

This I Believe

The Tangible Reminder

Did someone say free T-shirt? If so, then I am in. The running joke in my family is that I would do anything for a free shirt. So the day I typed my name into the Grandma's Marathon Registration Page and said, "I'm doing it for the t-shirt" was the day I took this joke to a whole new level.

The joke, of course, was on me. By the third week of training, I didn't just hit a brick wall, I smashed into it. It started with a 5 mile run, which before mile 2, brought on a complete mental breakdown. Flailing my arms, pouting, and seeking sympathy, I was an absolute disaster. Big sis, who knows my games, looked at me like I was the most pathetic thing she'd ever seen and said, "Go ahead, quit." It was the gut punch I needed. So with "the pout" behind me, I was, quite literally, in it for the long run.

So we ran. Day in and day out, we ran. Through sunshine or rain, wind or snow, we ran. Over and over we traced the same 3 mile loop. The path and its cracks became familiar friends. Our incredibly slow pace created space, and in it, my sister and I began to discover each other. We planned our days and dreamt of new goals. The time together became valuable and precious.

Race day finally arrived. We imagined breezing through those 26.2 miles, easing over the finish line, and standing tall as they draped the medal around our necks. I wish I could say it was a breeze, and I wish I could say I stood tall. It wasn't, and I didn't.

Each new mile brought new obstacles. Both of my legs cramped, my toes bruised, my hip popped, and a constant throbbing pierced my foot. I was in more pain than I ever imagined possible. Determined not to walk a single step, we shuffled along.

Hours later, we spotted mile marker 23. With only 3.2 miles left, I shut down. My legs cramped so deeply that every stride felt as if I was tearing muscle. Limping along, we hoped each turn would reveal the great shoot.

Finally, it appeared. In our minds, we sprinted. In reality, we gimped, and when we crossed the line, I crumbled. Laying in a heap, I probably looked pathetic, but this was one of the greatest moments of my life. They draped the metal around my neck and handed me my t-shirt.

Yes, I still do crazy things for a T-shirt (who wouldn't?), but it is only a tangible reminder of something bigger. Life is not about the T-shirt, it's about how you earn it. Life is not about crossing the line; it's about the road taken to get there. Life is not about a single moment or the accolades that accompany the accomplishment, it's about the people with whom you share it and the forging of life-long bonds. Life is not about the cracks in the road, it's about finding the beauty in each one. Life is not about sprinting through, it's about laying in a pathetic heap gripped by the breathtaking scenery of a path less traveled. Life is not about success, its about finding excitement in every obstacle. My drawer will be stuffed with t-shirts, and I will have stories to tell. I am Karianna Grindberg, and I believe in the power of the journey, no matter how crazy it is.