

# Blog

## July 28, 2012-Post EPIC Relay Recap

A week ago yesterday I dropped out of the race at mile 110. Any time I have done that in the past it has nagged me incessantly, which probably tells me it was an correct decision. However, this drop hasn't plagued me at all. The course was beautiful, with a lot of climbing, little shade, lots of wildlife, and even a very curious mule in the road at 10,000 feet. Somehow a number of factors synergistically acted and determined that it was all too much for me. Coincidentally, I read an on-line article from Trail Runner magazine when I came home and learned I had heat exhaustion. My resting heart rate on Friday morning was 84 bpm whereas normally it is in the 50s. A classic symptom that now, in retrospect, I should have known about. Even before knowing that information I still knew it was the correct decision to stop so that 1) I wouldn't get permanently injured and 2) so that I can give myself the best possible chance in the Wild West Relay which starts next Wednesday.

So until then, I rest, rehydrate, eat well, run a bit each day and mentally prepare for the next race.

And as always, many thanks to my crew (Andrea, Cole, Bill, Tim and Robin), family, and everyone who gave positive words and prayers. I wouldn't have even crossed the starting line without you.

## July 18, 2012 Race day

You train for months, you plan, you pray and then all of a sudden it's race day. We start tonight at 5:00 PM. I pulled back from my original start time of tomorrow morning at 0500 (that is, I pushed vanity aside) and refocused on the goals of:

- a) finishing;
- b) finishing during daylight hours on Saturday and when the finish line is open;
- c) finishing without having bonked or hit the wall;
- d) all of the above done while having a good time.

If interested our progress can be followed on our Twitter site @arpurdy.

Well, we've gotta run...

## July 4, 2012 Uncertainty

**The past 6 weeks have been fraught with circumstances that have been beyond my control and have added a dynamic to the training which I didn't foresee:**

- **There has been the sickness that lingered in my chest;**
- **The continued battle with trying to find the pair of shoes that would allow my heel to relax and allow me to run pain free. In trying to work out my plantar fasciitis my heel became agitated so this has just been a comedy of errors and practiced patience. In the end I did find some minimalist shoes and some intermediate shoes that really feel great;**
- **The rerouting of the EPIC relay course. To put it another way, the uncertainty of not knowing if there would be a race because of road closures. In the end, yes it is still going on;**
- **The local fires which made existence difficult. There is the one level of just dealing with training through all of the smoke which clogs the lungs and then compounds the earlier sickness. The**

**more difficult part was feeling helpless because of friends and colleagues that live within the burn area. You offer help, you listen, you pray for relief but you see the toll it takes on someone who may or may not have lost their home. You try to be there for them in whatever manner you can. You're relieved to hear that some friend's homes were untouched and you mourn with those who lost everything;**

- **The fires have also impacted the Wild West Relay course both here in Fort Collins and across the state line in Wyoming. Yes, a new fire popped up and is threatening the town of Woods Landing and consequently the race course. Just when we saw the local fire go to 85% containment, the new fire pops up and you go through the emotions again. Can we help, what can we do, is everybody alright?**

**So what do you do? One of the best and simplest lessons I learned from running long distances is that you have to have a base. There is the physical base of training, but more importantly there is the base within side of the individual. Things are bound to get difficult, you may want to quit, you may get injured or face a host of other issues but what do you do?**

**As for me, I turn to what I know.**

**I know God is my foundation that keeps me, supports me, guides me and protects me. Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber from Denver said a couple of years ago that "comfort is not a gift of the Holy Spirit" meaning there is no guarantee that things will ever be easy but I do know that God will always be there for me and carry me through the difficulties.**

**I also know that running is a great therapy for me and a great healer. With all of the uncertainty that was mentioned in the end I knew there was one thing I needed to do; just run. Perhaps it's a metaphor. Regardless of the circumstances, when everything is getting chaotic, even collapsing around you at times, you still go forward. Sometimes it is one step at a time-right, left, right left. Sometimes when I feel like I have no control over anything (the concept of control is probably an illusion to begin with anyway) then I go to my base, to what I know. I just run.**

May 30, 2012 Sickness

The last time I ran was 5 days ago and I probably won't run again until at least tomorrow or the next day. I caught whatever bug was going around and consequently ended up with the usual malaise and a nice low grade fever. This comes at a time when my mileage is (was) steadily increasing and I am putting more and more emphasis on my long runs.

Over the years my response to sicknesses has changed dramatically. It use to be that I would enter a state of depression upon getting sick and a feeling of helplessness at not being able to accomplish everything I thought necessary in preparation for my events. As I said, my response has changed significantly. I now resign myself to recovering as quickly as possible. This means increasing my hydration significantly, concentrating on eating a diet even higher than usual in fruits and vegetables, and giving in to the need for rest. If I feel like sleeping I do it.

