

Fatty Hanrahan runs a marathon



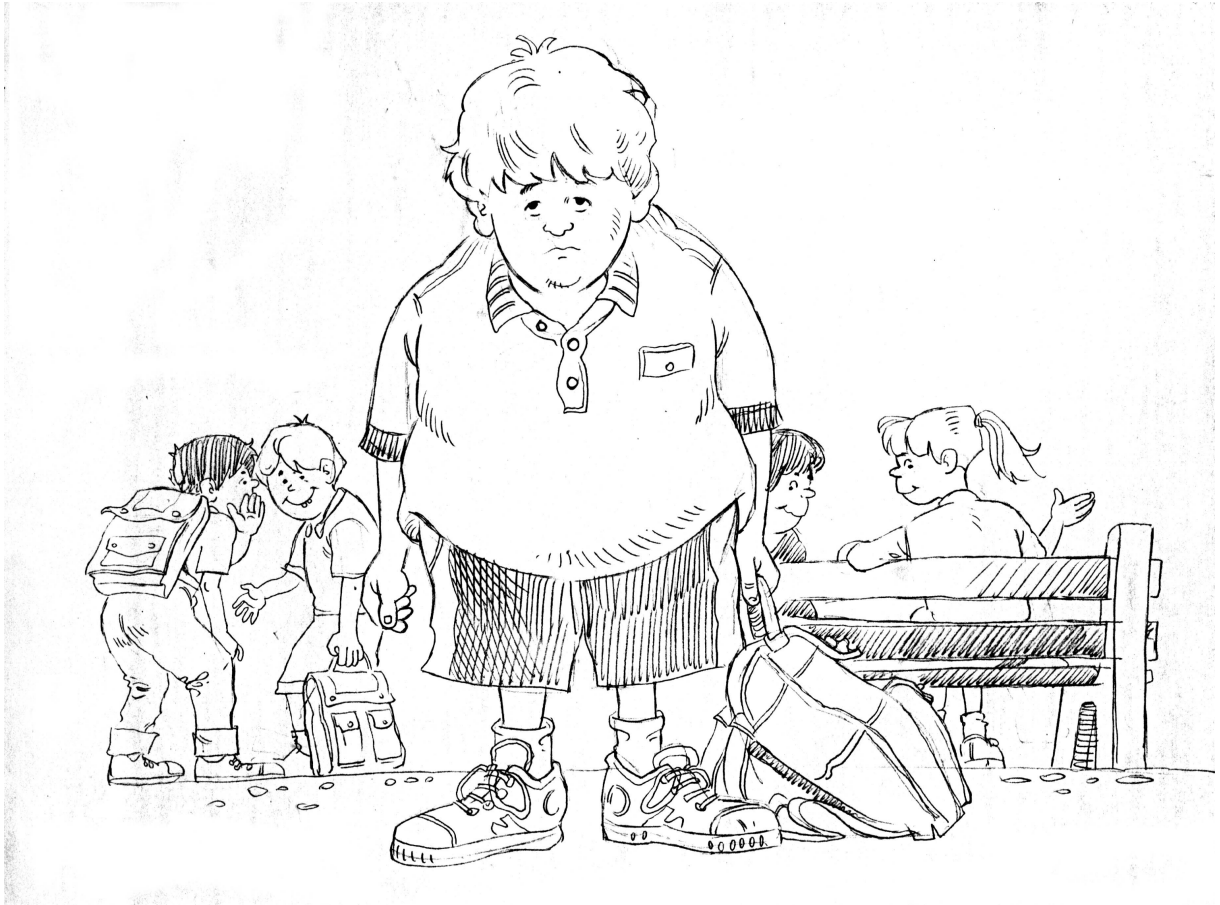
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Can Fatty become the world's biggest
marathon man?

Fatty had been teased all his life. He had been teased as long as he could remember. He was teased because he was big. Quite big.

Usually Fatty didn't let the teasing bother him. But sometimes, it got very depressing. Sometimes the silly nicknames got to him. Fatso, Fatman, *Pphhht!* That sort of thing.



It was worst on sports days. Fatty hated it when two captains chose their teams. He was always chosen last.

Then, if he fumbled and let the team down, his team-mates would jeer and boo. That was the hardest part.

If it was a game like poison ball, Fatty would always go out first. (He was a big target.)

