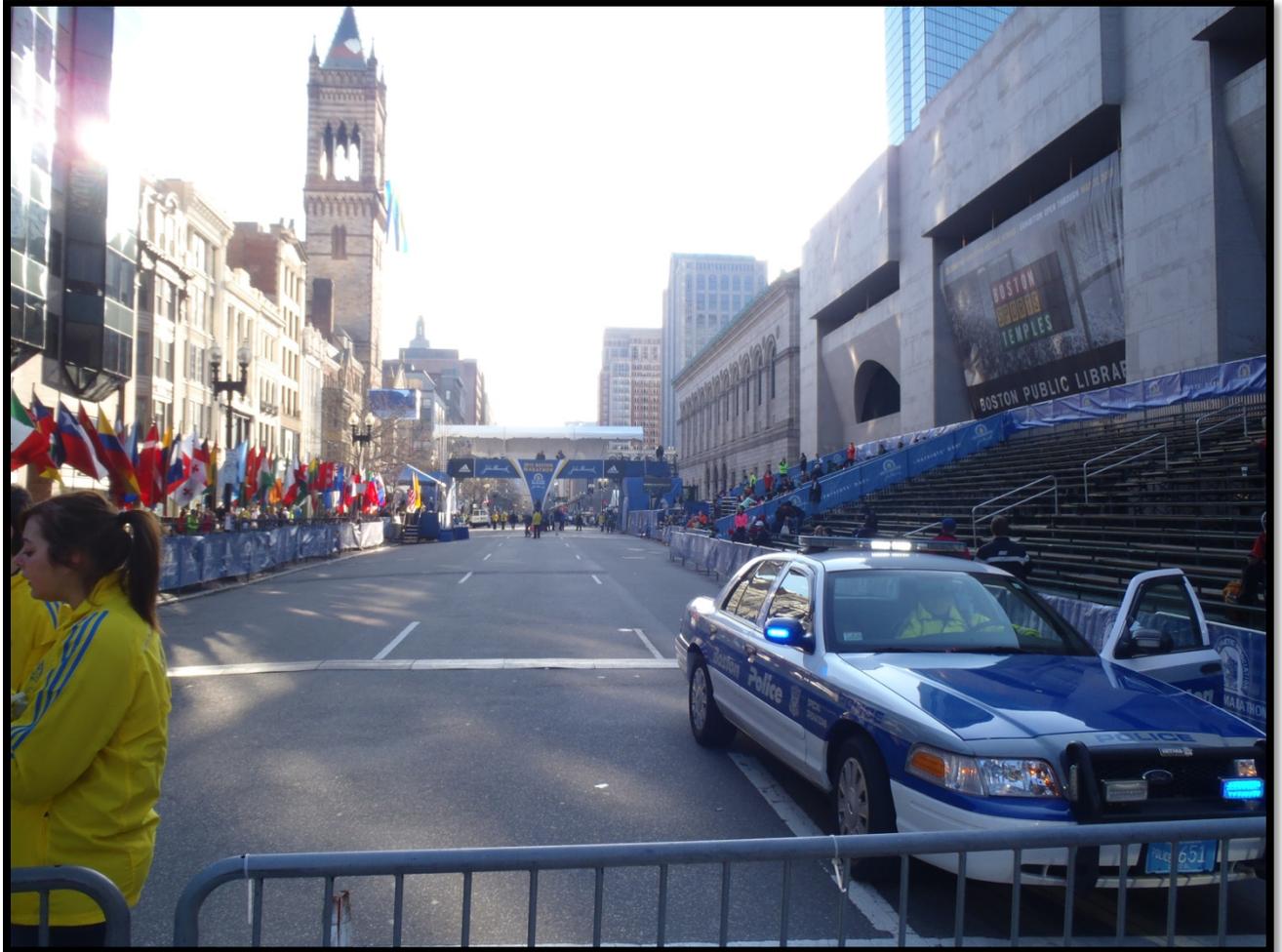
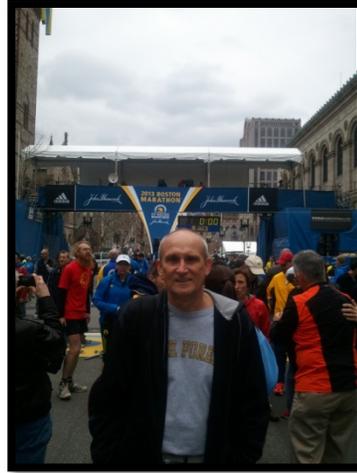


