

Urban Swaras Running Club *Kenya*

Jack Ndegwa!



New York, 2017

Editor's Note

Hello Swaras,

These past two months have been very run-eventful.

Kipchoge finally smashed the WR that had long *Eliuded* him, Swaras hauled medals in the Mt. Kenya Ultra and Chicago Marathon. Yet another Swara has been inducted into the WMM Six Star wall of fame.

In this issue you will find our heroes;

- Jack Ndegwa
- Martha Muthoni

Your stories:

- Mt. Kenya Ultra: Claire Baker and Victor Wesonga tell us what happened
- Maina Ngatia's run to a pub
- Nyokabi Kamotho on Chicago

And a few other tidbits. We hope you enjoy.

Interim Editor.

USRC Newsletter

Jack is the new General in town. A Star in Urban Swaras and Kenyan recreational runners' circles.

On 7th October 2018, in Chicago Marathon, he earned the coveted Six Star Medal, issued to finishers of the 6 marathons making the Abbot World Marathon Majors (WMM); Berlin, Tokyo, London, New York, Boston, Chicago.

He becomes only the third Kenyan to get the Six Star Medal, The first Kenyan was Legendary Swara James Waliaula who was way ahead of time getting his Six Star medal in 2015, the second is elite Marathoner Edna Kiplagat who joined James after Berlin 2018.



But Jack's six star is only the crowning glory. We get to find out the story behind the crown.

So who is Jack?

Jack is a 45 year old recreational runner, 45 sounds *'too old'* for his kind of speeds.

He does not; have a running background, have a 'running shape', his legs are thick and won't pass the 'eye test' for a runner. Jack is also a family man with a regular day hustle like most of the recreational running population.

He tips the scale at 67 kg which he says is his ideal weight. He was around 75-78 kg when he started running. He is 172 cm high.

Jack now owns the fastest Swara marathon time of 2.42.28 posted in Chicago 2018. He replaces James Waliaula's 2.48.09 set in Tokyo 2015.

2.42.28, in simple terms requires running at a pace of 3:49 min/km!!

How he got here

Jack began running consistently at 40, he joined the Urban Swaras Running Club around the same time. His first Marathon attempt was at the Nairobi Stanchart in 2012 where he DNF'd (Did Not Finish) because of 'pancakes'.

This is his famous pancake story; after running well in the early parts, hunger and fatigue got the better of him on the infamous Mombasa road stretch, but fate was on his side, he lives in South C, and as he battled the marathon demons, suddenly he was sure he picked the scent of pancakes being cooked at his house, battle lines were drawn, finish marathon vs. pancakes, marathon finish proved to be no match for the allure of the pancakes aroma. He ended up at his house. And sure enough, he maintains, there were pancakes waiting for him. Well.

Jack went back to the drawing board, trained better and registered for his second Marathon in 2015, Singapore it was to be. He jokes that he chose Singapore as it would be too far from the distracting pancakes. Singapore was good to him and he crossed the finish line in a time of 3:48.

In 2016 he completed the 56 km Two Oceans Ultra-marathon in South Africa with a time of 5:40, this is in addition to half marathons in Nairobi, Kilimanjaro and Lewa.

Contd..

Then, starting with Berlin in 2016, he shifted focus to the Majors, embarking on what would be a whirlwind two years of mixed fortunes culminating in an electric Chicago finish.

The outstanding progression seen in the Majors is hardly what a regular runner would achieve in two years.

| Marathon | Finish Time |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Berlin, Sep 2016 | 3:21:04 |
| Tokyo, Feb 2017 | 3:14:13 |
| London, April 2017 | 3:37:00 |
| New York, Nov 2017 | 3:01:49 |
| Boston, April 2018 | 2:58:08 |
| Chicago, Oct 2018 | 2:42:28 |

Despite the perceived glamour, the Majors journey is a sacrificial pilgrimage mainly of:

Time: The many hours away from your people and other obligations while training and travelling

Financial: Apart from the normal travel expenses, getting into some races is even more expensive when you have to enter through charity or tour agencies.

Jack also participates in smaller races. A week after Chicago Marathon he won a 5k race (also in Chicago) in a time of 17:34.

Berlin: Getting a time of 3:21:04 on a 3:40 goal made me believe I could do better with improved training.

