

# The Starting Line

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## Diary of a Winter Warrior

by Lindsay “Blizzard” Benson

Let me make one thing perfectly clear: I would not have signed up for Race Cancer’s Winter Warrior Challenge, had I not received a personal invitation from Crystal Clear Carl during our email correspondence about my topic for the January newsletter. Don’t get me wrong, I love a good fitness challenge. I love to run. But, to commit to running EVERY DAY for 31 days was an overwhelming prospect. Between my job, my husband’s job, and our kids’ commitments, my biggest concern was finding the time to sneak in a run every day, while also guaranteeing that I got enough sleep to function. I was about to embark on an experience that would test my tenacity, my organizational skills, and my ability to remain upright on snow-covered roads. This is my story: the daily musings of a Winter Warrior.

Day 1: Day one is a Sunday, which helps. Due to a terrible chest cold (the worst I’ve had in years – one that left me hacking over a trash can, unable to speak, on several occasions), I haven’t run since December 3<sup>rd</sup>. I run 3 miles at a 9:40 pace. I am miserable.

Day 2: We have a day off from school, so I am able to “sleep in” until 8:15 before I head out for my second run. My cough is still bothering me, and I don’t want to make it worse, so I cut my distance to 1.7 miles. With the abbreviated distance, my pace improves to 9:17. I change the “How’d you feel?” screen on the Raceday app, which logs your daily runs for the challenge, from the sad face to the straight face.

Day 3: I wake up early to sneak a run in before school. Logically, I think that I must set my alarm for about 30 minutes earlier than I would have on a normal school day. Despite my reflective clothing and flashing lights (clip-ons, borrowed from my 4-year-old’s shoes), I am terrified. Wild animals, passersby, the few cars that pass – everything is 1000x scarier in the dark, and I spend the entire run consumed by anxiety. I make the decision to wake up later, and compensate for the time that I will miss in my classroom before school at some other time.

Day 4: I set my alarm to wake me up 30 minutes LATER than I would have on a normal school day. I set out at dawn, and run three miles, without the anxiety that haunted me on the previous day.

Day 5: I run 2.3 miles along the Heights, and catch my first un-obscured sunrise. Since we moved to Falmouth in 2015, I have intended to rise early and catch a sunrise more times than I can count, but I had yet to actually do it until today. I change the “How’d you feel?” screen to the happy face for the first time.

Day 6: It’s Friday, and it’s snowing, but not hard. The roads are lightly covered with fluffy white snow. I am able to run on the untreated roads without any issues, but the main roads are slushy and slippery. I learn an important lesson about

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# Winter Warrior

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running in the snow – snow covers obstacles. I trip over a pile of litter in the Bristol Beach parking lot, but steady myself, and make it home without seriously injuring myself. As soon as I warm up, I order a pair of Yak Trax.

Day 7: We are officially under a blizzard warning. I decide to head out early, before the snow gets too bad. Only, it's already gotten bad. The previous day's snow has melted on the roadways, then re-frozen. The newly fallen snow has obscured the icy patches. I fall flat on my behind before I even reach the end of my road. I decide to shorten my planned 3-mile route to 1.7 miles, and "run" it at a snail's pace. I have to catch my balance several more times. As I run, I think about whether I should send my husband for pizza or Mexican when I get home – I decide that, after this run, I probably need both.

Day 8: My YakTrax (traction cleats) are here! I happily strap them onto my running sneakers and head out for a run on the snow-covered roads. The previous day's snowstorm provides a gorgeous backdrop. The roads are still nearly pristine, and the snow-covered beaches and salt ponds are beautiful. I run a three-mile loop around all of the most scenic areas in my neighborhood. Maybe this winter running thing isn't so bad, after all.

Day 9: It's Monday again, and I have to run before work. I have become somewhat accustomed to this schedule, and it hasn't been bothering me, except that today, the "feels like" temperature is -1 degrees. I run 2.5 miles, then take a selfie with a gigantic icicle. Today, I feel like a true Winter Warrior.

