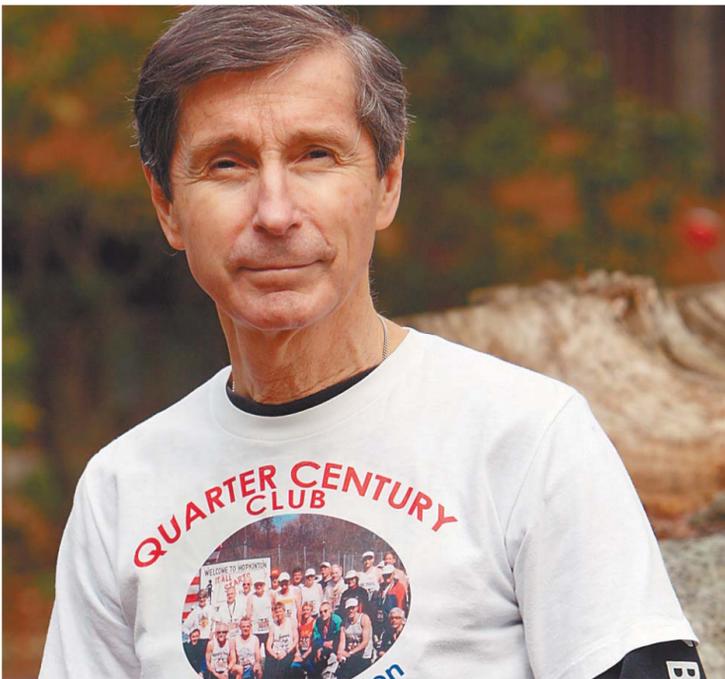




# BOSTON MARATHON FACES

Profiles by  
Maggie Cassidy



JOANNE RATHE/GLOBE STAFF

## Ronald Kmiec

Last Sunday, as part of the MetroWest Symphony Orchestra's Boston Marathon Kickoff Concert, Ronald Kmiec performed Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 at Hopkinton Middle School.

Kmiec, 65, describes the piece as "one of the major warhorses of major literature," but playing it is nothing new. The concert pianist and private piano teacher has his bachelor of music degree and artist diploma from the New England Conservatory of Music, and has run his fingers through the concerto's dramatic melodies hundreds of times.

Monday, Kmiec will return to Hopkinton to tackle a different kind of "major warhorse," one he's intimately familiar with nonetheless: the 112th Boston Marathon, where he'll wear bib No. 20577.

An avid runner, Kmiec has made it a point to run a mile every day since Nov. 28, 1975. He appreciates consistency: The Carlisle resident and Salem, N.H., native is proud to run his 35th consecutive Boston, a streak he almost had to give up.

On Nov. 22, 2007, Kmiec finished the Feaster Five, a 5-mile race in Andover, experiencing intense chest pain. The pain persisted and he finally saw a doctor Nov. 26. After a trip to the Emerson Hospital Emergency Room, Kmiec was amazed to learn he had suffered a heart attack.

"[I was in] disbelief, shock," he said. "How can that be happening to me? I've been running for 37 years and I thought I was immune to it. But I guess I was wrong, and I found out it could hit anybody."

The next day, he underwent a coronary angioplasty, wherein doctors inserted a stent into one of his arteries to supply blood to his heart. He didn't run a mile, ending his streak at 11,687 days — one day short of 32 years but still the 14th longest consecutive-day running streak in the United States. During that time he ran 44,438 miles, an average of 3.8 miles per day.

Kmiec didn't run for a month, but he never forgot about the upcoming Boston Marathon. While he said his wife thinks he's "foolish" to run it, he's just happy to get back on the road.

"Once I started a streak like I had, I won't let that go very easily," he said.



MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

## Kris Porell

In spring 2002, after undergoing a double mastectomy as a result of breast cancer, doctors had to tell Kris Porell to slow down during recovery.

"Of course they're telling me, 'OK you can walk,' and the next day I'd be walking 3 miles, and they'd say 'No, that's too far! You can walk to the mailbox,'" she said. "I kept getting in trouble."

But the walk to the mailbox just wasn't interesting enough. In August that year, Porell joined the Zipcar team to participate in her first Pan-Mass Challenge, an annual bike-a-thon to raise money for cancer research at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

Porell, a mother of four who works at Norfolk Middle School, raced the PMC four more times because she enjoys helping to find a cure for others.

"Every time I speak to another person going through breast cancer treatment and surgery, [the therapy is] something different they're doing just because of the money we're raising for research, little by little," she said.

