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- Forums
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## Jacqueline Hansen: Runner, Pioneer, Hero.

 by PegLeg1983 

16 hours ago

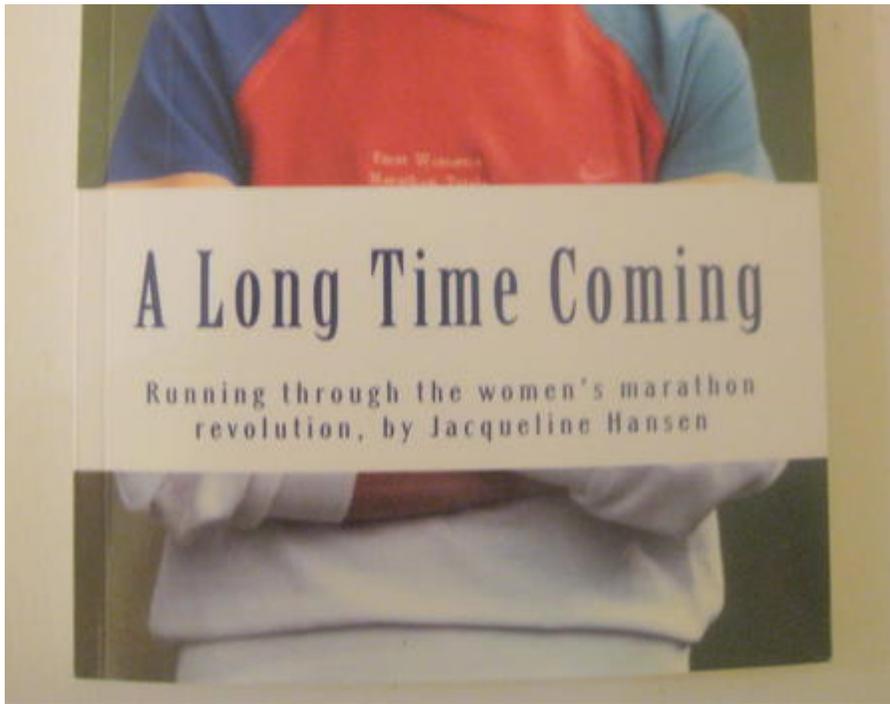
I was late to the running scene, so most of the running greats have only recently been introduced to me through books and media- and from hanging out with runners- in the last year or two.

Until last year, I had no idea who Steve Prefontaine, Roger Bannister, Frank Shorter, Katherine Switzer, Dick Beardsley, Grete Waitz-- you fill in the blank with your favorite runner-- were. In fact, it wasn't until shortly before the 2012 Olympics that I knew Galen, Mo, Meb, Shalane, and Kara even existed. 2012 was the first time I watched any Olympic running events. I also didn't know who first broke the 4:00 barrier in the mile until I read a book about it this summer. Seriously.

*Don't shoot me-- when you're illiterate about society except what you can get your hands on to read for the first 23 years of life (and my father heavily chaperoned what I could read; Reader's Digest and Time Magazine were considered too eye-opening for our household), it takes a LOT of time to catch up on politics, current events, music, movies, art, football, and yes, running. After all, I'm only "7 in world years..."*

