



The Ultimate Cultural Running Experience

by Mike Solis

For most of the last thirty seven years, the first weekend in November has been a beacon for thousands of runners who aspire to the ranks of marathon finishers. The ING New York City Marathon is a celebration of athletic achievement and cultural diversity. Boston may have its tradition, Disney may have its mouse ears, but the New York City Marathon is a run through the streets of the “Greatest City in the World.” I can say this because I am a native New Yorker



Mike Solis, shown here at the Rock ‘n Roll Sprint Triathlon at Lake Tobesofkee on May 31st. Photo by Sam Martinez.

who had the opportunity to return home to run in this marvelous event. For many years, friends have playfully teased me about being a “Yankee” or made comments about having an accent that did not match my Georgia address. So going “home” to run the NYC Marathon was an opportunity to share with some friends the unique atmosphere of New York and its diverse neighborhoods.

Myself, local running legend Suni Heaton, accomplished triathlete Gina Foil, and longtime colleague and runner Paul McCommon traveled to New York to participate in this year’s event. We had all previously finished marathons, but our talents registered differently on the “successful runner scale.” Suni and Gina have both completed Ironman events. Paul recently finished a marathon in Phoenix. I, on the other hand, had not run a marathon in almost a decade. So while I was heading to NY with high expectations, these expectations were tempered with a stark reality --- it had been a long time since I had participated in

a marathon. In addition, trips to three different orthopedists had resulted in the same diagnosis: “Don’t run a marathon. If you do, a knee replacement is something that you will experience in the near future.” For me I knew this would have to be my last marathon.

This year’s event had the added attraction of the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials. Imagine the flashing neon lights of Times Square on a predawn Saturday morning without a single vehicle on the streets. The only sounds in Times Square were the cheers of fellow runners lining the streets as about 100 of America’s best runners competed for the chance to represent our

country in the ‘08 Olympic Games. The thrill of watching Ryan Hall, Dathan Ritzenhein and Brian Sell make the Olympic team was tempered by the tragic loss of Ryan Shay. It was a true whirlwind of emotions.

The New York Marathon is a Sunday race that starts at 10:10 am in Staten Island at the foot of the Verazano Narrows Bridge. Organizers require participants to arrive literally hours before the race start. This year, because of road construction, runners were urged to catch transportation to the bridge no later than 4:30 am! As Paul and I waited for the cab, we both noticed that even at 5:15 am on a Sunday, Eighth Avenue was alive with people, the majority of whom were not marathoners - - New York, the city that never sleeps.

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Running Club News:

My pansies are wilted. The cilantro has turned to seed. Even the cats want to spend the afternoon inside. It's hot out there! Add in the kids being out of school, going on vacation, and other summertime disruptions, and it can be really tough to maintain a training schedule. The best thing to do is consider it a planned rest segment in your cyclically phased formulaic training plan (you have one of those, right?). In other words, maintain as best you can, rest up mentally and physically, then hit it hard again in the fall!

I'm very pleased to announce that **YKK, Run Fit Sports,** and **Taylor Services** are now sponsors of the Macon Labor Day Road Race, joining **GEICO, Cherokee Brick, Dent Tricks,** and the **Medical Center of Central Georgia.** I have several zippers in my sewing box that my son brought home after a field trip to YKK, and, while researching wetsuits recently, I was interested to see in the description: "YKK Custom Zipper is the smallest and lightest and makes removal easier than ever." Anyone who's ever tried to remove a wetsuit while frantically transitioning from swim to bike during a triathlon will definitely appreciate this! Perry is donating shoe certificates to be given as prizes again this year, giving even more reason to come to those Tuesday night track workouts with us. Taylor Services will be supplying our portable restrooms for the Labor Day Race. They're even bringing cool hand washing stations. We appreciate all their support. Labor Day planning is going well and we should have additional details and online registration available soon.

