

ADELAIDE MARATHON WARRIORS: Part 3 – Warriors and Spartans by Ian Hill (updated 8 Dec 2021)

Welcome to the third and final part of the Warriors' articles. This was held over from the previous issue of the Spartans' newsletter because of uncertainty at the time as to whether the Adelaide Marathon was able to go ahead as scheduled on 22 August 2021. While we were pleased that it could, unfortunately for a second time most interstate entrants were unable to participate even though state borders were open only a couple of months earlier.

This had a direct effect on one of the three people arranged to be interviewed well before the Adelaide Marathon. Spartan **David Staehr** from Kaniva, just east of the SA/Victorian border was in Port Augusta for the Pichi Richi Marathon on 27 June 2021 and he approached me just before the start and said with a smile *"I have always lived in Victoria – see you at the finish!"* He was referring to the inference I made in Part 2 that he had lived outside Victoria at some stage. As the marathon was about to start that was the end of our conversation. David ran it in 2:46:28 for the fastest second place since 1983 and did indeed see me at the finish – from a bus window on his way back from Quorn. I was still out on the course with about two km to go striving to finish under six hours. That bus was not going to wait for me!

However David and I were able to connect through Strava and arrange for an interview by email. His three page reply was so interesting that I suggested to David Foskey that he might like to place most of it in the main body of the newsletter and I would feature the parts relevant to the Warriors. David's reply was classic - *"with his strong family connection to the Geelong Football Club, I can refuse him nothing!"* That was the week before the AFL preliminary finals and seeing as I'm a Port Adelaide supporter there was no further footy talk from either of the Davids or me!

David Staehr's frustration at being a Victorian stranded on nine Adelaide Marathons for two consecutive years is matched by **Kirsty Gwynn-Jones** who is a South Australian who started her quest to become a Spartan in 2013 and has finished every Melbourne Marathon since. By now Kirsty and her Victorian friend **Sally Beggs** who is striving for the same goal should have been on nine Melbourne Marathons but are stranded on seven. Like most people with similar ambitions they duly ran a virtual Melbourne Marathon in 2020 but it's just not the same! Kirsty *will* become a Spartan, being the first South Australian woman to do so, but it may have to wait until 2024 because, even if this year's Melbourne Marathon goes ahead in December, it may be too risky for a South Australian to be in Melbourne then.

These concerns are not an issue for our third interviewee **Stephen Dunn** who qualified as a Warrior in 2010 and a Spartan in 1996. Stephen has now completed twenty Adelaide Marathons and is looking to becoming the next Legend when he reaches 25 finishes. Not only that but Stephen has also run 30 Perth Marathons and finished 138 marathons overall in Australia and many other countries.

Warriors and Spartans – a comparison

There are currently 119 Warriors and 1548 Spartans, of whom 8 (6.7%) and 149 (9.6%) respectively are women. The mean age on becoming a Warrior is 49 years while the oldest is 73 and the youngest is 28. For Spartans the ages are 46, 81 and 22 respectively. Further age comparisons are shown graphically in the Appendix. The fastest male Spartan, Eric Sigmont at 2:19:20 is ten minutes quicker than the equivalent Warrior while the fastest female Spartan Colleen Stephens with 2:48:14 is over twenty minutes quicker than Mandy Towler's Adelaide Marathon PB of 3:11:12.

As far as we can tell there are 15 Warriors who are also Spartans. In alphabetical order, the following people have been identified as both Warriors and Spartans. Also included are three people who have nearly qualified. The table shows, for Adelaide and Melbourne Marathons respectively, the number finished, the qualification year for Warrior/Spartan and fastest time. Then each person's total number of marathons finished *in Australia* and if known, overseas, personal best (PB) and the venue/year of the PB are shown.

