

Příloha č.1: Výchozí text

Introduction

I sat in the front seat of the police car and felt my world crumbling around me. It had only been a few weeks since I heard the news that I would not only be unemployed in a month, but I would simultaneously lose my home, having been a dorm parent the last three years. The 2008 economic downturn had taken an extra couple years to hit private education, but now I was becoming a casualty of budget cuts at Stratton Mountain School. This wasn't just the school that had employed and housed me for three years; it was also my alma mater, the same school that established a citizenship award in my honor. Since being made redundant I had numbed my emotions each night, looking down a bottle, and then hiking away the hangover each morning as penance for my actions. I was literally spending days escaping my problems to the only place I could think of: the woods. I was out of shape, having spent my post-college early twenties working hard and playing harder. I had packed on about 20 pounds since graduating, enjoying wing night and \$2 drafts in excess. It all seemed to catch up with me that rainy night.

It was early summer 2009. I sat in that police car in the pouring rain, about to take a Breathalyzer test and most likely add another layer to my current trouble with DUI. After I blew into the device I tested just above the legal limit, but the kind police officer took pity on me and offered me the chance to take a field sobriety test, saying, "I don't trust what these things say anyway." As I climbed out of the police car I could feel my heart ready to leap out of my chest. I carefully listened to the officer's instructions and tried to do as he said, while the two inebriated passengers in my car watched breathlessly. The rain poured down hard on me as I took the test then rejoined the officer to discuss the outcome: I had passed. I had dodged the biggest bullet of my life. It was at this moment that I knew I needed to make a change.

In fall 2009 I started a new job at a new school, holding that experience close to my chest and not revealing it to anyone. However, as I look back at that night, I know that it was my brush with disaster that started me on the journey that led me to write this book. Shaken after that period in my life I now refer to as "the black hole," I knew I could not continue to live that lifestyle, a time bomb that would eventually go off. I

jumped with both feet into the new job, stopped going out so frequently, and started to look to other things in life for fulfillment. It was time to shift from one extreme to another; I just didn't know yet what it would be.

One wintery day in early 2010, I was browsing Facebook when a friend's "like" popped onto my newsfeed. It was for a new event called the Spartan Race. I felt compelled to find out what it was. I Googled it and learned it was this new sort of race called "obstacle course racing" and it would be held in May outside of Burlington, Vermont. At the time, I was living less than two hours from the race site, in central Vermont, and thought I would give it a try. I thought maybe this would be what I was looking for. I had been a two-sport varsity athlete in college and it had been years since I was in competition for myself. I spent my post-college life coaching other student athletes, but my own internal fire for competition had gone up in smoke.

The Spartan Race was advertised as a 2-mile trail run with obstacles mixed in. The ad said you would get wet and muddy, and that there would be fire. It was so new and so different that I decided to try it out. I showed up on race day not knowing that it would change the direction of my life. Over those two miles I made all the rookie mistakes. I felt like I didn't do anything right – but I knew one thing at the end: I loved it! I knew I had rediscovered something that I'd lost years ago. The spark of my inner competitor was relit, and it was time for me to regain who I was and discover who I could be. I found a few more obstacle course races that year, finishing in the top 25 percent but not breaking any records or placing anywhere near a podium. I was slow and I failed a lot, but I learned a little bit more with each race, loving it more and more. I was just out in the mud getting dirty – and experiencing something completely new.

In winter of 2011, I hesitantly signed up for an event called Tough Mudder, a 10-mile obstacle course race. Up to that point, the handful of races I'd run had all been 5Ks (about 3.1 miles) and I had never been a "runner" nor thought about running a 10-mile race. Just one month before the event I started a crash exercise program. I had coached alpine skiing for almost seven years and women's lacrosse for five years. I knew what it took to train and how to train, so I got on the trails and trudged through the miles. My longest practice run was an 8-miler just prior to race day. As I stepped up to the Tough Mudder starting line I was nervous, wondering if I would even be able to finish. As I took off on the trail, I turned my brain off and just moved. The race is a blur;

all I remember is crossing the finish line and finding out I had finished third for women in my heat and in the top 25 for the day. I was told I qualified for World's Toughest Mudder. That same day I created DirtinYourSkirt.com. Until then Dirt in Your Skirt was just my personal blog, a way of holding myself accountable to my training and tracking my journey up to the race. I would record workouts and feelings on the blog. Over time, people started to catch on and wanted to learn more. The blog grew.

