

Big Sur International Marathon April 28, 2013

After my success with completing LA marathon last year, I decided to run another marathon and so I set my eyes on Big Sur. If I am going to run for 5+ hours, it should be interesting/beautiful/worth it, in other words a *destination race*!

On July 15th, 2012, Erin, Holly and I registered for Big Sur (BSIM). The journey to Big Sur started slowly...both mentally and physically. Big Sur is a HILLY course (when you talk about hills in relation to the BSIM course, it should be in capital letters, lowercase is just inappropriate) and the Winter Trail Run program was a terrific way to get started on running hills. What a humbling, challenging way to start my training, however that laid a great foundation for the training that was to follow. I love trail running now (thanks Linda)!

Erin and Holly are two of the most determined, focused women I know...we all had challenges during training, but we stayed the course. Erin and I (and her running group) ran most of our long runs together---couldn't have done it without her! Holly joined when her plan matched up and we did run the shorter long runs together. Most importantly, we made it to the start and FINISHED.

Fast forward to race weekend. We (Kelly, Erin & I) drove up on Friday, made good time and went to the expo for bib/bus pass pick up. Bought a few mementos including a bottle of wine with a BSIM label! It's a love/hate thing...to buy these things BEFORE you actually finish the race, but that's how it goes. Anyway, expo complete, we went to dinner. The most fabulous dinner at Casanova in Carmel, thanks to Kelly's suggestion. After dinner, we checked in at the Cypress Inn (a Doris Day hotel). It was a great place to stay- good service, good food, helpful staff, rooms were quaint, comfy beds...just lovely. I totally recommend staying there, just not in room 107, unless you are a night owl ☺.

Saturday we decided to drive the course to check it out and take pictures together as we figured we probably wouldn't run together at the race. Erin runs faster than me, especially on hills ☺. It was a beautiful drive; we took pictures at all the key points/landmarks, did a little sightseeing and impromptu shopping! It was feeling more like we were on vacation than there for a race. It was awesome!

One of my DUH moments that weekend: not realizing that the “gail force” winds I was experiencing while trying to take the pictures, were the winds they mentioned would/could be there on the course! Met up with the crew (Holly and family and Diana & Kurt) for dinner at a lovely Italian restaurant. It was so authentic that even our server was Italian 😊!

Race morning. Up at 2:30 AM, ‘cuz wanted to have a real bathroom for nature’s duty...had to wait a bit, but it worked! Got ready and headed out at 3:30, stopped in the lounge for some breakfast TOGO. They had bagels, hard boiled eggs, yogurt, and fruit. Since you are not suppose to do anything new on race day- I played it safe and grabbed a couple of eggs for later...not used to waiting 3+ hrs. to run once I’m up. Bus pick up was at 3:45 and it was just a couple of blocks up the street from our hotel. We boarded the 2nd bus and guess who sat in the row in front of Holly? Jeff Galloway and his wife! They were across the row from us, and since I couldn’t hear over everyone’s talking, I put my earphones in and took a nap. We arrived at race start in Big Sur at 5 am. This was a very organized, well run event WITH humor! The port-o-potties had signs on them like “room with a view”, “Carmel residents only”, “best selling authors only”, and “big screen TV included”. It was the perfect thing to see at 5 am with only 2 hours of sleep...made me laugh and calmed my nerves.

Race start had 3 waves...not based on age groups but on predicted finish time. We were in the 3rd wave, 4:45+ finish time. As we were standing around waiting to start, I couldn’t help listening (eavesdropping) to the pace leaders discuss their strategies...the 5 hr. pacer said she was going to “bank” some minutes in the first 6 miles because they would need it for the “rollers” at the end. This strategy fell in line with my plan. The race director mentioned that for this course we should adjust our finish time to be 15-20 minutes slower than our best marathon time because of the course. This would translate to a finish time of 5:22-5:27 for me...but based on my training runs (& my heart’s desire) I was hoping to finish in 5 hours. Finally, the gun went off at 6:55am.

The 3 of us started together, but since we were towards the back of the pack--it was too congested for me to get a good groove going. I was holding back instead of “going with it”. Not wanting to miss these “free” downhill miles/minutes, I started weaving thru the crowd. Erin stuck with me, but we lost

Holly. Erin kept checking with me, asking if we were going too fast, but it was a nice pace and since I could talk, I knew I wasn't pushing it. We banked some significant time by the time we hit mile 6-7. The weather was perfect. The redwoods were gorgeous and it felt like we were in Big Bear, minus the altitude. Stuck to the plan of run 1 mile, walk a minute...until mile 17. They were right the 1st half of the race is "gentler" than the 2nd half. There were stretches of flat and lots of folks stopping to take pictures. Saw all the scenic spots...but once we got to the open pastures around mile 6-7 with the ocean to our left, the wind picked up. We had a combo of headwind and crosswind for the remainder of the race (think SART). Besides the wind, the other "thing" we had to deal with was the slope on the road. After a while, that was wearing on the feet/legs. When we could, we ran on the shoulder if it was flat so we could get a break from the slant. It was beautiful and looking at the scenery did help the miles to pass. It was a bummer both on Sat. and Sun. the lighthouse was hidden by the fog...it was one of the iconic landmarks on the course.

