

Shalane Flanagan: The Runners' Daughter

Be careful to pick your parents well.

BY TITO MORALES

On November 7, 2010, Shalane Flanagan will line up at the foot of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge in Staten Island for her first attempt at a marathon. The last time a female American distance runner with Flanagan's credentials made a similar move up in distance was almost exactly nine years ago when Deena (Drossin) Kastor also debuted at the New York City Marathon.

Flanagan, as was Kastor that winter, is a national champion many times over in cross-country, on the track, and on the roads, and she is the American record holder in distances ranging in length from the 3,000 meters to the 10,000 meters. But the 29-year-old Flanagan has one thing on her resume that even the great Kastor didn't have prior to her first marathon: a bronze medal in international track competition, which she earned in the 10,000 meters at the Beijing Olympic Games.

And unlike Kastor, who was once admittedly leery of ever participating in a 26.2-mile footrace, Flanagan's move up has never really been in doubt. While, yes, Flanagan admits that the prospect of racing that far is daunting, she takes comfort in the fact that both of her parents have already paved the road for her. In fact, given her lineage, it seems almost to have been predestined that Shalane Flanagan would one day become an elite-level marathoner.

A woman's place

The world was a far different place when a teenager by the name of Cheryl Pedlow decided she would like to do a little running.

"Back in the '60s, there were no sports for women," Cheryl, now 61, recalls. "The only acceptable sports were gymnastics, skating, and swimming."

Cheryl, thin as a youngster, had started putting on weight in junior high school, so she began to research how she could best reverse the trend. First, she, her

► Shalane celebrates her third-place finish in the 10,000 meters at the Beijing Olympics.

mother, and her doctor took a closer look at her nutrition. Then she happened upon an article in her local newspaper's Sunday magazine supplement penned by Bill Bowerman, head track and field coach at the University of Oregon, which extolled the virtues of walk/runs and something called "jogging."

"He talked about burning calories and toning muscle," Cheryl says. "It was just enough to pique my interest and to think that it was something I could do."

Cheryl, a majorette at North Central High School outside Indianapolis, Indiana, decided to walk over to the track after band practice to see how many laps she could cover. Each day, clad in heavy gray cotton sweats, she would try to make it just a little bit farther.

When Cheryl's social studies teacher, who also happened to be the track coach, saw her laboring around the track, he offered her encouragement and advice.

As she slowly strengthened her legs and cardiovascular fitness, Cheryl learned early on that she would also need to fortify her resolve because when someone from the school board saw her commingling with the boys, she was prohibited from running anywhere near them.

"I had to be on the opposite side (of the track)," Cheryl says. "I was isolated from the get-go, but I stuck with it. Fortunately, that was my personality. I was used to doing things by myself."

It is difficult for athletes born after Title IX to grasp the narrow-minded attitudes that existed when it came to women and competitive sports in the decades before the passage of the act on June 23, 1972.

"We had what were called 'play dates,'" recalls Cheryl. "Someone brought the Kool-Aid and the cookies and another school would come over and we'd



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play volleyball or some other sport. It was supposed to be this really sweet, noncompetitive event.”

Vigorous exercise was said to be harmful to a young woman’s reproductive system. Her hormones, it was believed, would go berserk from physical exertion. She would grow facial hair. She would become a lesbian. And the cautionary list went on and on.

But Cheryl, whose mother had also had a competitive streak when it came to anything sports related, didn’t put much credence into the nonsensical admonitions, and she continued with her training. Eventually she started dating one of those classmates who practiced on the other side of the track, and she became so smitten with the sport that she became the team’s official scorekeeper.

“I was totally involved with the team, and the guys were my best friends,” she says. “I just felt as if I’d finally found people who understood me.”

Unfortunately, scribbling numbers on a stat sheet was as close as Cheryl would ever come to competing in track and field at the high school level. In order to race, Cheryl was forced to join a local AAU team. Age-group track was big in the 1960s, but for kids up to 12 or 14—not for young women.

“Most women did not compete, because it was not ladylike,” Cheryl says. “But the guys did, so I went to one of the workouts, and some of the guys who were in college offered to help coach me.”

At first she ran the 100 and 200, but then she gradually moved up to the 800—mostly because none of the younger girls had any interest in running that far. In the beginning, her performances didn’t exactly turn heads.

“I wasn’t trained. I was going slow. We didn’t know anything,” laughs Cheryl.

At one of her first meets, though, she did catch the attention of a track official named Larry Bridges, who would become her mentor and, a few years later, her first husband.

Running with the Huskies

Steve Flanagan, 61, grew up playing team sports in a small high school in rural northeastern Connecticut. Since there was no track program, he focused his attention on the more traditional sports of football, baseball, and basketball.

But Steve realized early on that he might just have an aptitude for running.

“I could run wind sprints all day long,” he recalls.

When he started his studies at the University of Connecticut, he approached Bob Kennedy, the school’s track coach, and brashly announced that he would like to join the team. Kennedy, intrigued, asked Steve to detail his running background. The coach became understandably amused when the young man informed him that he had never run a day of track in his life.

“I told [him] that since I’d played football, I could certainly handle anything that track had to offer,” Steve says. “He kind of laughed, and I said, ‘No, seriously.’”

Kennedy overcame his initial dismay and decided to give the kid a try. Although enthusiasm and boldness opened the door for Steve, confidence and tenacity would propel him through to the other side.

“I ran the half mile, the 1,000 meters, and cross-country,” Steve says. “If we needed a miler, or if someone got sick or something, then I ran that, too.”

Steve would eventually become one of the school’s top middle-distance runners, and he attributes most of the accomplishments he enjoyed at UConn to the mental toughness he acquired while playing football and other team sports.

“I had a pretty successful career, not having run in high school at all, partly because I knew how to lose and how to be tough and aggressive,” he says. “When I went to college, I jumped into this stuff, and I had a clear psychological advantage over everybody I competed against.”

Running was so novel to Steve that he looked upon the new endeavor not so much as a challenge but as an escape.

