

Creative Business Thinking

Exclusive interview with **Linda Wagar**, founder of *Canadian Marathon Stories*

BY LORNA SLOUKJI

Every once in a while, an entrepreneurial spirit revitalizes the fitness industry and deepens the sense of community amongst fitness enthusiasts, athletes, and fitness professionals. Linda Wagar, an Ottawa resident, launched *Canadian Marathon Stories.ca*, in an effort to create a stronger community between runners by publishing their stories. I caught up with Linda to find out how this venture began, what its mission is, and what future plans are like.

Lorna Sloukji: What is your background with marathon running?

Linda Wagar: I'm in training for my sixth marathon in hilly Sudbury, Ontario. I did my first one in November 2002 in New York City. I thought it would be my one and only, but I knew I was in trouble when training for my first marathon and already making plans for my second. It has an empowering element to it that is very seductive.



Priscilla Lopes-Schliep (left) Canadian Olympian supported by proceeds from the sale of *Canadian Marathon Stories* and Linda Wagar.

LS: What is your company, Canadian Marathon Stories all about and why did you start it?

LW: I launched www.CanadianMarathonStories.ca in the spring of 2003. I wanted to attract stories from across the country and my vision was to compile stories and publish a collection that would benefit a charity. I chose the Canadian Athletes Now Fund which raises money for amateur athletes. These are stories about runners who ultimately are helping athletes be the best they can be in their respective sports.

LS: What is one of the most memorable stories you have promoted in the Canadian Marathon Stories?

LW: There are so many memorable stories that are all special. I like the one from New Brunswick. Mark Black, he is told, will not make his 25th birthday unless he gets a double lung and heart transplant. He goes on to train to run a marathon. He enters and completes the Blue Nose Marathon in Halifax in near-hurricane conditions. He won't give up, and he has written the names of patients on his hands that were not as lucky as he was. This fuels him to keep going.

LS: Describe the book publication of Canadian Marathon Stories.

LW: *Canadian Marathon Stories* is a compilation of 31 stories from across Canada, four of them are in French, from Quebec. All are about three to four pages long, some

with beautiful photography. The book won the Bronze Award for best regional non-fiction by the Independent Publishers of North America.

LS: What are some pieces of advice you have to novice marathon runners?

LW: Do a few half marathons before you choose to train for a 42.2K distance. The marathon is not like anything you have ever done. If Lance Armstrong says "It was the hardest thing I have ever done" after completing the NYC marathon, you can pretty much count on it being difficult. This is a given. Nutrition, rest, and cross-training are crucial to a successful experience. Read and ask questions; an informed marathoner is more comfortable with the experience. There is no such thing as cutting corners. If you do, the experience will not be as pleasurable. Remember that you have no control over anything other than your thoughts. A running shoe company a few years ago said, "The mind leads the body."

LS: What's next for Canadian Marathon Stories?

LW: I entered the book at the Beijing Book Expo. Some Chinese publishing companies are considering purchasing the copyrights to the book. It was a nice ending to 2008, the Beijing Olympic year. Time and patience will tell what the future holds. Expect the unexpected—life is full of great surprises, much like the stories you find in this book. □



You can pick up a copy of *Canadian Marathon Stories* at any Running Room store in Canada. They donate \$10 to a Canadian athlete. You can also purchase it online at www.runningroom.com or www.CanadianMarathonStories.ca