

# It's What We Do

For pain or for fun?

by *stephanie clausen*

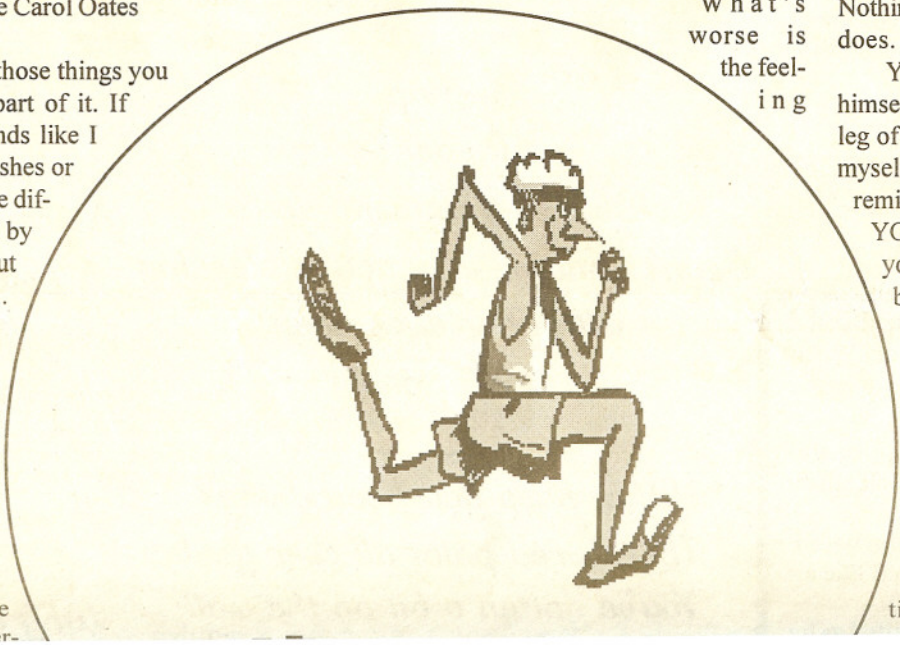


"Running! If there's any activity happier, more exhilarating, more nourishing to the imagination, I can't think of what it might be."-Joyce Carol Oates

keep on running. You become hooked, and can't imagine what your life was like before you took that first step.

I'm addicted to running. It's one of those things you can't understand unless you're a part of it. If you're not a runner, it probably sounds like I just said that I was addicted to car crashes or taking finals. But running hides a whole different aspect of itself that is only seen by the runners themselves. It's true: we put ourselves through hell and back. But, it's this other side that causes us to think we enjoyed the trip.

It was a case of temporary insanity that made me go to that first day of cross country my freshman year. I staggered through the not-even-3-mile run, barely making it back through the parking lot. Yet I returned the next day, and the day after. Remembering this, I wonder what made me show up that first day. Other athletes per-



What's worse is the feeling

legs, and long to be adorning your worn running shoes, showing off your white thighs as you run alongside. Nothing draws you back time and time again like running does.

Yet even the most addicted runner sometimes asks himself incredulously as he stumbles through the final leg of a difficult race, "Why do I do this? Why do I put myself through this?" It only takes a fellow runner to remind him: because you love it. This is what you do. YOU ARE a runner. You don't just run: this is who you are. It's what you'll always be, once you've begun.

And then, you remind yourself why you do it: it's for the long workouts in the rain; it's for the sound of the gun as you expectantly spring forth from the starting line drawn in the dirt; it's for the feeling of elation you get when you realize you've beaten your own best time. Each runner has his own reasons, but everyone can relate to their fellow runners. We all have a memory of that special, exhausting run that draws us back time and time again, hoping to recreate it. But we can never



