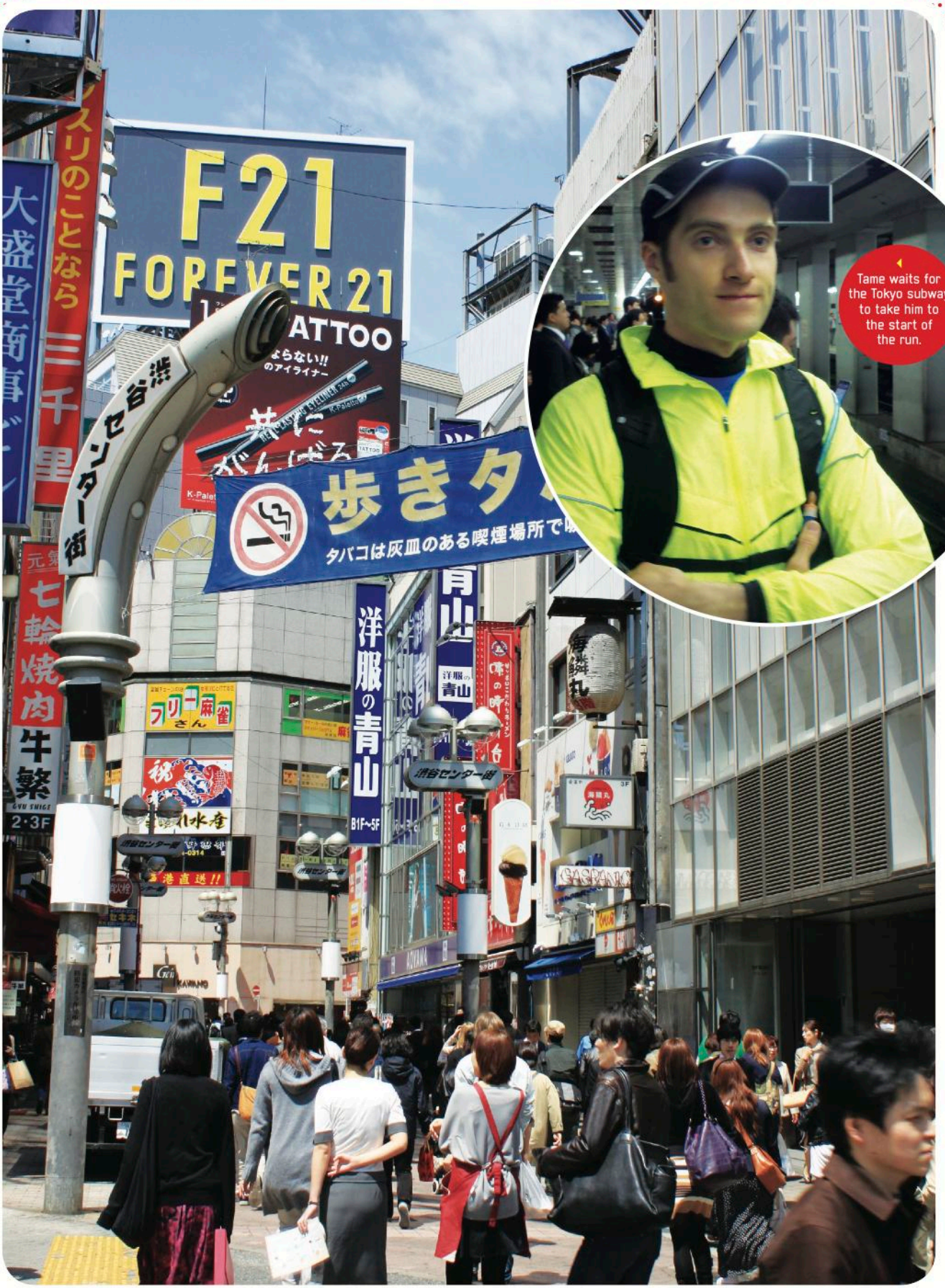


Tame waits for the Tokyo subway to take him to the start of the run.

I Heart Tokyo

How a gangly British tech geek became Tokyo's most popular runner, and the Tokyo Marathon's biggest pain.

