

The Long Run Home

“We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival”.

Winston Churchill

“The virtue of all achievement is victory over oneself. Those who know this can never know defeat”.

A. J. Cronin

Are you ready?

I have no idea...

This is how I answered people when they asked me this question. How could I possibly know if I was ready? I had never done anything remotely this challenging before. I had been training fairly consistently for about 4 months; which by the way is not the recommended lead up period for something like this, but due to work and family commitments, 4 months was about all I had.

The more that people asked me this question, the more I tried to convince myself that technically it was impossible to be completely prepared for running 375kms in 5 days. Impossible or not, I had done what I could to get my body as conditioned as I thought it would need to be. In the back of my mind though, I knew it would be mental strength that I needed, more so than physical strength to get me through most of the distance.

I consider myself pretty tough mentally, but don't confuse that with mental intelligence. To consider running that far to begin with, requires a lack of mental intelligence. What I had going for me was resolve. I had made a decision to change my place in the world.

When I was 16 years old I lost my father to stomach cancer, he was only 36. Shortly after losing my dad, my paternal grandfather died from cancer. I had also lost a grandmother and great grandfather when I was much younger, to cancer. For the last few years my maternal grandfather had been doing battle with cancer also. His fight was long and arduous, but earlier this year it took him too. This disease was slowly taking my family from me and I was doing nothing about it. So, I made a decision. It was that simple. I decided that I wasn't going to sit there and be an observer anymore. I was going to do something. That was when the Long Run Home was born. The idea was to run a 5 day 375km ultra-marathon from Melbourne (where I currently live) to Portland (where I grew up). It took me 12 years to realize that I didn't have to feel helpless anymore, and that I could potentially help save lives. I may not be able to bring back the people I have lost, but at least their son, grandson and great grandson had done his part to make sure that their loss was not in vain.

My grandfather was very proud of my plans to do this run and I had his full support. Losing him two months before the start of the run made me even more determined to make this thing a success. The difference we would make with the Long Run Home may only be a drop in the ocean when it comes to the money needed to find a cure for cancer, but drops produce ripples, ripples spread, and who knows how far they will go?

It quickly became obvious to me that this resolve I had and probably the insanity of the whole idea was contagious. Within hours of the website promoting the event going live, I started to receive emails of encouragement and support. Along with that encouragement, came helping hands. Relatives and friends offered their time and dedication to the cause with an equal determination to mine. This was a fantastic development because it meant that we could make this thing even bigger than I had planned. As I soon came to realize, to raise a lot of money, you need to make a lot of noise. So we did.

Fundraising began with emailing everyone I knew and asking them to do the same. With the website as the central information tool, it was easy to get the story behind the run out to a lot of people. The initial response was a flood of online donations which, I knew would have to slow down eventually. So the next step was to go after some corporate sponsorship. In this task I had a lot of help from two of the main players in the event crew, my uncle Gerard Coffey and one of my best friends Daniel Birch. These two were invaluable in helping me approach companies in the search for some major dollars. For every 10 companies that we approached, we probably only got about 1 yes, but they never showed any sign of giving up. These two amazingly generous men gave nothing less than 100% of themselves for the whole event and for that I am endlessly grateful.

Along with the online donations and corporate sponsorship, Gerard, Daniel and several other members of the crew and their extended families, took it upon themselves to gather donations and raise money in various other ways. The ripples were spreading.

The next step for me was to expose the Long Run Home to people beyond our social and business networks. The media seemed the best way to do this, and I was banking on the idea that they would find my plans interesting and perhaps a bit nuts. Lucky for me they did. It started with a preliminary story in the Portland and Warrnambool

newspapers. Following this I did a number of radio interviews and some more newspaper stories in Melbourne and Geelong papers. There was even a feature story in an online running magazine, which kind of made me feel like a serious runner for the first time.

I don't consider myself a professional runner. I compete in about one to two races each year and pretty much run by myself most of the time. When I do compete, I am a middle of the pack finisher, top 3rd if I'm lucky. Just after Christmas in 2007 I entered a semi-formal race near my home in Rosebud. It was a 28 km trail run which I did purely because I love running on trails and it was a good excuse to get out for a run with my good mate and longtime training partner Chris O'driscoll. At the end we were fortunate enough to catch a lift back to the start line with one of Australian's best known ultra-runners along with a couple of other runners with some pretty decent credibility in the running scene. The topic of the Long Run Home came up in conversation and their initial response was silence and the hesitant question of "are you sick?" This was the first time that serious doubt had entered my mind. If these proven running machines thought I was crazy, perhaps this was going to be even tougher than I thought!

Of course my mother, grandmother, aunts and other family members all thought the idea was nuts and pleaded with me not to do it. While they were all trying to talk me out of it, I could tell that they too were beginning to get a little excited by the idea. For me, the biggest and most welcome surprise was that The Long Run Home was beginning to bring my family and friends closer together. It began with our support crew meetings and spread into other family and friends working together to help with logistics and fundraising. Slowly but surely my friends were beginning to feel like family members, and my family was getting closer every day. If the run was going to be half as enjoyable as the preparation, we were in for a great time.

At our last support crew meeting, my father in-law Gerry asked me what the fall back plan was going to be. What did I plan to do if something went wrong? If I sprained an ankle or if the temperature was 45 degrees, was there a plan B?

I had spent a lot of nights over the last few months running around Rosebud by myself with nothing to think about but what I would do in this situation. To be honest, this was my biggest fear. Not that I would hurt myself, but that I would be unable to finish the run and everyone's hard work and effort would be for nothing. It soon occurred to me though, that even if I didn't make it, we would still have raised a whole pile of money for a great cause and I'm sure the sponsors wouldn't be asking for their money back. Nevertheless, I did have a plan in the case of an injury. If the weather was too hot to run during the day I would find an oval and run the day's distance around it at night (Vic Roads didn't allow us to use the roads at night). If I injured myself I would attempt to ride a bike the remaining distance. If I couldn't ride a bike I would push myself in a wheelchair. This last suggestion raised more than a few eyebrows, but I was deadly serious. There was nothing that would stop me from making it to Portland. To be honest though, I never had any intention of not running in the heat, or ending up on a bike for that matter, if I could stand, I would run. Unlike any ultra event that I had done in the past, this time I had the drive of running for my family, and that was enough to get me through anything.

Day by day the 25th of March, the start of the event, was getting closer. Some last minute sponsorship was gained, and the final route was set. Everything seemed to be falling into place and surprisingly I couldn't wait to get out on the road. While I was looking forward to finding out what my body was capable of, I secretly wanted this run to hurt... a lot. That might sound a bit strange, but if you can imagine doing something that you feel so passionately about, that means so much to you and your family, you don't just want to be a part of it, you want it to be burned into you forever. Needless to say, I got my wish. It hurt... a lot.

I didn't sleep much the night before the start. I woke up with the same nervous energy that I have before any big run, but this time it was different. This time I couldn't hide in the middle of the pack. This time I couldn't run myself into the ground with the knowledge that the next day I could rest and recover. After showering and throwing down some breakfast, we loaded up our hired minibus 'The Shuttle' under the meticulous direction of Captain Gerry Ryan, and the mountain of gear and people headed off to the start line. Our 'Shuttle crew' included my wife Kellie, our three kids Shilo, Kalani and Phoenix, my mother and father in-law Jenny and Gerry, my support runner Chris O'driscoll and myself.

The start line was Melbourne's landmark Federation Square. I had chosen this venue because it was right in the middle of the city and a well known point from which to begin. Normally booking a venue the size of Fed Square would wipe out the bank account of an event like ours, but fortunately Fed Square had agreed to sponsor us the use of the site and also supply us with free advertising on a digital screen the size of a house during the launch.

A few days before the beginning of the run I had heard that there would be road works taking place on Flinders Street, right next to Fed Square. This could potentially mean difficulties accessing the venue for our crew and others that might wish to attend the send off. I contacted the appropriate authorities to find out if they would be finished by the time we needed to enter, they assured me that the first Tram on that Tuesday morning needed to be travelling down Flinders Street at 6am. This, I was told meant that the road workers needed to be packed up and gone by 6am at the latest. Our estimated time of arrival was 6:30am. What else could I do but trust the word of this woman on the phone...?

Of course, we arrived at 6:30 only to find yellow flashing lights, road closure signs and large plastic bollards all over the place. So much for being gone by 6:00am! So at this point I did what I could to try and persuade the road marshals to let our support cars enter the square. This proved to be very difficult as they seemed to lack the ability to communicate with each other in any sort of useful way.

To my surprise, Brett Morrison who was the designated massage therapist, pit stop manager, lunch preparer and captain of what we called the 'Mothership' (his 4WD and pop-top caravan), had managed to talk his way through the blockade and was parked right next to the square waiting for everyone else to arrive. This was Brett to a Tee. Always on time and always reliable. So, as I ran around between the road marshals and the Fed Square management crew trying to get our support cars in, the crew sat in various cars stuck behind various bollards on various streets around Fed Square. Slowly the road works began to clear and the crew started to trickle in. My major concern was to get the Shuttle onto the square along with the two pilot cars, so that anyone that had come down for the start of the run would know exactly where we all were.

At this point I should explain that Vic Roads stipulated in our event approval letter that we must have a pilot car in front and behind any runners at all times whilst on the road. These two cars had to be fitted with flashing lights and large signs warning other motorists of pedestrians on the road. Along with the lights and sign, the trailing pilot car was fitted out with a roof mounted megaphone, which I knew could potentially be simultaneously embarrassing and annoying in the wrong hands but also hilarious in the right hands. This car (or should I say ute) was to be driven by my uncle Gerard and co-piloted by my friend Daniel Birch. Daniel's role on the run was crucial. He was in charge of coordinating the entire crew, organizing pick ups of supplies, communicating with media outlets and making sure accommodation and other groups like Lions Clubs were ready for us when we arrived at each of the towns. All this he did perfectly.

The lead pilot car, which was an old American looking Jeep wagon, would no doubt turn a few heads along the road. This car was driven by an un-known entity named Barry. Barry had been called in at the last moment by Frank Nagle, who was originally our designated lead pilot driver. Who was this Barry and did he have any idea what he was in for? I was hoping he understood that the next five days would involve him driving at about 10km per hour for anything up to 12 hours per day. After introducing myself to Barry I also apologized to him ahead of time for the hours of boredom he was about to endure. To this he responded with some quick witted humour that we would soon come to discover to be typical Barry form.

With the two pilot cars assembled at either end of the Shuttle on the square, and the Mother Ship parked near by, there was only one other car to arrive. This car contained the Noyes. Andrew and Suzie Noye have been great friends of mine for about 8 or so years and I was thrilled when they decided to jump into the Long Run Home crew. Andrew is a Physiotherapist which I was certain would come in very handy once the kilometers started to add up; he could also relieve Brett's hands of some of the massage duties. Suzie is a nurse and had volunteered to manage my general health and the blisters that I knew would be inevitable with something like this. They had both also been involved with organizing food supplies for several of the days and planned to be with us for much of the journey.

So this made five vehicles in all. Two support cars, a large van, a 4WD and caravan and the Noyes car. Who would have thought that it would take so many people and cars to get one bloke from point A to point B? As it turned out, every one of those cars and people were crucial in the success of the run.

Now that all the crew had arrived and the convoy was set, it was time to turn my attention to the well wishers that had assembled. Firstly my Grandmother and her sister, my aunty Heather had come all the way from Portland the night before (a 5 hour bus and train ride) just to be with me for a few minutes at the start. This should show you the sort of family I come from; loving and supportive like you wouldn't believe. My aunty Julie (Gerard's wife) was there too. The first thing she did was walk up to me with a permanent marker and write Phillip, Kevin and Neal on the inside of my left forearm. These are the names of my Dad and Grandfathers. It instantly made me feel stronger.

Also at the square were a host of other friends and work colleagues who had braved the early morning drizzle, road blocks and steadily building traffic to be there to see us off. Their well wishes and combined positive energy was a huge lift for me.

Amongst the group was a very tall and athletic man in lycra, sitting casually on a bike and wearing a knowing smile on his face. This was Chris Wight, or Byam as we call him. Byam was another support runner who had volunteered to join me for the last two days of the run and had come down on his way to work to see us off. He would have to be the most talented runner I have had the pleasure to run with over the years. While his height and frame don't exactly fit the stereotypical picture of an ultra-runner, he certainly doesn't let it slow him down. I was a bit concerned about him spending the last two days with me because I knew I would be in various forms of disrepair by that stage, and though Byam would never say anything, he would no doubt be chomping at the bit to up the pace. I guess time would tell as to how we would go.

At 6:50am we hadn't quite finished arranging all the gear, so it was clear that we weren't going to be ready for a 7am start. The decision was made to push the start back to 7:30 which took the pressure off considerably. To add to our initial issues, the huge digital screen wasn't working, so our big impressive logo and website details weren't on display. While this was disappointing, all I could think about at that moment in time was getting on the road.

After a few quick group photos in front of the support convoy, we started the count down. 10, 9, 8, Chris and I stood nervously next to each other like we have at the start of so many races over the years. 7, 6, 5, a quick wave and a thank you to the assembled crowd. 4, 3, a bang on the window of the shuttle and a wave to Kellie and the kids. 2, 1, Go!

18 months of planning in my head, 4 months of solid fundraising and physical preparation, the combined effort of 20+ people, plus the generosity and support of 100's of others and the moment was here. It had begun. Chris and I took off from the square with butterflies in our stomachs and excitement poring from us. This is the stuff we live for. There is nothing in this world quite like the feeling of pushing through physical and mental boundaries and realizing your potential; and this experience would no doubt take us to our boundaries and beyond.

The first stage of day 1 took us along the Yarra Promenade to Crown Casino. As we stood at the traffic lights waiting to cross the road, I looked around me at all the people in their suits on their way to work and realized how fortunate I was to be doing what I was doing. All these people were heading off to work on their first day back after the Easter long weekend, and I was beginning the biggest challenge of my life. The support convoy had left Fed Square and were snaking their way out of the city and heading for the first check point in Williamstown. Almost as a reminder of why we were here, there on the road in front of me was a \$1 coin. Waiting for a gap in the traffic I bounded onto the road and scooped it up. This would be the first of many 'on the road' donations we would receive.

Gradually we wound our way past Crown and over the river into the Docklands precinct and past the Telstra Dome. From here we headed down Footscray rd towards Yarraville. While running along Footscray rd my phone rang and I did a quick interview with a radio station in Geelong. I was expecting this call, which was why I had my phone on me. I was however, looking forward to getting rid of it for the next 5 days. It was good to get off the main road and onto some back streets as we ran under the West Gate Bridge and along the water's edge into Williamstown. As

expected, there was the crew, parked on the side of the road doing some more organizing of the gear. In the back of Gerard's ute was Birchy's mountain bike which was proving to be a bit of a pain when it came to packing the supplies around it. I told Gerard that he could drop the bike off at his house as we passed through Werribee if he wanted. I think he and Birchy were hesitant to do this because if my legs blew out, what would I do then? I never seriously considered riding the bike, but I was happy to keep it around if it put everyone's mind at ease. Little did I know how important that bike would become.

With the 14km stage 1 done and a warm sun shining down, we began stage two (the longest of the day at 21kms). The pilot cars were now in front and behind with the flashing lights drawing a few quizzical looks. I guess it must have seemed a bit strange when people saw the big signs on the cars stating "Caution – Foot Event", the flashing lights and multiple support cars, and then only saw two guys running leisurely down the road.

