

The Quest for the Buckle

John A. Gunther

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My Crew: Jim, Barbara and Gretchen

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS THE WESTERN STATES 100 MILE ENDURANCE RUN?

In 1955 Wendell Robie and five horsemen rode the Western States Trail from Squaw Valley to Auburn, proving that horses could still cover 100 miles in one day. Thus the Western States Trail Ride or the Tevis Cup “100 miles-one day” ride began. In 1974 with the inspiration and encouragement of Drucilla Barner Tevis, veteran horse rider Gordy Ainsleigh joined the horses at the start of the Western States Trail ride to see if he could complete the course on foot.

Twenty Three hours and forty two minutes later, Gordy arrived in Auburn, proving that a runner could indeed traverse the rugged 100 miles in one day. In 1976, Ken “Cowman” Shirk ran the 100 miles, finishing just 30 minutes over the 24-hour mark.

In 1977, 14 men from four states participated in the 1st official **Western States Endurance Run**, which was held in conjunction with the Tevis Cup ride. Runners were monitored by Dr. Bob Lind at the three veterinary stops set up for the horses. Runners were responsible for producing all of their own supplies, except water. Three runners finished the course with Andy Gonzales, age 22 in the record breaking time of 22:57; and Peter Mattei and Ralph Paffenbarger, ages 53 and 54 tied in 28:36 (and the 30-hour award was born.

In the fall of 1977, the board of Directors for the Western States Endurance Run was formed as a part of the Western States Trail Foundation. The run organization later became its own entity. In 1978 the event took place in June, a month earlier than the Tevis Cup ride. The event mushroomed to include 21 aid stations and six medical checks, thanks to an ever growing corps of loyal volunteers and the support of the Placer County Sheriff’s Communication Reserve and the Search and Rescue Unit. 63 adventurers ran the race, and the first woman, Pat Smythe, finished in 29:34.

One hundred forty-three runners from 21 states and three foreign countries attempted the course in 1979. Since then, the run has reached its full entrance quota and draws athletes from across the nation and around the world.

The Western States Endurance Run is one of the oldest ultra trail events in the world and certainly one of the most challenging.

The run is conducted along the Western States Trail starting at Squaw Valley, California and ending in Auburn, California, a total of 100.2 miles. The trail ascends from the Squaw Valley floor (elevation 6,200 feet) to Emigrant Pass (elevation 8,750 feet) a climb of 2,550 vertical feet in the first 4 ½ miles. From the pass, following the

original trails used by the gold and silver miners of the 1850's, runners travel west, climbing another 15,540 feet and descending 22, 970 feet before reaching Auburn.

Most of the trail passes through remote and rugged territory, accessible only to hikers, horses and helicopters.

Due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the trail, the Western States Endurance Run differs substantially from other organized ultra runs. Adequate mental and physical preparation are of the utmost importance to each runner, as the mountains, although beautiful, are relentless in their challenge and unforgiving to the ill-prepared.

The race begins at 5:00 am on Saturday of the last weekend in June at the west end of Squaw Valley. Runners must reach the finish line no later than 11:00 am the following day in order to be eligible for an award. Those who finish the race with 24 hours receive a belt buckle inscribed with,"100 miles in one day," and those finishing in 24 hours one minute to 30 hours receive a belt buckle inscribed with "100 miles,"

Approximately 1,500 dedicated volunteers help out at each Western States Endurance Run. They are the life-blood of the run and will do everything possible to make your day and your run a success. Many spend more hours out on the trail than do the runners themselves.

I would like to put the race into perspective with some interesting facts. The Forest Service allows only 369 runners every year, so you must put you name into a lottery to be eligible to run the race. To enter the lottery you must qualify with a specific time in a 100 or 50 mile race. I qualified by doing 3 - 50 mile races within the time limit of each race (usually 12 hours), and by volunteering a specific number of hours as a volunteer doing course repair or race assistance. A startling fact is that 10% of those chosen by the lottery in November will not make it to the starting line in June due to injury, illness or other "real life" interventions. The number of lottery positions selected is based on a five year average of finishers in the race, with the entries for this endurance race averaging 1000 runners.

The course record holder for the men is Scott Jurek with a time of 15 Hours, 36 minutes, 27 seconds in 2004 for an average of 9 minutes, 36 seconds per mile. As of 2008, he has won the men's race and was the overall first finisher in 7 races. The course record holder for the women is Ann Transon in a time of 17 hours, 37 minutes, 51 seconds in 1994, for an average of 10 minutes, 58 seconds per mile. As of 2008, she has won the women race 13 times. Any runner that finishes 10 races within the time limit of 30 hours receives a gold belt buckle inscribed with the words "1000 miles" on it.

CHAPTER TWO

MY GOAL IS TO FINISH

The Western States Endurance Race is a life changing event of immense proportions. You don't wake up one morning and suddenly decide that you have decided to run a 100 mile race. The decision could come about with a moment of insanity, but for me it was the challenge.

Often times in human struggles we come up with goals and dreams that seem so important at the very moment of their conception, that we make the dream bigger than life. Then, with some discouragement from others whose opinion we value, or the lack of personal discipline, or the erosion of unfulfilled moments, we lose our desire to pursue the dream. The moment of getting started is easy. It is the minutes, the many hours of running, and the days that follow that are the key to success. So this is a chronicle of events leading up to my finishing the Western States 100 mile Endurance Run.

