

ROAD WARRIOR

Donald Arthur ticks off the marathons he's done in the last 12 years: New York City (ten times), Los Angeles, Alaska ... 27 in all. His goal is to complete the grueling 26.2-mile road race in each of the 50 states; he has 34 to go.

And yet it wasn't so long ago that Arthur couldn't so much as chew his food without becoming exhausted. "To walk a block could take me more than an hour," says the 63-year-old retired bookkeeper, who lives in the Bronx, New York. Facing death from dilated cardiomyopathy, an enlarged heart he blames on decades of cigarettes and alcohol, Arthur had only one option, his doctors told him: a transplant.

He recalls the precise moment—6:10 p.m. on August 2, 1996—when he got the call that a donor heart had become available. A 25-year-old man named Fitzgerald Gittens had died from a bullet intended for someone else. After five hours in surgery, Arthur had a brand-new heart. Soon enough, he could walk up stairs without tiring.

That was just the beginning. A fellow patient told him about the Achilles Track Club, which helps people with disabilities run marathons.

Arthur contacted the club's president, who told him he could complete a marathon if he trained hard enough.

"I thought he was crazy, but I went down to the club anyway and saw people who were blind and people in wheelchairs," Arthur says. "I was hooked—absolutely hooked—by the way these individuals looked at life."

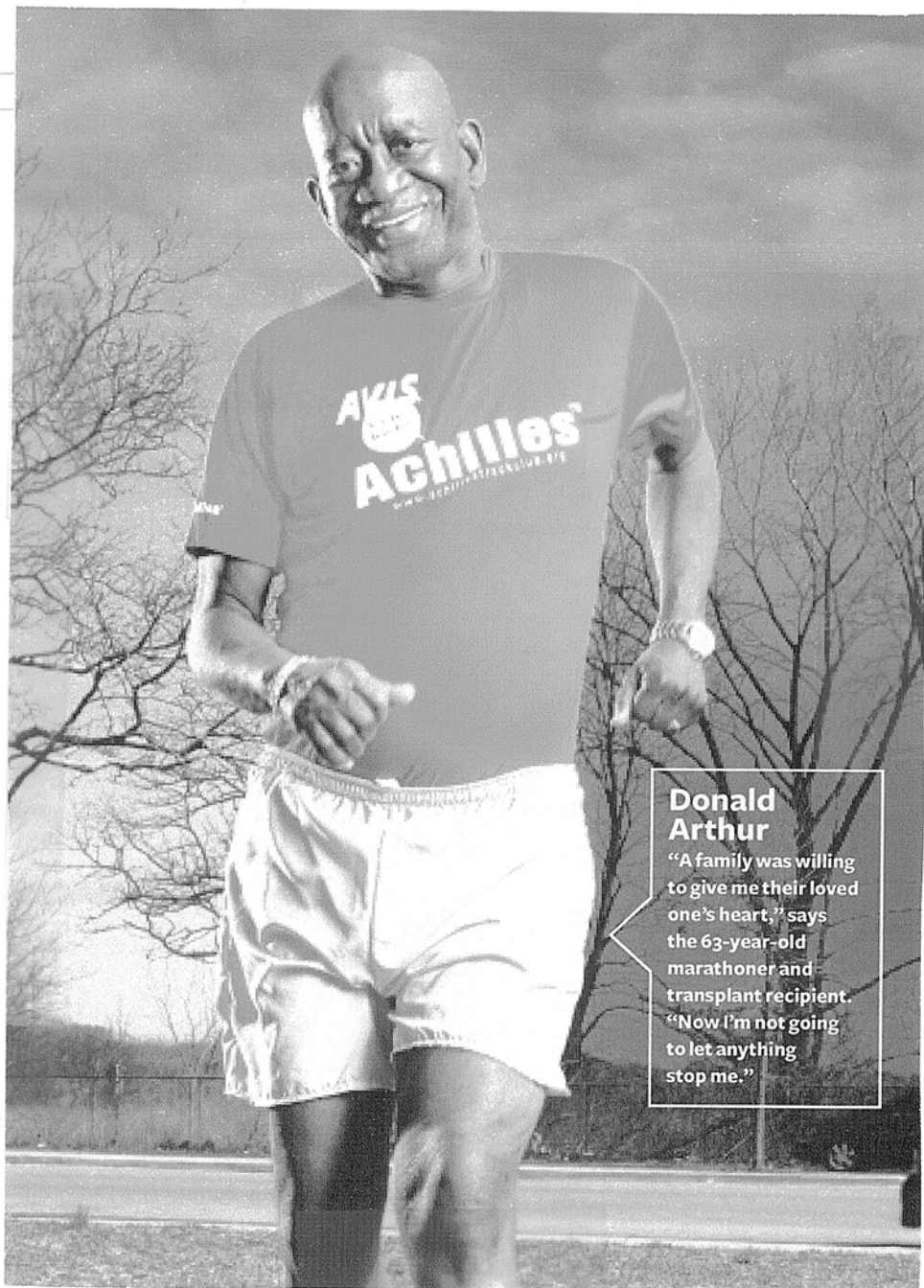
The club, he says, "gave me a belief in myself." He joined its six-mile walks around Central Park, then moved up to racewalking to improve his endurance. Fifteen months after his transplant, he finished his first New York City Marathon.

In 2001, in the prelude to the Winter Games, Arthur carried the Olympic torch on part of its journey. But his most memorable run was the 1999 New York City Marathon, when he was accompanied by Mack Andrews, the brother of the man whose heart now beats in his chest.

"I put Mack's hand over my heart once we finished," Arthur says, "and I told him that his brother lives on."

Kathryn M. Tyranski and Neena Samuel

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"A family was willing to give me their loved one's heart," says the 63-year-old marathoner and transplant recipient. "Now I'm not going to let anything stop me."