

Photographing the Girls on the Run 5K run

By Jon Morgan

I hadn't planned on photographing the Girls on the Run 5K event on Saturday morning, but I'm glad that I could. I wasn't even certain that I would be attending it until about 8:30 a.m. that morning when I finally decided to walk over to the football stadium with my two sons in tow. Mind you, my youngest is 3 months old.

My plans started to change Friday afternoon when Krystal, who has been working with me on the Shepherd Today Facebook fan page, texted me to ask me if I could photograph the Girls on the Run 5K run that was taking place inside the Village of Shepherd on Saturday. I had passed along announcements about the event via the Shepherd Today fan page, so I knew about it happening, but hadn't really thought about photographing it. I usually photograph events whenever I get the chance, but it can be challenging without being able to ensure that my kids will stay out of trouble. Kayla is twelve, and Josh is ten so they don't need as much supervision as they once did, making photography a little easier, but their little 3 month old brother is definitely far more high maintenance. I couldn't imagine taking him with me to the GOTR run when I knew I would be taking photographs.

So I told Krystal that I might be able to do it, but I needed to find a babysitter. I tried some options, but none were definite. But even a weak "maybe" kept me thinking about the opportunity I had with the GOTR event being in Shepherd.

I got up early enough on Saturday morning that I had showered and gotten dressed by the time that Elijah woke up for his morning bottle. My daughter, Kayla, was going to be at a friend's competition all day, leaving just Elijah, Josh, and me.

As eight o'clock rolled by, it was beginning to look like I wouldn't have anybody to watch Elijah. I started to think that my only choice was to take Elijah with us, and maybe Josh could watch him if I kept them both at an arm's length. The weather was favorable for taking Elijah out; it was overcast and cool, but looked like it would warm up enough and stay dry.

Besides, the entire 5K run wasn't going to last any more than a couple of hours, which put us between Elijah's feedings and right in the middle of his morning nap. With any luck, he could sleep through the entire thing.

So, I asked Josh to carry the stroller outside while I dressed up Elijah in a coat and double checked to make sure that we had everything we needed in his diaper bag. I moved Elijah out to the stroller, grabbed my camera, and then locked the house. Now we were on our way.

Unfortunately, however, I had waited too long to decide whether I was going or not, and with everything else we were running late for the run. As far as I knew, the race was starting at nine o'clock and we were going to miss the start of it if we didn't hurry.

But, when we reached the stadium I discovered that we still had forty minutes before the race would actually start. This was great, because it still gave me a chance to take some random photos of the participants while they were getting ready.

We moved up and down the track taking turns pushing Elijah. When I needed to focus on taking photos, I made sure that Josh knew to stay with his brother. I took a couple of photos from the stands, then roamed the field with the hopes of finding runners from Shepherd.



There was an announcement asking Kayla's friend, Sarah Cox, to step out onto the track with her father. Then, her story was read out loud while everyone listened. Since I knew them I was sure to get a photo of them standing together.



While we were waiting, Josh asked if he could run around the track once. I rolled around with Elijah looking for photo opportunities, then took a shot of Josh when he crossed the finish line.

When Sarah's father, Mark, first saw me he asked me if I would get a shot of him and Sarah while they ran down main street. I had planned on moving down to the end of the walking trail to take shots, like I did for the SMSF 2013 5K run, but the idea of taking photos in the center of town was appealing so I agreed that I would try.



The time drew near, and the different groups began to line up. I moved up and down the track, unsure on which spot would be the best for taking photos. It didn't seem that anywhere along the track was going to be great, because I could only see everyone's side and I didn't know where the Shepherd runners would be located. As it turns out, the runners started the run as groups, but when Shepherd Middle School passed by me someone stepped in the middle of my shot, and I lost the chance. This was when I realized two things: One, I was never going to get a great angle and, two, if I spent too much time here in the stadium trying to catch the runners while they were starting the race, I would get to Wright Avenue too late to photograph Sara and Mark while they were still running.

So, Josh, Elijah, the stroller, and I hurried towards Wright Avenue where I could already see that the runners were starting to pass. I was afraid that I was already too late but thought that I would still have a chance of catching some of the runners from Shepherd Middle School and most of the runners from Shepherd Elementary.

It wasn't long, however, before Mark and Sarah passed by. I took a couple of shots of them.

I've learned from the last couple of years that I've photographed the SMSF 5K run that the best strategy for photographing the runners is to try to spot either patterns in how people are spaced out, or focus on someone who stands out for some reason. The shots I was looking for, my ideal, would contain at least one person who looked like they were running, otherwise someone looking at the photo wouldn't be able to tell that it was a 5K run without some additional context.



Most of my shots were of random people who were spaced out, but sometimes I focussed on someone who was running, and I was constantly looking for people I recognized from Shepherd.



We stayed on Wright Avenue until I had captured shots of most of the Shepherd participants, then my little entourage hoofed it back to the stadium where the runners were just starting to come back in. I positioned myself on the track close to where they would be coming in at a curve. It took some experimenting before I found the right spot right next to the curve on the track. Too far down, and my shots weren't as good because the runners were facing away from me before I could take the shot.

In order for me to capture the ideal group of photos, I needed to create the illusion that I was directly in front of the runners when I took my shots. This isn't practical because of the real danger of being run over (or kicked out) but with a lot of zoom and patience, I was able to get what I needed.



With an event that size, it would be easy to feel frustrated about the amount of shots I wasn't able to get. For example, I couldn't be at the finish line if I wanted to get shots of people entering the stadium. I see it as a chance to tell one portion of the event's bigger picture.

We ran into Jessica and her two daughters as we were roaming the field looking for girls from the Shepherd group again. I offered to take a photo of Jessica and her two girls. Before the boys and I headed towards home, Jessica invited us to a birthday party they were having for her three girls that afternoon.

I felt good when we left the stadium. I had taken a ton of photos from the race, and couldn't believe my luck with Elijah—he had slept for most of the time, but when he was awake he hardly made a peep.

On our way down 2nd Street we stopped briefly to check out a garage sale.

We made it home, and I turned my attention towards Elijah. I changed his diaper, fed him his bottle, and then rocked him to sleep. Then, I worked on lunch for both Josh and I. Josh picked out macaroni & cheese. We had stumbled upon a NCIS marathon on one of the channels, so we were watching them while Elijah was eating and while lunch was cooking. We ended up eating our food and watching a third episode (it was a two-parter).

Elijah woke up, and it was coming closer to 1 p.m. when the birthday party was starting. I had at first thought that I'd send just Josh to the party, but then decided that the Ryans were close enough friends that all three of us could attend, and I could always leave early and let Josh stay longer.

While we were at the party, my sister-in-law dropped off the highchair that my mother-in-law had bought for Elijah to sit in. I knew this because Theresa texted me that her mom had called her about it. The highchair was sitting on our front porch.

Everyone stayed at the party until around 3 p.m. The boys and I walked back home. Elijah was sleeping, so the two of us hoisted him up into the house stroller-and-all. I took advantage of the opportunity and worked on uploading my photos from the 5K Run.

Josh had started to watch "Indiana Jones and the Lost Ark," so while I was feeding Elijah I sat and watched it too. Theresa returned home with Kayla and we recounted a part of our day, or at least the parts that I hadn't told her about during lunch via text message.

Kayla had a good time supporting her friend at the Cheer competition. After a little bit, Theresa

and Kayla headed out to the skating rink in Mount Pleasant where Kayla was going to get one more chance to practice ice skating before the arena is closed down for the spring and summer.

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