



London Marathon Trip Notes April 13-19, 2010

The marathon itself was a carnival. Sure, there were those serious runners but not in the back of the pack where I was. When I read in the newspaper that all runners were charity driven and that most were in costume it seemed an exaggeration. NOT! If we call NYC Marathon “one long block party,” this is more so. If we think NYC Marathon has the most and loudest spectators, this is more so. Not that it was perfect but like NYC Marathon, it was pretty close. The London Marathon should be on any marathoners list who likes to have a good time if not a good finishing time. I wasn’t likely to make any fast finish time anyway so I made the conscious decision to spend all the time on the course that was allowed and I came pretty darned close.

Upsides

- **Registration** through Marathon Tours was simple. No medical form was needed and no extensive forms to complete. It could be that only the international runners are exempt from running under the auspices of a charity. After dealing with all of Rome, Medoc and Munich marathons and their registration paperwork, this was a delight to have it done for me.
- **Expo**, though far outside of town, was without lines and contained a large number of vendors.
- **Adidas** was the official clothing sponsor and their merchandise was as good as the 2007 Boston Marathon merchandise and similar with green instead of orange. So I indulged justifying that the jacket was a bit heavier and lined; I sure didn’t need a running jacket.
- **Start area** was huge and well organized with three starting corals with each numbered 1-9. There were air balloons and a party atmosphere.



- **Fluid stations** were plentiful with full water bottles from Nestlé.
- **Energy drinks** in full bottles by Lucozade: I’m told it’s by a major pharmaceutical company but not palatable to my taste.
- **Medical tents** as well as traveling bicyclists and motorcyclist “ambulances.”
- **Spectators** not only beyond imagination but tireless even for those back of the pack runners. There were no areas empty of spectators.
- **Snacks** were offered by spectators consisting of candy, cookies and fruit. Oddly a lot was unwrapped items like jelly beans and gummies.

- **The Course** was amazing and went past many top tourist sites such as Greenwich, (skipped the sailing boat Cutty Sark this year), going over the Tower Bridge, through the Wall Street type canyons of Canary Wharf, Isle of Dogs, along the river, past Big Ben and finishing at Buckingham Palace's fountain.
- **Fast course** - without a doubt as evidenced by the records set at London. Friend David Holmen managed his own PR at 3:04 (despite having run Paris Marathon the week before) while I might have managed my own PW by taking nearly all the 7-hours. (To keep you from digging results – I came in at 6:48.)
- **Traffic** was totally contained, totally safe. They simply closed down the roads.
- **Costumes** on the course are just unbelievable. There were countless amazingly imaginative costumed runners. Some of the costumes or themes included large groups. It was easy to take my time and hard to stop taking pictures. My picture count numbered well over 350. Here's my favorite costume(s) of the day – on the back of one of these two hunks reads "Bankers Exposed." I tried to keep up with them
- **Pubs** along the route were said to number 74 with most of them furnishing live bands or at least boom boxes.
- **Showers** are offered at various points along the course. They are a series of sprayers.
- **Volunteers** were out in great numbers and well marked with red shirts and/or jackets. They were clearly having a great time themselves and seemed tireless.
- **Finish line** was totally open for all of the advertised 7-hours.



These and header pictures are from prior marathons.

Downsides

Yes? No? It's hard to think of them! Yet it has always been my goal to present marathons as honestly as possible. The following is not meant to give an overall 'negative' but rather to help know what to expect.

- **Expensive?** It is said that overseas runners pay up heavily but it was built into my overall price which included entry, support, a cocktail party and a reasonably good hotel complete with huge breakfast so I conveniently really don't know about the entry fee.
- **London and the British Pound** exchange rate makes the whole event on the expensive side for Americans. If it says 1£ the price seems right in dollars but it costs \$1.70 to buy 1£.
- **This IS a foreign language.** You just think we share a common language until you try to understand it. Maybe I'll work up a list of weird terms they use that either mean nothing to us or have x-rated connotations. At least with the French or Italians you are expecting it to be foreign. (Like getting knocked up which means a door knock.)
- **Expo** was out in the boonies necessitating three subway changes and 4£ one way to get there which was downright pricey plus inconvenient. This does seem to be the modus operandi of foreign marathons however to be on the outskirts of town.

