

HELL IN THE SAHARA
7 Days - 144 miles - No shower
By
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December 2001. The sponsorship was there. The time off was approved. More importantly I got the "OK" from Melanie, the wife. I had just entered the mother of all footraces, The Marathon de Sables. It is deemed the "Toughest footrace in the world".

I have always wanted to do this race, The Marathon of the Sands. The friend of a client of mine, Dr. Louis Fabre, was willing to sponsor the entry fee of \$2600 for me to enter the MDS. A couple of other clients were generous enough to put in some money to help pay the airfare. Hearing about this race for many years but never having the financial means to go, it's always been on my "To Do List" of races and places to go.

The MDS is a stage race across the Sahara Desert through Morocco for 7 days. Through the 7 days of running, each runner is required to carry all of his/her provisions for the week. No crew, no family or friends waiting impatiently for you at each aid station. So whatever runner thinks he/she needs for the race is carried in a backpack for the entire distance. Food, clothing, and whatever else one think they'll need is neatly carried on the back. 9 liters of water a day is given to you. You sleep in open-air burlap covered tents with 8 others and berber carpet under you. That's it.

I looked at the calendar and saw that the MDS took place April 7-13. The Boston Marathon was April 15th. Hmm? I had already signed up for Boston. Could I swing it? Could I do both races? Could I leave Morocco and get back to Boston on Sunday? Let's find out!

I started training December 22nd, the day I got my Moletracks backpack in the mail. I put in bottles of water for weight. I decided 10 pounds was a good starting point. I would then add a pound a week to gradually adjust to the weight.

Training was going well through January and February with wearing the pack about 3-4 times a week when running with clients and then doing the long run on Saturday. I even drove out to Monahans Sandhills State Park in west Texas the weekend of March 8-10 so I could learn how to run sanddunes.

March training went just as expected, but by this time I was ready for the race to get here and I was tired of wearing the pack. My last long run was 20 miles and 25 pounds in the pack. I did this run in 2:45. I was ready and thought that I had a good shot at being the first place American.

Tuesday, April 2nd came and I was on my way. Boston, Paris, Casablanca, and then to Ouarzazate, Morocco. I arrived late Wednesday night to Ouarzazate and checked into the Belere Hotel around 12:30 a.m. Thursday morning there was a meeting with the American contingency at 10. Sleeping like a baby, I woke up late to jetlag and got to the meeting about mid-way through.

After the meeting, I began meeting other American runners around the country: San Francisco, Cincinnati, Vail, Atlanta, and Birmingham just to name a few places. I also met the other Texas competitors: Ed from Corpus Christi, Greg from Dallas, and Jimmy from Lumberton. A few runners mentioned that they were going for a run around 4 o'clock. I asked if I could join them, and they said, "Sure."

During this run I met Mike Wille, a chef, from San Francisco. We talked and talked about this and that, and after about 20 minutes of running, we looked behind us and we had left the group behind! So from then on, we began to develop a friendship for the MDS and vowed to come in together as the first Americans.

Friday, April 5th

This is our departure day into the Sahara. We boarded coach buses at 9:40 and drove off into the desert. The route took us parallel with a river. It had just rained 3 days before so the river that was usually dry as a bone, was now flowing with water. We passed tiny village (a

kasbah) after village with women washing clothes in the river. Children playing in the river, and men tending to their livestock. It was amazing to see how these Moroccans lived with little or nothing at all in the middle of nowhere. You could see for miles the utility poles and lines stretching across the vast land and mountain passes we encountered. It was funny because even though these people had virtually nothing, they all had satellite dishes on top of their adobe houses!

With stops and lunch along the way, the buses finally halted at 2:15 to let us out. Over to our left about 1-mile, we could see the bivouac set up with its white tents for the race management and the black burlap tents for us. To get us to the bivouac, they loaded us up in dump trucks painted aquamarine. So everytime a truck came rolling up, 20 or so runners hopped up in it with their gear.

Between trucks coming and going, a race official came by in his blue Land Rover and asked if anyone needed a ride. Well, 2 others and I wasted no time getting in that SUV!

We arrived at the bivouac and checked in. They gave us our race numbers and 3 bottled waters containing 1-1/2 liters each. I also waited in line for a cardboard box that the bottled water came in. This was used as my bed mat for the next two days for sleep and rest. They told us to choose a tent between 36 and 45. We chose Tent #43 for the duration of the race. Joining me in my tent was Ed from Corpus Christi, Greg from Dallas, Bren and Martin from Birmingham, Josh from Phoenix, John from Atlanta, and 1 woman; Kathy from San Diego.

