

Stars and Stripes
My Journey to “Qualify” on the 4th of July
Marcie Butler

I have always been a spur of the moment decision maker. When I make a decision I go with it. So at some point this winter I decided that the Butler Family (Vann, Gino and I) would take a summer vacation that would take us 3,157 miles from our home. I called my sister, Liz, to confirm that she'd not only have us, but be so kind and watch the boys as I ran a marathon in Portland, OR. Without hesitation she accepted my plans. So moments later I booked our flight.

June 25, 2011 I boarded the airplane with my three and not-quite-two-year-old. I chose a night time flight in hopes that they would be asleep for most of the flight. After three hours of restless fidgeting I had two sleeping toddlers. We flew into Portland, roughly 6 hours from my sister's house. I had booked us a minivan and a night in Portland to help with the jet lag. Once we touched down I was giddy for our adventure to begin.

I will spare you the details of the vacation, since many of you saw my never ending posts and “check-ins” via FaceBook. I will say, while in Oregon I accomplished all that I wanted to do, and more, while leaving room to explore new destinations on our next family vacation out West. During those 10 days in Oregon the boys and I played on many playgrounds, splashed around at a very cool Oregon themed splash pad, explored one of the most extensive and engaging children's museums I've ever seen, waded in the Rouge River, checked out an impressive zoo, went camping amongst the majestic redwoods, ate well, laughed often, played until we nearly passed out with exhaustion, and enjoyed time with my family. What more could I ask for in a vacation? Oh right a Boston qualifying marathon time.

The expo was an extreme contrast to every marathon expo I have attended. It was more like a packet pickup to a local 5k. I arrived at the running store gave my name, got my bib number, pins, and tee shirt (the design and fit is one of my favorites).

Forth of July. Crack of dawn. Dressed in my lululemon finery. Bib number on. Timing chip on. Out the hotel door.

I registered for this marathon for two reasons:

1. It fell within the timeframe for qualifying for the 2012 Boston Marathon
2. It fell within the timeframe I would be in Oregon

Aside from the two reasons above I knew very little about this race before happily signing up for it. The race website claimed it was “about the flattest and fastest

half and full marathon on the West Coast.” Knowing little more than that I boarded the bus.

When I stepped off the bus I was treated to one of the most spectacular sunrises I have ever seen. The brilliant colors blended together and spread out over the strawberry patches and corn fields. This marathon, while in Portland, was run entirely on a small farming island, Sauvie Island. Before the race began I meandered through the start/finish line farm and stopped to pet the sheep for good luck and dropped off my bag at the check in. This was an extremely small race, so small that when we were urged to line up I somehow found myself a few feet from the start line without that being my intention.

This was easily the most gorgeous course that I have ever run! On the way out the Willamette River was on the left and lush farmlands were on the right. There were about 8 miles of running exclusively through farmlands, wildlife preserves, parks, and residential neighborhoods (think farm houses on acres of land), The last miles we ran along the Columbia River.

I was deliriously happy to be running. With each step I came more alive and I drank in the sights and sounds. Along the river I watched the boats pass by, people fishing in canoes, bigger boats out for a sunrise cruise, I even saw a few house boats. I saw hawks and other birds gliding above. I waved to some of the farmers in the fields and spectators along the course. The spectators were few and far between but in their absence I enjoyed the breathtaking views of snow capped mountains in the distance. I felt like I was running through the classic American song: “America the Beautiful” by Katherine Lee Bates.

I set a goal for myself and I intended to keep it! Anytime I felt my energy crashing I would shoot pack a packet of gu. I hate gu. I think the consistency is gross and the flavors are less than desirable, but I packed 5 packets in my skort pocket and I used all 5, jet blackberry flavor. Around mile 24 my body began to revolt the intake of gu and for nearly a mile I dry-heaved my way past people, apologizing for the sound as I approached.

It felt good, DAMN good, to be near the finish with steam in the engine. I enjoyed the fact that I was still beaming ear to ear knowing my goal was within reach. After the nausea passed I picked up my pace and kept my eyes focused of the road ahead and my ears were keenly aware of the announcer’s voice becoming louder and clearer with every step. As I approached the home stretch I had to take a sharp right turn and run about 200 yards to the finish line. As I came closer to the turn I heard the excited scream of my sister, she spotted me and lead the charge hooting and hollering for me to RUN I was almost there, literally, and with my goal.

I sprinted to the finish with a time of 3:39:50. I needed 3:40. I saw the time on the finish line clock and I immediately began to cry. Tears of joy! Within a few

seconds of crossing the finish line I was embraced by my sister and the boys! Vann asked me why I was crying. My answer: because Mommy is VERY happy. My niece and nephew, although teenagers also looked perplexed. Jacob also asked why I was crying. My sister told him that I had just ran a time that qualified me for the Boston Marathon. I'm sure he was less than thrilled at the significance. Both he and my niece, Iris, offered hearty congratulations. My sister's boyfriend, Ginger, was also on hand the whole day helping with the boys and gave me an excited celebratory hug. I was sweaty and smelly but so happy that I had my family there with me to celebrate!

I have always been a bottomless pit and devour unholy amounts of food when I finish a long run, but on that day I wanted no part of food, even the home made strawberry shortcake with fresh whipped cream that they boasted about online. I just wanted to take in that moment in time, my moment in time, my first qualifying time! With joyful tears in my eyes I called Paul and my parents with the news, I was nearly jumping out of my skin with excitement.

417 finishers. I finished 98th. 5th for my age. 18th for women. Talk about an ego boost for a marathon! I highly recommend this marathon, the low key ease and breathtaking views make it worth the trip. If you are in search of a marathon in each of the 50 states, skip the city and go for the beauty, you won't regret it!

I trained my ass off for that marathon. With the advice and guidance of my coaches I got there. With the continued support of my Mom who watched the boys on many of my long runs I got there. With the many logged long runs with Rob and with Kara I got there. With so much positive energy from the East Coast and all over the FaceBook world I got there. With the flooding of good luck text messages I got there. MOSTLY I think the fear of putting it out there "running a qualifying time" and coming home without it, certainly propelled my feet and got me there!

The fear of putting it out there, verbally or online, for all to bear witness to is a powerful motivator!

Upcoming goals:

September 11, 2011 – my first half IronWOMan. Pumpkinman, Maine - My goal as told to me by sMartOne: remember to breath and have fun, you only get one 1st time!

November 2011 –Manchester Marathon - My goal: run and enjoy the time with my West Coast marathon partner Alison Williams

January 2012 – the Goofy Challenge - My goal: to be Goofy with my favorite training partner, Paul!

The Big goal for some undetermined marathon: RUN a 3:30 marathon and finish with a smile!