

2009 Holiday Lake 50K++

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About a year ago I was standing in the parking lot of the Holiday Lake 4H Center watching a bunch of crazy people, including my girlfriend of 6 months, finish running a long, long race. She had asked me to accompany her and be her support as she competed in her first ultramarathon, and new love overcame sanity, as I taxied her to the starting line hours before sunrise. On the drive home I congratulated her on her accomplishment and marveled at her strength, all the while thinking I NEVER could do anything like it.

A couple of weeks later I entered and ran my first race in 28 years, the Explore Your Limits 5K (<http://www.mountainjunkies.net/>), directed by Josh Gilbert (another HL50K finisher this year) of Mountain Junkies, LLC. My competitive fire was rekindled, and I ran a number of short races over the course of the summer and fall.

Fast forward to Valentine's Day, 2009. I'm standing in the parking lot of the Holiday Lake 4H Center with a bunch of fun-loving, dedicated runners. Seconds before the gun went off, I stood at the back of the pack, kissed my fiancée (!!), and said a quick prayer. The starting gun cracked, the crowd surged forward, and I was beginning my first ultramarathon, in fact, my first race at a distance longer than 13.1 miles.

The evening before at the pasta dinner (outstanding lasagna!) Dr. Horton offered some words of advice to first-timers. He suggested talking with, and more importantly, listening to, experienced ultra runners. I spoke to a few people, and one guy said to "start slowly, then ease off". I began the run with my fiancée, but she struggled with a touch of the flu and urged me to go on. At about the 7 or 8 mile mark, I was passed by a couple of men who, from their conversation, had run a number of ultras ranging from 50K to 100 miles. The two men cheerfully asked me to join them and provided me with encouragement, wisdom, and fun the rest of the way.

Before reaching the turnaround, we had decided to take a minute or two with our packs to restock supplies, and to add/subtract/change clothes. When we arrived at the halfway point, I was amazed to find we all had left our bags under the same tree, at the far end of the circle. No coincidences in God's world, eh?

At this point in the race, I was feeling strong mentally because of the companionship, and physically doing pretty well, as I made a conscious effort to remain hydrated and to take in nourishment via gel, M&M's, gel, Reese's cups, gel, Oreo's, gel, and Hershey bars.

I can't remember the point in the race when I started feeling sore, but it was somewhere in the mid-20's. It became more difficult to get the knees up and the feet over those large obstacles in the trail, such as pine needles. My springs had sprung, but we kept rolling. When we finally hit the blacktop, and the last 6/10's of a mile, I found a bit of extra energy, stretched out the tired legs, and drove toward the finish. As I crossed the line to cheers of well-wishers and Dr. Horton shouting out my name, I felt a sense of community with the other runners.

What I remember most about the race is the camaraderie displayed by the majority of people involved; the willingness to stop and help another runner who was experiencing

some trouble; the kind words passed from leaders to trailers and back; the support shown by Aid Station volunteers and family members.

Thank you Dr. Horton, the volunteers, the 4H Center (especially the cooks!), the sponsors, and all the other runners for making my first, but not last, ultramarathon a wonderful experience. A special thanks to my fiancée, Julie Palmer, for your love and support in helping me accomplish this goal.