

I was a regular runner for many years. For one period of over ten years, I ran every day—from two to ten miles. Then, when someone in the family was sick, I forgot to run one day. After that, I pretty much quit a regular routine, though I did run occasionally for a long time. But now, it had been over ten years since I last laced up my running shoes.

A couple of months ago I felt the urge to hit the road again. It probably was reinforced by the sight of my niece going by day after day, but her dedication to this activity didn't provide the main impetus. I still had to put on my running clothes and make myself go out the door.

I'm ten years older since the day I quit running and a full two decades past the day I ended a long streak. And most people my age don't run. I suppose it has crossed my mind once or twice that someone I meet on the road might well ask himself or herself what that old woman is doing huffing and puffing along. But, I don't really care. I should probably call my running "jogging" these days. I don't carry a watch or even look at the clock to gauge my speed or the length of time I was out of the house. I know I am not very fast.

What running was to me and what it is becoming once again is hard to explain. What is easier is to put into words what running is not.

I'm not running to control my weight. Years ago, people would sometimes ask, "What's the matter? Afraid you will get fat?" That wasn't an issue with the active life I have always led, and now, during this pandemic, although we have enjoyed a full and adequate diet—mostly from what we have raised here at home—the total absence of ice cream and cheese and the near zero amount of candy has made it difficult to maintain weight. So, no, I don't run to avoid extra pounds.

I never ran with the expectation that I was going to set any speed records. In the past, whenever one of the good old boys who couldn't cross the road without puffing hollered, "Can't you run any faster than that?" while leaning out of his four-wheel drive pickup with an ATV in the back for the places the truck couldn't go, I would think about that myth—that the outdoor life dedicated to driving around in blaze orange or camouflage while observing the natural world through the windshield of a truck is some indication of a healthy lifestyle.

I never ran to have a chance to wear fashionable or trendy running clothes. Mostly, it was the same T-shirt I'd milked the cow in earlier, a pair of old shorts, and running shoes. It is the same now. I do change from my jeans to a pair of more suitable pants, but they are the same ones I wore in cold weather twenty years ago. I don't care what I wear when I am running as long as it is comfortable.

Some people run for companionship. That has never been my goal either. I have run with others at times, mainly Runo or my niece. But, especially now, when I am older and slower, it suits me to run alone. I may once again enjoy occasionally running with someone else, but that will only occur if I become speedy enough so that I don't hold up the running partner.

Why I ran in the past seems to be very much the same reason I have

started again. I believe it is the act itself, the almost hypnotic quality of repetition, putting one foot ahead of the other time after time, mile after mile. There is a connection made, on the best runs, between my mental life and my physical activity. There are sometimes cold runs, wet runs, painful runs, but I cannot say I've ever had a "bad" run. I have always—every time, years ago and now—felt better when I had completed my run than when I started.

This time, though, I am taking care to avoid obsession. I make sure I avoid running every day. At least every third day, I do not put on those running shoes and go. I have progressed to about three miles a day now, and I do want to work my way back to a condition where I can run much farther, but I have no interesting in moving faster. And, I will probably never run a race again. I will enjoy the world around me and proceed along our dirt roads without hurry.

So, I guess the reason I started running again is the same as why I pursued the activity decades ago. I like to run.