

Bouncing

The repertoire occurred in mere seconds, over short steps, along a running path, early on a weekend morning, before the hoards of Spring descended.

I was just into the beginning of the second half of my weekend long run, beginning my focus in maintaining my running pace, beginning to just then feel the effects from the current effort over the first half of my run.

Passing a gentleman walking his leashed puppy dog, mentally checking the effort I had remaining in my energy tank, I casually slide-slipped him to his left, slightly raising my right arm in a gentle wave, offering a quiet yet energized “good morning,” to which he gave a “hello” in response, the dog all the while sniffing up his immediate world.

The left ankle felt strong, not that it was a bother. Sometime earlier in the week I felt a weakness when I placed weight on it in walking through the house, irritating me. What I had done now. I’m so busy and preoccupied with exercise in strengthening my glutes, my inner thigh muscles, and my shoulder tendons, I’d overlooked my ankle friends. It’s always something.

Speaking of glutes, my stride gave consistent clues that I was running more smoothly than I had in quite a while, because the front inside edge of my running shoes wasn’t scuffing against the inside right heel edge of my right shoe. During the two years, immediate to this morning, the scuffing ruined way too many pair of running shoes that were fresh out of the box, grinding down the front left outer midsole and the right inner heel of the shoe’s upper.

The ultimate finding regarding the culprit of this malady was a “slight” bit of arthritis in my left hip forcing my left leg to veer slightly to the right when I ran, a conscious effort from my brain in seeking balance in running. Because every action has a reaction, the right leg became the “post” in response to my left leg’s invasion of the opposite leg’s running space, leading to the lateral heel whip that caused the quick destruction of many pairs of running shoes. I am not so rich that I can replace my new running shoes weekly. And I am not so stubborn that I refused to find a fix.

And while shoe goo became my friend and ally, I needed a permanent fix. Three physical therapists, two orthopedists, and one cellphone later, a fix was discovered, utilized, and the issue, while not fully resolved, was compelled into mandatory mediation, leading to my running to be more of a style, rather than a desperate reach for the next step. On an almost-daily basis, glute muscle exercises are conducted in rebuilding a base for the hips to perform as they should, just as exercises for the outer hip muscles are done giving a greater range of motion for the left hip mostly, a compelling plea to the left leg to stay on its side of the running movement process.

Just as performing a household chore is never done quickly, as in, repositioning a framed painting requires eyeballing the corrected location followed by a lengthy and firm discussion about why that particular location works for the painting, the wall, the room, the house, and the marriage, followed by first patching and painting the old hole in the wall, before measuring, remeasuring, and doing the same measurement a third time, to place the wall attachment in the agreed-upon wall spot, before finally placing the framed art's hanger over the attachment, only for the person directing the placement to realize that particular spot doesn't work for the room or the piece, so does rehabilitating a running stride.

Finally, finally, a run comes along wherein I don't notice that I am actually not scuffing the inner midsoles of my shoes, I am no longer hitting my inner right ankle bone with my left shoe, and I feel like I am again, a runner. Of course, now my left knee knocks into my right knee on a fairly regular basis. Because I own a handheld device allowing me to look up exercises to stop the knee knocking, discovering that all of the therapeutic work the hip muscles and the glute tendons overlooked the inner groin muscles, and that a new series of exercises are required, a remedy was ascertained. Throughout my work day, I lift, pull, push, and separate my legs and leg muscles, gaining muscle strength where needed, elasticity where needed, and better balance which is always needed. I simply seek to run.

All of that leads to this morning's interaction on the run. Just – and I mean just – steps following my running past the fellow with his leashed dog, a runner coming in the opposite direction, runner thin in presence, smooth of stride, jauntily passes me on his way from whence I came. Glancing towards me, sizing me up as it were, making eye contact, he offers aloud, “Good form? Great bounce in your feet and a smooth running gait.”

