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Lakeview

Spotlight City



Alone in His World
Meeting James Castle

Running for Cal
A Hundred Miles in Eagle

Before the Fourth
In Coeur d'Alene



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RUNNING FOR CAL

A HUNDRED MILES IN 24 HOURS

BY MIKE CHILLSTROM

CLOCKWISE FROM
INSET: Volunteer at an
aid station; partici-
pants in a run; the
author in training at
Eagle Island State
Park; sign announcing
starting times for vari-
ous events.

"Mike, are you pulling your skin off?"

It's a legitimate question but I have to laugh. I'm at mile sixty-three of the Pulse 100-Mile Endurance Run, so my laughter is nothing more than a pained smile at this point. I may be running a hundred miles but I'm not insane and I'm not a masochist. Yes, I'm in pain and exhausted, but pain is subjective. This pain will mostly be gone tomorrow. Other types of pain in this world never go away, which is really at the heart of why I'm running today.

"Jon, if I did that I'd be screaming like a little kid," I tell my friend, who's here as part of a small cheering section for me. "This is a special bandage I use for long races. Usually these things are awesome, but this one just doesn't want to stay in place."

I've been running trails at Eagle Island State Park for more than twelve hours straight. It's a little past 10 p.m., on a Friday night in late March. It's dark. It's 42 degrees. It's getting colder, except for one thing: my feet. For a runner, hot spots on your feet mean you've got blisters, or, at the very least, you've got blisters-in-progress. The balls of my feet are giant blisters. I think my blisters have blisters. This is awesome, I tell myself, sarcastically. If I were a car I'd have a flat tire. Two of them.

I mentally recap what I've done so far and what's ahead of me.

The first fifty miles of the day seemed so easy. I'm happy to be at mile sixty-three, but now my feet are toast. How am I supposed to run another thirty-seven miles like this? I guess

this is what I signed up for. Maybe I AM a masochist?

Deciding that to spend ten minutes fixing my feet will be a good investment of time, I sit down on a camping chair, put my feet up on a five-gallon bucket, and slowly remove a couple of old bandages, which is when my friend thinks I'm ripping off my own skin. I pretend to be a field medic and patch things up the best I know how. Lance the blisters. Spray on a skin-toughening agent. Apply some new bandages and drying powder. Fresh socks. Fresh shoes. Pop a couple of over-the-counter analgesics. Back on my feet.

This is better but it still hurts. Damn, this is really gonna suck the rest of the way. Can I do this? I have to. Buck up, buttercup. These miles aren't going to run themselves.

BLISTERS OR P IT'S NOT CANCER

On May 27, 2015, I was working at my kitchen table when I got the email I'd been dreading. A friend's four-year-old son, Cal Thomas Reinhardt, died just shy of his fifth birthday from a rare cancer. Quite a few of my family members and friends have been affected by cancer, but there was something about Cal—a kid I'd met only a few times while I was on a softball team with his dad—that tore my heart out. Maybe it was because at the time I had a three-year-old boy and a ten-month-old girl. Maybe it was because the name Cal Thomas mirrored names in my family: I often refer to my daughter, Callie, as "Cal," while my son, T.J., is a Thomas James. I couldn't comprehend how devastating my friend's loss would be as a parent.

On the day Cal passed away, I told myself that somehow I'd find a way to honor him. I didn't know what that would look like, but I needed to do something. It had to be a tangible way to fight cancer.

I should raise money for cancer research. That's a good idea, but how do I do that?

For a decade, I had dreamed of doing a hundred-mile run. Books I'd really gotten into, such as *Born to Run*, *Iron Wars*, and *Eat & Run*, had made ultra-runners and top triathletes my heroes. These were stories of near-mythical athletes who'd conquered Ironman triathlons or excelled at the most grueling ultra races in the world. I was hooked. I wanted to do that.

The challenge for me, however, was that far from being a running god, I was a mortal, plain and simple. Everything about my running ability was incredibly



JEFF ALBRECHT



COURTESY PULSE RUNNING & FITNESS SHOP

FAR ABOVE: Mike grabs a drink along the way.

ABOVE: The beauty of the route.

