

## FAQ

**These are the questions most frequently asked of Kathrine Switzer.**

***Note: If you use this material, please quote Kathrine Switzer, as she wrote it herself they are direct true quotes. A longer bio and high-resolution photos with appropriate captions and necessary credits are available by going to [www.marathonwoman.com](http://www.marathonwoman.com) and clicking on press and photos***

**Would you please give me a kind of mini-bio about yourself?**

Sure, here's one: Iconic athlete, sports and social advocate, author, and Emmy award-winning television commentator, Kathrine Switzer was the first woman to officially enter and run the Boston Marathon. She was instrumental in making the women's marathon an official Olympic Event (1984) and empowering millions of women to run. She founded 261 Fearless, Inc, a non-profit named after her old Boston Marathon bib number that empowers women through running. And she continues to run herself, even running the Boston, New York City and London marathons at age 70. She has been honored widely for her achievements, most importantly being inducted into the USA National Women's Hall of Fame for creating positive social change.

**Before I ask you about your history, would you please tell us what you are doing now?**

Every year in my life seems to produce something quite amazing, and ageing in no way has diminished this phenomenon. But something extraordinary has happened recently, which is that quite organically and almost magically, my bib number from the first Boston Marathon, '261', has become a number meaning "fearless in the face of adversity" and women around the world are rallying to embrace the spirit of it.

Thus, some friends and I have formed a non-profit 501c3 non-profit organization called "261® Fearless". With a series of 261 clubs, unique training, events, educational programs, merchandising, and -most of all- communication, we are uniting to empower women around the world through the transformative vehicle of running. [www.261fearless.org](http://www.261fearless.org)

I am very happy that adidas has joined us as a major sponsor. (And it's sensational for me to be an endorsed adidas athlete late in life!). Also, Ironman Rock'n Roll and Humana are helping 261 Fearless and have asked me to be an 'Ambassador' for their events. It's an honor to represent them and a lot of fun to be back into running in major events.

We are grateful for other sponsors and individual friends and contributors. Our 261 team is very small and we are working 24/7 to make 261 Fearless accessible to women globally. We are

proud to have clubs now in places from America to Albania and Zaire. We are also proud of so many fearless women who are driven to give back to women everywhere the gift of self-esteem, empowerment, and health in a safe environment. These women are also running in the Boston, New York City and Marine Corps marathons as charity entrants to raise money to support 261 Fearless. Running can do a lot, but it's still a big job!

Most of the women in the world live in a fearful situation. Think about that, and join us—by applying to start a 261 club, or becoming active in other ways with 261 in changing women's lives. Go to: [www.261fearless.org](http://www.261fearless.org)

Among other things, I've gone back in training! I did the 2017 Boston Marathon 50 years after I first ran it. It was a challenge for sure, with plenty of pressure as no woman had done that. But the race went beautifully and fueled on that and confident, I ran the New York City Marathon also in 2017, 43 years after I first won it. And then I ran the London Marathon in 2018, on the 100th anniversary of women getting the right to vote in the UK. That too, was phenomenal, but Boston was the real triumph. Not only did the Boston Athletic Association grant 261 Fearless a number of charity bibs that raised money for the 261 Fearless non-profit, but everyone in Boston (and beyond) seemed to know the story. So imagine being the only woman with a bib number in 1967 to being surrounded by over 13,000 women with bib numbers, all of them empowered and believing in women's capability! The crowds cheered and we made a great impact. I am so grateful for my health, and also those special 125 women (and 7 men!) who supported me in the race. And the media coming on board to give us so much visibility. If you're interested in joining me on the start line of the Boston Marathon, get more info at [261fearless.org](http://261fearless.org).

Also, I'm running in a lot of the Rock 'n' Roll races--like Chicago, San Antonio, Las Vegas, Denver... and the Humana events, like the Humana Kentucky Derby Festival Marathon and Relay. You can usually find out what I'm up to by going to my website calendar.

