

Footprint

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LAVENDER U: By the Fall of 1973, a new concept in education had swept the country, "free universities", which existed as free newspapers that listed classes for all sorts of things, such as art, literature, crafts, photography and of course, "new age" subjects, such as TM, TA, EST, yoga and meditation. Heretofore, most classes were associated with established institutions, such as colleges and churches. A group of gays in San Francisco decided to start such a free newspaper and call it "Lavender U". The organizers hoped that it would foster social and educational opportunities of special interest to gays. The paper was published every two months. As I recall, the fee was \$6.00 per ad.

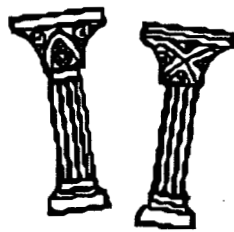
JACK AND GARDNER: Jack Baker and Gardner Pond were friends of the Lavender U organizers and were asked to list a class. They had an interest in furniture refinishing and decided to list a class in that. They were also runners, and at the last minute, decided to change their ad to a "learn to jog" class. As members of the San Francisco, Dolphin, South End (SFDSE) Runners, one of the largest running clubs in the country, they modeled their "class" on that club, which had a "scenic run" every Sunday. They listed a two-month schedule of runs, beginning with a half mile, adding a half mile each week and finishing with a five mile run on "graduation" week.

THE FIRST RUN: The first run was on the first Sunday in January, 1974. It began near the South Windmill in Golden Gate Park. Each week, the run was at a different "scenic" location. When it came time to renew the ad (they hadn't planned ahead), they simply began the series over again. After doing that a few times, they settled into a routine of listing a variety of three-to-five mile runs. For the first couple of years, the ad listed a fee of \$2.00 for each series of

runs, but they never bothered to collect. At some point that first year, the listing changed from "learn to jog" to "Lavender U Joggers". Some of the early runs were Golden Gate Bridge, Portals of the Past, Stern Grove, Miracle Mile (Folsom Street), Aquatic Park, Palace of the Legion of Honor, Lands End, Dolores Park, and of course Stow Lake. Every Sunday, Jack brought a gallon of coffee. Once a month Jack or Gardner would bring doughnuts.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

By Bud Budlong



BUD JOINS: I joined the group in October, 1975 at the Golden Gate Bridge run. Weekly attendance varied from five or six to 15 to 18 out of a total of 45-or-so "members". Lesbian runners were few and far between (an issue the club continued to struggle with for years). By the Summer of 1976, Jack and Gardner were beginning to loose interest and frequently asked me to lead the runs.

By the Fall, I had expanded the repertoire of runs (we eventually had 26 "scenic" runs, which repeated twice each year). By the end of the year, I was the leader, by default. The group gradually grew in numbers, attracting up to 30 runners at a time. The monthly "tailgate brunch" became routine, with many runners contributing to an increasingly healthy repast. Coffee gave way to fruit juice; doughnuts were replaced by trail mix. Occasionally, a group of us would go to a restaurant after the run for a real brunch.

UNIQUE ROLE: The club played a unique role in the community at that time. In the early 70s, there were only a handful of gay organizations, the gay pool, bowling and softball leagues, Gay Rap and the royal courts, to name a few. There were few gay activities that were not centered around the bars. There were no hiking clubs, track, swimming, skiing, wrestling, bicycling or tennis clubs, bands, choruses, theater groups, or self help groups (except gay AA). For many, the Lavender U

Continued on page 3



BRUCE BUD TALLER
SHOES

Look at this way: it's finally out of my system. Yes, I finally scored a ticket to see Barbra, and this could very well be the last time you have to read about it for awhile. I imagine there are those of you out there who won't even make it past this paragraph, because I've discovered that there are some who have little or no interest in Ms. Streisand, at all. To those, I promise to use Barbra as a conduit for deeper social analysis, of the kind I know you've become used to finding in this column.

