

Shoe Repair

Sperry Top-Sider Brown Tassel leather boat shoes were made and retailed in the 1990's. The shoes remain in my collection, alongside two pair of dress shoes, a black patent leather pair to go with my tux, another pair of downlow black casual soft soled shoes, and a mahogany knockaround casual shoe, sans tassels.

I don't recall when I purchased the top-siders. Now in their third decade, the innersole has been replaced time and again with over the counter insoles. The outer sole is in great shape, it being made of a hard black rubber ridged throughout the length and width of the sole. The top-siders are, after all, a *boat* shoe. The brown leather color has been modified over the years from my rubbing baseball glove oil into the leather injecting life into it.

In purging my side of the master bedroom closet, ridding myself of shoes I hadn't worn in years, long forgotten, and taken out of the rotation, I paused when I came to the top-siders. I visually enjoy the kiltie-tasseled look on the shoes with the leather wrapped around the shoe where my foot slides in. Internally, I take quiet pleasure in the sound from the kiltie tassel striking the top of the shoe as I stride along my day. I kept the top-siders.

Now, they look tired. There is a squeak in the stride, from where on the shoe I don't know. The insole needs a redo. The fine quality leather stitching is fraying or frayed. I worry that the outsole may leave the top part of the shoe in disgust. Perhaps it is time to replace the top-siders, probably one of the oldest items of clothing and footwear that I own.

At 64 years old, I can now say that I am in my fifth decade of being a distance runner. There is no Cal Ripkin, Jr. award for that milestone. It is what it is. An intense diversion from my career, from the unsortedness of day to day life, that brings me a moment of joy every day. When left to my own thoughts, I ponder my current day's run, next training run, my recently completed runs. I know I am fit, healthier than most, willing to put myself out there, every day.

From those five decades, I've run, raced, and finished too many marathons to bother to count. Somewhere between more than 50 to less than 100. There are Boston Marathons in that mix, along with marathons run in some 20-plus states, and some repeats for spice. Not entirely missing from that list are those marathons I didn't finish.

I can count those DNF occasions on less than four fingers. An honestly, I cannot recall the last marathon I didn't finish. My first Boston in the early '80s, the

atmospheric river of rain in a Seattle marathon in the late 80s, and a failed first attempt for a BQ in the mid-90's. My point is that not finishing a marathon is for me a rare event. Win, lose, or draw, I am a finisher. Like Captain Kirk in the "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn," I don't believe in the no win scenario.

I tell you all of that to get to this: I didn't finish my latest marathon. 30km into the race, my body gave out. It gave out, not from fatigue or exhaustion. My body didn't give out because I sprained an ankle, or snapped a knee, or even because I had a lingering issue in a leg. I didn't experience any pain and I had no warning. The reason for my failure to finish was immediate, painless, and seemingly unexpected. From what I know now, seemingly unexpected is incorrect.

I fell. Well actually, the fall wasn't really a fall. It was more of a strong final lurch into holly bushes along the righthand side of the road, over the street gutter, past the sidewalk. The true definition of lurch as a verb: I made an abrupt, unsteady, uncontrolled movement in the form of a stagger. That was my fall. As a noun, my body gave a violent lurch and I fell into the holly bushes, with their thorns.

Bloodied on my right side, because that's the side that led the way, I stood up. No pain was obvious. My thoughts were clear. My legs felt good. Waving away other marathoners who stopped to assist, horrified in the blood along my lower right leg and below my right elbow, I determined I would resume the race and would stop if that lurch again happened.

It did, not 400meters later.

Same deal: a sudden strong pull into another section of holly bushes and more superficial scratches. Again, I waved off runners who had stopped their race to assist me. Waiting for an opening, I crossed the roadway, heading to the next aid station. I've run this course before, and I knew the walk would be a bit over a mile. I walked a straight line, no weaving, no pain. Following my arrival to the aid station, I was cleaned up and given a ride to the finish. No finisher's medal and no BQ for me.

In hindsight, I can recall that from mile 16 to the first fall, my body had been pushing me to the right, a hard right. In fact, the only reason I didn't force myself off-course was the nine-inch high gutter along the road. Compensating for that strong force pushing my hard right avoided my actually leaning my upper body heavily to the right. I didn't want to list like old runners do when their bodies are exhausted. But clearly, that had its own consequences.

In further reflection, I knew when that strong pull began that my request from my Physician just two days before the race for a physical therapist was somewhat prescient and telling. I am unstable in my walking, in my slow running on my

treadmill, and in my running a straight line when I run outside. Numerous falls in which my ankles and my knees tried in vain to take on the job of supporting me will do that. These falls and my dreading going down stairs had been recent but were continuously occurring. I knew something was amiss and had to be addressed.

After my marathon experience, ya think?

Having attached myself to physical therapy, I now know my ankles won't cash the checks I write for my body. They simply cannot support my standing, walking, and running without being newly strengthened. So, I'm focused on that. I now know my hip and glute muscles cannot support my standing, walking, or running without being newly strengthened. So, I am focused on that. I know now that my back is taut with exhaustion from subbing in for the hips, the glutes, and the ankles. My back gets a lot of credit for the attempt. It clearly has my back.

Homework, in the form of exercises designed to reawaken the ligaments in my ankles and hips, have been give to me. I have bands of different colors accompanied with printouts showing me how do these exercises. Having been shown the proper and improper ways to do these exercises, I have the tools to retrain my hips to direct my glutes to power my runs, rather than putting all that strain on my hamstrings. My ankles will come along for the ride, the foundation for my ability to actually jump, to not stagger when I walk or run, and to walk down stairs without trepidation.

And most importantly, I have distance athlete's mindset. I must do these things. I must do the exercises, even when doing each seems more of annoyance than a gift. This is another process, the long-range plan that will result in my being again agile enough to be normal. Unlike Professor Hill's think system, I recapture my abilities through the doing of it. This is now my job, my vocation, my career. The alternative is no win, unacceptable to me.

I see men my age, awkwardly walking, throwing themselves along their chosen path, so similar to toddlers doing the same. I see men my age with their bodies listing to one side when they stand, or walk, or even run. Men of a certain age carry the physical baggage of work, but not of taking care of ourselves. I get it: we're men and we're tough. We don't need no stinking physical therapy. For those that miss the point, I can't replace my body. I can make it better, albeit with a bit of wear still showing.

Next week, the top-siders are going to the shoe smith for an overhaul, reconnecting the shoes whole again. I want the squeak gone, the rubber sole firmly reconnected to the uppers which will be given a sheen, and the tassels to shine. Those shoes give me joy when I wear them. So too does my racing in proper form. One step forward.