On August 6, 2011, I took my next major step toward where I am today, taking part in the first Spartan Race Beast, the only half-marathon-distance (13.1 miles) obstacle race at the time. It was held literally in my backyard, on my training grounds on Killington, Vermont. I showed up to that race unaware of what would happen. The race began and I took off, crossing the finish line just under three hours later and placing third overall for women. This was my first official podium in the world of obstacle course racing, run on what is still arguably one of the most challenging courses. Less than a week later I would follow it up with a podium finish at the Warrior Dash in Widham, New York. This is when I knew obstacle course racing was for me. Later that year I would finish sixth in the first-ever Spartan Race World Championships held in December in Texas. The World's Toughest Mudder would not prove as successful. After 21 hours of racing, I was the last woman to drop from the race, with only two women finishing. It is certain that 2011 was the year I advanced from just being a racer in the crowd to a competitor.

With the start of the 2012 season and a second-place finish at the Spartan Race Sprint in Tuxedo, New York, a couple of companies came on board to help fund my endeavors. My racing resume grew while Dirt in Your Skirt rapidly evolved from just a hobby blog to a small business and full-blown website. At the end of the spring season, I got my first paid sponsorship. With the latest bit of encouragement, I leapt into the unknown in July, 2012, quitting my daytime job in education to pursue racing full-time with the backing of sponsors and burgeoning new business. With this single move I became the first professional female obstacle course racer, opening a new door for athletes in the sport. Throughout the 2012 season and early into the 2013 season I would pick up more podiums and more top-10 finishes. In addition to racing, I grew Dirt in Your Skirt into a forum designed to empower women to enter new sports, explore new possibilities, conquer old fears, and inspire those around them to go beyond their

perceived limits. The website now features many women making differences in their own lives and the lives of those around them. To this day I have completed close to fifty obstacle course races across the United States and internationally, of varying distances and with a variety of race organizers. Tens of thousand of users visit DirtInYourSkirt.com monthly, and we have a team of ambassadors to spread the Dirt in Your Skirt ethos: explore, conquer and inspire. I am proud to have been a part of the sport since its humble beginnings and have turned it into my vocation in life. Little did I know, sitting in a police car in summer 2009, that my brush with disaster would be the tipping point that would lead me to realize my life's passion.

I wrote this book to introduce you to all things “obstacle course racing” and “mud runs”. It is designed to help you pick the right first event for you, create a training plan to get you moving, and help you create a diet to get you going. I talk you through some of the basic obstacles you will encounter in your race, as well as how to get through race day with ease and look like a professional. I have also included personal accounts from friends who are deep into the obstacle racing world. They share their experiences and walk you through what happens after the race. Finally, we throw in plenty of insider tips and advice along the way.

Whether you do one or one hundred obstacle races in your lifetime, you will learn something about yourself in the process and maybe, if you are like me, you will find a new passion and love. I am not going to say this book will change your life, but it just might be your tipping point.

Chapter 13 – Stories from the course

Every obstacle course racing champion started somewhere; no one wakes up one day to suddenly break world records. Each racer has his or her own story, journey and reasons why OCR is their sport of choice. The following stories are from a variety of racers. Some often find themselves on the podium while other have used OCR to help change their lives and, in one case, regain a life. The stories below are diverse, offering tips for race day and strategies that have helped achieve goals at all levels.

Shelley Koenig

Shelley is a chemistry teacher and mother of two. She had always been one to

favor the outdoors but obstacle course racing opened a new door in her life. She has not only tackled and succeeded in Tough Mudders, Spartan Races, and World's Toughest Mudder, but she is also the 2012 Female summer Death Race winner. She is a tough Mainer who always races with a smile on her face. In her own words, here are Shelley's tips for the new racer:

By no means would I describe myself as a pro in the obstacle racing circuit. In fact, I am not sure that I could fairly describe myself as a pro at anything. Some days I am wildly successful, some days are utter failures, but most days are a mix. In the last few years, I have been fortunate enough to become part of the obstacle racing community, a community of extraordinary people who have forced me to challenge my own weaknesses, helped me to see my strengths, and accepted me without judgment. I have gained a sense of belonging amongst friends simply through shared experiences. This community has looked out for me on a journey to find myself. On one occasion, I was (literally) picked up off a ground by a total stranger who helped me press on when I thought quitting was my only option. On another occasion, friends of only a few short hours shared their food and water with me when I was unprepared. I have learned much from the people in this amazing community. I have learned that the approach to every race, every training session, and every moment in our lives really ought to be the same. So, here is my attempt to impart a top-five list of things this community has taught me for those who are thinking about giving their first OCR event a shot.

