

Reflection on my Participation in my First Marathon, the Kona Marathon, on June 28, 2009, in Kona, Hawaii

by JoAnna Kai Cobb

Marathon Eve

The day before I ran my first marathon, I started to get a sick feeling in my stomach. I didn't doubt that I could finish the course, but the task at hand seemed so overwhelming. Twenty-six and two-tenths miles is a long way. It's the distance from my house in Bedford to the Atwater Garage on Indiana University's campus in Bloomington, as I had (unwisely) calculated before my husband Ed and I left Indiana. That knowledge made my knees nervously clack together. However, in my favor, I would be running this marathon in Hawaii, where I wouldn't be able to get the feel for relative distance as well as I could at home. Still, as a worrying fidget, I kept banging my palms on my forehead; so much so, that my husband Ed said, "Why do you keep slapping yourself in the head?"

I earned my participation in the Kona Marathon with a fellowship from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. In October 2008, I had applied to become a Lilly Fellow through the Teacher Creativity program. This program offers grants to Indiana educators for the renewal projects of their choice. I wrote my grant to train for and run the Kona Marathon, a race which supports the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America. I have Crohn's disease, and I wanted to use the project to demonstrate to my students that one can reach goals in spite of obstacles. In February 2009, I learned that Lilly was going to fund my dream. Now, on the eve of the marathon, it seemed like I was truly part of a dream, functioning in slow motion. I had to tell myself repeatedly, "This is really happening."

I picked up my race packet the day before the race, and drank over 48 ounces of Gatorade to fuel myself with electrolytes. Ed and I went to a little Italian joint called "Rocky's" so that I could carb load. There, I had the worst spaghetti—no, the worst meal—I've ever eaten. I knew I had to have the fuel though, so I forced myself to eat, and eat heartily. Back at the hotel, we found that the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation had delivered my orange singlet. I affixed my race number, 72, to it, and I pinned my baggies of GU and salt tabs into my shorts. I asked Ed for marathon advice, and he said, "Don't stop."

Marathon Morning

I awakened at 4:00 A.M. I did not sleep well at all, but my running expert/coach Jimmy Sowders told me I wouldn't. He said it was the sleep two nights before the marathon that mattered. I lathered on the sport sunscreen, put some Bengay all over my thighs, and got dressed. As I put on my shoes, I apologized in advance to my feet and hips. They didn't reply. I topped off my race day attire with a white flower around my ponytail and pink flower clipped to my hat. I was in Hawaii, after all.

My best piece of equipment that day was my prayer band. A runner friend of mine, Wendy Miller, had suggested I dedicate each mile to important people in my life. That way, I would be able to keep my thoughts guided and feel the support of my friends and family. My waterproof bracelet had a name or names for each mile, 1 through 26.2.

On the way to the start line (which was conveniently located at my hotel), I wished Ed a Happy Anniversary. We had both sort of forgotten about the date in all the marathon excitement. Ed's

marathon duties were to stay a few miles ahead of me in the car, take photos, offer support, and keep my parents updated. He had an emergency bag I'd packed with extra socks, extra shoes, extra GU, water, and post-race flip-flops.

I called Mom and Dad and told them that I was getting ready to go for a 26.2-mile run. "Listen to your body," Dad told me. "We're with you," said Mom.

I reviewed my race plan, which was to run for nine minutes, then walk for three minutes, over and over until I finished. I was hoping to keep an easy, slow 10:30 running pace and a 15:00 walking pace. If I stuck to that plan, I would finish the race in about five hours.

The atmosphere was charged. There were 1,200 people ready to race different distances, and I don't mind saying that I was proud of my black number that was less than 300, which indicated that I was running the marathon distance. However, everyone around me seemed more prepared than I, making me feel like a freshman on the first day of high school.

The announcer indicated that it was time to toe the line. Ed walked with me to the start. I began crying when we got there because I was feeling the emotion of weeks of work culminating to this moment. Actually, I almost felt like all 30 of my years had helped prepare me for the journey I was about to take. The announcer introduced the elites and gave some instructions, in English, Japanese, and Hawaiian. At 5:30 A.M., Ed said, "Have fun," and then somebody sounded the gun.

Mile 1

Dedicated to: My Facebook Friends

Split: 10:34.10

Elapsed Time: 10:34.10

I chose to dedicate my first mile to my friends on the social networking site, Facebook, nearly all of whom are my buddies in the "real world," as well. In the weeks preceding the race, I received a plethora of encouragement and support from them. I would've loved to have been able to bring them all to Hawaii with me. Since I couldn't do that, I had been keeping them updated on Hawaiian happenings through videos, and the support continued to flood my inbox. I ran the first mile for them as a thank-you for believing in me. I pretended like the people all around me were my Facebook friends.

The first mile of a long race is always adrenaline-charged. The race crowd is thick, and the spectators are more plentiful. The course began with us runners traveling north on Ali'i Drive, the A1A of Kona. The southbound lane was closed to traffic; but vehicles were still allowed in the northbound lane, and they honked and cheered for us. Near the end of the first mile, a runner stopped and took his own picture with a stone manatee mailbox. I laughed, because I had forced Ed to take my picture with that same manatee just a few days earlier.

I decided to run the entire first mile in order to judge my pace more accurately. I ran a very easy pace, sticking to the outside of the crowd in order to let nearly everyone pass me. I was disappointed when I reached the end of the mile and the folks at the aid station did not have any water or fuel available. However, I was comforted to see that I was pretty close to the 10:30 pace

I was hoping to keep on my running segments. I looked at Mile Marker 1, and noticed that the opposite side said Mile Marker 25. I tried not to think about it.

