

## **Respectable is a Feeling, Not a Finish Time: Chasing Ghosts and the Runner in the Red**

By: Laura McDonell

The Boston Marathon is more than a race; it is history, legacy, and a dream. Growing up, I watched gymnast Nadia Comaneci and dreamed of the Olympics. As a runner, Boston became that dream and the only "valid" receipt for a lifetime of miles.

For years, I viewed my lack of a qualifying time as a failure stamped onto my identity. With 40 marathons finished and zero jackets, I felt like a trespasser in my own sport. I was chasing ghosts, trying to catch the runner in the red, or that faster, "legitimate" version of me. I believed if I could just catch her in the distance, I would finally belong.

In 2024, my husband ran The Boston Marathon. While I was proud of his hard work, the weekend was a lesson in humility. Surrounded by the "Boston Everything" culture, I felt a nagging irritation. It was a mirror. I was chasing a requirement for respect, and in that pursuit, I had traded my joy. I was so busy staring at the runner in the red that I missed my own race.

Kathrine Switzer reminds us that success isn't about the clock; it's about defying logic. She stayed on the course when the world tried to pull her off. That is Grit, or the refusal to let your dream be grounded by a qualifying standard. In every stride, there is a moment when both feet leave the ground. You are flying. I realize that keeping a dream alive is not only about the landing; it's about the courage to get to the runway, takeoff and stay in the air.

I run to connect with God, make sense of the world, and show my kids how to dream without limits. Resilience is defying the data and realizing "respectable" is a feeling, not a finish time. I may never wear the Boston sleeve or catch the runner in the red, but I am not looking for a ghost in the distance. I show up. I run. I fly.