

Sheos

The early years of the new millennium I was something of an Überjock: training six days a week at [Sifu/Guro Ron's](#) (Monday thru Friday nights, and Saturday mornings) on both the Chinese side of the house (Jeet Kune Do/Grappling – throw in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and you'd have what we now call Mixed Martial Arts)... and the Filipino (Kali/Arnis/Escrima and a unique Silat cousin called [Kuntao](#)). But I was also going to the gym three or four times a week.

Then Life Intervened, as often happens. By 2010, I had become sedentary and ballooned up to 220 pounds (on my 5' 7.5" frame). "Fighting weight" is around 165.

At the time, coming off the Great Recession of 2007-2009, my morning internet fix was courtesy [Lew Rockwell](#). The interesting thing about Lew's site is it isn't exclusively Austrian economics or libertarian politics – there are, from time to time, interesting side topics. Early 2010, one of these involved minimalist footwear: links to articles on the [Tarahumara running ultramarathons](#) with what amounted to a piece of old tires strapped to their feet. This is as opposed to expensive, super-supportive running shoes that were (are) all the rage.

And then there was a post talking about [Vibram FiveFingers](#): those goofy minimalist shoes with articulated toes. Plenty of talk about heel drop and why that encourages runners' heel-strike strides and why that's Bad. Honestly, I'm not a runner (nor play one on TV), so didn't really know or care about how those were about to become The Thing amongst marathoners, half-marathoners, 10k-ers, 5k-ers... Shit, at the time, my everyday footwear was steel-toe Red Wing workboots, on account of having so many customers in construction. (When still going to Ron's: wrestling shoes. Which I also snuck into other places, like airplanes.)

But what I had was an aunt who loved walking barefoot, but couldn't do it cuz she had a normal office job, and that simply won't go. Since it was approaching Easter, I was eyeballing a potential present to her from the Bunny. And – luck have it – there was a store not too far away that actually carried the damned things: [The Shoe Mart in Norwalk](#). (That was highly unusual then.)

So I made a pilgrimage down to Norwalk. The intent was merely recon: what are these silly things, and how does one go about buying them? I already heard the sizing was goofy: European, and not always consistent across models. (Turns out even goofier, as the structures of your feet WILL change as you wear them, and thus your size will change.) But the mission was still oriented towards buying a pair for my aunt.

Then the salesman suggested I try a pair myself: “I just happen to have one last pair in your size!” Well, I was there, anyway, so...



Hooked.

He also sold me a pair of Injinji socks, cuz you cannot wear regular socks with shoes with articulated toes – it doesn't work.

I wore them home out of the store. It was transformational, from the moment I took my beloved Red Wings off and put them on. Moving was suddenly... FUN again. It was something I hadn't felt in years.

Other things I was to feel over the next few weeks as well. When you encase your feet in leather boxes, they atrophy. The muscles, tendons, etc., that do the work of supporting you while you stand and move... decay. I was forcing mine to do their normal work again... and it HURT. I'll never forget that Easter day: we had family over, and I was doing cooking chores. WOWWIE were my feet sore. THAT is why they fell out of favor with a lot of runners: their "transition" to them wasn't. I tell people bank on NINE MONTHS to rebuild the structures in your feet.

Once they're there, they're THERE. My feet changed radically. For one thing, I was previously at the beginning stages of plantar fasciitis, due to the footboxes, the inactivity, ... That just disappeared. But bigger than that: my feet CHANGED. They became more foot-like. They got shorter, and broader. And much, MUCH stronger.

Little did I know that wasn't going to be the only change. This was to be the beginning of my reclamation, health-wise. I dropped fifty pounds. I did, actually, run: a few 5k races here in town. The big thing, though, became the mountain bike, something that almost faded away. And, once again:



Funny thing: I DID actually get a pair of them for my aunt – we took her to The Shoe Mart so they’d be sized correctly. Despite her being the “barefoot” person, I don’t know that she ever wears them.

Mine are a usual enough fixture they’re practically my trademark. Do I wear other shoes? Yes, but also minimalist: I don’t like riding or doing yard or trail work with articulated toes, so I wear LEMS or VivoBarefoot. I cannot go back to reg’lar shoes, though. I tried wearing my beloved Red Wings

again, and was in AGONY within fifteen minutes – my feet had changed that much.