

The Capital 2 Coast Relay runs from Austin Texas at Reunion Park to Corpus Christi Beach by the USS Lexington. It is 223 miles run on roads/highways and the goal is to finish by 5 pm on the Saturday of the race. The race is normally run in teams of 8-12 people but I chose to run this race solo. I had run the 200 mile distance in 07 and 08 but that race was on trail so I was concerned about how much of an effect 223 miles of road was going to have on my ability to finish. My prior road experience at that distance was a 48 hour race where I ran 148 miles.

I choose to run this race for a foundation called "Parenting Alone", a group in Dallas that helps single parents in crises after a divorce or death. The foundation offers practical help with an onsite food bank, attorneys for legal counseling, and financial assistance as needed and private counseling. They have a mentoring program from other single parents that help walk you through the initial weeks of change. They have classes for children to teach them skills in organizing, homework, cooking, finances and how to deal with anger. They also offer small group counseling for the parents to assist them with the changes they now face and how to incorporate a two parent home into a single parent income.

From a crew standpoint this race was much easier to keep track of me, as the crew would meet me at the exchange points normally 4-8 miles apart. I had hoped to run a similar race in the spring but was unable to compete as I couldn't find anyone to crew it for me. While this is a solo effort the only thing solo about it is that I'm the only one running the whole time. I had sent out an email for the spring race and shortly after the event got a response from a girl named Kristi, asking how I did. I mentioned I wasn't able to run due to lack of support and she immediately responded with, if I do another one to let her know. As I prepared for the C2C she was on the list of hopefuls and emailed me that she was taking leave the entire 3 days to be there to help. It's always interesting to me the kind of people that put their



lives on hold to help me achieve a goal. I was so blessed; Kristi is an accomplished ultra cyclist, FBI agent, runner and wife. Her sister and mom live in Austin and came to help us on the first night which was a huge blessing. At the end of the race I had a sponsor and friend from work come down with my children and helped with the last 12 hours. God had provided just the right people at the right time.

(Kristi...she always had the camera so I had to get a casual photo after the race!)

My goal going into the race was 72 hours. I felt like I might be able to finish faster but wasn't sure how the road, hills etc would affect my performance. I planned on stopping every 5-6 hours and sleeping for 15 min and then every 24 hours sleeping about 45 min, 6 hours total. We started the race at 3pm on Wednesday afternoon which gave me a 2 hour cushion on the finish time and I wanted to be sure to get out of Austin before rush hour became too much of an issue, the first 5 miles are right down Congress Ave. We met the co Race Director, Brandi at Reunion Park. They did not have the park reserved until Thursday night so there was another group there doing an event. They were visually handicapped for the most part from what I could tell. Brandi enlisted several of the leaders and members of their group to hold the start line sign up for me. It was a great way to start this event. I was immediately humbled by their cheers and encouragement and grateful for my ability to "see" the events of the next 3 days.



Pain would be nothing compared to what they face every day in their challenge to lead a normal life.

As I took off through the park I could hear one of the guys from their group singing. The sound system was a little off and his voice sounded old and tired but the words coming from his heart resounded in my ears ..."one day we will 'see' Jesus, life's trials will

seem so small when we see Christ. One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrows will erase, so bravely **run the race**, till we see Christ". It was from an old hymn I knew from growing up in church and set my mind so perfectly for this race.

Kristi and her mom took off in the crew vehicle to get a hat for ice and were to meet me at the exchange about 5 miles away. I had the directions on the first leg in my pocket and got worried at the first turn onto First Street as it wasn't marked, so I asked for help from a nearby security officer. I yelled thank you, I'm running to Corpus Christi as I took off and saw this look of puzzlement that made me laugh! I got about 5 blocks and realized I had to go potty. Normally in the woods no big deal, just pull off behind a tree, not so here in the middle of Congress Ave! Fortunately I went past a small shop and the bathroom was right inside the door so I didn't lose any time. That was the last real bathroom I would see for 3 days. Kristi and her mom met me about 3 miles in with ice and a hat, it was upper 80's and bright sun so I was very grateful. We met again at the exchange point and they gave me my safety vest for the next leg and the new set of instructions with turns highlighted. The last 200 mile race was a straight shot on a towpath and I still managed to get lost and add 8 miles so all the turns had me

worried. We decided they would meet me right before each of the turns as the initial ones were not well marked. This was the inaugural year and the teams didn't start till Friday so we were the direction guinea pigs so to speak. If there was a correction we would call the race director and he would note it to make it easier for those coming behind us.

