

Attitude of Gratitude: 2015 Javelina Jundred Race Report

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Original dateline: November 7, 2015

"It is through gratitude for the present moment that the spiritual dimension of life opens up."

~ Eckhart Tolle

Gratitude.

If I only had one word, that would be the one to summarize my first 100 mile race.

I've raced many times, and had many great experiences. Even still, there are a precious few races that have made me feel the way I feel now.

Grateful. Joyful. Peaceful.

I have a hum in my body and mind that speaks of the possibilities of life. It feels and sounds sort of like this:

Of course, given that I just ran 100 miles, there's significantly less hopping around in my version of this musical gem. Is it a coincidence that her character's name is also Maria? I should think not.

Prior to starting the 2015 Javelina Jundred, I had an inkling that running 100 miles would be just my sort of challenge + fun. I watched John race 100 miles several times, and [each time I crewed for him](#), I craved the day we'd swap places.

Finally, it was my turn.

I was somewhere around mile 45 of the race when I realized the truth of my assumption about running 100 miles. While I still had a long way to go at that point, I knew – I absolutely *knew* in every single fiber of my aching muscles – that this was a special experience and I had better make the most of every moment.

In short: I am happy. I am grateful for the amazing experience of running 100 miles.

In long: you'll need to read on.



Less than 4 minutes before the start of the 2015 Javelina Jundred. Look closely – that's fear mixed with excitement.

A bit of context about the race course is necessary before I get to the juicy bits. [The race course sits in the Sonoran desert](#), on the Pemberton Trail which is located within the [McDowell Mountain Regional Park](#). The trail is a 15.3 mile loop, that you complete 6 times. Then, you start out on a shortened 7th loop, which is 9.1 miles. All told, the race is 100.9 miles—which I'm just going to go ahead and round up to 101 miles (and which my Garmin rounded up to 102 miles).

That extra mile is just because this race is so much fun. 😊

459 people started the race, and 280 finished. This 61% finisher rate is one of the highest this course has ever seen. I managed to be one of those 280 finishers by sticking to my strategy, and focusing on my goals throughout the day.

First, the strategy. Oh, good molly, do I love the race strategy.



Pre-race, waiting to start. Excited much?

The Strategy: PEDS

I had a simple strategy for this race, summed up by my made-up acronym: **PEDS**. I thought an acronym would be a useful tool in the event that I found myself hallucinating in the middle of the desert. I might not be able to tell what's real or an illusion, but gosh darn it, I'd stay on my race plan come phantoms or goblins. (It was Halloween, after all!) Spoiler alert: there was no hallucinating, but there was solid execution of PEDS:

- Pace smartly.
- Eat regularly.
- Drink frequently.
- Smile at everyone.

Pacing smartly was tied to heart rate – not my actual minute-per-mile pace. I kept a general sense of my pace throughout the day, and checked a pace chart I had made to see where I was in relationship to my goals. However, I didn't make any decisions to run harder or easier based on pace. I had learned my lesson during [Labor Pains](#). Overshoot the effort and you'll pay for it on the backend.

For those who are curious about the pace charts, I used excel spreadsheets, and made laminated copies for myself and for my husband John. The charts would give him a sense of when to be ready for my return at Javelina Headquarters, which was the beginning and end of each loop. While handy for these reasons, mostly I made the chart because I love any reason to use excel. #ExcelIsMyJam

Here's what they looked like. The segments were tied to the aid stations on the course.

