

# The 12th Annual Reach the Beach Relay

Cannon Mountain to Hampton Beach, New Hampshire, September 17–18, 2010

Imagine joining 11 running buddies to cover more than 200 miles of New Hampshire in a little over 24 hours, running through the night, through rain, through blinding sunshine, down a ski slope, up mountains, across valleys, alongside lakes, and to the ocean. Then imagine doing it again.

That's what Tom Eaton's *ERC – Beach or Bust* team did, returning in September to run the Reach the Beach Relay for the second year in a row. Tom and six other RTB veterans—John Fabbro, Brian Foster, Chris Jaworski, Susan Mello, Doug Williams, and Phil Coffin—were joined by rookies Bob Goodsell, Ed Kelly, Ellen Kim, Sharon Morrissey, and Glenn Trimboli to race 209 miles.

The numbers say that the two years were remarkably similar. In 2009, we were 39th in a field of 401 finishers; in 2010, we were 39th in a field of 429 finishers. In 2009, we averaged 7:26 per mile, finishing in 25 hours 42 minutes 21 seconds; in 2010, we averaged 7:28 per mile, finishing in 26 hours 4 minutes 9 seconds (the course was 2 miles longer this year).

In truth, this year's race was a unique experience—similar to last year's but distinct. The people, personalities, efforts, and triumphs created a story all their own. Here it is, in their own words. —Phil Coffin

## GETTING THERE

**Phil.** Many of us who ran Reach the Beach last year had apprehensions about running it again. RTB 2009 was such a wonderful experience that there was a temptation not to run it this year for fear of tarnishing those memories.

Doug said that he and John had talked about this very issue and that John had replied, "It won't be the same as last year. But we'll create a new set of good memories."

John was right. We did create a new set of good memories. Perhaps it's the sleep deprivation (for the second year in a row, I had three hours of sleep spread out over 42 hours), or the adrenaline bath that must have washed over all of us, but there is a warm-and-fuzzy feeling about RTB 2010—a sort of mental angora sweater.

**Tom.** I was skeptical about fielding a team this time. However, there was much excitement from some of last year's members, and I thought about how much fun New Jersey's River to Sea Relay is year after year. Yes, I was convinced to give Reach the Beach another shot.

Injuries and scheduling conflicts made it difficult to assemble a team of 12. I was becoming frustrated and nervous but kept drawing on last year's memories to prop up my confidence that we'd have a great time. Finally, after asking 40 people, it was mid-August and I'd roped in 11 besides me, including a few I didn't know very well. Well, I can't be happier with the team we fielded.

*Aunt Gladys's Gang.* One of my favorite parts of this adventure isn't even part of the race. It's the time we spend at my Aunt Gladys's house near Newfound Lake in New Hampshire. [Editor's note: Tom's aunt makes available to us her lovely, spacious, comfortable house about an hour's drive from the race start.] No matter how excited we are on the trip north, when we pull up to the house we are still 12 individuals; when we leave, we're a team. The time spent bonding over Mama Mello's (Susan's mother's) pasta sauce, breakfast and sandwich making, van decorating, and final race preparations is in my mind the glue that brings and holds us together, focused on a common goal.

Arriving at the start at Cannon Mountain was exciting and daunting. The sunny blue skies back

at the lake were replaced with clouds and rain. Eventually we saw sunshine through the clouds farther down the road and became confident the weather was going to clear. Then, with all our final race registration details behind us, Glenn was on the starting line, pumped and ready to go!

**Ellen.** Our stay at Gladys's house was one of my favorite parts of our three days together. We were all under one roof, and I was getting to know everyone, crash-course style. There wasn't much lost between us, changing in front of one another, using the bathroom one nervous runner after another, walking around in one's pajamas, and so forth. We melded as a team quickly and easily. We were solid.

**Glenn.** So there I was at a logistics meeting a few weeks before the race, and half the people I didn't know too well or at all. Having been in relays before (River to Sea), I knew it was a big gamble trying to get compatible teammates. It's hard enough finding 7 people (R2C), let alone 12 (RTB)! There being even one person who doesn't gel with others on the team can make for a very long race. At the meeting, everyone seemed nice. First impressions, however, can drastically change after a long trip, sleep deprivation, et cetera.

But I believe an aura around Gladys's house had a special effect on the people within. After dinner, we sat around, talking and laughing, and at that moment I knew somehow Tom had pulled together a team of destiny, especially since no one really wanted to do this in the first place!

**Susan.** *(Still) a Chick's Perspective.* As in 2009, I sent my entry fee to Tom in March and then proceeded to ignore him. All summer. Until. He. Couldn't. Take it. Anymore. I left him no choice but to sign me up himself at the end of August.

Once again my mother was happy to make pasta sauce for our prerace dinner. Luckily, no one noticed I overcooked a batch of pasta, which I cleverly mixed with the al dente batch. Sharon and I also tackled breakfast. Lots of folks chipped in on both meals. If everything else went wrong, at least we could take comfort in knowing we'd fed our team well. That satisfaction must have come from a hidden store of estrogen I didn't know I had.

**Sharon.** RTB 2010 was at the top of my list of "last things on Earth I should do in September." It was an indulgence of sorts, but one that I can honestly say was an experience of a lifetime and one that I am proud to say I was a part of. It was the New Hampshire running road trip that I like to dub, *Live Free or Die ... Running.*

**John.** While packing my bag of gear, I had conflicting emotions. RTB 2009 had been such a great experience, I was concerned this year's race might fall short. I'd also just dropped my daughter off at college and was a bit drained, physically and emotionally. Later, once the gang was on the road and entering the foothills of New Hampshire, I felt excited, and lucky to be on the 2010 RTB team.

