

The 2012 Maple City Walk Marathon September 29, 2012

I had been looking forward to this day ever since last year's Maple City Walk – a chance to walk another marathon!

Last year, all I wanted to do was to finish the marathon (26.2 miles) in one piece, which I did in 8 hours and 56 minutes. This year, well of course I still wanted to finish the marathon in one piece, but in addition to that, my goal was to finish the marathon in 8 hours or less and not get sick afterward like I did last year. Last year I came down with a nasty case of bronchitis after the marathon, probably due to being exposed to chilly 35-45 mile-per-hour winds during most of the marathon. The marathon was very challenging because of the wind, but my motto was "Failure is not an option!" I just had to finish that marathon, especially since Julia Gautsche, one of the Maple City Walk organizers, told a Goshen News reporter that I planned to walk a marathon, and the reporter interviewed me before the walk began. I persisted and finished the marathon without hitting "the wall", but I felt slammed up against the wall for the next 2 or 3 weeks. Well, I say it's better to hit the wall *after* a marathon than *during* a marathon!

For this past year, I trained, plotted, schemed, and strategized, to finish the marathon in less time and in better condition. Obviously, the first thing to do to complete a marathon in less time is to walk faster. To be able to walk faster I needed to stay in shape during the winter and train harder during the spring and summer. After last year's marathon I kept in shape by continuing to walk 2 or 3 miles daily as much as possible during the week and walking 6-8 miles on the weekends before winter set in. Since it was a mild winter I continued to take short outdoor walks.

Luckily for me, spring began early with 80-degree temps in March. I took advantage of the warm weather and began to take longer walks and had worked up to a half-marathon (13.1 miles) by the end of March. From March through September I walked two half-marathons, six 14-milers, two 17s, one 21 and two 23s which was a lot more long walks than I had taken last year. I took a lot of 14-mile walks because that was the distance from my place to CR 33 on the Pumpkinvine Trail and back. I took a long walk almost every weekend and took numerous 2-3 mile walks during the week. A slacker I am not!

In February I purchased a GPS watch to monitor my miles and pace. Previously, I had used a pedometer to keep track of the miles I walked.

The problem with my pedometer was that its accuracy fluctuated depending on my stride, the pace I walked, and even with which pair of shorts I wore. I could walk the same distance, and my pedometer would vary by several miles. Another problem with my pedometer was that it could easily get reset if I happened to bump the reset button. In fact, that happened during last year's marathon.

The GPS watch was huge improvement over my pedometer. It varied only a few hundredths of a mile for the same distance, and it couldn't be easily reset by accident. Plus, not only did my GPS watch keep track of the miles I walked, but it also kept track of my average pace during a walk. It was satisfying to see my average pace decrease from 18-minute miles to 16-minute miles as my training continued. The only drawback to my GPS watch was that its battery lasted only 8 hours when the GPS was activated, another reason why I wanted to finish the marathon in 8 hours or less.

Losing weight was another way to make it easier to increase my walking speed. Although I had lost a few pounds from training for last year's marathon, I hadn't made much progress losing weight because I had the bad habit of snacking in the evening... spoonfuls of peanut butter, 2 or 3 granola bars etc. I kept saying I would stop snacking next week, but I said that every week, which of course meant I never stopped snacking!

Last January I entered the "Biggest Loser" competition at work hoping to break my snacking habit. Contestants paid \$10 to enter, and we had a weigh-in once a week. We had to pay an additional 50 cents for every pound we gained over our previous week's weight and \$1.00 for every pound we gained over our weight from our first weigh-in. After 12 weeks the person with the highest percentage of weight loss won 75% of the kitty, and the person who came in 2nd won the other 25%.