I run with my Bluetooth, it looks a little odd and may seem unordinary but I am first and foremost a mom and I try to always stay available to my kids. About 13 miles into the race Kristi called to see where I was and said to smile pretty when I came to the checkpoint in ½ mile as they had a camera crew from ABC Austin there to film our effort. I came in to the exchange, talked for few minutes about the run and the cause and was off again. It turned out Kristi saw them doing a story about something else and told them what we were doing and they changed their piece. The next few legs were really rough with traffic, small country roads and lots of turns on unmarked roads. The race director put the mileage to the 10<sup>th</sup> so the crew kept track of that and were able to figure it out by the time I had to make the turns. Kristi's mom stayed with her till 9pm and we were able to get out of town safely. I took my first stop at 8:30, mile 26 and as I rested we iced my legs.

The first night went pretty well, the towns were deserted and it was fun to run down the middle of the roads. There was a rather lonely deserted country road I hit from midnight to 4 am. I had started to carry my pepper spray as I was worried about dogs and animals. I put my I Pod on hoping to drown out unwanted sounds that would spook me. I wanted Kristi to try to rest so I told her I was fine and asked her to meet me at the next exchange point. There was one point where I began to pray that God would send me someone to run with, or call me or something so I didn't feel so alone. Then about 5 min later I passed these houses which are all set way off the road and 3 dogs came to the edge of their property and stopped at the fence. Well all except this one who looked like a pointer of some sort. He came the whole way out on the road, gave a few barks and stretched long and hard. I told him to go home and he seemed to turn around so I did too. I ran a few yards and saw him zip past me to the next driveway and sniff around, mark the spot and moved on. He zig zaged that way for a few miles and was good company so I didn't mind. Then he went to a lane on the right and immediately ran to the other side of the road, I shone my headlamp that direction and there was a very LARGE bull with no fence! I could hear other cows on the other side of the road calling to him so the dog and I both, tiptoed past, praying he wasn't going to chase us! At one point I had to stop for potty break and he came over and just stood there so I could lean on him to get back up. Later I heard the coyotes as we got closer to the town we were entering and was even more grateful for my new friend. We had traveled together for about 3 miles by now and I was starting to worry about him being too far from home but I saw Kristi pulled off right before the Guadeloupe River, (our next exchange point) so we fed him some crust from my PB&J and gave him some water. As we were leaving and crossing the bridge he went running toward something on the opposite side of the road and in the next second a motorcycle turned on its light and took off. It startled me and as Kristi passed in the SUV she said she never knew he was there! A mile or so later I stopped seeing my new friend and assumed he decided to head back home. I learned that night that if you pray for God to send someone to run with you, to be specific! I got a dog for my answer to prayer but really felt like he was sent to protect both of us, maybe just from unrealistic fears or real danger I'll never know.

