

Valerie Alston



Valerie Alston was a member of the Longboat Roadrunners from 1990 until she passed away in 2015. She is deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing her.

A leader in the field of health care information, Val started her running career in Toronto in 1981 while employed at the Addiction Research Foundation. Inspired by colleagues who ran during lunch hour, Val decided to quit smoking and join them. Running changed her life. She had finally found a place where she belonged. Not until she joined the running community did she understand why – runners are from another planet!

Val and long-time partner, Allen Groome, traveled across Canada and the world seeking running adventures. They ran through Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Paris, Italy and India. They also ran around the lower part of Manhattan three times, the last time stopping to share a very moving moment at Ground Zero where the World Trade Center stood. A fond memory of running was through a small village in Umbria. Village women hanging their wash on the line called out to Val and cheered and clapped for her. "Bravo signorina! Bravo!" Their last run together was on the Wild Pacific Trail in Uclucelet on Vancouver Island in 2012. She fearlessly tackled the rugged trail with a partly paralyzed arm. Classic Val.

Val's running accomplishments are too many to list fully. In 1991 and 1992 she BQ'd in Washington (Marine Corps) and Toronto, coming in at 3:40 in both marathons. Her best 10K was the Columbus at 43.30, and her best 5K was from Upper Canada College to City Hall, when she broke 20 minutes. A truly memorable race was the Quebec City Marathon relay, which she did with her daughter Emily. But the one of which she was most proud was the Bermuda International 10K in 2010. It was a last minute decision – she entered the day before, then ran 55:56, finishing 2nd in the F60-69 category.



Val's BQ at the Marine Corps Marathon in 1991

Val was also a leader within the Longboat Roadrunners. Over the years she served Longboat as President, Vice-President and Equipment Manager. She contributed to the Longboat Newsletter, and was instrumental in the Longboat Wildfire Dragonboat Team in 1998.

When Val became ill, the prognosis wasn't great, but after the initial shock, she took on the dragon and fought back. Year after year she let the doctors know she wasn't about to check out. Even though it was a terrible struggle at times, she continued to run, go to yoga and spinning classes, and to work as long as she could. After spending time in the Dorothy Lea Hospice, a facility where one usually leaves by another door, Val was asked to find another place to stay. It was demoralizing for the other patients when someone gets out of bed and does laps in a wheelchair. So for the first time in its history the Hospice staff lined up to wave goodbye to one of their patients as Val moved to a rehabilitation centre. Twenty-five years after she joined Longboat it was with great sadness we said goodbye to our dear friend Valerie Alston. She had brought so much joy into our lives. Through fierce debates kindled by strong opinions and a deep passion always to do her best, Val challenged everyone around her to also be the best they could be.

By Diane Marrow