

Love. Move. Rize. in 2025.

"MOVE: The GReat 100"

By Karen A. Sparks



(An ultramarathon, also called ultra distance or ultra running, is any footrace longer than the traditional marathon length of 26.2 miles.)

"The only way out is through, the only way through is in." –Robert Frost

In October of 2020, I had a plan to run the Indiana IT-100. It was five years since Reagan and Grant were killed by their dad, which took place on November 1, 2015. I was going to "reclaim the weekend" but it was canceled due to COVID-19.

God placed this in my heart so I created my own solo race, "The GReat 100." My race was more complex than most one-hundred mile races that are run on 20-25 mile loops. The park had two running loops, one is the gravel road that is 5.5-miles and the other is the 10-mile dirt trail. My plan was to alternate between the two loops in total for my 100-miles. People told me I was insane to do it this way because I would be running shorter loops.

I arrived at Erwin Park at 6:30 AM on October 31, 2020, with my SUV fully stocked with supplies for my run. This is far from the Moab 240 in Utah, but it's my home base of two hundred twelve acres of wooded area and ten miles of trails. It waited for me on this muddy and cold 45-degree morning. The sun isn't awake, so the running trail ahead is dark. It's a public park in a heavily populated suburb, so I'll share it with bikers, runners, campers, birthday parties, and playground warriors as the day arrives.

Although this race is solo, a local news outlet, WFAA, sent their Senior Sports Photojournalist, Arnold, who went by AP, out to film because they were covering my story. AP was waiting for me at the Pecan Pavilion that I reserved. It will be my

aid station/home base for the duration of the 100 mile run. While I was unloading my things, AP started filming. My dad arrived, and he prayed over me. I click on my headlamp, and I get ready. This is a race that I must run without the cheering crowds or the dozens of aid stations. Only the trees and creatures that call this place home will watch me run toward the demons. I've been in the shadows of grief for too long, and it's time to *show up and let God lead me through this dark battle.*

Five years ago to the day, my light was taken from this world, and a canyon of grief replaced my heart — the day my only two children, the loves of my life, were murdered. In the next thirty-plus hours on this "100-mile trail", the goals on my pace chart are to match the timeline of the actual events of that day. I remind myself that I'm here to face the nightmare from hell that killed me and forgot to bury me.

Nature, the trails have become my sanctuary, my church for a season. This is the place where I can be alone and talk to God. My breath is visible in the cold as I whisper Psalm 23:4, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Reagan and Grant, your lives count. My life counts. You did not die in vain, and evil will not prevail. Okay, guys, I'm wearing your race uniform armed in your neon colors head to toe.

"Rea and G-Man, let's go to battle, fight through the demons, and RIZE from the ashes. Amen."

I'm running through October 31st and November 1st to reclaim this time, these hours, to turn pain into power and write the rest of my story.

There is no starting gun.

I'm no longer running away from it... the pain. Instead, I'm running toward it... the pain. It's time to pound the earth and take my revenge on the evil that has swallowed me whole— when I finish, this dark muddy trail will be my sacred ground.

The clock is ticking! I take my first step. For the first four hours, I ran alone.

I could feel the heartbeats of my children pulsing strongly in the earth beneath. Their voices were in the orchestra of sounds as the wind swept through the trees. The demons began to shriek and growl and I could feel them chasing me. My mind shifted to my watch as it kept record of my pace and my past.

When Reagan was born, she had to be in the NICU for four days. Sixteen months later, Grant was born. I battled postpartum with both, but my children were the only

things that kept me going. David told me after Grant was born that he'd fulfilled his bargain by giving me children before I was thirty.

"That was the only bargain you fulfilled, you piece of s***," I murmured and spat forcefully onto the ground.

I was a mom, and I had a purpose. Reagan was stubborn from the get-go. She was my mini-me. Grant was a meticulous little guy and a rule follower. She called him Bub. He had a little speech impediment and couldn't pronounce his "R's" so he called her Reags, but it came out "Waygs." When they were toddlers, she spoke for him.

With tears in my eyes, I groaned, "Reagan, Grant, and Jesus, I know you're here. Breathe life into me."

