**THE ROAD TO BOSTON**

**Setting a goal and training**

Over the last 18 months, my mother kept saying, take care Sandra you’re not getting younger…well, I guess she’s right…at 57, I’m not getting any younger but I am getting fitter and stronger and feel like a better runner. In August 2016, I got a stress fracture – I think it came from falling over running fast downhill. I ran the Sydney ½ marathon without quite realising that was what I had done but when I finished that race I surely realised something was not right. I had been training for Melbourne marathon but that had to go – I got lots of support and held onto Vlad’s words “stay strong and positive and use the opportunity”…and I did. I couldn’t run for 3 months but I could do lots of gym work and even one legged push ups! The return to running was a wonderful experience but so much harder than I imagined. I decided to set my sights on a long-term goal so that I could really run again and decided on getting back to Boston…did a ½ marathon in February and trained slowly to get a qualifying time in Brisbane, a good enough time to get me in for Boston. Hooray I was on my way.

My running fitness has always been a bit like a rubber band – it stretches out to meet the race and then sort of springs back to where it started. This time I decided to give training a real go. So I signed up for everything that was going with Runlab and tried to put myself out of my comfort zone …summer sessions, done, UTA run camp in January, done, MyRungroup, done, Runstrong done, run program done, UTA 1-day session, done ...loved all of it and loved feeling stronger over time. If it was on my program I just did it – Runstrong class Thursday followed by either a hill session or tempo run on the same day ….2-day camp Saturday & Sunday followed by MyRungroup (note there were hills that night!). 36km run in high humidity, oh well, I sweated a lot…wear compression tights, get those good socks, do it all!

When I did the camp, I took advantage of the sweat test which confirmed I am above average but unfortunately in the ‘wrong’ direction – above average sweating and well above average sodium loss for females. I got nutritional advice on how to manage these things, especially for long runs and also dietary advice. So six weeks of sticking to an eating plan and changing what and how much I ate made a huge difference to how I felt. I got used to drinking 750ml electrolytes (65g carbs) each hour for two hours in long runs and managed to run 36-38kms without stopping and still feeling good.

**Inspiration**

I always get a bit nervous about those 3km time trials, always want to run faster than the time before but never quite make it but this year I got a PB first time trial and then another PB at the end of the term – so happy and so thankful for the training and coaching. I have felt like I’ve been surrounded by wonderful people. One of the people in my Rungroup, Jo, was also running Boston and what an inspiration she was to me, what courage and attitude she has – a real fighter …and of course people like Vlad kept winning races or achieving tremendous results and all the other runlabbers and coaches, like Pete, I trained and ran with were so positive and encouraging to be around. It’s just been months of fun!

**Boston Bound**

After a wonderful relaxing taper week in sunny warm Miami, off I go to Boston. Enjoyed watching my husband run Boston 5Km on Saturday morning (4th in his age group…) and had fun at the expo, of course, I needed all that extra running gear!

I was feeling great, had a couple of nice shake out runs and looking forward to running a PB. Of course who knew what the day would hold – weather in New England is unpredictable and there’s no use looking at 3 or 5 or 10 day forecasts because it can all change…but certainly the closer it got the worse the predictions for rain, cold and wind. And sure enough the day arrives and it’s about 1 degree. It’s ok, I have my whole outfit worked out (after changing it about 3 or 4 times), partly thanks to the Boston Marathon training FB group which I joined several months ago- mostly crazy Americans and a few international folks but some fantastic runners and full of positive support and some useful ideas and training tips– wear disposable surgical gloves over your gloves to keep them dry, buy a Houdini jacket from Patagonia clothing….so I’m bundled up in running singlet, tech long sleeve top, newly purchased wind jacket, disposable raincoat, Runlab buff, cap, gloves, disposable gloves, decided on shorts because if it was going to rain as hard as predicted then I’d just have wet cold tights for 42 kms …good decision….plus some throw away clothing to wear to get to the athletes village - top, long fleece pants and another poncho.

**Marathon Day**

Just read a BM training FB post - it could be really gnarly out there, so just chill the dickens out, put on some Lonely Island or Spice Girls, make it to the line smiling, and be proud to run like an animal with 30,000 of your newest friends – well ok, I will then.

I was in the last wave so didn’t need to get to the buses early – they have fleets of those yellow American school buses to take you to the athletes’ village. Climbed on board and the guy next to me didn’t say a word – kinda pleased so I listened to my music and chilled out, spying sprinklings of snow along the road on the near on hour ride out to Hopkinton, the start of the marathon.