LEFT: Food and refreshments at the finish line.



COURTESY PULSE RUNNING & FITNESS SHOP

PAIN DOESN'T SEEM SO BAD. OR CHEMO. IT'S NOT LOSING A CHILD.

average (I'm a modest four-hour marathoner), except maybe for my heart. Still, I wondered how I'd deal with the pain and exhaustion of a hundred-mile race. What would go through my mind during those dark moments? Would I be stubborn enough to push through the misery? Both my wife and my mom were sure they knew the answer to the stubbornness question, but I needed to find out for myself.

If I'm trying to honor little Cal and all the pain and suffering he went through, maybe I need to endure some pain and suffering of my own. I should finally do a hundred-miler, and I'll turn my participation in it into a fundraiser.

That's why I'm in this race. I'm running to achieve a dream, and I'm running to raise money for cancer research on behalf of Cal. Suddenly, blisters or pain doesn't seem so bad. It's not cancer, it's not chemo, it's not countless surgeries and procedures. It's not losing a child.

* * * * *

When all the training was over and the day of the big race had finally arrived and I actually had begun running, my heart raced throughout the first quarter-mile. I had so much going through my brain. All my nervous energy bubbled to the surface and came out in the form

of chitchat.

"Hey, is this your first hundred-miler?" I asked a fellow racer named Karen Johansen, a Calgary resident whom I hadn't met until now.

With a confident, wry smile she simply said, "No, I've done these before. I like this one because it's pretty easy for a hundred-miler."

I laughed a little on the inside, but was taken aback. Did she just say that a hundred-mile run is easy? This race will probably take me about twenty-four hours to complete—that doesn't seem easy to me.

Karen's comment gave me a glimpse into the mind of a hardcore ultrarunner. No race is too long. No event is too hard. Bring it on. But my brain couldn't quite compute the words I was hearing. What am I doing here? Are these hundred-mile people crazy? If so, does that make me crazy, too?

I told Karen that after doing about a dozen marathons, a handful of fifty-milers and an Ironman triathlon, this was my first hundred-miler. I wasn't sure why I was spewing my athletic credentials to a total stranger. Maybe I was trying to prove that I belonged here. I chalked it up to the nerves of a newbie talking to a veteran.

Karen congratulated me and said this was a good event for first-timers, which I found

reassuring at the moment. She explained that she used this run as a "long warm-up to get ready for race season," referring to rugged ultra-marathons held in the mountains of Canada and the Pacific Northwest.

Again, I laughed a little to myself. This is the race of my life, and it's just a tune-up for her.

"What other races are you doing this season?" she asked.

"Umm, this IS my race season," I replied, and we both chuckled.

