

Brenlee Muska

Brenlee Muska and the marathon go together like pancakes and maple syrup, as if it was ordained to be. Winning the Manitoba Marathon once is an outstanding achievement, winning it twice is exceptional, winning it five times between 1997 and 2005 is indefinable and that is how you could describe Brenlee “indefinable”. She has the uncanny ability to exceed expectations and out perform.

Brenlee’s connection to the marathon began early. As a 16 year old, grade 11 Winnipeg high school student, she entered her first marathon, the 1979 inaugural Manitoba Marathon, and ran to mile 18 before dropping out. The following year she completed the Manitoba Marathon in 4:01:08. A prelude for what was to come. Her first marathon under the formidable 3 hour barrier was not until the 1997 Manitoba Marathon, where she unexpectedly came through as the winner in the women’s race.

Her life as a runner began in grade 7, as a student at Weston School. Her Phys Ed teacher saw something in her and encouraged her to come out for the school cross country team. She was an immediate high placer in her races and a seed was sewn for a life of running. She recalls an 800m race in Junior High, running on a wood board track, where she won the race but did not know where the finish was and kept running until stopped by officials. She competed in cross country and track running through her Junior High years.

Moving on to Tech-Voc High School the stars continued to align for her as she came under the guidance of Phys Ed instructor and running guru Doug Sammons. Coach Doug invited her to join his recently formed Phidippides Running Club where she came into contact with some of Winnipeg’s best runners, and her training became more consistent and systematic. She ran cross country and track through her high school years but found her true calling in road running. Before high school was over, she would complete her first 26 mile test of endurance, an enormous accomplishment for someone so young and a testament to her mental toughness, a necessity for marathon running.

After high school she headed overseas to France and university, where she studied French and education. Her sojourn to France lasted two years and she continued to run regularly and stayed fit enough to complete the Paris Marathon. Her next stop, for more French studies, was Chicoutimi, Quebec. Running remained a part of her routine there and she got in some local road events. Back to Winnipeg by 1985 where she reconnected with old running friends and put more miles in for the marathon explosion that was to come. Through her twenties, while pursuing the life activities of her age group, she never lost the desire to run as a part of her daily life. Her long buildup of consistent mileage would strengthen her body for the rigours of the marathon.

Moving into her thirties her running destiny needed one more push. It came in the form of local runner and coach Ken Perchaluk. A group of Winnipeg runners started training together with Perchaluk and decided to form a club which they named “Road Kill”. Brenlee found her way into this eclectic group of running talent and her potential was easily spotted by coach Ken. They worked together on refining her training and her confidence grew under his

encouragement. Long Sunday runs and mid week speed work put her in the best shape of her life, as attested to by her performances at various road race distances. She was now winning many of those races. The marathon beckoned her and she was now ready for her return to the daunting 26 mile race, now as one of Winnipeg's best female runners, in the 1997 edition of the Manitoba Marathon.

As race day arrived, she was not given a thought to win against the more experienced runners in the field nor was she remotely expected to break the 3 hour barrier by her coach. In a gutsy performance that defied explanation she did both. Now a national class elite marathon runner Brenlee went on to win four more Manitoba Marathons and ran her career fastest marathon of 2:48:22, at the 1999 Chicago Marathon. Her annual marathon performances ranked her among Canada's top 10 female marathoners for several years and she considers this the crowning achievement of her running career.

Her final marathon came in 2005 with a victory in her last Manitoba Marathon. After 2005 she gradually downsized her running, continuing to participate in local races for fun. She continued her active lifestyle with cycling, hiking and relaxing runs. Today she remains fit and trim at her marathon weight. After retiring from competitive running, she redirected her abundant energy and enthusiasm to supporting school children and encouraging them in an active lifestyle, through various school and Manitoba Runners' Association running programs. Brenlee served on the board of the MRA from 2011 – 2016 where she conceived and established the MRA's Youth Running Series in 2011, for runners 16 years of age and under, to introduce them to running for health, fun and friendship. The program has been extremely successful and remains popular with young runners to this day. She says this was her way of giving back for what she was given. Brenlee's other passion in life is working with children and she recently reached her 29th year as a teacher's assistant, taking care of special needs children in the classroom. An occupation as demanding as marathon running.

As one of Winnipeg's best female runners in history Brenlee was inducted into the Manitoba Runners' Association Hall of Fame in 2011. View her [Hall of Fame plaque here](#).