

## **Drue Mathies 2010 Disney Marathon**

I had come to run the Disney Marathon with my 25 year old son, Daven, and his childhood friend, whom I consider to be my second son, Leo Lake. Leo will shortly receive his wings from the Coast Guard and will fly rescue helicopters from a base near Astoria, Oregon. Daven lives and works in Forest Grove, Oregon, where he graduated from Pacific University.

Leo had run the Disney Marathon last year, and so enjoyed the experience that he invited Daven and I to share the fun with him this year. We couldn't resist what sounded like a grand adventure. Leo's goal was to complete the "Goofy Challenge" this year. (He would run the half marathon the day before, and then run the marathon with us.) Daven did not find the time to train properly and so his goal was to just finish.

Daven and I had never run a marathon. I immediately searched the internet for a training program. We had about 8 months to prepare. I had run many 5Ks, but never anything longer. I started to focus on the 10K, and ran about six races. I scheduled the Clarksburg half marathon about two months before Disney. I was pleased with my 1:40:29. It was almost 5 minutes faster than my goal of 1:45. I told a running friend that my goal was to just finish the marathon. He advised me to set a goal time. That it would be more stimulating than running just to finish. I discovered that to qualify for Boston, at age 63, I had to run under 4:00. I had my goal time.

My wife, Rene, and I arrived before the boys. We left our home in warm Nevada City, California, to attend our niece's wedding in Illinois. (Who gets married in Illinois in January?) From the below zero high temperatures in Illinois, we flew down to Orlando where the locals were enduring a record cold snap of their own. We had a few days to explore the area before the boys arrived. Daven was flying in from Portland, Oregon, and Leo was driving up with a friend from Pace, FL where he was undergoing flight training. So, of course, we went to Gatorland.

We watched the alligators lay like stones as they were prodded to get into the water. The cold was so severe that they would not move. Alligator wrestling became alligator snoozing. Rene and I were freezing, but happy. We dined on alligator ribs for lunch. They were okay, but did not taste like chicken.

Daven was the first to arrive. Leo and his Coastie friend, Luke Zitzman, also an aspiring rescue helicopter pilot, but not a runner, arrived the day before the half marathon. We were up at

3:00 a.m. the next morning and made our way to the Epcot parking lot where thousands of freezing folks were gathered to either run or cheer the half marathon event. The four of us watched as Leo, clad in his bright orange sock hat, completed the first portion of the Goofy Challenge in 1:42:57.

The next morning, at 3:30 a.m., we rose from our beds, after very little sleep, to begin our day. Little snow flurries (this was Florida?) accompanied us as we drove once more to the Epcot parking area. We parked the rental car and made our way to the staging area. Up tempo rock music filled the air. Searchlights beamed across the sky. Even more thousands of folks than yesterday, were here. All were very cold. We were seduced by the aroma of fresh coffee. As we waited in the line waiting for coffee, a runner proclaimed happily that he was from Michigan, and shouted that "this cold was nothin!". But, I noticed that he could not control his shivering.

Daven and I had on multiple layers of sweat shirts and light plastic rain coats. Many of the other runners wrapped themselves in old blankets and plastic garbage bags that they would later discard. When we registered, we discovered that Daven, inexplicably, had to start in J corral. J corral was the last group to start. It was where the walkers and really slow runners would begin their race. Leo and I opted to drop back and start with Daven.

After finishing our coffee, we left the staging area, and removed a layer of our outer clothing and checked them at a holding tent. It was here that I lost my borrowed sock hat. My ears were cold. We continued on to the start area and found J Corral. I jogged to stay warm and to stimulate my bathroom response. I failed to achieve either mission.

Finally, the first corrals were starting. An amplified male voice excitedly began the countdown: "three, two one!" Aerial fireworks exploded in the sky. The rude smell of the propellant, providing thrust for the rockets, charged into our senses. Some falling pieces of flaming residue littered the course in front of us. The boys and I were protected under an overpass, but we saw mad scrambling to our left front as other runners dodged the debris.

Now, it was our turn to start. J Corral surged forward as one tentative mass. I was feeling a bit claustrophobic and knew instantly that it would be impossible to run a fast time today. Some of the folks in front of us were already walking. It was impossible to pass them.

We made a beeline for the edge of the course where we could pass on the outside. Soon, we were in position to pass folks on the edge, and then dodge back inside for smoother running. This was the best strategy we could come up with. I'm certain we ran an extra three miles doing this, but it was the only way we could actually run.

Discarded blankets and various articles of clothing were strewn on the outside of the course where we would do our passing. I almost went down after tripping on someone's garbage bag. My ears were freezing. It would be dark for at least another two hours. I shouted to Daven to be on the look out for a discarded hat for me.

The first mile I wanted to be under 8 minutes. It didn't happen. It was 9:15 when we hit that marker. I did find a great sock hat, however, and now my ears were toasty! We continued to run on the edges. It was impossible to maintain an even pace. We found ourselves sprinting for openings and then slowing to avoid crashing into walkers. As we continued thru the first 5 miles our adrenaline subsided, but we were happy to feel a bit warmer. The boys were looking strong and I felt strong. But, I was disappointed that we could not find a clear path.

