

A letter from Rich Busa.

Season's greetings fellow trail runners:

Having been the invisible man on the running circuit this past year I feel obligated to provide an explanation. It's a lengthy explanation but I'll do my best to stick to the details.

My problems began in the spring of 2012. On training runs I found that after about 4 miles I would incur discomfort in my left side causing me to have to walk. This continued for about a month; I decided to go to the VA clinic in Worcester. I told the doctor that I thought I might have a hernia. She didn't do what I thought was a standard procedure, which was to thrust the fingers upward into the groin and cough, instead, she sent me to x-ray. After reading the results she told me that I had arthritis in my lower spine. This was nothing new to me as in 1956, while hitting golf balls at a driving range I awoke next morning and could not stand up. Somehow I was able to stand up. After some effort, I was able to get dressed and got myself, via a cab, to the original Lahey Clinic which was in Cambridge. After an exam and x-rays I was told that I had a worn disc. I received some therapy and a set of exercises. Somehow I managed to run although periodically I'd have an episode where I was incapacitated.

The problem continued into 2013 where I ran 9 snowshoe races, the last one The US Nationals at Bend, OR. I was only able to complete two trail races, The Mother's Day Six Hour in Topsfield where I struggled to complete 22 miles and the Stonecat Marathon where, with the assistance of my super friend, Karen McWhirt, who paced me the whole way allowing me to complete the marathon in 8:31:00. Definitely not a PR!

During the early part of 2013 I had gone to my primary doctor at the Bedford VA concerned that I might have a hernia. It was the same problem, after a few miles the discomfort would kick in. I also had problems when cutting my lawn; same thing, after getting about half way I had to take a break. After a half hour I was OK and finished up.

My doctor gave me the standard, turn your head and cough routine and wasn't convinced that it was a hernia based on my recovering once I stopped what I was doing. To be sure, she sent me to see a urologist. He came up with the same diagnosis and recommended an MRI.

The doctor at the VA in Jamaica Plain that interpreted the MRI told me that I didn't have a hernia; he concluded that a nerve from my arthritic lower spine traveled around and down into my left groin. This all took place toward the latter part of the year.

Entering 2014, I completed six snowshoe races, the last being the US Nationals in Woodford, VT. This was going to be special because it was to be the first time in ten years that my family would be there to see me compete. The morning of the race arrives and I began to put on my gear. Suddenly, I was aware that I had forgotten to pack my shoes. I had my snowshoes but no shoes that are needed to fit into the harness. I should know better as I've done this a number of times. Once at a trail race I forgot my shoes and had to run with a dilapidated pair of gardening shoes. Then at a snowshoe race I forgot my tights and had to run in my jeans. And believe it or not, I once forgot my snowshoes!

In this latest incident, my friends took me downtown where we found an Olympia sports store that was open and I got a pair of Saucony shoes. The race site was in great shape, lots of snow and very little wind. The race was 5K to the top of the mountain and 5K down although there were several uphill coming down. Going up wasn't too bad but coming down was where I was feeling the discomfort: I just couldn't run my normal stride. I finally finished and collected my age group gold medal and was off to the hotel. After showering we all went to dinner; upon arriving back at the hotel my three grand daughters went to their separate room where I'm sure they giggled the night away. I sacked out early. Sometime during the night I awoke and put my hand down by my left groin and felt what seemed like a broom handle running from my groin diagonally up toward my hip. I got up, went into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. There I saw this protrusion. I pushed it back in and went back to bed. The following Monday, I saw my primary doctor and described what had happened. She made an appointment for me at the VA in West Roxbury. Again, the doctor that examined me was a female who really new her stuff when it came to hernias. I told her it was my left side but she checked my right side first and lo and behold I was told that I have a small hernia on that side also but that it was nothing to be concerned about at the present. Then she checked my left side and uttered, "You have a hernia!" I wanted to say, (for the ladies reading this, please forgive me,) No Shit! I went through four doctors before the fifth one told me what I already knew. Until I had the surgery I did nothing. After the surgery I waited a few weeks before doing a trial workout. I found that I couldn't do any sustained running because I was still experiencing discomfort. A couple of months later I awoke one morning and was

supposed to go to an appointment at the JP VA hospital. But I suddenly had the runs and my feet were cold. My wife had me call and cancel the appointment. I then sat in my recliner to watch the news. Suddenly I started to shiver. My wife got me a blanket. Then, I began shivering uncontrollably. My wife couldn't take my temp because my teeth were chattering and she was afraid I'd break the thermometer. I ended up at the local hospital where I was admitted to the emergency room where I resided for nine hours. It turned out that I had a bladder infection.

Now it's the end of August I'm back to square 1. The beginning of September I had to go to the Tufts Eye Center for a laser procedure on my left eye. In layman's terms, it was described as a scrapping. A day latter I saw my primary and she suggested that because of my age and never having had a colonoscopy that I really should have one which I did a week later. After that I was scheduled for a blood workup and a catscan. The blood work was OK but the catscan detected some cysts in my kidney. The radiologist requested that I have another catscan, this time with the dye injection to ensure that the cysts are benign. I'm closing out the year with a bang as I'm having that procedure on the morning of Christmas Eve!

Heading into December it dawned on me that I haven't completed a marathon this year which will break my streak of having completed at least one marathon or longer for 27 years. As a result I've been desperately trying to find a race, preferably a 12 or 24 hour track race where I can plod through a marathon. The only race I found was in NYC on the 21st. but when I checked the application it was noted that the registration was closed.

I decided to look outside of N.E. I found a race in Indiana and though that that wasn't to long a distance so I checked it out. The Race is called the Huff, a 50K. After viewing a race video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60jOGxBoD-A>

I knew that my streak was over and suddenly I was resigned to that. All of the tension and worrying about my streak this whole month suddenly wasn't a concern anymore. I'm headed to Maryland the day after Christmas to spend a week with my daughter and the family. So my goal for next year is to start a new streak! I have another streak which will be very improbable to continue but I've got high hopes. I have completed a 100 miler in the 20th and the 21st century. Only 85 more years to go to make it a three peat.

If next year turns out to be another 2014 you won't be hearing from me because I'll be waking the plank!
Should you pass me on the trails, be kind and say something encouraging.

Most humbly submitted,
Rich (the Silverback) Busa



Richard Busa

photo by Scott Livingston