

April 2004

## Running Bringing People Together

I was reminded again this past week about how running continues to benefit me over the years. Not in the healthy way but in the extended community I've been fortunate to be involved with over the last seven years.

Once a year, my company's user group meeting is hosted somewhere around the US and Canada. For the past seven years, I've been able to coordinate group runs (including walks the last three!) each morning for those who would be shy about venturing around a city on their own at 6 AM and/or for those who want to meet new people and share their run with. Originally (prior to the seven years), it was a colleague and I getting together and we've managed to evolve it to a multi-hotel pickup and dropoff that accommodates distances ranging from 2 – 6 miles and attracts up to 20 - 25 runners and walkers.

Each year we get new runners and walkers but there seems to be a core of consistent runners each year that have seem to have developed a special bond of which I just realized this year (last week!) how much I enjoy as I caught up with them over the three day conference.

As I met up with them last Monday at 6 AM getting ready to run to the Art Museum in Philadelphia (yes, this year, it was local), I see some familiar faces:

- Mary – I know her normal schedule has her running in the afternoons but she doesn't pass up the camaraderie of these group runs in what usually is a new city for her
- Doug – a New England guy who spends the winter cross country skiing but enjoys running in the fall, spring, and summer and uses these runs to kick off his real training
- Ken – oh boy – Ken will talk your ear off during the run, always about interesting topics, but be prepared for a philosophical lecture or discussion – depending on the pace you'll run
- Donna – loves coaching new marathon runners training for either San Diego Rock'n'Roll or Alaska marathon as part of Leukemia Society's Team in Training program. I find out this year, she's also training for her first triathlon
- Drew – the ultramarathoner of the group who traverses the country each year to run those 30, 40, & 50 mile runs as easy as you or I would run a 5k
- Steve – young, athletic, and ambitious runner, looking to be competitive at the ½ marathon distance but starting to get the itch for the marathon . . . we'll see next year if he does or not

There are definitely others that I've met over the years that quite honestly I know I've forgotten but at the same time, I meet new people every year that bring excitement, newness, and fun to each morning's run.

For a short three days each year, we come together with a common bond of running (and I guess work . . . ) and converse like we've known each other all our lives, catching up on races run and planned, injuries recovered from, and running experiences that make each other laugh. We also review the previous day's conference activity, especially last night's social event and why we think some people didn't make it out this morning and hope they come out tomorrow so we can get THEIR side of the story . . .

Although we barely scratch the surface of the more personal sides of our lives, I believe that the running adventures we have shared across the country in San Diego, San Francisco, Toronto, New Orleans, Nashville, and this year in Philadelphia remind us how fortunate we are to have a hobby that provides these great opportunities of sharing.

I am very grateful over the years for the people I've met on these group runs that have exposed me to an extended community that encourages, motivates, and excites me. It reminds me of how a simple act of running can be a great source of inspiration and fulfillment in my life and confirms to me of why I continue to do it year after year . . .