

LEARNING TO RUN

By Pat Weber

I love to walk. I've walked a marathon, 2 half-marathons and countless other distances to raise money for charity. I've walked the canal path and trails through the area parks. I've walked to de-stress and to clear my head and come up with great ideas. I've walked to have an excuse to listen to music for 3 straight hours and ignore the rest of the world. And I've walked simply because there wasn't anything better to do at that moment.

Almost every time I would be out walking, I'd inevitably see one or more runners and I would think – why would they do that? It's tiring and they really don't look like they're having much fun. For years, my mantra has been "I think you should run only if someone is chasing you". It's funny how things can change.

I started working at Fleet Feet in August 2007. Of course, everyone here is a runner. Ellen & Boots knew that I wasn't, but that I loved to walk and that I understood that walking was a great way to keep healthy. And no one here ever pushed me to change to running. I was very proud of the fact that we could now emphasize that our group workouts were more "walker-friendly" than ever, since I was participating frequently and always walking. And the Winter Warrior program even turned me into an outdoor winter walker instead of a treadmill winter walker!

But during this time, I watched a lot of races, and would hear people talk about the fun they had. And I started to think that maybe running wouldn't be so bad after all. So I joined our spring 2008 Learn to Run program (also known as No Boundaries). The goal was to spend 12 weeks training, and then run a 5K race as our graduation. I actually asked Mark Andrews if anyone had ever "flunked out" of the Learn to Run program, and when he said no I told him that I might be the first ☺

We started in February, and the first couple of weeks weren't bad. A little cold and snowy sometimes, but running wasn't as hard as I thought it would be! Of course, at this point we were running for 1 minute at a time with 4 minute walks in between. Ellen would only send us 2 weeks of the program at a time because she said that if we looked ahead we'd get discouraged and think that we wouldn't be able to do it. The whole 12 weeks is up on the employee bulletin board at the store, but I didn't look ahead, which is probably a good thing. As the weeks progressed, we ran more and walked less – much less. And I'm not going to pretend it wasn't a challenge. But most of the time it was a great challenge. Some days were easier than others. Sometimes I walked more than the program said, but I would try to run the intervals as scheduled. And before I knew it, I was running 5 or 6 minutes at a time; with only 1 minute walk intervals in between.

It's now May 10, 2008, and I'm getting ready for The Run for the Young 5K in Greece – our graduation day!! I'm writing this at a little before 6am, and I don't mind telling you that I'm nervous. It's a nice day, overcast and about 50 degrees. Way better to be chilly than 80 degrees - I was kind of worried about that. I still don't think I'm ready to run the full 5K, but I definitely know that I'll be running a lot more of the distance than I would have 12 weeks ago.....

I'm back, and what a great time that was! I ran the first full mile (in 11:56) and got worried that I was going a bit too fast. So I walked for a few minutes, and then did the run/walk thing until I got to the 2-mile mark (at 26:00). So with 1.1 miles left to go I was still ahead of my goal pace of 13:30. But my legs were feeling tired. I ran more than I walked the last mile, but it was pretty slow "running". I have to learn how to push past the tired legs. I wasn't gasping for breath or anything, so my only problem was my legs. Then Mark came back out to cheer us on (after he won the race in 15:24!!) and he told me I only had about ½ mile left. As I approached the turn to the finish line, all of a sudden it hit me that I was going to do this! I was running all by myself, so the crowd at the finish line was definitely my motivation to push a little harder to cross the line. And I did – in 41:30 (13:23 pace), with a smile on my face. 350th out of 361 finishers. But now I'm a runner.

So, what's next? Well, a bit of strength training for the legs (actually, bicycling to work may help that out some), and I have to keep up a running program. I'll be doing the group workouts through Fleet Feet, and instead of just walking, I'll be able to run some of the way. I haven't picked my next race yet, but I'll do that soon. I know I have more work to do, but it still surprises me how much I am enjoying it.