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Pheidippides Revisited

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Pheidippides Revisited

BY

James C. Stockwell

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2002

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For Kathy

My best friend and companion, for without her love and support I would not be the person that I am today. Thank you for being you, I love you.

For Bryan and Sara

My two most important reasons to get up each day. Regardless of the money I make, I will be forever rich having you in my life.

In Memory of Margit M. Stockwell

The passing of my mother during graduate school taught me to never take a day for granted.

I wish to acknowledge the following people for their contributions:

My Father, Jim Stockwell, for running along side me during the 2000 Chicago Marathon, in my eyes one of the most successful people I know.

My Brother, John Stockwell, for our lifetime of sports and laughs, don't change.

My two sisters, Carin and Cathie Stockwell, mom's spirit lives on in you, believe me.

My Mother-in-law Diana Kattner, I am truly happy to be part of your family.

My Father-in-law Jim Kattner, may the harvest always be more than you expect.

My brothers and sisters-in-law, Lynn, Ron, David, Cheri, Dan, Kim, and Pam, thank you for making me feel like one of you.

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And to the 36,000 runners and over a million spectators that made the 2000 Chicago Marathon a success. For almost eight hours that October day, we came together as ambassadors of good will, showing that indeed patriotism is not just cheering on the winner, but it is celebrating everyone's effort as well.

Thank You

Jim Stockwell
January 2001

RUNNING HEAD: Pheidippides Revisited

Pheidippides Revisited:

An Autoethnography

Jim Stockwell

Eastern Illinois University

CHAPTER ONE

A Conversation

“If what you did yesterday seems big, you haven’t done anything today.”
- Lou Holtz

“I saw a sign back there that said to find a cute butt and draft. Do you mind if I follow you?” Under normal, business circumstances this statement might be considered sexual harassment. However, it was said to me during the running of the 2000 Chicago Marathon.

Generally when someone makes a comment about one’s backside, you can either be offended or take it as a compliment. Most of the time a reaction to a comment is based on the receiver’s frame of reference, which leads to how the message is interpreted.

Huh?

Let me back up for a moment. Sorry for the fly by. Communication is the simultaneous sharing and creation of meaning through human symbolic action (Seiler & Beall, 1996). In other words, people engage in a particular activity, and then discuss it either verbally or nonverbally, resulting in a shared understanding. Whatever activity a person decides to do, there can be a sharing of experience by communicating with others. In simple terms, this is called interpersonal communication.

Fine. What’s the point?

The basic idea behind the information I just provided is to develop a shared meaning. Once there is an understanding of where I am coming from, perhaps there can be a way to share my experiences.

So?

Well ... sometimes people do things that other people wish they could do or have always wanted to do. By sharing experiences, people can gain insight into these activities and determine if they want to know more about it.

This is all very vague.

Yes, indeed it is; but in due time it will make sense. Perhaps it would be wise to back up even further.

In the fall of the year 2000, on a brisk October Sunday, I embarked on a journey that, in retrospect, developed a new branch of my person. Through interpersonal and intrapersonal communication I experienced an event that was unlike anything I had known before.

And that was?

Running a marathon.

Impressive.

Running the race may have been impressive; after all running 26.2 miles under one's own power does deserve recognition. However the really interesting information was the cultural interactions of other runners, spectators and/or bystanders, and myself. Each communication interaction that took place during either the training, the running, or the recovery of my participation in the Chicago Marathon helps to paint a picture of the experience.

Now you're getting somewhere. Tell me more.

With pleasure. Marathon running and training is more than just a simple question of desire. As I will show, my ignorance of the sport lead me through an emotional roller

coaster of training, but my education and information gathering helped culminate a successful venture.

It is important to note however, that the marathon is just a vehicle in which to tell the story. The real issue is the communication surrounding this event. In this thesis I will explore how storytelling was used to help me understand why someone would, first run this distance, and second why I did it.

So by using the marathon as a backdrop, I will analyze the interpersonal communication that took place to provide a unique look at my experience in this event. I think that it is safe to say that no one can experience everything, so we rely on others to tell us stories about their experiences so we can have an idea about other subjects (Armstrong, 1992; Faber, & Mazlish, 1990; Kaye, & Jacobson, 1999; Rubie, & Provost, 1998).

However, before one looks ahead, it is important to look where one has been, for we can learn from the past. The past often provides a common frame of reference, which helps with understanding; please pardon the pun, in the long run.

CHAPTER TWO

Hindsight

“Study the past if you would divine the future.”

- Confucius

In 490 B. C., a man by the name of Pheidippides ran from the harbor city of Marathon to the Grecian capital city of Athens to deliver a message. According to legend, the Greeks were at war with the Persians, and after the battle of Marathon, Pheidippides was sent to give notice of “Niki” which meant “victory” in Greek (Braunstein, 1999).

This may not seem like much of a task, however Marathon was 24.85 miles away from Athens. Without the use of cell phones or the Internet, the quickest way to get the message anywhere was by foot. Pheidippides was considered the fastest man in the Grecian army, so he was given the undaunting task of delivering the message.

He did succeed in getting to the capital of Greece, proclaiming “victory” in the battle, then died from exhaustion. Quite an unceremonious ending to an incredible display of athleticism. Though Pheidippides may be lost among the history books as mere footnote to a great battle, his accomplishment has since spawned the sport of marathoning (Braunstein, 1999).

I had first heard the incredible story of Pheidippides when I was in junior college, taking an ancient history course. I found the feat (of running a marathon) to be quite interesting, which later developed into a fascination, then an obsession. I had never run anywhere near the distance of a marathon. I used to run the mile in junior high, but that was a fraction of the distance of a full marathon.

Originally the distance between Marathon and Athens was 24.85 miles, the distance that Pheidippides ran back in the 5th century (Braunstein, 1999). The Marathon was measured at 26 miles for the 1908 Olympic games because that was the distance from Winsor Castle to the White City Stadium in London, England. Later, 385 additional yards were added to the race so that the finish line would be in front of the royal family's viewing box. In 1924, the distance of 26.2 miles was officially adopted at the Paris Olympic games, thus making it the current length (Braunstein, 1999).