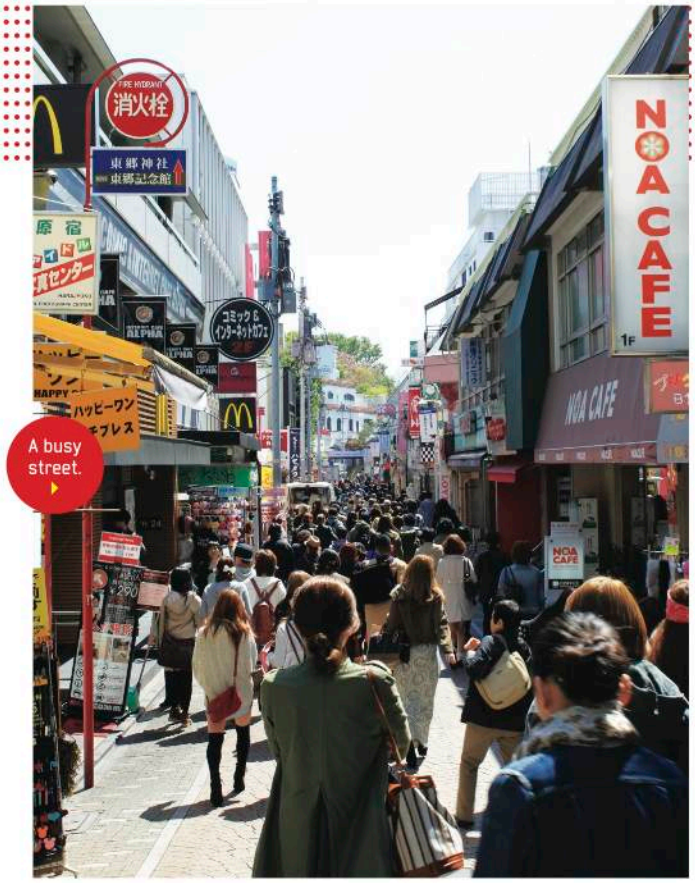
BY ERIN BERESINI

Joseph Tame is fast.

I'm chasing the 33-year-old British expatriate through his adopted home of Tokyo on a crisp, cloudy afternoon and, to put it in Tame's terms, we look "quite mad." We are the only Westerners I've seen on the streets in the three days since I arrived on April 18, our foreignness magnified by our relative enormity—at a lanky 6-foot-1, Tame is half a foot taller than the average Japanese man and at 5-foot-7, I'm a female giant.

To make matters worse, Tame holds an iPhone in each hand and is running in an acid yellow Nike jacket ("It's my signature!") and a big black fanny pack. The small Nike one wasn't large enough to hold his iPod shuffle, two USB batteries, Wi-Fi router, USB cables and his requisite 3.5-ounce Godiva 72-percent dark chocolate bar ("My nutrition is pretty bad, actually.") He topped the ensemble off with a Nike backpack that looks like a neon yellow honeycomb.

We are running a giant heart around Tokyo with the Japanese script, Kanji, for "heart/spirit/inner strength" written in the middle of the heart—at least that's how our seemingly aimless, GPS-tracked zigzagging through the city should show up on a digital map when we're done. It's



A busy street.

technophile Tame's way of giving back to his beloved city after the March 11 earthquake shook Tokyo and its residents. The problem is Tame, who ran the last Tokyo Marathon in six hours and 16 minutes, took off on our 31-mile adventure at eight-minute per mile pace, triggering his iPhone gyro sensor, which spun Google Earth around and launched us in the wrong direction for at least two miles.

I'm sure the black-suit clad government workers we pass near Imperial Palace, the Emperor's residence, would have assumed we robbed the Apple store if we weren't dressed so conspicuously. As it is, no one says a word. Not one heckle, jeer or shout.

"The Japanese people are very respectful," Tame says when I catch up to him at a stop light. "There's a whole culture of unwritten rules that makes everything run smoothly. That's why I love it here. And I love being a foreigner here because that means I get to break the rules without looking like an idiot."

The way he's currently dressed, that's debatable.

It's technophile Tame's way of giving back to his beloved city after the March 11 earthquake shook Tokyo and its residents.