	seg	Total	24	23	22
Javelina Jeadquarter	0	0			
Coyote Camp	2.1	2.1	6:30 a.m.	6:28	6:27
Jackass Junction	6.5	8.6	8:03 a.m.	7:57	7:53
Rattlesnake Ranch	5.2	13.8	9:17 a.m.	9:08	9:00
Javelina Jeadquarter	1.5	15.3	9:38 a.m.	9:29	9:20
Rattlesnake Ranch	1.5	16.8	9:59 a.m.	9:49	9:40
Jackass Junction	5.2	22	11:14 a.m.	11:01	10:48
Coyote Camp	6.5	28.5	12:47 p.m.	12:30	12:13
Javelina Jeadquarter	2.1	30.6	1:17 PM	12:58	12:40
Coyote Camp	2.1	32.7	1:47 PM	1:27	1:08
Jackass Junction	6.5	39.2	3:19 PM	2:56	2:32
Rattlesnake Ranch	5.2	44.4	4:33 PM	4:07	3:41
Javelina Jeadquarter	1.5	45.9	4:55 PM	4:28	4:00
Rattlesnake Ranch	1.5	47.4	5:16 PM	4:48	4:20
Jackass Junction	5.2	52.6	6:30 PM	5:59	5:28
Coyote Camp	6.5	59.1	8:03 PM	7:28	6:53
Javelina Jeadquarter	2.1	61.2	8:33 PM	7:57	7:20
Coyote Camp	2.1	63.3	9:03 PM	8:26	7:48
Jackass Junction	6.5	69.8	10:36 PM	9:55	9:13
Rattlesnake Ranch	5.2	75	11:50 PM	11:06	10:21
Javelina Jeadquarter	1.5	76.5	12:11 AM	11:26	10:40
Rattlesnake Ranch	1.5	78	12:33 AM	11:47	11:00
Jackass Junction	5.2	83.2	1:47 AM	12:58	12:08
Coyote Camp	6.5	89.7	3:20 AM	2:27	1:33
Javelina Jeadquarter	2.1	91.8	3:50 AM	2:56	2:01
Coyote Camp	2.1	93.9	4:20 AM	3:24	2:28
Tonto Tavern	3.4	97.3	5:08 AM	4:11	3:13
Javelina Jeadquarter	3.6	100.9	6:00 AM	5:00	4:00

In addition to my target heart rate, I had a heart rate cap. Once I hit that, which was only on some of the inclines, I walked for 30-60 seconds until I got my HR back where I wanted it. These walk breaks – especially in the early laps – prevented me from doing too much damage while I was still feeling fresh. Because of these brief walk breaks in the beginning, I was able to run the entirety of this race.



Overlook of Javelina Headquarters, aka tent city. John took this snap from a hill overlooking the area.

As I came back in to finish the first loop, John was waiting for me at Javelina Headquarters. He cheered, “You’re pacing smart, Maria! People are out there burning themselves up. Just stick with your plan.”



Coming in at the end of the first loop, with a friend I made along the way.

So, that is what I did.

I remember at one point during the 3rd lap, I was feeling SO FREAKING GOOD. I thought for a brief moment, “Maybe let’s push this a bit. Maybe the target is too low.”

Then, just as immediately as that thought entered my mind, a smarter one replaced it: “No, you dumbass. You feel good because you’ve been sticking to the plan. Keep doing what works.”

Yes, I absolutely do taunt myself with profanity insults when I race. I find it helps me...or something.

Looking back on my splits, I can see that the strategy was effective as I held pretty consistent splits through the day, and I was able to run all day (and night).

I maintained a regular **eating and drinking schedule** by using my Garmin, which beeped on regular intervals to remind me that it was time to put something in my mouth.

If my watch beeped, I was as good as any Pavlovian dog on its best day.

Smiling – this part of my race plan was so easy! It’s easy to smile when you are surrounded by positive people—racers, crew, volunteers, and race staff alike.

I was also inspired to stay positive by a card I received a few days before the race from [my friend and colleague Lindsay](#). She wrote: “*Stay grateful and do your best.*”

This is probably the best mantra we can have in any race, and it helped me keep a positive and optimistic attitude. We *always* have a choice: focus on the negative, or optimize the positive. You have to work that positive mental game just as hard as the strong physical game. Shirley Temple has some good advice here (in keeping with the musical inspiration):

Every time I felt a little negativity creep in, or considered pushing my effort, or wanted to skip a feeding/hydration, I just whispered: PEDS. And, in case you are wondering, I did hum this Shirley T. ditty to myself a few times during the race.

Strategy in place, it’s time to talk about what I was strategizing *for*.

Process – with a side of outcome

Prior to this race, I was hesitant to set too fine a point on outcome-goals, such as finishing time or target pace. However, I’m only a mere mortal, so my goals were [a mix of both outcome-based goals and process-based goals](#).



