

We Remember LAFR Co-Founder Barry Norcross 1932-2013



Jerry Weyer

I ran my first marathon in 1980 in Honolulu. Barry Norcross served as my unofficial coach. I would meet up with him in Silverlake, Santa Monica or WeHo for our weekly runs. Often we would run together on weekends in Griffith Park or Santa Monica for our long runs. He would caution me about going out too fast, varying my distance runs, stretching, hydrating, etc. Barry was always generous with his time. He encouraged us novice runners with wonderful personal suggestions to help us improve our skills. He had done a few marathons and was willing to share these experiences with us. He was never negative, only positive, in his criticism of our techniques. He and Darrel Kindred, our first president, invited me to join LA Frontrunners in August, 1981. He loved the LA Frontrunners. He served us well as president and board member, and most of all, as a loyal club member. I remember his smile and encouragement, working at the Frontrunners water station at the LA Marathon in 2001, my 55th and last marathon. I am so grateful, as a runner and person, that such a man shared so much of his love of running with so many of us LA Frontrunners. He will be greatly missed.

Amy Ross

My fondest memory of Barry is at the NY City Marathon in 1984. Barry had the great (?) idea of squeezing six LA Frontrunners into a cab and taking it over to Staten Island just before the bridge closed. As that meant not having to stand in line for the buses at the library, I was on-board. However, that left me, the sole woman, wedged between five men who reeked of Ben Gay (that is an actual liniment, not someone's nick-name, for you youngsters!).

Barry's mantra in the cab that morning was, "I gotta get a PR, I gotta get a PR." Fellow LAFR Carlo Ramirez replied, "Why are you so worried about that? Think about that AFTER the race." Barry looked confused, and said AFTER the race was too late to think about a Personal Record time. Carlo had us all howling when he winked and said, "Oh, I thought you meant you need to get a Puerto Rican." Can't remember if Barry got a PR of either variety, but we sure had a great time that year.

About Barry

Provided by Connie Nelson, a personal friend of Barry's for over 55 years.

Barry Norcross was born on July 14, 1932 in Newton MA, coincidentally in a home along the course of the Boston Marathon. He was an only child. He graduated from the Vermont Academy prep school in 1951. He then attended Brown University but did not graduate and moved to Southern California in 1957. He came to visit with a friend and decided that this is where he belonged and never went back east, except to visit his mother over the years. He really liked the idea of having blond hair and being tan all the time.

Barry was hired to work the box office at the Center Theatre Group in downtown Los Angeles, a job he held for a number of years. His friend Garth Nelson saw to it that Barry stayed steadily employed in the box office arena, long enough for Barry to put in over 20 years and earn a pension. Barry also worked at the Ambassador Theatre in Pasadena, the Coronet Theatre on S La Cienega and finally the Westside Playhouse, now the Geffen. He was always in a coat and tie and very professional.

Barry was the proud owner of two sailboats, both of which he named the Sparhawk. He kept them in Marina del Rey. The first Sparhawk was smaller and he kept it moored in the marina while he still lived in West Hollywood. Since the second Sparhawk was larger, he decided to make the Marina his home and lived on the boat almost until the time he left us.

Barry had large circles of friends from The Frontrunners, his group out in Palm Springs as well as friends from his time in the theatre. He loved running, sailing, the sun and the theatre... and his blond hair. Barry will be missed by many.



Barry & Jim Byrd at the 1983 Pride Run



*Barry & Bill Walsky at the LAFR Annual Meeting in 1990
Behind Barry from left: Ric Munoz, Jon Van Gaasbeek, Don Thompson, Bob Radke, Conni Montgomery & Lorraine Silver*

Destiny Has An Address



At the Chardonnay 10-Miler in 1989: Back row from left: Barry Norcross, Jane Dods, Ric Munoz, George Takei, and Brad Altman. Front from left: Jerome Tellio, Bill Walsky, and David Dassey

Every April, marathon runners from around the world make a pilgrimage to Boston. They gather on Boston Common in the early morning hours of race day and board busses to the start line in Hopkinton. Once the gun goes off, the marathoners begin their trek through their sport's most hallowed course. The next 26.2 miles are filled with the unique charms of the Boston Marathon...colonial villages, bucolic scenery, supportive townspeople, the screaming and kissing girls of Wellesley College, the rowdy frat boys of Boston College, Fenway Park.

LA Frontrunners has its own special landmark along the famed Boston route. Just before coming to the aptly named Heartbreak Hill late in the race, the marathoners run by the home in which LAFR co-founder Barry Norcross was born.

