

The Running Artist



by Betty Dietrich

When asked why she started running, Susan Hall gives credit to her friend, Stephanie.

"She was the one who convinced me, in the fall of 2009, to give running a try" Susan stated. "I was walking 5 miles a day, but truly never dreamed that I could ever run again".

Initially, Susan could only run 3 minutes on the treadmill, but she kept at it. Three minutes turned into a third of a mile, then 3 miles, then a total of 300 miles.

Her first race was in 2010 and she has run over 60 races since then.

"It shows the difference that friends can make when we encourage and support each other." Susan said. "It also shows that if we start slow, and keep pushing ourselves, we can travel to places we never dreamed possible."

In her career as an artist, Susan has traveled to 'places' in her dreams that most of us could not even imagine.

In 1979, She began a career as a

medical illustrator. Standing for 8 to 10 hours in an operating room, Susan used her skills to document over 6500 congenital heart surgeries. Her illustrations have been published in more than 30 textbooks and medical journals.

"That was a time that was both emotionally and physically so challenging", Susan recalled. "Being there for the families... giving them understanding in a time of real crisis" was the reward.

Susan has also had a second career as an encaustic artist. One that is flourishing! Encaustic, meaning "burned in", is an ancient technique which originated in Egypt over 2000 years ago.

Using hot beeswax and pigments applied in layers on a wooden board, Susan uses a propane torch to "paint with fire". Nature provides the source of her inspiration.

Susan was one of only 40 artists invited to the 2009 International Encaustic Works held in New York. She recently had simultaneous showings of her work at two prestigious galleries—one in Seattle and one in Sun Valley.

If you Google search "Susan Russell Hall", you will need to allow plenty of time to read about this remarkable woman.

Yet with all the accolades she has received as an artist, Susan is unabashedly proud and joyful about the accomplishments she has enjoyed as a newbie runner.

She chuckles when asked about her early sports interests. "Zero!" She laughs. "The last person chosen on the volleyball team. I was this little, skinny kid, you know. My focus was on my artwork."

She was born in Seattle and, with the exception of about 2 years, grew up mostly in the Bellevue area.

Susan began running a little bit when she was in her twenties. She was putting in long hours working at the hospital and needed an outlet for the stress.

She ran at a slow pace and did a couple of races but gave it up in her thirties when she began having some tenderness in her hips and knees.

She had an arthroscopy of her knee. "I can't do this anymore." Susan thought. "I wound up walking 5 miles a day".

She was in her early 50's when her friend Stephanie convinced her to give running another try.

Her first race was in 2010. It was the "You Knock My Socks Off 4 Miler" in Gig Harbor. A friend told her it was flat. "I was completely freaked out", Susan laughed. "This was NOT flat! I thought I was going to die."

A pulled tendon at the St. Patrick's Day race a month later, motivated Susan to seek a sports therapist. He advised her to get off the treadmill and pound the pavement. It turned out to be excellent advice, strengthening her joints and building ankle stability.

Since then, Susan has been injury free. In her 50's, she is running faster, training longer, and racing at every opportunity. "My knees and hips feel great." Susan marvels. "It's crazy! There's nothing that hurts!"

Susan attributes a great deal of her conditioning to her decision to work with a personal trainer, Will Baldyga. He has helped her build up her arms and back and worked on balance and strength training.

