



## UNLIKE POLITICS, THERE IS NO LOSER IN A MARATHON

There we were, two days before the election on a cold but sunny Sunday, in the extreme City of Villages, shivering and huddling in the middle of Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island, awaiting the start of the 33<sup>rd</sup> running of the venerable New York City Marathon.

At the same time my husband Bill and I were back east running a marathon, several of my friends back home were running for office, winding up the last week of their campaigns. Guess who was in more pain Tuesday night.

And so, while my buddies in San Diego were walking precincts, this early Sunday morning six Carmel Valley/Del Mar day-trippers would begin a 26.2 mile jaunt through the friendly streets of New York's five boroughs..

Bill, an old time marathoner and precinct walker, decided to join me among the schlep patrol this time out so we could experience this matchless happening, together.

Where else could you creep along with 31,908 lunatics through the birthplace of the Wu-Tang Clan rappers, Staten Island, where sixty percent of its residents voted in favor of secession in 1993, elbow to elbow with three very big Australians singing *New York, New York* at the top of their lungs?

At the gun, fired by New York Mayor Blumberg, we clip-clopped over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. It trembled for two miles under the thunder of 62,000 pounding feet from all over the world, pouring into gritty old Brooklyn neighborhoods like Bay Ridge, Bedford Stuyvesant and Sunset Park, then on to Queens.

For the next thirteen miles, we strode through a virtual Mars to this Southern California girl, jogging down potholed concrete streets lined sometimes with old-world leafy brick town homes, often with deteriorating storefronts and dilapidated stoop houses, and always with hordes of party-down multi-colored earthlings.

The only place in this outpost remotely related to my biography, having grown up in LA, was the old Brooklyn Dodgers clubhouse visible at the seventh mile, and the historic Hasidic Williamsburg community at the tenth, where I was told that an old Rebbe relative once lived.

Somewhere up the way a piece, our Carmel Valley comrades Gary Levitt, Barry Dancher, Sarah Legh and Andrea Neugartin, within minutes of each other, were running for real, past the *Sex and the City* soundstage, over Spiderman's Queensboro Bridge, into the arms of a riotous Manhattan-ite super-crowd greeting runners onto First Avenue.

By the time we hit 20 miles in Spanish Harlem on the way to the Bronx, where a NYC cop yelled "Keep running—nobody walks through the Bronx," the Carmel Valley quartet were in various stages of finishing, having dashed through appreciative packed crowds in Harlem, down Fifth Avenue onto the hilly paths of Central Park and over the finish line at Tavern On the Green, three in less than 4 hours.

Levitt, 46, a Planning Board member and the developer of Del Mar Mesa's Duck Pond Farms, finished his third NYC Marathon with a super 3:48 time. His only criticism of the course was that "extra" gruesome 6.2 miles that is always tacked onto the "easy" 20 miles, something marathon organizers generally insist on, I reminded him.

An emotional Andi Neugartin, a 36-year-old ultra-marathoner who ran the tough rolling course in 3:52, described the race as the supreme experience of her life. Running the biggest marathon on the planet in the greatest city in the world was her goal even before moving from South Africa to Carmel Valley six months ago.

The 2.5 million people lining New York streets brought even this 50-plus marathon veteran to tears many times along the way, especially in Harlem when an elderly African-American lady spectator came out of nowhere to massage her cramped leg.

But, high school teacher Barry Dancher is Mr. New York City Marathon, having run the race 23 times. Dancher not only shares Neugarten's passion for this marathon, he owns it. He told me he chokes up at the sounds and sights of the crowds along the way just like the rest of us newbies.

Two hours after Andi, Gary and Barry finished their race, Bill and I held hands under the bright lights that came on as darkness set in over Central Park, crossing the New York City Marathon finish line with that silly song blaring and people still yelling. Wow.

While we were in flight Tuesday night, three good friends who worked their tails off with the kind of determination and passion it takes to finish a 26.2 mile race were losing their marathon campaigns for political office in San Diego after an orgy of last minute spending from outside interests buried them in attack mail.

As for the agony of victory, and the thrill of defeat, the only thing I could remember that felt as long, painful and crazy as running a marathon was running for office.

But, in the New York City marathon, everyone is a winner.