It is fitting that Barry's life journey began along the route of the world's most famous race. Fortunately for us, that journey eventually brought him to our coast. To celebrate him is to celebrate LA Frontrunners. For in so many ways, his story IS our story.

Here is the tale of our club's origin – lovingly referred to as "The Hippopotamus Story":

On September 14, 1980, a small group of runners from the West LA/Santa Monica area called the Frontrunners met an equally small group of runners from the Valley/Silverlake/Mid-Wilshire area called the Upfront Runners. The meeting took place that day under the 'H' for Hippopotamus sign in the zoo lot in Griffith Park at the KNBC Peacock 10K Run. The two groups recognized each other as being of the same sexual persuasion. One in the group, Darrell Kindred, suggested that the two groups have brunch at the Melting Pot in WeHo. They did, and got along so well that they thought, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to have a running club similar to those in San Francisco and New York?" Later, after brunch at Barry Norcross' West Hollywood apartment, the Westside group merged with the Hollywood group and became the Frontrunners of Los Angeles. The group became an official club after the December 1980 meeting in which by-laws and officers were initiated and the name "Frontrunners Track Club of Greater Los Angeles" was adopted.

Bill Walsky



Barry and Me: I was lucky enough to know Barry Norcross for twenty four wonderful years and call him my friend. We shared countless meals and films together and spent endless

hours at the LA Times Book Festivals where Barry especially liked the give and take of the authors on the political panels. He enjoyed living in the marina, aboard his beloved Sparhawk, with its easy access to nearby running paths and clean air. Most of all he was proudest of being a founding member of LA Frontrunners. He was a club president in the early years and until his health deteriorated Barry was a volunteer at the Crescent Heights turnaround at the annual Pride Run every June. Last year, despite foot and leg ailments, he insisted on being at the finish line to cheer in the runners.

What I will remember about Barry is how witty and charming he was and how he always encouraged his running friends to do their best. On one occasion, back when the Pride Run was held in Griffith Park, I saw a group of veteran Frontrunners standing around wearing race bibs with low numbers. Kidding around, I said I'd never been this close to elite runners. Without missing a beat Barry replied "Play your cards right and you might get a lot closer". Another time LAFRs volunteered at a breakfast run in Beverly Hills for the international runners who would be running the LA Marathon the next day. Several members took notice of an especially attractive blonde twenty-something wearing the colors of Canada, but at the end of the event it was Mr. Norcross who walked away with a new friend. Yes, he could be a silver tongued devil when the occasion called for it.

Barry may be gone, but I'm not sad. I prefer to think he's reunited now with his good friend Jim Byrd, another founding member of LAFR, and they're sitting on a bench at the beach. The sun is shining, the waves are crashing and just like old times the two of them are checking out the volleyball players and discussing where they're going to have lunch. Ah yes, he led a good life.



Barry and Jane Dods at the Don Thompson Memorial event held at Amy's in 2006.

Jane Dods; Bye Bye Barry

I just learned of Barry Norcross' passing and was very saddened. Barry and I and a handful of other gay runners were founding members of the L. A. Front Runners (no smooshing up of words in those days!). What a privilege it was to be on the ground floor of a running club that catered to "us." I had just begun my running "career" two years earlier in 1978 when the club was formed in 1980. Was that good timing or what! Barry and I were contemporaries and attended many, many events together over the next ten years before I moved to Oregon. We enjoyed the fun runs as well as the not-so-fun training for marathons - many laughs and occasional moments of glory. Not only did Barry enjoy running, he also gave of his time to the club, serving as president one year. He was a big guy with a big heart and will be missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

Sail on!