The only sport he was good at was the shot put. But he couldn't go in it one year because he was sick. And another year, he had to go to the dentist. *What's the use?* he thought.



As Fatty got older, people teased him less. Of course, they still made comments behind his back. He always knew when they were doing it.

Relatives used to say that when Fatty got older he would shed his "puppy fat". But by the time he was eighteen, he was already eighteen stone (120kilos)! That's a lot of puppy fat.

It wasn't much fun being different from other people. It wasn't much fun when you weren't really good at anything.

Fatty did try a few things. He joined a model aeroplane club. He went to night school and tried to learn Esperanto. He collected bottle tops for a while.

But it was always the same. Nothing ever really went right. (Even his scales broke.)

Then Fatty read about a man who ran across Canada with only one leg. At first Fatty could not believe it. Then he started to think.

Maybe I could do something like that, he thought. Maybe not as far as the whole way across Canada. Maybe, maybe a marathon. I could be the world's biggest marathon man!

The more he thought about it, the more Fatty liked the idea. *Yes!* he thought. *But I had better do it properly.* So he went to see his doctor.

She was very encouraging. "You will have to train," she cautioned. "Start slowly and work your way up to it. Cut down on junk food ... and don't forget to stretch."



Fatty bought a new pair of lycra shorts. Then he bought a new pair of running shoes. (They cost quite a lot of money.) Then he got up early one chilly morning and walked around the block.

When he got back, he was puffed. But he had a hot shower, ate breakfast and felt good.

But the *next* day Fatty was stiff and sore. He decided not to get out of bed when the alarm went off.

All day he felt guilty. So, the day after that, he walked again — twice around the block. And although he had forgotten to stretch up at the start, he remembered at the end.



Every second day Fatty would walk and walk until he got puffed. Each time he would have to walk a little bit further or a little bit faster, just to get puffed.

All the while he clung to his dream of becoming the world's biggest marathon man.



After about a month, Fatty felt ready to start running. He didn't run the whole way at first. He walked a bit and ran a bit. Then he walked a bit more. It was hard all this fartlekking.

Before long, Fatty was running more than he was walking. He figured out that he was running nearly two kilometres a day. *Wow!* he thought.

Then he got The Flu. He couldn't get out of bed for three days. He lost interest in everything, including running. *What's the use?* he thought. That was when he stopped running altogether.



About a month later, a new neighbour moved in next door. His name was Stretch. Fatty soon got to know Stretch because Stretch had a dog called Spot that kept burrowing under the fence into Fatty's backyard.

Well, it turned out that Stretch was a pretty serious runner, only he hated running alone. So Fatty started running again, this time with Stretch. It was more fun now. Fatty had someone to talk to and confide in.

Fatty and Stretch ran every second day. Week in, week out. Rain, hail and smog. They ran on weekends too. And they entered four fun runs together, though Fatty only finished one of them.

Stretch became like Fatty's coach. When he felt Fatty was ready, he entered them both in the city-to-surf marathon. Fatty was pretty scared.



The big day came. Fatty had a sleepless night. "Calm down," said Stretch.

At the start, there were a lot of people. Fatty had an attack of arachnophobia. "I don't know if I can do this," he said. But Stretch just pushed him into line.

