

Barney Thomas & the Last Marathon

The true story about Barney's 2005 trip to run a marathon in Antarctica – written by Hal Wolfe



Writers note: *This is the first of a four part story about one of our members, Barney Thomas, who traveled to Antarctica in 2005 to run a marathon. Barney has been struggling with ALS for 3 years now and this story was written over the past few months with my help. I started it several months ago when Barney could still talk, but unfortunately due to other commitments I wasn't able to finish the article until now. I'll be posting one part of the story to the club web site each month for the next 4 months. I hope you take the time to read them. I've found the story to be interesting and inspirational.*

Barney is currently living in Brian's House, an assisted living facility in Bay City. Barney grew up in Bay City, and his brother still lives there. Barney is confined to a bed, as he no longer has the use of his arms or legs. He can no longer speak, but he can listen, smile, nod his head, watch TV, and read. He enjoys visitors and hearing news of the goings-on of his friends. You can visit him at Brian's House or send him greetings via e-mail if you'd like. His e-mail ID is bltnd@yahoo.com. His e-mails are tended to by his brother Kurt or his wife Debra. If you want to visit or have any questions you can contact me for details or directions at runlikehal@yahoo.com. I hope you enjoy the article. Barney and I both put a lot of effort into it.

- Hal Wolfe

Message from Barney:

Hello AATC Members, this article is meant to share with you my experiences during my trip to Antarctica for the marathon. The article was originally only going to cover the marathon but give Hal a pen and he wrote about the trip there (and back). Enjoy. Any comments, contact Hal.

Barney Thomas
9-15-07

Prologue:

Barney Thomas was diagnosed with ALS in September of 2004, at age 52. This was 36 years after his father contracted the very same rare and fatally debilitating disease, also at the age of 52. Six months later, in February of 2005, Barney ran one of the most grueling running races on the face of the earth, the Antarctic Marathon. This is the story of his life surrounding that event.

Part 1: Running Out of Time

Hello, my name is Barney Thomas. I'm from Michigan, and I'm a runner. I ran track in High School and did pretty well then and just sort of got stuck with it. Running can do that to you. I was a distance runner, which back then meant either being a miler or a two miler. I was a two miler. My PR was 10:40, which didn't set any school records by a long shot but was pretty respectable. I also played little league baseball as a kid growing up in Bay City, and I did OK at that too.

As an adult I moved to Florida, where I started coaching little league and eventually playing in the over 40 league. We played double headers every Sunday. I played second base and held my own, but I never gave up on running. By the time I moved back to Michigan, I was done with hardball and back to hard running. I guess you could call me a marathon runner. I run lots of different distances, but I've run quite a few marathons, so in most people's minds, that would make me a marathon runner. Now I'm a marathon runner with ALS. I've been a runner much of my life. The ALS part just happened recently. I'll continue to be a runner in my heart. Running has been a part of my life for too long to think of myself any other way. Unfortunately having ALS means that I won't actually be running for too much longer.

If you're also a runner, then you know that to be successful you need to make goals for yourself. That's probably true for any sport, but especially so for running. Runners can tend to be pretty neurotic, and obsessive about setting goals and then plotting detailed training schedules to help achieve them. Every marathon runner knows well the goal of completing a marathon, and getting on a training schedule to accomplish the goal. You can't simply go out and run a marathon without having done a lot of hard work first. The key to success is having the discipline to stick to the schedule you set up. That's also the rub, because the training can hurt. Sure there are a few very talented and determined runners that stay in good shape all of the time and can simply step up and push themselves through a marathon. But those people are few and far between and let's be clear: I've never been one of them. I've run quite a few marathons, and I had to set training goals and push hard for all of them. That's the way it works if you run marathons. That's the way it works for a lot of other things in life too.

A few years ago, I set a goal for myself to run a marathon in every continent in the world – all 7 of them – so that I could join the Seven Continent Club I'd heard about. If you're not up on all your major land masses of the globe, that means running a marathon in Antarctica as well as the other six inhabited ones. As you might expect, running a marathon in Antarctica is a bit of a trick. You can only do it once a year. (*Note: In 2005, when Barney did it, the event was only held once every two years.*)

As it turns out, there's a hardcore outfitter called Marathon Tours and Travel that sponsors adventure races all over the world. Once a year, they make a stop below the land down under, at the bottom of the planet on what was once known as the last continent: Antarctica. They make the voyage down to the Antarctic Circle on two specially outfitted Russian trawlers that sail out of the southern most tip of Argentina very near Cape Horn, and if you can believe it, it's actually a popular trip with the community of adventure-running psychos. OK, popularity is a relative thing, but it's popular enough to fill up the charter every year. That fact alone is surprising to many people who don't know the sport, and plenty who do.

So in January of 2004, I called up the tour company to sign up for the darn thing - the Antarctic Marathon, or the Last Marathon as they call it. It was one of the seven, so it was on my list. I'd already done a bunch of marathons in North America, and one in Australia. If I was going to make all seven, I had to hit the biggie in Antarctica sometime, and now was as good a time as any. At that point it was still 14 months before the race, so I figured it would be plenty soon enough to assure me a spot on the list. I was wrong. They put me on a waiting list. A waiting list for a chance to pay five grand to run a marathon on the most desolate, barren, lifeless continent on the planet. Go figure. Turns out that people who are crazy enough not only to want to run marathons, but on top of that who want to go and run one in a place like Antarctica, well those people are also crazy enough to sign-up well in advance. I guess part of the fun is having plenty of time to let everyone you know carefully ponder the full depths of your insanity for actually choosing such a ridiculous vacation destination. The message to let people dwell on would be along the lines of: hey - if being a marathon runner isn't crazy enough for you, well how about this – I'm going to run one on glaciers in Antarctica! Let all those egghead PhD scientists down there study that!

Yeah, you'd expect most people to think wanting to do something like that was completely over the top, and that was just the kind of image that most pathological runners such as myself were happy to assume, so it seemed like a good plan. It also seemed like it would actually be a lot of fun. That is, so long as you consider preparing for months to travel to the bottom of the planet to spend between five and six grueling hours pushing yourself to the limit of your physical endurance to be fun. But then, that's the ticket to participating in this sport in the first place. If you don't enjoy stuff like that, then you're barking up the wrong tree entirely, whether you're headed for Boston, Chicago, Big Sur, Antarctica or any other place where hundreds of people congregate to engage in a primal display of masochistic human endurance. So if it took getting on a waitlist for this jewel, then so be it. And after all, they only allowed 180 people per year the chance to participate in this spectacle, so having a waitlist was really no big surprise. New York lets over twenty thousand people participate, and even they have a waitlist.

It was four months later in May that I got a call from one of the staffers of Marathon Tours. I was informed that they now had some cancellations and now had some open slots on the boat. "Do you still want to go", she asked me?

"Hell yes!" was my two word response.

"Ok, welcome aboard. We'll send the forms to you. See you next February."

That was about it. No hoopla. No big deal at all. Just a 30 second phone conversation. I wondered how they informed astronauts that they'd been selected for a space mission. I can't say for sure, but the phone calls are probably similar.

I committed to participating in this lunacy before even giving my boss any chance to approve the trip, or more to the point, to disapprove of the trip. Dan, my boss, owned and managed Hanson Engineering where I'd worked for the past two years. The firm designed temporary earthen retention structures. Dan was the principle, but I had become his right hand man. It was a small firm and I was one of only two registered engineers on staff, so it wasn't like I could slip away unnoticed, but Dan was generally pretty generous about things like that, and he did encourage his employees to take at least one long vacation every year. Plus he definitely thought I was crazy already, so this would fit right his expectations of me perfectly.

Dan and I were both civil engineers but other than that, we were about as different as two people could be. We shared a common profession, but that was where the similarities ended. Where I was healthy as a horse, Dan had pretty much been picked up by the ear and stuffed into life's hurt bag on his head. His many health issues included diabetes, kidney trouble, and heart problems. Basically, his life expectancy was not much longer than someone out taking a Sunday stroll through an Australian swamp. Sooner or later he was gonna get gobbled up. To some degree we all stare death in the face every day of our lives, but in his case it was breathing right down his neck. Still, in spite of all that, he was pleasant, had a positive outlook and was a really good boss – very down to earth. We'd go to lunch together on many a Monday, and he'd always say something like, "So Barney, what did you do for fun over the weekend, run 20 miles?"

My answer was generally “yes,” to which he’s reply that I was crazy. That was part of our routine, so when I told him about the notion of taking two and a half weeks off to go run a marathon in Antarctica of all places, he took it right in stride. He leaned back and told me that his suspicions of my less than sound mental status were now fully confirmed. As I expected, he gave me his blessing to take the time off and make the trip. Boss or not, he really was a good guy. I liked him a lot.

Now that I had those obstacles out of the way, I had nine months to prepare for the trip and more importantly, the race. That should be no problem, since it was something I’d done plenty of times. My PR was a 3:11, which was far from world class, but a good bit faster than most people can muster, and for someone who didn’t start running marathons until my late 20s I figured it wasn’t too bad. And at this point in my life with 20 marathons under my belt including Boston, I was pretty much a bona fide marathon veteran, so I was no stranger to the rigors of training for them. I did have to admit that I was a little ways past my prime as a runner, as I was running times of closer to 4 hours these days than the 3 hours runs in my younger days. But at age 52, my times were still good enough to meet the Boston qualifying time, the gold standard of marathon race times, so there was no shame in the times I was mustering lately. And actually, this event was not really going to be a race. It was more of a grueling 26.2 mile fun run through a frozen, lifeless desert.

Now, runners may be crazy, but you still don’t go to Antarctica looking for a good race. Well, not unless you want to race emperor penguins or leopard seals, that is. No, this event would just be for fun, for the huge personal challenge and triumph of completing it, and for the thrill of a distant adventure. As expected, the course was known to be really tough, so the preparations would need to be pretty intense, but I had plenty of time to prepare, which was a good thing. I set into my normal summer training schedule with a weekly mileage of 20 to 30 miles per week. Things would ramp up a bit from there in a few months but that was a good place to start. Plenty of marathon runners do a whole lot more mileage than that, but I found that around 30 worked for me. Every runner needs to find their own training groove. Plus, I’d generally attend a good interval training workout once a week on Tuesday nights with the Ann Arbor Track Club. Throwing some speed work in with the LSD (long slow distance) runs is always a good idea. About a half a dozen of us would generally go out for dinner after the interval workouts. The social aspects of the sport were definitely something that I found added greatly to the whole thing. Plus there’s nothing like going out for a good meal after a tough workout. Rewards like that helped take the edge off an otherwise monotonous training routine.

The training was going fine when, in April, I started having trouble with my right hand. I noticed that my grip felt a little funny initially. It seemed like I had a hard time making a fist, which is the normal hand position when distance running. I’d had a pinched nerve a few years back that produced symptoms of numbness and tingling, so I thought (or, more accurately, hoped) that this was simply another bout of that. But this time the problem persisted for awhile, so I finally went to a doctor in June. They did the standard tests on me but couldn’t find anything wrong so over the course of the summer they proceeded to do a battery of additional tests. I had reason to be worried, and it wasn’t looking like a pinched nerve as I wanted to think it was. In September I finally got the answer I’d been hoping not to hear. I was in the early stages of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), better known as Lou Gerhig’s disease.

ALS is a very rare disease that systematically attacks the nervous system as it eventually disables all of the voluntary muscles in the entire body as it runs its course. It’s the exact same disease that my father had died of 36 years ago. That was my reason to be worried. He had been dealt a bad set of cards that struck him down in the prime of his life and now the doctors had confirmed that I’d been dealt the same hand. As a child I had watched my dad slowly succumb to it. It wasn’t easy to watch. In both of us the onset was precisely the same – it started our right hand. As it progresses first you lose control of your hands and feet, then your limbs. Then it seems to creep through your central nervous system until you eventually lose the ability to swallow, to speak, and ultimately to breath. But while it ravages the body, it leaves the mind unscathed - you never loose the ability to think. It’s kinda like the complete opposite of Alzheimers. The medical community has made a lot of advances, and the means to deal with the affects of ALS have improved dramatically, but their lack of know-how to do anything about the disease itself hasn’t changed one bit. You get the disease, and you don’t get rid of it. It gets ric of you, simple as that. That may sound harsh, but that’s the reality of it, and I knew it.

