

Training for a new adventure

By Bill Shaw

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The ultimate test for a recreational runner is the 26.2-mile distance of a marathon. Marathon registrants seem to grow every year. The Houston Marathon fills quickly, and if runners haven't registered by early fall, they are out of luck.

As a "born-again" runner, I listened to marathon veterans tell stories about their marathon experiences. They told stories, in particular, about training. I considered going the marathon distance a personal impossibility.

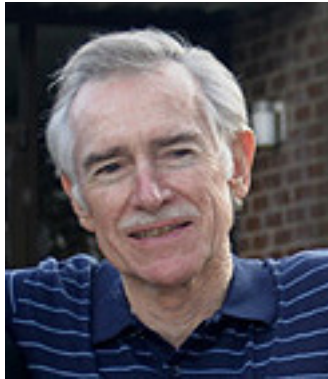
Inspired by those veterans' stories and guided by a training schedule in Jeff Galloway's *Book on Running*, at 48, I finished my first marathon. I became a marathoner.

Friends and acquaintances of marathoners view them in one of two ways. Some are awed and amazed and view them with respect. Others think they are demotivated and masochistic.

One marathon is enough for some recreational, middle-to-back-of-the-pack runners like me. Indeed, I vowed, when I crossed the finish line in 1989, "I'll never do that again as long as I live." I was at the starting line of the Houston Marathon the next year and eight more years, and I fin-

ished the New York City Marathon in 1996 — one was not enough.

I retired from marathon training and running in 1998. Training was too long and too hard. I experienced a series of injuries that kept me from following my six-month marathon training schedule. In addition, marathon training "consumed" my life and



widowed my wife in the last two months of my training when I went out every Sunday for a three or four hour run.

After a particularly painful back injury, my personal physician suggested

that I stop pounding the pavement, which aggravated the injury, and swim. I swam 25 yards my first time in the pool and hung on to the wall panting. Swimming was not as easy as I expected. With some hints and advice from my swimming companions, I progressed and improved.

"Humm," I said to myself. "If I can swim, I know I can ride a bike, I can run. What about training for a triathlon?"

Just three days short of my 62nd birthday, I finished my first triathlon — a 300-yard swim, 15-mile cycle route and a 3-mile run. I was now not only a marathoner; I was a triathlete, a recreational, back-of-the-pack triathlete, but a triathlete. I was hooked. I have finished 28 triathlons and will head up to Pearland for my 29th next Sunday.

"Triathlon is hot," an online article on runnersworld.

com said. "In the past five years, participation in the sport has increased by more than 30 percent in the United States. It's estimated that almost 500,000 people in this country will dive in the water, hop on their bikes, then change into running shoes all in a single race this year."

"But for all its power to change your life, training for a triathlon isn't going to consume your life," said Eric Hart in *Triathlon Training in Four Hours a Week* (Rodale Press 2003).

Triathlon training does require discipline and a strict exercise regimen in the pool, on the bike and on the run. Triathlon training, however, does not expose recreational athletes to the stress and likelihood of injury that marathon training does.

You can't become a triathlete overnight, but this summer you might vow to train for a new personal physical adventure. Training guides and books are abundant, including "The Triathlete's Training Diary for Dummies" (IDG Books Worldwide 2001). Many area triathlons offer training sessions for newbies.

Many triathletes, both competitive and recreational, live and train in our area, including the the Brazosport Area Triathletes, who can offer training tips and encouragement. BRATS is on Facebook.

Join us. Become a triathlete. The experience will change your life.

Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.