We've re-launched my book, *Marathon Woman*, this is the 4th edition and was a special one for the 50th anniversary run. And in 2019 a children's book called *Her Fearless Run* will be launched. And yes, I know, it's time for ME to get writing the next book! I continue my work as an author, but I am really working hard right now as a public speaker. My speaking schedule is extremely active! If you are interested in hiring me as a speaker, please go to:

[www.marathonwoman.com](http://www.marathonwoman.com) and click on Contact Kathrine, or go directly to my speaking agent: Amy Richards, Soapbox Speaking Agency, 106 Suffolk St., 2A, NY, NY 10002 Phone 202-798-4729

*Now here is some historical background:*

**How long is the Boston Marathon?**

All marathons are 26 miles, 385 yards (or 42.2 Km) long. Any distance less than that is not a 'marathon.'

**Why is a marathon called a marathon?**

It is named after a small seacoast town in Greece, called Marathon. This is where an important battle took place in 490 BCE. After the battle, a messenger ran to Athens with news of victory. The distance was about 25 miles. The old legend said that the messenger ran so hard that after he delivered the news he fell down dead. The Greeks loved this story and the messenger became a heroic figure in Greece. It was not until two thousand (!) or so years later, in 1896, that the marathon became a running event for sport. The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896 and organizers decided a special run from the town of Marathon to the Olympic Stadium in Athens would create public interest. They called the race the Marathon Race, and indeed, it created great excitement. After this, organizers began organizing other 'marathons' and the event became a permanent fixture in the Olympic Games. The word 'marathon' therefore now is also used as an adjective meaning 'long lasting'; so, a marathon phone call, for instance, means a lengthy phone call.

**Why did you start running and how old were you when you started?**

I started running at age 12 when my father encouraged me to run a mile a day so I could make the field hockey team in my high school. (There were no intermediate schools in those days; I began high school at age 12).

**How old were you when you ran your first marathon?**

I was 20, and my first marathon distance was run in practice; my first marathon race was the 1967 Boston Marathon.

**Why did you want to run a marathon, and the Boston Marathon, in particular?**

I discovered early that running always made me feel powerful, free and fearless. The longer I ran, the stronger I felt so the 26.2-mile distance intrigued me. The Boston Marathon, which was founded in 1896, was the most famous race in the world to me next to the Olympics. Yet unlike the Olympics, it was supposedly open to anyone who wanted to try to run. I felt thrilled by the

prospect of running 26.2 miles in a race where supposedly anyone could run in the same race as the greatest runners in the world. There was no other sports event like that! (For instance, you cannot just go out and play baseball with the New York Yankees). Plus my coach Arnie Briggs had run the Boston Marathon 15 times and he used to tell me stories about this race and they inspired me.

### **Did you train for the race?**

A lot! My coach didn't believe that a woman could do the marathon distance but promised to take me to Boston if I showed him in practice that I could do it. We trained hard and one day ran 31 miles, and he was amazed, exhausted, and also proud. True to his word he helped me enter the race.

### **Were you trying to prove anything or make a statement when you first ran the Boston Marathon in 1967?**

No, I was just a kid who wanted to run, and was there as a reward from my coach who didn't believe that a woman could run the distance. I had heard that other women had run marathon distances and that one woman in 1966, Roberta Bingay Gibb, ran the Boston Marathon but without an official bib number, so I wasn't trying to break any barriers. It wasn't until a race official attacked me during the run did I become determined to finish and speak out on behalf of all women.

### **Why did the official attack you?**

The official claimed the race was a men's only race and that I was not allowed to run. He was very angry that I had obtained an official bib number, and he lost his temper.

### **Why was the Boston Marathon a men's only race?**

Nowadays, that is an interesting question, as there were no real rules in 1967 stating that the Marathon was for Men Only. Nor was there anything indicating gender on the entry form. But almost all sports were for men; women rarely participated. Most people assumed that women could not run the marathon distance and if they tried they would hurt themselves. Most women themselves were not interested in running for the same reason, and many people also believed that difficult sports made women masculine. In 1967 the longest event in the Olympic Games for women was 800 meters on the track, and cross-country races for women were 1-1/2 miles.

