



Photo by Ramsey Mohsen

This “perfect stranger” brought orange juice and bagels from his home across the street to stranded runners Diana, left, and Ali.

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Runner

Age 27

Kansas City

Another runner walked up to me. “Can I use your phone to call my mom?” he asked. “I need to tell her I’m okay.”

“Oh yes, please take it.”

After he dialed, I heard him say, “Hi, Mom.” And, standing five feet away, I could hear her scream.

When my fiancé Ramsey Mohsen and I arrived in Boston the Saturday before the marathon, the first thing I wanted to do was go to the finish line. When I saw it, I immediately got choked up and was struggling to talk. It was so emotional, it really set in. I get to run this race and I get to run across this finish line. I was going to run the Boston Marathon! It is the dream and goal of so many.

The rest of our group, my parents, my friends Stacy Scalfaro and Diana Stauffer and their spouses, arrived in the afternoon. We were staying at the Copley Square Hotel, which is about a block from the finish line. That evening, we went to a bar on Boylston Street, had a few drinks and had so much fun. Normally, I would not drink beer before a race, but I wanted to soak in every moment of this experience. We were not running this race for time; just to finish and celebrate. On Sunday morning, we went on a run and saw all the 5K runners. We got coffee and walked over to the Expo. What an amazing experience! I picked up my bib and got tears in my eyes just seeing it. We took pictures in front of the course map and visited all the booths. We wanted to see everything!

Sunday night, we went to dinner on Newbury Street and stopped by the finish line on the way back to the hotel. It was just buzzing with people; everybody was taking pictures and there was such a feeling of excitement mixed with anxiety. We had our Bos-

ton Marathon jackets on and took funny pictures at the finish line. Everyone was excited to run, and if they weren't running, they were excited for the people who were. Wherever we went people would ask, "Are you running tomorrow?" "We are!" Everything revolved around the race.

On race day our plan was in place: My parents and fiancé planned to watch me around Mile 24-25, and Stacy's husband was bringing our clothes and meeting us at the family meet-up. My dad bought champagne the night before for the first part of our celebration, a toast on the street. We would then go back to the hotel, shower, relax and go for fish and chips and my favorite wine at Legal Seafood that night. We made the reservations six weeks earlier.

Stacy, Diana and I ran together. The weather was perfect. Although we didn't have a specific goal, we wanted to finish in less than four hours. I was carrying a cellphone because I write a blog and planned to take lots of pictures and document everything. One of my great memories is running through some of the towns where there were crowds from every angle, screaming and cheering for us. It was so loud, so wonderful. Stacy had run the race before, but Diana and I had never experienced anything like this. At one point Diana grabbed my arm, tears in her eyes and yelled, "This is amazing!" I yelled back, "I know!" There were a bunch of kids jumping on mini-trampolines and dancing to the Gangnam Style song. And running through the college towns was pure happiness! We saw our families at Mile 25. Things were going as planned.

As we were running into the city and approached the Mass Avenue bridge, Diana got really bad stomach pains. The three of us slowed to a walk and by the time we came out of the tunnel, she was fine. We started running again and from there on, it was eye on the prize. Get to the finish line! We ran the race side-by-side and were going to finish it together, no matter what. A right on Hereford and left on Boylston, and it was so loud we couldn't talk as we ran down the street. We soaked it all in; I can still remember everything about it. Right before we finished, we grabbed hands and threw our arms up. It was a great moment!

Our clock time was 3:54:35, about 30 minutes before the explosion. We got our blankets, got our medals, grabbed some snacks and took pictures. We met up with everyone else in the family waiting area, a couple of blocks from the finish. I hugged them and said, “I need my clothes. I’m freezing.” My dad was holding me up and my mom was helping me get my clothes on. I threw my jacket and gloves on. We took a few more pictures. I had taken a picture at the start of the race and wanted to post a picture of me finishing the race. As they got ready to take a picture of me holding my medal, we heard the first explosion.



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When it went off, it got eerily silent and everyone had a nervous look on their faces. I remember a woman next to me start to cry. Then the second one exploded. I was feeling panicked and saw panic all around me. My dad said, “Okay, let’s go.” He put his arms around my mom and me and we started walking. My friend Diana said it was probably cannons for celebrating, someone else thought it was scaffolding falling. But I saw police officers running and in an instant it went from so happy to panic mode. I thought bombs were dropping out of the sky and I wondered where the next one would explode. My dad thought we should move away from large groups of people and we walked across a bridge into a

quiet neighborhood and wandered around. I pulled out my phone and checked Twitter and read about the bombs. OMG, two bombs near the finish line! Stacy began crying. We reached out to our family and friends to let them know we were okay. My brother was having a hard time; his entire family was in Boston. I updated my Facebook to let everyone know I was okay.