Mile 2

Dedicated to: Kim Hoagland (Friend)

Split: 12:20.01

Elapsed Time: 22:54.11

I met Kim Kinman Hoagland in July 2008 at the Ross Country Jamboree, where she is a regular vocalist and I am a guest vocalist. She, Jenny Lynn, and I are always involved in some kind of unusual antics together. The day I found out I'd earned the grant to run the marathon was a day we all performed together, and they celebrated the news with me. Months later, I asked Kim what mile she would like to have on my band. "An early mile," she said. "If you think about me on a late mile, you'll be laughing too hard thinking about us, and you'll pass out." I certainly smiled a lot thinking about "Proud Mary" choreography, eating chocolate off the stage floor, and Kim's cheerful personality.

I walked the three minutes of this mile, ran seven and a half minutes (to make up for the extra running on Mile 1), then resumed my 9:3 plan. I enjoyed my first sip of water near the end of Mile 2, but nearly ended my race early when I "rear-ended" a girl who stopped short in front of me at the aid station. This mile included the "Bali Kai" resort, which made me smile. Kai is my middle name. It means "ocean water" in Hawaiian, so it's incorporated into the names of many coastal establishments.

Mile 3

Dedicated to: Dave Morthland (Friend)

Split: 11:48.50

Elapsed Time: 34:42.61

I've known Dave Morthland since I was a community theatre rug rat in the early 1990s. In recent years, he's become like a family member to me. He manages *Forever Gold*, the oldies band with whom Ed and I perform. He's a bi-annual Hawaii traveler; when I called to tell him I earned the grant to Hawaii, he was on his way to Hawaii, and he thought I was joking. For years, I've listened raptly to his Hawaiian tales, and he would always end them by saying, "You'll go someday." As I ran, I thought about all the opportunities Dave has given me. He's a great example as he works hard to make life full and fun for those around him. I said aloud, "I finally made it to Hawaii, Dave."

I started to get concerned about Ed while running Mile 3. Though the honking cars in the northbound lane of Ali'i drive had thinned a bit, they were still plentiful. I kept looking for Ed in our rental Mustang convertible, but I wasn't finding him. I tried to tell myself that I must've missed him going by me while I was involved in the pageantry of Mile 1.

Near the end of this mile, I took my first "Ultima" at an aid station. It's like Gatorade, but not as good. My plan was to alternate water and Ultima at aid stations. I did not look forward to Ultima after this station. Taking GU and salt tabs at 40 minute intervals kept the nasty taste out of my mouth, though.

Mile 4

Dedicated to: Lisa Higgins (Friend)

Split: 11:20.06

Elapsed Time: 46:02.67

Lisa and I became friends when we were both cast in the community theatre show *Good Vibrations*, the cast of which ultimately became *Forever Gold*. Lisa is probably my most supportive non-family member. She always helps me with anything I need, including a 5:30 A.M. marathon training run to her house, after which she supplied me with water, a banana, a peppermint, and a ride home. She completed this mile "with" me in Indiana. Our relationship is such that we often find ourselves hilarious when no one else does, so I suppose it's appropriate that I earned a few strange looks on Mile 4 as I laughed out loud thinking of some of our antics. Lisa is a strong mother with a full-time job; she's often being pulled many ways at once. I considered her amazing stamina all through life, and applied it to the 11-12 minutes I spent on Mile 4. "This is nothing," I thought.

I hit the 5K mark at the beginning of Mile 4, and my watch said 35:something. I was instantly struck by the fact that less than five months before, I had run a 5K that was nine minutes faster. Granted, one runs faster in a 5K than in a marathon; but still, it messed with my head a little. Also, based on my pace, it looked like a sub-five hour finish was going to be difficult. I kept reminding myself that the finish line was the goal, and not to worry about time. A marathon is 8.5-times the distance of a 5K, so I was about 12% finished. At that moment, I vowed not to figure "percent done" again until after Mile 20.

On Mile 4, the beautiful plant life surrounding the route opened a bit, forming less of a canopy around the road. However, the sun was not touching the Kona side of the island yet. Though the sun rose above the horizon at 5:45, it didn't appear in Kona until about 7:00 A.M. due to the presence of the volcano Hualalai. I noticed the Royal Kona Resort, the site of the Luau Ed and I had attended two days earlier, nearing on my costal side. I was still worried about Ed's whereabouts.

The hills were a steeper grade on this mile. I thanked God for each uphill, because I knew it would be a downhill on the return trip.

Mile 5

Dedicated to: The Kern Family

Split: 11:50.93

Elapsed Time: 57:53.60

My Mom's parents had three daughters. Each daughter got married and had her own family, and now those kids have families. Altogether, there are 51 of us. On Mile 5, I focused on my Kern family and their influence in my life. I pictured all 50 faces in my mind and thanked them for their support and love. I especially focused on Meem and Gramps, the matriarch and patriarch of the bunch, and Anna Susan, my cousin who passed away shortly after she was born. I thought about how blessed I am to have them and 24 of my other Kern family members living within a block of me. Most of them are very active in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, so I found it very appropriate when "Amazing Grace" played on my iPod during this mile. I smiled, thinking they would find that appropriate, too.

The fifth mile was when I was finally reunited with Ed. (I learned later that a policeman had not let him take Ali'i Drive, so he had to go up to the highway and come back down another street.) As soon as I saw him standing in the distance, I started running faster. He took some pictures and shouted, "Where are you?" I told him I was around 4.5 miles complete, and he asked, "How are you feeling?" I considered it, and answered, "Fine! I really feel fine!" Two things occurred to me at that moment. First, I realized I hadn't been taking good inventory of my condition, because I had to think when he asked me how I was. Second, I realized that I really was FINE! I didn't feel the hip or thigh pain that had been plaguing me through training. Hooray.

This part of the course entered the Kailua-Kona area. There are many shops and historical sites to see, in addition to beautiful, blue Kailua Bay. A photographer took my picture near Bongo Ben's, a restaurant Ed and I would enjoy three days later. The folks getting ready to open their shops stopped and clapped as we ran by them. I noticed a girl sitting outside an ABC Store, waiting for it to open. A closer look showed me that she was an employee of that store, one who had helped me a few days before and had wished me luck on the marathon. We had enjoyed a laugh over the silly "no smiling" rule on Indiana drivers' licenses. She had said, "That doesn't sound like a very friendly state."

