

What is a 5k?

by Sarah Veach 6/13/10



What does “5k” mean? Well, of course, it means \$5,000. Right? Until less than 2 months ago, that’s what 5k meant to me. On January 17, 2010, I weighed 408.5 pounds. The highest weight I’ve carried is 500 pounds. It took surgery (gastric bypass) to get to 408.5. Surgery was 13 years prior. So 13 years went by without success. One thing I’ve learned (Okay. One of many things I’ve learned) is the person has to be ready him or herself. No amount of motivation or encouragement from others matters until the person in the hot seat pulls that gumption from within. I grew up in a “can do” family. Nothing was out of reach. That didn’t do it. Even my mother’s deathbed wish that I lose the weight didn’t do it. Though her ashes hung around my neck today, as always, my only regret is that she wasn’t here on Earth to see. Point is, the drive has to come from within.

Back to January 17. Everybody knows the #1 thing in my life is Pet Harbor Rescue and all the fur babies it shrouds. Not any longer. I am #1 in my life and have been since January 17. I have not strayed from my mission one iota.

For 24 years, I’ve been employed in the same boring job, court reporting transcription, from my computer in my house surrounded by four walls. Nice dress code and commuting expense, but I can do without the boredom and loneliness and need medical insurance and to have taxes taken out of my checks. So January 22, I had a job interview as a dispatcher with the Virginia State Police. Though I didn’t get the job, it really doesn’t matter. That interview changed my entire life. And that matters! I fell madly in love with the job. So I embarked on a mission to drop the weight so I can comfortably go out into the “real world.”

Though three years prior I joined a gym, I’d gone only a handful of times (almost exclusively in the water) until January 17. Then it was full speed ahead. It’s kind of interesting. I grew up in a family of athletes. Yet, I know zilch about fitness. It’s not because they didn’t try. My father got us tennis lessons and golf lessons and we did all sports, but nothing sunk in with me. I blocked it. I’m 51 years old now. It just now is hitting me. Let me tell you it is NEVER too late for anything. My mother got her Ph.D. & 2nd Master’s degrees in her 50s. So 51 is not too late for my light bulbs to start popping.

My gym, American Family Fitness, in Fredericksburg is VERY motivating. I absolutely positively LOVE my gym. Most of the employees and clients are fantastic and have genuine interest in how folks are doing. Many people my size won’t go to gyms. I hope I change some of those mindsets. Sure, there is equipment in the gym I can’t yet use, but it makes ZERO difference. There are things I can do now I couldn’t do before. Progress is progress, no matter how small or how great. For example, I have very arthritic knees and cannot climb up on curbs or steps. Cardio (By the way, I had NO CLUE what “cardio” meant before this.) was one minute on the bike before my knees gave out; later two minutes on the arc glider, then the knees shut down. The treadmill was something I feared. I couldn’t get up on it alone. Even with help, I froze because of my tremendous fear of falling. Bad knees + 400 pounds = a recipe in disaster when it comes to getting up off the floor. One night less than 2 months ago, I was at the gym about 1:00 A.M. No one was in my section (AmFamU). I did my strength circuit and spent that time psyching myself up for the treadmill. I got on it about 3:00 AM and did 12 minutes! There’s been no stopping me since.

Patrick, one of the employees at AFF, a year older than my daughter, spent time helping me. Most kids his age, especially fit ones like Patrick, don’t care at all about people like me. Patrick is doing an IronMan in November. I had to research that one, too! Anyway, Patrick mentioned a 5k to me once.

I went home &, like everything else I do, Googled it & found out it was a 3.1-mile race. Once I stopped laughing at the prospect of my doing it, I clicked on another Google link, "60 Days from Couch to 5k." Further researching, looking 60 days out, I found a 5k in Fredericksburg, VA, close to 60 days out, "Run for Rescue," a race to benefit the Fredericksburg SPCA, June 13. I knew I wouldn't be able to drop 100 more pounds by then, but wasn't that fate? A run for rescue? Did I have a choice, really? Rescue? That was made for me.

Still apprehensive, I texted Patrick and asked, "So do you think I can do it?" I knew I couldn't "run" like the winners, but could I finish was what I wanted to know. Patrick's response was "I KNOW you can, and I'll do it with you." Then I told Samantha, a running and animal friend. She had the same response. So off we went. I started working with both of them separately. I got up to 2.1 miles on the treadmill. Last Monday Samantha and I walked/ran. My "run" is not most people's "run," but that makes zero difference to me. I figured we did a little over 2 miles. It was hilly terrain. We stopped and talked to a few people. It took 2 hr, 25 min. Samantha clocked it after we finished and sent me an e-mail (from my computer) because she didn't want me to know until she was out of my sight. Wise woman. We did 3.62 miles. Until that moment, I still had doubts I could do this.

Today, June 13, I weigh 326.5. I'm glad those 82 pounds were not on my back today! By the Monument Ave 10k in March I hope to be down to goal or close. What is my weight loss goal? I have no idea. I'll see when I get there. I submitted an application to appear on the Biggest Loser and had a casting call by invitation to a new ABC weight loss program. The casting call didn't pan out because I told them I was already successful on my own. It didn't matter. They were right. I am fine without them. I've got this!

