

Rob Rose Column - 4/14/07

The Boston Marathon is an event identified with the self. The ability to get to the starting line is predicated on an individual's aspirations, perseverance and motivation. There's no one else to blame. For a Norton couple, Monday's marathon will be a joint journey that would not have been accomplished without each other's support and contribution. When Team Robitaille pushes off at 10 a.m. on Monday in Hopkinton, they will be running apart yet together.

Monique and Ron Robitaille bring several strata of uniqueness to the Boston Marathon this year. In addition to running as a couple, they are both qualified runners. They are also, at the ages of 67 (Ron) and 64 (Monique), the oldest local couple that will be out there on the six town sojourn. Not long ago, in regard to physical fitness, they were on separate tracks.

The Boston Marathon was never in anyone's thoughts when Monique began running in 1980. "I was doing a race now and then," she said. "Five miles a day and that was it." Ron was on the sidelines until 1999 when he could wait no more. "Whenever we'd go anywhere she would go out for her run and I'd be sitting there waiting for her to get back before we'd get anything done," he said. "I would get aggravated because she would decide to go for a little bit longer run and here I am sitting and waiting. Finally I decided that I'm going to start running so that I wouldn't be waiting anymore. She'd be high (from the run). Here I am uptight and I want to go for breakfast. That's how I started running."

Monique got Team Robitaille rolling but it was Ron who took them to the next plateau. "I wasn't running marathons until he started," Monique said. Then with emphasis, "He's the one who kicked it up a notch. He always has to kick things up a notch." Shortly after he began running, the team decided to tackle the New Bedford Half Marathon with predicable results. "She said 'I'll go nice and easy' ... till we got there," said Ron "I almost died."

That experience didn't deter the team because, as Monique related, "he wanted to do Boston when he was 60." Ron had a sister who died prematurely of liver disease, so the couple ran Boston 2000 for the American Liver cause. "The first year's training was not as good as it has been," Ron said of that first Boston. "We had no idea what training for a marathon was. We tried to do this on our own. It was difficult."

From that point, Team Robitaille has become a running juggernaut, competing in thirty races a year, including four marathons in 2006. They have collected multiple age group awards, traveled the nation to compete in many marathons and they have qualified for Boston numerous times. Although they are entitled to run as qualifiers, they still raise funds for

American Liver each year.

Surprisingly, Team Robitaille does not spend hours on the road compiling triple digit weekly mileage. Twenty miles a week is their norm. There are other factors that contribute to their success. "We do cross training, weights, we spin a little bit," said Ron. "If we do 3 or 4 marathons a year what happens is that you never really get out of condition. At the same time you're really not having to push to train hard because you're basically physically fit." Last summer, they spent ten days cycling in Italy. "Then we came back and PR'd in Chicago," said Ron. "That's the first time I broke 4 hours after 7 years of trying."

Mentioning the fact that most of their contemporaries are long gone from the athletic stage brings a look of consternation. "I never even consider myself old," said Ron in a huff. "I can probably outrun everyone that works for me. I don't feel the age. We have some aches and pains but no more than those 20 years younger than us. Eating right and doing what we do keeps us away from the doctor. Sorry we can't tell you otherwise."

After all the marathons that they have completed, in all the exotic locations, the Boston Marathon retains a special significance. "I don't know if it's because Boston was our first but there's nothing like crossing that finish line in Boston," said Monique. "No matter where we go, no matter what marathon we do, there's always people there who are interested that we've done Boston. That's their goal. They're trying to qualify for Boston, Phoenix, Disney, Grandma's, Twin Cities. They're always in awe that we have done Boston and that's what they want to do someday."

Having a husband that is fit and robust has created situations that Monique had not anticipated. "There's always women trying to grab onto to him at marathons and races," said Monique. "I have to be there. I walk up after I'm done and the women are clamoring around him. He doesn't wear a ring. I think some women are ... envious is not the word but they wish that their husbands could be there with them. I tell them, 'It took almost twenty years to get him there so keep doing for yourself. When he's ready, he'll join you.' It certainly would help marriages if husband and wife would do something like that because it's positive."

Running has had a positive effect for Team Robitaille, bringing new elements to their 46 year marriage. "We get high off of each other," said Monique. "We egg each other on. It's a competition thing. We try to outdo each other." Then almost as an aside, Ron added, "It's like we have become more than man and wife."