“I liked to practice and spend time with my teammates,” he says. “I got to see other schools out and around New England. It was a big adventure for me.”

After he graduated, Steve taught physical education and health for three years at RHAM High School in Hebron, Connecticut, and also became the school’s track coach. He still considered his own running career to be on the upswing, and he continued to train with an eye on seeing just how far he could push his running abilities.

In 1974, Steve took a leave of absence from RHAM to pursue an advanced teaching degree at the University of Colorado. He and Cheryl first met in 1976, while each competed for the United States at the World Cross-Country Championships in Chepstow, Wales, and the two became fast friends.

Later, when Steve heard the news that Cheryl’s marriage to Larry Bridges was falling apart, he suggested to her



Courtesy of Steve Flanagan

► Steve, a late bloomer to the sport, excelled once he set his sights on running.

that it might be a terrific idea for her to move to Boulder, where someone could get lost in running. Steve and some of his friends were staying at Frank Shorter's house, and there was a spare room available. Shorter, the gold medalist in the men's marathon at the 1972 Olympic Games, was out of town preparing for the 1976 Olympics. He had formed a running store named Frank Shorter Sports, which he hoped to franchise.

Cheryl took Steve up on the offer and moved in with the group. She took a job coordinating inventory at the store, and eventually she became the group's corporate buyer. Steve and Cheryl got married in 1978.

It runs in the family

Shalane was born on July 8, 1981, in Boulder, Colorado. When Steve and Cheryl ultimately divorced in 1986, Shalane and her younger sister, Maggie, moved with their father to Marblehead, Massachusetts, a town some 15 miles north of Boston. It was there that Shalane spent her formative years.

There is something to be said about genetics and athletic performance. NFL stars Eli and Peyton Manning possess the same DNA as their father, former quarterback Archie Manning, which surely contributes to their ability to calmly direct a professional football team down the field in even the most trying of situations. Barry Bonds and Ken Griffey Jr. inherited superior hand-eye coordination from their fathers, and the great swimming champion Gary Hall Jr. unquestionably owes some of his success in the pool to the genes he inherited from his father, a three-time Olympic medalist. But for every Manning, Bonds, Griffey, and Hall, countless other progeny of elite athletes never come anywhere close to matching the exploits of their famous parents.

When she was young, Shalane's focus was on soccer and competitive swimming, in part because that's what her friends did. It was on the soccer field and in the pool, her father is convinced, that Shalane gained the same type of mental toughness and training ethic that he himself had learned on the football field and the basketball court.

"She worked hard in the pool," Steve says. "She used to work her buns off just to be third in a race."

Steve and Cheryl, who had both had stints as educators, made a conscious decision to be patient with both of their daughters because they had witnessed too many promising age groupers burn out before they reached their full potential.

"I've also seen kids that did a lot of mileage in periods when they should be growing, and I think that it stunted their development," Steve says. "You need to develop normally in play, and you need to learn to move laterally. When you do nothing but run, it's rhythmic and you overdevelop certain muscle groups. The complementary groups never get stimulated, so it's counterproductive."

“Neither one of us pushed running on [Shalane] at all,” says Cheryl. “We wanted her well rounded. We’d seen too many people force it on their kids, and it just destroyed them. We didn’t want that. That was sort of an unspoken pact. We didn’t want that for either one of the girls. We wanted them to find out what their passion was, and their passion did not have to be ours.”

But that’s not to say that Shalane and Maggie were not brought up in a running household.

“I remember my parents running on a regular day basis,” recalls Shalane. “I remember pleading with them to let me run around the block, because I wanted to do what they did.”

“Her dad and I would tag team to go out for a run,” says Cheryl. “One would watch the kids and the other would go for a run, and then when they got home we switched off.”

“I thought everyone’s parents ran,” says Shalane. “It was the norm in my house.”

Shalane’s stepmother, Monica, also set a good example for the two girls. Always active and fit, Monica competed in basketball and field hockey in high school and once completed a marathon in Anchorage, Alaska.

By the time Shalane went out for cross-country in her sophomore year of high school, she, like Steve when he arrived at UConn, was not only mentally prepared for the training, but she was eager to embrace it.

The cardiovascular system she had developed in swimming and soccer translated well to her new pursuit, as did the assertiveness she had developed battling other girls for control of the soccer ball.

► It was only a matter of time before Shalane, shown here in high school at a Junior Olympic meet in Maine in 1996, turned her attention to track and field.



© Martha Harris

“She was hungry to compete by the time she was ready to get onto the track,” Steve says.

“My dad somehow recognized that I had passion and desire, and he knew to hold me back,” says Shalane. “He allowed me to unleash that passion at the right time. Most parents would have tried to get it going too early, but he didn’t.”

And when success started to come early—she won the state cross-country championship three years in a row at Marblehead High School—Shalane was mature enough to realize that natural ability, while nice, would take her only so far. She would need to incorporate the same training ethic she had developed between the lane lines to her running.

“It was the perfect storm of conditions,” says Steve. “She started getting lots of recognition, and she didn’t have an overbearing high school coach. She didn’t really know much, and she got whatever information she needed here around the

kitchen table. She ran just enough to be trained to the point where she could run some great times—fast enough to get a scholarship. And then, when she got to college, she just began to develop even more.”

For the record, Maggie became a well-regarded runner in her own right for the Marblehead Headers, but she was never a fan of the requisite training, so she quickly moved on to other interests.

During her tenure at the University of North Carolina, Shalane would go on to win an NCAA title in the indoor 3,000 meters and two national cross-country titles and lower her 1,500-meter and 5,000-meter PRs to 4:11.24 and 15:20.54, respectively. More important, by the time she accepted a professional contract with Nike in 2004, she had only just begun to tap her full potential.

◀ Shalane, competing for the UNC Tar Heels, on her way to victory at the 2003 NCAA Division I Women’s Cross-Country Championships.