Name	#Adel	Year W	Fastest	#Melb	Year Sp	Fastest	#Mar	PB	Venue	Year
Corrie Davel	10	2008	3:34:28	11	2006	3:31:56	106	3:25:40	Noosa	1997
Richard Davie*	26	1989	2:54:23	11	1994	3:04:52	41	2:53:59	SA Chp	1985
Jack Donkin	12	2002	3:49:06	17	1998	3:29:28	40	3:29:28	Melb	1992
Ken Down	12	1993	3:30:04	11	1994	3:28:15	27	3:23:29	Au Chp	1987
Euan Downing	24	1992	3:25:45	12	2000	3:23:04	37	3:23:04	Melb	1987
Stephen Dunn	20	2010	2:53:39	10	1996	2:48:17	138	2:47:02	SA Chp	1989
Geoff Howard*	10	1993	3:22:39	10	1994	3:25:50	20	3:22:39	Adel	1990
Owen Lloyd	12	1999	3:14:15	16	1995	3:18:03	28	3:14:15	Adel	1990
Phillip O'Connell	20	2001	3:27:04	20	2001	3:34:51	40	3:27:04	Adel	2002
Adrian Pearce	11	1993	3:24:38	12	1992	3:32:31	25	3:24:38	Adel	1986
Peter Quigley	13	1993	2:33:02	11	1997	2:38:05	53	2:32:53	SA Chp	1990
Lester Smith	32	1995	3:10:40	20	2005	3:09:36	191	3:04:27	SA Chp	1989
Michael Tompkins	10	2001	3:26:42	13	1998	3:25:09	83	3:19:19	Canb	1993
Graham Venus	15	1990	3:17:29	13	1992	3:21:42	59	3:16:03	SA Chp	1984
Robert Wiese*	11	1996	2:53:06	10	1994	2:54:02	24	2:53:06	Adel	1989

Next to join list ...

David Staehr	9	...	2:42:42	10	2016	2:44:41	46	2:38:53	Barossa	2015
Mandy Towler	17	2010	3:11:12	7	...	3:14:03	50	3:11:12	Adel	2006
Jane Sturzaker	7	...	3:47:52	20	2006	3:48:31	306	3:47:52	Adel	2006

**deceased*

The table was compiled using the complete list of Warriors and recording the number of Melbourne marathons finished for each person. Those who had done ten or more were closely examined at ausrunning.net to ascertain consistency between age and time. Total career marathons exclude any run in other countries unless listed in the "Australian 100 Marathon Club" web site.

Looking at the list, the most combined Warrior/Spartan Marathons is 52 by Lester Smith, followed by Phillip O'Connell on 40 and Richard Davie on 37. The minimum of 20 by definition is the case for only one runner, Geoff Howard while Corrie Davel and Robert Wiese are on 21. Three people ran *only* the Adelaide and Melbourne Marathons and no others in their career – O'Connell, Howard and Owen Lloyd. At the other end of the spectrum three "centurions" Smith (191), Stephen Dunn (137), and Davel (106) have run numerous other marathons in Australia and overseas. Surprisingly *everyone* has a personal best of under 3:30; the fastest are Peter Quigley (2:32:53), Dunn (2:47:02), Wiese (2:53:06) and Davie (2:53:59) while the "slowest" is Jack Donkin with a PB of 3:29:28 in the 1992 Melbourne Marathon.

The photo on the left was supplied by Peter Kotsoglous, inaugural race director and now historian of the Pichi Richi Marathon which will be celebrating its 40th running in June 2022 after having to cancel in 2020. Graham Venus is wearing his green Spartan's singlet while running with Roger Williams in the 1992 event. Both have finished 15 Adelaide Marathons. On the right Euan Downing, aged 70 and after a break of seven years returned in 2008 to finish his 12th Melbourne Marathon in a time of 5:17:06.



