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A DAY IN NEW YORK

THE ADVENTURER |

My Own Marathon: Going, Going . . .

11:54 a.m. I'm all geared up to go, go, go on my 24-hour NYC mini marathon. Pumped up, I race down the steps to the sweaty boiler room called the subway en route to my Central Park bike tour. I take my last gasp of fresh-ish air. Inhale, and hold.

12:13 p.m. A two-man mariachi band blows through the subway doors. As the festive music fills the car, I tell myself: If they throw down the hat, I will dance. Instead, they pass it around for donations. Before I can even shout "¡Ay caramba!," they're out the door and on to their next gig.

1:05 p.m. Woody Allen, are you filming this? Me, madly racing through the crowds of Midtown, dodging pedestrians, cat-size dogs and steaming pretzel stands. I'm late for an important date with . . . no, not my therapist or my best friend's second ex-husband, but my tour guides.

1:10 p.m. Our group — which includes a bachelorette and her gal pals from Atlanta, a flock of older Canadian women and two young Korean guys — meets at a bike shop, where we saddle up for our spin through Central Park. For the next two hours or so, we will pedal through the park, glimpsing movie sites, celebrities' apartment windows and landscape design. But first, we must tangle with traffic. (We wisely walk our bikes.)

1:24: At the Columbus Circle entrance of Central Park, guides Richard (he's the one with the Fabio-tastic blond locks) and John (dapper in a khaki sports coat and cool shades) point to the Hearst building and explain how William Randolph Hearst once ran the New York Times and partly ignited the Spanish-American War. Uh, didn't Hearst run the New York Journal? I decide to muzzle my inner schoolmarm, since exercise is the point.

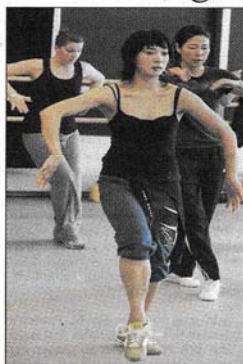
2:19 p.m. I am cycling along lightly trafficked roads more horizontal than vertical when Richard stops to show us the backside of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Cleopatra's Needle, the only Egyptian obelisk in North America. I also learn another interesting fact: Richard is an actor (no, really?!), as is John, who also works in theater and tap-dances. So that explains his Gene Kelly tic.

2:55 p.m. "Richard," I ask — pedal, pedal — "have I seen you in anything?"

"Well" — pedal, pedal — "I'm going to be in an episode of 'Law and Order: SVU' with Robin Williams. I play a hippie protester."

"Was that a stretch, Richard?"
We coast to the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir.

3:30 p.m. After climbing up to Belvedere Castle, home of the Henry Luce Nature Observatory; paying respects to John Lennon at Strawberry Fields, a memorial to the Beatle who was killed nearby; and seeing film locales for such B-list movies as "Stuart Little" and "Home Alone 2," I finally experience



Anyone can work out at the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. Just be flexible.

the biggest adrenaline rush of the tour: a daredevil ride through Midtown.

5:10 p.m. Now back on my feet (bye-bye, bike), I head to the way Upper West Side to play billy goat along the steep inclines of Fort Tryon, Manhattan's hilliest park. The irises, azaleas and daffodils add some nice eye candy to my stroll around Heather Garden and along the impenetrable stone wall that commemorates Revolutionary War battles fought in the area. The park is serene and spottily populated; I see only a couple locked in love, a bearish man throwing bread crumbs to squirrels and some stray joggers. I hoof it up a slope to the Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art that specializes in medieval artifacts. A guard is standing outside the closed museum, reading a copy of the New Yorker. I ask him what's inside; he replies, "The museum was built to give context to the statues and monastery and church fragments." Did he just read that in his magazine?

7:05 p.m. My heart is already racing as I arrive a little late to my hip-hop class at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. I still have to sign up and change into my JLo wear. When I reach the studio, the students are already standing in place, stretching nimbly before the mirror. It's obvious they have been here before. They are made of elastic, whereas I am built of steel rods. As our instructor, Robin, leads a warm-up routine, I search for a commiserating soul. The Russian behind me looks as if he is going to snap like peanut brittle. I feel your pain, comrade.

7:54 p.m. And one, two, step, step, arm 'round, swivel, slam. Oops, sorry, hope that didn't hurt too much.

8:05 p.m. Robin shouts out words of encouragement — "Ho-ho-ho, a-huh, a-huh" — yet I am still falling terribly behind. However, I am surprisingly good at the last move, a crouched pose with a finger pointing at an imaginary bird or falling star.

For cool-down time, Robin leads us in a Circle of Love. Her earlier words return to me: "Look at yourself and love what you see." With my eyes closed, I envision myself doing backup for Kanye West. Love it.

11 p.m. The title of the improv show at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre is inappropriate for children's ears — I am so there. The famed club has hosted such brilliantly twisted talents as Mike Myers and Will Ferrell, and although tonight's show does not star any marquee names, the topic de nuit is quite recognizable: dysfunctional families. At the start of the act, the comedians pick an audience member to share his or her tormented childhood. I'm sitting next to a guy wearing eyeliner, so I know I'm safe.

11:20 p.m. TMI Matt is telling the crowd about his family. His grandmother was a hairdresser nicknamed Beaver, who also gussied up corpses at his dad's funeral home, which is how his mom and dad met. His father had four wives, one of whom died on a horse. (The beast now grazes in his dad's back yard.) His sister and mom live together, but after a fight the mother secured a restraining order against the daughter. Now, they must always keep at least one couch length between them. The curtain hasn't even risen and the room is already crackling with laughter.

11:35 p.m. A man-mom is riding a man-horse. We all know how this is going to end, yet it's still hilarious.

12:30 a.m. A few audience members begin to assemble for Liquid Courage, the after-hours show featuring non-pros' own skits. I watch a guy slip on surgical gloves . . . and exit stage left.

10:20 a.m. After yesterday's activities, my feet are spent. So I treat them to an exhibit of Christian Louboutin shoes at the Fashion Institute of Technology. As I gaze at the Retish Ballerina ("Swan Lake" in stilettos) and the Cleavage Pump (toes with Pam Anderson décolletage), I empathize with the poor piggies sacrificed for fashion.

11:25 a.m. Chelsea Piers is an emporium of sports and entertainment, including golf, bowling and ice skating. I've come for the 200-yard driving range, featuring the biggest water hazard ever, the Hudson River. (Thankfully, nets stop the balls from hitting denizens of Jersey.) However, with a 45-minute wait, I have no choice but to putter up on a tiny patch of faux lawn.

The competition is tough here on the putting green. The 6-year-old with the glove and sun visor has quite a stroke. Back to you, Nick.

11:54 a.m. On my way back to the rental counter, I pass long-faced golfers waiting for their turn at the driving range. I'm tempted to hand them my putter and tell them to stop idling, go be active, you're in NYC, the city that never stops sweating. But they need to learn that lesson through their own sore feet and exhausted muscles.

— Andrea Sachs