Since I really wasn't overweight like a lot of the other contestants, I realistically didn't stand a chance to win any \$\$\$. My goal was simply not to pay any more \$\$ into the kitty, which meant I couldn't gain any weight during the competition. That really motivated me to stop snacking in the evening! Eliminating snacking in the evening was the magic bullet for me to lose more weight than I ever thought possible. Not only did I keep my goal of not paying any additional \$\$ into the kitty, but I broke my snacking habit and came in 3rd with a 15.51% weight loss of 23.5 pounds! Too bad I didn't win any \$\$ though, because I needed to buy a new wardrobe, being that most of my clothes were now several sizes too large! Not that I'm complaining!

After the Biggest Loser competition ended, I lost a few more pounds by continuing to avoid snacking and taking longer and longer walks. By the time of this year's marathon I was 35-40 pounds lighter than I was when I walked the marathon last year. That's 35-40 less pounds of fat to carry around, making it a lot easier to walk faster.

Since I wanted to finish my marathon in 8 hours or less, all I needed to do was to walk the pace listed for an 8-hour marathon from the pace chart in "The Complete Guide to Marathon Walking" by Dave McGovern, right? Wrong! What the author failed to mention is that if you want to finish walking a marathon in a particular time you need to walk *faster* than the corresponding pace listed on the pace chart because you will not be walking 100% of the time. For example, out of the 8 hours and 56 minutes it took me to finish last year's marathon, I estimated that about 45 minutes was "down time" from waiting on traffic lights, waiting in line to use the port-a-potty, refilling my water bottles, changing CD's on my portable CD player, etc. To finish this year's marathon faster, not only did I need to walk faster, but I also needed to figure out ways to minimize my "down time".

Although I walked a marathon in last year's Maple City Walk, the Maple City Walk was actually a half-marathon walking event that had been held annually since 2009. I had walked the half-marathon in the 2009 and 2010 Maple City Walks, but I wanted a bigger challenge for 2011. So I took matters into my own hands by walking an entire marathon even though there was no official marathon option. Crazy, huh?

The walk began at the Power House by the Millrace near Washington St, continued through downtown Goshen to the Maple City Greenway on 5th St, and then followed the Pumpkinvine Trail to CR 33. CR 33 was the turnaround point to go back to the Millrace Power House for a 13.1-mile half-marathon walk. At CR 33 walkers got their entry card punched to prove they made it to CR 33, refilled their water bottles, and picked up a snack before heading back. At the finish, walkers were rewarded with a medal and turned in their entry cards for a drawing for a free pair of New Balance walking shoes. To my surprise, I won the pair of walking shoes last year. Quite deserving, don't you think?!

To walk the marathon, I walked the course twice. However, since the event was officially a half-marathon, I was on my own for my 2nd trip to CR 33 and back. That meant there were no snacks and water waiting for me at CR 33. I had to provide my own, or else go hungry and thirsty, highly

unadvisable for walking a marathon! So, I left a cooler filled with snacks and bottles of water at the Power House. When I got back from my 1st trip to CR 33, I repacked my bag with snacks and water bottles and was on my way to walk the course again.

This year, the Maple City Walk organizers decided have both half and full marathon options. Snacks and water would be provided for the full marathon, and I wouldn't need to spend time repacking my bag like last year. This would save me at least 5 minutes. Wonderful!

I enjoy listening to music when I go on long walks because the beat keeps me moving, especially near the end of a long walk. Years ago, I purchased a portable CD player to listen to music when I took short walks. That worked fine for 45-90 minute walks. However, for longer walks I either had to listen to the same CD over and over, or take a bunch of CDs with me and stop to change a CD every 60-90 minutes. Changing CDs is fine for a leisurely walk, but a time waster if one wants to improve their marathon time. Yes, I finally got with it and purchased an iPod! No more stopping to change CDs! This should cut another 10-15 minutes off my time.