Between mile seven and eight, I shouted to the boys that I had to find a bathroom now, and that I couldn't wait until we reached the portapottys. I left the course and sought relief in a tree line about 20 yards to my left. I glanced back at the boys and saw them running beautifully. They looked very strong. I didn't know if I would be able to catch them when I returned.

Just before I reached the tree line, I stepped into ankle deep water. Both of my New Balance 769s were under water. I continued to wade to a hidden spot another 20 yards into the tree line. I started thinking about alligators. Hurriedly, dropped my sweats and completed my mission. Quickly leaving the swamp, I re-entered the race. My sweat pants were soaked from the swamp water and my feet were freezing.

I ran as fast as I could. I was thinking that if I keep my feet moving, that I wouldn't get frostbite. I watched for Leo's orange sock hat. I wanted to catch up to the boys. After about two miles, I realized that I probably wouldn't catch them. I stopped at the next water station and removed my heavy sweat pants. They came off easily, as I had scissored about six inches up the back of the calf prior to the race. I grabbed a cup of power-aid, but couldn't drink it as it was frozen solid. A young lady gave me a fresh cup that was still liquid. As I began to stride away, I

slid and almost fell. The cups discarded by earlier runners had spilled their liquid remnants onto the course and they had frozen into a sheen of slippery ice. Soon, I heard shouts of warnings of the ice from other runners. I made a mental note to remember this at the next water stop.

At mile fifteen, dawn was breaking, and I thought I saw Leo up ahead. Nope, just another fellow in an orange sock hat. I pressed the pace as I dodged even more walkers.

I unzipped my ratty old sweatshirt and tossed it to the side of the course. Now, the cold is my friend. I felt exhilarated. Two fellows with Puerto Rican flags on their backs passed strongly by me. I fell in behind them and matched their pace. The one on the left had the name Tino written on his shirt, the other had Tony. I planned to stay with Tino and Tony.

At mile seventeen, I felt a familiar pain (old injury) in my right calf just as I began to feel fatigued. I tried to maintain my pace, but the pain was persisting. I felt even more tired. I started to wonder if I should quit the race. I backed off the pace. Tino and Tony left me behind. I was just doing little more than jogging, now. Other runners passed me. I considered walking.

I noticed a fellow jogging next to me. He was hatless. I asked him how his ears felt. He looked puzzled by the question. I asked again, are they cold? He understood, and happily shouted, "not anymore"! I ripped my hat from my head and tossed it into the air. The cold refreshed me.

Daybreak brightened my attitude. I tentatively picked up the pace. No pain. Soon, I heard an amplified voice shouting encouragement to the runners. The 20 mile mark. Only a 10K to go! I discarded my gloves. I realized that I can still break 4 hours if I picked up the pace a bit more. I ran as fast as I dared. Miles 21 thru 24 flew by. There is no way I won't qualify for Boston. I was in a state of elation! Where was mile 25?

The mile 25 marker evaded me. I started to really worry about my time. The watch was ticking and I hadn't yet reached mile 25. Also, I realized that at mile 25, I'd still have 1.2 miles to go, not just 1 mile. My brain had been tricking me. I might not make it. I ran as fast as I possibly could. I actually sprinted. I flew by Tino and Tony. A runner on my left shouted, "Go for it old timer!" I loved that.

Around a turn and up ahead I saw, not mile 25, but....the finish line! I had missed the marker for mile 25. I broke the finish line at 3:55:32. I qualified for Boston.

I couldn't walk properly after finishing the race. Someone gave me a mylar blanket with a Dis-

ney logo, but I couldn't manage to fit it properly onto my shoulders. A friendly volunteer offered to help me, and pulled a can of coke from her pocket and gave it to me. I staggered to the tent to pick up my clothing bag and spotted Luke, Leo's friend. He told me Leo and Daven hadn't finished yet. I had somehow unknowingly passed them. It turned out that somewhere along the course, Daven tied up and couldn't get his legs to run any faster. He told me later that he wasn't tired, but that his legs just would not move. Leo stayed with Daven to help encourage him to finish. They came in at 4:34:44.

Rene found me standing near our designated rendezvous spot. She gave me a beautiful hug and congratulated me. Her warmth was heavenly. She and Luke had ridden the monorail to the different viewing spots along the course, and had been able to cheer Leo and Daven along the way because of Leo's highly visible orange hat, but only saw me at the finish.

The camaraderie felt by all of the runners was very gratifying. To run a marathon with my boys was special for me. Daven achieved his goal of finishing, and Leo became a full fledged "Goofy Runner", and I qualified for Boston. It was an epic adventure that I will always remember.

Drue is a retired Southern Pacific railroad switchman. He resides in Nevada City, California, and is a member of the local Sierra Trail-Blazers Running Club.