Tame earned international attention as both a tech nerd and a marathoner when he live streamed the Tokyo Marathon this past February. Fourteen thousand people joined him through live video broadcasting website, UStream, as he jogged the city's streets in a homemade contraption he dubbed the iRun.

At its core, the iRun is two Steadicams—stabilizing mounts for video cameras—fused together with carbon rods. Then Tame added foam padding for comfort, a climber's harness for stability, four iPhones (one streaming Tame's face, one streaming the race, one collecting data and one for taking calls), an iPad and three wireless routers for functionality, and red and blue foam tubes, a toy windmill and a birdfeeder-cum-satellite dish for style. All of which prompted U.S. technology Web magazine, *Engadget*, to post a teaser video for Tame's 2011 live stream under the headline: "Man will run Tokyo Marathon with dizzying array of gadgetry, amazing lack of shame."

"There's only a one in nine chance of getting into the marathon," Tame tells me the day I arrive. It's true: Only 30,000 of 294,468 applicants made the cut this year. "A lot of my friends didn't get in. I did, so I thought I'd share the experience."

Twenty-five friends stationed along the course and in a make-shift television studio on the 17th floor of the Washington Hotel by the finish line mixed Tame's personal stream with the 1,000 tweets per hour Tame received, fans who Skyped in, and the crew's own commentary to create a professional-quality broadcast. Those efforts put Tame in the crosshairs of Tokyo Marathon officials, who license out event broadcasting rights to Fuji Television. Neither Fuji TV nor event organizers have come after him yet, Tame says, but as his broadcasts get better and garner more attention—his 2011 Tokyo Marathon broadcast spattered him across local news shows, CNN and the Associated Press—Tame is becoming nervous about the legality of his actions.

Television, Tame says, doesn't know what to do about techies like him who, with five iPhones, a $425 monthly phone bill and an Internet connection, can broadcast any event to the world.

Hour three. We rounded the bottom of the heart and are slowly making our way up the left side. We have run past 12 miles of gray concrete buildings and men dressed in suits. Black suits and black ties. Gray buildings and a gray sky that starts to sprinkle rain. The uniformity, at this moment, is irritating. Why is Tame so in love with this city? Why would the son of a school principal and an occupational therapist from the rural town of Hereford, England, leave his loving parents and three siblings to live on the other side of the world?

Between pointing out Tokyo's Hyatt and the stuffed animals that women attach to their purses in some sort of fetishistic fashion statement, Tame tells me that

he left school when he was 17 because epilepsy drugs made him sociophobic. At 22, he moved to a small tourist hotel in the Swiss Alps below the Eiger's north face where he worked as a waiter for two years, often serving Japanese tourists.

Tame moved to Tokyo in late 2001 to teach English on a one-year working visa and fell in love with the city and a culture that shared two of Tame's most cherished values: kindness and perseverance. He still remembers the first time he rode the bus into Tokyo at night.

"The route took me on this road, raised up above the city. We were driving through skyscrapers, floating through the air like on a flying bus—Oh my God! Like Bladerunner in the future. All of the red blinking lights! The city's alive! I could do anything here! Of all the places I've lived, it felt like home to me."

When Tame's working visa expired and efforts at obtaining an extension were rejected, he returned to England to pursue a four-year degree in Japanese studies at the University of Sheffield, where he met his Japanese wife, Satoko. When he returned to Tokyo in 2008, wife and spousal visa in hand, he was finally, irrevocably home.

I wonder, after Tame nearly runs into a wall while inspecting one of his iPhones, if the greatest mark he'll make on his beloved city might possibly be in the shape of a ginormous heart.

Tame is an unlikely runner. In 2002, at home in England, he tried to run but found his heart aching after 100 meters, an ailment that led to 24-hour surveillance of his heart's rhythm and a subsequent diagnosis that deemed nothing was wrong with him, but if his heart hurt, he shouldn't run.

