

# A runner's high

5/20/09

Anyone who participated in the Pittsburgh Marathon a couple weeks ago will likely tell you what a well-organized and festive event it was.

I'm happy to report that the winner finished only two hours ahead of me. I cannot sprint 20 yards with everything I have at a pace the elite marathoners maintain throughout 26.2 miles. Incredible. But, yes, I am a survivor and proudly crossed the finish line. I still have the blackened toenails to prove it.

While finishing was truly exhilarating, it didn't come close to matching the pre-marathon high I felt a few days before. My wife and I try our best not to make our children feel that material things are the important things in life. We refrain from buying many things they want. When they ask me why they can't have this or that, I tell them that money doesn't grow on trees. They have to work hard for it.

So, a few days before the marathon, it was funny to hear my 6-year-old daughter, Gracie, tell my 7-year-old daughter, Veronica, that Daddy would win the race and then we'd finally have lots of money to buy things. Of course that was preposterous and I had to break the news to her, but darn if she didn't believe me.

"I know you'll win, Daddy," she kept saying despite my insistence. The belief of a child is so special at this age.

But a bigger surprise would unfold a couple days before the race.

I use an iPod shuffle when I run. It is an amazingly tiny



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gadget that plays music, lots of music — like 450 songs — which was the only way I got through my training along the country roads in Jefferson Township. It was also the only way I figured I could get through the marathon.

Two days before the big event, I somehow lost it. As our family gathered for dinner, my wife asked me if I was going to buy a new one. Wanting to set a good example for the kids, I said, "You know our rules, honey. We don't just buy a new one when we lose something. I lost it and it will be very hard to run without it, but I'm not going to buy a new one."

I'm so absent-minded at times, my wife joked that I probably threw it in the garbage. The sad part is, I knew that could be true.

Gracie had been saving up for a new bike. She had to do yard work or clean the barn or whatever tasks we could think

of to earn a little money. She had \$11 and some odd cents saved up and she needed to reach \$75 to get the bike she wanted. You can't know how much she wanted a new bike, as she had outgrown her other one. Understand, we could afford to buy her this bike but we wanted to reinforce that hard work is important.

Unknown to me, Gracie went up to my wife after that dinner and took all her money to her and asked if it was enough money to buy her daddy a new iPod. I try hard not to be an emotional guy, but when my wife told me this, I fell to pieces.

You can't know how important that bike was to her. To give that up for something as stupid as an iPod for her rickety, absent-minded dad trying to prove something to himself in a crazy race was unbelievable.

The next morning I grabbed Gracie and told her I had decided that she had worked hard enough and she was going to pick out a new bike. We still can't wipe that smile off her face and she's been riding it ever since.

I know this place in life won't last long. I'm sure she'll hate my guts at times later in life when I'm being critical of her boyfriend, tattoo or nose ring. But as my legs dragged in concrete over those last few miles, I turned off the music of the iPod I eventually found, gritted my teeth and thanked God for such a blessing.

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