The 2013 Boston Marathon

By Dana Mauldin



“In retrospect, running the 2013 Boston Marathon renewed my faith in humanity. Yes, it was just an athletic event with a tragedy, but for me it turned into something more... a validation of why America is the greatest nation in the world. The causation of this despicable tragedy does not deserve mentioning but the heroism, kindness and warmth of the community should be hailed in the highest regards.” Dana Mauldin



INTRODUCTION

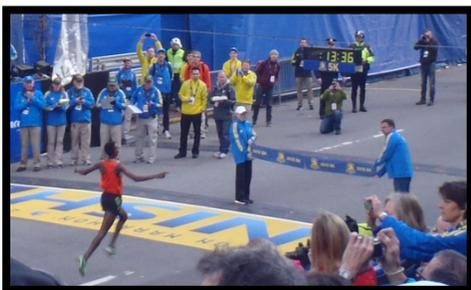
Running the Boston Marathon all started when my brother, Gene, asked me in the summer of 2012 if I wanted to “Run Boston.” Halfheartedly I said ok, not thinking anymore about it until he called asking for my credit card number for the entry fee.

To run in the Boston Marathon, you usually must first qualify by finishing sanctioned races in set times, but they also allow 7,000 runners in under a charity program. Companies donate huge sums to charities for these slots, and it raises tons of money. These runners cannot start with the qualified runners, but they (we) begin in the back.

It wasn't until I received my “time waved” acceptance letter that I figured “well I guess I'm running the Boston Marathon.” The irony is that there are thousands of runners who spend their whole lives just trying to qualify, and me, I'm going to run the prestigious Boston Marathon with a lackadaisical attitude.

This is my first-hand account. It's probably more information than you would ever care to know. But in writing, it was bizarrely therapeutic for me. Running Boston was one of the highlights of my life, even though initially my head or heart was not into it. It became much more than just an athletic event.

The logistics of the race were a pain; the flying, the subway rides from South Boston into the city were complicated and aggravating. The sheer volume of people that city life exposes you to was a little overwhelming – especially for someone who lives in rural Brunswick County – a lot of “hurry up and wait” – let's just say I was a little over-sensitized and stressed prior to the race on Monday.



SUNDAY MORNING – Prep Day

We go into the city early to watch the 5K and to pick up our race packets. What an exciting 5k race! To see some of the best in the world competing is amazing.

The winner turned in a time of 13:37. Not a record but faster than I have ever witnessed.

Then it's off to the Expo, where you could buy the coveted Boston Marathon jacket. I decline because I can not think of a single place that I would wear it.

The Packet Pick-up / Expo was held in several Wal-Mart sized rooms, with the latest in anything remotely related to running: shoes, jells, iPods, clothing, etc. and tons of free stuff. There's even a travel agent if you had the desire to go on a "running vacation" to exotic locations like Ethiopia, Iceland or the Antarctic.



After the Expo we have lunch at the Cheers Bar, which takes me back to many years ago to my Navy days when a group of crazy sailors made a road trip from NAS Brunswick, Maine to Boston just to go to this bar. It's funny that I still remember how to get there. After a very good lunch and a few beers we take the train back to the motel.

I take about an hour nap, then get up and ready to go back into the city at 5 p.m. for the Pre-Race Pasta Dinner. When we arrive we found thousands of runners waiting in a line that stretches about a half mile.



The meal is actually very good with three types of pasta, with salad and bread, plus all of the beer you would care to consume before a marathon.

Samuel Adams, one of the major sponsors, brewed a beer (named "26.2") just for the marathon – It's very good,

with a taste similar to Blue Moon.

On the way out, we were handed a dessert bag filled with candy – it was great, even had a large chocolate bunny which I eat when I get back to the room. All of this took less than one hour from getting in line behind thousands of people, to walking out. Phenomenal logistics.

MONDAY – Race Day

I Get up at 4 a.m., in time to double check everything: Band-aids, glide, race belt, compression sleeves, sunglasses, jells, iPod.

