

A Happy Place

By Adjani Arumpac

Picture this. The city is sleeping. A throng of happy men and women are stretching to a catchy beat. Adrenaline fills up the whole space. In a few minutes, the music gives way to a countdown. Up in the skies, fireworks dot the murky skies.

Three, two, one, zero.

The starter's pistol fires. Hundreds pound the pavement in one easy rhythm. All eyes are on the horizon breaking to reveal the golden rays of a new day. This is not just a run. This is a thriving community.

This was the scene inside Jaymie Pizarro's mind when asked: "Why race?" The *chinita morena*—dressed in spandex sports attire that hugged her lean physique—went into a daze momentarily as she recalled her first 5k race. "Just getting into the race and seeing all the runners around me, it was a brand new experience."

Jaymie, known to the running world as The Bull Runner, started running in 2006. Every work-at-home mom is familiar with her story. "For the longest time, I had a treadmill at home and I would walk on the treadmill trying to lose weight because I had two kids and I never lost the five pounds from giving birth," Jaymie recalls. "The one thing that changed it all was when one of my friends said that she could run on her treadmill already for thirty minutes." In two months, Jaymie was also able to run for thirty minutes on the treadmill. In another six months, her mounting passion for running was already looking for kindred spirits. But she found a dearth of information about running or runners in the Philippines.

This was the gap that she filled with her wildly successful blog, The Bull Runner. "On my birthday, I said 'why don't I just start a blog?' I'm a writer, a graphic designer. I bought the domain. I created a logo and wrote the first article and posted everything within one hour, thinking that no one would ever read the blog."

To date, the Bull Runner website gets as much as 60,000 hits every month. The blog's popularity owes much to the running fever that burned up the Philippines in 2008, just a year after she started her blog. "I think mine was the only running blog at that time. It was the main source of all the information on all things running and I knew what runners needed because I was a runner myself." In 2011, almost 400,000 Filipino men, women, and children are estimated to have run together a total of roughly 39 million race kilometers. And the numbers keep on adding up every year proving that, indeed, fitness is the new black. And at the frontline is The Bull Runner.

From running races, Jaymie eventually organized her own race. "The Bull Runner Dream Marathon came from my experience with my first marathon. When I crossed that finish line, I felt like a changed person. I felt stronger, more confident. I was like a whole new person." Inspired, Jaymie collaborated with active runner and coach, James "Jim" Lafferty, to create the first and only race for beginner marathon runners. The program is a 22-week intensive training specifically designed to guide marathoners from beginning of training until they cross the finish line. Jaymie stakes on her own experience in crafting such an endeavor. "Personally, when I ran my first marathon, finishing it was only the icing on the cake. The best part of marathoning is the journey as you see yourself progress and you go out there and push yourself."

And it doesn't hurt that the views during the arduous journey are breathtaking. Since its inception, Jaymie chose what she calls "a happy place" for her pet project. "When we saw NUVALI in Sta. Rosa, Laguna—the route, clear traffic-free roads, with views of Tagaytay and Mt. Makiling—I thought, what better place to have a marathon? You're so close to nature, you feel you like you're free to run anywhere." Jaymie fondly recalls that the first time she went to check out the place, NUVALI was still mostly under construction. But GM Jun Bisnar, who is also a runner, gamely offered to work around the marathon requirements—building basic quality infrastructures such as roads and lights for safe and worry-free run through the area. Jaymie was only too happy to work with NUVALI as a partner. "Every year since then, when we conceptualize the route, we see how fast the development is in NUVALI."

The Bull Runner Dream Marathon, simply put, grew up with NUVALI. The two brands are firmly entwined in their bid to build an identity that is scenic, safe, and ultimately, holds a soft spot within everyone who has experienced what they have to offer.

In 2014, the TBR Dream Marathon will celebrate its fifth anniversary. Amidst juggling a day job as a graphic designer, being a mother of two, and fulfilling the role of a full-time running icon, Jaymie—the Bull Runner—is not showing signs of letting up. She only has to remember one scene to keep her going. "When I see people crossing the finish line, crying, hugging their families with that look of triumph—then I forget how tired I am. I go, yes, I will definitely do this again; yes, we have to get more runners to run a marathon." From 300 runners, the TBR Dream Marathon now boasts of 900 runners. NUVALI, as well, has grown into a beautiful estate specially designed for carefree living away from the bustle of the metropolis. "It's a great partnership wherein together we see the progress. We help each other bring more people here and also bring more people into running and changing their lives."