I put together an 8-hour playlist including the "Mama Mia" and "Tommy" soundtracks, "The Essential Electric Light Orchestra", "More ABBA Gold", "Styx Classics", and of course "Queen's Greatest Hits"! Not only do the songs help keep me moving, but the playlist helps me know emotionally where I'm at in the marathon. For example, when I'm listening to the "Mama Mia" and "Tommy" soundtracks I tell myself, "Don't even think about all the miles you have to walk. You are just getting started!" When I'm listening to Electric Light Orchestra and ABBA I know I'm in the middle miles, when I'm listening to Styx I'm well past the halfway point, and when I'm listening to Queen I'm getting excited because I'm up to around miles 22-24. I put Queen near the end of my playlist because their songs have a great beat especially "Bicycle Race" and "Don't Stop Me Now". These songs will keep me moving, no matter how tired and sore I get. After Queen I added some very special songs such as "Don't Wait for Heroes" by Dennis DeYoung, "Winning it All" by The Outfield, and "The One and Only" by Chesney Hawkes. These are celebration songs to enjoy because I'm almost to the end of the marathon. For the very last song I chose an inspiring instrumental piece entitled "Olympic Spirit" from the "1988 Summer Olympics" soundtrack. After all, the marathon was my own personal Olympics! If everything went according to plan I would be listening to "Olympic Spirit" as I crossed the finish line. (Now if for some

miracle I got to the finish line in less than 8 hours, I was not going to slow down just so I could listen to “Olympic Spirit” as I crossed the finish line!)

During the last half of last year’s marathon, I kept in contact with Julia Gautsche, and Becky Christner by cell phone. I called them every hour or so to give them an update on how I was doing and to give them an estimate time of my arrival to the finish line. As mentioned earlier, Julia was one of the Maple City Walk organizers. Becky was a good friend from my Goshen College days. I kept in contact with them even though it slowed me down because I didn’t want them worrying about me out there on my own, plus I wanted a few people waiting for me when I crossed the finish line!

This year, since event organizers would be checking up on us during the entire marathon, I told Julia and Becky not to expect phone calls from me during my walk because I wanted to improve my time. I told them my goal was to finish in 8 hours, but that they might want to be waiting at the finish line earlier just in case I finished in less than 8 hours. Of course I still took my cell phone in case of an emergency. I also carried my ID and insurance card. Not that I expected anything to go wrong, but I believed in the Boy Scout’s motto, “Be prepared!”

With all these modifications I figured that I would cut 20-25 minutes off my “down time”. So to walk an 8-hour marathon I decided to walk at a pace for a 7.5-hour marathon which according to the book was 17:00 - 17:15 minute miles – a pace that I am capable of doing on a good day.

Of course there are certain elements of “down time” that can’t be avoided such as waiting for the traffic lights to change. Traffic is not stopped for the Maple City Walk like it is for the Chicago or New York City marathons. Also, I might have to wait on a train since I will need to cross the railroad tracks on 5th St four times during the marathon. A slow moving or stalled train would make me very unhappy! Finally, I might have to wait in a long line to use the port-a-potty during the marathon.

Of course weather is a variable no one has control of! A risk of having the Maple City Walk in the fall, rather than the summer, is that there is a higher probability for unpleasant weather on the day of the event. In fact, it was a chilly, rainy day for the 1st Maple City Walk back in 2009. The 2010 Maple City Walk started out with chilly mid 30-degree temps in the morning, but it warmed up a few hours later and became a beautiful day. As for last year when I walked the marathon, there was a wind advisory with 35-45 mph

wind gusts. This year I was hoping for a mild sunny day with a light breeze, morning temps in the 60s, and afternoon temps in the 70s. I don't ask for much, do I?

This past summer had been very hot and dry which worked out well for my training. Other than postponing a walk for 2 hours due to rain, I never had to cancel a training walk because of bad weather like I had to in 2011. I usually began my long walks in the morning while it was relatively cool. By the afternoon I sometimes struggled because of the 90+ degree temps and high humidity. But I will take hot, humid weather over cold, rainy, stormy, windy weather any day! After all the training and preparation I had done this past year, the marathon could be ruined by lousy weather! (In fact this year's New York City Marathon was canceled because of Hurricane Sandy.)

