

**Here's a report written by a member of Tim Shea's team called The Gingerbreadmen.**

**Hi Bruce**

**Here is a race report one of our teammates wrote about R2C12. We had a great time despite the setbacks, and the whole team can't wait till next year!**

**See you Saturday**

**Tim**

**Begin forwarded message:**

**Subject: R2C Race Report**

**Hey Guys,**

**Here's the race report Mary wrote. It's about 3 pages long, so read it when you've got some time. I must say it is a great account of the events that occurred on that day.**

### **River to Sea Relay : A Race Report**

**Heat waves radiated off the pavement in the small parking lot. Groups of runners clustered under nearby trees and open trunk hatches. The shade was not much, but it would have to do. This race, the 92 mile River to Sea Relay, is a grueling test of endurance, and every bit of energy had to be conserved. Every few minutes another runner would cross the exchange area, to cheers and waves. Then all would go quiet again. It was too hot to make a fuss; the thermometer on the side of the building read 94 degrees. Greg, Michael, Katie and I stayed in our team's van, chugging water and blasting the AC. Suddenly, a race official came tearing out of the building and yelled across the steamy lot:**

**“ Runner down, runner down!”**

**All the teams stood up, and waited to hear more. But, no further information came. The official jumped in a car and sped out of the lot. A runner could be down for lots of reasons, but on a day like today, none of those reasons seemed good. The entire lot was silent for a moment, each team counting their members and hoping that it would not be their runner. Then, Katie's cell phone trilled and the worst was confirmed. Bill, one of our strongest teammates, had gone down in the fourth leg of the relay.**

**A few harried minutes later we arrived at his side, to find a police officer and the rest of our team tending to Bill. Pale and shaky, he was sprawled on the ground with an oxygen mask clamped to his face. He was barely conscious and he did not know where he was or what was happening to him. In the distance, an ambulance was fast approaching. All seven of us tended to the prone figure; some iced his limbs and others wiped his face with a damp cloth. The facial expressions on our team said it all: “if this happened to Bill, what about us?”**

Several hours before, we had all convened in Tim, our captain's, kitchen, to prepare for the day. It would be the first time we had all gotten together: Bill and Pat from South Carolina, Greg, Jesse and Tim from New Jersey and Michael and I from New York. None of us had ever done a relay and the race seemed like a huge adventure. The River to Sea course started in tiny Milford, New Jersey on the Delaware River. It would take us 92 miles across the state, to the finish in Manasquan, on the shores of the Atlantic. All seven runners had been assigned two legs, totaling 10-13 miles, and we needed a strategy for each one.

Bill, a former Army Ranger, was meticulously prepared. He had annotated the course book, with detailed maps and charts. He knew each leg by heart, and had a plan for each runner, as well as the support crew. The day before, he had even taken the opportunity to drive a large part of the course, so that he would be familiar with it at race time.

Bill was not the only one that had prepared well. Tim and his wife Katie and stocked our support vehicle with enough water, accelerade, towels and food to handle twice our number of runners. Katie, ever the elementary school teacher, even labeled our sandwiches and plastic cups. Their good friend Mike had volunteered his car as an extra vehicle so that we would have a support car on the course as well as one in the exchange zones.

As we headed to start, the mood was very upbeat. We joked about our assignments: Bill volunteered to take on a leg called "the beast" and we all wondered what other challenges the course might hold. Just after 8:15, Jesse took off on the first leg of the race and opened up a huge lead on the competitors. It was unbelievable the nearest runner was a half-mile back. We laughed and cheered, it was certain to be an amazing day.

It's now just before eleven a.m., and the sun creeps higher into the sky. The paramedics have arrived, and the decision is made to take Bill to the hospital. Katie and Pat will go with him. As they bundle him onto the stretcher, Pat asks Bill what year he graduated West Point. When he comes up with the right answer, Pat nods approvingly and waves to us. It's a sign that he will be all right. The race officials turn to us as the ambulance speeds off.

"Who is the next runner? That runner needs to finish this leg and then you can continue on from there."

