

➤ BACK ON TRACK

I used to find fast-food wrappers under my husband's car seat. Today, he knows the caloric content of a small tangerine.

by MARSHA MCGREGOR

Fifty pounds lighter, he works out two hours a day, every day, whether he feels like it or not. This is, by all accounts, a transformation. It started 10 years ago. Rod was a strong runner in high school, and ran a year in college. Before he could blink, life took over — home, family, owning a small business — and running got away from him. He got it back, and began running competitively. He's 62 now, and the medals he accumulates lie around the house like coasters.

Thus, the high-altitude tent. It is installed in our grown daughter's former bedroom, the clear plastic hoop house cocooning the bed and droning like an air compressor. The tent and its motor-controlled air supply are designed to simulate the breathing conditions in, say, Flagstaff, Arizona. Supposedly laying in it builds red blood cells to help his Ohio lungs function at a higher capacity.

The tent was first seeded in casual conversations as a kooky, slightly fanatical notion. Gradually, he slipped in nuggets of documentation attesting to its worthiness, like, "Actually, a lot of NFL and NBA players use them." For several months he pretended to have forgotten about it. It was a ruse. One evening I arrived home to him wearing a sheepish look.

"You bought it, didn't you?"

"How did you know?!"

"That thing is not going in our bedroom."

This would seem self-evident. But I knew a woman who once had to explain to her husband why he could not hang a giant mounted trophy buck in their Chippendale dining room.

Later that evening, I texted our children a picture of the tent, with Rod in it.

My son's reaction was characteristically straightforward: "What is that?"

My daughter proceeded to howl in all caps: "OH MY GOD I'M DYING ASK DAD IF I CAN TWEET THAT."

Then, because she is 23 and not a woman married for 30 years, she added: "YOU COULD MAKE IT A MAGICAL CANOPY 🍌."

"YES," I texted back, "A MAGICAL CANOPY INSIDE A JET ENGINE."

Obviously, I remained skeptical. The one other man in Rod's diet and exercise Facebook group suggested a wine and cheese party in the tent to curry my favor. The women's comments were basically variations on, "Are you still married?"

Frankly, runners are odd birds. They are the only humans alive who look forward to turning a year older, because it means moving closer to the low end of a new age category. They are noncha-

lant about a 10-mile run but insist on driving around a parking lot to find the spot closest to the door.

Most things, I have come to real-

ize, are a competitive sport to them. Like finding the top-rated supplements, which have gradually consumed our cupboard space normally reserved for foodstuffs. Their contents go far beyond the typical A, B, C, D and glucosamine. They have a mysterious lexicon of their own: l-arginine, beta alanine, hyaluronic acid, turmeric curcumin complex, and for a few days, something called Moringa leaf powder, which tasted so vile even he couldn't swallow it.

It's all in preparation for next month's Senior Games in Albuquerque, New Mexico. People who have never attended them often think they are cute, like grandpas playing shuffleboard.

It's true that shuffleboard is an official Senior Game event. But those folks will compete along with runners, long jumpers, pole vaulters, swimmers, cyclists, basketball and softball players, and athletes in 15 additional events, all of them age 50 and older.

This year, anticipation runs high for the return of Senior Games standout Orville Rogers. Rogers broke five world records at the USA Track & Field Masters Indoor Track and Field Championships last year — in the 60-meter, 200-meter, 400-meter, 800-meter and 1500-meter events. He had just celebrated his 100th birthday.

Orville Rogers is a hero of Rod's. So is a legendary role model from his high school days: Dave Wottle, the runner from Canton who came from dead last to win the 800-meter gold in the final 10 meters at the '72 Olympics.

Last year marked a high point for Rod. At the same meet where Orville amassed his gold, my husband and three teammates broke a world record of their own: a time of 9 minutes, 50.9 seconds in the 4x800-meter relay, 60 to 69 age category.

My spectator's role at the Senior Games will be humbling at best. I am reasonably fit. But when a victorious 80- to 84-year-old women's basketball team sweeps through the hotel lobby wearing neon sweatbands and doing fist pumps, I feel like a poser. Have I actually earned the right to wear a fast-wicking top with side vents?

After 30 years of marriage, you think you pretty much know a guy. But here we are in our early 60s, and Rod's running discipline is still teaching me more. How getting older can also mean getting faster, stronger and happier. How you are never too old to dream big. How you can push to higher altitudes when you would rather kick back.

He inspires me.

But that tent is not coming near our bedroom. **Cle**