



by: Lauren Runow

Once In A Lifetime

A few years ago, now 18-year-old Karli Bosler had a dream that became a reality for her and her family! Her dad told her about an event that sounded like more than just a marathon—imagine 2,400 runners from all over the world gathered on Yin and Yang Square at the base of the Great Wall of China. At the clap of the starting gun, they would begin the most challenging marathon of their lives, along one of mankind’s greatest monuments. This would be an opportunity of a lifetime—to run on the Great Wall of China!

The Great Wall of China spans 6,000km (3,730 miles) across China and is without a doubt one of the most stunning achievements of mankind. Karli, a member of the local group The Honeybee Trio, and her 12-year-old brother Tyler, became fascinated with the thoughts of visiting China. They had even written their country reports on China in their sixth grade classes. With all of the research done and inspiration from family and friends who had run in the marathon before, Bruce, a local dentist, and his wife, Kim, began planning. Karli and her dad set a goal to run the full marathon (26.2 miles).

Tyler and his mother originally were going to participate in the fun run (six miles). Karli and Bruce found a training guide online and began training together, spending quality father-daughter time as they encouraged each other.

The Great Wall Marathon is considered one of the toughest marathons in the world due to its tough terrain that includes 5,164 steps of uneven sizes, which participants must climb. For most, this adds to the excitement and the challenge. “We knew it would be tough, but we just felt like it was a once-in-a-lifetime, incredible opportunity to meet people from all over the world,” Kim says.

After training all through the winter and spring, the Marathon month of May finally arrived and the Bosler family headed to China. “All in all we went on seven plane rides, four boat rides, two subways, a gondola, river raft, and twenty bus rides in-between Beijing, Jixian, Xi’an, Guilin, Yang Shuo, Kowloon and Hong Kong,” Bruce states. They went with a fun group of friends that were associated with the marathon. Though they were in a pretty large group of people, the site of Karli fascinated

the locals. "We couldn't take two steps in the city without mobs of people wanting a picture with her. We were with a group of adults and it was kind of embarrassing the way our whole group had to wait through the 'Karli photo sessions.' Her 'fan club' became a friendly joke," Kim laughingly remembers.

Kim had toured China in 1980 in college as a member of the singing entertainment group BYU Young Ambassadors and Bruce had lived in Taiwan for two years as an LDS missionary and had learned to speak Mandarin. One night they went to dinner at a nearby hotel and they were escorted into a private room surprisingly just the four of them. They had a private dinner with three beautiful young waitresses to attend their every need. "We broke out into hysterical laughing fits, however, watching Dad try and communicate with our three lovely waitresses about the menu. Not one of them spoke the tiniest bit of English, so we discovered that Dad's 'fluent mandarin' works best if communicating with someone that knows at least a few words in English," jokes Karli.

The Great Wall of China entrance is located near Jixian, which is far away from any major city, and their "four-star" hotel was an experience in itself. The toilets outside were a mere fancy hole in the floor that you had to squat over and the mattresses were rock hard! The day before the race, Bruce sat down on the bed to look through the sightseeing pictures with Kim she'd taken in the days before. "As he stood up from the side of the bed, we heard a huge rip and snapping sound, and blood began gushing everywhere," Kim said. As Bruce grabbed a hotel towel to tie around his wound, Kim frantically looked around trying to find the "weapon" and then noticed a large metal hook jutting out from the side of the cheap mattress which had gouged deeply into the back of his knee and ripped through his skin, tearing even more as he stood. Kim ran into the lobby, desperately searching the hotel for help from someone who could speak English, but to no avail. Finally reaching their tour guide by phone, the guide jumped out of bed and rushed Bruce by taxi to a hospital.

The hospital looked more like a war zone than a hospital, and there were no doctors that spoke English. The first thing Bruce noticed was the people wailing in the dirty halls on gurneys, waiting for help. When it was finally Bruce's turn, he was a little nervous about the lack of sanitation. Using his knowledge of Mandarin, Bruce was able to respectfully ask if the doctors could use gloves when treating his leg. "They laughed and told me no, they didn't have any gloves, but at least

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they washed their hands,” Bruce smiled. He was also offered a Chinese bottle of medicine, and a shot with a thick, used needle, which, of course, he turned down. And then the doctors topped it all off by delivering the news, “NO MARATHON RUN FOR YOU.”

Upon arrival back to the hotel the management brought the Bosler family a plate of cucumbers as an apology gift.

The next morning was the day of the race, and Bruce was undaunted. He woke up very early, Kim re-wrapped his leg with limited supplies that his tour group of new friends gathered together for him, and he announced, “Hey, I didn’t travel 8,000 miles to China for nothing. I’m doing this thing!”

It was this same determined attitude that prompted Tyler to change his mind. Because he was so young, originally he was signed up for the Fun Run. With a chuckle, Kim recalls, “He looked at me and said, ‘Mom, we’re not traveling to The Great Wall of China to do the Fun Run. I’m doing the Half- Marathon—come on let’s do it!’ I don’t know why I agreed, but I’m glad I did.”

The day of the marathon the weather was perfect for running, around 70 degrees and overcast. Kim and Tyler were able to upgrade their run to the Half-Marathon and Bruce and Karli set out for the full 26.2 miles. Even though there was such a diversity of people from different countries, there was a definite bond and camaraderie between all the runners. “The air was so filled with passion for the sport that everyone felt an immediate friendship and bond with each other. We all knew that this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience; the runners had trained hard, worked hard, and now here we all were together, ready to go!” remembers Kim. Even the people who were not running in the marathon were excited and encouraging the runners. The course ran through small villages where young children greeted each runner with Chinese chants of encouragement and offerings of small fresh “flowers” (weeds) they picked from the sides of the road.

Just like their training together, Bruce and Karli crossed the finish line celebrating hand in hand. Although a large, purple welt of drained blood had swelled up near his ankle, Bruce came in 11th place within his division and Karli placed 2nd within her own division. Ecstatic to be running the half marathon, Tyler came in 1st place in his division, beating his mother by nearly 90 minutes.

Since the marathon, Tyler has realized his ability and enjoyment in running and trained early each summer weekday morning as a new member of the Vacaville Christian School’s cross-country team. Karli is now at BYU, and excited about the university’s Triathlete Club that she signed up for. As for Bruce and Kim, the parents of six children, they know that kids grow up all too quickly, and for this, they are grateful for the incredible family experience they shared with their youngest daughter before she dashed off to college. “Your time is really short,” Kim says, “and I hope the story of our trip will encourage people to have a dream for your family and to share meaningful experiences - whatever they may be - together while you can.” With this event crossed off their bucket list, the Boslers hope to have a lifetime of significant memories together and are even more excited to continue to create them as they just welcomed their eighth grandson. ■