- **Point to point course** necessitating a bus to the start at 7:15am whereas the start isn't until 9:45. We didn't start until 10am.
- **Toilets!** There were lines at the start and lines on the course until about mile 18. They were bad enough for me to call them criminal: long lines, no supplies, and filthy. I realize I was at the end but it was advertised to accept runners that long so give us support! Even for me, late in the



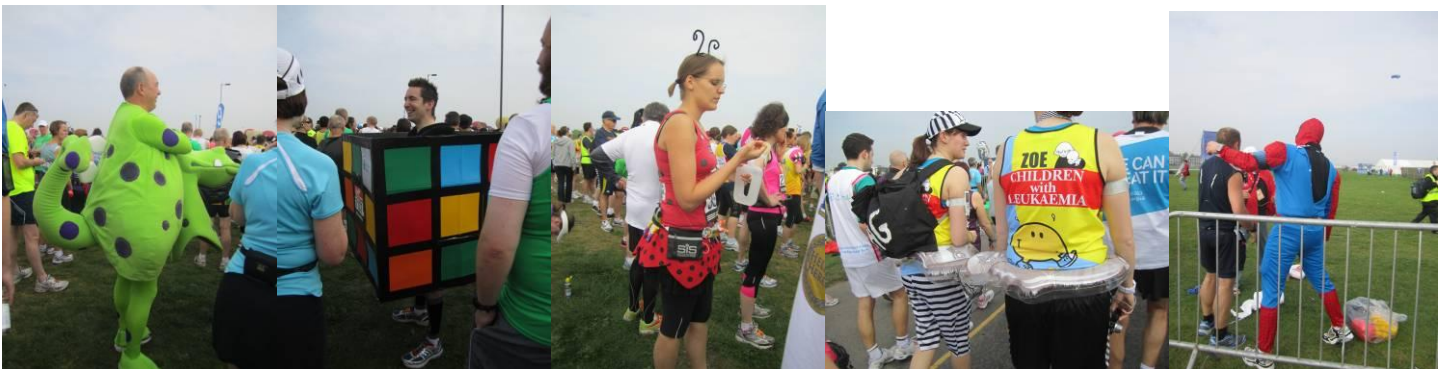
course cost me at minimum a full five minutes in line. I'd say who cares but I could have been on the course taking pictures! What are female urinals? I fortunately have no idea but equally I didn't ever take to the bushes either as it seemed to be totally frowned upon here. Do you like that sign? "Don't Wee in People's Gardens."

- **Food** on the course was limited to a type of GU in two locations. Otherwise it was gummies from spectators and oddly much of that was in the form of open packages and bare hands. I never saw pretzels and limited fruit.
- **Energy drink** might take some getting used to. I carry my own Gatorade anyway.
- **Finish line food** was next to non-existent and came in the form of a bag with an apple, energy drink, water and two types of bars.
- **Massage** was offered for a fee at the Expo and probably not at all at the finish line. I don't partake anyway, preferring to wait a couple days and for my own trusted professional.
- **T-shirt** might have been the worse I've ever encountered. It was flimsy white cotton with a barely readable red Virgin logo. Worse it was wadded up in the finish line bag of food and drink. I'd think Sir Richard Branson would complain about even having his logo on the t-shirt. In this picture I've ironed it out as well as I could.
- **Merchandise** was not offered for sale at the finish line. Had it been most marathoners would have hustled over to buy a decent shirt to commemorate a wonderful event. With a terrible t-shirt.

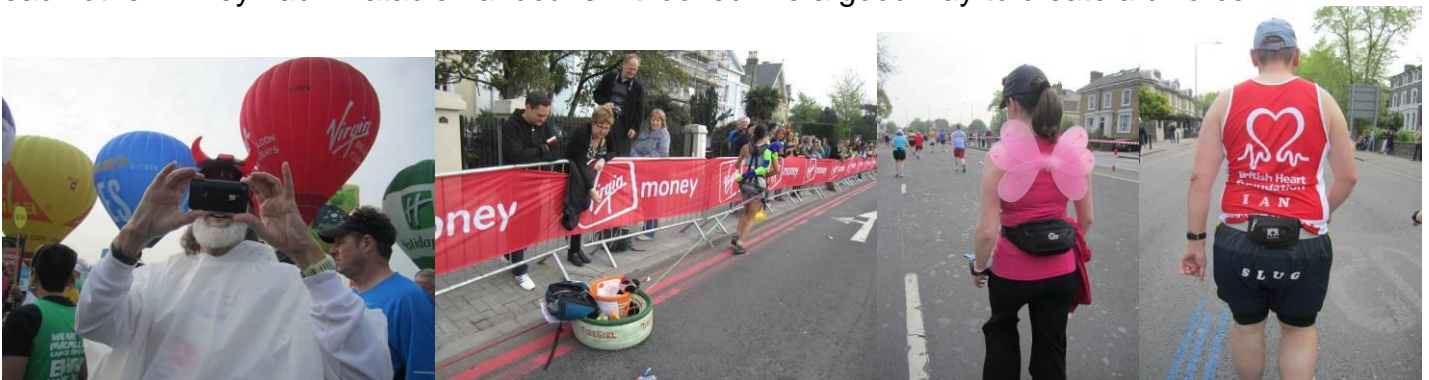




Here are some of the costumed runners we lined up with.



