

Bold Steps By Jessa Vartanian

When you're 31 and single, it's time to get bold. At least, that's what I tell myself. Fortunately, being a runner has given me the self-confidence to take risks.

Sure, my boldness has caused me a few humiliating moments. On more than one occasion, I've slapped my hands over my face and cried, "Oh, my God! What have I done?" But being bold gets my heart fluttering. And that's always a good thing.

Boldness struck last April as I passed the 5-mile marker on the steep, muddy trails of a local half-marathon. I was taking baby steps up a 1,500-foot climb, trying not to look past the visor of my baseball cap. Without warning, a pair of powerful calves entered my field of vision.

"A man," I thought.

Clean-cut, with short, dark hair, he was exactly the hill-climbing distraction I needed. I inched up alongside him and puffed, "How's it going?"

"Good, how 'bout you?"

"Fine. I think this is the last hill."

"I hope so."

Together we made it to the top and kept on running and talking. By the time we reached the 6.6-mile turnaround, I'd learned that his first name was Frank, he worked for a consulting firm in San Francisco, and he was originally from Boston. I forgot all about the cramp in my big toe.

At mile 7, I stumbled on a tree root. He grabbed me around the waist to keep me from falling. I glanced down to check for a wedding ring. None. Definite possibilities, I thought.

Thirty minutes later, we discovered that we'd gone off course. Could we have been babbling that much? So we backtracked, and in 10 minutes found the left where we should have gone right. Crossing the finish line together, we tied for last place in the longest half-marathon either of us had ever run.

Afterward, as Frank and I stood around sipping Gatorade and gnawing on malt-nut

PowerBars, I waited for him to ask for my phone number.

It never happened. My friends were getting ready to leave, so I said a hasty goodbye to Frank and headed after them.

I climbed into the backseat of my friend's Jeep and immediately began kicking myself. Why hadn't I asked for *his* phone number? All the women's magazines say men love it when women ask them out, right?

When I got home, I dug out the book *Guerrilla Dating Tactics* my sister had given me last Valentine's Day. I decided it was time to put those tactics to the test.

I called Frank's company and managed to find out his last name. Then I wrote him a casual little note asking if he'd been practicing his trail navigation skills. I dropped my business card inside and mailed it off.

Every time the phone rang, my heart sped up a little. But two weeks went by—no Frank. Maybe my instincts had been wrong. Maybe he hadn't liked me after all. Maybe he had five wives and 12 children. Okay, at least I gave it a shot. I was bold. Chalk it up to experience.

And that, of course, is when he called. His company had two buildings, and my letter had gone to the wrong one. He'd just received it. He was glad I'd mailed it, said he'd thought about hunting me down, too. We made a date to go running.

If this were a made-for-TV movie, now we'd cut to the scene where Frank and I are walking down the aisle. But it isn't, and we're not. We had a pleasant run, spoke a few more times on the phone, then quietly melted out of each other's lives.

Nonetheless, I don't regret tracking Frank down or sending him that note. Because being bold is like running: it puts a spring in my step, a shimmer on my horizon. I like planting little possibilities and waiting to see if they'll grow—things to look forward to, things to be anxious about, things to make my heart quiver when the phone rings. **R**

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