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Autistic Twins Marathon Runners



Written by Robyn Schneider Thursday, 25 April 2013 00:00

Both of my sons, Alex and Jamie Schneider, 22-year-old twins with autism, were on course to finish the Boston marathon at very different times. Alex, the faster of the two, trained by his coaches Kevin McDermott of East Islip and Stephen Dalton, of New Hyde Park, crossed the finish line in three hours, 23 minutes and 22 seconds; setting a personal record. Had Alex been just 46 minutes slower, as he was two years ago in the Boston Marathon, he, his coaches, and my friends and I, watching in the first row of the grandstands at the finish line, would surely have been in harm's way.

When Alex crossed the finish line, he and his coaches walked to the family gathering area several blocks away. I, along with Stephen's wife, Danielle, and their two young children, walked to the same area to meet them. We were all ecstatic about Alex's performance, and celebrated in the street, taking pictures and reminiscing about the race.

Some of my friends moved to another area near the finish line. Others went back to their hotel on the corner, the Westin Copley, but Alex and I stayed for awhile. Then, instead of following tradition and returning to the grandstands to watch and wait for his brother Jamie, I decided to grab a sweatshirt for Alex from the hotel room before returning to the finish line.



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As we were headed out of the hotel room, the first bomb exploded. We watched the events unfold from our window on the 24th floor and heard the second blast. We saw the smoke and heard the sirens and watched the chaos in disbelief. Joined by Alex's coaches and their families, we all waited tensely for news. I knew my friends were still outside but I could not reach them.

Four miles away from the finish line, Jamie was running with his father Allan and another coach, Katie Reed, of Copiague. After the first explosion, they were quickly taken off the course along with thousands of other runners, and brought to a lockdown facility where they were told of the explosions. Knowing that I was at the finish line with Alex, Allan frantically tried to reach me, but cell service was down. They waited for hours in a church, given blankets and food and listened and waited for updated news. Eventually, we were able to communicate by texting; and grateful that all of us and our friends were safe. By 8 p.m. Jamie and his father were taken by bus to the Boston Commons where they walked back to our hotel and reunited with us. I think that was the biggest hug I've ever had. Shaken and terrified of the events that unfolded, we are all grateful to be back home, but terribly saddened for the victims and families that lost loved ones.

Fortunately, for the us and our friends, it was Alex's fast pace and Jamie's slower pace that helped to secure our safety from the tragic events that occurred at the finish line. When asked if they will run the Boston marathon again, I can only say, "running is the most important activity in their lives and they love it. I can't imagine our lives without it." To read more about the Alex and Jamie and their running journey, visit: www.autismrunners.com

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