The next to last couple here (she in prison garb) were the first of many we would find 'chained' to each other. They had inflatable handcuffs. It looked like a good way to create a divorce.



Here's Dr. Tom at the start line with some of the huge balloons in the background. He has red devil horns and was sometimes referred to as The Lucky Devil. Ms Tyre Girl was the first of the many we found who were seeking contributions along the way. I think that our method of asking for a check prior to the marathon is preferable. The guy in the red and white 'heart' t-shirt has SLUG written across his bottom – but he was ahead of us.



The Japanese contingent was the most persistent in their fund raising efforts: they would stand in front of spectators with their pails of coins and insist on a contribution. Mr. Soccer Guy had been featured on TV and apparently had completed other marathons kicking the soccer ball the entire way. The marching band was just the first of numerous large groups we'd see, but Mr. Free-to-Dance was the most fun. A fairy for sure and proud of it; he was not the only one I danced with.



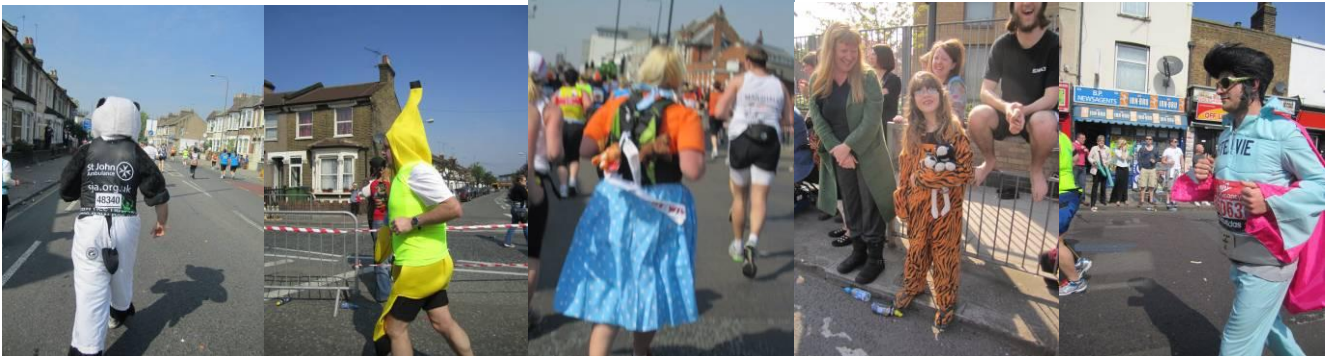
Mr. and Mrs. Superman "100 Club Marathon" were equally persistent in their fund-raising. I thought they would get a lot of weight lifting out of carrying the pail of coins through the marathon but they were met and downloaded their coins at various locations, as did the Japanese contingent. See Ms Spectator in her British flag? See the Liberty Lady shadow at her feet. This old guy in white ballerina costume would stay with us and be found later conducting a band on the course. He was celebrating someone's 10th anniversary with a new heart. He had heart. I hope he emails me – he wanted his pictures and I wanted to know more about him.



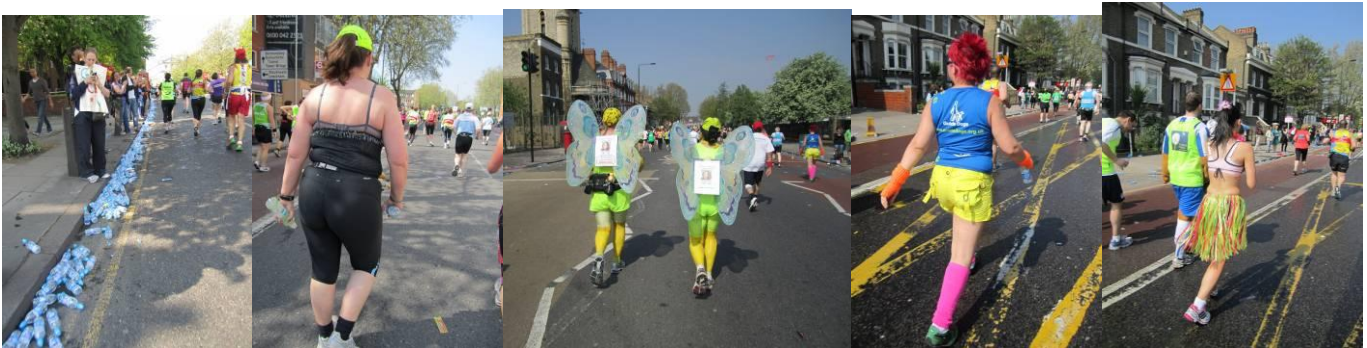
That's a rhino! Then an old fashioned telephone named Dan. A group of gals intending to hula hoop the entire way. A guy gutsy enough to wear a pink tutu is a real man? In fact there were quite a few guys in tutus.