My next goal is the indoor triathlon at my gym in March 2011.

So I did it. I did the 5k today. I wasn't sure I'd finish. About ¼ mile in, I was out of breath. My daughter, who is extremely supportive, albeit also jealous, stuffed my apron (the excess skin around my abdomen, for those of you who don't know) in a girdle. That pushed my organs up & decreased lung capacity. It served its purpose, though, of eliminating the flapping as I run! She also stuffed me in a sports bra. I guess I was wrapped pretty tight today.

I finished.

That was my goal. I didn't care when. I just had to finish. And I did it. If I can do it, anybody can do it. All this weight on arthritic knees and on a fitness-ignorant person (until a few months ago) and a junk food junkie and 51 years old. Yep. If I can do it, EVERYBODY can do it. There's no reason to stay on the couch. There's no competitiveness with all the real runners. I compete only with myself. Now I have a baseline. I DID IT. I went from January 16, having a hardship walking from my chair to the bathroom, to a 5k. Show me somebody who says, "I can't." YES, THEY CAN! I have proven it. And if you know someone who thinks they can't, please send them to me. I really want to help others like me.

How do I feel? I can't stop crying. Carl said, "You're supposed to be happy & proud!" Oh, but I am.

It really is better than just finishing. Brandi (my daughter), Dad, Wanda (my stepmother), Les (my brother), Doug (my other brother), Donald (Brandi's significant other), and Carl (my significant other) came and supported me. My family drove from WV and the other side of VA to support me. That meant absolutely the entire world to me. For that, I would do it many times over. In fact, I asked if they'd come back when I do a 10k. Since they said yes, I know I'll do it! They all joined me at the end of the 5k or took pictures. (Of course, Carl got distracted looking for crawdads in nearby mud holes or deer tracks alongside the road. He's not one to tell me wonderful things. When I started this

couch-to-5k journey, he wouldn't give me an opinion other than he wanted me to get medical clearance. His being there at the crack of dawn today and doing the last 1/3 with me were his way of expressing pride.) The SPCA/VA Runner folks joined Sam & me at the end.

Another thing I learned – real runners are amazingly encouraging. The real runners (a group to which one day I'll belong) offer such genuine motivation for someone like me. They could easily say, "OMG, why is someone like that trying to do something like this?" or shun me or whatever. I was, after all, by far the biggest and least fit person there. They did not. I can't think of a word to describe them except to repeat "amazing." They applauded, up-thumbed, and shouted things like "Great job." Even one runner leaving after his race took his hands off the steering wheel as I was nearing the end and applauded me. I have no idea who he was, and he won't know how his gesture will live in my mind. Those people don't know me, and they just were, at the risk of repeating myself yet a 3rd time, amazing. Even more amazing are the runners I know personally. They have been ultra supportive. Tim, one of our adopters, just yesterday asked me about my race. He runs faster than a cheetah (Okay. I may exaggerate just a bit.), a league way beyond me. Yet, he stopped to be supportive.

Then we come to Samantha and Patrick. Sam I've known since she was knee-high to a grasshopper. She came to the gym as my guest. Then she joined. She's a runner. She's fit. She's all those things I will one day be. Like me, she works weird hours because she's a law enforcement officer. So we can go and walk/run on off hours. Even though I sweat buckets to her not breaking a sweat at all, she sticks right with me. The cop thing comes out when we're out there. She will stop in the middle of the road and make cars go around us. She keeps the boredom out of it by having us count the "stretch marks" in the road that equal the calories we burn. The other thing is I have no fear when I'm out there with her! That's for sure. Fortunately, she knows how important she is to me because I could not begin to put it into words. Sam went with me to buy running shoes. Now, as for Patrick, Patrick has a lot for which he has to redeem himself. Patrick was best man in a wedding last night and, same as anyone would, he drank too much after the wedding. So Patrick slept through the 5k. No person in this world has more exuberance than Patrick. Even when I had major doubts, he never for one second doubted that I could do this. So when he finally called about 3 minutes after I finished, I had to be mean and tell him since he wasn't there to motivate me, I stopped halfway through. ☺ Of course, I eventually told him the truth. It really was mean of me because Patrick cares so much about people that he felt badly about it. All is forgiven. Patrick went with me yesterday morning when we picked up our racing packets. Both Sam & Patrick were really excited about today. And the fact that they're real runners and compete for the speed and stayed back with me today lives in my heart. Even Samantha, who wanted to make sure I was not last, purposely came in last herself. That's a huge sacrifice I'm sure for a competitive runner. Because of Patrick and Samantha, I was able to do this. Without them, I eventually would have myself but not this soon. Before I even sat down after the 5k, they both were planning my 10k! Both of them mean a great deal to me.

Even more people would be supportive, I'm sure. However, most people had no clue what I was doing. I did this for me, just me. And I had to prove to me that I could do this before I could let others know. So I did it. It's done. I'm very proud. Now everybody can know.

So what is a 5k? Is it \$5,000? It may be, but today on June 13, a 5k is worth millions to me.