This is where I make the decision to leave my phone in the room – in reflection, this might not have been the best idea. Then it's off to meet the train at 6 a.m. so we can get on a bus to Hopkinton, the starting point of the race – an hour and half bus ride. (Note: careful on the fluid intake prior to getting on the bus)

Once off the bus, we're introduced to the Athletes Village, where 26,000 runners are being staged. Anything you would want prior to a race is here; food, jells, coffee, a medical staff – you can even get a massage if you want.

We drop off our “yellow bags” with the items that we will pick up at the finish line; some runners opt to put their phones, wallets and room keys in these bags which causes issues later.

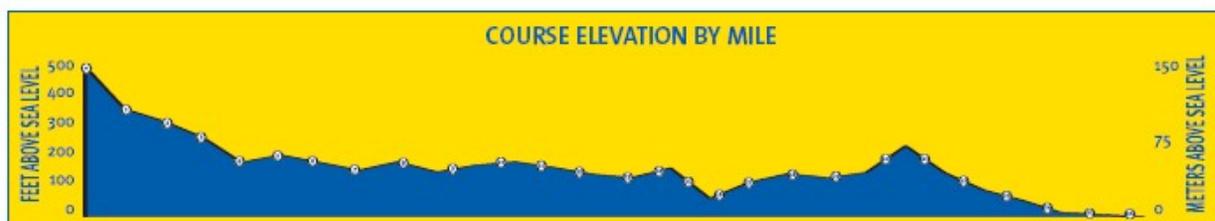
After a few hours and the sheer volume of people, toilet tissue becomes an issue, and this is where my three years of failing high school French classes pays off. When a lady from France or Canada asks me: excusez-moi, c'est la' tout le papier tolet gauche? I respond proudly “oui.” Mrs. Bracey would have been proud.



THE RACE

After what seems like eternity, the announcement comes for us, the third wave group, to begin walking to the starting line; it is almost a mile from Athletes Village to the starting corrals.

The race begins in a mass of humanity and we're just the last of the final wave “the last of the last.” I am not a huge fan of starting an event in the middle of the day, especially in the last wave, but we're off. I had read that the first 20k was all downhill and for the most part that's true with the exception of some impressive uphill grades.



I'm on my own pretty much from the start, as my brother is a faster runner than me, and even if he was a nice guy, you need to run marathons at your best pace and not hang with your brother.

The first 5k, I feel great. The streets are lined on both sides with people cheering and holding their hands out, and waving American, Korean, Japanese, and Panamanian flags and some more that I do not recognize.

At this point I'm expecting the crowds to start thinning, but they never do. For the 22 miles I will run of the Boston Marathon, there are people on both sides of the road encouraging us on, offering everything from oranges, water, jells, candy, petroleum jelly, freeze pops and, if you're so inclined, beer and cigarettes.

10K – Still strong and for the most part going downhill, I decide to slow down a little and take my first jell; I'm beginning to sweat, so I alternate a small sip of water, then a sip of Gatorade at each mile.

15K – Feeling good, I'm amazed how many people are still around. The sounds of different types of music – Latin, Rock and Rap – fade in and out, the smell of barbeque waft through the air. Small children run into the streets holding out their hands for a “high five.” People smiling and offering encouragement.

20K – Starting to get tired, the dreaded thoughts of “not-even-half-way” begin to taunt me. My pace is starting to slow, and the course is flattening out. I take another jell and a Motrin with a sip of Gatorade.

Off in the distance I can hear a loud cheering, and the closer I get the louder it is. I turn the corner and for as far as I can see are “Girls” lining the right side of the road. (Afterwards I found out these are the girls from Wellesley College and this is a long standing tradition of the Boston Marathon).

Cheering at the top of their lungs, holding signs that read “*Sexually suppressed science major, I see your stamina, let me show you mine,*” and “*Your id in my id – I'm a psychology major.*” The girls run out into the road and kiss you on the cheek; most are wearing lipstick so when they kiss you it leaves a lasting impression. For the girl runners there are some guys – not sure if the lipstick has the same effect?

The humor was just what I need as I approach the halfway point.

Mile 13 - Halfway, and I'm feeling good, the girls cheered me up and the Motrin and jell are working. At this point I turn on my iPod; it's just a mental thing for me to reward myself for making it half way. The other thing I do is to start counting down miles; I count up to until mile 13, then down – my weird Idiosyncrasies.

Mile 14, 15 – A slight uphill, but my pace is ok. It's overcast and the temperature has dropped as predicted, and unfortunately there is a headwind. I'm running in a short-sleeved shirt and shorts so I'm starting to feel a slight chill.

