

The run of his life

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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<http://www.ozaukeekeepress.com/images/041813/marathonSM.png> **OHS grad's Boston Marathon finish gave him and his Fredonia family time to walk away from eventual blast zone**

It was his dream race — the prestigious Boston Marathon — so when 2008 Ozaukee High School graduate Brian Preisler finished the 26.2-mile course in a fast 3:10:51 Monday, he was ecstatic.

Just more than an hour later, the 23-year-old Preisler began to realize just how important it was that he ran fast that day.

That was when two homemade bombs detonated near the finish line, killing three people, injuring more than 170 others and turning a scene of celebration into ground zero of a national tragedy.

Preisler could have been there. His family — mother and father Cindy and John Preisler of Fredonia, sister Stacy Huegerich and her 5-month-old son Isaiah, all in Boston to see him run — could have been near the bombs when they exploded had Preisler not finished the race in time to unwittingly stroll away from danger.



"I was very happy with my finish, but in the end I am so thankful I was able to run a good race and finish before the explosions," Preisler, who flew back to Wisconsin Monday night, said from his Madison home Tuesday. "I don't think it was an accident. My family was blessed that day."

After finishing the race, Preisler reunited with his family. They walked to Boston Common, which a day later was the site of a vigil for the bombing victims.

"We were about three blocks from the finish and I was crossing a street when I heard the first explosion and saw the smoke. The second explosion followed pretty quickly," he said. "At first, I didn't think anything of it. With it being Patriot's Day and a half-million marathon spectators, it was one big celebration.

"But as soon as we heard the sirens, we knew something was wrong."

It was another 40 minutes before Preisler began to understand just how wrong things were.

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“A friend of mine from Madison called and asked if I was OK,” he said. “That’s when I first started realizing how tragic this was.”

Preisler and his family were safe, but he couldn’t help but think what could have happened.

“I was just so thankful that I had finished the race and was with my family when this happened,” he said. “I knew where everybody was and I knew we were safe.

“If I hadn’t finished, I would have had no idea where my family was or if they were safe, and no way to contact them. My cell phone was waiting for me at the finish, which was chaos after the explosions.”

Preisler was able to take a subway train to Logan International Airport and catch his flight home. His parents, sister and her son, who is Preisler’s godson, drove to his sister’s home in New Jersey.

“We are so thankful Brian is OK, yet we are saddened by what happened to so many people,” Mrs. Preisler said Monday night.

After graduating from Ozaukee High School as the salutatorian of his class, Preisler left Fredonia for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He graduated in May and is currently working in student ministry at St. Paul University Catholic Center in Madison.

In high school, Preisler participated in just about every sport the school had to offer, but he had no interest in distance running.

“I only ran if someone made me,” he said. “I picked up running about two years ago as a great way to stay in shape while in college and have been shooting for the Boston Marathon ever since.”

He qualified for the renowned marathon with his finish in last year’s Haunted Hustle Marathon in Middleton and had been counting the days to April 15, 2013.

For most runners, especially Preisler, who had three marathons under his belt going into his first Boston Marathon, that was to be a day of personal triumph and achievement. Tragically, it turned out to be much more than that.

“That day was on my calendar for a long time because of what it meant to me as a runner,” he said. “Now it will be on my calendar forever for such tragic reasons, for reasons I’d rather not remember.”

But Preisler, who plans to run a marathon with his brother in Green Bay next month, said he will return to Boston.

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“I will certainly run another Boston Marathon,” he said. “I’m sure it will have a different feel — more somber — but that won’t take away from the pageantry of this great race.”

Image Information: SHORTLY AFTER FINISHING his first Boston Marathon Monday, Ozaukee High School graduate Brian Preisler (left) and his sister Stacy Huegerich held a sign made on behalf of Preisler’s 5-month-old nephew and godson Isaiah, who was asleep in a carrier worn by Preisler’s father John. The time stamp on the photo provided by Preisler’s family indicates it was taken about 35 minutes before the explosions.