ALS is a disease that affects only one out of about 100,000 people worldwide. Doctors don’t know what causes it, or how to cure it, but they do know that in it sometimes seems to be passed on through heredity. In the very rare event of it’s onset, it seems that about 10% o the people that contract it have a parent or grandparent that died from it. It also seems to affect active people more so than most others, like the person it was named after – another baseball player – New York Yankee’s famous iron man, Lou Gerhig. I had fallen into the 1 in 100,000 trap, but at least I knew why I had it, unlike the other 90% of the poor bastards that get it and have no idea where it might have come from and why they were stricken with it. But knowing why I had it doesn’t make it any easier to deal with, and it damn sure doesn’t change the outcome. My dad lived for three years after he contracted the disease. The last two of those years he spent in Bay County Hospital basically wasting away. That was the way things were 30 years ago. I also have two younger brothers who have no signs of any ALS as of yet. How time will treat them is still a mystery. In a way I’m glad I never had any kids who would now be forced to go through what I did watching my father wither away, but my brother Kurt has been forced to watch the same episode twice now. I pray to God it never touches him or my three nieces.

I may have had a little better outlook to look forward to that my father did, but the one thing I couldn’t know for sure was how much time I’d have left that I could still physically function, and still run. One thing was certain, time was something I was now running out of. If I was going to make my goal of a marathon on every continent, and the other goals in my life such as completing my master’s degree in Architecture, I needed to get on with things. When you’re an aging athlete in any sport, time is generally not your ally. Running has altered the formula in people’s favor somewhat by posting the results of most races in 5 year age groups, so getting old isn’t quite such a big deal in my sport. In fact, many determined runners look forward to moving up in age brackets, because through attrition the competition generally starts to thin out. But as a runner with a degenerative nervous disorder, I was one of the runners who was getting thinned out. It seemed that I too now had a hungry croc breathing down my neck, or more accurately, steadily crawling up my spine. Time was now my most precious commodity, and it was also my arch enemy.

But Since I still had a lot of time before the race, I didn’t need to change my training habits anytime soon, at least not based on the timing of Antarctic trip. A marathon training regimen generally takes 12-16 weeks for most people. That meant that I didn’t need to make any

changes to my standard routine until around November for the February Race. I still liked to do a long run every Sunday. I usually went to Kensington Metro Park and did a lap or two round the lake there with a couple of buddies. I did a lot of my training with Kevin Galvin, who also ran with the Ann Arbor Track Club. We were pretty well-suited for each other as we had a nearly identical pace. It's always good to find someone that can match your pace to train with. On the days when your commitment to yourself wanes, and there are plenty of those, the commitment to a training partner takes over to keep you moving. Kevin was my guy there. I also started running into Mike Golombek out at Kensington. He was also from Bay City and we'd run track together there for All Saints High School back in the late 60s. He was a year younger than me and back then I could kick his butt pretty good, but he was holding his own now and was also right near my pace.

By winter of 2004/2005 I was starting to increase my mileage. I was ramping up from my standard 30 miles to more like 40-50 miles a week. Two laps around Kent Lake at Kensington was about the longest training run I'd make. Most marathoners run a couple of 20 milers in the month or two before a race, but I found that doing 16 was enough. At this point, six months after I noticed the first symptoms, the ALS was starting to affect my right arm more severely, making my right hand pretty much unusable. Of course, like most people I was right handed so that meant that a lot of adjustments had to be made. Getting myself dressed took a lot more time and effort, and things as simple as tying my shoes became impossible. I also could no longer even hold my arm up when I ran.

That made my training difficult. Having an arm dangling lifelessly at your side is not only irritating as all get out, it also affects your gait and stride. I thought about trying a sling but I never got around to it. It was just something I had to adjust to – I had no other choice. Plus knew it was only a matter of time until it would start to affect my legs also, but for now my training seemed to be going as well as I could expect under the circumstances. It's harder to train outdoors in the winter, but I managed fairly well. I rolled into February feeling as good as I could about my training under the circumstances. I wasn't going to be setting a PR, but I figured I could finish any marathon on any continent including Antarctica.

By mid-February, about a week before the race, I was ready to go, or at least I felt like I was. I already had a good waterproof nylon running shell. It wasn't Gore-Tex, as they recommended, but it had taken me through quite a few Michigan winters so I was pretty sure it would do the trick. Under that I would wear fleece underwear, running tights, a synthetic shirt, and a cotton sweatshirt. Debra, my wife (well, she was still my ex-wife officially, but I'd been living with her again for the past 12 years), helped out and got me extra socks and underwear. She also threw in some extra T-shirts for good measure. Experienced runners know not to skimp on footwear so I bought a special pair of Gore-Tex running shoes and a couple of good pair of smart wool socks. I didn't know if they would keep my feet dry during the race - and more importantly warm - through all of the snow and ice and especially river crossings, but it seemed like a good idea. I also picked up a pair of knee high rubber boots they told us we'd need for zodiac landings. Combined with the gloves and stocking hat I already had, I felt I was pretty well set for clothing.

For water bottles I bought three new large mouthed hard plastic bottles. I wrote BLT (my initials - and a fine sandwich) on all of them. I also bought a brand new camcorder to go along with the digital camera I already had. I didn't figure to go to the South Pole a second time anytime soon, so I wanted to get plenty pictures and videos to remember things by. If saquatch or the abominable snowman showed up for a visit, I'd be ready for them. So with all of the special new gear along with the rest of my things carefully packed into a suitcase and a duffel bag, I figured I was as ready as I'd ever be for this peccadillo.

The string of events that occurred just before the trip rocked my world even more than everything else going on in my life at the moment. It happened to be Debra's birthday two days before I was to head south for the big race. I planned to take her out for a nice big, fancy birthday dinner. Then while I was gone, she was going to go visit some friends in Kentucky, where she'd moved to from Florida for a few years after our divorce. The dinner would make a good send off for both of us.

The harmony of that plan got turned upside-down when, the day before Debra's birthday, my boss Dan up and died. He hadn't had any significant trouble recently and there was no reason to suspect any imminent life threatening condition, but then again, when you're a diabetic on dialysis and glycerin, you're on the bubble already and every day of life is a bonus. He was at the dialysis center and he simply became unresponsive. He died during the procedure. It sometimes happens that way for people in his condition. There was no significant attempt at resuscitation, nor was there any autopsy. We were told he likely died of a blood clot or of heart failure. Finding the actual cause for a man in his condition would be paying to make a very moot point. Whatever it was that got him, it was fast. Dan's death certainly cast a pall over the birthday event, but we kept our plans to go out anyhow. We went to the visitation and then I took Deb out for her birthday dinner. I took her to the Real Seafood Company in downtown Ann Arbor. The next day we went to the funeral. The day after that I left for Antarctica. Even looking back now with all I've been through, those were a string of pretty unreal days.

Going to Dan's funeral sure wasn't the kind of bon voyage event I was expecting as a send off for the adventure vacation I'd been planning for well over a year. In addition to the shock of his loss I was also starting to wonder what would happen to the business, and my job. He wasn't just the boss, he was also the owner. Reality meant that there would be some big changes there. It also struck me that the way Dan went so quickly and unexpectedly, well, that he and I were destined to be opposites right to the bitter end. Thankfully I had to put that all behind me for the time being and focus on the task at hand. It was time to get the car loaded up for the trip to Metro Airport for my flight to Miami. The first leg of my journey to the bottom of the earth was about to begin.

Part 2: Traveling to the Bottom of the Earth



My flight left on Thursday, February 17th at 4:47 PM and arrived in Miami just under three hours later at around 7:30 PM. Most of the rest of the people on the trip were meeting the following day in Miami for the flight to Buenos Aires, Argentina, but I figured I'd play it safe and arrive a day early, just in case there was any trouble with the flights. I hadn't spent nine months getting ready for this dumahugger only to miss the boat due to a chance February snowstorm on the day of the trip, that's for sure. Debra took me to the airport along with Engee, our devoted cocker spaniel that I'd bought as a present for her 12 years before. She pulled up to the unloading area and dropped me off. I kissed her good bye but there was no great fanfare. With the trouble with my right hand, which was now afflicting much of my right arm, I had some trouble with the bags but I managed to find a cart. Deb would be leaving the next day for her trip to Lawrenceburg. I felt better knowing that she and Engee would have friends to visit with while I was gallivanting off to planet Earth's no-man's-land to complete the most difficult leg of my seven continent running odyssey.

I boarded my plane at Metro Airport for the three hour flight to Miami thinking I would be in good shape for starting the journey south to the Antarctic. It was my first return trip to Florida since leaving almost a decade earlier. Unfortunately, when I got to Miami I found out that there was a boat convention in town and all of the rooms at the airport hotels were booked up solid. To top it off, there was not a single rental car available. A boat convention. Nuts. With all of the excruciatingly detailed preparations for the marathon and the voyage, I had neglected to make even the most basic plans for my night in Florida. That turned out to be a bit of a mistake as I spent the first night of my sojourn sleeping on the floor of Miami International Airport. I guessed this wouldn't be the toughest thing I'd have to endure over the next two weeks, so I took it in stride. I got a sweatshirt out of my bag and made a pillow, which helped, but, needless to say, it was a long night.

The next day there were some rooms available, so I got one just so I could sleep in a bed for a few hours before the eleven hour red-eye to Buenos Aires. I made sure to arrange for a wake up call. I got in a few hours of comfortable sleep and got back down to the airport in plenty of time to catch my flight. A bunch of the runners were on my flight. Half of the group was leaving along with me, and the other half would leave the next day, although a few people were meeting directly in Buenos Aires. It's surprising how much more comfortable an airplane seat can be than the floor of an airport. Since I was pretty tired, I managed to get a little more sleep on the long flight south.

Buenos Aires is about a third of way down Argentina on the Rio De La Plata, a large bay off of the Atlantic. It's at 35 degrees South latitude. That puts it the same relative distance from the equator as Atlanta, so even in February, it was still quite warm. This was the summer season in the Southern Hemisphere, which is of course why they chose this time of year to venture to Antarctica. Runners may seem crazy, but they are also very pragmatic. Any other time of year would not only be ridiculous, it simply wouldn't be possible. Temperatures can drop to 80 degrees below zero with 100 mile per hour wind gusts in the Antarctic winter. All travel to the Last Continent stops during that time of year. Everyone that's there stays there, as no one comes or goes for any reason for nine long, cold, dark months, when it basically becomes Hell frozen over. You may recall hearing the true story about the doctor who was stationed there that got appendicitis and actually had to operate on himself. That's the nature of the isolation there. Yes, Antarctica in winter could be a very rough place, but we had arrived in Buenos Aires in mid summer, and things were far more hospitable at that time of year.

At the airport we were all herded into buses and headed to the Plaza Hotel, which was very near downtown Buenos Aires. We were to stay in Argentina for most of three days while everyone arrived and we got acquainted with the group and the group leaders. Many of the runners came with a running partner and had double rooms there. I got a single. I figured I'd have plenty of time dealing with other people on the tight quarters on the ship after we boarded. I'd never been on a cruise before, but I knew pretty much what to expect on the boat from the information they provided, which included layouts of each level of the boat. We wouldn't have to sleep in rows of hammocks, but we wouldn't exactly have a penthouse suite either. I went up to my room and unpacked my things. The first thing I discovered was that my brand new camcorder was gone. I'd had it in Miami, so it must have been swiped at the airport in Buenos Aires. That was a disappointing way to start off the trip. I suppose I could have run out and bought another one but that one had cost me nearly a thousand dollars. I guess it was foolish to pack it in my checked luggage, but with my bum arm I didn't want too much to deal with in my carry-on bag. Luckily I had kept my digital camera with me, and that actually could take short videos as well as stills, so that would have to do.

Every day at the hotel we'd have lunch and dinner together with the group. The first night was a big dinner with everyone meeting there together for the first time. I happened to meet a big fella from Boston who I started talking to. I'd run the Boston Marathon so I knew the town fairly well, and I knew 26.2 miles of it very well. He asked me where I was from.

"Ann Arbor," I told him.

"Every once and a while they have a good football team there," he piped up.

Being a misplaced Notre Dame alumnus I wasn't about to take a compliment like that laying down, so I said, "Yeah, but there's a school a little further south that has a better one!"

"Which one," he inquired?

"Notre Dame! That's where I went to school," I told him.

Turns out this guy had not only gone to school at Notre Dame, he had played football for them in the early '60s. I hadn't met too many Irish football players before, and meeting one in Argentina was about the last place on earth I figured to have such a chance encounter, but here we both were. We met another guy who was wearing a Notre Dame Law School sweatshirt, and a fourth that we met that had competed an MBA there, so we formed a mini-Fighting Irish alumni section amongst the other voyagers. The Four Horsemen of the Antarctic. Small world.

The tour company also had an informational talk every day after lunch about the trip, and about the race. Everyone was eager to soak up as much information as they could about the strange new world we were about to enter. I was just as eager. Taking a journey into the unknown made me feel like a kid again, and I loved it. It was also fun to be meeting a group of new friends to share the journey with, such as the three other "Golden Domers" (Notre Dame alumni) I had met.

