

#2: MC's DM Tour 1.0 Journal

Part 0: Introduction:

Yeah, yeah, I know. I know.

“... his story continued on and I’m not telling more stories of the past, yo.”

My literal words. More or less.

But when I was thinking back on it, I don’t think I could properly have you feel my heart’s magnitude of what I’m currently planning (mainly what it means to me) without properly telling an older story, my way.

Now, sit back and grab that delicious coffee/ tea drink.

We are just getting started, y’all.

So, if you were attending a dance marathon at Colorado State University, Syracuse University, Carthage College, Seattle University, NDSU, MSU Mankato University, Concordia College, University of Toledo, Bowling Green University or Loras College, chances are, you might have seen me around. I wasn’t walking around with a sign that read, “Hey! Look at me! I don’t go here.” If there was an event shirt, I was probably wearing one. My Minnesotan accent might have been showing but otherwise, I was a part of the crowd. Dancing along and having fun with everyone else. I was a moderately inconspicuous participant on a slightly under-the-radar dance marathon tour. Although, now, you might be wondering how I got on this tour and literally crafted this journey on my own.

Well, there were a few reasons. Including but not limited too: to see family and friends, I like touring, work on my line dancing skills, I wanted to try it, to impress a girl, boredom, being spiteful and angsty to those who mocked my previous philanthropic ideals, I really wanted to go to Pittsburgh to eat a sandwich, etc.

You know, basic reasons.

But like wow to the wowza... Who would mock something so beautiful as philanthropy done by you?

That is a great question, my wonderful reader and I would love to get into it but we have a different story to tell! This is really, ultimately, just a story of a time when life handed me lemons and I gave that theoretical lemonade a really interesting and epic adventure. One bent on making other people happy.

:)

But first, I would like to start by giving a few shout outs to the people who made the tour possible.

To: My wonderful family. For: Listening to my countless rants about it all and helping with advice and support.

To: My managers and coworkers at the Fargo Northern Tool and Equipment. For: Giving me the time off and covering the slack at work while I was away on the adventures.

To: Audra and Pruthvi. For: The conversation and ride home to the bus station in Syracuse!

To: My roommates. For: Being okay with me never being around. If it wasn't for my living situation, I wouldn't have been able to afford this all.

To: Erik and Yannick. For: Accompanying me on the first two legs of the tour.

To: THON ND Planning Team of 2013/ 2014. For: Your work bringing and maintaining the event at NDSU and your incredible devotion to the cause is what introduced me to dance marathons in the first place.

To: Dr. Brooks. For: Standing your ground and failing me when I absolutely deserved it.

The last one of those was probably the biggest catalyst.

I didn't do the work in his class so I failed.

Makes sense and is obvio fair.

But having that situation happen does mean that I didn't graduate university on time and I had to go back for one class' worth of credit with SO MUCH FREE TIME NOW. Naturally, I then decided a dance marathon tour across the U.S.A. seemed like the most logical choice, right? Wrong!

Most of it came from the feeling I got from the first few marathons and how amazing they were.

Wait, before we start, next question! What in a dragon's fire is a Dance Marathon (DM)?

Well, Dance Marathon is a fundraiser event where participants gather and dance/ hang out for anywhere between 6 to 24 something hours. The theme is to generally not sit down (disabilities or such are excluded,

obvio) and in the case of some Iowa events, be caffeine free too. There are usually a lot of high fives, glow sticks and fun outfits involved.

We raise money for the local children's hospital to focus on special events and programs, covering large bills and buying things like helicopters for patient transference.

NOW, without further preamble, let's discuss that first tour stop.

Part 1: Fort Collins, Colorado

The Colorado State Dance Marathon was the first of the tour and it was a grand adventure to say the least. My roommate Erik and I left Fargo in the early AM hours on October 20th so we could make it there on time. We had one main mission on the first day, make it the 12 something hours to Cheyenne, Wyoming then continue the journey to Colorado State.