**Bob.** When I first started running with groups, I heard stories about crazy people forming teams to run godawfully long races, usually from an outdoorsy place to a large body of water. River to Sea comes to mind. I filed these stories away under the category of "Those guys are nuts." As that first year of group running moved into fall and winter, and we began starting and eventually ending our early-morning runs in the dark, a few runners began strapping tiny lamps to their foreheads and wearing lighted running vests. Then out came the blinking red lights. All that got filed under "I'm running with a bunch of miners!" Next, we started going more east and west than north and south on our runs—which in Montclair means hills. These runs have names like *Ten-Hill Challenge*. Okay, so now I was running with mountain goats. It wasn't until Tom asked me to join his team that I figured out where all this was leading: I was being asked to join the Nutty Miner Mountain Goats for the running adventure of a lifetime!

**Brian.** Another September, and another relay with the gang. I was really looking forward to this year's installment. My grandmother passed away less than two weeks before the race, so I wanted to get away and try to enjoy myself without thinking of anything much. Susan's mother and Gladys should be made honorary team members for their contributions! Our time at the house is the best part of the trip. It really allows the team to come together. Now the running.

## THE RACE

*Leg 1, 1:20 pm, 7.97 M, moderate, 54:46, 6:52 pace Glenn.* The rain stopped, and the weather at the start was perfect, overcast and cool. But my first 100 yards were almost my last, as I turned to run down a wet, slippery slope of loose rocks. That's when I thought, *I have 20 more miles to go ... easy.* Soon, though, my ski hill run turned into a road race, and the adrenaline kicked in. I started to do what I like to do best, pass people. I also wanted to get us off to a good start. At the finish, Tom said I'd banked over 5 minutes. The race was on!

*Leg 2, 2:14 pm, 8.96 M, hard, 58:36, 6:32 pace Brian.* This leg, on Route 302, had some amazing scenery. Running between the mountains and eventually up into them was awesome—there was more than enough to keep my mind occupied. My goal was to do my three legs at a pace faster than last year's 6:58. I was passed by a runner around the 1-mile mark, and all hope of staying with him lasted about 200 yards. Later, two more runners passed me, but I kept within 10 seconds of them. And I passed three runners, so it was a net zero. In trying to keep those last two runners in sight, I might've squeezed too much paste out of the tube ... and I don't know of any way to get that back in. I was happy with my sub-6:40 pace but concerned about my remaining relay legs.

*Leg 3, 3:12 pm, 3.88 M, easy, 26:08, 6:44 pace Tom.* Brian ran this leg last year and couldn't understand why it was designated *easy* in the course description. I couldn't either. The steady uphill over the final 2 miles wore me down, and, even though this was my shortest, supposedly easiest leg, my average pace here was the slowest. However, the magnificent view of the Mount Washington Hotel nestled in the mountains and below a layer of clouds made it worthwhile.

*Leg 4, 3:39 pm, 2.9 M, moderate, 18:51, 6:30 pace John.* I was most wary of this leg because it was a new running experience for my aging body. On heading out, I heard my college friend Jeff's voice. Jeff had been captain of the cross-country team and is responsible for my love of running. He'd always told me to relax and go with the downhill. I started taking his advice, but my concentration was soon broken by the sight of several stopped vans and people taking photos of a moose foraging 10 feet from the road. The hills continued to carry me downward at PR-setting pace. I finished and was amazed by my time and how easily the miles had zipped by. As I cooled down, I realized there was one little problem: walking.

*Leg 5, 3:57 pm, 5.5 M, easy, 37:55, 6:54 pace Doug.* A relatively easy leg, but I'd spent so much time anticipating it that it was a bit difficult. The first time the crew gave me water, I said how fun the leg was. It was less fun a few miles later.

*Leg 6, 4:35 pm, 8.62 M, hard, 1:06:29, 7:43 pace Susan.* Unlike last year, my first leg would be in daylight (estimated start time, 4:45). I was in the portajohn line when I realized other runners were

wearing their night gear (it was required starting at 5:30). I couldn't believe Captain Tom had let me out of the van without a flashlight and a reflective vest! For the most part, this leg, though long, was primarily downhill. I briefly thought to back off so I wouldn't hear my quads screaming later, during my other relay legs, but who listens to reason on such a beautiful race day? When I saw Glenn (I think?) poised to take a photo of me along the course, I couldn't help but grin from ear to ear and wave signaling my pleasure.

*Leg 7, 5:42 pm, 7.23 M, moderate, 51:12, 7:05 pace Ed.* The hardest part about being the first Van 2 person to run was the wait. We had to sit around for Van 1 to finish its six legs—in this case, for four, four and a half hours. When the call finally came that Susan was a mile out, I hurried to the start. It was now about 5:30, the sun was setting, and I was told I had to run with my night gear. Damn, I thought, there was already enough pressure to perform for Captain Tom—I didn't want all this night gear to get in the way, too!

As Van 2 pulled up and waited for Susan to arrive, Tom turned to me and said, "See those guys in the bright orange shirts who just passed? I don't like them, and they keep passing us, so make sure you get them." I looked at Tom and said, "Forget it. They have a 4-minute head start."

Susan came in, and I took off, slowly, as I knew there were going to be some hills and two more legs to run. Quickly, though, I found a rhythm, something I hadn't felt in a long time. I was soon passing runners, and then up ahead I saw a bright orange shirt. I sped up and then was passing the guy wearing that shirt, team name Cradle Robbers. On my face was a smirk that no one could see. When I handed off the baton to Bob, I learned that the best part of my run was when my van mates called Tom and told him the Cradle Robbers had been left in the dust. Meanwhile, I'd made Van 2's first deposit into the bank.

*Leg 8, 6:33 pm, 6.61 M, moderate, 49:34, 7:30 pace Bob.* This great leg had a few minor climbs in the first mile and then a relatively flat 2-mile stretch and a nice downhill before finishing with 3 miles of gently undulating rises and falls. Because of the fast times of the team members before me, what had been projected to be a night run became a run into the setting sun, which made the skies over the many open fields simply gorgeous. This clearly was the most beautiful of my three legs.