Let's briefly discuss the 1992 and the 1994 races that I didn't finish, but learned valuable lessons from. In 1992, I ran 30 miles and failed to urinate the entire time, gaining 8 pounds. At Robinson Flat aid station, I was told that I needed to urinate in order to continue. Failing that test after drinking 40 ounces of ice cold water, and when the time limited expired, my wrist band was cut off and my dream was left uncompleted. The funny thing was that over the next two hours I urinated every 15 minutes and lost the eight pounds that I had gained over 8 hours of running. Why this happened is unexplained. In 1994, my podiatrist had doubled the Spenco pads on my orthotics, and when arriving at Rocky Chucky aid station (mile 78.1), I had two large blisters under both of my big toes, losing both toe nails, and I eventually missed the cutoff time, and had to ride in a vehicle over a very bumpy road to get out of the American River Canyon. The lessons were to train under difficult conditions, do not change the dynamics in my running shoes, and to believe that I could finish running 100 miles.

The race and training had become somewhat of an obsession for me over the greater part of the previous four years. It was an accomplishment that I desired to complete and then move onto other challenges in my life. I celebrated my 50th birthday in 1995 and decided at the time that this would be my last entry into the lottery for the Western States Endurance Run. I had been in various stages of training for ultra distance events for the last four years. I had averaged between 1750 to 2300 miles per year of running combined with approximately 800 miles of indoor turbo bicycle training. It was almost fate that I was selected in 1995 for next year's race. A fellow racer had been injured, and at the draw through our running club in January, I was selected. I remember saying that I was ready mentally to finish the race. Soon, the booklet arrived from the race directors, Helen and Norman Klein. The 41 page booklet covered every aspect of the race, including a new rule that you must carry a plastic bag to pick up your feces and

dispose of used toilet paper due to the problem in years past of littering on the course. I read the book a number of times and soon I began planning my strategy for the race.

I initially discussed this adventure with my wife, Barbara, because as the crew and pacer coordinator, a lot of responsibility fell on her shoulders. She agreed for the third time to plan this out. The next thing I did was get my pacers scheduled. Doug Plourde, a running friend for five years, would run with me from the Foresthill School check point (mile 62.0) to the Green Gate check point (mile 79.9). At this point in the run, my bonus son Steve Larrieu would run from Green Gate to the finish line with me. I hoped that the pacers would go to the training runs I had planned over the next six months to familiarize themselves with the course, as both would begin their runs with me in the dark.

Next, I talked to my faithful and dependable crew of Jim and Gretchen Wolfe (experienced after my two previous attempts at finishing this race), and they decided to avoid sleep and deprive themselves of a normal week-end and join me at the critical crew access points: Robinson Flat (mile 30.2); Michigan Bluff (mile 55.7); Foresthill School (mile 62); Highway 49 crossing (mile 93.5), and hopefully the finish line (mile 100.2). Also, I asked by bonus son Jim and his wife Michele to be my second crew, but to my disappointment, they said they would be in Japan for the Ironman Triathlon. Also, my mom and dad said they would meet me at the finish, along with my sister Sue and my brother Paul. What a supporting cast! I was hoping that they would all meet me at Robie Point (mile 98.0) and walk with me to the finish line on the track oval at Auburn High School.

The secret to the success of this major physical and mental challenge is to be 100% physically prepared and 100% mentally hardened to face the demons on the trail. The two prior attempts had been a great learning lesson and I would have to apply those lessons to my education for this years run. One of the major challenges to this race is the elevation gain and loss factors that are listed on the back of the T-shirts given to race participants and volunteers:

Total elevation gain: 15,540 feet

Total elevation loss: 22,970 feet

Net elevation loss (Squaw Valley to Auburn) 3,930 feet

Just these statistics alone makes one aware the amazing challenge that this race offers over a maximum of 30 hours (the race cut-off time limit). In fact, this statistic may keep some runners from even attempting such a feat.

This written description says it all,

“Beginning in Squaw Valley, site of the 1960 Winter Olympic Games, the trail ascends from the valley floor (elevation 6,200 feet) to Emigrant Pass (elevation 8,750 feet) a climb of 2,550 feet in the first 4-1/2 miles. From the pass, following many of the original trails used by the gold and silver miners, runners travel west, climbing another 15,540 feet and descending approximately 22,970 feet before reaching Auburn, a small town in the heart of California’s historic gold country.”

The challenge is there, the plans have been made, and now it’s time for action. As Robert Schuller once said, “If it is to be, it is up to me.” Never have truer words been said.



*John at the Starting Line
4:30 AM, June 29th, 1996*

CHAPTER THREE

THE FIRST STEP - DECEMBER 1995

We have all taken upon projects, established goals, and dreamed great thoughts. But, I feel, that until they are put into writing and a strong personal commitment is made to bring them into reality, they are just thoughts that soon evaporate and erode, unfulfilled, in a short period of time. Even putting them in writing is meaningless unless we act upon them with a strong commitment.

So my first major step, once I made the selection for the race, was to write down my goals for this major running endeavor. I felt that my commitment was as strong as it needed to be. I wanted to do it and have a "No Buts" attitude. One important key to my success would be to break down the goal, and put it into workable size chunks. For example, if I run and complete a 25 mile training run, then within a few weeks do a 35 mile run, and then eventually do a 50 mile run, then the believability of doing one greater is made more believable. Someone had told me over the course of my ultra endurance running career, that if you can finish a 50 mile run, then you can complete a 100 mile run. Over my training, the most I had run was a 50 mile run, in fact quite a few of this distance races. In fact, over the last 3 years I had completed and acquired the finisher's coats from three American River 50 mile runs.

