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WEEKEND BREAK

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Photos by Ed Hunt

Memaloose Island and the Columbia River Gorge are beautiful in the fall.

OWNED GOALS

What we learn along the way

Four runs in one year before turning 50

By **ED HUNT**
For *The Daily Astorian*

*"When I run, the world grows quiet."
— Matt Inman, "The Terrible and
Wonderful Reasons Why I Run Long
Distances"*

It must feel good to be so close to achieving your goal," my wife, Amy, said.

I was wary rather than excited, and tired from working the night before. I stared out the car window at the storm clouds growing over the Oregon Coast.

My goal was as simple as it was arbitrary: I wanted to run four half marathons in one year before I turned 50. Each half is 13.1 miles, 4 x 13.1 = 52.4 — more than 50 miles, give or take a stumble.

We were driving south to Newport to run the fourth and final half: the Newport Resolution Run and Polar Bear Plunge. Out of shape from the sugar season, I wondered if I would even finish the race.

And if I did finish, what would come next? What happens after you achieve a goal?

When I set about this adventure, my plan was that this would be a last big hurrah for running. I love hiking and vowed to do more, perhaps as a substitute for these organized runs, which can become expensive. Yet each run introduced us to new places and got us out of our rut of attending only local runs.

May 20: Run on the River

Astoria's Run on the River was a great way to start. I signed up as a walker so I wouldn't get in the way of more experienced runners.

The weather was perfect, and I love the waterfront. I took off at the start running way too fast, passing most of the slower walkers. When my phone's app told me my first mile time, I was stunned. I felt good and my pace was eight minutes a mile — I rarely ever run that fast. Nervous energy. Wow, I felt really good — running without hills is great! In fact, the first seven miles or so is absolutely flat with great views along the riverfront to enjoy.

The flat running ended at the town's far east end. The course turns right and goes steeply uphill into the Alderbrook neighborhood. The real runners had flown by me long before I got to the first hill, but mine wasn't the only pace that slowed to crawl. I finished with cramps in my legs and a decent time of two hours and 15 minutes. One down.

Aug. 12: The Bridge of the Gods Half Marathon

Having grown up on the Columbia River, I have a strange desire to run or walk across all this magnificent river's bridges some day. The Great Columbia Crossing is one of my favorite runs each year.

The Bridge of the Gods is narrow and 99 years old. We ran first across the metal grate bridge and then up onto forested roadways still charred from the previous summer's devastating fires that threatened the town of Cascade Locks. Smoke from distant fires was still in the air, smudging the August sun.

Oct. 21: The Gorge Half Marathon

After the muted skies at Cascade Locks, the weather in Hood River was a postcard-worthy sunny autumn day. A friend warned me, "The first two miles are all straight up hill." I was glad for the warning. The climb was psychologically defeating, yet it soon leveled off and was worth every step. Fall colors and bright sunlight against blue skies. This run follows the old cliff-side highway yielding picture-perfect views around every corner. I finished just short of my personal best time but feeling great.

Then came the sugar season. Baked goods, fancy dinners, candy and cookies. Busy days, excuses not to run. "I'm in shape. I just ran three half marathons!" I told myself.

Cartoonist Matt Inman calls this "the Blerch," that inner voice that gives you all the great reasons not to exercise, to quit or not even try.

I all but stopped running more than once a week and some weeks I didn't run at all. I gained eight pounds. I forgot to ask for the right days off work, so I had three 12-hour night shifts scheduled right before the final run.

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ABOVE: Amy Hunt and Ed Hunt at The Bridge of the Gods Half Marathon. It is better when you run with a friend or someone you love. **BELOW:** Amy Hunt meets Ed Hunt at the finish line at the Newport Resolution Run. **BOTTOM:** This is as close as Ed Hunt got to jumping in the ocean for the Polar Bear Plunge in Newport, Oregon.

