

Islander runs her 11th Boston Marathon

As Marylee Schroeder prepares for this year's race, memories from last year are never far behind.

By **Barry Stringfellow** - April 16, 2014



Marylee Schroeder (left) and Anita Smith of Vineyard Haven run on Middle Road in Chilmark as daylight breaks. — Photo by Ralph Stewart

On a recent frigid morning, Marylee Schroeder and her training partner Anita Smith ran along Meetinghouse Road in Chilmark, guided by headlamps that bobbed like fireflies in the predawn darkness of Martha's Vineyard.

They turned on to Middle Road, conversing in a relaxed banter, even though they were starting mile five of a hilly six-mile workout, an “easy day,” according to Ms. Schroeder. The rising sun gave the low-lying mist an ethereal glow as the two runners headed for West Tisbury, so caught up in their conversation and in the road ahead, neither one noticed a large doe, just a few feet away, frozen with surprise.

“I love running on Middle Road,” Ms. Schroeder said in a later conversation with *The Times*. “When the sun comes up over the hills, and the sheep and bulls are grazing, it’s so serene,” she said. “It’s moments like that when you think ‘this is why I do this.’”

This past winter, Ms. Schroeder logged many miles on Island roads, often in weather conditions that would send the heartiest soul back to bed.

“The snow just hung around forever, which rarely happens here,” she said. “But the worst was the ice. I went down hard twice. A friend of mine slipped and broke her shoulder.”

Ms. Schroeder had to brave other hazards — close brushes with cars on narrow winding up-Island roads, almost getting run over by a deer, crossing paths with skunks, and lately, a new foe — turkeys. “They’re in mating season and the males are very aggressive,” she said. “They hiss at you and run after you sometimes,” she said, laughing. “But so far I’ve outrun them.”

Ms. Schroeder isn't sure how many miles she's logged since last year's Boston Marathon, but she knows she's run 482 miles since Christmas, according to her new Garmin runner's watch, a gift from her husband, Joe Schroeder who coaches the cross-country and track teams at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS).

Ultimately Ms. Schroeder thinks this year's tempestuous winter was a gift, because she rested her body more. "I've only averaged about 30 miles per week this year," she said. "That really isn't enough, but I feel better this year than I did last year."

Last year

Ms. Schroeder finished last year's Boston marathon in 3:38:03, beating her goal of 3:45:00 and thus automatically qualifying for the 2014 Boston Marathon.

The bombs went off 50 minutes after she crossed the finish line, when she was sitting in the crowded Rattlesnake Bar on Boylston Street waiting for friends and family to join her for traditional post-race beers. She didn't hear the explosions over the Patriot's Day revelry.

"I started getting texts from people on the Island asking me if I was okay. I didn't know what they were talking about," she said. "Even when the bar TVs showed coverage, it just showed a lot of smoke. After Joe came and said there had been explosions, we still didn't know they had been bombs. As we walked back to the hotel I got a text from my father and it said, 'there's blood everywhere.'"

Later that day, Ms. Schroeder spoke with The Times from her locked-down hotel room while Joe fielded calls from loved ones. They didn't know when they would be able to leave the city — or their hotel, for that matter. No one knew who was behind the attack and who was in danger. But during the phone call, Ms. Schroeder spoke with remarkable calm as uncertainty and turmoil swirled around her. "It was a good race. The weather was perfect," she said. "I actually ran past my family at Hereford [Street] until Whitney called 'Hey Mom!' So I ran back and gave Whitney, Joe, and Mikey a hug."

Ms. Schroeder told The Times she'd already made up her mind that she would run the race again, adamant that whoever was behind the carnage, they were not going to deter her from her 11th Boston Marathon.

One year later, as she recalled the events of that day, the stolid Ms. Schroeder was clearly shaken by what happened, and by what could have been.

"My daughter Alexia was at Villanova and she saw it on TV. She couldn't get a call through. She sent me a text, 'Mom, are you there?' Ms. Schroeder recalled, her voice trailing off. "The Sunday after, I was reading the Sunday [Boston] Globe, and it had all this coverage, it all hit me," she said, wiping her eye.

Traditions past

This year, many of her 11-year traditions are going by the wayside. Ms. Schroeder preferred to sleep in her own bed the night before the marathon. Now, because of added security, the bus she always takes with the Cape Cod Athletic Club has to be in Boston between 6:30 and 7:15 am, so she'll spend the night in a Falmouth hotel room.

She also won't be wearing her retro MVRHS track uniform which she donned every year, because the elastic has finally given out.

She will wear a "Find Your Strength" bracelet and will go to Boston on Saturday to pick up her entrant number. "The jury is still out on the 'Life is Good' cap," she said, referring to an old baseball cap with bite marks from her dog that she has worn every year. "I might go with a Davidson hat this year," she said, referring to where her son Michael, a standout runner at MVRHS, goes to college.

Four of the Schroeder family will maintain the tradition of staying in Boston for a few days, although not in the Back Bay Hilton, which reneged on their promise to credit Ms. Schroeder for the night they evacuated.

Ms. Schroeder's favorite marathon tradition takes place when she's almost to the finish line. "I always pull away from the crowd when I reach Comm. Ave and Hereford. That's where my family always stands," she said. "Last year Joe's friend who's a state trooper and assistant track coach at Bishop Feehan said he could get us a spot at the finish line. But I knew if they were at the finish line, I wouldn't be able to see them, so I selfishly said I wanted them at our spot on Hereford. Thank goodness I was selfish," she said, her voice quavering. "I would have gone back and watched the race with them."

This year, Ms. Schroeder's number is 19,550, the highest number she's ever had. Although the school administrator looks younger than the 50 years she will turn on May 10, this means she'll be in a different qualifying group for next year's race, and will have a luxurious four hours to qualify for the race in 2015, where, like this year, her family will be waiting for her at the intersection of Hereford and Comm. Ave.

Follow Ms. Schroeder's progress in the Marathon with live updates at the Boston Athletic Association link and enter bib number 19550.