We all talked a little about ourselves and asked questions to one another to see if we were going to be ready to kick anyone out of the tent after a couple of days. Things seemed to go well and we all agreed that we had a pretty diversified tent, and we would stick together and none of us would quick this silly race. A race official came by at one point and said that the weather forecast for the week would be unseasonably cool and windy, and we would have ideal conditions because we would be running without the heat. We all applauded and smiled.

Saturday, April 6th

This is the day for runners to finalize the packing of the backpack for the race. We would have until 2:00 to decide what/what not to pack. The rest would be put in our luggage to be checked in and given to the Race Management (RM) before our mandatory check-in and inspection of the backpacks.

5:45 a.m. comes as Bren and Stuart begin talking and giggling and wake the whole tent. I try to go back to sleep, but it is no use. The giggles elevate to laughing and everyone begins to join in on the conversation. Everyone in the tent but me gets up and goes to breakfast at 6:30. I stay behind to try to get some shut-eye. It is no use. So I reluctantly get up and walk to breakfast.

After breakfast, it is time to decide what to put in our packs. So the next couple of hours is sorting out food, clothing, and personal items to take or leave. I decide not to take my tights and vest as I feel it will not get that cold for them. This loses me about a pound. Besides the food and mandatory items, I decide to take an extra pair of socks, an extra coolmax shirt, and a long-sleeve shirt for nighttime. I also take 2 cameras, my journal, an army stove, and a little stuffed bunny that my daughter Gillian gave me for good luck.

We go eat lunch before it is our time at 1:00 p.m. to check in. Check-in goes by pretty quickly. We have to write down everything that is in our pack. They also give us some safety items that we must carry: space blanket, flare, and our water card. They also weigh our pack. My packed weighed 20 lbs. We get back to the tent and word gets around that the email and satellite phone tent is up and running. So I buy an email card and set up a tab for the phone. It is \$40 to send 6 emails and \$5 per minute for the phone. With these kinds of prices, conversations are short and emails are long! Everyone is anxious for tomorrow to get here and begin this thing.

Sunday, April 7th

Stage 1 – 16 miles. As the sun arises, so do we runners. It is 5:45 and the workers are already beginning to take down the tents. They come by our tent about 6:00 and take off the burlap. Everyone is awake and mulling around except for Josh and me. The start today won't

be until 9:30 or so. Josh and I slide our cardboard and sleeping bags off the carpet and continue to catch some shut-eye till at least 8:00! Temperature is in the mid 50's with a slight breeze. So it is a little chilly with just shorts and a shirt. This is why I am still in my bag!

With everyone up and getting ready, I finally get up at 7:30 to use the bathroom and eat some breakfast of Chocolate Chip Pop-Tarts. I get my pack organized by 9:00, and we all walk over to the starting line. The wind has already picked up to at least 15 mph with runners' items blowing everywhere.

Finally, after a lengthy welcome and instructions on the day's stage, we are off at 9:40. Today, we luckily have the wind at our backs. We start off on some stony terrain for about 2 miles. My body feels sluggish and it is a strain to keep pace the way I want to run. I put it down as not running for a few days that has made me feel this way.

After we cross a creek, we enter some small dunes (dunettes) for about a ¼ mile and then we are back on the rocks.

I notice that the water bottles attached to the front of my pack are irritating my biceps as I swing my arms back and forth. This is causing chafing on them. At the first checkpoint (CP) at 6 miles, I go to the medic vehicle to try to solve this problem. This takes about 12 minutes to put bandages on each arm. This turns out to be pretty useless as the bandages last about 5 minutes.

I tell myself to bear it for the next 11 miles, as I will figure something out when I finish the stage. Miles 6-12 are pretty flat and boring. I pick up the pace to make some time up and pass 30 people before CP 2 at 12 miles. I grab my bottle of water, chug down a few swallows and throw it in the trash box. I figure I can make it to the finish with the bottles I'm carrying each ½ full.

Again, the next 5 miles is relatively flat and dusty with me passing 10 more runners. With about a mile left, Michael Wille comes up from behind me and tells me that he already had some blister problems and he had to stop and take care of those. So we run the last mile in together to finish in 2:39. 149th place for the day.

