

IN MEMORIAM

Running for Two

by Carol Bingley

If you've shared a good run with someone, you've created a bond with that person for life. We runners have a bond because we share something in common. We "know" a side of each other better than even our families and friends seem to know us. We have a connection beyond the surface. We've seen each other at our best and our worst. We've seen each other physically and emotionally drained from pushing ourselves farther than we thought we could be pushed. We push each other, and when we fall, we pick each other up. We're part of a unique community, a family of runners with all our strengths and beautiful flaws.



Annie at the Beloit Triathlon in 2002

I met Annie about 5 years ago. She was a dear friend of my sister Patty. She was a beautiful woman...talented, energetic, bright, vibrant and she was a runner. I wasn't much of a runner at the time, but wanted to be. She helped me train for and race my first triathlon. She was amazing, strong, elegant, and dying of cancer.

Last year I saw Annie, looking stunning as always. It was around the time her doctor had given her 2 months to live. She asked me to run for her, until she could run again. She shared how she'd missed running. How she missed feeling the breeze in her hair as she ran, how she longed to go out and just run, and keep on running.

A group of us decided to run for Annie. We logged miles and miles for our "sister". We offered the run up for our friend, a woman most of the group had never met. We had

a bond with her, through her, to do something outside ourselves. To offer that run up to whomever it is we pray to. We were Running for Two. Running for someone else, who missed running desperately. We started out doing it for her, and quickly realized how much she was doing for us. She was giving us strength, inspiring us every step of the way.

Annie died a few weeks ago. This incredible woman had been given 2 years to live, 6 years ago. She'd been given 6 months a few years ago. Her endurance was beyond anything we can imagine. When she was given 48 hours, she took another week. She fought all the way to the finish line. Her body was done. But something way beyond physical strength took over. She stayed on this earth longer, running toward her own finish line. Not giving in until her race was won.

A few months ago I read an article in *Runners World* written by Kristin Armstrong. It was about a marathon she'd done with a friend. How they'd run the miles, dedicating each mile to someone they loved. They prayed for that person for a mile then moved on to the next. I thought that was beautiful. The idea stuck with me as we ran all those months for Annie.

Last week at the Rock Cut Hobo Run 25K trail race, my friend Julie and I decided to run it for Annie. It was a beautiful day, Sunday, a day Annie would have loved to run. We ran to the first mile marker, slapped hands



Ann Kenny 1957-2007

and decided to whom we'd dedicate each mile as they came. We ran for Annie, her daughter, her two sons, her husband, her dear "sisters", and for Annie again. We rotated through the people whom Annie loved. It was such an emotional, spiritual journey running through those woods, gaining steam at each mile. We thought about the endurance this woman had. The strength she showed as she faced her own mortality. The dignity and grace she wore as she fought this unimaginable battle. When we had thoughts of doubt and pain and feeling tired, we thought of Annie. We know that the small amount of endurance we exhibited that day was nothing compared to the race Annie had just completed. At mile 8 I was feeling tired. I guess it was that middle point where your mind gets a bit weak and self doubt fills your heart. Only halfway done and I was so tired. When the next mile marker came up, my friend Julie and I regrouped, slapped hands and said this one's for Annie. I started off, on the second half of the Hobo run, winding through the trees, the sun spilling through the leaves. I closed my eyes for a second, consciously breathing in the fresh air. Just then something filled me up, I felt lighter, energized, refilled. I cannot give credit to my sports drink and energy gels for this one. This was beyond the chemistry of complex carbs and electrolytes. I believe I felt the presence of something bigger and the warmth of knowing that Annie was smiling, and probably somewhere out there... running! I finished the race, worn out and filled up. I watched for Julie. She came cruising in, with an amazing energy, passing a man with a decisive surge at the finish. We were exhausted and energized. Laughing and crying. She shared how she'd pooped out the last mile and a half, didn't think she'd finish.



Julie and Carol, 2007 Hobo 25k

She said she'd just flown in on Annie's wings.