



## Rites of Spring: Patriots, Marathons and Chicken Legs &

Runners' Chicken & Pasta

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**In case it has slipped your mind, Patriots' Day is next Monday.** Although

Patriots' Day has disappeared from popular knowledge, most Americans have heard of Paul Revere and his famous ride. Revere's midnight warning helped the brave colonists beat the British the next day at Lexington and Concord. The mostly forgotten holiday honors these opening battles of the American Revolution.

**The Boston Marathon, one of New England's most famous rites of spring, takes place on Patriots' Day.**

The marathon runs twenty-six long miles from Hopkinton to downtown Boston. I grew up on the route at about the half-way mark. Massachusetts is one of the few states to celebrate Patriots' Day and, unlike the rest of the country, schools are closed. When I was little we often watched at least part of the race while waiting in line, usually in the rain, for the matinee at the local movie theater. It never occurred to me that I would or even could run the marathon but years later I did just that.



I was working on my MBA when I began training for the great race. Running was a welcome respite from the spreadsheets and case studies that monopolized most of my time and thoughts. Besides I like to set goals. Running twenty-six miles in under four hours seemed as good a goal as any. My friends and family thought I was nuts but that was nothing new.

It was raining buckets Marathon morning. However, luck was with me and the zillion other runners and the downpour stopped just in time for the race. Still and all, from Hopkinton to Boston, it was cold and grey, a typical April day in New England. It was spitting snow as I wound my way through Framingham. Still strong, I passed the old movie theatre in Wellesley and headed for Newton. Newton is where, after twenty relatively flat miles, the course climbs up the infamous Heartbreak Hill.

**Topographers and surveyors insist that Heart Break Hill is a gentle incline of about a half mile.** They are wrong. It is a unbelievably steep hill that goes on forever. Boston College lines this part of the route. The sidewalks were jammed with students drinking beer and cheerfully heckling runners. Valiantly, we struggled to the top of the hill. My most vivid memory of the marathon was an enthusiastic co-ed shrieking in a thick Boston accent, "They've all got chicken legs!"

I don't think I changed anyone's mind concerning my sanity but a few friends and most of my family found places along the route to cheer me on. Then nine, my niece Gillian created a colorful poster with a picture of me running and lots of encouraging words. Her enthusiasm was sweet in spite of her ulterior motive. She hoped her elaborate sign would improve her chances of an interview with at least one of the dozens of reporters and talk show hosts covering the event.

Gillian did not make it on television but I did make it to Boston in one piece, chicken legs and all. As for my goal, I finished the marathon in three hours and fifty minutes. After all, it was a very long time ago.

Bon appétit!

## Runners' Chicken & Pasta

*Carbo loading with pasta is a marathon eve tradition. Whether you are a runner or not, give this hearty pasta a try. Enjoy!*

Serves 6

Olive oil

12 ounces mushrooms, sliced

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 yellow or red bell pepper, chopped

1 onion, chopped

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

Pinch red pepper flakes

3-4 cloves garlic, minced

1 cup dry white wine

1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes

1 cup chicken stock

About 1 1/2 pounds boneless chicken breasts or thighs

1/2 cup flour

2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

6-12 ounces spaghetti or linguine

Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese



Heat a little olive oil in a large, heavy sauté pan on medium-high, add the mushrooms, season with salt and pepper and sauté until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Reserve.

Heat a little olive oil in a large saucepan on a medium-high. Add the bell pepper, onion, herbs and pepper flakes, season with salt and pepper and sauté until the onion is translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté 1 minute more. Add the wine and simmer until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Add the mushrooms, tomatoes and broth to the pan and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 15-20 minutes.

While the sauce simmers, sprinkle the chicken with salt and pepper and dredge in the flour to lightly coat. Heat a little olive oil in a large, heavy sauté pan on medium-high, add the chicken and sauté, in batches if necessary, until golden, about 2 minutes per side. Reserve.

Add the chicken to the sauce, turning to coat, and simmer for about 5 minutes or until the chicken is piping hot and cooked through.

Meanwhile, cook and drain the pasta in salted water according to package directions.

Transfer the pasta to a serving bowl, add enough sauce to lightly coat, sprinkle with half the parsley and toss. Slice the chicken and arrange it on top of the pasta. Drizzle the chicken with a little sauce and sprinkle with the remaining parsley. Serve immediately, passing any remaining sauce and grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.