

## **Runs in the Family** by Ian Vogan

My 50<sup>th</sup> birthday fell on a Sunday so I decided to celebrate with a weekend away and a marathon in La Rochelle (France). Most people who read this will consider that normal. Hotel research is not my strong point but I bumbled through and found a hotel on Isle de Re about a half hour drive from the airport. Somebody was smiling on me. The hotel was just what we wanted.

(Very) fast forward ten years. My 60<sup>th</sup> is on a Saturday so I decide to return to do the marathon again. Sue and I had already been back to La Rochelle a number of times for long weekend breaks. This time we would celebrate with the family. We decided to make it a running weekend.

Along came my son Gareth, a snowboarder who runs when he remembers, my daughter Nik and her husband Rich. Gareth was aiming to complete his first marathon, Rich wanted a sub four hour marathon, Nik was training seriously for an off road duathlon championship so she chose the 10k. Sue did what she does magnificently and agreed to cheer us on and look after “coats”.

My training went as usual, I annoyed my hamstrings early on and my longest training run was 15 miles. I got off the plane in La Rochelle on the Friday and said to Sue that I would have a test run on Saturday but might not run on Sunday. The test went well.

Come Sunday we were all nervous, but the marathon course is two laps and fits around the 10k, there were going to be plenty of opportunities for Sue to support everyone. We went our separate ways to the different starts. Gareth had decided that he would run with me, we went to the veterans’ start. I told him that my plan was to run the first lap and see how I felt.

Gareth’s training had been as minimalistic as mine. We had a pace plan but that got forgotten, we got to half way bang on two hours! We knew the wheels would come off, the question was when. We finished in under 4.5 hours so were happy with the result. Rich came in comfortably under his four hour target. The “goody bag” for the race includes a tray of oysters. We had no idea what to do with three trays of oysters, but the waitress at the cafe where we had lunch seemed very pleased with her tip.

Nik missed her target time by seconds but was second lady back. The presentation was in a grand auditorium and the announcer sounded grudging when he had to say “Grande Bretagne” as he handed over the trophy. We had a great weekend, all runners pleased with their achievement and Sue totally knackered from trying to be in the right place to shout at us.

The race does disrupt the town but it brings in a lot of business for the weekend and at least one couple have been back regularly to boost the local economy.

Ian Vogan, May 2020