

FW: Marathon Effort. Stroke Survivor's New York triumph!

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MARATHON EFFORT

Survivor goes the distance

By KIM REED

VIOLET Lawrence is a woman who walks the talk.

The 52-year-old Mairangi Bay woman, a survivor of five strokes, achieved her dream of competing in the New York City Marathon on November 5, buoyed by cheers of support from thousands of onlookers lining the city streets.

Her feet pounded the New York pavement for seven hours, covering 26.2 miles (42 kilometres).

Alongside her was walking partner, Carole Norris, 37, of Milford, a volunteer for Achilles Track Club New Zealand, a non-profit organisation that encourages people with disabilities to take part in long distance running events.

Because of nerve damage, Mrs Lawrence can't run, so the two women trained for the past year by power walking, often during the early morning hours in bad weather.

Together with New York Achilles volunteer Nicole Mauriello, the trio, known as Team Vi, crossed the finish line in Central Park with their hands clasped together and held high in a



Long haul: Carole Norris, left, and Violet Lawrence in training for the big race.

sign of triumph. Wrapped in a thermal blanket afterwards to keep warm from the cool autumn air, Mrs Lawrence was in a state of euphoria that was soon overcome by exhaustion.

"It was so exhilarating but I'm a bit tired and sore. I have a blister on my right toe and was a bit disorientated at first. I forgot Carole's name," laughs Mrs Lawrence.

The woman felt prepared mentally and physically for the grueling challenge but what they didn't anticipate was losing Violet before the start of the race among the



Marathon pair: Carole Norris, left, and Violet Lawrence showing off their medals for completing the New York City Marathon.

throng of 38,000 runners.

"We are told guides must never leave their athletes. But what do you do when your athlete leaves you?" says Ms Norris.

As they were lined up for the start, Mrs Lawrence had to go to the toilet.

The queue was long and while she waited, the runners were gradually moving as the race began.

Ms Norris and Ms Mauriello decided to stay in the same spot so Violet could find them, but she never returned.

Mrs Lawrence assumed

her running partners had moved ahead with the line so she looked for them there.

"The race started. We checked the toilets and there was no sign of Violet," says Ms Norris.

"We didn't know what to do."

One of them stayed behind and the other went ahead to find her. After little success the two volunteers decided to split up, with Ms Mauriello going ahead and Ms Norris staying behind.

"We were the last two to

cross the start line," says Ms Norris.

Ms Mauriello finally found Violet and the pair continued walking ahead while Ms Norris had to run to catch up with them.

"I trained to walk it, not to run it," says Ms Norris, who caught up to them by the six-mile mark.

Mrs Lawrence's name, her country and iwi, Ngati Kahungau, were on the back of her vest.

An ambulance driver came up behind them and yelled into her loud speaker to the crowd. "Hey everyone

Violet from New Zealand is here."

"It was an area where there were lots of pubs on both sides of the streets and people were sitting outside. Everyone yelled hello to Violet, some gave her high fives and offered her a beer," says Ms Norris.

Mrs Lawrence says it was a surreal experience.

"It's a once in a lifetime dream come true. If anyone has the chance to do it they should. It's such an amazing experience and shows if you work hard you really can achieve your goals."

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