Photo courtesy Peter Kotsoglous, from Rod Martin's collection



Photo courtesy Euan Downing

Apart from David Staehr whose interview appears below, waiting to join the list are Mandy Towler and Jane Sturzaker. Mandy's 50 marathons include Adelaide with 17 finishes, Pichi Richi (13) and Melbourne (7) while overseas she has run the Tokyo Marathon twice and the Comrades ultra. Her record at Pichi Richi is remarkable – ten wins and three second placings. Her PB is 3:11:12 at the 2006 Adelaide Marathon. Mandy is pictured at right with her brother Shaun Hughes in the 2016 Pichi Richi Marathon which she won in 3:23:39 while Shaun ran 3:29:07. Jane has finished 306 marathons and her PB of 3:47:52 is also from Adelaide in 2006. About half of her marathons were run overseas. Jane is pictured near the 40km mark of the 2019 Melbourne Marathon which she finished in 4:59:49.



Photo courtesy Jane Sturzaker



Photo courtesy Mandy Towler

INTERVIEWS

Our three interviewees all have connections, if by name only, with famous runners of the 20th Century. David Staehr is a resident of Kaniva in Victoria, just 25 km east of the border with South Australia and has an ancestor with the surname *Landy*. Stephen Dunn lives in Adelaide and his mother was a *Banister*. Both also have a *Walker* in their families. Kirsty Gwynn-Jones cannot claim any connection with famous milers and will have to make do with being the great-niece of *Ern Jolly*, 1931 Victorian Marathon Champion and SA's first international marathon runner when he represented Australia at the 1938 Empire Games in Sydney. Kirsty grew up in Bordertown, 17 km west of the Victorian border. Astute readers will have already worked out that David and Kirsty lived the exact marathon distance from each other, but not at the same time.

David Staehr (expanded interview)

Family background, as told by David

Dad was a talented sportsman at anything he tried his hand at. He played in a senior football premiership for Kaniva as a 15 year old, a dominant side that won its six premierships in eight seasons. The following season he was chased by Essendon, but my grandmother made it very clear he needed to finish his final two years of schooling before leaving town. By the time summer came around, he had secretly signed with Geelong and ran off to the big smoke!

Mum's father was also a strong footballer, starting at Geelong in his late teens. The club recognised his leadership with the young players, and was made Captain of the Seconds from very early on. As a result, he is the only player in VFL/AFL history to play more than 200 Reserves games, which included two premierships as captain before World War II. He also went on to serve as Captain/Coach and non-playing Coach after the War, coaching a premiership in 1948.

Not surprisingly, sport was more than in the blood growing up. At age seven, we moved from a standard suburban block on to the expanses of an acre and a half. The front half of the block quickly became a football and cricket ground. An asphalt tennis court followed a few years later, which became home to all manner of sports. It wasn't uncommon for five, ten or more neighbours turning up after school or on weekends to take part in whatever sport was popular at the time.

Running was also in the family. Mum's three brothers were all talented middle distance runners and were heavily involved with the Geelong Cross Country Club as I was growing up (of which two are still very active). They competed in many Great Otway Classics, an annual three day relay team event of seven runners over the Queen's Birthday long weekend covering 350km from Geelong to Lorne via Colac and Apollo Bay. Having each been on different winning teams over the years, the trio teamed up for Myer in 1986 to beat home some more fancied teams to take the title.

During the preparation for this interview to be included in the Spartans' newsletter, David Foskey said:

I am intrigued to know his mother's maiden name because of her brothers' success at the great Otway Classic. A few Spartans (Colin Silcock-Delaney, John Kaparelis at least) have had some involvement, if not participation, in these events.

David replied:

My mum's maiden name is Walker. Her father was Bob Walker, although we knew him as Johnny and his real name was actually William. His younger brother Joe played alongside him in the 1937&38 reserves premierships. Their uncle was William 'Plugger' Landy. He played 2 senior games for Geelong in 1915 just before turning 18. On turning 18 he enlisted for World War I and died on the battlefield at Fromelles.

Mum's brothers are Jeff, Ken and Terry. Jeff is closing in on being the first to 1000 Geelong Cross Country Club runs, although a recent hamstring injury and COVID will probably push it back till 2023.

I think I remember Colin's name from back in the day, but I don't recall John. A name I clearly remember was Frank Shevlin; three decades later I bumped into him at a small low key fun run. Frank finished runner up in a Melbourne marathon at his peak and was a multiple Great Otway Classic King of the Mountain winner and it was fascinating to chat with him about those times.