I walked around town quite a bit during the two days there in Buenos Aires. We got there on Saturday morning. It was hot, with temperatures in the 80s most of the time and up into the 90s in late afternoon. But there were a lot of things in walking distance in the area so I headed out on foot to go see them. I went by myself on my walks. Like any runner, I was quite used to heading off on my own for workouts, so walking excursions were no different. There was a lot of interesting architecture to be seen, and since I was studying that subject in a masters program in Ann Arbor I found it quite interesting to tour the city and take in the local scene. The use of vivid colors on the building facades was very prominent in some areas with pinks, blues, and greens all side-by-side. It was not the kind of thing you'd see in the States at all. Argentines truly are a colorful people.

On the second day there I decided to take a cab to the local Harley Davidson dealer. I thought a Spanish Harley T-shirt would make for a good souvenir, but it was a Sunday and wouldn't you know they were closed. The group had scheduled some training runs, but for me, coming from a winter training regimen in Ann Arbor, it was just too darn hot to do any running in Buenos Aires, so I skipped the training runs. It turned out that most of the rest of the group did too. The marathon was only one week away at this point, so I don't want to put in too much more training mileage, but I did do plenty of walking around town near the hotel.

On Tuesday morning, February 22nd, we packed up and flew down to Ushuaia, a city right down at the lower tip of Argentina in Tierra Del Fuego – land of fire - which was of course made more famous by the 70's classic pop song "Popsicle Toes" than by the naked natives who once inhabited the area. Tierra Del Fuego is an archipelago (a group of islands) that are split between Chile and Argentina. The archipelago is separated from the mainland by the famed Straits of Magellan.

"What a great place to start an ocean adventure," I recall thinking.

Ushuaia is a port town with the ocean on one side and the Patagonia National Forest on the other. It's also ringed by mountains. Big mountains – the Andes to be exact, which is actually the same mountain chain that formed our destination: the Antarctic Peninsula. We were all packed onto two planes for the flight down to the bottom of South America. They were commercial flights, both Boeing 727s. Heading in on our final approach the pilot had to drop down and actually weave in and out of the mountains. I had never come in on an approach like this, and with the intermittent cloud cover I hoped to God that the pilots had all passed their instrument flight lessons. I whispered a few "Hail Mary's" on the way in for good measure. I hear that the flight into Rio is also kind of rough, but that one to Ushuaia was a doosie.



Ushuaia is the southernmost city in the world – at least with an airport – and as it turns out the residents there are very conscious of their geographical status, and quite anxious to point it out to visitors. There were signs everywhere proclaiming whatever was at hand to be the "Southern Most such-and-such in the World!" This was amusing to us since we were all headed even farther south, but in fairness, many of their claims were probably true, since most of what was being touted as the southern-most whatcha-thingy likely didn't exist in Antarctica. It led to some good jokes among some of the runners. ("Hey, I'll bet this is the southernmost public restroom in the world." "That guy is probably the southernmost taxi driver in the world," kinda stuff.) We had a little fun with it anyhow.

Also in evidence soon after touchdown, the unofficial mascot of Ushuaia turned out to be penguins. There were penguins on everything – shirts, mugs, posters, the walls. It was kind of like southern Florida and alligators, only cuter. Being a seaside town the two main industries there are fishing and tourism, and they definitely liked their penguins. We arrived at around noon. It was a lot colder than in Buenos Aires – about 40 degrees, so it was much closer to the temperatures I was used to in Michigan. We had to be ready to board the boat at 4 PM, so that left me half a day to buy everyone a penguin souvenir. I got everyone something – I got Debra a penguin mug, and I got an assortment of other tchotchke's for my brothers and their kids, Don's wife, and a couple of people from work. Let's face it: everyone loves penguins, and I was really looking forward to seeing the cute, stubby, real ones out in the wild.

I got all of the stuff I needed to buy and made it to the docks about an hour before departure. This was one boat I didn't want to miss. We were going to spend 11 days on board. There were two ships: the *Vavilov* and her sister ship, the *Ioffe*. I was to travel on the *Vavilov*. They were largely identical Russian trawlers. They were both good sized boats, well over 300 feet long, but they were nothing like the colossal new 1000 feet plus Caribbean cruise liners, that's for sure. But then, this wasn't any Carnival Cruise that we'd signed up for – not by a long stretch. The ships were built in 1989 in Finland, right at the end of the Cold War era, ostensibly as research vessels, but both were capable of quiet running and long distance submarine listening. Research? Maybe. Regardless of their original nature, the boats had been outfitted fairly well as cruise boats, including a nice topside lounge, a library, a meeting room and elevators to carry passengers from deck to deck.



There were 90 runners on each boat, along with a couple of staff members from Marathon Tours, plus about a half dozen hired hands from an Australian tour company called Peregrine, which was experienced managing this kind of trip. There were also about 45 crew members for the ship itself. The ship's crew members – all Russian - would all stay in the crew quarters in the back of the boat, but they would definitely be seen wandering around the deck in the evening after they'd consumed a good bit of Vodka. Some things are universal, and sailors at sea hitting the sauce seems to be one of them. Of course so is the proverbial ritual of swabbing the deck, but I never saw them out holy-stoning the teakwood. Who knows, maybe they did that early in the morning when we were still asleep. Swabbed decks or not, in my opinion, our boat, the *Vavilov*, seemed to be the better of the two boats. Our lounge was up on the very top of the boat with a better view of the sea. It was essentially a glass-lined observation perch with a lot of thick glass windows on all four walls. It was also set up with a couple of telescopes fixed on tripods and various pairs of binoculars. The *Ioffe* had a nice lounge too, but it was down closer to the main deck level. Since we would all end up spending quite a bit of time hanging out in the lounge while on board, I was glad to have the upper lounge with the better view.

I got on board the boat and made my way to my cabin. It was not what you'd call spacious. The two beds were bunks that were set back into one wall in an alcove of sorts. I took the top one. The bathroom was cramped as you would expect. It was about a three foot by six foot chamber that barely had room for a toilet, sink and shower. You don't waste floor space on the head in a research ship built during the cold war, that's for sure. But it was big enough. The toilets were standard ship-shape suction bowls – loud as the dickens, but very efficient. (All runners appreciate efficiency.) There was one closet, two half sized dressers (built-in of course), and one small table with a lamp – attached.



To help offset the claustrophobic feeling the room might have generated, every room seemed to have a fairly good sized porthole. That was a nice feature. It didn't offer much of a view most of the time, but if you ever forgot where you were on a boat, all you had to do was take a quick look outside. Some of them on the higher levels actually opened. That could be convenient if you ever needed to stick your head overboard in a hurry and the WC happened to be occupied, but we were on a lower level so ours was sealed tight. Nothing about the room stood out as anything other than standard seafaring accoutrements: Spartan but functionally adequate. The porthole was the lone attraction. It also turned out that our room was right around the corner from the ship's dining room. Meals are always a big part of any cruise, so that was convenient.

A few minutes after I got there my cabin mate came in.

"Hello, I'm Barney from Michigan," I said, thrusting out my left hand to him.

He shook it and said that his name was Peter and he was from New Zealand. He was about my age (53) and had once been professional soccer player there, but he had long since given that up. He had become an avid runner in his post-soccer years, not unlike me in my post-baseball years. OK, I wasn't quite a professional ball player but I had quite a few pretty good years with the sandlot leagues in Florida, where I met Deb. And as it turned out Peter was also on the trail of the seven continent club, and like quite a few others, this was the final leg he needed to complete to join it. So Peter and I seemed like a pretty good match to spend the next 11 days cooped up together in a room about the size of a large walk in closet.

After the boat boarding and bunk bed picking, the first order of business was a pre-voyage cocktail welcome party up on deck. Peter and I popped our heads into the cabin next to us and introduced ourselves. Its occupants were two guys also near our age, Reto from Switzerland and Ming from China. They both spoke good English, and we hit it off with them right off and all four of us headed off for the lounge. We sat down together and struck up a conversation about where everyone was from and what we all did. Reto, being Swiss, was into banking (no surprise there) and Ming was a computer programmer. As for Peter, now that he was done playing sports for a living he had gotten into the sport of horse racing, and as it turned out he made a trip to Kentucky very near Lawrenceburg once a year to buy

thoroughbreds. That was another strange connection to make. Most of the people on the trip were from the United States, so it was interesting to get paired up with such a diverse group of runners from all around the world to add to the three new Irish buddies I'd already met in Buenos Aires.

I was wearing my University of Michigan sweatshirt at the cocktail party, and after awhile a guy named John Martins came up to me with a U of M hat on and introduced himself. Turns out that he and I had both worked on our MBAs together in Ann Arbor. We discovered that we'd been in the same real estate law class, but neither of us remembered each other from it, as it was a fairly large lecture class. It also turned out that he was an electrical engineer who worked at Delphi Automotive with another AATC club member I knew fairly well named Bill Hill. Smaller world.

The boats we'd boarded weren't big enough to withstand heavy seas without tossing around a lot, which not only slowed the boats down, but could really shake things up and generally make things miserable for the passengers. Sea sickness is one of the timeless joys of sea travel. A 300 foot ship may sound big, but put it in 10 to 20 foot swells and it gets tossed around like a cork, and as we were told about the treacherous waters we were entering, chop like that wasn't at all uncommon. Consequently, the use of Dramamine was highly recommended in the pre-race info and most of the runners were taking something in one form or another. Under those conditions all bets would be off as to whether any medication would do any good, but for more moderate surf, they were expected to help. Not being able to hold down food for two days prior to running a marathon didn't sound like much fun, so I brought along the patch type, and had already taken care to put one behind my right ear. Each patch lasted for about three days so I didn't have to remember to take daily tablets. However, the patch-delivered medication worked its way into the system more slowly than tablets, so I decided to start taking it right away just in case.

Certainly many of the crossings got rough, but just in case the seas were too angry, they left a four day window of time to make the crossing of the Scotia Sea in the South Atlantic, or Southern Ocean as it's sometimes called, to Antarctica. Crossing the Drake Passage, as these waters were known, would take two days in light to moderate seas. Luckily things looked good for our passage. The weather was calm and clear as we boarded, so we were able to depart right on schedule. (Runners also appreciate things that go according to schedule.)

The first leg of the voyage was down the Beagle Channel, along the southern coast of Argentina near Cape Horn. While we were in the channel we'd be protected from rough seas, but that would only last for a few hours.

After setting sail, the first thing we did was have our lifeboat drill. One thing you want to be sure of when you're sailing to Antarctica is how to get to your lifeboat if there's any trouble. We all put on our life jackets and met at our assigned lifeboat station. We got the drill about the proper procedure for getting into the boats, which were actually fully enclosed pods that looked more like submarines than boats. Thankfully there were no children on board, and the women on this trip were as tough as nails and could fend for themselves, so any antiquated women-and-children-first notion wouldn't be any dilemma if the ship floundered.

The staff also rendered the requisite shock treatment of what would occur if anyone had the bad luck of falling overboard. With water temperatures of 1-2 degrees Celsius, basically human life would cease after a miserable 20 minutes or so. Wading in Lake Superior had given me the only lesson on that that I needed. For anyone who hasn't had that experience, seeing the movie *Titanic* ought to make a made a believer out of you. Either way, I certainly didn't intend to verify the claim, but it sure makes you wonder how so much sea life could survive in such frigid water. I guess blubber is the key. (Marathon runners typically don't have much of that.)

We soon passed the southernmost town in the world, Puerto Williams, left the Beagle Channel, and headed out to the open sea of the Drake Passage. Our next sight of land, ice-covered or otherwise, would be Antarctica – or an island near it anyhow. The ship was capable of churning along at a pretty good clip – about 14 knots, which is about 16 miles per hour. If we could hold that pace we'd likely reach King George Island in just about two days. The main question was whether or not the seas let us hold our course at full steam ahead. Speaking of which, the ship's engines were definitely not steamers – they were modern diesels, but "full fuel ahead" really doesn't have the same ring to it. Plus, sailors are generally somewhat archaic in mannerisms but quite frankly, many aspects of sea travel are rather invariant. With that and the tendency for mariners to be at least a little bit superstitious, many of the traditional maritime quirks and jargon still seem to hold favor in many ways when at sea. There is something charming and vaguely comforting about that in a naively nostalgic sort of way.

We had our first dinner on board that evening after the lifeboat drill. I sat at a table with Peter, Reto, Ming, and about six other people. The dining room was set up with long trestle type tables that held about 10. There was no assigned seating as there is on many cruises, so mealtime generally afforded a good opportunity to make some new friends, and talk about running, of course. Runners do plenty of that. They also like to eat. Breakfast and lunch were served cafeteria style, but dinner was a traditional sit down affair. The food was quite good and plentiful, similar to what I had heard about regular tourist type cruises, but without the midnight desert buffets.

