

BOSTON BOMBINGS

# Change of plans may have saved couple

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Peter McQuillan was supposed to meet his wife, Carol, at the international flags once she crossed the finish line of Monday's Boston Marathon.

Instead, he decided to meet her farther down the road.

If the Stouffville residents had stuck with the original plan, the result could have been tragic.

A bomb went off in the vicinity of the flags at 2:50 p.m., killing three and injuring at least 170.

Mrs. May-McQuillan crossed the finish line three minutes earlier.

"I was one of the lucky ones who got to finish," she said.

More than 17,500 runners or 75 per cent of the field crossed the finish line before the first blast.

The two connected a short time later in front of Marathon Sports.

With Mrs. May-McQuillan inside the finisher's chute and her husband on the outside, she told him to stay there and she would meet him. He decided to keep moving toward the end.

The windows at Marathon Sports were blown out by one of the two blasts, a few minutes later.

"I was just really thankful I knew where Peter was," Mrs. May-McQuillan said.

The McQuillans were about 500 metres from the first explosion.

Mrs. May-McQuillan said she heard a loud noise behind her, toward the finish line, then saw "a huge smoke plume".

Then it got "eerily kind of quiet. I think everyone was in shock," she recalled Tuesday morning from a balcony of the apartment the couple rented at the corner of Exeter and Newbury streets, which is just outside the city's cordon zone.

Helicopters flew overhead, as they did for most of Monday night, while swarms of police officers and news crews made the street their home base.

"Today it seems like a war zone," Mrs. May-McQuillan said.

While still maneuvering the finisher's chute following the first explosion, Mrs. May-McQuillan asked fellow runners what was happening.

One thought the explosion, now officially deemed a terrorist attack, had to do with Patriots Day celebrations.

Her gut told her no.  
"You should get out of here," a police officer told her.

That is when she started to panic.  
"The fear on people's faces after the second bomb. ... It's terrible. They've been through this before," Mrs. May-McQuillan said in reference to 9/11.

The pair met up and made their way back to the apartment, which was a few blocks

away, physically unharmed.

"I'm OK. A little shaken up. There's a lot worse people here than I am," she said.

Those killed and injured by the bombs were spectators, the family and friends who "just come to support you and it's all about you. You feel bad they carry your stuff around all day and you get to run," Mrs. May-McQuillan said.

With poor cellphone service and TV and Internet access cut off, they remained oblivious to what was happening on the streets below Monday night.

*'The fear on people's faces after the second bomb. ... It's terrible. They've been through this before.'*

The pair planned to celebrate at the marathon's post-race party, so they had no food in the apartment. They were left to celebrate with whatever Mrs. May-McQuillan had left in her race bag as the city went into lock-down.

Marathon Monday started off great. The sun was shining and the temperature was race-day perfect.

This was Mrs. May-McQuillan's first time running Boston. She qualified last year in Ottawa after failing to do so a few times before.

"I never thought I would qualify. I never thought I would be fast enough," the 43-year-old said.

Mrs. May-McQuillan had no intention of trying to re-qualify on Monday, but she did want to put in a solid four-hour race. Along the way she high-fived spectators and snapped some photos.

"The experience is overwhelming and there's nothing like it," she said.

The pair, who were scheduled to fly to Toronto Tuesday night, had hoped to return next year, this time with Mr. McQuillan running. He wants to qualify in Whitby next month.

"It makes you think twice about entering a race in the U.S.," she said.

Two other Whitchurch-Stouffville runners were listed in the marathon's results.

Ricardo Mansueto, 32, finished the race in 3:10.

However, 49-year-old Nancy Chapman did not get to cross the finish line.

Her race ended sometime after the 40K checkpoint, which she crossed with 4:11 on the race clock. The first bomb went off with 4:09 on the race clock.

Both have returned to Whitchurch-Stouffville.

(See photographs on facing page. See Saturday's Sun-Tribune for more coverage.)

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