Running, Aging, and Such

Masterpiece Ftiness would like to target the 60’s and over age group this January. Getting ready to turn 60 myself in 2016 I understand the struggles physically and mentally as we age. I really do believe we can be like fine wine if we choose to be. We can truly get better with age in all aspects with a lot of effort and determination while making the right choices to make this goal a reality.

I have been running since my early 20’s. I have participated in races of all kinds since the first 10K run I signed up for in Asheboro NC where I was living then. I was young, single, and optimistic. My life changed dramatically through the years eventually becoming a wife, homemaker, giving birth to four children in six years, becoming a home school mom seeing to the education of my children, supporting my husband’s career, to eventually living alone again, and starting my own business. Through it all I remained a consistent runner becoming an endurance athlete doing marathons, triathlons, and an ultra marathon. In the midst of all this I had a horse accident in 2000 that made resuming my active lifestyle quite the challenge. It was after the accident I did my first adventure triathlon the following year, and then resumed marathons after a 20 year break due to the demands of my family.

I feel I need to give you some background on my lifestyle so you will understand I am qualified to address obstacles that life throws at us to cause us to slow down or quit. I was determined to do neither, ever! Nothing had stopped me yet! I absolutely was not going to allow myself to age. Is anyone else out there that can relate? So I treated my late fifties year old body the same as I had the early twenties body I began with. Amazingly I pulled it off till the 58th year. My time began to drop due to me training for distance and embracing trail running. I never wore a watch or timed runs. I ran for the love of running till…my time was not what it felt like. My under eight minute miles had now become under nine on a good day. I was shocked! I thought something was wrong. There had to be a hidden illness. I started doing speed work to no avail. I was close to dying if I hit an eight minute mile. I had a rigid training schedule for my first marathon in 20 years. I got injured. I wasn’t use to injuries. This was just the beginning of the new revelations I was to receive as I thought I could defy aging.

That year I not only did my marathon, but the weekend before I did my first ultra marathon. I achieved my goals in 2013, but I lost my joy in running. I was not getting the message my older body had been trying to tell me. Instead of making modifications I trained harder! The next year in 2014 I trained for the New River Triathlon as an individual. It is a grueling training schedule as I was now training for three long distance events-40 miles biking- 12 miles of kayaking- and a half marathon. I had done it a couple of times, once in 2001 just after the horse accident and again in 2007. My life had dramatically changed since then. I now was trying to juggle the grueling training schedule and work as a personal trainer which is a physically demanding job in itself. Injuries were much more common, and I was beginning to experience chronic fatigue. I decided I needed to make some changes so I focused on speed and shorter distances. I strapped on my cell phone every run and timed myself now. In order to make my runs more stressful I became friends with my 24 year old son on Run Keeper, and we held each other accountable to encourage one another. In reality I compared my times to his and spent 2015 exhausted, depressed, trying to convince my son along with myself I wasn’t getting older. My times, no matter how hard I tried, weren’t improving. I now dreaded most of my runs. My carefree playtimes had become WORKOUTS! However, for a grand finale to stupidity on my part, and a lot of mercy and grace on God’s part, I allowed my son to sign me up for his first marathon in Michigan Lake, Michigan five days before the marathon! I had only been doing seven mile runs for months with no long distance. I pulled off the marathon with a great pace and what would have been my fastest marathon had I not got lost and ran an extra two miles! You would think I would have known to rest after that at least a couple of weeks with easy runs. Oh no, not me. I was inspired believing myself to be invincible, and went back to speed work with a vengeance on hellacious hills near my home. I promptly injured my piriformis, and I had difficulty even walking for a week. Running was out for several weeks. Thankfully I could still work.

All of this history to say this: I have learned some things about aging the hard way as always. We can get better with age, but it may not be the way you think. My almost 60 year old body now has to have more recovery time than it did ten years ago. If I had allowed myself to rest more I could have saved myself a lot of pain and discouragement. I am not going to be able to maintain the speed I had through my 40’s. I did break 24 minutes doing a 5K in my mid fifties, but I could not hold onto that pace working on endurance runs and trail running that I enjoy most. I am not saying it isn’t possible for others, but for me the speed wasn’t worth the price I was paying.

 I began 2016 with a lot of changes in my life. I chunked the cell phone and Runkeeper. If I wear a timer I allow it to hijack the joy of my run. If I hear a time I will kill myself to perform. I lack the self control to ignore it. I am back to losing myself on my runs as I have so many years past enjoying all the beauty around me. I am back to being more conscious of God’s Presence and that still, small voice that speaks more often on runs than any other time in my life. I am running injury free, and feel invigorated after my runs, not total exhaustion. I have stopped hammering my body for times to impress other people and just be thankful for the joy of the run.

In summary you have to run your own race of life. You must run as an individual. Don’t compare yourself to others 20 years younger. Don’t waste time comparing your times to times you had 20 years ago. Live for today and tomorrow. Enjoy your memories but don’t try to hold onto them. The past is the past. Expand your horizons. Set new goals. Be kind to your body, and yet discipline yourself to work hard, and stay fit enough to enjoy the quality of life you enjoy. For some of us it will be marathons till we die hopefully. For others it will be hikes. We are all individuals. We learn from each other, but be who you are. Don’t try to be like someone else. If God didn’t make snowflakes alike He surely hasn’t made any two people alike. When you try to be someone else you are robbing the world of the only you there is. A wonderful thing about aging is you contemplate more what really matters in life knowing your days are numbered. That is a good thing. Ultimately, I want to focus on the eternal more than the temporal.

What does that mean in your life? You alone have to make the choices to ensure aging doesn’t rob you of quality of life. That means choosing foods according to their nutritional value, and not only what taste good. It means when others indulge in sedentary lifestyles you must live a disciplined life of constant movement. Take the steps, not the elevator. Park away from the front entrances in order to require yourself to walk a few more steps. Our bodies were created to move. You cannot live for instant gratification and expect to not eventually face consequences for bad choices. For those of us who tend to be over achievers, slow down; relax and learn to not feel guilty for it. Simplify your life as much as possible. Read your Bible and pray. That is where I find all the answers I cannot find anywhere else. Masterpiece Fitness wishes you and yours a wonderful 2016 of faith, health, and happiness with the realization we are all in the process of aging!



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