*Leg 9, 7:22 pm, 6.36 M, moderate, 48:40, 7:39 pace Ellen.* When Tom said I would be running in the dark, he was not kidding. The only thing I could see ahead of me was the blinking lights of other runners and whatever my headlamp hit on. I had dropped my flashlight in the portapotty minutes before I began this leg and was relying solely on the little beam of light from my head.

The air was wet and cold, but my legs felt good. I knew that, if I could bank strong splits over the first 2.5 miles, I would have some leeway on the climb that followed. I maintained a steady 7:04, and then the climb came. I *think* I love hills, and I had hoped to capitalize on this

during my relay legs. Now I was passing one blinking light after another. One runner I was trying to pass remarked, "You know we still have a ways to go, right?" I replied that I knew I sounded as if I were dying but that I was okay. As soon as I saw the bright lights and Phil's smiling face at the exchange, I felt relieved that I had been able to push through at 7:39 pace. I also nervously wondered why this leg was rated only *moderate* and what my next leg, rated *hard*, would be like.

*Leg 10, 8:11 pm, 5.1 M, moderate, 44:34, 8:44 pace Phil.* I was nervous. I had resumed running in June, five months after major knee surgery, with 5 minutes on a treadmill. I had run as much as 6.5 miles, with three runs a week. But now I was going to run three times in 18 hours. This first leg was my longest, with lots of hills. It was quite dark, and my knee was wobbly as I ran off.

Maybe not being able to see the hills, only the blinking lights of other runners, helped. My Garmin was indicating I was handling the hills okay.

I was not handling the humidity, though. Moisture kept condensing on my glasses in the final couple of miles so bad that I had to pull off my glasses to wipe them clean. Not the easiest task with a headlamp strapped on. It didn't take long for the process to repeat itself, and once again I couldn't see. Finally came the road to the Brass Heart Inn, and I felt panicky. This was a rutted dirt road, my glasses were covered with moisture, and the lights at the exchange area were full blast in my face as I came up the final rise. I was so fearful of stepping in a hole and wrenching my ankle or knee that I slowed almost to a walk. My teammates may have thought my knee had given out. Nope, only my bravery.

*Leg 11, 8:56 pm, 4.8 M, easy, 37:56, 7:54 pace Sharon.* This leg started at the Brass Heart Inn, one of the prettiest spots in New Hampshire, except it was pitch-dark and except they said this leg was easy and except they said I would have to "after a short climb turn right and head down the dirt road" (translation: I had to run up the dirt road first and then down the short climb). I'd like to meet the person who rated these course legs.

*Leg 12, 9:34 pm, 3.87 M, easy, 27:39, 7:09 pace Chris.* At this outpost on the dark side of the moon (a.k.a. the White Lake State Park transition area), the floodlights were up, and members of scores of lunar landing parties were milling about or walking to or fro, sweeping their flashlights and headlamps back and forth, or aiming them downward. These people were on a vital mission: to run and have fun through the night.

My assignment was to race out of the inky-black wilderness. Sharon came in and handed me the wrist-wrap "baton," we gave each other a hug, and off I ran to the sound of her calling out, "I love you!" That got me chuckling and put a spring in my step. Can I just tell you how good it was to have my good friend Sharon kicking me off on this and each of my other relay legs?

For some reason, my having read that Phil ran in "total darkness" during this leg last year did not prepare me for just how pitch-black it was

on the path out of the park. My headlamp was useless in the fog, and the only things I saw were those that fell within the small circle of light thrown by my flashlight. So, I had to keep running inside that circle. Then, just as I was nearing a rough area of pavement, my flashlight quit! Well, the strangest thing happened next. My body started tingling, and all of a sudden I was suffused with Sharon's lunar love and began glowing brightly from within. Miraculously, the glow illuminated the path at this critical moment and allowed me to escape a pothole with just a minor twist of my left foot. (Okay, that's all true, except the flashlight failing and the lunar love glow!)

After exiting the park, I had 3+ road miles to run. Should I conserve my energy for Legs 24 and 36? Nah, that would be then, this was now. Besides, I'd started out fast, so I'd just go with it, and did, passing five runners. Then I looked to hand off to Tom—er, no, in the dark I finally saw it was Glenn. (Tom had done Leg 13 last year.) Darn, I didn't tell Glenn I love him! Later, I learned I'd run these 3.87 miles at PR pace, a few seconds faster than my best 4-mile race pace.

*Leg 13, 10:01 pm, 3.91 M, easy, 26:50, 6:52 pace*  
**Glenn.** Spending our downtime on a dock on a lake was one of the coolest parts of the race. In our sleeping bags, we felt as though we were in the middle of the lake. We put on the tunes and watched the sky turn dark and the stars come out, billions of them—only to be interrupted by car alarms, the sounds of people swimming, and the cheers of the crowd. Then came a voice out of the darkness: "Glenn, we got the call. They'll be here in 20 minutes!" (That was Tom, of course.)

Chris came flying in, and I was off. This leg was a gradual uphill all the way. I got into a good groove right off the bat, and so did a runner from another team. We ran stride for stride until the last half-mile or so. The traffic was getting a bit tight, so I said, "I'll just jump in front of you." And that was the last I saw of him. I found the *Trim-boli kick* and beat him by almost 30 seconds!

*Leg 14, 10:28 pm, 7.79 M, mod-hard, 53:14, 6:50 pace*  
**Brian.** Last year, my second leg was by far my favorite, and this year was no different. I passed a few people right away. I was running too fast again but luckily caught someone who was doing a similar pace, and we stayed together the next couple of miles, passing a few people and chatting about the race. This was his fifth RTB and, he said, probably his last. I told him that I hadn't tired of RTB and that it is probably my favorite race. His team was leapfrogging him quite often, and they kept telling him to slow down. When we hit the final climb with a couple miles to go, I took off and started pushing again. I passed about 14 runners. There were a bunch of hills, but in the darkness you never knew how long they were, so they didn't seem to hit as hard.

