

Cynthia Menzies

I started running at the age of 7. I learned two things at that age: I loved to run and I loved to write. During this time, I lived in Churchill, Manitoba. It wasn't an ideal location for running, given the wildlife (polar bears) and harsh northern climate. But it was an ideal location for the imagination. I also realized, likely at the Duke of Edinburgh school gymnasium, that I loved running. One day, I asked my mom, (on one of our regular drives to Fort Churchill), if I could run behind the car. She drove a white Ford Mustang, which essentially looked like a polar bear on wheels. I ran that long road behind her car, keeping both eyes wide-open for bears. And I think about that time now, as a time of discovery and hardship, and a time where I still hadn't fully realized my soul's purpose, and ultimately, where I would discover over half-a-century later, where I was most at peace as an adult.

When I moved to Winnipeg, I started running x-country races at age 10-11 years old. After a big and unexpected win at a divisional cross-country championship race in Birds Hill Park (I raced girls 3 years older, by invitation only). That Saturday morning, no one expected me to take the title. Neither did I. I mention this experience because it was when and how I found my first running coach, Fred Scheider. I joined the Galaxy Track Club, and under Fred trained and raced a combination of road races, indoor and outdoor track, and x-country. I can't recall which road races in the early 1980s, but I do remember a 10 km race at the Bronx Community Club, where I ran a 41 minute 10 km at 14 years old. I loved the feeling of road races, and I think it had a lot to do with feeling free, but at the same time a part of a running community. However, during my teen years, I dedicated most of my training and racing towards racing 800 m, 1500 m, and 3000 m distances. I raced competitively and competed provincially, and nationally.

At 11, (1981), I entered the Manitoba Marathon (26.2). Although I stopped at 20 miles, it was an amazing experience (with my Dad and sisters cheering, and following me around the route by car). At 19 miles, my legs hurt, and I hadn't experienced anything like that before so I got scared. I hadn't thought about using nutrition, or even drinking water. I asked my dad if I could stop, and he agreed. It didn't dawn on me to walk and run my way to the finish line. I was pretty inexperienced, and thought you could only **run** the marathon as part of the rules for racing. I returned to complete my first full marathon (excluding Ironman races) in 2019. It was the Manitoba Marathon again, and I dedicated the finish to my dad.

I continued to run until injuries became an issue. I didn't return to running again until my late 20s. At this time I became an avid road running runner --- running every race I could, and running for the joy of it, and running for the points. I made a lot of running friends. I am most proud of introducing my dad to the running community when he turned 50. This, during a time when he quit drinking alcohol cold turkey, after a life-time of struggling with addiction. I shared many road races with him, and he was actually quite a bit faster than me, until his early 60s, (when I reluctantly passed him in a trail race). He told me once more, to run my own race, and to get going. It was still very hard to pass him.

Running injuries began to return in my early 30's, so a friend suggested I also try triathlons. And for 20 more years, I trained and raced with the triathlon and road running community. My racing in triathlon went from sprint and olympic distances, to Ironman distances, and I always could count on my run (well, most times) to be my strength out of the three disciplines.

I have run so many road races over the years on Winnipeg roads and in parks. I still return to those same roads and parks to train or walk my dogs over the years. Some of the parks have benches dedicated to coaches that have either coached me or supported me as a young athlete. It is hard not to think of running without thinking of Winnipeg. And so in saying that, I guess one of my favourite races has to be the Manitoba Marathon finish in 2019. Not because I ran a fast time (I bonked at mile 16), but because I returned to the race to complete it after 38 years. And although my Dad wasn't able to be at the finish line, or be with me along the way (like he was at the 1981 Manitoba Marathon, I was still able to share my medal with him afterwards. The Manitoba Marathon was like a trip down memory lane for me: visiting roads, parks and neighbourhoods that I lived and or trained in all my life --- it was nostalgic and heartwarming. Not to mention that Marilyn Fraser (Mouse) was waiting at the finish line.