Day 10: Like most Tuesdays, today is unremarkable. It's still cold. I run another 2.5 miles before work. I post a photo of

myself looking cold in a winter hat. I worry that I am running out of ideas for clever running selfies.

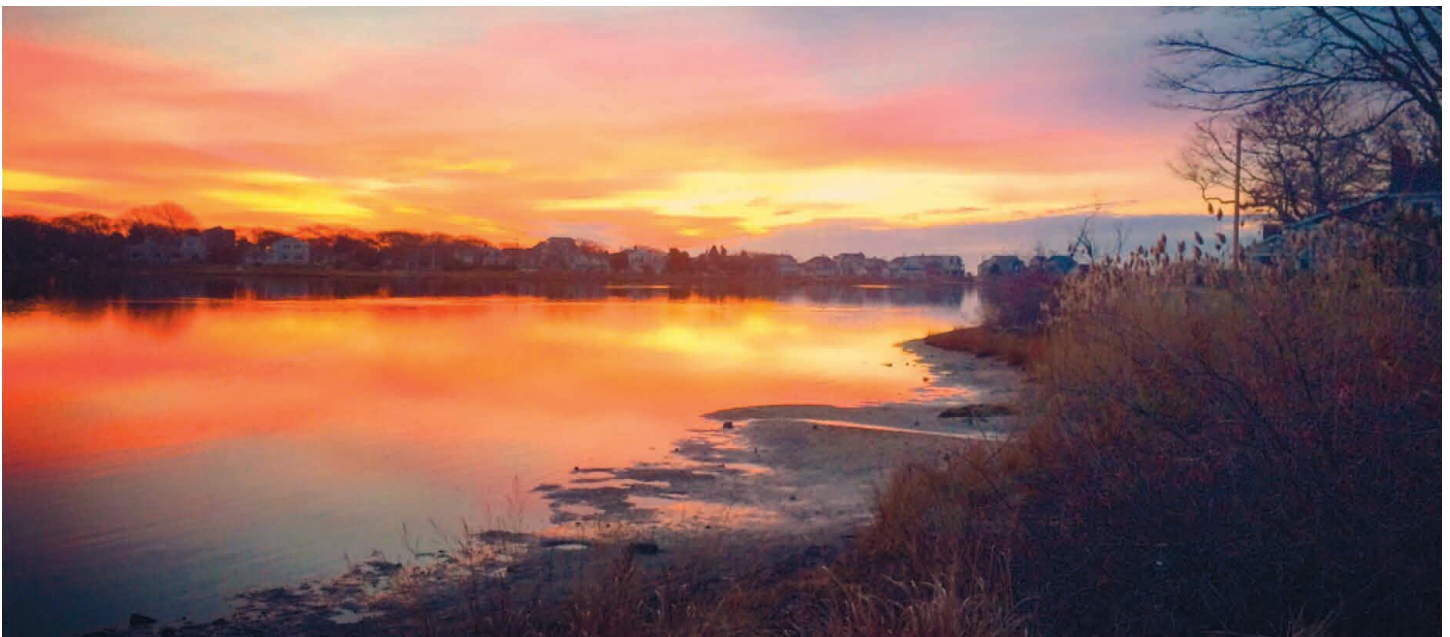
Day 11: As suddenly as we were hit with the deep freeze, a blast of warm air rolls in. I run in the rain, which is actually refreshing. It feels almost balmy, and I enjoy splashing through the puddles, as it provides such a stark contrast to the past few days, when I carefully plotted each step in the snow and ice. When I finish my 2.5 miles, I take a photo holding an umbrella for the team page, then edit my post to clarify that I did not try to run with an umbrella.

