

"And why do we fall? So we can learn to pick ourselves up."
-Thomas Wayne

Lighthouse 100 race report

Many of my friends and family know I started running back in January 2013 to ostensibly lose weight, but also to cope with a terrible divorce from an abusive spouse. I was a shattered shell compared to the person I am now as I type this race report. I quickly found a coping mechanism with running but then it turned into something more. It made me stronger in every way. It made me a better person in every way.

I wish I could say running led me to Valerie but instead that story is about how a hospital therapy dog reintroduced two old high school classmates. But at the same time running gave me the strength and courage to ask her on a date a 3rd time after she had rejected me for a new Grey's Anatomy episode and adult coloring books, respectively, the first two times I asked her out.

My journey to 100 miles has also been fraught with failure. 4 times before I failed for reasons I won't expound up here but suffice to say I wasn't fully prepared each time and I failed. But I learned from those lessons. And I never gave up on my dream to run 100 miles.

So I signed up for the Lighthouse 100 almost as soon as I heard about it because I knew it would be a great opportunity to finally finish a 100 mile race. It was in my home state, in one of the most beautiful parts of the state and it meant I could ask Valerie and my parents to be my crew. It was only a two months before the race that I decided to double down on the stakes of the race by buying a ring. I secretly had to figure out her finger size and what she might like in a ring. Thankfully, running helped out as I could easily stop by the store before or after a run to shop. Training went as well as one could hope and soon Valerie, my parents and me headed north for race weekend.

The night before the race I packed up the car with everything I'd need for race day including hiding the ring in my hydration pack. Then I managed to sleep for about 6 hours before the 3:45am wakeup. I grabbed a banana

some yogurt and we headed to the Petoskey lighthouse for the start. Arriving at the start was a beautiful sunrise...and the realization that I'd forgotten my hydration pack!! I accidentally left it on a chair in the cabin when I loaded up the car. I didn't panic and quickly arranged for my parents to meet me at mile 7, besides if I couldn't run 7 miles without water what kind of ultra runner was I?! I then found my friends Shenoa, Erinn and Elizabeth and wished them all good luck.

The race started at 6:03am on the Petoskey lighthouse jetty as a gorgeous sunrise lit up the sky around us. The first 15 miles or so were on a paved bike path that leads to Charlevoix and hugs the Lake Michigan shoreline. It was drop dead gorgeous, about 55 degrees and a cool breeze off the lake. At mile 7 I saw my parents and grabbed my pack. I quickly chugged some water and part of a larabar. I glanced at my phone and noticed a severe weather warning for high wind advisory with south gusts of 30-45 mph. And then I noticed the temp...91 degrees as a projected high. Shit.

Fantastic when you consider 70 miles of the course had us running south. Mile 8 was when I started chatting up John. John is a huge reason why I finished. We ran from mile 8 to mile 80 together. He has finished multiple 100 milers and his guidance and level headedness helped to keep me focused. I can't thank him enough. It was truly a pleasure to run with him. Back to the race, mile 11 saw the first aid station and I loaded up on anything with electrolytes knowing the convection oven roasting I was about to run through. Mile 17 we hit downtown Charlevoix and made like badly dressed tourists casually walking through town like we owned the place with our garish running gear, drenched in sweat and taking in the sights as the well to do locals stared. I'm glad Charlevoix got a taste of the best the ultra running community has to offer.

Mile 22 aid station was when my crew met me for the first time just outside Charlevoix. The temp was starting to rise so we started a pattern that would repeat the entire race, pickles, oranges, bananas, trail mix, ice, and water, quarter slices of a turkey and cheese sandwich. Thus refueled I moved on knowing there was minimal shade from mile 22-30 and big, steep, rolling hills. The aid station captain said "The road looks like a roller coaster, up and down about 7 or 8 times until the 50k aid station."

He wasn't lying! It was hilly and while the temps were only in the low 70s there was zero shade. At the marathon point my crew was waiting...unfortunately it was next to a field that had pig manure on it. Stinky. We moved on into a solid run the downs/walk the ups cycle until we crossed US-31 and rolled into the 50k aid station around 6 hours. The early morning clouds had burned off and the sun was starting to pound down on us. John wanted popsicles. I wanted ice. We started headed due south on Old Dixie highway. Shade was minimal. The road was mostly flat but we did run walk/cycles because of the heat.