After dinner we went to the lounge to hang out and have a drink. I hadn't had an alcoholic drink of any sort since I moved to Michigan and Peter wasn't much of a drinker either so I had a soft drink and he had a beer. I hadn't touched a drop of the sauce for over 10 years and I wasn't about to fall off the wagon now. We soon met a guy named Travis from England who'd run over 100 marathons. He was always looking for someone to grouse with and he had stories that could have gone on all night, and maybe they did, but after awhile we headed down to our cabin to turn in. Thankfully, the seas were very calm, so sleeping that night was not too much of a problem. The constant vibration from the ships churning engines was the only obstacle to sleep, but even stone sober that didn't stop me for long.

Peter and I both awoke on Wednesday morning well before the ship's loudspeaker made the first announcement at around 0800 hours. Michigan is about due north of both Argentina and the Antarctic Peninsula, so we were also in the same time zone and jet lag wasn't an issue for me. It would have been for Peter, but he joined the trip directly from an African safari, so his jet lag was not as bad as it would have been from New Zealand. He seemed to have adjusted already in Buenos Aires. We started our first full day of the adventure on board the *Vavilov* by heading up to the lounge to have a cup of coffee before breakfast. That became a pretty regular part of our

schedule. The seas were still calm the first morning at sea – which was a good omen for our crossing.

I say our first day on board was Wednesday, that much I remembered because we had boarded on a Tuesday. The days started blurring together soon after that. Once we set sail, there was really very little concept of time other than the shipboard schedule, and that we all knew race day was still looming in front of us. I decided to stop wearing my watch for the time being. No one could wander far enough to miss out on anything important like lunch or dinner, so it seemed like the thing to do to unwind. We really had no connection with the outside world for the next 11 days. There were no TV or radio stations to tune in, and certainly no newspapers on board. The only news we got of any relevance was about the prevailing weather conditions. Those reports came with regularity. They did have an Internet terminal that was capable of logging in to the outside world, but it cost 10 bucks a minute and I didn't make any use of it. A few people seemed to write e-mails, but to me that seemed contrary to what a trip like this was all about. Being disconnected from the outside world for a week or two was a big part of it. It left one free to contemplate things important to us at the moment – the ship, Antarctica, the race, our lives, and our time together to share the adventure afoot. In the old days, Antarctic adventurers would be out of touch for over a year when they'd make an extended voyage.

On board the ship they had a number of seminars every day to give information about the trip. They focused on wildlife, the history of the area, and the race. Now that we were on board the ship for our rendezvous with destiny, the information about the race and everything else about the area took on a bit more urgency. Everyone was ready, but everyone was also eager to hear more of the details. It wasn't everyday that you ran a marathon in Antarctica, that's for sure. At the first lecture they also told us about the kind of wildlife we'd see the most of: birds. There were many of them including penguins, albatrosses, petrels, skuas, terns and gulls, and with a surprising number of varieties of each. They also told us about the sea creatures we were apt to run into, including migrating humpback whales, fur seals and an occasional dolphin. Of course the penguins were the birds that everyone was the most interested in. They were quite abundant on the Last Continent and were the only ones that we'd be able to actually meet face to face. Plus, how can you not like penguins! We all looked forward to our encounters with those bumbling little beauts.

After the lectures, many of us went out on deck to observe some of the birds we'd just been told about. The first sea bird we encountered was the wandering albatross. Those had appeared the night before as soon as we set to the open water of the Drake. They may be big and ungainly looking when on land, but they are an elegant bird in flight. With the largest wing span of any living bird at over 11 feet, they can soar almost indefinitely. Up to a half dozen of them generally sailed behind the ship, drafting in its air wake and seeming to glide along effortlessly. As one former Antarctic voyager once said, "I now belong to a higher cut of mortals, for I have seen the Albatross." I wasn't sure I felt quite that strongly, but they were interesting to watch as they hovered about. Having a ship to follow must have been a joy to them, as they spend most of their lives scouting for food over the open ocean. What a strange nomadic life they lead.

With the help of the staff, we also observed Chilean skuas, giant petrels, and the ubiquitous scavenger of the air, sea gulls. The staff kept a complete daily log of all of the sightings to be published for us at the end of the trip, and they encouraged us to help with the spotting. It gave us something to do while at sea besides fret or feel nauseous.

The second lecture of the day was about Ernest Shackleton's renowned 1914 journey aboard the *Endurance*, when he and his crew planned an attempt of the first ever crossing of the entire Antarctic continent. In this almost unbelievable survival story, the ship became hopelessly frozen in the unpredictable shifting ice in the Weddell Sea. They were able to stay aboard the *Endurance* while mired in the ice for many months. Eventually the ice shifted, the ship started tipping, and finally the ice crushed the ship altogether. This happened over the course of a week or two and allowed the crew time to off-load most of the ship's supplies, including the life boats. The dinghies were then rigged with sails and the entire crew sailed to Elephant Island, where they hunkered down and hunted seals. Being particularly plucky, Shackleton and five crew members soon set sail again in one of the skiffs and almost blindly managed to traverse the Weddell Sea to an inhabited area in the Sandwich Islands. There they eventually managed to commission a Chilean navy tug and returned to Elephant Island to rescue the crew he'd abandoned there 10 months earlier. In an epic tale of incredible human endurance, there was not a single loss of life in the intrepid crew, so somewhat ironically the only loss was the ship named *Endurance*. It's an amazing and inspirational story that was recently turned into an Imax movie. The sad ending was that many of the British crew members that Shackleton worked so valiantly to save soon perished after the onset of the Great War (WWI). The perseverance to prevail against great odds only to get obliterated soon after in some other manner was one of the thorny ironies of how life can treat people. That particular irony I was coming to understand rather well.

On our second day at sea, we were again treated to calm seas and smooth sailing. The horror stories of the heavy seas that can whip up in the Drake Passage had not materialized. One thing about boats: they rock. Even if it's calm they rock a little. So far it was just a gentle rocking, which didn't seem to bother most people too much. We were able to stick to our schedule of onboard lectures. We had a morning lecture on seals and the fur trade industry. We also got information on how to photograph seals and other wildlife. Everyone had a camera at the ready to capture snapshots of this rare destination. I brought plenty of extra memory chips for my digital camera. When we didn't have lectures going on, there was also a small but well-stocked library that had many books with additional information about the Antarctic and other nautical adventures. Most of the runners aboard seemed to be fairly well educated, so most of us were curious types and stopped by to do some reading now and then during the days at sea. It was a good way to learn a little more about the area, plus let's face it, there's only so much you can do cooped up on a boat all day long when sun bathing isn't one of the options. They also had a supply of puzzles, including one featuring the ubiquitous penguins that a number of us chipped in on and completed in fairly short order.

Another thing we learned about being this far south in February was the length of the days. Similar to the arctic regions of the North in July, the days were long down here in their summer months. The sun rose before 0600 and didn't set until around 2230, which provided plenty of daylight for photos. Since our destination, King George Island, was just off the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, we weren't going to actually cross the Antarctic Circle, but we would come darn close. The temperature on the island was expected to be in the 30s, which was actually a bit warmer than it had been when I left Ann Arbor! That was a bit of a surprise, and we were told that the temperatures had been a good bit warmer than they would normally be in Antarctica at that time of year. After planning for so long a time to endure the rigors of the Antarctic, I didn't know whether I was happy to have it so warm or not. Also, as we'd later find out, the warmer temperatures

would cause some trouble during the upcoming race. For the time being, however, we just enjoyed the sunshine and calm seas.

The ship's bridge was open to passengers most of the time, so I wandered over to take a look at it and met Russian Captain Sazonov. He seemed typically Russian, and spoke very little English, but at least he seemed sober. I looked at the myriad of dials and levers on the control panel. There was certainly plenty of stuff to look at other than scanning the horizon for icebergs, which other than an occasional whale was about all we'd see until we reached the peninsula. But they had radar and generally had 2-3 people on the bridge, so it seemed like they could handle things. At one point some people on the bridge were treated to a group of hourglass dolphins body surfing the bow waves of the boat. That would have been fun to see, but I missed them and as it turned out, that was the only school of dolphins we spotted the entire trip. Dolphins are nowhere near as common as whales, seals, and penguins in the cold southern waters.

Prior to reaching the peninsula we entered the iceberg zone. Lest the fate of our fair ship befall a similar ignominious misfortune as the likes of the *Titanic*, the wily new mariners on our well-manned boat held vigil and scoured the horizon for the impending danger. Consequently, sometime a little after lunch someone spotted an iceberg far a head off the starboard bow. A call was sounded and everyone scrambled to the front deck to get a good look, and of course to make sure Captain Sazonov saw it as well. He did. The distances at sea are staggering and with good visibility you can see for about 10 miles from the deck a fairly large boat like ours, so it took a most of a good hour to actually pass the iceberg after first spotting it. Safe to say we avoided any *Titanic*-eque closeness to the potentially dangerous berg by a long shot. Some people also spotted our first whale blows off in the distance, probably migrating humpbacks. Someone also spotted the first penguin of the trip - most likely a gentoo - skimming along right next to the ship. All penguins swim exceptionally well, but the gentoo, which is one of the smaller breeds of penguins, is the best of them all and can swim at amazing speeds of over 20 miles an hour. This is not only faster than any of its predators, (the leopard seal being first among those) but as it turned out, it was easily faster than our boat as well! Not bad for a clumsy footed, dorky little bird.

At 18 hundred hours we spotted King George Island off the starboard bow. Everyone clambered for the first sighting of the Last Continent. Anyone who had claimed to feel seasick seemed to be magically cured. Due to the glassy ocean, we were a bit a head of schedule. As if to counter our good fortune, the crew seemed determined to let us know that the good weather was not likely to hold. None of the previous trips had escaped this harsh region unscathed from some form of rough weather, so why should we be so lucky? Of course they were right. A few hours later we were told that a low pressure system was moving that was likely to roll in two days later—on our scheduled race day. It would likely bring with it falling temperatures, strong wind, and snow squalls. Great. But, this was exactly the type of weather we were drilled to prepare for, and being an experienced runner in Michigan winters, I was pretty well used to that kinda stuff.

For sure no one had any excuse to not be mentally and physically prepared for the difficult event in store for us. We had heard the stories of how one year they got 6 feet of snow the day before the race and had to cut trails through it with the four wheelers they cart in for logistical support during the race. We also knew that if the seas were too rough, even the zodiacs couldn't be used safely. One year the runners from one ship made it ashore, but when the landing boats from the other ship tried to leave a bit later they encountered much rougher water and had to turn back. They waited for hours and had to sit and watch as the other runners went ahead and started the race without them while they were stranded shipboard but near enough to become unwilling race spectators. They eventually made it ashore in time to compete a modified marathon course.

And we had all heard the story about the one trip when it was simply too rough to make it to shore at all for anyone, so this ships simply sought refuge in a relatively calm bay. Anyone that wanted to run a marathon had to make 422 laps around the windswept decks of the swaying ship. Talk about making your head spin! You could run circles around a ship anywhere, in fact people do it on cruise vessels all the time, just not generally for 26.2 miles at a stretch. No, planting ourselves firmly on to Antarctic soil—or more accurately ice—was definitely everyone's goal. One person on our boat had participated in the onboard race. Hearing him describe the endless laps around the deck sounded like a real nightmare. He'd come back this time to do the real thing on our trip. So long as the front didn't keep us from making land, with our rubber boots, wind shells, extra shoes, hats, gloves, and water bottles, we'd do fine. Just get us to shore and bring it on!

On our third day the call to quarters went out early – at 0700. “Come on deck and witness the dramatic entrance to Neptune's Bellows,” the loudspeaker boomed with an added sense of urgency.

After a year and a half of waiting and planning, we were finally going to be able to start exploring Antarctica. Everyone was excited. I sure was. We'd journeyed almost 9000 miles for this. Peter and I were already up having our morning coffee so we popped out on the deck in a hurry to watch the passage into the middle of a small outcropping called Deception Island. Its name came from the fact that it's actually an active volcano with a large bay in its center that is actually the spigot of its volcanic caldera. The narrows was the only entrance to the well hidden harbor and it became a favorite mooring for sealers and whalers dating back to the early 1800s. There was an abandoned whaling station on the island that was established by a Norwegian-Chilean whaling company in 1906. It was used until the early 1930s, when complete whale processing ships rendered the land based slaughterhouse obsolete. The island was subsequently used for scientific purposes by a number of nations, primarily the Brits, until a major volcanic eruption in 1969 buried many of the buildings there in the lava flow and the island was effectively abandoned.

With some maneuvering to avoid the submerged rock in the middle of the narrow entrance to the natural harbor, we made our way into Whaler's Bay through Neptune's Bellows. The passage is only 750' wide but it opened into a beautiful, harbor that looked to be a mile or two in diameter. The surrounding volcanic ridges that formed the lip of the cauldron were largely shrouded by glaciers. After a quick breakfast and a few last minute instructions we all went ashore on our first zodiac excursion. Loading the boats required first lowering them on davits from the upper deck down to the water. There was a stairway down the side of the boat and a small loading platform that was also lowered into place. Then we simply walked down and hopped in. At about 15 feet long the zodiacs were pretty fast and maneuverable rubber boats but with only a few of them they had to make a number of trips to get everyone ashore.