In April 2004, a year and a half after her first PMC, she ran her first Boston Marathon since the surgery. As temperatures topped 85 degrees and runners melted on the pavement, Porell decided her third Boston Marathon — which took her five long hours — would be her last.

"I swore I'd never do another Marathon," she said with a laugh. "It was the worst experience of my life."

She said in addition to the temperature, the 2004 Boston Marathon was also tough emotionally because it was her first run after the surgery.

But Porell, 43, ran track at Millis High School and was a sprinter at Colby College, so the Norfolk resident had a hard time staying away. She qualified with a 3:44 at the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in Phoenix Jan. 13.

"I definitely feel very proud and blessed," said Porell, who will wear bib No. 17570. "I do speak to a lot of people that have all different outcomes, and I just feel very, very lucky. That's why every day you get out there and run, or do whatever you can, to appreciate what you have."



ED MEDINA/GLOBE STAFF

## Beth Kissinger

Beth Kissinger is running her fourth Boston Marathon for three good reasons.

She is running for her oldest brother, Steve, who died in 2003 at age 49 from a rare genetic liver disease called primary hyperoxaluria.

She is running for her brother Eric, who has recovered since experiencing serious complications from the disease in 2006.

And she is running for the family that donated the liver that saved Eric's life, a gift she calls "remarkable."

On top of that, the 42-year-old mother of three wants to raise money and increase awareness about liver disease, and will run with the American Liver Foundation for the first time this year, while wearing bib No. 12472.

"Having my brother be sick and die, and having Eric be really sick and live, it really makes me think about people who might be in the same situation, and want to take what we've gone through and help somebody else," she said.

Kissinger, too, has primary hyperoxaluria. The disease causes people to overproduce oxalate, which, if undetected, could lead to renal failure, which Steve and Eric both experienced.

Kissinger's side effects are relatively mild, but some things have changed. She takes about 1,000 times the average recommended dose of B6, consuming anywhere from three to six vitamin capsules per day — depending on the serving sizes she can find at the grocery store in Hopkinton, N.H. — plus three doses of potassium citrate and a few aspirin. She avoids foods that bind with oxalate, but the list is complicated; for example, red peppers are OK, but green peppers could prove disastrous.

But the hardest change, she said, is coping with the loss of her brother, who remains a strong inspiration because he urged her to get tested as soon as his results came back positive.

"It was like something was broken that couldn't be fixed when he died because we were such a unit," said Kissinger, the youngest in a family of eight. "So I got really angry and sad, and I'm still sad. I miss him so much . . . In part, I run the marathon in his honor because I love him, and because I got tested early I'm healthy."



DENIS POROV/ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Johan Otter

In August 2005, as he lay tattered on a mountain ledge in Montana's Glacier National Park, the Boston Marathon was the last thing on Johan Otter's mind.

The Holland native and two-time Marathoner was focused on surviving. After turning onto the craggy ledge of a steep hiking trail, Otter, 46, and his daughter Jenna, 21, had unwittingly disturbed grizzly bear cubs — and their angry 400-pound mother.

As Otter moved in front of his daughter, the bear lunged. It gashed his thigh and arm, broke his vertebrae, and nearly ripped off his scalp, puncturing his right eye.

"At one point the bear was putting its teeth into my skull and that's when I was thinking, 'OK, if he bites hard one more time I'm going to die,'" Otter said.

But after a 15-minute brawl, the bear relented. Six hours later, Otter and his daughter, who also suffered serious injuries, were taken by helicopter to Kalispell Regional Medical Center in Kalispell, Mont.

Otter, who is assistant director of sports medicine at Scripps Memorial Hospital in La Jolla, Calif., suffered almost 30 separate wounds. He underwent eight surgeries and wore a clunky metal halo for three months.

Determined not to let the attack keep him from running Boston, the 15-year runner tried to qualify for the 2007 race, but he missed the mark by nine minutes at San Diego's Rock 'n' Roll marathon in June 2006 — an emotional blow to the dedicated athlete.

"You just so want to get back to normal, and that was my normal prior to [the attack]," he said. "I thought I could do it. But I didn't realize how much that attack had taken out of me physically."

In June 2007, Otter bettered his San Diego time by six minutes. Four months later, he finished Utah's St. George marathon in 3 hours 29 minutes, finally requalifying for his favorite race and setting himself up for a meaningful run Monday, when he'll wear bib No. 11430.

"It's kind of the third," he said, referring to his previous two Boston runs. "But it's kind of the first."

For video profiles of a handful of interesting runners competing in Monday's Boston Marathon, go to [www.boston.com/sports/marathon](http://www.boston.com/sports/marathon)