With each step, I inhaled grief and I exhaled hope. The physical pain kicked in earlier than I expected. I made it to my aid station. Dad tied my shoes and took my headlamp because the sun was rising. I saw a friend, Suzanna, I smiled, and told her three down and 97 miles to go!

AP caught up with me on the gravel loop, and we talked about how I get through my "pain cave." The mindset that is – one step at a time, staying in the moment, one mile at a time.

My rotation crew and pacers had now arrived.

Andrea joined me around 10:30 AM at **mile 15**, and by that time, the news crew had a drone camera following us. I was trying to stay focused on my pace, and a little boy with brown hair who looked to be around eight or nine appeared out of nowhere. He ran behind me for a short time and then he was gone. I know that was a visit from my G-Man!

Part of the beauty of these ultra races are the connections that are formed in the running community. A great example is Allison, who I met two years ago as a volunteer at an aid station at the IT-100 race in Indiana. It was my first fifty-mile race. We reconnected online and she flew all the way to Texas to help crew me in The GReat 100.

The weather turned out beautiful. Sunset was approaching, and my anxiety was creeping in *because this time, five years ago*, R&G were trick-or-treating in our old neighborhood with their dad, my soon to be ex-husband, David. I bought their costumes and Reagan was dressed in purple and black as a witch. Grant was the Grim Reaper. I was looking forward to seeing the pictures, so I texted David to send me photos.

He responded, "No pictures. Now you know how I feel."

This was a typical reaction from him, always *the victim*.

Days after he killed them, several people gave me their accounts of seeing R&G with David in the neighborhood. Everyone said that the kids seemed to be having fun and were acting normal but David seemed aloof and irritated. One neighbor told me that he jokingly asked David why he wasn't in costume?

David snarled and said "Everyone thinks I'm the devil don't you know?" Then he laughed and walked away.

I clapped and yelled, "NO WEAPON FORMED AGAINST ME SHALL PROSPER – get out of my way!"

Mike, a Sports Reporter, and an Anchor from WFAA News, showed up on the scene in street clothes. In spite of how he was dressed, he grabbed his heavy news camera and ran with us for several miles. I'd spent time with both him and AP days prior for my interview. I told him that he and AP were more athletic than me – carrying all that equipment! They were incredibly supportive and encouraging.

Dad was still here, waiting for me at the aid station. He was talking to Greg, my coach. Team Dirt & Vert had a Halloween Run they'd planned, and I was glad they would be out on the trails with me overnight.

Fiona and Andrea ran a squircle (trail/gravel) loop with me. I told them that the sound of the gravel took me back to the gravel driveway of the house where they died. I explained that the house was about 30 yards from the road, so the driveway was just as long. R&G were very competitive and would race one another to check the mailbox.

I picked up my pace for a moment, "Race you there!" I yelled.

Fiona and Andrea laughed.

Mile 43 and the "Halloween Moon" made its appearance. We switched off our headlamps for a while on the gravel loop because the moon was so bright. I knew about this moon phase because Brandy, my BFF since middle school and who introduced me to running, told me to look for it. She was running a race in Arizona on the same night and said that it would connect us. I googled "Halloween Moon" before my race and told Fiona and Andrea that it was the first universal sighting since 1944. Brandy said that it's also called "The Hunter's Moon."

"And, I'm definitely hunting down evil tonight," I laughed.

I stood in a warrior stance and switched my headlamp back on, "I'm here to take back the night and fight until sunrise," I proclaimed, followed by a howl.

They howled with me.

Andrea told me about bees - extracting life's honey, accomplishing the impossible, and endless persistence. Then the dragonflies – transformation. Chatting along the trail helped keep the focus off of pain and the monotony of the loops.

On the next trail loop, Jen joined us, and Halloween costumes rushed past us as others were running in their own event– a costume contest and a Halloween fun run.

Meltdown #1. I peered down at my watch. The time was closing in on me, and I thought back to what R&G were doing that night after he took them to the house. *Were they aware of David's temperament, were they scared? Did they ask to call me and he told them they would never see me again?* My mind was scrolling through fearful possibilities, and I felt like something was gripping my neck. I couldn't breathe. At the end of this loop, I ran straight for my dad at Pecan Pavilion and wept in his arms. He spoke scripture over me.

