

The race left a lasting impression

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DEATHS, LIKE Sunday's tragic fatality in the Wharf To Wharf Race, make you wonder why running seems so important to people.

I know it's good exercise. I know, too, how much fun it can be to get together with friends and run a race like the Wharf To Wharf.

And there's nothing that better typifies the spirit of competitive athletics than someone like Tim Gruber, who grew up in Aptos and was one of the elite runners in the field. He gave every ounce of effort he had to try to win Sunday's 15th Wharf-To Wharf Race. He finished third, but was satisfied with his effort; knowing he'd run so hard, he thought his legs might collapse before he reached the finish line.

"I competed as well as I thought I could," said Gruber, who was fourth last year. When he reached the downhill stretch to the finish line, "I was praying my feet would get out in front of me. I could not have given it one more inch of effort. That's why I'm completely satisfied."

Bravo. That's what makes running great. Doing your best; even if you don't finish first, you can win. There were probably 10,000 personal records set for the Wharf To Wharf Race — and not just because a new course was set up this year. All around Capitola Village, and out on the beach, there were smiling faces.

At one end of the spectrum, there was tiny, 10-year-old Carrie Garritson, of Fullerton, who was

Ed Vyeda



ninth overall in the women's division. At the other end of the spectrum, there was 88-year-old Paul Spangler, of San Luis Obispo, who may have enjoyed it as much as anyone.

The scene seemed like a classic example of the slogan *Run for the health of it*.

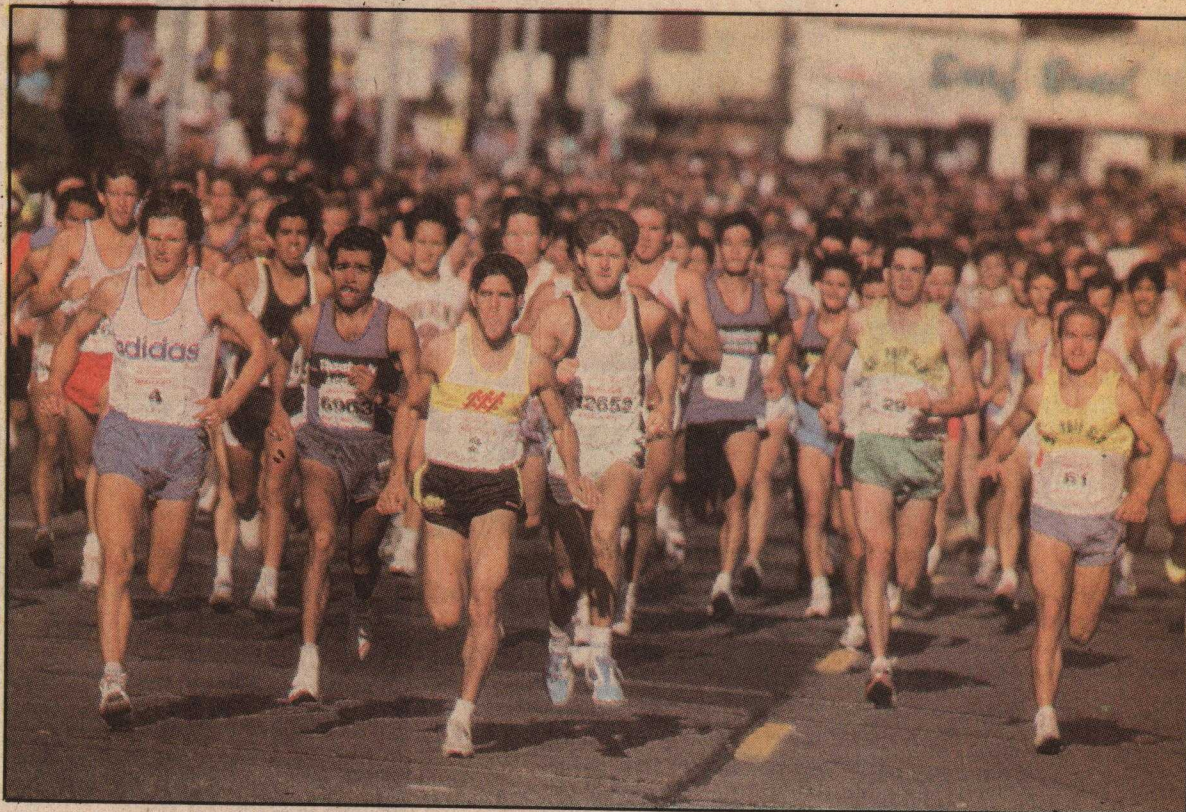
Then you hear about someone like Joseph Wonder. He was only 39. Sunday, he probably was all ready to enjoy jogging along with the pack in the Wharf To Wharf Race, following the trail of huffing and puffing bodies to the finish in Capitola Village.

But Wonder didn't get there, dying from an apparent heart attack in the middle of what is a relatively easy six-mile course.

It just doesn't make sense.

Maybe only someone like Mahlon Lee can understand it. Three years ago, Lee, then 36, ran the Wharf To Wharf Race, and decided to jog back to Santa Cruz, instead of getting a ride back.

On East Cliff Drive, at 26th Avenue, Lee collapsed, suffering a heart attack. He was kept alive and underwent bypass surgery. It was, strangely enough, almost the same spot where Wonder was stricken.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The day started out so brightly, with Tim Gruber (4) at the head of the pack.

Sunday, Lee, 39, ran the Wharf To Wharf Race again, as he did last year, going right by the spot at 26th Avenue where he nearly died.

"I don't think about it," Lee was saying Saturday, when asked if it affects him to see where he collapsed. "It doesn't bother me."

Lee, who is healthy enough again to run 10K races almost every

other weekend, doesn't think about having another heart attack. "If it happens, it happens," he said.

Sunday, it happened to Joseph Wonder.

I don't know what I'll remember more about Sunday's 15th annual Wharf To Wharf Race — Gruber's gutsy effort, or hearing about Wonder's death.

I want to remember the smile Gruber flashed, even though he didn't finish first. I want to remember all those other people who seemed to be having such a good time Sunday.

But I know that for a while, every time I'm out running near 26th Avenue, I'll think about Lee. And Wonder.