

Running has always been a part of my life. Beginning from the time when I started to become serious about conditioning for high school sports. I never liked running...I just ran because there was no alternative for aerobic conditioning that could replace simply slapping on a pair of sneakers and going for it. I realize that this is a throwback and dead giveaways for the era but those sneakers were Converse "Chuck Taylor" high tops. We have come a long way since those white Chuck T's.

Throughout the years running became my go to exercise. Living a busy life and raising two athletic kids there was no time for anything else. Also, when I traveled, I could explore a city and get in a work out by touring the town on foot at pace. My running shoes, shorts and top became travel partners. Over time I began to embrace the chance to tour a city this way and still do. It's fun.

My running mantra is that I do not like running on most days...but I have always loved how it felt when it was over....100% of the time. Coming to embrace this is what has turned me into a runner of sorts. I always bristled at the thought when someone referred to what I do as "jogging"; it felt condescending. For those who "run" you know what I mean...no further explanation necessary.

I never, ever, expected to run a half marathon, let alone a series of NYC Marathons. Of course, like life, you aren't quite certain what path it will take or roads traveled but given the history of participation someone knew to prepare me. And he prepared me well.

Over the years, our family embraced athletics of many types and the running thing became a household conversation. Whether the objective was for conditioning for a race, improving speed, aerobic conditioning or mental health we all were fully engaged in running; my daughter, Tiffany, as an accomplished collegiate runner and my son, Brandon, as a soccer player. And, of course than there was Karen (Wife, Mom and dedicated exercise fan...probably a bit of an understatement) while Karen had always run, it was not until her 40's that she started to take it up more seriously and truly become a student(pick up Chi Running sometime one of Karen's favorites) of running. In part perhaps, due to the success that Tiffany was having at the scholastic level. Likely, it was a combination of fitness and mental wellness that truly drove Karen to want to run.

Karen always wanted to run a marathon. It started with Karen's desire to run a half marathon, I am not quite certain what the origin of the thought came from but she became possessed with the distance



thing. A 10K was no longer good enough. It was in the fall of 2007, when Karen announced that she wanted to do a half marathon. I was not crazy about the prospects of Karen training alone for hours, so, I agreed to train with her. Maybe Karen was preparing me. We researched half marathons on the east coast and found the Shamrock Marathon in Virginia Beach Va. We thought it could be a fun weekend. This was a fun event, a very cold blustery day, an out and back course that finished on the beach walkway under the Greek statue of Poseidon.

The success of the Shamrock Half led us to making a commitment to run a half marathon in Philadelphia for our 28th wedding anniversary in November of 2008. We planned on staying in Philadelphia for the weekend. We ran the half marathon and went dancing at a club to the tunes of Philadelphia's "Butter". a WDAS DJ that was credited for defining the "Philly Sound" and who Karen listened to since her teen years. It was a great weekend and we both ran personal bests for the half.

After the Philadelphia Half marathon I swore I would never, ever run a marathon. I always contended that a person my size was not built for the distance. As things go, Karen wanted to run a marathon, and so we committed to run the Country Music Marathon in Nashville. My thought was that if we are going to do it this had better be a fun weekend.

On a training run in January of 2009, during a morning run that Karen typically would do on her own, I got a knock at the door and old friend had Karen in the car who he luckily found lying on the side of the road immobile. I carried Karen to the car and rushed her to the hospital. Karen's femur snapped at the neck of the ball joint. This was foreshadowing the events to come over the next 8 months. The bone snapped from the effects of melanoma cancer.

The ensuing months were torture for the whole family. Watching the grace of Karen fighting a good fight through hip surgery rehab, paralysis from a stroke, chemo and radiation therapy was humbling to say the least. Throughout her ordeal as friends and family visited they always left her room feeling comforted by Karen. It was never about Karen, the name of our foundation, "Light Up the Room" originates from this spirit. Karen was a purely spiritual person, a stronger faith than you will ever find. To know her life story, you would be in awe of the power of her faith.

And so we run. Karen passed in August of 2009 from the vicious effects of melanoma cancer. Soon thereafter as a method to heal we established the Light up the Room Foundation in Karen's name and committed to run the New York City marathon in her memory. Each year my son, Brandon and I run the NYC Marathon, this is our 9th year. If it was not for a career ending injury to Tiffany's foot there is no doubt that she too would be at the start with us each year. Now, truth be told, due to injury I have not been as consistent as my son who has not missed a year. As a side note, Brandon has never run any other race, until this summer, other than a marathon.

It was probably after the completion of our second marathon in 2010 at our victory dinner where Brandon said to me, "Dad, I will always run the marathon for Mom". My immediate response was and I am holding to which was, "Brandon, you have me until I am 60, after that I will always be there with you cheering you on." And so we run.

This year will be our 9th since Karen's passing and my last as a participant. I can tell you that the training does get harder with age. Irrespective of the pain, I am not going to let anything stop me from the finish. I know that whatever pain I endure during the months of training is nowhere



near the pain that Karen endured suffering from cancer and she did it with grace. My only hope is that I can finish with as much grace as she did life.

Race day is an awesome experience a feeling of expectation, joy and accomplishment. It is a special day for the Rust's we truly embrace it and the prospects of finishing because I have always loved how I felt when it was over....100% of the time.

If you would like to contribute to our NYC Marathon effort and the Melanoma Education Foundation you can do so by following either of the two links below.

Thank you and God Bless.

Tom, Tiffany and Brandon Rust

The Light Up the Room Foundation.org



Brandon: <https://www.crowdrise.com/melanomaeducationfoundationnyc2017/fundraiser/brandonrust>

Tom: <https://www.crowdrise.com/melanomaeducationfoundationnyc2017/fundraiser/tomrust1>

www.angelsrun.org