

## **Report from a Solo Tom's Run-ner 2008 Tom's Run**

**By: Rochelle N. Frazier**

200 miles from Cumberland to Bethesda. 184 miles of a towpath trail. It was all downstream with the canal on one side and the Potomac on the other. Trees shade the course almost the whole way. It's beautiful! Since I had run this before I was not sure I wanted to tackle it again. The mental game of keeping positive, motivated and having the "want to" had changed. My previous crew was not available and my family was tied up with other commitments. But I was invited to come back and the new race director made a plea that was hard to resist, "this is a run, not a race". If I had the ability to run the distance solo it was a huge inspiration to others that they could get out and do at least a portion of it. There were approximately 30 other relay teams with anywhere from 8 to 31 on each team that would participate.

I posted on the Ultra list to see if I could find some volunteers from the area that could help make the trip. Part of the rules state you have to be shadowed by a cyclist for the whole race due to the remote areas and unexpected ranges in weather conditions. Then you need at least one person to drive the crew vehicle. Two or three others are helpful to re supply the vehicle and trade off navigating and cycling. I was blessed with four experienced responses to my request. One of the three crew volunteers Peter Shoemaker stopped and picked me up on the way to the start he was coming from Northern Virginia. He had served as a Marine for 5 years and is training for an Ultra race in November. Having run several extreme Adventure races already he was well experienced! The second volunteer Tom Marchand was an Ultra Cyclist from Florida that came on Sunday and biked the 184.5 miles from the end to the start and finished Tuesday with a day to rest before he made the trek back with us Wednesday night. The third volunteer Brian Moore would come Thursday night with his daughter and a tandem bike. He currently serves at Coast Guard Headquarters and had moved from Texas last year. He and his family live right off the canal close to the finish. Fourth was mom who was the only one from last year that was able to commit to helping this year again. Each day she would drive the Ice and fresh supplies in for the rest of the crew. Since she calls me on every training run no matter what time of night or day she would know what I needed when I would start forgetting to ask.

The unlikely crew at the start, looking fresh and ready for the challenge... The plan was to start the run 3 hours earlier than last year in hopes of completing it earlier with stops every 6 hours for 20 min to rest/recover. The run's only request is that you attempt to finish between 11 am and 1 pm. We started at 8 pm. The weather had been unseasonable cold for months even a week before the start. But that was then. The day of the race there were tornado warnings and torrential downpours. We made it to the start and met with my mom who re supplied during the race and the new Race Director Roger Butterini a Commander in the Coast Guard. The storms had tapered to a light rain that let up just as we started. The temps were in the low 80's at the start and dropped the first night to upper 60's. Things went fairly well and with a completely new person to get

to know the miles ticked by comfortably. The course was very wet and muddy and we spent most of the night dodging puddles, skunks, snakes, possums, deer and a turkey that I thought was a bear from the distance until he pulled his feathers in!



**Team Ultrachelle (before)**

Thursday was very hot much worse than last year with the temps close to 90. Every mile I was reminded the time of day I was at the same spot last year and remained the 3 hours behind all day. But I was okay with that as the first hundred last year were much easier with conditions dry and cooler. Thursday night at dark we got off the top part of the trail where it detours for about 5 miles due to washout, about 95 miles in. Due to a mix up we stayed on the detour portion of the trail and went through some pretty hair raising sections teetering on the edge high above the Potomac, slopping through mud and muck or crossing what felt like boulder fields as my feet were feeling the push through the last 11 mile stretch that turned into 13.

The darkness is hard to imagine. I love running in the night but this place is so dark at night that if you turn out your light you can't see your hand in front of your face. We made it to the check point at 10:30 and met Peter. Tom was right behind me with his bike in tow and a twisted ankle. We took a quick break and headed off to meet Brian and his 8 year old daughter where the detour picks up the path again at 83 to go on the towpath. This section was really rough. Downed trees 50 ft tall and more with trunks 3 and 4 ft wide from the tornados and wind 2 days earlier had been cut up and moved to the side but smaller branches would loom out of no where in the light of the bike and head lamp. Brian and daughter had a tandem bike and it was so helpful. Every few minutes I would call out for something, drink, ice pack, S Cap, They would stop pull ice from the

cooler or drink from the bottom, Brian would steady the bike as his daughter handed or took whatever I needed. They kept me motivated with stories and singing! They brought me to dawn and I caught another 20 min break while Brian massaged my sopping stinky feet.

