

The Running Life: Curro, Ergo Sum

I run, therefore I am. With apologies to Rene Descartes

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Let's imagine that you find yourself at a cocktail party. When you get there you discover that this imaginary party is all about me. Every person there is somehow connected to me. Every conversation is about me. See those people standing by the bar sipping Shiraz? They're the *Running Times* editorial team. The ill-behaved group in the corner cackling with laughter — that's my family. My design clients are drinking martinis, sizing up the décor, and finding it woefully inadequate. My art school colleagues, hipsters every one, are taking in the scene through sleek black-framed glasses while nibbling tuna carpaccio. My women friends are trading tales with my boyfriends, past and present. You probably recognized the *Running Times* readers the minute you came through the door. They're the ones dressed in jeans and running shoes, drinking beer and regaling each other with accounts of PRs, bodily functions, and overuse injuries.

While it's unlikely that a party like this will take place anytime in the foreseeable future, I conjured this fictional gathering to make a point. What is notable about this group is that each cohort knows me in a different context, but they all know me as a runner. To one I'm the writer who runs, to another I'm an artist who is also a marathoner. I'm the mom who races or the board member who comes to early morning meetings dressed for a run. They all know me for different reasons, but each one knows that running is not only what I do, it is who I am.

The joy and frustration of being human is that we are expected continually to modify and refine the person we are. Before I became a runner my life was full, packed to near bursting with a fulfilling job, an extended and demanding family, and interests that challenged my mind and my body. I studied languages, joined reading groups, and went to aerobics classes. But activity doesn't necessarily equal growth, and although I was busy, busy, busy, I wasn't really evolving.

And then, well into adulthood, I became a runner and everything changed. My life opened up in ways I could never have anticipated. Running was not simply an activity that made my behind firmer or my blood pressure lower; running became a way to help define the life I was living and the way I was living it.

OK, I'll admit it. In the beginning it really was all about a firmer behind. Few would question the fact that running is an almost sure-fire way to get in shape — fast — and in my case fast was exactly what was called for. With a body bent noticeably out of its former shape by childbearing, I was ripe for what seemed to be a quick fix to a common problem. And it was; within a few months I had my old body back. Well, not exactly my old body. Unlike the original, this one had muscles and strength and stamina that probably sent my old body into an envious funk.

Over time, however, running became much more than what I did for an hour or two every day; running became one of my defining characteristics. How did I go from running to runner? It started when I realized that my highest-level thinking happened when I was out for a run, not every time but often enough that running became a problem solving activity as well as a physical one. When something was unresolved in my life, a personal problem, a work situation, a design dilemma, I would go for a run. Internal chaos ensued as the problem chased itself around my head. After a mile or two order started vying with chaos for space on the hard drive. Eventually, order prevailed and resolution arrived, usually by the end of the run.

In time my universe expanded to include runners as friends and eventually as colleagues. Rarely a month would go by without my reflecting on my ridiculous good fortune at meeting another new and intriguing running friend. My default comment, tired with overuse but still ringing with truth, is how lucky I am to know these people and how they would never have found their way into my life were I not a runner. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff? A runner. A famous rock star? A runner. A noted cancer research doc? A really fast runner. My best girlfriend? Another annoyingly fast runner. My OB/Gyn, my mother's priest, my UPS guy? Runners one and all.

Robert Frost wrote: "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." Running feels like home to me, a place that is safe, a place where I am always welcome, no matter the time, no matter the circumstance. In a life filled with change and instability, I found something rock-solid, an activity that grounded my body, but allowed my mind and my spirit to soar. In a way that I still can't adequately describe, running gave me peace.

One of the questions I am asked most often is: "What makes *Running Times* different from other running magazines?" Sometimes answering this question feels like trying to tell someone why smelling the ocean makes me happy. The explanation would be very long, and in the end, if smelling the ocean didn't make you happy, too, then you probably wouldn't understand. But here is my short answer: *Running Times* is a magazine for people like me, people who are passionate runners, people who define themselves as runners, people who, no matter what else they do, are happily pursuing the running life.

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