Once we landed we could wander through the remnants of the station at will. There were a number of buildings that were still largely intact, some whaling boats, and an aircraft hanger with a few gutted old planes still remaining. It was interesting to explore the relics. There was also a good view of the area from up at Neptune's Window. I made my way up to that along with Peter, Ming, Reto and quite a few others. The most interesting thing about Deception is that the underground thermal activity is still active and it heats up the ground water to a warm 60 degrees year round. If you dig a hole in the beach you can take a fairly warm dip. We didn't do that but a few people did strip down and took a dip in the bay, which has slightly elevated water temperatures in spots. I'm not sure if they found one of those spots and I sure as heck wasn't going in even if I had three good arms.



We went back to the ship and had a big pre-race pasta lunch and then headed for our second stop at Half Moon Island. There we were greeted by fur seals and a baby elephant seal. This was our first close encounter with penguins. These were chinstrap penguins. Penguins are very curious by nature and they have absolutely no innate fear of man, so they are happy to mix right in with us. I wandered off a bit and found a gaggle of about 4 of them that began to follow me around. These were intrepid little buggers, quite feisty and cute as a button. I ran up the hill a bit and they raced right on up after me. I headed down and so did they. This was a magical encounter for sure. We kept up this game for about 10 minutes. They are rather clumsy on land but they could waddle around fast enough to keep up with me at a slow jog. It was easy to fall in love with those affable aquatic beauties, and I sure did.

We got back on board and had dinner, then the mood changed a bit as we had our pre-race talk. The reason we had come was now looming right in our face. 26.2 miles trudging over mud, snow, rocks, streams, and up and down glaciers. They went over the check-list of required equipment. They hardly needed to do that because we'd all checked that list a hundred times before we left, but they drilled us with it one more time for good measure. They went over the weather. We could expect fairly moderate temps, but with the front coming in we could also likely expect some wind and driving snow, and we needed to be ready for both. But we would be moving, and I knew from winter running in Michigan that a common mistake was to over dress and overheat. That would lead to dehydration and, with limited water available, dehydration would be a sure ticket to cramps and likely not finishing the race. Multiple layers was the key, so that outer layers could be removed if need be, along with a fanny pack to shed them into. They went over the starting procedure. There would be two separate starts about 20 minutes apart. We would also be having a race with the other boat. The combined time of the top five finishers from each boat would determine the winner. They went over everything they could think of and everything we could think to ask.

When the lecture was over people started breaking up into their smaller groups and mulling things over. Spirits were definitely high. No one seemed overly concerned about the rough go of it we were in for. If anyone was nervous, which some likely were, they kept it well hidden. I stayed up and talked for a while in the lounge. Travis was pretty loose and pumping out some of the better stories of his 100 plus marathons. That guy could really talk up a storm. I sat down with him for a while.

"So, Barney, do you think your trail running experience will carry the day tomorrow?"

He was obviously goading me a bit. "No, I told him, I think the Queen of Antarctica will be the one to carry the day."

"The Queen of Antarctica, and who might that be?" he pressed.

"Mother nature," I told him. "Mother nature."

"Indeed. Well done," he said with a grin. "Wise beyond your years and slippery as an eel."

After awhile, people started filtering off and hitting the sack. A good night's sleep seemed like a good idea. Tomorrow was gonna be a tough day, but I was as ready as I ever would be.

Part 3: The Last Marathon

The third part of the true story of Barney's 2005 trip to run a marathon in Antarctica – written by Hal Wolfe

Writer's note: Debra Thomas, Barney's wife, died Thursday night, November 1st, shortly after a single car accident near Bay City Michigan. She was alone when she lost control of her car. It rolled several times and she was thrown from the car. She was conscious when police arrived and was airlifted to Flint's Hurley's Medial Center, but died enroute, most likely of severe head trauma. She is survived by her husband Barney, her sister Donna, and her mother Vivian, both of whom reside in North Carolina. Barney and Debra had no children. She will be cremated after a memorial service with her family. Debra was 52 years old.



I woke up early on race day. I slept well enough but was a bit anxious about the big day. Mostly I just wanted to get on with it and get it behind me, since it had been dangling out in front of me for so long. The loudspeaker greeted at around 0600. Peter and I were already up. It took me a good while longer to get dressed these days, so I wanted to make sure I had time to get ready. I had already put most of my clothes on, but I didn't want to miss any details so I was fussing over my gear: gloves, hat, water bottles – filled and sealed tight, energy bars, extra socks, extra shoes, towel, dry clothes, boots, and my shoe horn. That was one thing I kinda tried to keep to myself - I needed to use a shoe horn to get into my running shoes. I left them tied in a knot that Debra put in before we left and used about a foot long wooden spatula of sorts to stuff my feet in. It worked well enough and I had been doing it for over a month now so I was pretty good at the drill. Everything else I could do with one hand well enough. Peter got up and started getting ready soon after I did. I headed right up for a light breakfast. They had fruit and cereal and eggs and bacon and toast if you wanted any. I stuck to cereal and fruit. I didn't eat too much, but I had the energy bars just in case.

The weather didn't look bad enough to threaten the main event, but we'd probably get snow. The start looked good for sometime around 9 AM they told us. I was wearing my watch again at this point. That's mandatory for any race. Part of the crew had gone ashore the night before with the 4 wheelers to check over the course, mark it with flags and get things ready. A well marked course is important anywhere, but out in this neck of the woods it was absolutely mandatory as a possible matter of life or death, and the crew knew it. They put up signs at all of the turns and all of the mile markers. Antarctica or otherwise, you don't run a marathon without mile markers, no two ways about it. They wanted to start the race early and get as much of it as possible out of the way before the afternoon winds kicked in. Even if it isn't too cold, strong winds can make a race miserable between the wind chill and the extra effort required to run into a headwind and all. Every runner knows about running in the wind. For anyone who thinks that the part where you get to run with the wind would sorta cancel out the part where you gotta run into it, well it doesn't work that way. It has to do with physics of wind resistance and the square of velocity (i.e. V^2), but for anyone who isn't an engineer all you have to know is it's a whole lot harder to run into the wind, simple as that.

Around 7 AM most of us were ready to start boarding the zodiacs. At about 7:30 they started ferrying people to the island for the race. As I mentioned before, you don't come to Antarctica to race. You come for the experience, and the challenge, and to do what we all love to do, to run. I wasn't at all nervous like before some races. My first Boston had made me nervous, but not here. Mostly I was curious as to what the place was going to look like, and how the course would work out and if the weather would hold. It sure wasn't a regular marathon, but it was still gonna be 26.2 miles over grueling terrain with a lot of hills and one big ass glacier. I may not have thought of it as a traditional race, but I planned to finish it as fast as possible. For some it was just an excuse to plan an exotic adventure trip, while for others it was the last notch on their seven continent quest. You could that a few were taking it more seriously because they had their game faces on. All of us had come for the adventure and the challenge, and there was no shortage of either. No two ways about it, it was time to ante up and toe the line.

It was a chilly boat ride. The zodiacs move pretty fast and can whip up a cold, wet wind buffeting over the frigid water. I was bundled up pretty well in my boots, rain suit, and with a stocking hat and gloves on. As we were heading over I held onto my hat and thought about the course. They had gone over it a couple times with us. It was a two lap course. Some people were only doing a half marathon, so they would only do one lap, but most of us were going to run the whole thing, so we'd make two complete loops. "Why the heck would you come all this way to only do half of the race?" I figured. I thought about my pacing. With a totally unknown course, I definitely didn't want to start off too fast. I figured I'd start off somewhere around my normal 10 minute pace where I could maintain it on the flatter parts of the course, and then take it from there. If I felt good, and I could hold somewhere near a 12 minute per mile pace overall, I'd finish in a little over five hours. I figured that with the harsh course if I could punch it out in anywhere under six hours I'd be pretty pleased. That's a far cry from four hours, but that was part of the unknown aspect of this race – not only was the continent unknown, so was the area, and the terrain, and, most importantly, so was how I well could handle it. I also didn't know if the ALS would drag me down in some way didn't expect. It was nothing I'd ever had to deal with in any of my previous marathons, but it was a part of me now, and it had already affected my training to some degree. That much I knew for sure. The cut-off was six and a half hours if they held fast to it. It wasn't really clear how they would enforce that. Issuing DNFs to everyone over that time would be one way if they wanted to play hardball. I doubted they'd do that, but the issue was still salted away somewhere in the back of my mind.

The course had been laid out for us pretty well on a map they displayed in the ship's lounge. It wasn't a loop course as much as it was an out and back – a double out and back more accurately. It started near Bellinghausen, the Russian research base that we'd use as a staging area, which was a short walk from the landing site. It headed off to the right through the mud field (yes, aptly named) and then through the arduous "Upson Downs" (also aptly named) where, they warned us, there might be diving skua birds, likely due to nearby nesting. Then it went past "Lake Uruguay" (not so aptly named), then swung down through the rocks (a large field of cobblestones) before heading up Collins Glacier. (Yes, this too is aptly named – but I came up with a few of my own later on that I won't mention!) I figured the glacier would be a bitch, but then again, what would a run through Antarctica be without having to traverse a glacier? After all, this entire continent is covered in ice, in some places nearly two miles thick! We're weren't on any suicidal trek to the South Pole, but the 600 foot ascent up Collins would be our frosty little treat. Boston's Heartbreak Hill doesn't hold a candle to this iceberg. Fact is the graph of the course profile looks more like an EKG trace than an elevation chart for a marathon. After making the steep half mile climb to the top of Collins it's a 180 turn and then head straight back down the icy 23% grade. After the slalom run down, it's back across the rocks, the ups and downs, the mud, and back to the starting line. That was only the first of the two out and back legs.

The second one headed off through the scientific base camp. After the galley the road turned right and swung past the Russian base, then swung around the garage (yes, there are vehicles there other than dog sleds) then looped back around the Chilean base. You made a right hand turn at the gym, then headed out up a hill toward the airport. You then had to make the hairpin curve in order to avoid straying onto the runway, which they discourage – but with no assistance from course marshals. From there its back down across a stream, along the "fur seal freeway" and into the Chinese camp, for the second turn around, and then back through all of that again (including the stream, and don't miss the hairpin turn again) and finally doubling back to the start / finish line. That was one lap. If that wasn't enough - and it wasn't for all of the real marathon runners - it was back out for a second crack at all of it. For anyone that is struggling, you get dragged past the finish line three times before you actually get to finish, which when exhausted can make the urge to stop running really hard to fight off. (Someone needs to talk to the course designer about that.)

Drinking water on the course was another trick. There were no aid stations, that's for sure. (And no screaming Wellesley co-eds either.) You had to bring your own water bottles and drop them off on the course. If you wanted any special brew of electrolyte replacement fluid that was up to you to mix up. You definitely needed to mark your bottles. I wondered what they'd do if it was a cold day well below freezing. A frozen block of Gatorade wouldn't exactly be what you'd want to find at mile 22 along the course five at hours into a race. Lucky for us it was warm enough so we wouldn't have to worry about that, but getting water out on the course still turned out to be a bit of a chore. They had three spots for water bottles – at the start / finish line, and one out along each loop. The first one was about two miles out, so you needed to lug a good sized bottle through the mud field and the Upson Downs to the first drop. You could also hit that coming back 4 miles later. You would leave at least one bottle (likely your biggest one) one at the start finish area and also lug another one out around the hairpin and past the airport and drop it there just past blue church. Then you could hit that on the way back down the leg also. That gave you a max of 11 possible water stops along the way if you were willing to carry your bottles out there. You also had to remember to pick your bottles back up as you made the last lap around each of the two legs. Some people simply chose to leave all of their bottles at the start finish area, which gave them a total of three water stops for the entire race. I didn't figure that would be enough stops, so I had my BLT bottles ready to drag around to the various drops.

So, that was the course. The parts I had the most concern for were the mud field and the rocks. If I could survive those the first time in the first four miles, and the next three times, and deal with the two trips up Collins, I figured I was home free. I thought a 10 minute pace would be pretty safe, but I didn't know how hard the uneven terrain and the glacier would hurt, so figuring on five to six hours in our palatial penguin paradise seemed reasonable. I was still thinking things over when we hit the beach. It was about a 10 to 15 minute ride. They didn't have any docks to unload on, we just took the boats right up near the beach and unloaded everyone right into the water. That's where the boots came in. Keeping my feet dry was my main concern as my boots only gave me about 12" of protection. I grabbed my water bottles and hopped out over the bow. Luckily the zodiacs have a pretty small draft and I made it to dry land successfully with dry feet. That part accomplished, we started walking up past the start to the Russian base, which was less than a quarter of a mile away. This was when we first discovered that the warmer weather had melted most all of the snow around the base. Normally there would be at least a couple of feet of it covering most everything around, but at the moment there was none to speak of. Just rocks and dirt, which also meant a lot of mud on the roads. Great.

