

## One for the road, please

It was June 1986, near the end of my first year living in Maine. Settling with a child in a new place had been all-consuming, and some important things, like my running, had been neglected. It was nearly a year before I got around to running my first race here — the Doc's Tavern Three-Miler.

My decision to run the Friday evening race was spur-of-the-moment, so getting on the road, finding the mysterious Biddeford and registering were all in a last-minute flurry, with no time for any warmup or hydration. That particular Friday was by all accounts the hottest day of the season, the air sodden with humidity. Unprepared and wilting, I was further undone by the size of the crowd of runners and the sight of the upgrade start — and, oh-oh, the scary onset of a huge thirst as my mouth grew dryer with pre-race jitters. And not a drop of water in sight! The only visible liquid was in the hands of the Tavern regulars, in the doorway watching the crazed runners assemble. Having at least planned for the fabled post-race beer at Doc's, I had tucked a couple of dollar bills in my lingerie, savoring the thought of this reward a little later in the hour.

At the starting gun I hurtled into the race with legs of lead and a thirst worthy of the Sahara. I did all right for the first mile, with a split of 8:00, but the heat and lack of hydration were bringing me down fast. I'd heard there was a water stop "just after the first big right turn." Gratefully, I soon saw the turn coming, the runners ahead flowing into a right-angled line. But finally there, I saw no water stop, no hands reaching out, no specks of white cups on the ground. Dra! But, just

across the street was a small variety store, and on my person were those two dollars. Should I ... naaahh, too weird ... but otherwise ...

I burst out of the ranks and sprinted across the street, thankful I'd been passed by enough runners that few would witness my side trip. Flying into the store with bib number flashing, still going at about 9:00 pace, I PR'd to the back cooler and made one of my life's quickest choices. Good old Coke!

The surprised patrons were mostly open-mouthed at my appearance, but one old fellow croaked out, "Is that race still going on?"

"I hope so!"

With a couple of fumbling motions I dislodged the two sweaty bills and threw them at the grinning clerk, yelling, "Keep the change!" Then, as Old Blue Eyes once sang, I picked myself up and got back in the race.

Awkwardly running with my purchase, I took only a few sips of the sickeningly sweet stuff and finally the water stop appeared. I tunked up and cajoled a surge all the way to the sweet downhill finish (I wasn't even last!). By then I didn't need that post-race beer, I'd gotten my refreshment just beyond Mile 1. And next time I'd know just where the water stop would be.

I've had a number of next times at the Doc's Tavern Race since that first one. And always, at that first right turn, I smile a silent greeting to the "little store across the street."

— Pat Buckley