Day 12: Five days ago, we were buried beneath a foot of snow, but today, there is not a trace of winter. The sun is shining, and the snow is gone. I increase my distance to 3.1 miles, because it's just so enjoyable to run in the peace and quiet of the early morning, in this warm (for January) weather.

Day 13: It's Friday again, and I increase my distance once again to 3.75. While I enjoy my morning run, I make it to school just in time to meet my students at the busses, so I make a mental note that maybe 3 miles should be my max distance on schooldays.

Day 14: Day 14 coincides with a virtual run that I have participated in for the past three years, honoring Meg Menzies, a fellow road runner from Richmond, VA, who was tragically killed by a drunk driver while out for her morning run on January 13, 2014. Today, I am grateful for the pain, the sweat, the wind, the cold – all of it. Today, I run five miles for Meg.

Day 15: It's the halfway point of the challenge. I celebrate by running out to Surf Drive Beach, a route that I typically





reserve for the summer months, when I frequently run the Shining Sea Bikeway out to Woods Hole. I continue the celebration when I get home with more Mexican food.

Day 16: I take advantage of the holiday to sneak in a 5.5 mile run out to Green Pond, and reminisce about the Cape Cod Marathon Half. Note to self: sign up for that one again as soon as registration opens.

Day 17: Back to school. I'm still no fan of actually waking up and getting out of bed early, but I am solidly accustomed to my new routine, and I am considering maintaining it after the challenge is finished. My musings are confirmed when I run by Little Pond and catch one of the most breathtaking sunrises that I have ever seen – all blues and purples and reds and oranges and yellows, running together like watercolors, and reflecting off the water. I also notice that my pace has consistently been hovering around 8:50 for the past week or so – a steady decrease since I started the challenge. Yes, I will continue my morning runs. Maybe just not every single day.

Day 18: It's raining and my knees hurt.

Day 19: It's still raining, so after yesterday's experience, I strap on my neoprene knee braces before I head out. Two pain-free miles. I get by with a little help from my neoprene (read to the tune of The Beatles' "With a Little Help from My Friends").

Day 20: It's Inauguration Day. As the country prepares to usher in a new era in American politics, I spend my entire 2.5 mile run brainstorming ways that I can be the change I want to see in the world (as opposed to my typical non-productive runs, when I turn off my brain and jam out to Ke\$ha). Immediately following my run, I pay for a stranger's coffee at Dunkin' Donuts, and make a donation to a nonprofit. I will continue to perform acts of kindness throughout the day.

Day 21: It's a particularly busy weekend for our family, and we find ourselves forced to abandon several of the events tentatively marked on our calendar. I decide to kill two birds with one stone – I throw our four-year-old in the jogging stroller and run downtown for an event at the Village Green. Check, check.

Day 22: A nasty nor'easter has set its sights on Cape Cod. I take advantage of the calm before the storm and run 3.5 miles along the coast, with the understanding that I will be blown into the sea if I attempt this route again the next day.

Day 23: The storm is advancing up the east coast. Vineyard sound is mighty choppy, and the wind is picking up. I stick with an inland route around Little Pond, but can't resist a short run along the Heights to snap a picture of the waves.

Day 24: The 11:00 news claimed that we would be facing 55-65 mph winds and driving rain this morning, but when I head out for my run, the storm has been reduced to a few sprinkles and a few gusts of wind. After all the hype, it's kind of a big letdown, because I like to brag about running in adverse weather conditions to my friends on social media. This nor'easter's a dud.

Day 25: I'm sick. Again. I wake up with a head cold. I am tempted to walk my miles today, but I decide to try running – I can always slow to a walk if I need to. To my surprise, the run clears my sinuses far better than the excessive amount of tissues that my husband claims I have already used.

Day 26: I am out of running clothes. I run in my Christmas leggings – bright red with reindeer pattern. Must be nearing the end of the challenge...