Running down Kororoit Creek Rd out of Williamstown I began to think about the enormity of what we were doing. My legs weren't wrecked yet, but I could definitely feel a bit of fatigue in them already. We hadn't even hit 20kms and I was starting to feel it. Come on! How am I supposed to keep this up for 5 days? This was about the time Birchy cranked up the PA system on the tailing pilot car. It started with a few comments like, "Is this as fast as you can go?" and "There is no way you are going to make it guys", and from there deteriorated into him singing and trying to beat box with the siren going in the background. Needless to say, my attention to the tiredness that was creeping into my legs was replaced by the hilarity of Birchy's antics on the microphone.

It was also around this time that we began to work out our system of getting drinks to the runners. This began by Chris and I dropping back to the ute and simply taking drink bottles or snacks from Birch, while he radioed Barry in the lead car to slow down or stop while we drank. Pretty soon we worked out a signal of holding up one finger for water or 2 fingers for sports drink; then Birch would jump out of the ute and run our refreshments up to us. Chris and I thought this was a fantastic opportunity to have a bit of fun, and as Daniel approached us we would accelerate and make him sprint to keep up. This was a past time that never got old. I think we were still doing this on day 5.

This section really did seem to drag on and the sun was quite warm by the time we got to check point 2. As we came up over a small rise and could see Brett's caravan (The Mothership) set up with the Shuttle parked next to it, I was very much looking forward to sitting for a few moments to rest the legs and to get some more food into me. We had now run 35kms which is only 7 short of a marathon, but because of the atmosphere created by what we were doing and the energy I got from everyone around me, I felt like I had only run about 10kms. Sure my legs were a bit sore, but mentally I was cruising.

After a short break at the pit stop we headed off again and in towards Hoppers Crossing and Werribee. About 2 kilometers after leaving the Mothership Chris started to develop some pain in the side of his knee. This was his worst nightmare coming true... Chris has suffered on and off for the last few years with a niggling injury that, when at its worst, has put him out of commission completely. He had received plenty of treatment and done extensive rehabilitation on it, but unfortunately it had chosen today to make its triumphant return. Interestingly, it was at this same time that I started to develop some Achilles soreness in my ankle. What a pair we made! We pushed on down the road and I could see Chris willing the pain to go away. We stopped at a couple of traffic lights and tried our best to stretch out our individual aches and pains and as mine gradually started to subside, Chris's only got worse.

It was time to call an emergency pit stop. We waved the pilot cars to a stop and I rummaged through my medical bag for some nurofen gel for Chris. After applying the magic cream, off we went again with fingers crossed. It was only about 800 meters down the road that Chris made the difficult and selfless decision to pull out and let me continue on unhindered by his dodgy knee. I can only imagine what it must have been like for him to prepare for this thing for months and months only to have it taken away from him on the first day. I was disappointed too. Not because Chris couldn't keep running with me and supporting me as he had done so well all day, but because he wouldn't get to share this amazing adventure with me from the perspective of "The Runner".

Chris said to me "My knee has had it. I'm going to jump in the car. Keep going and I will see you at the next check point". I knew he had pushed the pain as far as it would let him go, and now he didn't want to be responsible for slowing me down. So off I headed, for the first time running by myself. As I bounded along, a little quicker now with my Achilles pain gone and thinking about lunch which was scheduled for the next stop, I heard something approaching from behind me. Chris was back! What? He hadn't got in the car after all. He had stopped the ute long enough to get Birchy's mountain bike out of the back and then sped off to catch me. Luckily the action of peddling didn't hurt anywhere near as much as running. This meant I hadn't lost my partner after all. The adrenaline hit me and I think I upped the speed even more. It was great to know that Chris was still there with me.

There is an unspoken understanding between ultra-distance runners. Particularly those that have shared so many hours of torture together, as Chris and I had. We have had the unique opportunity to experience many of life's extremes together over the years. We have run together through almost every type of terrain imaginable, run from dawn to dusk then dusk till dawn and beyond. Probably the most memorable running moment in my life was a few years ago when Chris and I were training for a 100km race together in the Dandenong ranges. We had headed off late in the evening and had run over the top of a mountain and were coming down over the ridges on the other side. As we ran along in silence, the sun softly filtered through the fog that hung in the ancient trees around us. The trail was soft underfoot and the gradient a gentle down hill... my favourite. The unspoken understanding passed between us and we picked up our pace with huge smiles on our faces. It was one of those moments where life is just beautiful. Your senses are heightened, your body feels energized and all you can feel is this untamed life force pumping through you. I guess it is hard for me to explain to people why I would want to run for hours or days on end, but the best I can do is to say that it is for moments like these, that I run.

Now two feet and two wheels, we approached the next pit stop and the 45km mark. This was our officially designated lunch stop and it was great to know that we could refuel properly before attempting to push on for the remainder of the day. We arrived at the stop and plopped down in a seat with the support crew doing an excellent job making sure we got what we needed. I had my Achilles on ice to try and settle down the niggling pain that came on earlier, Chris hit the massage table to see if Brett could get his knee back in working order, and the smell of meaty pasta was emanating from the Mothership. Soon we were both full as boots and saying hello to some friends that had managed to locate us and had dropped by to show their support. I also asked Brett to give my legs a massage, as I knew they still had a long way to go. Brett did a great job and managed to loosen things up for me considerably. It was strange though; lying on a massage table at lunch time on a Tuesday on the side of the road on the outskirts of Werribee. We certainly got a few odd looks from people as they drove by. The odd looks would continue for the next 5 days and was something that turned out to be a great source of amusement to myself and crew.

Back on the road we went, this time with Chris running. He was feeling much better after the massage and decided to give the knee another go. Typical O'driscoll, he won't give up without a fight. This section was one that has really stuck in my head. During the preparation for the event, my kids had often joined me for training sessions so that they could be ready to run sections of the Long Run Home with me. Being 7 (Phoenix), 8 (Kalani) and 10 (Shilo), they obviously didn't plan on running for hours at a time but they had hoped to clock up a few kms with me on the back roads. With a relatively quiet road and the sun shining, the kids threw their shorts on and hit the road with Chris and I. Add to the mix a very hesitant runner by the name of Daniel Birch (it took considerable pressure from me to get him out of the ute), and we had a pretty large group bounding down the road. The kids were great, so much energy from being cooped up in the Shuttle all day; they were ready to fly.

After the first 500 meters they realized that sprinting was going to be difficult to sustain and slowed down to a comfortable trot. Birchy was looking strong and helped keep the kids moving along from the tail end. The goal was for them all to run 2kms, but what we hadn't banked on was the wind. We were heading due west and the wind was coming straight at us and fairly hard. Gerry and the rest of the Shuttle crew were hovering behind the tail pilot car ready to pick up any road weary children if they found it too difficult. I think 2 kms into a head wind was proving to be more difficult than everyone had realized. Phoenix with his little legs was beginning to show signs of distress but his determination kept him going for well over 1 km, but he eventually had to pull out. Later I found out that he was really upset because he thought I would have been disappointed in him for quitting. Nothing could

have been further from the truth. I was so proud of him and the way he hung on well after the going got tough. Shilo was next to start slowing down and I could see her giving it everything she had. Chris stayed with her and helped encourage her to keep going. I occasionally turned around and ran backwards so I could smile at her and give her something to chase after, and she pushed and pushed and stayed with us. Kalani was in his 'soldier mode' and had his trademark look of total concentration. There was no smile and no talking, just head forward and running his little heart out. He was puffing like everyone else but I could see he wasn't going to stop. As the distance reading on my Polar watch showed 1.5kms, I decided it was time to make this little run something to remember for Birchy and the kids. So with a wave to Bazza in the front car, we increased the speed and went into full blown battle with the wind. "Time to sprint guys" I yelled at the gang, and sprint we did. The group slowly came together and soon we were running full tilt in a tight formation. I didn't realise it earlier, but Birchy was sweating. In fact, he looked very close to having a heart attack. Perspiration was pouring off him and I could see he was giving it his last bit of energy. "Here!" I yelled at him and pointed to ground beside me, he was going to make the distance and that was my final word. Bit by bit he edged up next to me with Chris and Shilo not far behind. 200m to go, 100m to go. Birchy and kids were pushing with all of their might and my heart was swelling with pride. Finally we hit the 2km mark and we all stopped with huge smiles and a great sense of satisfaction. Birchy looked like he might vomit, but other than that it was a great bit of fun and I was so happy to have shared that experience with them. The Shuttle pulled along side and the kids climbed in sweaty, exhausted and ready for a sit down. Birchy retired to his position in the ute totally spent but with a look of satisfaction in his eyes. I had noticed Chris was running with a nasty limp, so obviously his knee was at it again. Of course, he didn't want to miss out on all the fun and managed to make the 2kms with the others. But unfortunately it was back on the bike for him.

From this point through to the next check point was a tough one for me. The wind was relentless and I found myself running about 2 inches back from the Barry's bumper to shield myself from the some of the wind. This worked pretty well, but I had to be very careful to hold a steady pace or I would give myself a nice big bruise on my shins. To make things more interesting, a large and very dark cloud was coming our way. This was fine by me; I was actually hoping it would rain soon to cool me down a bit. So it did. It started out as a light drizzle but soon started falling a lot heavier. At first it was a nice distraction, but the constant wind and cumulative effect of the kilometers was beginning to take its toll on my legs and my mind. I was tired. This was the time of day I had been waiting for. Strangely, I was looking forward to when things began to get tough. I said earlier that I wanted it to hurt; I was beginning to get my wish.

I hit the checkpoint and pretty much fell into a chair. Brett helped me greatly with another quick massage on some trouble spots and I threw down some food and drink. Chris came over and said to me that when it started raining someone had asked him if I would want to stop and wait for it to let up. His response was something like "Are you kidding? It could be hailing golf balls and he wouldn't stop". He was right, the rain and the pain just made me love the experience even more. Now was when the REAL running began. I knew the next section would be the toughest so far because my body was saying "no more" and my energy levels were very low. My counter attack to this was my Ipod. Kellie had given me this as a Christmas present and I had loaded it up with a carefully selected mix of songs that I knew could get my blood pumping. So off I went with earphones in and autopilot on. What I try to do when things get really hard is disconnect my mind from my body. I set my legs at a speed they are comfortable with, and say goodbye to them, I just let my mind drift. Often I will focus on the lyrics of the song and use them to motivate me or I look around and seek out the details in the scenery as it passes by. I notice birds in branches or patterns in the clouds. I just allow myself to absorb as much of my environment as I can. It makes me feel very fortunate to be doing what I am doing and helps put everything in perspective.

A little way down the road, Birchy discovered that if he put the microphone in the car near the speakers of the car stereo, the music could be broadcast over the PA system. Genius! What a surreal experience this created. Picture yourself running down a deserted back road through farmland with rain falling intermittently from the sky, the wind doing its best to make things difficult, your body systematically breaking down and suddenly 50's and 60's Rock and Roll tunes start playing at 6000 decibels just behind you... I had to smile. What else could I do in that situation? I found it hilarious and awe inspiring at the same time.

When I first came up with the idea of the Long Run Home, there was no way I could have conceived that I would find myself in such a situation. What would the locals think when they saw this bizarre sight roll by? Hopefully they would find it as strange as me, and have a laugh too.

The kilometers slowly passed by, along with a couple more check points and we gradually made our way to the outskirts of Geelong.

As we approached the industrial area at North Shore near Geelong, I was feeling like my legs weighed a ton and my muscles were so tight they might snap. I was low. Physically, mentally, emotionally I had had enough.

As I ran along, I tried to picture the maps I had studied in so much detail before beginning the run. What was around the next corner, was it the finish, or did I have another couple of bends to go? I soon came to realise that if you aren't sure if there is another couple of bends to go – then there probably is.

It was then that Birchy came over the PA with the announcement that there was about 1km to go. 1km, I can run 1km! No, I can sprint 1km! So off I went, as quickly as my devastated legs would carry me. I soon remembered that 1km feels like 100kms when you have just run 81 of them. After recalibrating my effort to something I could actually maintain I realized that Chris had yet again jumped out of the car and was disobeying the orders given to him by his knee, so that he could join me for the big push to the finish.

Gradually the finish line came into sight. I knew my family and friends would be waiting for me as well as some other well wishers who had promised to be there for the end of the first day. Now I sprinted, only this time my body didn't respond with the same kind of "What the hell are you doing to me?" feeling. Obviously the adrenalin and sense of achievement that I was getting had dulled all my pain receptors to the point where my body became irrelevant. The feeling I had as I sped into the car park with everyone there to welcome me in, and Chris just behind me, well, I don't think there are words that come even close.

I encourage just about everyone I know to try long distance running. I try to describe to them the ultimate feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that you get when you achieve these seemingly impossible goals; and most people just smile politely and say something like, "yeah, that must be great..." But as I reached the end of the first day and fell to the ground with this huge smile on my face and tears running from my eyes, I think a few of the people present might have got an idea of what I mean.

Wow, what a huge day. And there were 4 more to go. I was in so much pain, but at the same time having so much fun. I loved that this had brought so many of my family and friends together and that they had all done it voluntarily just to be a part of it.

Soon after picking myself up from the ground, shaking some hands and sharing some hugs, I was greeted by a photographer from a Geelong Newspaper. He had come to get some pictures of me for an article they were going to print on our event.

You wouldn't believe it, but his first words were, "would you mind heading down that road a bit and running towards me while I get some photos?" I gave him one of those 'You have got to be kidding' looks, but he just stood there waiting for me to do as he asked. What else could I do? I walked a little way away, turned and ran towards him. He ended up making me repeat this 3 or 4 times, surely he must have had some notion of how I felt? From the finish line of the first day, we headed off to our first night's accommodation at a holiday park in Geelong. We arrived and were treated to the Geelong Lion's Club cooking us up a storm on the BBQ. There were mountains of food for us and we all gratefully accepted their generosity which included a donation to the cause.

This feast was organized by Andrew Noye's uncle Paul (a member of the Geelong Lion's Club).

After taking a quick walk through the freezing swimming pool at the park to help with the recovery, I attended our make-shift medical centre.

Jammed into one of our cabins were two massage tables where Brett worked at repairing Chris's legs, Andrew worked his magic on mine and Suzie worked on draining, cleaning and dressing the blisters I was now farming on my feet. Andy and Suze had to drive back to Melbourne for work the next day, so it was a huge day for them also. Plonking down on a couch I devoured some more of Brett's pasta then headed off to bed. It was now about 11:30pm, far too late to be going to bed when I had to get up at about 5:30 the next morning and run all day again.

Sleep didn't come easily and ended far too quickly. When I did eventually peel myself out of bed I was confronted with a problem... My legs didn't work! I stood next to the bed supporting myself against the wall, and when I went to take a step nothing happened. Not good.

Ok, so how do I deal with this...? With a little coaxing I managed to take a couple of tentative steps and slowly but surely I worked my way over to the bathroom. It seemed the more I moved, the more I realised that movement was what I needed.

After pulling on my shorts, T-shirt, socks and shoes (the latter two proving to be the most difficult), I left my wife and kids and headed outside to get organised for another day of fun and games.

The crew had surprised me once again, as I hobbled out to see them all dressed, packing the cars and just about ready to roll. I really did have the best support team in the world. All I had to do was make sure I stayed upright and moving forward for another 4 days, and the rest would be taken care of.

In the cars, we drove back to the finish line of yesterday's run. 10 minutes later I was confronted once again with legs that had decided to ignore me. Sitting in the car, even for such a short time apparently put my legs back to sleep. So for the next few minutes I hobbled around the car park, rubbing and slapping my legs, willing them to do as they were told.

There we were, the pilot drivers and Birchy had finished discussing the route for the first stage of the day and they were signaling me that it was time to move. Chris was on the bike and ready to follow me down the road. My job was easy, right? Just run.

