

Running from embarrassment

By [Tim Graves](#)

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Costumed in a kelly green tracksuit with yellow stripes down each leg and arm, I left our tiny apartment for a run. I must've been a sight! I didn't get into running consistently in college despite that green polyester jogging suit.

My feelings of conspicuousness coupled with the memories of public school gym classes led me to abandon running in a few weeks. I associated exercise with being targeted, taunted, and ridiculed.

Running was a punishment in junior high school.

In my thirties and forties I dabbled in running, never getting serious. Still, I couldn't help myself in my pre-dawn walks, often shifting to short runs. Because no one could see me, I was free to move my body. Those adolescent feelings of negative self-image die hard. Today, the taunting of my poor athletic skills and my husky childhood body still lurk within my psyche.

In the last few years, as my running became frequent and regular, I've begun to identify as a runner. That identity is qualitatively different than previously.

My aging body is certainly not qualitatively more graceful or attractive. You will not see me on the cover of *Runners World*. I am, however, healthier and more comfortable in my own skin. Major surgery coupled with the natural aging process has changed my mind and spirit. I care less about what others think.

I am healthier and happier because I run.

Re-starting this kind of intensive activity in your fifties can and did lead to a few injuries. I listened to my body. They were minor and I recovered well. As I set personal goals, I challenge myself but am respectful of my limits. Despite craving the daily endorphin fix, I've learned my body cannot handle running more often than every 36 to 48 hours.

I choose to learn from the experiences of others, but I focus on health and self-care rather than anything close to competition. Maybe that's why I do not participate in group running events. Others say they are about personal challenge, not competition. I have no reason to mistrust other runners but for now races do not appeal to me.

Runs are physical and spiritual journeys that mirror life. Some days I meet goals and challenges. Other days I struggle and run slower or not as far as I'd hoped. Some days I just want to go home.

Running is embracing the *imago dei* within myself. Created in God's image, I have nothing to be embarrassed about with the limits and skills of my body. My mind, body, and spirit are all facets of who I am.

And so I run. I sweat too much, my fat jiggles with each stride, and maybe I look a sight! This is me, as beloved by the Divine as the fittest athlete. But run I must because it heals past hurts, strengthens me in the present, and fortifies hope for the future.

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