I didn't have to deal with unpleasant weather during my training until the weekend before the Maple City Walk. That Saturday was predicted to be cold in the morning with 40-degree temps and a chance for rain. I wanted to get some experience walking in that type of weather just in case it was cold and rainy on the day of the marathon. I got up early and completed an 8-mile walk. Although it was cold, it didn't rain during my walk. However, a heavy downpour began about 10 minutes after I got home from my walk. In the afternoon there was a thunderstorm with hail. What a miserable day that would have been for the marathon! Although, I have to admit that I would have enjoyed telling the story with gusto, had the marathon been on that day!

During the week before the marathon I kept checking the weather forecast and was relieved when Saturday, the day of the Maple City Walk, was predicted to be sunny with afternoon highs in the upper 60s to lower 70s. Unfortunately, the morning temps were predicted to be in the 40s. I would need to wear a jacket and gloves for the first hour or so until it warmed up. At events like the Chicago or New York City marathons, runners and walkers can discard their sweatshirts or jackets along the path, and they are collected for charity. This was not an option for the Maple City Walk. I planned to wear a lightweight jacket that I could stuff into my bag after taking it off, and I planned to leave my jacket with the event organizers at one of the check in points after it warmed up.

I needed to make other preparations during the week leading up to the marathon such as eating lots of pasta, making sure my iPod and GPS watch was charged, figuring out what to wear, and getting my water and

snacks ready. Although snacks would be provided at the CR 33 turnaround point, I planned to take some of my own comfort foods such as grapes and peanut butter granola bars. I always took grapes on long walks because they helped relieve my thirst if I ran out of water. Water would also be provided, but not bottled water. Organizers told us to bring our own water bottles. I planned to bring 2 bottles of water and have them refilled at the check in points.

Everything was going great except for one nagging problem. The pair of walking shoes that I had been breaking in for the marathon were not breaking in the way they should be breaking in. The shoes just didn't feel right, and they seemed to be a little bit larger than normal. They were the same brand, style, and size as all the walking shoes I had been wearing for years. Why did I have to draw a lemon now?! My other pair of walking shoes were too worn out for a marathon. What to do? I was still debating which pair of shoes to wear the day before the marathon. Neither pair felt right. The older pair, although exactly the right fit, had heels that were too worn down. The newer pair was a little too large, slowed me down and just plain didn't feel right. This was not the kind of problem to have the day before the marathon! Guess I can forget about walking the marathon in 8 hours! Should I even attempt the marathon at all? My feet ached. Did I over train? Why do I think I have to walk an entire marathon when most Maple City Walk participants are happy to walk a half-marathon? I was in panic mode!

Finally, in desperation I tried out a thicker pair of socks with the newer pair of shoes and walked a mile or so wearing them. That combination seemed to be the most comfortable choice. My worry was that I had never walked a long distance wearing those type of socks. Wearing an untried pair of socks was a risk, but what else could I do? My gut instinct told me to wear the newer pair of shoes with the thicker pair of socks.

I got up at 4:00am on the day of the marathon. For breakfast I ate one of those "Healthy Choice" dinners, which was what I always ate on the day of a long walk. I doubled checked my checklist to make sure I had everything I needed: iPod, GPS watch, regular watch, cell phone, granola bars, grapes, 2 bottles of water, keys, hat, sunglasses, toilet paper.... Hey, sometimes the port-a-potties were out of TP during my training walks! I put on sunscreen and insect repellent. The mosquitoes should be gone by now, but after being chewed up by the mosquitoes numerous times when walking through the wooded section of the Pumpkinvine trail; I wasn't taking any chances!