Today is December 23, 1995 and since January 1st, I have been averaging 40 miles per week of running. Today, I got my first set back, a head cold. One positive factor since my last attempt in 1994, I have lost 13 pounds. My weight goal is to drop another 5 pounds and that would be a weight of 168 pounds for race day. My mind, my legs, and now healing my body needed to be accomplished, and then I will be ready to train on a new dimension.

Over two previous attempts, I had learned that along the trail many demons await the runners, and maybe this year I'll be blessed and their exorcism will be completed before I get to the places where they hide. I have been told that injuries on the journey, hallucinations, hunger, and weakening of the spirit can all occur over the 100 mile run. I have watched a number of "NBC" video taping of this race and have seen all of these spirit breakers on the tapes.

GOAL: My goal is a time of 28 hours, 47 minutes and with control and training, I feel this is a doable goal. My pacers are committed, my crew is committed, and now the next 6 months the journey of dedication and hard work begins for me. The slight bout with a head cold is discouraging, but not enough to knock me out of the game. My mind is set, and I am ready to begin the training regime.

I believe that many of us give up before we even get started. We get discouraged by friends and family and overwhelmed by the decisions we must make to finish the goal. We think we can't, so we don't even begin. Many people that I have encountered talk about busted dreams, unfulfilled ideas, and adventures not taken. I want to be a doer of deeds, an active participant in life, not a spectator who lives vicariously through the accomplishments of others. Too often negative self talk stops the desire before any action is even undertaken. We consciously allow others to steal our dreams.

It seems to me that the most difficult time after a decision of this magnitude is reached is the first few weeks after the decision to move ahead with our goal. Often, others negative comments or our lack of discipline, will take the dream away from our consciousness. Too often the initial excitement disappears because of another's negative experience with the same goal or dream. Remember, we are not other people and we don't have their dreams or mental make-up. Don't let others make decisions for you. Don't expect them to get excited about your goals if they cannot understand your motivation or the excitement you have for such an endurance event. I often reflected that it is better to keep most of your personal goals to yourself and share the specialness and the excitement of the achievement after the attainment of the goal, in this case, running 100 miles.

Today is December 25, 1995 and I rode my bike for an hour on my turbo trainer, If felt good. I will begin running tomorrow, but only if the temperature reaches 25 degrees or warmer.

Today is December 29th. It is my last day of being "goal lazy." Between the holidays I have had sweets, potlucks, parties, and the rest that goes along with this season. I am behind my personal schedule for December. Tomorrow, I will begin the "Start" program. Rather than wait until New Years or a Monday, I will begin my training regime on the 30th of December, a Saturday. What a thing to do! But the "Doing It" is the point.

The last Saturday and Sunday of 1995 turned out to be fantastic days, both hitting a temperature in the 60's. Two runs, one 12 and the other 14 miles, concluded the week and the year 1995.

Statistics for 1995;

Total running mileage: 1677 miles (average of 32.50 miles for 52 weeks

Total turbo bike mileage: 593 miles.

Total hours of exercise: 637 hours (Average per week: 12.25 hours

Weight 173 pounds.

CHAPTER 4

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO START - JANUARY 1996

Whether it's January 1st, or a Monday, don't put off for another day what you can start immediately. We have many excuses like, "I'll start next week," or "I'll begin on January 1st." I feel that the moment we must start is this very moment. Even if it begins with minor failures, start and use the expression "No buts" as a mantra and to your advantage.

The goals for January, 1996:

Running Mileage: 40-50 miles a week, with a 10 miler once during the week, and a long run (18 plus miles) and a moderate run (6-10 miles) on the week-ends.

Turbo bicycle Mileage: 50-60 miles per week.

Weight goal: to weigh 168 pounds by the end of the month.

All of these goals I felt were achievable and doable, but some elements were not in my control, like the weather which could limit my outdoor activities. So goals need to be flexible and we must flow with the obstacles that life gives us. Now is the time of struggle and when real personal motivation comes into focus. Each of us has what it takes to finish and achieve our goals and dreams, but we need to look inside ourselves and search for the real elements that comprise our personal motivation.

My goal is clear and written in stone, my motivation is high, and the bumps and bruises tossed at me by my job and personal responsibilities will and must be taken in the normal stride of living. I will do what I need to do to reach the goals for this first full month of training. For example, I need to consume 1500 calories per day, and along with my normal amount of exercise (6-10 hours per week) I will lose 5 pounds for this month.

Flexibility is an essential part of goal achieving. If we get too rigid or do not flow with events out of our personal control, then failure can overtake us on this journey, and another year passes with unfulfilled dreams and goals. I can't imagine, for a moment, the number of dreams and desires that have been shot down, left behind, or just forgotten because of personal frustration with events out of our control. Events like: business trips make it is easy to not continue; unexpected company and commitments, and we fail to negotiate the things thrown at us.

Setbacks are constant in goal achieving, and we better get ready for them. If we can't be honest with ourselves, I feel we'll lose our dreams. Often these setbacks are from year to year developed habits. Yet by being conscious of them, we can erode their negative influences on us one bit at a time. It's not necessary to conquer these setbacks, but only to deal with them honestly and do our best to offset them.