By Mile 5, all the runners had assumed their positions in the pack. The crowd had thinned, and I found myself running near a guy with "MARK - 50 STATER" scrawled on his shirt. He, a 50-stater (one who has run a marathon in all 50 states), was running my speed? That news gave me some hope for my marathon-ing future.

Mile 6

Dedicated to: Ed Cobb (Husband)

Split: 10:55.07

Elapsed Time: 1:08:48.67

Ed chose Mile 6 because we were married in the sixth month of 2006. Because I was running the marathon on our anniversary, I first thought about the day we got married. Our wedding was on the beach at Myrtle Beach State Park on the country's east coast. Now, we were in the USA's western most state. I thought about all the support he had given me through the training of the marathon, and it brought me to tears. On several Saturdays preceding the marathon, he awakened at 4:30 A.M. to drive me to another town or county so I could have a training run along the highway. He listened to me talk about each detail of every training pain and gain. He was truly my partner through the whole experience. He gave me the strength to go a little faster on this mile.

At the beginning of the sixth mile, I exited Ali'i Drive and made my way up Palani Road toward Kuakini. By "up," I mean UP. The hill was pretty steep, though brief. A guy passed me saying, "Walk in the park. Walk in the park." I smiled at him and said, "We're in Hawaii." We both picked up the pace.

The course turned left onto Kuakini after the hill, then turned right (toward the mountain) on Makala shortly after that. At this point, the course changed slightly from the original map. Due to new stoplights at a shopping center, certain roads couldn't be closed for the race. Therefore, we had to run around the shopping center. When I completed the sixth mile, which was behind the stores, my watch showed me right on track for a 5-hour finish.

Mile 7

Dedicated to: The Cobb Family

Split: 12:30.16

Elapsed Time: 1:21:18.83

Ed's parents, Steve and Selma, accepted me as a daughter the minute Ed and I told them they were getting married. We have the privilege of having Sunday dinner at their house every week. Selma always acknowledges the accomplishments of each family member with a special meal. When I earned the Lilly endowment, Selma threw a Hawaiian-themed dinner party and invited my parents. I also appreciate having Stephenie, Ed's sister, and his grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, etc., in my life. They are all a blessing to me. On this mile, I considered my appreciation of them and their strength as a family, especially during the recent deaths of family members.

Mile 7 was an eventful mile. It began with a photo from the professional photographer. I waved. On my left, a guy passed me. He was moving at a brisk pace, which led me to wonder what he was doing back with the mid-pack. It quickly occurred to me that he was the leader of the half marathon, which had started a half hour after the full marathon. I'd had a 30-minute head start on this guy, and he passed me about six miles into the race. WOW. The female half-leader passed me soon after the male half-leader.

I noticed a little contraption ahead of me. It was PVC pipe, fashioned together in a giant upright rectangle. There were little holes in the pipe, and a hose was running water through it, creating a shower of water. I was a little hesitant to run under the water, because I didn't want to soak my shoes. Plus, I wasn't too hot yet. The sun was just starting to peek over the mountain.

Shortly after she'd passed me, the female half-leader passed me again on her way back to the finish. Due to their intense focus, the elite runners normally don't acknowledge the slower runners; so I was surprised when she said, "Good job, girl." I felt honored. About a week after the race, I found her online and told her thank you for the encouragement. She wrote me back and told me that I'd made her day with the thank-you.

The half-marathon turnaround was an action-packed spot. Ed was there waiting for me, and I ran faster when I saw him. The Crohn's and Colitis Team Challenge cheerleaders were there too. They started whooping and hollering when they saw me, and screamed, "You're the first one! You're the first Team Challenge runner!" I shouted back, "I'm doing the full," which let them know I'd had a half-hour head start on the other Team Challenge runners, most of whom were running the half. That information didn't seem to upset them though. They continued to bounce around and wave pom-poms and flowers. I have a very specific memory of a girl's dark, curly hair springing up and down while she yelled, "Go, Jo!" (Ed had written, "GO JO!" on my bib.)

I was due for an Ultima at the aid station there, but accidentally asked for Gatorade. They said, "We don't have Gatorade," so I took a water. The elevation change from the parking lot to the road was about five feet, so a steep wooden ramp had been built to make the incline smoother. It was a bit rickety, but I felt safe. The one block ascent to the highway was very steep, and for the first time, I felt a catch in my hips. I wrote it off to the climb and turned left onto Queen Kaahumanu Highway.

Mile 8

Dedicated to: Sam Cobb (Stepson)

Split: 11:33.72

Elapsed Time: 1:32:52.55

Sam is the wisest 18-year-old I know. He's the kind of guy who doesn't speak much; but when he does, you listen. The month before the marathon, Sam graduated from his high school as the valedictorian of a class of 350. He helped lead his team to the State Finals in golf, and was looking forward to attending the University of Evansville on both academic and athletic scholarships. He always excels when under pressure. While running, I was reminded of the day Sam stayed focused and shot a low score in a high school tournament just hours after learning of the sudden death of his uncle. Once again, I felt that running Mile 8 of a marathon was nothing compared to that trial. "That was hard; this is not," I said.

Mile 8 was uphill on the first half and downhill on the second half. I had kind of dreaded this part of the course because the view wasn't as spectacular as that near the ocean. However, the highway had its own charm. I could see grand Hualalai to the east, its peak just beginning to be covered by the daily vog (volcanic debris + fog). To the west, I could see the vast expanse of the coast in the distance. On either side of me were fields of a'a lava from a nearly 200 year old Hualalai eruption. Different colors of little flowers lined the roadside, as well.