Per tradition I walked to the event. I must be one of the few people who actually walk to a marathon! Actually, I first walked to the Elkhart County Administration building on 2nd St where I'm employed and hung out there until it was time to head over to the Power House, 2 blocks away, where the marathon would begin and end. The 1.5-mile walk to my workplace gave me a chance to work out all the kinks in my body and gave me confidence that I had made the correct decision about what shoes and socks to wear. Just to be safe I had packed an extra pair of socks that had worked fine during the summer in case the thick socks didn't feel right while walking to my workplace. I also had another pair of walking shoes at work in case the shoes I was wearing didn't feel right. But the shoes and socks I was wearing felt great! I had made the correct decision. What a relief!

At work I stretched and got psyched up by listening to some of my favorite songs on my iPod, including "Don't Wait for Heroes" by Dennis DeYoung:

"I've got my dreams. I know you think that's crazy, but I won't give up 'cause I've got this burning desire in me... While the world sleeps I sit up all night thinking and making my plans 'cause there's something special ahead for me... So don't you tell me that I'm wasting my time, ruining my life, and the odds against me are a million to one. Don't be concerned. I'll take the heat for all the chances I'm gonna take, mistakes that I'll make. Wait and see. You're gonna hear from me... Don't wait for heroes. Believe in yourself. You've got the power. Winners are losers who got up and gave it just one more try."

This song was my anthem, especially last year when I wasn't sure if I could walk a marathon or not. This year I knew I could walk a marathon, but could I walk it in 8 hours? I had been aiming for this goal ever since last year's marathon. I felt physically, mentally, and emotionally ready because I had done everything possible to get myself ready for the marathon: taking the training walks, figuring out how to minimize down time, losing weight etc. During this past summer I even sent thoughts of encouragement to the "future me" who would walk the marathon. I know that sounds far out, but hey it can't hurt, right? Also, not that I am superstitious or anything, but I didn't cut my hair after starting training last spring (you know, like Samson wouldn't cut his hair to keep his strength).

My game plan was not to walk any faster than 17-minute miles during the 1st half of the marathon. Then I would try to walk a little faster during the

2nd half. At that pace I should be able to finish the marathon in 8 hours, provided I didn't have to wait on a slow moving or halted train, didn't have to battle wind, and didn't hit the dreaded wall. As long as I didn't start out too fast, I should be OK.

Mentally, I divide the marathon into 4 main segments: the start at the Power House to CR 33, CR 33 back to the Power House, and then repeat those 2 segments. I further divide those 4 segments into the start through downtown Goshen, the wooded section from State Road 4 to CR 127, the open field section from CR 127 to CR 31, and the final section from CR 31 to CR 33. I don't think, "OMG! I have to walk 26.2 miles today!" I just think of each segment as it comes and mentally check it off my "to do list". For example, at the beginning of the marathon, all I'm concerned about is getting through downtown Goshen, hoping I'm not stopped by too many traffic lights, or a train at the 5th St RR crossing. After that I will think about getting through the wooded section from State Road 4 to CR 127 etc.

A lot of people showed up for the walk. Organizer, Julia Gautsche announced there were around 120 participants with 6 marathoners registered. After a few announcements we were underway!

Although I planned not to walk any faster than 17-minute miles for the 1st half of the marathon, I started walking the same pace as everyone else and was surprised that I was already walking at a 16:40 minute-per-mile pace through downtown Goshen. I thought I would settle down to a 17 minute-per-mile pace after crossing State Road 4 and getting into the wooded section. However, when I got to the wooded section I was shocked to see I was walking at a 15:50 - 15:55 pace. "Slow down! You are going to hit the wall!" I kept telling myself, but I didn't slow down! The pace felt great! So much for my plan to walk 17-minute miles! I through that plan out the window! Sure hope I won't pay for it later. When my pace got down to 15:46, I forced myself slow down. I though. "OK, maybe I'm gonna be able to walk faster than I originally planned, and I will keep up this 15:50 - 15:55 pace as long as it feels comfortable, but not go any faster."

