

Dedicating the 2003 Boston Marathon

By Carrie Young

This story is one of friendship.

Missy Wahlfeldt Levite was an old friend. We grew up together, going through confirmation at church, counselors at church camp for several summers and high school in Danville, Illinois. We also spent a lot of time together after high school. Missy would stay some weekends with me in my first apartment. We sure had some fun, crazy times together.

As time passed we grew apart. We still kept in touch with Christmas cards and the occasional correspondence. Four years ago Missy was diagnosed with breast cancer. This past January 2003 **Lewis Levite**, her husband, contacted me to notify me that she didn't have much time left. I immediately made the long trip to Dover, Delaware from Bloomington, Illinois to visit with Missy and her family. The visit included catching up with each other, getting to know her teen aged daughters **Patricia** and **Bethany** and visiting with **Mark** and **Sue** (Missy's brother and sister-in-law) — who also made the trip that weekend as a surprise for Missy.

After my return home during one of our many phone calls I told Missy I was dedicating my Boston Marathon race to her. I think if I could've seen her face she would have been glowing. Her voice sounded so pleased. I mentioned that I would need her strength with me that day. She said she would gladly give it. The race is always held on Patriot's Day at 12:00 noon; this years race would take place on April 21st.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2003 the cancer claimed Missy's life. Her husband, Lewis notified me that she was finally at peace.

February 25 was also the day I started my first speed work for Boston. I didn't want to train. I didn't want to push myself. But there I was. On the Illinois Wesleyan University indoor track ready for a workout. I finished my workout and found it was good therapy.

The week before the Boston Marathon I called Lewis, to talk about the marathon and Missy. We mentioned how we both hoped she'd still be around for the marathon and other events. Lewis told me Missy would be with me in spirit. That week was an emotional one for me thinking about the race but more importantly thinking of my final good bye to Missy.

I knew running Boston would be tough. The course had many hills, my emotions would be up and down and mentally I was not as prepared for the race as I could've been. I felt nervous. A friend of mine, **Karen Clark**, had always wanted to see Boston so she made the trip out too. I felt relieved to have some support with me.

Monday, April 21 was cool and sunny in the morning. I rode on the buses provided, to Hopkinton where the race would start, with **Walter Ruppman**. He had run Boston 7 times before so I was glad to have him around for encouragement and to answer all my questions. Walter and I found a spot to sit in the huge tent outside provided for the athletes. We had several hours to wait for the start of the race which gave me time to reflect on my race and Missy.

Dennis Killian and **Carol Reeb** stopped by to visit. **Mark Bayles** and **Tom Holthe** also joined our little get together in the tent waiting for the race to begin. Walter was experiencing some calf problems so he was expecting to run a slower race than normal for him.

Dennis Killian and I were hoping to run together for a 3:30-3:40 finishing time. We managed to get in the same starting corral thanks to some maneuvering by Dennis. The temperature at the start was warm (I later heard it was 71°F) but I kept my gloves with me — just in case I needed them later — as the temperature was suppose to drop the closer we got to Boston and the cool Atlantic Ocean. Turns out it was foolish thinking on my part.

I mentioned to Dennis that I was dedicating my race to my friend Missy. Dennis had also recently lost his brother to a long illness. We both had experienced a tremendous loss.

It took Dennis and I 10 minutes to get to the start of the race. With the chip timing system this would not affect our final race time. We both agreed to go out slow and pick it up later — a strategy we knew would help us achieve our goal. The first mile had a huge downhill. Hills, we were to learn by experience, were all throughout this course. We chatted quite a bit the first 10 miles. The small towns with large crowds cheering along the side of the road seemed to just fly by as we wracked up the miles. We passed Wellesley College and I remembered a guy and his wife from my Yoga class telling me to think about them as we ran through the deafening cheers from the Wellesley girls.

We were slowing down. At mile 15 I told Dennis I wouldn't be able to make our goal pace and he should go on without me. Dennis told me he wasn't going to leave me. I really appreciated his support. He was my “wing man” in so many ways.

As we entered Newton and another series of hills Dennis asked a spectator if we'd just finished the first or second hill. The man said it was the first. It sure didn't seem right so a little later Dennis asked someone else. As luck would have it, we'd only climbed the first Newton hill. That was such a tough mental concept.

As I continued my walk/run Dennis would get my water for me and even managed to grab a sponge for me. How nice! Now I could try and keep a little cool and hope the chills I kept experiencing would go away.

At one point in the race we passed **Will Ferrell**. The crowd went wild when they saw him. I had to explain to Dennis who he was (Saturday Night Live fame) but still it was fun to see a celebrity on the course. At one of the water stops Will Ferrell passed us and we never caught him again.

Dennis and I passed Walter Ruppman and Walter wondered why we were in the back of the pack with him. I mentioned how I didn't have much energy left for this race.

Throughout the day I kept thinking of Missy.

As we were getting closer and closer to the finish every step was an effort. We were weaving in and out of people and the crowds were still cheering us on. At one point Dennis told me we passed Fenway Park. It took quite a bit of energy to turn around and look but I saw it!

At last we saw the Citgo sign which meant the end was exactly 1 mile away. But, we had to cross an overpass where another hill was lurking. I couldn't believe it. I was so focused at that point that I couldn't see anything but what was right in front of me — the road and Runners. At last we turned the final corner and I saw the finish line. It looked so far away! I guessed it was half a mile

but it seemed longer. I surged (well it felt like a surge) across the finish line and stopped. Dennis and I congratulated each other and hugged. We made it! I said a silent thank you to Missy for pulling me through.

The Boston Marathon was my 6th marathon and felt like my toughest. The hills tore up my quads, and the heat was more a factor than normal (hadn't trained in it yet). I would not consider it ideal racing conditions.

The final finishing chip time for Dennis and me was 4:08:17. Boston was one of my slower marathons but worth every effort it took to finish. My other running friends I've mentioned finished as follows:

Walter Ruppman — 4:15.36

Carol Reeb — 4:31.38

Mark Bayles — 3:44.19

Tom Holthe — 4:10.47

Celebrity Will Ferrell — 3:56.12

My next race...(after a trail race on June 14th) the 2003 Race for the Cure 5K in Decatur on June 28th. I'm happy to participate in such a worthy cause, Breast Cancer Research. I pray a cure is found for this dreadful disease and more women who are diagnosed with breast cancer have a chance at a longer, healthier life.

I miss our talks and I wish Missy were still here with us.



Some of the Bloomington-Normal runners who completed the marathon from left: Erik Maki, Mark Bayles, Carrie Young, Tom Holthe and Patrick Bittner.



Carrie Young wearing her Boston Marathon finisher's medal and holding her race number.