Tokyo: Goal was to get a 3:15 to qualify for Boston, I qualified by a whisker. But Tokyo was my darkest Major; It was too cold and lonely with no Kenyan compatriot, It coincided with the bad news of the passing of a training partner in Kilimanjaro Marathon, I was limping badly from an aggravated shin splint injury. The only thing I wanted was to get back home.

London: Happened two months after Tokyo, I didn't expect any time improvements and it turned out to be the slowest Major. It's the one I'd love to do again. I popped into London, ran and was out even before sweat had dried. I was feeling kinda guilty for do-

New York: I considered myself a veteran, knew how to manage injuries, I wasn't sure I could hack a sub 3 yet. At 41 km I realized I might end up with a 3.00.40. I wasn't ready to live with that so I stopped, fished out the Kenyan flag and decided I'd be better off

Boston: Most Memorable experience, I was ready for a sub 3 and it happened even with the terrible conditions.

Chicago: The best was saved for last. There was a big fun team, 2:42:28 was unexpected. but I was going for a sub 2.50



The Majors, In his own words...

So how did Jack do it?

'I'd say my success came with consistent training, joining a group that was training consistently and following set plans greatly helped. Discipline in training is key'. He acknowledges James Waliaula for mentoring him and setting the bar very high, his training partners; David Thuo who doubled as coach, and Davis Gitari a 'never say die' steely runner.

His first three majors were riddled with injury. He is indebted to Tata Nduku, the running grandma, for dragging him to see a physio when his knees were falling apart.

He learnt from experience and solidified his training in the last three majors.

'I capped my training to 4 days a week to allow time for my body to recover, hence avoiding injuries'. He would do 80km mileage per week, once or twice extending to 90 or 100km.

His favourite running spot is the Kahara-Kona Baridi stretch in Ngong, and the Ngong area in general. He periodically visits Fluorspar for the traditional Fluorspar hill and dizzying altitude.

But all preps would be in vain without the critical travel visa, the domestic one. Jack was fortunate to obtain the visa and ensured he had finished the Majors in the shortest time should the visa be unexpectedly revoked.

And Jack is not dull; it is possible he is that 'Jack' in the 'all work and no play...' proverb.

He has been known to fully exploit his 'Kenyan' credentials to admirers of Kenyan running; hanging out as an elite, signing autographs etc. He's been overheard contemplating charging a fee for his autographs. Most recently he was at his best behavior in Maasai shuka and gear goofing around in the streets of Chicago together with the other members of the Kenyan Chicago entourage on the eve of the marathon.

What next?

Jack is restless; he usually begins club runs with the slow folk, too slow though, increases speed, casting furtive glances this way and that way hoping someone would go with him, rarely anyone, and he disappears into the future in his trademark high-arm-carriage-fast-stride gait. Back in 2015, 2016 some of us would catch up with him later after he burned out. Now no one catches up.

Yes he's restless, and can't retire at 45. He wants to run in Ghana, Nigeria, Morocco and Egypt.

He has covered 4 continents, he wants to see Australia, South America and Antarctica by the time he's 50. He has therefore signed up to the Seven Continents Club (we need to look that up).

More than a Marathon *By Claire Baker*

Long anticipated, the first ultra marathon in Kenya featuring a 100km distance finally happened. A total of 58 runners took part and completed various distances;

| Distance (km) | 100 | 72 | 71 | 65 | 60 | 45 | 21 |
|---------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Finishers | 6 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 30 | 10 |

One thing you notice in Kenya is that people use the term 'marathon' loosely. "I ran a marathon yesterday" could just as well mean that person ran a grueling 42km, as it could they jogged 3km round the block. For an unknown reason, we rarely do the same with the term 'ultra marathon'. In fact, more often than not we have to explain to people what we mean. The joy of being amongst Swaras, though, is you can comfortably bandy about the word 'ultra', 'split' and 'ORS' and people know what you mean (or pretend to then subtly Google under the table to save face).

One thing you don't do with an Ultra is mess with it. Or it will mess with you, in a big, leg-crippling, soul-destroying way. You respect the distance, you listen to your body and, most importantly you have fun and enjoy the ride. I say this because I did the shortest possible distance to technically qualify for the 'Ultra' title. Those who did the 100km were overheard saying 'I didn't enjoy a single bit of it, except the finish line. It was worth it just for those last 50m'.