Why would someone want to do this? Why would someone want to put his or her body through a vigorous activity like running a marathon? What would one get from doing this? These questions were raised in my mind and over the years they would culminate into a decision to run a marathon.

“What do you think about running a marathon, Dad?” I remembered saying during the summer of 1999. This was not just passing dinner conversation. I was really interested and according to Hal Higdon (a man whose methods I will discuss in detail later), you should tell any and all people of your decision to run a marathon.

My relationship with my father had developed over the years into more of a friendship than a parent/child relationship. We often talk about issues that friends do, like sports, movies, and politics. As I grew older however, I felt more inclined to share my views, rather than have them decided for me as they had when I was a child. Perhaps the maturing process had done this to me, allowing me the confidence to open up and disclose my feelings that I had not had before.

My question about the marathon was met with a lukewarm response. “That’s a long way to run. Do you really think that you want to do that?”

I have been often referred to, within my circle of friends, as a “peacekeeper”. Generally I receive counsel from many people before making decisions that will affect a group of people. Sure I personally was going to run the marathon, but the entire process was going to touch more than just me. At this point it was important to get support for my endeavor from the other individuals that would be affected.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship that I had with my father was more like a friendship than anything else. However, he was still my father, and having him support me was important in achieving my goal. I’m not alone in that thought process. In a parent/child relationship, parents play big roles in child athletics (Barber, Sukhi, & White, 1999). Parents also need to understand that a child generally plays a sport for fun (Berggren, 1997). I also found, that children really want a parent to encourage them and support them (Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn, 1999). Taking all of this into consideration, I pressed on to gain his support.

Parents can often communicate messages that may lead to undesirable results. Negative thinkers or parents that project depression tend to create depressed children (Brage, Meredith, & Woodward, 1993; Jacob, & Johnson, 1997; McCall, 1988). Parents who use violent methods in discipline or perform violent acts create children who often have behavioral problems (Youssef, Ahia, & Kamel, 1998). Defensive behaviors such as withdrawal or isolation may result from violent homes (Gibb, 1961; Mazzoni, 1997; McCall, 1988).

On the other hand, positive attitudes or outlooks tend to breed positive children (Baxter, & Clark, 1996; Krech, 1990; Palardy, 1999; Sui-Chu, & Willms, 1996). Open lines of communication, where children are encouraged to talk with their parents, lead to

stronger relationships between parents and children (Krech, 1995; Masselam, Marcus, & Stunkard, 1990). Involvement of parents in the lives of their children lead to achievement in almost any endeavor a child undertakes (Brage, Meredith, Woodward, 1993; Heston, 1996; Sui-Chu, & Willms, 1996).

Why?

“What?” I remember my wife asking that question. “You want to run a what?” I told her that I wanted to run a marathon and she couldn’t understand why. I attempted to explain to her that I thought it would be something really great to accomplish. In the back of my mind however, there was something missing. Why? What was the point? Obviously, Pheidippides ran because it was basically his job. Even though I wanted to do this because of an odd fascination, there was something missing.

Still the question of “why?” came to everyone’s mind when I mentioned that I wanted to run a marathon. I once took a philosophy class as an undergraduate student and a question on a test was simply “why?” After much deliberation and analysis, I answered the question, “why not?” which turned out to be the right answer. Indeed, optimists see the glass as half full, whereas pessimists tend to see the glass as half empty. It was apparent that I choose to run a marathon simply because I wanted too.

Granted this answer is adolescent, when we were children if someone asked us why we did something, we often respond with a “because” or “I wanted to”. The complexity of my reasoning is much more in depth than a simple “because I wanted too” and I had to figure that out for myself. Getting to find out why others ran, might help, but

just because one person jumps out of a perfectly good airplane, doesn't mean everyone does.

My interest in running was just half the reason now. The second was to get people to understand why, especially myself. Without knowing someone who ran a marathon, I needed to discover for myself what it was like to do it. On the other hand, for everyone to really understand my reason for running a marathon, I needed to explain it to them at a level in which they would understand. I had to establish a common frame of reference with them so they would be able to understand why I was going to do it. By the same token, living the experience, immersing into the culture, I could understand why others have run a marathon before me.

Interest

I was working one Monday back in 1998, when a co-worker of mine began discussing her plans for the evening. I mentioned that I was looking forward to playing with my year-old son, who was just learning to walk. The girl said that she probably would do little, for her boyfriend had just run the Chicago Marathon the day before, and was not feeling too energetic. I laughed at first, but after a few minutes of talking about the marathon, my thoughts of running one came back into my mind again.

For the next few weeks, the two of us occasionally discussed the prospect of running a marathon. She said that her boyfriend trained for quite some time and was glad that he ran. I wondered where he ran and she said that they had a treadmill at home and that was where he did most of the running.

Though my co-worker was not an actual marathoner, she was familiar with the process. I never really talked with her boyfriend to ask him about his experience itself, which meant I was getting a lot of information second hand. Though most of the discussions that we had were very interesting and supportive, I wasn't able to establish a common frame of reference with her or her boyfriend so complete understanding could not be shared. Back to the drawing board, or the race continued.

CHAPTER THREE

Let me tell you a story

“A wisely chosen illustration is almost essential to fasten the truth upon the ordinary mind, and no teacher can afford to neglect this part of his preparation.”

- Howard Crosby

I was beginning to understand that common frames of reference were important in understanding a communication interaction, but was telling a story a communication event? Sure they are fun to tell, often provoking some humor in an exchange between a sender and a receiver, but does telling a story of an experience qualify as research? It was then that I decided to explore storytelling to determine if I could use it to share my experience thusly creating a common frame of reference for the parties involved.

