

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - Louise Holz

Once upon a time there was a girl who liked a certain element of surprise ('I didn't know you could run'), who quietly pushed her own boundaries (what is this mind and body capable of?) and who, on Saturday 14 May 2016, ran her longest trail race (by 25 kilometres), the Ultra-Trail Australia 50.

That girl is me...that girl is a 47 year old mum of 2 girls who wasn't athletic at all as a young child, who has discovered her 'tribe' and wants her legacy to be to 'Have Courage and Be Brave - Find your Strength'.

My training, well you could say it was 'organic' and I made peace with that. As a working mum with a full family life training just had to 'fit in'. By fitting in I mean...20 squats each time you go to the bathroom, calf raises brushing teeth, cooking the dinner standing on one leg, running up and down the driveway (100m long and pretty steep) and lunges from one end of the house to the other putting away the washing. I did 'try' to do stair training once a week (with kids in tow), yoga once a week, one long (ish) run a week with my training pals (Summit Sisters), usually 'on course' including a night run as well as attending the Summit Sisters UTA stair and hill training days (highly recommended).

I spent the day before the race checking into accommodation at CMS (just across from the start line - best decision we made) with 3 lovely friends also all competing in the their first UTA 50. We settled in and then cheered on those in the 22 km race. The UTA expo was buzzing and so was my credit card - weird hey? Friday afternoon saw us sitting on the lawn overlooking 'The Three Sisters' getting our packs ready for the race. This I found grounding, therapeutic and very settling. Dinner, race briefing and then into bed by 9pm to get as much sleep as we could before race day.

On race day, up at 5am for physical and mental preparation. We wandered leisurely across to the start at about 7.30am and found many friends. We hugged, kissed and cried from the sheer emotion of the moment before entering the start area. Wave 5 - the party wave! This was more emotional than I anticipated and I was happy to begin and get going at 7.50am.

My mantra for the race was to 'Run happy' and this I achieved. I knew the course and my strong sections. I knew that my ITB would politely but annoying raise its ugly head on Kedumba so I was conservative on that amazing descent and it served me well!

Highlight 1, putting all I had learned during training into practice....the comment behind me going down giant staircase 'Gee I love your going down stairs sideways technique' - thanks Jo, channeling Gretel's 'get down low and go go go' power hiking technique, getting my nutrition right (practice makes perfect - I used Tailwind, Hammer gels, Hammer Fizz and salt tablets over the course of the day and I took chips, lollies and mandarins at the aid stations), listening to my body - reading signs of brain fatigue, sensibly hydrating and 'feeling' my way - it all just seemed to fall into place and for this I am truly grateful.

Highlight 2, the people on course - trail runners are such a great bunch! Seeing so many familiar faces and people genuinely happy for you and wishing you well. Cheer squads rock! Names on race bibs is a stellar idea, people calling out for you specifically is so motivational!

However the moment I think back to time and time again is crossing the finish line with my girls and seeing my family and friends lining the finishing chute cheering me home.

That girl is me... an athlete... brave, courageous and strong!