



Jerry Geary gives credit for his recovery to his wife, the Achilles Track Club, the NYC Marathon, and the National Association for the Visually Handicapped, Inc., where he is a volunteer (and shown above).

Marathon Walker Comes Back From Brain Injury

by Richard Finn

Geary, who regularly trains by walking the perimeter of Central Park, now embraces the challenge of finishing the 26.2-mile course. For two years after the accident, however, he didn't have any motivation at all.

"I was not able to articulate well," says Geary, a 1967 St. John's Law School graduate and the father of two. "I didn't have the energy to do things." Staying cooped up at home, Geary spent many hours in bed, listening to the radio (and gaining weight). A fit 195 pounds before the accident, his weight shot up to 245. And that bothered Geary, who had been active all his life—running marathons, hiking, swimming, and playing slow-pitch softball.

"I didn't want to do anything," he says of those long days when recovery seemed as far away as the Marathon finish line might seem to some. "Maybe it was depression. I know I wasn't any fun to be around. That's what it was like for two years."

Staying in bed was definitely *easier* than getting out; there were many times when Geary had trouble walking a simple block. He took some falls. "I lacked the confidence to do it," he says of leaving the house. But Geary has battled back, helped by the Achilles Track Club, which he joined shortly after the 1994 NYC Marathon. "He's sharper," says Traum. "When

you communicate with him, you notice his interpersonal skills have improved dramatically. He is able to understand subtleties, which was not the case a few years ago."

While preparing for the Marathon, Geary felt so good that he was considering taking on the distance without any assistance. Most likely, though, he will be accompanied by Achilles Track Club helpers, as he was last year. "That's all right, it was terrific," Geary says of the help he received from the volunteers. "They give encouragement and everything else that enables you to do it. Who knows if I would've been able to do it without them?"

Traum believes strongly enough in the connection between physical activity and recovery from traumatic brain injuries that he has approached Mount Sinai Hospital to study the relationship. Geary is one of the case studies. "If you run, it helps you, it makes you healthier," says Traum. "You tend to lose weight, you feel better about yourself."

But anyone can understand the healing power of running by listening to Jerry Geary today. "I am finding that parts of me work that I didn't know would work again," he says. "And when something like that happens, you are so empowered. It is just a wonderful experience." ■

For many, running is a way of life. For Jerry Geary, running has given him back his life.

Four years ago, Geary was struck by a car while bicycling near his home in Bayside, Queens. He suffered broken ribs, but that was the least of his problems. He also had serious brain damage—in medical terms, "traumatic brain injury."

Two brain operations followed the accident. Geary lost some of the sight in his right eye, needed a cane because of the limp in his right leg, and lost some of his memory and the ability to put together thoughts. A lawyer by trade, and an active person at heart, it seemed as if Geary had to surrender most of what his life was about.

Today, he is still slow-

moving and takes a long time to forge certain ideas. But while those disabilities may hamper him, they will not stop the 54-year-old from proudly wearing his Achilles Track Club T-shirt on November 3 as he walks the New York City Marathon for the second year in a row. With every step he takes, Geary is farther along the road toward reclaiming his life.

"The Marathon gives him something to live for," says Achilles' president Dick Traum of Geary, who will likely finish the race in about seven hours. "For everybody, a marathon produces anxiety: 'Will I be able to do it? Will I be able to achieve the time I want?' But this is a very exciting part of his life, having a problem that he is about to solve. He has a goal."