

# BEACH BUZZ

September – November 2002

Volume 3, Number 3

a publication of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation and its Chapters  
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"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

## BARE TO BREAKERS 2002 Show Biz Run, More Than Athletic Event

By Mario Garcia

San Francisco Examiner, May 20, 2002

I knew it was going to be a different kind of race when I showed up at the starting line on Market and Spear streets shortly after 7:30 a.m. and saw a young man with a set of protruding plastic breasts, a girl with purple hair and horns, and another in a white bridal gown with her two bridesmaids behind her and tending to her "train."

And my real surprise was to find a few who had decided to wear only their running shoes.

Not to mention the shower of flying tortillas that fell from the sky along with the rain.

As a Floridian visiting here, I got a wonderful introduction to San Francisco through this race. It took me 83 minutes to complete the distance; I found myself stopping frequently to take pictures. I could've stopped for even more had I not cared about finishing in a respectable time.

I run several races a year, not only in the United States, but around the world, as my job as a newspaper designer takes me everywhere a newspaper publishes. One comes to expect certain things from a race. But a few minutes into this one I decided that this was not an athletic event. This was show biz, glitter, over-the-top behavior – and tons of fun.

One of the first things I noticed was the absence of chips to tie to our shoelaces. Most races now use these chips to determine a runner's time; the runner turns it over to the race staff after crossing the finish line. The chip guarantees the runner has been in the race from start to finish, and keeps "cheaters" from joining

whenever they feel it is convenient.

Here, I saw "runners" coming out of their apartment buildings and joining the pack at different points during the race, probably after enjoying a good brunch.

The next thing I noticed: very few water stops. I remember downing 40 cups of water and Gatorade while running the New York Marathon last November, and half of that while doing our Gasparilla Race last February in Tampa, my hometown.

Here, water came too little, too late. But, alas, why dispense water to people who are carrying their own beer (and who knows what else)? One group, dressed as doctors and nurses, passed blue plastic cups with "drinks" to anyone who would accept them.

It was in this spirit that I set myself to enjoy the Bay to Breakers experience. And enjoy it I did, especially while climbing Hayes Street (we Floridians don't train in hilly terrain like that, so that was a big push for me) and seeing residents of the Victorian buildings participating in the fun from their windows: One woman lifted her top to reveal her tanned breasts; a group disguised as the Village People entertained from their porch; two or three drag queens in orange and blue wigs surveyed the scene from an upper floor.

The best was a group of portly citizens under a banner that read "Greetings from the Hayes Street Porch Potatoes."

Even crossing the finish line in this race had a different kind of feeling. Normally, at the end of the race, one grabs his medal, meditates a little, stretches a lot, and heads for the Chiquita banana truck and the water lines.

Here, there was none of that. But, there was the Pacific Ocean, its waves

displaying the energy that we all lacked after a steady run of 7.5 miles. Just looking at the sea made it all worthwhile.

Instead of doing a long stretch, I decided to walk back with my camera in hand to continue capturing scenes of the most picturesque run in the world.

The New York Marathon may have the view from five bridges and Central Park, and the Copenhagen race provides the two-country experience as runners cross its hanging bridge to Sweden; but only at the Bay to Breakers can one see a guy trying to run in a see-through dress à la Jennifer Lopez (I still wonder how he could do that), or a grandmotherly type wearing nothing more than two butterflies in her hair – and without a care in the world.

I figure that many of these people probably do not get up and run each morning. They certainly do not read Runners' World magazine. And I saw nobody consuming power bars.

These are a special breed of runners, walkers and "entertainers" who save up all their energy and creative talents for that one special day of the year when their city calls upon them to provide a touch of extra color and fun to a place known for having an abundance of it already.

I can say that this year's crop of participants answered the mandate splendidly.

Who knows? I may be back next year. This gives me enough time to practice hill running, and to figure out what to wear. The latter, I think, will be the tough part. ☆