Dad called the hotel and they said we could come back, but I was uneasy about going back to Copley Square because it was so close to the explosions. I really felt anxiety walking back there. We got into our rooms, but were only there for about 10 minutes before the hotel evacuated everyone. “Grab your possessions and leave!” Stacy remembers: “It was one of those moments when you think of what to take. I grabbed my ID, credit cards, phone and wedding ring. This sounds awful, but I wanted to have my ID in case something really bad happens. Yes, I think of the worst sometimes, but this was like nothing I have ever experienced.” We went across the street to the Westin but couldn’t get in because it was in lockdown. We didn’t know where to go, so we sat on the street in front of the Westin. My dad remained calm, our voice of reason. My mom reached out to everyone and told them we were going to be okay. There were so many runners walking around with their heat blankets and medals looking for someone they knew. One female runner appeared to be lost and all of a sudden a man screamed her name. He ran to her, hugged her and they both just started sobbing. I promised myself I would never run without my cellphone.

We were ordered to move from our spot in front of the Westin. We tried the Marriott, but they wouldn’t let us in either. We wandered a few blocks into another neighborhood; no businesses, just brownstones. There were a ton of runners and others sitting against a wall. Residents started coming out of their homes to help and offer their support. I remember seeing Carlos with the cowboy hat walking by us, covered in blood. At that time, we still didn’t know how many people had been hurt or killed, but after seeing Carlos, we said, “Oh, God. This is bad.” While we were sitting against the wall, our “perfect strangers” started appearing. A man named Peter brought us orange juice and bagels. He lived

right across the street and was having a marathon party. A woman brought out blankets. We were so cold and so grateful for that. We just kept thanking the many people who were being so kind to us. Another woman and her eight-year-old daughter were telling people they were welcome to come into their home to warm up. We declined, thinking we wouldn't be there much longer.

But we were, and sometime later a woman, Margaritte, walked up to us and asked, "Are you okay and do you need anything? I just live around the corner in a brownstone. Would you like to come to my home?" We were freezing and we all nodded yes. All eight of us followed her. We still had the blanket and Stacy gave it to this poor, shivering guy who was wearing just his

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running clothes. When we reached Margaritte's house, we had to walk up the most insane staircase to get to her front door. That's when it kicked in how sore I was. Once inside, her home was so warm. We sat down on the couches and the floor. I charged my dead phone. Margaritte apologized for not having very much food, and then brought out chips, chocolate and cheese on serving trays. It was so elegant. We would've been happy just eating chips right out of the

bag. Diana kept saying, "These are the best potato chips I've ever eaten in my life!" And Margaritte brought warm Heineken beer, which was awesome! We called the hotel and were told it was okay to go back. Margaritte gave us her phone number and told us to call if we needed help. She said, "You can spend the night if you need to. I have a couple of air mattresses you can sleep on." It was hard to leave there, I felt so safe. We hugged and told her how grateful we were.

Back at our hotel and watching TV, I finally got the magnitude of what had happened. The images! Ramsey gave me a hug and we just sat there for a long while, watching it together. I said,

“I think I smell.” He said, “Yes, you do.” We cleaned up and went downstairs for dinner around 9:30.

I couldn’t sleep that night and just needed to write about what happened. I remembered everything so vividly at that point and I posted on my blog.

We flew back to Kansas City the next day, and then it all hit me. It was non-stop crying for five days. Non-stop feeling sad and being in a daze. I made the mistake of going to work right away. I wasn’t ready to focus on budgets and reports and wound up with tears pouring down my face.

That was the moment when I knew I wasn’t yet right. When people would be having a normal conversation about other things, I would be wondering how they could talk about normal happy things.

I didn’t understand why I took it so hard. I finished the race, found my family, didn’t get hurt and didn’t see any of the destruction. Why was I so upset? Crying? Angry? I soon found out I wasn’t alone. There were 75 of us from Kansas City who ran Boston. After the race, the organizer sent out a note checking in with everyone. From that, we created a kind of support group. Occasionally, I would get an e-mail in the morning saying, “Having a hard day today. I hope everyone else is doing okay today.” It was so helpful knowing someone else was feeling what I was feeling.

I still tear up and get upset, I sometimes feel less secure when traveling and being among large groups of people. Loud noises startle me more than they used to.

Boston changed me, but for the better. The experiences there allow me to see things in a different perspective: I no longer sweat the small things. My priorities are different. It reinforced how precious life is. Boston will forever be a part of me.



Ali Hatfield urges you to consider supporting the One Fund at onefundboston.org. You can read Ali’s blog at mileswithstyle.com.