

## INTRODUCTION

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All great stories begin with “what if?” I was an aspiring writer working as a teacher in Boston Public Schools in 1980 when Jock Semple, co-director of the Boston Marathon, asked me to write his life story.

I jumped at the chance, since I was a runner and Jock was a legend. In 1929 he ran his first Boston Marathon after emigrating from Scotland. Nine times in the 1930s and 40’s he finished in the top ten. In the 1950s he took over operations for American’s most historic race and in 1967 he made himself “infamous” by chasing Kathrine Switzer down the road in the Boston Marathon at a time when women were not permitted to run. He was not against women, or as he put it, “I was simply protecting the rules.”

Each day after school I would sit in Jock’s cramped cinderblock cubicle in the old Boston Garden where he worked as a trainer and a physiotherapist. I would write furiously with my pad and pen (no iPads in those days) as Jock’s “patients,” as he called his portly businessmen clients, teased him about his irascible responses to “cheats,” including decades of chasing interlopers who tried to get into the Boston Marathon without conforming to the rules.

Oh, the stories, which became a book I co-wrote with John J. Kelley, winner of the 1957 Boston Marathon, called *Just Call Me Jock*.

It was an on-the-cuff comment by one of Jock’s patients that triggered my long-standing interest in a “what if” that has led to this story that follows.

*Tom Murphy*

The fellow on the rubdown table asked Jock if he would have chased the “Runner in Red” in 1951, and Jock responded with a throw-away line, “If she woulda been real, I would have protected the rules.”

“If she woulda been real,” caught my attention and sent me to the Boston Public Library to research the “Runner in Red.”

I learned that the legend was real. There has been a long-standing belief that a woman slipped into the 1951 Boston Marathon undetected and ran the race, which if that could be proven would make her the first woman to have run a marathon on American soil. She wore “red,” as claimed by a group of Canadian runners who say they tried to bring the matter to the attention of Jock and other race officials. But to no avail, their story was never corroborated, and so today the “Runner in Red” remains a mystery and an urban legend.

It remains a “what if” mystery I have long wanted to explore in novel form drawing upon Jock and all the wonderful stories I “soaked up” along with the liniment fumes.

This fictional account, a period piece set in the 1990’s to coincide with the 2000 Boston Marathon, the Millennial Marathon, is my attempt to solve the mystery of that historical “what if” in the context of a love story and family drama.

I hope you enjoy the “run” with me.

Tom Murphy