

# In Praise of Analogue Adventures

Martin Howard has discovered some curious and satisfying similarities between his two passions: running and restoring vintage typewriters

By Liam Romalis



**A** dedicated runner for nine years, Martin Howard, 60, arrived in Toronto from his native England as a seven-year-old. Over the past 30 years, he's become Canada's foremost collector and restorer of 19th-century typewriters. In 2016 Howard starred in the documentary *California Typewriter*, alongside Tom Hanks, John Mayer and Sam Shepard. The film is available on CRAVE, Amazon Prime and iTunes.

## What do you love about collecting?

Anyone who collects is hunting for treasure. I've had many adventures that have taken me travelling to Europe and across the United States in pursuit of typewriters. It is a delight meeting all sorts of wonderful people in the process. It's not unlike running. Every run has the thrill of a unique adventure.

## At what point did you start to run seriously?

I started running when I was 51. I had the urge bubbling up inside me. Before that time, I would find myself walking along city blocks, but half running, wanting to go faster. I was doing that for maybe two years, this sort of walking and running, just for the sheer joy of it. And then one day, I launched from the front steps of my east-end Toronto home and ran the 2 km to a neighbourhood park. Since then, I have run many 10ks and a number of half-marathons. After breaking through the barrier of the Around The Bay Road Race in Hamilton, which is 30k, I started to realize that I might be able to run the full marathon. With the encouragement of my daughter telling me, "You can do it, Dad," I went on to run five marathons in the following five years.

## What personal benefits do you derive from running?

When I started to run seriously, I was very excited to feel my body respond to the discipline of regular, structured exercise. But it's not just the physical – there is the mental serenity that one gets after exercising. The pleasure of doing elemental things like drinking, eating

and sleeping are enhanced. But for me, one of the biggest payoffs is my enhanced patience toward others. I became a more empathetic person. That alone is worth the price of admission.

## Is there a relationship between running and typewriters?

There are a number of very natural connections for me. Both typewriters and running have deep historical roots. The typewriter that we use today still has the QWERTY keyboard that is unchanged since 1874. Both typewriters and running are firmly rooted in the analogue world. More than ever, we are living in a digital world. We are all staring into screens. Both typing and running are tactile. You strike the key on a typewriter, just as your foot strikes the pavement. There is also a rhythmic or metronomic relationship between the two. When you are using a manual typewriter, you hear the sound, your fingers strike rhythmically and you feel a sense of cadence. It is the same with running. When hill climbing or really exerting myself, I will actually start to count, using my hands and fingers, to reinforce the cadence.

Lastly, I'm often working on a restoration of a typewriter that can take up to several weeks and many hours. When I sit down at my workbench, I need to be keenly focused on the project at hand. Running helps me find that focus. Once I have gone for a run, I feel relaxed and grounded, and I feel a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

## When you're on a run, do you use a digital or an analog watch?

I use a digital watch – a wonderful little device.

To learn more about The Martin Howard Collection, please go to [antiquetypewriters.com](http://antiquetypewriters.com). 

Liam Romalis is a Toronto-based documentary filmmaker and – with the assistance of Martin Howard – a recent collector of typewriters from the 1950s.