

## THE MAGIC OF BLOOMSDAY

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Bloomsday has been described in many ways, but I will always think of it as “magic.” Yes, the race has been responsible for improving the health and happiness of many thousands in our community. Yes, it has brought in gobs of tourist dollars to Spokane. And yes, I am proud that my wife Karen headed up the whole enterprise for 13 years. But let me give you an example of the magic of our signature 12 km race.

Bill Greene and I became friends a couple of years after we each moved our families here in the late 70s. We ran our first 50-mile race, the Le Grizz in Hungry Horse, MT, together in 1982 and over 60 Spokane area residents, including Don Kardong and Steve Jones from the Lilac Bloomsday Association, later followed us to tackle that adventure. Over the next three-plus decades Bill and I ran together on roads and trails for over 17,000 miles.

I have often said that Bloomsday was magic for Bill. Even in years when he would develop an injury in the spring when we trained for the race, he would end up in the top 5 or 10 in our very tough age-group. Once he ran the race in 42:57.

Bill is a physician, the go-to guy for pediatric infectious diseases in this area. One of the kindest, most gentle people you could ever meet, he was also a fierce competitor on the road,

A few years ago, Bill began having a difficulty coming up with words. His subsequent decline in cognitive functioning was painful for him and his family and for the many in the community who love him. Bill now resides in a memory care unit. He still remembers me but does not remember much from one day to the next. His speech is nearly unintelligible. As his functioning declined, we continued to get out on the road together, often with our friend Doug Clark. Over time our pace slowed until the “run” became a walk. In 2017 the three of us prepared for Bloomsday with most of the training being walking for 2-3 miles. The week before Bloomsday Bill was able to communicate to us that he wanted to do our annual practice run of the Bloomsday course. It took us exactly 2 hours to do so, much slower than ever before. Coming across the Monroe Street Bridge we repeatedly waited for Bill and encouraged him as he was falling behind, despite our slow pace.

Bill rode to the race with my family to ensure that we would meet Doug at the starting line. We were concerned that Bill would fall during the race since he was not too steady. When the gun sounded, the three of us (75% of the founding members of the NDBF Ultrarunning Society) took off down the street. We kept Bill in between us for reasons of safety in the crowd. At several points I thought he was going down. We assumed that after a couple of miles we would be walking a lot. Yet from the start, Bill was going like a bat out of hell. (His blazing start reminded me of the time in the 80s when I ran the first mile in 5:25 and when Bill caught up to me, he said, “What in the HELL are you doing?” Of course, that year I blew up after climbing Domsday.) Due to my heart surgery in 2010, my exercise capacity is much reduced and I was soon having a difficult time keeping up with Bill and Doug. Yeah, keeping up with the guy who I had spent weeks encouraging to run rather than walk. The guy who wanted to practice the course and barely broke two hours, even with all our encouragement. Somewhere around two miles into the race, I pulled around next to Doug and gasped, “I can’t stay with him. You’ll have to keep an eye on him.” Off they went, finishing over 11 minutes before me at 1:27:45, not bad for any 73-year-old. Bill flashed his trademark beaming smile for me when I found him after the finish.

That was Bill's last race. He does not remember that race or running any of those 17,000+ miles with me and no longer knows what Bloomsday is. However, on his last race, Bill was again graced by the magic of Bloomsday. I will start this year's race with a lump in my throat, with Bill in my heart and with thanks to Bloomsday for its magic.