The 100 km runners, die-hard distance lovers, 'top guns of the trail', set off at 6.15am targeting to cover their 100km before nightfall, whilst the second wave, consisting of all the other distances let's call them the 'let's see how far we can go-ers', waved them off, and continued chomping down

on sweet potato and omelettes, waiting for the drizzle to pass. The drizzle was still there when it was time to flag off

5th Mt. Kenya Ultra

the 'lower distances', but it didn't dampen the spirits, and a collective 'Bolt' pose and photo opportunity with the chief paparazzi, Ranu, sent everyone off, uphill, with a spring in their step.

The beauty of this trail really is in the undulating hills, the bodies of water that surprise you in the middle of verdant pastures, the cows that silently cheer you on from the middle of a two-body-wide trail, and, of course, the fact that you're so high, both in altitude and endorphins, that you wonder if there's muratina (local martini) in the support vehicles' supplies, not just water and sodas.

One unexpected addition to the scenery was a band of merry photographers. These wily camera-wielders had a knack for surprising you just as you rounded an uphill bend, all the better to catch the breathlessness and bent-over weariness of the tired Swaras as they hit important milestones like 'kilometre 63 of 100', or 'kilometre 37 of 45'. The numbers almost seemed absurd in their grandeur.

We had many blessings to count along the 45km and 65km route (the LSHFWG-ers): support vehicles with drinks, snacks and all-important cheers and words of encouragement, loaded with Swara wisdom and pure, utter enthusiasm from dawn until dusk. Some of us got to cross paths with each other at various points, exchanging snatches of 'strong', and 'you got this', but it was at the finish line that most of us got to congratulate each other, have a communal stretch, and, for some, a sip of something cold and refreshing that was well-deserved and hit just the right spot.

What we never once saw was discouragement, disappointment or dissatisfaction. You can't help but be proud of what you've achieved: whether it's running an ultra, or organizing one. I was just disappointed I hit the hay so early!



Mt. Kenya Ultra....in Pictures

Photos by **Karanu Waweru**

The 100 km supermen... Elvis , Bond, Chikani, Victor , Sam, Peter, Masika... be advised to only run away from any of them if you'll run for over 100km...



Ashok tries to grow wings...



Post-run voodoo stuff...

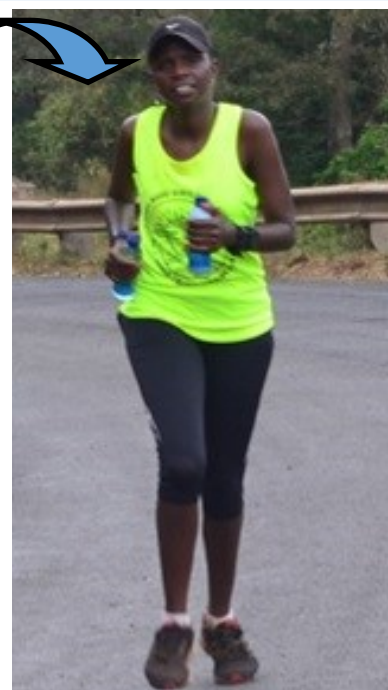


fully armored F2, gun-belt and all...



They look happy, someone clearly forgot to throw a hill at them....

You can't joke with golden girl Chebet, she is here looking straight at an unplanned 72km...



Mt. Kenya Ultra:

PYTHON HUNTING ON THE SLOPES OF MT.KENYA

By Victor Wesonga

The evening prior to the ultra at our adopted Olympic village was uneventful and mainly characterized by carbo-loading, hugs and high fives as a form of motivation, and other forms of bravado on the various strategies for the python hunt the following day.

The following day would be D-day, runners gunning for 100km and other lesser hunts.

The 100 km was flagged off by the chair at 6: 15 am.

THE HUNT

We started with a surprise on the road on which I was accompanied by centenarian Sam Nyingi's cousin and his 9 year old nephew, Jimmy. The surprise was finding senior Katwa Kigen at the 30th Km running alone in a forest full of elephants and other wild animals having started at 4am in the morning. The boldness and patience of this extraordinary Swara warrior has convinced me that we clearly must all learn to run our own race in life.

After refreshing senior Katwa, along came Masika, Bond, Peter "the inkalimeva", Victor Kamau, Sam Nyingi and the beast from Kavirondo, one Elvis Obonyo. They were promptly refreshed with water and chapatis as the villager and two warrior queens; Felicita aka F2 and Chebet aka 1 GB followed in hot pursuit.