There is no discussion of stopping; it is not even hinted at. Silently, we have all made the unanimous decision to finish this race. Without hesitation, Michael starts out from the spot where Bill had fallen. Quickly, we re-arrange the cars, as we have now lost two runners and one of our drivers. Greg, Tim and I head to the next transition area while Mike and Jess take over the course support. When we get to the transition area, Greg makes an addition to our window-markered van:

"4 Bill"

My first leg is next and by now, it's past noon. The runners coming into the exchange area are definitely not moving as fast as they had before. Nervously, I tie an ice towel around my neck and walk out to the exchange zone on the side of the road. I have to be careful not to step too

far out, this course is open to traffic all day, and one false step might be a runner's last. Out of the haze, I can see Michael approaching. He's charging along at a good pace and before I can think about it too much, it's my turn. He applies the tag and I'm off down the road. Mike and Greg zip by in the support car and I know that I am on my own for now.

The sun blazes down and I am alone on the road through a cornfield. After a half mile I can hear soft footsteps, but when I look back there does not seem to be anyone behind me. A few feet later, I turn back again and finally see the runner. Long and lithe, he is approaching fast, and I move over so he can pass. He's sweating and gasping, but his pace does not show it. His support team flies by in a pick up truck, but he waves them off. As he passes, I catch sight of the small M-dot tattoo on his calf. That explains it, he's an Ironman. I no longer feel so bad about getting passed. His team number is also 103, which indicates he was among the last to start. Teams started on the course in staggered waves, according to 5k times. The higher the number the faster the time. In my head I wish him well, since yelling and breathing at the same time are certainly out of the question.

A sign up ahead tells me I am entering Princeton. This is the fifth or sixth town we have been through and I am pondering how many more we could possibly have to go. Up ahead, Greg and Mike have pulled over and are ready with water, accelerade and ice. I take all three from Greg as he runs with me; this has become our routine for support. Mike pulls the car up, the support crew runs out to the athlete while they take what they need. Then, the team member jumps back in the car and leapfrogs ahead a mile or two.

This ritual gets repeated seven or eight times in the course of my first 8.5-mile leg. At one point, Greg even has to direct me, since there are no course markers. Many of the roads are quite busy, and this one really looks like the on-ramp to the interstate. Greg assures me the turn off is not far ahead and they speed off up the street. Now, I seem to be gaining on a few teams, and after running for so long it seems strange. Several of the teams that I pass have low numbers like 5 or 17. These teams started at 6 a.m. and for the first time, I begin to worry that we will not make the 8:30 pm cut off time.

The end of my first leg is finally in sight, and I feel like I am moving underwater. Quickly, I make the hand off to Jesse and grab a drink from Mike. It's just past one in the afternoon and we still have half of the race ahead of us, so there is no time to waste. It's back to the support van and out onto the course. The mood in the van is intense, but in a supportive, we're all in this together type of way. A call comes in from Katie; Bill is at the hospital and doing well. He was suffering from heat exhaustion and will not be able to return. But, his son Pat will be back out with us soon. She tells us to hang in there, that she'll be back too.

In the meantime, Jesse is gaining serious ground. Although he appears to be running easily and effortlessly, he is clearly moving in high gear. It is almost difficult to stay ahead of him with the support van, as he's moving so quickly. Mike, our driver, seems to have grown into his role as the wheelman. He's perfected the quick stop and the cut over, and now seems to be making his Volvo SUV do things only seen in the commercials.

Katie rejoins us in the next transition area, and tells us that Pat will join us at the next stop. This is great news on many levels: it means Bill is home and resting and a fresh runner, who is all of sixteen years old, is on his way. As we wait for Tim to relay to Michael, we witness one of

the great disappointments of the race, and one that we will see repeated. A runner enters the exchange area only to find that the next runner is not there. Over the noise of the crowd, we hear:

**“Team 100? Runner from team 100? 100!”**

The fresh runner is nowhere to be seen, and his teammate slumps and looks at his shoes. He can't go anywhere until his teammate arrives. After a second and then a third call from the official, the fresh runner comes darting through the crowd. By this time, several other teams, including ours, have already completed their exchanges. The original runner from team 100 glares as his successor tears off down the road.