It is very rare for someone not to have some type of influence on an activity. Usually there is an inspiration or reason that a person does something, and when they accomplish the goal, they generally revert back to what got them there. My goal of running a marathon was no different.

I remember it was a Friday night, the 7th of January when I got the call. I was playing with my son in the living room when my dad’s voice echoed off the answering machine. He told me to pick up the phone.

Excited to hear from him, I quickly picked up the receiver. The next four minutes are still to this day incomprehensible but vivid in my memory. My mother had been in a car accident and was dead.

Relaying the message to my wife, a shroud of shock encompassed the house. I'm not sure if I reacted normally, but the next few minutes were spent repeating a horrid story that to this day is still difficult to tell.

As far as the world was concerned, my mother was two things. To the people that knew and loved her, she was an ongoing string of stories and incidents that involved laughs, tears and joyful smiles. To the rest of the world, my loving mother was a cold statistic, just another traffic fatality logged in the annals of time. It was then that I realized life was more than numbers, instead an ever-evolving narration of experiences.

Interpretations of human activities are always shaded by the cultural values and life practices of the day and culture in which they are formed (Denzin, 1997). When I began the training and made the choice to become a marathoner, I broke into the culture. Nothing we can know about a culture or about ourselves is free from interpretation (Goodall, 2000). The question of why I was doing this resurfaced again, but I also was now curious about the culture I was entering.

At this point in my life, I was beginning to look at everything with a narrative flavor. My son asked me questions on top of questions about everything, and much to my credit, I generally had an answer. That was until the day he asked the same question that everyone else was asking – “Why?”

Granted, he was more curious about why we had to wait for a green light before we could go through an intersection, but my thought process was the same. I had to support what I was saying with facts or rules so that people would accept my reasoning. Of course, this hinged on the idea that facts were interpretations (Goodall, 2000).

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, interpretation is an explanation, which is associated with a story.

Hmmm

Does this mean that stories are an interpretation of experience to help provide an explanation? Browning (1992) said that stories are communications about personal experiences. I often use stories in teaching, either for an example or to help illustrate a point. It has been said that humans are natural storytellers (Fisher, 1987) and all of our interactions in daily life involve the process of storytelling. One person tells of an event, the receiver interprets the story (Riessman, 1993). With that said if I was going to answer the question "Why was I running a marathon?" perhaps if I told the story of actually running a marathon, people (myself included) would understand why I did it.

Maybe this was putting the wagon in front of the horse, but to me it made perfect sense. Now I had a focus. I was going to tell the story of running a marathon so people would share the experience and then have a better understanding of my motivation for doing it. At the same time, I would gain a better understanding of the culture, which should shed some light on why others do it.

I discovered that narrative stories must be focused, simple, clear, and interesting if a story is to come to life (McGrath, 1998). Also personal stories are those, which feature the narrator in a positive role (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1993). This research helped place a framework on my story. A good story takes readers (or listeners) somewhere where they haven't been before, introduces them to an individual or group of individuals, and teaches them to admire or care about the adversity that the characters face (Rubie & Provost, 1998). Through the discourse process of listening and responding,

change can occur (Cinnamond, & Zimpher, 1990). In other words, people are drawn to stories because of what they have to tell.

I also knew that I couldn't just write a story without taking some notes on the experience. Field notes (or notes in the field) are to mediate between lived experience and the story being told (Goodall, 2000). This meant if I was going to tell a story, I had to build a journal of thoughts related to the experience.

I now had two motivating forces in my life for running the marathon. One, I had developed that fascination with the activity and two, I was looking for information to build my story. Of course, where do I go from here?

As any researcher knows, questions are generally used in "containing" or "leading" a study down a particular path. With this in mind, several questions continued to surface as I developed the focus of my story. Why am I doing this? Why do others do this? What's the point?

Asking the wind was not going to provide the answer, though I generally asked it while I ran. Talking to yourself is fairly common, for I'm sure everyone does it, but it was the arguing that got me. I was looking for answers that I was used to finding on the pages of a book. So I ran to the library.

Knowledge does come from experiences but it also comes from teaching (Vaughn, 1997; Amerikaner, Monks, Wolf, & Thomas, 1994). In other words, people teach or tell others about their experiences, thus increasing the receivers' knowledge.

Perfect.

So, if we are natural storytellers (Fisher, 1987), a story takes people where they haven't been before (Rubie & Provost, 1998), and stories are communications about

personal experiences (Browning, 1992), I can use the interpersonal communication surrounding the marathon to allow others to share the experience.

Storytelling was a way to share experiences; interpersonally I could create a common frame of reference of an event with my narrative. This would allow the receivers to gain insight to the activity; they could now understand why I did it and what the experience was like. This was half the battle. Sure others would benefit from my story, but would I? Why am I running? Self-discovery is very hard, especially when you can't find it in any book. Telling a story is great, but it still was bothering me why I couldn't answer why? Talk about running in circles.

I remember as I embraced my wife after the news of my mother's death, I thought about our second child who was to be born in another month, and our son who played peacefully on the floor near my feet. Someday, somewhere one of them will ask about their late grandmother. I'm certain that I will respond with more information than just a cold statistic. It most certainly will be a story.

CHAPTER FOUR

Storyteller

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...”

- *George Lucas*
(The opening line to the movie Star Wars)

“So the officer says to me, didn’t you hit the pig up in the next county? Evidently the pig squealed on me.” Okay, this is the end of a really bad joke, but it supports what I’m about to say. So far in my life I have had multiple jobs that require me to explain or provide instructions to others regarding countless tasks. I have been called many things (some to my face, others behind my back) and one of the most common labels is that of a storyteller.

I remember walking into my advanced public speaking class on a Monday morning. These kids were a lot of fun and over the course of the semester I had developed a personal attachment to each one. At this point in my career, I had taught basic public speaking for over a year, but this was my first semester teaching upper-classmen.

Unlike most underclassmen, these kids already had a major, which for all of them was speech. This meant it took very little prompting to get them to talk. Come to think of it, it was actually very difficult to get them to be quiet.

