

Sub5 Members & Friends Remember Bill Pinkham

He made very sure...

A couple of years ago, I ran in the Bar Harbor Half Mara-thon. It was a beautiful day and I felt great as I approached mile 12. Just then Bill Pinkham pulled up beside me and we chatted for a while. I knew Bill from his days in the legisla-ture. I told him it looked like we would break 1:45 (which would have been good for me). He said, "You know, you're right, let's just make sure. Then he took off and left me there like I was standing still. I did (barely) break 1:45, but he made very sure.

Heaven must have needed a runner with white hair and a flat-top crew cut.

-- Peter Daigle

In Memory of Bill Pinkham

Bill Pinkham was instantly recognizable. There was the hair, of course, white as snow and trimmed as neatly as a hedgerow, but it was really more just his presence, as if he was a bit larger than you would think from his weight and height.

I first met Bill many, many years ago at the same place many people met him; about 3/4 of a mile into a race. I think it was at Hancock, the old Hancock 10.2 miler. Bill never learned not to charge out as hard as he could, and we came to realize that this was not a racing strategy, but simply a part of his personality. He was funny too, with a downeast deadpan that could catch you off guard. I'm not sure that I ever want to laugh as hard again as I did when he showed us the pictures he'd taken of Ed Rice finishing Cabot Trail Leg 17 with matter-of-fact commentary for every shot.

But most of all, Bill was always there. I came to feel that if I were somehow able to clone myself and race in two different places at the same time on the same day, Bill would be at both of them.

That is what made his last race so extraordinary for me. I worked the finish line at 4th of July. My job was to click the button that recorded each finisher, and this required me to at least glance at every single person in the

race. I probably personally recog-

nized 75 to 100 people, and I could tell many of those reading this Newsletter what they looked like at the finish, but I didn't see Bill. If you had asked me right after the race where he had placed, I would have said something like, "Isn't that strange, I don't think he was there." Post race, when the equipment was safely stowed, I went over to the parking garage and saw a stretcher being carried to an ambulance.

Only then did I see Bill that day, at another finish line. Perhaps I just missed him in the race. Maybe I glanced down for a moment, or maybe somebody else got in the way. Or maybe his heart already knew that it had gone beyond its bounds, maybe his spirit headed for that other finish line, and he was invisible to me. I know little about these things other than their mystery, but I knew that he had passed on when I saw him on the stretcher because the only sound I heard at that time came from the parade, and it was the haunting keening of bagpipes calling to the spirit world, taking their leave of ours.

From now on, at every race you run, give a little nod when you are 3/4 of a mile in, because I think that's where Bill will be watching us, challenging us to charge out there and give it all we've got, come what may.

And rest assured, he will be there at every single race.
-- Judd Esty-Kendall

Running With the Q-Tip

For me, the loss of our dear running colleague Bill Pinkham has been particularly difficult. His passing ends a long and remarkable career “on the roads” and the marvelous vision of his white crew-cut bobbing amongst the heads of his fellow runners. I ran with Bill for over 25 years. Of course, when I say “with” it is somewhat of a lie. We ran countless races together, but until 3 or 4 years ago I was never able to beat him. I was often very close, but I had an unblemished record of only viewing his backside.

Of course, all that rear-viewing inspired me to invent the “Q-Tip” nickname. Its adoption by the whole running community was evidenced at the Fort Knox 5K in Bucksport, where most of us who knew him pinned Q-Tips to our clothes in his memory. It was a sad day, not to see him there and be able to yell out his nickname as he went by. It was sad, too, not to have him come up to get an award, which he almost always did.

I don’t know why or how I was able to suddenly find the speed to beat him. As we approached and passed the 60 year plateau both had slowed somewhat, and I was victim of several injuries and joint problems that kept me from vigorous training. But in those 3 or 4 years he never beat me. That included this past April, in a small 5K in Orono, where he went out fast (as usual) and I passed him after a mile or so (as usual, in recent history). I thought he’d come back, but he didn’t. He griped to Robin Emery afterward that he’d been beaten by a cripple!

At the Orrington 10K in May, Bill started fast and stayed there, beating me by 23 seconds. It was my turn to watch his backside again. So when we both showed up at Hampden for the 8.5 Miler, I wondered if he was starting a new streak. Patrice Lastufka and Marilyn Hintz joshed him into doing something he had never done: START SLOWLY. He did, and it was the first time I ever led him in the first mile! After about 2 miles I had a lead of probably 200 yards. But I decided that I didn’t want to run the whole race wondering when or if he was going to catch me. So I circled back and suggested that we run together, to which he gladly agreed. During the run I told him that I had done a few races since turning 60, but had never finished above 2nd place in that age group. So when we approached the finish line together, not racing, he dropped back for a second and let me win.

And then there was the 4th of July. As usual, Bill went out fast and disappeared into the huge throng of runners ahead of me. At about the middle of the bridge I saw the Q-Tip up ahead. I caught him near the end of the bridge and suggested we run in together. He said

he didn’t know if he could keep up, and I felt strong enough that I wanted to keep pushing. When I turned around after the finish I saw that he was not far behind – 8 seconds, according to the results. We chatted

My Beacon

Bill was my beacon in all of the races I ran up there in the north country. I knew he'd go out too fast, but that was OK because he was so easy to spot. I'll miss that chalk white head bouncing along ahead of me, saying, "Catch me if you can!" I'll hold dear in my heart the fact that I got to see him at Cabot and to rub his Q-Tip haircut for good luck one last time.

-- Erin Brennan

a moment, and he went inside the garage while I stayed outside to congratulate others coming across the line. Five minutes later, Bill was gone.

