

Interesting Runner Stories + Call-Outs for 2019

Some of these stories are in the race program, some are not.

MELANIE BLOCK - BIB #10684 [RELAY]

Fourteen years ago, as I approached my “mid-century” mark, I reached out to my nearest and dearest to ask their interest in a run/walk in our local marathon (BSIM) as a milestone marker. Living in beautiful, coastal California, all responded with a resounding “YES!” Over the last 14 years, we have compiled more than 2,200 miles collectively. We have faced divorce, death, cancer treatment, orthopedic surgery, loss, love, and so much more. But, through it all, we all found strength in our sisterhood, and made our yearly marathon weekends the “April carrot” to keep moving forward. The reward of the incredibly-spiritual walk/run along Highway 1 at sunrise continues to empower us all. That, and the power of “walking as women” together, has become an even more important metaphor at this time in history.

SUSANNA CONSTANTINO - BIB #1120 [MARATHON]

My running journey began six years ago when I finally decided it was time to quit smoking. I smoked for years and realized this awful addiction was beginning to affect my health with bouts of bronchitis and difficulty breathing. I knew it was time to make a change before things turned for the worse. When I started running, it was difficult to breathe, but it was those effects that helped me quit smoking. I quit cold turkey and continued running and as the weeks passed by, my breathing became easier and I started to run further and finally signed up for my first 5K in San Francisco. I finished in 29:57. I felt so proud! Six years later, my passion for running has truly changed my life. I have run multiple races, won awards with my fastest 5k in 22:10, run over 15 half marathons, 12 marathons, including Chicago and Berlin, and am now on a quest to run a marathon in every continent. I'm running in China (Great Wall Marathon) next year and Antarctica in 2022. I am proud to say I have been a non-smoker now for six years and love this running journey!

JOSELIN RIVAS - BIB #3480 [MARATHON]

I was born in El Salvador with a broken neck, back and feet. Due to limited resources and dire circumstances, my chances of survival were almost nonexistent. Now that I'm 22, I'm a living miracle that nothing is impossible. I want to break the current record of being the Youngest Latina to run 100 Marathons and inspire people to be active along the way. From the day I decided to run my first marathon, I was told that I could not do it, but those words only made me want to run more. I trained with severe pain, but the day finally came when I crossed the finish line of my first marathon. Since then, I've completed over two-dozen marathons and the Big Sur Marathon will be my 28th.

JEFF COBB - BIB #1090 [MARATHON]

I first ran Big Sur in April of 2017, only 3 months after completing 30 radiation treatments and 6 doses of chemotherapy for throat cancer. I had lost 35 pounds, my immune system was compromised, and I was a weak 148 pounds. But, I had won a spot in the Big Sur random entry drawing prior to my cancer diagnosis and the goal of completing this beautiful race became my rallying cry. I trained and completed this race, albeit 1 hour slower than normal, and it was a painful grind!! However, it was the most gratifying marathon of the 28 previous marathons I had completed. Seeing the whales, hearing the grand piano, seeing the beautiful mountains, and having my dear friends hold my hand to cross the finish line really lifted my spirit. And I was just thankful to be alive and running this awesome course. The 2019 Big Sur Marathon is my opportunity to complete this race with a healthy body, and, hopefully, enjoy the run even more.

SAVANNAH LAVENSTEIN - BIB #2391 [MARATHON]

Not all race prep looks the same. I'm writing this story during an extended hospital stay before brain surgery. Being confined to a hospital bed is an unorthodox training method for marathons, to be sure, but it has called me into a more meditative state. Last year, I had more seizures than normal so I am here looking for a new way to manage some badly-behaving neurons in my brain. Running Big Sur this April represents a day of independence and ability - no matter where I am in the pack or my recovery. The race is one piece pushing me towards getting answers about my brain. I want my body and my personality to be able to run free again. I'll be running the marathon with my best friend, Maddie, and can't wait to smell the smells, see the sights, and see where my legs can take me that day.

GENEVIEVE ROEDER- HENSLEY - BIB #3518 [MARATHON]

I am running the Big Sur Marathon because of and with my incredible mom. My mom ran cross country in high school but was advised by a doctor not to run again after a dirt bike crash shattered her right foot as an adult. I followed in her

footsteps and began running cross country in high school a few years ago. I soon turned to running marathons as a hobby and an outlet. Over the years, my mom has been my biggest cheerleader, but witnessing the joy I get from running inspired her to try running again despite her injury. A couple of years ago, she eased into running, and we ran a half marathon together. She always dreamed of running a full marathon, so we entered the Big Sur entry drawing and couldn't believe it when we were selected! I have been training in Los Angeles, and my mom in Aptos. We have supported each other from afar. We know that this race will be a grand adventure that we will always remember

MICHAEL MORRIS - BIB #5631 [MARATHON]