This particular class period started in typical fashion, where everyone discussed their weekend and what they did or wanted to do. Out of courtesy they paid me the most attention.

As always, someone wanted to know more about a subject that I brought up. One of my favorite students prompted me with the question “Do you have an interesting story to lead us into the lesson?”

Although most experts agree that storytelling is an effective teaching tool, it is not used as often as one would think (Cooter, 1991; Medina, 1986; Morrow, 1979; Nelson, 1989; Nessel, 1985; Peck, 1989; Roney, 1989). In my short career, I also agree that storytelling is a very useful tool, however I use it quite frequently. The “mind organizes best in story form” (Egan, 1986) and stories provide a way for knowing and inspiration (Raines, & Isbell, 1994).

Native Americans, known to have a rich history of storytellers, often use an intimate voice, invoke the natural world, and depict magical and humorous events (Bugeja, 1993). It is also a common belief that children are drawn to a story (Raines, & Isbell, 1994), and in order to comprehend certain social issues they can be told stories (Combs, & Beach, 1994). So why is this important? It all boils down to a very simple concept. Storytelling is a way of transferring information, which as stated earlier, is communication.

Persuasion

I happened to notice one of my fellow grad students walking along the indoor track at the campus recreational center. She was a quarter of the track behind me and I decided to see if I could “lap” her before she got to the same place the next time around. By “lapping” her, I mean to pass her before she reaches the same position on the track. This term is often used in running or auto racing, where circling a track a given number

of times determines a winner. If a person is “lapped”, it will take two circuits on the track to catch up.

I began to pick up the pace to almost a sprint. Granted, she was power walking (an aerobic form of walking) and I was running, making the contest not much of one. I realized that I had been running for almost a half an hour as my muscles ached and sweat began to form on my brow. I became warmer and warmer as I turned up the intensity of my pace. The track was fairly empty as I sprinted along allowing me to focus on my steps and speed.

I caught her about half the track before her destination. She smiled and commented how fast I was. I laughed and told her that if I could run that pace for the whole marathon, I might set a new world record.

We walked and talked for a while, discussing the training and running. She was incredibly supportive, wishing that she could do it too. We were sharing the experience of running and exercising, which was our common frame of reference. The fact that she had been exercising gave her the knowledge of what her body could and could not do. However, she was unaware of whether she could run a marathon because she hadn't pushed herself to that level. I tried to explain what it was like to run the distances that I had, but without doing the same thing she couldn't completely associate.

I explained to her that all she needed was a goal. I told her the story of the man who used to write his goals on a piece of paper everyday and scratched them off as he accomplished them. At the end of the day he could see how much he did.

I came to realize that I almost always told a story when I was to prove a point. I mentioned this to my friend and she rolled her eyes. “There you go again, trying to show that all communication is persuasive.”

She was referring to class the night before where I practically opened Pandora’s box by making the statement that all communication is persuasive. We (meaning the whole class) spent an hour and half arguing back and forth on that topic. Needless to say the argument was not and may never be, settled.

Obviously, the idea that all communication is persuasive will have its supporters and its critics. Furthermore, I’m not out to defend this view at this point. All things being equal however, persuasion is a communication process, with the ultimate goal of action or change (Seiler, & Beall, 1999).

With this in mind, speakers use different tools to achieve persuasion. An upper class woman in the 17th and 18th centuries often obtained social leverage because of participation in social conversations (Craveri, 1993). Real people and real events help historical stories come to life (Kennedy, 1998). Positive descriptions influence judgments (Garlick, 1993), and dry facts, which have been the staple of business communication, are often supported by real life situations to engage the listener (Harris, 1999). This all leads to a simple conclusion; stories and storytelling are a way of communicating.

CHAPTER FIVE

Preparation

“I hated every minute of the training, but I said, Don’t quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.”

- Muhammad Ali

Perhaps the hardest part that I found in the training was getting the motivation to do it. I was quite busy all of the time, working two jobs and what not, so I thought the training would be just one of the things I did everyday. I told myself that most athletes need to make a commitment to something, and success was certain if you did it. The road to marathon was similar to any Chicago expressway in the summer time, tiring, slow going, and frustrating.

Though it might seem at first as just a athletic event, I can say from experience that running a marathon is perhaps 10 percent physical, and 90 percent psychological. In other words, yes it did take quite a physical training regimen, though the most valuable tool I found was my mental toughness.

I tended to be more sporadic in my training in the early going. I told people what I was doing and they offered encouragement. Often, people wanted to know how my training was going and about the marathon itself. When I told someone about my plans for the first time, almost everyone was excited. This was really important to me, for it made me feel like I was doing something that was worthwhile.

Hal Higdon offered the advice that a person in training should tell as many people as possible. This would help with the encouragement. The more people you told, the

more likely you were to finish your objective. It was true, as I told more and more people, and received positive feedback, the more excited I became. It was also harder to give up my goal. I didn't want to let these supporters down. I remembered that when one person gains positive descriptions or support, it will influence one's judgment (Garlick, 1993), I wanted to do it now so that when someone asked how the running was going, I could proudly say how far I was running. It was great for my inter-self and self esteem. I was going to be marathoner and that was something to be proud of.

Enlightenment

I ran two miles in a hundred degree heat one morning in June. I drank a whole carton of chocolate milk when I got to my job and ate four doughnuts (breakfast of champions, huh?). I felt fatigued, yet there was something different about the physical nature of my body. There was tightness under my right arm, as if I had pulled a muscle.

Why?

I don't recall doing anything different with my workout. I actually don't even work my arms that often, so why was there muscle tension? I walked around at work most of that day feeling like I needed to have a massage; only wanting to relax and take it easy.

I went home that evening and as I was getting undressed, my wife noticed what appeared to be acne on my back under the right shoulder blade. Concerned, she examined it further and thought that it was a rash. Maybe I was reacting to the detergent that she used on our clothes. I went to bed without another thought.

