



# Marathon Man

*See Steve run -- for his life*

March 1, 1999 By John R. Quinn

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Steve Kovacev is a leading authority on the loneliness of the long-distance runner. But he doesn't worship at the altar of protease inhibitors -- this long-term survivor has been disappointed by five different combo therapies. "My body is always in crisis," the 45-year-old Provincetown, Massachusetts, resident says. "But I'm not going to let it stop me. Until it stops me."

In April '96 it definitely slowed him down. Having mourned the AIDS death of first one and then another lover ("That was the last nail in the coffin," he jokes blackly), Kovacev found himself on a deathbed made of PCP, CMV and other infections. "I was cashing in the chips, preparing to die," he recalls. "And I was OK with it. Almost."

Yet by that fall, a regimen including organic veggies, Western meds and alternatives ranging from good old St. John's wort to the exotic carnivora (a Venus fly trap extract) had him up and running -- literally. And running's no casual pastime for Kovacev: It's a vocation. "I run every day in Provincetown's woods and beaches," he says. "It's gorgeous here, very spiritual. Off-season there's nobody here, and I can just be with nature."

We're not just talking jogging here. Kovacev first took up the sport in the '70s ("When everyone else was doing drugs") and later got serious about it, racking up five Boston marathons before first falling ill in 1992. Yet staring death in the face steeled his soul, and he resolved that "before I ever return to my deathbed, I would do a number of things, and one was run another marathon." Not for his own glory, Kovacev says, but to honor his dead lovers -- and to prove that there is life after an AIDS diagnosis. He finished the '97 Boston Marathon in 4 hours and 50 minutes; in '98 it took him only 12 minutes longer.

What is it about running? "It makes me feel good on every level," he says. "I get a chance to think about everything -- from the silly to the profound. Today I reminded myself to write thank-you notes to the people who sponsored me to go the '98 Gay Games," he says. "But I also say my prayers to my loved ones and ask for the guidance and protection I need to keep on with my struggle."

Sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back. Last fall, neuropathy tripped him up, interrupting his training for the '99 Boston Marathon. "I have hopes of being at the starting line in April, but I don't know," he says. "Some days I can't even do my four-mile jog, let alone the

minimum six-mile-a-day run a marathon requires." Kovacec's name -- an athleticism -- can be found elsewhere in *POZ*'s pages this month; in the summer of '97, he and 11 other HIV positive crew members aboard the *Survivor* completed the 2,300-mile Los Angeles-to-Honolulu TransPac Yacht Race (see "[Race With the Angels](#)").

Whether or not he's at the starting line in Boston next month, Kovacec is still in a race -- against time -- to get his hands on drugs that work. Right now he's giving a mistletoe-extract compound from Europe a try. "The AIDS community has lost ground because of all the hype about protease inhibitors," he says. "We're no longer in crisis mode to find a cure. That's a tragedy."

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