No, that's not a hippo in an orange tutu but close. Mums on the Run were oddly colorful. Then it was two guys inside the 'bus' toot-tooting their way along followed by one of the few airplanes I would see on the course.



Panda Bear was good but Mr. Banana was better; he didn't know what his 'stem' looked like bobbling along in front of him and I had trouble not giggling. See the cute little 'tiger' spectator? There were plenty of Elvis.



Bottles lined the street and unfortunately very few were consumed. I don't get it – this is a European thing and I can only guess that bottles must be totally recyclable. Then you've got the runners such as the 2nd and 4th who might not have intended to be in 'costume' but just didn't have a mirror at home or a mommy to tell them not to leave the house looking that way. Unintentional costumes?



Dancers and music were common. The Lucky Devil joined these cute little cheerleaders. We would see more bagpipe players on other parts of the course.



Adam and Eve were of my favorites. Adam was in the bushes when I took this picture. Admiral Nelson wanted to tell us about his history but we got amused by the cheerleaders instead.



Bicycles and motorcycles were roving ambulances: an excellent idea. The first time I saw this was at the Leading Ladies Marathon in SD where the Race Director had Boys on Bikes (BOBs). See the little boy in blue wizard costume? His face was totally covered in chocolate. He needed the next costume . . . We believe the washing machine was a full sized metal machine that would presumably be carried the entire way. But not all costumes made it to the end as evidenced by some on the sidelines. It must be hard to fix a foot blister when your head has to come off first.

Results

At the starting line, just as I was exiting the bus at around 7:45am, I ran across Dr. Tom from Oregon. We ran together around Diamond Head area in Honolulu's December 2010 Marathon and it was a delight to have his company again -- both for the long wait to the start and for the entire 26.2 miles. I will try to meet up with him again despite my shyness around a psychiatrist (smile).

As we watched people getting into their costumes I made the decision that no matter how I felt, this was a marathon that needed all the allotted time so as to totally enjoy it. I wasn't going to have a PR no matter so why not a PW and enjoy it -- and enjoy I did with a zillion pictures, stops, dancing to bands, veering off course, etc. I'll include some of these pictures here and am most willing to send a CD if you wish.

My PR (Personal Record) was 4:25 at Scranton Pennsylvania's Steamtown Marathon in 2005. Thank you to encourager Maricar, coach Tom, pacer Art and trainer Jeff. That finish time at age 60 was sufficient to even meet next year's new and tougher Boston Qualification (BQ) requirements. I am doubly grateful to have accomplished it so that now I don't have to push any more. I'm clear and comfortable that there's a world of difference between 4:25 to 6:48 and I remain grateful to just be out there and accomplishing my 7th marathon of the year. I've



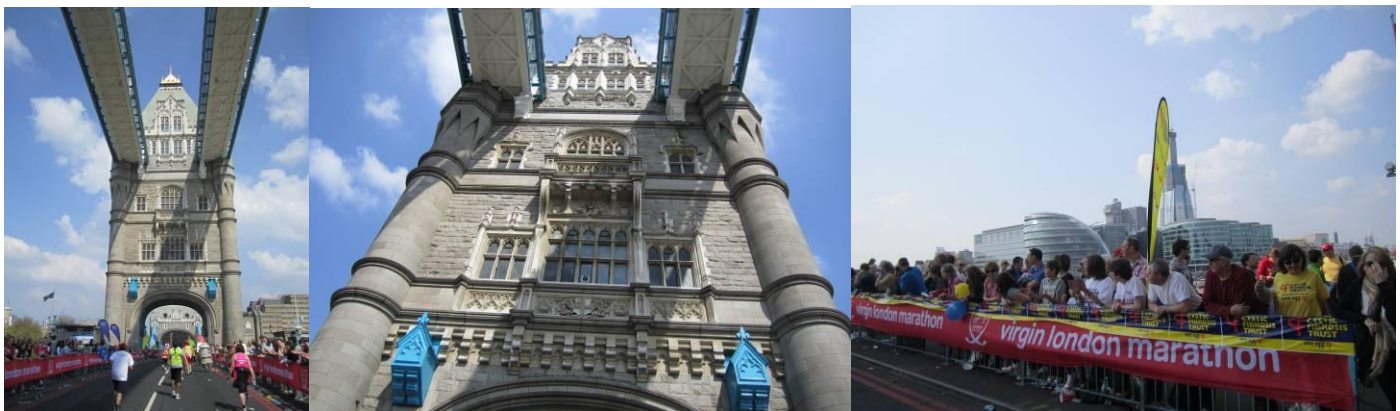
just come off my streak of 24 marathons in the past 12 months due to too many hikes or other endeavors. This was my 79th total finished marathon since my first one in 2002 (and I only did 5 in the first 4 years.)

