

## CLEVELAND ROCKS!

Submitted by Jill Montaquila

That's probably an overused phrase, but one with a much more positive spin than many of the phrases of my childhood, when Cleveland was known in part for being the city where the river caught fire. On May 20, the only thing ablaze was the pavement, as thousands of runners took to the streets for the Cleveland Marathon.

I flew into town on Friday and spent the day with various members of my family (who all reside in Northeast Ohio). Saturday morning, I headed to the Convention Center for the Expo. At the Expo, I attended a seminar given by *Runner's World* Executive Editor Amby Burfoot. The seminar was basically a Q&A session; Amby asked the questions, and the person with the best response was awarded a peppermint Life Saver. His questions were hard: How many days per week should you train? How long should your long run be? And there were others, even more difficult than these. Finally, Amby asked a question for which I was certain I knew the correct answer: What should you have for breakfast the day of the marathon? I raised my hand and confidently responded, "You should have whatever you've been eating (with success) prior to your long training runs." As I sat there, anxiously awaiting my peppermint Life Saver, Amby responded, "Well, yes, of course, but what do *you* eat?" My reply of "Entenmann's crumb-lovers' crumb cake" wasn't good enough for a Life Saver; the correct response was "a bagel." Who knew???

Having survived my failure to provide the correct response, and no worse for the wear, I took to the streets of Cleveland to jog the spectator route I had planned for my personal cheering section (my dad, sister, nephew, and anyone else whose arm I could twist!). My plan was to have them cheer at miles 13, 23, and the finish. However, my scouting jog convinced me that this would not be feasible, and as a result, I revised my plan. They would cheer at mile 11.5, grab breakfast (for themselves, not me!), and then head to the finish. There was a potential issue in that there were no sit-down, eggs-bacon-and-pancakes types of places for breakfast for them (You'd have to know my family to appreciate that this was a *real* concern!), but I was hoping that coffee and a bagel might suffice.

Marathon Eve was relatively uneventful. The only downside was that the grocery store I stopped at didn't have Entenmann's crumb cake, so I had to settle for an "all butter coffee cake" instead. (I didn't worry too much, because I figured the ingredients should be similar enough that my stomach wouldn't know the difference.) I was in bed by 9:30, but it took me about an hour to fall asleep. (Normally, I'm asleep before my head hits the pillow, and sleep soundly through the night.) I woke up around 12:45 feeling underhydrated, drank a 16-ounce bottle of "Energy Water," and could not fall back asleep for about another hour and a half! (Note to self: Don't drink 16 ounces of anything with "energy" in its name the night before a big race!)

Having set two alarms and arranged for a wake-up call from my partner at 4:15, I had no problem waking up on time, despite the sleep interruption. I was happy that the weather forecast of high 40s and rain with possible thundershowers had not panned

out. In Cleveland, I was able to find parking and the port-a-potties with no problem. Finding the start line and my pace group was a bit more of a challenge, but I did find the pacer with a few minutes to spare. After a brief shower just prior to the start, the rain dissipated and the weather at the start was cloudy with temps probably in the upper 50s.

About 2 miles into the race, as we ran on an overpass, I had a strange sensation, as if my legs were giving out on me. When another woman in my pace group commented on this, I was quite relieved to know that it wasn't just me! (Apparently either the bridge or the pavement itself had some give.) A little further into the race, we came upon the inspirational brassy sound of a band playing "Hang On Sloopy"—the unofficial Ohio State song and the official rock song of the State of Ohio. A nice feature of this race was the presence throughout the course of various bands and music piped through speakers.

By about mile 6, I was feeling hunger pangs—apparently my stomach *did* know the difference between the crumb cake and the all butter coffee cake! I had a stash of gummi bears in my pocket, but was reluctant to dip into them that early. But realizing that I should probably do what I could to keep my stomach happy, I gave in and started refueling.

The next several miles were uneventful. Somewhere around mile 11, we came upon a crowd of cheering spectators, many of whom were cheering, "Go Jill!" When one of the women in my pace group expressed amazement that so many people had come out to cheer for me, I had to turn around momentarily to show her the "Go Jill!" I had written on my shirt. I know it's a shameless way to get support, but it worked! And by mile 25, the throngs of cheerers yelling my name definitely provided a much-needed boost!

Regrettably, at mile 11.5, my real fans were nowhere to be found. Turns out that the instructions I had written up for my family placed them alone at the intersection of E. 9<sup>th</sup> and Prospect, when all of the action was actually a block away at E. 9<sup>th</sup> and Carnegie. By the time they realized my error, my pace group and I had already passed by.

From about miles 17 through 19, we ran through the Cultural Gardens area of Rockefeller Park. Our pacer doubled as a tour guide as he pointed out the statues and other features that represented the cultures of various countries—Indian, German, etc. As we passed the one for Finland, I pointed out the "Finnish" to the others in my pace group. The humor was lost in the fatigue of the moment, but amid the groans, the pacer commented that he was going to use that joke next time!

Miles 19.5 through 23.5 were the most challenging of the course. I think the course was designed to really test our mental stamina, because this stretch was a monotonous, straight, flat stretch of asphalt that ran alongside Burke Lakefront Airport. For miles, we could see the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Browns Stadium ahead, and knew that we had to reach those destinations before we could make the turn back toward

downtown. Plus, there were very few spectators along this stretch. At mile marker 24, we emerged from behind Browns Stadium to the throngs of spectators.

Despite the crowds, the last two miles were tough. I was very tempted to ease off the pace. But I realized that too much work had gone into training and into running the first 24 miles to allow myself to slack at that point. So I did what I could to try to maintain the pace, although I have to admit that my finish line kick was virtually nonexistent. As I approached the finish, I scanned the crowds looking for my family. Somehow amidst all the cheering, I heard the “Go Jill” of my aunt’s voice. At least my directions had gotten them to the finish line!

So that’s the story, start to finish, of my second marathon. It was a long time coming—five and a half years after my first—and I have to say that I think I’m hooked! Six months ago, I would never have thought that I would have this story to tell, or that I would have met such a great group of people as I have through running with the LRR. Thanks for getting me to Cleveland....I’ll see you at the next run!