

Afterword

“I’ll be happy if running and I can grow old together.”

—HARUKI MURAKAMI, Author

It’s July 2024 and a lot of water has gone under the bridge. After completing the 2020 Boston Marathon I tackled the virtual London and New York marathons. I finished the year by running a 5km, 10km, half marathon and marathon on the last four days of the year. I celebrated my 65th birthday in December and wondered what 2021 would bring.

Well, it was much of the same. We continued to survive living in a world of COVID-19. This meant masks, vaccines, travel restrictions and zoom meetings. On July 1st I became Rotary District 5360 Governor covering 45 clubs in Southern Alberta. Traditionally Sue and I would travel to visit the members however now it meant all the visits were on zoom. I managed to keep my fitness up with training for and running the virtual Vancouver marathon.

In 2016 and 2018 I ran in the Marathon of Afghanistan. I went there with film maker Kate McKenzie to support the Afghan women and girls who run for freedom and equality. I had read about the verbal and physical abuse that Afghan women and girls had to endure just for going for a run. I knew that I wanted to let them know that people cared and wanted to help them in their quest for gender equality.

Spending time with these women and girls showed me the true meaning of resilience and courage. In the face of threats and attacks, primarily by men, they would not stop. Some trained in secret while others wore knuckle dusters and carried pepper spray to protect themselves. These women and girls became my friends.

Over the last several weeks of August 2021 the world had turned upside down. The Taliban had swept across the country and now control Afghanistan. My Afghan friends had contacted me with their stories of desperation and despair.

Here is an email I received on August 17th: *“Hi Martin and Sue, Thanks for reaching out, we are OK and stay home in Kabul now. These three days were the most horrific days of my life. I was on my duty at the office when they entered the city and we ran a long distance to our houses. When the gunshots started I laid down on the street. The tanks were coming everywhere. I sent all my docs and information to see if there is any chance to get out of the country, we are safe now and will be updating you, Love you both so much and will never forget you! “*

Over the following days, weeks and months a number of these women and men managed to get out of Afghanistan and have started new lives in several countries including Canada, USA, England and Italy.

At the beginning of 2022 there appeared to be some light at the end of the tunnel. COVID restrictions were being lifted and I started to think about what challenge I should take on next. That all changed in early March. I had felt a pain in lower stomach and had tried to run through it. No luck. I saw my doctor and he sent me for an Ultra-Sound. The result...I have hernia. We received an email saying that it would

be 3 to 6 months until we would hear about a date for surgery. It actually ended up being over 2 years with surgery scheduled for July 30th 2024.

On May 14th 2022 we had our Rotary District Conference in Cochrane, Alberta at the Alliance Church. The theme was "Supporting the Environment" and we had based it on a TEDx, one day event with 10 speakers. It was the first in-person Conference in 3 years and the 350 plus participants were so happy that we could get together. On July 1st I finished my year as District Governor. It had been a huge undertaking and time commitment and my fitness had suffered. I couldn't run due to the hernia so it was time to get back on the bike. My morning rides take me out into the foothills of the Rockies and around my old marathon route, the Horse Creek Loop.

Looking back over the years, tackling "62 beats 47" with Malc had brought the joy of my running back to me. I had hoped to beat my personal bests but it didn't happen. However, out of the ashes of those dreams came the goal of running Boston again. Qualifying at the 2019 Edmonton Marathon was a huge thrill and I was so looking forward to Boston in April 2020. Then COVID-19 hit and our world was turned upside down. Boston was postponed and then cancelled. It seemed that it was not meant to be but then came the news of the virtual Boston Marathon. And finally the achievement of that goal.

So, what are the future plans for "The Ageless Athlete"? Well, with the Spray Lake Sawmills Centre reopening I got back into swimming and the warm water therapy pool. While I was at the centre I met Lorin. He operates a triathlon store called "TriHub". We started chatting and I must admit it got me thinking about doing another triathlon. The last one I did was the Calgary 70.3 in August 2009. Now if I could do one in 2025 that would be a 16 year gap. That would make me 69. Time to start planning!

So remember, whatever plans and goals you have, go for them because..... Age is just a number.

Martin's Acknowledgements

The Ageless Athlete came from a notion that maybe we can turn back the hands of time. Maybe with help from a team of people we can achieve far more than if we tackled it on our own. The person who joined me on this journey was my running coach and friend Malc Kent. Malc was willing to give my crazy idea a chance. He supported me all the way, gave me tough love when it was needed but never gave up on me. Also, cheering me on was Malc's wife Kat and young son Jonny.