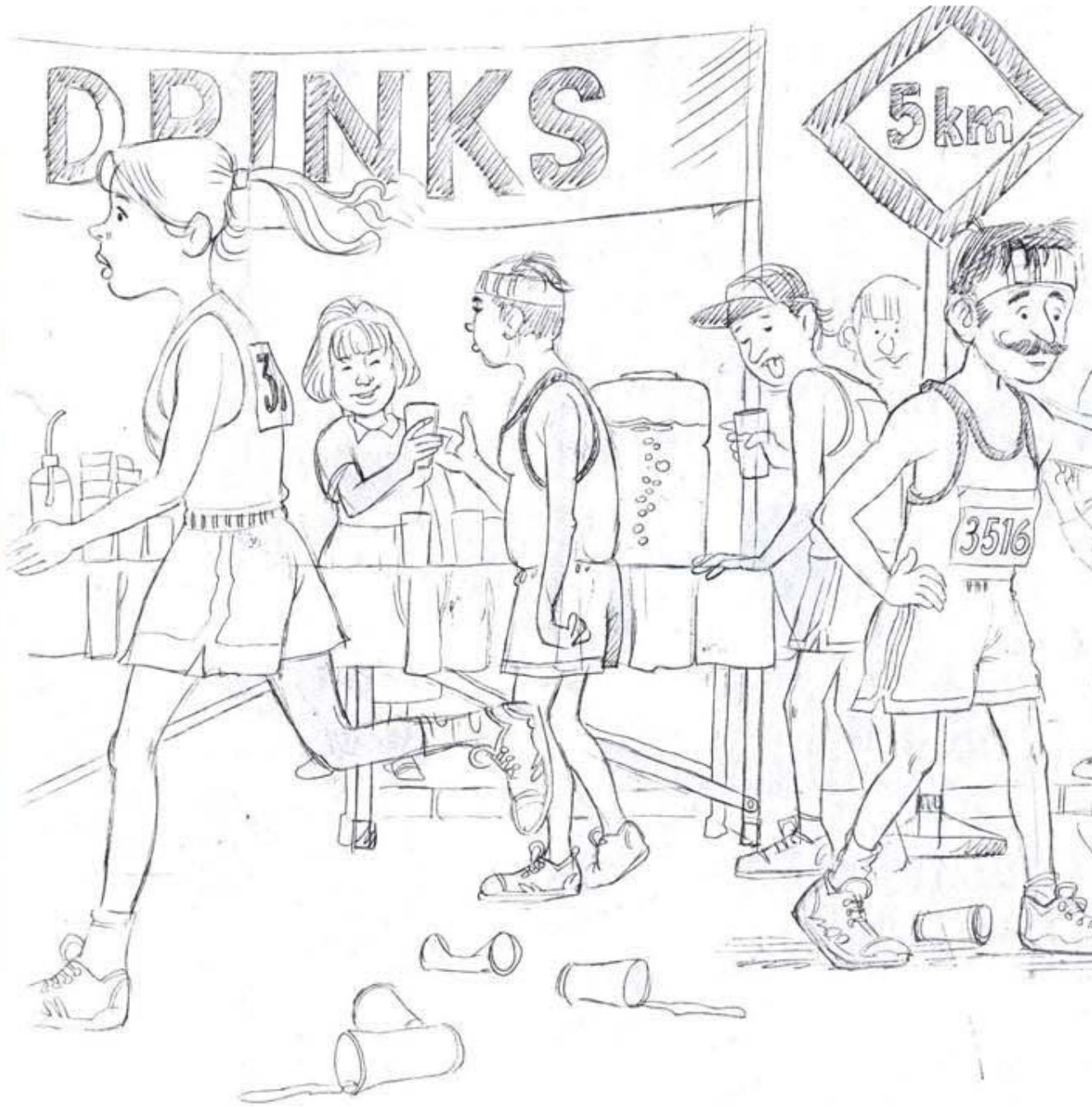
Then the race began. Fatty and Stretch ran together. After fifteen minutes, Fatty wanted to stop. "How much further?" he asked Stretch.