The demand at this point was fruits, rather than the water and chapatis that I had plenty of. I headed back to base to arm myself with the fruits and caught up with the villager at 40 km to feed him all the oranges, watermelons and bananas that young Jimmy could hold out for him in a bowl. We did the same for 1GB and Elvis at the 41km and 42km respectively before we caught up with F2 at 43km and the elites, plus new addition Chikani at 45km and later at km 53.

At 60kms, the villager decided he would not leave the tarmac and created his own short route to base camp through Karatina town. He had set out to do his run till he dropped, and he was faithful to his vow until a third cold beer on the road confirmed that his party had effectively ended at 70km despite his ambition to fight on. My only advice to him was that he whose seeds do not germinate does not give up farming.

The remainder of the troop fueled up again at 60kms with evergreen aka Nyokabi tagging next to 1GB who was closing in on

the lead pack. Without breaking a real sweat from my observation, F2 ended her beautiful run at 68Kms when she clearly had enough in her reserve tank to do more.

Evergreen supported 1GB all the way to a beautiful 71kms, which I suspect, wasn't her limit. The real battle for 100kms I noticed began after 70kms. Whilst in the beginning the 100km troop would tell us to wait after every 10 km, we now had near telepathic instructions to fuel them up after every 3-5kms. Meanwhile, Swaras future in the form of 9 year old jimmy joined the team and ran a cool 11kms uphill from the 60thkm.

After 80kms, the lead team had only two choices, move as one or let the stronger ones go at it alone and we definitely wouldn't have had seven centenarians if that happened. They remained together.

Eventually, Masika and Elvis had to fall behind. Elvis earlier than Masika, who was nursing serious muscle cramps and graciously allowed the rest to proceed without him. His mental fortitude is clearly one to watch. He had the biggest excuse to quit at 90km when an impossible hill beckoned at dusk, but the thought didn't even cross his mind. All we could do was drown him in more coke and electrolytes to trick his mind.

Meanwhile, Elvis had gone off trail at 65km following marks leading to a funeral over three ridges away. At the funeral, everyone figured out that he was hopelessly lost due to his alien appearance. It dawned on Elvis that he had veered off track by 6 kilometers and had to retrace his steps to the 65kms point. When I met him later on at 90kms, I tried to convince him that he compensates the 6kms via a shortcut and that we would acknowledge the change but he firmly and politely turned me down. The chair also tried to convince him whilst searching for lost Ashok to no avail. Ashok later casually walked into camp and wondered what the drama was all about, he simply quipped that he was to run till he dropped and he hadn't dropped yet.

I escorted the lead-runners; Victor, Sam, Bond, Peter and Chikani to base camp where they finished together with joined raised arms, faithful to the end in their team spirit. It is indeed true: if you want to go fast like James Waliaula, victor Kamau, Jack Ndegwa, Davis Munene et al go alone. If you want to far, go together. Ranu became Masika's eyes in the dark as the trail marks were not reflective, leading him to a battered but gallant finish. Benevolent Swaras searched for Elvis and also lit his path until his victorious finish.

As is the norm, the after party of the would-be tired and nearly dying Swaras was very much alive, it left me wondering whether the trail was tough enough. Music and drinks flowed freely as if Swaras were just from a 5kms family run.

In another 3 years, 100 miles will be possible. To their credit, Swaras work as hard as they play and methinks that's the true essence of life. To live each moment as if tomorrow will never come.

To acknowledge that indeed running is living!

Mt. Kenya Ultramarathon:

A Long Night By the Fire by Maina Ngatia



I've done a couple of stupid things in my life.

Once, I accompanied a couple of rugged village boys on a mission to steal mangoes, but while at it, the owner was alerted by his dog. He started our way to investigate, and while the other boys quickly climbed down and escaped, I sat on a branch, intending to stay still until the owner left. If the other boys came back, I'd have a head start collecting the ripest mangoes.

Unfortunately, the branch I sat on was too close to a wasps' nest. They started a fight, which gave me away to the tail wagger, alerting its owner, who politely asked me to come down. I initially

declined, but when he picked up a sizeable boulder and turned my way, I was persuaded. In an ironic twist of events, the branch gave way, saving me a disgraceful slow climb down, but with immense pain. What followed after I was handed over to my mother made me question the meaning of maternal love. I'd have won a case at the ICC, using strong phrases like 'grave human rights violations'.

I've done other more stupid things and gotten away...

