

**Tom Bulger**  
**Hall of Fame Speech**

February 12, 2005

I want to start off by recounting a conversation I had a couple of years ago at the HMRRRC banquet with Vince Juliano, our Stockadeathon czar. He said to me, "Tom, when you make your Hall of Fame acceptance speech, please keep it short." At the time, I was gratified that Vince had such faith that I would be included in the Hall of Fame, but I was not sure if he was implying I was long winded, or that previous speeches were long. Well, Vince, rest easy. I have always listened to the wisdom of "Hamlet" (the play, not Vince's dog), where Shakespeare says "Brevity is the soul of wit." In saying this, I don't mean to denigrate Vince's dog, who often demonstrates more sense than his owner. In fact, the picture that Ed Neiles chose to accompany Bob McFarland's article about me in the Pacesetter shows me holding the leash of Hamlet at the Subaru 4-miler in Buffalo two years ago. So my induction is yet another example of how the HMRRRC is going to the dogs.

I have to recount an e-mail conversation I had with Bill Robinson after the cancellation of the banquet. He wrote me and said, "It figures that with the Siena Saints sinking to new depths, a banquet honoring one of their esteemed professors would be the first HMRRRC event ever to be postponed because of weather." As I said to him, "It's a sad time to be a Siena sports fan." By the way, Bill, for your next present I am going to give you an autographed copy of Jose Canseco's book, so you can find out a little more about baseball and honesty.

Speaking of the cancellation, I want to thank Debbie Beach and Suzie Bacon for all the help they gave me in rescheduling reservations and for all the work they have done in putting the banquet together. I especially want to thank Lee Wilcox for flying up a second time to attend this event. I also want to thank my family and friends who traveled great distances to attend the last event.

When I first became a member of the HMRRRC in 1981, there were three runners that dominated the racing scene: Pat Glover, Dale Keenan, and Bill Robinson. As I quickly discovered, as good as runners as these three are, they are truly superior individuals. In particular, I want to go on the record as saying that Bill Robinson is the most heroic person I have ever met in my life. So to join any group which includes them is a privilege and a pleasure.

By singling them out, I don't want to ignore or diminish the other august members of the Hall of Fame. The individuals who are already in the Hall of Fame are exceptional in a variety of ways, ways which most of you already know. I admire and respect them all. But Bill, Pat, and Dale were always the shining stars in my running firmament.

I have plenty of stories about a variety of races and individuals that I could share with you tonight. But I don't want to tell my stories. That is what I have done in too many of my articles for the Pacesetter. What I want to do is to thank all the people in my life who have made running such a wonderful experience for me. I have run or worked with just about every runner

in this room, and I could share with everyone at least one story about you all. But I have a time limit, so I want to thank in particular several people who have especially important in my life.

First, I want to thank the Hall of Fame committee for judging me worthy of this honor. In particular, I want to single out Ed Neiles and Bob McFarland, who articulated my case in their inimitable and unimitated manner. I banter back and forth with both of these gentlemen on a regular basis, and to an outside observer it might appear that we disliked each other. But nothing could be further from the truth. I am especially glad that Ed Neiles is feeling well enough to join us this evening, because I would like to publicly recant my description of him as “the evil webmaster.” Megan Leitzinger had it right when she called Ed “the admirable webmaster” at an Hour run two years ago. As for Bob, he is one of the finest people and best of friends I have ever met. I hope when I reach my Jurassic years I can be as spry a dinosaur as Bob is.

Second, I want to thank a number of people who have made running such a joy for me. I will begin with Chuck Bitley, who after our basketball days together talked me into long-distance running. Without the encouragement and company of Chuck, I never would have become a runner. I also want to thank all my training partners and running teammates who have put up with me over the years. The RPI group (John Bradley, Ed Powers, and John Tichy) made running every day not just a job, but an adventure. Also, the Partridge Pub and Troy Running Club exposed me to a cast of characters I will never forget, try as I might. I also want to thank Bob Reilly for giving me the opportunity to coach with him at Siena, and work with such splendid runners as John King, Rich Coughlin, Rich Cummings, and Dan Cantwell.

I especially want to thank Don Wilken, who after my illness ten years ago invited me to join a meeting of the Lazarus Dead Runners Society. That fateful day, I did three miles for the first time in a long time. Best of all, at this run Mike McCarthy and Bob McFarland persuaded me to join their weekend running group which usually meets at the Niskayuna Bike path. This running group has provided me with training partners who are also good friends: Bob, Dick Adler, Carol Trombley, Terry Baxter, Joanne Spinelli, Phil Borgese, Al Gaige, Chuck Trimarchi, and a host of others. If I hadn't gotten Don's invitation, I am not sure if I ever would have resumed my participation in the local running community to the degree I have done in recent years.