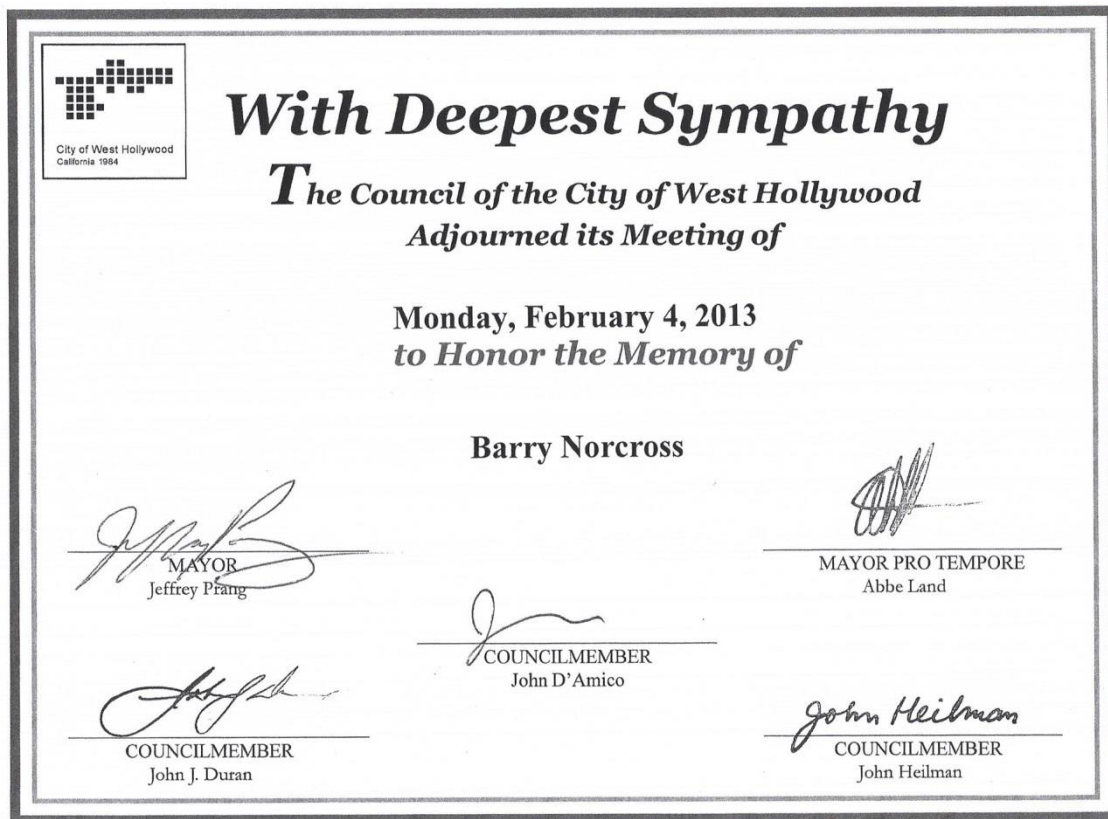
Bill Winkelmann

Barry was the first LA Frontrunner I actually met when I attended my first run in 1984. He was kind and welcoming, the same way he remained for the rest of the time that I knew him. In the earlier days, few runners wore a Frontrunners club singlet more proudly than Barry. (It also helped to be so tall!) He was also the first club member to call attention to the Gay 'Olympics' when they first took place in 1982 in San Francisco.

Due to his love of the sun, the water and the boys playing volleyball on the beach, Barry was a diehard westsider. I always enjoyed my trips over to Santa Monica on Wednesdays to run with him, Jim Byrd, Marty, Bob and the rest of the usual gang. Barry's other interests included his love of sports. He attended many a Super Bowl party at our home in Burbank where he would always turn down a more potent brew for his beloved O'Douls. His work in local box office venues also afforded many of us a free ticket to the theatre. Former member Mike Palacio recently told me that Barry got him such good comp passes one night that he sat between the playwright and a noted female celebrity in killer seats.

As Barry slowed down in later years and took part in fewer events, I always looked forward to our annual Pride Run where Barry worked at the 5K/10K turnaround at Crescent Heights. I always remember his hearty cheers for the runners he knew and those he didn't who needed encouragement. It was especially nice to hear his support on that second trek up the hill in the 10K. Even though he was absent from that race day assignment these last two years, I will hold fond memories and feel his running presence and support as I make that turn during the race to head west again on Santa Monica. He owns that spot.

Barry began organizing LA Frontrunners from his apartment in West Hollywood back in 1980. It was a such a fitting tribute to Barry that the West Hollywood City Council adjourned its meeting on February 4, 2013, to honor the memory of our good friend and pioneering runner upon hearing of his passing. Rest in peace, Barry. A tan's easier to get when you're closer to the sunshine.



Ric Munoz

135 Washington Street, Newton, Massachusetts. That's the address of the house that Barry grew up in. When I finally qualified for my first Boston Marathon in 1991, Barry proudly described how the house he was born in is on the Boston course. And he made me promise that I'd wave to it as I passed by it. Located to the runners' left, somewhere past mile 14 but before mile 15, that house meant a great deal to Barry, as did his New Englander roots. Assuming he went "back home" after departing this life, I'd like to think that when I wave to his house during this year's race, Barry will be somewhere on the porch waving back.



