

My First...

We were breathing hard, his firm body collided against mine, and we sweated profusely as he decided to remove his drenched shirt, everything just seemed so right. There was humidity in the air with such moisture that would lock in and make me remember this moment for the rest of my life. It was my first time. Every time he would try to leave I would just go faster and the motion of my body was exhausted. A whole forty-five minutes; oh how proud I would make them! My breathing became harder as I became more aggressive. My legs shook out of nervousness; sweat dripping from our inner thighs, quivering to the rhythms we kept as we were persistent, our chests becoming one as our heartbeats raced against time. He was my fellow teammate. Every moment seemed surreal and unforgettable. It was a Sunday morning, May 1, 2010; the day of my first 5K race.

It was mid January...

“LaToria,” my mother eagerly called my name.

“Yes, mommy dearest,” I replied back wondering why her voice sounded so ecstatic.

“I have an idea; a goal for us to attain,” she said as her voiced echoed through the walls.

“Oh lord, mommy not another one of your crazy plans, you are always trying to do something,” I said to my mother having no idea what her intentions were.

“Okay so I was thinking, we’ve been running a lot on the treadmill and why not make a goal for ourselves, let’s run the 5K Race for Hope sponsored by the brain tumor society ,” said my mother with integrity and courage.

Obviously I said yes to her matriculate idea, being the gracious daughter I am.

How could I agree to her idea? I wear a size sixteen in jeans and I am expected to run three miles straight without stopping? My insecurities about myself began to take over with grueling memories of my elementary and middle school years of kids taunting me, telling me I was too fat to do anything in P.E.; a psychological complex that still haunts me today. Body image; Ha, I knew I was no Barbie, no need to tell me that, but I

was no Lance Armstrong either. According to society I was considered obese although I always thought I just had a little more meat on me than the average teenager. Where I was shopping in the women's section in the store, my friends shopped in the juniors. While I was at Layne Bryant and Torrid's, they were at H&M and Hollister. How I envied these skinny and preppy girls for all the wrong reasons, my insecurities of my image took over.

I sat in the sporting goods store admiring her sculpture, wishing I looked like the lean and fit Under Armour manikin. Then reality seeped in. It was March of 2010 when we decided to go shopping and by then I was fifteen pounds lighter. Still in a size sixteen, I was healthier than ever and in the best shape of my life. My mother and I decided to wear the exact same outfit for the race while my ten year old sister, Kyra, had plenty of choices of what she wanted to wear. She has the body of a gymnast but at the same time the legs and muscles of a basketball player. I admired her beauty.

I endlessly attended the gym each morning. Everyday, my alarm would go off at four thirty in the morning as that was the only time I was able to go to the gym due to having to be at school at seven thirty in the morning. Work followed directly after until seven, then eating dinner, doing homework, and getting ready to wake up the next day to do the same exact thing. Training was breathtaking, literally! I started off the first week not even being able to run for five minutes straight, but then as the weeks continued to progress my confidence shot up into fireworks, my body became shapelier and fit and I had the determination and courage of the crouching tiger. I was now self-assured that I was going to run the 5K no matter how long it took me. As the race was a month from approaching, I began running hills outside and jogging outside of the gym where the roads were like a winding hill off of a Dr. Seuss book. As I would get tired my fellow gym partners would say, "NO PAIN, NO GAIN!"

I would say "Pain is weakness leaving the body," as this was from a shirt on the Marines at the gym. Then I would take notice of a quote of my favorite rapper as she would say "A struggle is nothing more than a preparation for what has yet come"- Lisa "Lefteye" Lopes. I WAS DOING IT!!

I was running three miles straight without stopping; I wasn't out of breath, I was happily in shape feeling as though I knew I looked better than that manikin I came across at the sporting goods store. Two weeks from the race, I needed to improve on my time. I was never timing myself, it was all about pacing in the beginning but now I had a goal of having at least finishing the race with a paced time. Every time I ran I timed my self; the first couple times of me running I kept getting a pace of running in sixty minutes; again I continuously attempted to speed myself up, trying to be the athlete that I had so longed for in the past. FINALLY!

It was the night before the race, I meditated and prayed that I would not stop running no matter how tired I became or how humiliated I felt at the moment. I slept tossing and turning trying hard to foreshadow the day that was progressing forward. It was seven o' clock in the morning; we had to be in Washington D.C. by nine thirty for check in. My anxious legs slipped into my, now, fitted spandex and my confidence was higher than the sky. Although Washington D.C. is about a half hour drive from my house, it felt like the most dawdling car ride ever.

Finally, the moment I had been waiting months for has now came to life. No more waiting, there was never a thought in my mind of backing out because it was a chance for me to prove to myself that anything is possible through hard work and dedication. I slowly got out of the car amused at how organized and big the event really was. Tears came to my eyes as I watched the brain cancer survivors run past with their yellow balloons celebrating their moment of joy which reflected like a beam of golden sunshine. Their hardship of still having the cancer and those having gotten rid of the cancerous condition amazed me. Balloons shown every where; looking left and right I saw nothing but people with shirts that either said "In memory of..." or saying, "(name of the person), has been a survivor since (following the date in which the person was diagnosed)."

Our team of members raised \$62,370.00 in honor of our fellow gym member, Beth-Anne Telford for fighting against her brain tumor despite what the doctors told her. In my eyes it all came to me at that moment; an epiphany, it wasn't about me being a size sixteen and running the race, nor was it about my insecurities with my image. It was about helping those who were diagnosed with a condition that demanded money that was almost impossible to pay. The teams raised a cumulative total of \$3 million for the race

that day to go to the Race for Hope Charity. As the announcer said this, tears of joy and encouragement came to my eyes. The event was larger than me and everyone else. It was about helping those that needed it and being a crutch to them as they battled this evil cancerous disease.

What happens next doesn't even matter; my experience in the race is just a quiet storm that has passed.

"Toria, it's okay you got it, don't stop, you've come this far, don't you quit, just think of how you'll feel when it's over; look, the balloons we're almost done, come on run faster, sprint to the finish line, hold my hand; see we're done it's all over. Good job Toria, 45 minutes; WE DID IT," my sister, Kyra, exclaimed to me as we approached and crossed the finish line of the race. This ten year old sister of mine, who never even trained at all, was my stepping stone to finishing the race.

It was not about my time, nor image, nor circumstance. It was about courage. It was about the bonding experience I was able to have with my mother and sister. People are scared to attempt that in which they think will make them a failure due to their freight of not coming up on top. But that defeats purpose, coming up on top is not always what's best. It was about the experience of meeting new people and seeing new things; being grateful for the life that I am living. Character should not be generalized, but rather expressed. This race was to prove to myself that I had something I never thought I possessed, which was poise, courage, and stability.