I don't know about easy, but there was a strange kind of muscle memory thing going on. Somehow my legs had remembered the pain they had gone through the day before. I won't deny that those first few kms of day two were excruciating, but my body seemed to be accepting what I was doing and its method of dealing with the pain has shifted from denial to acceptance.

So off we went, slowly working our way from Stead Park in North Shore Geelong, down through the industrial estate towards the esplanade that follows the waters edge towards the center of town.

With Chris rolling on my right, the sea sparkling in the morning sun on my left and a clear blue sky above, I was having another one of 'those' moments.

I looked across to Chris and said with a smile, "where else would you be?" a rhetorical question to which he replied, "I know what you mean" smiling back at me.

Out there, pushing down the road, striving toward a single goal, life just made sense. In our normal lives there are so many variables, so many things to consider and adapt to. It is this adapting and evolving that makes life interesting I guess, but when you are presented with the simple task of getting from point A to point B by doing whatever it takes, it reminds you of how important it is to actually be present in your daily life. To appreciate the details of the day and to actually utilize the potential of these amazing vehicles we have been given – our bodies.

At about 6am that morning, I had done a short radio interview over the phone with K-Rock in Geelong. The radio hosts had jokingly said that if I was running past the studio, that I should drop in and they would throw some money in our donation tins. I had decided that we should take them up on the offer, and as we approached Geelong CBD, Birchy made a phone call to K-Rock and told them that we would be in shortly.

I think they got a bit of a fright that we had called their bluff, but they invited us in for a face to face interview and also shook the tin around their offices for us. The interview was great for morale, because as soon as we hit the road again, half of Geelong were tooting their horns and waving at us.

The road out of Geelong wasn't much fun. Actually it was no fun at all. The wind had picked up a lot and there was a slow steady climb all the way to the outskirts of town.

By the time we reached our first pit stop of the day, I was already spent. The CPF (cumulative pain factor) was really adding up and my body was requesting an emergency crisis management meeting with my brain. But luckily, my brain had taken time off for stress leave and was quite enjoying the battle it was waging with the road.

It was great to see the rest of the crew waiting for us with refreshments and supplies. They were a little confused why it had taken us so long to get there however, and when we explained the whole radio interview thing, Kellie gave me a look that said, "what is this, a run or a media tour?" Her no nonsense, get on with the job attitude

comes from her father and it would serve me well on this adventure. I knew that she would never tolerate me giving up, and if my resolve started to waiver, she would chase me down the road with a big stick until I got to the end if she had to.

So, after a short stop, something to eat and drink, we were off again and working our way towards Winchelsea.

As the road stretched out ahead of me, my sense of well being deteriorated along with the weather. The morning's blue skies and sunshine was being replaced by looming clouds, strong winds, rolling hills and eventually rain. Not the rain that we had yesterday, but real rain. Great big drops of soaking, numbing rain.

The kms ticked by slower than ever, but I constantly reminded myself that I was living a dream I had long held, and my Grandfather's and father's names written on my forearm reminded me why I was here.

Now I was running tucked in behind Barry's lead pilot car just as I had done yesterday. This really did help to cut down on wind resistance and took a lot of the sting out of the driving rain.

A tendonitis in the front of my left ankle was now excruciatingly painful with every step and my right knee wasn't far behind.

Spotting the 'Welcome to Winchelsea' sign on my left, I veered over to it and gave it the biggest high-five I could muster. This would come to be a tradition as we entered each town along the road; a way of celebrating small victories won.

Now I could see the crew off to the right, all set up in a picnic shelter, pasta cooking on the stove and lots of dry clothes and towels waiting for me.

It was now customary for me to pick up the pace coming into the pit stops and finish each section as strongly as I could. So I pulled out from behind Barry, crossed the road and charged over to the shelter with a big smile on my face into the welcoming arms of the kids, who were always excited to see me at the stops. Once again the crew was fantastic. I was soaked through to the bone, but they had me dry, fed and feeling much better in no time.

Back on to the road we went, still feeling my aches and pains, but mentally much better after the re-fuel.

Today was the day I had worried about the most in the lead up to the run. I figured I could force myself through the first day, but day two, after day one's torture was always going to be the biggest challenge. Looking back now, I guess day 3, 4 and 5 could potentially have been even worse than day 2, but I think I blocked those days out of my mind in an attempt at a self-imposed ignorance. Now day two had really begun.

Running through suburbia helps to pass the time because there is always something to distract you, so getting through Geelong was psychologically ok. Then, knowing that Winchelsea is only a short drive from Geelong also helped. Now there was pretty much nothing between Winchelsea and Colac, the designated stop for night two. Exacerbating this unsettling fact was the knowledge that before we could get into Colac, there were some fairly decent hills to climb.

Nevertheless, on we went. Chris peddling along next to me, ferrying drinks and food from the pilot cars as needed. Slowly we ate up the road in front of us and the road signs informed us that Colac was approaching. There was one problem though, the distance to Colac on the road signs told us that it was actually further away than we had thought. For almost two days now, I could take comfort in the fact that I knew exactly how far it was to each pit stop. I would ration out my physical, mental and emotional output to get me to each rest point. Now that I had discovered that end point of day two was not just a little further, but several kilometers further than expected, it really hit home just how much I relied on that knowledge of distance. Add to this the wind, cold and the hills coming into Colac, I was once again finding myself searching for some inner reserve of energy.

Almost on cue, support arrived. On the side of the road, some family friends appeared to wave and cheer me on.

Then a little further down the road, some more familiar faces popped up. This time it was Birchy's in-laws who are also old family friends of ours, Paul and Sue McVeigh. Paul and Sue were to be our hosts for the night and their hospitality is legendary.

Following a long slow climb into the outskirts of Colac, I caught a glimpse of the town. There on the side of the road was Brett, Shilo and Kalani who had come to run the last km or so with me. The usual surge of energy came and I picked up the pace for a strong finish on the town green in the main street.

Paul and Sue had driven ahead and were waiting for us, along with my crew and family. As per yesterday, the final push ended with me collapsing on the ground in an exhausted, sweating heap.

As I stood up, Paul said the words I had been dreading, "Your Dad would be proud mate". Paul was an old friend of my Dad and I knew that when I heard those words I would break down. As hard as I tried to stop them, the tears came and my throat tightened. Anyone that knew my Dad would know that he would have given his right arm to be involved with something like this. Being a dad myself now, I know what it feels like to see your kids achieve their goals.

With the last trickle of adrenalin leaving my body, it was time to start winding down for the day and to begin filling up the tank with some food and drink. The Colac Lions Club put on a very impressive spread of food for us at their club rooms. There was a small army of them manning the BBQ's and kitchen facilities. To see a group of complete strangers give their time and energy to support some crazy guy on a mission to madness is something to behold. Not only did they cook us up a storm, they also handed over a sizable donation. Our handshakes and thanks on the night couldn't possibly have conveyed how appreciative we all were, but hopefully they could see it in our contented faces and fully bellies.

After arriving at Paul and Sue's we all settled in and got organized for a well earned sleep. Brett dished up a fantastic massage for my throbbing legs and after applying some ice to the multiple sites of tendonitis in my ankles and knees, I headed off to bed. Tonight, like last night, Kellie and I lay awake talking about the day's events. As tired as I was, it was the perfect way to finish each day; taking the time to discuss the mental and physical challenges I had faced during the day. I think Kellie sensed this and of course, she was there for me as she always is. It wasn't just me going through mountains of pain during the week; Kellie, being heavily pregnant and suffering all sorts of back pain was in constant discomfort, which was exacerbated by the long hours in the bus. True to form, she did her best to keep it to herself and gave her all to the job at hand. I will never forget her selfless determination, and to see her with a smile on her face at the pit stops no matter how much pain she was in, always put my own pain in perspective.

The 27th of March 2008 began the same way the 26th did, with the sun coming up and my legs pleading with me to stay in bed. But today my mind was different. Today I knew it was possible to run all day and still be able to get up the next day and do it again, so after slowly getting my legs moving, I began to get ready with a little more confidence than yesterday.

Heading outside, I found Brett packing up his caravan. He had just discovered that his wife Cath's grandmother had passed away the night before. Obviously he needed to head home to be there for Cath, but he was hesitant because he didn't want to let me down. That is Brett for you, you couldn't find a more loyal and committed person. I told him to go home and not to worry about us. Cath needed him more than I did and we would manage without him, I reassured him.

Brett and I met years ago when he and Cath began training in one of the Martial Arts classes I was teaching at the time. Brett and I soon became close friends and went on to become partners in a massage education business which we continue to run today. Brett's attention to detail and his adaptable nature is the key to our business's success and the reason why I was so happy to have him as part of the Long Run Home crew.

After letting the rest of the crew know about our modified team situation, we packed the cars and got ready for the day. Breakfast was prepared in typical Paul McVeigh fashion, with an old fashioned country fry up. Bacon, eggs, sausages and hash browns rolled onto our plates and we all ate more than we probably should have. I followed this with my usual bowl of Weetbix and a banana.

A short drive back into town, took us to the point we finished at last night. With Chris on the bike and me on my feet, we headed off down the main street of Colac as the town began to wake up. Shortly after beginning the days running, I noticed an uncomfortable feeling in my stomach. This feeling soon developed into a nasty cramping sensation that forced me into the slowest of shuffles. As I struggled up the street, willing the pain to go away, a police car pulled up next to us and waved us over. I knew what they were going to say... Chris wasn't wearing a helmet, and that was cause for a fine. Surely they would let him off when they found out what we were doing. We explained the situation and promised to retrieve the helmet from the support car when they caught up just down the road. The police gave us a very skeptical look when we said that I was running to Portland, and took down Chris's name and address for good measure. The reason Chris wasn't wearing the helmet was because the only one we had was Birchy's sister's, and it was pink.

By the time we reached the outskirts of town, the pain in my stomach had me really worried. If it kept up, there wasn't much hope for me finishing the day's distance.

In ultra-distance running the most common cause of participant drop-out is intestinal pain, and I was now experiencing the debilitating effects of this. The only thing I could think of that might be causing it was the fantastic cooked breakfast that I had eaten about an hour earlier. Normally my stomach can handle most things and not affect my running, but then again, I had never pushed my body to these limits before. Lucky for me, a short toilet stop at a service station made a huge difference and I was able to get back to the 'other' pain that I was beginning to find comfortably familiar.

Today's distance was to be the shortest of the five days with only 68kms to complete before finishing at Terang.

Today my company on the road was to change from time to time as Chris jumped in the car and let some of the others take a turn on the bike. This was a good idea all round, as it allowed Chris a chance to rest his knee properly, and for the crew that had worked so hard, to experience in more of a hands-on way, what it felt like out on the road.

It started with Gerard on the bike and Chris taking the position of driver.

About 5 years ago, while on holiday with Julie and Gerard in Thailand, I had seen Gerard attempt to ride a scooter that he had hired near his hotel. He got about 2kms down the road and asked me to dink him back and drop the scooter back where he had picked it up. The owner was utterly confused as to why we were returning it so soon and was clearly concerned that Gerard would want his money back. Gerard didn't want his money back; he just couldn't wait to get rid of the thing that had caused him so much stress in such a short time. Needless to say, Gerard and two wheels don't go comfortably together. So when I saw him straddling the bike and preparing to take to the highway with me, I knew I was in for a laugh.

The first few peddle strokes were tentative, but soon he found his rhythm and was cruising along behind me nicely. Trouble started when I asked him to grab me a drink from the ute behind us... He slowed down to a stop so Chris and Birch in the ute could pull up along side of him and pass him my bottle. He held onto the bottle with one hand and realized after a few seconds that he wasn't going to be able to control the bike with the other, so after a frustrated attempt at another bike / bottle holding configuration and probably a little swearing, he dumped the bike and ran up to me with the bottle. By this time I was laughing too hard to run and had stopped on the side of the road. Gerard can be very funny when he wants to, and sometimes even funnier when he doesn't want to.

Birchy's prowess on the microphone had become legendry by day three and his various alter egos were commonplace during each day's running. He had conjured up several characters such as 'Phil the farmer from Ballarat', out of boredom no doubt, and would act out these hilarious monologues over the loud speaker. Occasionally he would interview whoever was sitting next to him in the ute, or just make random comments to people on the side of the road. Any livestock in the paddocks along the road to Portland were always fair game and Birch would do his best to either communicate with them or just plain frighten the life out of them.

The day rolled on and so did the distance. Eventually Gerard decided he had had enough of the bike and headed back to the ute to swap with Birch. Within seconds of Birchy jumping on the bike it had a puncture. This sparked an endless litany of jokes about the size of his rump and the inability of the bike to support him. Luckily Chris was able to load the bike into the Shuttle and fly ahead with the rest of the crew to Terang where he replaced the punctured tire and bought a spare just in case.

Upon his return, Birch did finally get the chance to clock a few kms with me, but not before testing out the new tube by popping the smallest wheel-stand I have ever seen.

The changing faces were good for me, as the difference in conversation distracted me from my pain.

Next on the bike was Jenny, my mother in-law who opted to join me during a very windy section along a long straight boring road. She did a great job and battled through a whole section from one pit-stop to another. It was around this point that Jenny hopped off the bike that we were paid a visit by a local Aboriginal man that was somewhat of a legend in the area. He had completed a run similar to mine several years earlier and now regularly rode hundreds of kms on his bike along these same roads. The distances he rode were impressive enough without considering his advanced age and the strange streak of blue he had in his hair. He dropped in on us because he had

heard we were in the area. "I've come to see the boy" was his greeting when he pulled up alongside the crew. He chatted away for a while with some of the crew, then jumped on his bike and headed off. It wasn't until later that day that I even heard of his visit. It left us wondering if he had actually 'come to see the boy', or if he just wanted to let us know that there was more than one nut case out on the road.

The day had turned quite cold by now and the sky was grey as far as the eye could see.

The wind was cutting straight across the road and slightly into our faces; needless to say, I was reaching that point, like on previous days where "the real running begins". To my surprise, and I must say delight, Kellie announced that she would like to do a shift on the bike with me.

With the clouds looming like they were, I thought it best to make sure she stayed dry, so after rummaging through my kit box I found her a pair of waterproof pants and a rain coat. Rugged up in her plastic shell and fitted with the now famous pink helmet, she mounted the bike and bravely headed out into battle with the elements along side me. I was very impressed with her strength and determination, which had been tested even more during the day, as she had taken over from Brett in the massage department. Pregnant belly and all, several times during the day she would be hunched over me on a blanket, rubbing and kneading the tension out of my legs. What a wife! She had been there for me in every way with her support and encouragement and now she was out there actually doing it with me.

As this was the last section for the day, Chris had decided that his legs would just have to do what they were told for a few kilometers, so that he could be part of the best bit of the day... the finish.

The tendonitis on the front of my left ankle was now a constant stabbing pain that was only just manageable. I had to ice it at every stop and use anti-inflammatory gel to keep it under control. With Kellie on the bike and Chris back in his rightful place beside me, I have to say that I did feel a whole lot better about the last section of the day. Chris and I treated Kellie to a rendition of American Pie in our loudest and most out of tune voices. We would often sing during our long training sessions, as it would take our mind off the pain. Unfortunately for Kellie, it seemed to put her in pain.

On we charged, now getting a little warmer from the exertion. Kellie had shed her waterproof layers because she was sweating too much inside it, but of course as soon as she dropped it in the ute, the clouds opened up. The rain started out lightly, but was enough to give Kel a good soaking. What a sight we were. Me with my Cliff Young Shuffle, Chris hobbling with his dodgy knee, and Kellie and her belly in a white skivvy, all of us getting progressively wetter with Chris and I singing our lungs out.