This was an emotional race for me. My mom loved nature and when I was little, I'd roll my eyes at her remarks about the beauty of nature and how marvelous God's creation...and here I was running in a place that she would have loved to visit. There were many moments that morning that I got teary eyed on the course: finishing hurricane point and approaching the halfway point- crossing at Bixby bridge, seeing Cheryl on her bike at mile 14, passing the pastures- seeing the ocean beyond the cliffs, looking out towards the lighthouse, ah, so many places. And at most of them it was because I could feel my mom with me looking out at God's creation and marveling at the beauty and greatness of it all. I had such a sense of peace. I wanted to complete this race so badly, I had obsessed about it for so long. I'd gone through times of doubt that I wouldn't be able to meet the time cut offs, times of confidence that I would make the cutoffs and possibly beat my LA time...oh the journey had a bit of all kinds of craziness in my head! As I was racing, it became clear that I would make the cutoff AND that I was going to make my secret goal of a 5 hour finish.

Finally at mile marker 17, I abandoned my plan of run 1 mile/walk 1 minute. I was now going to take geographical breaks...and kept on. The wind and HILLS had taken their toll. Talked to a gentleman from Fort Lauderdale, FL---when I

made a comment like, “oh, a hill, what a novel idea,” out loud and he chuckled with me. We were slanted forward because the wind was so stronger and we were climbing, it was just a funny moment (can still picture it in my head). Maybe it was the delirium that sets in during long runs. We shared that moment and then I ran along. I hit mile 23 and running time was 4:28...3 miles to go and 32 minutes...it would be close, but I might just make my goal! However, I was in the middle of Carmel highland “rollers” which were the last “set” of HILLS before the final HILL at the beginning of mile 25. The 2nd half of the course is a series of HILLS...you were either running up or down...if there were any flats they were negligible. My legs were tired and ready to be finished. It was here that met a couple from Memphis. They were cute. We chatted on the uphill and then run the downhill ‘cuz to quote the man, ”gravity is our friend!” It was the lady that reminded me that we had made the 22 mile cutoff. We continued together for a while.

Then at mile 24.5 my left quad cramped up...but what I felt was like the top part of my quad separated from my hamstring. I stopped, and a million thoughts ran through my head...did I just break myself? Was I done for the (tri) season? Would I finish? Am I going to have to get picked up? Took a moment and then I thought, I can drag my leg across the finish line! Stretch! So, I bent my knee to grab my foot to stretch my quad and then I felt a cramp start at my glute/top of hamstring, so I quickly straightened my leg. So then I remembered Martha’s stretch the opposite muscle from the “problem”. I bent at the waist and kept my legs straight---ah, release! I stood up and could keep going. I’d never experienced that feeling before. The course IS as difficult as they say! I stopped looking at my watch at that point, because I started walking more than running and knew I wouldn’t make my heart’s desire finish time. I must say that final HILL at mile 25 reminded me of Vista del Lago on the OC tri course---that was overkill on the course, I mean really, we’d already run so many HILLS, but I thought of all those training runs on VdL with Dianna and so I chinned up, took a breathe and tackled that last mountain! Once I got to the top, I knew it was literally and figuratively downhill from there.

Unlike the previous years, spectators could not line the finish, they were held to the finish chute. Kelly, Diana, and Holly’s family were the 1st faces I saw

just before entering the chute. I could have used seeing their faces earlier in the race, but circumstances this year didn't allow for spectators on the course ☹. At that point I looked at my time and thought, "don't let more time pass, just sprint the final 50 ft." and so I did. And after 5 hours and 13 minutes on that beautiful Sunday morning, I finished my 2nd marathon...and I shed a few tears at this finish too...and again when Kelly found me at the finish. Must be a marathon thing?!

Holly finished her 1st marathon!...after many years of wanting to and due to injuries not making it to the start. Erin ran a sub 5 hour marathon, something she hadn't done in a while ☺! I didn't make my goal time, but I finished faster than 15-20 minutes slower than my last marathon time (5:07). This WAS beyond a doubt a *life changing* event for me. Would I run this course again, *probably* not--- but I will be back to run those Carmel highlands strong and "redo" my finish ☺...can you say "RELAY"!

Remarkable things about the weekend: had an unbelievably fabulous time with my roommates: Kelly and Erin! They really enhanced the entire experience for me...and it did feel more like a vacation than a "race" weekend. I really enjoy eating good food and we ate GOOD food that weekend. Kelly was far and beyond an absolutely fantastic Sherpa!!! She took wonderful care of us that weekend (especially since I had mush brain a lot of the time)!!! Words cannot thank her enough.

Bib	5.2 mi.	13.1 mi.	15.6 mi.	21.2 mi.	Total Time	Div Place	Age	Age Place	Gender Place	Pace
2543	48:29	2:24:10	2:56:36	4:09:23	5:13:17	2458/ 3120	45	174/239	1119/ 1544	11:57