

Good Morning!

5 Minutes - the time it takes for a quick shower, the time it takes my top athletes to run a mile, the time it takes for me to brew a good pot of coffee. What is so important about 5 minutes? I will tell you.

This past weekend I went to Chicago along with several members of TrainingGoals.com to run the Chicago Marathon. Several months ago the race organization contacted me about coming back to the race this year to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of my victory of the 1988 Chicago Marathon. I thought it would be a good idea not only to attend the race but to run the race in order to reminisce and to pull up long ago memories. I figured it would be good for me to get back in touch with what it feels like to run a marathon. It might make me a better coach to be back in touch with the Mental Tango one goes through during the race. You know, the right side of the brain telling you "come on girl you can do this, keep going, you are wonderful" and then the left side screaming "quit, quit, just stop, walk, whose idea was this anyway?"

Back in May I started to mentally and physically gearing for running the marathon this year. I was also starting to get excited about the race and even proclaimed on the Chicago Website blog that my goal was to run a 3:20 marathon. Hmm..."what was I thinking?"

However, in mid July a sore Achilles tendon and a chronically sore back kept me from training much more than a few miles at a time. Although I continued to swim, hike, take an occasional bike ride or spin class I did manage to generally stay fit. By this time, however, I had talked myself out of running the Marathon.

Then, after two months away from running and several visits to the Acupuncturist I started to feel some relief from my aches and pains. The little niggles in the back of my head started to talk about running the Marathon anyway. So the month before the marathon I ran a 16 mile Trail run and the next weekend a 2.5 hour Endurance Run and mentally proclaimed that I would toe the line in Chicago and run the race.

5 minutes...remember that number? Here is the point where I explain why 5 minutes was seemingly so important. You see, the timing chip, the little device that you wear in your shoe to electronically time your race, that I was given to wear was actually a timing chip for the Elite starting time. The top 50 runners from all over the world who were vying for the \$450,000 in prize money and the victor's laurel were to start the race 5 minutes before the other 45,000 runners. The race organizers had given me a timing chip that would be activated at 7:55am. My ego would have loved to start the race with the Elite, however my legs would not tolerate such a thing so I held back and started the race with the masses at 8:00am – 5 minutes later.

By this time I had made the decision to shoot for a 3:40:00 marathon pace. This would, in my mind, be respectful and achievable. How funny... 20 years ago I was shooting for a sub 2:30 marathon. Who would have thought that 20 years later a sub 3:40 marathon would elicit the same feelings of anxiety, hope and anticipation?

Before the start my husband Bud and I talked about him meeting me at the 13 mile mark with an extra gel. The outfit I was wearing did not have any pockets for me to carry a Gel so Bud was going to meet me with an extra one. I had one to carry that I would eat at 6 miles and I did not want to be burdened with carrying more than that. The plan also included the option of me dropping out of the race at 13 miles if my back or Achilles started talking back and or not cooperating. I had options.

The race temperature at the start was 68 degrees which is warm for marathoning purposes. So I made a mental note to drink water at every water stop which backfired as I needed to make a visit to the rest room at mile 8. Not to worry, I was 5 minutes ahead of 3:40 pace when I popped into the restroom.

As I began to approach mile 13 I had already talked myself out of finishing the race. I was going to stop. My left brain was speaking louder than the soothing thoughts of my right brain. My legs were stiff, it was hot, my back was starting to hurt but I was still on a sub 3:40 pace. As I passed under the 13.1 mile marker I looked around for Bud. My race was to be over. I was okay with it. But then I saw Bud standing alongside the road with a huge smile on his face, he was excited to see me and dog-gone-it I could not stop now. He was happy for me. So I grabbed the gel he handed me and ran off with him shouting in the distance that he would meet me at mile 16 and then run the last 10 miles with me. Crap. I had just mentally quit the race and here I was still running. Okay, at mile 16 I would tell him that I was ready to be done. However, I was still on sub 3:40 pace. I must be crazy.

The sun was beating down on the road. I noticed that $\frac{1}{2}$ of the road was paved with asphalt and the other $\frac{1}{2}$ was cement. I mentally noted that asphalt is softer than cement so I drifted to the asphalt side of the street. It was hot, so I gravitated to the shady side of the street whenever possible and noted that it was 5 degrees cooler in the shade - 5 degrees.

Getting lost in my thoughts carried me for the next 3 miles and as I looked for the 16 mile mark up in the distance I prepared my speech to Bud as to why I was going to drop out of the race. "I am sore, hot, not trained, my back hurt and I was getting blisters on my left foot". My speech was ready. 16 miles came and went and no Bud, at about 16.7 miles I felt a shadow on my left shoulder and it was Bud. He had jumped into the race alongside me without a word and was running alongside me. Oh heck, by this time I figured I had less than 10 miles to go so I might as well just fall into step with Bud and keep running.

I started to tick the miles down, 8 to go, 7 to go etc. With 6 miles to go we made a hard right turn and the Harris Bank sign on the corner read 86 degrees. It was hot but I was still on a sub 3:40 pace so I kept looking down the road for the next mile marker or water stop.

I made sure to drink water at every water stop and by this time I had eaten all three of my planned gels so at one of the water stops I grabbed a Gatorade and drank about 6 ounces of pure sugar or so it seemed. Right away I could sense that the Gatorade was not sitting well or rather it was sitting too well in my stomach and not absorbing. I could feel that the water I was drinking and the gels that I ate were getting absorbed but the Gatorade just sat there in my stomach. So I continued to drink water.

Mental note, there were thousands of discarded water cups, banana peels and sponges along the ground at each of the aid stations. This was new for me. When I competed as an Elite runner the race

courses were clear of such debris. I kept thinking about all the litter on the ground and trying to avoid slipping on a used banana peel. How funny would that be - to run 22 miles only to be injured by a used banana?

Getting lost in my thoughts and memories carried me for several more miles. Then at mile 23 I found another groove, I calculated that I would in fact run a sub 3:40 marathon if I maintain the same pace. Bud was running alongside providing positive affirmations and I was just happy to have him in my space. Unlike the woman who had been running in my space for the past two miles. I smelled her before I saw her. I could sense that she was racing me. She must have been in my age group or perhaps even younger which is why I think she was trying to beat me, or perhaps she remembered me from my earlier years of racing and she wanted to say that she beat a former champion. I really don't know, all I know is that she at some point during the race had intestinal distress and it was not a pleasant sight or smell! I was downwind and I needed to get ahead of her yet every time I pulled ahead of her she sprinted in front of me again. I thought "for crying out loud lady wipe yourself off!" I made a decisive move and pulled ahead of her and carried the surge to the finish line with a 3:39:01 finishing time.

However, the clock added 5 minutes to my time because of my timing chip. 5 minutes. I worked so hard mentally to stay in the race and not to quit because I was still on my goal time of a sub 3:40. I did not know that there was a discrepancy in my timing chip until after the race. Had I thought I was running slower than my goal of 3:40 I am not so sure I would have mustered up the mental energy to finish the race. I am glad I finished, I am pleased that I did not stop and I enjoyed the process of drowning out the doubt and temptation to quit. I am thankful for Bud running alongside me. I am proud of my blisters and sun burn and I don't care about the 5 minutes the clock added to my time.

I am glad I did not quit.