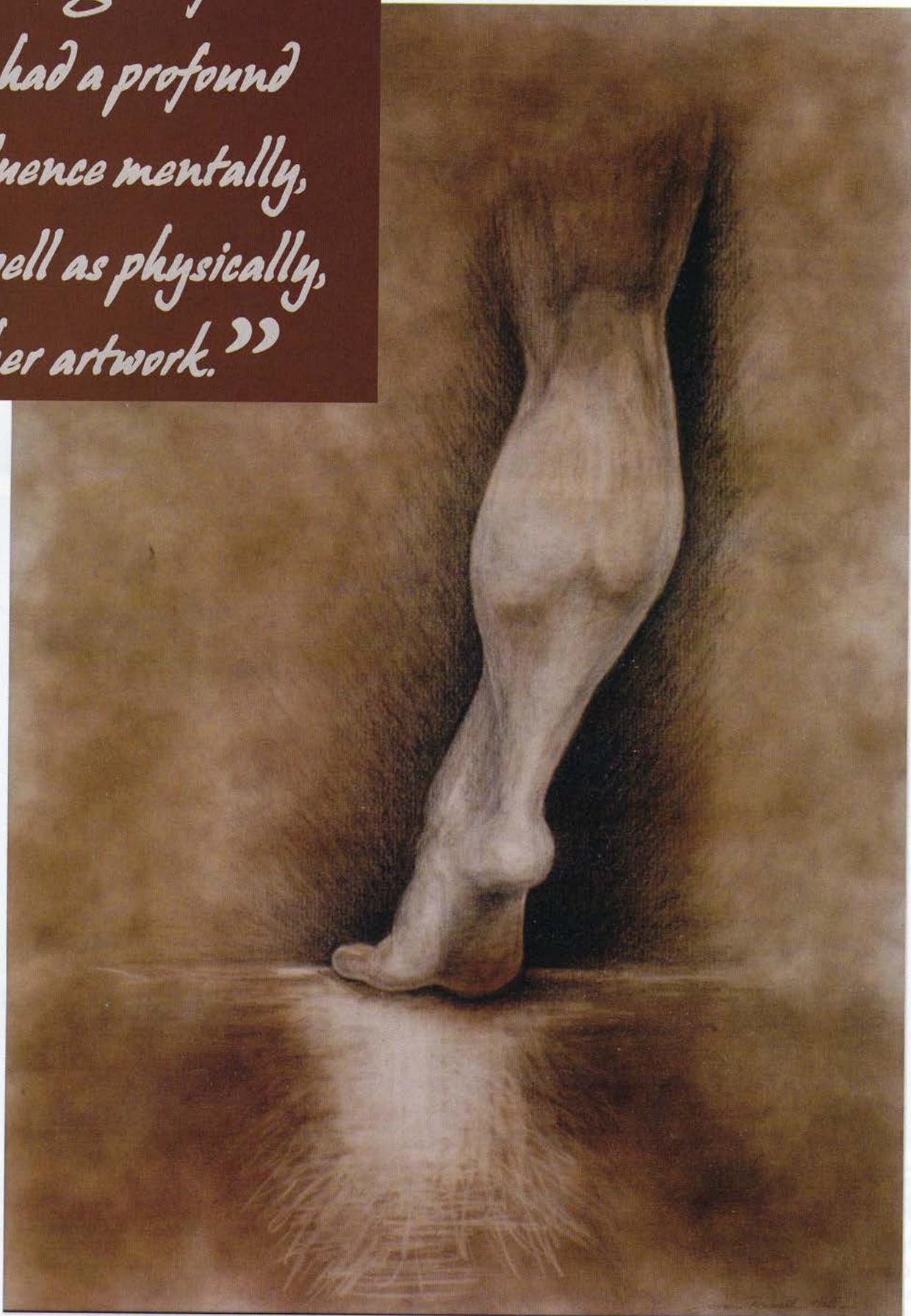
"We work with weights." Susan pointed out. "He's had me even working on the chin up bar, doing push ups, and a lot of lunges for knees and quads."

"I think you don't realize how much you use your back sometimes when you run" she continued. "It's kept me injury proof."

Another very important benefit of this strength training, is how it has impacted her work as an artist. "My work is really, really

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“Grounding” - Susan Hall

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heavy...all those big paintings." Susan explained. "Now I can lift everything."

Running itself has had a profound influence mentally, as well as physically, on her artwork. Susan feels "It is the most important thing I do. It gives me clear, creative thinking time. It's just invaluable!"

She says she is able to quiet her mind from the "conundrums of the studio". She concentrates on watching her form, paying attention to her surroundings and breathing.

Susan believes this translates to life itself. "Once you do that in life, you can get through anything".

Posted on Susan's bulletin board are these reminders which she strives to incorporate in her work and running: You only fail when you don't try! If your dreams aren't worth fighting for, they aren't worth having. Gratitude, mindful awareness, and unlimited possibilities.

