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http://www.fltimes.com/opinion/cheers-for-no-marathoner-switzer-revolutionized-running-for-women/article_2c824458-27b8-11e7-aedf-33abf5b38eb3.html

261 cheers for No. 261: Marathoner Switzer revolutionized running for women

By Betty Bayer Special to the Times Apr 23, 2017



Kevin Colton

There are likely more than 261 ways to recognize and say thanks to Kathrine Switzer, the first woman to register and run in the Boston Marathon in 1967.

Her bib number 261 will long reign as a sign of revolutionizing the world of running and sports for women. On crossing the finish line of that renowned 26-mile and 385-yard run, Switzer says she knew then she would devote her life to women and running. At age 70, she celebrated a repeat run of the Boston Marathon crossing the finish line very near to her original time. Over those 50 intervening years she has paved many a marathon-length road to freedom for women in sports and immeasurable miles of inspiration. Mention Switzer's name to a coach, athlete or runner (of any age) and be ready for the onrush of heartfelt accounts of the revolutionary power of running.

No other moment calls Switzer's revolutionary power to mind as readily as that now iconic photograph of a 1967 race official trying to tear away her bib number and to remove her from the race. Its continual global circulation makes it one of the "world's most enduring photos of [the] women's rights movement," says Switzer. Indeed. Today, the photograph, as Switzer's historic run, evokes a larger and longer women's rights history, so much so it may have been what prompted one person to name Switzer the Susan B. Anthony of running. One could argue that similarities in facing obstacles and being denied a position in public events along with their perseverance and going strong over long distances makes for a profound resonance between Switzer in 1967 and Anthony in 1872 (the year she voted, and then was arrested two weeks later).

There is another equally significant but less noted epoch-making connection between the two, however. That's the history of the women's movement and women's physical mobility — call it the women's rights locomotion history or a history of women's freedoms growing with freeing women's physical movement. For Switzer it is women's running and for Anthony it was the bicycle. What running and bicycling direct us to is a longer chain of historical significance in women's "freedom and self-reliance," as Anthony put it. The bicycle, she posed, offered more to "emancipate women than anything else in the world."

She was not alone in seeing in the power of a new form of transportation new avenues for women's mobility. Elizabeth Cady Stanton too wrote of how the bicycle would "inspire women with more courage, self-respect, self-reliance ..." Frances Willard claimed "a whole philosophy of life in the wooing and the winning of my bicycle." If the bicycle spurred on the new woman, the new woman likewise egged on women to ride; each prodding the other in the larger effort to advance women's rights and enfranchisement in the 19th century.

So, it can be said for women and running, as Switzer reminded and reminds us in the 20th and 21st centuries. This history too is about more than being the first woman to officially complete the Boston Marathon, though that was history-making news in itself. It is also about how that moment undid assumptions about who women

are and what we might become, throwing open the archives of history for all of us to think once more about how we tell the history of women, gender and possibilities in the world.

These are precisely the reasons Kathrine Switzer — as the others mentioned here — was inducted into National Women's Hall of Fame. Her life's run from that historic moment has been all about women around the globe putting on their runners and with each mile run changing women's futures. That's what groundbreaking moments do — they toss old orders of meanings and arrangement up in the air allowing them to assume new patterns and arrangements. Kathrine Switzer did this in 1967 when, at 20 years old, she completed the race in 4 hours and 20 minutes and again just days ago when, at 70, she completed the race in 4:44:31. Today, millions of women run marathons, begin running at any age, and understand the power of running for its personal and larger — cultural, political and economic — meaning in women's history of freedom and emancipation.

261 cheers to #261 whose marathon number while officially now retired nevertheless finds new life in Switzer's organization 261 Fearless — a global community of runners, joggers and walkers building global connections of strength and courage.