“Thanks, but it’s the shoes,” I say quickly in response. “Without the shoes, I’d be a turtle trying to cross the road.”

From behind me and just in front of the runner, we hear from the man walking his dog, laughter in his words, adding, “so you’re the tortoise that beat the hare!” Raising and waving to the man without looking back, my laugh joined his mirth. A very nicely-shared moment, indeed.

Wearing a new pair of running shoes because the prior pair had worn out their welcome after 400 miles of use on the run, having covered my inner right ankle with a wrist sweatband which was covered by a flimsy ankle brace keeping the wristband in place – not because that ankle perspired but because uncovered and protect by only a sock, the left shoe would cut through the seven layers of skin – finishing the run before looking at the damage I had wreaked upon my shoes, I was pleasingly surprised.

No scuffing. Also, I couldn’t recall my knees touching, much less knocking against one another. Though I recalled the occasional left foot to right inner ankle touching, those were more of unwanted caresses than they were constant destruction upon myself. Looking closely at the shoes, I couldn’t see even a slight discoloration or the beginnings of a pattern of the left shoe’s midsole being flattened. I could see from what I wasn’t seeing that my consistently rehabbing myself were paying off. I smiled while congratulating myself before looking at my running watch.

The pace had been quick, quicker than I’d run in months. Attributing the morning’s pace to the renewed ability in taking in and utilizing oxygen, I also had the sense of leaving a faster pace on the table. When I’m running well, that sense of unused effort is a constant refrain in my head, a reminder that I have more in the tank for another run on another day. That feeling beats the one with which I’ve dealt over the last two years, which feeling of being drained after a run, with no positive reward as a result.

Tracing through the mile splits on my watch, the tight grouping of mile times leapt from the scroll. Following a two-mile warm up in which I’d walked 30 seconds after the first quarter mile, doing the same a half mile after that, and again three-quarters of a mile following after those two walking bits, before a solid mile, the final 9.5 miles of my route were all within 20 seconds of each other. Each of those mile splits were almost two minutes per mile faster than I could run just a few months before this run.

Before my general practitioner, my endocrinologist, and my urologist each determined from my recounting to them my anecdotal information that I was constantly tired, feeling worn down, lacking consistent appetite, and that my running paces had slowed to a crawl that testing was needed, testing that showed a low red blood cell count that was too low to read, and a testosterone reading that couldn't be found no matter how many blood draws were taken, I'd resigned myself to becoming that old guy runner, who shuffled between walk breaks and short running spurts. It was less than ideal.

In hindsight, looking through my running logs and my race results, I could see where the descension into an avid runner's hell began to manifest itself in my daily running. I also knew that no matter the medical therapy, retrieving what I had worked so hard to earn would take time. This morning was yet another sign of time being on my side, in so many ways. I didn't feel compelled to take a walking break over the final section of the run because I wasn't needing to recharge my engine. I ran. I bounced.

The route includes a mile around a shallow lake at the far end of the balloon-shaped path. At the far end of that mile is the halfway point, the beginning of the return to the trailhead finish. In the recent past, when I hit the finishing part of a run, the portion wherein the effort matches the increased pace, I would slow because I'd run out of energy, my body not utilizing the insulin I am storing. Yes, I am a Type II Diabetic and no, it's not from eating pancakes. For me, it's genetic. Today, running those last miles in a further tightened grouping in times, I ran faster despite the feeling I's run out of energy sources.

The final two miles are the most challenging because of little inclines over which my fatigued legs need to rally for the run to be considered a successful step to the next step. Though I felt tired, as if I were running in sand, those were my fastest miles of the morning. Weaving round others on the path, easing my way to the finish, I had a runner's rhythm, my ankles flicking, the knees gently lifting, the hips in slight rotation, the air coming and going easily through my lungs, my mind focused on the next stride, the next marker, the next undulation in the path. I bounced.

Who knew that the tortoise had become a hare? All I knew was how I felt. I felt great, indeed.