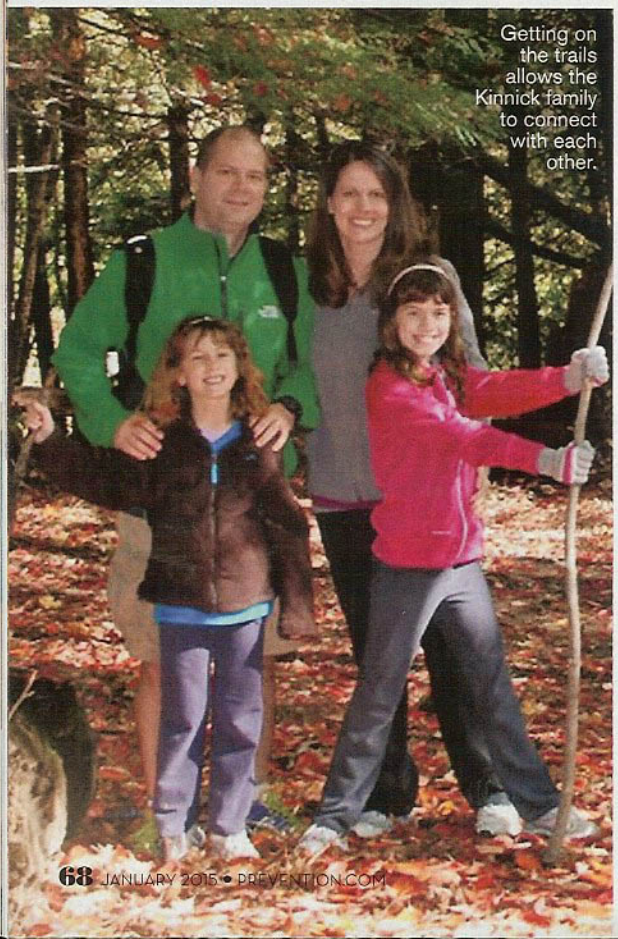
Better Than Ever

"Dad, let's run it together," my daughter said as we drove past a sign for a local 5K. "It'll be your birthday gift." Surprised, I looked in the rearview mirror to see if the little girl in the backseat was serious. In the past 3 years, she'd seen me go from being an out-of-shape dad who couldn't even climb the stairs without breathing like a two-packs-a-day smoker to one who practically lived in his running shoes. Even though the 40 pounds that had inspired me to start working out and eating healthier were long gone—and my blood pressure was back in the safe zone—I hadn't stopped running. In fact, after completing my first half-marathon, I'd caught the racing bug. Now, if I wasn't training for a marathon, it was only because I was working toward an Ironman or helping a friend get ready for their first race.



Getting on the trails allows the Kinnick family to connect with each other.

"So, can we?" came the prompt from the backseat. Even though I had my doubts—not a lot of 9-year-olds would go out and run for 3 miles straight without giving up—I was touched that my older daughter wanted to be a part of what had become such an integral part of my life. It was a no-brainer. The race was in 6 weeks, and we were doing it.

Every Saturday morning, we'd take an easy, 45-minute jog on the trails near our house. It was a nice break from my training workouts, and it reminded me that exercise doesn't always have to be intense and grueling—it can be fun and relaxing, too. It also gave us time to talk about school, friends, and whatever else was going on in her life. We'd always been pretty close, but suddenly we had something more in common: We were headed toward the same finish line.

That October, on my 37th birthday, we ran the entire race side by side. I was proud that my daughter stuck with it but even happier when she started asking what we were training for next. Since then, we've gone on to run more 5Ks, and now we're gearing up for our first father-daughter triathlon, which we'll complete this spring. What's even better, though, is that my younger daughter, who is 7, has started running with us on weekends; she even joined us for a 1-mile fun run. I always check in to see if she's getting tired and wants to stop, but she invariably responds with a determined grin and tells me, "No, let's do this!"

It was never my master plan, but running with my kids has become a great way for us to stay connected. When we're sitting at home, there are so many distractions—the TV, their iPods, our dog—but on the trail, it's just us. Years from now, when they become teenagers, then leave for college, and leave home, I hope that running will still be that one place where we can find common ground—where my "Hey, let's go for a run" will still be met with a smile and a "Let's do this!" For now, though, we'll take it one step—and one 5K—at a time.