After arriving at and then exploring Fort Collins, we called it an early night in anticipation for the day of the event. Finding the CSU Union turned out easier than I expected. We entered the marathon and I knew from that moment that it was going to be a good day. While Erik further explored the great city of Fort Collins, I attended the marathon and from the first moment of entering the event, I knew it was going to be awesome. On the upper balcony, the FTK signs illuminated the room and the hours of Ships and Sailors and Morale Dances proved to be worth the blisters. It was there that I met Jason, Jacqui, Amy, Kara, Dallas and many more awesome CSU attendees as we played games, danced and ate Panda Express. I would recommend CSU Dance Marathon to anyone and the \$7,000 raised was amazing, every moment of it. After the event, Erik and I met back up and went back to the camper cabin to finally get some sleep. As we reached the city limits of Fargo, two days later, it was apparent that we were onto something.

This feeling was undeniable.

Luckily, it was only a short time until the next one up, Syracuse University's OttoTHON in November.

Part 2: Syracuse, New York

The Syracuse University stop was the longest trip, lasting 8 days in its entirety. Our journey from Fargo to Pittsburgh and eventually Syracuse began when we left Fargo towards the east in the late evening after we both finished work. Yannick and I arrived in the Minneapolis area at my parents place, took a breather, slept for a few hours and then hit the road for Chicago. Little did we know, there was a "once in a lifetime" style adventure ahead.

Arriving in Chicago and parking near my cousin's place, where we were staying, we arrived around the 8th inning into the clinching game of the World Series of the Chicago Cubs versus the Cleveland Indians. As we wandered the streets, eating our schwarma, the environment was electric. Including the nice beer shower, happy mob that shut down the streets and the fireworks which all gave to celebrate the 100 years of the Cubs losing coming to a glorious end.

Going from there to Ohio and then eventually, Pittsburgh, we saw my family and went our separate ways, Yannick to Maryland and myself to Syracuse. Getting to the bus station at 1 AM, I found a flaw in my planning. I was at the bus station, a few miles away from Syracuse University with no money for a cab and no money to afford somewhere to sleep. It was there that I found a nice spot on the floor because I was waiting for my 7 AM bus to bring me downtown then a separate bus to bring me to the event. A few cold and sore hours later, I walked through the doors of the building, smiling because I finally arrived. After I signed in, ate some breakfast and listened to some nice opening remarks, the dancing was underway.

It all began with "Let's Get it Started" by The Black Eyed Peas and it didn't slow down from there. The rest of the event was amazing, we danced hard and about halfway into the event, we had a march to the nearby CMN hospital to inspire us in our quest. The total reached over \$111,000 as we screamed, cried and *some of us were reluctantly pulled on stage because we came "all the way from North Dakota."* Because of that public knowledge, those certain individuals that hailed from North Dakota were then met by many, many, many people who loved the idea of the tour and were very excited they were there. Along with that, I got a ride to bus station by two very nice people, Audra and Pruthvi so that was pretty awesome and had some wonderful conversations with people in the coat check room about the developing tour and just the general marathon life which further solidified this idea of "FTK (For the kids) Touring" and how awesome it can be.

Syracuse, New York. Or as I remember it, the official birthplace of DM Tour 1.0.

The return trip was far less exciting than watching a "100 year old baseball curse end" yet still it held an important part of the journey. After sleeping in my overnight bus back from Syracuse to Pittsburgh, I met back up with Yannick and drove the Midwest to stay with another Chicago cousin of mine. Staying overnight and then skedaddling in the afternoon, we arrived for one last stop in the Minneapolis area at my parents place. Leaving the next day, just in time so I wouldn't be late for my one-day-of-class-a-week as I was still finishing university. Then, in only a few short weeks later, the next journey would begin. This time in Wisco for the third marathon of the tour.