(Frank Shevlin won the 1990 Adelaide Marathon in 2:22:49 a few months before being runner up in Melbourne, in 2:22:34. He finished nine marathons in total, including the Melbourne Marathon four times - Ed.)

Inspiration for running marathons

David continues:

Having watched Robert de Castella on TV as a youngster to win in Brisbane and then Helsinki the following year, there was always an interest in the marathon distance from a very early age. The concept of the Westfield Sydney to Melbourne also captured my imagination, firstly Cliff Young, and to a greater extent, the incredible feats of Yiannis Kouros that followed. In that era, having watched the coverage of the Melbourne Marathon over the years, and seen a neighbour's finishing medals, it became something I wanted to attempt someday.

(continuing with the original interview – with more photos...)

David Staehr has run 47 marathons and twelve ultras since his first marathon in 2001, although there was a seven year gap until his second! That means most of his nearly 60 long distance races were done in the 2010s and in nine marathons he was a pacer.

While marathon pacers have been used for a long time it is considered part of being a volunteer for the event – someone who is willing to run at a slower pace than usual to assist others in achieving their goal, whether it is to break three hours or a more esoteric four and a quarter hours. There are no rules for this – only an unwritten desire not to make a fool of yourself by failing to deliver the required time or close to it. Often pacers dress up and wear balloons or a sign to indicate which particular goal is theirs.

It is not a task people would make a career from, or maybe hobby is a better word, unless they find the experience so enjoyable they are keen to repeat it. David is such a person and has been an *elite* pacer for the Melbourne Marathon seven times and the Adelaide Marathon twice. All these were at three hours, 2:50 or 2:48, but he is capable of much faster times I believe and with the correct focus, training and nutrition would give 2:35 or even 2:30 a decent nudge!



Photos courtesy David Staehr

(Left) David's first marathon, just finished in 2:55:29 at Melbourne in 2001

(Centre) his second marathon in 2008 finishing on the MCG in a net time of 3:07:11

(Right) as the 2:50 pacer in the 2015 Melbourne Marathon, with a gun time of 2:49:54

A close look at David's early sporting career reveals a range of activities from Little Athletics, tennis, golf and the 10km Barwon Banks fun run. Then he turned ten and had some success in interschool cross country but found while attending high school that unfavourable age grouping rules saw him competing against boys up to two years older. Not to be deterred, by Year 12 he played cricket, football and ran his first half marathon on his 17th birthday with little training! David takes up the story:

After graduating from university, I started my career with a large Engineering firm in February 2000. I decided to give football away and was still running a little, completing two half marathons in the first half of the year. By the middle of the year, work had taken over my life and all exercise had gone by the wayside. By April 2001, I had realised that things needed to change and started on the path to a career change into teaching and fulfilling my dream of running the Melbourne Marathon.

After dropping the extra weight I was carrying, my training quickly progressed to running 15-20km six times a week. About nine weeks out, I woke up one morning with excruciating pain in both hips. Three years later an arthroscopy to both hips would repair tears to the labrum in both hips, a result of running on the hard concrete footpaths of Melbourne's inner eastern suburbs and a training program with little variation. At the time, I could barely walk the 200m to the tram stop each morning, but I found if I could bear the pain for the first five to ten minutes, the pain would subside enough to keep up the training. This was enough for me to make it to the start line and achieve a time (2:55:29 – ed.) that I was more than happy with.

Ongoing hip pain gave me little motivation to run a second marathon, as well as the general leg soreness for weeks afterwards. I returned to playing football in 2002 and on completing my teaching course, I moved to Kaniva to teach at the start of 2003, where I have lived ever since. Even after the surgery, the hip pain continued. At the end of the 2008 season, issues with fingers, thumbs, ribs and shoulders made me question continuing to play football. With eight weeks to the Melbourne Marathon, I decided to make a last minute attempt to train for the marathon. Despite the continuing pain, I got enough kilometres in the legs and managed to make to home on a hot and blustery day.