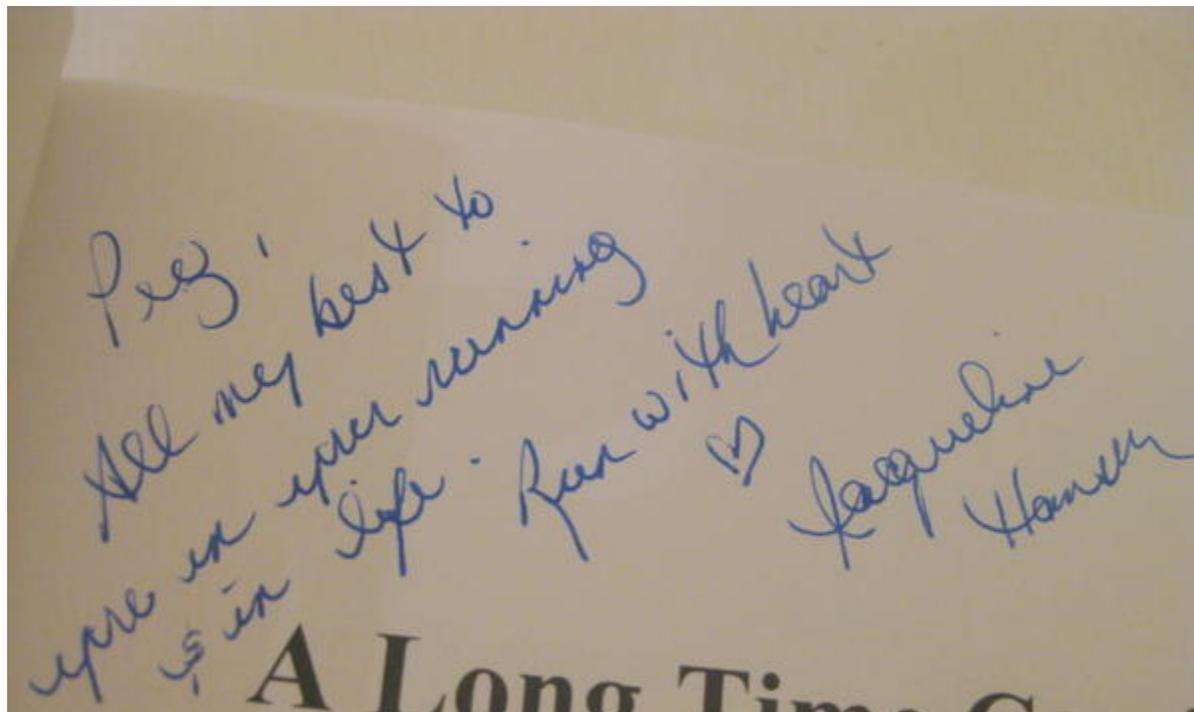
Friday night at the big house in Rehoboth, pre-race, Bangle took me aside and presented me with this:

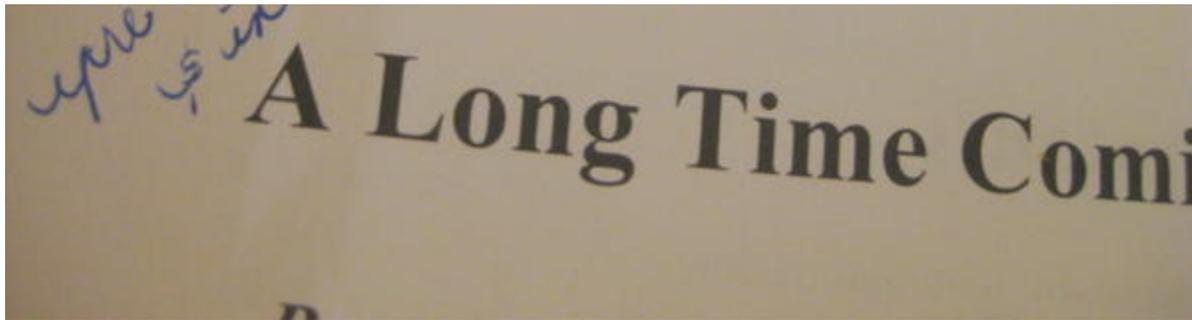




I remembered, when he mentioned it, a post he had on Facebook soon after Boston of this year. He was attending a local Boston memorial/vigil for runners, and happened to meet a running legend there, Jacqueline Hansen. He approached her, spoke with her, and became Facebook friends with her. She lives in LA!