Thinking now if I can just make it to mile 16, then there will only be 10 miles left. My mind is staying too much in the present; I have to think about anything other than putting one foot in front of the other.

Mile 16 – Steep downhill, this is great, with only 10 miles left and my pace is starting to pick up. Unfortunately, it has nothing to do with me, but it's all about gravity. Beginning my mental preparation for the dreaded miles 17 through 21, it's only a short distance of 4 miles; how hard can it be? It's just a little over a 5k.

Miles 17 through 21 are all uphill, and the steepest section is known as Heart Break Hill, so named after runners that have led the race until this hill.

Mile 17 – The beginning of Hell. I take a jell stop to boost my energy before the hills, Power Bar gives out their Jells at this mile marker. I have never seen so many jells, the road is slick and sticky for a quarter of a mile with all of the remnants and empty packets. Each flavor is color coded so, for example, if you want a banana flavor, you go to the yellow flags.

I go to the brown flags and chug down a chocolate one with a warm cup of yellow Gatorade. This is not a good thing to do, and after consuming the gooey, nauseating, warm, super-sweet mixture, the gag reflex kicks in, but I control it and keep going.

Mile 18 – This is not a hill, it's a f-ing mountain!! Steep is an understatement, my legs are starting to scream, but I'm still running. I guess you could call it that – it's a very slow pace. My daughter, Megan, calls it "the old man shuffle" and that is a very accurate description.

I'm starting to develop my "runners haze." The only way for me to describe it is that it's similar to the feeling you get after a night of partying – the next day – not sick but you just don't feel like your normal self, "kind of cloudy." I'm pretty sure it has something to do with lack of O2 to the brain in both cases.

Now my arms are beginning to hurt. Skrillex comes on my iPod, I hate Skrillex.

Mile 19 – Slight downhill, a great relief. I'm running on the right-hand side of the road when I see out of the corner of my eye, a guy in a green shirt running over to my side. He slows down and stops a few feet in front of me, and begins this horrible retching. I quickly move around to avoid this bio hazard – sorry dude not much I can do for you, I've got my own problems. After a few hundred yards or so, the guy in the green shirt runs by me. I'm impressed.

Mile 20 – The beginnings of the Heart Break Hill(s). Legs screaming, arms hurting, and my feet are starting to hurt as my plantar fasciitis starts to override the Motrin.

Mile 20.5 – This is an extremely steep climb. I begin to walk as a sign reads "Welcome to Heart Break Hill." There are people on both sides of this hill cheering and offering encouragement.

The Hash Hound Harriers are there with their infamous motto: "*The drinking club with a running problem*" and their offering draft beer. I should get one just for the story.

Trying to stay focused.

“The physiological study of this is fascinating, but basically I’m an old man crying, running behind Wonder Woman.”

Mile 20.7 – Damn Wonder Woman! I’m walking – after a few experiments, I found that my “old man’s shuffle” was slower than my fast walk. I can see the top of the hill, and I’m trying to maintain a 14-minute (per mile) pace, when this portly woman in a Wonder Woman outfit passes me.

She is wearing a cape, yellow leggings and red silk panties with “*Wonder Women*” written across them. The outfit is way too revealing for her stature, but that’s ok with me – she is who she is, and if she’s comfortable with that, it’s cool by me.

She is just another one in this crazy, eclectic tribe of runners that I love so much...and she just passed my ass!

Mile 20.9 – I’ve just crested the last hill and now I’m beginning a sharp descent. I can see downtown Boston, and it’s all downhill from here. Starting to run again, but my legs feel heavy. My eyes are starting to water; this is a well-documented phenomenon in extreme physical exertion that you become emotional.

The physiological study of this is fascinating, but basically I’m an old man crying, running behind Wonder Woman.

Mile 21 – A little over 5 miles left. I’m starting to look for a clock to find some reference of how long I have been running. We started in waves, but all the course timing clocks started at the initial start of the race, (well before I started,) so I have no clue how long I have been running.

Finally, using the course clock and a clock on a building, I’m able to figure out that I’ve been running somewhere around 4 hours plus or minus 15 minutes. With 5 miles left and at the worst, a pace of 15-minute miles walking, I realize *I’ve got this*; I’m going to “medal” at Boston, (everyone who finishes gets a medal,) and with a little luck, a personal record for me.