I also want to thank Ray (a.k.a. “The Living Legend”) and Pete Newkirk (“The Godfather”) for the wonderful opportunity to be the first coach of the Willow Street Athletic Club. They showed tremendous faith and loyalty in me at a time when I dearly needed such support. (I think they also thought I was as efficient and productive as my father who worked for them, which they found out was not the case.) On the subject of the Willow Street team, I want to thank all the team members I coached, and I want to thank particularly the two captains, Zach Yannone and Emily Bryans, who have done a great job in supervising their teams. I see a number of Willow Street runners here (Jim Armenia, Ben Greenberg), and I want to say it's been a pleasure for the most part in dealing with this team. Except for the missing hubcaps.

I want to acknowledge all my guests here from all the walks and runs of my life: my Siena friends, my family, and especially all of you who traveled great distances to attend this

event. You all know how important you are to me, and I am grateful that you chose to share this evening with me.

I have saved the best for last. Like the biblical story of the wine at the marriage feast at Cana. (I threw that in for those of you who think I am always irreverent. That means you, Mom.) The three people to whom I owe the greatest debt are my deceased father, Lee Wilcox, and my mother. My father was no runner, but he taught me the value and the virtue of hard work. My father was the hardest working man I have ever known, so when he worked for the Newkirks and said Ray and Pete were the hardest working people he knew, I recognized that Ray and Pete were kindred spirits with my father. I will say that I worked very hard to become the runner I did, and it was due to the lessons my father imparted and inflicted on me as a youth. Thanks, Dad. John King wanted me to discuss more of my philosophy of life in this speech, but I will simply say my philosophy of life is very much like my father's. "With malice towards none, with charity towards all."

As we all know, unfocused work is not very successful, and that is where Lee Wilcox rescued me. When I first started teaching at Siena. I lived in Troy with my parents, and I would go down to the RPI's Armory to run in the bad weather. At the time, I was running about 6 miles a day, and I would run as hard as I could every day, about six minutes a mile (the good old days). Lee saw me doing this on several occasions, so one time he caught up to me and struck up a conversation. If I recall it correctly, it went something like this.

Lee: "What are you doing?"

Me: "Training for a marathon."

Lee: "Well, if that's your goal, you're going about it the wrong way."

So we talked more, and I learned how knowledgeable and accomplished Lee was as a runner and a coach. I took full advantage of his willingness to help me out, and I can say that my development as a runner was a direct result of Lee's gracious willingness to act as a mentor to me. I will say that there are many deserving people who should be inducted in the HMRRC Hall of Fame, but foremost among them is Lee Wilcox. Ed Powers and I recently had a conversation about his while we were golfing, and Ed said to me, "The secret for success in life is to find great teachers and to follow their advice to the letter." I completely agree, and the greatest teacher of running I ever had is Lee Wilcox. Not only is he a great teacher, he is also a great friend.

Last but not least is my mother, Grace. My mother has had to put up with my running shenanigans (not to mention my other shenanigans) for a long time. When I was competing, I periodically came down with Achilles tendonitis, so I would keep a bag of frozen peas in my mother's freezer as an ice bag for years. Now, she finally knows it's safe to cook the frozen peas in her refrigerator. But I also have to thank her for developing my appreciation of literature. When my brothers and sister were young children, my mother would take us every weekend down to the Troy Public Library to take out books. It was her influence that caused me to learn to love to write. So if anyone is to be blamed or given credit for all the articles I have bombarded the Pacesetter with all these years, it is my mother. (Even though she once described my writing as the product of a "frustrated humorist.")

But the most important reason I have to thank my mother is for her coming out to San Diego when I was in a coma and taking charge of my hospital care. Were it not for that, in all likelihood I would not be standing here tonight. I literally owe my life to my mother.

I have one more story and then I am done. My mother tells me that when I came out of my coma (many people still insist I am still in one), the nurse who was taking care of me asked me a couple of questions to see how much brain damage had occurred. According to my mother, the nurse first asked me if I remembered any poems. I then rattled off a long Emily Dickinson poem: "I taste a liquor never brewed." Then the nurse asked me if I remembered any songs. My mother said I then sang, "In heaven there is no beer, that's why we have to drink it here." The nurse asked my mother, "Is that a song?" My mom said, "I guess so." What that showed me was that my subconscious realized I was not having a good time in the hospital, and that I was yearning to join my friends for a celebration. So I am ready to celebrate tonight with all the people here, folks who I respect, admire, and love. Carpe Diem.

I was going to end by singing my favorite song, but after running that idea by my sister Grace, I decided to forego this idea. She heard me singing at Christmas mass, enough said. But I do want to read the lyrics of the song I wanted to sing, the Beatles' tune in "In My Life":

There are places I remember, all my life, though some have changed  
Some forever not for better, some have gone and some remain  
All these places have their moments, with lovers and friends, I still can recall  
Some are dead and some are living, in my life I've loved them all.

But of all these friends and lovers, there is no one compares with you  
And these memories lose their meaning, when I think of love as something new  
Though I know I'll never lose affection, for people and things that went before  
I know I'll often stop and think about them, in my life I love you more, in my life I love you more.