

# STARING DOWN DANGER

For most of us, *living dangerously* is a relative term. Maybe it means we forgot to wear a seat belt on the drive to the grocery store, or we went for a swim too soon after eating, or we cavalierly tossed a red sock in a load of whites.

But for some Webster daredevils—a stunt double who sprints away from an exploding building, a skydiver who leaps out of a plane at 13,000 feet, a driving instructor who places his life in the hands of 15-year-old beginners every day—living dangerously is a way of life. (You can bet that the driving instructor *never* forgets to fasten his seat belt.)

What is it like to risk life and limb so often? We asked six Webster alumni and a student to tell us why they do it—and why they can't imagine doing anything else.

BY ERIN PETERSON • ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIN SALAMUNIC

## Fast As You Can

**y**ou might have trouble convincing anyone that endurance running is a dangerous sport—unless you're Tony Reed (BA '78, St. Louis), a marathon runner who has tackled the 26.2-mile race on all seven continents. He's had to confront seasickness, charging rhinos, and crumbling two-story walls. And that's often before he even toes the starting line.

Reed, who was diagnosed with a pre-diabetic condition as a youngster, picked up the sport in college after learning that long-distance running could help him avoid insulin dependence. "I liked that it was something I could do all year, anywhere I was," he says. He ran his first marathon in 1982 and was hooked.

On a whim, he signed up for the Great Wall of China marathon in 2006. After he'd paid the registration fee, he learned that the race had been named one of the 10 toughest marathons in the world. In a pre-race tour, he saw that the course took runners over two short sections of the wall, which Reed found both exhilarating and terrifying. "The Great Wall wasn't exactly built to OSHA [safety] standards," he says. Portions of the wall were fewer than six feet wide, with steep drop-offs, no guard rails, and steps with an unpredictable rise—one step might be a few inches high, another more than a foot. Reed stayed safe but watched another runner get carried off on a stretcher.

A year later, he headed off to a marathon in Antarctica, braving two full days of 30-foot waves on a tiny ship that ferried runners from the southern tip of South America to the frigid starting line. Several times during the race, he and other runners had to avoid penguins that gave chase.

But perhaps Reed's most dangerous race was Kenya's 2007 Lewa Safaricom Marathon, a portion of which was held inside a game reserve. The day before the race, while runners drove the course with a guide, the group crossed paths with cheetahs, lions, and rhinos. The guide offered a rather unconvincing reassurance that the animals would be frightened away by the buzzing helicopters that patrolled the course on race day. "He told us that if a rhino charged us, we should turn around and run as fast as we could in a zigzag pattern," Reed recalls. "He said that if we were lucky, the rhino would eventually lose interest and we could finish the race." Reed finished the race without incident but doesn't have another Kenya marathon on his must-do list, he says.

While health reasons inspired Reed to start running, the novelty of seeing cities and countries through the lens of the marathon keeps him on the road, no matter what obstacles pop up. "A run in any city can help you get the lay of the land and see it in a new way," he says. "You just put on your shoes and go."