Our next Macon Tracks Social is coming up on June 22nd, a pool party at Tom & Elizabeth Jones' house (details are on the race calendar at www.macontracks.org). Tom sent me some more information about special guest Scott Ludwig:

Scott is a very humble person. He has run daily for 28 years which puts him in the top 10 of running streaks in the U.S. He has run over 100 marathons, including Boston about 10 times and 100-miler ultras. He has run across Georgia, but there is more. When he shows up at a race, if you're lucky, he might pace you. He did that for Earl Tyler and myself, and we both qualified for Boston. He has chronicled his running experience for 28 years and that is the essence of his book, Running Through My Mind. He is both truly amazing and inspirational, yet a regular guy. I will be honored to introduce him to the Macon Tracks Running Club.

We're honored to have him come to our party!

There will be a new race in the Macon Tracks Piedmont Sports Medicine Race Series on July 19th, held in conjunction with the Bragg Jam Festival and organized by 11th Hour editor and new runner Chris Horne (you may have seen him at some of the local 5K races this spring). It will be an evening (8:30 pm) race and promises to be loads of fun.

Hope all your training schedule disruptions are good ones!

Kerry ☺

Keep on Keeping On

By Autumn Perry

Several years ago I shared a story with you about my nieces and nephews. Their visit to us from Pennsylvania and Vermont and how I took them to a Run and See Georgia race—their very first 5K! They had a wonderful time and did a great job. Well, I would like to give you an update, if I may. (You know, proud aunt!)

All four of those children are still running. The eldest is a niece from Vermont who has just finished her first year of college and went on a hockey scholarship. She ran to get into shape (on the track team) and still runs to stay in shape. She has also done a triathlon as part of a team. She did the running part and the team placed! Yes, I am very proud of Erica.

Then there is Andrew, next oldest. Andrew is from my hometown, Zelenople, and is 15 years old. He runs track and cross-country. Andrew took to running as a duck takes to water and he has been running since. Started out doing a few 5 K's and winning and improving his time. Then he did x-c and loved it and does extremely well. This year he also joined the track team and is doing remarkable work. At the last invitational he did the 2-mile race in 9:50!! Impressive!! Am I proud of him, YES!

Maura is next in line and is Andrew's sister. She is blowing the girls out of the water as well as the boys. She runs local races and wins her age group as well as first female in the town and county. Look out brother Andrew—she is catching you soon—well, maybe!!

Trey is the youngest and he runs all the time. He has just begun running in some competitions and talks about football all the time. His running may run him down the field with the football but, regardless, he loves it.

Truly, I am very pleased with these young folks—and proud to be their aunt!! Even though they live far away from me they still inspire me and they call me after their meets or races to let me know how they did. Yes, I know pride is a sin but my heart is truly bursting with p---- about these young people. It is wonderful to be able to share the love of running with others and especially those in my family. Keep running, Kids!!

My Dance with Dirt

by Zack Moore

It was Thursday, 1 May 2008 when I got the email from Andy Burnham. Andy is a friend of mine from Indiana. I met him the year before when he ran on my team in the 2007 Dances With Dirt, held in Gnaw Bone, Indiana.

Dances With Dirt is a 100K (62 miles) team relay trail race. I've run on a team every year since 2003. It's a lot of fun, but I had just given up hope of going this year. Every year that I've done this race, the hardest part has always been putting together a team to go. It's just difficult to get five people together who can all go out of state with you on a particular weekend. Every year, I've managed somehow, until this year. With only ten days until the race, I only had myself and my wife and we had made the decision that it was time to give up for this year.

That's when I got the email from Andy. Andy had gotten on a team to run the race, but now he had a wedding that he had to attend and had to drop out and his team was going to be one person short. The timing was fortuitous and I quickly agreed to take his spot.

Andy and I are both Hashers.

That means we run with an international running club known as the Hash House Harriers, and so did everyone else on the team I was joining up with. If you've never been to a hash, it's a little bit like a fraternity. There are silly traditions and we give each other funny names and we generally like to have fun while challenging and pushing ourselves. Hashers also tend to enjoy off-road running. They don't mind getting dirty or cut up, and they abhor the mundane and monotonous. In short, this was the perfect race for a bunch of Hashers.