*Leg 15, 11:21 pm, 8.24 M, hard, 53:56, 6:32 pace*  
**Tom.** We didn't know how well Brian was running, or when he'd arrive, because a narrow road had prevented us from crewing for him over the final 5 miles of his leg. Luckily, I was ready to go

when he came flying in, and off into the darkness I ran. It was a beautiful night. The temperature was crisp but perfect for running. With a steady stream of runners ahead of me, I kept focusing on reeling in the next in line. Running hills in the dark is interesting. I couldn't tell when they were coming or how high they went. Only the blinking lights gave me an idea of the elevation changes to come. Glenn told me that one of the people I'd passed had called me a freight train. I hope that didn't mean I was big and loud.

*Leg 16, 12:15 am, 6.6 M, hard, 53:20, 8:05 pace*  
**John.** This pitch-dark leg with two steep uphill was most challenging. The weather was perfect for a night run, and I was concentrating on and enjoying the peacefulness even while these demanding country roads were testing me. The only sounds were coming from crickets and runners' footsteps. But the childbirth-type breathing of a male runner coming up from behind abruptly interrupted that. Over the next 2 miles, the moaning got louder. I pushed to get away from it, to no avail. Labor Boy passed me in the last quarter-mile. Nearing the transition area, I contemplated rubbing his face in some New Hampshire mud, but I figured that might blow my nice-guy image. I wasn't upset that I'd been passed (well, maybe a little) but more that I'd had the tranquility of my night run taken away.

*Leg 17, 1:09 am, 7.39 M, mod-hard, 55:34, 7:31 pace*  
**Doug.** It was really early in the morning and very dark. This leg was somewhat challenging, but I was really happy with the lighting system John had suggested. My shadow spooked me several times during this run!

*Leg 18, 2:04 am, 4.89 M, easy-mod, 40:20, 8:15 pace*  
**Susan.** After our first set of legs, we slept, or we tried to sleep, by a lake. Tom and I had to go rescue Glenn, Brian, and Doug, who were sleeping on the dock but had neglected to take flashlights. We led them out of darkness, but I drew the line at lighting the portajohn for them.

This year, I was more prepared for the night. I had blinking lights galore, two headlamps (one for my wrist), and a flashlight. There would be no missing me—until one headlamp malfunctioned. On this year's night leg, I also saw many more people and ran through a town with streetlights. Still, I felt a bit disoriented in the darkness and was relieved when I saw the transition area.

It felt good seeing Ed ready to run and the rest of the team waiting to greet me. Everyone was quite pumped, even at 2:30 am!

*Leg 19, 2:44 am, 4.33 M, moderate, 31:26, 7:16 pace*  
**Ed.** After getting slightly lost, we arrived at New Hampshire Technical College and tried to catch some sleep. Phil and Bob took refuge inside the building, while Chris, Sharon, Ellen, and I sacked out in the van. The only problem with the van was that the transition area was brightly lit and noisy. Vans were pulling in and out the entire time, and driving over a nearby manhole cover. Combine that with the sound of Ellen's stomach grumbling from hunger, and ... no sleep for me.

Running on no sleep and in the dark made this the toughest of my three legs. It started out uphill. I felt okay but kept to a slower than usual pace, as I did not want to tire on the hills. I could not see ahead, so I could not tell how big each hill was, but I must have been going faster than I'd thought, because I started passing runners. One, two, three ... by the time I finished the leg, I'd pass 21 of them. I would've passed more or run a bit faster, but with a half-mile left I offered to run the rest of the way with someone whose headlamp was dimming. Sorry, Tom, but I added many other deposits to the bank!

*Leg 20, 3:16 am, 9.23 M, hard, 1:18:44, 8:32 pace*  
**Bob.** Ah, Leg 20. The big advantage of starting this at 3:16 am is that it was so dark I never got a full view of the unending hill I was climbing! The leg started with a gentle, teasing dip that was followed by 5 uphill miles, a 650-foot elevation change with cruel plateaus and dips followed by even steeper sections. The constant climbing was a real challenge, but it paid off at mile 6, as the remaining 3+ miles were pretty much downhill. I encountered few other runners on this leg, just the shirtless, 30-something speedsters who streaked by, and the runners I myself passed.

At some point, going uphill, I slipped into a dreamlike daze, chasing the light of my headlamp, not worrying about the grade of the road beyond its illumination. The peak of the hill magically appeared while my legs still had some strength. It was with great pleasure and some relief that I completed the final 3 miles at the fastest downhill pace I could manage.

Whereas my early-morning Montclair runs sometimes start at 5:30, this one ended almost an hour earlier!

*Leg 21, 4:35 am, 8.5 M, hard, 1:06:06, 7:47 pace*  
**Ellen.** Well, it turned out there was a difference between *moderate* (Leg 9) and *hard* (this leg). From mile 2 to mile 5.5 ... 430 feet of pure climb.

I am used to running early in the morning, but now, without sleep, I felt I was on a midnight run. It was still extremely dark, so I'd put a headlamp around my waist for extra lighting. However, I realized the encompassing darkness actually was my ally, as it hid the magnitude of this climb.

This was my most challenging but favorite leg. When I wasn't "chicking" men (16) or passing women (2), I was completely alone—well, except for the strange growling that came out of the forest and spurred me to run faster. In addition, this leg may have been designated a Quiet Zone, but I began taking full advantage of my many moments of solitude to inhale and exhale as loudly as possible. That felt fantastic!

When I was finally cresting the hill, my van mates were outside cheering me on, and I was shouting, "That was one mother of a hill!" Then, I entered the exchange area ... but could not find Phil. "Runner 133, hello? Phil?" And there he was, all smiles, ready for the handoff.

*Leg 22, 5:41 am, 3.55 M, easy, 27:54, 7:51 pace*  
**Phil.** I was scared. This was my shortest but toughest leg. Mile 1 included a 160-foot elevation

drop, and, of all the tests for my knee, running downhill has been the most difficult. Now I had to run a downhill almost equal to Bradford Avenue at home, but spread out over a longer distance. To compensate, I ran with short and choppy and, I was hoping, faster strides. I wasn't sure about the fast part, but I was keeping pain at bay.

