

Patrick Rooney
"More Than Just a Race"
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Lowell House

April 15th, 2013, dawned bright and mild, perfect running weather. One of my most salient memories of that early morning was listening to Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" laying in bed, shouting out the refrain in quiet bursts.

The song, incidentally, has nothing to do with physical, athletic running. It's about finding meaning in the midst of a difficult journey and having faith that the end of that journey will be redemptive in some special, unforeseen way.

Make no mistake about it, the marathon that day was going to be a joy to run: shoulder to shoulder with a group of friends, we'd step across the starting line and gaze east, over the mass of bobbing heads, into the sun, confident only in the fact that we had no idea what was coming along the course to Boston. That uncertainty was something that I had learned from experience. The year earlier, I was literally brought to my knees trying to beat a time goal in the 95-degree heat.

But for all of the unpredictability of the marathon, the one thing that seemed certain was that the final turn would yield an awesome sight. The finish line, a yellow-painted section of asphalt stretching across Boylston Street, marked the end of the uncertainty of the race and the beginning of a collective celebration.

And that's what made the bombings so terrible. I was three blocks past the finish line and saw the blasts and felt the ground spasm under my feet. The certainty and joy that final destination had represented to me quickly dissipated with the wispy smoke wafting into the sky.

As a participant and an eyewitness, I've given up trying to understand the tragedy of that day, the heartbreak of mothers losing their children and the lingering shock that so many carried during the following weeks. I've given up trying to rationalize evil. I can't wrap my head around it, and to be honest I'm okay with that.

At the time, though, I had so many questions: How could I, how could we find any redemption for what had happened? How could the city heal? Almost immediately we could see people who made us all take heart. News reports detailed how runners who had already completed 26 miles continued to Mass General to give blood. Videos surfaced showing volunteers and police jumping barriers minutes after the blasts to help the wounded. These heroic actions revealed us to be "Boston Strong". The healing process had begun.

Having carried the memory of that marathon day with me for six months, I personally found closure in an unexpected way, on a warm night in Fenway Park.

Much like the marathon, the Red Sox have historically served as a symbol of the spirit of Boston, its grit and perseverance. With the “Boston Strong” motto memorializing the tragedy and the heroism of April, the city began once again embracing the reassuring rhythm of summer ball. Though the prior season had seen the team sink to last place in the final AL East standings, by October, the Sox had found themselves in the most unlikely of circumstances: a playoff run culminating with a World Series berth. Throughout the season, the team was carrying the hopes of a scarred city with every pitch, easing the healing process. By the postseason, they seemed destined for victory.

In a bizarre stroke of luck, I was able to attend the final game of the World Series with a group of friends. The atmosphere was unlike anything I had ever witnessed. A city that had lost so much earlier in the year was rallying around their team, not to forget the past but to honor it, a fact made abundantly clear by the “B Strong” banner that hung proudly from the Green Monster. As the last pitch hit the back of the catcher’s glove, the crowd erupted in cathartic relief. It was pure rejoicing in awe of what had come to pass.

That Saturday at the parade, Jared Saltalamacchia placed the Championship Trophy atop the marathon finish line on Boylston Street in tribute to the bombing victims and to those conquering seemingly insurmountable odds of rehabilitation. Memories were shared and lives were honored. For me, closure had arrived in that perfectly unassuming, yet awe-inspiring, moment.

My experience with the Boston marathon has been a tangled web of emotions, filled with unimaginable lows and incredible highs. And it isn’t over yet. On April 21st, 2014, with friends old and new, I’ll cross that starting line again. We’ll be running with a purpose, carrying the memories of so many, helping to build back that certainty of a joyful finish for generations of runners to come.