About 5 am I hit my next scheduled break at 56 miles and had been running strong through the night. I felt I got a good head start on the day that I knew was going to be very warm! By mid morning it was getting hot and my feet were starting to sting from the constant slapping on the road. I managed to stay strong but my pace fell to 15 min average. By now we were on Highway 123 and would take it for approximately 65 miles. It was a 4 lane highway with a nice wide shoulder. No trees, no houses, no shade and it was on asphalt. I could feel the sun beating down on me and heat from the road radiating up on me. The only breeze was when an 18 wheeler would pass by. I got to the exchange point about 92 miles in, at 2:30pm and was happy I had achieved my first day's goal of 90 miles but I felt spent. The next leg was approx 4 miles and took me almost 2 hours. We decided to break for an hour to recover from the heat, change for the night and get some rest. Leaving there I felt better and towards the end of the next leg I was able to start running again. Once the sun went down Thursday night things started to get cold. I had checked the weather repeatedly the week before in Austin, Corpus and a few cities in between and the lowest was supposed to be 50-55. I had brought a few extra jackets and gloves just in case I felt chilled but never expected the cold that came from the valleys in the early morning hours. The temps fell from upper 80's to mid 30's by Thursday night and adjusting became very hard. I ended up breaking at 11 pm mile 117, for 1 ½ hours as moving around in the back of the SUV was hard when I got stiff. Kristi was great, jumping out in the cold to find whatever I was looking for, getting me settled, putting ice packs on my legs and feet, waking me up, feeding me, helping me find as many layers as I could to keep warm. All the while she was cracking jokes to keep my spirits up.



My friend and computer genius Mike had been calling me off and on and keeping me up to date with my average time and how many min per mile I was going to have to do to finish at my projection. I'm a commercial loan officer by day and it's amazing how hard it is to do math in your head when you are running. I knew I had fallen off pace Thursday night but also knew from experience that was the hardest night as well. I was walking a lot more now as my feet stung so very bad! By Friday morning about 3 am we finally got off highway 123 only to enter highway 181! Just as long, a little wider but still no shade or clouds.

(four layers at this point)

The relay teams started between 7 and 8:30 am so I was now part of the race and mentally it helped to know there were others coming. About 9 am and only 140 miles in, I started running on the side of the shoulder where some grass would occasionally grow onto the asphalt. It was instant relief, I really had to watch where I was running so I didn't trip but that was a great mental relief and the miles started going by more quickly. I knew I was in for another hot afternoon so we took another 1 ½ hour break at 12:30 to get out of the sun and get my feet some relief. My legs were feeling good since we iced something, knees, quads, hams, feet, abs every time I stopped but the pain in my feet from slapping the road was so unbearable. The only relief I could get was to get off them which ended up costing us a couple of extra hours overall. We laid a towel on the ground at the back of the SUV and placed the ice pack on my feet after Kristi would massage them and get the blood flowing back down my legs.

The next leg was the hottest part of the day and a good 8 miles long so I power walked the whole thing. Kristi met me with fresh Ice about every 2 miles and made sure I was eating and drinking well.

About 2 miles from the exchange the RD, Clint and his fiancée and co RD Brandi (they got married on



Sunday) went by with the signs for the course and stopped to encourage us and let us know how excited everyone was that we were doing this. Somehow we had gotten misinformation when we hit leg 27, that the first relay teams were at leg 22. The news breathed life in me as I expected to have company soon but it was still hot and it didn't last long.

( Race directors Brandi and Clint at the finish line.)

We took another 45 min break about 6:30 mile 164 and prepped for the night. We had news that the relief crew was on their way and in style. One of my sponsors owns a limo company and was bringing an extra driver and my children down in the best limo he had. I was motivated to get in as much mileage as I could so I could spend more time with the kids on Saturday. Kristi would have someone else to drive my car home and she and I could ride home in comfort. Wow what a blessing! We set off and I was able to run strong through each leg stopping only briefly to put my feet up for 5 minutes while Kristi jammed more calories in me, promising I wouldn't have to eat P Nut butter for a week, after this was over. Eating was getting harder as I couldn't tolerate more than 100 calories or so at a time. I carried my boost and supplemented with the PB&J, Lunchables and soup Kristi had found at a Wal-Mart along the way.

