



Volume 15 | November 2021



## Marlyssa's Story: Running 'Happy'

*Editor's note: We hear some compelling stories from our Team Inspire marathoners about why they run. This may be our favorite. It comes courtesy of Marlyssa Ittes of Gilbert, AZ.*

Dear 26.2 Foundation,

I have been wanting to put together an email ever since the Monday [Boston] marathon, but words have not come easily. I am going to do my best now. :)

But, honestly, I'm not sure there are enough words to fully capture my gratitude, my appreciation, my thankfulness, and the love in my heart that is the Boston Marathon and running for charity!

This past weekend was beyond my wildest dreams. Truly. It was so emotional. So exciting. So inspiring. So incredible in every single way.

The 125th Boston Marathon was my 22nd marathon (if we count the 124th virtual marathon). I have a couple of races I run annually but otherwise I like to try new ones – and my goal is to run one in every state. I have run small races, with fewer than 100 people, to, of course, the world majors in London, Berlin, Chicago and New York, and now BOSTON!!!

When the Boston bombing happened in 2013, I wasn't even close to being a runner. I had knee surgery in high school and just never ran. But that year has stuck with me. I followed that story so closely. I don't even remember really watching or following any marathon before that, but that race changed everything.

However, it wasn't until 2017 that I really truly knew what the Boston Marathon was. It was in that year that I actually started running. After domestic abuse, an awful, awful divorce, another horrible breakup, and some other life experiences that got me to my lowest point, I stepped outside and thought, "Why don't I go for a run?"

Okay, so that lasted all but a quarter of a mile! It was hard – but that made it worth it! So, I kept going out – and my dog as my running partner helped as well. And little by little I worked up to a 5k a month later, and then a 10K a month after that, and I decided then that I would run a half [marathon]. Just one.

Someone asked me at one point in July 2017 if I would ever run a marathon, and I

laughed. No way. Not ever. Until November 2017. Six months after I started running, I ran my first marathon. The Seattle Marathon. It was cold. It was windy. It rained. And that was it – I was hooked. And I went on to run 10 more marathons in 2018; seven in 2019. Boston 2020 was supposed to be my 20th.

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As I write this, I find myself thinking I should erase what I wrote because it sounds too crazy. Or ridiculous. Or maybe stupid? That I should leave it at a top level and not give specifics. But this is the truth. My running life is strange and crazy and ridiculous-sounding. And that kind of totally fits me.

My fiancé jokes that I run 'happy.' And I do. Yes, there are highs and lows, but I run really, really happy. Running is where I'm most happy. And, really, it's running marathons where I'm at my happiest. The challenge. The effort. The struggles. The triumphs. It's the most humbling and most incredible experience. And I love them.



That is why running for the 26.2 Foundation was so incredibly special to me and why it means so much to me still. This race was about so much more than a marathon. And it lived up to every expectation I had. My only disappointment was how fast it came and went!

Running has changed my life in so many ways. And this marathon was almost like a celebration of all that. It was such an incredible day, and I have both of you [Meghan Dulac, administrative officer and team coordinator for 26.2, and Susan Hurley of CharityTeams, which manages invitational entries for the Foundation] to thank for all of your support and encouragement and everything you do to make this possible for us.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for believing in me and giving me this chance. And now I have found another marathon I have fallen in love with!

I truly, sincerely hope for more opportunities to run with CharityTeams and the 26.2 Foundation in the years to come. I know I am not local, but the charity and the run represent so much of what running is to me and why I believe in marathons so completely. I really hope to stay in touch, to find more ways to get involved, and to continue to support the efforts that you do!

Thank you again for everything, and please keep me in mind when charities open for future Boston Marathons!!!

Best,  
Marlyssa

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*marathonng, as well as health, wellness and economic-development initiatives through investments in innovative programs on local, regional, national and global levels.*

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