And then Saturday, 22nd September 2018 happened. Even on this occasion, I still believed I could walk away, until I was knee deep into the murk.

On this day, the [Urban Swaras Running Club](#) hosted the annual Mt. Kenya Ultra Marathon, on its 5th edition. Runners had told beautiful tales about previous editions, making it a must attempt for many club members.

When I joined the club, I could have ran the 3rd edition. However, I travelled to Nyeri 3 days earlier, carried my running gear, except running shoes. The 4th edition found me descending from Mt. Kilimanjaro, the roof of Africa.

The 5th edition was therefore one I couldn't miss, choosing instead to forego the Nairobi Marathon. Initially, I elected to run 8 hours, as this was only the second ultra-marathon I was running in. I needed a feel of 60K+, having suffered immensely in my first ultra-marathon of 56km.

During training, foolish courage got the better of me, and I adjusted my running time upwards to 10hrs. Courageously, I estimated that this may cover a little over 80km, and to avoid blowing my cover, 80km is what I registered for.

I lined up with the 100km heavyweights at 6am on Saturday morning, outside Omega Gardens, Karatina. I was obviously the odd one out, known to the Swaras more for light and awkward moments rather than serious discourse. Twice, during the photo op, our Chairman Ajaa Olubayi asked me if I was clear I wanted to dive into the deep end. Unfortunately, I stuck to my guns, and on my debut Mt. Kenya Ultra Marathon, took off intending to get 100km under

my belt.

Surprisingly, running an ultra is so unlike running the 42k distance, but sadly, I didn't know this. During the climb up to Kagochi market, I was able to keep up with the strong men. We shared experiences, cracked jokes, talked to villagers walking the opposite way, and literally had fun. I struggled a little, because climbs are never my highlight, but I'd still catch up with the group on a relative flat. It's great preparing for a fight you know you'll 'not win', because you're very keen on the escape routes. I knew I'd be lucky to run with these mighty runners out of the stadium, let alone into the forest. In training, I mostly ran alone, or with earphones. I talked, or attempted a discussion, with the fun guy, the WhiteCap lover, who we share inner space with. I made his friend, knowing I'd need him all through my Ultra.

Having reassured him of our light and awkward moments, rather than serious discourse. Twice, during the photo op, our Chairman Ajaa Olubayi asked me if I was clear I wanted to dive into the deep end. Unfortunately, I stuck to my guns, and on my debut Mt. Kenya Ultra Marathon, took off intending to get 100km under my belt. Surprisingly, running an ultra is so unlike running the 42k distance, but sadly, I didn't know this bond, I guess he wasn't amused that I kept company of the big men for 12km out of Karatina. At the time I needed him, he claimed drowsiness, which took another hour to clear.

I will honestly acknowledge, and with admiration, that at the start, 4 other Swaras joined me tagging the Centurions. Two were taking advantage of an early start, contrary to the express direction of the club. The club's weatherman, he who tells you what you'd love to hear, and at great cost, has given us a hot and dry day. His medium on the ground, who had words like Equinox and wind warping, called it the hottest day in Africa all year. These two had listened. God knows what the other two were trying. Reports later showed that they fought on the front all the way. Life has brave souls, and I salute these! After entering the forest zone, The Villager found himself alone. My inner mate is possibly a girl. Convincing him to come with me, that my dalliance with the mighty didn't amount to desertion, fell on deaf ears. He only came along after I promised that there'd be no more races this year. With this fellow I ran along with, from around 15km, just the two of us. When we came across elephant poop from the night, we mused how the elephant's gut system was wasteful, and how it'd be possible to get hay out of it.

We shared the contents that were inside the 'oxygen tank', as some Swaras have nicknamed my hydration Camel pack. We poked each other, cried, called each other bad names, questioned our common ancestry, for that we couldn't deny, till we got to our first support point, at 30km. Guess who was manning it? The hired weatherman's medium! Luckily, before my skepticism took over, I saw the Centurions emerge from the forest, only a 100m ahead, from a 1.4km loop. The temptation to cross over and rejoin the group was very ripe, but I was scared of the weatherman's medium. What if he conspired with his boss, to ruin the rest of the run? You see, the weather had held beautifully so far, with no hint of heat. I still wore a thermal top beneath my Swara singlet!