Day 27: My newsletter submission is due today. This will be my last entry. The clouds have finally cleared, and I zigzag my way through the side roads of my neighborhood, catching the sunrise over the horizon from several different vantage points. How lucky are we to be able to run this town? I have four more days to go, in order to complete the challenge, and officially earn the title of Winter Warrior. Despite my initial hesitance, I am thrilled that I participated. I am not planning on continuing my run streak. I appreciate a day off here and there. But, I will continue to run during the work week much more frequently. I have deviated from my previously rigid work schedule and running routine, and I have become a stronger runner, a more efficient teacher, and a stronger person for it. 'Til next year!

-Blizzard Benson



*Lindsay "Blizzard" Benson is a former summer-person, who returned to her Massachusetts roots after spending eight years in Charlotte, NC. She lives in Falmouth Heights with her husband and three sons. Lindsay is the lower elementary (K-4) Therapeutic Intervention Program (TIP) teacher for Falmouth Public Schools. When she's not teaching, Lindsay enjoys running, hiking, reading Elin Hilderbrand novels, and working on her post-run selfie technique.*

# A Cookbook Review for Athletes

## Run Fast, Eat Slow

Reviewed by Allyson Manchester



I received Shalane Flanagan and Elyse Kopecky's cookbook, *Run Fast, Eat Slow*, for Christmas. Upon my first perusal of its pages, I was, admittedly, a bit annoyed. The hefty

hardcover volume features glamour shots of Shalane and Elyse (both in fluorescent Nike apparel) in various locations around a gourmet kitchen. In one shot, the two blonde goddesses flex their sinewy biceps as they pour rolled oats into a mixing bowl. This image is a far cry from my own clumsy experiences in the kitchen. How could I relate to Shalane and Elyse—let alone recreate their recipes?

Now, after a closer read and a few kitchen experiments, I am so grateful to own this cookbook. Shalane and Elyse offer a simple yet revolutionary culinary philosophy that they call “indulgent nourishment.” According to the philosophy of indulgent nourishment,

we should “eat in tune with what our bodies need and fill up on healthful foods. Real food leads to serious satisfaction.” Shalane and Elyse resist the popular diet trends of calorie counting and obsessing about fat.

The recipes in this book are extremely approachable. Best of all, Elyse and Shalane also write about how each recipe can fit into your running routine. The chapters range from “Morning Fuel” to “Runner’s Remedies.” As someone who is constantly RUNGRY (hungry because of running), I loved learning about how to select and prepare foods that provide substantial energy. So far, my favorite recipe from the book was the antioxidant-rich “Root Lover’s Winter Salad.” Now, I can’t wait to try the “Fartlek Chili” and “Don’t Get Beet Hummus.”

I completely forgive Shalane and Elyse for their glamour shots in Nike apparel. The recipes in this book are delicious; the accompanying text is extremely thoughtful and informative. I highly recommend!

*Shalane Flanagan is an Olympic medalist, four-time Olympian, American record holder, and world-class marathoner. She finished second at the 2010 NYC marathon and ran the fastest time ever by an American woman at the 2014 Boston Marathon, completing the race in 2:22.02. At the 2014 Berlin Marathon, Shalane ran a personal best of 2:21.14, the second-fastest time ever by an American woman.*

*Elyse Kopecky is a chef, author, [nutrition coach](#), runner, and proud mother. Her friendship with Shalane began 16 years ago on the cross-country team at the University of North Carolina. After graduation, both moved to Portland, Oregon, to work for Nike—Shalane as a professional runner, and Elyse as a digital marketing producer.*

*Allyson Manchester just moved to Falmouth and loves to run all distances. Her favorite Falmouth running spots include the grass on Worcester Court, the hill on View Crest Road, and the Great Sippewissett Marsh section of the bike path. Sometimes, she even stops for Dairy Queen mid-run. She teaches 10th grade English at Falmouth Academy and is an especially huge fan of tea, Shakespeare, podcasts, Fleetwood Mac, and her dog.*