Barry with friends at the very first Pride Run in 1982



Barry finished 2nd 40-49 in the first Pride Run in 1982

Carlo Ramirez & Val Norman

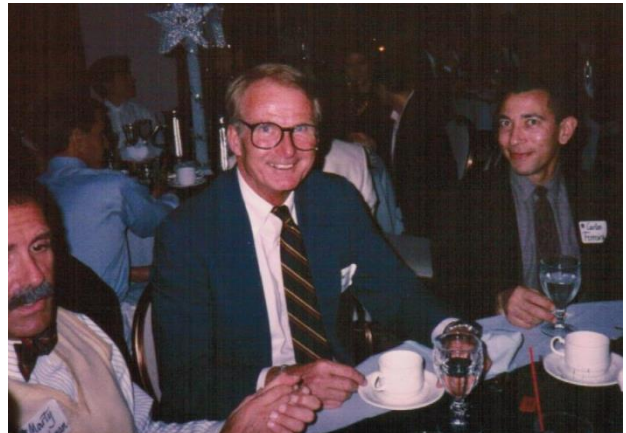
We were very saddened by this news and although very far from the L.A. area, we live in Barcelona, Spain, we often think fondly of our years as Frontrunners. Val and I will celebrate our 43rd year together on April 3rd, and we remember Barry's friendly smile and great disposition. I remember how grateful he was to me, when he was elected president and I was vice-president, and he got sick and could not attend the installation dinner due to illness and I had to carry on in his name. From Barcelona Val and I say to Barry: Olé, Olé, Olé and thanks for the wonderful memories.

David Woodbury

Barry was best friends with my partner, Jim Byrd, who was also one of the founding members of Frontrunners LA. Barry was a great friend to me and was there for me when Jim Byrd passed away. I will always remember his kindness and for welcoming me into Frontrunners in 1986. Barry will be missed and always remembered for starting Frontrunners. Aloha Barry!

Henry Ong

I will always remember Barry as a man of great humor, a kind gentleman whose only sharp rebuke was when I remarked that Kate Hepburn was overrated. I will miss you, dear Barry.



Barry at the LAFR Banquet in 1991

Barry Norcross: Don Thompson Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

Barry was presented with the Don Thompson Lifetime Achievement Award at the Don Thompson Movie Night Scholarship Fundraiser in Sept. 2008.

As a Director-at-Large in 1983, Barry would go on to run for Club President the following year with this statement: "I have been associated with the club since it's founding, serving as interim Co-President, on the Board of Directors, and on various committees. I hope, if elected, to be able to help lead Frontrunners Track Club to even greater participation in the local running scene and continued growth as one of the most positive elements in the gay community."

Barry was elected, and, in him, the club won. To long-standing members such as David Dassey and Bill Winkelmann, Barry was the face of Frontrunners: the tall, blonde friend whose calm, friendly and respectful New England demeanor inspired them to join. To those training for their first marathon, Barry became the veteran voice of support -- having himself logged 22, or is it 23 marathons (his friends say he's not sure)? Talk about leading by example. The man ran the 5K in 21 flat; the 10K PR was even faster -- 41:35 (Century City, 1985). Mark down his half-marathon PR at an hour thirty-nine (Santa Monica, 1982) and his marathon PR at a very impressive 3:41:15 (that was the 1987 Nike International in Eugene, Oregon). Barry was a part of award-winning relay team, the "Frontrunner Star Trekkies", that kicked off a string of successes at the inaugural Jimmy Stewart Marathon. He also placed second at the first-ever run for Gay Pride in 1982, and went on to place in his new "over 50" age group the next three years the race was held in Silver Lake. And Barry is a welcome annual fixture at the Frontrunners water station at the Los Angeles Marathon.



Don Thompson, Bill Austin, Bill Winkelmann, and Barry at Pride Run '05

Leading by example, of course, is -- at times -- open to interpretation. Just ask the five people he persuaded -- at the 1984 NY Marathon (also known as Nightmare in New York) -- to cram into a cab instead of taking the bus over to Staten Island. You haven't lived until you've seen Barry Norcross in short-shorts hailing a checkered cab.

He is also a Master Chef and kitchen aide extraordinaire at Jim Byrd's Monday Night Football parties. For Barry's flair with spatula and sauce, please direct your attention to his donation to the Don Thompson Night: a day of sailing for up to four plus a catered lunch!

Oh yes, our Barry is an accomplished sailor: captain and chief resident of the Sparhawk, moored in Marina del Rey. It's the vessel with the parked car near whose license plate reads "NOR X".

For someone who started running back in 1980 as a tension release, and whose first run was one lap around the Fairfax High School track, Barry Norcross has officially caught up with destiny. Or perhaps destiny has finally -- after lagging behind him all those miles -- caught up with him. One thing is certain: LA Frontrunners owes our destiny to this year's most deserving recipient of the Don Thompson Life Achievement Award. Ladies and Gentlemen -- Barry Norcross.