

My First 100 Miler: Heartland Spirit of the Prairie

Cassoday, Kansas, middle of nowhere

October 9-10, 2010

by Kay Scott-Seale

The few weeks before the Heartland 100 were crazy: not because I was so busy, but because of what I was doing. 6 weeks before the race, I did my first Ironman. I'm a lousy cyclist, so I devoted most of my training time over the summer to the bike, and trusted in my running base to get me through the marathon. I gave myself 6 days to recover, and then started training for Heartland with a 20-mile run. My strategy was to run only twice a week (one long run, one 5 mile pace run) to give my body the maximum amount of time to recover. So a week later, I ran a 50k trail race. The next week, I had to work, so no long run at all. The week after that, I did 34 miles at an 8-hour race. The next weekend, the one before Heartland, I "tapered": a half marathon on Saturday, then a 12-mile trail run with friends on Sunday.

For you numbers nerds, this was a total of 130.3 training miles over 5 weeks (156.5 over 6 weeks if you include the marathon part of the Ironman) or an average of 26-26.5 miles/week. I'm VERY glad I didn't do the math before now, because otherwise I'd either have quit before I reached the starting line, or added a lot more training miles that would have left me sore and injured!

I'm slightly obsessive, so at the beginning of training, I graphed out my previous best times for various trail distances, and run a trend-line analysis to project my 100-mile time: 30:45 in a race with a 30-hour cutoff. So between that and my short training timeline, I expected to be among the last finishers. Surprisingly, though, my training races were going really well, with huge improvements in speed and very little soreness. A week out, I realized I could do much better than "barely finish." I posted on the Ultra List for a pacer, and began to dream big dreams.

The Thursday before the race was my 10 year wedding anniversary, so I didn't do much packing, race prep, or sleeping. I woke up Friday morning, made lunch for the kids, took care of the cats and then started packing the car. It was a 6 hour drive to Cassoday. I wanted to be there before the pre-race meeting at 4:30, so I wanted to leave the house by 10:00.

By "packing" I mean grabbing stuff and putting it in the car. I'm one of those people who lives out of my car, training-wise, so it wasn't too hard – most of it was already in the car. Or still in the car, to be exact, some of it still there from my last long race, Bandera, 8 months prior. (Yes, I've admitted that in writing, now I'll never be able to live it down!)

At 9:30, I pulled out, and headed to Wal-Mart to pick up some last minute stuff. I parked next to the automotive entrance to save time, but that backfired when the 2 people in front of me in the cashier line both had returns, which required waiting for a manager to come from the front of the store. Still, I had plenty of time.

I often take the route to Highway 121 (once or twice a week), but I guess I was distracted or something, because I went past the exit without noticing, and didn't realize it until I was almost 2 exits further. Then I turned around, and missed it AGAIN coming from that direction (the signage was confusing! I swear!) Finally I made it onto 121, my nerves rattled, and wondering what was wrong with me. Then I missed the exit for I-35!

What a way to start! Once I got onto I-35, I thanked my lucky stars that I got to stay on it all the way to Cassoday – if I'd had to navigate, who knows where I might have ended up! I engaged the cruise control, and headed north to Kansas.

*Heartland racers sing this song, doo-dah, doo-dah!
Heartland racetrack's way too long, oh de doo-dah day!*

Cassoday makes most small towns look big: 1 convenience store, 4 streets, and 92 people. I didn't know where I was going when I got off I-35, but I figured I'd follow the cars in front of me with the out-of-state tags, and sure enough, they led me to the right place. It was just about 4:30 when I walked up

to the building. Walking up at the same time was a tall, lanky guy with a sun burnt tan and a Wasatch shirt. “Kay?” he asked – it was Joe Judd, my pacer! He’d answered my post on the Ultra List the week before. We’d talked on the phone, but never met.

Joe’s a great guy. He’s a homebuilder from Salida, CO, a Badwater finisher, and a 3-time Heartland finisher, most recently sub-24! He’s got a wife who is also a talented Ultrarunner, and a 6-year old daughter. During the race, I got to know a lot about him, and I can honestly say that I couldn’t have done it without him. He greeted me with a box of Little Debby powdered donut 4-packs. “Happy Birthday” he said. How sweet! He’d obviously read my bio on the Ultra List, in order to know that it was my birthday, and that mini-donuts are one of my favorite running foods!