I believe however, the most difficult aspect to being sick is the patience that is requisite. Perhaps it is more like a resignation. I can't do anything about it, so just give in. In many ways I believe it comes down to training. It's never easy but, as I said, you have to resign yourself, time after time, that devoting yourself to healing will get you out and running that much sooner. And don't get me wrong, I'm not

acting cavalier but focusing on getting back to running, and not dwelling on the sickness, makes it more tolerable. This also equates to good mental preparation for the late miles of any run.

I really started learning this a few years back when I watched, via a blog, Tony Krupicka, an amazing ultrarunner and writer, go through quite a few set-backs. He has been quite the inspiration to me and given me copious amounts of things to ponder about and while running. Check out his site at [antonkrupicka.blogspot.com](http://antonkrupicka.blogspot.com) to get an idea of what one of the top ultrarunners is capable of achieving.

May 20, 2012-WHY? Part 2

I just can't leave yesterday's posting where it ended. I think there is a bit more in terms of my rationale for doing what I am doing. It gets a little difficult to actually answer the question of 'WHY?', but for me it, the actual running/stress/strain is an exploration of self; it is an experiment. Each ultra run asks the questions of me, 'Can you, will you, or will you quit? Will you rise to the occasion?' And the prospect is simultaneously horrifying and intriguing because to be honest, no one really knows if they can actually finish any race, of any distance, but therein lies what draws anyone who has ever toed the line.

There other reason for doing this is that I hope that somehow this will change others. I hope my example of actions will inspire others to get involved with some activity that improves themselves and those around them. I'm not saying that everyone should go out and run a 200 mile race. I didn't start running with the goal of 2, 200 milers within 2 weeks. In the fall of 2001 I was 60 pounds heavier and needed to lose weight. I knew that running would make the weight come off faster but I still remember the first day, running with my Australian Shepherd Mattie. We went 1 mile and both of us thought we were going to die. We did it again the next day. Months later it was easier, for both of us, and the miles increased. Conversations with my friend Matt lead to thoughts of going longer and so on. The point is, it took time, it was gradual, it was a process, and after years I learned I could use it to benefit others. Again, the point is, I hope this inspires others to realize that they *can* become something different, something that they want to become. All they have to do is start, believe, and surround yourselves with people who will support you in your pursuits.

May 19, 2012-WHY?

So this week my friend Lydia posted an announcement on her Facebook page about my effort to run and raise the funds for the Food Bank. I read the first couple of responses and one in particular made me pause. It was from Billy G. who we know from our days in college. His brief response was something to the effect of "what's chasing him-LOL". Knowing Billy it is a typical response and while I know he probably didn't mean anything beyond the joke I think the question, like so many other people have posited in one form or another, is very legitimate.

More than ever, I feel the running and the fundraising is a way for me to practice my Christianity. In Gordon MacDonald's book *A Resilient Life*, he talks about the concept of *becoming* a Christian. That is, I am certain I will never reach a place on this earth where I have 'checked every box' and I think now I have become the model of a Christian. Likewise, I know I will never be the best, fastest, prettiest running form runner, but I believe that the model described by MacDonald is transcendent. If I never get out and perform, act in the manner a Christian should (working for the Food Bank?), get dirty, push the edge of my comfort zone, then I will be static in my spiritual life and similarly in my running abilities. Neither of which is the path I am choosing.

I just recently (this morning) finished another book, *The Lure of Long Distances*, by Robin Harvie. The author describes his very personal journey to becoming an ultrarunner with the goal of completing the Spartathlon in Greece in 2009. It's quite a page-turner and is rich in quotes and stories from some of the world's greatest athletes, adventurers and philosophers. While there were many similarities with his education in ultrarunning and mine, there were also many differences which I imagine is the way for everyone. However, in the end Harvie made two comments that stand out to me. The first when he said 'I asked too much of running when I thought one race would transform me, just like that, forever'. It's a lot of pressure to put on one's self and I have learned from personal experience that I do better when I have not inflicted that upon myself; but I digress. The more important message, I believe, address why he and so many other run. It is 'about becoming a more sentient person' as Harvie put it in his last sentence.

So back to the original question. What is he running from? In the past I've had answers and heard answers to this question; old age, time, the ghosts of past short comings, the big guy catching up on me in the dark. However, I think you can flip the question to more properly state it; that is, what is Phil running to? In truth the answer is that I don't know but I am excited about the Christian, the husband, the father, the animal physiologist, the person, the fundraiser, and the runner that I will become all because of the challenges (endurance, logistics, fundraising, publicity, etc.) that I am placing before myself in relation to this event .