Part 3: Kenosha, Wisconsin

Carthage College's DM happened in the first weekend of December which was three weeks before my much anticipated graduation from NDSU. I left Fargo for Minneapolis in my usual late night fashion. Arriving Friday

night in Milwaukee, it was time for me to sit back, hang with my family and eat veggie burgers. As we talked about life and the tour, they eventually went to bed and I watched movies until the early hours of morning.

The next day we decided on getting lunch at a local movie theater that served food, local root beer and movies all in one. Eating a pizza, while watching a magical movie and sipping on root beer with the stars in the constellation patterns of Seville, Spain proved to be a great way to spend time in Milwaukee. It was later that day that we left Milwaukee and drove to Kenosha. Arriving at the event, I was a little early so I signed in, went to the bathroom, watched a local swim meet and then entered the athletic field. It was a first year program, as I learned, but that didn't stop them from going all out. Giant posters decked the walls and the attendance was good with the pump up music thumping. As the event continued on, we danced and played games. Hula hooping was a hit and the night proved to get real crazy when we began to dance one of my favorite line dances, The Wobble.

The room was electric while wobbling and even in the power hour; one person stage dove into the crowd. Heading back to Minneapolis on Sunday night and then towards Fargo the following day, I spent the last few weeks as a college student in happy bliss thinking about how great the first three marathons have been. But little did I know, it was *still* only developing.

Part 4: Seattle, Washington

After taking a brief break after Carthage College to graduate from NDSU and vacation in Los Angeles, I was back on the grind in the third weekend of February. The fourth stop of the tour was going to Seattle to see family and friends, explore the Pacific Northwest and of course, attend Seattle University Dance Marathon (SUDM). Due to some family members getting very sick, I had to improvise. The Green Tortoise Hostel in downtown fit the bill. It was nestled right next Pike Place Market and this location worked out great. It was there that I was going to stay in the majority of the adventure. In the following few days, I took a series of ferries, buses, trains and walked my way across the city. After seeing my family the night before and checking in on some of the most important people to me, I got up in the early morning and walked over to SUDM from downtown.

I entered the event and was immediately excited. We were divided into teams based upon our Miracle Kid that we were honoring and I was guided towards Team Max in a circle meeting and greeting each other. We had opening remarks; yoga and then the themes began. These themes throughout the day helped motivate and power our dancing. We had International, Birthday and Seattle Hour to name a few of the themes and each was effective. Throughout the sixteen hours, I met friends and danced hard with my fellow members of Team Max and other dancers. The event kept the morale up with every song ranging from Lip Gloss to Take on Me. It was all building to the Power Hour(s).

That's when the lights went down, the glow sticks cracked on, and the raving began.

The part when I get even more excited. This raving and high energy music and dancing proved to work pretty well for SUDM's fundraising abilities too, even though they already proved to be quite formidable.

Throughout the day, we were given challenges to raise money. If we rose over \$10,000 on the day of, Alaska Airlines would match. We did it before the halfway mark. The next challenge is to see if we could raise what the first marathon did a decade ago, over \$5,000 in one hour. We also did that. Throughout the event, we raised incredible amounts of money and the Redhawks showed me how they party. Which was apparently very good.

Through the power of belief in that room and the generous support to those who believe in the cause as much as we did, SUDM ended up raising over \$148,000 in its Decade of DM celebration. I would highly recommend attending SUDM to anyone planning a West Coast Dance Marathon Tour. This juggernaut of the coast proved to be quite the adventure and afterwards, in fear of collapsing on the street, I took a Lyft home to my hostel and went to bed. Soon, I would go home to Fargo and the following weekend would play host to the highly anticipated "back-to-back of the tour" with two marathons in two days, my alma mater, NDSU and the mighty MSU Mankato.

Part 5: Fargo, North Dakota

The fifth marathon on the tour was my alma mater of two months, NDSU. Walking into the Great Plains Ballroom, which I knew all too well, I saw balloons lay upon the floor and lights covered the floor in a Bison yellow glow. After the opening remarks, the dancing commenced.