At 11:00pm Friday night we were at mile 178 and we took our last long break. I didn't feel tired but it was getting pretty cold again, so we got some soup, sleep and added a few layers. As I set off on this long section of road I saw quite a few skunks and was more than a little worried about smelling worse than I already did. I was trying to run on the grass on the side of the road up to this point but decided it was too dangerous. It took a while to get my pace back but upon hearing that the relief crew was only a few miles away I stepped up my pace. They came in about 3 am and pulled in front of me on the deserted highway 181. It was awesome; the kids were asleep but woke up to say hi. Leah decided to stay with Terrance who was providing relief for Kristi so she could go to the hotel and shower and nap for 2 hours. I gave Ray the owner/driver strict instructions to have her back by sunrise! I had really come to depend on her to keep me eating, drinking taking my S Caps etc. I was happy she was going to get some rest as it now seemed it would take the full 72 hours and one more day of blazing heat to finish by 3pm.

The road was deserted at this hour of the morning and the shoulder was a lane wide so Terrence and Leah stayed right behind me and handed me a cracker, cheese and meet slice every mile with a quick drink. They blasted the radio with my favorite station and I clicked off a few strong miles to get me to the next exchange point. I remember listening to this one song and the verse really moved me, "when I'm feeling all alone with so far to go...when the night is closing in, it's falling on my skin, Oh God will you come close". Here I was on this lonely highway, so tired in the middle of the night. My head was bent low trying to see the road, I had been like this for almost 3 days now, focused, driven to make just one more mile. It's so dark out, just a sliver of a moon and in the distance I can see the lights of Corpus Christi, but it was like 40 miles away and felt like forever. Then the chorus came on "light up the sky to show me, you are with me, I can't deny that you are right here with me. You've opened my eyes so I can see you all around me". It grabs my attention so I look up and see there are thousands and thousands of stars just "lighting up the sky". It was the most incredible moment of the race, I was so encouraged. I realized you are normally brought to that kind of an awareness of how fragile or weak we are and how big and capable God is through some kind of tragedy, but I was privileged to experience it after 3 nights of running.

We got to the next exchange at mile 191 and I took a short 15 min nap and I woke up before I had too. I had been weaving and falling asleep on my feet so it was just what I needed. Daylight was just over an hour away and we were diverting through a little town. The crew went on ahead to get some gas and the RD checked in by phone to see where everyone was. I was a mile from exchange #32 and he said the first relay team would be catching me on the next leg. I heard from Ray and Kristi and they were bringing me breakfast.



At this point we set out on highway 181 again and it's still barren with wind turbines and a nice 2% grade in full sun. At 10 am I'm at mile 205 and Kristi tells me I've run more than 200 miles! I started to tear up, did I hear you right? So close, 23 miles to go...but it was so hot! The ice under my hat and around my neck was melted within 10 min. My body was having such a hard time cooling itself. I was hydrated and stopping beside the car every other mile to potty so I just kept moving forward. The time seemed to tick so slow, the miles went on forever. The kids were in the Limo and Kristi and Terrance in the SUV. Each car would stop ahead of me, come back and spray me down with water and by the time they passed me I was dry. When I would stop to put my legs up they would ice my calf muscles with these huge chunks of ice that would melt and conform to the shape of my leg within seconds. It was such a humbling experience, they

never went more than ½ mile away from me and took such good care of me.

The first relay team went by in their van and yelled cheers and encouragement about halfway through leg 33. When we came into leg 35, mile 213 there were two other teams there waiting for their runners. The Marines and another group immediately came out to greet us. I was so honored by their kind words of awe and astonishment from these men I admire, which fight for my freedom. We were getting back into town now and more teams showed up along the way, pointing the right way to go or offering water as they passed. Kristi and



Terrance ran with me on this leg and kept me cool, fed and drinking. My feet were beyond sore, just this intense pain that stung with every step. I kept reminding myself to keep relaxing my body and not to tense up from it. It was amazing how that helped but I remember one point where Kristi was talking me through it and tears of pain were streaming down my face. I was so close by now, 7 or 8 miles, I couldn't slow down or stop. Just keep moving forward. We finally got to the last exchange point at mile 217, I stopped at the back of the SUV for a minute and laid down, changed out my sneakers, brushed my teeth, got some more food. The kids made their appearance from the back of the limo to tell me what a great job I was doing. That was just what I needed for the last 6 miles over the Memorial Bay Bridge.



