

Thomas (T.O.) Okazaki's passion for running started by sneaking in runs while in high school

Hello, my name is Thomas "T.O." Okazaki. I am a member of the Lake Grapevine Runners and Walkers in Grapevine and have served as president of that club. I also belong to the Marathon Maniacs, 50 States Club and the North America 100 Marathon Club.



*Runner
in
the Spotlight*

I have run 127 marathons and ultras combined, including six 50 milers, with my longest race being the Bandera 100K as of Oct. 8, 2011. I completed my very first marathon at White Rock on

December 15th, 2002, and ran my 100th marathon/ultra at Cowtown in February, 2010. I also PR'd and earned a Boston Marathon qualifying time on that same day.



I have run marathons all across the United States. Some of my favorites include Boston, Eugene, Pikes Peak, Big Sur, Bataan Death March, Disney World, Chicago and Marine Corps. My favorite marathon in Texas is Houston, and I will be going for my 10th finish there in January. I have qualified for NYC Marathon for this November and hope to run 12 marathons and ultras in the next 3 months to finish off 2011 strong.

I started running in high school and grew up being a big fan of both the legendary Steve Prefontaine and Olympic miler Jim Ryan. I fell in love with the sport watching the 1968 and 1972 Olympics. Growing up in Lodi, Calif., there were miles and miles of levee and dirt country roads winding through grape vineyards along with almond, cherry, apple and peach orchards that I would love doing my long workouts.

My father supported my running, but my mother did not care much for it. She was always trying to come up with a good reason to discourage me from doing it.

I suspect her biggest concern was that she didn't want my new hobby to take time away from my studies and hurt my grades at school. Going to college and getting a good education was really important to her. So, in order to hide how much running I was really doing, I would get up early in the morning and sneak out the back door to go for an hour run and get back home before my parents woke up, and then get ready for school. I wanted to go out for the cross country and track teams, but I was never allowed to do so. That is why I am always thrilled for all the high school kids I meet today that have parents who let them participate in these sports.

I continued to run off and on while attending college and after graduation. When I first moved to Texas in 1994, I was still racing just 5Ks and 10Ks. Running a marathon or even a half marathon was not even on my radar screen back then. Then one day, a co-worker suggested that I should give marathoning a try. I told him it was already hard enough to run a 10K, so I could never see myself ever running 26.2 miles!

Then one day I realized the years were going by way too fast and I wasn't getting any younger. If there were any dreams still left out there that I wanted to pursue, I had better hurry up and get going. Running the Boston Marathon one day was one of those dreams. So, I ran and completed my very first half marathon at the DRC Half in November, 2002 and then one month later ran and finished the Dallas White Rock Marathon. I was hooked!

My passion for running really went to another level when I got active with my running club, The Lake Grapevine Runners And Walkers (RAW) in 2005. They offered both 8- and 12-mile courses that were well marked distance-wise and they also put out water and Gatorade on their popular weekend runs. Running with others in a group really helped jumpstart my running and took it to another level. In order to get faster as a Masters runner, I lost 25 pounds by eating well and exercising, increased my weekly mileage, did speed work and ran hills intervals, along with doing more core workouts and pushups. I found out it was important not to get yourself into a rut of doing all your training runs at the same pace if you wanted to improve on your finishing times.

I started getting interested in running ultras when I read the book “Confession of a Midnight Runner” by Dean Karnazes. One of the best words of advice ever given to me as a runner was by local ultra running legend Scott Eppelman. He told me “Don’t let your mind limit what you think you can do.”

I qualified to join the Marathon Maniacs back in 2008 at the suggestion of Sam Thompson, finisher of “50 States in 50 Days” to help raise money for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. I ran four marathons in nine days on back-to-back weekends in order to qualify to join that club.

I like racing all distances from 5K to ultras. The marathons and ultras help me build strength and stamina and I like to use the shorter races for speed work. I also enjoy doing doubles, marathons/ultras back-to-back on the same weekend. Someday I think it would be fun to try and do a triple and/or a quadzilla. Maybe next year!