Random thoughts prevail over these chronicles of my quest for the 100 mile belt buckle. Very few people actively chase their dreams. They talk a good game, but the performance necessary never comes into existence. What a shame, we should all be able to reach our dreams and fulfill our potential.

This week culminated in a 16 mile run over the foothills on Peavine Mountain just north of downtown Reno, and tomorrow a 10 mile run, giving me a 53 mile week, plus 26 miles on the turbo bicycle trainer. I feel exhilarated and ready to tackle the 100 mile endurance race. These little victories over self and negative self-talk, help us to get ahead with our lives and reach the fulfillment and joy we want. It amazing how many people go around constantly with a sour look on their face and their personalities are basically sad... Come on folks, live your dreams and get on with your dreams and your goals.

CHAPTER 5

CONTINUATION OF MY PAST EFFORTS - FEBRUARY 1996

January, with its unpredictable weather, turned out to be a good training month. Today, the 4th of February, is raining cats and dogs, but my mileage this week was over 38 miles running, and 40 miles on by turbo trainer. My training attitude is great, and I need to work on further weight loss over the next 60 days. Every pound off my body, is a pound I don't have to carry over 100 miles. Saturday, I had a great 16 mile training run on the American River Trail, what a great place to run. Many different thoughts go through my mind over these remaining months, and they will be recorded and discussed.

My goal for February, 1996, is 50 miles per week of running, with one long run of 20 miles plus, plus 40-50 miles plus on my bicycle turbo trainer. On the 24th of February is the first Western States training run beginning in the dark from Forestville to Rocky Chucky, with the last climb to the bus pickup being one mile up hill. At the top Norman Klein cooks chicken hot dogs, and has chips, fruit, soda and water to drink. This is a good first indicator where the level of my training is at, and I will learn what I need to do in the near future.

My goal today, February 1st is 28 hours, 47 minutes and 12 seconds and my goal weight is 168 pounds, a real winning combination for a winning goal.

The theme for February is dealing with the elements and the excuses they could provide for us. The second theme is the rededication to the goal and not letting too many outside distractions get in the way. The clear cut issue is I want to finish the race on my third attempt, so I need to focus on the goal not the excuses.

It's amazing how much goes into setting a goal, working towards it, and the ultimate task of completing it. It takes real dedication, with a strong and positive attitude, and lots of hard work. Thoughts must constantly be orchestrated into positive channels, and the element of training with the attitude of "It's Showtime." All of these things contribute to a success.

Today is Valentines Day, and I did two 6 mile runs 11 hours apart. I awoke at 5:50 a.m., and struggled to go out in 29 degree weather, but once I began running, it was great. I did a 63 minute 6 mile run. Later that day as the sun began to sink over Verdi Peak to the west, I took off from home and ran the same 6 mile course two minutes faster. I realize that with a "No buts" attitude, my success in the Western States endurance run will be my reward.

On Saturday I made an eating mistake, otherwise I am on schedule for a 50 mile week of running despite the rainy weather. Some days you feel right on the money, and other days you wonder why you're even doing the training. My attitude with running and my training has been good all month, with some minor setbacks. My weight dropped to 172 pounds, and only 4 pound off my goal weight of 168 pounds. That will be 16 pounds lighter than when I last ran the Western States Endurance Run. It takes a lot of mental conditioning and awareness to keep the pace up, but with the ultimate goal in mind, I am right there.

Since Friday, the 23rd of February, I have been unable to run the rest of this month. Picking up a pencil on the floor, I pulled by back out. Two visits to my chiropractor, Dr. Gary Warren, and with his suggested stretching exercises, and my back was back to normal. Totals for February, 1996:

Running 129.3 miles

Bicycling on turbo trainer: 77.0 miles

CHAPTER 6

RECOVERY AND MOVING AHEAD - MARCH 1996

I feel disappointed as my performance did not meet my goals for the month of February. Yet with perseverance and dedication I will move ahead in March and finish the race the last weekend in June. I ran today, March 1st, after a 6 day respite. My back is healed and I feel great. How we encounter and deal with disappointment has a lot to do with our survival skills we learn as children. When I close my eyes every morning I see the finish line at Auburn High School Track Oval and crossing the finish line with Helen and Norman Klein there to greet me. My goal for March is:

Running 200 plus miles
Bicycling: 30 miles per week
Weight: 170 pounds.

The first week-end in March the weather cooperated and gave me a great opportunity to get caught up with my mileage. Friday was a 6 mile run, while the next day I ran 15 miles into the wilderness of Dog Valley, near my house in Verdi, California. Then Sunday I came back on tired legs and ran 17.8 miles over the same course as Saturday. The weather cooperated, my legs were tired, and I felt great. Monday I took off, and then I will do my first 50 mile week plus if all goes well. I'm looking forward to participating in the 20 mile night run on the coming Saturday over the California Street section of the Western States trail. This run is important as running with flashlights will be a new experience for me. Doug Plourde, my running partner, will run this section with me in June. It will be in the dark.

So far the first week of March has been productive, 40 miles plus on the turbo trainer and one 17.6 mile run last week-end. If all goes well with the weather, this will be my first 50 mile running week. Goals are made easy and hard, long and short term and I do classify a 100 mile run as a hard goal over a long term. Just keeping focused on the end result is difficult, but I feel that the reward and the accomplishment is what keeps me going after the elusive finish line of the Western States Endurance run.