Disaster was averted at the aid station on Mile 8. As I was sipping my water, I noticed one of those PVC-pipe sprinklers. It was starting to get a little warm, so I thought it would be a good idea to run under the pipe for a little cool down. As I ran underneath the shower of water, my iPod shuffle abruptly stopped working. "No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no," I lamented. I continued to run and mess with the switches on my iPod. Before we'd left Indiana for Hawaii, I had carefully selected 83 songs, totaling five hours of inspirational and fun music. The thought of running 19 more miles without music almost made me have a panic attack. However, I quickly assessed the situation, and said to myself, "At least the problem isn't with knees, legs, hips, or feet. This I can handle." As soon as I had resigned myself to the fact that I was iPod-less, it started working. Ha!

As I neared the end of Mile 8, I laughed thinking about Sam jokingly having told me, "I don't care if you finish the race as long as you finish my mile."

Mile 9

Dedicated to: The Hackney Family

Split: 13:36.46

Elapsed Time: 1:46:29.01

My Dad's side of the family isn't as large as my Mom's side. There are 20 of us all together, though two have passed away. I conjured up each face in my mind, focusing on each family member's attributes. I focused especially on Papaw, who passed away in 1999, and my cousin Bill-Bill, who died as the result of a traffic accident in 1982 when he was 15 (and I was 3). I thought of German-born Mamaw who moved with her American-soldier husband from war-torn Germany to an America of the 1940s, which was not friendly to Germans. Again I thought, "Those situations were hard; Mile 9 is not." I also remembered happy times. It was the Hackney family who taught me how to truly enjoy an ocean vacation; and here I was in Hawaii, having the ocean vacation of a lifetime. Scenes of our

good family times played over and over in my mind. I also heard an echo of Mamaw's marathon advice: "If you get hot, just jump in the Pacific Ocean for awhile."

Within minutes after being thankful for no problems with my hips, I started having problems with my hips. I was getting that familiar feeling of near-dislocation. Normally, I would just suck it up and push through it. However, two-thirds of the course remained. I decided to allow myself a little more walking time than I'd originally planned. I figured going to a 5:5 run:walk ratio would be fine.

As I neared the end of Mile 9, the leader of the marathon passed me going the other direction, which meant he was a little beyond Mile 17. "Are you kidding me?" I thought. Once again, I was surprised when he smiled and waved at me, a lowly mid-packer. He ended up winning in 2:42:06.

Mile 10

Dedicated to: My Musician Friends

Split: 13:24.85

Elapsed Time: 1:59:53.86

Between singing with *Forever Gold* and at several regional country jamborees, I have made many wonderful friends, all of whom are talented musicians. I dedicated a mile to them because of all the support they've given me in every endeavor I attempt. I found it very fitting that the song "Rocky Top," one of my favorite songs to sing in the country shows, played on my iPod as I ran this mile. Most of my musician friends think I'm slightly unbalanced to want to do all the distance training I do; but what they don't know is that by running, I'm also increasing my stamina for our gigs. Running improves a lot more than my health!

I began to notice the heat of the road on Mile 10. Recently paved, it was absorbing the sun's heat quite well, and my legs below my knees were very warm. I was also beginning to feel blisters on my feet. Surprisingly, I was able to disregard the minor annoyances, even the slight uphill. The 5:5 rhythm was going well, and I was enjoying the scenery. While looking at the satellite map of the marathon course before the race, I had thought the stretch on the highway might be rough because it was through a lava field. However, I continued to find it quite interesting and beautiful in its own way.

Mile 11

Dedicated to: Libby Endris (Friend)

Split: 15:05.75

Elapsed Time: 2:14:59.61

Libby was my best bud at Bedford Junior High (now named Bedford Middle School, and my teaching home). We were involved in school and community theatre together over the years. More than 15 years later, we still laugh at teenage, inside jokes from school days that only we (and perhaps our mothers) remember and understand. In the weeks preceding the marathon, Libby had gone through some tough times. As was becoming a thought of mine on many miles, I considered, "Her situation is hard; Mile 11 is not." On this mile, I saw white rocks arranged in a peace symbol on the darker lava and knew Libby would've liked it. A month later, she finished her first 5K, pushing her son Evan in a stroller. He beat her by a second.

My hips were starting to feel extremely weak. When my hips hurt at Mile 11 on a half-marathon, I push through it, because there's only 5K or less to go. Conversely, in a full marathon, there are 16 miles remaining. I thought about Dad's advice to listen to my body, and I employed Plan C: time to walk. I didn't saunter, though; I kept a steady, brisk pace. I planned to walk until I felt I could run again. Disappointment in losing my sub-five goal was fleeting. *Finishing* was the real goal.

As long as I was expending less energy, I made it my mission to give good, hearty cheers to those running the opposite direction, rather than just waving as I had before. Everyone, and I mean *everyone*, gave a return smile or wave. A few of them even yelled, "Go, Jo!" after supposedly reading my bib. Good feeling.

Mile 12

Dedicated to: Cathy Hackney (Mom)

Split: 12:57.23

Elapsed Time: 2:27:56.84

Ah, Momma, my biggest cheerleader. She's the woman who still tells me my birth story on the evening before my birthday; still calls me at 7:26 A.M. on June 1 (my birth minute) to sing; and still calls, emails, or visits to do a "Good Luck Cheer" before I attempt anything that requires good fortune. She was matron of honor at my wedding, and is my best lunch partner, special occasion shopping buddy, televised-pageant watching friend, substitute teacher, sunning companion, road trip mate, and encourager. It stung a little that she was 4,300 miles away while I was running, but it felt as if she were there. While running west, I saw the shadow of my ponytail whipping around my head. I thought to myself, "Mom would say, 'You're looking great! So's your ponytail!'"

After running nearly five miles on the highway, I was looking forward to the turn in Mile 12 that would allow me to run west for a while. When I was making the turn, I saw a friend I'd made at the hotel running in the opposite direction. We gave each other excited waves, and then I proceeded downhill. Though the elevation change was tough on my hips, it didn't hurt as much as I thought it would; and I was able to run more on this mile than on the previous one. Near the end of Mile 12, the marathon organizer passed me going the other direction. I gave him a heartfelt, "Thank you!" and he smiled, waved cheerfully, and said, "You're welcome!"