### Running in February!

**Fight for Air Climb**

2/4 ~ Boston

**Annual MV 20 Miler-Amity Island Relay**

2/18 ~ Vineyard Haven

**The Old-Fashioned 10 Miler & Flat 5K**

2/19 ~ Foxboro

**Mardi Gras Madness**

2/24 ~ Plymouth

**Hyannis Marathon/Half/10K/Relay**

2/26 ~ Hyannis

**The Amherst 10 Miler**

2/26 ~ Amherst

**The Frozen Shamrock 3M Road Race**

2/26 ~ Haverhill





# #SisterGoals

by Mary Vando

Last November I was able to run the New York City Marathon with my sister, Mai-Vi from Florida.

I knew it was going to be a special experience meeting up in NYC for a few days and running the marathon together, but I had no idea how just how special it was going to get. You see, my sister is a Doctor of Physical Therapy, and it turns out that her experience was going to get me to that NYC finish line.

It all started when we both decided that it would be totally awesome to both run the NYC Marathon together and signed up months in advance for the lottery. When the results came back, she got in; I did not. But, as luck would have it Mai-Vi knew someone who could get me a number. So, it really is a special thing that we were even given the opportunity to get to run together. Training started, and for me the summer months of Cape Cod were the most glorious time to be outside everyday getting to workout. Maybe too glorious. Overtraining (for a triathlon) led to what I believed to be a stress fracture in my foot. With the marathon two months out, I figured I could rest it for a couple weeks and get back at it. Wrong. Week after week the injury got worse and those scheduled weekend long runs vanished into empty training logs. Well, I thought to myself "I'm coming off a really great training cycle, I'll be fit enough to finish if my foot holds up. If not, I'm going to drop out to prevent a more serious injury."

The time came to travel to the city, and my sister, her husband, Steven and I had a wonderful first couple days exploring NYC. Delicious food, Broadway, super cool runner's expo, shake out run in Central Park; it was all just what any runner would want out of the marathon week experience. Except the foot. The foot hurt – a lot. I was then mentally prepared to start the race, but not finish. I shared the news with Mai-Vi and she went into immediate doctor mode. She was already prepared with KT tape. She did an evaluation of my foot and said she would stick by me no matter what through the race. She promised the most important thing for her this weekend was to run the race with me; it was not about her time. This meant so much to me. As we all know, it's not that easy to get into the NYC Marathon and she put in all the training for a great race. She sacrificed her great race to be with me.

Race morning came with its 5am wake up call, ferry ride over to Staten Island, and hours long wait at the foot of the Verrazano Bridge. Quite randomly I saw a friend from Cape Cod (Pam!) and we chatted out all our nerves before lining up in our corals. At the sound of the cannon, Mai-Vi and I - all decked out in matching red, white, and blue outfits – started our journey through the boroughs of New York. The first half was great. The spectators, the city, the crowds, the smells, the music; all of it was so amazing. The second half the wheels came undone. I don't remember anything about the city from mile 16 on. I had no idea when I crossed into the Bronx, or Manhattan, in fact I was quite oblivious to anything except how much I hurt and Mai-Vi's voice coaching me through the hurdles of the marathon. As we neared the finish line and I realized that I was indeed to going to finish, I started to cry (I cry a lot in races if you remember my Boston marathon write up!) Mai-Vi and I held hands and rejoiced crossing that line. We hugged and I remember thinking how I had never, nor will probably ever again have such a difficult, yet equally satisfying experience with my sister. Marathons have a way of breaking down all sorts of limits and allowing us to encounter each other on a whole new level of companionship.

We got our medals, we went back to our hotel, ate, slept, and went our separate ways the next morning. Later on in the month, and MRI confirmed two stress fractures in my foot. Was it smart to run on the fractured foot? Probably not. Most will tell you it's not a good idea at all. But then again there are those who say that pain is temporary; and experiences – well, those that forever.