As an example, before I froth about how fabulous she was I'll offer this detail: Though many didn't notice it, there was, quite unexplainedly, a cardboard cut-out of Bill Clinton in the orchestra. It was one of those life-sized things, a stand-up image of him playing the saxophone in his Ray Bans. Add that to the facts that her set decoration reflects her newfound fascination with all things Jeffersonian, and that she presented a lengthy photo montage of all of the political victories scored so far by the

Running at the Mouth

by
Mark McCormick

latest rumors concern Barbra and Hillary, but you didn't hear it from me! No matter! The very thought of Barbra in the White House! We should be so lucky.

Now, a news flash: Barbra is human. It's true. She was visibly nervous when she appeared. Through my high-powered binoculars from way in the back of the Arena, I actually viewed her heart pounding in her chest and her hands shaking as she entered. (Or maybe she was just drawing attention to her perfect nails and diamond necklace.) And during the first few songs, she held back a bit. Then she loosened up considerably, but throughout the concert, her vulnerability was ever present.

And she worked it. She is a mega-star because she really lives the songs she sings. At the very end of *You Don't Bring Me Flowers*, her lower lip went out in a pout of subtle, yet epic proportions. It was real, I swear.

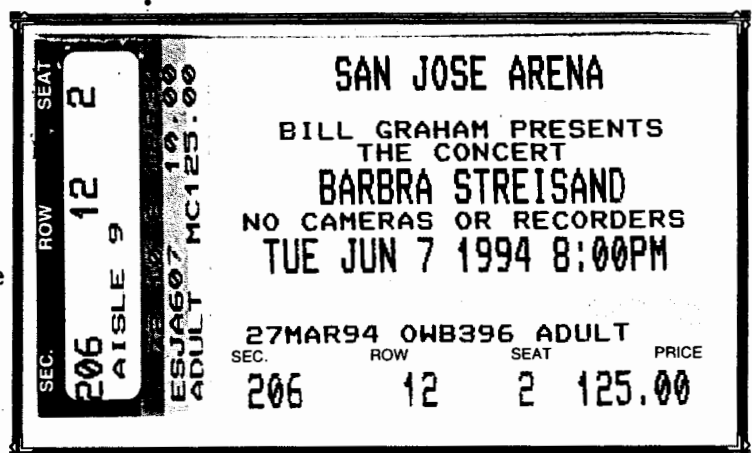
And then when she related how her mother (with whom she is said to have a rocky relationship) sent her the *Variety* article that suggested that she didn't really have the laryngitis she claimed to have that forced her to cancel four shows in Anaheim. It's bad enough, her expression suggested, to read this shit, but to have my mother send me the article in mail! We feel your pain, Barbra!

Then, she offered a photo-montage of Jason, her son, as a backdrop to the song, *Nothing's Going to Hurt You*. Freud would have loved this part, because if one didn't know he was her son, one might have drawn assumptions—from the photos of him as a young man posing with her—of a more intimate relationship. Again, to me, this just underscored her humanity.

As did the second encore, *Somewhere*. We know this to be a gay rights anthem, and she acknowledged it as such in the introduction when she talked about how she hoped for a place and time when differences didn't matter, and were, in fact, appreciated. She is an active supporter of gay rights and AIDS causes, and her words were obviously heartfelt.

The ironic part for me, though, was that even though it was satisfying to notice this very real part of her, I didn't feel the deep connection with her that I expected. It was hard sharing the space of the Arena with 15,000 other devotees. And since I didn't have great seats, I had to watch the whole thing through high-powered binoculars. There was just something missing. I have had this experience seeing other divas: Diana Ross, Bette Midler, Liza Minelli. I'm not sure how the dynamic changes in a large concert hall. The sound is good, the immediacy is there, but not the intimacy that one gets at home, late at night, the lights out, when Barbra is on the stereo or the VCR or cable television singing her heart out for you, only you.

It's an expensive lesson to learn, but I think I finally get it. Thanks for sticking with me through my trials.



Continued from page 1 Joggers was the first gay group they had joined. For more than a few, it was their first experience knowing and being around other gays. There was no membership list. Although many exchanged their full names, many others revealed only first names. In 1978, the club first staffed a water table at the San Francisco Marathon.

