

by Becky St. Clair

mission fully alive



They were beyond sleep-deprived. Oliver Glanz, assistant professor of Old Testament in the Seminary, and Oleg Kostyuk, MDiv student, had been awake for more than 36 hours and had spent 21 of them running. But let's back up. This was 8 p.m. on Sunday evening. There's a lot that happened before then.

At 5:45 on Saturday evening, Oct. 22, 2016, a crowd of cars and people gathered in the parking lot behind Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University. Bags and boxes of food were transferred between vehicles, gallons of water were strapped into a saddle bag on the back of a bike and small groups wandered between each other, exchanging cell phone numbers and comparing notes. It was about to begin: Five individuals were preparing to bike or run 100 miles from the campus of Andrews University in Michigan to the Water Tower Place in downtown Chicago.

"This is something I've wanted to do for more than five years," explains Kostyuk, who, along with Glanz, had been training specifically for this run for nearly ten months. "I've done marathons and I run regularly for the fun of it, and I wanted to challenge myself."

Glanz and Kostyuk have known each other for only a couple of years. In that short time, however, their relationship has grown beyond typical as they've run and biked together countless miles and hours.

In his native Germany, Glanz watched his father, a pastor, ride his bike to each of his churches to preach. As he grew into a young man and then an adult, Glanz fell in love with mountaineering. With mountains a few short hours away, he was able to regularly participate in rock climbing, high altitude climbing, ice climbing and big mountain skiing. He has summited Mt. Blanc, the highest peak of the Alps, several times.

Now, Glanz regularly jogs his commute to work, a distance of six miles one direction, sometimes alongside his 6-year-old daughter bicycling her way to school. This commute is more than just travel time or physical activity. Glanz considers it bonding time with his daughter.

"We talk while we pedal and jog," he says. "She tells me what she dreamed last night or what she thinks of school. I ask her about her friends, her teachers and her life."

As a result of regular Sabbath afternoon hikes on the Appalachian Trail, Kostyuk became accustomed to hiking 18 miles at a time. He and his wife also regularly went diving in Florida, and after doing several marathons, Kostyuk now laughingly refers to them as "little jogs."

In 2016, Kostyuk and Glanz completed a couple of marathons (26.3 miles each), and some 30-, 40-, 50- and 60-mile runs.

The buzzword for this kind of athletic prowess is "ultra-running."

"We call something 'ultra' when it is further, higher or deeper than what one would consider being just far, high or deep," explains Glanz.

It's not a term reserved solely for running or even just physical activity.

"Everyone has an ultra," says Kostyuk. "An ultra is anything beyond your comfort zone in every aspect of life: Studying, love, public speaking, parenting, etc.

Going one step further than you thought you could is what makes it an ultra.”

For Glanz and Kostyuk, going “one step further” proves to be quite a bit beyond average. When they decided to attempt a 100-mile run, the runners knew preparation and training were key, which for them simply meant increasing the activity and healthy diets they already incorporated into their everyday lives.

By the time Glanz and Kostyuk said their final words of inspiration to the gathered crowd on Saturday, Oct. 22, they were more than ready to get this epic run started. The energy and excitement were palpable as a crowd of about 50 supporters gathered on the campus sidewalk to bid the athletes farewell.

It was 7:10 p.m.

“Ready! Set! GO!”

And they were off. Cheers, claps, whistles; the crowd watched them as they quickly made their way across campus, down J.N. Andrews Boulevard, and toward the south-east edge of town.

They had five checkpoints between Michigan and Chicago, and wore a live GPS tracker so family and friends could track their progress, and the support team could stay on top of the runners’ average minutes per mile, allowing them to calculate where the runners would be and when.

Accompanying the two Andrews runners was Calvin Kim, a third runner who had connected with Kostyuk and Glanz online and had flown out from Washington State specifically to participate in the 100-mile run. Two bicyclists, Flavio Prestes and Lisandro Stout, volunteered to serve as support for the runners. They packed first aid kits, water and flashlights and rode alongside the runners for the entire event. Prestes also served as the communication point-person, providing hourly updates to the University Health & Wellness and media teams.

At checkpoints two, three and four a volunteer physical therapist set up a table and gave the runners much-needed massages to soften their muscles.

