

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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Grandma's lessons

First of all, you sweat off sunscreen somewhere between miles five and 10, so forget about actually preventing some kind of sunburn. Second, toenails are not a permanent part of your body. Third, the North Shore does, in fact, GET HOT.

This past weekend I joined 8,500 fellow nutcases in running the full Grandma's Marathon, 26.2 miles, from Two Harbors to Duluth. I had been training relatively intensively, so I wasn't too worried about the race. I had a laid-back approach, unconcerned. I figured that I knew what to expect.

The day started out in dramatic fashion, when our bus driver mistakenly tried to drop us off at the start of the half-marathon less than half an hour before the gun was set to go off. We quickly corrected him, but the mood in the bus had changed from nervousness to borderline panic, especially for the people who had not visited the portable johns provided at the Miller Hill Mall.

We made it to the starting line, and I barely had time to stretch before the gun went off, and the long run began.

In a run like this, it's very easy to make friends. At the moment, you're stuck along with everyone else in the midst of an epic ordeal that isn't ending any time soon. I started running next to a girl, originally from the Iron



Matt Nelson
Summer Intern

Range, who had never run a marathon before.

"This is surreal," she told me during the run. "This is something I've always wanted to do — and now I'm doing it."

It made me think of last year; the first time I attempted the marathon.

Last year, I was scared out of my mind. I remember standing at the starting line, looking around me at all the people wearing running belts which had shots of some sort of miracle juice that would make their feet light and ensure a daring victory. All I had were a pair of broken-in tennis shoes and determination.

This year I found myself more prepared. I had bought a run-

ning belt at the expo and energy gel packs.

I ran with the girl for 12 miles, and then decided to walk through the water break at mile 15. Suddenly I found myself overwhelmed with the heat and exertion (I learned later that 2009 was one of the warmest Grandma's Marathons on record). The girl kept going, but I had to pace myself or I knew I wouldn't finish. Mile 16 was bad. Mile 17 was a little better — and then I caught my second wind and started running again.

At this time, however, I knew I would not beat my time of last year unless I really pushed it, which was not an option. So I decided to start having a little more fun with the run.

Spectators do the goofiest things at marathons. I was one person in a colorful crowd of sweating and determined individuals, surrounded to my left and right by spectators banging cowbells, impersonating Elvis Presley, and always cheering. At one point I ran into Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble — and, unable to resist, I took the time to take a picture with them.

My personal favorite came at mile 24, when one guy held up a sign that said "ZOMBIE ATTACK! RUN!" and a tall man with a stellar makeup job lurched around in undead fashion, groaning. A woman next to them waved another sign —

"THE END IS NEAR!" Being a Romero fan, I had to pause, take a couple pictures, and shake their hands.

I couldn't take this race seriously anymore — I laughed a lot, continuously gave the 'rock on' signal to the crowds and at one point joined in a chorus of "Don't Stop Believing" with fellow runners.

Last year, I was so intent on finishing my marathon that I forgot to enjoy the small, quirky and vivid components of an epic endeavor. A marathon is sort of like life — it seems long, hard, with a whole lot of pain, and sometimes you hit a wall. Yet there's a sense of accomplishment that slowly grows the farther you progress.

This column isn't about a marathon. It's about moving too fast and forgetting about the cool parts that people fail to see in the process. Those who know me know I'm a literary person, and one of the most common themes in literature (most evident in L. Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz") is this: "it's the journey that counts, and not the destination."

I don't know if my female running companion made it to the finish line — I hope she did. I made it there... eventually. And I had a really great time in the process.

hdt Kudos

ku'dos, noun 1. fame; honor; glory; prestige; credit; as for an achievement.

2. a Hibbing Daily Tribune column featuring words straight from the community recognizing outstanding individuals and institutions.

Kudos to the Hibbing Police Department, Fire Department and the HPU for a quick and efficient response to a power outage on 19th Avenue on Sunday. Thank you. (Submitted by a 19th Avenue resident)

Kudos to Duke Skorich Barbeque and everyone that stopped by on Wednesday to help support the VFW baseball team. We appreciate the support. Thanks from the VFW Baseball team.

