

# Marathons offer magic with misery

By Bill Shaw

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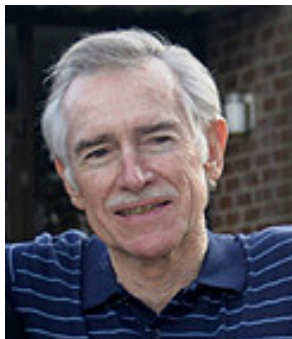
**A**s I ran a short 4-miler Saturday, I thought of the Brazosport-area runners who would be lining up with thousands of others for the Houston Marathon on Sunday. Today, we can look in the newspapers and online to see how our friends fared.

"To describe the agony of a marathon to someone who's never run it is like trying to explain color to someone who was born blind," said Jerome Drayton, Canadian marathoner who won the Boston Marathon in 1977.

"I'll never do that again," I told my wife when I finished my first marathon in Houston in 1988. A year later, I was at the Houston Marathon starting line. I remembered the exhilaration, pride and prestige of finishing a marathon; I forgot how difficult the contest was. I finished my last marathon, my 10th, in Houston in 1998. As a mediocre and aging runner, I don't have the time it takes to train for the 26.2-mile distance. Every November and December, I was out on Sundays running three to four hours. Spectators and non-runners have no clue of what it takes physically and mentally

to make the distance. Families do, however, for sometimes marathoners' spouses become widows, and their children become orphans when runners abandon them to train.

In this post-2009 Houston Marathon column, here are some comments about the agony and the ecstasy of the marathon taken from "*The Quotable Runner: Great Moments of Wisdom, Inspiration, Wrongheadedness and Humor*"



by Mark Will-Weber (Breakaway Books 1995).

"The marathon can humble you," said Bill Rodgers, winner of four Boston Marathons and four New York City Marathons.

"You have to forget your last marathon before you try another,"

said Frank Shorter, who won the Olympic gold medal in 1972 in Munich and the Olympic silver medal in 1976 in Montreal.

"I definitely want to show how beautiful the marathon can be," said Uta Pippig, former East Germany runner who became an American citizen in 2004; she won the Boston Marathon three consecutive years (1994-96), the Berlin Marathon three times and the New York City Marathon once. "I am an opponent of all those who find the marathon bad: the psychologists, the physiologists, the doubters," Pippig said.

"I make the marathon beautiful for myself and for others."

"I was unable to walk for a whole week after that (marathon), so much did the race take out of me," said Czech Olympic Marathon winner Emil Zatopek in Helsinki in 1952. "But it was the most pleasant exhaustion I have

ever known. We (marathoners) are different in essence, from other men. If you want to win something, run 100 meters. If you want to experience something, run a marathon."

"The marathon is a charismatic event," said Fred Lebow, who as New York Road Runners' president promoted big-time marathoning and the New York City Marathon. "It has everything. It has drama. It has competition. It has camaraderie. It has heroism. Every jogger can't dream of being an Olympic champion, but he can dream of finishing a marathon."

"Marathoning is like cutting yourself unexpectedly," said Australian marathoner John Farrington. "You dip into the pain so gradually that the damage is done before you are aware of it. Unfortunately, when awareness comes, it is excruciating."

"In this mechanized society of ours, marathoners want to assert their independence and affirm their individually more than ever," said Eric Segal, author of "Love Story." "Call it humanism, call it health, call it folly. Some are Lancelots, some are Don Quixotes. All are noble."

All those runners who lined up for the marathon yesterday are indeed noble, whether they triumphed like Lancelot and finished, or tilted at windmills like Don Quixote and dropped out because of fatigue or injury before the finish line.

I salute you all.

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