The challenge of finishing the 2008 Melbourne Marathon (3:07:11) at the time cured me for good, but by the time I had made it home, I was plotting to get fit to try and break 2hr45mins. Twelve months on, I achieved this at the Melbourne Marathon. Without the bash and crash on the body that football created, the hips slowly improved and have not been an issue since. This has led to 47 marathons and 12 ultras since. The Adelaide Marathon became a regular event on my calendar, given Adelaide's closer proximity to Kaniva than to Melbourne. It has been pleasing to see how the festival has grown from my first Adelaide Marathon in 2009.

David's debut marathon in 2001 was remarkable given his hip injury and it's no wonder he switched to football for many years until continuing pain in the hips and an assortment of other injuries drove him back to long distance running. His slowish return to the marathon on a hot day had him "cured" – until he got home! That's a story familiar to us all.

David's return to running in 2008 coincided with a major boom across Australia not seen since the late 1970s and his improvement in the hips enabled him to enjoy a marvellous and very consistent marathon career. After achieving his goal in 2009 with 2:44:43 he took on the pacing role and clocked gun times of 2:59:56, 2:49:46, 2:49:50, 2:49:51, 2:49:57, 2:49:54 and 2:52:48 from 2010-16 respectively. In 2010 he was the three hour pacer and from 2011 the 2:50 pacer each year until 2016, the final time a little slower than planned. David comments on his pacing duties:

The satisfaction of helping athletes that are driven like myself to achieve a goal that hadn't otherwise been achievable is as rewarding as anything I have done individually. The stories aren't always apparent at the finish line; it isn't until the runners track you down in the days after or even years later to tell you what it meant to them and how it has changed their lives that it adds so much meaning.

David's fastest time was at Tanunda in May 2015 where he won the Barossa Marathon in 2:38:53. It was an emotional experience for him:

My run at the 2015 Barossa Marathon is one I reflect on with pride. My wife was in hospital in Melbourne and Ballarat all the preceding summer, pregnant with our second child, Zoe. In between travelling up and down the highway from our temporary home in Geelong, a lot of running over that period was with our son Jackson in a running pram. Operating on little sleep once Zoe arrived, my training was much more limited than hoped heading to Tanunda. To pull away in the second half and finish with lots left in the tank, still has me scratching my head at all the faults of my diet, sleep patterns and training in the lead up that somehow allowed me to run better than I had before and since!

In our careers most of us have an event or two like that, not necessarily in the marathon. It makes all the training worthwhile. David followed up his sub-2:40 with another one at Barossa four years later when he finished second to Paul Mulholland (2:34:39) in a time recorded by *Event Strategies* of 2:39:59.847. In official race results that appears as 2:40:00 of course.

Building on his success in 2019 David planned to become a Warrior in 2020 with the Adelaide Marathon originally scheduled for May 31st and run several other marathons during the year, including one before Adelaide. He was well into a taper for that marathon in March 2020 when COVID-19 restrictions were announced. At the time we all expected everything would be back to normal within a few months but that was not the case and planning for anything with confidence became impossible. David continued training in the hope that eventually he would be able to run a marathon *somewhere*. That opportunity arose on June 27th 2021 when he finished second to John Csongei at the Pichi Richi Marathon.



Photos courtesy David Staehr

(Left) David Staehr at the 2011 Adelaide Marathon where he finished in 2:42:42 (Right) David's family at Portland in 2019 with Robyn and children Jackson, Sophie (being held) and Zoe

David describes his immediate future:

I have reached a point where I feel I have satisfied everything I have wanted to with my running. While some people would think I need to tick off a big event like London, Boston etc, I always get lots of enjoyment out of meeting up with people I have met over my journey at smaller events. There is still a small desire to run 100km, 100miles and even a multi-day race, but the longer lockdowns and state borders persist, the less the training needed seems achievable, knowing it could all amount to nothing as it has so many times in the last 18 months. Getting Adelaide number ten ticked off in 2022 is my main objective, and hopefully having the opportunity to run at events like Shepparton and Portland that have been put on hiatus in 2020 and 2021.