A long night by the fire.....contd

Wesonga promptly informed me that the loop was only 1km, fed me fruits and chapati, and sent us on an incline to our left. A couple of high fives and the run resumed. If I knew that that would be the last time I'd see a yellow shirt, running or otherwise, I'd have cheated. And for the next 40km, I ran on. There was immense support and encouragement from the club, invaluable moments restocking the oxygen tank, talking to a human being, breaking the monotonous rhythm of a run, to walk, or even stand still. That episode through the forest Shambas was the most punishing, for it was silent, and with dew still on the grass, the shoes picked up weight like a magnet in a scrap yard.

Running through the forest, however, taught me big. Despite my earphones, and I am glad I had them, I could hear a leaf drop. A gravesite isn't as silent. What, with elephant poop that was as fresh as the dew?

Running under the dangling wires that mark the edge of the forest can be assuring, but not when you've stopped caring. A glimmer of hope came when I got to a stretch I thought was familiar from a previous run at Graceland. Did this help the pain? No! But it did wonders to the mind. The pace probably increased. In my mind, this was supposed to be the hottest stretch, but it was still bearable. This being my home turf, I imagined some villagers spotting me, returning with their story to the village, and I quickened some more. Shortly, an hour later, possibly two, I spotted a tiny yellow ahead, and my hope blossomed. At another long turn, a second yellow. Well, at 2pm, when you've been running since 6am, most of it on solitary confinement, hope preaching does no trick on you. You are also very clear, as a good sailor is, to note the tide turn. And a good sailor knows not to fight the tide. Believe me, the tide can be fought, and won. Cost is the contention.

Chaka, Kiganjo and Marwa (Nyeri Nanyuki Junction) crowned my third fight, one borne out of false bravado! I refused to run what Swaras had marked, after the Marwa Junction, because I knew the shortest way to Karatina Town. The loneliness had finally broken me. I now craved the company of normal human beings, not Swaras. Who, for crying out loud, proclaims that you're 'Strong', when you're barely lifting your legs to get along? The Swaras for you. Despite wanting to save face, and struggling all day with a painful hamstring, I cut short a sad story at 9hrs 28minutes 14seconds. The legs

simply declined to board, gave up all rights, including prosecutorial, for the sake, supposedly, of another run.

I saw a conspiracy in this, because, knowing the neighbourhood, a bar lay only 1km away. I tried the side argument, believe me I did. After 2 beers, we could continue the run into Karatina, and onwards to Omega Gardens, on the outskirts of town. But after 3 beers at Martine Resort Villa, the idea of running into a heroic welcome in Karatina Town died in a fizzle of bubbles. My 70km that day became the longest distance I've ever ran. A new Personal Best, and Swaras are crazy about PBs.

Though I was 32minutes short of what brought me to Karatina, it is a day I'll never forget, and will always be proud of. Many thanks to Swaras, for this run can only get bigger!

A Villager's bag of lessons;

#Never be afraid throwing your weight behind an argument, so long as you're confident you can pull back. Life is about trying.

#Alone does not necessarily mean wrong! Push, alone, till you find company. You may be the only one preventing the earth from tilting to a VERY dangerous angle.

#People who support runs are more heroes than the runners themselves, especially if they are runners, sacrificing their own runs. At times I sought them not for what they gave me to eat or drink, but simply because they understood what I was going through.

#Follow your conviction. If you fall short, pick yourself up, forget the dust, start planning a comeback.

#Have fun. This is the most important. If the light doesn't come on, don't even bother.

#I think COMRADES is a possibility...



My Sub-2 half marathon journey and losing 20 kilos *By Martha Maina*



The journey to doing a marathon begins with willpower. And then some. Plus, you need someone and something to push you when that last half mile seems like a light year.

When I reluctantly started running in 2016, 'the villager' aka Erastus Maina, my Husband, pushed me forward, while my weight pulled me down.

Roundabout that time, I tipped the scales at 80 kg. My BMI was 32.9 and it needed to be 23.5.

Running was not even on my mind. It was what others did. I'm a wife, mother and career woman; what do I know about running except getting off to running stats on research papers and proposals, and running a tight ship at

home?

One happy day – (for him) – the villager finally got me out on my maiden 6km run. It seemed like with each step, the distance grew further by two steps. At times it seemed I was moving backwards. Or that time stood still.

"Are you sure this is not 60 kilometres?" I kept asking.

"You're a champion, you can do 60," the villager joked, and my muscles screamed in pain.

