

## **Brenda Krueger**

The MRA is celebrating 50 years of growth, change, accomplishments and challenges. It is exciting to celebrate as an organization and as all the individuals involved throughout the years. Every member has a story of running and their connection to the MRA.

My MRA story begins with meeting Aldo and then seeing that black with green jacket and me thinking ..."I never wear green." I eventually talked to Aldo more and kept seeing that jacket at expos and various running events. But I hesitated to join MRA as I always ran alone and considered my running something very individual, personal and kept it to myself because my journey to running was not easy.

I had polio as a child and eventually required surgery on my deformed right foot which is still three sizes smaller than my left foot. My back also had post-polio problems and I was in a body cast in grade nine and after that I was sure I could not run. Swimming was helpful and I really enjoyed walking so I focused on walking faster and further. I fulfilled my dream to become a teacher but my personal life was quite troubled at the time and being active and really pushing my walking was an important part of my survival. I started buying two pairs of runners to get a proper fit for each foot and had custom orthotics made. I thought my polio leg would always be my limitation. But years later, when everything was finally getting better, including meeting my now husband, the doctor phoned me at work to say I had cancer in my left leg. I was devastated and so scared. Surgery and a difficult recovery followed and the therapy that got me walking again made me want to do everything that I possibly could for as long as I could. So in 2008 I walked my first full marathon in Vancouver with my daughter running beside me. But being there, with all those runners, motivated me to try running and I realized not only could I run but I really enjoyed it! Then the more I ran...the more I enjoyed it! I started entering running events of all distances and loved the experience and the challenge.

It was hard at times with leg problems but running was so good for me and also brought new opportunities. I was honoured to be asked to give motivational talks at many Running Room clinics and to other groups, something I still enjoy doing. Then I also started volunteering to speak for the Terry Fox Foundation. I had always admired Terry and consider him Canada's greatest hero. As I met Terry's brothers and read Terry's journals I became more dedicated to sharing Terry's story and inspiration. I ended up travelling throughout Saskatchewan and Manitoba every September speaking to students in all grades in up to five schools a day. From huge

city schools to small rural schools, I spoke to nearly 15,000 students some years. It was always extra special when I got to run or walk with the students. Of course the pandemic has taken away that opportunity but I certainly look forward to doing it again when possible.

I stress to the students to work hard, to do their best and to focus on what they themselves can do.

And that is the same for us as runners...just doing the best that we ourselves can do. Certainly there is the time and place for being competitive with others (only runners celebrate a birthday moving them up an age category), but overall you are at your best and most satisfied when you run focusing on yourself and your own abilities. I still remain a solo runner preferring to train by myself and run my own run. Especially as I never know when my polio leg or my cancer leg will cause problems.

So back when I started running more and doing more events I kept seeing those black and green jackets. I finally learned more about the MRA and eventually became a member. I certainly have enjoyed getting to know people within the organization and participating in MRA programs and it has definitely enriched my running experience. It was a great honour to be the speaker when Terry was inducted into the MRA Hall of Fame. And yes I love my MRA discount when I'm running and stop at Tall Grass Prairie to fuel up with wild rice bannock!

Running has also provided so many wonderful experiences to travel and explore places I wouldn't have gone to otherwise, particularly Boston and New York. I had the incredible honour of being the flag bearer for Canada at the Opening Ceremonies of the New York Marathon in 2017. I was so proud as a runner and as a Canadian.

I am a very goal orientated person and that is evident in my running in many ways. Certainly when I have an event coming up such as a full marathon I am very dedicated and focus my running on that specific preparation. That's part of the motivation and the reward. Unfortunately no matter how well I train and prepare I never know how my legs will handle a run. Thankfully my best marathon was in Boston but often my cancer leg swells and becomes painful and it is a struggle to finish.

My worst marathon was Chicago 2018. My leg was bad within 30 minutes, something that had never happened before, and it was a terrible experience but I did finish. No matter what, crossing the finish line is always rewarding and such a relief!

But in addition to the various events, I also have lots of fun with my running by setting odd goals and challenges. Last year my goal one day was to do every single street, crescent and cove in Southdale in one run ... but how

far would it be? It was 30.9 miles including one Wendy's Frosty! I have a "Run the Year" goal, tracking my miles for the year to see when I will reach the same miles as the year...working on 2022 now! And the usual birthday run of 65 kms on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday (and the next day cycling 65 miles). A favourite fun long run is from Southdale to Lockport and back to have a Mama burger at the A and W and ice cream at the Half Moon. A unique running experience I had was in 2018 when my husband cycled across Canada in 48 days. I drove the van and provided support as we camped from Vancouver to St John's Nfld. While he cycled I had lots of time to run each day...every street of small rural towns, laps of campgrounds, sideroads, roadside stops, even laps of grocery store parking lots. What a great way to see the country and meet interesting people! Currently I'm running to as many painted rock gardens as I can throughout Winnipeg and finding rocks for the grandkids! All the fun running helps balance out the work of more focused hard training and completing many current virtual events .

Now with Covid and all the restrictions it is great to enter the virtual events...for the challenge but more importantly to help the organizers and the causes they support. Certainly being able to go out and run is one of the most "normal" activities right now and provides so much relief at a time of difficult challenges.

I just appreciate all the satisfaction, benefits and rewards of running whether it is working hard for a specific event, completing a fun personal goal or participating in a program like the MRA Celebration series. I think during these Covid times we have been reminded how fortunate we are to be able to run, and certainly one of the best runs is to just go out and run...not worrying about distance, time or pace...but just running for the pure joy of running. I feel running is a big part of who I am and makes me a better person. That is something to celebrate. And yes we all are looking forward to running an in person event again. Someday it will happen. Meanwhile we still have many things to be thankful for, and we keep on running! Congratulations to the MRA on this anniversary and all that has been achieved in 50 years. And I am looking forward to proudly wearing my MRA jacket!