And it was beautiful out. The moon was half-full and, when I dared look up from the road, marvelous in the clear night sky. Stars were everywhere. Rural New Hampshire doesn't have much ambient light, and the light of the night was an accelerant for me.

Another runner came up and began chatting. He loved downhills. I said they were my nemesis. Have a good race, I told him. No, he said, I'll run with you a while, it's good to run with someone. He could've raced on by, but for a quarter-mile he talked about the race and the night's beauty and the unique feeling of dashing through the darkness. He could've picked up that many more seconds for his team, but he kept me company. Then, when we approached a slower runner, he wished me well and cruised ahead, leaving me behind but also leaving me thinking how nice it had been to share the moment.

*Leg 23, 6:09 am, 6.24 M, easy, 50:56, 8:10 pace*  
**Sharon.** This was my favorite leg mostly because I ran it at the time I usually run: dawn. Running over hills into a sunrise of cotton-candy pink and blue clouds is a vision I won't soon forget. I was greeting runner after runner with a cheery *Good morning* and feeling the love, so, when I finally saw Chris waiting for me, I was able to muster an "I love you, Chrissy." (This fact is of course true, but it's also a little trick I use to keep him My Chrissy and not Ellen's Chrissy.)

*Leg 24, 7:00 am, 6.87 M, moderate, 52:31, 7:38 pace*  
**Chris.** Last year, Sharon's Chrissy got the "sunrise leg." This year, Sharon did. A benefit of her pulling in when she did and not sooner is that I did not have to wear my night gear—it was required only between 5:30 pm and 7:00 am. So, I could go with just the basics on this beautiful morning and wonderful route.

After slipping through a rotary, I had 5.7 miles of a quiet highway to run—a two-lane rolling road with wide shoulders and long curves and extended sight lines and no turns. I did not check my Garmin for time or distance. I just went! And very quickly I entered a state in which I was nothing more than my running. Thoughts came few and far between. I was so free and wild and running fast and wanting to chase someone!

The first runner I spotted was wearing a bright yellow shirt and matching knee-high socks. This homing beacon was about a hundred feet ahead. I was chasing down and passing other runners but could not close the gap on the color yellow. My van mates stopped maybe halfway through with some Gatorade. Finally, 5 miles into the leg, I drew near and passed the yellow. Yes.

Around the 5.4-mile mark, Phil told me I had only a third of a mile left on the road, then 1.2 miles in Bear Brook State Park. That was all I needed to know to finish strong. I passed two run-

ners on the three-quarter-mile uphill in the park, then sped up on the long-awaited downhill to the exchange, catching my final quarry (number 16) as we were nearing the end.

Here I was running as fast as I could, simply because it felt so good. The sensible thing to do would have been to slow down, particularly when taking the sharp left into the exchange, but safety never occurred to my endorphin-engorged brain. Good thing I was able to keep my balance at that turn, where I hit a bump and my leg buckled, or I might have wiped out, hurting myself and the team's prospects. I was glad to come out of my second "pavement malfunction" of the relay intact.

I ran Leg 24 at PR pace, a few seconds faster than my best pace in a race of a similar distance, the 2007 Newport "10,000" (6.56 miles).

*Leg 25, 7:52 am, 8.59 M, hard, 1:02:04, 7:13 pace*  
**Glenn.** Spending downtime in the van was one of the worst parts of the race. I tried to sleep, but, each time I shut my eyes, I heard a watch alarm beep. It was 5:15 am! I shall mention no names, Ellen. And the snoring. Again, no names, Doug. I even kept myself up cursing. So, no sleep. As I watched the sun rise, I asked myself how on Earth I'd be able to loosen my legs up enough to run. After walking around a lot, using a roller, and brushing my teeth, I felt the adrenaline return.

This, my last leg, would be my hardest. Tom kept saying, "Just get to the 5-mile point. The rest is downhill. You should pass 20 people this leg."

In came Chris, falling down his last hill like a man possessed! I think seeing him run like that pumped me up even more. Well, now I had my 5 uphill miles to do! I started a bit slower than usual and didn't use my watch. I made it my goal to pick off as many people as possible.

By the time I'd reached the mile 5 summit, I'd picked off 13 runners, and been passed by 2, for a net of 11. But now I was cruising downhill, on rocky roads. I passed 3 more, 2 more passed me, net 12. I then caught a runner who'd passed me earlier—there's no feeling better than that! It was off to the races now ... 13, 14, 17, 19, and finally 20 was in my sights, with 2 miles to go. And then 20, 21, 22. One hundred yards from the finish, I saw 23 and, barely breathing, caught him a few steps from the handoff.

But I looked around and didn't see anyone from the team. Number 133? Brian? I was being passed: 23, 22, 21, *nooo*. This transition area was a disaster. Brian had to be let out of the van early. When he ran up, I was in disbelief! Most teams had the same problem here, though. No worries, Brian could pass those runners back, and he did.

*Leg 26, 8:57 am, 5.12 M, moderate, 36:00, 7:02 pace*  
**Brian.** We had some issues here. We hit traffic about a third of a mile from the dropoff. I got out of the van so I could warm up, get to the transition, and use the bathroom. I was stuck on line! Eventually, I heard Doug and Susan yelling that Glenn had come in. Luckily, I'd just left the bathroom, and only a minute was lost. I felt terrible. The team was great, though—no one flipped out.

Right away, I passed three or four runners who had slipped past Glenn at the transition area,

and I left them behind for good. After half a mile, a guy flew past. If he had that much left, I knew I wasn't going to catch him. However, I decided to try to keep him in sight. As the hills came, I started passing a lot of people and noticed that the fast guy had not pulled farther away. Rather, every time we hit an incline, I gained ground.

I knew the last hill was going to be tough. There was a pretty long downhill and a flat area before my final push. I eventually passed the fast guy on a long straightaway before the hill. I then made it a point to pick up the pace in an attempt to leave him behind for good. When I hit the hill, though, my quads were pretty burnt, so I tried to focus on the less than a mile remaining.

