

I put on my running shoes and went out for a morning jog. I don't feel that I should call it "running" these days, because I am propelling myself forward at a speed much reduced from that of the time when I ran regularly. My motivation is different from what it was in the past.

I no longer have a goal in running. Instead, I am interested in spending some time every other day or so absorbing the sounds, smells, and sights of Nature as I jog along, enjoying myself. And, those external stimuli are powerful influences on one's physical and mental state.

This morning, I went west on our dirt road. I noticed that there is just a hint of green on the trees that leaf out the earliest. The new willow shoots make me wish I knew how to weave baskets. One willow, in particular, was like a sculpture. It was a large bush, almost tree size. It had been cut off at some point in the past, and the new shoots had sprouted from that cut in great profusion. The yellow-green of new leaves was a sign of what is to come.

I didn't see a lot of birds this morning. There were crows, and I noticed a Northern flicker as it flew across the road in front of me. The tree swallows were resting on the power lines, and I saw the first eastern kingbird of the season. But, it was a quiet morning.

As I jogged through an area of white pine trees, I enjoyed their fragrance, and farther along the same road, I saw that the violets were beginning to bloom.

This was not a dramatic run. I didn't see a bear, and I didn't even spot one of our abundant deer. No rabbit was hiding along the road, and though I noticed where a turtle had crossed our lane, I didn't see it. But, it was a pleasant, peaceful interlude in another busy day.

Running used to be something else for me. At one point in my life, I had run daily for ten years and two days--not missing a single outing, until one day during a relative's illness when I forgot to go. That broke my "streak" and cured my obsession.

I used to like to run a race now and then, too, and that is also no longer of interest to me. I participated in an area annual 10K race regularly for years, ran several 5Ks, a couple of half marathons, and one full-length 26.2 mile long marathon. That was fun at the time, and I even

entertained the idea of a longer race, but never made the final commitment.

Now, though, jogging is a different matter. I don't really need the exercise; I get plenty of that. But, this quiet time of observing the natural surroundings, plus a good opportunity for planning--everything from the vegetable garden to the next newsletter--is like a gift of extra time. Too often, one can be caught up in the unending labor of spring on a farm to have time to think of how best to accomplish something, or, even better, how to appreciate time spent without accomplishment as a goal. As long as I am out on the road, putting one foot in front of the other, I am my own captive audience. It seems like a good thing.