Mile 39ish my crew was waiting and they had. freaking. popsicles. John was over the damn moon. I've never been so thrilled for a lime popsicle. We turned into a sub division that had shade for about a mile then back onto US31. There ZERO SHADE, there was now a steady 25-30mph headwind and the temps were into the 90s. It was 5 miles until my crew. It was the first of 3 death marches in this race. John kept me positive. Relentless forward progress.

Mile 45.8 and we finally reached my crew. We added popsicles to the pickles, oranges, bananas, trail mix, ice, water, quarter slices of a turkey and cheese sandwich rotation. We put ice into our hats and let it melt down on necks and faces. Heaven. We were now at Torch Lake and had 5 miles to daydream about the fancy homes and the Caribbean water colors but more importantly there was shade and slightly less wind. The heat persisted but we persisted more. Mile 51 brought a massively steep hill to climb but my crew was waiting at the top.

It was now a slow countdown to a finish. I reapplied lube to all the important parts and continued my food and drink cadence. My hydration pack holds 2 liters of water and I was drinking that 2 liters every 5 miles. It was that hot and windy. Onwards, we moved towards Elk Rapids. The wind and heat persisted.

Mile 59 and we were in Elk Rapids. More food. More drink. Refill the pack. Changed shirts. Headed due south on Elk Lake road which should be renamed the road from hell. Small shoulders. Crazy drivers who almost hit us multiple times. Me and John were salty at the drivers, yelling at them and flipping them off. Even some of the other runner's crews were driving

a bit crazy. It was hilly and hot. We could see Old Mission Point in the distance. It seemed so far away. The wind nearly knocked us over. It was the doldrums. My legs and feet ached. But then I remembered something: I run in these conditions all the time at Pointe Mouillee. No shade. Windy. Hot. I can do this! It was the internal pick me up I needed at the time.

Mile 65 we saw the crew again. More ice. More food. We grabbed flashlights as the sun finally started to drop in the sky. Death march #2 finally ended at mile 67. The sun finally set. The wind did not stop. 3 miles later we arrived at the TART bike trail. We picked up my pacer Clayton, did the food and water thing and put on headlamps and reflective gear. Every step I took was the furthest I'd ever run. 30 miles to go and shit was about to get weird.

Mile 73 we were on a random road in Traverse City when a bunch of jerks in a minivan pulled over and told us to get the fuck off the road! Ok then. Then a cop asked us what we were doing at mile 74. What was going on?! The wind still hadn't stopped and it was still hot. Still I persisted on. Mile 75 we met the crew again and made a fairly quick turnaround. After about a mile I realized we hadn't refilled my hydration pack! Crap! I went into water reservation mode. Thankfully, the sun wasn't out and we were back on the TART trail which was flat compared to other parts of the race. I could see John was hurting and I wanted to push for a 24 hour finish if I could. Clayton had directions for him if John needed them.

We pushed on. Everything hurt. My feet were screaming. Someone said we had less than a marathon to go. I wanted to punch that person. Mile 80 arrived and we were finally at Old Mission Point peninsula. Clayton and I decided we wanted to push for the 24 hour finish. John was ok with us pushing on without him. Miles 80-88 me and Clayton sniped 5 runners down as we ran the Bayshore marathon course and at mile 81-82 managed to avoid a skunk who apparently wanted to join us on course for a quarter mile. I had a second or maybe 3rd wind and the actual wind was at our back for the first time all race. But things were about to go sideways in a hurry.

Mile 89 came and suddenly I realized I had 11 miles to go. ELEVEN MILES. It seemed like forever. My feet were a complete shit show. Every

step was hell. It was dark. Clayton tried to cheer me up but I was so tired. I just wanted to sit. I just wanted to ask Val to marry me. The ring was like a brick on my soul and on my back. The course shifted to match my mood. More steep rolling hills. I told my crew I need them every 1.5 miles. I was in the pits. It was still 77 degrees at 3am. The wind howled. I was done. I climbed the hill at mile 91, and finally reached the 2nd to last aid station and dared to sit in a chair for a moment. My crew was there and asking what I needed, everything was a blur, my feet were dead, and my mind was numb. In the back of my mind a voice shouted "Get up get up, GET MOVING!" I found myself moving down M-37 without Clayton. I just had to keep moving. After a few minutes he caught up to me, and so began death march #3.