On Saturday, the 9th of March, the runners all met in Foresthill for the first night training run. Doug and I begin with about 150 runners to traverse the canyons above the American River. The distance to White Oak Flat is just over 20 miles, and I have got to love this section of the trail. Also some brave souls have volunteered at two aid stations for this run. Often, as with goals and dreams, the perspective changes with time, distance and a different view of the end results. I need to remain focused and determined in my program and this race is not different. Doug and I had a great time and after eating a chicken dog and chips, got on the bus back to Foresthill. The next day I did a 5 mile run from Robie Point to No Hands Bridge and back. So for the week I finished with runs totaling 51 miles and almost 40 miles on my turbo training.

Today, the 17th of March, after a 36 mile run week along with a 23 mile trainer-bicycle week, I did a 32 mile run up Jumbo Canyon into Virginia City during the St. Patrick's Day parade, and then back. At one point all we had was a crumpled \$1.00 bill and at the fire station in a loop we did, the Pepsi machine continually rejected this bill. It was so much like a Super Bowl commercial. During the run, the run coordinator, Fred Holabird prearranged a "Candy Aid Station" along with a water stop. He marked the entire course with orange ribbons, with the agreement that the last runners would pick up the streamers as we ran. The pain on the run was real, the suffering was optional.

Today I did an 8 mile run, and then came back in the early evening and ran another 5 miles. I felt great. This program of double run days has made me realize that goal striving with a difficult task is often similar to a strong personal drive. Both have a lot in common, the striving and the drive. To accomplish goals, the drive needs to be firmly planted in our psyche, or else the striving seems foolish and meaningless. The drive I have to finish the Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run is strong, and the punishment that I have put my body and soul through, must be worth the end result, being the crossing the finish line on Sunday June 30, 1996.

March 30, 1996, one day left in the month and I feel that I have had a great training month. You must improvise to achieve some goals, and if you are too rigid then the goal becomes less important. Last week-end I ran in Cupertino along the stream trail and had two good 10K runs. This week I ran two days of two runs four hours apart and felt great.

Today, the 30th of March, I was tired going up the hills and picked up 154 aluminum cans to recycle. There was snow at the top, so I came home, ran another 5 miles, with a coffee stop at Gold Ranch. My dream is less than 90 days away, and the focus on my goal needs to become myopic with my mind narrow and focused.

The reason, I feel, that so many others drop their dreams is that they fail to refocus and reevaluate the goal on a timely basis. Goals must be measurable and achievable. Obviously, a 100 mile race is measurable and has been achieved by others over the years. We must be adaptable to our goals, and looking at them often to make sure we are on track.

March ends with these totals:

Running: 247.5 miles total, for a weekly average of 54.98 miles
Bicycle turbo training: 108 miles
Total hours of exercise: 53.38 hours
Weight 172 pounds

This month was great and I feel that the success of attaining this goal is getting closer, and I need to just keep doing what I have done since December 1st, 1995.

CHAPTER 7

89 DAYS LEFT AND ALL IS FOCUSED - APRIL 1996

Today, until Saturday morning at 6 a.m., I am in limbo doing nothing but relaxing and trying to eat properly. It is difficult when there is so much time previously spent in training. In goal searching, there must be times when limbo is reached and we must just wait for the next step in the process of our goal attainment. I am on my way and feel great about my opportunity to run the Western States Endurance Run. It's a doable goal and I am excited about this unique opportunity to participate in such a fun and exciting event. The Lord has truly blessed me with some abilities that are hard, at times, to accept.

Yesterday, the first Sunday in April, I completed by sixth finish at the American River 50 mile run in 11 hours, 21 minutes, and 34 seconds, and had a great time despite the warm day. I realized that heat training will be critical for the completion of the Western States 100 mile run. I ate very little besides peanuts, M & M's, tortilla chips and Gu, but I drank a lot of Gatorade and water. My stomach felt queasy twice, which I attributed to the lack of solid food over the 11 hours of running. My goal was attained by beating last years time by 12 minutes, and I suddenly realized at the finish line that I was on my way to completing the Western States Endurance Run. Goals need to be reinforced with small successes throughout the struggle to attain the goal. Also, these small successes makes it easier to achieve our goals. I do feel that running 50 miles though is not a small success, but a major step in achieving the goal. Total Mileage for the first week:

Total miles: 59 miles
Total turbo training 15 miles
Total hours of training: 12.75 hours
Weight 172 pounds

The week ending April 14, 1996 was a tiring but a good training week. Total mileage was 41 miles, highlighted with a 13 mile run over Peavine peak with John Rhodes, Terry Cray and Doug Plourde. Our highlight was the sighting of 25 deer on the eastern slope just above Bull Creek drainage. I then came back on Sunday and ran a 10 mile hill course and a 5 mile flat run, back to back. I felt great, and realized that with the loss of the last 4 pounds of weight and with my continued intense mileage, and continued running of hill, flats and downhill terrain, I will be ready for the 100 mile run in 75 days. It's difficult to keep goals in our thoughts, but with some determination and a lot of great attitude, it can be done. Your don't get to the finish line of the Western States Endurance Run by just thinking about the race occasionally, it's definitely a long term goal that takes 100% determination.