Coming up the hill, I saw another runner walking, then running on the flats. I was spent and had made up my mind not to kick or try to pass him, as he was several yards ahead. That lasted just a few seconds. Once you heard the roar of the transition crowds, you had to take off. So I did, passing that last runner in the final yards.

I was done, happy, tired. I'd lost count after passing 20 runners, including the guy who'd passed me. I estimated 24 total. My time was slower on this leg, but I was okay with that.

*Leg 27, 9:33 am, 8.54 M, hard, 56:25, 6:36 pace*  
**Tom.** After getting an hour of sleep while reclining in our van's front passenger seat, I was off. We were all a bit nervous about how our legs would hold up, but the adrenaline was pumping again. I was unsure how to run here, as I thought I should save something for the big hill at the end, but the first couple of miles had some good downhills I wanted to take advantage of. Well, once I got going, I started feeling good and threw caution to the wind. This was my favorite leg: beautiful country roads, rolling hills, sun, shade, lots of other runners to aim for. My legs were tired, but I felt strong enough to keep pushing. I reeled in 35 runners and got passed by 1. Going up that last hill, I began reciting my mantra: *Don't give it all back*. Then, once I crested the hill and saw the transition, I hit my top speed of the day.

*Leg 28, 10:29 am, 5.5 M, moderate, 43:19, 7:52 pace*  
**John.** This leg with its rolling hills loomed over my tired body like the final 6 miles of a marathon. I knew those hills were coming but wasn't sure how my body would react. I focused on keeping a steady pace and tried not to lose sight of the natural beauty surrounding me. As I approached my final transition area, I began appreciating that I'd be able to stop running finally, and I came to that wonderful realization of the many gifts the simple act of running has given me.

*Leg 29, 11:12 am, 4.08 M, moderate, 30:05, 7:22 pace*  
**Doug.** Acorns? A bunch of acorns on the road made things a bit interesting. It was really nice out, but I could not get my legs to work. Why couldn't I run faster?

*Leg 30, 11:42 am, 3.15 M, easy, 24:11, 7:40 pace*  
**Susan.** Throughout this relay, I was having a fabulous time searching with Glenn for the letters that spell out *New Balance* (for a contest), navi-

gating with Tom, debating John about the next phases of our lives, teasing Doug, and yelling at Brian (how long was that bathroom stop again?) while marveling at his dogged determination on the hills. During my last leg, I felt so girly (in a good way!) when 100 yards down Brian handed me water with a bow, a smile, and the comment, "Your water, m'lady." My legs were really feeling it, but the knowledge that this leg was so short allowed me to keep up my determination.

*Leg 31, 12:07 pm, 2.43 M, easy, 16:57, 6:47 pace*  
**Ed.** The final vehicle transition area was at a high school. Runners could get showers for \$5 apiece there. I couldn't pass one up.

My van mates decided to rest, and someone got the bright idea that the best way to rest and relax and restore energy was to take a sleeping bag into the middle of a field and catch a few zees under the sun. We looked like baked sardines out there. Eventually, Chris found some shade, Bob started pouring water over his head, and I began thinking there had to be a better way.

Our final legs were relatively short. Getting Bob to the next transition required leaving me behind here. I waited on my own for about 40 minutes. Soon Susan came sprinting in, and then off I went with the baton. I was feeling just a bit stiff. I didn't see many people ahead of me, as we'd thinned them out with our impeccable passing capabilities. I quickened my pace, spotted a runner, and kept him in my sights. After catching and passing him, I sprinted on fumes to Bob.

My average pace on this leg was 6:47. How did that happen after I'd already run two legs and hadn't slept over the past 48 hours? Clearly, this was a memorable run for me. Oh, yeah, more deposits to the bank, too!

*Leg 32, 12:24 pm, 6.69 M, moderate, 54:49, 8:11 pace*  
**Bob.** This was another great leg. My starting time meant almost ideal running conditions: sunny, gentle breeze, not too warm. The course had a 100-foot climb from mile 2.5 to mile 3, then a good three-quarter-mile downhill stretch, and finally about 3 miles of rolling hills. Our van was able to squeeze in two support stops for me over the first half of this leg, and they proved to be a tremendous help. As my first two relay legs had taken a bit of a toll, I could not generate the kind of downhill pace I would have liked here.

With the day heating up and with my van mates already having made their way to the next transition area, I had to flag down another team's support van for a much needed bottle of water. Then, nearing the end of this leg, I used some of my remaining energy to push past a couple of runners before handing the baton off to Ellen.

My pace meant a small withdrawal from the bank, but not much of one—thanks to our team members and the many deposits already made.

*Leg 33, 1:18 pm, 4.15 M, easy, 31:44, 7:38 pace*  
**Ellen.** And it turned out there was no difference between *easy* and *hard*.

The sun was shining brightly, and the air was very comfortable. In short, the weather was ideal for running. However, my concerns about night

versus day running came back to haunt me, in a way I hadn't expected.

Glenn and Brian had joined Van 2 as part of the shuffling we had to do to get to the beach in time to join Chris for his run across the finish line. Glenn got me all fired up, and I shot out my first 2 miles in 13:53. I was feeling so happy and so confident and so good and was enjoying running in the light of day when I spotted a small group of old ladies holding up posters and cheering for RTB runners! I raised my hand to wave and began to thank them for their support when ...

In broad daylight my right foot magically found the one pothole in the road! I immediately went down, with my right hip contorting on top of the right ankle. The pain was searing.

The ladies screamed, "Call an ambulance!" And the once friendly Ellen turned into Ms. Hyde: "Please don't touch me or call the EMTs. You will get my team disqualified!"

I tried to get up, but the ankle pain caused me to keel over. I wrapped my ankle with both hands and pleaded with it, *Just work with me for two more miles. Please!*

The boys and I had agreed they would not crew for me on this leg, as it was too short. So, they were not immediately around to help.