I soon learnt that the first day is not the hardest, but going out the following day, and the next.

After that first day, my mind was torn between hitting the tarmac and waiting for my muscles to heal. But the villager taught me that muscles heal when you take them out again, and again. That it's about discipline, that it's a battle of mind versus matter.

I kept doing it. Kept running 5 days a week. It grew into a habit, and a good one at that. I couldn't shake it off if I wanted to.

Fast forward to ...

Sub 2hr half marathon; 1st attempt

On 27th March 2018, I packed my bags and high hopes for Cape Town, SA raring to go run the most beautiful marathon in the world: I was as ready as I could be. I had trained well with the Urban Swaras. For my first half marathon, the Kenyan in me had packed chapatis. On that early beautiful morning before the run, I had a chapati to ensure I was well fueled for the day. The weather was great. I ensured I was on time at the start.

With runners from all walks of life, as the sun kissed the skies, we waited patiently for the countdown and off we went at exactly 6am.

This is usually a family fun day in Cape Town, with song and pomp along the way, many families on the roads as early as 6am just to cheer the runners.

The starting point was a bit crowded. But as soon as I was on the second kilometer, I was able to join one of the buses for Sub 2 but ended up finishing in 2:04 hrs. So close yet so far.

Back in Kenya, we reviewed my performance. The villager committed to my sub 2 achievement and we enriched my training program which I followed religiously. He became my training and accountability partner, which made life easier.

Three days a week we would run together.

"Mauritius is all yours," he encouraged me. *"Hii Sub-2 ni yako."*

The cake before the icing

My 2nd Sub-2 Half Marathon attempt was on 15th July 2018 at the Mauritius Marathon. As part of my training, the villager introduced me to a seasoned recreational runner, David Thuo who assisted in the coaching.

D-Day

I was ready for a fantastic challenge in one of the most picturesque parts of Mauritius! Being mentally prepared gave me confidence. I had done enough physically in the build-up and trusted my body to get me to the finish line.

I got on the starting point on time, waited for the countdown and soon we were off.

Along the way, chirping and squawking seagulls seemed to encourage me whereas waves hitting the seashore was just what the doctor ordered; calming my nerves and making me concentrate on my pace.

The weather too was great for running. When I hit 6kms, I tagged onto a same-pace runner, keeping ahead of target pace.

Finally, Celebration time

And I finished in a time of 1:57:57! It was song and dance by the beautiful dancers at the finishing line as they put the medal round my neck. I was so elated with a runner's high.

I could now celebrate and enjoy the beauty of Mauritius for the next four days!

I would certainly not have made it without the support of the villager. Thank you for always pushing me out of my comfort zone believing in me and taking this journey with me.

To our 3 lovely kids, thank you for cheering mummy.

To all my friends thank you for cheering me on and for helping my dreams come true.

Drastic changes occur when you keep your eyes on just doing your thing and not, in this case, constantly staring at the scales. You know what? I have shed 20 kgs in 2 years. Yeah, you heard me right; 'two'-'zero' kilos.

What was initially a dreary undertaking has morphed into a love affair. It has become something that I cannot live without.

Running is living!



Quirky photo of the Issue



The photo was taken by Jerusha Nzembi in one of her runs. We won't ask questions... She also sent us this faceless picture so that we don't ID her...



"There are many challenges to running, but one of the greatest is the question of where to put one's keys."

Gabrielle Zevin

Swara Calendar; November, December

| Date-2018 | November | Location |
|------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Sat, 3rd | Tigoni Redhill, Floating Restaurant | Limuru |
| Sat, 10th | Ndenderu, Jowac Sports Club | Kiambu |
| Sat, 17th | Mukurweini; Hosted by Anthiny Kiai | Nyeri |
| Sat, 24th | Citam, NPC Langata road/ Kakamega Marathon | Kajiado/ Kakamega |
| December | | |
| Sat, 1st | AGM. Venue to be communicated Election for Club Patron | TBA |
| Sat, 8th | Loresho. Hosted by Raoul Kamadjeu | Nairobi |
| 12th Public Holiday | Karura | Nairobi |
| Sat, 15th | Broadways Hotel, off Waiyaki Way | Nairobi |
| Sat, 22nd | Arboretum | Nairobi |
| Sat, 29th | Arboretum | Nairobi |

Running trivia

The marathon distance of 42.1954 km (26 miles and 385 yards) was officially adopted in 1921, adopting the 1908 London Olympic Marathon Distance. before that marathon distances were not standard.