Signs at the beginning of each lap remind you which way to turn on the washing-machine style loop course. I stole a kiss the day before the race for good luck.

In terms of process, I wanted to achieve the following:

- Smart execution of my strategy
- Finish strong
- Stay positive no matter how bad I might feel
- Stay in the present moment—soak in the magic of a [first time experience](#)
- Be grateful
- Do my best

My outcome-based goals were tiered, from my basic goal to my stretch, super-secret goal:

- Basic goal: finish in under 30 hours because...[Western States 100 Lottery qualification](#).
- Good goal: finish in 24 hours because...special buckle.
- Very good goal: finish in 23 hours because...23 hours is faster than 24 hours. Duuuuhhh.

- Super-secret goal: finish in 22 hours because...this sounds like it will hurt, and also faster than 23 hours.
- Super duper secret I'm-afraid-to-even-think-it goal: make top 10 females because...top 10 is swanky.

100 miles is such an unknown. How would my body respond? How would my mind work?

There are so many factors that predicting a finishing outcome seemed arrogant to me. So, I didn't talk much to anyone about these goals, and I certainly did not think about them as I began the race.

I was worried that if I focused too much on the outcome, I would forget about the process. I didn't want to miss any of the moments that were a part of the 100 mile journey.

[I just wanted to feel the moments](#), end on beginning, each to the next.

There were moments of landscape. The desert is positively beautiful. If you've never seen it or been inside of it, I have to strongly encourage you to put a desert visit of some sort on your list.

I have locked away bubbles of so many beautiful moments in the desert: from the grand vista of the desert floor as the red mountains scrape the horizon, to the multitude of cacti that line the desert with varying shades of green and shimmering needles, to the changing look and feel of the dirt and sand under my feet—shell, glossy, matte, brown, silvery, gold speckles.

I vividly remember the moments of the sunrise, when the desert floor came to life, and the mountain horizon rose with the sun. Later in the day, I felt the sizzle of coolness as the sun dipped below the mountains and the shadows changed the look of the desert scape yet again.

I used to think that the sunrise and sunset over the water were the most beautiful things I had ever seen. The sunrise and sunset in the desert is pretty dang magical as well. Mother Nature rarely disappoints if you are open to her wonders.

There were moments of reflection. While I had some fun chats along the way, I spent the majority of my time alone and in silence (even after John started pacing me). I felt connected to everyone and yet pleasantly alone at the same time.

I thought about my deceased father a lot, which is fairly common for me during racing. He really loved sports, and I think he would have enjoyed the endurance sport lifestyle quite a bit. And, while I shed tears because I felt his absence as I ran through the desert, I also felt his presence in a way I haven't in a long time.









I remember the moonrise – large, orange, a festive decoration for the Halloween night. It was enhanced by the soundtrack of coyotes howling from near and far. I imagined their cackles were cheers of encouragement.

When I got to the halfway point of the 5th lap, the dark night corresponded to a dark mental point. The fatigue was setting in. The enormity of the task at hand threatened to cloud my focus. I grew silent. I got a little stuck in my head.

John, who started pacing me at the beginning of the 5th lap, noticed my silence, and my slump.

“It’s a strange thing...” John paused, “...when you are running 100 miles, it can feel like it takes so long to finish. There are dark moments that feel like they go on forever. But, when you finish, you think, ‘Huh, that really didn’t take that long.’ These moments don’t last—good or bad.”



When the road gets bumpy, just smile!

It was the exact thing I needed to hear at that moment. And, while I still wasn’t moving too quickly (the 5th lap was my slowest of the day), my outlook brightened, an outlook that was aided by my first caffeinated calories of the day. Within 15 minutes, my focus sharpened, my legs found renewed spring. (Note to self: start caffeine just a touch earlier next time.)

Positive encouragement + caffeine = magic sprinkles everywhere.

I’ve learned this lesson over and over: When you feel badly, Don’t throw a pity party. You need to eat something, drink something, keep your head on straight, and keep on moving until you feel better again.

We came through Javelina Headquarters, and turned out for my 6th full loop of the day. I was feeling good, ready to get after it. At this point in the race, I had about 23 minutes to play with to come in under 22 hours. All I needed to do to cement my super secret goal was to KEEP ON MOVING.