Before I knew it, there in front of me was the sign, 'Welcome to Terang'. With a huge slap, I high-fived the sign and picked up the pace. Almost on cue, the rain turned from a shower into a downpour.

We rolled into town with Birchy doing his best to drum up support from people ducking for shelter on the streets of Terang and the three of us looking like drowned rats. For some reason, the rain just makes me want to run like crazy, so I did. I hit the accelerator and soon found myself passing Bazza in the leading pilot car. A tap on his passenger side window got him upping the pace and from then on it was a full blown sprint down the main street of Terang with Kellie and Chris in hot pursuit.

Soon enough, I caught sight of Shilo and Gerry standing on the footpath in the rain, signaling the way into a picnic shelter, fully decked out with gas heater and BBQ's loaded. Once again, the local Lion's club had come out en force and cooked us up a storm.

I was so proud of Kellie for not just riding with me in her pregnant state, but not even hesitating when the weather made life 'interesting'. I am very lucky to have this formidable woman as my wife.

Shortly after arriving at the finish line, Chris 'Byam' Wight pulled into town to join us for the last two days of the run. Here was the fittest person I know, fresh and ready to join the group, and there was Chris O'driscoll and I looking like we were about ready to check ourselves into hospital. Byam must have thought, "What have I signed up for here?"

After a great dinner and some time spent talking to the Lion's Club members we offered our thanks and said our goodbyes. We now had a 25-30 minute drive from Terang to Warrnambool, where we had our accommodation organized at a holiday park near the beach. But not before a short stop of at Brendan and Hailey's house to lock away Byam's car for the next few days.

Brendan Coffey is my uncle Gerard's nephew, so he isn't actually my cousin (as Gerard is my uncle via marriage), but Brendan and I have spent a lot of time together over the years, so we have a strong history as mates. Brendan and his older brother Matthew drove down and joined us at the holiday park for a while before we settled in for the night, and it was great to catch up with them both.

That night we also welcomed back to the team Andrew and Suzie Noye who were now able to be with us for the remainder of the run. I was particularly anxious to see Suzie as I had not changed the dressing on my blisters for two days now. To be honest, I didn't want to upset whatever was going on under the dressings in case I made matters worse. I knew they were going to be a mess, but I have to say that the result of three long days of road running had turned the inside edge of the balls of my feet into something resembling a margarita pizza. I had actually managed to melt a plastic 'second skin' dressing that Suzie had placed under the tape. I didn't even know that was possible!

Suzie put her nursing skills to good use and tidied my feet up nicely while Andrew worked his Physiotherapy magic on almost everything from the ankles up.

An all too short night's sleep ended with me once again willing my legs to support my weight while I got dressed for day 4. Pulling on my shoes was very worrying, as the pain that they produced had me thinking "how am I possibly going to run 74kms today when just putting shoes on brings a tear to my eye?"

As quietly as I could, I gathered my gear up, said a hushed goodbye to Kellie and slipped out the door of our cabin and into the pre-dawn darkness. I hobbled VERY slowly over to the other's cabins and located the Weetbix and fruit for a quick breakfast before Suzie made some last minute adjustments to my feet.

Chris had decided to take a forced rest day today so that he could get his knee as good as it possibly could be for the final push on day 5. He was content in the knowledge that Byam would take his place and support me in his absence.

We now backtracked from our night's accommodation back to Terang where we had finished the night before. What I was about to see, was one of the most awe inspiring things of my life. There, parked on the side of the road in Terang was Brett Morrison with his caravan all hooked up and ready to resume his task of captain of the 'Mothership'. We got out of the car and Brett wandered up to us munching on his breakfast, just like it was any other day at the office.

"But, what, why, how...? What are you doing back here?" I fumbled.

Brett then went on to tell us that he had gone home to Cath and his daughter Crystelle and together they decided that it would be good for them to come back and pick up where Brett left off. The idea was that it would be a good distraction from all that had gone on at home, and they didn't want to leave me in the lurch. Brett had returned and Cath, with Crystelle would join us later that day.

I didn't know what to say. All I could manage was a feeble "Thank you" and a firm handshake. To be honest, I wanted to fall down and cry my eyes out. How did I manage to come across such fantastic friends? It wasn't until several days later that I heard that shortly after arriving home, Brett received the terrible news that his grandmother had also passed away. This was one remarkable human being. I mentioned earlier that Brett is probably the most dedicated person I know, well, this is what I mean.

Suzie had organized for us to be stocked up with food from the local bakery, so after a quick stop and a pose for a photo with the baker, we headed back onto the bitumen for day 4.

The day's running started with just me and Byam, and the pace of choice was sloooow. It took a good hour for my body to warm up in the crisp morning air, and for my legs to find some semblance of a normal running stride. I found myself trying to describe to Byam what the previous 3 days had been like, and gave up, realizing that he would soon see for himself what an amazing experience this whole thing was.

Byam had brought with him an attachment for his Ipod which allowed him to hook it up to the radio in the ute and blast our music of choice over the loud speaker. This was a great moral booster for me, especially when I plugged my Ipod in and was able to run to the music that I had spent so many long nights running to during the lead up to the event.

Soon we were half running half dancing our way along the highway. Byam had a look of stunned bewilderment on his face that summed up exactly how I felt about the experience; this was further displayed by his next question - "What choices have I made in my life that have brought me to such a unique and bizarre situation as this?"

Byam and I had crossed paths for the first time a little over a year earlier when we were both asked to join a team with two mutual friends of ours to compete in the Oxfam Trailwalker event in the Dandenong ranges near Melbourne. Trailwalker is a 100km walk completed as a team of four, to help raise money for 3rd world countries all over the world. Jess and Kath, our other two team members asked us to join because they had wanted to run the event instead of walk it and they knew that Byam and I were both keen runners. Byam was training for an Ironman Triathlon at the time and had previously completed some very impressive runs of his own. The first time I met Byam, I thought to myself, "This guy doesn't look like a runner... He is 6'4" broad shouldered with a shaved head and is wearing all black". He actually looked more like he belonged in a heavy metal band. Well, they say you should never judge a book by its cover, and that saying definitely applies to Christopher Byam Wight. Not only could he run; he could do it easier than pretty much everyone out on the track. Byam and I spend the entire 16 odd hours during Trailwalker chewing each other's ears off about all the fantastic runs we had done in the past and talking about our philosophies on why we run and what we get out of it. It was clear that we shared the same outlook on the sport and many other things also. Over the next 12 months we would go on to complete several epic training runs together (often with Chris O'driscoll) and even the Melbourne Marathon, which Byam left us both for dead in.

One run in particular has stayed in my mind quite clearly, and that was a mammoth night mission where we ran the 28km Two Bays track near Rosebud on the Mornington Peninsula in the rain. I had taken a few months off training and was feeling the need to get the running shoes on again, Chris had been doing bits and pieces and Byam of course was in his usual tip top shape. The three of us drove and ran around the quite back streets of Dromana for 45 minutes late one Friday night, looking for the start of the track. Eventually we located it and set off in the freezing cold with only two torches between us. Chris had forgotten to pack his, but we managed with him running between us. The rain fell for almost the entire time we were out there and my legs cramped on the up hills and burned on the down hills. The funny thing was, for all the pain, discomfort and difficulty of the experience, we loved every second. It was that same old feeling of achievement, satisfaction, and in this case camaraderie that we shared out on the trail. This night run was before my family and I had moved down to Rosebud, so I spent a solid hour freezing and cramping with violent shivering on the drive home that night back to Moorabbin where we lived at the time. After finally getting into bed at about 4:30am, my alarm went off at 7am to take Kalani and Phoenix to their swimming lesson on the Saturday morning. I was happy to do this, even in the pain and sleep deprived state that I was in, because the previous night I had the chance to experience something out of the ordinary. Something that most married men with a family don't get to experience, probably something that most people would go out of their way to avoid, but as far as I am concerned, they don't know what they are missing.

Once my body warmed up and I found my rhythm, I realized that several of my aches and pains had reduced slightly. Actually that isn't totally accurate... Several of my aches and pains had migrated. The cramping I had been experiencing in my hips for the last three days had moved down to my hamstrings, the pain in my right knee had now spread itself more evenly into both knees and my lower back pain had shifted up into my shoulders. Luckily the burning tendonitis in my left ankle was still as constant and familiar as ever.

Another difference today was that the sun had decided to show its face. It's funny how the world seems like a better place when the sun is shining. Everyone's spirits were high and the pit-stops were always a hive of activity. On each pit-stop approach, Shilo, Kalani and Phoenix would run down the road to meet us. Their little legs going 100 miles per hour and restless energy coming off them in waves. Their energy was contagious and their antics at the pit-stops hilarious. Each of them had assigned themselves a role during the stops. Shilo took on the role of Mother Hen, fussing over Byam and me, making sure we had the right clothes and a comfortable chair. Kalani saw himself as the human resting pole and positioned himself under my arm to prop me up whenever I was standing. Phoenix loved playing the role of waiter, and took our orders for protein bars, electrolyte drinks or whatever food we craved. The entire experience was so much richer for having them along for the ride.

Meanwhile, my in-laws Gerry and Jenny did a fantastic job supporting Brett in the set up of the pit-stops, helping Kellie with the kids and basically being the glue that held the various parts of the support crew together. With Brett back on board, Kellie didn't drop her work load one bit, and continued to be a crucial and much valued member of the team. As always, Bazza, Gerard and Birchy were the wind in our sails and kept Byam and I moving at a steady and constant pace down the highway.

Early on day 4 Andrew flagged the idea that he would like to run a stage with us. Fantastic! I had never run with Andrew before and I was looking forward to the opportunity to perhaps convert my good friend to the insanity of distance running.

He took to the road with us after a pit-stop early in the day, and looked quite comfortable. He started out cracking jokes along with Byam and I and we were all having a great time. I talked to Andrew about my growing list of physical impairments while he ran behind me assessing my stride.

How lucky was I! Not many people were lucky enough to be a part of an event like this, but not only was I a part of it, I was being supported by my very own Physiotherapist (while running) and had a personal Massage Therapist and nurse at the pit-stops. Then there was the small army of others that prepared the food, accommodation and every other detail of my day, and they all did it for free! It was all very surreal and I was awestruck every time I stopped and thought about the enormity of what everyone was contributing.

A few kilometers down the road I realized that Andrew wasn't saying as much as he had earlier, and upon quizzing him on this I discovered that he was starting to feel the distance in his legs.

Up to that day, Andrew's longest run had been 10kms. Before long, we reached the 10km mark and flew by it.

Andy was trucking along holding a good pace. The look on his face told me that he was hoping it would end soon, but the next pit-stop was still a little way off yet. Eventually the crew and the pit-stop came into view and we told Andrew that the only way to finish was with a sprint, so sprint we did.

We charged down the road, urging each other on. I knew how this must be feeling for Andrew; so much pain but at the same time so much exhilaration. He was clearly hurting, but we didn't let him slow down. We descended on the crew with cheers and pats on the back. They probably had no idea what we were so excited about, and when I began to explain to them that Andrew had just run the longest run of his life, and finished at full pace, I found myself getting a little choked up.

I've mentioned before how much I love that feeling of self-achievement you can only get from smashing your own limitations to pieces, but seeing your family or friends find that feeling can be even better.

Needless to say, Andrew let Byam and I head off from the pit-stop by our selves while he had a well earned rest in the car.

From here we were left pretty much to our own devices out on the road. The bike was in the ute, Chris was resting his knee, Birchy was up to his usual antics, Gerard and Barry were behind the wheels of the pilot cars and Byam and I just did our thing.

The weather was reasonably fine, but the wind was once again beginning to pick up. Today I was looking forward to raising a few extra dollars on the road as we passed through Warrnambool. Warrnambool is a major business town in the south west of Victoria, so there would no doubt be plenty of people on the streets for Birchy to spruik to.

Before we got into Warrnambool, we had a scheduled stop on the outskirts of town for lunch. The crew was fantastic as per usual and prepared us a feast to top up our tanks. Some massage and ice treatment helped to quiet my screaming legs and the short break made a huge difference to how we were feeling.

Out of nowhere a car pulled up along side our temporary camp site and out hopped Brendan. He had cleared the rest of his afternoon schedule at work and asked his wife Hailey to drop him off with us. He was planning to join us now for the rest of the day and the night. Brendan was dressed in shorts and a t-shirt and was clearly ready to work. So we left the pit-stop with Brendan in tow on Birchy's bike.

I am so glad that we didn't leave the bike back in Werribee, it had enabled so many people be a part of the action. The plan was to get the whole crew in formation and drive through town with the banners on the cars, music playing, crew members shaking donation tins on the footpaths and Birchy giving his call to donate over the speaker.

As we neared the turn off to the main street of Warrnambool, the various support cars pulled into formation and the designated crew members hopped out with donation tins in hand. They scattered to each side of the road and were poised and waiting for the signal from Birchy. It felt like we were an army preparing for battle.

Then it started. Byam and I looked at each other and almost wet ourselves laughing... Birchy had chosen the romantic ballad 'Unchained melody' as the soundtrack to our triumphant lap down the main street while he called out to the stunned bystanders on the footpaths. "Here we have Shaun Brewster running for the Cancer Council of Victoria, he has now completed almost 300km in the last four days and is one day away from reaching his goal of running to Portland and raising \$10,000 for cancer research. If you would like to make a donation please do so in

the donation tins carried by our crew, or approach one of the support cars as we come by” Over and over he repeated the call, never losing his enthusiasm; you could tell that he was more than a little proud of what we were achieving.

For Byam and I, the trip down the main street was hugely entertaining as we looked at the confused faces of Warrnambool’s population, trying to figure out what this convoy of cars with two guys running in the middle of the road were doing... The music obviously added to their confusion, and as Birchy got to the bit in his speech that mentioned I had run all the way from Melbourne, you could see the expressions on their faces change and their hands reach for their wallets. The words ‘Cancer Council of Victoria’ clearly held a special place in many people’s hearts also. Some people that missed the crew members with the tins even ran down the road to catch us so they could make a donation.

We pulled to a stop at the round a bout at the end of the street to do a u-turn and head back, and there Byam and I stood, waiting in the traffic, doing our best attempt at trying not to look out of place lined up with all the other cars. We just had to laugh at the strangeness of the whole experience. As we came around the round a bout we got our first glimpse of the size of our presence on the street. Barry in the jeep in front, followed by Byam and myself, then Birchy and Gerard in the Ute, then the Shuttle loaded with family, the Noye’s car behind them and then finally Brett with his jeep and caravan. All the cars had large magnetic signs attached with our logo and website details. It was all very impressive and I felt very proud of all the people that had contributed to putting this traveling circus together.

Heading back down the street, the people on the streets had by now figured out what was going on and were giving us applause and shouts of encouragement from the footpaths. To our surprise, a professionally dressed young woman in high heels, accompanied by another woman with a camera with a ridiculously large lens, popped up in front of us on the street. Birchy had organized with the local paper to come out and interview us while we passed through town.

“Hi guys, would you mind if we took your picture and asked you a few questions?”. “Sure” was our reply, “can you run and talk at the same time?” After about 20 meters we took pity on the poor woman in her heels and stopped to answer her questions.

Before we knew it, we had turned the corner and left the main street behind us. The whole crew was still buzzing with energy and really excited about the heavy tins they were now carrying.

It was a shame that we had been coming into most of the towns late in the evening, because we could have been raising quite a few more dollars if we were able to do that in each town.

The crew cars now drove off ahead of us to set up the next pit-stop a few kilometers out of town. The adrenalin faded as Byam and I followed the Princess Hwy west towards our finish for the day at Port Fairy.