Kirsty Gwynn-Jones

Kirsty Gwynn-Jones has now finished 20 marathons, with a mixture of road and trail events. Her PB is 3:35:34 at the 2015 Boston Marathon and her qualifying performance was 3:38:15 at the 2014 Barossa Marathon in South Australia. Kirsty's inspiration to run a marathon was unusual to say the least and that in itself is inspirational! She and a friend Sally Beggs made a pact to run the Melbourne Marathon in 2013 as a response to an event earlier that year, which gives a clue as to what is revealed below.

In August 2020 Kirsty took part in the Centenary Marathon which was organised to re-enact the running of the first marathon in South Australia on 21 August 1920 over a course in Adelaide which was largely still intact but impossible to use on a Friday except for small numbers running on the footpath. The marathon in 1920 was won by a Victorian, Percy Collins in a time of 3:18:23 and there were three finishers from six starters. In 1931 Kirsty's great-uncle, Ern Jolly from Adelaide won the Victorian Marathon Championship by nearly two miles in a time of 3:02:34 in probably the most atrocious weather conditions ever experienced for a marathon in Australia's history. An accompanying athletics program was cancelled and the only reason the marathon went ahead was because two interstate entrants, Jolly and Stewart Vance from Sydney had made the train journey to Melbourne.

Kirsty finished the Centenary Marathon in 4:43:48 and was the first woman to complete the course, thereby establishing a course record. In honour of her great uncle she wore his 1938 Empire Games tie around her wrist. In keeping with Ern Jolly's Victorian weather experience in 1931, the day in 2020 was also cold and wet with hailstorms, but not of the same ferocity.



Photo courtesy Kirsty Gwynn-Jones



Photo by Peter Kotsoglous

(Left) Kirsty at the 2015 Melbourne Marathon finished in 3:48:05 (Right) Before the start of the Centenary Marathon in 2020 being interviewed by Ian Hill and the ABC. Ern Jolly's Empire Games tie is wrapped around her wrist as she talks about her great-uncle's career documented with photos and race results.

What inspired you to take up running as a sport?

I was inspired to begin running marathons, rather ironically, after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. At this time I was right into the half marathon distance events. A year or so before, I had joined a boot camp and I loved the running component. Most of the bootcampers began extra running sessions in preparation for the Pichi Richi 10km. After that first 10k fun run, I was hooked.

My dear friend Sally rang me when the dreadful news of the bombing broke and of course we were completely outraged that “our sport” had been attacked. Sally said “we are not going to let them win” so we both decided to run our first marathon and attempt to BQ (*qualify for Boston*). Sally ran the Adelaide Marathon in August 2013 (3:38:09). I took a few more months to build up and we both ran Melbourne in October. We kept running and in May 2014 I ran a BQ at the Barossa Marathon (3:38:12). Sally ran a BQ in Adelaide in August (3:42:00), so then we applied to run Boston 2015, having decided if we were both accepted we were going!

How long have you been running marathons?

I ran my first marathon in October 2013 at the age of 41. I’ve now run 20 marathons.

What sport(s) did you do previously?

I played netball and enjoyed bush walking, but I wasn’t really sporty. I just loved getting outside and being in nature.

What attracted you to the Melbourne Marathon?

Initially Melbourne Marathon was attractive because it gave me enough time to build up and allowed me the opportunity to catch up with Victorian based friends and family. Then Sally and I learnt about the Spartans and decided we wanted to become one of them. Every year Sally (who lives in rural Victoria) and I meet up in Melbourne and spend several days soaking the marathon expo and enjoying the parks and restaurants of Melbourne. In 2019 we ticked off Melbourne Marathon number 7. In 2020 we ran the virtual and let’s see what happens in 2021.

What are your career highlights?

My marathon highlight was running Boston Marathon in 2015 with a PB of 3:35:34. I will never forget this experience with the beautiful crowds who supported the runners with homemade snacks and drinks, continuous cheering, playing live and recorded music, endless banners and even beer!