Today is the 28th of April, and this paragraph will end chapter 7. Even while on vacation, the goal must be clear and the activities directed to achieve the goal, even if the vacation changes because of the intense training. In Atlanta, Georgia I had a fantastic 3 mile course one- half miles from my brother and his wife's apartment. It was a challenging 3 mile run around Westminster Academy in Buckhead. Two days on vacation, I did a 10 and 13 mile run as a change of pace. The goal is with me everyday, and in 8 weeks the start of this fantastic race will begin. Every time I run I use the center of focus that Jim Meisenheimer used as a mantra and my driving force, "It's Showtime." If we could apply this principal to everyday living, so much more would get accomplished in our lives. A new concept and a new insight for me. Thanks Jim Meisenheimer for a useful and great concept.

April results:

Total miles: 203.5 miles
Total turbo training: 50 miles
Total training hours: 40.25 hours
Weight: 174 Pounds (6#s off of target)
Reflection: I am right on course

CHAPTER 8

IT'S ALL UPHILL IN MAY - MAY 1996

Goal for May:

Average miles per week running: 65 plus

Miles on bicycle turbo trainer: 80 miles

Weight: 168 pounds

Stress test: one week of 80 plus miles.

The month of May is very critical for goal striving for the Western States 100 Endurance Run. There is less than seven weeks of training remaining, I must stress my body to the max. Every time I run I will do an extra mile of running, an extra 5 minutes on the turbo trainer. My extra for the month will be no desserts or chocolate, no cookies or cake. The sacrifice will be worth the accomplishment of reaching my goal. Strive for the best and expect the best. The goal, after 5 months, is closer than ever before and I want to keep chasing it until I cross the finish line. A job, a vacation, a relationship, can all have value and all become the dream or goal, and we work for what gives us satisfaction. I wonder how many people give up after chasing a goal, a dream, just for the reasons that are trivial and make no sense, they just give up tired. I do get tired after so much exercise, so much sacrifice, so much time committed to a goal. May is a critical month, and it is all up hill from May 1st.

The first week of May was excellent with a total of 61 miles in the first week. The week culminated with a run over Peavine Mountain with John and Terry Rhodes, Doug Plourde, and Mike Clasen. We celebrated Terry's 40th birthday with a wrapped Power Bar, and a hand held candle, huddling next to the microwave tower at the top. We all enjoyed a great 14 mile run.

When you are tired and continue running, it is difficult. I have been running for 15 days straight, and the tiredness doesn't seem so awful once you just start running. The goal, burning brightly in my mind, keeps the body going during this month of May. I feel great, and need to work harder on losing the last 5 pounds before the race.

The third week of May has been long and tiring, but the benefits are obvious. It's easy to give up on a goal when we are tired, and it's easy to give up on a goal because it's too much work. With the proper mental attitude and a high level of determination, being tired seems unimportant. Ernie Reyes, the founder of the West Coast Karate organization, once talked to his aspiring candidates for a new belt color about drive, motivation, determination, and having an Olympic attitude. It was a great source of motivation for me. 47 miles in 9 hours, but next week is the big test. This week will be a 70 miles plus for me, and with work and limited yard work, it's a great accomplishment for me. You have to be determined and stubborn to follow and keep after a goal after 6 months of

running, running, and more running. Some people give you positive encouragement and others just naturally offer negative energy. Those who have chased a goal and achieved it fully understand the importance of the Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run.

The next two weeks are critical to my training, and this last week of 66.5 miles in 15 hours was a great week. I finished the Silver State 50 KM race and I felt good. You traverse over Peavine Mountain and up a fire road to the hill climb, and this is an excellent test of endurance. I received my belt buckle and finished in less than 10 hours. I realize that the body and the soul must work together in reaching for the stars. I now understand that the Western States 100 mile run is reachable for me, but it will be a combination of mental and physical strength, and I possess both.

Today is May 27th, 1996 and I just finished the three day training run in Auburn, California. The first day covers the trail from Robinson Flat to Foresthill. The second day covers the trail from Foresthill to White Oak Flat, and the third day covers from Rucky Chucky to the finish line. I finished the three days in a few minutes over 18 hours of running. These 70 miles of training gave each person a good indication of the level of fitness over the last few months. I had a thought along the trail. I called it the "Mind Set of Achievers." All of the entrants at this training camp have this mind set and it is crucial for the completion of this race next month. The positive motivation that is self-generated is the key to success. The reinforcement by the positive attitudes of Helen and Norman Klein, the race directors, is a core value helping us all get to the finish line next month.

A great month of training, May 31st, 1996 ended with a 4.40 mile run through Dog Valley. The week-end before, I ran 70 miles at the Western States training camp, and after a good strong finish on the third day, I feel that I am ready to run the 100 miles. May's totals were 262.5 miles of running over 5 weeks, weekly average of 52.5 miles per week. A strong month of running, and it adds a strong resolve to my goal of finishing the race. Achievement does much for self belief, which helps with goal re-enforcement. The dream is alive, and the simplicity of keeping it alive during the race will help me when I cross the finish line next month.

CHAPTER 9

THE RUN TO THE FINISH LINE - JUNE 1996

Today is June 2nd, 1996 and I finished a fantastic 26.2 mile run in the Grass Valley Christian Runners Marathon. A great finish time of 5 hours and 9 minutes, especially in the heat. The month of June started with a great beginning, and this week turned into a hard 58.6 mile week. The last week of hard running is at hand, and then two weeks of easy running until Western States starting time. My running achievements, over the past six months, has kept me focused on the goal. The more achievements finished, big and small, the easier it was to keep the goal in focus for these past 6 months.

