

Having fallen in love with Seoul's "Running Paradise" of the Han River and Namsan, This Time It's CheongGyeCheon.

Cindy Heckerl (American housewife)

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She's an American housewife in her early 40's with sons who are 15 and 12 and a 9-year-old daughter, but it's hard to believe from her slender and flexible shape. She took her seat for our interview in a blue T-shirt and miniskirt, and greeted me with "annyeonghaseyo" (How are you?) in clear Korean pronunciation.

She is now in her 9th year of life in Korea, where her husband Bob works as a teacher at a Yongsan foreign

elementary school. She takes care of her three children while also working sometimes as a part time substitute teacher at the foreign school and she also volunteers as a children's soccer and basketball coach on the Yongsan 8th Army base.

"Since we've lived in Korea for a long time now, it seems like home. My youngest child, my daughter Addie, was born here. My children really like life in Korea so I think we'll live here for a long time to come."

While getting together as usual with some Yongsan area American and Korean friends for marathon training, she heard about the CheongGyeCheon Restoration Memorial Marathon in October, from a Korean marathoner friend and he helped her to register. Several of her foreign running friends were planning to do the race, too.

"I've seen CheongGyeCheon under construction when I was passing by in a car. The changes have been really exciting. If I could be on foot and run by these places and see them firsthand, I thought it would actually be an even more exciting experience. Seoul is a big and crowded city but in many places like the Han River, Namsan, CheongGyeCheon, etcetera, it is very beautiful and exciting. Of course, these are also the best places for running."

While falling completely in love with Korea and Seoul, she participated in

several local marathons, gaining proficiency step by step. ChunCheon Marathon, Hi Seoul Marathon.... She says her most memorable was the Seoul International Marathon.

“It was even bigger and more exciting than any of the other events I’ve ever seen. With the huge number of people and the various events, the well-ordered street scenes, etc., the atmosphere was really fantastic. Most of the time the roads are packed with passing cars, so running on them was a really special experience. We ran throughout the city of Seoul and when I entered Chamshil Olympic Stadium, it was as if I was in the Olympics and it gave me an indescribable tingling feeling.”

When her three children saw her enter Olympic Stadium, they said proudly, “Our mom is cool!” Her husband feels no less proud of his wife than their children, and in spite of her Olympic drive he asserts that she is still a beginner in running. And when his wife trains, from time to time he bicycles along with her, he says.

Many people still think of marathoning as a men’s sport. Although she was an athlete who ran with her school running team, what is her opinion of marathoning as a person who began to run in earnest in her late 30’s after raising her children?

“I think marathoning is better for women than for men. For

maintaining health and taking care of your figure, there’s nothing better,” she says with a smile. “It is a sport that requires a time investment but in my opinion it’s never wasteful as my effort is for myself. That I am happily enjoying life is better than anything for my family, too. If I somewhat neglect my family to train or prepare for a race, I would make it up to them with a special gift to make them happy.”

While running together she meets many new friends and can get to know them, too, since the marathon’s acceptance of everyone is what makes it so appealing, Cindy says. Especially in Korea, the marathoners she’s met are kind and warmhearted, and their passion for running is impressive, she says.

“Since I have my family’s support, the moments I have to run with friends are really happy. This time at the Hi Seoul CheongGyeCheon-HanGang Marathon, my personal goal is to run the full course in 3 hours and 50 minutes and qualify for the Boston Marathon. After that, I think I’d like to take on the challenge of an ultra marathon.”

Hearing that, her husband beside her says jokingly, “ultra marathons are for crazy people.” But for his wife, for whom even a 42.195 kilometers marathon is not enough but who wants to run even farther distances, with her boundless adventurous spirit and desire for challenge, the ultra, too, is inevitable.