After the meeting and the feeding (great desserts!), we sat and talked a bit. I’d never had a pacer before, so Joe told me about his philosophy of pacing. It involved doing whatever it took to get the runner (pacee?) to the finish line, including appeals to the ego, misrepresentation (“Oh, it’s just a little further”) and goading. By the end, I was picturing a mischievous Kokopeli, but with a cattle prod instead of a flute.

I’d put together 3 pace charts: “Optimistic,” “Goal,” and “Realistic.” Joe laughed when he noted that they all had me finishing under 24 hours. “I better bring my A-game!” he joked. Yeah, I knew that was pretty aggressive, especially for my first 100 Miler, but I also believe that if you don’t express your goal, then it’s harder to live your goal. Still, I was nervous, because the predicted high temp for the day had been steadily increasing.

Joe introduced me to some people he knew from Colorado: Dan Schmidt (the eventual winner) and Anne and Matt Watts. And some other people whose names I didn’t remember (I’m horrible with names.) I also saw Claude Hicks and his wife Debbie, both of whom I’d met at Run from the Ducks, two weeks prior.

I went back to my hotel room around 7 and started laying stuff out. Because this involved a lot of sorting through all the sports-related crap that was in my car, but not necessarily applicable to Heartland, it took a while. Then there was the obligatory emergency trip to Wal-Mart to buy the stuff I’d forgotten to pack, the stuff that had turned out to be broken, and the stuff I was second-guessing myself on. After that was mixing my custom sports-drink concentrate, and pouring the concentrate and Hammer Gel into flasks and bottles for running and refilling. By the time I was done packing my 7 drop bags, and taking everything out to the car, it was after midnight.

I’d love to say I slept well, but we all know that doesn’t happen the night before a race. I woke up, wide awake after 2 hours, but managed to get back to sleep until the alarm went off at 4:15. Oatmeal and water, then I got to the race start barely in time to check in, drop off my bags, and use the port-o-lets before we were gathered together. I saw my friend Angela Ivory, and barely had time to say “Hi!” before we were off!

*Gonna run all night, gonna run all day!
Some people may call this work, but we call it play!*

The race is run on dirt-and-rock roads in the middle of the prairie. It’s supposed to be tall-grass prairie, but the grass never looked that tall to me. On this section, the road was fairly smooth, and even. The sunrise, about an hour into the race, was spectacular enough to make me vow that it made the entire race worthwhile. We were running into it, and the runners ahead were silhouetted against the first golden colors of the sky.

I ran the first 8 miles of the race with a young Marine, who told me about his remarkable wife, and the death of his infant twin son. Isn’t it funny how quickly two people who’ve never met before can become so intimate while running? We got to the Battle Creek A/S (8.2 miles) at an 11 minute pace, and I said goodbye to him.

I already knew my 24-hour hope was in trouble. I had the “Goal” and “Realistic” pace charts laminated together and pinned to my shorts, and I was already flipping it over to read “Realistic.” I realized that to stay on pace, I needed to carry less stuff. I had my fuel belt, with 2 flasks of gel, 1 flask of concentrate, and 4 halves of granola bars. I also had a backpack with “essentials” like my hat and sunglasses, and things that I could need at any minute – medical, rain poncho and phone. I saw that they had Raspberry

Hammer Gel at the A/S and decided to jettison one gel flask. I stuffed my jacket into my drop bag, filled my water bottle, and headed out.

The next section was where the rolling hills began. I ran the rollers with a crowd of people, passing some, and being passed by others. One woman I met during this section was Kathy, who turned out to be from the Arlington area, not too far from me. She invited me to run with her and her friends some day, and I told her I'd look her up. At the top of that hill, two giggly female runners came out of a field, and explained, embarrassed (and more giggly!) that the two haystacks in there were "really, really interesting."

Then I ran with a nameless Strange Guy for over 5 miles: he felt guilty that he wasn't in Afghanistan, so he was trying to appease the guilt by running races that hurt. (Strange and disturbing!) By the time we reached Lapland A/S (mile 17), he was giving me details about the bad state of his 23-year marriage, so I wasn't too sorry to see him leave the A/S ahead of me. Sometimes, that instant intimacy is too much!

