

Chapter 12



photo by Bill Dobkin

**IN THE 'BAY TO BREAKERS' I MAKE THE RECORD BOOK BUT MARGO ST. JAMES
'STREAKS' TO ESTABLISHING AN INSTITUTION .**

Besides Carol, the other grand dame of North Beach in those days was Margo St. James. She liked to think of herself as more of a 'working girl' than a topless dancer but no one will ever forget how she packed the Condor on 'Amateur Topless Night' dressed up as a Nun. Yeah, and with the North Beach Catholic landmark, St. Peter and Paul Cathedral, a stone's throw away, she purposely thumbed her nose to those 'Papal hypocrites' as she called them. She later walked her talk and went on to establish 'The Hookers' Ball' (whose legacy is the present day popular annual 'Erotic, Exotic Ball') and the prostitute protection organization, COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics). Her class on 'Women's Sensuality' (what women want sexually) at my Marina Greens Running Club, some years later, was standing room only, as Margo explained graphically the art of making love, highlighting female sexual sensations. With remembrances of Sausalito's 'Madam Mayor' Sally Stanford in the 40's, Margo narrowly missed out being elected City Supervisor by a handful of votes - a real loss for San Francisco because she would have been joining champion neighborhood feminist, supervisor Sue Bierman.

The memory for me that stands out by far of Margo goes back to May 16, 1965. Let's travel back to that beautiful sunny Spring day: I remember I was way out in front, running like the wind through Golden Gate Park. I could smell victory intertwined with the fragrance of the Eucalyptus and Monterey Cypress trees that line JFK Drive. This was the seventy-fifth running of the Bay to Breakers, the biggest footrace in the world. Jeff Fishback, the Olympic steeplechaser and the guy who edged me out of the winner's circle the previous year, was out of sight - this time behind me. I was about to wear the laurel wreath of victory. You see, running was my thing, long before North Beach Leathers. In fact, running begot leather. As I previously explained, that year after winning the National title I ran in the World Championships in Brazil. Loving Rio, I returned as a buyer for Cost Plus and the leather for the first NBL jacket came from there.

But back to the Race: Jeff's course record was history if I could maintain my blistering 4:45 per mile pace. It was at the Buffalo Field that I was taken aback. In front of me was another runner. In the mixture of confusion and fatigue I faltered with the thought of having to sprint to the finish line with this mysterious runner. I peered through my sweat stained sunglasses and noticed a shapely butt that looked familiar. Even more shocking was the fact that it was buck naked. I soon realized this nude runner was my friend and occasional lover, Margo St. James, playing one of her merry pranks. I had been to a party at Margo's cool apartment on Telegraph Hill a few days earlier and she had hinted of a surprise for the Bay to Breakers. I hadn't expected anything like this. Margo (one of the first fitness buffs) and I would occasionally workout together. She would pick me up at Cost Plus and we would go over to nearby Galileo High School, climb the locked gate and run on the grass field. After the workout Margo would drag me under the spectator stands for some extra curricular activities.



photo by Steve Frisch

In this Bay to Breakers she had taken a big head start and at the Polo Fields, stripped down for the finish. Once I realized who she was, I relaxed and pulled up to Margo just before the course reaches the Pacific Ocean and the final turn down the Great Highway. "A blowjob if you break the record", the wisecracking, crass, grand dame yelled out. I slapped her on her shapely tight tush as I sped by her, now in a full sprint to the finish. I ended up breaking Fishback's time by forty seconds and established a record that would stand for eight years - something I will always cherish.

My feat, however, pales in comparison to Margo's introducing to the Race a zany flavor that would continue to grow as the years went by until today when 100,000 persons participate, the big attraction is the weird outfits and especially the nude runners.

Needless to say, Bob de Celle and the other race officials were highly upset, but Margo slipped away into the bushes of Golden Gate Park, chuckling to herself I am sure. I never did collect the 'trophy' she promised me for breaking the course record.

In introducing a little zaniness to an otherwise serious endeavor, Margo made her mark on the whole fitness phenomenon that came out of the sixties. A case could be made that this movement of 'Health and Well Being' really started with the Bay to Breakers. Yes, President Kennedy, in seeing the horrible physical condition and lack of exercise of most Americans, both young and old, made an impassioned speech, urging the populace to exercise; however, it took a footrace in San Francisco

and a band of fitness nuts like Margo, Pax Beale, Elaine Peterson, Walt Stack, and Jack Leydig, just to name a few, to launch the movement. Also, the motivational articles of newspaper writer Walt Daley inspired out of shape couch potatoes to get out on the trail and train for next year's race. His sagas of people like blind Harry Cordellos running the eight miles across San Francisco or ninety five year old Dr. Paul Spangler jumping in the Ocean after sprinting the last mile couldn't help but inspire the populace to heed JFK's plea.

A further case could be made that the fitness/health movement that came out of San Francisco in the sixties was really born out of the 60's Cultural Revolution which took place in the City by the Bay - one of the good and beautiful elements of which I spoke about. Along with free thinking, tolerance, creative expression, etc. there was the embracement of the concept of developing one's mind and body. This was evidenced by the acceptance of Eastern health oriented ways and philosophies such as Yoga, Acupuncture, Zen, Meditation and Tai Chi. Many of my hippie friends got into running and actually it was they who carried on the zaniness that merry prankster Margo St. James started in the 1965 Race. No one, not even Jerry Garcia or Timothy Leary, was more hip than Margo.

BILL MORGAN'S • NORTH BEACH LEATHERS - TAILORS TO THE STARS



Margo started all this!

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