Oops, I just remembered a “worse” Personal Worse (smile) at Surfside Beach Texas in February of this year but that was on sand so maybe doesn’t count. Besides, I counted it as a BEST!

The best of the best – London Bridge



We are starting over the bridge. Here’s Dr. Tom, my shrink for the day. It is as you turn and go into this area that the spectators are like coming off NYC’s 59th Street Bridge. It vibrates with cheering squads.



In the background is the soon-to-be glass tower that’s in construction and said to be the highest if not skinniest tower in Europe. From Wikipedia: *Shard of Glass is a skyscraper under construction in Southwark, London. When completed in 2012, it will be the tallest building in the European Union and the 45th tallest building in the world.*

Dignitaries

Big names run NYC. Big names run London. And not just Kenyan big names though a record was once again set in London. Princess Beatrice was there. As everyone now knows, records were set in both London and Boston and they were by men with the same last name but no relationship. Sir Richard Branson ran last year. Here’s an email received the following day from “Richard” which is how he signed it. *Everyone take a bow! A massive well done to everyone involved in the Virgin London Marathon. It was a fantastic day and I was more than a little bit jealous of all those taking part. After running last year I know how tough, but rewarding the race is. It is a culmination of months of dedicated training and it was great to see so many people enjoying the day. 26.2 miles is a long way and takes a lot of commitment, so well done to everyone who made it to the start, and finish line. The crowd were fantastic and Holly and I really enjoyed cheering on all of the runners. London should take great pride in the amount of people that come to watch the event - yet again the crowd were amazing. Last year the cheers I got really spurred me on and I could tell that they were having the same effect on runners this time around. Last year the event raised £50 million and it looks like we’re going to beat that - so thank you to all who ran for charity, and to everyone who donated. If you want to be involved in the race next year don’t forget to register in the ballot which opens on 26 April 2011. Once again, thank you to everyone who took part, came to watch, donated or helped out on the day. I hope you had an amazing time.*

Best wishes, Richard,
Sir Richard Branson, Chairman of the Virgin Group of Companies

More course pictures



There were dozens of these kids in orange tutus. They were connected together with bungee cords and had the word Centipede on their backside. Near to Tony the Tiger and just as we were entering Canary Wharf, an area built up since I'd done business in The City of London.



In Canary Wharf was a huge screen TV monitor. You can see it just above the runners in the middle picture. Then the 3rd photo is a picture of the monitor with Lucky Devil and Liberty Lady in it.



I asked Mr. "Officially the Oldest Runner 2011" – "What race?" It was this day's Virgin Marathon. He then asked me if I didn't want to ask him how old he was, to which I replied "do you want to tell me?" He proudly announced he was 89 and I'd say that was well worth being proud of. So I



stopped to dance with these Taiko Drummers who weren't 89 but who in some cases had collapsed from being tired. I was impressed with both – 89 year old Paul and Taiko Drummers who could play for about 6 hours.

Dancing? Actually there's something good that happens to the legs when they stop to dance or when they skip to the music or hop up and down the curbs. I believe it has something to do with using other muscles (like the walk/run concept) if not giving the mind a rest. I always come out of it feeling quite refreshed.



Canary Wharf really is a cavernous group of Wall Street type buildings, all glass and modern. It was here that I saw the finish of a royal wedding costume that I'd only seen the beginnings of at the starting line. We would go through more than one area with Muslim dress and I would see a fair number of burqua. Whatever "humped zebra crossing" means I have no idea except that they do call their speed bumps "humps."



There were plenty of cute little 'bobbies' along the course and lots of female Bobbies too. I liked how these guys pulled out a sofa for their spectating. I might have liked an invite to sit with them for a moment had they offered me a beer. I don't know that Jane appreciated the sign "Run Fat Girl Run."



There had been plenty of demonstrations in London and this was a perfect forum to protest. Remember old man Mr. Ballerina from before? Here he is conducting and it was just before we ran to the side of the Tower of London where I'd taken a tour the prior day.



The spectators were all great fun and I think enjoyed getting their pictures taken. In this case they insisted on taking our picture with them.