My pace was still pretty good, but I decided that I needed to change backpacks. I was using a white mesh bag, figuring it'd be cooler than any of my others. But I'd never run with it before, and the straps were proving to be too short. It wasn't cutting into me, but I constantly had to readjust the carabiner that attached them across my chest, and it was slowly driving me crazy. The bag I'd worn at Bandera was my drop-bag at Lapland, so I spent 10 minutes switching them out, and winnowing more weight from the bag.

I headed downhill from Lapland, and though a really pretty short section of forest glade. The weather was perfect at this point: clear blue sky, and just starting to get warm. I was running well, but running alone since the crowd had passed through Lapland while I was changing bags. Well, not completely alone: the first 50 miler ran towards me from the turnaround. 20 minutes later, I heard two people behind me, a man and a woman, as I approached the unmanned A/S between Lapland and Teterville. Her voice was kind of familiar, and I recognized Anne Watts as she passed me when I stopped to fill my bottle. The first female 50 miler came along at this point from the other direction, and asked if there were any cups. "Who runs 50 miles without a water bottle?" I thought. It turns out that she not only kept her lead, but set a new course record, so maybe I ought to try it too!

It seemed like a fairly short trip from there to the Teterville A/S. Anne, who was doing the 50 miler, was just leaving to go back when I arrived, and she gave me some encouraging words. I had told Joe that I would text him from there, to let him know how I was doing. I had composed the text in my head during the last section: "+37 min @ Teter. But we can still make plan D 28." I typed it slowly, since I'm too old for that texting stuff, but found I couldn't connect to send it. I wasted a few more minutes walking around with the phone outstretched, trying to find a signal, then gave up.

I got some water, and shed still more stuff from my backpack. I really wanted to get rid of the phone, since it was the single heaviest thing in there, but couldn't in case I got another chance to text Joe. It was 11:30, and getting hot, so I also changed out of my grey shirt into a white shirt, put on my hat, and headed out. Another 15 minutes spent.

After Teterville, the road continued downhill for a short distance, then turned right and headed uphill through a rocky valley to the ridge. I'd gotten something on my left contact at Teterville, so the vision in that eye was kind of blurry. This made me blink it a lot. It was getting warm, so I was starting to feel pretty sleepy. No, it was getting hot! (It was high 80s, maybe even 90!) The valley was trapping the heat, but so was my hat. It was a fairly new white desert hat, purchased for its shade-providing flaps; I'd run with it before, but only for short periods of time. Now I realized that it wasn't breathing, and took it off. I immediately felt more awake.

A woman came up from behind me, and we ran together for a while. Her name was Susan, and she'd just done IM Wisconsin 4 weeks earlier. Since I'd also just done an IM, we had a lot to talk about. We chatted until we reached the top of the hill, where the route takes a left turn. She stopped to stretch and wait for her running partner. I continued on another mile or so to the Texaco A/S at mile 31. I felt like I'd been going slowly, but I noted with some satisfaction that my time was 7:44 for the 50k, over an hour faster than my 50k race time during training.

I didn't spend much time at Texaco: a pit stop, some Coke to countermand the sleepiness, a refill on water, and a pack of donuts from my bag. I realized when I grabbed them that I hadn't been eating much: maybe that was part of the sleepiness? I also wanted to change my white shirt (who knew they made

mock technical fabric?) I'd run in it before, but it wasn't breathing very well. But the shirt I had at Texaco was grey, so I didn't change.

The next section followed the ridge of the hill to the Ridgeline A/S. This section was exposed to the sun, and had wind gusts far in excess of the 6 mph powder puffs that had been forecast the week before. You'd think that the steady wind would counteract the heat, and it did to some extent, but it was blowing in my face so I still wasn't going very fast. I tried to run when I could, but the terrain was just rocky enough to be daunting. (Or at least that was my excuse.) The phone rang while I was running through here, but I couldn't get it out of my backpack in time. I figured guiltily that it must be Joe: I was already 40 minutes late for Ridgeline by the "goal" pace chart, so if he were waiting for me, he would be wondering where the heck I was!

One important thing that happened during this section was that my right shoulder really started to bother me. I run with a hand-held water bottle and, since I'm right-handed, it's usually in my right hand. This put a lot of stress on my shoulder when I first started running long distances, but I'd gotten used to it after a few weeks. But over the week before the race, my shoulder had suddenly started hurting again. It went away by the end of the week, just as suddenly as it started, and I didn't think much about it. (During this same week, I also had phantom pains in my left shoulder, left ankle, both feet, small of my back, etc, all of which came on suddenly, hurt intensely for a few hours, then disappeared. So I figured this was one of those.) At the start of the run, when it was cool, I'd filled my bottle only half-way. But as it got hotter, I started filling it three quarters of the way, and my shoulder started hurting a lot more. The rocky terrain was shaking up the shoulder too, adding to the pain whenever I ran. I tried running with the bottle in the left hand, but that felt unnatural, and I would switch hands without even realizing it. (Surprise!)

