



What Makes Me a Runner

By the time most of you read this, I will have participated in my second half marathon of 2018. With any luck, I'll run a third before the year is out. With all of the training that goes into preparing for a race just a bit more than 13 miles long, you might imagine it's easy to call myself a runner. Alas, it isn't so.

Maybe there are people who think of themselves as runners from the minute they lace up their fancy shoes and take off down the road, but I haven't met many of them.

Most of the runners I know—no matter what amazing feats they may be accomplishing—tend to think the real runners are those who are doing even more. While they may be telling their running companions, “If you run, you're a runner,” inside they're telling themselves they need to go longer, harder, and faster in order to earn that honor. The problem with this kind of thinking is you're chasing a moving target. No matter how much you improve, there will always be someone running farther and faster.

For me, that person is my husband, Greg. He finally turned 50 in July and has been training for a full marathon as part of his midlife crisis. Even as I train for multiple half marathons, he is, by necessity, doing twice as much work as I am. If I compare myself to him, then I will never see myself as a runner.

Lucky for me I have another metric that has allowed me to accept that I am a real runner. It has nothing to do with the miles I've logged, the races I've run, or the increase in my pace. What finally did it was the laundry.

I have never seen so much laundry in my life. Not even when our two kids were living at home.



Photo by Rodney Margison

Two people training for fall races, working out twice a day most days, create a small mountain of sweaty gear. And you can't let it sit around too long. That just isn't sanitary.

Other people might have other “you know you're a runner when” moments, but the laundry did it for me. And the showers. I take a lot of showers. Oh, and the hair.

When I moved to Bloomington eight years ago, I had hair down the middle of my back. It's a lot shorter now. Very, very short. Shorter even than the photo at the top of this page. Because of the running. And the showers. So, while I'm not crazy about doing laundry every day, I'm glad it offers me some perspective on who I am.

It's taken me a long time to get here, but I think it's time to admit it: I really am a runner. If you run, so are you. Don't believe me? Check the laundry.

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