Peter and I carted our gear up to Bellinghausen. Runners are generally not too shy about showing off their bodies and a good thing because the Russians were letting us use the area under their barracks area to stow our gear and use as a changing area. It wasn't heated, it didn't offer any privacy, and at 5' 7" even I had to stoop a bit to keep from banging my head on the elevated floor joists. But it was somewhat sheltered from the elements and that made it better than having to change clothes and leave our bags right out in the open. Everyone pretty much had on what they wanted to wear for the race, but brought a dry change of clothes for the way back. The crew had suggested that we all bring a gift for the Russians such as chocolate or vodka. I brought a bottle of liquor from Ushuaia. We all left the gifts on the steps up to the building. I didn't see any of the Russians at that point. I figured they were busy cooking up a huge pot of borsch for us. As to the residents of the island, they likely number around 200. We were also told that some countries even brought some children in to the bases. I guess they do that to in case they want to stake a future claim for territorial rights. Interesting place to bring kids to, but unless global warming kicks up a notch of two, I don't see this place sprouting up outdoor playgrounds anytime soon.

The zodiacs only held 12 people fully loaded and they only had four per ship, so it took a couple of trips to ferry all 180 people across Maxwell Bay to the island. With all of the loading and unloading, the ferrying took most of an hour to complete. In the meantime, people walked around, did some warm-ups runs, stretched, or hung out under the Russian barracks. Some people had even brought sleeping bags. I set about getting my boots off and prying my feet into my running shoes. After that I sat there for a little while sorta brooding a bit. I thought about bringing my shoe horn with me out on the course, but decided against it. When the next wave of runners arrived I snapped back into action and I went out for a short warm up. I didn't go too far, just back and forth by the base for a half mile or so. In a long run like this you typically go out slow and simply use the first part of the race for a warm-up.

It was already fairly warm with temps in the low 30s by 8 AM, but with the weather moving in we still didn't know what to expect. We'd

surely all been expecting something a good bit colder, at least I had. But I sure wasn't going to complain about the weather being too warm. Things could have gone far worse, such as being forced to run 422 laps around a 300 foot ship sloshing around in a cold ocean. That was nothing to remotely look forward to.

Other than not taking off too fast, I didn't really have any definite race strategy. It's kinda hard to have a race strategy when the course is such a total unknown, plus most of us had never actually run up a glacier before. I was not entirely clear on what strategy would work best. Just try to survive to the finish I guess. Once they got the rest of the runners over to the island they didn't waste too much time before they started herding us off to the starting line. Normally I'd be a little bit uptight, on edge at least, before the start of a marathon, especially if I was trying to PR, but that wasn't the case and I still wasn't nervous at all.

The race was ready to go at just about 9 AM. Due to the International Antarctic Treaty of 1959, they had to have two separate starts in order to keep the group size in any one place to under 100, which was one of the treaties caveats. I'm not sure if the treaty was brokered at Yalta, but it was a treaty none the less, so they abided by it and started the race in two waves of 90. They started the slower runners in the first heat. Peter and I and most of the fellas from our group were in the second wave. There was a rousing cheer from everyone just before the start. We gave the first heat as good a send off as we could, hooting and hollering quite a bit. We did the same for ourselves but to a somewhat lesser degree. I guess we're generally programmed to cheer more for others than ourselves. Funny how that works. Still, we'd come a long way for this moment. Our heat lined up about 10 minutes later. This was it.

The gun went off – ok, no gun actually (probably another caveat of the treaty), but they said “go” and we took off. I was in the middle of the pack, and took off fairly slow as planned. Off we went. Twenty six miles of unknown Antarctic tundra and glacier in front of us. Shackleton be damned – South Pole or bust! (At that moment you probably could have talked a few people into trying that.) Everyone was pretty loose. No one seemed to view this as anything other than what it was – a grueling fun-run into the unknown. On we went. Most of the run was on roads through out the base, and when I say roads I mean rutted, muddy 2-tracks. That's the best you get in these parts.



Pretty quickly we started spreading out and breaking into smaller pace groups. I got in with a group of about six other runners that were all at my pace. Things got really quiet soon after the start once we spread out a bit and people got down to the business of running. The first mile took us through the mud field and the Upson Downs. I definitely didn't want to risk losing a shoe in the mud so I sorta picked my way across trying to find the firmer spots. Most other people just trudged right on through. The key was not to sink your heel into it too deeply, so stepping somewhat gingerly and not heel planting too hard was important. I didn't have any trouble with the mud but I heard afterwards that one guy went up to his knee and lost a shoe. I'm not sure what he did at that point. Go back for another or dig in the cold mud until you find it I suppose. You sure as heck wouldn't run 26 miles on this stuff in only one shoe, that's for sure. The hills we hit in the Upson-Downs were tough, but they were tough along most of the course. We passed a small research camp from Uruguay about 2 miles into the course. They actually had a few people out cheering for us and giving high fives. It wasn't Wellesley, but it was better than nothing. It didn't take long to pass the little outpost by and it was back out into the wild.

We dropped our water bottles just after that camp. Then we hit the cobblestones. Turns out cobblestones was a bit of a misnomer. They were actually jagged rocks about 6-12 inches in diameter for about a half a mile. Running over them seemed absurd but we were doing it – in a slow step-at-a-time kinda pace. They were brutal. I tripped and went down once. I used my left arm to break my fall and luckily I didn't hit too hard so I got right up and kept going. That gave me a scare and an ankle twist but it could have been a whole lot worse. I sure wasn't the only one who fell. How nobody broke an ankle I'll never know. I'm guessing even Robert Falcon Scott likely would have avoided this crossing had he passed it on his ill-fated race to the pole. The rocks were bad enough, but right after them we hit the glacier. This was at mile three. You can talk elevation changes or percent grades all you want, but all I know is that the glacier was friggin' steep. Running up it was out of the question. No one, and I mean no one, ran up it. I don't think you could get Kenyans to this neck of the woods, but even if you did, they woulda been walking too. Even walking was a chore. Most everyone else around me started using their hands on their knees to help lift themselves up the slope. Anything to move more efficiently. I tried it but with only one arm as a push rod it didn't do me much good so I did the best I could and just kept moving.

And as warm as it was, it was also foggy. It was way too foggy to see the top of the glacier – so we just followed the markers and forged ahead up into the wet cloud. It was a long way up, one step at a time. Quite a few people came down past me. Many offered words of encouragement. Most of them I didn't look up to acknowledge. My friend John from Notre Dame was one of the first to go past. He called me by name and yelled something at me. When I got to the top and looked around into the fog. As hard as we worked for the chance of a view, to get stuck in pea soup seemed like a dirty trick. In the dreary, white-washed conditions, it seemed like a very surreal place, and even with 179 other runners around, I felt very much alone. It was kinda eerie.



Going back down was easier physically, but it was still really tricky going down the ice. The route on the glacier was mostly covered in corn snow, so the footing wasn't too bad, but in many places there was a crust on top and if you stepped too hard you'd break through that into deeper snow. That made some people ease up a bit, but a lot of people were simply bombing straight down the glacier. It was like running down a scree field on a steep mountain, pushing loose snow down with you as you went. It was a bit reckless but you could move pretty fast if you wanted to. Of course there were also some legitimate ice patches here and there thrown in for good measure and an occasional crevasse that everyone had to watch for.



Some people were more careful than others, I noticed, and were sort of traversing down sideways more slowly. They were easy to pick-off. Either way it was a lot better than the trudge up the frozen precipice, but it wasn't quite like a carefree sprint down a soft sand dune. I went for it as best I could but kept my pace controlled in case I hit ice. I didn't want to have to test my right arm again. I also didn't want to break my neck. My ankle was throbbing some from my fall, but I made it down without stumbling and got back out of the fog. Going down was actually quite a rush.

I didn't feel like I was sweating but I was thirsty. I had to make it through the cobblestones again to get to the water stop, so with the motivation of the upcoming water break it was back into the field of jagged rocks. I made a conscious effort to take them a bit more carefully the second time around. I didn't fall this time. The more fatigued I got, the more effort things like this took. I got to the water drop and stopped for a good long drink. Everyone who'd dropped a bottle stopped for some much needed hydration. There was none of the running and drinking from a cup while you go and dropping the cup on the roadside that you normally see at aid stations. We stopped and drank. There were a couple of other people at the bottle stop, but by this point most everyone that wasn't there with a partner had broken away from any group and was running alone. I dropped my bottle and headed back out into the course. Back past the Uruguay camp. Most of them were back inside at this point. The wind was starting to pick up a bit and now I was running right straight into it.

We moved on back through the hills and the mud and came back to the starting line. There was only one crew member there. He cheered a bit and offered some word of encouragement. Time to stop for more water, which I needed. There were also a few crew members that were driving around in 4 wheeled vehicles herding people up a bit, and checking on injuries. On this kind of terrain, injuries of some sort for someone seemed almost a certainty. Plus there was a guy from South Korea named Bill who was trying to complete the half marathon in a wheel chair. If running this race over rocks and glaciers wasn't ridiculous enough, attempting it in a wheel chair was totally insane, and incredibly difficult as well. It took a lot of courage to even attempt such a feat. I guess the crew was too busy with that kind of stuff to busy themselves carrying our water bottles out on the course. I found my spare bottle and grabbed it to take to the final bottle drop location. I didn't feel like lugging it around, but I knew I'd need it.

The second out and back loop was mainly through the camp area on muddy, hilly roads. The course wound around past the Russian base and up to the hairpin. Nobody that I saw missed the turn, which at that point consisted of me and only a couple others. Then we crossed the stream. It wasn't too deep and only took a couple of big steps to get through, but Gore-Tex or not, it was deep enough to give me two good soakers. If they weren't already, my feet were definitely wet after that. From there we plodded down the "fur seal freeway" toward the Chinese camp and their "Great Wall". This part of the course seemed to be picking up a cold wind off of the bay so there was a head wind whipping up a little snow. I didn't entirely expect that based on the temperatures when we started, but we knew we had the front coming in and it was making its presence known. We got to the Chinese camp at mile 10 of the run. They had a really large base camp, but the great wall they listed on the map turned out to be no wall at all. One woman I was running near spoke some Chinese. She shouted something and a few of the Chinese residents came out and called back to her. I would have thought that a few more of the residents at their remote outpost would have come out to watch and cheer, but most of the buildings seemed empty. No one there seemed to be too anxious to make much of a to-do about a couple hundred grungy runners tromping past. You'd think they'd be more interested in an occasional spectacle like this, as feeble as it was for entertainment value, but I guess they had better things to do

with their time, whatever those might be. What a lonely place.

We made the second turn around and headed back through the Chinese camp to our water bottles. Another break for a drink. Back up past the hairpin turn, past the Russian camp, the Chilean base, and on to the start finish line and time for another water break. I hit the half way point at 2:18. Not bad, and not far from my 10 minute pace goal. I was starting to feel tired, but for the time being I was doing OK. Being allowed to finish required making it past the start / finish line in less than 3:10 which was the half way cut off time for the 6 hour 30 minute overall time limit. I was well under that, the question was could I keep it up. There were two staffers there this time, one was calling out times, and one was taking pictures of the half marathon runners as they finished. I stopped and found my water bottle and took a big drink. As tired as I was figured I might need to walk through the stones on the second lap through them. Falling again when I was tired was not something I wanted to risk. Collins loomed as a bigger obstacle. It was tough the first time. The second time would definitely be worse. I didn't want to stop for too long or I wasn't sure I would be able to get going again, so I headed out for the second lap for more rocks, mud, hills and that damn glacier.

I made it through the mud without losing anything and got past the Upson Downs. The constant barrage of hills was taking a heavy toll on my remaining energy, so I started slowing down. And at some point in the second lap the wind seemed to kick up more. When I hit the rocks I broke into a half walk / half run scramble and watched my footing as carefully as I could. If I was going to get hurt anywhere, that seemed like the most likely place. I got through them intact, but found myself losing strength and even having some trouble with my vision. The group I had been with was now well out in front of me. When I got to the glacier the fog had largely lifted and the view of the area was much clearer, but I still couldn't see the top of the glacier. The second time up Collins I could now hear the sound of running water underneath the glacier. Things were definitely melting at a good clip on this warm afternoon. A few people flew down past me as I started the trek up. There were still plenty of runners behind me, but a lot of the other runners were now well out in front of me, and were on to the final loop at this point.