This would probably be a good time to describe the race a little more. I've already mentioned that the race is 100K and that it is run by a team. Each team is composed of 5 runners. To make the race a little more interesting, the rules



give special handicaps to certain runners. All female runners get a 12.5% handicap and everyone receives a 1.0% handicap for each year over 40 and 1.5% handicap for each year over 50.



Zack's team also entered the costume contest. They wore red dresses with KFC buckets on their heads. I wonder if they ate the fried chicken first or saved it for later?

The race is divided into 15 legs. Each leg is a different length. The longest leg is about 6.2 miles and the shortest being about 2.25 miles. This means that in order to give everyone a break between their legs and to even out the mileage, you have to play around with the leg assignments or you'll end up with someone running way more than someone else. I use a spreadsheet to help me calculate the distances and divide up the legs. My fellow runners felt that I was so well-organized (maybe too well-organized), that they quickly nicknamed me "Dad" since they kept asking me what we were supposed to do next.

The race course goes through the woods, follows single track trails, crosses creeks, and at one point climbs a ski slope.

In preparation for the race, I had been really piling on the miles each week. I wanted to well this year and I had been really working on my trail miles and hills. My favorite place to train is the Pig Trail here in Macon at the Georgia Industrial Children's Home. It's a nice long trail with lots of hills to make me work hard. About two weeks out, I noticed that my left Achilles tendon was starting to complain a little. Not a lot, but a little. So, like most people, I ignored it. I was too close to my goal. If I stopped to recover, I wouldn't have time to train anymore before the

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race. A week later, my heel was a lot more sore. Finally, I resolved to rest the last week before the race. I also probably had worn out my shoes and needed to replace them. But all this I realized later. At the moment, all I could think about was getting to Indiana.

Jennifer and I drove up Friday morning. Originally, I had planned to drive up in my truck. I was going to camp at the state park and throw a sleeping bag in the back of my Pathfinder. This sounded like a great plan to me, but my wife decided I was a little overzealous and insisted on driving me up and back in her Mini. I was glad to have her company and the Mini definitely saved on gas.

After sleeping in a B&B in Nashville, Indiana, Saturday morning finally arrived. We had met up with my team the night before and arranged a meeting place. After quickly arranging all our stuff in the van, we moseyed over to the start where Stacey, our first runner, prepared to get started. The first leg is a loop that brings you back to the start and the second leg is another loop. The idea is that it gives the runners a chance to spread out before teams start driving to the next relay point. That way you don't have everyone trying to get out of the parking lot at the same time.

I wish I could remember more of what Stacey said about her leg, but all I could think about was my first leg, leg 3. Each leg has a name as well as a number. Leg 1 is named "The Plunge" and is 2.84 miles long. After that comes, "Graveyard" which is 3.13 miles, and then my first leg, "Long Bone" which was 6.2 miles long.

Each leg is also given a color. For example, "Graveyard" was marked with White flagging tape and "Long Bone" was marked with blue flagging tape. Every 15 feet or so, a piece of tape is tied to a branch or tree. As long as you see your color, you're on the right trail. This was important because sometimes trails cross each other or follow the same track for a while.

When you're waiting for your runner to come in, you have to estimate how long you think they'll be out. You don't have to be really accurate, but you have to have an idea of when you should start looking for them. We were estimating between 10 and 15 minutes per mile since the trails are much slower than if you were running on the road. Stacey came in and Anne took off on her leg.

After what seemed like forever, but was actually a short wait, Anne came bounding back out the woods and across

the field. We quickly tagged and I took off. Of course I took off too fast, but I quickly started reining myself back in. I knew it was going to be a long day and I didn't want to burn out early. The wisdom of that became apparent after about a mile as the path started to climb and snake up a hill. The ground quickly turned into a mud pit where all the runners ahead of me had already plowed up the ground. It had rained in the days before and the ground was just torn up. I had opted to wear my road shoes as they were a little more cushioned than my trail shoes, but now I was wondering if that was the right choice. For a while I felt like I was skating instead of running as I slipped over the mud.