One of the people I passed on this section was Long Vu. I've seen his name on lots of race results, but never met him. He told me this was his 6th Heartland attempt, and he'd finished 3 times. Wow, talk about perseverance! (I looked him up later, and found he'd finished in 2001 and 2003, so I probably have the numbers wrong.) He said that he didn't think he'd make it this year, he was too tired. I was a little confused by this statement: it was only 2:30, and we weren't even at mile 36! I guess he just knew himself and the course well enough to know that what he had left wasn't enough.

As I approached Ridgeline, I saw someone standing by the side of the road. I tiptoed carefully across the cattle guard, and realized (yeah!) that it was Joe! (YEAH!)

He's told a few people that I looked like I was in rough shape when he met me there, but I don't remember it like that. Yes, I was behind on time, and a little tired. And my shoulder hurt like hell. But my calves and quads were fine. I'd been running some, and walking some, about a 50-50 split; no one had passed me since Lapland, except for at aid stations, and I'd caught up to and passed all of those people, plus a few more! So as far as I was concerned, I was doing great.

At the Ridgeland A/S, I filled my bottle with water, drank about a quarter of it, then topped it off while Joe got my bag. I drank some pickle juice, grabbed some donuts, and changed into a white shirt made of a REAL technical fabric. I decided to take an e-cap, and realized that I had way too many of them left. When did I take one last? I couldn't remember. Joe pressed me to eat some famous Prairie Power Pellets (Franks n Beans) but I couldn't handle the texture of the Vegetarian version.

Joe made me drink another half cup of water, then ran with me to the bottom of the hill where the course took a left turn. But as soon as I was sure that he was out of sight, I stopped running, winded.

A little way along, the runner in front of me stopped, and then bent over. By the time I got up to him, he was lying in the grass. I asked him if he needed anything, and started to recite the items in my medical supplies. At first, he said "No," then changed his mind and asked for some Tums. It took me a little bit to dig them out, but I had decided to take an ibuprophen for my shoulder (my first of the day) so it wasn't a bother. While I was putting the bag back on, Dan Schmidt, the eventual winner, came past us heading back towards Ridgeline.

Wow! That was pretty much the incentive I needed, plus I think the water, pickle juice and e-cap had kicked in, so I started running a bit more. And I was doing better about carrying the water bottle in the other hand, so my shoulder wasn't hurting as much. I really picked up the running when I came to a smooth section of road with a few more trees, and even a few houses. The sky was still, blue and

cloudless. The shadows were fairly long by this point, even though it was only about 4:30, so there was plenty of dappled shade. And the sun was laying golden highlights on everything it touched. Beautiful. Peaceful. And damn fine running conditions!

Soon enough, I started to hear the sound of the highway. This was my sign that the Matfield Green A/S was near. The road crossed the highway, and Joe was sitting on the railing on the other side of the overpass, swinging his legs. The sun was coming from slightly behind him, so he actually had a golden halo around him (I'm NOT making this up!) I couldn't see his face really well, but I bet he was surprised to see me so soon!

My Pacer-Angel ran the few hundred yards to Matfield Green with me. I had a pit stop, took Immodium, and took off my shoes to massage a bothersome spot on my left pinkie toe. I was wearing compression socks, which are a pain to get on and off, so I decided to wait until the return trip to work on the toe, especially since it wasn't that painful. In fact, I was planning to change socks at Matfield Green on the return trip. Joe easily convinced me to leave my backpack there for the 15-mile round trip to the turnaround and back.

"I'll go get something to eat, and change, and I'll meet you back here at 9." Joe said. "No wait, that's 4 hours, you can do better than that. I'll meet you back here at 8:30." (Sly, manipulative pacer!) Another drink of water, a quarter of the driest PB&J ever, then I grabbed my headlamp, and I was off.