I get back to the tent and the wind has picked up even more. Josh is already there and he says the tent has already blown down twice. So we spend the next hour trying to fix it as it keeps blowing down by the heavy gusts.

Finally, we get it secured by the help of some workers. About that time, everyone from our tent begins arriving one by one. Sitting in the tent is pretty miserable. Sand is getting into every nook and orifice. We decide to lower one end of the tent, find some rocks to keep it down and get some break from the wind and sand. The Fettuccini Alfredo I fix for dinner is pretty crunchy, as I can't get my water to boil because the wind is making it impossible to have a decent flame. 8:00 comes and the camp is already pretty quiet. A big contrast to the two previous nights. Stage 2 tomorrow.

Monday, April 8^t

Stage 2 – 22 miles. The wind kept blowing throughout the night rattling the tent. I don't think anybody got much sleep. Like the two previous mornings, someone wakes up at 5:45 and begins to chitchat. This time it is the tent next to us. Germans were laughing and talking it up. 6:15 comes and the top of tent comes down. Still windy, but not as cold as yesterday, I vowed to stay in my bag until 7:30.

7:30 comes and I start my MDS morning ritual: eating my Pop-Tarts, taking the journey out to the desert to go to the bathroom, and then returning to camp to get my pack situated. A race official comes by and tells us that we will start at 8:45 today. Now I have to hurry to get everything ready. About 8:15, locals come from out of nowhere to scavenge the area. Men, women, children are asking for food and money. I keep my belongings in sight as to get nothing stolen. Minutes later, a huge scorpion walks across in front of me, almost getting on Martin's shoe. He jumps out of the way as I yell at him!

At 8:50 we are off on Stage 2. I start out slow and easy because I'm not feeling too well. Immediately we have a headwind blowing about 15 mph. My legs feel pretty good as I begin to loosen up. I pass many people on this first stretch which is mostly flat and rocky with a few dunettes thrown in. About 45 minutes into this stage, approximately ½ mile to my left, I see a guard tower, guards with guns. Someone says that we are close to the Algeria border. I make sure I stay on course!

I get to the first CP in good time. After getting my water, I see the next section of the course is going to be dunettes for about 3 miles. They aren't very high, maybe 10-20 feet, but the path mostly weaves around them. Once out of the dunes, the wind is stronger. At this point I feel a low energy swing and I am hungry. I pull off my pack and get a snack bag of honey roasted peanuts. I walk and eat and walk some more. The wind is getting stronger every minute.

I tell myself to settle down into a power walk until the wind subsides. With my head down, my sunglasses on, and a buff covering my face, I lean into the wind. Well, the wind never does subside. I begin to feel weaker and weaker as the miles go by. Finally, after about 2 hours of walking from the last checkpoint, I see the finish. I grab my 3 bottles of water and diligently get back in line for a box. I get back to Tent 43 mentally and physically trained. I chalk this up as a "bad day", and eat spaghetti and snacks before heading to the email/phone tent. I'm in bed by 8:00 wondering what the next day will bring as the wind finally dies down.

Tuesday, April 9th

Stage 3 – 19 miles. During the night, I've discovered that I have gotten diarrhea. 3 times I discovered this. Not a good sign. After waking up at the normal time of 6ish. I cautiously eat my Pop-Tarts hoping that they don't make a quick journey through me. Looking at today's course book, it seems that we are going to have a little variety. Rocks, dunettes, more rocks, more sand, a kasbah, and of course, more rocks and more sand.

It is still cool here in the Sahara. It hasn't gotten above 90 degrees and doesn't plan on it the rest of the week. We are heading westerly across the desert meaning more headwinds throughout the week.

We get started on this Stage at 9:15. The wind is already blowing furiously. Surprisingly, my legs feel pretty good. I hook up with about 12 other runners as we form a peleton like cyclists do to share of breaking the wind. This goes on to the first CP as everyone disperses to receive their water. I form another line with some other runners to do the peleton dance through a dune section. About mile 9, I begin to feel very weak. I enter the Kasbah at mile 10. Children are giving us "High 5's". Women dressed in their long dresses with their faces covered are giving me strange looks. Men sit along the brick walls looking at us like we are fools. This is a very big town as it takes me a good 10 minutes to pass through it. Just on the outskirts of the Kasbah, I feel a wave of diarrhea about to hit. I dash behind a palm tree and do my business. I reach CP 2 knowing that I better drink as much water as I can so I don't get dehydrated with whatever I have.

