

## Amanda Younka

I started really running at age 11 (grade 5-1980) just up and down Lindsay Street. When I told my parents I could run to this corner or that street without stopping they really didn't believe me. I was a very small kid with a ton of energy. By the time I was in grade 7 at River Heights Junior High, I found myself on Mr. Tanner's Track & Field Team. But it was the father of a girl from school who picked me up on a cool spring Sunday morning for my first road race. Ron Chopek continued for a couple of seasons encouraging me to come out to other road races, until I could figure things out on my own. I believe I won the 14 year-old age category the first year Mr. Chopek took me out to the Puma Series!

I really loved, and still do, getting out with other runners to test myself. Road racing has a party feel to me. I find it exciting and a great way to catch up with runners I haven't seen over the winter months.

I started coaching in 1996 when I started working at the Reh Fit Centre. I took over the running program there and I am still there coaching the Heart Throbs Running Club. I began training a small group of mostly men and was able to bring many of these new runners out to the road race scene. The club grew over time and now is inclusive. I hope we can return to small in person group training in the fall ([click here to see the Heart Throbs Hall of Fame plaque](#)).

My most satisfying achievement as a runner was qualifying for the Boston Marathon and training for it through a winter and, of course, completing the Boston Marathon. I would like to do this again if I can find more time and less injuries!

My most satisfying achievement as a race director; for 11 years I did my best to make the Islendingadagurinn 10 mile Road Race from Winnipeg Beach to Gimli a race that would welcome all runners and a way to enjoy the day. I relied on all my family, friends, Flying M club athletes and my personal network of sponsors to make that race a success. Details like having bagels cut in advance, including fun, random draw prizes and getting the results correct the first time were always on my mind!

As a coach-It is very exciting to have runners of all ages reach their goals. I have coached someone for 20 years who has continued to train and maintain his fitness. This allowed him to get to Boston at age 61! Additionally, I coached a group of young Indigenous runners with the idea of building a bridge to the running community. This is still something I would like to work on as running offers so many benefits, but many barriers still exist for families and individuals to join road running.

Some favourite memories of my running involvement include coaching the Heart Throbs each week for over 20 years and having several different Kenyan runners and out of town athletes stay at our home during the Manitoba marathon week. My family and I enjoyed getting to know these people better and we really connected as runners. Great food and parties after the Manitoba marathon as well!

My best running times

- 5km 17:55
- 10km 37:50
- Half marathon 1:26
- Marathon 3:16

One of my favourite races was the Grand Beach Sun Run; always a great way to spend time with friends. It is also so hard on the beach to finish.

Coollest Road Race -The Main Street Road Mile - super exciting to run from City Hall and through Portage & Main, finishing near the Forks bridge.

Losing my best friend, training partner, and coach 15 years ago from a brain tumor has been my most difficult running experience. Janice Gill and I became fast friends through our love of road racing when she sent me a card the first time that I beat her. Janice congratulated me on a new personal best, 1<sup>st</sup> place finish and qualification for the Timex National Championships. I didn't beat her often; she was a fierce competitor, great mentor, and loyal friend. Janice has not been replaced and I mostly run alone now.

I do have to get back to more volunteer work within the road running community. Previously I served as race director for over a decade, and helped several race committees with event day planning. If I were injured, I would just show up to lend a hand at the finish line, of course with my children in tow and they volunteered as well.

Sponsors over the years- Athlete's Wear, Stride Ahead and Polar thanks to Ken Friesen!

Shoe Project since early 2000- Partnerships with Ken at Stride Ahead and then Erick Olson of City Park Runners. I have been picking up donated running shoes at their stores and taking them to family centres and Oak Table in the Village so people who don't have all the resources can try to keep their feet healthy...thank you and I hope to keep the project going!