Other runners and members of other vans were unbelievably supportive. They offered to carry me, give me water, drive me to my van. I kept saying I was fine. Then, once the stars began to disappear, I started to simulate running by doing a two-step hop, with the music of my cries as accompaniment. I was crying because I was so angry for letting my guard down, letting my team down. I'd even scarred those sweet old ladies. One screamed, "She's running and crying at the same time. Who does *that*?"

I finally started to get my rhythm back when I saw the boys driving past. I heard their cheers and then, "Something's wrong. Pull over." Glenn came out to see what had happened. Between gasps of tears, I told him I'd sprained my ankle but was going to keep running.

But if it hadn't been for Glenn, Ed, Brian, and Bob passing by in the van, I would not have finished this leg. Glenn offered to have the van retrieve Phil so Phil could complete my leg (he'd then have to run his leg as well), but I pleaded to be allowed to finish. To show Glenn I meant it, I passed three runners and squeaked out, "See, I'm good." I kept running. Glenn came out every so often to run a few steps with me. He comforted me and encouraged me all the way to the next transition area. At one point, he said, "Ellen, I know you want to push faster, but don't. Just get through your leg. It's all good."

I did finish, too. Glenn, now my forever big brother, is just one example of how amazing all our RTB teammates were. There is something about running for a team, for something bigger, that pushes you to places you are unwilling to go just for your own sake.

*Leg 34, 1:50 pm, 4.01 M, easy, 33:30, 8:21 pace*  
**Phil.** I was excited. My legs were a little stiff, but some soreness in my knee had dissipated through a mostly sleepless night. My teammates told me

Ellen would arrive between 1:55 and 2:01 pm. Okay, I'd be ready for 1:55. After stretches and some uncomfortable warmup jogging, I was walking around when a cry went up: "Runner!" It was Ellen, and it was only 1:50. Yikes! She was sprinting, two of our teammates were yelling at her not to, and I couldn't figure out why—she looked really strong. How was I to know she'd sprained an ankle a mile and a half back? Then, just as she was handing off, her face scrunched up in pain, she made a sound you can't reproduce, and the baton was in my hand.

I figured, given the fatigue and stiffness, I was running maybe a little under 9-minute pace. Eventually I came to an intersection at a four-lane highway, where a state trooper stopped me for a red light. Fifty seconds ticked away as I waited for the green. I asked the trooper if he knew how far it was to the end of this leg. He said a half-mile. I looked at the elapsed time on my watch and thought, if he's right, I'm running a lot faster than 9-minute pace. Then I thought, a half-mile to a trooper might not be the same as a half-mile to a runner. Here's the green, now go! However far it would be, I was going to push.

Before long, I saw the exchange area with people milling around, making noise. I saw Sharon in a roped-off chute, and I was flush with adrenaline. I was so excited that, maybe 150 yards out, I raised my arms in a Nixon victory salute. Sprint. Handoff. Done. Glorious.

*Leg 35, 2:24 pm, 3.41 M, easy, 27:54, 8:11 pace*  
**Sharon.** I was extremely excited to see Phil running toward me while I was waiting in the chute and Van 1 members in Van 2 were cheering me (I know, confusing). This is also where I learned Glenn's nickname, Maryann (I know, confusing).

*Leg 36, 2:52 pm, 4.09 M, 31:40, easy, 7:45 pace*  
**Chris.** I was a little sick to my stomach. I was on my own at the exchange area, waiting for Sharon and feeling as though our team's entire relay now rested on my spent legs. No pressure whatsoever! But then a few teammates showed up, and instantly I was put at ease. After Sharon gave me the wrist-wrap and another energizing hug, I was off, thinking I'd try to catch the few runners who'd headed out during my wait and wondering if I'd follow Brian's wise advice to not go out too fast on the slightly uphill first mile.

Rounding the first turn, I tripped! My third RTB pavement malfunction! I caught myself, and kept running. Mile 1 went by in 7:06. Not surprisingly, over the next 3 miles, I moved my legs only by force of will: 7:45, 8:03, 8:02. Finally, I plunged into the sand for my scamper to the finish line. *But where was it? And where were my teammates? I had to pass one last runner! And I did. Teammates were calling for me to slow down. Members of the crowd were telling me to go this way, no, not that way—this way! Lots of laughter all around. Wait for us, Chris! I have to stay ahead of the runner I passed!* Oh, boy, talk about running around like a chicken without its head!

Even though I still don't know where the finish line was, it appears that our team did indeed Reach the Beach!

## AFTER THE FACT

**Ed.** I am grateful to Tom and the rest of the team (Aunt Gladly, too), and I am glad I embarked on this journey. It's one I will remember. Although I didn't have the chance to share joys and laughs with Van 1 members, my Van 2 teammates made for an enjoyable time. Oh, and one last note, do not cross Ellen's path in a supermarket. She has a knack for trying to backhand other customers and trip big, burly Harley-Davidson dudes!

**Glenn.** A few highlights ...

— While crewing for Tom, he flew past, dusting two other runners. As those runners were passing me, I heard one say to the other, "That was a damn freight train that just went by!" And thus a new nickname was born.

— Passing the moose that came out for John's Leg 4 ... seeing a group of people naïvely photographing the animal from much too close a distance ... and later asking John, "How about that moose?" (John replied, "What moose?" Obviously, he was focused on the task at hand.)

— Ellen's legendary 2-mile hop/skip/jump/hobble to the end of her final relay leg. I hadn't known Ellen too well before RTB, but now I have a pretty good picture of who she is, and of how the runners she passed while in her agonized state are probably now scarred for life.

RTB was quite an experience, and I am glad I was part of this great team.

**Ellen.** I never imagined that in my adult life I would be part of the camaraderie and group character-building of something like the Reach the Beach Relay. I thought these would be sweet memories of my college and high school sports days.

**Sharon.** So tricky it was to spend time with this crew of folks and not come away feeling the love for them. Hopefully, my husband, Tom, won't kill me. I am in gratitude to all my teammates for what they brought to this race and for sharing in this incredible accomplishment.

