

Arrvada

This is how the end of the world shall be written....

Journey to the End of the Night

Posted on 06/19/2011 by

I didn't know what to expect when I talked people into going to the City to be chased by Zombies. All I knew was what the email said and what the website said. I didn't realize how blue the sky was going to be with the fast sweeping low clouds the scuttle by over the tops of the towering buildings that surrounded us. I

didn't expect our group to grow by three strangers and create a team. I didn't expect to be one of 1300 people coming from within San Francisco and the surrounding cities to run through the streets, to play a huge game of tag.

I expected to see some strange people, maybe a few nerds, but the crowd was so mixed that no one stood out. Every age, every ethnicity and every walk of life showed up to be signed in to run from Chasers.

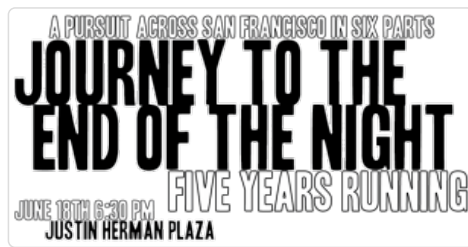
The game was simple; you simply had to make it from point A to point B without being tagged by a Chaser. We were Runners, we were the sheep, they were the wolves. I expected it to be fun, I knew I wouldn't last long, I am not a runner, I am not in that great of shape.

Over a thousand people stood on the grass in a Park on the Embarcadero, all of us proudly showing our blue arm band that showed we were human. We watched as the official Chasers with their red armbands stalked out into the streets to lay in wait for us. We watched them with growing trepidation; some were on bikes, some on Motorcycles, others on foot. All ominous in their solid black with bright, blood red tags that told you who they were. One even walked past wearing a gas mask and carrying a samurai sword. That one scared the shit out of me! I dreaded the thought of him jumping out of some alley somewhere in a city I am not native to.

And then we were off, mob mentality is amazing! Our carefully plotted plan was instantly forgotten as the crowd made a mad dash. Two of our group were instantly separated and I had to run after them and bring them back. You could feel the panic as if this was all real. As if these Chasers were actually or could actually hurt us.

I caught my two friends and together the three of us ran after our guides and other companions. They were a block ahead of us, running toward Market Street and then we heard it, that high pitched, heavy engine of a motorcycle. We turned and saw a Chaser, in all black, with red tags on forearms and at his knees.

My two companions wanted to instantly run, but I caught them, tried to walk calmly as if we weren't the hunted and then he saw us. The panic was instant and real. We ran, terrified he would jump the curb and come after us as we ran down market toward our other three friends. But he was stuck, he couldn't leave the road, we were safe, but our friends were not. He saw them. He knew he couldn't get to us, but he could get to



them as they stood innocently on the corner waiting for the light to change.

We screamed and they looked back at us. Again the three of us screamed as if one, "Chaser!" Our gestures and screams saved them and they ran back to us. Frustrated he sat at the curb, watching us as we gathered together like scared deer, watching him like he was a wolf. He knew we would not come back to the curb and then revving the engine he darted away.

We grouped, panicked and breathless, then climbed onto the bus that we had planned to take to get us to a safe zone. One the bus, we collapsed, panting, searching the street for anyone wearing a red tag. The other passengers looked at us in confusion, some more curious than others asked what we were doing.

How do you explain to a complete stranger that you are planning a game? That at thirty two you are playing tag with 1300 other adults and being chased by 'Zombies' without seeming like you have lost your mind? How do explain the true panic you felt and the adrenalin that is pumping through your veins? You can't, neither can you explain how amazing fun it is to run into the night, afraid to be caught, planning your next move in a city you don't know.

We took the bus to the first Safe Zone, found the bonus, a card that would make all Chasers freeze for 60 seconds if they tried to catch you. But to get it we had to square dance with thirty strangers, we had to earn that bonus.

From there we ran to the next bus stop that would take us to our next goal. The bus pulled up, we were not in a safe zone, but we could see no red tags on the people walking on the street. We raced onto the bus, but as we did we heard the pound of running feet. One of us was tagged!

Her bonus card was gone, but she was still alive. And breathless we rode the bus to our next stop. But there was no more safe zone. We knew the moment we stepped off the bus we would have to run. Would there be Chasers waiting for us? We had three blocks to run before we would be safe.

The bus slowed, stopped, we were off the bus and running. Two of our group ran one direction; we took the straight shot to the safe zone. We knew we just had to make it to Bush. Once across we would be safe. We ran, I fell behind, again, not in that great of shape. Up ahead were three of our group, I was behind and I saw it. Bush, a few more yards. My friends were across, they were safe! But wait! Chaser!

She came out of nowhere and grabbed my sister. She was tagged. While the Chaser was tagging her I ran past and into the safe zone. I stopped panting, waiting for my sister knowing she was changed. But wait! She wasn't. She had been tagged a foot inside the safe zone! Yay! She was still human!

