

# Agonizing decisions made ahead of cancellation

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was another weather prognostication gone off the rails thanks to way too much media hype.

Then she hit. Like a woman scorned. She unmercifully unleashed her wrath on everyone and everything that got in her way.

Yes, I'm a redhead named Sandy with a temper, but when I blow, I unleash a verbal onslaught that will make your ears ring. Death and destruction is not my MO.

As CNN reporters battled the wind and rain and their news anchor counterparts remained comfortably in their studios wondering how this would affect the presidential election nine days later, I selfishly wondered about the New York City marathon.

The race I dreamed about running long before I laced up a pair of running shoes. The race I spent four years entering a lottery in order to do. The marathon that was supposed to cap off a really good racing year. A race we spent a small fortune on.

You see, I had watched this race on TV for more years than I can recall wondering how all those people did it — run a marathon. Then one day, I decided, I, too, would run a marathon — the New York City marathon.

The more I saw of Superstorm Sandy's destruction late Monday night and into Tuesday morning — the flooded subway system, the Jersey boardwalk turned into kindling, homes leveled and people left with nothing but the clothes on their backs — I knew this was a race I was not going to run.

I knew in my heart of hearts I could not go to New York City and run through its streets knowing people within arms length of me were without food, electricity and homes.

Race organizers were on the ground. Most assuredly, they saw what we were seeing, only worse. How could they host a race for 47,000 people when there was something more important that needed to be dealt with? A state of emergency was declared in New York and New Jersey. You can't organize a race under those condi-



Stouffville Sun-Tribune reporter Sandra Bolan runs in the 2010 Grandma's Marathon in Duluth, Miss. Ms Bolan was to have run in last week's New York City Marathon before a superstorm shut it down.

tions? Can you?

Staten Island, where the race starts, was decimated and there was no way to get there. But apparently that didn't matter to race organizers. On Tuesday, they were claiming the race was still going ahead as planned.

For two days, my husband, Dave, and I kept wondering do we go or do we stay home? If we go, do we drive or will we still be able to fly? Once we get there, how do we move around the city? Better bring extra cash for cabs and plan to do a lot of walking. Will there really be a race to run?

After hours of frantic e-mailing back and forth between Dave and myself, checking the news reports for the latest updates and still trying to get our work done, I realized going to New York was just a bad idea.

I called Hotwire to see if we could get our hotel refunded. I knew it was a long shot, but I had to try.

While on hold waiting for the customer service rep to give me her final answer, more e-mails to Dave: "are you sure you're OK cancelling the hotel and staying home?" He said yes and the customer service rep refunded our money.

I think I lost 10 pounds of stress when I heard that three-letter word.

We hoped our vacated room would go to a homeless family.

You see, for about a month I had a really bad feeling about going to New York. I just knew something wasn't right. But I chalked it up to leaving behind an ailing and aging dog. I had no idea a natural disaster with my name attached to it was about to change the lives of millions forever.

Everything after that fell into place, including cancelling our flight without penalty.

I was sad that I was not running the New York City marathon in five days, but I knew it was the

right decision for me.

As someone who, while living and working in Bermuda, came away from Hurricane Danielle in 1998 unscathed, except for no power for a day or two, I had a small inkling as to what it was like to survive a natural disaster.

If back then the island were to have gone ahead with hosting a race, while many residents remained homeless and without food and power, I would have been livid. And if one emergency person were used for the race, instead of assisting those in need, I would have really blown my stack.

After all, racing marathons, for the vast majority of us, is just a hobby and no hobby should ever take precedence over another's survival.

But my thought process was clearly of the minority.

A running forum I frequent had a handful of people still packed and ready to race New York.

"My flight is still scheduled to go, so I still plan on being there," was the basic sentiment.

Fair enough.

While media outlets were reporting on the storm's aftermath and how the election may be affected, there was one group that remained eerily silent — the race organizers.

For almost a year, the New York Road Runners inundated racers' inboxes with messages made to get us oh-so-excited to be participating in this world famous event.

But come post-Superstorm Sandy, they fell silent. No tweets or e-mails. Just a short message on the race website stating they feel for the victims of the storm, but the race will go on.

They did, however, provide a cancellation option for those who decided they did not want to participate under these circumstances. If you cancelled by Saturday night, you were guaranteed entry into the 2013 race. However, race organizers were keeping your 2012 entry fee and if you wanted to run in 2013, you would have to pay that year's entry fee. For Canadians that meant we lost out on US \$350 for 2012 and would also have to pay at least that again next year to race.

Oh and if you could, please donate to the victims of Super-

storm Sandy.

Really? Now, these race organizers were really looking like narrow-minded, heartless money-grubbers.

Not a mention of the mammoth race was made on the news until maybe Wednesday and it was likely due to Twitter and running forums going into overdrive with more than 40,000 runners from around the world in taper mode all asking the same question: is the race taking place?

As media coverage of the race finally got some traction, organizers remained adamant the show would go on as planned. Even New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg was on board with it.

Those who died in Superstorm Sandy would want it that way, was one of the reasons given by race officials. Really?

Were race organizers not listening to the residents standing in rubble that once was their homes pleading for food, water, shelter and any other kind of aid available?

This continued for another two days.

Sometime late in the afternoon last Friday, race organizers came to their senses and cancelled the marathon.

My husband and I first heard about it when we sat down in front of the TV to watch Pardon The Interruption while I carb-loaded. The show's first story was the marathon. I told Dave to fast forward through it. I was tired of hearing the arguments for and against holding the race. We made our decision, let's move on.

But like a good husband, he didn't listen and let it roll.

Tony Kornheiser promptly announced: "The New York City marathon has been cancelled."

I was so happy race organizers finally came to their senses. But I also felt terrible for all those runners who spent thousands of dollars getting there only to find out it was for nothing.

This was the official announcement posted on the race website and sent to entrants:

"The City of New York and NYRR announce that the 2012

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