Bill was a charter member of the Maine Running Fossils on the Cabot Trail Relay team and gave us 7 years of his strength and companionship.

We have lost a wonderful individual and a stalwart runner. He symbolizes so many things that we we can aspire to: dedication to a goal, love of family, friendship. I will miss seeing him at all the races and be discouraged that he won't show up to make me work hard. I will need him, and he won't be there. But his spirit will continue to inspire me and others, too.

-- David Wilson

Keeping the Fires Burning

The late Fred Merriam had an expression, urging all of us to run and to “Keep the fires burning.” Our friend Bill Pinkham was the embodiment of that credo.

When Bill was still in his 50s and competing in the same age group with me, I lost track of the number of times he “made” the race for me. He’d go out fast and if I wanted to have the best possible race I was going to have, I’d have to focus on him and find a way to beat him. When I did, I felt quite exhilarated. When I didn’t, which was more times than not, I felt nothing but great admiration for him.

Recently, at a Fossil event at David and Katherine Wilson’s, Robin Emery and Bill put on a wonderfully satirical skit at my “expense,” complete with photographic sequential evidence and running commentary, about one of my more spectacular “dry heave” finishes at climactic Leg 17 of the Cabot Trail Relay. Bill, with that incredible dry wit spilling out his trademark Maineiac accent, had us all laughing until our sides hurt. I’m grateful to have had this recent funny, personal connection with Bill as a lasting memory...

And I’m so glad that, a few years ago, I made a point of speaking to him and flat out “thanking” him for all those times he set a standard for me in so many races. He smiled broadly but almost seemed awkward as well, not really sure how to respond. There was no need. Bill was “old school”.

...Like his pals Robin and Tom Kirby, he loved to compete and he lived to run. He ran his last race hard. And he was chatting things up with his age group winner, probably trying to work out what it would take to get to the top of his game once again, when his ultimate finish line arrived. He was as fine a personification of living and breathing this sport, no matter what your age, as there was.

And, like me, I’m sure he just loved being around the young studs like Judson Cake, Evan Graves, Mike Bunker and the rest of this new breed that insure for all of us that this precious running circle “goes unbroken.”

It’s too painful to really think about...but Bill did, indeed, pull off the feat so many of us have irreverently told our families, our friends, our co-workers and even those non-followers of our faith about what we’d like to do...be running just before it’s “check out time.”

Hey, Q-Tip, I’d like to believe I’m gonna try to chase you down, just one more time, in some road race in the great beyond. I already know Fred’s lowering my 10-K PR and I gotta bet you want in too...

Godspeed, Bill...

-- Ed Rice

A Great Example

I will really miss Bill. It was always a pleasure to talk to him. He was there at almost every race, and it is hard to imagine races in the area without him. I thought that I would never live to see a racing season without him. He left us far too soon.

With time I learned that he was a person of many dimensions—from head of the state marine patrol to a member of the legislature. His racing accomplishments are all the more impressive in view of this. Bill set a great example for the rest of us, with balance and high achievements in all areas of life.

— John Tjepkema

A Gentleman First

Bill Pinkham was a gentleman, first and foremost. He was always polite and positive. Before the race he would wish you a good one; after the run he congratulated you. He will be sorely missed by the running community, especially the Fossils whenever they run.

— Dick Storch

...without saying a word

I was extremely saddened to read in your recent newsletter of the death of Bill Pinkham. I did not know Bill other than the man who I battled with at the end of the Cobscook Bay 10k in 2003. This was the year I decided to convert from recreational runner to competitive racer. As Bill and I ran neck and neck up the last hill to the finish line I found strength in his determination and drive and was determined to keep pace with him. We finished in 47:07. What an introduction to competitive racing. When I found out that Bill was 21 years my senior, one thought ran through my mind--I hope I will be running that well in 20 years.

Over the next couple of years as my running improved and I was becoming competitive in my age category, I would see Bill at area races. While we were no longer running neck and neck, I always remembered that race in Cobscook and the strength and encouragement Bill was able to give to me without saying a word. I wish now that I had taken the time to thank him.

-- Marc Edwards

William 'Bill' Pinkham 1942-2005

He Was a Good Man

We should all hope that at the end of our lives all others can say about us is that we were always encouraging, and no one can think of a bad thing to say about us. That could be said about Bill as far as my knowledge of him goes. I really can't think of a better role model or example as a human being. He was a good man.

-- Pete Lodge

...Still on his path

I have to admit I was intimidated by Bill the first time I met him, intimidated because I knew him to be a good runner, a runner who had been around the scene for awhile. Formidable would have been a word I would have used back then, inspiring awe. When I first started racing he was always in front of me, the orange shorts and fabled head of hair. I remember chasing him at Hancock, at the Tour, at Terry Fox. I think it was the next summer when my times started to improve and Bill and I would often run about the same speed so checking results in the end it was easy to fall into a conversation. Bill was always so encouraging and enthusiastic. With that smile of his, holding a cup of water, and asking how was the run, what did I think of the hill at mile 5? Would I be at the next race? Then he went to Cape Breton and it's impossible not to bond with the Maine runners there, no matter what team they are on. That event is the physical manifestation of the running spirit as so of course it fit Bill to a "T". I'm not sure if it was the first year he went, but I remember one year he drove overnight to get there because a legislative session went too long. I'm sorry Bill is gone from this world of ours. It's a little more empty. But I believe our eagle, Fred, has shown Bill the ways of flying and so he's still on his path, still racing down the road.

-- Beret Skorpen