

Leisure & Arts

A Race, a Necktie, And the Spirit Of New York

By Steve McKee

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THE NEXT DAY, Sept. 12, the day after, I knew when I woke up from not sleeping in my Brooklyn house that smelled of smoke and dust that when I got dressed I would be putting on the Marathon tie. I knew that I would feel better, somehow and for some reason, with that particular tie tucked inside my shirt collar and knotted around my neck.

And I knew exactly why, too. As ties go, this one is terrific. From a distance it is just a riotous jumble of color on a navy background, a cascade of confetti tumbling down my shirt. Only upon closer examination does its pattern come into focus. It is filled to overflowing with miniature runners in colorful costume, each clearly distinguishable from the others, all different. This tie doesn't just capture the essence of a marathon. This tie is the marathon, the New York City Marathon, in all its joyous, vital exuberance.

Except that isn't why I wore it the day after. I put it on because I realized that on this slice of silk there are too many figures to count. There is an untold number -- we were hearing those words often -- and upon too-close inspection they can

appear as if they are falling. That's why I knew I would wear it: for the large numbers, falling.

THAT'S A LOT to ask of a tie, but it worked for me. It still does, in fact, and in ways unexpected. New York's worst day was Sept. 11. This weekend comes what many, myself included, have long insisted is New York's best day: Marathon Sunday. I see them now as joined by a swatch of fabric.

Alan R. Cadan, the president and founder of Alynn Neckwear Inc., (<http://www.alynn.com/index.htm>) the creator of the tie, surely had none of this in mind when his Marathon tie took shape in 1994. He says the inspiration came from that famous aerial shot of runners on the move across the Verrazano Bridge at the beginning of the marathon. "I like to form a V with my thumb and forefinger," he says, "and envision it as the tip of a tie. And then I ask myself, does this fit into an interesting visual?"

The answer here was yes. He dispatched two artists to weave this thread of inspiration 'twixt thumb and finger into a tie to encircle his neck. First the illustrator: "He captured the idea of people running, a sense of motion, the feel of the crowd, while still being able to pick out the individual figures," Mr. Cadan says. Second came an artist who "put everything together, gave it the right visual, in terms of both size and the right balance" of color. "That's what drove this whole thing: Could we turn an abstract vision into a concrete item, without losing the fluidity of all

these different people, this vast mosaic of multiracial runners?" Yes, they could.

Elements of that vision were echoed on Sept. 11. What we knew of New York in the abstract became concrete: People from 82 countries died. But there is strength in that countable number. Where else but New York City? We know this of the marathon, too, whose organizers like to boast that there are people from 60, 65 countries running its race. Again: Where else but New York City?

"Everyone knows the New York City Marathon," says Barbara Paddock, vice president, corporate sponsorships and event marketing with J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., which in its various merged permutations has been a lead sponsor of the race since 1976, the year the marathon first wound its way through all five boroughs. The company has even used a special Marathon tie (with a small "Chase" finishing banner) as a gift item. "It is a major international event. People from all around the United States, from all around the world, know the New York City Marathon. It touches everybody in some way. If you're not running it yourself, you know somebody who is, or at least you know somebody who knows somebody."

THESE PAST TWO months have been an astonishing time to be alive in New York City. Sometimes the being alive seems astonishing enough, because everybody does know somebody who knows somebody who, as it's said, didn't come home that night. The next day I saw my first

posted photo of one of the "missing": Giovanna "Genny" Giambalvo, 27 years old, Fordham grad, Cantor Fitzgerald. I have since seen her smile everywhere, along with thousands of others. A few days later came the candle altars, grief as public performance art. Ever expanding, they look like actual cities, the various-sized glass funnels forming their own little skylines.

I know that five boroughs, 26.2 miles, 12,000 race volunteers, perhaps 27,000 runners and maybe two million spectators won't change Sept. 11. But surely all that life celebrated this Sunday can serve as counterbalance to all the death mourned these past two months. The New York City Marathon stitches together an entire metropolis into one grand and glorious patchwork quilt. That's pure cliché, but no less true for being so.

Mr. Cadan says Marathon is the second-best-selling tie his Stamford, Conn., company has produced in its 23 years (\$35 in gift shops and catalogs). May he sell a zillion more. For all those people missing. For all those photos posted. For all those candles lighted. And on Sunday, for all those people running.

So excuse me, please. New York's best day is coming, and none too soon. I have to slice the oranges, get ready to be down there on Fourth Avenue in Brooklyn, just one of the two million. *Hey, Brah-zeeel! May-hee-co! Nippon, Nippon, Nippon!* It's almost time to tie one on.

Ed. update, November 2011: ING is now the lead sponsor of the New York City Marathon (<http://www.nycmarathon.org/>)

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