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The struggle to fit in

Even though Cheryl Pedlow's nonconformity was challenged at every turn, her interest in running did not abate with her graduation from high school.

"I can remember boyfriends asking me, 'You're not going to keep this up after high school, are you? Nobody's going to want to date you,'" she says.

If anything, the lack of competitive opportunities at North Central left her even more motivated once she reached Indiana State University. In this regard, Cheryl's late-blooming development was uncannily similar to that of Steve and Shalane.

As backward thinking as her high school had been, Indiana State was progressive. Cheryl explains that one woman in particular, Dr. Eleanor St. John, deserves the lion's share of the credit for arranging for the young runner to become the first female recipient of an athletic scholarship at a Division I institution.

"My scholarship was really what was then called a 'Talented Student Scholarship,'" Cheryl says. "She [St. John] made it happen."

Though it is difficult to prove, it is quite possible that Cheryl's scholarship may have been the first female athletic scholarship of any kind awarded from a public university. Whatever the case, practically overnight Cheryl went from being a high school outcast to being a star athletic attraction at a major college.

"I had the president and the board of directors coming to my track meets," she says. "I also traveled all over the United States. They totally understood that it was good publicity, and Indiana State has always been forward thinking like that."

► Cheryl, facing opposition nearly every step of the way, blazed trails at Indiana State University and beyond.



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Cheryl was the only woman on the team, but at least she was finally able to officially practice with the men's team. And contrary to the dire predictions regarding her social life, she relished the fact that she was continually surrounded by active young men who enjoyed running as much as she did.

"I got onto campus and I had 25 guy friends all looking after me," she laughs. It was this male kinship as much as anything else, she believes, that contributed to her continued improvement. They not only accepted her as one of their own, but they also bonded to help her succeed.

"When we were training, they knew that what I was doing was different," Cheryl recalls. "We used to have workouts where I was the rabbit and they had to catch me. Everybody had a handicap, and my job was not to let them catch me."

Decades later, when Shalane competed in Terre Haute at the NCAA Division I Cross-Country Championships, many of Cheryl's former training partners came out to watch her daughter in action.

"That was so special," Cheryl says. "They had protected me when the dogs came out on the long runs. It was just like having a bunch of brothers."

A leader by example

The mid to late 1960s was a time of great change and empowerment for women in the United States. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963, the phrase "women's lib" joined the lexicon, and by the end of the decade, the world was introduced to the rationale behind bra burning.

But Cheryl's goal during her high school and college years was just to improve her running. She never considered herself a revolutionary, and she wasn't into making political or feminist statements.

"That's the hard thing for some people to understand," she says. "There was no ulterior motive other than the fact that I'd found something that I was good at. I just wanted to see how much better I could get."

Today, Cheryl would surely be viewed as a crusader of sorts. Anyone who literally runs against the tide of prevailing wisdom is pretty much always looked upon as either eccentric or innovative. At the time, though, she was just a runner doing what came naturally.

"I don't think any of us females really gave it a thought as to whether or not we really had permission," she says. "It was no different than it is now. You get in shape, and all you want to do is test yourself. You want to try the next distance. You want to try the next course. That part is very, very basic."

But Cheryl's running feats in college did not change perceptions overnight.

As a freshman at Indiana State, the only cross-country competition that Cheryl was allowed to participate in was boy's high school meets—and even then, it was only because Larry Bridges had enough pull in the local community to secure the arrangements. The caveat was that Cheryl was required to wait on the line

for five seconds after the starter's gun went off because some of the coaches still weren't convinced that she knew what she was doing.

By then, though, Cheryl more than knew what she was doing. In fact, even with the time handicap, Cheryl was fast enough to never finish worse than third place in any given race.

Nurturing the marathon seed

Shalane spent the holiday season of 2009 patiently strengthening her mind and body to handle the rigors of the marathon distance, with her first goal to compete at the USA Women's Half-Marathon Championships on January 17, 2010.

Her coach, Jerry Schumacher, with whom she had formed an alliance the previous April, had taken over the reins at the Nike Oregon Project from Alberto Salazar in June 2008. Schumacher, Shalane believes, is just the person to get her running branching out into new directions.

"The way I'm training right now is pretty much taking on a marathon load of training," she said at the end of November. "I've never run over 80 miles a week, so I'm trying to get in that kind of mileage. We'll do some tweaking leading up [to] the half, but primarily he [Schumacher] is trying to train me like a marathoner right now so that I can get a taste for it. If the half feels good and my body is handling the workload well, then we'll make a decision as to when and where I'll run my first marathon."

Though the increased workload certainly took its toll—"It's definitely more tiring, and I'm finding myself taking more naps," she confessed—she enjoyed the training, which she believes is one of the biggest keys to being successful at the marathon.

Her number one concern with the adjustment in training, she explained, was learning patience. "I'm having a hard time controlling my excitement," Shalane said. "When I get on the track, I'm used to getting to the pain and the hurt right away. I want it to hurt immediately. But in the marathon you don't want to hurt until maybe the last 10 miles. I'm not used to that. I actually have a hard time focusing when I'm comfortable. I'm having to retrain my brain to approach the training differently.

"My gut tells me that I have the potential in the marathon," Shalane said. "I don't know if I'm quite ready to be a really serious contender, but I'm willing to try to see what is available."

Instinct has served Shalane well in her running career. The timing of her move up from the 5K to the 10K on the track was similarly based more on intuition than any grand plan.

"My first 10K ever was literally on a whim," she says of her debut at the distance at the 2008 Payton Jordan Invitational. "I thought, *I should try one this*

year, and maybe I should run that at the Olympics. So sometimes I just follow my gut, and that usually leads me to some good performances.”

Needless to say, her American record run on the Stanford track, in which her 30:34.49 broke Deena Kastor’s mark by nearly 16 seconds, was more than just a “good performance.” And that, as it turned out, was just the start of things in what turned out to be a career-changing year. Shalane ran still faster when it counted most, 30:22.22, on the opening night of track and field competition in Beijing, and her bronze-medal performance made her the first American to earn an Olympic Games podium finish in the 10,000 meters since Lynn Jennings’s bronze in Barcelona, Spain, in 1992.