It seemed I was stuck on Collins. My progress slowed considerably. A few people went past me heading up. I trained on some decent sized hills around Ann Arbor and normally I didn't let people pass me going up hill. My mind was starting to play games with me. Steps were coming slowly one at a time. I was breathing hard and the dry air was starting to bother my throat. I wondered a bit about the people behind me, but as tired as I was getting puffing up the steep icy slope, I didn't have too much time to worry about other people. There wasn't any practical way to train for running up the crusty ice of a glacier, even in the winter in Michigan. Sleeping Bear dunes in January would be as close as you could get I suppose. I never considered making a four hour drive to try a training run in the dunes, but I don't know if that would have made any difference anyhow. I tried to use my left arm to push with for a while. It didn't seem to help. My legs felt heavy, my arms felt heavy, and my head seemed to be spinning a bit. That worried me. I was hurting.

After what seemed like a long, long time, I made it to the top the second time. With the wind and the snow and the low hanging, gloomy-gray overcast skies, there was still no good view of the surrounding ocean. Figured. I was certainly glad I didn't have to face the glacier a third time. That wouldn't have been possible. Coming down the second time was much slower than the first. I was traversing down this time and the wind was right in my face. It still took some fancy footwork now and then to avoid falling. Needless to say, it was slow going. Finishing the race now seemed uncertain, or more accurately, not all that important. At that point finishing the race was not the most pressing of my concerns. Just getting through the rough stuff and back to the finish line on my own power without an injury became my primary objective. What would happen after that was unclear. The specific thought of not finishing the race had not entered my mind directly in any definite, fatalistic sort of way, and I never gave it too much thought. I was just going to keep going as long as I was able, and as long as they'd let me.

Back through the cobblestones for the last time, but this time against a stiff wind with snow stinging my face. I was really hurting and the wind didn't help. I didn't want to fall – thank goodness I didn't. I had no idea what my pace was at this point. It was slow. Probably around 15 minutes when I could run. At some point after the second trip up the glacier the ground actually started looking like it was moving. I didn't know what to make of it - some odd effect of having been on a boat for the past four days I figured. In hind sight it may have had more to do with the motion-sickness meds I had been using up until a day before the race. Some other people that used the patches complained about feeling light headed and had similar effects. Either way, it was a bit disconcerting to say the least. I slowed down a bit more and concentrated on my footing. Medication or not, this head thing was not something I'd figured on.

There were no other runners around me at this point. That was fine with me. All marathon runners run alone. I focused on my footing, my breathing, and on finishing this loop. I was really hurting. I got to my water bottle past the rocks. I could leave it or take it with me. I decided to take it with me, mostly to have a little water the next three miles. At some point over the course of the next few miles I resigned myself to stopping when I reached the start / finish at the 18 mile mark. It was no sudden decision of, "I can't go on" kind of thing, but more that I could tell I was just about used up and was grinding to a halt. The race had turned into an ordeal. Just getting back to the line was a goal in itself. I focused on that.

I made it to the mud. That meant less than a mile to go. I again picked my way through it as best I could with no hard heel plants. As slow as I was going and as unsteady as I felt, the only thing I was in danger of planting was my face. I cursed the wind. I thought about making a little push to the finish. Just holding my pace to keep running turned out to be all the push I could muster. I could finally see the Russian base. Almost there. Still working hard beating into the wind. Really hard. I finally spotted the little banner – finally coming in. 300 yards to go. Normally runner's pride would mean putting in some sort of a kick to the finish, especially if there were spectators. I had none of that at this point, and there wasn't anyone there to cheer either, there was just one of the staffers I saw 2 hours ago taking times. I got to the line and ground to a halt.

I stood there for a moment and got my bearings. Unfortunately the guy taking pictures had taken a half hour break. Wouldn't you know that this was right when I came in, so I didn't even get a finish line picture. I guess that was fitting in a way. They got my time at 5:16:21. The leg of the course had taken me almost three hours - longer than the entire first half of the race. That put me near the back of the pack of half marathon finishers. My actual half time would have put me in second place, but that wasn't important. Quite a few runners were already in having finished the whole thing, but there were still plenty of runners behind me. I got to the line early enough to

keep going if I'd wanted to, but my body was through running at that point. Something about the race, or whatever it was, had gotten the better of me that day. That was a set back to my goal of joining the 7 continent club, but it didn't look like any more continents were going to be in the cards for me at this point anyhow. Either way I wasn't thinking about that at that point. I wasn't upset, I was just glad it was over and glad I could stop running. My new shoes were really dirty and my feet were cold. I was whipped.

I watched a couple of other runners finish the marathon. They looked tired too. The finish line usually gives you a boost unless you've pushed it too hard, at which point it just signals an end to the agony. I didn't hang around the finish line for long. There was nothing overly exciting about it for me at that point. I wasn't ashamed of my effort. I'd given it my best shot. Whether the medication had an effect on me or not I can't say for sure, but either way I ran out of gas. I wanted to get back to the Russian base to change into some dry clothes. Even in Antarctica, when you run a marathon, you sweat. I slowly plodded back to the Russian barracks and ducked under the edge of the building. There were a few people under there already. Some were changing, some were stretching, and a couple were just laying down and resting. There were no dividers in the crawlspace area, so it was pretty much just drop your drawers and change. Antarctica is not a place for modest runners, male or female. I got some dry clothes on as fast as I could and sat down and stretched for a minute or two. I felt a lot better already. Just being done running alleviated most of the pain I'd felt towards the end of the run. It was still snowing and my feet were pretty cold.

The barracks had a commons area and that was open to the runners after the race. I headed up there. It was a big complex and the commons was good sized room and it was dry and heated. Most of the runners that had just finished were up here. It looked like there were a couple dozen Russian scientists there at that point also. They'd made soup and sandwiches. I needed to suck in some carbos so I ate a sandwich and had some soup. I think they said it was carrot ginger soup. Whatever it was, it was really good, but then, walrus blubber probably would have tasted pretty good at that point. I saw Peter there. He'd finished the marathon about 5 minutes before I made it in, so he was now an official member of the seven continent club. We talked about the race for a few minutes. He'd been hurting also. Running in the ruts of the two tracks had been hard on his legs. He'd gotten cramps towards the end in a muscle that, as he put it, he didn't know existed before it cramped up on him. Cramps always make it hard to run, but he was a tough guy and managed to leg it out. The race crew was anxious to get people ferried back to the boats, so we didn't linger there too long. It took over two hours for the rest of the finishers to cross the line. The cut off time was relaxed a good bit as it turned out, not that that had any impact on me.

I hung out with the Russians slurping down soup and sandwiches for about a half hour, then I headed down to the zodiacs. I was looking forward to taking a shower and getting cleaned up for a big dinner that we'd have later that night. The Last Marathon was behind me, and soon for all of the rest of us as well. The best part was that we still had three more days to enjoy seeing more of Antarctica with sore legs. As we were waiting to load up in a zodiac I heard that Bill, the wheelchair athlete, had finished the half marathon. He finished in dead last place, but he finished, and he was only about 5 minutes behind the next finisher – someone who used their legs to finish. I heard he used two different chairs to do it. They modified the course for him so as not to include the cobblestones and the glacier, but how he got up and down all of those hills and through the mud in a wheel chair I'll never know. But he did it. I was happy for him. We all were. He was one tough cookie.

Part 4: Antarctica & the Long Journey Home



We got back on board and I headed to my cabin. Taking a shower was top priority. I wondered how big the ship's hot water heater was. There were going to be a lot of people taking long, hot showers, so I hoped it could handle it. I was on one of the first zodiacs to get back so I figured the water ought to hold out. Peter got back before me so he was already in the shower when I got there. When he got out we talked about the race. He had just run a marathon in Africa less than two weeks before, but he didn't seem to think the repeat had been any problem for him. He even enjoyed Collins. He thought that was the best part of the course. It was the part that was most truly Antarctic. We didn't talk long before I jumped in the shower. I didn't dilly-dally for too long, but it felt good.

We were both looking forward to dinner that night. It was a great meal of seafood and pasta and even included piranha. I was hungry enough to eat most anything, including piranha. The fact that they were cooked helped. It was a good meal. You could kind of sense a bit of a collective sigh of relief from everyone, including the *Peregrine* crew. After dinner I headed to the lounge. It seemed like everyone was there that night. A spirit of convivial bravado had swept through all of the runners. There was a lot of high talk about the race, of course. John from Notre Dame had done very well – finished fourth overall. Reto and Ming were well behind him but both managed to finish ahead of the six and a half hour cutoff time. Larry, another Golden Domer, was about an hour behind the cut, but as it turned out they didn't have to enforce it as strictly as they might have had to if the weather had been worse or if we'd gotten a later start. Travis told us that he thought this was one of the five toughest marathons he'd ever run. The only one that stuck out as being tougher was one they run at the Everest base camp at over 20,000 feet. The lounge was packed that night and everyone was in high spirits. If anyone had been anxious about the race, they could relax at this point. It was a great night, but along with everyone else, I was pretty tired, so I hit the cabin a little before midnight. It had been a long day!

Getting out of bed the day after a marathon is always tough, but the loudspeaker woke us up fairly early as the call to the weary went out at "O-eight-hundred." I discovered that I wasn't as sore as I thought I might be. Some other people were really sore, though. Peter and I went up to have coffee in the lounge before breakfast as always. We took the stairs, but the ship's elevators were really busy. In fact, the Captain said they were busier than he'd ever seen them! We spent most of the morning on the boat puttering down the Gerlache Strait towards Enterprise Island and Wilhelmina Bay. There was still a lot of talk about the race going on, and a lot of people talking about how sore they were. No different from any marathon in that regard, except after most of them all of the runners aren't all together on a boat to discuss their sore muscles. But we were, and we did!



The clouds from the front that hit us on race day were starting to break up, so the sun was coming out and the winds were dying down. We got to the bay after lunch and most people, myself included, got into the zodiacs to cruise the icebergs at close range. We discovered a large pod of humpback whales, so we stayed with them for quite awhile. They gave us a good showing of their daily activities while they enjoyed the krill feeding frenzy, which was why they make the annual swim to the Antarctic. There were a lot of whales in the bay and they seemed to be frolicking all around us. They were tail thrashing (raising and wiggling their tails), skyhopping (popping out of the water straight up face first), and a few even breached (jumped) for us. It was fantastic to be so close to these behemoths and it was a lot of fun to watch.

After dinner we hung out in the lounge as usual. Still a lot of talk about the race and the sore muscles, but also a lot of talk about the whales and the beauty all around us.

We awoke the next day a little later than the day after the race. The effects were still making getting up a bit difficult but we had so much to see. That got people going. That day we were making a couple stops. Our first stop was at Danco Island. We all made the zodiac excursion to the island. Most of us made the trek to the top of the island about 560 feet above the ocean. For this climb there was no time pressure, and the view was better. We hiked around for about an hour while some people were taking their time trials in the kayaks. There was going to be a kayak race the following day at Paradise Bay so they were busy completing their trials to figure out who would make the finals. Some people were really into the kayaks, but with my arm, kayaking was not an option for me. We headed back to the boat and traversed a few icebergs, then headed for a rendezvous with the *Ioffe* for the big awards lunch.



The sun came out just as we were getting to the *Ioffe*, so we had good weather for a BBQ on deck. The lunch and the awards ceremony was a lot of fun. It was the first chance we'd had since Buenos Aires to get all four Golden Domers back together. There was also the matter of the inter-boat competition for top honors in the race. It turned out to be close, but our boat eked out a narrow victory. John, one of the Golden Domers, finished second for our boat. We stayed on the *Ioffe* for about 2 hours until everyone had all they wanted to eat and drink.

I took a lot of pictures and we got a good one of the four horsemen. After that we took the zodiac ferries back to our boat and did some afternoon sightseeing. We cruised through the Errera Channel into Andford Bay and on to Paradise Harbor. The views of the bay and the harbor were incredible, with jagged peaks covered with snow and glaciers. Some people took off in the zodiacs and some in kayaks. I took the zodiac tour. Aside from our wakes, the water was glass and the beautiful bluish hued icebergs were all floating completely still in the calm mirror of water, like jagged ice-castles seemingly balanced perfectly on the delicate meniscus of the water. Antarctica is like no other place on the planet, and the views in the bay were spectacular.



"The Four Horsemen of the Antarctic"

After dinner we got ready for the night on the peninsula – the Antarctic mainland proper. This was an optional excursion but a lot of people were doing it and I wasn't going to miss it. The crew provided sleeping bags and either tents or bivy bags. I got a bivy bag, which is basically a mummy style sleeping bag with a cover over it. We left on the zodiacs just after dinner. There were about 40 people who decided to spend the night off the boat, Peter and I among them. It was a true camping adventure, and spirits were running high.