The next morning I was practically climbing the walls. The pain was more intense than the day before, a pinching, burning feeling that would not go away. My shower was extremely painful and my day consisted of keeping my mind on other topics than the increasing pain of the rash.

A friend of ours, who happened to be a nurse, mentioned that it might be an allergic reaction, but it might be shingles. After consulting with a doctor, my friends' assessment was accurate; it was the shingles. When I found out I had them I was very confused. I had always thought it was a type of condition that affected old people. As it turned out, shingles are part of the chicken pox virus and can be caused by stress.

Let's see – here I am training for something I have never done before, and perhaps I was going about it the wrong way.

I decided to do a little research to help me in my training. The first thing I found that I needed to consider was how the body reacted to stress of running (Braunstein, 1999). There is also a secret to running a marathon, which is a little element called oxygen (Cohen, 2000).

I also found that running a marathon is really considered a survival test (Henderson, 1994). No kidding. I knew exactly what that meant because I was experiencing this first hand. The people around me could not completely share this particular experience, for they had nothing to base it against. I definitely shared this experience with everyone, perhaps describing it in terms reserved for sailors and women in labor. After I told the story, people associated with the pain and understood. They also offered sympathy. I was grateful, but it still didn't change the pain.

I began to wonder if other runner had ever experienced the shingles. What did they do? How did they react? Was I alone? I determined that since there was no documentation (A hole in the research perhaps?) about marathoners and shingles that there was no relationship. I was doing something wrong. The pain was terrible, almost to the point of wanting to give up on running. I realized that running the marathon was not just idle chatter or a passing fancy. The idea of covering this distance was going to take a serious commitment that I just wasn't ready to give. Yet.

Refocus

Almost a year after my shingles I ran on Father's Day with the full intention of getting ready to run in Chicago later in October. My brother looked up a training regimen from Hal Higdon off the Internet and passed it along to me. It was an 18-week session and now I thought that I was getting somewhere. I had a training program that was used by a guy who trained Olympians, so I took the training regimen and marked up my calendar to keep myself on schedule. I think it was a key in success.

The question of "why?" still hung in the air like low flying fog. I had a goal now, wrote it down and made a plan. I knew what I wanted to do, but I was still missing the purpose. I went through a setback with the shingles, yet I was back, chasing the dream of running the marathon. Why?

I began to notice that my conversations with others now shifted in focus. A year ago I tended to mention that I wanted to run a marathon, but now I was training, which changed the way I spoke. I talked about what I was doing, keeping people up to date on my progress.

As conversations with others developed, I noticed there were different levels of knowledge about marathons. For example, my brother and father (who were also training to run) spoke at a different level to me than some of my co-workers simply for the fact that they were more knowledgeable about the topic.

We could share our stories more intimately since we were experiencing the same phenomenon, such as ailments we were suffering from or training strategies. We had a shared context, which strengthened our bond. My brother and I had always been close, and our training together was helping us develop an even tighter relationship.

There are eight years between my brother and me, and when we were younger our shared experiences revolved around sports. Be it baseball, football, basketball or other physical activities, we did it. Of course I was older and more physically dominant, but we shared a bond of sports that eliminated the age gap. The only thing that seemed to be missing was the opportunity to play on the same team. With such an age difference, being on the same team in an organized sport was almost impossible. Even in the annual Stockwell Turkey Bowl, which we play on the Friday after Thanksgiving, my brother and I are on opposite teams. Running together put a new wrinkle in our athletic relationship. Unlike others who were only going to listen to the story of the marathon, my brother and I would have a great understanding of the experience because we were both experiencing the same event. It is important to note however, that my brother, father, and anyone else that was training might have experienced different episodes of the same event. Sure there is a shared understanding, but our interpretations of events were individual.

Although the ability to complete a marathon depends on your own body, it's not as individual as it seems. Children who run marathons are encouraged to run or walk

with a friend. This way they can encourage each other and maintain a pace by talking while they run (Degan, 2000).

Health issues are also raised when you run alone. Aside from the obvious dangers in today's world, often a new marathoner has a predisposition to hypoglycemia (Braunstein, 1999). By having a partner when you run, it's like having a system of checks and balances.

Obviously, interpersonal communication is helpful when running but I really didn't think it was going to play that big of a part. I was wrong. In fact, a successful run in a marathon depends greatly on your interactions with others. I was finding that I understood what people were saying about running a marathon because I was experiencing what they were talking about. There was also a level of credibility for what I was reading and the information began to make more sense to me. We have all heard that theories are good, but until there is actual practical application of the theory, credibility is questionable. Was it possible that I was entering into a culture?

Intensification

The hot July sun beat down on my head as I turned the corner on Sixth Street. *Shade*. The trees rustled with a slight breeze, though there was little relief from the humid environment. My shirt was soaked with sweat and my mouth desired some liquid refreshment.

Three miles did not seem like a lot of distance when I first looked at the schedule. I had run that distance several times before and this was no exception. I felt my muscles

tighten as I picked up the pace a block from my house. I sprinted the last hundred yards or so, reaching an imaginary finish line in front of the house.

I felt good and energetic as the effect of the run had yet to set in. I came into my house and immediately called my father to tell him of the accomplishment.

“Twenty-seven minutes, thirty-eight seconds.”

“How far today?” My dad asked.

“Three miles. It’s the first day of training.”

“I’m at the firehouse today. I’m going to run tomorrow.”

Our conversation revolved around the training process and how we planned to stay on schedule. I never thought a workout regimen would sound so interesting.

On another training day, I came around a turn near a gas station when I heard a beep from behind me. My wife was coming up the street and she passed me in her car. I waved back, but my attention was elsewhere. I had been running for nearly three hours, and I was on my last lap.

I had measured off a two-mile circle in the middle of town that I was going to run around eight times. I did this for two reasons. First, I was running by myself and I wanted to be in a visible area. Second, I wanted to be close to my house in the event I needed to return there.