International runs

Past Events

Berlin: Marathon of the year. A complete annihilation of the WR from 2:02:57 to 2:01:39 by Kipchoge in an amazing display of solo running from 25k. Gladys Cherono was a surprise winner smashing the course record. Pre-race odds were heavily in favour of the great Tirunesh Dibaba.

Chicago: Brigid Kosgey won in emphatic fashion, upgrading her second position at the London Marathon back in April. Sir. Mo finally got his maiden marathon win, employing to devastating effect his famous kick. Kenyans were relegated to the fourth position in Kenneth Kipkemoi, a strong marathon prodigy.

Amsterdam Marathon: Lawrence Cherono cements his place as a lead marathoner, posting a fast 2.04.05 time. Bekele yet again DNF'd.

Upcoming

| Race | 2017 Winners | 2018 Highlights |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| New York Marathon | Geoffrey Kamworor Shalane Flanagan | Kamworor, an Eliud Kipchoge training mate, is the man to watch. Bernard Lagat makes his marathon debut at 44. The ever so smooth veteran Mary Keitany lines up with sensational new kid on the block, Vivian Cheruiyot. Big Apple is definitely not to be missed. Swaras who will toe the line; Daisy Ajima, Avani Patel, Rebecca Mbithi, Wanjira Chege, Anthony Mwai, Timothy Macharia, Jen Wong (American Swara) |

Chicago Marathon in Pictures.... Photos supplied by Daisy Ajima

Chicago was super represented, not only in numbers, but by show stoppers! People who carried flags, sisal skirts, shukas, traditional paraphernalia, it is a wonder no one was arrested at an airport for witchcraft importation!

The two pictures below were taken at a 5K run with a long name on the eve of the marathon.

The Kenyan delegation reportedly had illegal amounts of fun!!



Chicago in Summary....By Nyokabi Kamotho



As we tapered off for Chicago, the impending anxiety was palpable. We were over 20 Kenyans, with a majority being from our Urban Swaras Running Club. We had been unified, our bonds made stronger by the singular goal: Chicago Marathon 2018.

Inevitably, many of us had gone through an entire training cycle together and were now more like siblings than mere running buddies. This helped a great deal whenever the varying expected issues arose; accommodation, flights,

travel, self-doubts, pre-marathon anxiety and all the existential angst runners experience before a race.

On Friday 5th October 2018, we came together at the anticipated Marathon Expo. Amazement was expressed at the architecture in Chicago and the marathon buzz from the airport to the city. After completing the rudimentary administrative activities we sat down, enthused, had lunch and parted ways.

The following day many of us congregated at the start of the Advocate Healthcare International Chicago 5km run. This is an optional annual charity run that takes place the day before the marathon. Brand Kenya was going to be our dominant theme at the run. We had runners in Maasai shukas, Maasai beads, brandishing the Kenyan flag and it was so apparent that our champions have placed us on the global map in an idolized position. We ran and sang (very loudly) any Kenyan song that we could remember...yes! We sang for the entire 5k "Kenya Yetu - Hakuna Matata" We were cheered by runners and spectators and when we reached the finish,

a local TV news crew interviewed us.

On Marathon day, most of us went through the motions of our first Majors Marathon in a semi-daze but the comradery was a savior. Those who had crossed these lines before gave comforting words of encouragement.

There was no noticeable disorganization, maybe as I was a newbie. Volunteers were everywhere and the entire City had come to a standstill for runners: elite, semi-elite and recreational alike. Everything was sectioned from the initial identification points to the bag storage stalls and rows of porta-loos to relieve oneself of the nervous strain.

The Waves took off like clockwork and along the route, distances were highlighted with digital time displays.

Humorous and witty messages were displayed on home-made boards in the hands of spectators lining the streets and they provided comic relief for the first half or until pain and suffering then each joke loomed as an insult. The abrupt and unprepared for cold weather, harsh gusts of wind and incessant rain was another shock for many but as runners, we all know that our best experiences are the harshest ones. Gladly everyone in tem Kenya finished the race.

That night we had a party, we were hosted by a fantastic group of Kenyans living in Chicago. Our very own Jack Ndegwa became a Six-Star Finisher and that called for additional celebration. We also found out that an article had been published in the Daily Nation about our large group.

Chicago was quite the memorable experience!

