

## Become poetry in motion

By Bill Shaw

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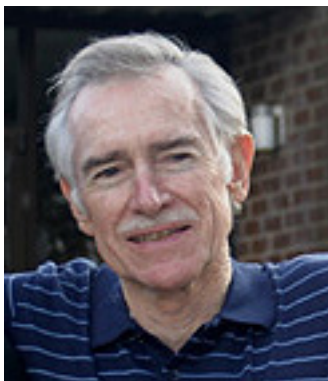
When I head out in the morning for a race or a triathlon, I pop the first CD from the soundtrack of “American Graffiti” in my player. The first track is “Rock Around the Clock,” an anthem for my high school class of 1957. When I headed out to West Columbia for the Race for the Cure on April 4, I changed my routine to celebrate National Poetry Month sponsored by the Academy of American Poets ([www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)).

Instead of Bill Haley and the Comets beginning my journey to West Columbia, I listened to a track on “English Majors: A Comedy Collection for the Highly Literate” with Garrison Keillor of “Prairie Home Companion” along with a number of guests, including Allen Ginsberg, author of the controversial “Howl” (1955), a Beatnik manifesto.

Ginsberg read excerpts of “Song of Myself,” from Walt Whitman’s equally controversial “Leaves of Grass” (1855). Whitman’s spontaneous free verse is an apt metaphor for a runner. Whitman begins, “I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as

good belongs to you” (1-3). Almost every training run or race is a celebration and song of self; the assumption of those who run is one of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, a fusion of the self into one universal body. Running is poetic.

Whitman writes later in his “Song,” “I too am not a bit tamed ... / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (1331-32).



I, too, am untamed in my morning runs. I feel the uninhibited wildness of a solitary runner. I bark at the moon or in the hollows of bridges. I sound my “barbaric yawp” over the rooftops of Freeport unbridled. This is the poetry of running.

“It’s insane to howl at the moon,” I wrote in “Howling at the Morning Moon.” “But in the early morning January cold / when the full moon burst through the winter clouds / as I jogged along the deserted road, / wolf-like, I howled, howled, and howled again, barked, yawped at the shingles of the sky. A primal urge emerged.”

I always cite my favorite definition of poetry by William Wordsworth in my annual poetry column. “Poetry,” said Wordsworth in the 1802 “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, “is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility.”

Running is a perfect time for “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility” and the solitude of the runner, that is if you put the head-

phones aside as I advised a few weeks ago.

“Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds,” said Percy Bysshe Shelley in “A Defense of Poetry,” published posthumously in 1840. “A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.”

Even the mediocre athlete like me revels in the happiness of finishing a 5K, a marathon or a triathlon at the back of the pack. We sing within like the solitary nightingale. In our solitary runs our songs within are sweet and cheer our solitude.

We become poetry.

In your solitary runs, sound your own “barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.” Become poetry.

Celebrate National Poetry Month. Read a poem; go to [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org) for the “Poem a Day” or “Poem in Your Pocket” projects. Enrich your life.

Running footnote: Don’t forget the Gator Gallop on Saturday on the campus of Brazosport College. Race check-in and race-day registration begin at 6:30 a.m. with the 1-mile run/walk at 7:30 a.m., the noncompetitive BASF Kids Run at 8 a.m. and the 5K Run at 8:30 a.m. See you at the starting line.

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