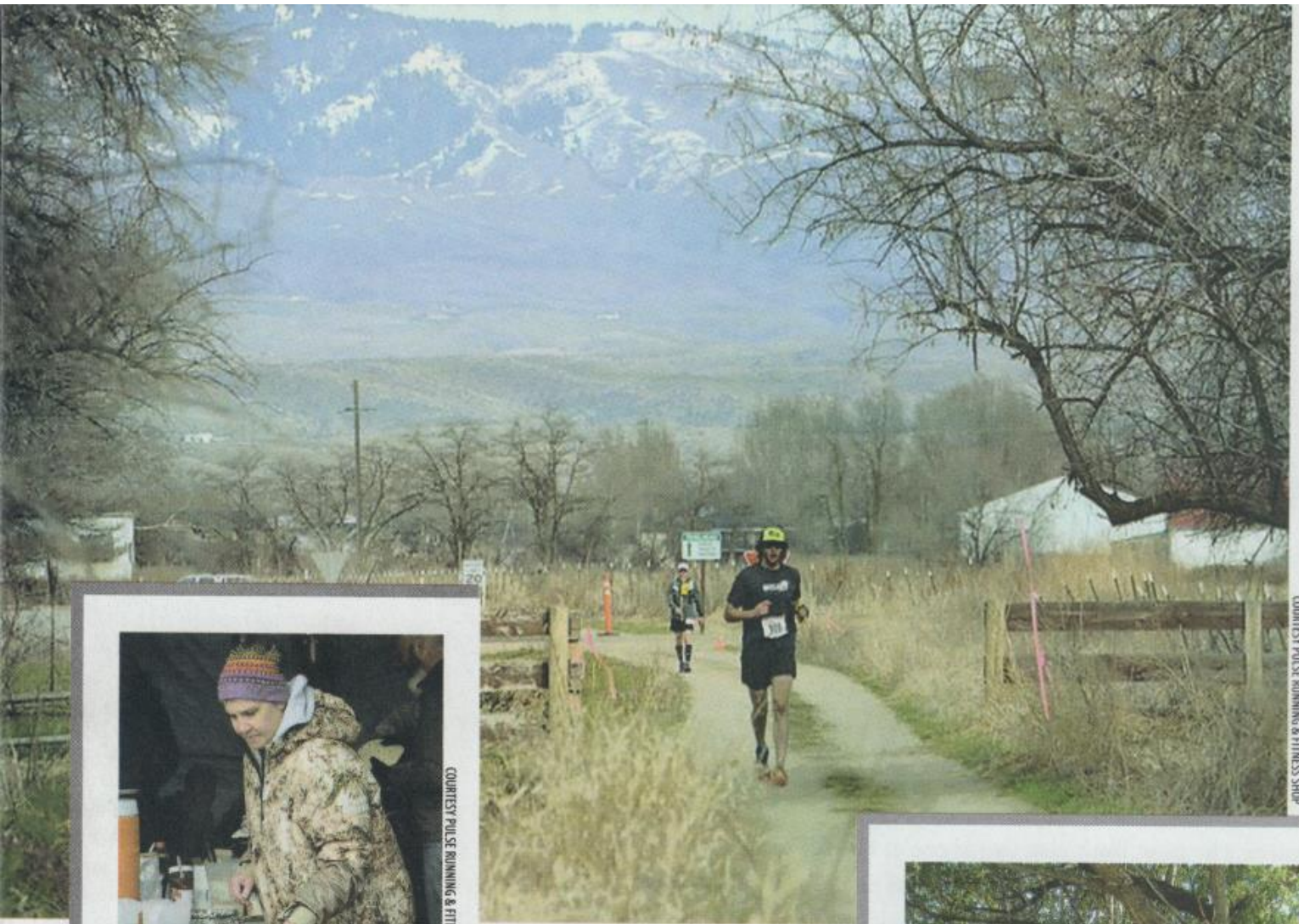
Before we went our separate ways, I asked Karen if she had any top-secret advice for a rookie like me. She didn't sugarcoat it. She said I'd hit a low point overnight. I'd be hurting bad, I'd feel like total crap.

"You'll want to quit," she said. "That's totally normal. Just push through it. When you finish tomorrow, you'll be glad you kept going."

Duly noted. I'm already expecting a lot of pain, but maybe I need to ratchet up those expectations even higher.

* * * * *

I've managed to get to mile seventy. I feel a new pain in my right ankle, which I assume has something to do with how I'm running and walking to try to help my feet, now a pickled mess. Every step hurts when I put weight on the balls of my feet, so I change my stride in an attempt



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JENNI CHILSTROM

48 HOUR RUN	TH - 6:00pm
100 MILE RUN	FRI - 10:00 am
24 HOUR RUN	FRI - 6:00pm
100 MILE RELAY	FRI - 6:00pm
12 HOUR NIGHT	FRI - 6:00pm
6 HOUR NIGHT	FRI - 6:00pm
12 HOUR DAY	SAT - 6:00am
6 HOUR DAY	SAT - 12:00pm

COURTESY PULSE RUNNING & FITNESS SHOP

LOOK FOR RAINBOWS OR SOMETHING GREEN, CAL'S FAVORITE PUSHES AWAY THE NIGHT SKY. I NOTICE A BRIGHT GREEN PIECE

to avoid some of the pain. I'm overcompensating and my ankle isn't loving it.