Kirsty added “there were lots of reminders of the bombing and tributes everywhere in shop fronts and especially in the street. We contributed to some of these by adding notes. We were given wrist bands saying ‘*There’s only one*’. Later I bought socks for us saying ‘*Boston Strong*’. We felt very strongly about this sentiment”.



Photos courtesy Kirsty Gwynn-Jones

*(Left) Kirsty finishing the 2015 Boston Marathon in 3:35:34 (Right) Sally, Carlota (from Canada) and Kirsty at the Expo
Sally finished in 3:35:37, also a PB, having started in a different corral and therefore a different time than Kirsty
Carlota finished in 4:09:38, completing all six of the Abbott World Majors*

Kirsty's and Sally's times were only three seconds apart, an amazing coincidence considering they had different starting times, calculated according to their Boston Qualifier performance.

Do you have any further ambitions you are working towards?

One other running ambition is to push myself further having run two 50km trail events and two multi day events of 100kms, I'm now lucky enough to be entered into the UTA 100km in May 2022! I'd also like to increase the number of official half and full marathon events I've completed.

With your running, how are you coping with the Covid19 situation generally?

The current situation made me reassess my goals. In April 2020 I accepted it might be some time before running events would begin again, so I decided to run as many half marathon distances (or more) as I could for the year. So including all distances of 21.1km and above from the start of 2020 I made it to 72. I continued this goal into 2021, thinking that actively working towards as many half marathons as I could for a whole year I could reach 100. As of 15/11/21 I've reached 86 half marathons in 2021.

Is there anything else you would like to include?

I'm also a keen mountain biker who loves to complete long distances. Earlier year, after riding in up to week-long chunks, I finished all sections of the Mawson Trail with my friend Bianca. In 2018 I rode the 500km 'Walk the Yorke Bike Trail' in 4 days.

Stephen Dunn

Stephen Dunn's story of overcoming adversity is truly inspirational. Adopted out as a baby and diagnosed as bipolar he struggled through his childhood but found that running came naturally to him. Later in life Stephen took a great interest in tracking down his biological parents and their families and discovered his mother's surname was Banister, a variation of the famous British miler Roger Bannister who was the first to break the four minute mile in 1954. But that's only half the story – his father was a Walker, namesake of New Zealander John Walker who was the first to break 3:50 for the mile. Stephen says he is always amazed that both his biological parent's names were *knighted* mile runners!

Stephen was inspired to take up running when as a six year old he saw film footage of a barefooted Ethiopian Abebe Bikila winning the 1960 Olympic Marathon in Rome. He knew marathons were for him but had many years to wait until he was eighteen! Having "terrible hand eye coordination" excluded ball sports but distance running presented no problems.

There was one other sport Stephen took on with great success and that was chess. "Yes it *is* a sport" he says! He won some junior tournaments and was a founding member of the Modbury Chess Club. He still plays but "due to Bipolar has difficulty concentrating and memorising openings".

Stephen's first marathon was over the tough Pichi Richi course from Port Augusta to Quorn on 6 July 1986 where he placed 23rd in 3:42:29 at age 19 years. A month later he turned 20 and began the first of five successive and much easier Adelaide Marathons with a time of 3:08:26, followed by his first Melbourne Marathon in 2:58:26 on the Frankston to Melbourne course which he loved. He says "point to point courses are the best as you feel like you are going somewhere and my 2:48 finish (in 1987) was special". Stephen took advantage of the SARRC bus tours to Melbourne and was able to visit relatives while there. He became interested in becoming a Spartan and achieved that in 1996.

In 1988-89 Stephen got serious about his speed and joined Adelaide Harriers where he improved markedly and set all his PBs over every distance. He had a go at a mile event run over a downhill course through the Adelaide CBD and down to the River Torrens and says "sadly it was (only) 4:29" and felt he didn't quite live up to his own expectations given his connection *by name* to the former greats! Stephen says "the downhill really helped"! Although Stephen ran his marathon PB of 2:47:02 at the SA State Championships at West Lakes in 1989 he considers his best ever performance was 2:49:08 at the Pichi Richi Marathon for third place a month later. The elevation gains are 22m and 467m respectively.