Mile 13

Dedicated to: Gordon Lowry (Friend)

Split: 13:40.42

Elapsed Time: 2:41:37.26

I met Gordon Lowry through my association with the Little Nashville Opry. I heard his fiddle playing before I saw his face, and I knew I would have to befriend anyone who could play those sweet sounds. Because of our geographic proximity, we often travel to gigs together. In fact, Gordon was our chauffeur to the airport on the night we left for Hawaii. The spring before the marathon, he had made plans to quit smoking. I can't imagine how hard that act is, but I know it was taking all his will power to be successful. Once again, that undertaking was more difficult than Mile 13 of a marathon.

Most of Mile 13 was an ocean road. Once again, I was able to do some running, but not nearly what I'd done in the earlier miles. As I neared the end of the mile, I noticed Ed waiting for me. I also

noticed that I'd been running and walking for about two hours and 40 minutes. I felt a twinge of annoyance at that time, since I had finished a half-marathon in 2:15 eight short weeks previously. Trying to remind myself that this was a completely different situation, I cut myself some slack. Also waiting was a PVC-pipe arch with a sign that said, "Marathon Turnaround." I made the turn, and thought about how Mile 13 of the Mini is usually much more eventful. I shouted to Ed, "Now all I have to do is run back!"

I didn't know it then, but the marathon winner finished less than a minute after I rounded the PVC-pipe turnaround.

Mile 14

Dedicated to: Mac Cobb (Stepson)

Split: 13:57.28

Elapsed Time: 2:55:34.54

Having just finished his freshman year in high school the spring before the marathon, Mac had become acutely focused on his grades and on bettering his golf game. I was proud of the maturity he'd shown over the last few months, and thought often of the barriers he'd conquered in the last year. His trademark impish grin and wily ways brought smiles as I ran. I also thought about my computer's desktop wallpaper, a picture of Sam and Mac playing in a high school golf match together at Otis Park. Before the marathon, Mac asked me which mile I thought would be the hardest. "Fourteen," I replied. "Then I want 14," he said. Though I can only guess his motivation for that choice, it helped to have Mac on the brain during what was indeed a tough mile.

What made Mile 14 difficult were the late elevation change and my own strange psychology. The out-and-back course made my mathematical mind break the course into two half-marathons, the distance with which I am most accustomed. Thus, Mile 14 felt like starting all over again. However, the fact that the oncoming foot-traffic was now *behind* me in distance made me feel a bit better. I kept thinking I was going to make the turn, only to find I was in last place. Even though last place is still a "finisher," I didn't want that designation. Before the course turned away from the beach and back east up the hill, I swerved to run in the sand for a bit. I wanted to be on the beach for part of Mac's mile.

Mile 15

Dedicated to: My Let's Go Team

Split: 14:30.65

Elapsed Time: 3:10:05.19

When I made the decision to give running a go in November 2006, I had no idea how to start. Obviously, one doesn't go from being unable to run around a quarter-mile track to finishing a half-marathon overnight. Luckily, I timed my desire to run quite well. That very same month, Jimmy Sowders organized the group "Let's Go," a group of Lawrence Countians interested in completing the 500 Festival Mini Marathon. Six months later, after support from the mentors and other walkers and runners of Let's Go, I ran all 13.1 miles of the Mini without stopping to walk. The knowledge, support, and friendships I've gained through Let's Go have helped me become a better runner and person.

Most of Mile 15 was uphill. It was only a 2% grade, but it was long. I started using landmarks as a psychological strategy. "Run to that access road," I would tell myself, "then walk for a bit." It was a good plan. Near the top of the hill I noticed that my toes and a spot on the inside of my left heel were starting to feel pretty raw. "Anything you can do about it?" I asked myself. Since the answer was no, I put it out of my mind. I still don't understand how I managed to squelch the physical pain.

When I crested the hill, there was a volunteer sitting in a lawn chair directing marathon traffic on the course. As I approached him, I waved and told him thank you. To my surprise, he stood up, and saluted me. I said, "Don't be silly. Sit down." He replied, "No, I will stand for what you're accomplishing today." As expected, I started crying. He laughed and yelled, "Don't cry!" as I passed him.

As I began the return trip on the highway, I had my mind focused on the faces of my Let's Go teammates. Maybe it was the heat, maybe it was my body's exhaustion, but I saw them lining the road. I *saw* them. All my Let's Go friends were standing in a line clapping and cheering for me and reaching out to slap my hand. I'm not delusional; I know they weren't in Hawaii. However, I think God gave me that image, clear as a forest spring, to give me encouragement to finish the next 11 miles.

Mile 16

Dedicated to: Claire Wilcher (Friend)

Split: 14:00.14

Elapsed Time: 3:24:05.33

On the first day of my freshman year of college at IU, in the first class, the first two people in the room were myself and Claire Wilcher. I was already sitting at a desk in that French class, panicking about starting college, when she sat next to me and calmed me. We discovered pretty quickly that we had a lot in common, especially a passion for musical theatre, and she remains the dearest friend I made in college. As I ran, I thought of all our good memories. I also recalled that on her 23rd birthday, her energetic father passed away. That was hard; this is not.

I was starting to reap the benefits of the "back" part of an out-and-back course that begins uphill. All of those "uphills" were now "downhills." The oncoming crowd was thinning significantly, but I still found encouragement in the highway traffic. People would honk, wave, and shout. I think the cheering drivers noticed that they were passing the "slow and steady" part of the pack. They would yell things like, "Keep going!" and "You can do it, Orange!" due to my orange shirt. At one point, a race volunteer passed me on a bike and said, "Doing OK?" I replied, "Yeah, do I not look OK?" She just smiled, leaving me to guess the answer for myself.

