

## It's A Marathon, Not a Sprint.

Written by Dave Howard

---



I am not a runner. I have never been a runner. I quit soccer when I was six and went into swim team because I hated running. So, naturally, I fall for my fiancé who is a runner.

It's been a rough couple of months for us. I lost my job and her big sister from her sorority is currently waging her third heroic war with breast cancer. So when she asked to me to participate in the Race For the Cure, I agreed. Had the event been for anything else, I would have hopped on the bus screaming the opposite direction.

This unemployment has allowed me plenty of time in gym. Spinning, weights and other classes have kept me occupied. I am building a new groomish physique. I still hate running. It's a 5k for chrissake, I can eat this for breakfast! 5k is tiny. I had never run a 5k but it is the smallest of all endurance running. We have a friend who runs 24 hours at a time, I can handle a 5k.

We get down to the Rose Bowl and get all yee-hah, enjoy the free coffee and vendor tents. They give away a lot free stuff at these things. My fiancé's sorority was a sponsor and handing out pink signs so you could celebrate a survivor. I felt a large clunk of burning phlegm in my throat as she wrote down her big sister's name.

I see this old man, easily two to three times my age (yes, he might have been one hundred and twenty) He had that stringy runner's bod with floppy man breasts. He was wearing equipment I didn't understand. A Karch Kiraly pink visor turned up at the brim was perched back on his head, bright red knee pads, those WHAM! style shorts and his recently obtained "Race For The Cure" shirt of sponsors. Is this guy serious? Sir, you look like a goofball.

So the race starts and I start puffing away. After about a quarter mile I tell her to move on and I walk a bit. We damn well knew there was no way I was going keep up with her. I paced down, my own terminology for walking, and take in the sites.

## It's A Marathon, Not a Sprint.

Written by Dave Howard

---

There was lots of positive activity going on during this race. After a half mile, some high school girls were leading positive cheers that I can't remember but appreciated. Pleasant memories of adolescent youth flood into me, especially that indestructible feeling. There have been many chinks in the armor since then. Fond remembrances of football afternoons, late night dance clubs and explorative backseats flood me.

The VHS went into that tracking haze as I see that geezer. He's AHEAD of me. Breather is over and I pick out a spot to run. A spot somewhere well beyond Mr. WHAM! Shorts, so he is behind me, where he belongs. My feet hurt, my legs chafe but I keep going. I pick a sign on the road and run to that. A quarter mile down, I take a break and start walking again. This old guy passes me again at the same steady pace. I catch my breath, pick out another sign and pass him.

For the rest of the 5k, I could not shake this frickin' guy. I'm beating my brains out trying to keep ahead of him. I burst out again.

Confident that I had dusted my nemesis, I slowed down to take off my Berkeley sweatshirt. The Jackie Robinson T-shirt underneath was drenched in my bodily fluids. I pass another cheering section of local high school girls armed with water (I grab two) and chants of "WELCOME TO MILE 2."

That's when I see it again.

That goddman Karch Kiraly hat was bobbing up and down about a quarter mile ahead of me. No time for boysish photo albuming nostalgia bullshit! Keep moving, young man!

What kind of ancient android is this guy? It was beginning to feel like that Twilight Zone episode called "The Hitchhiker" where a woman in a car journey sees the same hitchhiker shows up every 100 miles or so. The hitchhiker turns out to be Death. Considering how I was feeling that day, it wouldn't have surprised me one bit if this had been his true identity

## It's A Marathon, Not a Sprint.

Written by Dave Howard

---

He lurches forward. I lurch forward. My sprint and walk stops are fewer and fewer in between. My breath is lumbering, my feet burn.

On the final stretch, I see my gal. She had finished already and came back to see how I was hanging in there. She is thrilled with her time and glowing. I think she is even proud that her “I hate running” fiancé is pushing through. She pleads with me to put my sweatshirt back on so the photographers can see my race number. I think “STOP NAGGING ME WOMAN! I AM IN RACE WITH DEATH HERE!” but I just give her my backpack, put on my sweatshirt and say “I gotta beat this guy” and in a last gasp I sprint to the finish line with budding shin splints I will pay for all of next week.

Three minutes later, the Jurassic warrior finishes with his now trademark steady jog. He breathes deep and downs whatever promotional product they are passing off to us as water. There was no one there to congratulate him on giving this young kid a run for his money. He breathes heavy, picks up some water, wipes a tear from his eye and disappears into the crowd

I realize why this old man is running so hard, alone. He used to have something. He used to revel in her, as I do now. Today, he just runs.

She hugs me at the finish line. As I embrace her, my fingers brush against the safety pins attaching her pink paper celebration to her back. I realize how much I have. I have this beautiful, healthy woman who wants to marry me. I may not always have that.

Today, I have.