I was feeling better about my training and was getting a clearer picture of storytelling and the communication topic. Again the focus was the communication of the event but as people at work and my students in my classes asked about how I was doing, I could proudly say where I was with my training. I was also paying attention to frames of reference. As information was shared with the people I came into contact with, the

understanding level was affected by the information that was shared. The more descriptive that I was with facts and feeling, the closer listeners came to share the experience.

Hal Higdon

As I mentioned earlier, I had never run a marathon and so I went out to look for information to help me in my quest. When I brother had sent me the information from Hal Higdon, my goal became more realistic. Higdon was a consultant to the Chicago marathon, so his regimen appeared to be useful.

The whole idea was to build distance without overwhelming yourself or your body. The session was to take eighteen weeks and by the end of the training, a runner should be able to complete the run. Higdon was very thorough with his advice, taking into consideration all the questions that people would ask and all the areas that someone needed to pay attention too. Though I never actually met him, I do credit him with the advice that got me through the race. By using his information, which he explained in stories and experiences (where have we heard that before?) I was able to accomplish my goal. If I ever could get a chance to meet Mr. Higdon, I'd like to shake his hand.

CHAPTER SIX

Time to run with the big dogs

“It is by acts and not by ideas that people live.”

- Anatole France

I left my house around 3 p.m. on the Saturday before the race. There was a Health and Fitness Expo at McCormick Place in downtown Chicago where I was planning to meet my brother and dad. According to the letter I received from the marathon organizers, I needed to pick up a packet of information at the Expo that was to help me in my run.

The Chicago Marathon had come a long way since it is first running in 1977 both in terms of quantity and technology. I spoke with one organizer who said there could be almost 33,000 runners participating in the event. Technology was used to keep track of the runners; each participant was given a computer chip that had to be activated in order to enter the race.

As a runner crossed a checkpoint on the race route, the chip (attached to the shoe) sends a message to a computer database in order to keep track of each person. To me this appeared more efficient than writing down the numbers as they passed the checkpoints (as done in the past). Though it may be argued that computers aren't always accurate, after what happened in South Florida with the 2000 presidential election, hand counting in a race may not be the way to go.

I arrived at the Expo nearly two hours before my dad and brother. I obtained my packet, registered my chip (which would later be activated when I crossed the starting

line on the racecourse), and made my way to an area that was handing out what was considered a “goodie bag”. I also received my T-shirt and a race route map.

As I waited for my family, I examined the contents of my “goodie bag” which included several advertisements for many different items associated with running. I found energy bars and snack foods, recommended (from a pamphlet inside the bag titled “Do’s & Don’ts) to be eaten either before the race or immediately after. I also found some “liquid bandages” and some cream used to soothe sore muscles.

This was my first marathon and I began to think about that certain culture was present surrounding this activity. As I removed my bib number from my packet I examined it for a moment. To a casual observer it was a white piece of paper with a red number on it that was to be attached to the front of my shirt during the race. But there was meaning to the number and color. The colors of the bibs (either yellow, orange, blue, green or white) signified your experience and/or competence. For example, Khalid Khannouchi (last year’s winner and current world record holder) would wear a yellow bib, which meant he was seeded, whereas I had a white bib to signify I was a general runner. The numbering had reasoning too. Khannouchi wore the number 1 signifying his seeding; I wore number 35775 indicating when I registered in relation to the rest of the field. The numbers and bib colors also placed you in an area near the starting gate. Since I was an inexperienced and unseeded, I would start near the rear of the field. Though I don’t know for certain, I’m guessing that Khannouchi was right in front.

I began to observe the people at the Expo in an attempt to capture more of a flavor for the culture. Cultures communicate in different ways, but all forms of messages require a shared code, people or communicators who know how to use the code, a

channel, a setting, a message form, a topic and, of course, an event created by the transmission of the message (Littlejohn, 1999).

I listened to what I could hear and observed gestures when I could not, and was amazed at the results. Our shared code as runners was a mixture of contractions and slang terminology enhanced by exuberant gestures suggesting a physical movement. I never did speak to anyone during my two hours of observation, but I didn't feel alone. There were smiles in my direction (and not just because I am extremely good looking), along with nods and the occasional salute.

Since I was holding a "goodie bag", I guess the basic assumption was that I was going to run tomorrow in the race. I make that assumption, because I did the same thing. As people passed by me with their own bag, I considered them to be a runner. It was interesting, for I didn't base my opinion of anyone on anything but whether or not they carried a bag. Race, gender, age, or even size had nothing to do with it. I accepted people for being just a runner.

My observations of the interactions were enlightening. I heard two women discussing "the wall". One woman said (while moving her hands up her legs) that the tightness began in the calves, and then moved to the thighs. The other woman replied with her experience, saying that the cramping started in her lower back and moved to her stomach (using her hands to indicate). The second woman then mentioned that her stretch marks from her pregnancy actually helped relieve the pain (moving both hands up and down her stomach) and got her through it.

To anyone who is familiar with the sport of running, "the wall" is an understood term, but anyone outside of the culture probably wouldn't have a clue. And why was

this? It goes back to the same point I have been making. Shared meaning comes from a common frame of reference, which developed understanding.

In regards to the women, since both were runners they possessed and understood the shared code, talked while at a fitness expo, knew about “the wall” and were able to talk about it, they were part of the culture. Incidentally, “the wall” is a phenomenon that affects most runners between the miles of 16 and 24 of a marathon. It occurs when the body shuts down, preventing you from running much further. Anyone can be familiar with this definition, but without first-hand experience, true-shared meaning cannot be achieved.

The Last Supper

Once my dad, brother and I had received our packets from the Expo, we proceeded to my aunt’s house for dinner. One of the events during the marathon weekend was a carbo-loading dinner the night before the race. This was an opportunity for runners to get a lot of carbohydrates before running. Our family decided to have our own, private dinner.