My eyes start watering again. Damn this can’t be... I’ve just passed Wonder Woman, and in my runner’s haze along with being emotional and some sappy love song playing on my iPod... now I think I’m in love with Wonder Woman.

Mile 21.5 – Still descending. My best estimate is a pace of 12-13 minute miles. The wind is picking up from the sea breeze, the temperature has dropped, and I’m starting to get cold; the sweat on my shirt is exasperating the problem.

I hear sirens in the distance getting closer, a police motorcycle passes, and then another followed by a several police cars. I’m thinking someone has fallen out or has gotten sick. I’m betting it’s the green-shirted-bio-hazard-retching-guy.

Mile 21.9 – I can see mile marker 22 and there is a group of runners stopped with a bunch of police cars. It looks like a runner might have been hit by a vehicle, so I start mentally preparing myself to see some runners-carnage.

Mile 22 – There is no one on the ground, and the runners have stopped and are standing around talking to the police. This is very confusing, and then I hear one runner yell “I’m not stopping.”

Mile 22 is the end of the Boston Marathon for me:

There are about 50 runners stopped with more coming in behind us. A policeman with a grim face informs us the race has been stopped, and in a kind but firm voice he directs us off the road.

I see people using cell phones, crying. I’m thinking this can’t be good. Starting to overhear people talk about bombs and explosions downtown, walking around aimlessly in a runners haze trying to absorb this surreal scene.

More police arrive along with EMT’s, firemen and paramedics. They surround us. I hear the police responding to some of the runners’ questions; “All we know is there has been explosions in the downtown area.” Paramedics walk around handing out blankets (the thin metallic type,) asking if we are ok or if we need anything. I get a blanket and sit on the curb and watch the event unfold.

Most of the runners are trying to make calls. Some are grimacing and some are still crying. Some of the kids from Boston College have stopped by, offering assistance and lending their cell phones to anyone who does not have one. This is when I realize I should have carried my phone. This is the time for me to call home and tell Wendy I’m OK.

After a few minutes no cell phone calls are being connected.

The temperature has dropped significantly, and in my damp clothes I’m getting cold. I pull my knees up and huddle in my blanket and just listen to the conversations. I’m hearing everything from the city is under siege, bombs are place throughout the city, the JFK library has exploded, bombs have gone off at the finish line, people are dead and hundreds are injured.

Where is my brother Gene? Did he have a good race and finish, or was he waiting at the finish line for me when the explosions went off, or was he at the church that we chose as our post-race meeting spot? I know that he left his cell phone in the motel room, because we discussed it prior to leaving. With no cell phones or cell phone service and no way into the city, I’m pretty helpless.

I come to the stark realization there is nothing I can do to assist, improve or help the situation in any way, shape, or form. I am now the one being cared for... mentally this is tough for me. I decide that I must have a positive attitude and not dwell on what might be... focus on the business at hand.

School buses arrive and police officers instruct us to get on the buses. My legs are starting to cramp, so getting on the bus is tough, but the bus is warm and it is good to be warm.

A young lady – I guess in her mid-thirty's – sits beside me. She's very emotional because her family and children were at the finish line waiting for her. When she had called them, all she received was their voicemail. I try to reassure her that everything will be ok. A few minutes later she calms down.

A police officer and a paramedic come on the bus asking our names and bib numbers and writing them down, I assume for accountably purposes.

I guess we sat on the bus about an hour, (without moving,) when we're instructed to get off. If the situation were not so dire, this would be very funny to watch; 50 people, after running 22 miles, being sedentary on a school bus for an hour and then trying to walk off. We look like robots.

Next we're directed into Saint Ignatius Catholic Church, a large church on the campus of Boston College. Just walking into this church is very calming and reassuring. I sit on a pew by myself, and after a few minutes the church begins to fill up with runners. With everyone wrapped in their metallic blankets and walking stiffly, it looks like a congregation of aliens.

Most of the runners are calm with a few exceptions who are being comforted by police and paramedics.

Pew 22. Five people sit on this pew, an Asian lady, Japanese guy, South Carolina man and a gentleman from South Africa and me. We sit very quietly. The EMTs and Boston College kids keep walking around asking if we're OK or if we need anything, and it becomes a little aggravating, but we realize they just want to help in some way.

Just then, the most unlikely thing happens, like there is some divine intervention. A few of the BC kids walk by and ask if we want any Gatorade "YELLOW!!