Determined not to let Joe down, and refreshed by my 10-minutes at Matfield, I took off down the road, running a 2-run/1-walk routine, and passing people. The Marine, Strange Guy, and a few other semi-familiar faces came towards me from the turnaround, and I said "Hi" and "Great Job" to them all. And kept passing people. About 3 miles down the road, though, the wheels came off: my quads started to cramp, pain knifed through the bothersome pinkie toe, and I slowed to a walk. A guy overtook me and I didn't even make a token attempt to keep up with him. I was miserable, and I didn't have my Band-Aids, or my Bio-Freeze, both of which I'd left in my backpack. But I took an e-cap, and ate some donuts. I kept walking as fast as I could, and the hill with the cell-phone tower was getting closer.

This tower gets a lot of ink in race reports, because apparently you see it most of the time you are running, but it never seems to get closer. This report may be the exception, because I noticed it when my phone rang outside of Texaco, then pretty much tuned it out and forgot about it. So when I started running towards it, I didn't even realize it was the same tower. I'm normally much more observant than that.

I felt better by the time I eventually got to the unmanned Tower aid station: the toe was not bothering me much, and the quad cramps had worked themselves out. On the way down the hill, I saw my almost-neighbor, Kathy, walking with a guy I didn't recognize (her pacer?). She told me that they were trying to decide whether to drop. Drop? Not even in my vocabulary at this point! I wished her well, and kept soldiering on. I ran the last section of the downhill into the Lone Tree A/S, the half-way point.

This A/S had a smorgasbord of food, a grill and even a generator-powered microwave! But it had the most primitive bathroom facilities of all the aid stations: a fabric tent with one of those medical potty chairs. At this point, though, I didn't care.

While I was drinking some Coke, a woman with a long dark ponytail came in and told the volunteers that she was thinking of dropping. She knew my name, and I thought it might be my fellow Ironwoman, Susan. (Running with someone isn't really conducive to seeing them, is it? She'd come up from behind me, and then run beside me, so I'd never gotten a really good look at her face.) A man came in and complained about having blisters on his blisters.

I grabbed the donuts and chocolate milk out of my drop bag and headed back up the hill. Even on my most optimistic pace chart, I had planned to walk up this hill, partly because of its length and steepness, but mostly to give myself a chance to really refuel and digest before starting the second half of the run. The sun was setting behind the hill at this point: I'm sure it would have been spectacular if I'd been at the top, but as it was, I missed it all.

On the way up, I ran into a guy coming down who asked me if I had run Louisville – it was Susan Ironwoman's running partner. A few minutes later, near the top, I saw Susan herself; she had 20 minutes

to reach the turnaround before the cutoff, and I cheered her on. But wait, if that was Susan, then who was at the bottom of the hill? I still don't know.

A few hundred feet after the unmanned Tower A/S, I heard my watch beep the hour. I realized it was 8 PM. "Hmm," I mused "I guess I won't make it there by 8:30 after all, Joe." Then I thought "Why not?" I was feeling good, I had cooled off, there was a long downhill and then a long straight-away in front of me, and both were relatively free of rocks. Why not, indeed? So I started running.

I ran 5 minutes, then walked 1, then ran another 4 minutes and walked some, and kept running as much as I could. 3 cars passed me during this time, coming from the aid station with tables, supplies, and dropped runners, and each time, I had to stop running because of the clouds of dust they kicked up. I'd start running again as soon as I couldn't taste the dust in the air anymore.

I was just running, all alone in the complete darkness, my world limited to the few feet illuminated by my headlamp. The act of running fast was so liberating, that it broke through the claustrophobic barrier of darkness that surrounded me, and turned it into an experience that fed on its own energy. The more I ran, it seemed, the more I could run. I didn't feel tired, I didn't feel anything, it was almost an out-of-body experience. I don't think the English language has a word to describe just how incredibly magical this run was.

After about 40 minutes, though, I began to see the headlights of cars on I-35, and soon I came to the paved section of road that led to the Matfield Green A/S. Drivers, coming out of the A/S parking lot, either stared at me, bewildered, or rolled down their windows and shouted encouragement. I arrived at Matfield Green at 8:46, having covered roughly 4.8 miles in 46 minutes.

"You're looking good!" Joe greeted me. I collapsed into the chair he indicated. While I refueled, he ministered to my feet, taping the blistered pinky toe, and the balls of my feet. Then I changed my compression socks for a slightly larger pair, and Joe and I headed out together.