### **How did you enter the race if it was for men only?**

First, there were no rules written saying it was a men's only race. Next, there was nothing about gender on the entry form. Third, my coach told me it was OK for me to enter and in fact I must enter the race properly for my run to count. Lastly, I sign my name with my initials, K.V. Switzer. So the officials probably thought K. stood for a man's name.

### **Why do you sign your name with your initials?**

Because my name Kathrine was miss-spelled on my birth certificate and around age 12 I got tired of it being miss-spelled all the time. (You see there is no 'e' in the middle of my name; normally it is spelled Katherine). I also wanted to be a writer and admired authors like J.D. Salinger and E.E. Cummings, so I thought using my initials was a cool, writer-ly kind of thing to do.

### **In 1967 you had to take a pre-race physical attesting to your fitness to run Boston. How did you pass this unnoticed as a woman?**

The race application recommended that runners submit a letter in advance from a physician certifying we were fit to run the marathon. My doctor examined me and wrote a note saying I was fit, and I mailed it with my entry.

### **Did you disguise yourself as a man?**

Absolutely not! I was very proud of being a woman. I had long hair, wore lipstick and eyeliner to the start line. I was wearing a very nice shorts and top outfit so I'd look good, but because the weather conditions were miserable, 34 degrees, snowing and sleeting, I had to leave my baggy grey sweat suit on. I'd planned on only wearing that to warm up in, and then discard it, as most athletes do before a race. It was my worst looking warm-up suit, too! All the men around me knew that I was a woman. The morning of the race, it was not only snowing /sleeting but also very windy and very cold, and everyone looked alike in their baggy grey sweat suits—including me. So perhaps officials didn't notice me then. If it had been a hot day, and I was only wearing the shorts and top, history might have been changed.

### **At what point in the race did the official attack you?**

At about the 1 ½ mile mark, so I still had over 24 miles to run.

**What were you thinking when the official attacked you?**

I was very frightened and was just trying to get away from him.

**Why didn't you drop out?**

Because I knew if I did that no one would believe women could run distances and deserved to be in the Boston Marathon; they would just think that I was a clown, and that women were barging into events where they had no ability. I was serious about my running and I could not let fear stop me.

**What did the men around you do in the race?**

They were shouting at the official to leave me alone and tried to push him away but he was very determined. Then my boyfriend, who was an ex-All American football player, gave the official a massive shoulder charge and sent him flying out of the race.

**Did you bring your boyfriend along to Boston to protect you?**

No, my boyfriend originally came to Boston because he thought if a girl could run the race, he could run it, too.

**Did you finish the race?**

Yes.

**Was it difficult?**

For a while, it was difficult because I was very worried and nervous, and had lost a lot of energy. The adrenaline rush that comes from a shock flows out of you afterward and leaves you drained. But energy slowly returned and by the end, I was feeling pretty good.

**Did you ever have any doubt that you would finish?**

No, I was determined to finish no matter what. Plus I had run 31 miles in practice. I knew I could do it, but sometimes things just happen--like a twisted ankle or something-- when you run a long way. No matter what happened to me, I was determined to finish.

**There are famous photos of the official attacking you. How did they take those photos?**

The photo truck was right in front of us and the press and officials' bus was alongside of us, working their way from the back of the race pack to the front. The official jumped off the bus and attacked me...right in full view of the photographers taking pictures from the back of the truck. It was very bad timing for the official, but it was very good timing for women's rights. The photo of the incident was flashed around the world and is now in Time-Life's book, "100 Photos that Changed the World."

**What else happened in the race?**

Just about everything, because a marathon teaches you so much. Most of all for me, I got my energy back, and became both radicalized and inspired by the incident with the official to create opportunities for other women in running. When I finished, I felt like I had a Life Plan, and in fact, I did!

**Did you get in trouble for running the Boston Marathon?**

Yes, the official who attacked me had me disqualified (DQ'd) from the race and then expelled from the Amateur Athletic Union, the sport's governing body, for a whole list of reasons, one of which was running with men. Plus there was a lot of negative press reports and plenty of hate mail.

**Was there any good news?**

Sure! Almost everyone was on my side and thought the sports officials were old fogeys. Most journalists loved the story and became positive about me, and other women runners were also, after talking to me. I got invited to a lot of races. I got more fan mail than hate mail. And I learned a lot about people.