Friday morning was better with a slight cloud cover until after noon temps stayed in the 80's and we were able to stay on track. We had lost about an hour through the night due to conditions. Things heated up after lunch to the upper 90's and my feet were starting to feel the effects. We were running through sections that were almost impassable. I'm still not sure how Tom got through on his bike but he always showed up when I asked for Ice or fluid or how much further till we see Peter!



**A typical Tom's Run obstacle**

By late Friday evening the pain was getting worse with still 60 miles to go. We stopped for a quick ice bath, (Thanks Mom) nap and headed back out for another leg before dark. The break worked wonders and I was feeling great I was able to run again for about 8 miles and then the bank ran out! The next few legs were grit and determination until I could get off my feet again. Now the relay teams were catching up with us. We decided to do 10 min stops every 2-3 hours right off the trail. At checkpoints I'd lay down on the edge of the trail and Peter worked on my feet, ice one foot, massage the other and switch. My instep had become so swollen and sore that when they took off my shoe you could see the steam generating in the thick night air. I managed a few more

decent runs and then about 27 miles out on my favorite section I couldn't run through the pain. I hated this part! This is the section of the trail I had been looking forward to running. The falls are so loud and this year I would see them in the daylight. But the pain with each step made it impossible to keep a good pace for very long. Patience... relentless forward motion. I knew the goal to finish faster was slipping out of sight. But the goal to finish was never in question. Slowing down I got to enjoy the beauty of the falls, Brian did an amazing job keeping me moving, and reminding me that now was the time to push as temps were expected to rise to almost 110 that day. With 20 miles to go Tom and Brian switched while Peter helped with a quick exchange, brush the teeth, and change the shirt, everything resupplied. The checkpoint was alive with teams cheering, taking pictures and yelling encouragement as we left out again. I felt good for a mile or two and then it was all I could do to walk and not limp. We finally made it to the turnaround where you head onto the Capitol Crest Trail way, 9 miles up a low grade hill on asphalt. It was about 10 a.m. I switched to road shoes hoping it would help and took off. The break seemed to be the only thing that worked as I was limping again 4 miles up. We made it to the Rock Creek Parkway where Peter met us with good directions and my flip flops. I had taken my shoes off and the pain was gone but my feet needed something to protect them from the hot pavement.

5 miles to the finish! It was an exciting time last year when I got to this section, everyone cheering I felt great, ran great. This year there was just one team left. What was the lesson I had to learn here? When the path was flat I could run in the flip flops but for most part we just pushed through the miles. The last team passed us and congratulated us on their way to the finish. With the temps so extreme it was a late finish for most teams this year. We got to the gate at the Naval Hospital and had to wait to be escorted in as I didn't have my ID. Considering how I looked I don't know why they didn't believe I had been running for 2 1/2 days, maybe the flip flops threw them off. The race director and Peter came and escorted us in the last 3 blocks to the finish line. As we sat there waiting for them to arrive I realized how great I felt. I wasn't tired, I had slept approx 4-5 hours total, my legs still felt strong, my feet had stopped hurting and I think I could have kept going.

Luke and Leah, my children, my motivation and inspiration ran the last block with Peter, Tom and I. We came in as the last official team somewhere around 2:15 that afternoon. Yet we were the first and only solo team. Several others had stayed and cheered us to the finish, but the most notable was Tom Brooks' wife who had flown in from Wisconsin for the race.



**Nearing the finish at Naval Medical Facility Bethesda**



**Debra Brooks (right) came all the way from Wisconsin.**

She was so grateful for the effort we made and how it would bring recognition to what her husband had tried to promote when he was alive. It has been 5 years since he passed away from ALS. I began to understand why God had provided the opportunity to do this run. Not just for all the personal growth I would go through as a person and

runner, but to be an inspiration and encouragement to a woman who had lost her best friend. Mrs. Brooks honored the team and presented a Coast Guard Flag for our solo run. It stands in a place of prominence among the finishing medals as a reminder to finish the race of life as active and dedicated as Tom Brooks.

A special thank you to an amazing team that came together to help inspire those around us. What a gift we have all been given to have touched so many lives this year. Everyone knows you don't run 200 miles by yourself. My team, Tom, Peter, Mom and Brian, you deserve the recognition for your diligence, perseverance, amazing attitude, wisdom and patience in getting me to another finish line. To Roger our new race director thank you for your encouragement and support, the ice bath was great! To Aunt Stacey thank you for the wonderful time the kids had and how that helps me to stay focused! To those who have yet to experience this run, 2009 is the year! It will grow you in ways you couldn't imagine. Come join us!



**Team Ultrachelle (after)**