*Gonna run all day, gonna run all night!
Some people may think we're nuts, and they may be right!*

It was a beautiful, clear night, and we marveled at the stars. The moon was out, showing just a sliver of its full glory. We moved under the Milky Way, talking as easily as we ran. He told me about how he started running, and about his wife and daughter. I told him about my running history, and about how my day had been. Soon enough, we found ourselves back at Ridgeline.

We spent very little time at Ridgeline, just long enough to refill my bottle and verify that I didn't have a long-sleeved shirt in my drop bag. Because I'd packed based upon the Goal and Realistic timelines, I had put long-sleeved shirts in the bags I expected to reach around midnight: Teterville and Lapland. So I was a little chilly as we ran along the ridge to Teterville, but not too bad.

We were on top of the world on the ridge, with nothing between us and the incredible stars. But I was too busy looking for soft footing to spend a lot of time looking up. I had walked a lot when I came through here the first time, because of the wind and my shoulder, but also because it was rocky. In the daylight, I was able to faintly discern softer, grassy areas, but at night it was nearly impossible. We talked sporadically, about the footing, about the lights we saw, or thought we saw ahead of us, about the inky blackness below the ridge on all sides, about past races. I told him that I wanted to finish before dawn, and he calculated that we might – just might – be able to do it. Joe urged me to run a few times, and other times I ran because I wanted to. But we were walking more than we had been.

Soon, Joe heard the sound of the oil pump that gives the Texaco station its name. A quick pit stop, and an even quicker (unsuccessful) attempt to adjust my sock on the right foot where I felt a hotspot, and we were off.

By this point, the road was starting to run downhill. About mid-way to the turn-off, I saw something in the middle of the road, and suddenly stopped. It was a dead snake, probably run over. Joe came back to check it out, and pointed out the small rattle on its 18-inch body. "Probably a Prairie Rattler" he said. "We have them near my house." (NOTE: If anybody reading this knows my friend Jill, please don't mention the

snake. I WILL be cutting this paragraph from the version I send her, otherwise I will never get her to run on a trail again!) Joe challenged me to run to the turn-off.

At the turn-off, I told Joe about a friend who had gotten lost in the rain doing Heartland, and we wondered if this was the place. We turned right, and immediately saw a light ahead. No, two lights. No, three! So we set off down the hill, mostly running, in order to pass them all. We kept running strongly once we hit the long flat road at the bottom of the hill (was this my 3rd wind or my 4th wind?) and passed somebody else. By the time we got to Teterville A/S, we had passed 5 runners.

I talked briefly with another runner about nothing in particular while I changed into my long-sleeved shirt. Joe went into the aid tent, but I stayed outside, because the heat from the tent made me feel odd. I was actually dizzy when we left the A/S, so we walked a ways and I concentrated on hydration and food. We met up with two people walking together, and we talked with them briefly, before passing them. We saw a strange sight, coming from the other direction: to me, it looked like a double-amputee on curved running blades, but it turned out to be a woman with reflective tape on her legs, following the curves of her calves. She was walking briskly towards Teterville, and we teased her about going the wrong direction. Very quickly, we were at the unmanned aid station, then turning right towards Lapland.

By this time, we had fallen into a routine, complete with rituals and running jokes (pun intended.) The Heartland course is riddled with cattle guards. Joe's a tall guy, so he crossed them with one or two confident steps. I'm short, timid, and don't have a great sense of balance (hence the timidity) so it would take me a while longer. So whenever we got to one of them, Joe would lend me his hand for balance as soon as he got across. This became so automatic, that the one time he forgot, I put out my hand anyway, unbalanced, and almost fell!

The first joke was about Joe's bladder. He was much better hydrated than I was at this point, so he kept having to stop. While he stopped, I'd speed up my walking pace, or even run in order to make him have to work hard to catch up to me. (Hmm, maybe that was pacer psychology at work?)

The second was around my intense competitiveness. I seemed that all Joe had to do to fire me up was to say "let's go catch that headlamp!" and if we thought it was a female runner, it was even easier to get me to run!

The third concerned strange, wet, cursive-like scribbles on the road surface. At first, we theorized that it was a runner who was a fan of Dean K, because apparently, he's written that he pees while he runs? But we kept seeing them, LOTS of them, some just a few feet after the last! So either the runner was super-hydrated, and needed to go WAY more often than Joe, or it was a pack of peeing people in front of us.

