

## Forever Young

At age 70, Ida Mintz hit a wall. She was losing her zest for life. She looked around and saw that many of her friends were in ill health, and other friends had died. She brooded about her own life. "What have I contributed?" she asked herself.

This was not like Ida. She'd always had an optimistic nature, a resiliency forged in a difficult childhood. She'd grown up in Poland in the early 1900s during a period when pogroms were terrorizing Jewish communities. Instead of playing and going to school like other children, Ida spent most of her time hiding in an attic. While other kids were learning how to run and jump, Ida learned how to keep quiet.

In her teens Ida immigrated to America. Like many immigrants she worked hard to get by. She later met Lee Sol Mintz. They married and raised three children.

Long before it became fashionable, Ida established good health habits in her family, starting with herself. "I noticed friends getting heavy, and I knew this wasn't good." Her doctor gave her two pieces of advice she never forgot: "Eat to live; don't live to eat." And—"Exercise." Ida became a "closet exerciser." Every day for an hour she would retreat to her closet where she would stretch and do exercises. She had followed this routine for years.

But now, at the onset of old age, Ida grew discouraged, plagued with doubts about her self-worth.

It was then that her son Alan, a doctor and an avid runner, thought about the psychological benefits of running. He suggested that a little running might do his mother good. "Everyone thought he was crazy," his wife Gloria recalled. Everyone, except Ida. "Why not try?" she thought.

There was one problem. As a child who had spent so much time in an attic, Ida had never learned how to run. She literally had to be taught.

But Ida was a quick study. Her strides, so ungainly at first, slowly attained rhythm. Eventually she was able to jog a half mile. "That's not too hard," she thought. Her years of exercise had given her stamina. She worked up to three miles and then to five, and then she began entering 10K races. Her depression vanished. She found she loved to run.

By 1980, the running boom had hit, and people were flocking to marathons. One day Alan posed the question, "Mother, don't you want to try one?" So in September that year Ida, age 74, tackled the Chicago Marathon, running with her son, her daughter-in-law, and her grandson Ari—three generations of Mintzes. At the finish line her husband Lee greeted her with roses, and a crowd asked for autographs. Ida was surprised at how easy the race had been. She had run the marathon in 4 hours, 48 minutes, and 35 seconds, setting the world record for her age.

Now she was in headlines and in demand for interviews. She was called the "Galloping Grandma" and the "Recycled Teenager." Letters came in from around the world. People wrote, "If you can do it, so can I."

Ida reveled in the life of the runner. She rose before sunrise to do her customary hour of exercises, always finishing the hour with 100 sit-ups. Then it was time for her run. Usually she ran 5 to 6 miles, about 40 miles a week, but in the fall as the marathon approached, she built up to 70 miles a week. "If I miss a day, I feel guilty."

Ida ran 5K and 10K races, raising hundreds of dollars for charities by getting people to pledge money for her miles. And over the next ten years she ran 9 more marathons and set 5 more world age records.

The races weren't all easy. In the '84 Chicago Marathon with two miles left in the race, she slipped as someone handed her a drink. She fell to the ground and hit her face. When she got up, she realized her mouth was bleeding. "But I decided to finish. When I make up my mind to do it, I do it."

That perseverance continued even when Ida was diagnosed with cancer at age 85. She continued to walk each day until it was no longer possible. Shortly before she died, Ida summoned the strength to get up from her wheelchair to dance with her grandson Jeff at his wedding.

Ida had once asked, "What have I contributed?" Among her many gifts, to this day, letters still arrive at the Mintz home saying, "I ran with Ida." And Netanya Mintz, inspired by her great grandmother, decided that she too would find

the athlete inside her. She became one of the top speed skaters in the U.S. When asked, she would say, "I'm doing this because I remember what Nana accomplished."

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