**Did the official get in trouble for attacking you?**

Not serious trouble, although what he did was very serious. A lot of bigoted people said he was justified in attacking me, can you believe that?! But he received a great deal of bad publicity also.

**Did the official ever apologize?**

Not really, but he did give me a kiss six years later on the starting line of the 1973 Boston Marathon and we eventually became good friends.

**What was your time in that first marathon?**

4 hours and 20 minutes.

**How long did the Boston Marathon remain a men's only race?**

For 76 years, until 1972, and in that year women who could run a marathon in 3 hours 30 minutes or faster were admitted to the race officially. But for some of those intervening years, several of us women ran Boston anyway without numbers and worked to convince the governing bodies of the sport to allow us into the race as official athletes.

**How did the men runners feel about women in the marathon?**

Most of them loved having women in all running events. They admired us for being serious about our running, running such a difficult race and really supported our efforts for inclusion. I have never received a negative comment from a male runner. I believe that one reason women are so advanced in running as compared to other sports is because male runners have been so supportive and positive.

**How has the Boston Marathon experience changed your life?**

In just about every way because by the time I finished the race, I was inspired to become a better athlete myself and create opportunities for other women in running. All this led to several interesting careers, almost all of which I designed for myself and are connected to running and social change. The 1967 Boston Marathon also told me I could persevere over anything. And it has helped me to be pretty fearless in other ways, too. (Mostly, anyway!!)

**What was your best marathon time ever and when and where did you run it?**

My best time was 2 hours 51 minutes 37 seconds, in the 1975 Boston Marathon. I placed 2nd; it was my seventh Boston Marathon.



### **What is your biggest victory?**

My biggest running victory was winning the 1974 New York City Marathon, my biggest personal athletic victory was running a personal best of 2 hours 51 minutes—that improvement from my first marathon of 4 hours 20 minutes told me that women had more ability than we could imagine. I thought my biggest Life Victory was being a major part of getting the women's marathon accepted officially into the Olympic Games in 1984. I created a global series of running events for women that changed their lives and provided important convincing data for change. However, I now see that another big accomplishment may lie yet ahead of me: the founding of '261 Fearless,' a global movement that is empowering women well beyond the Olympics. (More on this was at the beginning of these FAQs and more is below).

### **What was your biggest contribution to getting the women's marathon into the Olympic Games?**

For many years, I created and organized a global series of races, called the Avon International Running Circuit—400 races in 27 countries for over a million women—that demonstrated women's capability and also had enough international representation to convince the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that the women's marathon should be included in the Olympics. In some countries, these races were often the first sports events of any kind for women. We also supported medical data showing that distance running was not harmful to women. I also worked directly with IAAF, IOC and LAOOC officials both in terms of lobbying and in compiling data and presenting a big report to them.

### **Why was it so important to get the women's marathon into the Olympic Games?**

Because I knew when the world saw women in the most difficult of all running events, competing in the most important and prestigious sports event—the Olympics—it would change world attitudes about women's capability. Everyone everywhere understands that 26.2 miles (or 42.2 km,) is a long way to run, and when they see women doing it they know that women can do anything and should be allowed to participate.

### **When was the first time a women's marathon was introduced into the Olympic Games? In 1984, in Los Angeles.**

Who won it? Joan Benoit, now Joan Benoit Samuelson, in 2 hours 24 minutes 52 seconds. It was a fabulous performance!

### **Were you sorry you didn't run in it?**

Not at all! I always knew I was never a particularly fast runner, and knew when we made the marathon an Olympic event, many talented women would seize the opportunity, train, and run much faster than I ever could. I was always more interested in creating the opportunity than being a competitive athlete anyway.

### **Where were you during the first women's Olympic Marathon?**

In the broadcast booth, doing commentary for ABC -TV Network sports.

### **Has having the women's marathon in the Olympics changed the world?**

Absolutely! The Olympic Women's Marathon opened the door for many other women's events and helped increase the number of women participants in all sports. Additionally, the women's marathon opened doors for new Olympic events for both men and women. Maybe most importantly, people around the world have been inspired by the women's Olympic marathon and now embrace a healthy and productive running lifestyle.