Now her instincts are telling her it is time to move up once more.

“I’m hoping that this marathon training, regardless of what happens, will still complement the goals that I still have on the track,” Shalane says.

Intuition aside, the timing of Shalane’s exploration of the marathon distance has also been based on practical matters. Since there is no world championship on the calendar in 2010, for instance, Shalane and Schumacher are not tied to a specific schedule, and they have more freedom to experiment with her training.

“I want to uncover any potential that I might have for the next Olympics,” Shalane explains. “I may run one, and I may say, ‘You know what? I think I’m better off staying on the track for a little while longer.’ I’m pretty much just doing some searching and trying to see what’s available.”

Ultimately, when Shalane crossed the line first in Houston, her time of 1:09.41 answered some questions regarding her marathon plans, but not all of them. Team Flanagan, which in addition to Schumacher includes Steve Edwards, Shalane’s



◀ Shalane won a national title in her first attempt at the half-marathon distance on January 17, 2010 in Houston.

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husband and manager, was pleased with the victory against a talented field that included defending champion Magdalena Lewy-Boulet and the ageless Colleen De Reuck. However, it was hoping for a crisper effort the first time out of the gate.

It wasn't by accident that the team had selected Houston for Shalane's debut venue. It was on the same course where Ryan Hall, who was similarly experimenting with longer distances, ran his first half-marathon on January 14, 2007, and became the first American to break one hour at the distance. Some three months later, Hall tackled his first marathon and recorded the fastest debut in U.S. history. But not everyone who jumps up in distance can expect such stunning results. For Shalane, her performance in Texas showed that there was still some work to do.

The crispness returned four weeks later in Spokane, Washington, at the USA Cross-Country Championships. And after a dominating performance in which Shalane bested a talented field by a whopping 52 seconds over the 8K course, she announced that she would be competing at the IAAF World Cross-Country Championships in Bydgoszcz, Poland, on March 28. The decision to focus on World Cross ruled out a 2010 spring marathon and instead opened the door for something in the fall.

"It's an art form," Steve says of his daughter's decision on where and when to debut. "Everything has to come together. You have to be ready to do it. There's no point in running a marathon just to finish. The training has to be right—otherwise, defer. Wait and do the next one in line. There's always going to be another race."

► Shalane won the USA Cross-Country Championships with a dominating performance.



As late as June, however, there had still been no announcement about Shalane's racing plans for the balance of 2010. To add even more fire to the speculation, Shalane twice dropped *down* in distance during the month of May to compete in the 1,500 meters at a USATF High Performance meet and the 2010 adidas Grand Prix against the likes of Shannon Rowbury, Anna Pierce, and Sara Hall at their specialty. She also elected to run the 1,500 meters at the USA Outdoor Track & Field Championships on June 26. The three races merely reaffirmed that Shalane, who has always enjoyed racing against all comers at any distance and on any surface, is one of the most versatile runners of her generation.

Putting the pedal to the metal in Boulder

When Steve Flanagan first moved to Colorado for his graduate studies, Boulder was just beginning to show signs of first developing into the running mecca it is today. Steve, who was still very much enthralled with running, joined the Colorado Track Club, which was coached by Jerry Quiller, the assistant coach at the University of Colorado.

"I bumped into guys who were just finishing up at CU: John Gregorio, Ted Castaneda, and Mike Peterson," Steve says. "We had some pretty good cross-country teams in the early '70s."

History reveals otherwise. In truth, the Colorado Track Club was one of the premier club teams in the country, winning three cross-country national championships. Gregorio, Castaneda, and Peterson were some of the best runners in the United States at the time, and once things became established, other stars such as Frank Shorter, Garry Bjorklund, and Mike Slack trickled into the community not just to capitalize on the top quality of competition but also to enjoy the benefits of high-altitude training.

"There was an efficiency to training at altitude," Steve says. "You could run 90 miles per week at altitude and enjoy the benefits as if you were running 115 to 120 miles per week at sea level. I don't know that there was any proof of it occurring . . . but intuitively we knew that we were stronger than the guys who were training at sea level."

Steve recalls that even Oregon-based Steve Prefontaine came to train with the group for a brief spell.

Steve Flanagan's running flourished in Boulder. His entire focus after college was on the World Cross-Country Championships, and he was talented enough to qualify for three U.S. teams.

Today, Steve underplays his abilities.

"At the time I believed I could make an Olympic team, but looking back on it, being one of the top 15 to 20 guys was a long way from being one of the top three," Steve says. "With my times, I was never in danger of making an Olympic team."

After a brief stint in East Lansing, where Cheryl was hired as assistant athletic director at Michigan State, and in Durango, Texas, where Steve and Cheryl opened a Frank Shorter store that ultimately foundered, they both returned to Colorado.

Steve's regimen, especially in Boulder, was grueling.

"I loved the training," says Steve. "If you don't like the training, it's certainly not the sport for you."

Part of the CTC's weekly training consisted of a Sunday morning 20-miler. Everyone, no matter what the specialty, participated in this demanding long run.

"There was a fairly accurate 10-mile loop in Boulder," Steve recalls. "We would run right around 6:00 pace for the first 10, and it would take about an hour. And then we would reverse the loop and run it backward. On the second loop we'd start picking up the pace very gradually so that by the last three miles we were probably running 5:15 to 5:20 pace."

