

What Do You Think of When You Run?

**ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW
ABOUT RUNNING**

by Members of the Montgomery County Road Runners Club

MCRRC
Rockville, Maryland

Acknowledgments

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS is a long time in the history of a running club. As our quarter-century mark approached, the Montgomery County Road Runners Club decided to mark the anniversary with a collection of members' thoughts and experiences while running the roads in Maryland and elsewhere. Most of the writing was drawn from *The Rundown*, which began as a newsletter in 1978 and grew along with the club.

Looking through back issues, we were astonished at the interest and variety of the writing. We believe this collection will be of interest not only to members of our club but also to members of other clubs—and indeed to almost everyone who runs.

The writers are Joseph Abernethy, Joyce Albro, David Asaki, Matt Bates, Roy Benson, Anna Berdahl, Ken Brown, Michele Burr, Christina Caravoulas, Freddi Carlip, Don Carter, Russ Chauvenet, Kathie Crosson, Joe Decker, Dick Durst, Jodi Finkelstein, Warren Firschein, Kathy Freedman, Sean Gallagher, Becky Gatwood, Glenn Geelhoed, Valerie Grasso, Bernie Greene, Bob Grupé, Kathy Guerrieri, Vince Guerrieri, CJ Lockman Hall, Marty Horan, John Howard, David Johnson, Lani Johnson, Lyman Jordan, Nancy Karabaic, Anne Kenderdine, Ron Kulik, Bill Kuta, Paul Loebach, Mary Low, Jeff Lowe, Michele MacLeod, Frank MacMillan, Jennifer Kuta Magin, Jeff Mazer, Neil McLaughlin, Bill Morrison, Margaret Neal, Tom Neal, Janet Newburgh, Irv Newman, Vickie Park, Natalie Partridge, Alan Penn, Rich Pesce, Frank Pierce, Sam Pizzigati, Ted Poulos, Dom Quattrocchi, Phil Quinn, Gary Resnick, Carole Rivera, Alan Roth, Gerry Sewell, John Sissala, Betty Holston Smith, Jim Smith, Marcee Smith, Adam Spector, Louise Stalter, Lee Stang, Denny Steinauer, Chris Stockdale, Carol Torgan, Dave Treber, Brian Tresp, Andy Weissel, Kirt West, and Jim Whitnah.

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—Frank Pierce

Part One

THOUGHTS WHILE RUNNING

Among the pleasures of running are the sights and sounds of the journey, which cannot be experienced any other way. “There is no race,” writes Gerry Sewell, “there are no winners, no losers. There is only life to be lived, savored, and cherished.”

There are also the changing seasons, says Bob Grupé. “The time from March to May, as the natural world shifts gears, is a very motivating season to run. In February the sight of so many leafless trees, with their vertical dark branches receding layer upon layer into the visual horizon, makes the woods impressively transparent. It’s like moving through the framed latticework of a partly constructed and very large cathedral.”

And the people one runs with. “We were running along Ohio Drive,” writes Alan Roth, “with the Potomac River on our left. The president said he was feeling a slight twinge in his thigh so he was not going to push the pace. He also explained that he had been in Arkansas and had not been able to run all week.”

Running has its consolations, especially in times of crisis. Betty Holston Smith was working at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. “Suddenly the air was filled with screams, fire alarms, burning debris, and smoke. . . . The next day I was still numb from the experience and I got precisely the help I needed from the Wednesday night run with my usual partners. Driving home after the run, I thought there’s so much more than the routine to be said about running routines.”

An Early Morning Run

Gerry Sewell

IT'S EARLY in the morning. An owl is calling outside the window. I rise, shaking off sleep to greet the darkness that precedes dawn, before the sun has shaken off the night, before the rest of the world has begun to move. I strip off the garb of the sleeper and put on the garb of the runner. Pull on the shorts, tighten the shoes, don the reflective vest—my red badge of courage. I am out on the street, a quiet, secluded residential street that will lead to country roads and, for the next hour, become my world.

The moon is high in the western sky; stars join it in the last symphony of night. Clouds skirt across, quickly flying on to the ocean as the moon stares down in quiet incredulity. It sees not a man or a woman, an executive, a nurse, a doctor, a carpenter, or a clerk. It sees only a runner. A deer jumps through the brush to my right. I catch only the flash of her white tail in the shadows. The crickets are still singing their hymn of twilight while the first birds have begun the morning song.