Less than 3 weeks to go and my resolve is stronger than ever, and the closer we get to the starting line, the more personal does my involvement become. This week, I run over Peavine Mountain with Floyd Whiting, Terri and John Rhodes in 3 hours and 15 minutes. It felt great, except I was tired on the 6 mile uphill climb. A 12 mile run with Doug today, and the day I have been waiting for is almost here.

When life is going well and my training runs feel great, then “wack” an upset in the schedule. I came down with a viral infection in my larynx, but with mild medication and some rest it will be fine before the race. The curve balls keep coming, but my resolve is getting stronger. I actually for a fleeting moment had the full realization hit me just how far 100 miles is, but then I buried it and thought about all the rewards of my training and the race: the positive fellow runners, the good feeling physically and mentally; and the challenge of running from Squaw Valley to Auburn, totally awesome. Tomorrow evening a run over Peavine Mountain, a 13 mile run of uphill and downhill proportions.

A great run over Peavine in 2 hours and 50 minutes, a new personal best time. It makes you feel great about your personal accomplishments and life in general. I followed the run with a walk, another two short 6 mile runs, and then today, Sunday the 16th of June, an 11 mile run in the hills above Verdi with Doug. Yesterday, Barbara and I walked from the starting line of the race to High Camp at Squaw Valley, and back down. Side note, in August there is the Squaw Valley Mountain Run, 4 miles up the mountain. Flashbacks came to my mind regarding the two previous tries at this race.



Barbara, Dad, me and Mom at the Auburn High School finish line

CHAPTER 10

THE RACE HAS BEGUN - JUNE 1996

Today is June 29th. At 4 a.m. in the dark of the early morning I awaken to the alarm on my wrist watch, and quickly realize that the day has finally arrived. Previously over the last two days we enjoyed the Western States Expo. Items for sale included t-shirts, running gators, packs, and lots of miscellaneous items. On Friday afternoon, a meeting was held outside talking about the race and what to expect over the 100 mile course.

I awoke excited inside our Dolphin Motor home, and immediately got dressed, adjusted the gators (to prevent rocks entering my shoes), put Gu packets inside my Western States two bottle pack, along with electrolyte tablets, vaseline tube, and two filled water bottles. My crew chief, Barbara, was getting ready to coordinate the team over the next 30 hours. I was excited and after stretching and eating a bagel and banana I went to the starting area for the race. The volunteers had set up a breakfast buffet for the runners and the spotlights lit up the first 100 yards of the race. I ate a few items, greeted and hugged running friends and joined the excited groups of runners. There was a slight chill in the air, so many of us wore cotton gloves. As the time neared 5 a.m., a slight glow of light appeared in the eastern sky.

The timer announced three minutes, and most of us showed anxiousness and excitement as participants in this ultra endurance event. No doubts, no fear, no questions entered into my head, I was focused on this race, and the rest of my life's issues disappeared. Suddenly, the timer began counting down from 10, the gun fired, and all of us began the ascent for 3.5 miles to the Escarpment. I started running and shortly began to walk the uphill, as the leaders began pulling ahead running uphill. The light from the early morning sun was lighting the eastern sky, and the road was marked with yellow ribbons and chalk to indicate the course. The two events that I remember over the first three and ½ miles, is at the Escarpment looking back and seeing the sunrise over Lake Tahoe, and then looking ahead into the canyons and realizing I only had 96 - ½ miles to go.

The beauty of this course enticed me to keep running the down hills and the flat terrain, and soon I came to the first aid station at Lyon Ridge, quickly opened a Gu packet, drank water and Gatorade mixed, and left quickly. I had finished the first 10.5 miles and felt great. The course traversed ridges, timberland, and was a mixture of up and down hills. At 8:50 a.m. I came into Red Star Ridge, a great aid station. I opened my drop bag and refilled my Gu Packets, drank water, and ate tortilla chips, nuts, and a few cookies. Topped off with Gatorade and water refills of my bottles, and quickly headed off into the Western States trail.

The volunteers and the food at the aid stations were awesome. Soon I was on the fire roads that traversed Deep Canyon I and Deep Canyon II. At the completion of these two canyons, I realized that my previous 6 months of running was paying off. I felt great and my legs were doing great. The secret for me was to run my pace, and the first 29.7 miles, besides the motivational volunteers at the aid stations, you were motivated by yourself.

At 10:40am, I came into another well stocked aid station, and with brevity refilled my needs, ate a few items, and left quickly unto the trail. I do remember just before coming into Robinson Flat, that the six miles between these two aid stations seemed a lot longer. At 12:25 p.m., I came running into Robinson Flat. I was weighed and told the doctors I felt great. And suddenly, I spotted Gretchen and Jim and my wife Barbara who had opened a lounge chair. As I sat, they laughed and smiled, washed my legs, refilled the Gu Packets and my water bottles, and quickly sent me on my way. I felt great, my legs were in good shape, and I was smiling as I left this aid station. Soon I was on the fire roads that covered Deep Canyon I and Deep Canyon II, a pleasant section of the trail. It is amazing that many of the names of the aid stations are from the mining history of the American River Canyon: Miller's Defeat (mile 34.4); Dusty Corners (mile 38.0); Last Chance (mile 43.3).

