



Kelly Kincl, Laurel Kincl and Kevin Huck post marathon

A Long Run In Houston

Marathoner tells her story ■ By Laurel Kincl

I started running years ago when I was in graduate school to stay in shape, to keep my sanity and to hang out with friends. Now running is a part of most days in my life and is still a social activity. My partner Kevin has done a lot of marathon training with me, skipping the really long runs on weekends but getting up with me at 6 am during the week to run.

My first marathon was the Flying Pig Marathon in Cincinnati, and I have run the Portland Marathon for the past three years. I was ready to think about a different one. My brother and most of my family live in the Houston or Austin area, and I have gone to watch the Houston Marathon for about five years because my brother runs it every year. I usually jump in with him at mile 18 and try to encourage him with jokes, pointing out things along the course to take his mind off the pain and just being next to him. He always has run a personal record when I

accompany him at the end of his race. This year, after checking with my brother, I decided to run in Houston.

In Houston on Jan. 14, the sun was not quite up yet at the start. It was a foggy, muggy morning, so it was somehow surreal.

I felt great as I got into my pace and tried to spend time observing my surroundings, taking in the spectators, other runners chatting, the street surface, the buildings and trees. I tried to be aware of my breathing and my legs and shoulders. Then I started feeling blisters about mile 9 or 10. I had not blistered

at all during my training runs, but I was not surprised given Houston's humidity, so I ignored them. I also started feeling a bit nauseous, which was also unusual for me, but I decided to stick to water only at the aid stations. That helped.

The support on the race is amazing, and all the people who volunteer, including those who hand runners water, are saints. The miles passed amazingly fast. I did become more internal as the race progressed, and instead of focusing on my surroundings, I focused more on myself.

During the race, I was not running with anyone I knew, but everyone is certainly chatty on the course, and I enjoyed hearing all the Texas accents. I chatted with various people along the way and used other runners as rabbits (a runner in front of you with a bright shirt or other distinguishable trait; you try to keep up with or pass your rabbit). All the runners are encouraging to each other and often say, "You look awesome" or "You're doing great!" Some pat you on the back if they pass you, and it always boosts me to feel a friendly touch. I find it helps me to do that for other runners — you give out encouragement, which boosts you as well.

One thing that helped the miles pass was the anticipation of seeing my family. I saw them three times on the course, and I beamed every time I saw them. I could not wait to see them at the end. I also drew energy from the crowd. Occasionally I would hear my name

moving forward. I thought about all the time I had spent in training, all the people in my life who went out of their way to wish me well in so many ways and all my running friends through the years. All of this kept me running, at a slower pace, but moving forward nonetheless. In the last miles, it got bearable, which was at the point when I realized there were just a few miles left and I was going to finish soon. Then my calves started cramping.

I regretted only drinking water at the aid stations! The cramping made running impossible, and I had to walk and shake my legs to try to release the muscles. I was determined to not let my time slip, so I kept running as much as I could, knowing there was an end. Kevin ran the half, so after his run, he was at mile 26 cheering me in the crowd. When I passed the 26 mile marker and the end was in sight, I think I had a smile that radiated way past the finish. I did it!

I am not sure there is any way to describe putting my mind and body through such a trial or the emotions I feel when it is complete. Despite the cramps, I ran a 3:48. My brother ran a 3:36, so he was always ahead of me by a few minutes, and I never saw him until the finish. For three of my marathons I have run a 3:48, so it seems to be my time, although I keep trying to improve it!

For the post race celebration, I took my traditional ice bath and then headed with my family for chips and salsa and margaritas. I

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in the cheering, and even though I knew it was printed on my bib, it lifted me every time.

But around mile 19, I began to hit the infamous wall. My legs were in pain, and the mental energy that had pushed me for the past miles was waning. I tried to focus on

feel content and look forward to the Eugene Marathon to do it all again. Who knows, maybe this time I can run faster!

Editor's Note: Kincl adds, "Houston is very high tech and has the results graphically on the web. If you type my bib number, #672, you can see all sorts of data on my race (at www.runpix4.com/hou07/ge.php)."

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