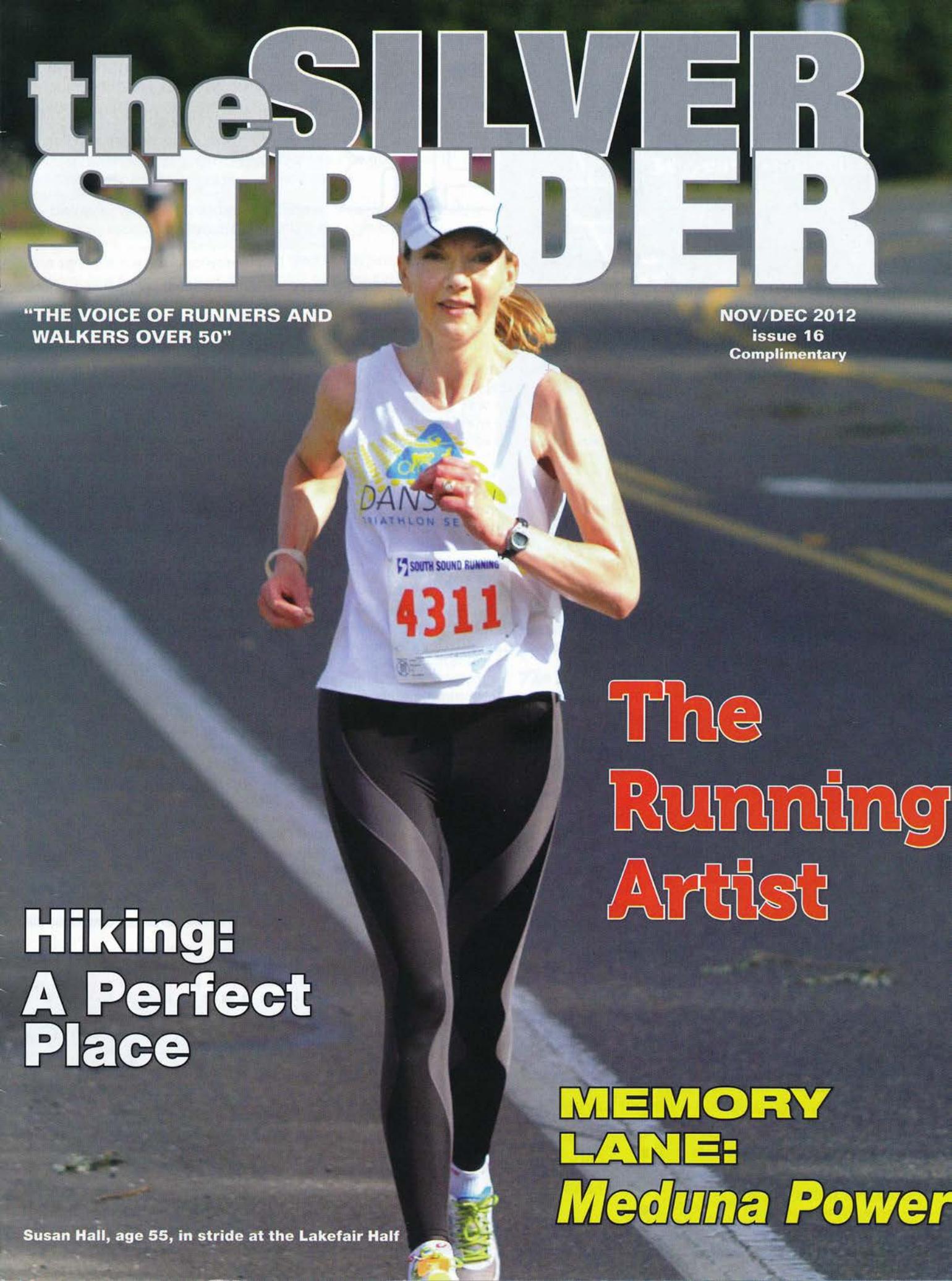
Other than time spent with her trainer and a Sunday morning running group, Susan prefers to do most of her training runs alone on a ten mile course at Chambers Bay. This keeps her in shape for half marathons - her favorite distance.

The finishers medals she earned from more than a dozen half marathons are proudly on display in her office, along with her 2011-2012 Silver Strider Grand Prix Series trophy. "The Silver Strider trophy meant a lot to me" Susan said. "I've never had a trophy in my life. It's up there to remind me that I can do anything."



"Timeless Devotion" - Susan Hall

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Hiking: A Perfect Place

MEMORY LANE: *Meduna Power*

Susan Hall, age 55, in stride at the Lakefair Half