A port-a-potty was located at CR 28, about 3.25 miles into the walk. My plan was not to take a pit stop there unless I really needed to. A line of people was waiting to use the port-a-potty, and since I didn't need to go, I kept walking. The next port-a-potty was at the turnaround point at CR 33. I was hoping there wouldn't be a long line there like last year. Since I thought I was ahead of a majority of the walkers, and I didn't see anyone immediately ahead of me, I thought my chances were good for a short line

or no line at all. To my relief there was no line at the CR 33 port-a-potty. I took care of business, got my entry card stamped, got my water bottles refilled, picked up a snack, and was on my way back.

So far so good! I was keeping up the 15:50 - 15:55 pace and felt fine. I tried to walk the curves on the path in a straight line as much as possible to cut down on extra distance, remembering that the shortest distance between 2 points is a straight line from my high school geometry class some 40 years ago. My high school geometry teacher had always said that geometry would come in handy someday...well, it sure took long enough!

One the way back I planned to stop at the CR 28 port-a-potty whether I needed to use it or not and skip the port-a-potty when I got back to the Power House. Most likely there wouldn't be a line at the CR 28 port-a-potty since the walkers would be spread out along the path. However, there could be a line at the Power House port-a-potty because in addition to the walkers who had finished the half-marathon, there would be family and friends waiting on walkers who hadn't finished.

The Pumpkinvine Trail was open to anyone who wanted to use it during the Maple City Walk. Since it turned out to be such a warm sunny day, there were lots of people using the trail who were not participating in the walk. Between CR 127 and CR 28 about 15-20 Amish bicycle riders passed me. I didn't think much about that until I arrived to the CR 28 port-a-potty where I planned to take a pit stop. You guessed it! All of those Amish bicycle riders who passed me earlier were waiting in line to use the port-a-potty! Change of plans! I calculated that I would spend more time waiting in line at CR 28 than at the Power House, so I didn't stop and kept walking. Good thing I wasn't in dire need to go!

As I approached CR 4, I heard a train grind to a halt. "Oh no! Not a stopped train!" As I got closer to the RR crossing on 5th St, the train started moving ever so slowly. I crossed my fingers, hoping that the train would be gone by the time I got to the crossing. No such luck! The train was still there when I got to the RR crossing, and there were quite a few walkers who had been ahead of me waiting at the tracks.

"Drat!" After the train clears the crossing all of us will get to the Power House around the same time, and there will lots of competition for the port-a-potty! Ah, but all those walkers were most likely half-marathoners! I figured when they got to the finish at the Power House, they would collect

their medals, turn in their cards for the shoe drawing, and congratulate each other before going to the port-a-potty. Since I was walking a full marathon, I didn't need to do all that stuff and would head immediately to the port-a-potty. Then I'd get my card stamped and my water bottles refilled. Such planning! I felt like I was playing a game of chess! My strategy worked like a charm! There was no line at the port-a-potty, I took my pit stop, got my card stamped, got my water bottles refilled, dropped off my jacket, and was on my way for the 2nd half of the marathon.

It felt great to have half of the marathon done! As I headed through town to the Pumpkinvine Trail, I passed a lot of walkers coming the opposite direction who were close to finishing their half-marathons. I was still keeping my pace of 15:50 - 15:55 minute miles, and I felt great! If I kept up this pace, not only would I finish the marathon in 8 hours, but I also had a shot of finishing it in around 7.5 hours, surpassing all expectations. What a great day!

Somewhere between State Road 4 and CR 28 my iPod quit working! "What the...?!" I stopped momentarily to try to figure out what went wrong. I turned my iPod off and on, and tried a few other things, but nothing worked. "Rats!" My iPod battery must be dead! I charged my iPod on Thursday, but I must have left it on or something. Well, no time to sit around and moan about it, I have to keep walking if I want to finish the marathon in 8 hours. I stopped at the CR 28 port-a-potty, and played around with my iPod while taking care of business. To my relief I got it working again! The only thing I could figure out was that perhaps the cable connecting my headphones to my iPod must have become loose so no music came through, and I re-established the connection without knowing it. What ever happened, the important thing was that I got my iPod working again!