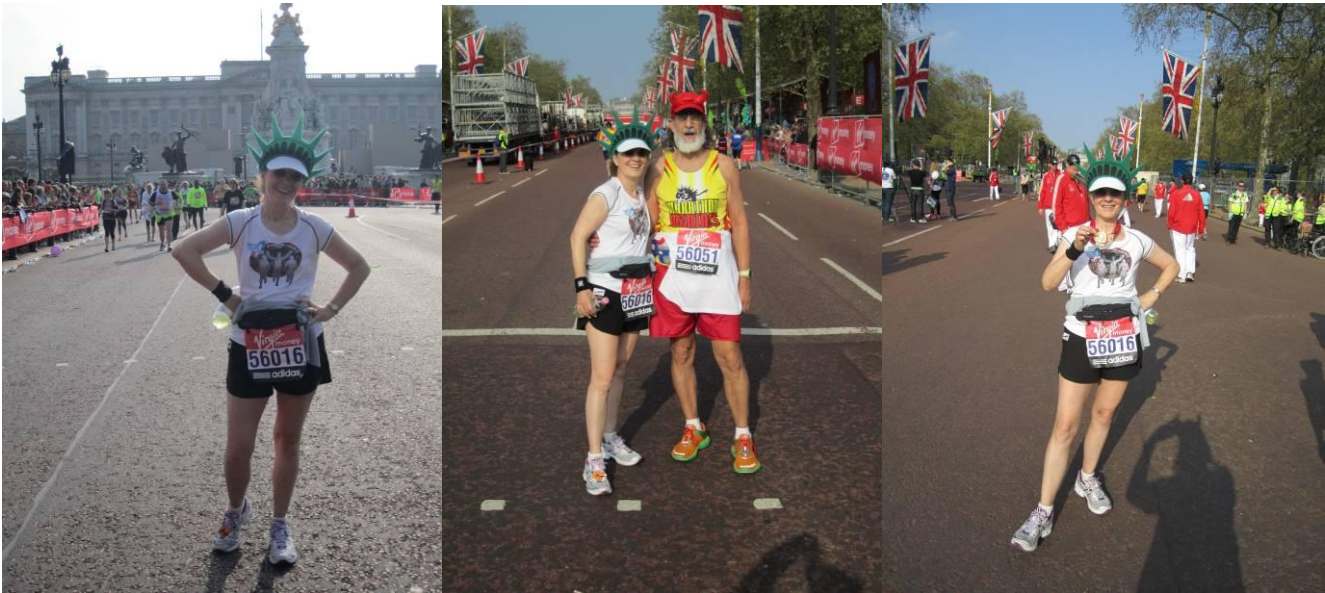


Running along the river, on the opposite side of the London Eye – the big carousel that holds 24 people per carriage and takes 30 minutes for a circle and one ride and maybe a couple hours standing in line to pay your 15 to 30£ cost for that 30 minutes ride. I didn't though I had sort of wanted to; it was just far down on my list and I chose other endeavors.

The finish line!



Ooooooooooooooh finally – we're coming upon Buckingham Palace and the finish line but not before finding Mr. Robin the Hood who looked like he should have been honored as the oldest runner of the day. But we wouldn't cross the finish line before stopping for some pictures. This was a momentous day – one of the Five Marathon Majors completed!



This flag lined street is called The Mall and leads into Buckingham Palace. It was here I saw the changing of the horse guards and their parade on two different days.

Mr. Lucky Devil and Lady Liberty had a good day. Tom had just come from Paris Marathon the week before so it was an especially big accomplishment for him. See Mr. Devil's shadow in the last picture? We shall meet again!

Moving onto Tourist Travel – which to some of us is one of the same as marathoning

Darned if I can figure out why I can't sleep on an airplane. Even giving myself a lie-flat bed and a night flight I was unable to sleep a wink. But I persist in staying up after arriving in a foreign country in the early morning which certainly makes it really easy to sleep that first night in the hotel.

I made good use of my first day (Thursday), and my second day, and even my third day I would put on many, many miles totally forgetting the rule that one should at least rest the legs the day before a marathon. And even after the marathon I would walk miles and miles through all the parks and shopping districts as well as some museums.



My hotel

From the old St James Courtyard came the modernization by Crown Plaza. They had four award winning restaurants with one even earning a Michelin star. Amazing, in London? I was in the back building called the Spa 51 on the top corner floor and plenty happy.

It would serve me well being so close to Buckingham Palace on one side and Westminster Abbey area on the other.



I would find myself at the Albert Memorial and exhibition hall more than once – both for a guided tour and again when I walked to museum row. The same was for Westminster Abbey as it was on a tour, at the crossroads and where I returned from a boat tour. Everyone knows about London phone booths? Some are totally void of phones but sometimes filled with tourists as this one was. How many tourists can you get in one? This group of girls managed four.



Trooping of the Colors Invite: Eons ago when we were attached to SHAPE/NATO headquarters we had an invite to see the Queen's birthday celebration in June called Trooping of the Colors. The next best thing is the changing of the horse guards which I would see three times – once on a tour, another time on my own and the third when I got lost and found myself in the area. It is next to St James Park said to be the most beautiful of the chain of parks and I would walk through it on my way home more than once.



