

## **Mark d'Almeida**

Congratulations to the MRA on their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It has been a pleasure being a member of this organization as well as working with their leadership.

My formal road running really only started in the early 2000's when I was asked to be part of a Manitoba Marathon relay team, but my love of running began about 50 years ago. We had just purchased a family cottage in the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan. My good friend, Michael, had a cottage on the same lake, but it was about two miles away. So, rain or shine, I ran to Michael's cottage -barefooted - on the road that lazily wound its way along the lake. I often ran to and from Michael's cottage twice a day. Without realizing it, I was road running 4 to 8 miles a day.

Why did I run? Because walking took too long. Why barefooted? Because once school was out for the summer, I never put on shoes until it started again in the fall. That was in the early 70's. As of 2021, we still have the cottage, I'm still friends with Michael, but I definitely do not run barefooted!

I continued to run for a local track team and my high school as a sprinter. In university I jogged to stay in shape and had terrific fun competing with a bed-race team in Regina. Unfortunately, lack of attention to proper running footwear led to knee issues resulting a 17-year hiatus from running until my

friend asked me to join the marathon relay team. Equipped with real running shoes, my knees didn't hurt, I felt great, and I haven't stopped running. Since then, I have entered many 5k's, 10k's, half's and full marathons.

One of my most memorable races was the 2018 half marathon at the Islandsbanki Reykjavíkur marathon in Iceland. The event is paired with Culture Day in Reykjavik which celebrates Icelandic culture, art, music, and hospitality. Collectively, the race, the celebration, the island, and its landscapes were beyond amazing. I have also had the good fortune of qualifying for and running Boston. The preparation for my qualifying race reinforced the idea that if one dedicates themselves to a goal, great things can be accomplished. It has been a few years since I ran Boston and would love to run it again once qualifying events get back on track.

Boston and Iceland are only two of the many terrific events I have been a part of. There have been other great courses and personal bests, as well as difficult runs, injuries, and disappointments. My fondest memories, those that keep me motivated to run, are not necessarily my races. Rather, they are training and recreational runs with my running partner and my family members. Race day constitutes very little of the time we actually run; the vast majority of time is spent training. Running twenty-plus miles with

someone is so much better than running it alone. It's also a significant amount of time to spend with another runner; an opportunity to share ideas, stories, and personal moments. Having a great running partner is a bonus and I am fortunate to have one! Arthur and I have been running together since 2009. We have a competitive relationship that helps us continually improve, and we are good friends on and off the track. I'm not entirely sure how many miles we have logged together, but it is significant. Despite the sweat, effort, and sometimes the discomfort, those miles represent time well spent.

In addition to being a runner, I also enjoy being a race volunteer, and was the race director of the Linden Woods Fall Classic (LWFC) for several years. I took over as director from Bev McConnell who had the initial vision for this community event and a great ability to recruit volunteers for the committee. Our mission was to promote active, healthy lifestyles and to fundraise for a local school. The race had humble beginnings, but the LWFC caught on. To some, it became affectionately known as the *Turkey Run* as it took place on Thanksgiving weekend for many years. At our peak, we had over 325 participants (which maxed our capacity limits) from all over Manitoba, other provinces and even New York State! Turns out there

is also a Linden Woods in New York. Our apologies to that runner, but thanks for the donation!

As a fundraiser, this event generated over \$100,000 in financial support for playground and community park developments, and we donated \$80,000 to school breakfast programs in the Pembina Trail School Division. The success of this event and our ability to support the community rested squarely on the shoulders of our dedicated and motivated volunteer committee members. Without a doubt, my most satisfying achievement in road running was not as a runner, but as a committee member and race director of the LWFC.

Congratulations again to the MRA. Here's to 50 more years of success and promoting road running in Manitoba.