"God promised, 'I will be with you,' " as he quoted Exodus 3:12, referring to God appearing to Moses as He called him to end the suffering of his people and deliver them out of Egypt.

I shoved a PB&J in my mouth and changed clothes. I slammed down a Coca-Cola, let out a big burp, and shouted, "Oh, s***, big momma!" Sorry guys, that's Grant making us laugh– he loved that quote from the movie, 'Big Momma's House.' "

Going up and down hills was painful. I leaned into Denny going down, and he pulled me up the hills. Jeff joined us for a while as he was finishing his thirty-mile run. A couple of strangers jumped in with us for a while.

Was I crazy for doing this? My sweat made the temperature seem colder, and I was getting tired. Visions of David pouring gasoline all over the house and flashes of the kids caused me to have an emotional breakdown.

Denny and Andrea pulled me aside and reminded me why I was out here, "Reagan and Grant are so proud of you. They're cheering you on."

I was so thankful for my friends. I rallied.

Andrea bowed out at 2:00 AM - she'd run 51 miles with me, and I was at **mile 65**. Denny and I ran another hour until I came back for a break. He ran 16 miles and then needed sleep because he was one of my anchor legs.

Dad asked me what I wanted to eat. Allison asked if I wanted to change clothes while handing me ramen noodles. I heard all of their voices.

Keep shuffling if you can.

Let's do intervals, someone said.

They reminded me to drink my water.

That's something I easily forget because I get so loopy. I finished off some mashed potatoes and drank a Coke, Mountain Dew, and a Topo Chico. I took a bite of grilled cheese and spit it out – cheese grossed me out at this point.

I quickly grabbed pants, two jackets, a beanie, and gloves. The pacing baton was passed on to Greg, and we hit the gravel trail for 5.5 miles.

The moon was so bright on the road that we didn't need headlamps. It was beautiful. We power hiked and ran ten-second intervals. He took my phone because I kept getting calls and texts and he wanted to help me stay focused. Greg told me race stories to keep me going. When that loop was over, he hugged me and said he was proud of me.

Next pacer up was Baha. The sun was coming up.

On cue, my mind went to Sunday, November 1, 2015 at 6 AM. Over and over, *David texted me that I needed to come alone to pick Reagan and Grant up at the house*. As usual, the texts fluctuated between angry, apologetic, and back to angry.

His last text was sent to me around 12 PM: "YOU BETTER CALL ME!"

My parents and sister kept reminding me not to engage him, to just tell him that you'd see him at 3 PM at the agreed exchange location. And that's what I did. My mind screamed, then the words shot out into the trees, "Why didn't I call him? – NO! That's not on me. He **CHOSE** to do this...and because I didn't call or 'listen' to him – NO! But, if I would've just called him or gone by myself, maybe they'd be alive, maybe I could've talked him down from his rage?! NO! Those are lies from the enemy trying to bring on the guilt. I'm not perfect, no one is perfect– but that doesn't mean you murder your kids! You took my babies. You didn't give them a chance! **YOU DID THIS!** Don't put this on me – I cheered you on and backed you for eleven years, I did the best I could, and this is how you go out? NO! You chose evil, and after all of those years of scheming, you

ran out of people to ask for money. Just get a job and keep a job. You were smart – why? You ran out of options and you put yourself in a hole. Your sole concern was how the divorce would make you look – that people would know the truth of who you were. You chose hate. You never were capable of loving. You proved you never loved your kids. *I know you can hear me!* Reagan and Grant will live on because I'm still here to share their story and tell people how amazing they are! I am *not* quitting!"

I finished that loop exhausted and collapsed into my folding chair. Dad took a nap in his truck and he now paced around the pavilion praying while the crew worked on me. At age seventy-two, wearing his pink R&G t-shirt, Duke watched in awe as the crew worked their magic as I came in and out. Every time I came in, someone new told me how incredible and encouraging he was—giving out high fives, hugs, prayers, and telling stories about R&G to everyone. *He's my hero.* I needed my dad to be here with me. He is my rock, as he was for his grandkids. I knew this was tough for him too, but we're a team.