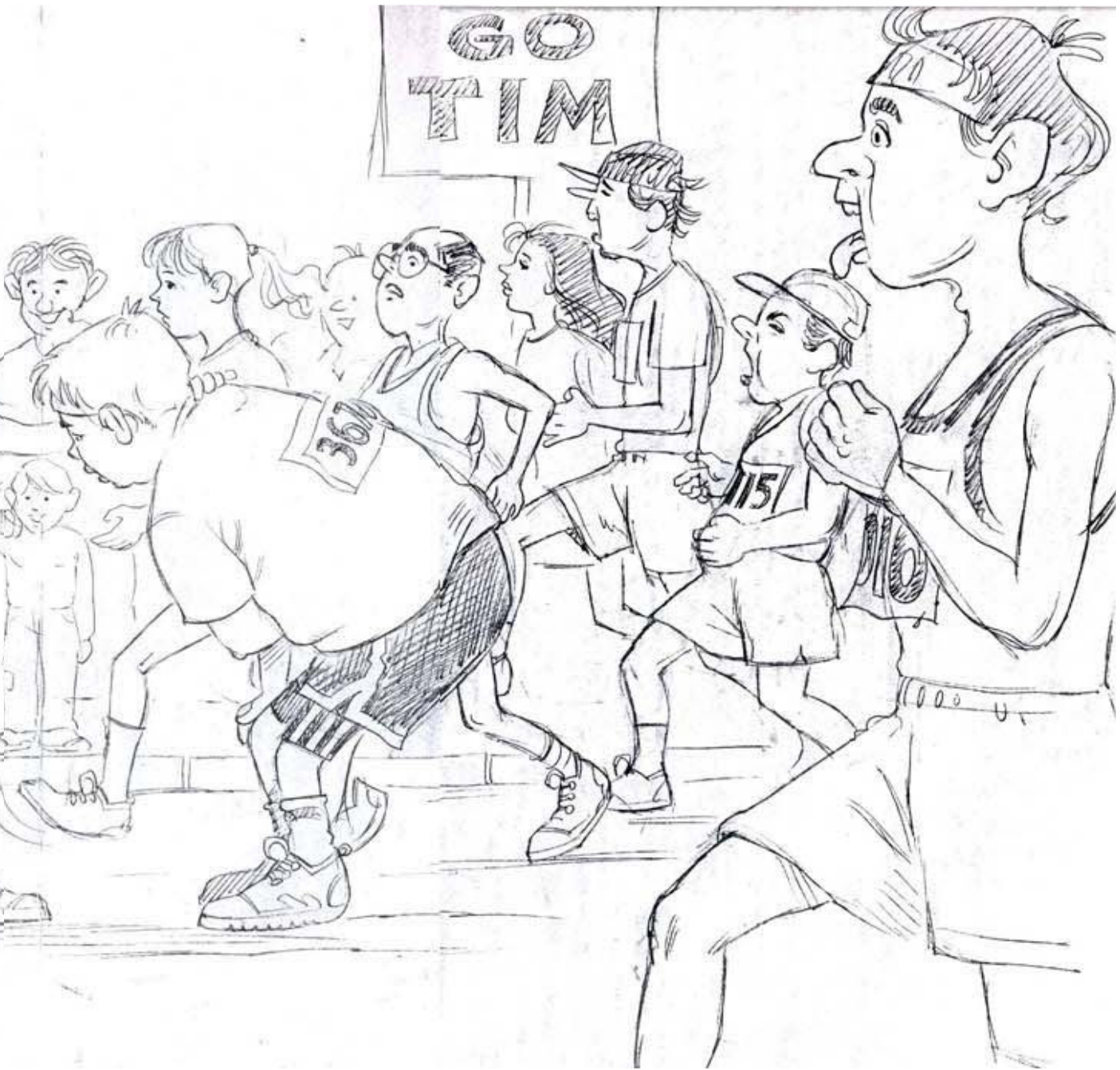
"Only another five hours," Stretch replied.

After thirty minutes, it didn't seem so bad. "You've run through the pain barrier," said Stretch. Then Fatty got the stitch. It was pretty bad. He doubled up on the road, and people had to run around him.

"Keep going," said Stretch. "Sometimes giving up is worse than going on."

Fatty started to think, *what's the use?* Then he thought, *I really do want to be the world's biggest marathon man.* So he started to run again.





They ran on and on. Stretch looked at his watch and made some calculations. "Ten kilometres to go," he said. Then Stretch tripped over something and landed on his knee. His face was full of pain. Blood started to ooze from his knee.

"You go on," he said to Fatty.

Fatty ran off, leaving Stretch behind, just sitting on the road.

A minute later, though, Fatty returned with a first-aid officer. She made very sympathetic noises and put some gloves on. Then she cleaned and dressed the wound.

Six and a half hours after the race began, Fatty and Stretch struggled over the line. Everyone was clapping them like they had come first or something. A news reporter asked Fatty some questions while the camera flashed.

Fatty was so puffed he could hardly answer. He was very excited. He was the world's biggest marathon man!

"I've got news for you," said Stretch later, when they were alone together.

"What do you mean?" said Fatty.

"You've lost a lot of weight," said Stretch.

"I can't have," said Fatty, "I don't feel any lighter."

"Thirty kilos, maybe," said Stretch. And Stretch was right. Fatty weighed himself that night at Stretch's house. He weighed 93 kilos.

***What's the use?* he thought. Well, actually he didn't know what to think.**

Nevertheless, he ran quite a few more marathons after that. Most of them with Stretch.