Bangle can correct me on the details if I'm not getting this right, but as I understand it Mrs. Bangle procured a few of these books several weeks prior to Rehoboth. She then messaged Jacqueline and asked if she could meet her to have them signed. Jacqueline agreed, and they met over coffee. One of the copies was for Bangle, and another one was for Bangle to give to me. I'm assuming Mrs. Bangle told her why she's signing a book for a random person in Pennsylvania; Bangle coaching me through my debut marathon, etc? Jacqueline signed the books, and mine says this:





*Fast forward to Rehoboth Beach:* like I said, I knew nothing about this woman. Bangle gave me a quick run-down of her; not just a running legend, but one of the early crusaders for women's rights in the running arena. Of course, that struck close to my own life experiences-- which is, I guess, why he was giving me this specific book to commemorate my first marathon.

*I was pretty touched. To have Mrs. Bangle and Bangle do this for me...well, they're great and I love them both. Really, you guys rock.*

Very early on race morning the next day, after I'd been awake for over an hour... I grabbed the book, left Quadracool soundly sleeping and tiptoed down to the kitchen. I spend the next hour reading the first few chapters. I was immediately intrigued and impressed, and I thought about her frequently during my marathon. In a way, she helped inspire me enroute the finish line.

*When I got back home, I finished the book. And then I read it again. Bangle requested a report on the Loop, thus this bloop.*

Jacqueline Hansen. She is one of my new heroes; I cannot get enough of this woman's story. I've researched and read and looked at pictures and race stats and her training logs from the '70s (on her website), and am amazed over and over.

She started her career by running track in high school. She was good at it, but not the best on her team; her coach informed her she wasn't a sprinter. At that time the longest distance for high-school girls was a quarter mile (!!). She went on to run track and cross-country in college as well. She loved distance, so after organized workouts, Jacqueline would meet with her teammate and best friend to see how far they could run on their own.

Jacqueline credits much of her discipline and drive early in her career to her post-college coach, Laszlo Tabori, a "disciplinarian-style" coach who believed in intense workouts (Hansen, 2013, p. 26). In 1971, she spectated as a friend and teammate Cheryl Bridges (mother of Shalane Flanagan) set the women's world record at the Western Hemisphere marathon, in 2:49:40. Bridges did so "illegally", because the women's marathon distance was not yet recognized. Jacqueline set her sights on completing that distance.

One year later, Jacqueline ran the Western Hemisphere as her debut marathon, with her two longest training runs being only 10 and 14 miles. She won it- WON the first marathon she entered, in 3:15.

She called it a "slow" time, and her first thoughts upon finishing were "never again" (Hansen, 2013, p. 33, 34). But before the awards ceremony was complete, she was already planning her next marathon. From the running journal she faithfully kept is this excerpt:

*"Those last four miles are almost unbearable, particularly the last two. Up to 22, it seemed almost a relaxed seven-minute pace. Then the race began for four miles. And worth every sore muscle- a thousand times over."* (Hansen, 2013, p. 33)

(If that isn't the marathon in a nutshell, what is?)

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Jacqueline went on to win 12 of her first 15 marathons, including setting the women's marathon world record in 1974, with a 2:43:54. The following year, she ran the Nike-OTC in Eugene, OR, with another world record of 2:38:10. The latter was also the first ever sub-2:40 women's marathon time. In 1978, she ran the AAU National 50 Mile Championships in Santa Monica College, CA, *on a track!* Jacqueline not only placed first in 7:14:58 at the 50 mile event, but upon completion, broke 11 intermediate world records at varying distances.

*Jacqueline wasn't "just" a runner; she was a normal person, with a normal life. She married in 1977, and she gave birth to a son, in 1980. Two years after her son was born, she won the Catalina Marathon. In her memoir, you can tell that, although a disciplined runner, she also loved being a mother and was devoted to her son.*

Since she personally knew/knows women like Joan Benoit Samuelson, Grete Waitz, Nina Kuscsik, and Cheryl Bridges, facts about them and their races are sprinkled throughout the book as well. Jacqueline's dialogue with and description of these women never indicates that they thought themselves celebrities. They just did what they loved and let nothing stop them. Jacqueline herself is modest when writing about her accomplishments; while reading, you almost miss the magnitude of her races unless you pay attention to the numbers.