It's amazing how friendly, familiar faces can do wonders for the soul when you're down and out, and want to quit. I have some great friends supporting me today. On Wednesday mornings, about ten of us usually get together for a men's group in our neighborhood. We share stories, talk about the challenges we face, discuss Bible verses, and enjoy each other's company. My men's group saw to it that I have a cheering section today, and at this moment, it feels good to be loved. One of the guys, Jeff, has been here with me for twelve hours, serving as my personal errand boy. Grab more energy gels, fetch this, find that. He does it all with a smile, completely selfless. Right now it's past midnight and about seven or eight guys are still here rooting for me. One by one, they take turns power-walking a couple miles with me, because my feet aren't allowing me to run very much.

We talk about kids, hockey, childbirth stories, pursuing dreams, crazy things we've done, near-death experiences—each step is still brutal, but my mind is occupied and my spirits are up. I'm now at mile ninety and it's the wee hours of Saturday morning, but in a way it feels

like a normal Wednesday morning men's group to me. Nice work, gentlemen, mission accomplished.

* * * * *

As I get to mile ninety, every fiber of my being tells me I'm in too much pain and should stop. I pull a note out of my running backpack. It's a message from Lucy Reinhardt, Cal's mom. Their family sent me several notes of encouragement, which I tucked away, waiting for the right time to read them and get a boost of energy. This one's a tearjerker. Lucy reminds me that my pain is temporary and little Cal is smiling down upon me right now.

I can't throw in the towel. I couldn't live with myself.

But my feet hurt so much, I have to quit. There's no way I can finish.

I remember Tim, Cal's dad, telling me to look for rainbows or something green, two of Cal's favorite things. If I see them during the race, it's a telltale sign that he's here with me. A few minutes later, the sun begins to shine, ever so slightly, breaking up the previous ten hours of running with a headlamp in the pitch dark. As the sun pushes away the night sky, I notice a piece of farming equipment on the horizon. It's bright green. Thanks for checking in, Cal.

* * * * *

I've made it to mile ninety-seven. Holy hell. I'm so close, I can taste it.

It's been almost twenty-four hours. No sleep, constant movement. My feet are so swollen, I think they've gone from being size 12.5 to about size 14. Suddenly, my mind starts racing again. I'm tangled up in—and overwhelmed by—a web of emotions and feelings. Personally, I want to conquer this challenge that's been rattling around inside my brain for a decade, and am pushing myself further than I ever have. I'm thrilled to be in the moment—painful as it is—experiencing firsthand what this is like. It's exciting that after months of training, I'm finally in the homestretch.

At the same time, running this race for Cal and his family has placed a certain burden on my shoulders. Not only can I not fail the little boy who's been my inspiration, but also nearly a hundred people have contributed a total of \$8,300 total to the Children's Cancer Research Fund, the Reinhardts' charity of choice. All those people gave their hard-earned money to support my fundraiser. They're all cheering me on and tracking my progress on the race's website. I can't let them down, either.

Anyway, all this

THINGS. THE SUN OF FARM EQUIPMENT.

bellyaching has served a purpose: my mind has been so distracted that I haven't realized I'm able to see the finish line, which is now maybe two hundred yards distant.

You did it, buddy. Awesome. This is for you, Cal.

I expect a big surge of emotion as I cross the finish line. Instead, I just stop and put my hands on my knees. I look up at my wife, my kids, and my friends. I don't smile, I don't cry, I just take a deep breath and look up at the sun. I think I'm in shock that I'm finally done.

I just ran a hundred miles. That was the hardest thing I've ever done.

My finish was in just under 24.5 hours, good enough for fifth place out of seventeen finishers. They'll probably never write a book about me, but I did okay for a mere mortal.

My wife has her phone out. "Mike, I'm taking a video. Tell it to the camera: are you ever going to run a hundred mile race again?"

I know she wants to me say no. Believe me, my feet want me to say no, too.

"Never say never," I say with a laugh. I just may be a masochist after all. ■

To donate to the race's Childrens Cancer Research Fund fundraiser, visit **childrenscancer.org/100miles**

Every dollar donated helps researchers secure an additional eighteen dollars of funding from the government and other sources.



CHASSEN/FLICR



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JEFF ALBRECHT

FAR ABOVE: Eagle Island State Park.

ABOVE: A tranquil spot near the race course.

LEFT: Mike presses on.