For the first time during this entire run, I was starting to develop some chafing. Chafing for a runner means misery, particularly when you get it where I was getting it now... In my crotch! I tried running with my legs further apart, and other than making me look ridiculous, it made no difference what so ever. The only solution for this is to use some kind of lubricant. Vaseline normally does the trick but the only tub of that was in the Shuttle driving off into the distance. Chris had a stick of Bodyglide which is a specially designed roll on thing used just for chafing for runners. Unfortunately no one was quite sure exactly where that was. To complicate the uncomfortable nature of the chafe was the fact that I was busting to go to the toilet, and I’m not talking about the kind of toilet break that only requires some thick foliage on the side of the road to stand behind. Ordinarily, out on the back roads it wouldn’t matter what kind of nature call it was, I would just duck off to the side with a roll of toilet paper, find a tree to block a direct line of sight to the road and ‘take care of business’. Unfortunately, Warrnambool is the home of tens of thousands of people and there was no such place to hide. So for now, I had to just put up with the chafing, run a bit faster and get to that pub on the hill up ahead.

Finally we pulled into the car park and I made the mad dash for the men’s room. I had been quizzing Brendan (the local) before we got there on which entrance to the building would offer the shortest path to the toilets. Using his advice I walked as briskly as I could through the main bar, trying not to draw attention to myself. Keep in mind that mid afternoon on a Friday in a country town, it is reasonably difficult to walk into a pub, dressed in tiny running shorts with slightly longer lycra shorts underneath and a sweat soaked singlet and not be noticed. As the locals turned their heads and looked on in curiosity, I gave a quick “G’day” and walked straight past as though I was a regular at the bar. A few of the others also took the opportunity to use the facilities and back at the ute I managed

to locate Chris's Bodyglide. I didn't tell him till much later where on my body I had applied it; otherwise he may have just gone and thrown it straight in the bin.

The chafing eventually settled down as we ploughed on out of town. Brendan had begun to unleash his seemingly endless supply of jokes while riding along with the two of us. I had heard most of them over the years, but Brendan being such a good story teller managed to make me laugh anyway. I think Byam was impressed with Brendan's sense of humor and all three of us were having a great time. Next, Brendan asked us if we thought he could ride over one of the white plastic reflector poles on the side of the highway. The poles were held up by thick strips of rubber so that they can fold over if hit by a car. I had never seen someone ride over one on a push bike before and evidently, neither had Byam. He bet Brendan \$10 for the donation tin that he couldn't do it. So without hesitation, Brendan put the foot down and charged straight into one. Sure enough it folded over and he rolled over the top. Byam was bitterly disappointed that it hadn't flicked up and hit Brendan in the groin, which he said would have been worth at least \$10 in entertainment value.

For the last day or so, everyone had been talking about Tower Hill. Tower Hill is an extinct Volcano that the Princess Hwy drives up and over on the way to Port Fairy. Gerard, who grew up in Port Fairy and the others that knew the area, were a bit concerned about how we would handle it. I had driven over it plenty of times over the years and my memory of it also had me a bit apprehensive, particularly considering my current physical state. Now getting close to 4 full days of near constant running, my body was protesting loudly at what it was being put through. Byam too was beginning to show some signs of stiffness, though he was a long way off his limits. Slowly Tower Hill loomed in the distance. It is by no means a mountain, but in terms of hills that you find on a main highway, it is of reasonable stature. There is a long straight section of road leading to the foot of the hill, so unfortunately there was plenty of time to size up our adversary. We approached the start of the incline and began to climb. The current music selection playing over the PA system just wasn't doing it for me, so I gave Birchy the signal to flip to the next song. Perfect! The Foo Fighters blasted over the speakers, singing the line "Is someone getting the best, the best, the best of you?" This song inspired me to make sure I was giving 'my best' to everyone that had given so much to make this dream of mine a reality. Without any verbal communication Byam and I took off. He let out a "whoohoo!" as he had had a feeling that I was going to charge the hill and was hoping that it would happen. As the incline steepened we simply pushed harder and harder. Again, it was one of those moments where you leave your body behind and just run with your heart. My legs seemed irrelevant and as my brain said 'go faster' somehow I did, and faster and faster we went until we crested the hill and took in the awesome view of the endless farmland on the other side. The guys in the car behind us were cheering and yelling, as were Brendan and Byam, both excited by the spontaneous burst of energy that we had just displayed; behind my sunglasses I cried. I cried for the love I felt for everyone that had given me the opportunity to live this experience and I cried for the three men that were the reason I was doing it. It was a moment of pure joy and exhilaration.

This wasn't the first time I had tear'd up along the road. Anyone that knows me well knows that when it comes to my family and close friends, I am an emotional creature. All I have to do is think about how much those people mean to me and I lose it.

Whenever there were quite times on the road, or when I needed to distract myself from my discomfort, I would spend time thinking about the 'thank you' speech that I would like to give at the end of the run. How would I phrase my feelings and describe to those present, how much everyone had given of themselves to the event and to the cause? How could I possibly explain the enormity of it all and the impact it was having on my life? Perhaps I couldn't, but every time I pondered these thoughts, my throat would tighten and the tears would come. The speech was clearly going to be harder than the running ever was.

As we struggled down the other side of Tower Hill and through the farm land towards Port Fairy, I could see two people in the distance jumping up and down and waving at us from the side of the road.

Who were these two over excited nutters, and what were they doing out here?

As we moved closer to them, I could see that they were both dressed in knee high socks, shorts, singlets and waving pompoms! What?

"Who is that?" asked Byam. "That" I answered with a huge grin on my face "is my crazy sister Leah".

Leah had come out to show her support, and in true Leah form, was doing it in flamboyant style. With her was Olivia Wallace. Olivia and her brother Andre had been friends of ours pretty much since we were born. Needless to say, she knew my family well and also felt strongly about the reasons we were all out here.

Leah was dressed head to toe in green and gold. While being very patriotic, sporting the Australian Olympic team colours, green and gold are also the team colours of the Tyrendarra Football Club. My dad played for many years for Tyrendarra and Leah had decided that seeing those colours would be a nice reminder of dad, and perhaps would help to keep me moving. She was right. Once again I was running and so were my eyes. It seemed the closer we got to Portland, the more emotional I became.

It was fantastic to see the effort that Leah and Olivia had gone to; and a great morale boost for me.

Leah had brought with her a CD she had put together with a specially chosen mix of songs that she knew I would like. They were songs from our childhood; every one of them bringing back fond memories of family holidays, days on our old farm or just crazy times with all of us singing at the top of our lungs, not caring who heard.

This CD she passed on to Birchy, and soon it was pumping over the speakers and out into the paddocks we were running past.

The elation I had felt when I had spotted Leah, had multiplied and now felt like a tail wind that was carrying me along.

Leah and Olivia joined Byam, Brendan and I as we headed down the road. We chatted away while Leah and Olivia zig zagged in front of us, waving their pom poms and entertaining us with their antics.

Soon the zig zagging slowed, as did the chatting and it was becoming clear that they were beginning to tire. I found myself wondering if they realized that every step they took down the highway, they had to retrace, to get back to the car they had left on the side of the road. I asked Leah if she realized this, and she replied that it didn't matter because she didn't have her keys anyway. "What? Where are your keys?" "They are in my bag" replied Leah. "Ok, but where is your bag?" I asked. "I gave it to Kellie" she said. Kellie was doing a stint in the lead pilot car with Barry and had taken Leah's bag from her when they passed her back on the road so that she didn't have to carry it while running with us.

This was hilarious! I thought she was being brave and running beyond her capabilities to show her support, but in actual fact, she was hoping that the lead pilot car would stop so that she could catch up and get her keys back.

Lucky for her, Brendan sped off ahead on the bike and soon returned with Leah's bag and keys.

Gratefully she took her bag and they dropped off from the running group and returned to the car. A little while later, they flew past us in the car with a flurry of horn honking and waving pompoms.

It wasn't far now till the next pit-stop, and now it wasn't just me that was feeling the distance. Byam was at last admitting to a bit of tightness in his legs. I was very relieved to discover that he wasn't just running along, frustrated by the modest pace I was holding.

As the pit-stop came into sight, so did the extra people standing with the crew. Along with Leah and Olivia joining the fray, my mum Maree and my grandmother Lynette had driven over from Portland to see for themselves that I was in fact still alive and kicking. They had both been stressing for weeks now, that I was going to do serious damage to myself, so when I saw them, I made sure I was wearing a big smile and powered into the stop looking as pain-free as I could. I was of course, in 101 kinds of pain, but letting them see that would not do any of us any good.

It was great to have my mum, grandma and sister all there with me. We exchanged hugs and kisses before Byam and I sat down to rest our weary legs.

Grandma was doing the rounds saying hello and introducing herself to the crew members she didn't know. "Hello, I'm Lynette, Shaun's grandma. You can call me grandma". She leaned in to Byam and introduced herself and promptly planted a big kiss on his head. As far as grandma was concerned, anyone that was a friend of her grandson's, was family and would be treated as such.

Suzie wandered over to me and whispered, "Your grandma is awesome. When you are finished with her, can I take her home?"

Mum was giving me a look that said so many things... 'How much pain are you really in?' 'Please stop running.' 'You don't have to do this to yourself.' 'Your dad would be so proud of you.' 'I am so proud of you...' She didn't need to actually say any of these things, as I could see it on her face, just as I could see it on Grandma's. Leah's face told a different story though.

A couple of months before the start of the Long Run Home, I asked Leah to perform at a celebration on the night of the final day of the run. The Richmond Henty hotel in Portland had been booked as the venue and Leah was to sing and play guitar to entertain the people who would hopefully buy tickets and help to raise some more money for our cause. Leah had been worried sick for quite a while now about the performance. She was scared that she would make a mistake or embarrass herself. I knew she would do a fantastic job and had been encouraging her

accordingly over the phone for weeks. A week or so after the Long Run Home had come and gone, Leah told me that after seeing me on the road, she suddenly knew that anything was possible if we believed in ourselves, and it was this confidence that I now saw on Leah's face. She wasn't showing any worry about her performance or for my safety; Leah had found the self-confidence that she needed and I could see she was enjoying the feeling. Also joining the crew now was Brett's wife Cath and their little girl Crystelle. Cath threw herself into the crew and helped with the various support tasks, while Shilo extended her role as Mother Hen and helped keep an eye on Crystelle.

Before long, it was time to get back on the road. Starting again after the pit-stops was getting more and more painful. Byam and I had taken to letting out an agony filled yell on our first few steps. The scream seemed to help dissipate the pain somewhat, along with probably adding to the crew's concern about our physical condition. This was the last section of the day and would end on the town green in Port Fairy. The crew's accommodation for the night was to be at Toot and Jo's house. Toot (Tim Coffey) was Brendan's other brother. He and his wife Jo had graciously offered up their house and volunteered to cook dinner for our growing number of crew members. Brendan's mum Rita had also organized a cabin in the holiday park next to Toot's house, for Kellie, the kids and I, so that we could have our own space and the kids could play in the park. In fact, Rita had put towels in the cabin so the kids could have a swim in the pool, and stocked it with breakfast supplies so that we had something to eat in the morning. The Coffey family is known for its generosity and will always go that extra mile for their family and friends. We were all very appreciative.

The next familiar faces to pass us on the road were my aunty Julie and Birchy's wife Jackie.

I lived with Jack at Julie and Gerard's for a few years while we were both studying at university. During that time, Jack and I shared countless hours of laughter and developed a brother and sister relationship that remains very strong to this day. For those that have the fortune of knowing Julie and Gerard, they will understand why I consider myself very lucky to have these two beautiful people as my second set of parents. They have taught and given me so much over the years, and I will forever be in their debt.

Having all these people here with me now was just what I needed, to find the strength to get me home.

The sun was making its way towards the western horizon as Byam and I pushed on in that same direction. The houses on the side of the road began to appear more and more frequently as we neared the center of Port Fairy. The various members of the Brewster and Coffey family were parked on the side of the road waving and cheering as we passed. Amongst them was Frank Nagle. Frank was the owner of the lead pilot car driven by Barry. Frank had been a major driving force behind the Long Run Home, organizing a large part of the logistics, fundraising and supplies. He had worked tirelessly and his connections in the Lions Club had proven invaluable.

The turn off to the main street of Port Fairy was now in view; as was an end to the pain I was in, at least for today. We rounded the corner and this time it was Brendan on the loud speaker, letting the locals know who we were and why we were here.

It seemed that the surprises of the day weren't over just yet. There, waiting on the corner was Suzie and Shilo, ready to run to the finish with us. At the same time, one of my favorite running songs came on over the speakers. 'Straight Lines' by Silverchair. The lyrics seemed so appropriate, "waking up strong in the morning, walking in a straight line...".

The usual adrenalin kicked in and once again I was passing Barry in the lead car. Quickly I noticed that Shilo and Suzie weren't going to be able to hold the pace so I slowed down momentarily to take Shilo's hand. Shilo had a look of total fear on her face when she realized how fast we were actually running. I think she thought her legs were going to break off at that pace. Byam was right beside us, closely followed by Suzie. A right turn around a round-about with Shilo on my left, hanging on tight and her legs almost leaving the ground, we motored to the finish to the applause of all assembled.

Four down... One to go.

That night was one of the most memorable few hours of the whole five days.

Assembled at Toot's house were over 30 people, all buzzing with the energy of the thing that had brought us all to that place. Everyone was recounting the events of the last four days and talking about the excitement to come tomorrow. Toot and Jo had cooked enough food to feed 100 people and everyone was blown away by how

welcome we were made to feel. Their house was filled with mattresses in every room and everyone had everything they needed for a well deserved rest.

After eating and a short rest on the couch, there were the ritual massages and the much needed cleaning and dressing of blisters, before Kellie, the kids and I headed back to our cabin for the sleep that wasn't just calling to me, but screaming my name.

The alarm rang as it did every morning, and I rolled out of bed onto feet that felt like exposed nerve endings. Today I would reach my goal. How much money had we raised while on the road? We didn't know, but estimates were looking very good.

I dressed in my shorts and Long Run Home T-shirt and pulled on my shoes; picking up the rest of my kit, I said goodbye to Kellie and slipped out the door into light rain. Kellie would be up soon too. She would single handedly pack up hers, and all the kid's luggage and get them ready for another day on the road as she did every day. After getting ready she would meet up with the rest of the crew before heading off to meet us at the first pit-stop. Kellie is an extremely determined person, and has been known to train like a woman possessed. Obviously her pregnant state prevented her from being as actively involved with the run as I'm sure she would have liked. I hope that one day she and I can complete something like this together, from start to finish. If any of the kids, find in themselves that need to push themselves to their limits also, it will be my great pleasure to help them do it. But for now, my wife and kids may not have been on the road with me all the way, but they were certainly in my heart for every step.

It was as though the activity and energy from the night before had never ended, and as I walked through the front door of Toot's house, the place was alive with people preparing for the final push. I could sense a feeling of nervous energy in the air. It was different to the nervousness of the first day; today everyone knew exactly how much hinged on this last leg. We had achieved so much together, and if anything were to go wrong today, it would be disastrous.

My mum, sister and Grandmother had gone home late last night and were all preparing for our approach to Portland and for our celebrations tonight. Their excitement was physically palpable last night. They were genuinely excited to be a part of it all and clearly thrilled to see me achieving my goal.

This run also had a very special meaning for my mum. While she was terrified that I would hurt myself in the process, I knew that she felt so much pride in what we were doing. My mum is one of the strongest people I know. She has endured so much over the years, but has always been there for Leah and myself and put us before her own needs. I don't think I could ever adequately express how much I love and admire my mum, but I'm pretty sure she knows.

