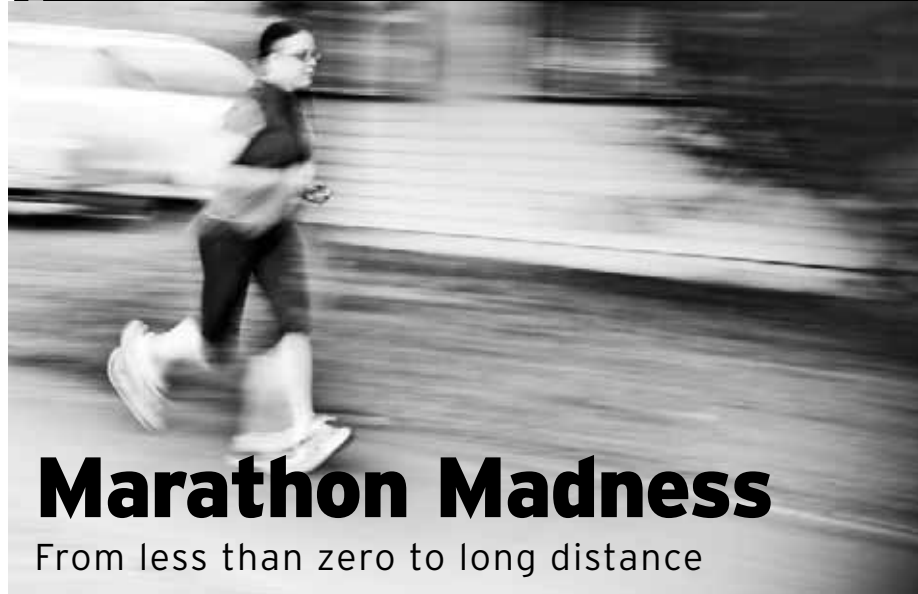




Marathon Madness

From less than zero to long distance

The morning of my first 18 miler it was raining. I was prepared for the weather and the run. Rain hat, sweat band, Gatorade for mile 3, Gu energy paste for miles 7 and 12, even electrolyte tabs.

It took more than three hours, but it felt good — really good. I was home before lunch, showered, iced and ready for the day. It wasn't until that afternoon that I saw the strange rash forming on my chest. By bedtime it became clear what had happened: The Nike swoosh on my T-shirt had rubbed against my skin for hours and mixed with sweat and rain. I'd been branded.

After waiting tables for years, I finally had my first 9-to-5 since graduating

college. I liked the new job, but I was tired all the time. Part of my exhaustion came from using a part of my brain long dormant. But I had to admit that sitting on a bus, then at work and finally in front of the TV was doing my body no favors.

A friend I used to wait tables with lived three blocks away, and we missed our hours of mindless chatter. We decided to start running together. Once or twice a week we'd lace up our shoes and jog for an hour. One night after running we went for hot chocolate and she gave me a book outlining a training schedule for beginning marathon runners. I laughed. She was serious.

Eventually I gave in, and brought aboard a third runner — a former sorority

sister and, in character and temperament, my neighbor's exact opposite. I thought the group dynamic might make things interesting, even if the running wasn't.

A little more than 18 weeks later, we crossed the finish line at the Seafair Marathon, holding hands. And six months after that, I cried as I watched them run in the Seattle Marathon. I'd intended on training with them but had bowed out. I've regretted my decision ever since, but it wasn't until now — five years later and 280 miles south in Eugene — that I've decided to do anything about it.

I'm going into training older and slower but a lot more prepared for what's going to happen to my body — the good, the bad and the ugly. I've built a nice base of 3 miles that I can manage a few times a week. Already those lovely endorphins are flowing through my body, filling me with energy. I'm hungry a lot. And I've reconnected with an old friend here in Eugene, where I grew up, to train with during longer runs.

I know as my mileage increases, weird things will start happening. Sudden cramps in my calves will shoot me awake in the middle of the night. My thighs probably won't chafe, but my armpits certainly will. And I've already invested in a sports bra as expensive as my car insurance payments, so hopefully my boobs won't be quite as sore this time around. Thankfully, I've never had to deal with some of the more common ailments of the long-distance runner — killer

blisters, dead toenails, bloody nipples — but, then again, I have no idea what the next few months will bring.

After a couple months training last time around, I discovered a confidence I'd never before experienced. I was superwoman; I could run 10 miles straight. One Friday night, a musician friend of mine was passing through town to play a show. I was feeling particularly confident. I could go see his set at 11 pm, no problem. I could even have a drink, a vodka cranberry — the juice would be good for me. But the drink turned into three or four or five, and then it was 7 am and my alarm was going off. I had 11 miles to run and a friend waiting for me. I don't remember much about that particular run except finding every public restroom (you get really good at planning routes based on available toilets) and drinking fountain we passed.

I learned an important lesson that day: No matter how good I feel mentally, I am mortal. In order for my body to perform, I have to respect it. It would have been wiser to switch the run from Saturday to Sunday that weekend.

I'm more prepared for the pain and sacrifice this time, and more excited about the rewards. If I properly respect my body, it will pay me back with fitness and finesse and energy. My muscles will grow stronger, and my heart will thank me.

A pretty fair trade off, even if I do end up getting blisters, bloody nipples and dead toenails. **EW**



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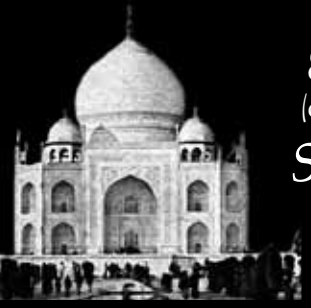
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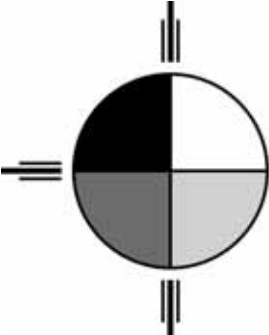
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