1. Remove can't from your vocabulary. Failure is only how you define it. If you are paralyzed by a fear of failing, you deny yourself opportunity for growth. We all fail to meet our goals sometimes; this is part of achieving success.
2. Be open to celebrate the camaraderie of obstacle racing. People will offer you their hands, backs, shoulders or whatever it takes to help you compete obstacles. As you become more experienced, you can return the favor to others.
3. Embrace burpees. Guaranteed: somewhere you will be asked to do them; you might as well enjoy them.

4. Don't steer around the things that scare you. Go over them. Go through them. They have nothing on the strength inside you.

5. Don't take yourself too seriously. I used to train meticulously. I calculated miles, weights, and max heart rate. I worried about it all. Racing in my first Tough Mudder, I glanced over at my training partner and noticed that she had mud between her teeth and her long blonde hair was dyed blue and resembled tangled seaweed. I told her she looked ridiculous. She poked me and replied, "What do you think you look like?" We giggled the rest of the way. Enjoy every moment of the experience. Before you know it, you'll be looking for the next one.

In short, the joy is in the process. Savor the small victories. Each small victory slowly will erode the notion of the unattainable and provide a foothold for the next step. Embrace your failures. Only in failure are we forced to define our weaknesses. Realize that life is the race, a race where victory isn't defined by the successes of someone else; rather, it is defined by what you do with the miles that lie before you. Do you curse the miles ahead, focus on discomfort, and focus solely on reaching the end? Every race has its end, whether we know where it is or not. Savor each step, appreciate the path ahead and know that the strength to confront challenges already lies within you.

Chris Rutz

Some find local 5Ks to run each weekend; Chris follows the obstacle racing circuit. When he decides to do something, he does it 100 percent. He is a regular at the Spartan Race series, taking part in more races in 2012 than any other person in the world. Not only did he race; he also finished the end of the season ranked third in the world. Not bad for a guy who often refers to himself as the "masters" racer, as his license shows his age as over 40. He has taught the young ones a thing or two in the last couple of years; it's clearly not just a sport for the young. Here are Chris's tips for success: So, you want to run your first obstacle race? Maybe you have seen the pictures of the ultra-fit men and women plastered on Facebook and the race websites, or maybe a friend or a family member took you to a race. Perhaps you are a runner who has heard of these "mud runs". You have decided to step up and register for your first race. What

next? What do you do now? My three step plan for finishing your first obstacle race:

Stay Calm

Be Anxious

Be Eager

Stay calm:

Literally hundreds of thousands of people have done an obstacle race, perhaps even millions. They are people from all walks of life, all sorts of athletic or non-athletic backgrounds. There are moms, dads, grandmothers, grandfathers and kids. There are people who weighed 200, 300, 400 pounds. There are people without legs, arms or both. If they can run an obstacle race, so can you.

Be Anxious:

Now that you are calm, it is time to make yourself nervous. Sure, you could go into the race without any training and walk much of the course and skip the obstacles but that would quite literally be “a walk in the park.” If that is what you want, go for it. On the other hand, these are not easy events if you want to complete every obstacle and the entire course. You need to do some training. Running. Yes, running; I know you do not like running. Keep at it; you will grow to love it. Burpees; same thing. You know what a burpee is, right? Strongly recommend burpees. Not just because some races make you do them, but because they are a great overall exercise. Push-ups, pull-ups, squats, mountain-climbers. Pick up something, anything, and carry it for a while. Put it down, pick it back up. You need to get in shape for this thing and you need to get in shape for life. You do want a life, right?

Be Eager:

Okay, I have convinced you that you can do it. You have trained – maybe a lot, maybe a little. Whatever you did or did not do, today is the day. Get to the start line and be eager, not anxious. Eager to run your first obstacle race, eager to climb that first wall, eager to get that finisher medal, eager to get that t-shirt. Most importantly, be eager to call yourself an Obstacle Racer. Get out there and get your feet wet, get a few scratches, get some dirt in your face. It is so worth it!