The other key member of the team was Evan Baldwin. Evan is a physical therapist and the go-to person for me when I was dealing with my injuries. Evan and Malc had worked together in the past and the Runner / Coach / Physical Therapist proved to be a winning combination.

As the idea for "62 beats 47" became a reality I was contacted by Dominique Keller, Kevin Pennock and Philip Harrison from Fireweed Creative. They thought the concept would make a great short documentary, and were Malc and I interested? Easy answer: Yes. They made a pitch to Telus and it was a go. Over the next ten months the film crew followed us from the mountains in Kananaskis, Alberta, to the California International Marathon in Sacramento, California.

The person who has intersected my running journey over 15 years is John Stanton. John has had a huge impact on the Canadian running scene and I was honoured that he agreed to write the Foreword for *The Ageless Athlete*.

Finally I want to thank my wife Sue. She knows trouble is coming when I say, "Sue, I have an idea!" However, at the end of the day Sue is my number one supporter and always will be.

Malc's Acknowledgements

It's definitely true to say that Martin's idea seemed a little bit crazy to me on first hearing it. But as Martin went on to explain that he was willing to give it his best and was open to thinking of it as a challenge that he could grow from whether he was objectively successful or not, he hooked me in. I've always been magnetically attracted to try things that most people on the outside would say are nearly impossible. I think this goes back to school and early teachers saying I couldn't do this or achieve that, being replaced later by teachers who strove to get the most out of school kids like me.

So the people I have to thank for making me into the scientist I am today are a mix of school teachers who inspired and encouraged me and career role models who showed me what was possible and really opened my eyes. Making crossovers between industries and career paths is often a pretty difficult thing to do successfully, so I have to acknowledge the influencing role models who showed me this was possible.

But from a personal life perspective I have to acknowledge my parents and particularly my late father for teaching me to always question assumptions and commit to things 100 per cent with total dedication. My father's hard-working diligence mixed with tenacity and passion for everything he did certainly wore off on me growing up. He was 100 per cent all in with what he chose to do, and this created an infallible authenticity that was recognized everyone around him. I hope to some extent my approach follows this same path.

More recently it's all about thanks to my wife, Kat, who has let me explore so many different avenues with patience and understanding, knowing that some of these left and right turns would have some kind of impact on her. She has always been an amazing sounding board and a compassionate, caring partner on the life journey. And now this has been complemented further by Jonny, who, like many kids, provides ample reason every day to be motivated to explore, learn and apply.

About the Authors

Martin Parnell is originally from Devon, England and in 2010, following a 25-year mining career, he started his "Quests for Kids" initiative. Martin is the bestselling author of *Marathon Quest*, *Running to the Edge* and *The Secret Marathon*. He speaks about having a "Finish the Race Attitude – Set Goals, Overcome Obstacles and Achieve Outstanding Results." Martin has written for, or been covered by *BBC*,

CBC, CNN, Huffington Post, The Globe and Mail, National Post, Runner's World, Men's Journal, Canadian Business and Maclean's.

In a five-year period, from 2010 to 2014, Martin completed ten extreme endurance "quests," including running 250 marathons in one year and raising \$1.3 million for the humanitarian organization Right To Play. His TEDx talk, "Life Is a Relay," can be found on YouTube.

Martin is a member of the Rotary Club of Cochrane, Alberta, where he lives with his wife Sue. They have three children, Kyle, Calum and Kristina, and three grandchildren, Autumn, Nathan and Matthew. Sue and Martin enjoy walking, snowshoeing and tennis.

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Malc Kent is a highly experienced coach and one of the leading experts in the world in remote and wearable gait analysis. He has coached athletes in more than ten countries and performed more than 4,000 gait analyses on runners of all levels, all over the world. The wearable gait analysis methodology that he has developed over the past six years has led to work with leading clinicians, coaches, trail runners and road runners. In 2019 he worked with members of the NN Running Team group in Kaptagat in Kenya performing wearable gait analysis in the field.

Malc has also consulted to a number of technology companies and shoe manufacturers and currently works with VF Corporation and their running shoe research department. In recent years Malc has spent time teaching in physiotherapy and chiropractic clinics across North America and helped start up a new and innovative physiotherapy clinic in Calgary.

For more on Malc's cutting-edge work in assessing runners in real world conditions visit:
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