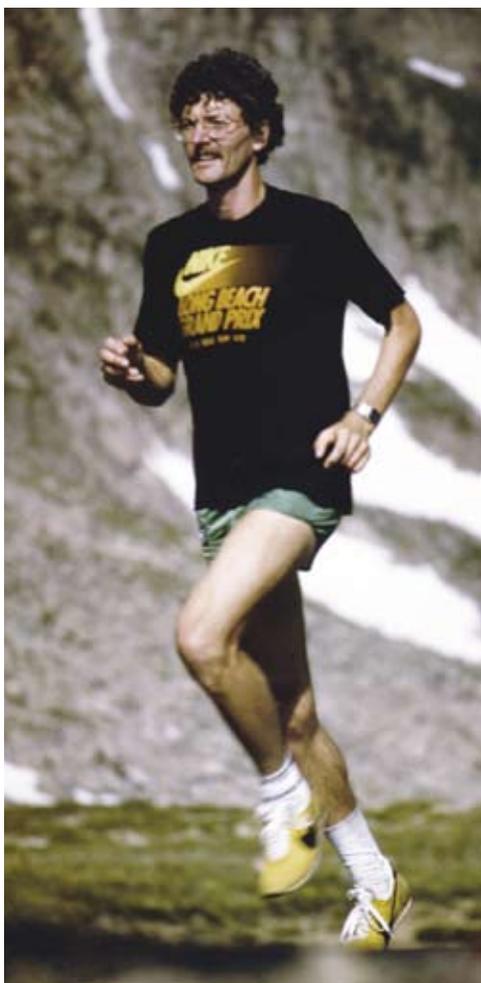
Steve took a no-holds-barred approach to his sport.

"I averaged 90 miles a week for six years," he says. "I raced and trained hard—from about 1974 through the end of 1979 and into 1980."

But what Steve remembers most fondly about his tenure in Boulder has little to do with mind-numbing mileage or body-destroying workouts, but rather the camaraderie he developed with his teammates.

"There was a group energy that raised the bar for everybody," he recalls. "We were tough competitors on Saturday at a meet or wherever. It was definitely dog eat dog. But through the rest of the week we actually cared about one another," he says. "It was a nice cast of characters."

► Thanks to a grueling regimen and a talented group of training partners, Steve thrived as a runner in Boulder, Colorado.



Courtesy of Steve Flanagan

Road races were just then coming into vogue, and Steve describes the scramble to win what little prize money became available. Runners would often keep their racing schedules as close to their vests as possible, because the fewer people who knew about a race with money up for grabs, the better. Besides, prevailing wisdom dictated that if you could pocket the winnings without have to fully exert yourself with a sub-30-minute 10K effort, then so much the better.

“There weren’t big shoe contracts,” he says. “We were living hand to mouth. A lot of us were going to graduate school. If you could make \$6,000 to \$8,000 in a year’s time in some of these road races, that was enough to get by.”

Laying the groundwork

When Cheryl was at the peak of her running career, her focus, like that of Steve and a great many other runners of the era, was on the cross-country season.

“There was Nationals and there was Worlds, and that was it,” Cheryl explains.

The primary reason for her emphasis on cross-country, Cheryl says, is that there were so few competitive venues for distance specialists. Prior to 1972, for instance, the longest women’s race on the Olympic track and field schedule was only 800 meters.

While there were some local meets on the calendar, Cheryl’s running had become so proficient that the competition was almost nonexistent. Part of the problem, Cheryl says, was geographic in nature. Compared with the East and West coasts, the Midwest was simply behind the times when it came to the women’s running revolution.

“In Indiana, we just didn’t know any better,” she says. “You just did what you thought was the right thing, or you tried something not knowing that you weren’t supposed to be doing it.”

Whatever Cheryl was doing was working. The young woman who had started running to lose weight would eventually set American records at three miles and 5,000 meters, and she would qualify for five national cross-country teams, competing in world championships staged in such exotic locales as Scotland, England, and Italy. Cheryl’s highest finish at the International Cross-Country Championships was fourth in 1969, and some of her teammates on the U.S. squads of the day included Brenda Webb, Francie Larrieu Smith, and the legendary Doris Brown Heritage.

Brown Heritage grew up in Washington State and attended college in Seattle, where she came under the tutelage of Dr. Ken Foreman, who had a reputation for working with girls and young women. A USATF hall of famer, Brown Heritage won five world titles at the International Cross-Country Championships from 1967 to 1971.

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“Doris was so much better than the rest of us,” Cheryl recalls. “She was in the right place at the right time, and she had the right motivation.”

In those days, participating in cross-country was as much a labor of love as anything else.

“If you made a world cross team, you had to pay your own way,” Cheryl says. “You paid your way to go out to run in the qualifier, and then, if you made the team, they told you how much it was going to cost. You went home and you did a fund-raiser.”

The team’s racing attire wasn’t much more sophisticated.

“There really weren’t uniforms,” Cheryl laughs. “The cross-country team was always the last one to get uniforms because we competed in February and March, and the new uniforms started for the summer track group. It was always interesting to see what sizes were left, and frequently I got the shot-putter’s uniform. We kind of looked like a motley crew.”

After college, understandably, the ranks of female runners continued to dwindle still more.

“At age 22 or 23, you didn’t really compete anymore,” says Cheryl. “My mother kept asking me, ‘When are you going to start acting like a lady?’”

Debuting on a whim and a prayer

In 1970, Larry and Cheryl Bridges relocated to San Luis Obispo, California, where Larry accepted a teaching and coaching position at Cal Poly. Cheryl, still very much focused on being a runner, pursued a master’s degree in physical education while teaching junior high school in nearby Arroyo Grande.

Cheryl looks back upon her California years with a great deal of fondness. She was fitter than ever, mostly because she was training with her husband’s team in the rolling hills of Central California. As usual, she was the only female in the group.

“Our Sunday runs were always called ‘Church of the Sunday Run,’” she says, “because we would always go by all of these churches where everybody was singing.”

She had progressed to the point that she was logging 60 to 65 miles a week and she could comfortably run two to three hours at a stretch, albeit without water even on these longer efforts because she suffered from a sensitive stomach.

One weekend, a fortnight or so after Cheryl competed at the national cross-country championships, Larry informed his Cal Poly squad that it would be running the Western Hemisphere Marathon in Culver City, California. The details as to why are a bit hazy. It could be that the coach wanted the guys to get in a long workout. Maybe it was a team bonding expedition. Whatever the reason,

Cheryl decided to tackle the distance too since she considered herself virtually part of the team.

