

## PPR's Valerie Arhondakis Finishes Boston Marathon in 3:58:03 and has a Story of a Lifetime.

*By Patty-Pat Kozlowski*

13 minutes. For the rest of her life, PPR's Recreation Programming Coordinator Valerie Arhondakis will remember those 13 minutes up in Boston. As she crossed the finish line at the 117th Boston Marathon on Monday, April 15, 2013 with a race time of 3:58:03, little did she know that only 13 minutes later an evil devastation would change everyone's life at the Boston Marathon that day.

Val and her father were blocks and blocks away and 13 minutes from the finish line when the first bomb went off at the Boston Marathon. She already had her medal around her neck, her proud poppa already handed her a bouquet of flowers when all hell broke loose.

During the 117th Boston Marathon on April 15th two bombs exploded, killing 3 people and injuring 183 others. The bombs had been placed near the finish line, along Boylston Street. They were detonated at 2:49 p.m., 13 seconds apart. No warning was given and no claim of responsibility was made for the bombings. The FBI led an investigation and released photos of two suspects, brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

On the night of April 18, after the death of an MIT police officer in a shooting at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, police engaged in a shootout and subsequent manhunt for Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Tamerlan died in a hospital early in the morning of April 19. Residents were asked to remain home, with their doors locked. Public institutions closed, including transit, Amtrak, businesses, schools and universities. Various police forces, coordinated by the state police, conducted a manhunt in Watertown and followed leads until capturing Dzhokhar Tsarnaev around 8:45 p.m. on April 19.

With cell phone service almost nonexistent after the bombings, hundreds of Valerie's friends had no way to find out if she was okay, so they turned to Facebook for information about their favorite runner. Minutes felt like days, and hours felt like years, but finally Valerie posted on her Facebook page that she and her father were safe and sound. A huge sigh of relief was heard throughout the Philadelphia Department of Parks & Rec.

Even though the Arhondakis' were scheduled to depart Boston on Monday evening, all runners were sequestered and prohibited from leaving the city until given police and FBI clearance. After staying an extra night at her hotel, Valerie and her dad flew home to Philly on Tuesday, April 16.

When she arrived back at work at Parks & Rec, Valerie posted this message to her Facebook account:

"In the past 39 years of my life, the last 4 days have shown the true measure of the impact I've had on people I... have come in contact with in one way or another. I have been showered with love and kindness by an infinite number of people. I was publicly welcomed home by everyone at Philadelphia Parks & Rec today and welcomed with hugs and flowers from Northeast Raquetball Club and my dance family. I'm so blessed!"

“I was overwhelmed with emotion and I couldn't believe I lost my composure in front of my coworkers,” she said. “I thought that I was upset but it all hit me today and I couldn't hold back the tears amidst so many hugs and people telling me they were so glad to see me! It was truly so warming I felt like it was a true work family greeting. I think people who were there are more affected than we realize!”

A few days after the Boston Marathon, Valerie pulled out her medal and reflected on the significance of it all. “Today I look at this and it brings tears to my eyes. The fact that so much tragedy befell others while watching others to obtain this, its heart wrenching. I will never forget this race or day as long as I live!”

And if you know our gal Val, you know she'll be lacing up her running sneakers and training for Boston 2014! She's entered in a contest called The Extra Mile and asks that all her co-workers and fellow employees of Parks and Rec take a few minutes to log on and vote for her entry.

“I am not going to let some psycho, mentally deranged individuals ruin zest and zeal for running the Boston marathon! I love this town and I love running here, please don't forget to help me with my goal to get back here next year! [http://jhextramile.com/?page\\_id=309](http://jhextramile.com/?page_id=309).”

“And finally my friends I can't thank you enough for all your concern and support through all of this! I am truly blessed and overwhelmed!”