

## Chapter 13

### The 60s: Boston or Bust (Part 1 of 2)

“I will never be an old man. To me, old age is always 15 years older than I am.”

—FRANCIS BACON, English Philosopher

The struggles of the past year just melted away. The injuries had been major obstacles to overcome but with the help of Malc and Evan the journey had continued. As an older athlete I know that there will be more physical challenges, but with help, I see no reason why we can't continue to challenge ourselves and live a healthy life. I had taken on “62 beats 47” for a number of reasons. The goal was to beat my personal best times set 15 years ago, but the reality was that what really counted was the fact that I was just happy to be there.

Next morning I travelled back to Calgary via Vancouver. I was suffering from the marathon and sitting in a plane for hours on end didn't help. When I arrived home Sue asked me how I felt and I told her that I had tried my hardest but I just couldn't go any faster.

Thursday morning I headed over to Malc's place. I was feeling a lot more refreshed and ready to debrief on everything that had happened during the year.

To start things off Malc went over the results:

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|-----------------|-------------------------|------------|
| • 5K            | 21:42                   | PB 21:05   |
| • 10K           | 45:03                   | PB 42:00   |
| • Half marathon | Scrubbed, due to injury | PB 1:30:01 |
| • Marathon      | 3:51:27                 | PB 3:22:44 |

On the minus side I didn't beat any of my personal bests. This was disappointing, but I went back to one of my favourite quotes, from Nelson Mandela: “I never lose, I either win or learn.” So what did I learn? Well, by taking on this challenge I achieved some good times. I ran my second fastest 5K, fourth fastest 10K, no result for the half marathon (DNS and DNF) and my sixth fastest marathon. I also learnt that taking on all four distances at once was too much.

My biggest disappointment was that I was just 87 seconds from qualifying for the Boston Marathon. The target time was 3:50 and I came in at 3:51:27. I had a busy end of year coming up so Malc and I agreed to take a break and get back together in early January to figure out what was next.

However, there was no time for me to sit on my laurels. The 9th Annual Run/Walk fundraiser was coming up and there were only three weeks to go. On Saturday, December 8, six days after the marathon, I headed out for a 8-km run with members of the Cochrane Red Rock Runners, and afterwards we had coffee and I told my tale of woe.

It was a busy time with book sales for *The Secret Marathon* and I ended up doing book signings at the Canmore and Cochrane Rotary Clubs, Crowfoot Running Room and Orange Theory. December 19 was my 63rd birthday, and 62 was left behind.... The Ageless Athlete was one year older. Who know what 2019 would bring?

I kept my running up in the final weeks of December but I wasn't sure how the year end run would go.



On December 31 the 9th Annual Run/Walk was held. The annual New Year's Eve fundraising run in Cochrane once again raised thousands of dollars for the less fortunate on Monday. A series of races ranging from a full marathon to a 2-km fun run for kids brought in \$3,000 that will go towards Free to Run who are helping young Iraqi women enjoy the benefits of sport.

On January 3, I attended the monthly meeting of the Cochrane Public Library Book Club. The members had read *The Secret Marathon*, and I was invited to go and speak to them about the book and the upcoming movie of the same name and to answer their questions.

For me it was an enlightening experience. Usually, I meet people at book signings and other events where I am selling my books and the purchasers have not yet had a chance to read them.

At the book club, I was hearing what people thought of the book, its contents, the layout and how the chapters from different contributors enhanced the story. I also heard about what things might have been added, e.g., a map of the area in which the story occurs. I heard about which aspects of the book resonated most with people and which ones gave them most food for thought. I listened to suggestions and comments that would be of great value if the publisher ever chose to opt for an updated version.

I was delighted to hear that some people had been affected emotionally, some had been inspired to take action and others had learnt things they had not previously been aware of.

All of the comments and observations were invaluable to me. They gave me an insight into how a diverse group of people perceived my work. It made me realize how important it is to ask for feedback.

On the following Thursday I headed over to see Malc. I had had time to think about the future and I wanted to share my thoughts. At the end of the California International Marathon I had an initial idea of running a spring marathon, possibly the Paris. Malc and I discussed this and we both agreed that that would be too soon. The goal was now to qualify for Boston. I told Malc that I had a new plan to qualify for Boston every ten years. The first would be Boston 2020 and then it would be 2030, 2040 and 2050. Malc thought it was be a good plan.