Spaghetti was the choice of meals and the house smelled of tangy sauce and garlic bread when we arrived. I was hungry and the smell increased my appetite even more. Our gear was brought up and while my aunt and sisters finished the preparations for dinner, my brother and I unpacked. My dad had brought a cooler full of Gatorade and beer (not my choice of beverage, but to each his own, right?) and the three of us organized our equipment.

I had three shirts made for the race, one for each of us. They were royal blue in color and had our names (Dad, Son #1 and Son #2) over the left breast pockets. On the back, in big letters, I had printed the words “2000 Chicago Marathon”. We planned on wearing the shirts during the race so that if we were separated, we knew what the other’s were wearing.

Our conversation revolved around our equipment and why we had certain items. I was going to wear a tight shirt under my blue shirt so I wouldn’t irritate my nipples. Both my brother and dad said they would wear band-aids over their nipples to avoid the same thing. This all sounds a bit crude, but someone who hasn’t trained or run this distance before might not even consider this precaution. Oddly enough, I received this tip from a co-worker at Eastern Illinois University who had run a marathon before. She warned me of this constant rubbing from a shirt, in addition to the tenderness of one’s skin. When we talked about running, she shared with me her experiences with me as I did for her. Since she had actually completed a marathon, this gave us a unique bond. I had yet to complete one, but I used her experiences to make a judgment on how to react.

The two of us hit it off almost instantly when it was discovered that we both were runners. Even though I worked with several other people in my time at EIU, I remember our conversations about running and exercising more vividly. In fact I never judged her by her age, gender, educational level, or anything. She was a fellow runner and that made her okay in my book.

Oddly enough, her husband ended up helping on my thesis committee. That’s pretty darn ironic to me.

Our last supper before the race was utterly delicious. My other aunt and uncle arrived to show support for us and the discussion over spaghetti was multi-leveled. When either my brother dad or I spoke to each other, we used terms and thoughts associated with training. When others were integrated into the conversation, I found us explaining ideas to help increase understanding.

After dinner, my uncle turned on the World Series while final plans were made for the next day. The race started at 7:30 a.m. and it was recommended that we arrive around an hour beforehand. My dad suggested we would leave no later than 5:45 a.m., which sounded good to my brother and me.

We got everything situated, placing our sleeping bags on the floor of the dining room. My aunt and uncle departed and my sisters and other aunt retired to the bedrooms. My brother, dad, and I joked and laughed about different adventures we had experienced. It was great to be with them enjoying their company and conversation.

Just before I drifted off to sleep I thought about the baseball game on TV. The Yankees had tied up the game in the ninth and would later win it in the twelfth. Two thoughts came to my mind: don't ever give up, and it ain't over until it's over.

The Moment of Truth

Sunday morning came very early. The sky was still dark and the sounds of Chicago were nonexistent. My father and I talked briefly over our breakfast drink, but otherwise there was no conversation. There was communication present, a nonverbal understanding among us, since we both were focused on the task at hand. Our past

conversations over the training had covered everything (common frame of reference you think?).

The three of us climbed into my dad's truck and headed for the lakeshore. The weather was chilly, but I felt comfortable in my T-shirt and shorts. Our conversation revolved around the streets and time. In true family fashion, we were running behind.

A good friend of my dad is a Chicago fireman and after some buttering up, he arranged for us to park near Navy Pier. We arrived at the docks shortly before 7 a.m., and after a brief discussion with one of the firemen on duty, we began the mile and a half walk to the starting line.

Not five minutes into the walk my brother and I had to use the rest room. My mother often went just before we left to go anywhere, and I could just hear her telling us she told us so. We meandered our way through the streets and sidewalks, attempting to find a bathroom. My dad continued to give us a hard time about it, a gesture that would come back to haunt him, for he would later have to use the restroom sometime around mile twenty. About 7:20 a.m. we found a public restroom a hundred yards from the starting line. Both my brother and I took care of business and got into the lineup just as the gun sounded for the start of the race.

We heard over the loudspeaker that there were over 33,000 runners in this year's field, making it the largest marathon field in history. In a letter in *The Chicago Marathon Magazine*, Carey Pinkowski (the executive race director) stated, "There is no other sport in the world where an individual can compete on the same day, at the same time and in the same place as an elite athlete in a particular sport." I never really thought about this fact before I read it. Truth was, everyone was running the same course, regardless of the

time frame, and we were the race. I may never shot baskets with Michael Jordan, pitch to Sammy Sosa, or golf with Tiger Woods, but I was running with marathon's equal to those guys. I was a marathoner.

Well, not yet.

With the volume of runners about to take on the challenge, it took nearly twenty minutes for me to reach the starting line. My brother told us he was going to move up to the front of the line as much as possible. We wished him good luck and he disappeared into the crowd. I wouldn't see him for another 5 hours. My dad and I were going to run together for as long as possible, which provided the setting for most of our conversation.

Once we got started, I felt a rush of excitement go through my body. I had trained for almost two years for this day, and finally I was going to do what I wanted. I felt strong and energetic. These feelings would help me later on.

I Hear Ya Talking ...

A half-mile into the run, I looked behind me and noticed that the streets were jam packed with runners. This was amazing. Here I was, participating in one of the most grueling athletic events ever and there were more people than I could see.

My dad and I talked about the magnitude of the event and how great it felt to be part of this environment. My dad said that this should be a new way of life for us; whenever we decided that an endeavor was worthwhile, we should do it. I agreed. No one knows for certain how long we have on this earth, so all we really have is time to experience life. The Nike slogan is right: "Just do it."

A woman ran up next to us and struck up a conversation with my dad. She thought that the two of us were pretty entertaining (by this time our conversations turned to a more lighthearted, humorous tone). She mentioned that she had run in last year's race, and this one had much better weather. Weather was a common topic of discussion with everyone at the beginning of the race; towards the end of the race the topic was simply to finish the race.

As we crossed mile number one, a large roar came from the crowd. Now I knew how Michael Jordan felt after making a basket. These people were out to support me and share the experience of a marathon.