Every so often, we would briefly stop to have a guest speaker, performer (who would usually join us to contribute to the already pumped energy of the room) or fundraising challenges like texting our roommates for donations. Throughout the night, circles of dance would form and a brave dancer would take the middle for a verse or two. The wobbles of the dubstep overtook the air in most instances and people would shake, rattle and roll all the way to the ground for the kids at Sanford Children's.

Every moment at NDSU DM was especially amazing because it brought me back to my first dance marathon in 2013 where I experienced this epicness for the first time. NDSU's HerdThon ended at 12 AM while raising over \$6,700 for the hospital. It was after that, I would say my goodbyes, go home and get some sleep before the grueling early morning wake up time for MSU Mankato.

Part 6: Mankato, Minnesota

The time of 5:30 AM came far too early but that didn't stop me from showering, hitting the road, and getting to MSU Mankato's Mavathon before it started at 12 PM. This event, which raised money for Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare in St. Paul (which I would later happily tour), was great from the very beginning. The sixth overall marathon and second half of the back-to-back proved to be quite the tiring yet awesome feat.

In the event, there were teams based upon color. Our team, Yellow Team, was in competition with the others to receive the Spirit Stick. While we had the Spirit Stick, we were earning points and showing our morale for the event.

One way to get this Spirit Stick was to win various activities and games throughout the day. Along with this very smart idea with the Stick itself, we were doing other activities to raise money. Two of these stuck out to me as being super genius and different from what I have seen thus far. First off, there were the handcuffs that you could find you and a partner in. At the event, I had a group of girls approach me and ask if I wanted to handcuff with one of them. I agreed and we wandered the event searching for donations so we could become free. It only took a few minutes but all the while, throughout the event, those handcuffs were a hit.

Along with that genius idea, there was the couch. It was sitting on the right side of the room with a person protecting and guarding it. To gain access to the couch, you had to pay time to sit or lay down on it. The paid fee was yet another fundraiser for the event. As the Spirit Stick was passed around at the event of each hour, awards were handed out and the morale was hyped throughout the day. All of this helped our total reach over \$28,000. Both marathons of the back-to-back proved to be admirable and fun DM's. If you are ever in Fargo or Mankato, I would recommend checking them out and throwing up the "hand horns" for both the Bison and Maverick marathons.

Part 7: Morehead, Minnesota

Between the back-to-back marathons and the seventh tour stop, I had a gap and time to work and rest. That gap found its end on April 1st when I would go across the river and attend Concordia University Dance Marathon. At Concordia, we were divided into different colored teams like some of the other marathons that I attended. As a member of Team Orange, we would prove to be small yet mighty in our morale. Near the beginning of the event, a circle was created and the improv went around. We shook, we grooved and we laughed as the emcee got us all loosened up. After that, we learned the morale dance, like most marathons, would be learned (slowly) and then done every hour to keep the energy up. After doing each hour's morale dance, we would go back to playing our games and activities but unbeknownst to me, this DM was going to be unlike any other along the tour.

It was all merely a series of games, leading up to the Battle of the Bands. But before the student bands would duke it out, the ping pong wars were first raged.

As the players smacked the balls back and forth, the crowd sat in anticipation as to see who could launch the ball the farthest, fastest and most importantly, with the highest accuracy. The Ping Pong tournament crowned its champion and a few hours later, the Battle of the Bands began.

While the covers of “Uptown Funk,” “Stacy’s Mom” and “Worst Enemy” rocked the house, the people danced and partied. This part of the event brought in non-participants of the marathon yet it was still part of the event so donations were still getting accepted to raise funds. The \$23,000 raised for Sanford Children’s that night was an incredible experience. (Side note, I did have the greatest limbo game of my life here too. So... wooooo!) I would recommend this marathon to anyone who wants to see what a small(er) size group of individuals can do when they truly believe in a cause. After this, it would be a few day break before the next marathon in Tol-edo.