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'Only I'm the president'

White House press conferences are often pallid and pre-scripted affairs. But President Obama's occasionally testy exchanges with reporters this week revealed a key dimension of his approach to the presidency.

The question was Iran, and the charges leveled by Republican critics were that he'd been too "timid and passive" in denouncing the repression of political dissent. After acknowledging the "genuine passion" of those critics, Obama asserted: "But only I'm the president of the United States. And I've got responsibilities in making certain that we are continually advancing our national security interests."

In other words, it's easy to appear on television or speak in the Senate and toss out popular applause lines about the evils of tyranny. It's much harder to sit in the Oval Office and calibrate your language, knowing that every word you say will be distributed and dissected around the world.

When you have "responsibilities," the president was saying, you can't afford to see the world in black and white -- or even bright green, the color of the Iranian protesters. And you can't indulge your emotions and reach for the quick headline or sound bite. "I know everybody here is on a 24-hour news cycle," he snapped at reporters who pressed him for sharper words and clearer threats. "I'm not. OK?"

OK. But if Obama wants to avoid the florid rhetoric that simply



Cokie & Steve Roberts
Columnist

"makes us feel good about ourselves," as one aide told the Washington Post, if he wants to focus on America's real "national security interests," the next question is this: What are those interests? And how will the president pursue them?

At the press conference, Obama said that his "position coming into this office" was to focus on two "core" issues: "Making sure that Iran doesn't possess a nuclear weapon and it stops exporting terrorism outside of its borders."

On the first point, the president is absolutely right. During the 2004 campaign, both George Bush and John Kerry agreed that the number-one foreign policy issue was controlling the spread of nuclear weapons, and that priority has not changed. A nuclear-armed Iran would profound-

ly alter the power balance throughout the Middle East and directly threaten the existence of Israel.

No matter what happens on the streets of Tehran, that remains the primary focus in Iranian-American relations and the biggest threat to our "national security interests." No matter how badly the theocrats ruling Iran treat their own people, the American president has to keep open diplomatic channels and keep alive the possibility of negotiations - no matter how faint that prospect seems at the moment. As one Obama aide warned, the centrifuges Iran could use to enrich uranium "are still spinning."

"Exporting terrorism" is almost as dangerous. Iranian support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza is a constant source of tension and turmoil throughout the region.

In effect, Obama came into office enunciating a version of the "containment" policy that dominated America's thinking about the Soviet Union for decades (and also applied to Saddam Hussein's Iraq before Bush 43 replaced containment with invasion). What you do inside your own country is your business; when you start to threaten your neighbors, it becomes our business.

But here's the problem: the world has changed since Obama took office. New technologies enabled young Iranians to voice their hopes, connect with each other, organize an election campaign, protest the fraudulent outcome -- and show the world the bleeding face of tyranny.

That blood demanded a response. Decency was in conflict with diplomacy. If Obama failed to express his outrage at the violence, he would jeopardize his moral stature. But if he went too far, he would jeopardize his ability to engage and influence the Iranian regime.

Overreaction carries other risks as well: as Obama put it, the United States should not be a "foil" for Iran, and give the mullahs a chance to discredit the legitimate protesters as tools of the Great Satan. And it should not raise false hopes or make promises it cannot keep.

Yes, the president said, he would "bear witness" to the "remarkable opening within Iranian society." But he would not use American power to enlarge that opening. The cavalry was not coming. "Ultimately," he stated clearly, "this is up to the Iranian people to decide who their leadership is going to be."

The situation is delicate and difficult. Obama has to honor American values while pursuing American interests. And the young president clearly understands that only he can shoulder those responsibilities and reconcile those conflicts. OK.

Cokie Roberts' latest book is "Ladies of Liberty: The Women Who Shaped Our Nation" (William Morrow, 2008). Steve and Cokie Roberts can be reached at stevecokie@gmail.com.



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