I was really enjoying my marathon walk! The sun was shining, and the sky was a beautiful shade of deep blue. Some of the leaves had turned brilliant red, contrasting with the leaves that remained bright green. The view was spectacular!

As I was walking through the open fields between CR 127 and CR 31, I kept thinking about how I was struggling against the wind at this point during last year's marathon and how every muscle in my body was aching. Not this year! I was still keeping pace and going strong. Somewhere between CR 31 and the turnaround point at CR 33, Sherry Wenger, one of

the organizers, passed me on her bicycle and asked me how I was doing. I assured her that I was doing fine.

At CR 33, while I was getting my card stamped, my water bottles refilled, and collecting snacks, I asked how the other 5 marathoners were doing. Sherry said 3 of the preregistered marathoners didn't show up for the walk (chickens!), and the other 2 marathoners had already come and gone. One of those marathoners was Doug Yoder, a track coach at Goshen College, who runs marathons. I don't know who the other marathoner was.

About 15 minutes after leaving CR 33 I realized I had left my stamped card there! I figured Sherry would tell Julia that I had made it to CR 33 so I wasn't going to waste time by going back to get my card!

As I approached 20 miles, I knew I had the walk in the bag! During my 23-mile training walks I felt like I went on "automatic pilot" after hitting mile 20 because my body just kept going, and it took more effort to stop than to keep walking. I was expecting the same thing to happen. However, around mile 20 my pace began to slip from 15:55 to 15:58. At the start of the marathon, I had only wanted to finish in 8 hours, but now since I had been walking at a 15:00 - 15:55 pace throughout the marathon, I wanted to finish with a pace less than 16:00 minutes-per-mile. I kept telling myself, "I won't hit the Wall." and "Come on legs. Keep going. You can do it!"

I decided not to take a pit stop at the CR 28 port-a-potty because Queen's "Bicycle Race" was playing on my iPod, and I could always count on that song to get me moving faster! I thought I was walking faster, but after the song finished, my GPS watch still showed my pace at 15:58. I was going to have to dig deep to keep my pace from going over 16:00. But what I really wanted to do was to get my pace back down to at least 15:55. I felt a "force field" closing in around my legs, forcing them to take shorter and shorter strides. This didn't happen at last year's marathon. In fact, I thought the last 3 miles were not that difficult, but that was probably because I was no longer out in the open fields and being pounded by the wind! Plus, my pace was probably only 18-20 minutes-per-mile, considerably slower.

"Dig deep! Don't hit the wall! Keep going!" I kept telling myself. I was in total concentration of putting one foot in front of the other. As I approached State Road 4 someone walking the opposite direction called out to me, asking if I was walking the marathon. I shouted back, "Yes, and I've got to keep going!" Gradually, my pace was going back down... 15:57... 15:56.

But could I get my pace down to 15:55? “Dig deep! Come on legs, you can do it!”

Earlier, I had mentioned how I tried to cut down on excess mileage by walking the curves on the path in straight lines. Well, I still managed to pick up extra mileage because according to my GPS watch I hit 26.2 miles, a marathon, somewhere between State Road 4 and the bridge over Rock Rum Creek, and I still had a ways to go before getting back to the finish line at the Power House. OK, so I’m going to be walking more than a marathon! Last year I didn’t have a GPS watch and had always wondered if I had really walked a marathon. Now I knew for sure that I had indeed walked an entire marathon last year. As I hit 26.2 miles, Queen’s “We are the Champions” was playing on my iPod. How appropriate!

“We are the champions my friend, and we will keep on fighting until the end. We are the champions! We are the champions! No time for losers because we are the champions of the world!”

I was a marathoner again! This gave me a needed boost to keep going!

The bridge over Rock Rum Creek was up hill, and I really struggled to cross it! I wasn’t expecting to struggle so hard crossing that bridge, but my legs felt like jelly, and they didn’t want to go uphill after walking more than 26.2 miles. By sheer willpower I crossed the bridge and continued on.

