

The Perfect Storm

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The last Saturday of March, I was signed up to run the Golden Gate Headlands Half Marathon. It was also supposed to storm that day. Shortly after I woke, my running partner canceled. Then I saw my garbage cans being blown over. And then it started to rain...hard. As I carefully drove through rain on wet roads, I was wondering what I had gotten myself into and why I was headed toward what looked to be disaster.

I started thinking about how going headlong into a trail race in a storm was a lot like the decision to get married and be a parent. I mean, who would really sign up for the constant commitment and occasional storm that family life can be? But we have done it, knowing that there is something redeeming and beautiful in the craziness.

We live in a culture that teaches us we deserve to be happy most if not all of the time, that things should come easily, and that personal freedom is more important than anything else, including other people. How does this mesh with what we know to be the reality of marriage? In the few tender years that I've been married, there have certainly been times that feel like a storm and I'd rather be curled up with a cup of coffee somewhere warm and safe and mostly without the person making me feel bad. I am committed to staying through the storms, though, and strengthened by the following adventure.

A few minutes before the stormy race started, a California State Park Ranger withdrew the permit to hold the race, citing dangerous trail conditions. Though the race was canceled, the course was marked, and I had showed up in the rain to run, so I figured I may as well go for it. I set off on the course with several other runners. As I struggled up a very long incline, soon to be passed by other runners, I thought about how marriage

can be lonely. Sometimes, it seems as though everyone else is flying by, doing well while I'm struggling on my own. While most of us know intellectually that this can't possibly be true, it is important to remember that with a commitment like marriage, everyone struggles at some point. If you are struggling, this does not indicate a personal or couple defect.

When I finally made it up that very long hill, the ribbons marking the course ended. I found myself standing alone in the rain and strong wind on Hwy 1 with no idea where to go. Need I articulate this parallel? How many times have you been here? Wind and rain are all around with no reprieve in sight and no idea how to move forward.

I decided to turn around and find other runners to ask for help. A few of us figured out where to go and then encouraged others that were also lost along the way. Around this time, I rounded a corner and before my eyes was the Pacific Ocean beautiful and pounding against Muir Beach. I couldn't have gotten to this exact spot and sight without running through those difficult parts first. My mind was flooded with sweet memories of the redeeming things that only marriage can bring. With this inspiration in front of me, I carefully bounded back down the hill.

Another message in our culture is that if we are at some point thin enough, make enough money, change things we don't like in our spouse, etc that life will all of a sudden be better. The truth is that there are always good and challenging factors in a relationship and family. Though I was now heading down and not up, I was dealing with elements of being exposed on a hill. When I was heading up, I was protected by the backside of the hill and its' trees. Though I almost lost my hat several times and was being pelted with rain, I continued down the hill remembering the protection I lost and appreciating the view.

On the way to the flat road where I could finish the last mile, I saw the race director driving down the road calling out time splits from his car, like a mobile race clock. Knowing he was still there lifted my spirits and gave me

another push to do well into the unofficial finish line. And there he was again, at the finish, cheering in runners. This reminded me of my partner's devotion to me. I may think I'm the one out there, running the course, being faithful to my commitment and enjoying the view of the ocean. But he's also there, by my side, keeping our promise as imperfectly as I do. The race director, Dave, has been married for 16 ½ years. He understands dedication. This was his race and he wasn't going to leave us alone.

So ladies, stand by your man. Think twice the next time you want to complain about him to your friends. With the exception of any threat to the safety of yourself and your children, commit to keeping your commitment. Show up when it's raining. Keep going when someone else tries to cancel. Have fun along the way. Ask for help, encourage others. And notice your spouse on the journey with you. Maybe even say, "thank you."

One last note; I was wearing my hubby's rain jacket that day. And I was dry everywhere that jacket covered me at the end of those 7 miles in the pouring rain. You see, I decided to do the 7 mi course instead of the half marathon (13.1 mi) because sometimes you have to pace yourself and know your limits. None of us do marriage as planned. I made a game-time decision to do the best I could with what I had that day. I wish the same for you and your family. Happy Father's Day.