Above and beyond her running talent is what Jacqueline did for women in running. She fought for the marathon. By 1976, the Olympic games still offered no distance longer than 1500 meters. In 1984, thanks to the publicity garnered by Jacqueline and other women like her, the women's marathon was finally added to the Olympics Games. It was fitting that the 1984 Games were held in her hometown of Los Angeles, California.

The heartbreaker in all this? Had this event been included in the 1976 Olympics 8 years earlier- maybe even 4 years- she would most likely have taken the gold medal, since her 1974 and 1975 marathon times were both world records. When the Olympic Trials took place prior to the 1984 LA Games, she competed, having qualified for the Trials at the Boston Marathon with a 2:47. But, by then there were younger and faster women who edged her out, including one Joan Benoit Samuelson.

In her memoir, Jacqueline did not express a smidgen of bitterness over having narrowly missed out on representing her country at the Olympics because the distance was unavailable in her heyday. Instead, she channeled her influence to pave the way, not only for the marathon, but later for the addition of the women's 5,000 and 10,000 meter Olympic distances. She was repeatedly blacklisted and opposed by people in power who resented her campaign, and she describes a couple of those instances in her book.

Apart from her own ambitions, Jacqueline poured herself into advocating something she didn't even get to participate in- but she knew someone else would. She considered the 1984 Games a personal triumph, stating: "As I watched this dream unfold... it occurred to me that young girls all over the world were watching Joan...knowing they, too, could grow up to be Olympic champions if they wanted..." (Hansen, 2013, p. 156).

I'm getting choked up just typing that ^ quote. Gritty, passionate, humble, determined, selfless, hard-working... There's a new goal near the top of my bucket-list: *meet this amazing woman in person.*

Joan Benoit Samuelson says, in the foreword of A Long Time Coming: "With the first Olympic Marathon for women now 30 years past, I am sometimes referred to as a 'pioneer' for having won that gold medal... But (I) gently point out... that our inaugural race was made possible by the efforts... of earlier women marathoners. They broke down the barriers of intolerance and indifference, starting long before

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In some way, I feel like I can relate to Jacqueline- NOT to her accomplishments or ability- *let's be real, I'm a mortal middle-of-the-pack runner and she's won marathons and set world records.* I'm not trying to compare myself to her- *please, never.*

But I can relate to the way she felt when trying to make her mark on the running world, and kept being tripped up by social roadblocks and opposed by naysayers. Much more monumental for her, of course; the fact that she was female was keeping her from racing a marathon in the Olympics when she could have *won*. For me, it was simply about being female as well as being in a culture that forbade participation in public sports, like signing up for a local 5k. But for both Jacqueline and I, that "*You Can't*" knowledge frustrated, angered... and maybe in some ways, fueled?

Because when you're asked "why" ....?

*Why buck the norm?*

*Why push for change?*

*Why not just let it go?*

*Why challenge tradition?*

*Why want something few others want?*

*Why be different?*

...you want to scream this to the world:

**Because I love to run. BECAUSE I AM A PERSON!!!!**

Not just female. Not just of a certain faith or ethnic group or color. But because you're alive... and strong... and a human being.

Jacqueline Hansen was gifted; she could run fast, and she could run far. She wanted to be able to run more than a mile; heck, she wanted to run 26... or 50! And she wanted every other woman on the planet to have that same right.

Because of Hansen and the other women-pioneers of her time, we girls from all over the world get to put on those pretty shorts or that running skirt... the Brooks shirt with the women's cut... the hot pink running shoes... and we get to go out there and compete on the very same turf as the guys. We can register for any distance we please. We are respected; we are never asked to leave based on our gender or skin color or faith. We get to represent our country at the Olympics, we get to break the tape in a win at a local marathon, we get AG awards, we set personal bests, we qualify for Boston, and we get a medal for finishing 26.2.

We are seen, not just as females, as PEOPLE. People who run. And we'd better not take that for granted.