Between CP 2 and the finish, the wind picks up even more and a sandstorm develops making visibility quite difficult. I travel along a dry riverbed with the wind and sand just wearing me down. I try to keep the person ahead of me in sight so I can follow through this storm and get back to camp. 3 more times I have bouts with diarrhea, the last two have blood.

I get to the camp, lay down and I am more wasted then the day before. I tell everyone my story and they encourage me to go to the medical tent. I am in no mood to eat or drink anything. My stomach is in knots. At 5:30, I succumb to the medical tent.

I am told to walk through the medical tent to the back of it were the doctors are. As I am walking through the tent, it looks like a MASH unit. Nurses are carefully attending to runners who are in pain do to blisters on their feet and back. Blood, pus, and loose skin hanging from feet and toes are everywhere. Nurses popping blisters all around as runners scream in pain. I actually feel lucky.

A doctor and a nurse take care of me as I lie down. They ask me questions about my eating, drinking, and my diarrhea episodes through the day. They get me to lie down on a cot and rest. A worker gets my pack from the tent and brings it to me, a not so good sign. I try to eat and drink, but nothing tastes good so I just lie there. I do take sips of water every so often to

force something down. The doctor gives me anti-biotics and tells me that I am staying the night. Between 7:00 and 10:00 I venture out to the dark desert 5 more times to do my business. I can't eat, drink or do much of anything but lie there and contemplate quitting. At 11:30, the nurse puts a needle in my arm, and I begin the first of 4 bags of IV that night.

Wednesday, April 10th

Stage 4 – 44 miles. I finally get a decent night's sleep as the cot is pretty comfortable compared to the rocky ground. 5:30 comes and the medical staff is taking down the tent to get to the next location. They kick me out to the cot and tell me to walk back to my tent. I get back to my tent somewhat refreshed and ready to take on what the day is going to hand me. Tent 43 is amazed that I am back and am continuing. Actually, just about all the Americans are surprised as word got around last night of what happened to me yesterday. I tell my tent the story and they shake their heads in disbelief wondering if I'm going to survive this day. Today is the longest stage of the race and also "Dune Day". 14 miles of nothing but dunes from miles 22-36.

I don't eat anything for breakfast as I just figure out what my strategy is today to run. I don't even make up my Gatorade for my bottles because I can't stand the taste now. So it is water all the way today. I pass out the extra food I had from yesterday's ration and it goes quickly. "Anything to lighten the load," I say. I tell myself that to get through this day it is going to take patience. 3-minute walk, 2-minute run is what I'm doing today. I'll keep it up as long as I can.

Stage 4 starts and I start walking. The wind is already howling through my sunglasses and hat. Luckily, the heat is not a factor once again. I do the 3/2 ratio for about 3 miles until a peleton passes me up. I get the urge to get sucked up in them and I last with them for about a 1/2 mile but realize that this is a bad idea because I could crash later and this race would be all over for me. So I discipline myself to continue on the 3/2 ratio cycle.

The scenery so far is pretty boring. A whole lot of nothing out here to look at. Since the wind is up, visibility is only about a mile or so. Progress is slow but steady. I'm averaging about 1:20 for each 10K I walk/run. Around mile 15, I see a man walking perpendicular to me across a dry lake bed we're crossing. He is not carrying anything on him. I look to my right and I see nothing, I look to my left, and still nothing. So where is he going? Where is he coming from? Another mile ahead I pass the skeleton of a camel. It looks like he had been there for a while. I take a picture and tell myself that I hope I don't end up like him. Right before the last checkpoint before the start of the dunes, a little boy about 8 or 9 years old is tending to about 30 goats in the field of sagebrush the goats are feeding on. Again I look all around and I see no sight of civilization.

Well, just about everything is going well until I get to CP3. Here, I need to go to the bathroom. With nothing in my stomach except water, I can't imagine why I have to go. I go twice and think, "Oh no.....not here in the dune section!" I do my thing and I'm off to face 14 miles of Dunes. There are no markers here to find the way, just the use of my compass.

About 2 miles into the dunes, an American passes me (I can't remember his name) and offers me some salt tablets. I know it is not good to take these because they will be too much for my system, but I do anyway in hopes they would make me feel better. Well, wouldn't you know it, about a mile later I'm vomiting these things on the dunes. Of course further down the dunes I have a nature call again with another bout of throwing up. It is a long way to CP4. The dunes are high, the wind is blowing 30 mph and I can't see more than 50 yards with the sandstorm coming through with perfect timing.