Juliana Sproles:

Juliana and I briefly met in 2011 at World's Toughest Mudder, she had just won the women's race. I was eager to meet this woman who was able to brave the hypothermic temperatures and be one of only two women to finish the race. However, it wasn't until 2012 that we got to know each other. Juliana has an unwavering passion for anything she does and gives it everything she has once she gets started. Below is her story from the 2011 World's Toughest Mudder:

Again and again, I was slipping and sinking up to my ears in icy, dark, murky, muddy water, breaking through sheets of ice as I went. I had become tired of trying to carefully move myself forward through a series of very long, deep, slimy mud pits only to fall up to my eyeballs into unknown sinkholes every few steps. There was simply no way to gracefully walk across this particular "Mud Mile," scramble up the embankment, climb up and over an 8-foot wall and ease back down into the muck just to do it all over again, five, six or seven times to the far side of the pit. I needed a new strategy.

"Thirty-two is better than twenty-seven." I kept saying it over and over. I was there. I was deep in the first-ever 24-hour obstacle course known as the "World's Toughest Mudder." I was literally freezing but I absolutely would not let myself admit it. I would not allow myself to shiver nor shake for even an instant. I knew that if I did, it would all be over. Instead, I continually kept asking everyone around me what the air temperature was and I developed a mantra (several of them, actually) to help me survive the madness. In my mind, I thought that every time I entered the water, if it wasn't frozen, it must be at least 32 degrees. On the other hand, the air temperature was dropping every time I asked and the wind chill was cutting through to my Mylar, nylon, neoprene and wool layers like a knife. There was nowhere to hide. I decided that under the water was the best place to be I could relax my body, rest a minute and shield it from the fierce and unrelenting wind that kept stealing away my body heat. So I kept saying it over and over: "32 is better than 27." It didn't matter if it made sense or not; it worked for me. And since we had so many water obstacles to navigate, I got to practice my mantra consistently throughout the race, and I swam through or skimmed across as many water obstacles as I could.

How did I get to this place? What was I doing here? And why? Why was I

running through mud, around in circles like a hamster on an arctic ice wheel? On a regular basis, I ask myself and am asked these questions. Only now, it seems, everyone is doing it and everyone has the answers. They truly “get it.” So many athletes and weekend warriors have discovered the thrill of navigating great physical obstacles on muddy courses all over the globe. We pay to play in mud and come home with great stories. We share our triumphs, our trials and tribulations. We are elated. We connect with our comrades and we are happy. We are human. We are truly alive.

After 30 years of running and 24 years of age-group triathlons I was bored, it was time for something new. My friend, Brooke, came home from a weekend away and described this new event she volunteered for where “people run through mud and fire!” I asked about the fire and she said, “it's really just little fire.” I was intrigued and we decided as a team to try it out the next time Tough Mudder came to town. I agreed to this adventure with much trepidation, skepticism and doubt. Having a tendency toward claustrophobia, I was not at all excited to enter cold, dark, wet tunnels and other small, dark cramped places, nor to be electrocuted, but I went along with the plan anyway, with my teammates by my side.

It was May 2011, Memorial Day Weekend at Snow Valley, a ski resort in Southern California. The forecast called for freezing rain and harsh wind chill. We hadn't really believed the forecast, but my two teammates and I found ourselves shivering in a near-hypothermic state on top of a deserted ski run in the middle of our very first Tough Mudder challenge. We had to make a decision – and fast. Any heat we had managed to trap within our less than adequate layers of clothing had just been stripped away after we emerged from full submersion into what was then known as Chernobyl – a gigantic tractor-trailer-long ice bath. After that, we did manage to make our way straight up the side of a mountain in spite of the cold and wind chill cutting through us sideways. I wrapped a piece of discarded Mylar around my head like a turban, convinced myself I was warm and carried on. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but we finished our very first Tough Mudder under some of the harshest conditions and brought home several war stories from our battle with ice, wind, electricity, broken noses and, more importantly, with ourselves. On the drive home, I exclaimed to my teammates, “I know how to go 24 hours. I am going to World's Toughest Mudder.” Right then and there, I submitted our team via email and cemented

the idea in my mind.

Even though they were invited, my teammates declined to join me in my quest for World's Toughest Mudder. I was excited about it anyway and set out to prepare for it. I recruited help from my outdoor exercise group and we completed several kinds of workouts together. I went through quite a mental process and, finally, I convinced myself that I was capable of winning WTM 2011. I arrived in Englishtown, NJ and sought out other female competitors, but couldn't locate any until just before the start. About 900 of us took off at the starting line. Twenty-four hours and five minutes later two of us crossed together. Junyong Pak and I agreed to run across the line at the same time even though he had completed one lap more than I did. This is how I won World's Toughest Mudder.

