

The Running Life: Seeds of Change

Thirty Years of Growing Runners

By Candace Karu

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I've always asserted, only half jokingly, that the one constant in my life has been change. A childhood spent as an Army brat meant that each year brought a different school, a different house, a different adventure. Moving to a new town or a new country not only altered my perspective of the world at large; it also required that I carry with me the things that were most important. Like a crab, I carted my home on my back, bringing the things that made me feel secure to each new posting. For me change was not only a way of life, but also a much-anticipated challenge. In retrospect I realize that what allowed me to deal with the persistent rearrangement of my life was consistency. As long as certain essential elements — my sister in the next bed, my mother's unflagging optimism, my father's discipline — remained intact, most external alterations were manageable.

Anticipating the 30th anniversary of *Running Times* gave me the chance to reflect on the extraordinary changes that have taken place in the running community since the magazine first appeared. What I found is that, like my own life, certain constants have grounded RT throughout its history. Over the years, the staff has been dedicated to a consistent editorial mission while reacting to and anticipating changes, large and small, within the sport.

Thirty years ago the majority of runners and of our subscribers were men. Title IX was just beginning to work its magic, making it easier and more acceptable for young women to become athletes. Participation in races, especially at the longer distances, was overwhelmingly male. Even running gear, still in its developmental infancy, was designed with the male runner in mind. In spite of the decided male orientation of the sport, I had to smile as I scanned the cover of the inaugural issue of *Running Times*. There, head bowed in concentration and impossibly young, is a sepia image of 19-year-old Joan Benoit. No one reading that first issue could have predicted the changes that would shape running and runners in those 30 years. But RT would be there at every step, documenting running's metamorphosis to the world, giving readers a meeting place, a philosophical home, a mirror reflecting the growth and expansion in the community of passionate runners.

Delving into back issues of RT proved to me that the magazine has consistently found a way to embrace change while remaining true to its original goal of providing information, inspiration, and motivation for the dedicated runner. The method of delivery has morphed into a more sophisticated, comprehensive, and inclusive publication, but the RT philosophy has remained intact.

RT Publisher Carol Lasseter-Rice, a friend and mentor since my first piece appeared in these pages, has inspired me to be a better runner and a better writer in the 12 years we have known each other. Given her 28-year tenure at *Running Times*, she has also served as my institutional memory and cultural historian. As we reflected on this anniversary issue, I asked her how she felt the magazine had changed. Carol created the tag line we at RT live by, "The Runner's Best Resource." She told me that although our mission has remained constant for 30 years, we have had to expand and refine our editorial scope continually in order to serve a much larger and more diverse group of runners, a very different group in 2007 than in 1977. The changes in the running community have required *Running Times* to become more sophisticated, to respond to the needs of all runners, not just those at the top of the sport.

Writing this column coincided with a visit to my oldest friend who lives with her husband on a 1,000-acre farm in Oregon. Staying with them was a revelation. I loved the experience of running on dirt roads through acres of beans and broccoli, garlic and cherries, taking in the smell of fresh earth. During these runs my feelings about RT's anniversary began to coalesce.

I learned that a large part of the business of the farm was producing the seeds used around the country to start new crops on other farms. Who knew an acre of one crop can produce enough seed to yield hundreds more acres? One night, as we were picking corn for our dinner, it struck me that the process of producing seeds, creating the means to continue the cycle of production, is not unlike what we are trying to do at RT. We take the products of the running culture and find ways to distill them, refine them, and explain them to our readers. We find ways to create kernels of information and inspiration and plant them so that existing runners can develop and improve and new ones can emerge and grow.

Specialty magazines like ours should be allowed to count their birthdays in dog years. In addition to being a well-deserved cause for celebration, a niche publication that has grown and flourished for three decades can be declared a minor publishing miracle. In the years this magazine has served the running community, hundreds of specialty titles have emerged and disappeared while RT has prevailed. Through running booms and running troughs, *Running Times* has remained true to its original mission, making connections for the community of passionate runners — connecting them to each other and to the shining stars of the running world, connecting them to coaches and doctors, races and retailers, groups and clubs. Since 1976 *Running Times* has served the running community with diligence and enthusiasm, documenting, inspiring, teaching, and promoting the running life.

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