

Escaping the closet

By [Bill Shaw](#)

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The mood in the Chapel of Perpetual Fitness on Bluewater Highway between Surfside Village and San Luis Pass was somber the evening of April 1, two weeks after the vernal equinox. Members of the Closet Runners Anonymous World League (CRAWL) and the Women's Entourage of the Closet Runners Anonymous World League (WECRAWL) filled the chapel to capacity. Clad in warmups, the group stared down pensively at the laces of their running shoes.

CRAWL/WECRAWL members are lean, fast men and svelte, swift women who lack the courage to come out of their closets and display their prowess and fleetness on the roads and in local races. They prefer to run only in the dark of the early morning or at night to maintain their anonymity. (See the group's Web site billshawsite.net/CRAWL.htm.)

Just as the autumnal equinox is an occasion for celebration because it marks when the days grow shorter and the nights longer, the vernal equinox is an occasion for mourning because the nights grow shorter, the days longer and leave less darkness for the group to run in anonymity.

As a charter member of CRAWL, I have a standing invitation to the CRAWL/WECRAWL meetings. Members of the "come-out-of-the-closet" faction outnumber members of the "no-way-we-go-public-faction," and the former group invites me to encourage members to take that first step of registering for, showing up, and finishing a public race.

Many have registered for races and shown up only to hide in their cars or escape to the bushes along the race route because they lack the courage to cross the finish line publicly.

The CRAWL/WECRAWL Serenity Prayer, which begins each meeting, sums up their problem: "Grant me the serenity to run secretly as well as I can, the courage some day to come out of the closet to display my running prowess, and the wisdom to know when the time is right."

I sat at the front of the chapel and waited my turn to make my case that spring time is the right time to come out of the darkness of the morning and night and make a public commitment to running.

With all the business done, Bill Q., the joint chair of the Brazoria County chapters of C R A W L / W E C R A W L , introduced me.

"Hi, I'm Bill," I said, as I stepped to the driftwood lectern.

The crowd responded with a less than enthusiastic, "Hi, Bill," because they sensed what was coming.

"I can't hear you," I yelled

in my best Marine drill instructor voice.

"Hi, Bill," the gray walls of the chapel reverberated.

"On March 25 I ran for my life in West Columbia for the benefit of the cancer victims; today, I ran for Jesus for the building fund of the Community Baptist Church in Danbury," I said. "Saturday, I shall run the Gator Gallop at Brazosport College."

I held up a yellow T-shirt with the lettering, "Four Mile Gator Gallop '81."

"I escaped the closet in this race 25 years ago," I said. "I'm just a mediocre runner. You are some of the fastest and the best. If I escaped the closet with my average ability, you can too."

I went on to tell of my marathon and triathlon experiences and my more than 250 public runs and the joy of running publicly.

"Carpe diem, Gator Gallop, seize the day," I chanted and encouraged the audience, whom I had worked into a frenzy, to chant along with me. "Carpe diem, Gator Gallop, seize the day."

The meeting concluded with a rush to the front of the chapel to grab Gallop entry forms.

I hope to see a large number of CRAWL/WECRAWL members at the Gallop Saturday.

See you at the starting line.

Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.