We had to come up with a race and decided on the Edmonton Marathon on August 18. The disadvantage to the event was that it could be a hot day, but on the plus side it is a flat and fast course. Malc and I then discussed where our training was going to go. I felt that as I was now strictly training for a marathon I could do it on my own. I planned to apply what Malc had taught me plus all my knowledge from 16 years of running and qualifying for three Boston's.

Malc agreed. He felt that sometimes a coach and a runner maintain their relationship when there is no benefit to either party. The other thing I wanted to bounce off Malc was the idea for "The Ageless Athlete" book. I felt that the work we had done would be of interest to runners and non-runners alike. In fact we'd had great response to our weekly Facebook sessions. Also "The Ageless Athlete" documentary would be coming out in the not too distant future. Malc said he was in. Time to get to work.

As I drove home from Malc's I had a sense of sadness. It had been over a year that Malc and I had worked together. There had been a number of ups and down but we had tackled them together. What was really important wasn't the outcome but the journey, and this wasn't the end. Working together on the book would bring a whole new wrath of challenges. Bring it on!

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Work continued on another front, "The Secret Marathon" film. On January 18 Sue and I headed over to Steve place to watch a screening of the film. We were joined by Bill Baird, music writer, Scott Townend, director, and Murid, film cultural advisor and manager for Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Murid is from Afghanistan and lived there during the pre-Taliban, Taliban and post-Taliban periods.

This was the first time we had all watched the completed film and we were mesmerized. It was stunning, and afterwards Murid shared with us stories from the time she spent in the country.



# THE SECRET MARATHON

After the evening of the presentations several minor changes had to be made and the film was a lock on February 4. What a relief. So much hard work had gone into this documentary and there were times when we thought it would not see the light of day. But an incredible group of people had applied themselves and would not give up. It is amazing what the power of an idea can achieve.

On March 6, The Secret Marathon 3K was held across Canada and around the world. This was the second running of the event and momentum was starting to build. The number of participants had grown from 1,100 to 1,300 and the number of countries from four to 17. The fundraising for Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan went from \$8,000 to \$16,000 and allowed the hiring of teachers and educational support for students in the country. The highlight of the day was the 3K I did with the students at École Notre-Dame des Vallées. We headed out on the pathways in Cochrane, all the runners wearing their "Equality" bibs and having a blast. A couple of days later I was headed into the mountains to hook up with nephew Chris. My destination was Lake O'Hara lodge, and Chris is the chef for the operation. Now the lodge is 12 km from the parking lot. There is no car traffic allowed, but during the summer there is a bus service that you can take. In the winter it's another kettle of fish. No car, no bus. Your choices are snowshoes or ski. No contest, snowshoeing it is.

Arriving at the parking lot I buckled on my snowshoes and headed up the fire road. The conditions were good and I got into a great rhythm. I arrived at the lodge in 1:57:10, breaking the two-hour barrier and a personal best. Chris was there to meet me and he showed me into the staff area where we sat down for lunch. Chris is a bit of an adventurer and in 2015 he walked the length of the Japanese Island, Kyushu.

That afternoon we headed out into the backcountry, I with my snowshoes and Chris with his mountaineering skis. He's in great condition and I had to bail out as I'm not a young man and two sessions in the mountains was enough for me. After an amazing supper, cooked by Chris, I hit the sack, exhausted but happy.

Next morning, after a classic full English breakfast I said goodbye to Chris and headed out down the fire track. As this was all downhill I really wanted to push and see how quickly I could do it. Well, I was pleased that I arrived at the parking lot in 1:40:49, a full 16 minutes faster than the outward trip, however, there was a big price to pay.

I had made a huge mistake by not wearing ski gaiters on my trail shoes. This had allowed chunks of ice to work their way into the shoe behind the heel. I had felt some pain as I had snowshoed out but just thought it was the heel rubbing. When I took my shoes off the heels of the white sport socks were red. Then I peeled off the socks and surveyed the damage. The ice chunks had macheted into the heel causing deep gouges. Driving back to Cochrane I knew this was going to cause me trouble in the weeks ahead.