As I finished Mile 16, it occurred to me that the distance to the finish line was approximately the same as the distance from Mitchell to Bedford. Having run from Mitchell to Bedford before, I thought, "Just run home." However, there's something about having covered 16 miles and knowing there are still 10 miles to go that is a little discomfoting.

Mile 17

Dedicated to: My Pets

Split: 14:15.75

Elapsed Time: 3:38:21.08

It may seem silly to have dedicated a mile to my pets. However, the four Yorkshire Terriers I have owned in my lifetime have affected me more than many people have. Itsy Bitsy, Kacey Já, and Yankee Doodle Dandee were always happy to see me arrive, sad to see me go, and faithful to be good comforters, playmates, and friends. Those dogs have all passed away, but Abbi keeps me company now. As I ran, I imagined her on a leash, happily bounding along the highway with me.

Somewhere on this mile, I became annoyed with the Queen Kaahumanu Highway. It was 90°, the sun was tropically intense, my feet were freely oozing and bleeding, and my hips were aching; but none of those things were bothering me. Above all else, I was unnerved by a highway. My problem with the highway was visibility and safety. First, I could see too far. When running, it's never good to have a seemingly unending stretch of course in front of you. Second, though I was running on a shoulder, I was running with, rather than against, traffic. I didn't like that feeling of cars coming at me from the back. Orange safety cones kept me protected, and I used them to help me pace my running and walking. ("Run to the third cone, walk to the next cone," etc.)

Mile 18

Dedicated to: Those With Crohn's Disease

Split: 14:27.76

Elapsed Time: 3:52:48.84

When I crossed into the 18th mile, I checked my prayer band and immediately got emotional. I thought of the many strong people I know who have Crohn's disease, but I also thought of the many Crohn's-afflicted I don't know. Of the 1.4 million with Crohn's disease (30,000 of those in Indiana), most are able to lead fairly normal lives with the help of diet, lots of medication, and a good ol' positive attitude. Knowing that this marathon was supporting the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America in the same way as our concert, Croonin' for Crohn's, was a special thought to have in my mind. Crohn's has, surprisingly, been a *positive* force in my life. Because of it, I became tenacious about living life. I tried things I hadn't tried before I was sick, simply to prove that I could do them. If you had told me on April 18, 2003, the day of my diagnosis, that I would one day run a marathon, I would never have believed you. Appropriately, the song "Fighter" played on my iPod during this mile, the lyrics of which seemed more poignant than ever:

*Makes me that much stronger,
Makes me work a little bit harder,
Makes me that much wiser;
So thanks for making me a fighter.*

*Made me learn a little bit faster,
Made my skin a little bit thicker,
Makes me that much smarter;
So thanks for making me a fighter.*

Still annoyed by the obnoxious highway, but *much* more appreciative of my situation after an attitude adjustment, I started taking inventory of my body. I'd stuck to my water and Ultima plans, and had faithfully taken salt tabs and GU every 40 min. each (on a 20 min. rotation). I was feeling

surprisingly good. In order not to jinx myself, I decided to focus more outwardly rather than inwardly.

Nearing the end of the Mile 18, I thought I saw the road on which I should turn. Alas, I was incorrect. I knew the turn was closer to the end of Mile 20, so I don't know why I allowed myself that delusion. It goaded me until I finally did turn about two miles later.

Mile 19

Dedicated to: Chad Cobb (Brother-In-Law)

Split: 15:24.59

Elapsed Time: 4:08:13.43

Ed's only brother died suddenly on May 31, 2007. The hurt the family experienced was unlike any pain I'd felt and observed previously. I sang at his funeral and didn't make it through the whole song. Though those sad memories made me realize, as many situations had on the other miles, that that was hard, and this was not, it was my happy memories of Chad that buoyed me on Mile 19. He was a wicked guitar player, was handy with an automobile, and made me laugh a lot. I recalled the strength of his family to help me, as well.

I saw Ed at the beginning of Mile 19. He was waiting at the intersection that I thought had been the turn. He held out his cell phone and said, "Your parents are on the phone! Yell to them!" I shouted that I loved them as I ran by the phone. Ed did a great job of keeping Mom and Dad informed of my position and condition all morning long.

In the middle of Mile 19, I crossed the four-hour mark. I thought to myself, "If I were a Lafferty, I'd have this thing licked." (My former boss, Larry Lafferty, has two daughters, Buffy and Allison, who had recently run sub-four-hour marathons, and he and I had been in contact about my Hawaii and pre-marathon experiences.) Strangely, part of me was glad I wasn't done. I knew I would remember the marathon forever, and I didn't want the experience to end. The highway, on the other hand, could be over at any time, as far as I was concerned.

Mile 20

Dedicated to: Those Unable To Run

Split: 14.41.12

Elapsed Time: 4:22:54.55

For whatever reason, many people are unable to run. For six months in 2008, I was unable to run due to a broken leg. Even with the knowledge that I would be able to run again soon, it was hard. With each step I took on Mile 20, I thought about how lucky I was to be able to use only my legs to travel 20 miles, and I thanked God for the ability and the desire to run. Scrawled on my prayer band for this mile were also the initials "E.L." for Eric Lowen, one of my favorite singer/songwriters. In 2004, he was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), and has gone from being a touring musician to being wheelchair bound, unable to play guitar. He has always given me hope through his songs and attitude, so with his name on my heart, I sent him hope on Mile 20.

Mile 20 brought the much anticipated exit from the highway. The decline was rough on my thighs. I saw Ed in the parking lot of the shopping center, and I yelled for him. Because I was retracing my steps, I had to go down the rickety-ramp I had climbed to get out of the shopping center parking

lot on Mile 7. It was much more difficult to descend than to ascend. I snagged a cup of ice and a water at the aid station. I lifted my hat and dumped the ice under it. It stayed pretty secure and melted down my neck and back for the next mile or so.