So, for the final time, we ate our breakfast, organized our gear into the support cars and headed off to the starting point of day 5. It was a chilly and frosty morning with a light mist in the air. We could see the sun was trying to break through the clouds, but it was still too early for it to make an appearance just yet. Suzie Noye was on the bike and joined Byam and I for the first section of the day.

The road coming out of Port Fairy is quite nice, with gently rolling hills and lush green paddocks as far as the eye can see. We started out slowly, with Byam and I in reasonably good spirits, cracking jokes with Suzie and having a good old yarn. Soon though, our responses to Suzie's questions or comments became one word answers, or in some cases just a grunt. Clearly, she picked up on the rapid decline in our condition and the conversation all but came to an end. I was hurting... bad. Byam was feeling the pain too, I guess he was in the same position I was in on day two. This was his first day of 'backing it up' after a solid push the day before, and the feeling is not a pleasant one.

I had decided that rather than try to ignore the pain, I would do the opposite and take an inventory.

I began to take a mental note of where my body was hurting and did what I could to adjust my posture, stride or rhythm to ease the pain. Starting at the top, I thought about the pain in my shoulders that got gradually worse throughout each day, the stiffness in my elbows from keeping them bent for 12 hours a day, tension in my lower back that was bad on day one but was now getting better, the abdominal cramping that came and went, the constant hip pain on both sides, the pain down the outside of my right thigh and into the knee, the tendonitis under both knee caps, the strain in my right groin that was getting ridiculously painful all the way down to my knee, the deep ache in both shins, the inflamed tendon on the front of my left ankle that had been with me for 5

days now, the lack of movement in my left foot, the blister farm near my toes and the soles of my feet that were badly bruised.

It soon became clear that no amount of postural adjustment or changing of stride was going to make any difference. So here I was, in a stupid amount of pain, and coming to the realization that there was absolutely nothing I could do about it except to keep on going and keep on smiling. Just as it had on the way out of Geelong, the acceptance of the pain seemed to lift my spirits. To be honest, I was quietly in awe of how much the human body is capable of. As physically and mentally hard as this task was, I still wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else on earth.

The first pit-stop of the day approached and we took a very welcomed stop on the side of the road. Suzie traded her bike in for a seat in the car and Andrew hit the highway with us for another dose of madness. Andrew had a bit of crazy in his eyes today; like he wanted to really give it a crack...

The next pit-stop was 10kms away, this came and went and Andrew was still with us. Heading back out onto the road meant that he was committing himself to completing this next section which was 11kms. The two sections combined would result in him running a half marathon! Don't forget that up until yesterday, Andrew's longest run had been 10kms. If he could make it all the way, this would be quite an accomplishment.

The sun was now out and the sky blue, with only a few clouds. It's funny how everything in life seems better when the sun shines. I was buoyed by the fine weather, the acceptance of my physical state, the beautiful scenery and one of my best mates, about to discover what he was made of.

I ticked the kilometers off on my Polar watch as we ate up the distance on the road. Andrew was beginning to show signs of fatigue, but no signs of giving up. The 10km mark slowly approached and I gave Byam the nod... Without speaking, we upped the pace a little. Andrew was going to remember this run for a long time, weather he wanted to or not.

"How you going Andy?"

"Um, yeah, ok"

30 seconds later...

"Still feeling ok mate?"

"No, not really"

The pace increased...

"Not sure if I can hold this pace guys"

"You will NOT slow down Andrew! We leave nothing in the tank, Ok?!"

"Ok..."

The pace blew out completely. We sprinted!

The crew were all set up and waiting for us in a clearing on the side of the road. I'm sure they were wondering why on earth we would be running so fast at this early stage of the day. Little did they know that one of the three people running down that road was having one of those 'moments' that stay with you for ever. The other two people running beside him were having the time of their lives, sharing every step of the experience with him. Andrew charged into the rest stop totally spent and as we say "with nothing in the tank".

I don't know, maybe that 21km run was more fun for me than it was for Andrew, but I like to think that it is something that he will look back on fondly.

Back on the road, in our usual position just left of that endless white line; looking off to my left I noticed a little river passing under the bridge I was crossing. The willows hanging over the water and calmness of the scene made me think of my Grandfather Neal Woodford; my mum's dad. I thought back to the time when he lived with us on our farm outside of Portland. I remember him telling me about his plans to one day live in Kakadu, spending his days perched on a river bank fishing for Barramundi. He eventually made that dream come true.

Seeing that little pocket of tranquility tucked away off the side of the road made me think of him. I could picture him sitting down there, smiling up at me. I felt stronger. I knew he was with me, just as I knew my dad Phillip and my other grandfather Kevin were with me. On this last day of the run I needed them more than ever before; and today their presence was so strong.

There were some very important geographical locations to reach today; the first of which was Tyrendarra. Tyrendarra is a small town (one shop and a Football club) where I spent many Saturdays as a child while my dad played Football. We had planned the day's lunch stop to be at the Football club. I knew that there would be a lot of family and friends that would come out to meet us here and I was very much looking forward to the mental boost it would give me.

Before we reached Tyrendarra, there was one more pit-stop for an energy top-up and a quick rest before the push to the lunch stop. Meeting the crew on the side of the road, I was really starting to struggle. If things weren't bad enough, the pain just above the inside of my right knee was beginning to get unbearable. I knew it wouldn't stop me completely, but I didn't really want to walk either. So far I had made it four and half days without having to walk any of the road, and I didn't plan on starting now.

To my delight, Leah, mum and my Aunty Toni were there with the crew. Aunty Toni started crying when she saw me. I'm not sure if it was because she could see the obvious pain I was in, or if it was because she felt the enormity of what all this meant for our family.

Today Leah was dressed differently. Today she had chosen to wear something that she knew would pick me up. She was wearing my dad's old Football jumper.

When I first saw her, my face lit up. I couldn't believe she had thought to dig it out and wear it today. It was the perfect motivation I needed. Just another reminder of why I was here and what I was doing. Once again the tears came and I found myself unable to talk for the first few minutes at the pit-stop. Then Leah came over and said "Do you want to wear this?" There was no hesitation. "Absolutely!" So after a quick change, there I was wearing my dad's number 30 in the green and gold.

The sun was shining, I had my family and friends all around me and life was great.

It was around this point that Chris O'driscoll had planned to make his triumphant return. He had given his knee as much rest and recovery as he was willing to allow it; now it was time to run again.

Chris deserved this as much as anyone and I prayed that his knee would let him have it.

Next stop Tyrendarra.

It was now the hottest part of the day and we were all working up a decent sweat. Byam was beginning to feel some real pain from the cumulative distance (which I was secretly happy about) and my body was now in about as much distress I can ever remember it being in. The pain on the inside of my knee was getting beyond the point of me being able to block it out. I tried changing my stride length, stopping for a quick stretch, anti-inflammatory cream, nothing worked. I would just have to put up with it. Three times during this stage the pain literally stopped me in my tracks. I would give it a break of a few seconds then will my legs back into motion. Bit by bit we worked our way west.

There it was; a large white sign with the words 'Welcome to Tyrendarra'. I'm sure I left a dint as I high-fived it with all the strength I had. This was the sign I had been waiting for, the point at which I had planned to empty my tank for the second time today. About 300 meters past the sign on the right hand side of the road was the Tyrendarra Football ground and I was now charging towards it with renewed energy. I could feel my dad running along next to me.

Chris, Byam and I crossed the highway at speed and entered the gates to the Football ground.

Standing at the entrance were my mum and aunty Julie; they started running along side us but soon realized that we were moving a little faster than they had anticipated. As we got closer to the ground, everyone was expecting us to run around the oval to the clubrooms on the other side. As soon as I saw the grass that I remembered from my childhood, I just knew I had to run straight across the oval.

The second that my feet hit the grass, something happened to my body. I could no longer feel my legs, they just seemed to float. It honestly felt like I was flying.

Standing on the other side of the oval with her arms spread wide was my grandmother, calling me to her. Behind her were my crew and lots of other family and friends that had come out to show their support.

I ran into my grandmother's arms and squeezed her tight. This was one amazing day and we hadn't even made it to the end yet.

Kellie came over and hugged me; she could see that I was very emotional. "He's here," she said in my ear. Kellie never got the chance to meet my dad, but she could feel him here with us. I could feel him too, as clearly as I could feel the tears rolling down my face.

We had a little time up our sleeves, so I planned to spend a bit longer at this stop. It would allow us to get our aches and pains a bit more under control and also prepare for a strong push to the finish. Byam and I both got a fantastic massage while everyone stood around eating, talking and enjoying each other's company. The feeling of excitement in the group had built even more with the finish line only a few hours away. While I was on the massage table, Phoenix was doing one of his favourite things; being a waiter. He had a huge platter of sandwiches that he was circulating around the crowd and loving every second of it.

I was now starting to get cold, so obviously it was time to get moving again. It was heartening to feel that the excruciating pain on the inside of my left knee had reduced by about half and I was now back to the same collection of aches and pains that I had been carrying for five days now. It's funny how you can find comfort in familiarity, even in situations like this.

The road was gently undulating, and while the sun was still out, there were a slowly growing number of grey clouds on the western horizon.

1, 2, 3, 4, I ticked off the kilometers as we ran them down, working our way to the next pit-stop. Chris's knee seemed to be holding up ok. Perhaps he was suffering, but either way, he appeared to be enjoying himself back on the road. Byam was his usual steadfast self, even with the pain he was in.

The next target was Narrawong; another small town (one shop, a school and a camping ground). Narrawong also held a very special place in my heart. Every Christmas school holidays from the year I was born till I turned 16, Leah and I had spent about 4 weeks camping with our grandparents at Narrawong. I looked forward to those 4 weeks all year. Every day was filled with swimming, fishing, playing games or taking long walks along the beach with my grandfather, who we called Papa.

The town slowly started to appear around us and up ahead I could see another gathering of people waiting for us to arrive. This time it was Leah, Andre Wallace who is one of my oldest friends, his sister Olivia and some others that had come along to join in the circus.

Our running crew was growing in numbers and the timing couldn't have been better. The introduction of fresh faces and energy helped us feel that little bit more alive. The new additions fell in behind us and seemed comfortable with the pace we were holding.

We were still about 12 kms from Portland, so I was a little concerned that some of the group might not be able to stay the distance, but everyone seemed prepared to go all the way.

Narrawong came and went, and as we passed the turn off to the camping ground that Leah and I had spent so much time at in our youth, I reflected on all the things that the place had given me and the time I had spent with my grandparents. I hope that I am able to give my kids and my grandkids fond memories of a place like that.

Soon it was time to turn off the Princess Highway for the first time in 4 days. This road had for so long now, represented an endless challenge. Now, as we turned left down towards Dutton Way, on the approach to Portland, I could see the cliffs and the harbor of the town I had grown up in. Every inch of the town holds a story for me. Looking at the cliffs, I thought back to catching fish and crabs along the coast when I was a kid, and building grassboards out of plywood to surf down the slopes near the tops of the cliffs. I had built a cubby house in or under just about every tree along that bit of coast and had even abseiled down those cliffs in my teens. The house I lived in until I was 12 was perched on one of those cliffs, so what I was now looking at was essentially the 'front yard' of my childhood. I miss Portland dearly, but I am also very happy to be living in Rosebud. It has many similarities to Portland, being so close to the water and having ample natural playground for our kids to explore and make memories like mine.

The last major physical obstacle on the entry into Portland was Dutton Way Hill. This is the rather abrupt climb that takes you from sea level up to the cliff top and along Hanlon Parade where I grew up, then down to the town foreshore a few kms further on.

Of course there was no way we could let this hill go without giving it our customary 'smashing'.

I turned around and started running backwards so that I could speak to the 10 or so people that were now with me.

"It has become a bit of a tradition over the last few days, that when we hit a hill, we 'HIT' a hill. So as we start going up, we are going to give it everything... Are you with me?"

The new additions looked at each other and nodded with expressions of confusion and perhaps a little fear. Chris and Byam both had smiles on their faces and Byam said "just give the word". They wouldn't have had it any other way.

The start of the climb approached and I said "Let's go!"

The boost of energy I felt going up Tower Hill wasn't there for me this time, but there was no way on earth I was going to let that stop me from making another memory, right now.

I dug down as deep as I could and threw everything I had at the hill. Faster and faster we went. I wanted to yell out to the others to encourage them on, but I don't think I had the breath to spare. Like so many other times, the world slipped away and it was only me and the road. I knew there was more in me, so I ignored my lungs and the growing feeling of weight in my legs and forced them to push harder.

The crest of the hill came into view and there at the top were members of my family waving their arms, taking photos and cheering.

Reaching the top, I pulled to a stop; feeling like my legs might give out from under me. If today had been 6 days ago, I might not have believed that I was capable of continuing on to the finish line, but after the last 5 days of craziness, I knew that if the mind is willing – the body will follow.

Andre wandered over to me with a big smile on his face and looking like he had earned every step of that hill.

"Man, when you said you were going to hit that hill, you lied... You smashed it!"

"Thanks" was all I could manage between heaving breaths.

Next, another familiar face walked over to me. It was Malcolm Gamble, a man I had met the year before when competing in the Cradle Mountain Ultra marathon in Tasmania. Mal and I had got along really well and kept in touch since then. When he heard of my plans for the Long Run Home, he was eager to come and join in the fun. Due to other commitments, he was only able to join us for these last few kms into town, but at least he was able to stay for the celebrations at the end. It wasn't until shortly after the end of the run that I heard that Mal had jumped in his car and driven back to Melbourne to compete in an ultra-marathon the next morning. Mal had effectively driven 5 hours from Mordialloc to Portland, ran with me for about 25 minutes then drove all the way home. I never cease to be amazed by the quality of people I meet through my running.

As I prepared my mind and body for its last push, on the last section of the last day of the most challenging run of my life, I felt a strange feeling of sadness wash over me. I realised that even with all the indescribable pain I was in and the immeasurable amounts of effort it had taken to get to this point, I didn't want it to end. With that in mind, I started running again.

The first road we headed down was Hurd Street, the first street I ever lived in. This was not the path that the support crew was expecting me to take, but I had a little business to take care of on the way to the finish line. The crew and those running with me were trying to figure out why I was taking this street when the shortest path was another way. Running a little further down Hurd Street, I turned into Dutton Street and headed up the small hill towards my Grandmother's house. My family now realized what I was doing. What they weren't prepared for was for me to actually run up the drive way, around the back of the house and down the side to the front of the house again. The support crew cars didn't know whether to follow me up the drive way or just stop in the street. The other dozen or more runners with me just ran along behind, asking each other where we were going...

My grandparents built this house when they were married over 50 years ago, and I wanted call in to this place that I had spent so much time as a child, to feel my Grandfather's presence. It worked... I was flying again.

Back onto the street now and my Aunty Julie was leaning out of her car laughing her head off. She knew why I was there and thought it was hilarious that all these people were also doing a lap around my grandmother's (her mum's) house, following this nutcase on his crazy mission.

Leah was laughing too; she was having the time of her life. She had been on the bike up until the top of the hill at Dutton Way, now Birchy had taken the wheels and Leah was back on the road with me.

Down Dutton Street we went and yet another unexpected turn had most of the crew wondering if all the miles had sent me a bit loopy. Only my close family knew where I was going now. Two blocks away was the house I had lived in for most of my childhood. Mum and Dad sold it when I was twelve years old, but it still held so many memories

for me. It probably would have been inappropriate to run into the current owner's backyard, so I just ran across the front lawn instead.

Now we were back on the street that led down to the foreshore and the designated finish line.