As I left the exchange and turned onto Broadway the view of the water was spectacular in the afternoon sun! The downside was the traffic was terrible and the shoulder not very wide. Kristi who had been so zealous at staying close if I was at all at risk gave me strict instruction to stay as close to the wall of the bridge as I could. The limo went in front of me with Hazard lights and she and

*"The Blind Side Photo"*

(Terrance walking me in that last 2 miles)

Terrance stayed behind

me. I didn't want to keep any of us in harm's way so I ran as much as I could. They had little openings just a few feet apart for rain water to escape so I would run 25 of them, and then walk 5. The race director called and said they had a police escort for us as we came off the bridge. Soon I was to the top of the bridge and could feel the adrenaline kicking in, just 3 miles to go. I flew down and it felt good to stretch my legs. As I was getting to the bottom a guy that was twice as tall as me, from one of the teams went by and said congratulations. I watched him for a while so I knew what exit to take as things had changed up a little. I could see the Police escort pull up to him on his motorcycle and since he was

moving so fast must have thought that was his runner so off they went. I thought it was funny and realized with the two of us side by side he definitely looked more like someone that could run 223 miles! People were on the side of the road taking pictures and cheering for us as we were coming in to the finish. A group of ladies asked who was in the limo...I yelled the two most important people in the world... My children!



As we got to the finish we were to meet at a staging area so the kids and the team could run in with me. But the kids were asleep in the Limo and there was nowhere to park the SUV. The limo stopped in the middle of the road and I woke Luke and Leah up. I almost had to drag Leah out by her foot as she was sleeping very hard, but we were yards away and I wasn't going to finish without them! We finally crossed the finish line in 72:41.24 (including 9 hrs 20 mins of break time), but then headed off the few extra yards to the Gulf and plunged in!



The team was close behind me and we stayed around the finish line for a while answering questions, signing autographs, and doing interviews. I was grateful they were there because simple questions like where are you from were not coming to me. Terrance would say, she grew up in Pennsylvania but lives in Dallas, or Kristi

would chime in with details even I didn't realize had happened. The team sat me down for one final good 10 min icing of my legs while we waited for the reporter from NBC to come. Ray took the kids back to the water so they could play and I had a chance to meet some of the amazing teams and hear their story's of survival over the 223 miles.



(A team of guys who had gone to college together and went their separate ways.)

This race was such a unique experience. In some ways I felt completely spent, but after resting a few moments I felt strong again, like I could go on forever. It was amazing getting up the following morning and thinking about going for a run. Or on the trip home to get out of the car and feel no major stiffness like I have in all of my previous races. I really think that is due to icing something every time we stopped



and convinces me even more of the power of ice!

I am so very thankful to Kristi who used 3 vacation days, went 3 nights without sleep, drove more miles than I ran and never once complained. You set such an amazing example for me and for others and I was so blessed to have you as my crew. To Terrance and Ray who brought my precious children thank you for sacrificing your weekend time and money to help me accomplish this goal. I would like to send a special thank you to my virtual crew. To all those who called me at all hours to

*(Icing after the race, talking with runners while Leah basks in the sun ☺)*

keep me awake, motivated, encouraged and prayed so diligently; Particularly my mom back in Pennsylvania, Mike Potter from the NTRR group, Mike Galloway with all the stats and Kathy Smith my running partner. To those who text me such gracious words of belief and strength you must know they came at just the right time. To my sponsors who donated shoes, supplies, and money thank you and I will continue to work hard to make sure the word is spread about The Parenting Alone Foundation and how it can help others.



I would like to leave you all with this my life verse...I Corinthians 15:10 By the Grace of God I am what I am and his grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain but I worked harder than all those, yet not I but the Grace of God which is in me. We are created in the Image of God and equipped to do powerful things for His glory. Whatever you find in your hand to do, whatever you talent or ability is, commit to doing it with all your might, and He will provide the strength and motivation to keep pressing forward.

Chelle