LAVENDER U's DEMISE: By the Summer of 1978, Lavender U had gone out of business. Not only did the club need a new way to publish the schedule of runs, but it occurred to me (I'm a slow learner) that I didn't have to be in charge forever. I also decided that it was not good for any group to be dependent on one person. The regulars all agreed that we should re-organize and have paying members, elected officers and bylaws.

REINVENTING OURSELVES: There was consensus that the club should be a "running club", with all other activities secondary, that it should welcome runners of all abilities, from beginners to serious competitors, that it should serve all gays and lesbians, and be open to all who wanted to join, as well as to those who could not or would not pay. (Remember, many gays at that time would not join an organization, because they were fearful of revealing their names.) We modeled ourselves on the many straight running clubs in the city, especially SFDSE and Pamakids (yes, it means Pa, Ma and the Kids). We wanted to join the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union, which controlled amateur running at that time), and put on and participate in road races. We held the organizational meetings throughout the Fall of 1978 at Gary May's house. Many members wanted to change the name of the club, not only because Lavender U had ceased to exist, but because many did not like the word "joggers". We voted on "Front Runners" at the second or third meeting. Half the people who came to those first meetings swear that the name was their idea. They are all correct; quite a few people suggested it. Yes it was inspired by Patricia Nell Warren's novel, and no, we did not ask her permission. Not only can titles not be copyrighted, it never occurred to us to ask. We had a nominations committee and a bylaws committee and established dues of \$5.00 per year. The officers were to be elected at the first meeting in January, 1979. The first two newsletters were published in December, 1978 and January, 1979. They contained mostly information about joining and voting. About 40 paid their dues and became "charter members". All but three or four listed their full names and addresses in the membership directory, a brave showing that surprised us all. It was the first time that many of us knew each other's full names. By the end of 1979, there were 75 members.

THE FIRST OFFICERS: The first elected officers were Gary May, President; Pat Stein (a Ms.) Vice President; Marvin Shipley, Secretary and Frank Churchill, Treasurer. We joined the AAU (first gay club of any sport to do so) and Pat went regularly to their meetings as our delegate. Club meetings were held monthly at first, but bi-monthly, soon after.

THE FIRST GAY RUN: The 1980 officers were Bob Plantz, President; George Fischer, Vice President; Greg

Dunning, Secretary and Jim Milton, Treasurer. The club name appeared on the 1980 T-shirt as FrontRunners (one word). The Advocate magazine approached the club and asked if we would put on a race, which they would sponsor, and call "Gay Run". After much discussion about affiliating with a sponsor, the members decided to do it. There were 5K and 10K runs, with awards for women and men in four or five age categories. It was a great success; about 400 runners entered.

THE FIRST "OTHER" FRONT RUNNER CLUB: In the Spring of 1980, Bob Plantz got a call from Malcom Benjamin, who was editor of the club magazine for the New York Roadrunners (a huge club, with about six or seven thousand members). It is the club that puts on the New York Marathon. Malcom said that he was starting a gay running club and wanted to call it the New York Front Runners. He asked for permission to use the name. Bob explained that we did not control the name, and yes, it was OK. Malcom was a nationally-rated runner and he knew many other top runners who were gay. He wanted to have these top runners enter races (and win major races) as members of a gay club. He liked the way that our club was organized, welcoming all runners, and discarded the idea of forming a club for elite runners. Other FrontRunner clubs formed in rapid succession.

GAY PRIDE: I'm proud to have played a role in the early development of the FrontRunners, and I'm proud of all of the members, officers, committee members and volunteers who have worked so hard over the years to make all of the FrontRunner clubs what they are today. And what are the clubs today? The answer has always been the same. Each club is a place to run for fun or fitness, a place to compete or not compete, a place to brunch a place to look for a lover, a safe place to meet and be with spirited gays and lesbians of wide diversity, a place to find or be oneself.

CONGRATULATIONS to Front Runners all over the world on the 20th anniversary of your very special club.