People pitched their tents and I found a spot in the snow for my bag in a line with a bunch of other hardy bivy-baggers. It was cold, but I was ready with plenty of layers of clothing. I was fine, but some of the other people didn't seem quite so well prepared. We stayed up and all talked for quite awhile. It felt like a bunch of school kids out on a scout trip without any chaperones.

The only bathroom facility was a single-seated porti-potty known as Mr. Yum-Yum which was carted carefully to and from the boat by the crew. Runners are no strangers to using porti-potties before races, but usually they at least have walls. Not this one. And talk about a cold seat! We were encouraged to visit the head before we left, but once on the mainland we were told to use it. Possibly another treaty caveat, but Mr. Y definitely sparked a round of jokes: proper approach etiquette, what to do if you sat down and got stuck, best cure for a frozen heinie and so forth.

A little while after dark, people started ducking into their tents. It wasn't long after that that it started snowing. No big surprise since this was Antarctica, but it was unusual for summer. It was coming down pretty steady with big fat, chunky flakes. Someone got the bright idea of making a snowman. The snow was perfect for it. A few of us worked on that and in about 10 minutes we had a pretty nice one that was as tall as I was. After that the rest of us drifted off to our bivvies.



As I tried to tuck myself into my bag, I found I had some trouble with the draw string on the bivy, I couldn't seem to manage to tie with only one hand so I pulled it up as best I could and left it that. I made it through the race one-handed and I wasn't about to start asking for help now. I was trying to keep the snow out of the bag and off my face, which was hard to do since I couldn't close the bag all the way up. But I was bundled up pretty well otherwise, so I rolled over onto my side and made the best of it and eventually drifted off to sleep.

The snow kept on coming and at some point I woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of a zodiac. I guess some of the other bivy bag campers were bailing out of the snow storm and heading back to the boat. It's not every night you have a chance to sleep in Antarctica, and I hadn't come to wimp out due to a little snow, so I decided to stick it out. It was a long night, and it got pretty cold, but it was worth it. At some point after dark we heard what sounded like an avalanche. Lots of cracking and banging. Hearing this happen without knowing just what was going on was definitely a bit unnerving. With the snow falling, the thought of being buried alive in a slide crossed more minds than just mine. It turned out to be the sound of an iceberg "calving" off of a nearby glacier terminal. It happened a couple of times during the course of the night. Peter happened to be up near morning and actually saw one go. It was a chunk of ice nearly half the size of the ship. When morning arrived we were all fine, but we did have a 12 inch blanket of snow on the ground. The entire continent only gets an average of a couple of inches of snow per year, but the peninsula generally gets a good bit more than that and mother nature seemed determined to make up for the lack of snow cover for the race course. The people in the tents started popping out to look for Mr. Y. Some didn't even realize it had snowed. After horsing around for a while and peppering each other with a few playful snowballs, we packed up our gear and made for the zodiacs to head back for a hot shower and likely a warm nap for some. It was a fantastic night, and getting snowed on made all the better as far as I was concerned.

This was going to be our last day in Antarctica before heading back north to Argentina. After breakfast, the kayak race was the first order of business for the day. Both boats rendezvoused for this second feat of madness. There were about a dozen contestants, some in single boats and some in doubles. Some of them seemed pretty serious. After all, unlike the marathon, today they would have a big audience watching from the decks! They used zodiacs as course markers and once they finally got going the race only took about 10 minutes. Afterwards there were zodiac tours of the bay, which was largely iced over with a thin crust. Having spent the night out, I passed on that one. After lunch the clouds that had dropped all of the snow on us started to break up and we had our last excursion opportunity of our trip, this time to Cuverville Island, which was near Danco Island that we'd stopped at two days before.

I made the trip to the island along with most everyone on the boat. We arrived to be greeted by literally thousands of gentoo penguins. There was a huge rookery of them there so there were plenty of baby birds about. For sure the smell of a rookery will greet you long before the penguins actually do, but the birds themselves are so curious and unafraid that they will saunter right up next to you as soon as you get near to them. They simply have no innate fear of humans. With their antics they are always a lot of fun to watch, and they had a lot of youngsters that always seemed to be in playful moods. They were chasing each other up the hills, then they would turn and slide back down on their bellies just like otters often do. It was very amusing to watch the cute little buggers having fun. We spend a good hour there soaking in the final savory moments of our Antarctic experience and taking lots of pictures of the birds and each other. At last we had to board the zodiacs and weaved our way through some small icebergs as we headed back to the good ship *Vavilov*.

The ship soon made steam and headed back up the Gerlacke Strait and soon we were out into the open water of the Drake Passage for the return voyage. The ship was already into the Passage by dinner and there were already some swells – pretty mild ones, but some people were feeling sick nonetheless, especially the ones that hadn't taken anything. I had already started using my patches again. Even with the bad experience I had at the race, I knew that I'd be sorry if I didn't start using them for the voyage back. They seemed to help, as I was able to finish dinner whereas some people weren't. They headed off to their cabins. I headed to the lounge, but I didn't stay long. Since I hadn't gotten a lot of sleep the night before in my bivy bag, I soon headed down to hit the sack.

We awoke the first morning of the return voyage to find that the seas were again calm – we were lucky - but the air was now thick with fog, so watching the lonely albatross and the other sea birds was pretty much out of the question at the moment. Instead we turned to the reading room and most of us who weren't too seasick attended the day's presentations. The morning lecture was about the Roald Amundson and Robert Falcon Scott expeditions and their famous race to the South Pole in 1912. Amundson, from Norway, used dogs to pull his sleds. Scott, a Brit, had previously had bad luck with dogs so he tried to use ponies. Amundson's dogs worked out well, but Scott's ponies couldn't keep their feet up in the deep snow, and they didn't make it, so Scott and his crew largely pulled the sleds themselves, which actually was not uncommon practice at that time, and in fact still isn't.

Scott did finally make it to the pole dragging their sleds, but only after Amundson had already beaten them to it. Due to the planning and

supply problems and uncommonly harsh weather, everyone on Scott's ill-fated expedition perished only 10 miles away from returning to the safety of their largest supply depot. It was most of a year before they were found and the news made it back to England of the tragedy. That's the way things were back then. It was an interesting story, and reminded us that beating our way around the place for 26.2 miles was far short of what these guys faced trekking all the way to the South Pole. They must have been tough. After lunch we had two presentations, once on Antarctic marine life – whales, seals and the like, and after that we had one on Frank Hurley, the Australian photographer who'd photographed the famous Shackleton expedition and many other aspects of life in the polar regions. After dinner it was another evening in the lounge or watching videos in the presentation room.

At some point during the night the seas started heaving. It seemed a dreaded Cape Horn snorter had set upon us. The boat started rocking pretty hard, so much so that it became tough to sleep. I was thinking that maybe being on the top bunk might make for a rough landing if I got tossed out of it. I managed to stay put, but didn't manage to get much sleep. The same was true for Peter. The morning announcement told us that the seas were rolling to up around seven or eight feet. Things seemed pretty rough, but the crew was quick to point out that this was nothing compared to the mammoth 30 foot swells that were said to be common to the Drake Passage. Judging from the sparse turnout for breakfast, I seemed to be faring much better than many on board, but I sure hoped things didn't get any worse. We were to approach Cape Horn this afternoon, so after breakfast, we had a showing of the film "Rounding the Horn". It was interesting to see the difficulty that so many adventurous sailors faced as they struggled to get their windjammers to heel into the gusty, circling winds of the Cape. Prior to Panama Canal opening in 1914, that was the only route to pass from Atlantic to Pacific, and many a ship didn't make it. There is record of one ship struggling in the winds for 34 days. Of course with two 5000 kilowatt reciprocating diesel engines behind us, our odds were certainly a good bit better than the salty dogs of yore. Bummer for them I guess.

After lunch we had our final presentation, a recap of the trip and all of the adventures we'd shared for the past 10 days. Everyone was already a bit melancholy. Following that we were allowed to tour the bowels of the ship. The engine room and many of the other generally off-limits areas were opened up so we could get a final look at the entire boat. The boat definitely had the biggest darn engines I'd ever seen! It made for some interesting snooping around. The sun broke out and the seas started to calm and we rounded Cape Horn around 4 PM. The view of the islands that form the cape was distant and we had to swing a little out of our way to the west to get there, but we got a feel for the experience without being left at the mercy of the notorious winds. After that it was the Captain's dinner, the final meal on board the boat, which was hosted by Captain Sazonov for our last night together. It was a fine meal of Australian delicacies that even included kangaroo. No kidding! They are so plentiful in Australia that they are farmed and used for food quite readily. Someone made a crack about possibly serving Koala Bear as a second course. Everyone seemed ready for a big laugh and the place went up in stitches.

There was also a big spread of deserts afterwards. I ate my fill and then some. They certainly weren't going to send us packing on an empty stomach, and it was a good thing the waves had calmed down. After the big meal most people hit the lounge for awhile. It was a chance for one final time together with the group of new friends I'd made. There were a few toasts and boasts and stories from home and what people were going to do next. Travis was holding court with many of the British contingent and making plans to run 100 more marathons from the sound of it. I stayed up for a good while and soaked it all in. Around midnight, people starting disappearing below. A little while after that I said my goodbye and headed down to the cabin. After that big meal and in calmer seas, sleep came easy.

When we woke up, we were docked at Ushuaia. We had about an hour to finish packing up and hit the gangplank to head for home. There's no time when departing a ship for any extended goodbyes – those all had to be done the night before. It was sad to be at the end of the trip, and know that all of our new friends would be heading back to their lives in various parts of the world. Some stayed in and ran a marathon in Tierra Del Fuego a week later to complete their 7th and final continent. I had made only 2 & 3/4 out of the 7 but I would have made them all if I had had more time. I was also a bit melancholy because I knew my running career was soon coming to an end, but I didn't make any mention of that to anyone. It was a bittersweet departure, like so many in life. But I made plans to meet up with Peter when he visited Kentucky for one of his thoroughbred horse buying excursions.

Some people were staying on in the area but most were herded onto buses and headed off for the airport. It felt good to be on solid ground again, at least until the three long flights started. The first was the four hour flight back to Buenos Aires. Weaving our way through the mountains didn't seem quite so bad the second time. I had a few hour wait there until it was time to board the all-night flight back to Miami, and then it was another three hour flight from there back to Detroit. So much had happened that it seemed so long ago that I'd left. Debra was waiting for me at the airport in the baggage claim area. The trip was one of those adventures that makes it feel strange to be back, and makes it hard to remember everything that was so important beforehand. Showing up to work without Don in the office would definitely bring reality back home in a hurry, much sooner than I would like. My own trips to the U of M hospital would be sobering as well, but that wasn't on my mind at the moment. It's hard to sum up a trip like the one to Antarctica in words. I'd say it was my greatest adventure in my finest hour. I may not have finished the marathon, but I gave it everything I had, and I sure enjoyed the company.

Epilogue

The Last Marathon did indeed turn out to be my last marathon. I ran one more race – a 5K – in South Bend later that summer. Not too long after that race I also started having trouble with my left arm, and sometime later with my legs as well. By the winter of 2006 I was walking largely with a walker, but I'd still go to track club workouts every Tuesday and head out to dinner afterwards. I had a few good stories to tell about the big trip, but I generally wasn't what most people would call a big talker I guess. In July of 2006, Debra and I tied the knot for the second time in the back yard of our home in Ann Arbor. Our families both came and a lot of track club people made it. Soon after that I had a couple of falls and I was forced to give up the walker and switch to a motorized wheel chair. But by then my hands were having so much trouble that I needed someone else to operate the joy-stick for me. By the end of 2006 I moved back home to Bay City to live with my brother for a few months.

I'm now living in Brian's House – a small assisted care facility in Bay City's medical center, near where my father had died of ALS so

many years ago. At this point I'm confined to a convertible bed, as I no longer can move my arms or legs. I also can't eat or talk. Deb and my brother Kurt visit every day. Friends come when they can. I spend time listening to them or watching TV. I like the show "My Name Is Earl" pretty well. Football season is coming up so I'll be watching Notre Dame football games. I'm writing this story with the help of my friend Hal from the runner's club. He started it quite awhile ago when I was still talking but I think he's finally about done with it. (It seems like he's writing quite a bit more than I'd originally planned.) He's still asking me a lot of questions and I shake my head or else we use a letter board to communicate as best we can, one letter at a time. That's the way it is for me now.

Running has been a big part of my life for many years. It gave me something to do, a way to stay in shape, confidence and a lot of good friends. It can be exhilarating at times, painful at times, but it's slow and tedious much of the time. Like so many things, the key is to overcome the pain and find ways to enjoy it. Friendship was my key. I don't know how much time I have left – but then no one does.

Take care friends, and thanks for taking the time to read this story. For my sake and for yours, don't give up on yourself or your dreams. Life is short and there's so far to run. Run well, and don't stop until you can run no more.

Barney Thomas, September 6, 2007

Written by Hal Wolfe

