

Boston: The Movie

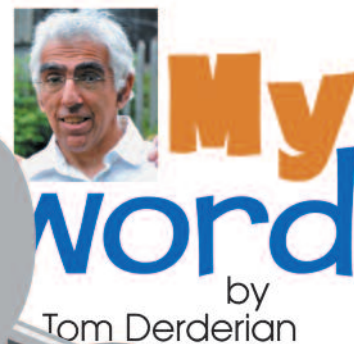
Before this year's marathon, the director and producer of the exclusive Boston Marathon documentary film followed the high-heeled minister up rickety stairs into the darkened belfry of the Old South Church, built in 1875, on Boylston Street. There, above the Boston Marathon finish line, he looked for the epic shot—the telephoto, then pan from a single runner to a cinematic expansion, revealing the crowds and all of Boston. Minister Nancy S. Taylor led director Jon Dunham to such heights so he could position a camera (where no camera had ever been positioned before) to film the finish of the Boston Marathon. Reverend Taylor said she had taken the job at the Old South Church in 2005 "...to step into and become a part of a great stream of history." Now she climbed in the dark as only a sure-footed reverend could to ensure a new view of a stream of runners making history.

That camera high in the tower of the Gothic Revival church was only one of 54 cameras positioned along the course. A 120-person crew did the filming. The cameras will have shot 208 hours of footage that would take, in a sleepless binge, about a week and a half to watch. The cameras are expensive. The director bought the cheapest, lightest, most-versatile one—a Sony PMW 300 for \$8,000. Over the start loomed a techno-crane, costing \$12,000 to rent, that carried a remote head that can twist, dip, and weave. More cameras loomed over Natick, Wellesley, Newton, and at Hereford St. near the finish. This \$2 million budget production was the most extensive and expensive filming of any marathon, ever.

Until this adventure I expected the movie business to be glamorous, with glittery cast parties and dazzling starlets angling for the producer's attention, but documentaries are not like that; especially documentaries that have to be filmed in one day with no retakes. With the marathon streaming by, no one could call "cut" and tell everyone to go back and try it again. The film has no stars, except for everyone running. That is 36,000 stars and no

extras. Runners and spectators are all part of the show. Yes, the show had to go on but with great trepidation. But never in the history of marathons anywhere has one been filmed so extensively and with such detail.

Back in 2007, Dunham had asked me for some on-camera work to establish some general marathon history to back up his Chicago Marathon film. At that time, I talked with him about a film documenting the Boston Marathon. He also made a film about the Rome Marathon, but in neither Chicago nor Rome did he have to talk to the police about the film making. For the Boston Marathon this year, he had to take instructions from police in every town along the course. At first, because of the previous year's bombing, the B.A.A. didn't even consider a film to be important compared to all the security worries. Dunham had to meet with emergency officials in the Framingham M.E.M.A. (Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency) bunker designed for protecting the government in the event of WWII. As Dunham explained, "A great fear was that overzealous police or citizens might stop the filming because of a perceived threat. We have to be careful to not talk about 'shooting' and angles and positions. We had to carry spare batteries in special clear plastic bags and tripods out in the open, not in their cases where they might have looked like rifles."



All film crew members had to have press credentials and wear special purple vests with the words OFFICIAL DOCUMENTARY in big yellow print, as much for the protection of the runners and the public as to protect the film crew. The crew had to be open and deliberate in all their actions, to not look to anyone as "suspicious." Film crews meeting before dawn to mass and distribute equipment can look like a military operation and resemble the Normandy invasion. But the only shooting and capturing they are doing is digital.

The film crew greatly appreciates the kind help of the understanding people at the B.A.A., such as Jack Fleming, Mike Pieroni, and Josh Nemzer, among zillions of others. The people the crew "followed" (can't say "shot") include 1968 winner Amby Burfoot, Kenyan Wilson Chebet, and Japan's Noriko Higuchi. The film also followed Mikayla Rose from Australia and Dan Soleau, who worked at Marathon Sports on Boylston Street and stood nearby when the bombs went off.

The plan is to create a visual memorial to the marathon, to Boston Strong, runners tired, and all the history of 118 years of running the Boston Marathon. After all the assemblage, disassemblage, sound, music, and credits, begins the task of distributing the film to a theater near you about a year from now. **NR**

Tom Derderian may be still in the belfry at tderderi@ix.netcom.com

Illustration by Josh Randall