But, at this point, the threat of blowing myself up had passed, so the game became:

How much under 22 hours can I get?

I'm soooooo predictable, right?

John was a willing partner in this game, and his words of encouragement were hugely helpful. As we hit each mile, he'd say: "Fastest mile yet!" or "That was a fast mile!" or some other variant of that. Of course, at mile 80, "fast" is such a relative term, but it was just the right amount of cheerleading to keep me moving.

I found the shift to focusing on outcome-based goals at this point in the race to be motivational and helpful. The extrinsic motivation to hit the time goal kept me moving, despite the pain...everywhere. Wow, does running 100 miles hurt.

As we came through to finish the 6th loop and head out on the 7th and final loop (which was about 10 miles), the encouragement from the people at Javelina Headquarters lifted me even further. In the wee-hours of the night, there was a full blown party happening, and as we crossed the timing mat, we did so to a remix version of Michael Jackson's "Thriller." We even did the dance a bit. That's just how good I was feeling.

Indeed, this was a thriller night. And, sure, let's keep going with the music videos because...why not?

On the course, the other runners could tell we were on the last lap – we had that sense of urgency, that spring in the step that said: *This will all be over soon.*

At one point, we passed a guy who said, "Now that's two strong people right there."

It's amazing the positive effect we can have on each other with just a few well-placed words. His words lifted me up, and they helped me carry my rotting carcass of a body over those last few miles.



As John predicted, the time would seem short once we saw the “1 mile to go” sign that was placed on the course. All of a sudden, I wanted to make it last – I wanted to slow down, to soak it all in, to look up at the night time sky that was dotted with no less than 1 million twinkling stars (to be said in the Dr. Evil voice for full effect).

So, despite my game of going as far under 22 hours as possible, we walked for a minute – just to soak in this moment that I would never have again: the last mile of my first 101 mile race. **weep weep**

In a blink, it was over: I crossed the finish line and the tears just gushed, as the feelings of gratitude and joy became as strong as the pulsating pain in my legs. So, that’s pretty strong in case you are wondering.

I finished in 21 hours and 33 minutes, as the 8th place female and the 41st finisher overall.

WHAT?!?! Is this real life?!

To say that this race exceeded my expectations is an understatement. As I told my students this week, you can’t piss in my cornflakes and keep me from eating them right now. I’m just *that happy*.

A perfect race is a rare thing indeed, and I am lucky that I experienced about as near a perfect race as I think anyone has a right to expect. I am filled with a gratitude that I want to bottle up and give away as a present.

Who wants some?

- I am grateful to have a husband who supports me in everything, and in whose eyes I could see such pride and love throughout the day. I just wanted to live up to whatever it is that he sees in me. I’m not sure I’m worthy, but I sure want to be.

- I am grateful to have a body that lets me move the way I want to move. I'm grateful for the soreness that tells me I experienced something that is so extraordinary, so unique, so spiritual.
- I am grateful for the opportunity to spend time with my good friends who live so far from me.
- I am grateful to have spent a day running through the desert and to see the beauty that exists there.



- *Fancy Buckle.*
- I am grateful for the ultrarunning community, which is absolutely hands down the most supportive athletic community I've been a part of. You couldn't pass a person without them saying, "nice work" or "good job" or "looking strong" or some other variant of that. From the fastest to the slowest, everyone had a good word to share—even in the darkest moments. Many thanks to the amazing volunteers, all of whom were helpful, supportive, and funny!
- I am grateful for the new friends I made along the way. Shout out to "Meg-animal" and #355, who is listed in results as K Ray. But, I never did get her full first name during the moments we ran together. I so enjoyed her enthusiasm and positivity as we repeated to each other: "We are doing it right!" Yes, we did!
- I am grateful to my family and friends for the outpouring of support I received via phone calls, text messages, tweets, Facebook comments, and instagram <3's. Wow.

Just wow wow wow! That so many of you would care about this silly selfish hobby of mine – just wow. You all make me want to be a better person.

Javelina is some sort of a transition point for me. I can feel that a new dimension of my life has opened up, and I'm excited to see where it leads and the new adventures that ensue.

Thanks for reading :).