

"Keep going - not far to go now."

Dear Hunterdon Hill Running Buddies,

Last week I was running with Bruce and Kim. The subject of running quotes came up. It got me thinking about the one quote I hear more on marathons than any other: "Keep going - not far to go now."

I know they mean well. I know those non-runners think that by fooling us it'll be a great help to get us to the finish line. How often I have gritted my teeth at the 20 mile mark when I hear some cheery, smiling, applauding spectator say: "Keep it up the end's not far now." Don't they understand that the 20 mile mark is only half-way in the marathon..... No I guess they don't - there's no way that a non-runner can grasp that concept.

Even as I write this there's a part of my mind that still doesn't buy it. How can you run 20 miles, be just over 6 miles from the end and have thoughts of abandoning it all? C'mon - I yell at myself - you don't even consider 6 miles a worthy training run. That's what you do just for fun! When will the day come that the mental marathon half way mark feels like I felt back there at the mileage half way point?

Year's ago a bumper sticker came to mind as I passed one of these grinning supporters: "I smile broadly because I have no idea what's going on." The truth is I have a love-hate relationship with these well-meaning fans. Firstly they are only out there killing time until the real star comes along: that uncle or daughter or husband or mom that is the object of their huge admiration for attempting such a daunting running goal. They are encouraging me as a warm up to the gushing outpouring of praise they are working up to offering. Having said that - I've done a few marathons where its so far out in the countryside that only the cows give me a glance at the 20 mile mark. Oh what I'd have given to pass a few gushing spectators.

One last thing: by the time I've gotten to 20 miles and beyond some of those spectators have been there on that corner for 2 hours already. I seen how their palms are getting sore and when they tell me how I'm still "looking good" I yell back thanks for their being there and tell them "don't get tired clapping now!" Just the mere act of still being able to thus converse reassures me that I haven't passed into some twilight zone where I'll be condemned to run forever - half dazed and yet half wondering if that wet feeling in my running shoes might be blood.

Pastor Andrew