London requirements – a London Taxi, a picture in front of Buckingham Palace (where the marathon finished) and many visits to a pub for draft beer if not for the free internet.



A guided tour of St Paul was a highlight and I got this first picture before being told to put my camera away. I bought a book. This was where Princess Diana was married; she thought it a bad omen to be married in Westminster Abbey since her parents were married there and then divorced. The upcoming wedding will take place in Westminster Abbey.

On a tour was the Tower of London but not nearly enough time inside so I would take myself back still again. The lions are at the entry, the houses are inside and apparently someone important was in residence since a guard sentry was on duty. These are the famous "Beefeaters" who are retired officers who give guided tours of the Tower's complex.

Want your own tour of The Tower of London? It's a bit lengthy but hilarious, particularly if you have been to the Tower of London. Nice to see political correctness ignored and appreciated by the masses. When you click onto the website you will see that there are parts 1 - 4. Suggest you watch them all but having said that, it's almost like this is a different language and I had to really concentrate to understand the British accent. www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWFq-v7TKdQ



The Millennium Bridge is for pedestrians and I think it's the one referred to as Wobbly Bridge since when it was first built it moved far too much to suit nervous walkers. The London Eye picture was taken from a river boat tour. The carriages hold 24 people. The trip takes 30 minutes for one rotation and the view is said to be spectacular. When it opened it was to be a temporary ride and cost 5£. Now it costs anywhere from 15 to 30£ depending on if you want to stand in line forever or if you want a fast pass. I would have gotten on for 15£ had there been no line. It was on my list but not over other less touristy things to do. It is some 437 feet tall; yet there are observation decks of some buildings at over 700 feet so it's a 'headline' but not mine. Dr. Tom said he took it at sunset which was spectacular to see the city light up.



Wedding pictures must have been a challenge because there was still about ten feet of train flowing behind this Japanese gal. This was on the docks at one of my river visits before seeing Westminster Abbey in the quiet. With Royal Wedding craze going on it was hard to see the Abbey in the quiet. This was only one of the locations where bleachers were being installed for the upcoming wedding.

No smoking in pubs! See the pub in the third picture with all the folks spilling out into the roadway? I wondered what was going on as this seemed to be the case for so many pubs. I didn't go in thinking they were packed but it turns out they were not – the smokers are now required to move outside and outside they move even into the streets.



I try to see Opera houses whenever possible and this was the Opera Arcade, not far from the home of the longest running play of Phantom of the Opera. The sequel called Love Never Dies is getting good reviews. I went inside the theatre.

By Trafalgar Square where a Danish festival was ongoing I went into the National Gallery of Art and then into the nearby Portrait Gallery where I spent most of my time searching for Sir Joshua Reynolds portraits and anything of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.

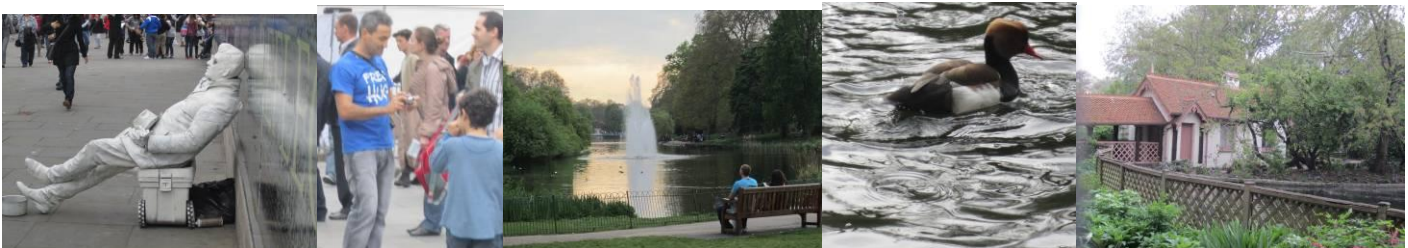
Next up was a walk through Chinatown full of familiar merchandise and foods to me and also full of a great number of tourists.



So many places I'd totally forgotten from our early 70s days in London. Walking Piccadilly Circus brought back reminders as did walking in The City where I'd had many business meetings during days of hawking stock in the 90s. The first two pictures are theatres of note. Then I went into a huge touristy shop of UK mementos and giggled my way through. There was a large carousel of humorously titled condoms plus a t-shirt that struck my funny bone and suited me well. No, I didn't buy it, nor am I going onto Facebook anytime soon. I admired a friend who gave it up for Lent.