Part 8: Toledo, Ohio

On April 5th, I would be on the road again for the eighth marathon. This time, going towards Toledo, Ohio where I would spend my twenty-third birthday and attend RockeTHON at U of Toledo. Little did I know, I would also be attending Bowling Green’s dance marathon, Ziggython, early the next morning.

On the way, I took a few days to see various cousins, the Indianapolis Colts stadium and eventually make my way to Bettsville, Ohio. Arriving at RockeTHON at 10 AM, I knew it was going to be a fun day when I walked into the John F. Savage Arena with over 1,400 participants littering the arena floor in anticipation. As the event kicked off, the dancers found themselves watching and participating in many different events and hearing stories about people’s experiences at Mercy Children’s Hospital. One activity that particularly stood out to me was the Pie in the Face. During this, different members of the American Football team went onto the stage and got a pie in the face from either a participant who dropped some money for a donation or a Miracle Kid. As whipped cream pies smacked on faces, we all laughed and kept raising money for Mercy.

Along with that, there was also an hour of trying to out-fundraise Bowling Green (BG) in which the attendants at RockeTHON yelled and chanted, “Beat BG.” All this being done in the name of who could fundraise more for Mercy Children’s. At this point, the rivalry was apparent and strong (so I felt it was best not to mention where I was going next).

Staying at Toledo till the end, we ended up raising over \$153,000 for Mercy and with that, this marathon took the cake for highest fundraiser thus far. It was a powerful and fun 13 hours being FTK (For the Kids). Based upon how amazing Toledo was, I knew that deep down; Bowling Green was going to be incredible as well and with a few goodbyes, I was back on the road. I was driving south on Interstate 75 towards Bowling Green to attend their marathon as my surprise stop.

Part 9: Bowling Green, Ohio

Due to the fact that I have been doing the dance marathon scene since 10 AM that day, I knew that the BG stop would be short but that didn't stop the ninth marathon from leaving an imprint on my mind and being a cool stop of the tour. At RockeTHON a few hours prior, I met the Mercy Children's Rep who was also attending Bowling Green's which started at a later time that same day. As we talked about the tour, she asked if I was attending BG's dance marathon. I said that I didn't sign up and she said no problem and that I could be signed up by her as a guest. So, that's how I found myself there and as I walked into the event, I was immediately welcomed at one of the founding five marathons and I could see why it was over twenty years old.

In my short time there, I made friends with one of the directors who proved very knowledgeable with fun facts about BG's legendary dance marathon. Along with that informative discussion, I also watched the second (but equally) entertaining drag show of the tour (first at Seattle University). While donating some extra money at the door on the way out, I ended up departing two hours after arrival, around 3 AM. Along the return trip, I stopped in Chicago with yet another cousin of mine to check social media and see the \$369,000 raised by Bowling Green as they too finished up. One was a surprise stop and one was thoroughly planned, yet I would recommend both of these for a dance marathon tour, especially if you would like to hit two sides of the same rivalry. Between these two DM powerhouses on I-75, along with others throughout the state, Ohio's dance marathons proved to be quite spectacular.

Rollercoaster Capital of the World, you didn't disappoint.

Part 10: Loras College

In the last weekend of April 2017, I had one more marathon and yet another surprise stop. That quickly planned surprise stop happened at Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare in St. Paul. Remember how I mentioned raising money for this hospital at Mankato and I would later discuss how I toured it?

Well... that's now!

It was pretty amazing to see this hospital in action and to see just what exactly events like Mavathon support. From the smiling staff in their superhero attire, to the in-house dentist office and the Ronald McDonald House located inside the building, each part was a "Wow" moment. Every moment that I spent there was inspiration for the tour and inspiration to help fundraise for this building and buildings like it. I honestly just wanted to keep living like this and the following few days in Dubuque, Iowa at Loras College Dance Marathon (LCDM) would provide me the ability to do just that.