Somewhere along the road into Portland we had gained a police escort. Brendan was on the loudspeaker doing his best MC work telling the growing numbers of people along the footpaths who we were and where we had come from. Little pockets of people had gathered at various points along the street to show their support. Lots of familiar faces, some that I hadn't seen for years, others I had never seen in my life.

There was only about 1 kilometer to go now. 374 down, 1 to go.

As we crested a slight rise in the road I looked down at my left forearm and saw the names of my father and grandfathers written in now fading text. Looking up into the sky and bringing my palms together above my head, I said a silent thank you to those three men. Thank you for providing me with this most amazing experience, and for giving me the strength and courage to know that I could do it. Thank you for bringing me into this amazing family. With that, the energy in me reached a critical point and my legs just took off with a mind of their own.

All I was aware of was the sun peering out from between the clouds and the breeze on my face. Behind me Chris, Byam, Leah, Birchy and the rest of the guys on the road were cheering and yelling, but I was only vaguely conscious of this. Right then, right there, I was more alive than I had ever been in my life.

Approaching the turn off to the foreshore, the crowds were quite large now, with lots of people coming to see what all the noise was about. I slowed down and waited for the rest of the guys to catch up. Leah pulled in next to me and together we led the group towards the end.

It was then that I realized Leah was crying. Clearly this thing meant as much to her as it did to me, and seeing how the emotion had overcome her, I began to cry too.

At the turn off, my Mum, Grandmother, Shilo, Kalani, Phoenix and host of other family and friends had formed a line and were ready to join us for the last 50 or so meters to the finish line.

Together now with all these people that mean so much to me, I would have been happy to run ten times the distance for this one moment in time.

Ahead was a large marquee with a huge sign saying 'CONGRATULATIONS SHAUN - LONG RUN HOME'. There were people everywhere, with whistles, bells, streamers and even music. Someone had come up with the idea of playing the theme song to Rocky as we arrived. Everyone was laughing and crying and just overcome by it all. I ran across the lawn area in front of the marquee and under the finishing sign, and in that moment, the full weight of what we had achieved came thundering down onto me and I collapsed to the ground. I didn't collapse because my legs wouldn't hold me; it was because my heart was overwhelmed. The love I felt for my family and friends right then was simply too much to bear. I wept. Hunched over on my knees, my mum and sister by my side with their arms around me, I cried tears of pure joy.

Eventually I composed myself and sought out Kellie. She could see that I was on the edge and quickly pulled me into her arms and I lost it again. "Well done babe, you did it" she said. "No, we did it". And nothing could be truer. This run was the combined effort of so many people. It was the energy and love of all these people around me that had allowed me to make it to the end.

I wiped away the tears and turned to face the crowd. One by one I shook the hands and hugged the members of my crew and my family and friends that had come to see us finish. With each person I faced, I found it more and more difficult to speak. The emotional gravity of it all was almost too much.

Soon our attention turned to the Mayor of Portland who had given up his time to come and give a speech and to welcome us into town. His words were very kind. He motioned to me to say a few words and luckily my Uncle Gerard stepped up and took the microphone. He knew that I would be unable to speak in front of the crowd at that moment, and I thank him very much for that gesture. Gerard also said some very kind things and thanked everyone involved on my behalf.

I don't know if it is technically possible to be in the most intense pain of your life and to be completely and utterly happy at the same time, but that is how I felt.

Eventually the crowd began to thin and I made a subtle exit from the marquee area and down to the edge of the water. I tenderly removed my shoes and socks and waded out up to my thighs. The water was freezing, just as I remembered it as a child, but the cold was a welcome relief on my aching joints and muscles.

I looked out across the waters that I knew so well and closed my eyes. Just over to the side a small seal played on the rocks.

I cried again.

The running might have ended for now, but the logistics of the Long Run Home weren't finished just yet. Now it was time to celebrate.

With the coordination of a finely tuned machine, everyone packed away into cars and headed off to various houses and hotel rooms to shower and change for the night's entertainment at the Hotel overlooking the harbor.

Before heading off to the party, Chris, Byam and I descended on Brett and Andrew's massage tables one last time. True to form, they worked their magic and got our legs back into semi-working order once again. By now there was no hope of eliminating the pain altogether, it was just a matter of damage control.

Before long, Kellie and the kids joined us, as did mum and several other members of the crew.

Together we headed up to the Hotel and I was once again blown away by the effort everyone had gone to. The daughter of a friend of mum's had given up her time to collect tickets on the door, a table was laid out with prizes to give away throughout the night, and a local band was setting up to entertain us.

The thing I was looking forward to most of all was Leah taking her turn on the stage and playing for us all.

Soon the room was almost packed and music filled the air, along with happy chatter and stories from the road.

There was a feeling of satisfaction of a job well done that I could see on all the crew's faces. Byam commented a few weeks later, that that room was the happiest room he had ever been in.

It was now Leah's turn on stage. She sat down with her guitar and didn't look the slightest bit nervous as she had feared she would. I positioned myself in front of the stage so that I wouldn't miss a thing. This was also a strategic move so that the other people in the room couldn't see the tears that I knew would come into my eyes. I must have shed more tears that week than in my whole life up to that point.

Leah looked up at the room and said something that I will never forget. She said "I feel honored to even know Shaun, let alone be his sister". Then she played my favorite song. A song about losing someone you love, about seeing that person's smile every time you look in the mirror. I felt every word of that song like it was written for me.

I will never be able to fully explain to Leah how much that song meant to me, but hopefully this story will go some way to explaining it to her.

Leah went on to play many more songs, each one getting the crowd going more and more. Soon people were dancing and playing a bongo drum that was being passed around the room. Everyone was having an absolute ball. For me it was strange to be enjoying myself so much and yet my body was gradually shutting down around me. I looked over to Kellie and could see that she was exhausted too, and poor Phoenix and Kalani were struggling to stay awake. It had been a huge week for everyone. While Shilo was still up for partying, we made the decision to say our goodnights and head off for a good night's sleep.

Mum gave us a lift back to her house and we left the crowd to dance the night away.

I had planned to make a speech to thank everyone for all the hard work and the love that they had poured into the run, but there was no way I could have gotten through it without breaking down. Instead I wrote down everything I felt in a letter and gave a copy to all of them. I hope this story helps them to further understand how I feel about what they have given me.

With the Long Run Home now done and dusted, I look back with fond memories of those magical five days with my friends and family. We raised over \$22,000 dollars through countless people's kind donations and the many fundraising activities that the crew took on. The Cancer Council of Victoria delegated those funds to a research project that I chose, under the name of The Brewster Woodford Award.

If I were to consider what I learned while out on the road, I would have to say that there were three things.

The first was that we all have so much more potential than we realise.

The second thing is that if you have the passion in you to do something, no matter how crazy it may seem, just do it. Don't hesitate for one second. Make it happen now.

The third and last thing I would like to pass on is that you should never underestimate your heart or the hearts of those you love.

Thank you.

P.S. I have been asked if I would ever do something like this again. I guess I could respond to this with the question, "Have they found a cure for cancer yet?"

I wanted to be tested on the Long Run Home, to find out exactly how far I was capable of going. I was tested, but I didn't fail, so that must mean I am capable of more. So yes, without a doubt there will be more challenges for me in the future. In fact, I've already got plans for the next one...

Shaun Brewster.

By Chris Wight (Byam)

This is probably the third or fourth time that I have sat down to “pen” my thoughts on my experience on the Long Run Home. Each time I seem to get halfway through a sentence but don’t really know how to string all my thoughts together. Therefore I thought I would forgo the free flowing, detailed description of my experience in lieu of a dot-pointed top 5 (in chronological order).

1. The start – Through my limited experience of running ultra-marathons the one thing that I have found common throughout is the start. I believe that the anticipation and hype around the start is similar across all distance of races, from the 100m sprint to the longest of multi-day stage races. You just can’t wait to start moving towards your final destination. Imagine a 100m sprinter walking around behind the blocks, keeping his muscles loose, then he gets the order from the starter to take to his blocks, a little closer, more anticipation....”Get Set”....”Go!!” It truly is a freeing feeling and I can imagine that Chris and Shaun would have felt amazing running out of Federation Square and beginning their epic journey.

While the start is similar in many respects, the ‘meat’ of the run is somewhat different and it brought a smile to my face when I was reminded of this shortly after Shaun and Chris headed off. After all the cheering and emotion at the start of the run, I said my goodbyes and got on my bike to head to work, expecting that the next time I’ll see them they’ll be shells of their former selves after labouring away out on the road for 3 days. I rode out of Fed Square and onto St Kilda road and there 100m ahead were Shaun and Chris standing around, chatting, and waiting for the traffic lights to allow them to cross the road and continue the run. I couldn’t help but laugh at how anti-climatic ultrarunning can be.

2. Running through Warrnambool – After having logged some decent kilometres in for the 4th Day (my first), the prospect of running down main street in Warrnambool was quite appealing to mix up the scenery and give us a break from the long straight roads with not much more than green pastures either side of us. Warrnambool was great, I felt relaxed, was enjoying some words of encouragement from locals as we ran a lap and got some extra donations, even managed to convince a journo from one of the local papers that if she wanted to interview Shaun she’d have to run alongside us and do the interview on the move (still can’t believe she actually tried to run in heels for 20m before Shaun and I took pity on her and stopped). It was about half way through the return leg of the main street that I started to realise what a surreal experience it all was....I think it was about the same time that Birchy let Unchained Melody blast out across the P.A.
3. Tower Hill – There was a lot of talk about Tower Hill. “Tower Hill is so long and Steep...it will really test you guys” or words to that effect had been repeated throughout the day. Hearing that pretty early on in the day I thought no worries, Shaun and I are tough, ultra-running types, if cars can drive up it, it won’t trouble us to run up it. However as the day progressed, the legs wearied and the warnings continued, Tower Hill began to conjure an Everest like image in my mind. Shaun was Hilary striving to do what nobody had yet achieved, I was the Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, there to help ‘Hilary’ on his quest for greatness (I’m not sure where Phil from Ballarat would have fit in with Hilary on Everest. Pretty sure Hilary and Norgay would have been fully aware of how cold it was. Same goes for Brendan, reckon Hilary and Tenzing would have been damn impressed if someone was riding a bike alongside them. I think I’m rambling now).

Late in the day as we finally did approach Tower Hill and we got our first sight of it, the 'No Worries' mentality came back, as although it was a very decent hill, I'd seen a lot worse. Still it was late in the day and Shaun in particular was nearing the 300km mark of the run. As we approached the base of the hill, though no words were exchanged, the pace begun to increase and we started to run a bit more on our toes. Bit by bit, the further up Tower Hill the quicker the pace got, until Shaun and I were sprinting, Brendan pounding the pedals on the bike and the Foo Fighters, Best of You, belting out from the P.A.....I had shivers going down my spine. As we reached the top of the hill, there were screams, cheers, handshakes and a pretty decent view. After hearing so much about Tower Hill I think that Shaun and I both wanted to 'own it' and boy did it feel good.

4. Port Fairy Accommodation –

The accommodation and company for my time on the Long Run Home was amazing, but none more so than in Port Fairy. Surely the term "Southern Hospitality", while initially derived from the southern US, must in some way extend to Southern Victoria. I decided to do a quick internet search to find out.

The first place I decided to look was wikipedia, which produced the following result:

Southern hospitality is a phrase used in American English to describe the stereotype that residents of the Southern United States are particularly warm and welcoming to visitors to their homes, or to the South in general.

No mention of Victoria, let alone Port Fairy. Perhaps I had the wrong phrase. Next step I checked Dictionary.com, which provided this:

Southern pron. [Suhth-ern] – *adjective*
- Lying toward, situated in, or directed toward the south

Port Fairy is definitely that.

Hospitality pron. [hos-pi-tal-i-tee] – *noun*
- The friendly reception of guests or strangers.
- The quality or disposition of receiving guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.

We were all guests, I for one was a stranger, and the way in which we were received was without a doubt warm, friendly and generous. Think the term Southern Hospitality is spot on. I'll have to get Wikipedia to elaborate on their description. Clearly rambling again.....Timothy thanks for the bed and best post-run meal I've ever had.

5. Portland – I could write another Top 5 just for Portland, both running into it and the celebrations that took place once we got there. Running down along the foreshore, just 100s of meters to the end you could sense the emotion of all those running together with Shaun towards the line. Obviously nobody would have been feeling the emotion more than Shaun and this showed when he took off down the road after a yell of "Yeah Shaun!" by myself. Shaun must have been so pumped up because when he took off, despite our best efforts, Chris and I couldn't keep up, all we could do was look at each other laugh and wait for Shaun to realise that we couldn't keep pace and ease up so that we could catch up.

The finish was a mess of emotions, I found myself choking back the tears and just taking it all in, it wasn't till about 10 minutes later that I realised that I hadn't eaten enough during the day, was seriously drained

of energy and shivering uncontrollably. Quickly back to the hotel room, into a hot shower then out and wrapped up in some blankets and handed a bag of chips to get the energy levels up.

Once the shivering stopped it was time for a massage. Without the efforts of Brett and Andrew I don't think I would have made it through the second day, the 2 of them kept me loose (well as much as possible) and on the road with Shaun. Thanks guys, the massages, as painful as they were, made all the difference.

I think the after party was one of the happiest rooms that I have been in, just such a good vibe. Loved dancing around, drinking and laughing my arse off at Gerard and Brendan playing their ridiculous Rhinoceros game. Good times, though perhaps Brendan could have given me a few less beers...I felt terrible the next day.

Having penned my top 5 now it has become apparent that the reason I summed up my experiences on the Long Run Home in 5 dot points is not because I can't string all my thoughts together. It's because I'm lazy. If I put down all my good memories from those 2 days it would occupy 10 pages and being a slow typist I just don't have the time....it wouldn't leave me enough time for running.

Just want to finish off with a couple of last points.

1 – Thanks to all the support crew, friends and family involved. I don't think this would have been as special as it was if not for your contributions.

2 – Shaun, you're an inspiration, how you ran that far in that many days is beyond me, I wouldn't have been able to do it, I barely managed to get through the second day. Thanks for having me along for the journey and showing me what's down the road less travelled.

Christopher Byam Wight, a.k.a – Big Big Chris, a.k.a – Nanna Byam

The Long Run Home Experience

Chris O'driscoll

Day 1 25/3/08

Melbourne to Geelong

It was an early start which suited me fine as all my training had been done early in the morning to beat the summer heat. But seeing as the day was going to be mid 20's and where we were running that day had little shelter there was the slightest bit of nerves in my system, not to mention the fact I was going to attempt to keep up with Shaun for 5 days (in my dreams!).

I should mention my goal for the run was basically to provide support by whatever means possible to Shaun, without hindering his pace, so he could get to Portland. I would have hated to have thought of him on the road for 5 days on his own.

We set off slightly later than usual, due to not being able to get onto Fed Square thanks to tram track works, but trying to be the optimist, I thought things could only improve. Anyway, leaving fed square at roughly 7:30 our first stop was about 50 meters away at the road crossing. Had to wait for the green man! After all we couldn't break the rules in the first minute!

Running through south bank was uneventful, although getting towards Docklands required a bit of creative navigation due to building works which blocked the pathways along the Yarra. After a brief discussion about where to go, we found Footscray rd and continued on to Williamstown stopping only for a quick radio interview at probably the worst possible spot (while crossing the Footscray rd bridge with semi's passing within meters of us above and below the bridge.) I don't know how Shaun managed it, as I couldn't hear a word he was saying and I was standing next to him!

Arriving in Williamstown brought some relief as it meant the support crew could be with us the rest of the way. Drinks were on hand thanks to Daniel Birch as we needed them. Also the psychological boost that there was a car in front and behind with big signs and flashing lights gave me the feeling that this was where the real run was to begin. We weren't just on some training run.