I was dead tired and I only had 9 miles to go. Everything was a fog. I kept trying to run but my feet would rebel after only a minute or two. My legs actually felt ok but my mind and feet were gone. 3 miles passed that I barely remember. It was mile 94 and suddenly I had to go. Somewhere on Old Mission peninsula is where I squatted 94 miles into a race. I hope I was deep enough into the woods. I'm not sorry if it wasn't. When you gotta go, you gotta go. I thought that things would improve after that but suddenly I was at mile 95 and I could barely remember the last mile. I had a brief moment of clarity that I must be sleep walking. I needed to sleep. I called my crew and told them to get a chair and timer for 5 minutes. I sat down and took a 5 minute nap. I startled myself awake just before the alarm went off and had a renewed sense of purpose. Weird, how 5 minutes could be so refreshing. I still couldn't run much because my feet were destroyed but I knew I finally had this. I reached the very last hill at mile 96 and stepped over the last timing mat and aid station. Suddenly I was crying and couldn't stop. I apologized to Clayton for crying. The hills were over, it was all downhill to the finish. This was going to happen! The sky was turning pink as the sun started to near the horizon. I wasn't going to be sub 24 hours but I'd still finish. I saw my crew one last time at mile 98.2 where Val took a great picture of my "I'm fucking done face." As they drove away I planned the final thing: Proposing to her.

As I shuffled along at a speed Usain Bolt would be jealous of, blazing along at 13 minute mile pace the last mile, Clayton would run ahead to catch me finish and be in position to catch the proposal on video. I could

see my dad in the distance. An orange glow emanated through the trees, my feet were numb, my heart was pounding out of my chest and I turned the corner and ran through the finish. I wish I could say I did something epic at the finish but I didn't. It was over and even standing was difficult at this point. But I was still smiling. I bent over to catch my breath as Val came in to hug me. The tears flowed, as she basically held me up and told me how she was so proud of me and loved me so much. The race director congratulated me and handed me that beautiful, wonderful belt buckle. He suggested we go catch the sunrise around the front of the lighthouse.

We walked over to the front of the lighthouse, the sky was magical shade of orange and yellow, my heart was pounding again from excitement, when Val turned around to look at the sunrise I pulled the ring out of my front pocket. When she turned back around I somehow got on one knee. She was so shocked she screamed out loud and started to laugh. After a brief moment I asked and she said YES! Then I used the fence to struggle back onto my feet. We then took a few moments for pictures and hugs before thanking the race directors one more time and heading to a hotel room for some much needed sleep for all. My heart was so full of joy. It was the perfect ending to an incredible 24 hour 29 minute journey.

Things that went right:

- I got engaged!!
- I finished a 100 mile race!!
- My crew was incredible! They not only helped me and John out, but numerous other runners. They were critical in making sure I got plenty of ice, water, salt and anything else I needed.
- Gas station popsicles are the best
- Pickle juice and oranges are probably the best electrolyte replacements on the planet.
- Best guess is that I drank roughly 30 liters (8 gallons) of fluid for this race and went pee 6 times. Pale yellow entire time. Drink more than you think you need and focus on heavy doses of salt to avoid hyponatremia in hot weather.
- My training was spot on. I focused on endurance, back to back long runs and slow/steady/easy training runs.
- As mentioned before, while my feet failed, my legs never really

crapped out on me the entire race.

- I focused on mid-day hot runs whenever I could and that helped save my race day.

Things that went wrong:

- The weather forecast, but I didn't focus on that.
- There were some minor course issues that were the product of a first year race.
- My feet got 4 blisters on them, but given the amount of pavement pounding this was probably inevitable and only became a real problem about mile 80-85.
- Don't forget your hydration pack at the start of a 100 mile race.