When I arrived at the back of the shopping center, I crossed Mile Marker 20. *Twenty*. Being a math geek, adding another number in the tens place was a big deal to me. The same guy who snapped my picture at Mike Marker 6 did so again at Mile Marker 20. I was pretty fired up, but he looked bored.

Mile 21

Dedicated to: Ken Hackney (Dad)

Split: 14:06.02

Elapsed Time: 4:37:00.57

Originally, Dad picked Mile 21 because it was going to be my "unknown territory," meaning my farthest training run was going to have been 20 miles. However, I never did that training run, and it was because of Dad. Perhaps because I'm his only child and certainly because he loves me, Dad worries about me a lot. He feels my Crohn's pain, other physical pain, emotional pain, and stress as much as, if not more than, I do. In the weeks preceding the marathon, he was afraid I was overtraining and was going to injure myself, thus losing the marathon. As I ran, I thought about all the walks we've taken together, all the high school basketball games we've attended, and all the rounds of golf he's played while I've watched. Though it drove me nuts when I was a teenager, his best advice has carried me through a lot of tough times in life, especially through Crohn's healing: "It's not what happens to you in life that matters; it's how you handle what happens." I was certainly employing that counsel in the marathon, and I said aloud, "I promise I'm enjoying Mile 21, Dad! I only wish you were here."

I wrapped around Makala and Kuakini on my way back to Ali'i Drive. I passed what looked like a Mini Golf Course, and I made note to visit it before we left. (We did so three days later, and Ed beat me by one stroke.) I was comforted to be running back to the part of town where I couldn't see so much of the road in front of myself. The pedestrian traffic was thicker, too, and it was nice to see the encouraging smiles. I noted that I could no longer feel the raw spots on my feet if I tried, and welcomed the numbness. The last part of Mile 21 was a steep decline on Palani Road, the reverse of the steep incline from the beginning of Mile 6. Once again, the descent was more difficult than the ascent. My thighs felt weak, but strong enough for five more miles. I noted that if I kept my pace under 16-minute miles, which I was sure I could do, I would finish in less than six hours.

Mile 22

Dedicated to: Diane Lineback (Friend)

Split: 15:34.31

Elapsed Time: 4:52:34.88

Since 1995, I have called Diane Lineback a good friend. We met as a result of her husband Jon's involvement in the Little Theatre of Bedford. Our friendship was strengthened through attending church together, participating in choirs together, and even performing in plays together. Her children, Katie and Rebekah, also became my friends. Diane is, above all, an encourager, and has always sought to support me in all my crazy endeavors. Though she doesn't call herself a runner,

she vowed to run Mile 22 "with" me from Bedford. Thoughts of her pushing herself to complete her distance gave me the "oomph" I needed to complete mine.

It felt good to be back on Ali'i Drive by the ocean. The southbound lane was still blocked so that I could run without vehicle interruption. I ran by Kailua Bay, and saw Ed standing in the middle of the road. He snapped my picture and said, "This will be the last time I can see you until the finish. Finish strong!"

I had traveled Ali'i Drive several times during our previous week in Hawaii, both by car and on foot. It suddenly occurred to me that I was within about an hour of finishing a marathon. The thought was a bit overwhelming. I started making sure I was appreciating all the sights, sounds, and smells of Kailua-Kona, because I knew I didn't have much time left to make marathon memories.

Mile 23

Dedicated to: Jean Ann Birkle (Friend)

Split: 14:55.36

Elapsed Time: 5:07:30.24

As soon as I crossed into Mile 23, I could have sworn I heard Jean Ann's laugh, which is one of her best personality traits. Jean Ann plays at both the Little Nashville Opry and the Corydon Jamboree, two places at which I frequently perform. She is responsible for the "branching out" of my individual performing, and she's given me a lot of advice and encouragement, from which I've learned to become a better performer. Once again, I considered her strength in the face of recent trials, and applied that to my focus on Mile 23.

No matter how much focus I had, I couldn't overcome my disappointment over a dreadful thing that happened on Mile 23. I heard someone shout, "Move to the right, please!" behind me. I adjusted my trajectory to the shoulder, and a car drove by me. This car had people on the back removing the cones! Traffic that had been backed up for a long time was filling the southbound lane. I felt very unsafe on the narrow shoulders, but the drivers were courteous and gave the marathoners a wide berth. It still made me nervous, though.

Though the trend was downward, the hills started to get a bit rolling, so I was feeling a lot of up, down, up, down in my legs. The road also started twisting here and there. I was appreciative of the variable elevation and scenery.

Mile 24

Dedicated to: Two Close Friends

Split: 14:02.16

Elapsed Time: 5:21:32.40

We've all been both the victims and the criminals when it comes to spreading gossip. While being the sufferers of some particularly vicious gossip in the months before I left for Hawaii, two of my friends showed real class and character. I knew it would have been easier for them to attack, hate, and complain, but they held up their heads and chose the higher, though harder, road. "That was hard; this is not."

On Mile 24, I came upon three folks, a girl and guy about my age and an older gentleman. I matched their pace for a bit so we could chat. The older gentleman told me he was from Illinois (which feels like a neighbor when you're in Hawaii). He was a 50-stater, and Hawaii was his 50th state. The younger people were his son and daughter-in-law, there to celebrate the accomplishment with him. He told me, "Of all my marathons, Kona is the hardest one I've run." I was instantly given hope. Though I may never be a 50-stater, it seemed if I could handle Kona, I could certainly handle other "easier" marathons.

I passed the 50-stater and his family and told myself that I had less than a mere 5K to go, and I was about 90% finished with the marathon. I felt a little lonely running alone after seeing the man from Illinois with his family. I refocused on my prayer band and remembered that it wouldn't be long until I saw Ed. My legs kept moving forward, probably because they didn't know what else to do after more than five hours of forward motion.