Last August, I was finishing a marathon taper when I was struck from behind by a hit-and-run driver. I was three blocks from my home, and they were driving the wrong way down a street. I woke up laying in the street with my new shoes knocked ten feet away and an EMT asking me questions. The damage to my body was eight broken ribs, a small lung puncture, and a concussion, but I count myself lucky because I know that it could have been much worse. I am grateful to have health insurance, and I received excellent care. The 2019 BSIM will be my sixth running of this race. I always struggle with (admittedly mild) SF Bay Area winter weather training, but this year the struggle began with months of recovery and a paralyzing fear of cars and crossing the street. The physical and mental challenges have been exceptionally difficult this year, but Big Sur makes it worthwhile. The people who volunteer and participate are always the nicest, and the quiet beauty of the misty redwoods and the majestic ocean vistas keep me coming back. This year won't be my fastest showing, and I'm not even sure that I'll finish, but just being in this beautiful race has been the goal that has gotten me back on my feet.

AUDRA Z - BIB #6997 [MARATHON]

I'm running the Big Sur 21-miler as a survivor of domestic violence. One in four women in the US are victims of domestic violence--a crisis which effects all social classes, races, and genders. As a confident runner for most of my life, I was criticized and ridiculed about my fitness status and appearance and given impossible standards to live up to by my abuser. Because my partner focused on this, as well as other things, I stopped running. I was isolated from the people and activities I loved. For the first year after leaving the relationship, I was not able to look in the mirror or return to fitness activities because, despite not being around the abuser, the abuse continued in my head. With the help of a close friend, I slowly associated my former love of running with positive people and experiences and re-invented the activity I loved in a way that brought joy and peace to my life again. This will be the first time I return to California since the abuse occurred and I will be running the 21-miler with my close friend by my side, re-painting the horror of my past into positive, beautiful new memories.s

DENNIS ECKSTEIN - BIB #5524 [MARATHON]

In the spring of 1988 as a non-runner, I was invited to join a 10K running team with friends from work. I was hooked from day one. A few months later, I met my would-be wife Cathy. Though not a runner, Cathy loved the sport and constantly supported and encouraged me. In the fall of 2009, Cathy was diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer. Suddenly running became unimportant. Cathy lost her physical battle to cancer in August of 2013, but during those four years she defeated cancer daily by being an inspiration to everyone around her. In 2014, I began running somewhat regularly again, but felt I would never run another marathon. Then, in 2015, on a challenge from my closest running friends, I ran five marathons. My daughter Caitlyn made a tech shirt in Cathy's Memory, which I wore in each of the five marathons. The shirt always brought questions, which allowed me to share Cathy's story. Last summer I came across an advertisement for Big Sur and the memory of my and Cathy's travel plans to someday visit and run Big Sur came rushing back. The decision was made to sign up for the VIP program and run one last race in Cathy's memory. Cathy's shirt has been retired for a few years now, but will come out of retirement for Big Sur.

THE WALSH FAMILY - BIB #4266 (David Walsh) [MARATHON]

Our journey to Big Sur is spread across 5 cities and 2 continents. What started as a whim for my dad to run his 16th marathon in a cool new locale and maybe a little quiet time with my mom quickly took a turn when four out of four of his children responded 'Yes' to his causal text: "Anybody up to run Big Sur?" Don't feel too bad though, he created this monster by signing us up for countless 5K's and 10 milers over the years. The youngest runner of the bunch is Daniel (age 20). This is his first marathon. Next comes me, Kielty (23). I live in Melbourne, Australia, and mostly saw the marathon as a ticket back to the states for a week. Up next is Conor (26). Conor is the athlete of the family and would not hesitate to tell you. The eldest of the crowd is Mathew (28). Mathew is certainly training the hardest; however,

living in Chicago, the steepest hills he can find are the highway on and off ramps - which he has to do in the snow with his Yaktraks on. Who knows what the finishing order of the five will be but there is money to be bet. After being grateful we are finished, we will be most grateful that we are together.

ALEX BAIN - BIB #607 [MARATHON]

Alex Bain is an autistic runner from Canada's smallest Province, Prince Edward Island, on the east coast. Alex joined the PEI Roadrunners in 2004 while in high school and has, since then, run hundreds of races on the Island and a few notable off Island races. He has run the Boston Marathon twice as well as Chicago, Disney and Napa Valley. Alex's "famous yellow running shirt" will tell you he runs FOR autism, NOT against it. Acceptance, Inclusion, Awareness. He's minimally verbal. On the course, where the playing field is even, he excels. While Alex is soaking in the scenery, his favorite part of running, his mom will walk the 5K, joined by his sister who transplanted to the San Diego area a number of years ago. Alex's running takes us places and brings us together with family and friends. Acceptance and inclusion seem to come naturally to the running community, so we always feel welcomed however far we are from home. This makes for some wonderful times and awesome memories and we can't wait to do that at Big Sur!