**Is it true that there are now more women runners in the USA than men? Why has this happened?** Yes, 58% of race participants are now women in the USA and this is also probably true in Canada. Running gives women fitness, self-esteem and empowerment they may never have had before. Also, running is time-efficient and inexpensive, and women can fit it into a busy day which may also include organizing a job, children and home. Interestingly, I see this trend happening now in Europe, and predict that it will have a global impact.

### **How important has Title IX been for women runners?**

Title IX has changed the landscape for all women, not just women runners. This is the 1972 amendment to the U.S. Constitution that mandates equality of education in any federally funded school in the USA. Which is just about all of them! The equality requirement not only applied to academic opportunity, but also, as it turned out, to sports. This has revolutionized opportunities everywhere for women, especially in sports and education. Now there should not be a young girl in the USA who grows up with a sense of limitation.

### **What more can be achieved for women's running?**

So much! We've only just started! Men have been running seriously for 3,000 years; women only seriously for 40 years. Women have natural strength in stamina and endurance and they will

be increasingly competitive in ultra marathons. As the sport changes and embraces very long distance and combines with other women's strengths such as flexibility, balance, ability to withstand the cold, then we will open a new era. But the critical thing is that right now we need to work on opportunities for many oppressed women in Africa, South America and the Middle East. Talent is everywhere. It only needs an opportunity. I am hoping to accomplish the task of reaching at least some of these women through the 261 Fearless non-profit organization.

Here is some information about 261® Fearless, Inc. 261 Fearless, Inc. is a global non-profit organization founded by pioneer runner, Kathrine Switzer. "261" is the bib number that the angry official tried to tear off Kathrine in the 1967 Boston Marathon, The number has come to mean 'fearless in the face of adversity.' 261® Fearless uses running as a vehicle to empower and unite women globally through the creation of communication platforms, clubs, training opportunities, ambassadors, merchandising and events. Through these networking opportunities, 261® Fearless breaks down the barriers of geography and social class and creates a global community for women runners of all abilities to support and talk to each other, encouraging healthy living and a positive sense of self and fearlessness. For more information please visit, [www.261fearless.org](http://www.261fearless.org).

### **Is there anything else to be done for women in sports?**

A lot yet needs to be done! There are many countries in the world where women are not allowed out of their houses alone, not allowed to drive cars, get an education or participate in sports. So getting the opportunities to these women will not be easy. We are working on ways to reach them, especially using technology and starting our new 261® running clubs (261 is my bib number from the first Boston Marathon). Also, many women are poor and don't have opportunities—that is why running is good, because you don't need to be rich to run. Consequently, many poor women in Africa are excelling in running and taking their empowerment and prize money earnings to change the lives of other women and children in their communities. This has become a social revolution.

### **Why do you like running so much?**

There are many reasons, but the biggest is because running is simple and only requires a pair of shoes; it is time- efficient and convenient and gets a person fit quickly. It reduces stress, puts me in touch with my own thoughts, lets me bond with nature and helps me be creative.

### **How old are you now and are you still running?**

I am now 72 and yes, I am thrilled and lucky to be still running—for 60 years!

**How many marathons have you run**

42 and still counting! My last marathon was the London Marathon in 2018. I also ran the Boston Marathon in 2017, the 50th anniversary of my first run. In 2010, I fulfilled a lifetime ambition of running from Marathon to Athens in the 2010 Athens Marathon, held on the 2,500th anniversary of the famous messenger's run in 490 BCE.

**How many races have you run and miles have you covered?**

I have no idea! Hundreds of races, thousands of miles.

**How many races have you organized?**

Over 400 in 27 countries, for a million women. Some of these races continue today—for instance, the Avon Women's Run in Berlin, started in 1983 with 180 women when the 'Wall' was still up, now has 18,500 women running in a free and open Berlin.