Denny, Fiona, Greg, and dad helped me warm up, fed me, and massage me. As soon as I got back on the trail, I needed a pee break. I veered off the path, grabbed a tree with both hands, and sang, "Let it go, let it go," laughing to myself. R&G would never let me hear the end of it, their mom doing this in the woods!

Baha waited while I did my business. He's from New York and has the attitude to boot. He always makes me laugh. While power hiking, he demanded that my shadow stay even with him, and if I complained, he made me run. I didn't complain.

Mile 86.5: Ginny and Kelley were with me, and then Fiona. She asked me what I loved most about R&G. She wanted to hear stories. I told her that Rea was always one step ahead of me, ready to defend herself if she got caught doing anything. I thought she'd be a lawyer, but she wanted to be a veterinarian. She was a spitfire and fiercely competitive. I told Fiona a story that was told to me after they passed. It was about a little girl sitting alone on the playground at school. Reagan asked her if she was okay. She said no one will play with me. Reagan said, "I'll play with you!" Every day after, the little girl said Rea found her, and made sure she was never alone. Rea could make you laugh and be ready compete for the gold medal on and off the field.

Grant would study athletes on tv, and I'd catch him imitating their moves. He was a momma's boy for sure. Rea was independent, but Grant was always at my side. He wanted to play football for the TCU Horned Frogs. One of Grant's teachers told me that he would often stay behind and walk during P.E. with a girl who had a heart condition. She couldn't run like the others. That was him – my tough, sweet little gentleman. I told Ginny, Kelley, and Fiona about how R&G always worried about me.

They never wanted me to be home alone. We ran through our tears, I was delirious and in pain. Fiona told me to grab her shoulder and she would pull me up the hills. This would allow me to keep pace. I was in awe of her and in awe of all of my pacers. *Who spends their time doing this for someone?* I'm blessed.

Ginny, Tzar (her dog), and Kelley got me to **mile 92**. I told them I'd never heard of "filicide" before my story. I talked about the other moms I met that had been through it. It was a club none of us wanted to be in. Ginny and Kelley reminded me about the importance of taking this weekend back. I showed them a picture of R&G, they told me how beautiful they were, and they pointed out "hearts" along the trail.

Meltdown #2. My mind and body were consumed with flashes of the fire, their funeral, burying my R&G, their crime scene photos and autopsy reports, and the fact that I would never, ever see them again on this earth...even if I finished this race. I wondered why I was doing this...nothing will change!

Out of exhaustion, I freaked out on them. They reminded me that I was nearly there and that running solo is harder than a real race. They told me to stay in the game, run my race, and that this was my day.

I had them call the aid station to tell them we were on our way. This would be my last loop and I wanted to make sure Denny and Jen were suited up and ready.

By the time I reached the pavilion, one of my high school BFF's, Angie, was waiting for me. I was overcome with emotion. We hugged and cried. The news cameras were in my face, and I snapped at them to back up. Anyone or anything was subject to my exhaustion...I wasn't one to mess with at this point.

Greg took care of me. There were lots of people around...I could hear voices, but it was a blur. I grabbed a donut and a Coke. Jen and Denny took me out for **my final 8-mile march**. That chocolate donut was heaven. Water was gross at this point, and my mouth hurt.

We marched out four miles on a different path because I told them I was tired of the same loop. They created a new route that I'd never been on before. It was very symbolic to say the least.

At mile 97, the battery on my watch buzzes to indicate it was very low. I panicked. Without it logging my run, I wouldn't have any record of it. Jen called Greg, and he drove his truck out to us with his mobile charger. He saved the day!

They charged it while we hiked, and I couldn't understand how it kept my pace while not on my wrist. Jen and Denny kept telling me that all I had to do was finish the victory lap and that I had defeated everything that had been in my way. I told myself that no power could stop me. They told me how inspiring I was, and I told them it was all Jesus. I said I didn't want the news cameras there anymore. I didn't want this to be about me, and I didn't want the attention. I just wanted to be with R&G, and this was about them. They are the focus.

Why couldn't Reagan and Grant be here to experience a time when I've discovered new possibilities - to see their mom as a fighter? How did they view me? Was I enough? Did I do my best?