My legs are pumping up the hills, heart beating strongly. I feel the air rush in and out of my lungs. I am alive, filled with life. Is this the runner's high? I drop the thoughts of yesterday on the shoulder of the road, all the disappointments, the worries. Cast off the angers, the bitterness, and refuse to let them be part of me. Remember the joys of love, of friendship; the wonderful variety of people I have met just in the last few weeks. I will enjoy this moment to the fullest and drink deeply the wine of morning.

I once ran to prove something to others, or to improve my health, my looks, to be more attractive, to meet people. I once wanted to run a marathon to prove I could do it, or beat an 8-minute mile pace in a 15K race, or just catch Mike or Alex or Lyman that one time. Now I run for the joy of life. While the world sleeps around me, I experience happiness few people will ever know. I refuse to live a life of "quiet desperation." It is too short not to taste the

wonders of life every moment. Running helps me cleanse away the past; I cannot change it any more than I can flatten the hills. It helps me prepare with excitement for today and ignore all the worries of tomorrow.

The sun has just begun to climb the hills to the east as I round the last turn, climb the last hill, push toward the finish. I walk now, panting some, and lift my arms to the sun rising, the moon setting. Here's to the runners, to all who refuse to take less than everything life will offer. We are not driven, but neither do we drift. We will choose the path we want and then pursue it with vigor and vitality. There is no race, there are no winners, no losers. There is only life to be lived, savored, and cherished.

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Running with President Clinton

Alan Roth

THE INVITATION to run with the president was totally unexpected. In fact, when my office called me in Hawaii (I was on a business trip) to tell me about it, I didn't believe it. The run had been arranged by the New York headquarters of the Achilles Track Club. I was asked to join three New York Achilles members and a volunteer and to bring three members from the local chapter. We required that everyone from Achilles be able to run at least the first mile with the president. And we also wanted a good array of disabilities to fully represent the diverse membership of Achilles.

We were all cleared by the White House the week before the run. The schedule was for us to pass through security at 6:45 am and be ready to run at 7 sharp. By 7:00 we were inside and ready, but where was the president? An advance person showed up and explained that we were to run in East Potomac Park and the president would meet us there. We made our way down to the park and got ready to run.

When the president arrived, we were lined up at the side of the road for a formal introduction and handshake. Then the president moved out to the road and we joined him as he started to run very

slowly. Two large press vehicles were moving slowly in front of us, and the Secret Service people brought up the rear. The president explained that he starts out slowly as he has allergies and it takes a little time for him to adjust to running and the environment. The first few hundred yards were probably at a 10-minute pace. It was photo-op time for the press just in front of us. Then the press vehicles sped up and were quickly out of sight.

The president picked up the pace to about 9 minutes a mile and even our slower runners were still with us. He gave a short history lesson on buildings we could see across the channel from the park. We then talked with him about the road we were on and the important role it plays in the Marine Corps Marathon, the Cherry Blossom 10 Miler, and other local races. He then asked the various Achilles members about their running experiences. Brenda Levy spoke of the gold medals she had just won at the Maccabiah Games in Israel. The president showed real interest in each individual.

As we neared Hains Point, we could see the press gathered for another photo-op. We had a near accident as our blind runner slightly tripped on the wheel of one of the wheelchairs just as the cameras were shooting. I was moving to the outside to give more room next to the president for our members and stumbled a bit as my right foot hit the curb. Of course, the footage used on TV that night was of that wonderful moment.

We were now getting into mile two and the pace was about 8:30 to 8:45 per mile. The subject again was the Marine Corps Marathon. The president said he would like to run it but would not have time to train for it. Jeff Pledger, who is totally blind, was running alongside the president and offered to help him train. He also said he would be glad to guide the president through the marathon. At that point, Jeff was being guided by Andy Tisch who is on the Achilles board of directors and was instrumental in setting up the run with the president.

We spoke a bit about personal bests. Jeff is one of the nation's top blind runners with a 3:16 marathon, a 39:20 10K, and a 19:30 5K. The president said he had done a 47:20 10K. He expressed his admiration for Jeff's accomplishments.

We were running along Ohio Drive with the Potomac River on our left. The two wheelchairs were just a little ahead. Jeff, Andy, Helene, and I were running alongside the president and one Secret Service agent was running just behind us. That was it! We were