

# The Running Life: Down Time

## Lost but not Forgotten

By Candace Karu

As featured in the May 2005 issue of Running Times Magazine

**How's your running going?"** It's the inevitable question I'm asked by runners and non-runners alike. In my small town those of us who are on the roads day in and day out are known, by shape and gait if not name, to one and all. Bus drivers and commuters, patrol cars and postal workers all notice our routines. Many locals also take note of any break in those same routines.

I realized this when my own routine was resoundingly broken. Busted. Shattered. Kaput. It was a long, inexorable slide from fitness to fatness, from 20-mile days to 20-mile weeks, from fluent speed to ponderous plodding. The days of effortless daily runs became a distant memory, replaced by sporadic forays onto my usual routes and loops, covering less ground in significantly greater time than I ever imagined possible.

"How did I get to this place?" I often asked myself. Like many simple questions in life, this one had a complicated answer. It started with the dreaded P.F.—plantar fasciitis. One morning I bounded out of bed, only to be painfully surprised by a stabbing pain in my right heel. Did I bruise it on a run? Was there something wrong with my shoes? Eventually the obvious diagnosis was made, and I dutifully iced and stretched and cut back on my mileage. It didn't help. The P.F. worsened. I tried new shoes. No luck. I tried new orthotics. Nope. I tried massage. I tried acupuncture. I tried cortisone. No. No. And no. Not only did none of these potential remedies work for me, my symptoms grew increasingly acute. And, adding insult to literal injury, the symptoms spread to my left foot.

Maybe it was biomechanics altered by pain, maybe it was the fall I took off a mountain trail, or maybe it was just the inexorable march of time, but at about that same time I started to develop significant back problems. I was advised to stop running altogether. Yeah, right. I tried that for a few weeks under the constant protest of my body, which even in pain missed every single day not running. My psyche sent up a dramatic hue and cry as well, indicating that a cessation of my beloved pursuit would put me at immediate risk for a dangerous assortment of psychic maladies including, but not limited to, depression, malaise, lassitude and anxiety.

For months I did whatever I could to repair my body and retain a reasonable amount of fitness, hoping against hope that I would soon be back on the roads. I biked, I hiked, I swam, I walked. I went to physical therapy and took classes in yoga, Pilates, and spinning. Eventually, after many frustrating months, I began to run again. My back problems limited me to a few miles two or three times a week. The cross training, onerous as it was, was still a big part of my regimen. I continued physical therapy and strength training, trying to get my back strong enough for the demands that running would put on it.

The months, and eventually two years, of low mileage had one miraculous benefit. Somewhere in that time my plantar fasciitis disappeared. I could get out of bed in the morning and walk gracefully to the bathroom. No more limping and hobbling for the first hour of my day.

My back problems, though not entirely resolved, are now manageable. Getting back into decent running shape will be an arduous, frustrating process. Last week, for the first time in two years, I logged 30 miles. I ran twice with my old group, friends I have sorely missed during this time.

I came to find out that I wasn't the only one in a slump, though mine was admittedly longer than anyone else's. Quite a few of our regular pack brought up the rear, regaling each other with tales of injury, illness, or bad attitudes. We complained about our slow pace, our widening posteriors, and our inconsistent motivation. We also tentatively batted around the idea of training for a marathon. This was a lofty goal for a group whose long run was hovering around six miles, but one that filled me with hope and optimism.

There were important lessons to be learned in the time I was estranged from the sport I love. The injuries I suffered taught me patience and the understanding that the road to recovery can be long and often very, very boring. My time away from running also taught me humility. I learned that the fast times and extreme fitness I enjoyed in the past were fleeting, but running, no matter how fast or how far, was forever.

Lately at the end of each run I find myself giddy with the simple joy of being able to do this thing I love. Because no matter how I was sidelined, no matter how long my hiatus, in my heart and mind I am now and always will be a runner.

\*\*\*\*

In our *Running Times* family, we are extremely fortunate to be surrounded by talented, accomplished people. One of these is my friend RT Senior Writer Rachel Toor, whose most recent book *The Pig and I: Why It's So Easy to Love an Animal and So Hard to Live With a Man* has been released by Penguin's Hudson Street Press. Rachel's delightful memoir incorporates the lure of the running life in her comic, revealing, and poignant tales about the difficulty and rewards of loving animals and men. Though not specifically about running, Rachel's adventures on the steep mountain trails of the Sierra Nevadas and the rollings hills of Durham, NC, will delight runners and non-runners alike.

Copyright © 2009 [Running Times Magazine](http://RunningTimesMagazine.com) - All Rights Reserved.