

I ran my first Holiday Lake, which also happened to be my first ultra, back in 2000 at the ripe old age of 21. It was a hard, magical, fun, horrendous race that caused me to fall in love with ultras and trail running. I remember vividly the feelings of apprehension about the unknown, and the thoughts that everyone else looked like a runner except for me. Now, here I was again 12 years later going for my 10th Holiday Lake finish. I knew I would finish this time. I was nervous not about finishing but about whether I had the endurance to run well. I haven't run much in the past two years since I had twin boys back in March 2010. I've had to relearn how to train, and how to adapt my running with my other commitments at home and at work.

I was surprisingly not very nervous the week leading up to the race. My mileage in January had been sporadic, but I had gotten my long runs in and had some good quality workouts. I would run whatever my body allowed, and that was all I could control. My goal was to run anywhere from 4:35 to 4:45, which I thought was possible since I had run 5:55 last year with minimal training. I slept at the 4H-center Friday night, although I probably only got 4-5 hours of sleep. I kept waking up, and was happy when my alarm went off at 5:15am. I got up, ate my bagel with peanut butter, drank my red bull, and went over to check-in. Before long, it was 6:30am. We attempted to sing the Star Spangled Banner, Horton said a quick prayer, and we were off! My whole strategy was to run steady and easy the first loop, and see what happened on loop 2. The first 6 miles went by easily as I chatted with a guy from Ohio. Sorry, I don't remember your name, but you really helped me relax and pace myself. I was third female at that point, although I was trying not to think about my position just yet. Another girl in a blue shirt passed me around that point looking strong and relaxed. I found out that it was Leah Daugherty who ended up winning the women's race. My competitive side kicked in for a few minutes, and I tried to keep up with her, but I soon settled back into my own pace. I let her go and she scampered off into the distance. So now I was 4th, which was okay by me. I was hoping for top 5, so I just had to hold steady and not do anything stupid. Horton kept me in check at the aid stations telling me how far ahead the women were, and telling me to run smart. I don't really remember much about the first loop, except that I ran with Brenton Swyers and another Liberty guy for awhile. I caught up to them and after a few minutes they asked me if I was "fat girl". I said yes and they said, "Oooooohhhhhhhhhhh, so YOU'RE fat girl! Horton talks about you ALL THE TIME"! That did not sound like a good thing, so thanks a lot, Horty.

I came to the turnaround, dropped my gloves, switched bottles, and was off again on the 2nd loop. I forgot to check my time, but my guess would be that I got there around 2:13-2:15 or so. I was back in 3rd place for women, but there were a lot of ladies right on my heels. I couldn't believe how fast everyone was running, but the weather and conditions were absolutely fabulous for running. I still felt pretty good, all things considered at this point. I always worry about my stomach going south, as it usually does at some point in a race. So far, so good, and I had been able to eat about 2-3 gels an hour so far. I stuck to water mostly and a little coke later in the race. Sports drinks tend to give me a sloshy stomach after a while. It was fun seeing all my friends as we passed each other on the trail. The few miles back around the lake went by quickly, but I felt like I was working a little too hard. There was a girl right behind me, and darn it if I couldn't seem to pull away from her. My quads were starting to protest a little, but nothing out of the ordinary. We came to the power line section (ugh), and I was not enjoying myself very much at all. Why did this all seem to be slightly uphill? Wasn't it slightly uphill the other direction? I think the low point of the race for me was from mile 24-28, or whatever mileage it is at the second to last aid station. From that aid station to the last aid station really, really sucked. I felt tired and slow. Mentally I just felt blah. I wasn't eating much by this point, which I'm sure was the main reason I felt sluggish. I ran with some guys off and on, but I mostly ran by myself. I was ready for this race to be over. Then, we made it to the last aid station, and one of the guys mentioned that we might be able to make 4:30. WHAT?! Since I hardly ever look at my watch during a race, I had no idea what my time was. I just run by how I feel unless I am trying to catch someone. Well, dang, now I have to work a little because I would hate to finish in 4:31. Horton would never let me live it down. 4 miles to go, just a short training run, I can do this. I felt much better than I had at the previous aid station, probably because it was almost over. I didn't see any women behind me, so I knew I could just run my pace without worrying that someone would catch me. I saw the sign for 1-mile to go. Yippee!! I popped out of the trail onto the road leading to the finish. There were a couple of guys ahead of me, and I saw the 2nd place female ahead of me as well. I thought she was too far ahead to catch with less than a half mile to go, so I didn't really try to speed up. We reached the sign leading into the 4H center, and I realized I was gaining on her. I thought I could catch her if she didn't make a final dash for the finish. I sprinted down the hill, and crossed the

finish line in 4:28, good enough for 2nd female and 22nd overall. This was my fastest time at Holiday Lake in my 10th finish, so I was ecstatic! I got a little emotional actually walking into the cabins to take a shower.

It feels so good knowing I can still keep up with the fast chicks. It has been several years since I could say I ran a competitive race, and ran it well. This was one of those races where everything just comes together. I never really felt horrible. I was able to run my own race, and I was able to spend a day in the woods with other like-minded people. It was wonderful to see so many familiar faces out there. One of my favorite sayings is, "Great day to be alive" and it certainly is! Thank you, Horty, for making this possible for all of us. I'm sure I will be back next year!

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