

Sproule Love '89 Sprints to the Top

Sproule Love '89 remembers the hard tackle in middle school that sparked a love for running that has led to recognition as one of the top stair racers in the world. Country Day's required sports program meant most boys in Love's class played football. "The younger boys played scrimmage games during halftime at varsity games, and it was a mob chasing the ball on a big field," Love explained. He was small and a self-described late bloomer, and he remembers the hit that changed his life. "I went for the tackle against an early bloomer who knocked me into cross country running in 8th Grade. I didn't think of myself as an endurance athlete. I was literally running away from football!"

Today, over 30 years later, he's a leader in the sport of stair racing, also known as tower running. That's right, he regularly charges up flights of stairs in skyscrapers around the world, and he does it for fun. "I've been stair racing for 20 years, and it still strikes me as this bizarre thing," he said.



Sproule Love with his wife Farah, son Mazin and daughter Yasmine.

ARUSH, A MAD RUSH

He was 28 and living in Brooklyn when he heard a radio interview with the winner of the Empire State Building Run Up (ESBRU). He was taking a year off cross country skiing and winter biathlon competitions, and the oddity of competing in this manner intrigued him. On a whim, he signed up for the next ESBRU, and on race day he experienced a rough introduction to a new sport. "It was on a Tuesday morning and employees were going in and out, using the elevators. When the gun went off, 150 people ran 30 feet to a four-foot doorway with a 90-degree turn and a banister." Love was shoved into the banister in the chaos, but he charged on. He finished in a little over 12 minutes, climbing 86 stories—1,576 stairs—to earn 7th place. The win earned him a spot on the front line the following years, which helped during that mad rush to the door. He's done the ESBRU 10 times over 20 years, making the podium five times, usually the top American.

"I was interviewed on 1010 WINS, the radio station playing in virtually every yellow cab in New York, so I felt like I made it after that," he laughed.



Love's senior photo.

The exhilaration reminded him of his years running cross country at CDS. "I loved the final hill on the Country Day cross country course south of the football field," he said. "I made moves to win races on that hill." When he returned for his 25th reunion in 2014, he connected with the cross country coach and they ran the course together.

A TALENT FOR SUFFERING

Love's success in tower running mirrors his experience at Country Day. He made the Varsity Cross Country team his freshman year, lettering all four years and serving as team captain senior year. "I discovered a talent for suffering, which is what endurance sports come down to," he explained. He calls his athletic experience formative; he learned through sports that he could continually surprise himself. The year he captained, the team came in 2nd at State after winning Districts and the ABC League. He's proud that the cross country team led cheers at the annual Red and White Day assembly his senior year. He also ran track for three years, losing one season to injury. He won Sectionals and Districts in the mile and he made All-State in both cross country and the mile. He set the school record for the mile in his final race.

He looks fondly back on that time. At his 30th reunion this year, he found his old team awards on display in the Steward Family Aquatic Center. He credits track coaches **Duncan Marshall**, **Chris Gould** and **Tom Fitzgibbon** as influences in his athletic life, along with calculus teacher **Will Hansen**, English teacher **Dan Piquet**, and drama department head **Peter King** as influential teachers. "I think the teaching was better than at Harvard, where intro classes were taught by graduate students who weren't as inspired, committed or qualified as these long-tenured teachers at Country Day," he said. He remembers the dedication of his CDS teachers. "They were clearly invested in us and our success, and now that I'm a parent, I know how much that matters. They didn't tolerate any sense of entitlement."

He continued running cross country while studying economics at Harvard, but stopped after unsupportive coaches, grueling workouts and intense competition doused the joy he found in running. He found an outlet in cross country skiing, competing for three years in college and becoming team captain. That led to training for



Sproule Love completes a run up the stairs of the Empire State Building.

winter biathlon, and Love became a top 10 biathlete in the country. He qualified for Olympic Trials but fell just short of making the U.S. team. After years of self-training and traveling for races, he needed a break. He moved to Brooklyn and heard the interview with the ESBRU winner. He had done some mountain running, charging up ski areas for training and thought he could be competitive.

RUNNING THROUGH ICONS

When Love first started stair racing, the Sears Tower (now Willis) and the ESBRU were the two main races in the United States, so he competed consistently in both for about six years. He met his wife, Farah, and took five years off to get married, go to business school and have his first child. Then, he was back at it.

"We moved to a high rise with 40 stories on the west side of Manhattan. I put my 25-pound son on my back, gave my wife a break and climbed in the stairwell across from our apartment." Mazin, now

9, loved it. When his daughter Yasmine, now 5, was born, he trained with her on his back. "It's a rite of passage in my family," he said. At 40, Love set a new record at the Willis Tower. The win kicked off a fun five years of traveling around the world to compete, racing in Asia, Central America, South America and Europe. He gained international rankings and sponsorships. He holds records at the Hancock Tower in Chicago, the Space Needle in Seattle and the Metropolitan Building in St. Louis. His Willis Tower record was finally broken last year, "by a guy 20 years younger and 30 pounds lighter." He's been crowned U.S. champion three times and has ranked as high as 6th in the world.

His favorite race is the Eiffel Tower, which he's run four times. It's a difficult race to get into, and only 50 runners compete each year. "There's no prize money," he said, "but it's so iconic. The strobes go off during the race and it's amazing. They don't let the public go up the final staircase, so to get all the way

to the top you have to enter this race. At the end, it's a spiral staircase with metal grating and you can see through to the bottom. There's a dramatic view of Paris at night after you've raced up the building."

A MIDWESTERN SENSIBILITY

Despite his world travels and living in New York, Love still considers himself a midwesterner. He works for his family's business, The Love Companies, and visits his hometown often. "The authenticity of St. Louis is great," he said. His experience at CDS still keeps him grounded. "It was pretty formal, and our class was a great group. We had family-style dining and each student would do a rotation as a server." The experience was humbling, and just one example of how CDS prepared students for lives of humility, fairness and dedication. He fondly recalls that CDS also gave him the opportunity to tutor at Mathews-Dickey Boys & Girls Club. His family lived in the city, and "Country Day supplemented my view of the world and



how people can come together.” He bonded with his classmates, many of whom are still friends today. His teachers didn’t coddle students, and he admires the work ethic they instilled in generations of boys.

Today, he passes along what he learned to his own children. “It may be easier to do it for them, but I make them do the work and clean up after themselves.” If anything, living on the East Coast has only galvanized his pride in his hometown. “I’ve been in New York for 20 years, and I call myself a St. Louisan,” he said. He still roots for his hometown teams, going to see the Cardinals when they play the Mets in town and staying up late to cheer the Blues to their first Stanley Cup win in June.

He applies the guidance he received at CDS to today’s life, even though so much has changed: Stay true to yourself and be authentic. Slow down and turn your

phone off every once in a while. “With the flood of information and social media echo chambers today, I think it’s imperative that people at any age take a step back, pause and give themselves room to make thoughtful decisions.” And he’d tell Upper School students today, “You may not save the world in high school, so don’t avoid the tedious work that will prepare you for shining moments that eventually come along.”



Sproule Love on the podium with a third place win at the ESBRU.