“It hurt,” Glanz admits, “but it was a good pain and probably the best massage we’ve ever had. Her work kept our muscles healthy and allowed us to continue to complete our goal.”

At each stop, the runners ate special food prepared just for this event by a sports nutrition class in the Department of Public Health, Nutrition & Wellness. The night was chilly—about 45 degrees at its coldest point—so they also took care to keep their muscles warm during each stop, using everything from hats and jackets to a special hot drink prepared just for the run, called “Glögg.”

“They were never out of breath,” says Janine Carlos, administrative assistant for the Department of Church History in the Sem-

inary. Carlos was responsible for providing meals for the runners at checkpoints 2–5. “At that fourth stop you’d never know they’d already run 75 miles—the equivalent of almost three full marathons.”

This intense ultra-run was not just to prove they could do it. Glanz and Kostyuk were running to kick off the University’s first-ever Wellness Week, themed “Mission Fully Alive.”

“The Bible writers encouraged their readers to be fully alive,” says Glanz. “According to Paul the best way to do that was to become a Hebrew—the biblical word for the modern word ‘ultra.’”

Glanz explains that there are only two people referred to as “Hebrews” in the book of Genesis: Abraham and Joseph.

“These two individuals become the prototypes of the Hebrews,” he says. “They leave their comfort zone and explore new social, physical, spiritual and psychological limits. They go ultra. They become fully alive.”

The joy Kostyuk and Glanz find in running is about more than competing against themselves. It’s also about what they’ve termed “The 3 E’s:” Embrace creation. Explore life. Educate yourself.”

“Running is an opportunity to get in touch with nature,” says Glanz. “It’s a way to reconnect with the world God created for us and experience more of what it has to offer.”

It’s not just about serious things, either.

“Running for us is like going to the playground for small children,” Kostyuk says with a smile. “When I run, I’m a child again. Sometimes we scream ‘yippee!’ as we run the hills, or pretend dogs are chasing us. We run in the rain, jump over things, try to run faster than a deer. It brings you back to childhood and creates immeasurable joy and happiness.”

They also use it as time to learn—about each other, the world and even listening to audiobooks as they run.

As the miles jogged by on the 100-mile run, Glanz and Kostyuk found they had an increasing need for encouragement. They had left

their previous record (67 miles) behind hours ago and their bodies and minds were tired.

“For the final few miles we just kept telling ourselves over and over again not to give up,” says Kostyuk. “We wanted to stop but we also wanted to finish, and we knew we could do it, so we pushed through.”

They approached Water Tower Place in downtown Chicago as a crowd of nearly 50 friends, family and supporters cheered, used noisemakers, clapped and waved signs of congratulations. Two people held a long piece of red crepe paper across the sidewalk, and when they got to it, Glanz and Kostyuk stopped, looked at each other, counted to three, and then burst across the finish line exactly as they’d started the run: In perfect step, together.

It was 4:30 p.m. They had completed the 100 miles in just over 21 hours.

“Christians are called to be Hebrews and be ready to go beyond to take the challenge and receive life to the fullest,” says Glanz. “To not shy away in the presence of pain, disappointment or rejection but to keep pushing, to fight for that life that brings healing, joy, true community and satisfaction. To fulfill the mission of being fully alive. To commit to a life that seeks new limits, that does not accept the status quo but seeks more of that life that God promises, to receive the blessings of God more readily, to surrender to God more fully. To become more fully alive.”

Challenge is key, say Glanz and Kostyuk, because growth doesn’t happen in comfort and ease.

“Sometimes we dream of the things we wish we could do, but the truth is we can do them,” says Kostyuk. “And if we can do these things for ourselves, imagine what we can do to help the world. We can move mountains with God. If God created us with these abilities, we have the responsibility to take care of ourselves and anything around us. To push ourselves to go beyond—to go ultra. We just have to commit.”

RECOVERY

Thanks to two professional physical therapists who volunteered their services, both Glanz and Kostyuk received intense and necessary massages within 15 minutes of completing the run. That night they slept for nearly 12 hours. The first few hours after waking included a number of stretches and working on building their energy and muscles back with healthy, hearty food. They also spent time in a friend’s sauna.

Due to their extensive training, neither Glanz nor Kostyuk experienced any major pain or soreness in the days that followed the run. They even independently biked 12+ miles two days later. The running they saved for a week later, however.

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