

**March 1998, Central Park, New York, NY:** *The Scene:* Maureen Lally, a new Achilles Track Club member and a recent finisher of her first road race—a 5K—is approached by Dick Traum. Traum, the founder of the Achilles Track Club, does not have a reputation for thinking small. And today, he has an idea for Lally. Namely, the 1998 New York City Marathon. Traum thinks Lally should compete.

Lally's reaction: "I would rather do naked public speaking than compete in a marathon."

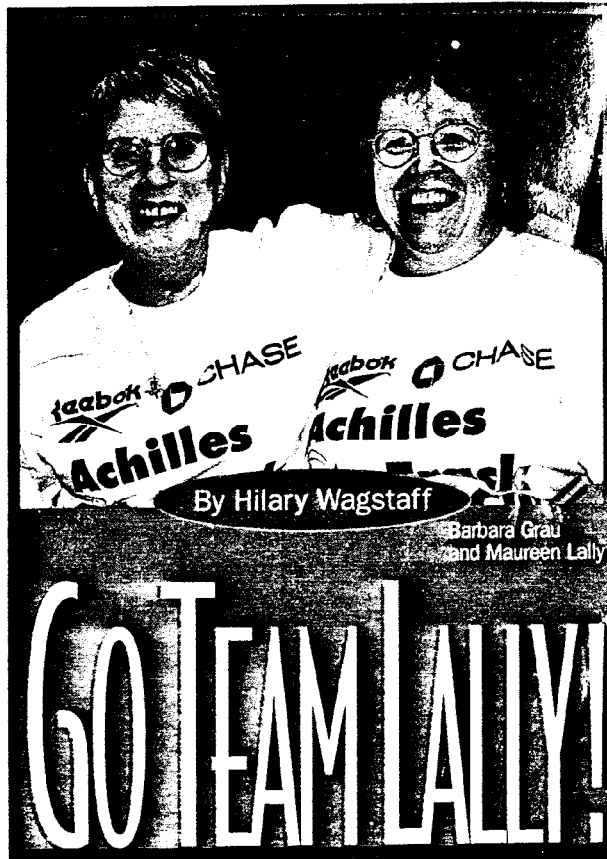
Five months later, Central Park (again): Lally completes her first half-marathon. The next day she returns for another 10K. The Marathon is just over two months away and she is in heavy training.

The question: What Happened? Here's the story from the start.

Maureen Lally, 45 years old, the second of seven children, was born two and a half months premature, weighing in at less than three pounds and without bone sockets in both hips. Consequently, Lally did not walk until age three and even then recalls that, "walking was like torture to me . . . anything that involved walking, I approached with dread." She had her right hip replaced in 1974, "back when petites and linebackers received the same sized hip," she recalls. Her right leg, as a result, was two inches longer than the left. After twenty-one years, she had the left hip replaced, at last relieving her of her uneven walk. The *third* replacement, in November 1997, was spurred by the fact that the left hip came loose (though, she walked on it for over a year). But after this last operation, she worked intensely with doctors and physical therapists to quickly regain mobility. On March 6th, she took her first walk as a member of the Achilles Track Club and by the end of the month was able to complete the Run for the Rainforest 5K. "It was a veritable miracle," she says, "but it's all a matter of perspective . . . I just feel so lucky that [the doctors] were able to help me at all."

Lally had first seen disabled athletes competing while watching her brother, Michael, run the 1994 New York City Marathon. Seated in a wheelchair on Vernon Boulevard in Queens, she stared in awe and amazement as members of the Achilles Track Club made their way along the course. "It was the first time I had even heard of Achilles. This man came up to me and gave me a big hug and said, 'Thanks for coming out and supporting us . . . next year it will be you,'" Maureen remembers. Later, her brother suggested she join the Club.

So she did. And the experience has been profound. "If I com-



plete the Marathon, it will be the biggest physical accomplishment of my life," Lally explains. In spite of her initial reluctance to go the distance (remember that?), Lally was ultimately persuaded by another Achilles athlete, Andrea De Mello, who completes the race in 22 hours. Andrea's winning line: "If I can do this, you sure can!" So Lally accepted the challenge and is on the road.

Lally attributes her success, in most part, to the kindness and generosity of the Achilles members and volunteers. "If they were not there, I would not be able to go out and walk. They make it safe for me, they encourage me, and they have given me the self confidence I always lacked."

Barbara Grau, Lally's walking partner, is always there at her side and will be there on November 1st for the entire

26.2 miles. Maureen regards Barbara with the utmost respect, "I never would have been able to do this without her support and encouragement." Lally is also strengthened by the cheers that she hears from other runners on the road. After hearing a runner shout "Go Achilles" for the first time, Lally was heartened. "To hear that kind of support from total strangers is unbelievable to me. I love it every time I hear it!" (Runners take note!)

Maureen is not the only Lally currently preparing for the long haul. All six of her siblings will be accompanying Maureen at different points along the route and one brother may even dare to go the whole distance. And along the course will be the full-fledged Team Lally, including parents, neighbors, friends, colleagues, landlady, and grocer, to name but a few.

Lally's 26.2 race is benefitting more than just herself. She is dedicating the race to her grandmother's memory (her birthday was November 1) and is also raising money for the Arthritis Foundation, as her mother has suffered from the debilitating disease for many years.

As for personal benefits, since beginning her Marathon training, Lally's outlook on life has blossomed, plus she has *more* energy for everything else. (Odd, how that works.) By day, Lally is a consultant for software testing at Bell Atlantic and in her spare time she enjoys astrology classes, live music, and her season tickets for the New York Liberty.

Maureen is grateful for being given the chance to change her life. As she tells others, "You too can do it if you really want to. It will transform your life as it has done mine." You just have to open yourself up to a little persuasion. ♣