

The Running Life: A Good Run

The Running Life takes a new road

By Candace Karu

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Through my eyes, change looks like a road waiting to be run. Change has been the one constant in my life. Change has been my greatest challenge, and in some ways, my greatest motivator. It is a blank slate and a new beginning. And in that spirit of change and growth, this will be my last column for Running Times.

There are new writers and runners eager to be heard on these pages and I, for one, look forward to hearing them. Though I won't be writing for RT, I will continue my career as a journalist, writing about design and architecture. That passionate engagement is one of the things I have loved about writing for this magazine and what I hope will continue in my new job.

I started running in my 30s, so much of my evolution as a runner has been chronicled in the pages of Running Times. My first article for the magazine appeared in April 1995. Then-editorial director John L. Parker, Jr., asked me to write about my experience at Maine Running Camp in a sidebar to the magazine's camp guide. That half-page article led to many more assignments as a freelancer. In 1996 I contributed an account of the 100th Boston Marathon. It was my first Boston, a once-in-a-lifetime experience made even more personally significant because my reflections became a permanent part of this historic day.

How lucky I am to have a chronicle of these experiences. I often marvel at my good fortune to have had a job that has turned my dreams into reality. Running has provided the lens through which I have looked at the world and related to it. I've raced in Idaho and Israel, and I've run with groups in Iceland and Indiana -- and that's just the 'I's! Running Times has been my professional home for 13 years. This association has allowed me to meet my running heroes, both famous and anonymous. Since I started writing for the magazine, I've met runners who have renewed my faith in the essential goodness of human nature, runners who have redefined my understanding of the word character, and runners who have enriched my life with wisdom, courage, and laughter.

This job gave me access to a world beyond my dreams. At times I have been called upon to report the most significant events of our sport. But more often my beat has been the quotidian, the everyday situations that many runners encounter, regardless of their abilities. I always preferred covering smaller races, events where there was no prize money, and hardware was, more often than not, nonexistent. I've sought out groups like my own, where runners keep each other motivated, challenged, and thoroughly entertained. My work here was an unending source of adventure and engagement, but the most gratifying aspect has been writing about events that bring people together for the sheer joy of running with like-minded people.

This column has connected me with a community that encompasses the world. But it has also compelled me to explore the consequences of running on a very personal level. It has required me to examine how running influences the way I deal with my family, my friends, and my community. Writing about running has always been a way for me to explore the complicated as well as the sublime. When I wrote about my struggle with depression and how running helped me recover, I heard from more than 100 readers who recognized their own battle in my words. Describing how running helped me cope during the time of my father's illness and eventual death brought words of commiseration and comfort from readers eager to share their own stories. My writing has allowed me to participate in the ongoing discourse within the running community about issues both important and trivial. I have become a better runner, and frankly, a better person because of the advice and counsel of virtual strangers responding to pieces I have written.

Since I have been on staff at Running Times, we have had an ongoing debate about our readers. We have tried to guess who they are and what it is they like, or don't like, about our magazine. In the end, I found that writing about my own life as a runner was the best way to connect to other runners. Over the years, readers have fluffed me with praise for my insight and taken me to task for boneheaded conclusions I jumped to, but they have always weighed in. And that has been the best part of my time at Running Times.

My colleagues at the magazine have my abiding gratitude and admiration. I am proud of the work we have done together and eager to follow the evolution of Running Times as it continues to represent the best of our sport. And while I face the changes ahead of me with a thrilling mix of exhilaration and trepidation, I do know that some things will never change. No matter where I go, I will still be a runner, and I will always love the running life.

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