

# Meet the 70-Year-Old Runner Who Ran 7 Marathons on 7 Continents in 7 Days

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These days, Smith feels differently. The Kansas City resident recently ran seven marathons in seven consecutive days on seven continents in celebration of her 70th birthday — and she ran them all while wearing [a pink pussyhat](#).

From January 25 to 31, 2017, Smith ran marathons in Perth, Australia; Singapore; Cairo, Egypt; Amsterdam, Netherlands; Garden City, New York; Punta Arenas, Chile; and King George Island, Antarctica. It's part of a challenge called Triple 7 Quest, operated by Marathon Adventures, which planned the itinerary and logistics.

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*Chau and Michael Smith running their first race together in Kansas City in 1995. Courtesy of Chau Smith*

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Smith says she may have broken a world record for the oldest person to run seven marathons in seven days and will be applying to the Guinness Book of World Records.

Steve Hibbs, 45, the founder of Marathon Adventures and an accomplished runner himself, said Smith epitomizes living life to its fullest. He's traveled with her before on other running excursions he's organized, and said that Smith was thrilled to try all the activities — including the Gorge Swing near Victoria Falls, Zambia, which involves free falling in a harness for about 230 feet over the Zambezi River.

"It's just amazing what she did," Hibbs said of Smith's seven marathons. "If there's anything to describe her, it's 'result.' She wants to prove to herself that anybody of any age can go out and run and accomplish this type of feat."

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Although Smith is 70, on paper she's officially 67, the result of a life marked by war. Smith was born in Vietnam in 1947 during the First Indochina War, known in Vietnam as the French War. Her father, a teacher turned Viet Minh resistance fighter, was arrested and killed five months before she was born. Because of the war, her mother waited three years before obtaining a birth certificate, which was not backdated.

During the Vietnam War, which is known as the American War in Vietnam, she was hit by shrapnel when she was 13 and spent a week in the hospital. Pieces from the incident still remain in her right leg and right arm, and Smith says sometimes it feels like it's cutting through her flesh when she runs.

"I always try to train in my mind the good things. So even when I'm really in pain, I'm able to think about something else positive," she said. "So you don't think about, 'Oh my god, it hurts so bad.' You just think about, maybe, the waterfalls, the streams, and the lake."

She also thinks about her siblings, all of who have chronic illnesses - including a younger brother who is partially paralyzed from a stroke - and how lucky she is to be able to run.

During the war, Smith immigrated to the U.S., settling in Independence, Missouri, with her husband at the time. After the couple divorced, Smith worked two jobs, in a factory and a restaurant to provide for her two girls as a single parent. Her first shift began at 5 a.m. each morning, and she wouldn't return home until midnight. Later, she worked in a department store, sewing alterations.

At a Christmas party in 1982, she met Michael Smith, who teased her for repeatedly returning to the buffet table for extra helpings. They married six months later. Michael Smith was a runner, and she had watched him run races. But, at the time, she never thought running was for her.

That changed when life became busier. She helped her four siblings and their families — 25 people total — settle in the U.S. She also opened up her own alterations shop. During the day, she would help her relatives navigate jobs, school, and meetings in their new country; at night, she worked long hours.

"And that's why I started to run a little bit with Michael," Chau Smith said. "And I feel good because it's just a stress relief. It makes me feel much better to go out and run."

In 1995, at 48 years old, she ran her first race — a 5K in Kansas City. She was suffering from hay fever and taking antibiotics for a sinus infection. She recalls the race being difficult for her, and says she nearly passed out.

"They [had] to put the oxygen mask on me," Smith said. "But I feel OK about half an hour later. So Michael drove me home to Independence from Kansas City. I said, 'Hey Michael, I want to do a 10K.' And he said, 'Chau, you almost died today! What are you talking about?' And three months later, I show him. I did a half marathon and never look back."

Smith estimates that she's run close to 70 marathons across the globe now. She was also at the Boston Marathon in 2013, and was about a quarter mile from the finish line when police stopped her because of the bombing.

The Smiths have run many races together and plan to travel and run together when they've both retired. In 2014, the couple ran on all seven continents, though at a more relaxed pace than seven consecutive days. She was looking for her next challenge when she heard about Triple 7 Quest from Steve Hibbs.

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Although her husband was not excited about the idea at first, he supported her. "Well, I know after 30-something years of marriage, I don't tell her she can't do anything," Michael Smith told NBC News. "I was very skeptical, because the potential for injury for some kind of adventure like this is very high and I didn't want to see her injured at 70 and then cut short her running career."

Chau Smith sought advice from a running coach, sports doctor, physical therapist, and nutritionist to create a training program that would build her stamina. Because she still works full time at her alterations shop, she trained

during odd hours throughout the year (Smith said she runs year-round, but really ramps up her training by running longer distances in the four months leading up to the races), and overcame a bout of bronchitis just days before she flew to Australia for the first marathon.

One of her favorite races, she said, was in Cairo, Egypt, where the Triple 7 Quest marathoners were paired up with local runners to navigate a tricky course, which involved crossing road traffic. Because of their flight schedule, the Triple 7 Quest runners had a six-and-a-half hour time frame to complete the marathon — the shortest window in their schedule.

Smith said she can usually run a marathon in under five hours, but had to pace herself for running for so many consecutive days. She wasn't sure if she could run fast enough, but ended up with a time of 5 hours and 51 minutes, her best time of all seven marathons.

At the next marathon in Amsterdam, she tripped and fell before it began, but still ran the race despite a swollen knee and busted, bleeding lip.

Along with running for her birthday, Smith, who said she's not usually one to make a political statement, chose to wear a pink pussyhat for every race, even in the 102-degree weather in Perth, Australia. Smith's eldest daughter, Thy Tran, crocheted the hat for her.

"I hope I don't offend anyone, but I'm a woman. I have daughters. I have a granddaughter. I run to represent the women," Smith said. "I'm against any man, powerful man, who think they can do anything they want to women without our consent, without our permission."

And what did Smith do to celebrate after her seventh and final run in Antarctica? While resting at the southern tip of Chile, she heard about another race. Two days later, she tied on her Saucony shoes and was ready to go for an eighth marathon.



*Chau Smith running at the start of the Boston Marathon in 2013, the year of the bombing. She was about a quarter mile from the finish line when police stopped her because of the bombing. Courtesy of Chau Smith*