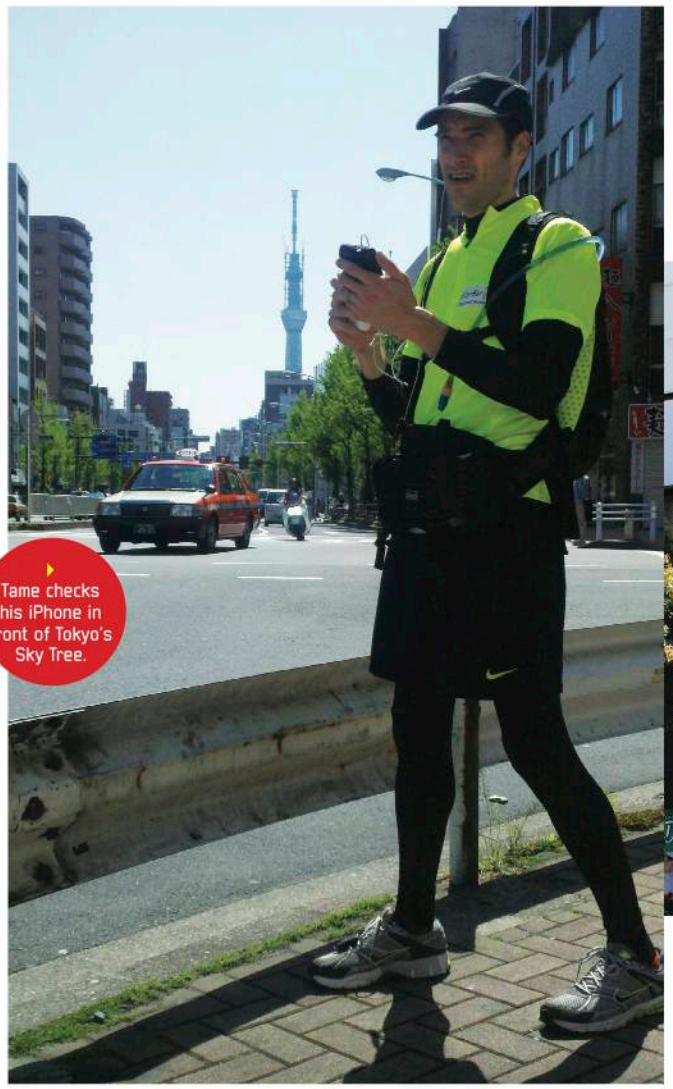
Then there is the epilepsy discovered at age 16. He doesn't remember what happened, only that he was asleep in a bunk bed at a friend's house, then woke up with his tongue throbbing and all of his limbs aching as if someone had tried to pull them off.

"I had no interest in running whatsoever," Tame says. "Honestly, I didn't think I could."

But when a friend from England and fellow Tokyo resident, Tom Kobayashi, suggested the two men start running together in 2008 to catch up on each other's news, Tame was game.

"I started bringing my iPhone so when I got home I could see what I'd achieved. That was key for me—to have a record of what I'd done," says Tame, who is a freelance social media consultant for companies including Nike Japan and JP Morgan.

Kobayashi and Tame trained for the Tokyo Marathon 10K, a race held in conjunction with the marathon, in 2009. Then they went all in and signed up for the 2010 Tokyo Marathon, where Tame first tried to live stream the event with an iPhone strapped to his hat. But Kobayashi



Tame checks his iPhone in front of Tokyo's Sky Tree.

A street in Tokyo

didn't win the 2011 marathon lottery, and Tame's wife, Satoko, a 28-year-old development director for Total Football, a Nike-sponsored company that introduces European-style soccer training to Japanese coaches and players, likes to wear a purple T-shirt with the words "Running Sucks" scribbled across the front in sparkly gold script; Tame had no steady training partners.

So the technophile grabbed two iPhones—one operating Google Earth and the other, RunKeeper—and ran the Meguro elephant, the Twitter bird and Hello Kitty through the city with stunning accuracy. The Hello Kitty adventure totaled 28 miles, turning Tame into an unwitting ultramarathoner and a local running sensation.

"An overwhelming number of people support Joseph because they look at what he does and realize how hard it is," says Steve Nagata, a Tokyo-based technology analyst. "They follow him because of his personality."

"I started bringing my iPhone so when I got home I could see what I'd achieved. That was key for me—to have a record of what I'd done."

Tame's Monty Pythonesque sense of silliness and willingness to risk failure make him stand out in a city where failure is unacceptable and conformity, in both clothing and behavior, is considered respectful.

