

Forty Years Running



April 16th of this year will be a special day for me. On this date, in 1982, I put on a hideously inappropriate “jogging suit”, laced up a pair of Kangaroo running shoes, jumped out the front door of my home in Massapequa Park, NY, and ran my first mile. At the time, I was 26 years old, and felt like an old man whose life was over and had nothing to look forward to.

Of course, I had run many times before this day, and had even run a couple of races back in the late 70s. But until this day, running never stuck. I’m not sure I even know why I remember the exact date, because when I ran this mile, I had no real reason to think this time would be any different than all the other attempts before this one. But a couple of days later, I went again, and it felt pretty good. So I continued, two or three times a week.

In the next month, the runs became a little more frequent, and I extended to distance to two miles, then three. And in June, I entered a 10K race in Shelter Island, NY. I was a hard race. I had to start walking after 3 miles, but somehow still finished in a little under an hour. My feet were blistered, and my legs hurt for a few days after, but then, I ran another race on July 3rd, and another one on July 4th. And the hook was set.

I had no idea at the time that running would eventually be a big part of what defines me. But I kept on entering races and rather quickly, my stamina and my times improved. In November, I bought my first paper running log, and started documenting my runs. By the end of 1982, I could run a 5K in under 21 minutes, and a 10K in under 44. Racing and improving was the big pull. That, and the T-shirts.

Running and racing was a lot different back then. Today’s new runners wouldn’t recognize the world of running and racing back in those days. Here is what running and racing looked like in 1982.

- T shirts, running shorts and socks were all cotton or polyester or a 50/50 blend
- For some reason, athletic socks always had rings around the top. A lot of shirts did too.
- The most common race distance was 10K, and if it took you an hour to run one, you would be in the back of the pack
- The average price for a road race was \$6
- Running shorts were very VERY short
- In most races, 90% of runners were male
- In most races, there were people at each mile marker calling out the time every 5 seconds
- Running shoes only came on one width, and there was no such thing as a women's model

- We actually journalized our runs in paper running logs
- We used actual road maps to get to races
- There were no heart rate monitors, or GPS watches or any other advanced technologies.
- If you wanted to measure your neighborhood courses, you got in a car and drove it, watching our odometer
- We ate spaghetti the night before a race, and a banana the morning of.
- You could not brag about your runs on social media. You had to talk about it face to face to anyone who would listen. (one thing that hasn't changed is that only other runners really care about your accomplishments anyway)
- All the top world class runners had names you could spell and pronounce
- Unless it was a marathon, you didn't get a finisher's medal
- There were no big prize money races. Top runners ran just for the sheer joy and competition of it.
- So did the rest of us.

Running today looks a lot different than it did 40 years ago, but so does everything else. It was a different world in pretty much every way, too. But although everything around running has changed, running itself is the same as it always was. The simple act of putting one foot in front of the other is the same as it has always been. In a way, it's amazing that something so simple holds people's interest for so many years, but it does. And the reasons we do it, and the benefits we derive are different for every runner.

In my last article, I started by saying my running days were over. And in a way, they were. I've been battling one roadblock or another in my running for the last year, and have had a hard time allowing my body to heal. When something runs through your blood the way that running does in mine, it's hard to modify downward what you have been doing for so many years. But no body can do the same things at 66 that they did when they were 26. I finally had to draw a line and convince myself that I am not longer going to run. That was the only way I could convince myself to back off and allow the healing to take place.

But I also said that some day, after my running days were over, that I would be back. And although my healing is far from complete, I am back doing just what I started out doing some 40 years ago. Running a couple of miles here and there, and running occasional races. Once a runner, always a runner.

These past 40 years of running has changed my life in so many ways, and every single one of those ways has been for the better. On April 16th, I plan to celebrate my 40 years of running by participating in a 5K race. I was very happy to see that FiveStar NTP very recently added a race on that date, so the race I am choosing is the Hop Into Spring 5K. <https://www.fivestarntp.com/races/Hop-Into-Spring-5K> I invite you to join me in this celebration of running.

Here's to the next 40 years, whatever they may bring.

Michael Selman
Senior Ambassador