“I went along, because I trained with them,” she says.

The notion of a woman running a marathon was still very much a radical concept in 1970. There weren't a lot of road races in general, and there certainly weren't a lot of women participating in those that were being staged. Kathrine Switzer had completed her famous “K. V. Switzer” run at the Boston Marathon in 1967, but it wouldn't be until 1972 that women were officially welcome to compete there.

In Culver City, Cheryl took off with the gun and settled into a quick, steady pace. As was her habit, she turned down any offers of water while she knocked out one mile after another. Every so often she heard a spectator call out that she was on world-record pace. That turned out to be either a good thing or a bad thing.

“I made 20 miles working really well, but then I really started to hurt bad,” she recalls. “I ended up walking and jogging the last six miles.”

Despite her difficulties, Cheryl still managed to cross the line in 3:15.

“Running the marathon was an absolute fluke,” she says. “The only reason I even ran a marathon was because I was curious.”

Several months later, in the summer of 1971, Cheryl was again feeling pressure to hang up her running ambitions once and for all. She was now 23 and had achieved a great deal of success. She decided, though, that if she was indeed going to walk away from the sport, she wanted to be absolutely certain that she had maximized her potential. Cheryl wrote a letter to Bill Dellinger, who had assumed the head coaching position at the University of Oregon from Bowerman, and asked him if he would take her on as an athlete. In the letter, Cheryl congratulated Dellinger on the fine job he had been doing with a fellow named Prefontaine.

Dellinger, who had never coached a woman before, was impressed with her story, and he agreed to give it a try. The arrangement would be simple: the coach would mail Cheryl two weeks' worth of workouts, and when she completed them, it was her turn to write back to inform him of how she had fared. Dellinger, preparing Cheryl for the upcoming fall cross-country season, prescribed a steady diet of interval training.

“With Dellinger, you did tempo runs, and you didn't just run distance,” Cheryl says. “He trained your brain. You began to believe that you could do things that you never thought were possible. He'd ask you to do something that was absolutely ridiculous. But you'd try it, and you'd come close, and then you started to believe. All of a sudden you lifted the restrictions that you'd put on yourself.”

Cheryl performed magnificently at the national cross-country championships, placing third and earning another spot on the U.S. team. Convinced that she was in the best shape of her life, Cheryl decided that she was going to go back to Culver City a few weeks later to give the marathon another try.

“I really don’t think that I had a time in mind,” she says. “I just wanted to get through it without hurting and without walking.”

In her semimonthly correspondence to Dellinger, Cheryl wrote of her challenging experience at Western Hemisphere the year before and chirpily reported that she was going to accompany the Cal Poly team for another crack at the distance. Dellinger, explaining that she wasn’t ready for the marathon, wrote back to tell her that he didn’t think it was a very good idea. Dellinger’s reply, though, didn’t reach Cheryl’s mailbox until after the team had already taken off for Culver City.

Steve takes the plunge

For most of the members of the CTC, Steve says, the marathon was a fringe event.

“The fields weren’t gigantic, like they are now,” he says. “Not many people really considered themselves to be marathoners. For most of the guys in the club, it was an afterthought.”

By the mid 1970s, the stage had been set for the great American running boom. In 1972, Frank Shorter won the gold medal at the Munich Olympic Games; in 1973, Bill Rodgers, who would eventually become known as “Boston Billy” because of his success in the Boston Marathon, notched the first of his 22 career marathon victories; and in 1977, Jim Fixx published his masterwork, *The Complete Book of Running*.

Steve’s decision to tackle a marathon, much like Cheryl’s, was born more out of curiosity than anything else. The city of Phoenix hosted a marathon in conjunction with the Fiesta Bowl, and in 1976, at the age of 28, Steve made the trip to the desert to test his mettle against the distance.

“You can’t believe how comfortable you feel for about an hour and 40 minutes, and then all of a sudden you get this creeping feeling,” Steve recalls. “I can remember getting to about 22 miles and just thinking, *Oh, my gosh*. I was depleted, or close to it, and I was just trying to keep from locking up. Everything hurt from the waist down.”

Steve can’t recall his time for that first effort—or he chooses to forget it—but he does remember quite well that he was pretty sore for probably two to three weeks afterward.

“It’s a terrible distance,” he laughs. “I mean, you can run anything else less than that distance nearly once a week for a long time.”

Steve is quick to distinguish between those who participate in marathons and those who race them.

“If you’re really going to race them, with a long, slow buildup, and you want to get in there and set a PR, regardless of your speed or talent, once a year is about it,” he says. “That’s where I used to come from, and that’s the group I ran with. We trained to race . . . and it was a very competitive situation.”

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Though Steve would go on to complete a dozen or so marathons, including some Bostons, New Yorks, and a Pan-American Games effort in New Mexico, he never considered the marathon his best distance.

“I never really thought of myself as a marathoner,” he says. “I would just sort of jump into them. There was no way I was ever going to run five minutes a mile for that distance, and I knew it. So you start off, right away, knowing that you’d be lucky to crack the top 15 or 20.”

After his first attempt at the marathon, Steve returned to Phoenix the following year and ran his PR of 2:18. But it was back in New England, he says, that he found the most enjoyment in the marathon.

“I did Boston three or four times,” he says. “Boston is the most exciting course I’ve ever run.”

Steve enjoyed the Boston Marathon so much, in fact, that even though he qualified for the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials in 1980, he chose to forgo the event. It was the infamous year of the boycott—when President Carter announced that the United States would not be participating in the Moscow Olympic Games. Many sports federations stuck with their plans to stage Olympic Team Trials, even though the top finishers were prohibited from competing in Russia. For the marathon, the decision was made to keep the race as scheduled in Buffalo, New York, on May 24.

Steve, though, was one of many runners who made other arrangements.

“I decided that I’d rather run Boston than go to Buffalo,” he says simply.

