

# The Toughest Race I've Ever Run

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*Bill Wardyga (December 16, 2008)*

My mom had terminal cancer. She was deteriorating very quickly. She had not had anything to eat or drink in days and her breaths were becoming more and more shallow. When we stopped by her house early Saturday morning to visit, it was easy to see that she would not last much longer than a day. It was hard watching her, as I have had a father and father-in-law who both lost their battles with cancer, dwindling to nothing, and suffering greatly. I love my mom but I did not want to watch her suffer any more. I also didn't want to be there when she passed away. I still have painful memories of both my father and father-in-law's final days and didn't want it repeated.

Although it was tough to leave, I kissed my mother's forehead, told her that I loved her, and told her that we would be back in a few hours, but don't wait, if it was time for her to go, then go, I want her to be at peace.

We finally managed to leave about 10AM, rushing to get to the race for the 11AM start. When we get there, I asked my wife to please shut off her cell phone till after the race is over. She already had. At the starting line my friend and teammate Jim Limperis told me that I had a shot to win this race. I responded that I doubt it, I had no energy, and explained my mother's condition.

The race started and surprisingly I quickly took the lead. After about a quarter of a mile I could no longer hear any footsteps near me, and I began to think of my mom, I had to wipe the tears from under my sunglasses several times, as I could only think of her. Over the past few days, as she slept, her legs would beat furiously as if she was running. Maybe she wanted to run? She would be running this race with me. When I turned the corner at just over a mile and glanced back I had at least a 20 second lead. This race was (ours) if I could hold up. We climbed a long and steep hill as we approached the two mile mark, I prayed to God to please give me the strength to win this race for my mother. I survived the hill. Only one more mile to go. Unfortunately this is where I ran out of energy last weekend just after hearing the news of my mother's impending demise.

With a half mile to go, one of the policemen stopping traffic exclaimed, "he's closing on you". I turn to look, what a cruel joke, I see no one. At this point I knew we would win. I started hyperventilating. I've won races before so it's no big deal for me, but emotions just take over, I hyperventilate the whole last half mile of the race, I can't breathe and have no energy left in me,

after what seems an eternity, I make the final turn to the finish line, my wife exclaims, "Your all alone, win this for Mom!"

I ease off the pace. As I approach the finish line I look up to the sky and shout "I love you MOM!". We had won the race. I then burst into tears, I kept walking further and further away from the finish area finally stopping and just put my head in my hands crying. Jim finished 2nd, came over and gave me a hug, my wife followed, and we cried as we embraced, it was a fitting tribute to my mother.

My Mom was infatuated with time. Even during her final week, which was spent in bed, she always had to know what time it was. (As if it mattered). What time are you coming tomorrow? What time are you leaving today? In her condition she had no concept of what time it really was. She had kept daily logs which went back to when she was dating my Dad and they include not only the date but the exact time that every little thing took place. I never really knew this about my Mom until this week.

The cell phone rings as we are heading home. I know what this call is, my mom has passed away. She passed as my sister Paula finished singing my mom's favorite hymn to her, my brother John is sitting on the other side of her bed. It's 12:45, 15 more minutes would have made it a "few" hours since we left and would return. She is at peace now. Incredibly, she went the way each of us were most comfortable with her going. She was one amazing lady, she was one amazing mother. "I love you Mom!!!!!!!!!"