

Andrea Paci

Born and raised in Winnipeg, I first began running in grades 5 and 6 when I accompanied my dad on runs along the “fitness trail” in St. Vital Park. During my years at Hastings Junior High, I actively participated on the cross-country and track and field teams, and ran several road races, including the second Manitoba Marathon in 1980 (at the age of 13).

The most pivotal stage of my youthful running career was the two years that I trained with the *Takus Track Club* under sprint and hurdles coach Dale Kerr, running mostly 400m and 400m hurdle events. The discipline that was absorbed during daily track practices, the experiences gained from out-of-town track meets, and the friendships formed with fellow runners, have had a lasting influence on my life.

Following high school, I continued to run, though mostly for health and lifestyle reasons. It was only once I had slogged through my Master of Arts degree in History/Archival Studies (graduating in 2001), that I found the time to re-engage with serious training and competitive running. After participating in the 2002 Great Grain Relay, I registered for my first spring road race - the Puma Series 5k. Following that event, I had the good fortune of winning a Timex watch as a random draw prize, and from then on, I was hooked. (Oh, the allure of prizes. ☺) By the end of my first road racing season I had run in a total of 13 races, achieving personal best times of 18:30 for 5k, 40:15 for 10k, 1:04:08 for 15k, 1:07:07 for 10 miles, 1:27:22 for 20k, and 1:28:37 for the half-marathon. (This latter accomplishment was achieved at the 2002 Manitoba Half Marathon, in which I placed third overall for women.)

Over the next decade, I was a regular fixture on the Manitoba road race circuit, competing in roughly 15 to 20 events per year, and often finishing first for women and first in my age category. I was selected to represent the province as a Masters athlete at the National 10k Championships in Ottawa on three occasions (2006, 2007, and 2008), and won the Athletics Manitoba ‘Female Road Runner of the Year’ award in 2005, 2007, and 2009. I maintained memberships with both the Manitoba Runners’ Association and Athletics Manitoba, and trained year-round with the *Roadkill Running Club* (which I joined in the spring of 2004) under coach Ken Perchaluk.

In the years between 2002 and 2011, I took part in road races in a range of locations, including annual summer pilgrimages to “lake country” to compete in the Grand Beach Sun Run and Islendingadagurinn (Winnipeg Beach to Gimli) 10 Mile Road Race. (Not being a “stinkin’ heat runner,” as “Coach Ken” termed individuals who revelled in hot weather running conditions, I always found those mid-summer races a tremendous challenge, though I conveniently forgot about the discomfort the following year when it came time to register for these “suffer-fests” again!)

Pat Riddell’s Puma Series in April was probably my favourite entry in the busy race calendar, as it heralded the start of another cycle of road events, and provided a steady and satisfying progression of race distances (5k, 10k, 15k – the upper limit of my enjoyment threshold) - and in cool weather to boot. Half marathons, by contrast, were never my cup of tea, and one Ron Melnichuk Memorial Half Marathon at Birds Hill Park endures in my memory as yet another overheated experience (with the “added bonus” of hills!). It certainly didn’t help matters that I had fully depleted my store of electrolytes prior to the race by spending a half day at the hamam (Turkish bath) at the Fort Garry Hotel – a “rookie move” if there ever was one. And then there’s the elusive full marathon, which (apart from my “accidental” completion of the distance in 1980) never held appeal for me. (I say “accidental” since I had no intention of running 26.2 miles that day in June just prior to my 14th birthday, but unsure how I would find my way home midway through the race, I figured I may as well complete the course since I lived only a couple of miles from the finish line.)

Dealing with adversity is an aspect of the sport that most runners have faced, and for me, in addition to coping with the seasonal scourges of heat and humidity, there was the ever-present spectre of pre-race jitters. That’s where my love of wine and wine-tasting events came in handy! What better way to distract the anxious runner’s mind from a looming provincial championships than to attend a night-before wine sampling session?!? Okay, definitely not a recommended practice from any standpoint, but running off those pours of wine certainly had a cleansing effect, both mentally and physically, and helped me to maintain a degree of “work/life balance” (“work” being running/“life” being wine ☺). Showing up at the start line “the morning after” also earned me the sometime nickname “Boozy Betty” (though again, let it be known that I do not advocate the consumption of alcoholic beverages as a training or racing tactic!).

When my “mid-forties body” started to protest the self-inflicted punishments of intense training and racing, I decided to step back from competitive pursuits and transition to a less rigorous daily yoga practice, while continuing to run “for fun” (ha, ha). In all seriousness, I will always be grateful for the many friendships, health benefits, and memories that running has provided me over the decades, and I hope to have the opportunity to carry on my “running ways” in the years ahead.