

The Shallow End Of The Gene Pool

by John Farrow

This wasn't running as he had known it. The effort was there, yes, and the muscles were moving. Not quite running out on the road, but it wasn't bad. *Splish, splash, I was taking a bath . . .* Got to maintain form – not let the feet touch the bottom – *Sheesh, a minute and a half to go 25 yards.* And the flotation belt was crushing the air out of his lungs.

Now he had time to reflect on the past few months: new running shoes - \$118; air fare and hotel - \$988; entry fee - \$50; first marathon experience - clueless.

Of course, there had also been all those races getting ready for the Big One. Texas and California, Kansas City and Chicago. Sometimes both Saturdays and Sundays. He even got to run with some old friends way down South.

Yes sir, he'd tell himself, he hadn't aged a day since he started running back in the '70s. Veritable Fountain of Youth, he was.

A check back through the training logs of a few years ago and he was certain he could beat those times. Why, some of those were run when he hadn't even been training. He knew all it would take was to build up his base mileage and then head to the track.

The leg speed still felt the same even if his watch occasionally seemed a little slow, and the youthful firmness was still there, somewhere, at least when he held in his gut. Even had a full head of hair -- well, most of it. And the youthful immaturity -- maybe even a bit of a regression on that one.

The heart, too -- still as strong as ever. Runners have the circulatory system of people half their age, he knew. And therein perhaps lay part of the problem.

Old? Him? Get real! But it all hit home when he learned his daughter was studying about the Kennedy assassination in history class. That wasn't history to him. He remembered President Kennedy urging Americans to get in better shape and challenged them to walk 50 miles. Last year he *ran* a 50-miler and *loved* it!

Not only did he love to run, he loved to run fast. Striding smoothly across the foothill trails or gliding along the river road at dusk made him feel free and alive, without a care in the world. And races just brought back the old competitive juices. He would

laugh out loud when boys less than half his age sprinted to try and catch him at the finish line.

Signs? Oh, there had been signs a-plenty. One log entry read "8 x 400 < 85" – quarters under 85 seconds; 5:40 miles. It was the next line that caught his eye: "Left Achilles hurt a little after the last one." *Achilles hurt* – he would write that a lot in the coming months.

He had a good doctor – one who had run marathons in New York and Chicago, the La Luz Trail dozens of times. One who didn't tell him to stop running with every little twinge of pain. This time, his doctor told him to think about golf. His doctor was also good at applying pure Aristotlean logic – that the ideal state of man or matter was to be at rest.

But Doc, you don't understand! I have races to run and PRs to set! But the doctor just smiled wanly and slowly shook his head. *They are all alike,* he must have been saying to himself. A brain that would have puzzled Darwin.

Most species have used the evolutionary process to gradually increase their chances of survival. The human race? Consider the following:

Women in Hong Kong recently refused to leave a burning office tower until they finished doing their nails.

Palestinian terrorists who were not living on Zionist time forgot to check their watches and had their car bombs detonate while they were driving to the target.

A man in Germany killed himself by driving his car into a bridge pier while watching a solar eclipse through special viewers that totally obscured everything except the sun.

Thieves tried to rob a gun shop with knives, only to be shot to death by the owner.

The stupidity of it all boggles the mind. But at least their genes won't be around to pollute the human gene pool any more.

As he finished yet another lap of water running, he knew that this was going to be a breakthrough year, one where he would finally realize his potential. And if not this year, without a doubt it would be the next. With a little work on his short irons and those 6-foot putts, he knew he could break par.

If you see this man, humor him. He is quite harmless, really. Just don't wake him up. □

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