**Bob.** One highlight of Reach the Beach was how 11 of us gathered on the sand at Hampton State Beach to eagerly wait for Chris to arrive and finish his and our final leg of this most remarkable journey. When he hit the sand with 100 yards to go, our ragtag group fell in behind and around him to cross the finish line together.

Over those final few yards, we may not have looked like the crackerjack group of runners who we had proved ourselves to be over 209 miles and 26 hours, but it was clear that we were a team that had given its all and that had been rewarded with an experience that would tie us together for years to come.

And after we all crossed that finish line, I recalled my early reaction to the stories of the bands of Nutty Miner Mountain Goats who had participated in 24-plus-hour runs on deserted mountain roads: "Those guys are nuts." Having now completed my first such adventure, I can attest that, indeed, those guys *are* nuts! And I'm proud to be one of them!

**Doug.** Overall, Reach the Beach was an amazing experience. It's amazing what we all accomplished on only three hours of sleep. At times, this race seemed like a dream. We had a great team, and we all worked together. I give Tom a lot of credit for this year's results. There was very little stress during our journey!

**Brian.** I am happy with my times. I ran about 12 seconds per mile faster this year than last and covered more miles. Our team was sensational. There is something about this race that raises everyone's running level. We hadn't thought we could finish anywhere near the time we ran last year, but our team's average pace was only 2 seconds off. Amazing! We shared a lot of laughs in Van 1, and I was happy to hang out with and assist Van 2's members on their final four legs.

Tom struggled to get enough people to form a team this year, but his efforts really paid off. I hope he will be up for captaining a team in 2011, and I hope I'll be asked to be a part of it, *ERC – Beach or Bust*, a.k.a. *Aunt Gladly's Gang*.

**Susan.** This one-time veteran thinks we worked a lot smoother this year, because we knew what to expect. My Van 1 teammates were awesome (despite the snoring), and Van 2 showed such great enthusiasm at every transition point that I always welcomed seeing them. Starting and finishing a few hours earlier helped, too. We were much less tired on that fast drive home this year!

**Phil.** On the drive to Cannon Mountain, Van 2 became pretty quiet when the cold rain started and we missed a turn for the staging area. You sensed an uneasiness that a long string of miserable weather and mishaps had begun. Two hours later, with the rain gone and Glenn off and running, the apprehension was gone, too. Excitement had settled in to stay.

Twenty-six hours later, we were walking into the ocean at Hampton Beach again, marveling at how far we'd come. And not just the 209 miles.

**Tom.** RTB 2010 was a special, incredible adventure that will stand side by side with RTB 2009. Although it was more difficult to field a team this year, that difficulty may have been destiny bringing *this group* together. Strangers and acquaintances two months earlier are now trusted friends who will weather an adventure with a smile and a sense of fun. Now for some final thoughts.

*Glenn.* Van 1's weatherman and deejay, and a trusted friend who was always taking care of anyone who needed a helping hand. Plus, he had the craziest shirt I have ever seen.

*Brian.* Solid in every sense. I'd known I could count on Brian to run well, to help out wherever and whenever needed, and to keep me laughing. Just never ask him if you are at the top of a hill.

*John.* An incredibly generous soul. Quiet but quick with an understated comment sure to make you smile. Also, he's our very own David Hasselhoff! John also most closely predicted our finishing time (he was off by only 9 seconds).

*Susan.* The glue that held Van 1 together. Organized, calm, and helpful, and she provided

our van with a welcome dose of estrogen. I've already signed her up for our 2011 team. Only three pounds of pasta next year!

*Doug.* One hundred percent chance of fun! Always smiling, ready for whatever came his way. I'm glad John convinced him to join us again.

*Ed.* Sleepless and super-busy. He used Facebook to keep all of New Jersey updated on our progress. Plus, he dusted the Cradle Robbers!

*Bob.* Unflappable. Although saddled with the most miles and arguably the hardest leg of the relay, he never complained, and he kept smiling. Plus, he didn't punch me for giving him Leg 20.

*Ellen.* Fierce! I knew of Ellen's propensity to fall from her morning running partners, so I was concerned about giving her two legs in the dark. She told me all would be well, and it was. So why did she have to fall when the sun was out?

*Phil.* A medical marvel. They will be writing papers about him and his knee for years. My co-captain and rock in Van 2. I am so glad he was able to join us again this year!

*Sharon.* Our den mother, maybe a little shell-shocked by the entire event, but always quick with a smile, a hug, a laugh. I know her family missed her, and she missed them, but I'm sure glad she was able to join us.

*Chris.* I think Chris surprised even himself with how well he ran. He also almost gave me a heart attack with his near fall finishing up Leg 24, but I should have known that his reflexes, honed from miles and miles of trail running, would keep him on his feet.

## FACTS & FIGURES

Time: 26:04:09.

Average pace: 7:28 per mile.

Overall place: 39/429 (top 9%).

Men's masters division place: 11/38.

Place among teams starting at 1:20 pm: 4/24.

ERC runners' mile totals and average paces:

Van 1	Miles	Pace	Van 2	Miles	Pace
Glenn	20.47	7:04	Ed	13.99	7:07
Brian	21.87	6:46	Bob	22.53	8:08
Tom	20.66	6:36	Ellen	19.02	7:42
John	14.95	7:43	Phil	12.67	8:22
Doug	16.97	7:17	Sharon	14.45	8:02
Susan	16.66	7:52	Chris	14.83	7:32

## TEAM SONG

*Racing in the Street*  
Bruce Springsteen

*Some guys they just give up living  
And start dying little by little, piece by piece  
Some guys come home from work and wash up  
And go racin' in the street*

*Tonight tonight the highway's bright  
Out of our way mister you best keep  
'Cause summer's here and the time is right  
For goin' racin' in the street*

My teammates, thanks for making racing through the streets of New Hampshire so much fun.

—John