I finally make it to CP4 at 5:30 p.m. with doubt in mind to continue. Since this CP is in the middle of the dunes, the RO had to helicopter in all the supplies. All there is here is a berber tent, boxes of water, and a few RO people. This means I have to continue on to CP5 because there is no way I can quit here.

The same doctor that took care of me in the medical tent is also here at this CP. He takes a look at me and asks me the same questions as before. He advises I stay here until the sandstorm blows over. I tell him that I am OK with that and whip out my sleeping bag.

There are about 20 people already here doing the same thing I am doing, waiting out the sandstorm. They are all under the tent. We are bunched up together like sardines. More and

more runners come and bed down for the duration. I have to go to the bathroom 2 more times before midnight and it is like an obstacle course stepping over each runner each time I have to go. There is an eight inch white lizard going through everyone's sleeping bag (including mine) that wakes and freaks runners out. Scary!

Thursday, April 11th – “Rest Day”

At 3:30 a.m., I wake up to familiar voices. It is Martin, Stuart, and Bren from my tent! They arrived at the CP about 8 p.m. and are headed out. It is now calm and peaceful out here. It is a beautiful night with the stars shining about. By the time we are all ready to go, it is 3:50. At nighttime, RO has erected a laser beam from CP5 and shot it over the dunes so we could find our way there. We spot that laser and keep in line with it.

Over and around the dunes we go, trying to escape and climbing over the 100 foot + high ones. I follow the 3 for about an hour and get frustrated because Martin has severe blisters and is moving slowly. So I pull away from them and I am on my own. At 6:00 a.m., I can no longer see the laser as dusk is near. So I get out my compass and it leads me in the right direction. I get to CP 6 at 6:50. It is now the last stretch to the finish. This last section is flat across a dry lake bed. A straight shot due east. As the sun comes up, the wind is getting stronger and stronger right into me. All I can do is walk with my head down. I pass 4 runners, as I am feeling pretty strong right now. I finish 24 hours later after I started this stage.

After this stage, we get 6 bottles of water for the day. This is a rest day. Stage 5 is tomorrow. This is a day when runners can relax, clean up a bit, and recover from yesterday's long day. This is what is supposed to happen. On the day, the wind is blowing harder than any day so far. Tents are blowing down like dominoes. Workers are feverishly trying to get every tent stabilized. One side of our tent is down to block out the wind, but sand is blowing in through the holes. We are covered in sand the whole day. The wind does not let up. It even rains for about 10 minutes, making everything muddy. Some rest day!

The wind continues throughout the night. We all sleep with our heads in our cardboard boxes to block the sand, but everytime we move, sand comes down on top of us from the top of the boxes. I still have not eaten anything since Tuesday morning. I'm drinking water, but that's about it.

Friday, April 12th

Marathon Stage – 26.2 miles. The wind died down overnight and we woke up to a beautiful day of not a cloud in the sky. I still don't feel like eating a thing. I tell myself the worst is over. Get by today, then tomorrow's last day is a “piece of cake” of only 12.4 miles. I can do this. I am going to finish.

Stuart has offered to stay with me through today's stage. I think he is tired of hanging with Bren and Martin with their walking pace and wants to run a little today. I am going to follow yesterday's strategy of the 3/2 walk/run ratio again and see how long I can hang on. I'm still not feeling like eating so I am basically running on body fat. I can feel the pounds shed away each day. Once again, I toss out food to anyone who wants it. There are many takers. Good thing though is that my pack is getting lighter and lighter.

The countdown goes off at 9:15 to start the day. Today's stage has a few hills in it. Not much sand, but a hell of a lot of rocks. The first 12 miles is a lot of ups and downs, but I keep to my regimen of 3 and 2. We do each 10K in about 1:15 to 1:20. I feeling OK, but still tired and burning fat to no end. I did take two PowerGels from John to see if I could eat them and I did around 10 and 14 miles. We pass by several wondering camels in the distance. We pass by mountains on each side of us roughly 5,000 feet high. One section of the stage, we go by what looks just like Monument Valley with its towering rock sculptures. It is pretty cool to see.

Well, the 3/2 ratio comes to an end about 21 miles. It still is a perfect day to be out here, but my body is tired. I tell Stuart that I'm going to walk the rest of the way. He says that he doesn't mind and that he will stay with me. We finish together in my PW (personal worst) time ever for the marathon of 6:21.