The asphalt comeback road

Team Flanagan has looked upon 2010 as a year of redemption for Shalane.

After her stellar 2008 campaign, expectations for 2009 were sky-high. But things fell out of sorts early and quickly for Shalane as she battled through a highly publicized coaching change and some frustrating health problems in which a thyroid condition was diagnosed and addressed. Even with the setbacks, Shalane still managed to produce an American record when she ran a sterling 14:47.62 in the indoor 5,000 meters at the Reebok Boston Indoor Games in February.

Many of the marks that Shalane has broken over the last few years have been Kastor’s, a runner Shalane has the highest respect for.

“She’s just been a great friend and a great role model,” says Shalane of Kastor, who is also slated to run the 2010 ING New York City Marathon. “She’s set a really great standard for a lot of us to follow. She’s just a unique, great person.”

Kastor’s legacy transcends black-and-white record keeping. What she conveyed to Shalane, Kara Goucher, Amy Yoder Begley, and future generations of American women is that with a little tenacity, perseverance, and conviction, they too can do what was once considered unimaginable: compete with the East African runners.

“She’s just a true competitor,” Shalane says. “She knew she had to raise the bar to accomplish her dreams, and she did it.”

Even though she was nowhere near Poland on March 28, 2010, Kastor must have been thrilled with the results of the 2010 World Cross-Country Championships because the U.S. women, lead by Shalane’s 12th-place finish, earned a bronze medal in the long-race team competition. The team bronze was a nice complement to the short-race team bronze that Shalane helped the Americans win in 2005.

Now Shalane, who has always had a reverence for the marathon distance, is determined to replicate Kastor’s success in that event also.

“In my mind, it’s the ultimate test for a distance runner,” she says. “It takes extreme dedication, unlike any other sport that I’ve seen that is running related. You can’t just go into a marathon halfheartedly. It has to be a full commitment. That’s what makes it exciting and emotional.”

When Kastor ran her first marathon in 2001, she recorded the fastest debut ever by an American woman: 2:26:58. That mark has since been broken by Kara



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▲ Team USA, with Shalane (third from left) leading the way, captured bronze at the 2010 World Cross-Country Championships in Poland in March. Between them, Steve, Cheryl, and Shalane have competed at 12 World Cross-Country Championships.

Goucher, a friend and rival of Shalane's, who ran 2:25:53 at the 2008 ING New York City Marathon.

Shalane has spoken with Goucher about the process of moving up. "I asked her if she enjoyed it, and she absolutely loves it." And since Shalane is now doing a lot of her training in Oregon, which has long been Goucher's home base, there will be even more discussions to come as Shalane draws closer to her first marathon.

Given Kastor and Goucher's success in New York, it made perfect sense when Shalane finally announced on June 16, 2010 that she, too, would make her debut there. Shalane, who has seen both the New York and Boston courses from the back of a media truck, contrasts the two races by describing the New York City Marathon as "young and hip" with "a different kind of vibe and crowd." Surely part of the appeal for running New York, too, was the fact that since the elite men and women's fields there are traditionally among the most talented in the world, Shalane is guaranteed not to be the center of the media's attention. The great Haile Gebrselassie, the current men's world record holder in the distance, will also be running in New York that day, his first ever marathon on U.S. soil, which ensures that Shalane's debut will be several extra blips below the radar.

As Shalane hardens her body for the November 7 challenge, she has also been toughening her psyche.

"It's scary to think that you're standing at the starting line and you have 26.2 miles in front of you and there's no stopping," she admits. "There are no rules like timeouts. It's a long way to go, and for me it's about mentally wrapping my mind around running that long and physically holding up."

Spending her formative years in Marblehead meant an early education in the allure behind the marathon.

"We would go almost every year (to watch the Boston Marathon)," Shalane recalls. "It's a big day. When I was growing up there, it was just a big celebration. Everyone went into the city to watch the marathon."

Shalane distinctly recalls her father running the 100th edition of Boston.

"That was my first strong memory of the Boston Marathon—when he ran the 100th," she says.

Watching her father and the likes of Uta Pippig and Tegla Loroupe left an indelible impression in the 15-year-old's mind. Although Shalane still had not made the transition from swimsuits and goggles to singlets and racing flats at that point, she was cognizant of running distance and pace.

"Someone told me what their (the women's) average mile pace was, and I remember thinking that I couldn't even run that pace for a mile," she says. "It was inconceivable to me that someone could string together 5:30 miles for 26 miles. At the time, I was just flabbergasted that human beings could endure that kind of a pace."

A run for the ages

The details of exactly who held the world-best time in the women’s marathon in the fall of 1971 are murky at best. Adrienne Beames of Australia reputedly became the first woman to break three hours when she ran 2:46 in August, and even though it quickly became apparent that the time was recorded on an uncertified course and at an unsanctioned event, the mark has continued to linger in the record books. In all likelihood, as Cheryl Bridges stood at the start line in Culver City on December 5, 1971, the fastest time ever recorded by a woman was by Elizabeth “Beth” Bonner, who had run 2:55:22 a few months earlier at the New York City Marathon.

Cheryl didn’t go into the race with designs on Bonner’s mark.

“The goal was to not hurt and walk,” Cheryl says of her return engagement. “And of course I got two side aches within the first 15 miles.”

Stitches aside, Cheryl was again lighting up the streets of Southern California.

One runner, a marine, wasn’t happy about sharing the course with a woman—especially one who could keep pace with him—so he tried to run Cheryl off the course.

“I would start to run by him, and he would just start pushing me over to the side,” Cheryl says. “I’d try to go around him the other way, and he’d start edging

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me over to the side again. People saw this happening. They basically ran interference for me so that I could get by him.”

Cheryl, averaging 6:20 miles, was again running as fast as, if not faster than, any other female marathoner in history.

“It felt so easy,” she recalls. “I was just thanking Dellinger like crazy, because it was all due to his workouts. I could run my fastest mile during that time period, and that’s what got me through it. Those muscle groups didn’t fatigue.”

