THE JOY OF JOGGING

Rhonda Reuter

(1) If the day is particularly bright and my spirits unusually high, like a flash the rare and irresistible urge to go jogging comes over me. I am energized by the race of my pulse and the thought of fresh, clean air filling my lungs. I long to be outside working towards good health and a twenty-four inch waistline. I conjure up a mental image of a tall, slim blonde in a fashionable jogging suit followed by a hundred admiring eyes. But nowhere in my mental imagery do I picture the intense physical abuse I am about to encounter.

(2) First, I get dressed and ready for all the fun I am going to have. Although my purple velour sweat suit is years out of date and half-eaten by moths, I eagerly climb into it and jump in front of my full-length mirror for a figure appraisal. The sight is not remotely similar to the beautiful blonde in my mental picture. Already panting from the physical exertion, I scope out several problem areas that will benefit from the new exercise regimen that I will, from this day forward, faithfully execute. From the neck up, I am delightfully average, and from the knees down, I could be mistaken for Bo Derek. Everything in between needs not only exercise, but a miracle as well. I pray that nothing is so far gone that my new jogging program won't cure it. The sight of my poor, unfit body urges me to get outdoors and begin.

(3) Once dressed and aware of the extent of the task I am about to undertake, I race down the driveway and scan the horizon for a course to jog. This decision has to be made quickly, before my desire to exercise drains away. I hastily decide to take the sidewalk down through the apartment complex and over the path that runs through the trees alongside the creek. With this plan of action in mind, I stride towards the apartments a few blocks away.

(4) My stride is strong and purposeful for the first few yards. My arms pump with the rhythm of my steps. I seem to fly down the sidewalks, trees and houses a mere blur as I race past. I can feel the thump of my heart as it pumps the blood to my hard-working muscles. The cool breeze on my face wakes me up, and I am filled with vim and vigor. Everybody must look at me and think, "There jogs a true athlete." I marvel at the distance I can easily travel without panting. I am truly a wonder to behold.
Just past the apartment complex is where I begin my decline. My legs no longer carry me at the same speed as when I first started. My breath starts to grate and scratch in my throat. A stab of sharp pain begins to attack just under my ribs and forces me to clutch at my side as I run. My expensive running shoes no longer absorb the shock of the jolts from my steps, and my ankles take an incredible pounding that leaves them weak and wobbly. The first trickle of sweat begins its descent down my temple and tickles the side of my beet-red face. The sun is a fiery ball of malice burning the top of my head. How much farther can I go? Can my body stand the physical torture of the return trip?

I decide that in order to survive my jogging bout I am going to have to turn around and start back. Oh, the agony! There is not a trace left of my original enthusiasm. I look sheepishly away as I drag myself past the same people who had admired me only moments before when I had sped past. My breath coming in short, wheezy gasps, I clutch at my side and limp back homeward. I realize that I have succeeded in reducing a merely unfit body into that of a near corpse. My mind is almost a complete blank during the journey back, with one exception: the vision of one perfect glass of ice water has replaced the image of the beautiful blonde jogger I was to become.

I stagger up my front steps, gripping the bannister so as not to fall and seriously injure myself more than I already have. Once inside, I quickly trip to the refrigerator, pour a cold drink, and then fall backwards into the nearest chair, the room wheeling before my eyes. Although my condition has improved somewhat, I am still not quite over the agony of jogging—my face is still blotchy from the intense exertion and my heart has not yet begun to slow. I am, however, sufficiently recovered to reflect back upon my death-run. I have learned an important lesson, one that I am not soon likely to forget. The art of jogging, I have realized, can only be mastered by a true professional—a person already trim, fit, and used to physical abuse. People like me—sigh—are destined to be forever flabby.