There was no train at the RR crossing on 5th St. “Hooray!” A surge of adrenaline surged through me as I walked, or rather ran through downtown Goshen to the finish line. Of course, I was stopped by traffic lights, but that gave me a little break to catch my breath before taking off. Finally, I just needed to get across 3rd St, and I was home free! 3rd St was very busy, and the traffic light was notoriously slow to change at the Washington intersection where I needed to cross. Fortunately, a medium strip separates the lanes of traffic. As soon as the traffic cleared in one direction, I crossed, and as soon as the traffic cleared in the other direction, I crossed again. I wasn’t waiting on that ever-so-slow traffic light to change!

After crossing 3rd St I ran as fast as I could to the finish line at the Power House. I wanted to give whoever was waiting for me a show! Dire Straits’s “Walk of Life” was playing on my iPod as I crossed the finish line. What a fitting song!

“...Hand me now my walking shoes...Do the walk. Do the walk of life.”

It was the walk of my life! According to my GPS watch, I walked 26.81 miles in 7 hours and 24 minutes with 18 minutes of “down time”, totally surpassing my goal of 8 hours! I walked the marathon 92 minutes faster than I walked it last year! And yes, I did get my pace down to 15:55! What a thrill! Yes, 26.81 miles was more than a marathon. Somehow I had picked up an extra .61 miles on the course! Note: I had walked the actual 26.2 miles in 7 hours and 13 minutes. So which time counts for the marathon? You be the judge!

Julia and Becky were waiting for me at the finish line, Julia had her camera ready and had fun taking my picture. When I asked her if she got a picture of me crossing the finish line, she said, “No!” and asked if I could recreate the finish! Being the good sport that I am, I did, but did it in “Chariots of Fire” slow-motion-style! Julia gave me a marathon medal, and I was tickled pink because it was the kind I could wear around my neck instead of a pin on medal which is what had been awarded at previous Maple City Walks. Julia said the organizers had decided to give the marathoners a medal they could wear around their neck while the half-marathoners got a pin on medal.

What a wonderful day! Yes, there were a few glitches such as my shoes not feeling right the day before, waiting on a train, an iPod malfunction, and port-a-potty strategies deal with during the marathon. But that was all part of the journey. There is nothing more satisfying than setting a goal, going through the steps to achieve that goal, solving problems along the way, and finally achieving that goal. This is a day I would love to repeat!

My original goal had been to walk the marathon in 8 hours, and had I walked the marathon in 8 hours, my next goal would have been to walk the marathon in 7.5 hours. But I already achieved that goal by walking the marathon in 7 hour and 24 minutes. This means only one thing... my next goal will be to walk the marathon in 7 hours or less!

As for achieving my other goal of not getting sick after the marathon like last year, I met that goal too. Other than feeling like my mind and body were “out of sync” the following day and my shins feeling quite sore for the next 3 or 4 days, I was fine.

It is now December 2012, and I have taken six 14-mile walks since the marathon with ever improving paces and times. I achieved a personal best for that distance on October 28 with a time of 3 hours and 34 minutes and a pace of 14:50. I tied that time on November 18. The weather was unseasonably warm on Dec 1, and I walked 17 miles in 4 hours and 34 minutes with a pace of 15:08, a personal best for that distance.

I will be forced to take a break from distance walking when winter sets in, but as soon as the spring thaw comes I will start training for the 2013 Maple City Walk Marathon!

Epilogue

I achieved my 7-hour goal at the 2013 Maple City Walk Marathon with a time of 6 hours: 47 minutes in spite of a stalled train on 5th St and having to take a detour to the overpass. My times for the 2014 and 2015 MCW marathons were 6 hours: 11 minutes and 6 hours: 27 minutes respectively. My goal for the 2016 MCW marathon is 6 hours, a time that I thought was totally unrealistic back in 2012.

-Vivian Schmucker