This time around, Cheryl, despite having to dodge the sexist marine, made it all the way to 24 miles before she started to slow.

“It hurt the last two miles,” she admits. “I was having trouble those last two miles.”

By then, though, nothing was going to stop her, and despite the difficulties Cheryl crossed the line in 2:49:40 to become the first woman in history to break 2:50.

As was the case 12 months earlier, there was no press in attendance to witness the achievement. Few aside from her husband and teammates, in fact, understood what she had accomplished. And in terms of celebrations, Cheryl said she and the gang dined at a local fast-food joint before piling back into the VW microbus for the 3 1/2 hour commute back to San Luis Obispo.

“The best part was that I didn’t have to take a shift driving,” Cheryl laughs. “That’s what I remember most.”

When Dellinger heard about Cheryl’s run, he ruefully wrote, “I guess you didn’t get my letter, did you?”

Still later, Cheryl received hate mail, which she attributes to the runner who tried to prevent her from passing him. But she didn’t give it much credence. “The letter was so irrational,” she says. Besides, by that time she had become accustomed to tuning out the naysayers and skeptics.

Eventually, Cheryl’s feat did make its way into the news. On January 12, 1972, she was the subject of a glowing, though somewhat chauvinistic, feature in the *Los Angeles Times*. And based on the attention generated from that story, Cheryl was invited to fly to New York to be the headliner on *To Tell the Truth*, a game show in which a panel of celebrity experts attempted to deduce a guest’s unusual occupation or experience based on a series of questions and answers.

“I wasn’t obsessed with that distance, to tell you the truth,” Cheryl says of the marathon. “I liked going fast. I would have preferred the 3,000 or the 5,000.”

Part of Cheryl’s reluctance to embrace the 26.2-mile distance was the letdown she felt after her historic run.

“That was the weird thing,” she explains. “After you do that, what’s next? I really kind of had a letdown. I went into a slight depression.”

Cheryl would go on to complete a few more marathons, including a mind-boggling 2:52 effort in 95-degree temperature and 95 percent humidity at a marathon

► Cheryl, like her daughter, was a versatile runner who excelled on all surfaces and at all distances.

in Houston during which she again declined to hydrate. But she is the first to admit that her second Western Hemisphere Marathon represented the zenith of her career.

“I never did anything that spectacular ever again, runningwise,” Cheryl says.

Perhaps had there been more opportunity for women at the distance, Cheryl would have continued competing in marathons. In fact, it’s difficult to imagine what her mind-set must have been as she, along with tens of millions of other television viewers, watched Frank Shorter shoot to prominence with his gold medal at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

“I just accepted that guys got to do that, and I didn’t think too much about it,” she says, without a trace of bitterness in her voice. “I always thought it was silly that girls couldn’t do it too, because I knew how he trained. It was just one more barrier that we had to deal with that annoyed me.”



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The thing about debuts

Forty years ago, when Steve and Cheryl were in the throes of their running careers, the marathon distance didn’t carry the allure that it does today. In 1970, the Boston Marathon, while world famous, attracted a field of just over 1,000 athletes. The inaugural New York City Marathon, confined to a few loops around Central Park, consisted of 127 runners, including one woman. And big marathons such as Chicago, Berlin, and London, which today attract in excess of 30,000 runners per year, had not yet been established.

When Steve and Cheryl ran their first marathons, there was no fanfare. Today, marathon debuts such as Shalane’s are filled with heightened suspense and pizzazz. They are not unlike splashy Broadway openings, highly publicized movie premieres, or releases of cutting-edge technology products.

Shalane’s announcement of her debut created buzz throughout the long-distance running community. In New York, organizers were understandably jubilant.

Organizers in Boston, on the other hand, who had also been heavily courting her, can take solace in the fact that Shalane has publicly stated that given her longtime ties to the city their race is at the top of her “to do” list.

By choosing to debut in the fall, Team Flanagan will have plenty of time to weigh its options for 2011 and the build-up to the London Olympics.

There was a time not so long ago when moving up to the marathon for a track specialist was viewed as a one-way proposition. No longer. Kastor set her American record in the 10,000 meters after having made her marathon debut. And Dathan Ritzenhein, who last year recorded a nearly 20-second PR and an American record in the 5,000 meters on the track after several years of focused marathon training, provided even more telling evidence that the line between the two running disciplines has become blurred once and for all.

Neither Steve nor Cheryl strayed very far from the sport after their retirement from competitive running. Steve is an independent sales representative for ASICS, and Cheryl is a clothing designer, photojournalist, and the mastermind behind *prettysporty.com*. Thus, they have both been fortunate to have watched Shalane’s running career from close proximity. What amazes them most about their daughter’s career is how much more technologically advanced the sport has become over the years.

“We intuitively did what seemed right,” Steve says. “[But today] there’s science to everything, from her nutrition to her massage and recovery therapy. They’re all far superior to anything we did. Everything is just more plotted and configured now. It’s well planned.”

“I would have loved to have had the science, the knowledge, and the ability to train full time to see what I could have achieved,” Cheryl agrees. “The whole package is so different.”

Both also agree that it has been exhilarating to have a daughter follow so closely in their footsteps.

“You can have a second athletic career if you have the right kid,” Steve laughs. “The vicarious thrill is amazing. Just the process and the stuff she goes through . . . It’s something I can actually relate to.”

“I can hardly contain myself, because I’m so excited about what she’s doing,” says Cheryl. “What she is achieving is so fantastic. So many people don’t understand that, because they can’t relate. I’m her biggest supporter and cheerleader because I’ve tried it and I know how hard it is.”

The one thing that hasn’t changed with the passage of time is the love all three share for running. In fact, that passion, more than anything else, is surely the greatest gift Steve and Cheryl passed down to Shalane.

“I think it really makes it even more special that we can all share something in common,” Shalane says. “It’s more enriching. We have a common bond that many families don’t have.” 