

God, Life, and Everything "Inflatable 5K"

So, did you do the Insane Inflatable 5K? Sure you did. You had to have because there were enough people there for the entire county to have taken part.

If you think I'm the insane one at this point, let me explain. The Insane Inflatable 5K is a fun challenge course that, as its name implies, is five kilometers long. Interspersed throughout the course are what can only be described as giant bouncy houses you have to go through.

They are of various sizes and shapes - one worked like those tires you see football players run through, another like a room filled with giant plastic balls that other participants toss (or roll) at each other, and yet another was an inflatable "mountain" you had to climb up only so you can slide down the other side. You get the idea.

Anyway, my wife and I decided to take part in this Inflatable 5K because we've been looking for different outdoor things to do together, and we did not want to get involved in the real insanity that our sons were taking part in - a much longer, much harder, much muddier challenge course called the Tough Mudder. (I did one with my older son last year at his urging and have concluded that one was enough for my lifetime.)

Aside from our foolish arrival at the venue an hour-and-a-half early, requiring us to stand in the 90 degree sun for far too long, it was great fun. Participants were roughly divided into runners, joggers and walkers (not officially, mind you, that's just how they shook out). We were with the walkers, thank you very much.

But here's what surprised me about this event - and truthfully, all such events: There were teams. I mean lots of teams. There were corporate teams, teams for non-profit organizations, teams for birthday parties, teams in support of cancer research or of individuals in medical crisis. There were teams for everything including a family reunion who wore t-shirts with a motto on the back: "We're so far behind that we thought we were first."

There were day-glo yellow and orange team shirts, black, red, blue shirts. And yes, one team wore tie-dyed tutus (that was a wedding party, and the groom wore one, too).

Now, my wife and I were not caught entirely unaware. The morning of the 5K, we said, "Hey, let's wear matching t-shirts." And since we do not own matching t-shirts, we raided our sons' dressers since they have an endless supply of bright orange Syracuse paraphernalia. They weren't there to stop us because they were out of town doing the Tough Mudder, remember? But I'm sure they wouldn't mind....

Back to the teams. There was a team from a different state that had 99 participants. 99! Another agency that gives medical care to uninsured and under insured kids (I think that's what they said), brought a team of more than sixty. I hadn't thought about it before, but looking at all those teams, I realized that the same types of teams were represented at the Tough Mudder, too. I bet these teams can be found at all the other similar events: Warrior Dash, Spartan Race, Dragon Boat Races. You name it.

Because these events are not just about having a good time - as I so naively believed at first. No, they are fundraisers, employee morale boosters, celebration, and advertising.

When I finally figured out the value of these teams, I thought, "Wow! Have I missed the boat!" We should have brought a team from the church. Or maybe we could have brought a team from the Council of Churches. Or from the Nursery School or the Community Garden or, well, who knows? I bet we could get a whole bunch of our youth group to do something as fun and silly as five kilometers of bouncy houses - all we need to do is find a worthy cause to bounce for!

On the other hand, there's something to be said for saving some things for pure, simple fun with no agenda. There's something to be said for not turning everything we do into a cause. Not saying I won't try to get a team together, mind you. But I am saying that the greater value of doing an event like this may not rest in the money raised. Rather, it just might be in the togetherness, the working together for a common goal.

Or, in just the love of bouncing.