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What Keeps You Going?

by Amy Miller Bailey

Last Saturday I ran in a 5K race with my daughter Claire. It marked the end of her Girls on the Run Fall program. This is the third time she has participated, the first time being last Fall when she was 8. This year she felt like a veteran. What was new, however, was the rain and snow on race day.

I must say, I was not pleased when I saw the weather forecast predicting the wintry mix for race day. Nor was I pleased with how confident the meteorologists were in their predictions. I kept waiting for the inevitable "as you know, the models can change" so I'd have a shred of hope that we'd stay dry for the race but no such luck, they were pretty certain. At 5:45 a.m. the morning of the race I woke to the sounds of rain on the roof. Reluctantly I got up and got ready and then woke up Claire who did the same. We arrived around 7:15 for the race which didn't start until 8:30. We stood in the cold and rain for over an hour with several thousand other girls and their buddy runners waiting for the race to begin. About fifteen minutes before we were to head to the starting line, another runner noticed that the "rain" on my jacket was actually ice. Soon after, large snowflakes began to fall mixed in with the rain.

Needless to say these were not ideal conditions, but interestingly, I don't recall hearing a single complaint. Sure, prior to the race many of us talked about how we wished it wasn't raining or so cold or were expressing jealousy over those we left behind at home in warm, dry beds, but the mood was positive. My daughter was talking and laughing with a friend as we waited. People were taking photos of smiling runners whose smiles remained long after the camera click.

As the precipitation increased people became anxious to get the race started, but there was no pushing or shoving on the way to the starting line and in the pack of runners, I didn't notice any overt frustration or upset or misery being exuded. I looked at my daughter several times during the race and she looked, quite frankly, like she was miserable. Her face was completely wet with raindrops dripping down her cheeks, her hat and jacket were snow covered and I knew that her feet and legs had to be wet just like mine were. I probably asked about fifteen times through the course of the race if she was okay and every time she said yes without hesitation. Not once did she say she wanted the race to be over, that she was cold or wet or tired.

We passed, and were passed by, many runners and if there were tears or complaining I didn't see or hear any. I heard buddy runners encouraging their partners, and spectators who had the choice to be indoors or under cover were all along the course cheering on all the girls. As we came up the last hill I was pretty spent. I actually felt a little ill in those last couple hundred yards. I told my daughter to go because I wanted her to



go as fast as she could. I kept my pace as she kicked hers up a notch but I didn't feel I could go any faster. For the briefest of moments I actually wanted to just stop.

Just as I had that feeling I saw ahead of me a little girl walking towards the finish line with the aid of a walker, her buddy runner beside her. I had only been running about a half an hour. This child had to have been walking the course for well beyond an hour. In the rain and in the snow and in a much more laborious manner than any of us had to endure. I was so moved by that sight it was all I could do not to lose it in those last fifty yards.



All of the girls accomplished something that day. They had all finished the race that they spent weeks training for and they didn't let a little bad weather deter them. I witnessed girls who were determined, I saw perseverance, I saw adaptability, I saw good sportsmanship and empathy and compassion. And I saw lots and lots of happiness. Smiles and laughter abounded – before and after the race (during the race I am sure we were all smiling on the inside). I think they all learned something about themselves that day – whether it was that they could do the thing they didn't think they could, that a little bad weather isn't really all that bad, that running is pretty invigorating or that being in something together feels good. I know I learned all those things and more.

When I look back on the dread I felt when I woke to the sounds of rain, I think about how silly it was to let myself feel that way. I was definitely being the pessimist thinking about how cold it was going to be, how we were going to be drenched by the end of the race – that it was just going to be awful. In the end, it was cold and we were drenched but it was not awful, it was uplifting.

Seeing thousands of little girls out there, all with their own challenges to face in order to finish the race, laughing and smiling and excited was pretty cool. I have told myself that when I start to think things are not so great I'm going to think back on that day and see my daughter's face dripping with rain and snow and how she said she was okay and that's going to help me realize that I'm okay; that when I'm dreading facing something because conditions aren't ideal, I'm going to remember how I dreaded the idea of the race that morning but how, in the end, I felt uplifted.

And when I think that I just have to stop, that I can't finish something, I'm going to see that little girl who was approaching the finish line with her walker and I will know that I can make it. I was already a huge supporter of the Girls on the Run program but now I am even more so.

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One of The Values Gals, **Amy Miller Bailey** is the co-author of the new book, *Five-to-Be-Alive: The Values Plan for Living Your Best Life*. For resources and information, please visit www.thevaluesgals.com.



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