**How many races have you commentated on as a TV broadcaster?**

This is a rough guess: probably 200. That's a lot of travel, preparation, interviews and on-air time! But there are some amazing results: for instance, I've done every televised edition of the Boston Marathon—41 consecutive years. Which means I know personally every woman who has ever won the race.

**What is your favorite marathon?**

Boston is my favorite; I like the rolling course and the narrow streets that are very crowded with spectators who know a lot about the marathon.

**What is your favorite race of any distance?**

It's still the Boston Marathon! My second favorite race is The New York Mini 10K, held every June in Central Park, New York City. I was a founder of this race in 1972 with legends Nina Kuscsik and Fred Lebow. It was the first- ever women's only road race and has been held annually for over 40 years. It was this race that gave us the idea to create women's only road races that are so popular now.

### **Who is the runner you most admire?**

Emil Zatopek, who won three gold medals in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, among many other accomplishments, political bravery and great kindnesses.

### **Who is your greatest woman sports heroine?**

Billie Jean King, legendary American tennis player (whom I know) and Vera Caslavka, legendary Czech gymnast (whom I never had the privilege to meet). Both of these women were beyond sports, they fearlessly spoke out on behalf of women's equality, human rights, and political freedom, often at great cost and danger to themselves. Also, Margot Fonteyn, the great ballerina, is probably my greatest heroine. She made something very difficult--ballet-- look beautiful and noble. I wanted to do that in the marathon. On the other hand, I have many unknown women sports heroines—they especially include women who had low self-esteem and were overweight, poor, hopeless or from the 'wrong tribe' but started running and changed their lives, and often their communities. THEY are fabulous!

### **How many books have you written and what are they?**

I have written three books. They include: my memoir *Marathon Woman* which is about my life and overcoming the impossible, written in 2007. This book was released in paperback in 2010, and has been updated yet again and was launched in a special celebratory edition for the 50th anniversary of the Boston Marathon and for me running the race, in April, 2017. Later in 2017, I narrated the audio version of *Marathon Woman*. (my throat is still scratchy from that experience!) *26.2 Marathon Stories*, which is co-authored with my husband Roger Robinson, is about the marathon, what motivates us and compels us to run it, and how and who made the race history. It is a beautiful book, gloriously illustrated with many never-before seen photos. This was written in 2005. My first book, *Running and Walking for Women Over 40* is a book for people (women especially) who are beginning to walk or run, and deals also with the uniqueness of aging and running, written in 1998. This book is now a best seller. It was updated as an eBook in 2014 with Diversion Publishing.

### **What do you like better, writing or doing television broadcasting?**

Definitely writing. I guess I'm a marathoner, because I prefer long-term projects. I have broadcast hundreds of races, and even the marathons are over too quickly for me to feel I've said everything that needs to be said. I'm actually easing out of broadcasting now as I find it too stressful and in the end, ephemeral. Writing books and articles give you time for more

reflection. For sure, when you are on a motorcycle flying along next to the greatest runners in the world in an event with millions of screaming spectators, it is a very thrilling privilege. It's also thrilling to see thoughts you have worked hard to put into words come to life between the covers of a book, and ultimately, that thrill lasts longer. In fact, it lasts forever.

**What do you like doing best, besides running?**

I just love public speaking. I love to talk to people about the joy of movement, accomplishment, of changing people's lives with opportunity and of motivating people to become a person they want to be by empowering them. I love to bounce ideas off people about how we can change the world.

**What is your advice for a person who wants to start running?**

Don't dream about it; do it. Make a commitment to go out everyday, write it down, and start walking and add small jogs. Get a good pair of shoes from a store where the sales people run, so they will fit you properly. Read! My book *Running and Walking for Women Over 40* is a great beginner's book even for men and children, I tell them they can skip the chapter designed for older women! Then, make a goal of running a small 5km race in your neighborhood in about 2 months' time. A goal gives you a focus. It will grow from there.

**What do you think about when you run?**

Only non-runners ask that question! Running is very creative; the mind is occupied with a million thoughts. It is a very good time to shake off the stress of the day, get good thinking done and feel peaceful, and for me, take time to feel grateful for all life has given me. Running makes me free Fearless, Free, and Grateful.

**END of FAQs**