

# Marathon Day in New York

*By Peter McFadden*

*Note: The November 2001 New York Marathon was the first major event held in the city after September 11th.*

My marathon day began before dawn with a pancake breakfast and a short drive to Harlem, where I parked my car and bounded up the stairway to catch the subway further downtown.

As I waited for the train, the sun began to rise over New York, and there appeared on the platform with me a fellow marathoner, 71-year-old James Tornes of Columbus, Ohio. Jim was dressed very patriotically in his American flag shirt, and his marathon that day was to be his 40th.

Meeting him was the first indication I had we were in for a special day.

It's an impressive feat running 26.2 miles, but to me more impressive is the organization of a race involving 30,000 runners winding through all five of New York's boroughs.

Once our subway arrived in Times Square, Jim and I made our way to the sidewalks surrounding New York's Public Library where we joined the many thousands already waiting for buses to take us to Staten Island for the start. It wasn't until four hours after I awoke that I finally made it to the starting area, but everything went smoothly and everyone was in good cheer.

More than 10,000 volunteers assist in making the New York marathon the great race it is. One of the interesting aspects of the race's organization is that its finish line in Central Park is far removed from its start. We runners had to put our warm clothes in a bag before we began running and we would need those clothes again soon after we finished.

UPS provided 70 trucks to move our belongings, but did not pay its employees for their work. They volunteered. When I dropped off my bag, I realized what this commitment meant. These volunteers had gotten up as early as I did, and would be there at the finish line much later. Many had brought their children with them to share in the work. When I saw a uniformed black UPS employee holding the hand of his young boy, also

wearing a UPS uniform, I was truly touched. We in New York can dream of our future once again.

As the 30,000 of us runners gathered for the start, I could easily see that Jim Tornes was not the only patriot among us. Particularly meaningful to us New Yorkers were all the international runners (more than 12,000 from 99 different countries) openly expressing their affection for New York and our country. After our national anthem was played before the start of the race, a German woman next to me told me "I am not an American, but I love that song." Then, we ran.

The two million spectators were awesome. Without them, many of us would not have finished. The race makes it way through dozens of different neighborhoods, and we were cheered on by all sorts of "ethnics," from Hasidic Jews with long beards and large families to the recent Mexican immigrants who were enthusiastically chanting "U.S.A... U.S.A."

Among my favorites were the rowdy group of young men who were humorously advertising a beer stop. They roared with delight when I became one of the few runners to take them up on their offer.

I ran the marathon even though I was not fully prepared because I wanted to show my own support for my city. I didn't want to be counted among those who stayed away because they were afraid. Two-thirds of the way through the race, I realized that 26 miles is a long way to run to make a statement. But when I crossed the finish line 4 hours 39 minutes and 12 seconds after I started, any regrets I had about the distance faded away.

At the reunion area outside Central Park where the exhausted and exhilarated runners meet their families and friends, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of joy and admiration expressed in many tongues by the thousands gathered about, and I realized that life had truly returned to New York and that, indeed, I am lucky to live in "the greatest city in the world."