Mile 25

Dedicated to: My Former and Future Students

Split: 14:37.73

Elapsed Time: 5:36:10.13

This mile was another emotional one for me. In my other miles that had a group on which to focus, I held an image of each group member's face in my head at some point in the mile. I lamented that this act wouldn't be possible on this mile due to the sheer numbers of students I've taught. However, in rapid succession, sixth grade faces were flashing in my mind's eye. I focused especially on those students that experienced successes in spite of difficulties, as I was about to do. I thought of the Lilly Endowment which had funded this trip, the aim of which was to aide me in helping students reach goals in spite of hindrances. Hoping that future students would benefit from what I had learned, I thought of all Bedford's kids, born and not yet born, that I will have the pleasure to educate. I also considered my teaching colleagues and students' parents, and the support many of them have given me.

Near the beginning of Mile 25, I saw one of the little PVC-pipe sprinklers. I decided that it was worth the risk to my iPod to take a pass underneath the mist. When I did so, I misjudged the height and smacked my head on the top pipe. Stars danced in my vision. Had I not just run/walked 24 miles, I think it would've been a non-event. However, my body's depleted condition didn't help matters. I staggered a moment, but regained control even though my head was pounding. It occurred to me later that the sprinkler couldn't have been too tall if *I* smacked my head on it.

Still on numb autopilot, I watched some of the surfers as I ran/walked. Kona was experiencing a "swell," bigger waves than usual, and the beaches were crowded. This crowding meant that the parking areas were packed, multiple pedestrians were darting across the road, traffic was slowed, and drivers were irritated. I was on high-alert to make sure I was safe. One of the surfers hailed me and shouted, "How far have you gone, girl?" I replied, "About 25 miles." "Wanna beer then?" he asked with a smile. I just grinned and shook my head.

Mile 26

Dedicated to: Myself

Split: 15:15.73

Elapsed Time: 5:51:25.86

Mine, mine, ALL MINE! On this mile, I allowed myself some time to reflect on how far I've come. I kept seeing images of my days in the hospital after I'd had a major intestinal hemorrhage, when I couldn't sit up without my heart rate going dangerously high. Little by little, over six years, I had gone from invalid to marathoner. I don't think I'll ever quite lose my thankfulness for that transformation. Also, if I'm ever that sick again, I'll know that with the right attitude, I'll be able to do anything I want eventually. I spent most of this mile, however, drinking in the moment. You only get to run the last mile of your first marathon once!

This mile was familiar as I had run it a few times since we had arrived in Hawaii. I passed familiar flowers, recognizable landmarks, and my friend, the manatee. One would think that I would've been able to run faster with the knowledge that the finish was imminent. However, my physical condition was deteriorating quickly. I didn't want to come this far only to collapse moments before the finish, so I "listened to my body" once again and saved the surge for the last moments of the marathon.

Mile 26.2

Dedicated to: Ken Hackney (Dad)

Split: 02:01.14

Elapsed Time: 5:53:27.00

When I planned the prayer band, Dad told me he wanted "the most" miles. Therefore, I gave him the final fifth. It was appropriate since there was probably no one in the world happier that the beating my body had been taking was very nearly over.

Very nearly over? Two-tenths of a mile is a lot longer at the end of a marathon than anywhere else. I summoned all my will to run the last fifth of the race. Ed was in the distance, waiting for a glimpse of me so he could get in position to take pictures of me rounding the final curve to the finish. I started crying long before the finish line, thinking about what a big accomplishment this was for me.

With my arms extended, I turned from Ali'i Drive into the entrance to the Keauhou Beach Resort. The announcer shouted, "Just look at the emotion folks! Congratulations, JoAnna Cobb of Indiana! You are a MARATHONER!" The substantial crowd in the area cheered heartily. Ed took pictures with one hand and held out his cell phone with the other so my parents could hear the finish. Race volunteers placed my finisher's medal and a shell lei over my head. I found Ed, collapsed into his arms, and said with a laugh, "I don't think I want to do that ever again." I changed my mind within the hour.

Post-Marathon

Ed had to support me immediately after I exited the chute. It was as if my brain was programmed to 26.2 miles, no more, no less. I literally had nothing left. I told Ed and a race official about having hit my head on Mile 25. They immediately steered me to the medical tent. After walking there, I sat and stopped moving for the first time in nearly six hours. It felt weird. The doctors inspected me. I had a bump but no blood, so they gave me some Gatorade and sent me on my way.

Ed and I met the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation volunteers, Jess Johnson and Carly Beck, who congratulated me while I cried, and then he and I went to sit in the breezy hotel lobby. I kept crying and crying, and called prayer band people to tell them I'd finished. One of the CCFA volunteers I didn't know came to give me a banana, and cried when she learned that I have Crohn's disease. For an hour and a half, I cried. It wasn't sadness; it was just a release that my body needed to experience. I found the marathon to be more of an emotional experience than a physical experience, so the tears were an appropriate ending, I think.

However, my body did indeed experience signs of physical effort. I've heard it said that completing a marathon is an injury unto itself, which I believe. In the short term, my hands and feet were swollen, and I was feeling distinctly nauseated. My body was back to regular size and routine the next morning, but the muscle pain, joint aches, blisters, and blackened (then lost) toenails persisted. Surprisingly, my joint and muscle pain just lasted about three days, only a day longer than half-marathon aches.

What has never disappeared, and will never disappear, is the feeling of accomplishment I felt, and still feel, after my completion of the Kona Marathon. The marathon was representative of how far I've come, not just since I was diagnosed, but since I was born. It gave me a new perspective on life, one that I will be able to share with others, especially my students. A journey of 26.2 miles that took me five hours, 53 minutes and 27 seconds to complete will forever be some of the most vivid hours, minutes, and seconds of my life. Those moments allowed me to reflect on my past, present, and future in a way I'd never done previously. Thanks go to God, my family, my friends, and to the Lilly Endowment for allowing me to see myself and those in my life in a new light. I'm proud to call myself a wife, daughter, stepmother, family member, friend, Crohnie, teacher, singer, runner, and MARATHONER.