"Why didn't you kill me, David? I was the one who made you angry – why not come for me? You were always a coward – never one to take responsibility for anything. Hear me now. YOU ARE WEAK! My children are strong, and they will live on in me, and I'll never quit! Reagan, you're on my right, Grant, you're on my left, God, you're at my back, Amen."

Denny and Jen pulled me close, clinched their arms in mine, and held me up, then told me to let go and run in the last few yards across the finish line. I did. I could hear everyone cheering. I saw my family, mom, dad, Uncle Chris, Aunt Karen, and Angie, with my running team. I ran through the pink and blue streamers that my team had made. I told Jen and Denny to save my run on my watch.

I saw my mom. I gasped, the tears came flooding, and I fell into her arms. Dad wrapped his arms around us both, and we cried together.

"Oh my baby, my baby...my Reagan, my Grant. Thank you, Lord – you *are* the Victor," he whispered.

I collapsed into my chair. The team wrapped me in my R&G blanket. Then the crowd went silent.

"I'm not making any speeches. Thanks to all of you, I've accomplished my goal. Reagan and Grant, thank you, I am forever grateful for all of you."

Jen and Greg presented me with a hand carved plaque that commemorated my run. Angie poured champagne, and this incredible and small family of people toasted the victory. I hugged all of my pacers, and just like that, it was over.

The cameras were back on me, and AP asked if finishing this race brought "closure" or "the beginning."

“There is no closure. There is "the beginning," — the beginning of healing and hope. There is no closure. There is, however, beautiful healing that can take place if we allow ourselves to be open to it. It does not stop the pain; no miracle cure makes grief or pain disappear. It remains. There is no closure.”

In this season of my life, my running family has embraced me. I know God has surrounded me with this incredible group of people who communicate with me that my race is ongoing and remind me that I am never alone.

I ran 100 miles in 31 hours in honor of Reagan and Grant, with my team by my side. "The GReat 100" enabled me to feel the physical pain and mental pain. I had to feel it. Moving through those 100 miles - I stared down demons and fought a battle that will continue until my dying day. MOVE.

I can say I won this round and that Reagan and Grant are very proud of me. All of you remind me that I still have a place in this great big world. We all have a story and pain to bear. Mine is not the only one. There will be days of pain and darkness. There will be moments of light and love. I want Reagan and Grant to see that, by showing up and MOVING, I'm not giving up.

My final finish line will be holding my children in my arms again. Until then, I will run my race at my own pace. My pace is my victory.

There is no closure, but there is hope.

LOVE yourself and others.

MOVE through your pain and MOVE forward.



“The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility]!” - Habakkuk 3:19 AMP Classic Edition

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To watch the Sports Emmy Award Winning WFAA Original Story, by Mike Leslie and Arnold Payne, "100 Miles For Her Babies," click the link below—

[North Texas mom runs ultramarathon to honor the memory of her children](#)

"How do I get through losing my child? A loved one? How do I trust again after an abusive relationship or trauma? Where do I even begin?" The Great Root Movement is small, but we are growing. We need you, as more women and individuals have reached out for help and guidance on how to MOVE forward.

We launched our **LOVE. MOVE. RIZE. in 2025** fundraising campaign with a goal of **\$10,000**, and we need your support to achieve it.

You can be a source of blessings for others! Every dollar counts, and no amount is too small. Thanks to the generosity of TGRM partners, we have expanded our professional resource network, reached over 250 women, and provided multiple RIZE Scholarships for bereaved mothers, domestic abuse survivors, and others in need of help to attend restorative & therapeutic programs, therapy, and support groups. Additionally, TGRM has awarded over 100 high school scholarships through our Reagan and Grant Small Endowed Memorial and TGRM Scholarships.

Our fundraising campaign runs from March 5th to March 26th.

We're profoundly grateful for your time and generosity. Together, we can reach our goal and increase our resources for those asking us for help. Let's continue to awaken and foster hope in the lives of others by helping them MOVE through and MOVE forward!

"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." - Proverbs 11:25

Scan our QR Code to give.



Share or give via our fundraising link: <https://givebutter.com/TGRMLMR25>

Thank you!

Love. Move. Rize.,

Karen A. Sparks

President, [The Great Root Movement 501\(c\)3 Nonprofit](#)

Race Director, [Love Never Ends Trail Series](#)