

The Road Less Traveled

By Lisa K. Harris

Running and I finally broke up.

In hindsight it had been an unhealthy relationship, full of obsession on my part and abuse on running's part. It took years of pain — Achilles tendinitis, shin splints, post tibia tendinitis — gouges to my pocketbook for frequent new kicks with the latest scientifically engineered soles, and sneaking around, mainly from my 9 to 5 job, so that we could be together, before I got the message that we weren't working out.

I started my love affair with the sport as a freshman at the University of Chicago, and ran nearly every day along the park-like grassy campus Midway and on bike trails near Lake Michigan. The only time I didn't run was when the weatherman issued a "lung freeze" alert and cautioned everyone to stay indoors. First thing in the morning, I'd lace on my latest pair of Nikes and burst from my shotgun style apartment, hitting the pavement along with my stride.

Running came before coffee, breakfast, and more often than not, a decent warm-up stretching routine. Running kept me in shape, maintained my sanity, drenched me in happy-drug endorphins. While pounding the pavement, I figured out solutions to multi-dimensional calculus problem sets as well as life's speed bumps. On those infrequent "off" days I felt dumb, lethargic, and fat. Running saw me through college, graduate school, first job, and the troubling time when I realized I hated my well thought out career path, wished I'd majored in something different, and decided to return to school for more training.

So when a sports medicine doctor advised me to take time away from my infatuation-turned-crutch — serious time, like probably forever — and blamed crippling tendinitis on my bad habit of running with cold un-stretched muscles and an anatomy that wasn't meant to take the pounding to begin with, I was heartbroken.

This issue of *Tail Winds* is about our love affair with running — from round the block jogs to high profile marathons. What a boon it is to train and run in Arizona, where there are no "lung freeze" alerts and oh so many miles of trails to explore. You can run on your own or with a scheduled pack. Phoenix has a lively trail running scene, as Michael Murphy discovers for us in his article. In Tucson, there is "Meet me at Maynards," a Monday night social run/walk together through downtown, highlighted on our Finishlines page.

If I'd taken the time to train correctly and used professional advice, like that described in Jim Bradbury's article on the Carmicheal Training System, I might still be running today. I remain inspired by those who run, especially long-distancers, such as Polly Campbell and Mark Jaxion, who we profile in separate articles. These two tackle ultra-distances, events which stretch beyond marathon lengths, and the strategies used by Campbell and Jaxion for ticking off miles, will serve

athletic participants of all sports.

My older daughter, Lyda, ran track in high school and college. I envied her ability to run six miles every day, and crossed my fingers she didn't inherit my propensity for soft-tissue problems. I crossed my toes when she developed shin-splints, hoping that daily therapy with trainers applying up-to-date rehab techniques and outfitting her with calf supports would overcome our family issues. She managed better with the break-up than I did, cut the bad boyfriend off when the first pangs of new shin-splint pain appeared after the collegiate season began. "It just wasn't meant to be," she said. "There are other sports I can do, and I don't want to end up like you."

Like me — years wearing clunky shoes outfitted with custom orthotics; not being able to drive a manual transmission car, for engaging the clutch caused pain; icing my calves after I hiked, played tennis, or skied; yearning for something beyond my reach. Not running sent me into a tail spin and I wished I had the knowledge that Michelle Kaseler communicates in her story about how runners cope after finishing a big event like a marathon. She describes the depression some feel during their recovery time, and how to combat it, including participating in other activities such as cycling or swimming.

Ultimately, I returned to running, though it is with a belt strapped around my waist and in the deep-end of my swimming pool. It took years to discover *agua jogging*, and while it tones my muscles and allows me to ponder solutions to whatever has my mind in a twist, my stomach never flip flops nor do my palms sweat when I strap on the buoyancy belt. Running shoes, though, with their low-slung eyelets, wild-thing colors, and second skin perfect fit still set my knees wobbling. Our four-page center spread highlights the latest eye-candy, making resistance to their siren calling futile, at least for me.

I've never been able to replace the feeling of freedom and invincibility in other sports that I found with running. "I feel like Super Girl," my 10-year old daughter Ava says, voicing my sentiments. With hair slicked back into a pony-tail, new firey-red kicks on her feet, and clad in a pink spandex top and shorts, she looks like a super hero poised to rescue someone in distress. Ava, too, has fallen hard. The fastest girl in her elementary school, she trains daily for Tucson Unified School District's upcoming City Track Meet. In running, she has found a home. Cheering class mates screaming "Go Ava Go," as she hurls toward the 100-meter event's finish line, sends her confidence and self-esteem meters sky high. And, there is truly nothing like hearing, "I can't beat Ava" from an opponent as the



young athletes jockey behind the start line to send her into high gear upon hearing the crack of the gun, just to make it so.

Come, run a lap or two with me, and I'll cheer you on as you read. Must sit in the bleachers though, as I can't cope with the heart (or tendon) breaking temptation.

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