

Today's Thank You Thursday features Resolute Running Youth Coach Joy Gonzalez. Coach Joy is a seriously accomplished runner, who we are honored to have as a part of our staff. But it is her work with our youth that makes us so proud to know her. Her Youth Camps have grown in numbers every summer, and her work throughout the school year with young runners produces inspiration and excellence! And for that we say, Thank You!



### ***1. What is your running background?***

I began running in 4th grade and fell in love with it. As I got older, I tried hard not to be "only" a runner. I used it to get in shape for volleyball, basketball, and tennis. However, I could never fully get away from it, and enjoyed the actual act of running. I started truly taking running seriously my 9th grade year at a small high school in Melrose Park, IL. I missed going to the State Championship meet as a freshman by 1/2 second in the 1600 meter run. I vowed to never let that happen again. I spent all summer training by myself in the wee hours of the morning in my neighborhood (although I cringe at how I ran on cement city blocks for 30 miles a week as a young teenager). In the fall, I quit volleyball and joined Cross Country. I was one of two girls on my team. I begged the coach to let me run with the boys. He eventually did and I ended up earning All State Honors that year in Cross Country. I then went onto doing the same in track in the 3200 meters. My family moved my junior year and I got very disillusioned with

running. However, I finished with a strong senior year track season and got recruited to run at several Division I schools. I chose University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. I spent two years running on their Varsity squad (mainly competing in the 5K and 10K races) and then my major became more demanding and I had to stop running. After college, I was looking for a teaching position, and my old high school coach happened to be retiring. He recruited me to take over my old high school program in Aurora, IL. After 5 years of being the head Cross Country coach at Waubonsie Valley High School (and being my dad's assistant coach in Track), I was asked to open the new high school in our district and start a Cross Country and Track program from scratch. I could not pass up the opportunity. I begin coaching and teaching at Metea Valley HS, and worked there until my husband's job moved us to Birmingham in December of 2012.

## ***2. What brought you to Resolute Running, and what is your role here?***

I met Alex Morrow my first week in Birmingham on a run (I was desperately lost in Mountain Brook and he graciously waited on me to find my way). Right away, his passion for the philosophy of running struck me. Many people know how to coach, but not many people understand how to continuously make athletes better. That was something I always tried to achieve when coaching high school athletes. I joined Coach Alex's team right away as the Director of Youth Camps. As my working conditions have changed, I now am in charge of the entire youth running program. I coach our young athletes of all age levels by designing workouts for them, training them at Resolute Running, or running special camps and speed sessions.

## ***3. What are some of the results of your athletes?***

Many of my athletes have taken minutes off their times. Specifically, two boys I trained in between Cross Country and Track seasons PRed in the 800, 1600, and 3200 all in one season. I am really proud of this because it's hard to improve at all three distances in a three-month season, but they did. In Illinois, I had two athletes in the top four in the IHSA 800 meter dash one year. I also had one athlete win the 800m Indoor Prep title. As far as my work with Resolute Running, my kids set

goals for themselves when training for a 5k or a 10k. What I love is seeing them beat their goal (many times by two or three minutes) when they get into "race mode". That is my favorite result.

#### ***4. What is your favorite Resolute Running memory?***

Honestly, one of my favorite Resolute Running memories was working with Coach Ann the first summer Resolute Running opened. We did the Youth Camps together. We went out there and had fun challenging kids to get faster or to slow down every day (they didn't know how to pace themselves yet). We loved getting them to do R-Dynamic drills with the cones and equipment. Many of them thought the "ladder" and "hurdles" were so cool. Their fresh enthusiasm was contagious. We just had a great time with the kids and I loved discussing the running and coaching philosophy with Coach Ann. She's an incredible person to bounce ideas off of.

#### ***5. What advice would you offer anyone considering a personal run coach and Resolute Running?***

Do it. Running is a sport that requires a support system. It's not just running mileage, but running meaningful mileage. To get yourself better, you need people to answer to, and a team that will push you. This is the most rewarding sport, but also one of the most complicated rides you will ever take. To share stories, injuries, successes, failures, laughs with your teammates makes the whole journey worthwhile.

#### ***6. That's great advice! Where do you see the future of the Resolute Running Youth Program?***

I would like to see us as our own USATF certified team of athletes. To me, it's my job to give young runners the inspiration to join their school programs; we have some great ones in the Birmingham area. I also design training during the off-season, which our youth runners need to succeed and hold themselves accountable to the goals they want to accomplish during their competitive season. I believe the Resolute Running Youth program can make Birmingham and Alabama a highly competitive state in Cross Country and Track & Field by inspiring more

youth runners (through our camps) and helping to assist the school programs with training our young adult runners. Overall, I just want to raise the level of competition and give back to the sport that has shaped so many of our lives. It's a life changing habit that can really help make our future generations healthier.