Finally, we leveled out and the blue tape turned into the trees and off the path. This was much better. The ground wasn't nearly as torn up, but for the next two miles it was a constant up and down as we ascended and descended the crest of the hill and zigzagged through a set of fallen trees. As I was still pretty fresh, I could easily hop over many of these. At around four miles, the tape turned again and we were back on the ploughed up road. Instead of trying to run through that, I jumped over to the side and stayed there as much as I could. As long as I could stay on solid ground I could keep moving.

At this point I felt like I was making good time, but was starting to notice my heel again. It was starting to get sore. This was not a good sign. I had hoped the week of rest would be enough. I just hoped that it would hold out for today.

With about a mile to go, the tape led us out of the woods and into a campground. We followed the paved road through the campground and sprinted to the relay point where Steve was waiting to tag with me.

After I finished my leg, I chugged some Gatorade and changed my socks. I tried rubbing my heel to try to keep the stiffness out and took some Advil.

I didn't have long to wait. Steve finished leg 4 and Stacey went out again to do leg 5. Leg 6 was me again, but it was a short leg at only 2.27 miles. "Easy," I told myself.

And I was right. It was pretty easy, but I was much slower than I had thought I would be. There were a lot of switchbacks and I almost missed one of the turns. And since we went out downhill, we had to come back in uphill. By the end of this leg, my heel was really hurting and I was starting to wonder if I would be able to do my last leg.

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My next leg was the last leg of the race, so I had a long break. I figured either my heel would feel better by then, or it would slowly stiffen up until I couldn't even hobble. At one point I talked to some of my teammates and told them I didn't think I would be able to finish, but I decided to wait until it was closer to the end and see.

And finally it was time. The last leg was here. I had come this far. I didn't want to quit. I had taken as much Advil as I could and kept walking on my heel to keep it warm and loose. I figured I could at least hobble the last 3.1 miles to finish. But I guess the running Fates were shining on me that day.

Steve decided to run with me. That way if I couldn't make it, he could either finish the race or help me get back. But by then Steve had already run all three of his legs and I had gotten my second wind. I thought I was going to have to hobble to the end, but instead I felt like I was full of energy.

The start of the leg was a terrible climb up a ski slope. I thought that would be the worst part, but after dragging myself over the peak, I was faced with a second longer climb. Finally, after that two miles of awesome running, came a steep descent down a ski slope and a big creek crossing. As I came cruising across the field to the finish line, I couldn't believe I had made it.

After I finished, I just collapsed into the grass and laid there catching my breath. When we all gathered together again, we got into the food line. As part of the festivities, the race had roasted several pigs for BBQ.

There were many Hashers there from all over the state and country. We finished out the day by having a big circle and we congratulated the race officials. That night I slept like a baby.

The next day we started the long drive back. I was really glad Jennifer had insisted on coming with me. I'm always glad for her company, but I was especially glad she was there to drive.

Of course, that was the morning of the tornado. Around 11 am I got a call from my brother. "The house is mostly ok," he said.

I guess it's time to start thinking about next year.

E-mail Zack at tzmoore@gmail.com if you'd like more information on Hashing.



Caryl Deems, Michelle Archer, Susan Webb, and David Tinkey ran the Cordele Kiwanis Memorial Day 8K. Cindy Beck did, too, and brought home a nice trophy. Photos by Donna Segelken.

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The cab ride was a typical ride of stop and go, blaring horns, and weaving in and out of traffic until reaching lower Manhattan, when all the vehicles seemed to slow in solemn respect. Gina was the first to notice that we were passing Ground Zero. Passing by Ground Zero before the race seemed to put everything in perspective. There are many things that are much more important than your finishing time or what place of finish in your age group. The mere fact that we were able to participate when so many others no longer can was humbling.

We arrived at the Ferry Station and were greeted by hundreds of fellow runners, all experiencing that nervous quiet that marathoners have before the big event. The ferry ride gave us postcard-quality views of the Statue of Liberty and the skyline of lower Manhattan. We arrived at the starting area around 7:00 am, a full three hours before the race was supposed to start. Paul and I had spoken with NYC marathon veteran Mary Katz, who provided us with valuable tips like: bring a blanket, read the newspaper, and take it all in. What a great piece of advice.