When I arrived it was chaos – there was a huge line of people (blue wave) weaving its way out of the village to get to the road to walk to the start line. Short toilet queues, down to 1 or 2 in a line, mainly because it was a mud bath out there. Strangest sight I have seen at a marathon was a Japanese guy smoking a cigarette while waiting his turn! Another guy was changing out of his old running shoes and putting on beautiful new orange ones...what a waste because within five minutes they would have been soaked and muddy.

**Let’s get going**

So I go to the toilet and then decided to make my way to the start….oh I feel the need to go again, and having run in 2015 and having to stop two times I decide to use the toilets near the start…great, so I head to the start line but where’s corral 1? Or any corral? No, they’ve dispensed with all of that, just start running, when you cross the ‘start line’ you’ve started...oh well, may as well get going! It was crowded and had to weave around loads of people and puddles and flooded roads, but quickly gave up on the watery roads and just ran – what a relief to be moving. After a few minutes couldn’t feel my feet, so cold, and never felt them again until well after I was finished. The rain was pelting down and it rained the whole time I was on the course, light rain to squally torrential rain, cold the whole way and windy gusts at times, mostly head winds with a bit of relief now and again.

Get to about 10 kms and what …I need to pee…seriously what is this…oh well, I lose some time but feel relieved…run on and get to 18 km and what ? …I need to pee again…oh seriously…I reckon when it’s hot I sweat buckets and when it’s cold, well you know, buckets too! So I felt minutes slip away spent in a nice warm, quiet sheltered port-a-loo - my PB was literally going down the toilet ☺ Both times I came out and couldn’t feel my legs, in fact they felt like I had plastic wrapped round them and took several kms to thaw again…on I run, feeling good, oh no 24 kms and what, I need to pee – no I’m not stopping again…push on Sandra! It was the strangest conditions to run in because the usual body signals weren’t getting through due to the cold. I had to consciously check my running style and posture, consider how my legs felt but it was also quite good feeling slightly numb.

I was running thinking of all these people out there in terrible conditions, all running for their own reasons, many charity runners, people running to say they’d run Boston and yes that was going to be me too- never crossed my mind to stop, ran the entire course (minus port-a-loo stops), and felt positive the entire time, even if I thought it was ridiculous from time to time. More amazing were all the volunteers and spectators. Reports said there were fewer spectators than in previous years, but honestly there were crowds and crowds, all cheering so loud, calling out people’s names, calling out support, smiling and laughing and clapping and dancing, blowing kisses, handing out paper towels to wipe your face, or fruits and snacks, even hand warmers – it was so uplifting.

So we get to the start of the Newton Hills, renowned for making Boston tough – a set of 4 hills – what makes them tough is that they start around the 16 mile (26km) mark and finish 4 miles later (~32km mark). But you know, I actually ‘enjoyed’ them. Having a change of pace and a little more effort going uphill warmed me up and the hills seemed smaller and shorter than I had remembered or imagined, nothing worse than running up Victoria Road, near where I live and nothing on the Blue Mountains! All that hill training and cross country running paid off. Yes CBD hill training up and over …and over and over again worked a treat.

As I got to 38km mark, I was nearly there – just a few more kms than my longest long run. I got to 40kms and started to feel really happy (really, really happy). See the 25-mile marker and just 1 mile to go – hey, we ran 1-milers in CBD training, easy! The joy I started to feel was just overwhelming. Sure, I always feel a blast of happiness at the end of a marathon but this was just wild – I ripped off my poncho and surgical gloves (photo op approaching) and ran for my life, wild and free, tears welling up and crowds just cheering down the boulevard and over to the finish line – yes I did it, I finished and it was over. Hardest run I’ve ever done, most tremendous feeling I’ve ever had. No not a PB (3:57:55) but never felt so happy with myself and so grateful to be getting older and better! (top 18% in age group). Got a qualifying time for Boston 2019...but hey, think I need something more challenging now ☺





**Post Boston**

It’s day two post Boston – too soon to go for a run? Feel so good, still happy and can’t wait to get back and train up a storm. Thank you so much coaches and runlabbers – a great supportive group, helping each other achieve our own impossible….

Never been one for mantras or sayings but I did read a Salomon quote (not a paid insert!) ‘embrace the unexpected’ – yep, embracing it x

**Race Stats 2018**