Nearly 4:30 p.m., I entered the canyon just before Devil's Thumb. The climb was a mile up a steep section of the trail. This was the first time since leaving Squaw Valley almost 12 hours ago, that my legs began to feel a little tired. This is a very strenuous part of the race for me. Nearing the top, with a view of the rock formation called Devil's Thumb I could hear the voices from the aid station. I saw a few friends of the training run who were manning the aid station. During the course of this day, I had my first quartered baked potato rolled heavily in salt. Refilled water bottles, extra Gu packets, and ate other snacks quickly, and took off into El Dorado Creek and the section called " Volcano " but by then the heat of the day had subsided. In some of the previous canyons the temperature was over 105 degrees. Soon, after a great downhill run, I came upon Bath Road (mile 60.5), and people waiting for runners to walk or run with them into the Foresthill Aid Station and that is where the pacers could begin running with you to the finish.

I came into Foresthill Aid Station at 10:40 p.m., got weighed and ate a few snacks. I suddenly saw my crew, my parents and my siblings Sue and Paul. And of course, my crew chief, Barbara, had a big smile on her face. I realized that I had conquered the canyons and only 38 miles to the finish line. Dad had got a real treat for me, while my crew changed my socks and washed my legs, he handed me a hot cup of coffee. What a treat. Also, Doug my pacer was ready to run the next 17 miles with me to Green Gate. A few extra minutes, two mini Maglite flashlights, and one more sip of the coffer, probably the best tasting coffee for me.

Doug and I left our friends and family, and off into the California Loop. The yellowish glow loops were placed every quarter of a mile, and the aid stations were manned and had all the goodies for us to munch on during this section. Uphills,

downhills, and the American River rapids off to our left, and we keep running the flats and the down hills, and walking the up hills. I don't remember this section, but Doug remembers that he had a difficult time getting me to eat and food at the aid stations. Food didn't look as good as it did earlier in the race. Finally Doug and I reached the Rucky Chucky crossing at mile 78.1. After two attempts, I finally get to cross the river. The volunteers had a 1 inch rope stretched across the river, attached to two jeep vehicles, one on either side. We waited our turn, and then into the river and we crossed in 12" of water. The water was cool and refreshing on my feet. The race was allowed to have the river flow dropped down from normal during the Western States race. Doug and I laughed and chatted as we crossed. Soon, on the other side, we sat and changed our shoes and socks. Opening my drop bag, I popped two Gu packets, filled the water bottles, and Doug and I went up the Green Gate road to meet my son Steve at mile 79.8.

Soon, near 5:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, I found Steve, thanked Doug for his help and left on the trail with Steve leading the way. This section is where while running I fell asleep and hit the ground, rebounded fully awake and Steve wasn't at a loss for words. He said to me, "John, I know you can fall asleep easily, but this isn't a good time for that to happen." We both laughed and continued running. My fondest memory is the experience coming into Brown's Bar aid station. We were running on a single track on a side of the canyon, and as we came around the corner I suddenly heard Rock N Roll in the still of the morning. As we came into the aid station, a volunteer was cooking bacon and eggs and the Music was great. His comment to me was, "The food for you runners is at the next table." The sound of Rock N Roll reverberated off the canyon, and after a few snacks we were off on the trail. In a few minutes we came around the canyon and we encountered the stillness of the canyon. It's like magic, I wondered if I hallucinated or was Brown Bar really there. The only other memory was the vivid sunrise over the American River Canyon, my second sunrise during this race.

I was told when we came into 49er Crossing (mile 93.5) at 8:00 a.m., I didn't recognize my family, had glazed eyes, and just kept running up the next hill with Steve. I had run this section of the course many times in training, and did recognize the spot called No Hands Bridge at mile 96.8. Suddenly, my mind shifted from fully automatic and I became conscious of my running. It was 9:15 a.m., and I realized that my goal was in my hands.

Finally, up the short, steep section to Robie Point, where Doug, Barbara, Jim and Gretchen were waiting for me. One point 3 miles to go to the finish line at Auburn High School track oval. I tried to run, but my legs after 28 and ½ hours of running refused to cooperate. I was feeling wonderful considering my physical condition, tired and tired.

Suddenly I entered the oval track and I could see the finish line 300 yards away and I still had time left on the hourglass. Doug and Steve walked with me until the last 30 yards, and then seeing my parents and my siblings' in the stadium seats, I ran over and gave the four of them a high five. Continuing, I got to the finish line and attempted to jump in the air in celebration, but my feet never left the ground. A big hug from Helen and Norman, the race directors, a medal celebrating my accomplishment over my neck,

off to the medical tent for a checkup, and then the reality finally came home to me. If you can train and finish a 100 mile race, nothing should be hard to accomplish.

Later, in the Auburn High School Gym, I fell asleep on the basketball court floor until it was time for the belt buckle ceremony. The first ones up were the 15 last finishers, and being 12th from the last finisher, I got the coveted belt buckle. The goal was set, kept in mind, and the action of finishing this race was over.

I yelled as we left to head back to Reno, “Yes, I did it, I ran 100 miles.” Barbara, who coordinated the pacers and the crew movements, drove home as I slept in the front seat. She actually had been awake almost as long as I was. What an amazing feat she accomplished being my crew chief.

It is amazing the accomplishment of running 100 miles in less than 30 hours. My attitude towards future accomplishment in my life is unlimited. If I can prepare, train, and finish this immense goal, then any goal I can set will be accomplished. The glow of this feat has given me a new perspective in my life. Often in the years after the finish of this race, I have been motivated to finish other major goals by remembering the feat of that day in June, 1996, when I crossed the finish line of the Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run.