Paul and I were in the same group, while Suni and Gina were together in another group. We said our goodbyes, wished each other good luck, and parted company. Paul and I were in the Green start group at the very base of the Verrazano Bridge. We found a nice grassy area, wrapped up in blankets and started to read the newspaper. It was at this time that we started to notice the people around us. Everyone looked like a runner but sounded very different. During the time we waited we heard close to a dozen different languages and accents - - - French, Japanese, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, German, Danish, English accents, Scottish accents, etc. All around runners seemed to be saying the same thing but in different languages - - - "what time are you hoping to run?" "I just want to finish." "How many marathons have you done?" While not knowing the exact words, you could tell by the tone and expressions, everyone was having the same conversations. New York has been the gateway for so many of our citizens to arrive in our country. It was as if we were sitting in a mini-version of Ellis Island before the race.

At 10:10 am, a cannon was fired to signal the start of the race. Gina and Suni crossed the start line within five minutes of the cannon. Paul crossed the start line within 30 minutes of the cannon. I was with a group that had a race pace of 4:45 (my very optimistic finishing time goal). In many large running

events, you can look forward and backward and observe a sea of runners in both directions. By the time I got to the start line, 41 minutes after the cannon blast, I turned around to look and THERE WAS NO ONE BEHIND US. I was in the very last group! Rut - roh!

But off we went, crossing the Verrazano Bridge and enjoying a breathtaking view of Brooklyn and lower Manhattan. After three miles we entered the neighborhoods of Brooklyn. For the next ten miles, runners were treated to every imaginable culture. Hispanic neighborhoods blaring salsa music, "Tony Sopranos" who live in brownstones exhorting runners to "Forgetaboutit!", and even members of the usually reserved Hasidic neighborhoods turned out to cheer the runners.

At the half mark, runners climb the Pulaski Bridge which takes you into Queens. I recall seeing on one street corner an older gentlemen who was at least in his mid-seventies and very proud of his Irish heritage. Decked out in green from head to toe, next to his bride in her wheelchair who waved to every runner, he stood on the street corner cranking out Irish tunes on his accordion and appeared to be having a ball! I imagine he has been on this street corner for every marathon that has gone through Queens.

At Mile 15, runners start the long climb across the Queensborough Bridge into Manhattan. For the first time since leaving the Verrazano Bridge, there was mostly silence, save the shuffling of feet and the panting of runners. The view of Manhattan, however, is spectacular. You can see the UN Building, the Empire State Building and the rest of the midtown Manhattan skyline. Several runners stop to take pictures and then start shuffling. Rumor has it that Gina, true to her triathlon roots, inquired about swimming across the East River into Manhattan. Race organizers, however, declined her request so as not to embarrass the elite runners and give her an unfair advantage.

As you near the end of the Queensborough Bridge you enter a tunnel and hear something which sounds like a subway train. As you exit out of the tunnel onto the street, however, you realize that the roar is not from a subway train, but rather the roar of the crowd. It is similar to what I imagine Derek Jeter hears every time he comes out of the dugout at Yankee Stadium. It is a totally exhilarating experience.

The race then turns up 1st Avenue toward the Bronx. 1st Avenue is a wide expanse of six lanes and again

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each side of the Avenue was lined three deep with cheering spectators. At this point, as I looked up 1st Avenue, as far as I could see runners were trudging up the Avenue through the glass and steel canyons of Manhattan. I finally dared to turn around to see what was behind me. When I turned to look I was pleasantly surprised to discover that there was a river, well maybe a stream, of runners behind me. Whew! No sweep bus in sight!

It was at this point, Mile 17, that I, as in all of my previous marathons, hit the wall. For me that means leg cramps and having to take walk breaks rather than running the whole time. The spectators, however, exhorted me on with shouts of "You can do it!" "You're more than half way there!" "Don't give up!" All well meaning statements of encouragement, but I began to regret not taking the subway in Brooklyn back to the hotel. I began to reconsider the wisdom of the decision not to continue on 59th Street into Central Park after crossing the Queensborough Bridge. But somehow the crowd won't let anyone quit, so the trudge continues on to the Bronx!

