



OPINION

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GET UP AND GO

She keeps running and running and running

By Nancy Shohet West | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 30, 2013



EVAN MCGLINN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE.

Nancy Shohet West, went for a run near her family's home before she started her day.

My running log for Aug. 15, 2012: Day 1,827.

As I completed my 2-mile loop along the Bedford Road footpath to Carlisle Center that morning last summer, I glowed with more than the usual workout endorphins. The day marked my running streak’s five-year anniversary; every day since Aug. 15 of 2007, I had run a mile or more.

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This was enough to impress my mother, and possibly a few friends. But all it meant to the US Running Streak Association was that I was no longer considered a beginner.

That’s right. To the national organization for “streak runners” like me, five years is a mere trifle. The men and women who have been at it a long time — the ones who occupy the uppermost ranks on the association’s official registry — have run a mile or more every day for more than 40 years. Reaching the five-year mark simply bumped me up from the “neophyte” category to the “proficient” category.

To answer the first question that inevitably arises when streak-runners describe their pursuits: No, it does not mean we run naked.

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The US Running Streak Association’s registry lists a number of residents of Boston’s western suburbs.

Streak runners are not the same as streakers, though I suppose it’s possible that there’s some overlap in the warmer parts of the country.

We are called streak runners because we maintain a ritual of running at least a mile every day, without ever taking a day off.

I started my streak after writing an article for the Globe about Ronald Kmiec, who like me lives in Carlisle. At the time I interviewed him, Kmiec was celebrating his 30-year

anniversary of streak running.

I left the interview wondering whether I could do something like that. I do love running, though I'm decidedly in the snail category when it comes to pace, or maybe even the slug category. I'm not a racer or a marathoner; I just like getting out for the exercise.

At the time I did the interview, I was typically running four or five days a week. Except on rainy days. Or cold days. Or days that I just couldn't find time for a run. Still, the idea appealed to me. I've always been someone with a particular attraction to routine and daily practice. But every single day? Won't weather and family life and work deadlines and even the occasional stomach virus get in the way?

Nonetheless, I resolved that summer to try it. And by the time I reached my five-year anniversary last August, I could almost understand how the men and women way ahead of me on the list — the ones like Kmiec, who have run every day not just for a few years but for decades — manage to do it.

Oddly, once you commit to running every day, you think about it less, not more. It becomes like taking a shower: I don't give it any thought, because I know I'm going to do it. Being a streak runner involves a paradoxical laziness: It means never having to decide whether it's a good day for a run.

Of course, all streak runners have their stories about "the time I almost missed my run." There are travel days, family emergencies, injuries, illnesses, and just the usual circumstances of life that can make any day difficult to predict down to the minute. And maybe it says something about the fairly quotidian nature of my life right now that I was able to accomplish this at all.

In my mid-40s, with two children of grade-school age, an interesting but hardly exotic life as a regional journalist, and a family budget that allows for a couple of vacations a year, I lead a daily life predictable enough that it's fairly easy for me to be able to fit in a run every day.

Sure, I've faced challenges. I've run through one or two migraines over the years, and

it's not uncommon for me to set my alarm for 4:45 a.m. if I happen to have a long travel day ahead.

I'm lucky to live on a quiet residential street where it's reasonably safe to run in the dark, even if it's not preferable.

Blizzards present a minor challenge; I just wait until the plow goes by and run in the packed snow of its wake. Hurricanes have produced a few hair-raising moments, as have a couple of lightning storms. But somehow it works out, or has for the past five and three-quarters years, anyway. I set the alarm and do my few miles.

There are far more worthy goals I could set than running every day, and sometimes I'm a little sheepish about this being the commitment I've chosen. I could try to help someone in need every day, or make a charitable contribution every day, or do something environmentally conscientious every day. Instead, I run every day, which really helps society in absolutely no way whatsoever.

But it goes beyond the running itself. I have no doubt that there will come a day when I don't run, whether because I'm too sick or injured or can't leave the bedside of a loved one or am dead.

Kmiec, the runner who first introduced me to the concept, broke his streak just before his 32-year anniversary after a heart attack. He took five weeks off — and then, at 65, began a new streak. Even knowing it's unlikely he'll surpass his previous streak, he wanted to return to that irresistible sense of repetition and purpose.

So for now, I'll keep running. Planning to run every day gives me a sense of continuity and purpose in an ever more unpredictable world.

One day at a time leads to one year at a time. And that's why for now, I'll set my sights on the six-year mark this summer — and see where I can go from there.

Nancy Shohet West's memoir, "The Mother-Son Running Streak Club: How I Bonded with My Son by Running a Mile with Him Every Day for a Year," is available at Amazon.com. She can be reached at nancyswest@gmail.com.

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