started to get chills and slight stomach cramps. I quickly realized I had not drank more than 1 water stop cup of water throughout the entire race—I had only consumed my Cytomax off and on that I had brought along with Hammer Gel. Realizing I was feeling dehydrated and not so well, I continued to run a slower pace and walked through the next several water stops as I gulped water at each. Daveed knew something was up and asked how I was feeling. I mumbled that I was chilled and dehydrated but he knew I knew what to do. He gave me a few words of encouragement and told me “to keep digging, you are almost there.” He stayed just ahead of me to keep me motivated. Occasionally he would drop back to make sure I was OK, neither of us saying a word, but knowing that just his presence was a comfort to me. As I approached a water stop, around mile 22 or 23, a volunteer was saying “Shoulders back, relax your upper body and keep up the stride.” She must have been reading my body language because that is what I needed to hear but my mind would not come up with on its own.

Soon my dehydration symptoms subsided and I started to feel better. This was about mile 23 and uphill from what I remember and the point when I started talking to myself (silently, of course.) As we approached downtown, the crowd support carried me in. An older gentleman spectator standing in the middle of the road (I was the only one approaching) looked straight at me and said, “You are looking strong, you can do this.” And then a woman yelled “You can see the finish line from here!” That was all I needed. They were talking to ME! Soon I heard loud music and cheering and, at this time, Daveed disappeared. He knew I had it at this point and I knew he was sprinting to the finish to find his place on the side lines to watch me finish.

As I get closer and closer to the finish, I hear a “Go Melissa!” and wondered who this might have been as it could not have been a stranger since I had strategically placed RUDY on my bib. So as I sprint (in my mind) to the finish, I wonder who this was. Realistically I was probably running the same pace I had been but it just felt like a “sprint” near the end. (Later I find out it was Tracy Barnes, a fellow Strider, cheering from the sidelines as he had already finished his Half marathon and PR.)

I see the finish and the clock time right around 4:06. I am so happy to cross the finish and think to myself I am going to make it under 4:08. Someone hands me a mylar blanket as I wonder where my hubby is and stagger over to the chip removers. Here you are supposed to balance yourself on one leg (right...!) as you LIFT the other and hold it still for them to remove your chip that is firmly attached to your shoe. Not an easy task after running 26.2 miles and your quads screaming at you, but I did it. So I stagger forward a bit more where I see Marathon Maniac Brosi standing just past the chip folks wearing his mylar blanket. (This was his 85th marathon.) I slap him a High Five and we exchange a few congratulatory words and the “have you seen so and so, or so and so...?” All I want at this point is water. Water. I am on a mission to find it when I hear this kind woman saying to me “Don’t forget your medal!” So I take all the energy I can muster to detour my legs over into her direction where she kindly places the medal around my neck and congratulates me. I am still dazed and finally find water and a banana which I am anxiously waiting to devour. For some reason I picked up two bottles of water and two

bananas. I am having a hard time peeling the one banana that I cannot wait to shove into my mouth while trying to keep my mylar blanket from flying away and hanging on to the other banana and 2 bottles of water. (My mind wasn't thinking but my hands were and I soon realize the extra bottle of water and banana were meant for my camel.) As I am scarfing down a banana, I soon see Lori, Jerone, Kevin, Lucy and Daveed on his Fuji all in a cluster chatting and waiting for the rest of our group.

I soon forgot what misery I was in just 30-40 minutes before this moment as I made my way over to the group. Lori and I were babbling about our times, aches, pains, etc. and were probably a sight for those watching. Daveed gives me a long, lingering, sweaty hug and kiss. Kevin, Lori and I pose for a few photos by Lucy Brosi and Daveed then watch Kevin chat with his numerous Maniac friends that finished their umpteenth marathons. We soon find Marina staggering in and guide her over to our group. Our moments of agony were soon all forgotten as we all chat, munch on (devour) post-race fuel and pose for more photo ops. My actual chip time was 4:04:05 –well under the 4:08 that I had expected to finish in based on my last 8 miles. After our pasta dinner just the night before, Daveed was suggesting to me that I shoot for 4:00. I told him this was definitely “not a realistic goal—for a runner to take 18 minutes off of their marathon time.” Truth be known, Lori took at least 20 minutes off of her best time and I took almost 14 minutes off of my previous time. So with just 4 minutes over the 4 hour mark which included 2 pit stops and walking several water stops, the challenge is on...