"In England, he would've gotten noticed," Kobayashi says, "but not to the same extent. He is ideally placed in Tokyo."

Tame's live streams and GPS runs have also earned him a reputation as a legitimate technology guru.

"Nobody respects anybody in the tech world," Nagata says. "He gets a lot of attention and that's all that counts. It's always the first person to do something that gets recognized and Joseph's good at that. Five years from now, people won't run around with propellers on their heads, but people will be using aspects of the technology and that's how it all works."

But will Tame's Tokyo Marathon broadcast—an activity that has attracted more social media clients than Tame can currently handle—be shut down? When I tell Tame I have a meeting with the chief operating officer of the Tokyo Marathon, he says he must accompany me as my fixer. Not just anybody, he says, can make an appointment with the head of a Japanese corporation—it's impossible. Now I'm paranoid that showing up to the interview with Tame in tow will tick off the COO, but I concede; I can't read the subway signs.

We ride in the front of an unmanned monorail car that glides above the reclaimed land lining Tokyo Bay. The ground beneath us liquefied, Tame tells me, during the 8.9-magnitude earthquake that originated off Japan's northeastern coast on March 11, turning it into something like quicksand. From our vantage point, I can't see the cracked pavement or leaning walls and telephone poles. Instead it feels like we're on a Disney ride through the film set of a futuristic city. The immense buildings dotting the landscape are gray and cold and one in particular seems to defy architectural possibility; what looks like supersized Erector set beams hold a giant copper-colored orb 25 stories above ground.

"That," Tame says, "is the Fuji TV building."

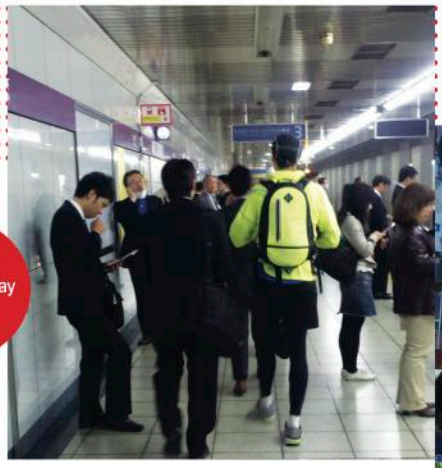
We arrive at the eighth-floor Tokyo Marathon offices in the Ariake district. Orchids fill the foyer, where the marathon course is etched into Plexiglas on a wall. The flowers are a sign, Tame says, that they've just moved in.

A secretary takes us into Chief Operating Officer Tad Hayano's corner office and tells us he should be in shortly.

"This is so exciting!" Tame gushes. "Where's your business card? The Japanese are very fond of business cards."

I dig through my wallet to find the two cards I stuck

Tame and running blogger, Nishida



Tame in a Tokyo subway station.

Shibuya, Tokyo

there two months ago.

Hayano and his media coordinator, Shota Fukushima, enter. We shake hands then exchange business cards. They would've bowed, Tame later tells me, but they know I'm American. We sit at a small table, Tame and I on one side, Hayano and Fukushima on the other.

Hayano asks how I like Tokyo. It's neat, I say. "Neat?" he says with a grin. "Yes, we are very clean." He knows that's not what I meant. "That too!" I say. "It's very clean!"

We laugh. Tame tenses up, probably nervous that I will somehow insult Hayano with my American sensibility. I know the salt-and-pepper-haired 53-year-old lived in the U.S. for almost a decade, spending six years as a gear representative for Asics, so I have some cultural leeway.

I ask Hayano what he believes is the reason behind the Tokyo Marathon's booming popularity.

"Tokyo had a marathon, but it was just for the elite," Hayano says. "American people run every day, more even. But not in Japan. Why? The hurdle was very high for the general public. We lowered it by introducing the seven-hour time limit and making running cool—fashionable. We targeted the women's magazines. We helped put a lot of articles about women's running in them," Hayano says. "Women's fashion is a big influence to everybody."

"Whatever the young women do," adds Tame, who has been flipping through the magazines on Hayano's table, "everyone else wants to do." Tame turns a magazine toward Hayano, pointing to a picture toward the back. It's Tame in his iRun.

"That's me!" he says.