I hadn't felt quite right since Teterville, and on this on this section, my stomach started feeling weird. Joe fished a Ginger Chew out of my backpack for me, and I sucked on it, and felt better. Shortly thereafter, we saw 2 lights, which turned out to be 3 male runners. (The cursive scribbles?) We passed them, running downhill. Then we ran into that short section of forest glade that had been so pretty this morning. Joe mentioned something about an abandoned Tree House in the glade, and I congratulated him on seeing details like that. "Well," he responded, "I've done this race 3 times, I've had more of a chance to look around." Good point!

We started walking when the hill up to Lapland started, and all of a sudden, I started choking for no reason. I spit out the ginger chew, but started coughing. I coughed all the way up the hill to Lapland A/S.

At Lapland, I layered a sleeveless fleece vest over my long-sleeved shirt. Joe had warned me before the race about the evils of warm fires, and the allure of warm tents, so he surprised me when he suggested I sit inside the A/S. I sat while I swallowed an ibuprophen, a salt tab, drank some coke, and ate some pretzels. I asked for a Hot Chocolate, and had someone help haul me out of the chair while it was being made. But once I got it, I accidentally spilled it before it was too cool to drink! Discouraged and restless, I started out of Lapland without Joe, who was still inside the tent, talking with another runner about his hometown in Colorado.

Joe caught up to me before I had gone too far, and we comfortably alternated jogging and walking. I was still coughing periodically, but it wasn't too bad. We walked a ways with a man and his sister/pacer, the same woman with the misleading reflectors on her tights. No, she hadn't passed us on the road: she'd

been heading back to Teterville to get the car. It was now parked at Lapland, with their father asleep in it. She VERY kindly offered me her gloves, and I accepted, since I have RA, and my hands were starting to hurt. Joe and the brother were walking slightly faster than we were, and were pulling away from us, so after a while, I left the woman, and ran up to, and past Joe. He said his goodbyes, and ran to catch up to me.

We saw more cursive scribbles, so we knew it wasn't the group of 3 guys. I theorized, mostly joking, that maybe they were the slime pattern left by a strange kind of worm or slug?

Just after the unmanned Lapland A/S, we met a man who was asleep on his feet. Joe gave him a No-Doz, and talked to him for a few minutes; then I spotted a headlamp ahead of us and took off down the next hill.

By this point, we were doing a lot more walking than running. Joe had warned me that the rollers started after Lapland, and he was right. Joe was starting to have to dip into his Pacer Bag of Tricks "Can you run? Let's run this downhill." I'd run as long as it felt "down-ish" but as soon as my legs told me the road was starting to go up, I'd slow to a walk again. We were walking pretty fast, though: I told Joe about my walking-pace-song (John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt), and he cursed me for putting it in his head.

Joe was unsure about how much further it was to the next aid station, but I remembered that we hadn't yet passed the two "really, really interesting" haystacks at the top of a hill, so I knew we still had several more hills to go. As we debated whether the light we saw ahead was a star, the aid station, or a headlamp, I realized that I was coughing less, but was beginning to lose my voice. I was okay with that trade-off.

The next hill seemed to go on forever. I vaguely recalled running down it that morning, but didn't remember it as being so long or steep! At last, we came to the haystacks. Two or three more hills, and two or three more passed headlamps, and Joe spotted the Battle Creek A/S. Yeah!

With just 8 miles left to go, I should have quickly refilled my water bottle, thrown down some sugar carbs, and grabbed something more substantial to eat while running (the "Three Cs": Carbs, Calories and Continuous movement.) But I wasn't thinking very clearly by this point.

There were two runners sitting outside the tent when we got there, a man and a woman. She was huddled in a blanket, and looked like she was not doing well. The man got up and offered me his seat. Once again, Joe surprised me by telling me to sit. The volunteers offered us chicken broth. I told them that I was a vegetarian and they offered me veggie broth instead. I drank two cups, but I should have drunk hot chocolate instead: I needed calories far more than I needed sodium.

Then a runner that we had passed a few minutes before came in. The volunteer offered him eggs, since they were scrambling some for Joe. No thanks, he said. "Then how about a Quesadilla?" Sure, he said. Me too! Me too! Quesadillas are one of my favorite foods, but they were a mistake here: not only did I have to wait for it to be cooked, but I should have stuck to simple carbohydrates because they take less time and energy to digest. (And don't get me started on the fats in the cheese!)

