

# *A Long Time Coming: Running Through the Women's Marathon Revolution*

BY JACQUELINE HANSEN

There is a snide remark that gets passed around between many of the running veterans when speaking of the new wave of runners. "They think running was invented the day their took their first run." Meaning, simply, that many of the new runners have no appreciation of the history of the sport. And considering the lack of emphasis on history in the public schools today, we should not be surprised.

Yet running is the sport/occupation that has allowed us to be here today. Our very ancient ancestors ran from the saber-tooth tiger to avoid being eaten, and ran down the wooly mammoth to get something to eat. And, as marathoners, we can trace our sport back more than 2500 years.

Yet one of the greatest revolutions in running is, relative to the marathon, virtually brand new. And that, of course, is the involvement of women in running. A revolution that regularly sees more females entered in some races than males.

In 2012 female runners heralded the 40th anniversary of the first time the Boston Marathon offered a female division and of Title IX. Races across the country held special celebrations where they lured some of the female pioneers out of the shadows so they could have a spotlight shined on them; other female pioneers were already front-and-center.

Over the past several years we have enjoyed a steady release of autobiographies by female running pioneers. Two that stand out are Kathrine Switzer's *Marathon Woman* and Lorraine Moller's *On the Wings of Mercury*. They are now joined by Jacqueline's *A Long Time Coming*, in which she runs us through her role and the role of her female running friends and the role of her husband Tom Sturak and guys like him in bringing women to parity with male runners.

Jacqueline had the honor of being the official starter of the 2013 Boston Marathon from a perch in Hopkinton. It was 40 years ago that she won the second Boston in which women were allowed to compete openly. She also has the distinction of being the first female in the world to run a marathon under 2:45 (1974) and under 2:40 (1975). She was also one of the political in-fighters who

pushed to get the women's marathon into the Olympics.

Her book was released around the time of the 2013 Boston Marathon.

The book roughly follows Jacqueline's career as a runner, from learning early on that she wasn't much at sprinting but that she could hold her own if the race was long enough to falling under the coaching influence of Hungarian expat Laszlo Tabori to helping found the International Runners Committee to push for longer distance in international events for female runners.

Some of the years, especially those in the mid- to late-'70s, are exhausting to read about. Jacqueline races from one race to the next, hardly stopping for air, eager to take in everything that was available at that time. She weaves stories about the other women in the sport who worked in conjunction with her to make positive changes, along the way the group of them formed their in bonds of battle, both in running competition and going up against the battlements of dug-in sports organizations both international and homegrown. Every woman who toes the starting line today owes it to herself, and to these dedicated pioneers, to read their history.

Especially memorable is Chapter 23, "Race Against Time," where now that the Women's Olympic Marathon will be included in the 1984 LA Olympics, Jacqueline is determined to make the US Olympic Women's Marathon Trials at Olympia, Washington, so she enters Boston and remembers nothing of how she finished, other than that she woke up in a hospital bed, where the first words out of her mouth were: "Did I finish? What was my time?"

One tough lady.

Currently Jacqueline is working with one of her long-running friends, Janet Heinonen, on *Our Longest Run: The History of Women's Long Distance Running*, which will detail the social and political dimensions behind women's long distance running, from ancient Greece through 1984.