"That's you!?" Hayano and Fukushima say.

"I know you," says Hayano, leaning back in his chair, touching his hand to his chin. "So you're that guy."

"Joeseph live streamed the Tokyo Marathon," I say. "I'm actually writing my story about him."

Before Hayano can speak, Tame begins to blither.

"Your marathon changed my life. It's fantastic! I learned so much about the city. And I felt so lucky to get in, but marathon training is kind of boring, so I started running with my iPhone and trying to draw shapes. I ended up running 28 miles to draw Hello Kitty, which was quite popular. But the marathon's energy and the posters all over the metro and the crowds are incredible! I wanted to share that experience, so I devised this contraption to live stream it but then I got quite nervous that I would interfere with Fuji TV's broadcasting. But then they featured me in a story so that final barrier was removed. Perhaps we could stay in touch for next year's marathon."

Hayano takes a sip of coffee. I take a sip of coffee while Hayano grins. I hate coffee. I take another sip.

"Please do stay in touch," Hayano finally says. "With Shota."

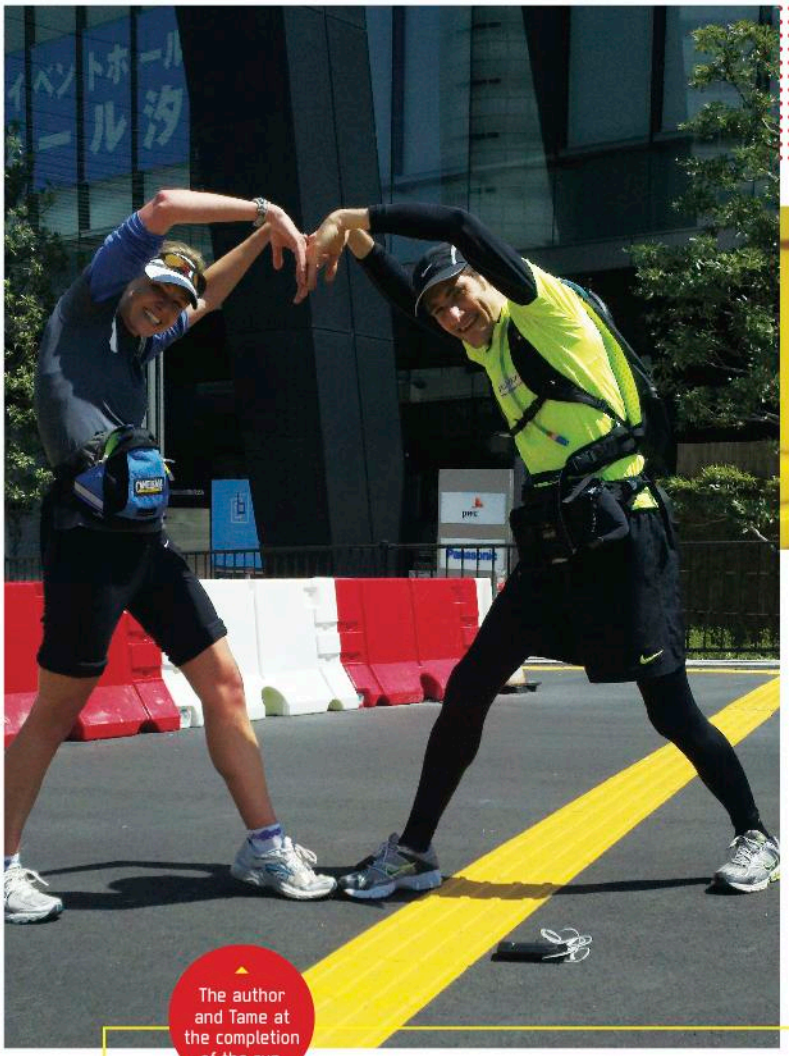
As we walk down the hall toward the monorail station, I tell Tame I hope I didn't just screw up his future marathon broadcasting ability.

"Did you see the way he said to keep in touch?" Tame says, rolling his eyes.