In late March I was contacted by Hubert Smith from H.G. Smith and Associates.

I had worked with Hubert on a number of occasions since 2016 and he asked me if I would develop a full-day workshop based on my “Finish the Race Attitude – Set Goals, Overcome Obstacles and Achieve Outstanding Results” program. This would be a part of the Pre-Employment Support Program for clients of the Stoney Nakoda First Nation comprising the Wesley, Chiniki and Bearspaw bands.

In total 14 workshops were held over the next 12 months with groups up to 12 individuals. The days I spent facilitating these workshops for the Indigenous men and women from Stoney Nakoda First Nation were the most rewarding I have had in a long time. It made me realize the untapped potential of these individuals and the goals and dreams they have for the future.

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It’s extraordinary how sometimes you meet someone and, through a series of connections, it can lead to an amazing opportunity. Three years ago at my year-end fundraiser in Cochrane, raising donations for Free to Run in support of a kayaking and camping trip for Afghan women and girls, I met Umair Khan.

I next met up with Umair at an event organized by my friend Gitti Sherzad, who appeared in my TEDx talk and had founded Pillars for Afghanistan, an organization that was raising funds for an orphanage in Kabul.

On April 4 I went to The Art of Leadership for Women Conference at the Telus Centre in Calgary. I had been looking forward to this event for months and the main reason was that Malala Yousafzai would be speaking. Malala’s story had been an inspiration to me as I travelled to and from Afghanistan running marathons in support of the women and girls who run for freedom and equality.

Arriving at the conference, I not only wanted to hear Malala speak but was hoping to meet her and give her a copy of *The Secret Marathon*. As it turned out, I learnt that Umair was not only going to be at the event but is a close friend of Malala’s father and had been at Malala’s side when she was in hospital, after having been shot by the Taliban.



Umair told me that I was to connect with him at the end of the event and he would try and arrange a meeting with Malala. At 4:30 p.m. I waited at the designated spot, and after 30 minutes Malala appeared. She was with two of the conference organizers and Umair. They walked over to me and Umair introduced Malala. I gave her a copy of my book and I mentioned to her that if she ever wanted to run a marathon I would be happy to send her my training program.

It was a meeting I will never forget, but it didn't just happen by chance. It was because I had met Umair three years earlier and we had become friends. When you make connections it can be the beginning of a journey. Be open to the people you meet. You never know where it will lead, and for me it led to meeting Malala.

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On Monday morning, April 15, I poured myself a cup of coffee, turned on the TV and spent a few hours indulging in one of my favourite pastimes, watching thousands of amateur and professional runners from all over the world braving hilly terrain and varying weather in an attempt to complete the Boston Marathon.

The event is hosted by several cities in greater Boston in eastern Massachusetts and is always held on Patriots' Day, the third Monday of April. Begun in 1897, the event was inspired by the success of the first marathon competition in the 1896 Summer Olympics and is the world's oldest annual marathon. The course runs from Hopkinton in southern Middlesex County to Copley Square in Boston.

There are some incredible stories connected to the race and the history behind it. One of the most well-known is that of Kathrine Switzer. For many years, women were not allowed to officially enter the Boston Marathon. In 1967, Kathy Switzer registered as "K.V. Switzer" and became the first woman to run and finish with a race number, despite an infamous incident in which race official Jock Semple tried to rip off her number and eject her from the race.

In 1996 the Boston Athletic Association retroactively recognized as champions the unofficial women's leaders of 1966 through 1971. In 2015, about 46 per cent of the entrants were female. Roberta "Bobbi" Gibb is recognized by the race organizers as the first woman to run the entire Boston Marathon (in 1966), although women were not officially allowed to enter until 1972.

I have run the Boston Marathon three times. The last time was when I had qualified with a time of 3:43:43 on marathon number 188, when I was aiming to achieve my Marathon Quest to run 250 marathons in one year.

I was already in training for the Edmonton Marathon, in August, with the aim of qualifying for the Boston Marathon 2020. If I achieved my goal, it would mean I have run it in my 40s, 50s and 60s.