

Run Your Own Race - At Your Own Pace

By Eileen McDargh

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On Thanksgiving Day, dawn spills over Dana Point Harbor where thousands of runners gather for the annual Turkey Trot. The largest holiday race in California beckons folks of all ages, sizes, shapes, and abilities. Waiting at the starting line for the 10-K, I talk to a Dad and his 7 year-old daughter. Around me, I hear bravado talk about marathons, triathlons, hard bodies and zippo fat content. Thankfully, I spy silver haired folks with knee braces, a young couple with babies in jogging strollers and runners decked in costumes ranging from Santa Claus to Elvis Presley. Running in a gold polyester jump suit, and pompadour wig while carrying a boom box blaring Elvis tunes will be some trick. Me-I just want to finish.

The gun goes off and we all inch our way under the balloon arch. Runners jostle for position, elbowing their way to break into stride. Me-I just grin at the new day and feel righteous for having gotten up and down to the event.

By mile two, my righteousness turns to dismay as the seven year-old passes me by. Elvis has already made the turn way before me and I am lagging behind a woman who must have 10 years and 20 pounds on me. The sense of competitiveness heats up and so does my pace. I forget that I already run two miles down to the Harbor and have 4.2 miles left to go. The runners around me set my pace.

Suddenly, as I make the turn, I am struck by a humbling sight. Facing me, arms pumping runs a young man with one leg glittering in the sun. The metal shank is attached to his thigh. A thin aluminum calf leads to a metal foot curved like a rocker. He is oblivious to anyone who passes him. He is running his own race at his own pace.

I slow down, take his lesson, and resume my 1-2-3-4 mantra. Lesson learned, smack between the eyes. How many times do we let others set the pace, ignoring our own goals, our abilities? How many times do we judge our success or our failure by what others have done?

I finish despite the pain in my knee. Way behind the silver-haired lady. Well behind the 7 year-old. Ahead of the sleek bodied teenager. It doesn't matter. It is my race, at my pace. And it is a great day for the race-the human race.

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