
FIRST PERSON ONLINE: “Energizer Banker” keeps on going

…and going, as he runs more than 32 years straight

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Thad Childs has run 87,000-plus miles, through illness and bad weather, keeping a runner’s log on bank calendars.

By Steve Cocheo, executive editor

When Georgia banker Thad Childs says he’s “had a good run,” he means it literally and figuratively.

Childs, 64, came from a Georgia community-banking family. Despite that, after four years in the Navy, he took a job managing a textile plant. Divorce gave him custody of his two-year-old son and a determination to find a steadier schedule than the 70-hours-a-week factory position was providing. He decided to take a job at a bank after all, and has been a banker ever since.

Looking for exercise that would go with being a single father, he pushed his son’s stroller to the high school track, left it in the center of the field, and did laps—never losing sight of his son. Inspired by Jim Fixx’s Complete Book of Running, Childs found running habit-forming, and built his schedule around a run-daycare-work routine.

Many bankers run. But what became most remarkable was that, since March 5, 1979, Childs has been running every day. He hasn’t stopped for illness, injury, work, travel, or any other reason causing so many others to stumble.

He’s run more than 87,000 miles over more than 32 years. Every day’s run of “the streak” has been recorded in bank calendars. “Whatever bank I was working at, that was my log for the year,” says Childs.

Thad Childs collects bank calendars. Not out of nostalgia—when he first began running he used his bank's free calendar as his running log. This became a habit, so now he has a record not only of his running streak, but of his various bank employers.

What makes a "First Person" story?

This profile is an expanded version of the story that appeared in the December 2011 ABA Banking Journal "First Person" column.

How do we decide who makes the grade? It's hard to say, it just hits you. But typically the banker has accomplished something, like climbing Mount Kilimanjaro; does something as a hobby or second vocation, like collecting tractors or used military vehicles; volunteers in an unusual or interesting way … something that sets them apart.

If you'd like to suggest someone for First Person, please email Executive Editor Steve Cocheo. We can't promise they'll wind up in the magazine, but we'll consider the suggestion and get back to you.

His basic routine: Rise at 4:45 a.m., drink coffee, and run for an hour, "no matter what." Later he breakfasts on a glass of Slim-Fast. "It's not to lose weight," says the 150-pound Childs. "I just love Slim-Fast."

He shrugs off concerns about rain, cold, or heat. In fact, on one run, the early morning crowd at the local Hardee's saw him caught in the fringe of a tornado, hanging onto a telephone pole guy wire while his legs streamed like a flag. Childs takes it all in stride. He's run with flu, sore joints, and more. "I've been blessed not to have things break or to have been in a bad accident," he says, so the streak continues.

In his younger days, Childs ran in three Boston Marathons and even in some ultra-marathons. While travelling,

he's run up and down Pike's Peak and along the rim of the Grand Canyon.

But Childs' preference remains his solo daily run. As he exercises his body, he exercises his mind, planning for what lies ahead. "When you are moving, even walking," says Childs, "your thinking process improves."

All through "the streak," Childs has been a banker. For much of his career, it was with the family's Bank of Gray, which grew well for years, but was sold in time. The acquiring bank failed in 2009. It was picked up by \$2.8 billion-assets State Bank and Trust Co., Macon, where Childs, now executive vice-president, manages 14 branches.

Childs' streak has taken him the equivalent of 3.5 times around the world, and he's going strong. Has he considered contacting Guinness World Records? "Never have," he says. "If I hit 40 years at it, I might start looking into that."

Q&A: Thad Childs and how to run a streak

Where the rubber—and feet—meet the road

Q. Childs must go through an awful lot of sneakers.

A. Childs says he has typically bought a new pair about every 500 miles. Asics is his brand of choice. But he's not buying as many anymore.

Q. Why not?

A. Because, more and more, he's gone to running barefoot.

That's right, barefoot, sometimes, or nearly so, other times, wearing "gloves" of a sort made for runners' feet. This is the "minimal movement" of running, something Childs recently became interested in. He says it can take a while for the feet to acclimate to terrain—everything from asphalt to woodland

trails—but this back-to-basics approach appeals to him. He says the feel of a run this naturalistic way results in a completely different experience.

Q. Childs's story has inspired me to get off the couch. How should I start?

A. Childs told ABA BJ that too many beginners think running is all about, well, running.

That's a good way to start out passionate and end up giving it up, he warns.

Until you've built yourself up, you won't be able to maintain a "run" only at speed. You'll likely tough it out for a week and then decide you don't really enjoy pain enough to continue.

Instead, Childs suggests choosing your distance, and then running for a period, then walking for a period, switching back and forth. You keep moving, but use the walking phases to catch up with yourself.

"I call this the 'Boy Scout' pace," says Childs, and he says that if you begin this way, "before too long it will all come together for you."

Q. Doesn't Childs ever decide to bag the outdoors and go on a treadmill?

A. Nope.

"I just don't like treadmills," says Childs. He says treadmill running feels unnatural and just isn't enjoyable.

"I like to be outdoors," says Childs.