The weather was still quite cool which suited me fine and I was feeling really good and my spirits were high. We were actually doing this thing. I knew that the section between here and Geelong would probably be the most boring as the roads were very long and straight, but it was only for one day of a five day mission.

Roughly 35k in, I started to get a pain in the side of the right knee. It was too early for this!!!! But we were near the support stop and thanks to the magic hands of Brett Morrison I managed to get a further 10k out of my legs before I realized I couldn't go on without hindering Shaun's pace. Luckily Birchy had brought his dads mountain bike along which I put to good use for the rest of the day. It actually worked out a lot better with this system from my point of view. Firstly there was no issue of me keeping up with Shaun and secondly if he needed a drink, all I had to do was slow down, grab one from the tail car and ride back up to him without Shaun breaking his stride. Win win situation!

I rode the bike for most of the rest of the day and thought I would run the last 5k into North Shore with Shaun, bad idea. Knee pain was worse and I managed about 300 meters while watching Shaun disappear into the distance! Back to the support car for me! Although I did hobble the last 200 meters to the finish line in Geelong!

Finally we headed off for a great BBQ at the El Dorado caravan park and a quick dip in the pool to cool off the legs. Following this we got a good rubdown off Brett and Andrew and a good night's sleep.

Day 2 26/3/08

Geelong to Colac

Today was the big test in my mind for Shaun. Meaning we didn't know how he would pull up after the first day never having done multiple day runs before! If he got through this in one piece I knew he would be unstoppable.

The morning was broken up a little bit due to the all important live radio interview with K Rock. One thing that I did notice after it was the attention we were getting out on the road. The first day was a disappointment with the lack of media attention and no passing cars paying any attention. Today was a completely different situation though. Numerous cars passing by were beeping their horns (I'm presuming in support?) and it felt a lot better for the morale as we weaved our way throughout the back streets of Geelong.

Finally hitting the highway was a bit ominous knowing we would be on this road for the next 300k or so even though I wasn't the one running it! The morning went well and Shaun managed to hold a consistent pace all morning despite the headwind which would haunt us through most of the adventure. Although we were able to get our minds off it thanks to help of Birchies alter ego "Phil from Ballarat" and his constant weather reports "its snowing up here in Ballarat!".

Halfway through the morning the weather that Phil was warning us about started to hit. The rain came down in torrents and even though I had a waterproof jacket over my layers of clothes I was getting very cold. Especially the legs as I only had shorts on and no option of putting waterproof pants on. I just kept telling myself, if Shaun's strong enough mentally to stay out there in this weather, I had no excuse. I don't think much was said that morning between the two of us, it was just a matter of pushing through. Great for the mental training!

I also noticed around this time I was having a bit more trouble catching back up to Shaun after getting the drinks from the car. I just put it down to the fact that there was a huge headwind and I had a jacket on my back that was acting like a parachute.

It was a great feeling to get into Winchelsea for lunch as the support crew had lunch set up under a big shelter. It took most of lunch to warm up, but after a bit of food and dry socks I was ready to head back out.

The weather didn't change much through the day, although there were some welcome breaks in the weather when we could thaw out. My knees were starting to play up a bit, especially on the up hills of which there were a lot leading into Colac. While running it was the outside of my knee playing up, but this was on the inside of both knees! Later diagnosed by Brett as inflamed cartilage! I chose to ignore it and just push through. I couldn't walk when I got off the bike, but that was irrelevant as I could still ride.

I was still struggling to catch up to Shaun after getting drinks from the car, I even got a tow off Gerard at one point. I thought I would see how the tyres were looking and found my problem. The back tyre was half flat! So I was having to work twice as hard to keep up especially with that headwind and oversize jacket! At the last stop

before Colac I tried pumping it up with the hand pump we brought along, but I think I lost more pressure than gained. So I just struggled along still keeping in mind my pains would be minimal compared to Shaun's.

Shaun and I had spoken during the day and were both surprised that he hadn't walked any part of the run. During most ultra's you will walk for a few minutes here and there to get some fluids into yourself and briefly recover. But Shaun had just kept up the same consistent pace through the last two days through all sorts of weather! That's good mental strength. He was on a mission!

The BBQ was supplied by the Lions club of Colac and was a great way to end the day and allow us to warm up and fill our very empty stomachs! Then it was off to Paul's house (Daniel's in-laws) for a number of beers for the support crew and a good nights sleep.

Day 3 27/3/08

Colac to Terang

To say it was a cold start to the morning on the bike would be a bit of understatement! It was very chilly, especially once the track pants came off again and it was just the shorts. It was a slow start through, I think Shaun was a bit stiff and sore, but after the first few k's we started to pick up the pace. Although leaving the town was not uneventful. I was pulled over by a police car for not wearing a helmet on the bike! We explained the situation about the whole run and after taking a few of my details he left us to continue on. I did put the helmet on once we caught up with the support cars, even though it was pink!

The night before a few people had shown interest in doing a leg on the bike, so not wanting to hog it, and wanting to rest the legs a bit, Gerard took the second stage of the day and I drove the ute following Shaun. Birchie took the third stage on the bike but within a kilometer of starting he had a flat (the tyres had been pumped up correctly at Paul's house in Colac). We initially thought it was due to his chunky rear end!

We were lucky it happened so early into the stage as the bus hadn't come past yet. So we sent Shaun off running on his own for the first time while I hopped in the bus with the bike and headed off 20k to Camperdown to see if there was somewhere to get a tyre tube. Luckily we found one easily and were able to get back to the designated stop area while I repaired the tyre. Upon repairing it I found a broken shard of glass had pierced the tube. Maybe Birchy's rear end wasn't that big after all!

Where we had stopped was right outside an old guy's farm. He came out to see what was going on while wearing his oversize plastic pants. He was a typical farmer, very friendly and offered us all a coffee (country hospitality for you). But one thing we noticed was he looked just like Bob Hatfield from the old TV show A Country Practice.

Shaun arrived not long after, so it was back to support car duties for me and finally a stage on the bike for Daniel which was much more uneventful this time.

I ran the final stage (about 12-13k) with Shaun that day and had Kellie on the bike following us. I think it was a bit of a shock for Kellie as she didn't realize until then how Shaun and I had been keeping ourselves amused. American Pie by Don McLean came over the speakers and the two of us sang the song word for word at the top of our lungs while dancing (sort of) while running. I also don't think she appreciated the foul stench that was emanating from our rear ends. Don't blame her!

Just as we got into the town of Terang it started to rain, which was the first real rain of the day and we had to get to the other side of the town. We picked up the pace and sprinted through Terang straight into the Gazebo the Lions had where there was a heater set up and another BBQ waiting for us. Chris Wight turned up about two minutes after we arrived there to join Shaun for the next two days.

It was then off to Warrnambool to the caravan park. Andrew and Suzie turned up as well to check out the damage Shaun had done to himself. Shaun's blisters weren't looking the best but after Suzie took care of them, his feet looked a lot better.

Day 4 28/4/08

Terang to Port Fairy

The second last day was here and I knew Shaun would have extra motivation today. He was running with a good friend Chris Wight who would be more than capable of keeping up with him through the next two days. Chris is someone Shaun and I both look up to as he is so much fitter than the two of us and could easily run rings around us all day if he chose to, but never shows any sign of superiority over anyone. But it was just good that Shaun had a runner who would stick with him to the end.

Today was a day off for me, I planned to run the last 25 or so K's into Portland so I decided to rest the legs due to my previous history. I started the day in the lead pilot car with Barry. This didn't last long as on one of the first stops I noticed Brett was left to pack up the caravan on his own. So I decided to lend a hand and spent half the day keeping him company.

We all pulled up in Warrnambool with Kellie, the kids, Andrew and Suzie. We kept ourselves amused playing word games which ended up being a lot of fun. Games like naming a piece of fruit or a body part that starts with each letter of the alphabet all taking it in turns with a letter each. The funniest part was we had a physiotherapist (Andrew) a nurse (Suzie) and two remedial therapists (Kellie and Brett) and we all got stumped on naming a body part starting with 'Y'. It wasn't until Chris Wight came in to the stop (mind you Shaun was stumped too) and said 'Y chromosome!'

After lunch we all made a detour up the main street of Warrnambool with Birchy on the loud speaker and Shaun, Chris, Brendan (Gerard's nephew) and me running up and down the street shaking the tins collecting donations. It seemed to be very successful with people coming out of everywhere to give us whatever they could afford. I also had a lady mention to me that her dad was good friends with Shaun's dad Phillip.

The rest of the day was spent mostly with Brett and another leg with Barry. Shaun's sister Leah and her friends turned up to run one of the last legs with Shaun and took it in turns riding the bike and running. I was in the car until we turned off the main road into the main town of Port Fairy. I hopped out of Barry's car and ran the last kilometer with a whole bunch of us. Must have been at least ten of us running down that street trying to keep up with Shaun while he put on one of his famous sprints!

That night was spent at Brendan's brothers house with the highlight (as far as food goes) of the week. We were all appreciating what the Lions club had done for us the previous days but there are only so many barbecues you can have before it all gets a bit the same. But this night we were given a feast of food ranging from lasagne, chicken skewers, salads, mashed potatoes and a lot of other great food. No-one went hungry!

I also got a great neck massage off Mare (Shaun's mum) which I really needed, and the sleeping quarters were the best of the whole trip, good mattresses and heated rooms which all added up to a good nights sleep.

Day 5 29/4/08

Port Fairy to Portland

The last day had arrived and was another chilly start out of Port Fairy. I started off again in the car with Barry for a stage or two until Gerard decided to hop on the bike again, so I drove the tail car along while Birchy and I tried to come up with some good ideas for Phil from Ballarat. It got a bit blue and we found out a few things about Phil and his strange habits which I won't go into.

All the locals had been talking about a hill halfway along this run called Tower Hill. The way they had been talking about it, it sounded like an absolute monster. Well after driving up it I was a bit disappointed, yeah it was a hill, but compared to some of the hills we have trained on in the past, it was just a slight bump in the road. From all reports Shaun and Chris had the same opinion and actually sprinted up the hill!

I then became the official DJ while Gerard drove and Birchy rode the bike. Chris had brought his Ipod along which I was shuffling through trying to find some good songs to keep the moral up. Leah then turned up with her Ipod which she had programmed some of Shaun's favourite songs. A very good selection.

The day had been progressing really well. Chris and Shaun were both in a fair bit of pain and were struggling to get moving after each stop, but considering, they were doing great. Leah turned up again with Shaun's dad's football top which he wore all the way to the Tyrendarra football oval where Shaun's dad used to play football. About one K out of Tyrendarra they stopped and looked very worn out. So I thought I would hop out of the car and run into the oval where we had lunch. The speed Shaun put on over that oval was amazing; I struggled to keep up with him on fresh legs!

The lunch provided there was great, more sandwiches than you would ever need and lovely fruit platters. Shaun got a well needed massage off Andrew and his mum before it was back on the road again. It felt good to be running again, as that was my main reason for being there, so I had been feeling a bit useless for a good part of the run. We had expected a few people to join us from this point but with about 26K to go it was understandable as most people aren't very comfortable with running that distance.

Before we knew it a few of Shaun's old friends from Portland had joined us along with Leah. Another bike was also thrown into the mix which was a good idea as it allowed the less fit the occasional break. Soon enough Portland came into view. It looked a lot closer than it was as we had the bay to run around so was probably half the distance the way the crow flies compared to running distance. But the sight was great; I never knew the town looked so good. The only down side was the strong cold breeze coming off the ocean.

We had a couple of drive by's by a police cars we got closer to the town. But the further we went, it seemed like he was ensuring the road was safe for us. He ended up doing an escort into town for us. Couldn't imagine service like that in Melbourne! It was probably a necessity though as the closer we got to town the more runners joined in. Every time I looked back it seemed as though the crowd had grown. We even had a young boy, maybe around 5 or so and only wearing pants, chase us down the road for a few hundred meters despite the screams from his mum to come back!

Running towards the town we could see this hill. Not a big hill, even by Tower Hill standards. But Shaun, even though he didn't need to, said to Chris and me "we will be sprinting up that hill". At the foot of it he told the same thing to everyone else following and it was on for young and old! Shaun took the early lead and I couldn't keep up with him, Chris was following not far behind and I was following just pacing myself. By the top of the hill, all gaps

had closed up between us and we reached the top within a few meters of each other. I think all the other runners following were near collapse, but it was a good effort by all as I don't think any of them had been prepared for it.

We had planned to stop for a minute at the top to put the team t-shirts on and get some fluids into us. Shaun's friend Mal Gamble was waiting for us here to run the last few k's with us. He was capable of more but was running a 6 hour race the following day so I think he can be forgiven for not running more. Also he had driven from his home in Mordialloc to Portland and home again in the same day! What an effort in itself!

So after donning the team t-shirts it was off on the last leg. Birchy decided to join us here and was welcomed up the front with us as if anyone deserved to be there, it was him after all the work he had done. With a quick detour around Shaun's Grandma's house (literally around) and across the front lawn of the house where he grew up, it was on the road to the finish line. Down the last kilometer Shaun picked up the pace to one of his famous sprints. Chris and I decided to let him go as this was his moment, although Shaun had a different idea and wanted us to join him.

The last 100 meters was very emotional as Shaun ran it arm in arm with his family finally to collapse on the ground at the finish, more from emotion than exhaustion I would say. I wouldn't normally admit to this, but I did have a tear in my eye at this point (luckily I was wearing sunglasses) but I'm sure I wasn't the only one. I would be more surprised if anyone there didn't! After all the speeches and photos at the finish line we headed back to the Richmond Henty Hotel where Chris, Andrew, Suzie and I were sharing a room. Chris's body started to go into shutdown at this point as he was feeling cold and shaking almost uncontrollably. He jumped in the shower and Suzie went off to get us hot chocolates and coffee/tea to warm us all up. Soon enough Chris started to warm up after being rugged up in blankets for a while (possibly the reason his nickname was now nanna!).

Andrew got the massage table out and gave both Shaun (who had turned up with Kellie and the kids) and Chris while I got a quick rubdown off Brett. Between Chris, Andrew, Suzie and me, none of us had thought about what we were doing for dinner. We were due to go to the presentation night at the pub next door fairly soon so we decided to head in, have a quick drink and decide what we would do about food. After the second beer we all decided to go for a walk down the street and see what was on offer when a huge platter of meat came out. There were party pies, fish bites, chicken and numerous other things put on the table we were just sitting on. We just looked at each other and agreed that this was exactly what we needed. There were a couple of other similar platters placed on other tables which other people were nibbling at, but the four of us attacked this one like a bunch of rabid dogs. No one else attempted to eat anything off this platter or even tried coming near us, we were on a mission and it tasted great! The night ended after numerous beers, some very loud singing, drunken dancing and a lot of fun. It had been a long hard week, even though I only ran about 80k and cycled about 130k (nothing compared to Shaun) and I think everyone was in a great mood and needed the release. One surprise of the night was Leah. I knew she was getting up to do a set or two, but she surprised me. She had a great voice, had a very good set list full of songs I like and played them faultlessly! Well done Leah.

One last thing, I know Shaun's determination and that when he sets his mind to it, he can achieve anything. But to run about 75k a day for 5 days in a row is something not many people could achieve even if they wanted to. But Shaun not only did it, but he did it in style by not walking any of it regardless of the pain he was clearly in. He is an inspiration to me and I'm sure to many others and it was an honor to be able to be part of a journey of this magnitude. Not to forget that it was for a very good cause.

Great work Shaun; count me in for the next mission impossible you come up with!

Chris.