

To All Our Family, Friends and Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I must start out by saying that I have been overwhelmed by the amount of support and prayers that we as a family have received from all of you. The love you have shown to us is, at this point, beyond my comprehension.

I enjoy running and am truly amazed at what the Lord our God has given to me. We have faced many trials and challenges recently, but I am learning through them that God is always with us, and if we will put ALL of our trust and faith in Him he is faithful to see us through. That is the great thing about our God, he is Holy and He keeps his promises. I truly love the Lord God with all my heart and was wondering what he had in store for me by putting a burning desire in me to first qualify for and then run the Boston Marathon this year.

In the last fourteen weeks I have run three (3) marathons: the Walt Disney World Marathon in January, the A-1-A Marathon in February, and the Boston Marathon, as most of you know by now, this past Monday. I have gone through two (2) bouts of the flu in the last eight (8) weeks; the second one followed by bronchitis, just 7 days before the Boston Marathon. At the time, we started to think that I would not be able to make it to Boston and run. I started my antibiotics, prayed and rested. On Wednesday evening (the 11th), we decided to continue with our plans and fly to Boston on Thursday afternoon, surely I would feel much better by Monday.

When we arrived at PBI we learned that the weather across the country was causing lengthy delays at many

major airports including Boston's Logan International. After a 2.5 hour delay, we left for Logan. The first night in Boston we got to bed at midnight, not good for recovering from the flu/bronchitis.

Friday morning I went for a 6 mile run through Boston, weather in the low 40's and windy. It was not a pleasant run, but it was good to take in the sights, although it was strange to not see the flowers yet blooming in Boston Common and the Public Garden. The rest of the day we stayed inside, shopped and I went hesitantly to the John Hancock Sports Expo to pick up my race number and timing chip. I was feeling quite weak, but still tried to push the doubt and fear out of my mind and remain strong in my faith that I was healing.

Saturday's run was really lousy. Winds were stronger and I felt tired and weak. I decided to not run any more before Monday's race. Saturday's weather was cool but dry. We took the subway to the Museum of Science, and spent most of the late morning and afternoon exploring the exhibits, visiting a show in the planetarium and watching a 3-D show on the M.E.R. missions to Mars. Afterward we took the Subway to Braintree, MA and were picked up by my Uncle Rich who lives in Cohasset along the south shore. My Aunt has been seriously ill since March 2nd, when a botched surgery to remove a polyp from her colon left her with a perforated bowel, leaking e. coli, etc. into her body. She has been hospitalized four (4) times since then, had two (2) stoma bags installed, and has had a "nuclear bomb's worth" of antibiotics. When we arrived she had just been released from the hospital the night before at 11pm. Apparently, the

antibiotics she had been on were not working, so they had switched her meds and she was actually holding down food for the first time, and had energy and color. She was really nervous to see us as she has been medically declared anorexic, not by choice, but because her body was either not holding food or not metabolizing it. To me, she looked better than I thought she would, still like my Aunt Margie, but much thinner. She was in good spirits and it was really good to spend time with them at their home. My Uncle drove us back to Quincy and we took the Harbor Express Ferry Boat back to the Marriot Long Wharf downtown, then jumped on the subway back to our hotel. Our bed time again was midnight, not good.

Sunday, we went to a church located on Boylston Street right in front of the finish line, the Old South Church, at the urging on my mother's cousin who is a retired minister who sometimes preaches there. The service was a special service to welcome and ask for a blessing over the runners and their families. It was a different experience, we must admit.

The weather in Boston had begun to turn really foul (read: Nor'easter coming in) by noon on Sunday. It was a raw biting cold. I started to contemplate what would be necessary to brave/bear the elements for the next day and decided to go to Marshall's to pick up an inexpensive pair of sweats to wear over my running clothes, and toss away in the last minutes before the race start (all such items are donated to Big Brothers/Big Sisters). I also realized that my long sleeved running top which I had planned to wear would probably not be warm enough, so I went to City Sports and

found a really warm one. I then proceeded back to the Hynes Convention Center to find an outer layer wind/water barrier lightweight running jacket. With everything I could think of in place we went to dinner, and then back to the hotel. I spoke on the phone briefly with several of you who called to give me words of encouragement, which I greatly appreciated.

I new something was not right with the way I was feeling when I awoke on race morning at 4:30 am, but I continued to proceed as planned and was out the door by 5:50 am. I took the subway to the corner of Boylston and Tremont Street at Boston Common, where I believe they had gathered every yellow school bus in the state of Massachusetts to transport the runners to the start in Hopkinton. I waited in line to board a bus for 40 minutes, with rain and gusting winds. By the time I had boarded the bus I was soaked and the cold I felt was raw all the way to my bones. I was glad to be inside where it was dry and warm. The ride to Hopkinton was long. When we arrived it felt colder than Boston, and very wet and muddy. The tents they had set up, an athlete's village of sort, were not large enough to accommodate all the runners. I could not find adequate shelter, then in an earnest attempt to find a port-o-let with paper, I enter the heated gymnasium of Hopkinton High School, but the bathrooms were off limits and the time to get staged to walk the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the start was approaching fast. Needless to say, I never really got warm, and subsequently used a ton energy trying.

I waited in the sea of runners with anticipation for the gun to go off. I was in the second wave start at 10:30 am. I

was not really as nervous as I would normally be, but once again standing on my faith that God would carry me through this. By all logical arguments I should not have been there. I should have been at home in Tequesta, watching the race on T.V., but I had felt compelled to be there. I didn't know what the day would have in store for me, but I know that **"...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,"(Hebrews 11:1)** and **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."(Philippians 4:13)** I can admit now that I really didn't know if my faith would carry me 1 mile, 5, 10, 18 or to the finish line.

At the start, the crowd of runners around me was really tight, and consequently my first mile pace was 8:43, not fast by my normal training standards but not slow for a course like Boston. The second mile was 40 seconds quicker. Over the next 15 miles my pace settled into about an 8:45 pace. The funny (odd) thing is that the whole morning (prior to the race start) my breathing had been difficult and labored, and the one thing I had been praying for is that the Lord allows my lungs to stay open enough to allow me to keep running. I never thought to ask for strength and stamina in my legs. It was at mile 17 that my pace slowed to 10 – 12 minute miles. The course was quite hilly and I did a lot of walking/running. I kept remembering **"...they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."(Isaiah 40:31)** On the up hills I found myself walking/running a lot, and then coasting on the down hills. Around my 20 I was walking uphill and found myself in great pain, but grinning ear to ear, because I knew I had somehow received a gift from God, superhuman strength to make it

this far and if he had carried me this far, he would carry me to the end, as long as my will remained. I could taste victory in Christ. I found myself shouting Hallelujah!!! The last 6.2 miles (10k) was the hardest physical thing I think I have ever done, but with God's help, I made it, 4 hours 13 minutes and 38 seconds later.

In retrospect, I know see part of what God had in mind for me. I never would have imagined that we would have friends who were so motivated to cheer us on, and share the intimate details of our journey with our group. I am a quite reserved and shy person, and not really wanting to "Toot my own horn". With this I can truly say that we feel blessed. ***"...My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*(2 Corinthians 12:9)** I feel that God has used me, in maybe an unusual way, to encourage others. I can say to this moment that I don't know how I did what I did except that I ***give all the glory*** to God!!!

Thank you for all of your prayers and words of encouragement. We are truly blessed. God is Awesome!!!

In Him,

Ann, Chris and Noah Gunn