April 28, 2012: Nutrition

There seems to be a continuous debate about what is the best eating plan for life and running. This gets compounded by an ever flowing stream of 'latest and greatest' new products that purport to give you such things as more energy, better sustained energy, complete energy, proper proteins and then you can get into the whole 'rocket fuel' types of products which are essentially high levels of caffeine. So the following is purely my perspective on fueling during a run. I have come to this formula after numerous years of experimentation with the above mentioned types of foods as well as numerous other foods that I have read were used by experienced ultrarunners. In essence it is quite simple.

1) My simple sugars (about 100 calories per hour) come from actual plant sugar-not a processed plant sugar and certainly not a synthetic sugar. I dilute about 100-120 calories of Vitamin Water with water so that, depending on the day, I am consuming 20-35 ounces of liquid per hour. This gives me sustained energy compared to the spikes that I get from the energy gel products and most importantly, my stomach is happy. In the past I have suffered the effects of too much sugar and get to a point where I no longer want to eat another gel. I have managed to alleviate these issues using the diluted Vitamin Water and this product has the added advantage of also supplying numerous vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes that my body desperately needs after numerous hours of running.

2) My complex carbs come from actual food. Again, there has been a lot of trial and error over the years (Tostitos slow down my digestion, and too much fiber speeds it up) but in the end it has become quite simple. I prefer *actual food* such as PB & J sandwiches, ham or turkey sandwiches (especially with mustard because the tartness is a great balance to all of the sugar), oatmeal cookies or Bo Bo's Oat Bars, ginger snaps, cranberries, pretzels, Clif's MoJo Bars (because they are actual food) as well as other things that are pretty simple to digest, and not spicy or greasy. This makes up an additional 100-120 calories per hour. When running through aid stations at races I also check out what they have at their buffets. The best watermelon and sourdough pretzels I ever had was on a hot afternoon at the North Fork 50 last July!

3) My recovery food is similar; carbs and lean protein. Then rehydrate with water.

4) Two other rules accompany the running foods. First, never try anything new in terms of nutrition during a race; you're rolling the dice with your success. Second, tap the wheel; that is, provide your body a constant stream of food rather than a feast or famine regimen. This allows better digestion and consequently utilization of the necessary calories and water.

March 25, 2012: The power of quotes.

Last year two quotes presented themselves as significant during the effort to raise money and actually run the Wild West Relay. The first came from a friend of mine, Andrew Salp, who said that during different difficult times he thought of Phil. 19:91 'Because I can.' Not being familiar with that scripture verse I tried looking it up but resorted to asking him about it and he reminded me of a few episodes in our past where it was the attitude, I imagine which was being driven by the high testosterone levels of an early 20s male, that got us through.

Andrew's quote reminded me of many golden days of our past, and the attitudes that we carried, but initially it gave me quite the motivational boost. Not that I'm old, but at 43 coming 44, you sometimes forget about that slightly uppity attitude that sometimes got you through, especially when faced with the enormity of impending situations. In short, it gave me the shot of self confidence that I needed. I will never be able to fully thank Andrew for that shot of motivation.

The second quote came from my sister Paula actually during the run; namely 'the spirit of Christ compels you!' Delivery of this quote via my wife Andrea and her cell phone resulted in quite a bit of confusion on my part and a vociferous burst of laughter from my very tired friend Lydia. What did it all mean? Luckily, after delivery of the Paula's quote I had about 50 miles left to run. But what did it mean? I 'ran' around in it for a good couple of hours, and even for a while after the run, exploring different facets of these two ideologies.

On a side note, it turns out that Paula's quote was from a Robin Williams movie and from the Catholic right of exorcism. I didn't know either of those facts until well after the run and after I'd had sufficient time to ponder their greater meaning.

It did occur to me late on the final day of the run as to why I was running and why I would keep running. If you take away the testosterone-laden attitude of Andrew's quote it gets at a very important aspect of my running; I can run the ultra-distances. I'm not saying anything about how good I am, because at best I am a mediocre ultrarunner, but I do have a gift for covering long distances day after day.

Likewise, if you take away the other contexts that are associated with Paula's quote you get at something that is very important and a personal motivator to me; I am affected by Christ and his actions which consequently have initiated certain actions in my life-running to benefit the food bank. Again, I'm not saying anything about how good I am at putting the tenets of my beliefs into action, because I do not think I am even mediocre in this case, but I know that at least in this instance the reason for the running/fundraising is a direct response to Christ's presence in my life.

So I put it together as I was given a gift/I can run (Andrew's quote) and therefore I need to use it accordingly-I am compelled (Paula's quote). But it doesn't stop there. It has made me look at other areas of my life and try to apply the same ideology; work, family, friends, community involvement, etc. Consequently, I'm trying to change myself but it's not easy, as change never is. Some days are better than others but I am different after all of these miles (road, trail, and life). I am still becoming what I will be.