Runners enter the Bronx by crossing yet another bridge across the Harlem River. For the many years I lived in New York, the Bronx had earned a reputation for urban blight. But on this day, I was greeted at the Mile 20 sign by a group of bagpipers, screeching out Gary Owen. At this point, I thought Amazing Grace would have been more appropriate, but it was great to see such an enthusiastic group. Around another corner, a children's group was singing and performing their hearts out on a make-shift stage. The run through the Bronx was just over a mile, but the residents displayed the same pride in their community as had every other borough before it.

You pass Mile 21 on yet one more bridge and cross back into Manhattan. At this point, runners turn on the famed 5th Avenue in Harlem. Again from my youth, my memory of Harlem was a neighborhood that had fallen on hard times. But much like the Bronx, Harlem has changed. The streets of Harlem were alive. It is a vibrant neighborhood enjoying and celebrating a renaissance. Both sides of 5th Avenue were crowded with cheering spectators. On one block, a gospel choir was singing songs of praise and encouragement. Within a few more blocks, another group was beating out the rhythm of rap and hip hop songs.

It was at this time I noticed that a group of Italian runners had been with me most of the run. They

seemed to always be passing me, but I never recalled passing them until I saw them stop in front of the hip hop group. They had stopped to have their pictures taken with the group. And then I recalled that they had stopped and had their pictures taken with the gospel choirs, the bagpipers, the ZZ Top group and the children's troupe, always making a memory to take back with them to show their countrymen the marvelous cultures of New York.

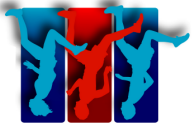
Just before Mile 23, runners reach Central Park which begins around 115th Street. The neighborhood changes again and the streets are lined with Upper East Siders who have descended from their swanky apartments. Even these usually staid residents of New York joined in the celebration of the marathon by cheering on every runner with words of encouragement. Around Mile 24, runners enter Central Park, the beautiful oasis amidst the steel, glass, concrete and asphalt.

The crowds were still present in the park, cheering everyone on to finish. Several NYC veterans had warned of the toll the hills in the park would take so late in the race. For me, however, the hills did not seem so bad. Perhaps it was a second wind or it may have been that just after Mile 25 I thought I heard a familiar voice. After slogging 25 miles and listening to shouts of anonymous cheering, to my complete surprise I HEARD and SAW my wife Vickie and Paul's wife, Debbie among the crowd cheering!!! It was just the shot of adrenaline I needed. The last mile went by in a flash! Well, maybe it was a lot longer, but it seemed to pass quickly and the sight of the finish line at Tavern on the Green was wonderful.

As in almost every race, once you finish and share the feat with friends, I am always asked the same question - - - "what was your time!" For me, marathons have always been about finishing and the time was secondary. This sentiment was even truer for this race, so when I am asked what my time was I reply "Sunday." Sunday is a day many people take the time to go to church and receive some spiritual guidance. Others spend the day reading the Sunday paper or watching gridiron gladiators do battle on their respective playing fields. For one Sunday in November, I had the opportunity to spend time with three good friends, experience the solemnity and reverence of passing by Ground Zero, passing the time reading the New York Times among a melting pot of runners, listening to the cheers of thousands of fans including one special fan and running through the five boroughs of the greatest city in the world - - - New York. It was the ultimate running experience.

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Photo by Sam Martinez

Amazing **Anne Wright** was 10th overall female at the Rock 'n Roll Sprint Triathlon at Lake Tobesofkee on May 31st. She won 2nd master. And that was just a practice race before she competed at the 2008 Vancouver BG Triathlon World Championships on June 7th. She competed with women from many different countries, racing the Olympic distance triathlon (1500 meter swim/40K bike/10K run) in a time of 2:29, placing 17th in the 60-64 age group. Way to go, Anne!!