We rejoiced, laughed in breathless glee and continued on two more blocks to the next part of our test. Check Point One was a birthday party and we had to join in on the party games. A game of twister with no colored circles. We lined up, took our places.... "Left foot yellow!" What? There was no yellow! We all just guessed and our left foot went into the circle. "Right hand calf! Someone else's calf!" What the hell? Ok, here we go. We were now a mass of ten adults crouched down to grab a stranger's calf. "Forehead green!" Huh? I put my forehead on the nearest object, a stranger's shoulder. "Right foot Unicorn!" What the F*CK! Well, we guessed. At that point my glasses fell off and the nice stranger my forehead was against and whose calf I was holding put them back on for me. They were on crooked, but at least they were stepped on! They called another position and I fell! Oh no! Had I lost? Nope, got my form tagged and I was able to go and wait for the rest of my group to finish playing the games.

The two boys in our group showed up ten minutes later and one of them had been changed. His armband of Blue was now replaced with Red. He was a Chaser and we couldn't travel together any more.

We caught our breath and moved out to our next stop. Check Point Two lay ahead. On our bus we met others of our kind. More runners and we teamed up. Our group of five grew to a group of twelve. Together we rode the bus to our exchange. We had

one block where we were not safe. So we ran all of us, just catching the bus, climbing on to the cheers of all of us because we had lived a few moments longer.

The other passengers and drivers looked at us like we had lost our minds and again we tried to explain the point of our game and our evening. We were off the bus again, and all of us, a small herd of paranoid runners now walked boldly through the safe zone looking for our next check point.

Runners came toward us, their blue armbands prominent and whispered to us ominously, "Beware Ninjas behind trees!"

All of us began to watch out for ninjas. Suddenly, four blocks from where we got off the bus a girl ran out of a door way and smacked my sister with a stuffed toy rabbit. She then grabbed my sister's arm and led her back to the check point. Now we all had to wait until someone struck us with a stuffed toy, only then could we go get our stuffed toy 'weapon' and go lie in wait for our 'victim'. My weapon was a stuffed toy duck. I captured a Chaser and brought her back to the Sensei. I received my stamp and we all regrouped for the next leg of our journey.

We made it back to the bus, but our next Check Point had three blocks in which the Chasers could catch us. No safe zone for three long agonizing blocks. Our group walked quickly, watching shadows, watching every person in the darkness to see if they wore a red tag.

We turned a corner and there, four Chasers were running across the street to tag us! I held up my Bonus Freeze Card. We were safe. The Chasers all had to stand, count to 60 and then, only then could they follow us. But we were gone, crossing into the safe zone!

We had made it to Check Point Three, further than I had ever imagined I would get. We didn't have to play any games; we simply were stamped and made a game plan. Twenty minutes and we knew what we were going to do; we headed out, back four blocks to the bus. We crossed the street, out of the safe zone just as the bus arrived we climbed on and our group grew until there were at least 20 of us.

We knew when the bus stopped we had to run two blocks until we reached the next safe zone. So we piled off, expecting an ambush of Chasers but we were safe. The majority of the group ran together, but the five of us kept to the shadows across the street and walked slow, holding hands as if we were just out in two very small little groups for the evening. Pretending to the world that we were just regular pedestrians while the rest of our group ran and darted like the hunted prey they were.

They were spotted, but we kept walking calm and cool, but the Chasers were after them and in their panic they ran towards us. Two of our group made it safely into the Safe Zone, but I and two others were stopped. But we had one Freeze Card left! We were safe. While the Chasers stood there frustrated we ran across the street and into the Safe Zone. We were safe. Only three or more blocks and we would have reached Check Point Four!

Well....We would have made it to the check point and gone on to the next, but someone took a wrong turn and all of us ended up in an abandoned construction site, on the other sides of the railroad tracks. We reached the end of the construction site and there was a fence. We all had to climb a chest high wall and then spin around the end of a twelve foot high chain link fence. We were definitely way off course! As I was climbing up, damn-it I needed help, did I mention I had food poisoning all night? A security guard walked up and demanded to know what we were doing. Again, how do you explain what 20 adults are doing walking around in the middle of the night? We promised to hurry and went on our way.

That wrong turn took us an hour to undo, but we finally made it to the final check point at 11:40pm. This one was sheer chaos! At least forty people were waiting to get their manifests stamped so they could move on to Check Point Five. They made us play random games; some of them demanded we have four letter words written on the knuckles of each hand by two different strangers. Another volunteer demanded we fill out a quiz, another demanded we all draw mustaches on our faces with Sharpies!

Others had to dance while wearing sun glasses. We spent another 20 minutes waiting to get stamped and by then the food poisoning was severe and we only had 30 minutes left to get through 2 more check points and make it to the end.

We made an executive decision and decided we would end our journey there under the bright street lights on the corner of 7th and Mission Bay. We walked until we found a cab and returned to our cars.

I was thrilled, I had made it to midnight without being changed, I had run and bused through the city, seeing corners I had never seen and meeting people that I would never see again. I was thrilled and wired and want to desperately do it all over again!

This entry was posted in Travel, Writing and tagged 5years Running, Arrvada, California, Horror, Journey to the End of the Night, San Francisco, Writer, Writing, Zombies. Bookmark the permalink.

One Response to *Journey to the End of the Night*



chas says:

06/20/2011 at 1:49 am

that is so awesome Arrvada! Very good!

Reply