

July/August 2015 *Wingfoot* Spotlight: The Ponytail Posse

by Amanda Kowaleski

Picture yourself running a 10-miler or half marathon when a large group of women makes their way past you – laughing, talking and calling out words of encouragement to one another. This is exactly what will happen to you if you come across the Ponytail Posse. “It’s like a party while running,” says Natalie Sheldon, one of the “Ponytails”.

You’d think these ladies had known each other for years but most of them met during Atlanta Track Club’s 2014 Half Marathon Training program. Their experiences and ages vary (20s-50s), but they’ve formed a close bond over the miles they’ve run together.

Christy Sharp is the unofficial leader of the Ponytail Posse. It wasn’t that long ago that she was embarrassed to even go to the gym since she didn’t know how to work the machines or weights. Sharp got over that fear, and then decided to start running again two years ago. She became an Atlanta Track Club member and signed up to train for the Half Marathon Training Program to meet people – and that’s where one of the run leaders would eventually discover and name this energetic group.

“That first day, we were all nervous and self-conscious. I thought, ‘what if they go too fast? What if I get left behind?’” Sharp remembers. “We did five miles and I thought, ‘well, I’m going to talk to somebody.’”

Sharp started to chat with Savelia Decheva, one of the few Ponytails who had completed the training program previously. Soon others joined in on the conversation. “I’m really happy just running with people, making new friends and moving,” explains Decheva.



Mindy Maris recalls the dreading the first run. “I am very shy. The thought of getting up in the morning and running in a group of 100 strangers was pretty terrifying.” But the girls got to know each other on runs, sometimes grabbing coffee or brunch afterwards. Maris, and everyone else, soon felt much more comfortable.

The Ponytail Posse talked about anything and everything to pass the miles, and the run leaders of the training program taught them motivational sayings to get them through tough times. “We’re really good at setting goals,” laughs Katie Roan. “We’d tell ourselves, ‘one more mile and we get snacks!’”

After completing the Atlanta 10 Miler with a lot of laughs and conversation, the Ponytail Posse continued training for the Thanksgiving Day Half Marathon. By that point, Ashley Irby felt closely tied to the group. “If we weren’t there on Saturdays, someone would text you and say, ‘where are you?’”

“The day before [the Thanksgiving Day Half Marathon], we had a group text, and all day long my phone was going off,” says Sheldon. “I had this whole community of people asking what I was wearing and if I had been drinking water. To be able to share my first half marathon with this group of women was something special.”

Their hard work paid off. All of the women finished the Thanksgiving Day Half Marathon – and then signed up for more races and In-Training programs. “That fall training was life changing for me,” Sharp says. “Now this is all I do. I drive all my non-running friends insane!”

The Ponytail Posse is still adding new faces. Pey Lin joined the group during Atlanta Track Club’s 2015 Spring Half Marathon Training. “I never thought I could do it,” she says. “It was pretty empowering when I crossed that line.” Hannah Milner ran track and cross country from middle school to college, but had an all-new perspective on running after joining the Ponytails. “It helped me find the joy in running that I hadn’t felt in a few years.”

Perhaps as equally important as their fitness goals are the friendships between the members of the Ponytail Posse. Susan Dabney’s children have grown up and started their own lives; her son now married and working on his PhD, her daughter a swimmer for Louisiana State University. “They’re my substitute daughters,” Susan Dabney says of the group. “They keep me young!”



The Ponytails have been through good times and bad times together. They were a great comfort to Maris after the death of her beloved dog, Max. And this June, they threw a baby shower for Irby, who announced her pregnancy to the group by showing up for a run in a shirt that read “Running for Two”.

Whether their group gathers over dinner or over a few miles, it’s safe to say there’s a lot of laughing and smiling when the Ponytail Posse is together.