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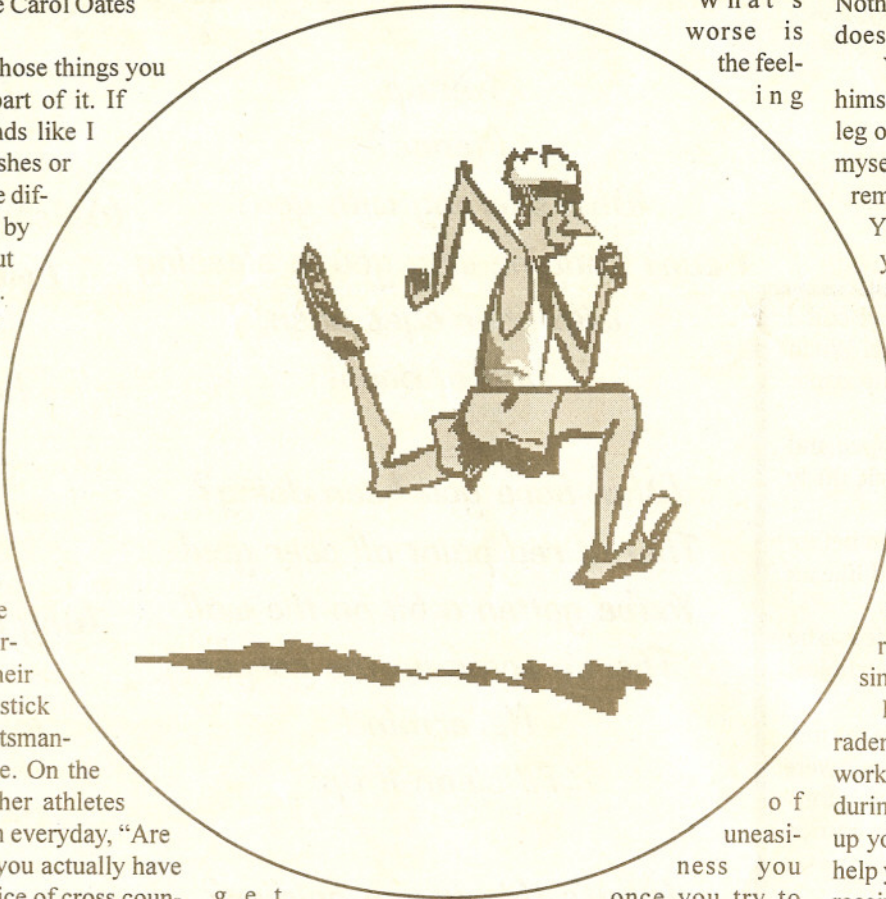
I'm addicted to running. It's one of those things you can't understand unless you're a part of it. If you're not a runner, it probably sounds like I just said that I was addicted to car crashes or taking finals. But running hides a whole different aspect of itself that is only seen by the runners themselves. It's true: we put ourselves through hell and back. But, it's this other side that causes us to think we enjoyed the trip.

It was a case of temporary insanity that made me go to that first day of cross country my freshman year. I staggered through the not-even-3-mile run, barely making it back through the parking lot. Yet I returned the next day, and the day after. Remembering this, I wonder what made me show up that first day. Other athletes perhaps wonder the same thing about their own painful sport. To some level, we stick with it for the same reasons- the sportsmanship, the competition, to stay in shape. On the other hand, the majority of those other athletes don't have skeptical peers asking them everyday, "Are you crazy? I could never do that. Do you actually have fun?" But I've never regretted my choice of cross country since that first run.

There's something about running you can't quite put into words: once you get into it, you can't possibly stop. Some force ties an invisible string around your waist and drags you along, giving you no choice but to

keep on running. You become hooked, and can't imagine

what your life was like before you took that first step. What's worse is the feeling



get once you try to stop. Whether it's by necessity, like an injury, or choice, quitting running leaves you with an emptiness you didn't know existed before you began. Driving by, you see a runner, with his characteristic short shorts and long muscular runner's legs. You look down at your own

legs, and long to be adorning your worn running shoes, showing off your white thighs as you run alongside. Nothing draws you back time and time again like running does.

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But more than all these things, you run for the camaraderie and the relationships that develop out of each workout, each race. It's the cheering of other runners during your toughest moments of a race and the thumbs up you get from an opponent as you pass them by that help you climb the next hill. It's the congratulations you receive after doing well, and even after doing not so well, that erases any memory of the pain. We run for the mutual understanding we runners have that we're a class of athletes separate from all the rest. And that's okay being different-because we're runners. That's what we do. (V)

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