

My Friend John

This has been a tough week for many of us. John's sudden passing has touched us and saddened us. We feel for his wonderful family and strive to find just the right thing to say. But nothing seems adequate or appropriate. It's inconceivable that we will no longer be blessed with his engaging smile and driven determination to be the best he could be and by doing so; to bring out the best in us. He was such an inspiration and a model. Personally; I haven't been able to run a single step since Monday without thinking of my buddy John, and the sleepless nights haven't been easy either. But I don't want to remember him this way. Instead, I choose to dwell on the good times. Below are just some of the memories that I will treasure forever.

How many races did John and I fight tooth and nail, often running side-by-side or right behind each other? We never dared say a word to each other, but we always knew exactly where the other was on the course, and plotted just when to time our kick so as to leave the other in our dust? We were each other's main competitor, and we always acknowledged that we were both better runners for it. Talk about motivation. Talk about friendship.

I don't know who got the most pleasure out of his running and triathlon "Shrine" downstairs in his house – him showing it off, or those of us who ogled and touched each of the mementos. The Shrine taught us many things about John and his athletic exploits. First; that he wasn't always as slim and fit as he was in the last few years, but rather that he had to work hard to lose excess weight and then apply disciplined training that paid off in continuous race improvement. He just kept getting better and better. It also showed how he couldn't have done it without his "crew" mate Diane.

Who can forget the fun times we had at the Jersey Shore Bar A Half Marathons in December of each year? And then the recounting of the experiences for years afterwards? The race reports of these experiences were framed and held a prominent place in The Shrine.

I remember how he always claimed that he had never even thought about trying to qualify for Boston until he got to know me, and saw how hard I tried for so many years and finally succeeded. I think that the truth is that he came to the realization that "if this guy can do it; anyone can". And he did. He was registered to run his 3rd consecutive Boston in 2009. He was looking forward to it. And so was I. It won't be the same.

Who can forget how we all shared in his excitement and pride when he took up triathloning, and then became so adept at it in such a short period of time, that he soon completed an Ironman? He was registered for the Lake Placid Ironman in July.

He became an integral member of our River to Sea team, and we were a better team for his enthusiasm, his determination, his camaraderie, and his running ability. How fitting that in his last R2C, his legs were The Beast and the finishing leg #14. Nobody could bring it home and cross the finish line with such excitement and joy.

We have John to thank for instituting the HRH annual Beer Pub run. He insisted it would be a memorable event, and as usual, he was right. He will be with us in spirit as we run this one for years to come and we'll toast him when we socialize at the pub afterwards.

For years now, I've looked forward to seeing Diane's lime green floppy hat, reserved for race spectating. There's no way that any runner can miss it, which of course was the idea.

John – you left an indelible footprint, and you will always be with us.