I had no idea what it would feel like to stand upon a stage and receive a \$10,000 prize for doing something as crazy as navigating cargo nets, mud, barbed wire, electricity, ice, physical exhaustion and mental demons all day and all night under such frigid conditions, with no sleep and minimal gear to keep warm. It was the true test of the human spirit. Even though it was definitely a race, we helped one another and we all came away with a sense of pride in how much we were able to endure. It didn't matter how many laps we completed. We were there. We put World's Toughest Mudder 2011 into the history books. My summary was this, "It was cold. It was hard. It was good. It was great. It was amazing!" And, yes, I would do it all over again.

Andi Hardy

I first met Andy in Spring 2012. She had recently won her first race and was emerging onto the race scene. In 2012, racing for Andi became much more than just about the medals and the trophies. We all saw a change in Andi: she seemed to blossom during the year, gaining confidence at each race. She made new friends and traveled around the country (mostly in her little red 80s BMW). Wearing her trademark lime green, this woman literally transformed before our eyes and the eyes of the OCR world. Here is Andi's story:

At 42 years old my life as I knew it was changing quickly before my own eyes. My business went under, my daughter left for college, my marriage fell apart, and I moving out of the dream house I had built on a beautiful mountain lake. What could I

do?

I was forced to try new things in life, so why not something new in the lines of fitness as well? After training three days a week for a sprint triathlon I realized that I could run three miles. I had only intended to walk the three miles of the tri, but found that the competitor in me could not simply walk. Two weeks later I found myself winning my age division in a 3-mile obstacle mud run. Two weeks of running and I placed better than 128 women my age. Hmmm, what if I actually trained? What could I accomplish?

I heard about the Spartan Race, an obstacle course race, and signed up immediately. It was almost five months away, but that would give me time to train. I trained every day, taking rest days when really needed. I felt great physically and mentally. All of the stresses of life were much more manageable with fitness now a big part of my life.

I won't say I wasn't a nervous wreck for that first race. The competitor in me put the pressure on to do as well as I could, and perhaps place at the top of my age division. The athlete in me was ready for a challenge unlike any I had ever faced. But, like many, I feared the unknown. I questioned whether I would even be able to finish, much less do well.

I started at the very back of the pack and hoped for the best. Little by little I passed competitor after competitor. I watched those ahead of me complete obstacles, and somehow I managed to learn quickly what to do. I also learned quickly what happens when you miss an obstacle (in my case the spear throw): 30 burpees really fast. I pushed myself, I dug deep, I yelled words of encouragement to others because it also helped me. I somehow made it to the finish line, and the pictures show I was even smiling!!

What an accomplishment! I was elated and totally driven. Little did I know it that day, but I would be repeating that feat over twenty more times in the upcoming nine months. Trying something new turned into a new love, a new passion, and a new lifestyle. Don't be afraid of the unknown; you never know, it could be your next step in life.

Chris Davis

I first met Chris while participating in the Spartan Race Coaching Certification in spring 2012. Chris came to Vermont to train under Spartan staff to help him get in shape for the Vermont Beast to be held in September. Chris at his heaviest had weighed 696 pounds, and when we met he was just under 400 pounds. He had competed in the Spartan Race Sprint in Georgia before coming to Vermont. I had the good fortune to work with him as his trainer for the last two months of his program and watch him slim down to 265 pounds by race day thanks to diet, exercise and a lot of hard work. This is his story:

I can remember it as if it were yesterday. It was 3 am and I was about to head out for the biggest challenge of my life: I was going to take on Killington Mountain to complete my first Spartan Beast. But this was no regular Spartan Beast – it was the Vermont Beast. The Vermont Beast is the Championship Race because it is one of the toughest, steepest, and most feared races in the Spartan Series. After getting into the car, I had a moment when I asked myself what in the world had I gotten myself into. Five months ago, I had a similar incident when I was pulling into the parking lot of my first Spartan Race in Georgia. I could not help but laugh; that race was only four miles and it almost killed me. Now, I was off to do a 15-mile race. A few minutes later, we pulled into Dirt in Your Skirt HQ, and Forest Call joined me. A few months earlier he had heard about what I was trying to do and he had offered to be by my side and film the whole race with me. I cannot tell you how much it meant to me to have someone by my side as I was going through this adventure. If there is one thing I have learned over the last year is that when you are trying to do anything outside of your comfort zone, it really helps to have someone there with you. If you do not have someone with you before you head out, find someone while you are on your adventure, and team up. I cannot tell you how many times I have wanted to quit, but kept going because I was with someone else, and I was not going to leave them alone.

