

The Twenty Fourth Mile **By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA**

"Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself." Gandhi

In April this year I ran the Toledo marathon with my daughter, Julie. It was a story of the agony and the ecstasy. Agony because 26.2 miles is a long way for this 52 year old body to run. Ecstasy because of what I learned and because it strengthened an already close relationship with my daughter.



But what I want to focus on in this article is the twenty-fourth mile of the marathon. See the accompanying picture with this article where a professional photographer snapped my picture. In it I have a look on my face like, "Someone please shoot me." In fact, that's about how I felt. Four hours of complete physical exertion left me totally spent. Just moving my legs brought on stabbing pains all over my body. At the same time I had so much lactic acid built up in my body that my muscles would barely respond. It was quite difficult to keep running without falling down. At the same time every insecurity I can feel is racing through my head. "I'm a loser. I am weak. I am old. Why in the heck did I sign up for this darn race? I will never do this again. Who am I trying to fool? I am no athlete!"

But that's why I love to run marathons and why I love the twenty fourth mile the most. I am still far enough from the finish line to consider quitting and I am in agony. At that point it's only will power that keeps me going. Therefore, in response to my body's intense pain and the myriad insecurities that haunt me I refuse to quit. "Put one foot in front of the other," I tell myself. "No matter what happens, do not quit!" It's that simple and it's that painful.

Before I know it I am crossing the finish line and I experience the joy of self respect that can only come from courageously facing our own pain; the joy of crossing the finish line into the waiting embrace of my sixteen year-old daughter as we celebrate our shared victory; the joy of the pride that I feel for an amazing daughter who has trained six hundred miles with me all winter, sometimes in blizzard conditions.

But there is another huge dividend which I experience when I run a marathon. I can use the experience in the countless situations that I face day to day that beg of me to quit because I am in so much pain. I tell myself, "if I can run a marathon, I can do this!"

Every one of us faces difficulties throughout our lives. Every one of us gets scared to death and wants to quit. Every one of us experiences the voices of insecurity. Fear is no stranger to any of us. Having the courage to finish what we start pays dividends that are priceless in our journeys to become better human beings and better leaders. If you are one of those who is struggling as you read this article, I want you to know I feel your pain. I ask you to believe in yourself and to follow Winston Churchill's words. "Never, never, never, never, never, quit!"