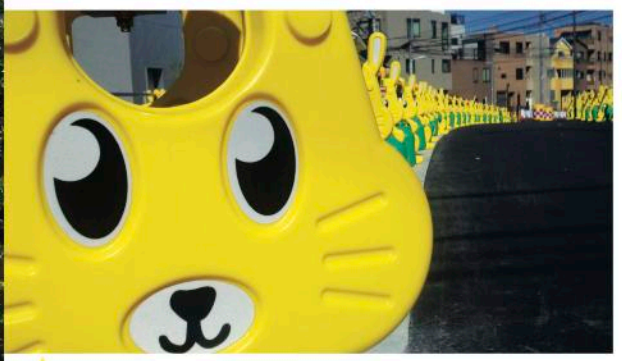
We must complete the heart. What started as a fun run has become something of a military mission; we cut the run short two days ago because it was raining, Tame's knee was killing him, and it was getting late. Now, at 7 a.m. on a Sunday, we have five hours to finish the top two humps of the heart before I have to catch my flight for Los Angeles. Tame's knee is still killing him and my hamstrings protest the idea of doing two 17-mile runs in three days.

But we must persevere; it's the Japanese way to suck it up and keep going, Tame told me when I arrived. That's why Japanese people love distance running and the imperative, "Ganbatte!" or "Keep going! Persevere!" It's one of the most used words in the Japanese language, Tame says, and the one most often heard on the Tokyo Marathon course.

The sun shines on Shibuya crossing when we meet Eiko Nishida, a running blogger and writer for Japan's *Trail Running* magazine, who heard through Tame's vir-



The author and Tame at the completion of the run.



tual grapevine about our mission and asked to become a part of our troop. We're at the world's busiest intersection, but right now the only people out are garbage men and twentysomethings doing the walk of shame in last night's party clothes.

We run in silence for an hour and a half, wondering how this run—a single, silly run—might help heal a city going through difficult times. And when we're going to make it to the finish. And where the finish actually is and what it looks like. The only words uttered are when Tame directs us right or left.

At the top of the heart, the buildings and roads shrink. We stop to take a photo of a street blocked off with plastic yellow rabbits instead of orange cones. We stop again when we see a cherry blossom tree in full bloom. "It must be the only one left!" Nishida marvels.

There's hardly any traffic, but we stop at every stoplight so Tame can stretch and wince then turn up the volume on his iPhone to drown out the pain with James Blunt and Survivor.

Two days ago, Tame gabbed during the entire run. He pointed out landmarks, like the Roppongi, "a sleazy night club area" that's home to the Gaspanic night club where one time, Tame said, a fried chicken seller from Iran tried to persuade Tame to come back to his place. We admired a small, wooden two-story flat with faded sea foam green fish scale details on the walls. Most buildings in Tokyo, Tame said, are renovated or destroyed after 30 years, leaving the city crowded with concrete and futuristic architecture that ignores the curved-roof aesthetic of centuries past. That old building somehow survived.

"I'll find places I know from life in Tokyo on these GPS runs," Tame said. "I now associate the DIY center with Hello Kitty's right chin. I remember the feelings I had during the run then, and I attach those emotions to some of the places."

Today, we continue in silence past corner shop owners rolling back metal barriers from their doors to let customers and sunlight in. Past a giant crane the same offensive shade as Tame's shirt that forces us to detour. Past a cat on a leash and a canal with replicas of Italian gondolas docked on one side. The city is still alive, albeit with fewer mad-looking foreigners running through the streets. It hums, even on a Sunday morning.

The city is still alive, albeit with fewer mad-looking foreigners running through the streets. It hums, even on a Sunday morning.

Tame is itching to share what we're about to accomplish. He knows with the network he's built, the news of his run for Tokyo will spread when he uploads it. Tweets it. Blogs it. He craves the feedback of his fellow runners and technophiles.

"Just at that stoplight," Tame says after over three hours of listening to each other's breath and footsteps.

We stop at a nondescript intersection beneath the raised road that entranced Tame almost 10 years ago. Pedestrians grin curiously as we high-five and take pictures of ourselves at the sleepy crossing. It's an anticlimactic end to a grand adventure, but the adventure has only truly begun. Now it's up to Tame to share his tech-enhanced ode to his beloved city so we can see how one big GPS-tracked run—one big idea—might bring a smile to the people who, in this moment, need one most. CM