He looks angry and hurt; all the effort he put into his run seems to have been undone by another's carelessness.

Back out on the road we almost have a complete team. Pat is back and Katie's parents have joined us for moral support. Her father is hanging out the window of his car as we pass, waving and shouting encouragement. The sight of an older gentleman in a Red Sox hat and “I Love Guinness” t-shirt egging on a group of sweaty runners is most welcome sight. We are going to need all the support we can get. The remaining legs are going to be the hottest of the day: leg eleven is described as “a piece of cake; but the cake is in the oven.” Pat's reading the description over my shoulder and says, “Well, that's okay. Just so long as the oven is on warm instead of broil.”

Pat is a talented cross country runner, and the youngest of our group. We know that he's got a lot of speed, but all of us are a little worried about the distance. His original leg assignments were a 3.9-mile stretch and the penultimate 2.5-mile leg. Now, he'll have to tackle a 6.5-mile leg just for starters. The plan is for him to take it easy through the first few miles and we will be meeting every half-mile for support. It's now getting close to six thirty in the afternoon and it's so hot outside even the insects have stopped moving around. But none of these things seem to have put a dent in the kid. He lopes off down the road with tremendous ease and Mike has to speed just to catch up. As Pat makes the turn into a small suburban town, I hop out of the car to direct him. He's really flying now and he zips past a group of teens standing on the sidewalk. The girls stare after him and the boys are glowering. I am laughing so hard Greg has to pull me back in the van so we can get to the exchange zone.

Pat hands off to Jesse and now we have just two legs remaining. Thankfully, the sun has started to sink into the sky and the finish line is less than ten miles away. Katie's father has already opened a beer and we make him to put it away until the finish. We need to be done by eight thirty, and we do not want to jinx ourselves. As long as the pace does not slow, we might just make it.

As the miles dwindle, Jess' pace increases. He's passing many of the runners now, and some of them have higher numbers than ours. With three miles to go in his leg, he'll turn off onto a bike path and out of support range. At the final hand off, Tim passes him a bag of ice and water. Jesse nods calmly and charges up the hill and out of sight. When he climbs back in the car, we grill Tim about what he said. Did he tell Jesse how close we were on time?

**“Nah, “ Tim scoffs, “ I jus tole' him to go like hell.”**

We consider this in the remaining miles to the beach. We also have to consider who will do the last leg of the race. Greg has offered to do it, if no one else wants it. Pat is considering it too, but we will have no way of knowing who takes it until we see them at the finish.

The beach road in Manasquan is very busy, although a lot of it is not race traffic. Sunbathers are heading in for the day, and party animals are heading out to the beach bars and nightclubs. The sun has sunk below the horizon, and we are all anxiously waiting by the finish line. The real time clock reads 8:22, 8:23, and 8:24. A handful of runners are finishing, and the race crowd seems to be thinning. The lights and noise from the local establishments start to wink on, as the surf pounds in the background.

The clock ticks 8:25 and then Katie begins to shout.

“There he is, there he is!”

Pat is coming up the beach road, fast. His thin arms and legs are just visible the twilight, kicking up and out in a smooth stride. We are all screaming at the top of our lungs as he draws near and makes the hard left towards the finish line. Arms outstretched, he hits the line. As one, our eyes snap up to the clock:

8:28:36...

“Victory!”

“Yeah Pat!”

“Oh my god!”

Pandemonium ensues as we mob the kid. His aunts and grandparents are trying to hug him, his uncle is trying to high five him and three of us are trying to hand him water. He smiles sheepishly at all the attention, and tells us “it’s a good thing you guys were all yelling. I can’t see much without my glasses.” We cheer, clap and scream and caper around. This was a huge challenge, and somehow we mastered it.

As the night rolls in, we chow down on pizza and sodas provided by the race; two pies for each team. Sitting in the sand, watching the stars come out, Tim takes a post race poll.

“So, who’s in for next year, “ he commands.

All the hands in the group go up at once. Twelve hours and 92 miles have turned seven runners into a team.

Katie’s father interrupts the reverie, with another burning question.

“Hey, who wants beer?”

All the hands in the group go up again. Apparently, this will be a very fun team.