The whole pew busts out in laughter. After running 22 miles and drinking only Yellow Gatorade – the only flavor available – that is last thing any of us wants! It breaks the ice and for the next several hours we become friends. We laugh and joke, and talk about our families, our homes, about how tough the course was.

What we do not discuss is what had happened at the finish line.

I think we had all realized that would have been an exercise in futility. This bonding reminds me of a Twain quote that has been proven over and over again in my life.

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

I guess the community has received word that we are in the church because food starts to arrive; pizza, fresh baked bread, pasta, salads and all kinds of fruit. It's amazing to see the outpouring of kindness from this community.

We have 15 minutes to board the buses. A police officer speaking from the pulpit announces we will be leaving to go downtown. Everyone cheers! Once there, we can pick up our yellow bags.

But we understand that once we get off the buses, we will be on our own, and unfortunately the city buses and trains are not working. That is troubling, but I am now back in control of my own fate and it feels good.

I start to devise a plan on how I will get back to the motel. If I can just get to the motel room, I could stage out of there. I have plenty of cash and credit cards in the room, and I could make all of the phone calls I need or even rent a car if necessary. I have a \$20 bill in my running belt, so I figure I can hail a taxi and pay the rest of the fare once I get to the motel.

I'm starting to worry about being able to see. It's getting dark and I'm still wearing my sunglasses – I had left my normal glasses in the motel, so seeing will be an issue.

The buses leave with police escorts into downtown Boston, about a 15-minute ride. It's heartbreaking to see how close to the finish line we actually were. On the way, we pass hundreds of police, FBI and military vehicles including armored personnel carriers with men on machine guns. This is not what you want to see in an American City, but the show of force is very impressive.

The bus stops, and the driver announces the bag pick-up should be a few blocks "that way." The aliens depart the buses in long lines. This is so funny, as by now most of the runners have two of the metallic blankets on; one wrapped around our shoulders and one around our torsos. We begin walking in-line in an abandoned city, and it looks like something out of some B-grade science fiction movie.

After walking a few blocks I turn the corner, and there is bag pick-up and my brother, Gene. What a great sight to see!

Gene had a great race and had been on course for a personal record. He was just a few moments away from the finish line when the bombs exploded. He is OK and in good spirits even after waiting for me for several hours. I pick up my bag and put on my pants and jacket – it's good to be warm again.

Gene talked to the Boston Athletic Association officials, and found out that the T-trains are working again. The only problem is that it is about a two-mile walk to the subway entrance, but we are so ready to get back to the motel, that the walk is a non-issue. I had put a camera in my yellow bag, so I take it out and take a few pictures on the way to the train.

We arrive back at the motel around 8:30 p.m. and decide to just walk over to the bowling alley next door to get something to eat and have a few beers.

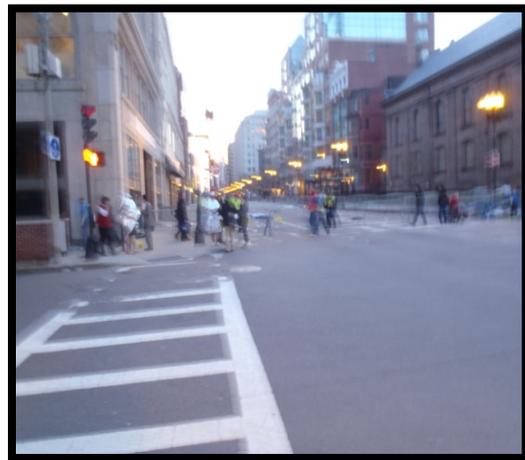
We spend most of the night answering our voicemails and texts.

TUESDAY MORNING, 4 a.m.

We both have early flights, so we get up early to meet our taxi to the airport. When we walk down to the lobby I'm surprised to see it full of people. Some are waiting for taxis to go to the hospital, and some are trying to figure out how to get their yellow bags, in which they had put their phones and wallets. Some people are very emotional recalling the events they had witnessed. This is one of the most somber times of the trip.



Triage tents on the way to the train



Looking toward the finish line, (note the aliens)

In the airport; you can tell who had run by their “robot walk.” Some runners wear their Boston Marathon jackets with the finisher’s medal around their neck. But, the thing that has since left a haunting impression on me was how quite everyone was and their unforgettable blank stares.

Within a few hours I'm back home and back to my normal everyday routine.