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Tim Murphy's marathon effort through Lamorinda

By Jon Kingdon



From left: family friend Steve Crossland, daughter-in-law Hillary Murphy, grandson Mack Murphy, Tim Murphy, and Tim's wife, Karen
Photo Jon Kingdon

Who were you rooting for in the race between the tortoise and the hare? In the case of Tim Murphy, you can be sure he was backing the tortoise. As Murphy approached his 74th birthday, he made it clear that he was not going to go gently in that that good night.

The term Marathon goes back to 490 BC and is credited to the legend of Philippides who was a messenger for the Greeks and was, he thought, witness to a victory by the Greeks at the battle of Marathon over the Persians and ran the 26.2 miles back to the Greek capital announcing, "We have won!" before collapsing and dying. The marathon has been an official event at the Olympics since 1896; 26.22 miles did not become the official distance until 1921.

It was Murphy's goal on June 13 to complete his fourth marathon. Murphy had run the prior three marathons, years earlier, finishing them all in under three and a half hours. In a concession to his three shoulder and four knee replacements due to a lifetime of competitive sports, particularly rugby, Murphy opted to walk the 26.22 miles through Lamorinda. After receiving clearance from his various doctors, Murphy took on the challenge head on. "I guess when you're going to be 74 years old and you've been house bound by COVID and you're a stubborn, obstinate Irishman, I set the goal for myself and found a program online titled `Preparing to Train to Walk a Marathon.'"

Murphy's daughter-in-law, Hillary, spoke for the family in their reaction to Murphy's efforts: "We've been apprehensively supportive. He's had a lot of surgeries, but Tim is an extremely determined person when he sets a goal. We're excited to see him finish because he has been training for months to do this."

In anticipation of taking the approximate 52,176 steps in walking a marathon, Murphy was not starting from scratch, already walking three to five miles daily. Walking various distances in his training, Murphy gradually moved up from eight miles to 10 to 12, eventually maxing out at 21 miles in his training.

No fool he, Murphy carefully designed his own marathon route and described it as such: "It's very closely engineered. It combines three things: 1) Very few hills; 2) Access to water; and 3) Out of respect to my 74 years - bathroom stops."

A graduate of Stanford and the University of Colorado Law School, Murphy and his wife Karen moved back to San Francisco and then to Oakland. "Karen is in real estate and in 1983, we became true Lamorindans," Murphy said. "We have lived in Orinda, Moraga and finally settled in Lafayette. It's a great community and we've met a lot of genuinely nice people."

In his legal career, Murphy worked on a wide range of cases, even going against Al Davis and the Oakland Raiders in their attempt to move to Los Angeles. "I tried all sorts of cases: medical malpractice cases and product liability cases," Murphy said. "In the last 20 years of my career I was with a firm that specialized in representing employers, management and a lot of discrimination and sexual harassment lawsuits. All of these were on jury trials and that was a lot of fun."

While you will see many of the runners with headphones and earbuds plugged in, listening to music or podcasts, such is not the case with Murphy. "For some reason, I can't do that," Murphy said. "I just walk along and have these nice four-hour walks and I think about all the things I've done and all the mistakes I've made and review the cases I've tried and it's actually pretty relaxing."

The academic side of Murphy aided in his preparation for the big day. "I learned that my body will burn 3,000 calories while walking a marathon, but the body can only store 2,500 to 2,800 calories," Murphy said. "At that point, your body with either burn stored fat or muscle. I will be eating cliff bars and protein bars and drinking a lot of water as I go along. I found that if you build up your body's ability to use carbohydrates in fat and not muscle, which you can do by increasing the mileage you walk, you can actually train your body to use the right calories and you don't hit the wall which hopefully I won't hit."

But to paraphrase the poet Robert Burns, "The best laid plans of mice and man can still go wrong."

With the weather not cooperating, it proving to be a very warm day, Murphy hit the proverbial wall at 24 miles, but took it all in stride. Surrounded by family and friends after returning home, it was not a time for regrets. "I came up short by about 10%. If Charles Lindbergh had done that he would have ended up in the Atlantic Ocean. I'm glad that I'm here and I'm glad I wasn't flying an airplane. On the part of the trail from Moraga Commons down to Glenside, there was no shade, and I got a little woozy even though I was drinking a lot of fluids. Having to finish on Mt. Diablo Boulevard and knowing that I would have to stop and start walking at all of the traffic lights, I said, 'It's a wrap.' However, I will get back to walking my five miles a day once I can walk up the three steps in my backyard."

As he looks back on this five-month effort, Murphy should find a great deal of comfort in the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, full effort is full victory."

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