Something like Times Square, Trafalgar Square has some of everything. Duck Tours (didn't they close them down after the deaths in Philadelphia?). Pubs had "Mind Your Bags" reminders on every table. Shops offered high-heeled sneakers, and there were the usual mimes seeking contributions.



The most unusual of Trafalgar Square were the good looking young boys with shirts saying "Hug Me" and it turns out they were from a church group who would later be on the marathon course. That got me ready for my 2nd of 3rd walk through St Pails Park with its fountains glowing in the sunset, huge pelicans on an island and ducks in the pond.

Disaster? Not! Before the Park, I would leave Trafalgar Square and all of its related excitement to find my own excitement. Being maybe too touristy, walking maybe a bit fast and not minding my feet, I was suddenly sprawled out on the sidewalk with my hat and backpack flying and some of it into the heavily trafficked street. People kindly stopped to offer assistance and helped me pick up my stuff to

include my badly scratched camera. I sat there awhile wondering what disaster had struck me. You know the thought about how your life can change in just a heartbeat? I looked awful with bloody spots and even bloodied through my jacket and long sleeve shirt. I looked back and realized that the flat sidewalk had suddenly morphed into a gradual step that I hadn't noticed. I was near to a pub I knew so went in to wash up body and clothing and decided that it was no disaster at all except to my ego. The very sore knees never affected my walking or running in the slightest. I did make a big mistake and used the pub's free internet to email Tom who worried until he found me later that evening. It took a few days for the black, blue and green colors to show.

Food talk – There have been questions about my restaurant experiences and there I am pretty much totally lacking when I'm not with a 'foodie' or Tom. But I did start out right on the plane and I kept the menu just for those of you who asked: *Warm toasted nuts accompanied by champagne. Selected appetizers of a demitasse of creamy corn and poblano soup accompanied by coconut shrimp and a vegetable spring roll with mango chutney. Then a salad of romaine and mesclun with tomatoes, mozzarella and crispy terra sticks accompanied by freshly baked garlic bread. For my main course I chose the braised beef short rib with bordelaise mushroom sauce, spicy aji Amarillo mashed potatoes, skinny green beans, baby carrots and baby tomatoes. After a fruit and cheese cart served with port wine I skipped the grand vanilla ice cream sundae and instead chose a single malt. All of which didn't help me sleep even in the lie-flat bed. I can tell you that all this good sounding food was not in the very slightest bit worth the price.*

No one eats well in London and I don't believe for a moment that they have changed their ways and now have good restaurants despite the claims. But I did enjoy crispy fish and chips one day and took full advantage of a huge buffet breakfast at my hotel each morning with the related sausage sandwich snatched and enjoyed later in the day. Guinness draft was enjoyed a few times as was a McDonald's big fat hamburger after the marathon.

Now, satisfied? Enough food talk?

More tourist after the marathon

The following day was at first a difficult choice but it turned out right for me. I could take the day trip to Windsor Castle and Stonehenge or I could walk the town and parks. In a effort to be true to myself, I stayed in London to get more saturated.



I had read that one could walk for miles from one park to another so I started in St James, went through Green Park via Buckingham Palace and the Wellington statue and museum, into Hyde Park and finally Kensington Gardens. On my way I had a snack at the beginning of The Serpentine and fed the ducks, watched equestrian riders and walked around the Diana Memorial before finding Peter Pan statuary and the Italian Gardens. Kensington Place was under construction.



From the parks and gardens going south one goes through shopping areas and into the back side of Museum Row. There's a Science as well as this glorious Natural History Museum covered in colorful tile and surrounded by flowers. My destination was a good walk through the Victoria and Albert Museum as well as lunch inside. It was hard to decide which dining room to indulge as they were every bit as striking as that in the Paris Muse d'Orsay so I just ate outside.



Victoria and Albert Museum is known for having an unusually large collection and it was hard to figure out where to go first. Statuary and especially that of Rodin was my favorite, followed by the Japanese wing full of netsuke and kimono. The royal rooms were hard to hurry through but there was, as they say, so much and so little time.



It felt fitting to leave the historical and royalty room creations of V&A Museum for Harrods, shopping location of royalty and on the must-list of every tourist each and every visit to London. The queen's groceries come from Harrods. Swiss flags were flying outside and inside was even more than I remembered and I tried to take in every section and every floor. It was a marathon in itself.



There's a room for pastry, a room for chocolates, a room for meats, a room for fish. There are designer fashions beyond imagination and this particular dress was a mere 1800£ or I might have had it. So for my sinful thoughts of extravagance I ended my day with a first-ever tour of Westminster Cathedral but not until I'd walked all of Sloane Street with Harvey Nichols and every designer known. It was park after park again on the way home with tootsies feeling every bit as though they'd done still another marathon. (see part 2)