Still, nothing seems to get my appetite rolling. One of the reporters comes by and offers me a Snickers bar. I take one bite of it and it tastes horrible! I shake my head in confusion as I hand the candy bar over to Stuart. About 6:00 p.m., RM comes by and says that they are passing out cans of Coke to the runners! I get my Coke, and believe it or not; it taste sooooo good! Someone else in the tent doesn't want his, so I drink it too. Well, my appetite is back! I am now hungry. I cook some instant potatoes and eat them cautiously and sparingly. I don't eat too much as I don't want to hit the "world's biggest sand box" in the middle of the night.

Around 8:30, everyone is asleep except me. With two cans of Coke, I've got this caffeine rush going. I finally get to sleep around 11:00

Saturday, April 13th

Stage 6 – 12.4 miles. We wake up to a beautiful sunrise as a few clouds have moved in and created the reddish/orange colors against the sky. We all get up and savor this moment as the last morning of the MDS has come. It is another perfect day to run.

With this being the last day, we empty our packs as much as we can. Food, clothing, and other things are left behind. Locals come around scavenging our tents, looking for anything, and we give them anything they'll take. We are all anxious and excited this day has come.

I went through the night unscathed and well rested. I'm really not hungry, but thirsty. I drink a whole bottle of water. Stuart offers to stay with me today, but I decline saying that I am feeling pretty well and I am going to run today. 9:30 comes and we are off. I start off too fast and feel it after the CP 1. From CP 1, I begin the 3/2 ratio of walking and running. Around mile 9, I trip and fall down for the first time the whole entire race. I am embarrassed and feel silly for doing this now that I am so close to the finish.

The last mile and a half are on a paved road into the village of Zoum Zguit. Everyone in the town has come out to see us. People are waving and clapping us on. Finally, I see the finish banner!! I cross the line and am once again exhausted. I get my finisher's medal and a can of Coke and chug it down. I get a bus ticket that tells me when I board. I don't board for another hour and a half, so we just sit and wait. We have finished in the town square. I walk to the back corner of the square where I just sit, rest, and conclude that this is finally over.

Behind me, there is a little restaurant where the cook is cooking outside on a grill. The aroma of the meat smells so good. He is grilling skewers of meat shish-kabob style. I didn't know what kind of meat it was, nor did I want to know, but I ate 5 skewers, a loaf of bread, and 2 more Cokes before heading to the bus.

The bus ride back to Ouarzazate is longer than I expected. It takes us 4 hours to get back. We arrive back at the hotel at 5:00 to a maze of runners trying to get their luggage back and trying to find out which room we are assigned. I get my room assignment and take my long awaited shower after 8 days. It takes 3 washings of my hair to finally get all the sand and dirt out!

My next leg of this journey is trying to get to Casablanca the next morning before my plane leaves at 7:00 a.m. to Paris. There is a bus that goes overnight to Casablanca and leaves at 9:00 p.m. They tell me it takes 8 hours to get there. Plenty of time to get to the airport, I say.

We all eat dinner at 7:00. I say goodbye to all my new friends and wish them well. They tell me good luck at Boston and wish me well also.

Sunday, April 14th

I wake up from one of my many bouts of trying to sleep on the bus ride and it is 5:30. No sign of Casablanca. We went through a thunderstorm through the Atlas Mountains, which slowed us down, but I didn't think this much. At 6:00 a.m., I see the sign for the Casablanca Airport. I rush up to the driver and ask him if he can drop me off at the airport. He says no, I'll have plenty of time to get there. I offer him about \$50 to take the exit and drop me off. Again he says no. He says he'll find me a taxi very soon.

It is 6:15 when the bus stops at a taxi stand. I get a driver and he rushes me to the airport. I arrive at the terminal at 7:00 a.m. Of course, this time the flight is on time and I miss the plane. The next flight to Paris is at 8:30, but on a different airline. It is a \$600 ticket. The next flight on the airline I'm on isn't until 11:30. I will miss both planes to Boston this day if I take the

11:30. I think about it and think about it. I finally admit to myself that Boston isn't in the picture this year and isn't worth the extra \$600 expense on my credit card. I will spend the night in Paris and fly back to Houston on Monday.

I am coming back to the MDS in 2003 and will do Boston the following Monday. With the help of a great sponsor for next year, I will be there to redeem myself and I will even the score in the great Sahara Desert.