

As a kid I remember members of our church running a marathon and regarding these members as super-human athletes with incredible dedication and God-given talent. On a trip to Dallas, Texas, I remember asking my dad to clock 26 miles on the highway so that I could imagine running it all. After losing interest, and several rounds of Donkey Kong on my Game-Boy, he reminded me we still hadn't traveled 26 miles. I never once imagined I would run even further and ever desire to do it again.

Two months ago I was peer pressured into registering for the Holiday Lake 50K, which seemed like a terrible idea at the time. In hopes it would help me stay in shape over the winter and improve my mountain biking, I signed up with only a little more than two months till the race. Although I had biked regularly for several months leading up to the day of registration for the race, I had done very little running. My first runs resulted in my knee swelling. I began to worry about increasing mileage too quickly, and if I could actually ever run such a long distance.

Sam Staal, a cross country runner for Trinity Christian College in Chicago, helped me learn how to manage weekly mileage and I was able to successfully gradually increase my mileage over the following weeks. I visited my parents in Mexico for almost a month over Christmas break and managed to run while I was there, enjoying the scenery and warm weather I had missed so much. Running is less common in the city of Oaxaca where my parents are missionaries. Many of the locals would awkwardly stare at me as I passed and yell funny things at me telling me such as, "Te vas a quemar guero!" (you're going to get sunburned you white person!). Many of my runs in Mexico left me exhausted due to extreme heat and at times, dehydration. My longest run before Holiday Lake was 23 miles.

The night before Holiday Lake I was nervous, but excited. The pre-race dinner helped me calm down by giving me the opportunity to ask experienced ultra runners last-minute questions and feel like part of the community. That night I returned to Lynchburg to my college dorm room and slept well for most of the night. Waking up at 4 am the next morning was surprisingly easy as I found myself excited and nervously jumping out of bed at the first sound of my alarm. In my excitement I had laid out my running gear the night before and had everything ready to go. Before I knew it I was lined up at the start line of the Holiday Lake 50K ready to begin. Even still I wasn't sure where I should be at the start, in the front or near the back. The whole experience was so new to me I didn't know how fast to start, I had never been to an aid station, I wasn't sure if I was dressed right, if I was sufficiently trained, or how well trained everyone around me was. I knew that I would find out soon enough; there was no backing down.

The first several miles were great. I maintained a good pace set by the person in front of me. I soon realized the jacket I was wearing was too warm and ditched my jacket and gloves at the first aid station. I felt good from the start through the half way mark chatting with people along the way and mooching off of their Garmen watches for the pace. I asked another runner for the running time and estimated I was half way around 2:45. Although this was encouraging, I knew the worst was yet to come. By the time I arrived at aid station number 5, I was beginning to understand the challenge of a 50K. My joints were beginning to ache and I had minor cramps, but I was still running strong. Soon my feet and ankles started hurting, which slowed me down. Later my knees and hips started hurting as well and I started to realize that many racers, including older ladies who were easily older than my parents, were passing me! I couldn't let this happen! So I picked up my pace but soon realized that although my pride is important to me, at that moment it seemed to take a back-seat to survival. I slowed my pace but ran as hard as possible fighting cramps and joint pain. I crossed the finish line at 6 hours and 16 minutes which was well within my goal of finishing within the given 8 hours.

I managed to accomplish a feat that as a kid I viewed as impossible. It's an experience I will never forget and it helped me realize I can physically challenge myself and achieve more than the scope of what is considered reasonable or normal. I am now sitting here with feet finally not quite as swollen as yesterday and finally walking without a limp, already looking forward to beating my current time and breaking 6 hours at Promise Land. See you there!

Miles Dyson