The race continued throughout downtown Chicago and at every turn there seemed to be more and more people cheering us on. Chicago has always been known as a great sports town and now performing in front of its fans had me in agreement with that assessment. My dad and I continued to talk about different things but as the miles went by I noticed that the conversation became less and less intense. There came points when the two of us were separated and when we reunited the only exchange was to acknowledge the other's presence with a simple nod of the head toward on another.

My dad and I finally separated for good around mile thirteen. I had stopped to get a drink but my dad kept running. This was the main difference in our training regimen: my dad would just run the entire distance allotted for that practice session, while I would run and stop and start again in order to prepare myself in the event I had to stop. In our discussions during the training this subject had come up. Though neither one of us considered the other weaker, both of us felt we were doing the right thing.

For the remainder of the race, I ran by myself. However, conversation continued. As the miles went by, I talked briefly to many different people including runners, volunteers and spectators. The subject matter was really, in my opinion, irrelevant. What I found important was the fact that people were willing to engage in a conversation with a total stranger.

Each conversation had a common denominator: support. Regardless of whom I talked to, everyone urged me to go on. I found this incredibly motivating. Though I did not know these people I felt a certain sense of attachment to them. I wanted to finish the race for the simple reason that I did not want to let these people down.

Around mile twenty-two I witnessed perhaps the most horrifying scene in my life. As I came around Comiskey Park, an ambulance went by. The roads had been closed to traffic to allow the runners a safer racecourse. When the ambulance went by, the majority of runners took notice and a man next to me said that it must be something important.

Within two minutes of the ambulance driving by I came upon a fallen runner. The fact that the runner was laying on the ground was not what disturbed me; it was the paramedics performing CPR on him. As I passed the scene another runner next to me commented that she really didn't need to see that. I would find out later that the fallen runner had died.

Just before mile twenty-three, (dubbed the "Michael Jordan Mile" by a fellow runner) I came across a spectator who looked very familiar. It was my cousin who drove a trolley car for the City of Chicago. Since the roads were blocked off, he couldn't go anywhere so he decided to cheer on the runners. I think he was as surprised to see me, as

I was to see him. He cheered even louder as I approached and slapped my hands, encouraging me to keep going. I felt a renewed sense of strength after seeing him and pushed myself even further.

Toward the end of the race, I saw a runner wearing a T-shirt that read “100th Marathon”. I came up next to him and told him I thought that was an incredible accomplishment. He thanked me and asked if this was my first marathon. I said yes and he smiled and told me I was almost finished. I told him that suddenly I felt really good. He again smiled and told me that was a “runner’s high” and that I should use it for as long as it lasts. I thanked him and congratulated him again. He wished me luck.

I crossed mile marker number twenty-five and felt as if I had just started the race. I knew I was in the last mile, so I began to push myself even harder. I started passing people who clapped as I went by. As I came over the bridge I could see the finish line. What happened next will forever be etched in my memory.

There was a large grandstand on both sides of the finish line. It was still packed with spectators three and a half hours after Khannouchi had won the race. The cheers from the crowd were louder than I had ever heard in my life. These people were cheering for my fellow runners and me as if we were champions. I guess we really were.

I crossed the finish line five hours and twenty-seven minutes after I started. More important than the time was the fact that I had finished. I was wrapped in a tin foil-like towel not long after crossing the finish line. I saw my brother and dad who clapped as I approached. The first thing I said was “Why did they give me this towel?” As I went to remove it I realized it was keeping the heat in. I put it back on and both my dad and brother laughed (for they knew exactly *why* I was given the towel).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Success

“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is the knack of getting along with people.”

- Theodore Roosevelt

I called my wife when I had returned to my Aunts' house. I told her that I had finished the race and she was happy. It wasn't what she said that was meaningful, it was what she didn't. I could tell from her voice that she knew that I would finish; it was just a matter of when.

I was physically tired, but I felt more alive than ever. Never before had I attempted to do something where the result was in as much doubt as the running of the marathon. I consider myself a levelheaded person, always thinking things through before I do them. I had the desire to run the marathon, prepared for it, but the actual completing was what I really was looking to accomplish.

After I was done, everyone that I talked to congratulated me on a job well done. People at school, at my job, and my family all thought it was incredible that I accomplished such a feat. What I found incredible was the fact that I was cheered on by people who didn't know me, but supported me just because I was participating.

I once heard someone say that hindsight is 20/20. After I finished the race, I took the time to reflect on it. I had been asking myself “why?” for almost two years now, unable to answer this burning question. It took actually running it to answer.

I remember congratulating my dad and brother on a great effort. We saw through a goal and did what we set out to do. I'm not totally sure why they ran it, for they teased me for coming up with a "crazy idea". For me, the reason was simple.

I ran to tell a story.

But not just any story.

This story was to have a moral or lesson.

And it was very personal.

In looking back on the race and the communication that took place in the training and running, I was amazed at the fact that almost all of it was positive. I'm sure each of the 26,000 finishers had a reason to run and each reason was personal. With all the things wrong in the world, it was refreshing to see that people could still support one another, looking past gender, race, and religion. Perhaps if the world looks at humans as a race, much like a foot race, what really matters is that we support one another while we go through life.

The culture was accepting and supportive. Runners don't judge, they support other runners. So why do people run marathons? Because, no matter who you are, what you do, how much money you make, or what background you come from, you took a chance to run 26.2 miles and did it. *We* are proud of you and congratulate not only the effort, but you're willing to take the chance.

Life is too short not to take any chances, but it is also too short not to support someone else's life. Like the Grinch, whose heart grew three sizes when he found out the true meaning of Christmas, I realized that the true meaning of life is having someone support you in your choices.

Some choices are better than others however, and as we tried to climb the flight of stairs at my dad's house (which was painstakingly slow going) my brother addressed the new burning question of "what about next year?" He said through gritting teeth, "next year, we're going camping."

As long as there's a bed to sleep on and food to eat, I'll support that.

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