So, naturally I say, onward.

The tenth and final stop of the tour brought me to Loras College. I didn't really do a whole lot the night before because I knew that I had to conserve strength. That proved to be a good plan for what lies ahead. Because wow. Loras is incredible.

Entering the building, I saw a sign informing the reader that LCDM was the highest fundraising dance marathon per capita in the nation and that made sense. It all started with the hyped entrance where you would run in and high five the people in front of you in line then stop next to the person in front of you to form a massive chain of people running in and high fiving. It formed a massive spiral of over 200 enthusiastic dancers and the energy just kept up from there. In the back corner, a gong sat in its rarely peaceful state. It was rarely peaceful because that was the \$50 gong which would get rung every time that someone raised over \$50 at the event. It rang like clockwork all day with each ring giving new life to the dancers in the room.

In times of true exhaustion, you may find yourself in the *Dancing in Our Hearts* room. In there, myself and the other members of Team Chameleon, were able to read stories of the previous kiddos whose lives were touched by LCDM before passing away. From the emotional family stories to the pumped up dancing, LCDM was electric in all senses of the word. We even lightly danced in line for the food and refused to sit down while eating (which I found was a common occurrence at many dance marathons across the country). The last hour or so of LCDM, and as usual my favorite part of the dancing was the rave and that didn't disappoint. The glow sticks cracked and the bass wobbled as all the dancers broke it down FTK. Loras College DM ended up raising over \$216,000 and took the cake for the highest marathon that I attended to the full length (Since I was only at the \$369,000 of Bowling Green for a few hours). With a founding five marathon in the same state and their own reputation as a premier marathon to match, Loras College Dance Marathon was intense and I would give them high regards and recommendations to any dance marathon enthusiast or novice if you are ever in search for an event in the Masterpiece of the Mississippi, Dubuque.

Part 11: Summary

Throughout the tour, at the 10 marathons over 6 months, a total of over \$1,068,700 was raised for different Children's Hospitals across the United States. Even with this impressive number, I never did quite mention why I love dance marathons and what it means to me though. You have seen with how I describe it what it means to some amazing people I met along the way but I haven't told you my opinion on why dance marathons are so fantastic.

Well, what does Dance Marathon mean to me?

That's a great question. Honestly, I don't have one single answer or can even completely answer it in this journal. What I experienced on this tour and doing these events was incredible. Every moment of it brought unparalleled joy to my life but in the end, it wasn't and always will be, not about me.

Sure, I had fun, won a trivia night with my team, ate delicious food and drank lots of soda but I wasn't traveling solely because of me. It was about raising money and smiles in the belief that everyone deserves to grow up and have the choice to go to college and follow their dreams.

To me, simply, it's a basic right.

This tour was taking those amazing feelings that I found at THON ND 2013 / 2014 and seeing how it matched up with the others across the nation. Trying to unite the marathons and bring us closer together. Because we are stronger together in our fight against pediatric illness and most importantly, showing these kids that they have A LOT of friends. Friends who care for them, care about them and want them to succeed, even if we don't know each other on a first name basis. It's really all about the unity, love, hope and so much more.

Because like I said, every child deserves the choice to be able to apply to schools and become a Ram, Orange, Red Men, Redhawk, Bison, Maverick, Cobber, Rocket, Falcon or Duhawk to name just a few of the options. Then maybe, just maybe, they'll stumble upon the DM at their school's involvement expo and get their dancing on. Maybe they can bust it down, spin on their head and raise more money than any marathon in their school's history. It's all about giving these kids the options to this potential future or any other. The possibilities for good are endless as long as we fight for the younger generation, the best way we know how. With a line dance, a shake and maybe a shimmy. Forever and always, FTK.

Now, this was the ending to the original story I wrote for this.

But... being a future MC here I can tell you, this was merely the beginning.

The DM Tour 2.0 Journal is coming soon.

:)

Always and Forever,

MC