It was almost 4 am before everyone arrived at Killington Mountain. You could see your breath, and I swear there was a thin sheet of ice on the water in the obstacles. After the first hour or so, everything just felt surreal. It no longer felt like a race; it turned into another training day with Joe Desena (Spartan Race founder) as he led us up the mountain. I have never been as happy to see the sun as I was that day. The funny thing was, as the sun started to rise the situation changed from being on a hike to being

in the Spartan Race. I saw the festival area start to fill with people, the music started up, and we started back towards the festival and the 4-mile checkpoint. That was the first moment when I started to realize I was in trouble.

My original plan was to complete two laps, and come home with the Ultra Beast. But it was almost 8 am when we reached the 4-mile cut checkpoint, so did the mental math and realized I had another 20+ hours of race course ahead of me. That had me worried, but I pushed it out of my mind and kept on going. I had to keep focusing on the next obstacle or the next hill. I could not afford to think about everything I still had ahead of me, because I knew that if I did I'd completely freak out. So I kept my focus on whatever was next, until famed obstacle racer Hobbie Call came running past me. It was good to see him go by, but I knew he had completed the same amount of the course in an hour as had taken me five hours. That is when I started to doubt that I'd be able to complete the race. I was so cold, tired, and now getting sore, and being lapped by people that had started the race over four hours after I did. That was when I had to remind myself that I was not racing them – I was there to challenge myself, to see how far I could push myself, to see how far I had come since my first Spartan Race. That was all that it took to get past that bout of doubt.

As each additional racer passed me, I felt stronger and stronger. It was like I had started to feed off their energy, and it was just what I needed to keep me going. Being around so many other racers was an incredible feeling; even the bad times didn't seem so bad because we were all in it together.

That feeling stayed with me until the climb up the Bear Mountain. The climb for me started late in the afternoon, after I had been on the course for about ten hours. I was starting to run out of strength, and I was finding myself taking a lot of breaks. The Bear Mountain climb was one of the longest, most brain-teasing climbs because it was switchback after switchback, up the side of the mountain, in thick woods. This went on for what seemed like forever. There were so many times during this part of the race that I wanted to quit, but I knew there was no way off the side of the mountain, and I would need to keep going to reach a safe place to be rescued. I really felt I was in trouble, and this is the point where having a friend by your side becomes so important. I knew that if I got into trouble, he would get help. So I pushed on further than I ever thought possible. Finally we made it to the top, and I'm not going to lie – I wanted to pass out and die.

That was when I bumped into my friend Kaitlyn Hummel on the course. We sat there and talked about what we had just survived, and started to laugh about it all. It was just what I needed to regroup and continue on.

Everything was going good again, until the log hop. I was doing fine until the last log. It was just so far away... I knew that as long as I touched it I was OK. I took a giant step, touched it, then fell off. I hit the ground hard – very hard. I hit so hard that I could not get up; I could not even move. I had ringing in my ears. A few seconds later, I was able to start moving again, but my left leg felt like it was on fire. I checked it out and found no obvious injuries, so I tried to get up and walk. That was when the real pain started; luckily, so did the adrenaline. All of a sudden the pain didn't seem so bad. So on I went – limping, but moving forward. I knew any plans I had for completing the Ultra Beast were gone. Now my goal was just to survive the Beast. I was near the end and I was not going to quit, so I dug in deep, and just focused on one step at a time. That was all I could handle. I was in survival mode for the rest of the race. I learned so many things about myself in this race. The first, and for me the most important discovery, was that I can push myself to try things that I think are impossible. Another key thing I learned is that I should never be afraid to ask for help: I am not alone; there is someone else going through the same thing I am, and together we are stronger. Lesson three: sometimes you have to stop thinking about the big picture, and just focus on one step at a time. Lastly, I learned that challenging yourself to do the impossible changes your life. You start to ask yourself, “If I can climb a mountain, what else can I do?”