While I finished the quesadilla, Joe discovered they had bacon, so I had someone help haul me out of the chair, and left the aid station ahead of him. It was getting light by this time, and I was edgy and disappointed. I had easily come to terms with not meeting my unrealistic sub-24 goal, but I really had hoped to finish before dawn. Now I knew that wouldn't be happening either.

Two other runners left the A/S with me, and I walked with them until Joe caught up, then we went ahead. We walked briskly, until I saw two runners ahead. "I wonder if one of them is a woman?" I asked aloud, my intense competitiveness coming out. "Let's find out!" So we ran towards them. "Ah, you knew one was a woman" Joe accused as we passed them. "How would I know that?" I asked, drawing a blank. "Because it's the couple who were at the Battle Creek when we got there" Joe responded. Whoa! I'd completely forgotten about them! It was really disconcerting to me that my short-term memory was so shot. I guess the 2 nights of poor sleep before the race were starting to affect me. I chewed on that mentally for a mile or so.

The sun came up; the sunrise was as beautiful as the previous day's, but this time it was behind me, so it played out in the changing colors on the wispy clouds. First blue, then purple, then lilacs, and pinks, and

rosy golds. The temperature rose along with the sun, so I was glad to see the woman who had lent me the gloves, driving along the road with her brother's family; I flagged her down and returned them to her, with my profound thanks.

Joe told me about the "Mirage" aid station that is sometimes set up at the last unmanned water station, serving beer along with encouragement. But it wasn't set up this year. Shortly, we turned left, and saw a long road in front of us.

The poor decisions at Battle Creek started to catch up to me on this stretch. Previously, it had been me that "Jingleheimered" along the road while Joe took care of business. But over the next 3 miles, I had to pee 3 times, courtesy of the veggie broth. I didn't seem to have much energy. We ran in short spurts, usually 30 to 40 seconds at a time, but sometimes I was able to force myself to run for a full minute. I ate my last two donuts, and staved off my hunger pangs with water.

A man passed us, running; I think it was my fellow Quesadillan. Joe and I didn't even try to speed up to catch him. I was more tired than sleepy, but I also needed fuel. I was even finding it harder and harder to keep myself walking at a fast pace. Not because my body couldn't do it, but because my brain couldn't concentrate on telling my body to keep going. (I told Joe "walking is what my legs do when my brain looks the other way." This was supposed to be doubly funny because in a pacer/runner relationship, the pacer is supposed to be the brains, and the runner is just supposed to be the legs. But I kept stumbling over the words, so the joke fell flat.) I remembered that I had one more granola bar, and ate it, but I think it was "too little, too late."

Finally we turned right, then left. Joe pointed out a tiny speck WAY in the distance, and told me it was the finish line. "Let's run to that telephone pole" he urged. "No, let's start running at the stop sign" I countered. "Okay, but then you have to run all the way to the finish line" he bargained. "Oh, that's a really long way" I said, without agreeing, but we both knew I'd do it. We picked up our walking pace, smelling the barn.

At the stop sign, we turned right onto the paved road, and started running the 400 yards towards the finish line. "How do you feel about finishing?" Joe asked. "I'd be crying if I weren't so dehydrated!" I said. Joe laughed, and said that he'd felt the same way when he finished his first 100.

With fewer than two hundred yards to go, my legs told me we were running up an incline. "That's a hill! You didn't tell me there was a hill!" I accused Joe. "Apparently, I need to re-explain the role of a pacer" he shot back. Touché!

I laughed, and was still laughing as I crossed the crack in the pavement that had been designated the "finish line." 27:26:11!!!!

I jumped up and down, and hugged Joe. Then I headed over to the tent to sit down. My friend Angela was there: she'd timed out on Saturday, but wanted to watch her friends finish before she flew home. I ate some of the Prairie Power Pellets, and this time I had no problem with the texture. I got up from the chair by myself (twice!) I called my husband. I accepted congratulations, listened to war stories, and made new friends. And I grinned from ear to ear the entire time.

I had finished my first 100 miler: maybe not as fast as I wanted, but much faster than I would have predicted 6 weeks before!

*Heartland racers sing this song, doo-dah, doo-dah!
Heartland done, now sing along, oh de doo-dah day!
Yes, I ran all day! Yes, I ran all night!
I bet my money on a guy named Joe,
Made it through alright*