

It was the summer of 1999, and I was training for the Ironman. Oh yeah! This was it! The big one! I got tired of hearing about it and seeing others accomplish this event on TV. I participated in my share of marathons and triathlons, once covering a 72-mile event (more than a half Ironman) in Roanoke, 1985. It was a 20-mile run, 2-mile swim, and 50-mile bike. Of course, I was a youngster then @ 43.

In 1999 I was 57 and counting ... the clock was ticking. I biked to and from Gallipolis, OH, more times than I can remember. I ran and swam and got ready for "the Big One" which was to be at a state park near Mansfield, OH. Close enough – and they were advertising the Ironman. I got in great shape for this event which was scheduled for the middle of September. What I didn't count on was a sinus infection which knocked me down, and almost out, just days before the event.

The irony of it all was the organizers didn't count on fog ... but that's what they got on the morning of the event. They cancelled the swim, cut the bike event in half, and I'm not sure what else. But imagine the frustration to those participating ... to show up and have their event mostly cancelled. I never made it to the starting line, and I never invested that amount of time again. So far as I know, the sponsors and organizers never had a second attempt at this event.

Now it's the summer of 2010. I still use the cross-training pattern that was established back in the '90s. Cross training appears to be a good recipe for maintaining, longevity, and avoiding injuries ... "knock on wood."

Today I find myself growing more and more distant from the race itself ... the passion and love of it. The part of the fitness campaign that was most integral is now slipping and sliding away. Perhaps I've just grown older; and the love of it, and the fire for it, is beginning to extinguish. I hope not, but it seems more difficult than ever.

In 1983 I enjoyed my best year. And after that year passed, although I had memorable performances, nothing could equal a sub-36-minute 10K, a 1:24 half marathon, and the running of the Boston Marathon. All of it culminated with a 2:56 marathon at the end of the year. They were the "good old days" ... never to be repeated, and never to be forgotten. It was all very special.

Running in 16 marathons (and finishing 11) in seven different states, my average time was 3:13 ~ not too bad for an old fat bald guy. My first was in January, 1980; and my last was December, 1994. The times spoiled me. They are one reason why I choose not to run #12. The Ironman will have to wait for another lifetime, as well as my next marathon. It was almost fun!

But the real reason for doing any of it and all of it is best described in the narrative below written by Mr. Anonymous, circa 1980-1985:

“A great dilemma of the human condition is the choice between fitting in and standing out. We all crave the soothing comfort of belonging, but also the satisfaction, the pure thrill, of an accomplishment that sets us apart.”

“The immense appeal of endurance sport is its ability to simultaneously gratify these conflicting needs. We can be truly excellent if we choose to be, knowing that with all-out effort comes contentment, that other’s achievements will never diminish our own.”

“This is why the roads and pools and ski trails are full. Those of us who are still running, cycling, swimming, skiing and rowing, long after we were denounced as faddists know that our participation has little to do with weight loss, blood-cholesterol levels or body-beautiful fitness. We know it has everything to do with the common bond of endurance – our instinctive empathy with honest effort.”

And may the wind be always at your back.

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