Photo courtesy Stephen Dunn

In 1991 Stephen moved to Perth for 20 years and ran in the Perth Marathon nearly every year and has now notched up 30 finishes, with a best time of 2:52:41 for 5th place in 2001. For about two years from 1992-94 Stephen took more than four hours to finish the few marathons he was able to run as he became very ill with the Bipolar disorder, but recovered to run the 1994 Melbourne Marathon in 2:51:39 and from then until 2002 over 30 marathons mostly under 3:30 with some under three hours.

Stephen Dunn at the 2010 Australian Outback Marathon which he finished in 5:20:01

He received trophies for being the first to enter in 2010 and 2011 and also ran it in 2012

Stephen stopped running the Melbourne Marathon after 1996 because it clashed with the Rottneest Marathon which he did 15 times including a time of 2:57:23 in 1997 for third place. He hopes to return to Melbourne to run with his Spartan number.

In 2002 Stephen hit the wall – literally as he ran the Great Wall Marathon in 5:32:42, an event to enjoy while forgetting about speed. He ran many more marathons under four hours until his final one, 3:09:54 in the 2006 Adelaide Marathon. There was one further visit to hospital in 2004 which caused him to miss the Perth Marathon. His last 50 marathons have been in the four, five and six hour range, his most recent and 138th being the 2021 Adelaide Marathon in 5:56:22.

Stephen's career highlights include wins the 2001 Alice Springs Marathon (3:03:12) and the Geraldton Marathon in 2003 (3:07:14) and 2006 (3:26:23). The 2006 win was very emotional for him because it was his 40th birthday and only three weeks after his biological mother had taken her own life. Stephen says "I felt she was with me".

He also won the inaugural Adelaide 50 mile track race (6:47:48) and has finished twelve overseas marathons and ultras including Comrades, London, Rio and the Great Wall of China. In shorter events overseas Stephen came second in Egypt's 1996 Pyramids 8km in 27 minutes and third in Cambodia's 2003 Angkor Wat Half Marathon.

Joining the 100 Marathon Club (as a Centurion) was a "great ambition" and he is aiming for 150 marathons. He is credited with being the second person to have run a marathon in each Australian state and territory after Dennis Cunniffe who was the first.

Other ambitions are to become an Adelaide Marathon Legend at 25 finishes (currently on 20) and setting a new Perth Marathon record for the most finishes which currently stands on 36 (on 30).

Stephen is planning to run on Easter Island as his final overseas marathon before retiring and concentrating on his 5km times where he has a life time PB of 16:25 but at age 55 he will be happy to break 25 minutes!

Stephen says marathons have helped with his Bipolar and provided something to look forward to during the times he was very unwell and struggling with everything. He is appreciative of his parents and says “they have taken me to many local races as due to my illness I’m unable to drive - I would not have been able to reach my goals without them”. Stephen will retire in seven years when he reaches his 37th Perth Marathon. It will leave a void after a 42-year career but will be something wonderful to look back on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Jay Fleming and David Foskey for asking me to write an article about the Adelaide Marathon Warriors. The invitation in an email dated 23 November 2020 read:

Hi Ian

Congratulations on your 35th Adelaide marathon! I noticed that your time was much slower than normal, I hope that this was due to lack of training and the gradual onset of age, and not something more serious.

Mike Peters of Ausrunning, having read my article re London Marathon Ever Presents in the recent Spartans newsletter, emailed to remind me of the Warriors. My apologies for not mentioning them but I did have overseas events in mind. Would you like to write something to include in our next newsletter, please? If you don't, I will write an article using your spreadsheet as the main source.

Regards, David

I think David had in mind just two or three pages of basic facts and figures but I knew there was a weird and wonderful story just bursting to be told and accepted the invitation with enthusiasm. I’m not one to do things by half-measure and therefore David was presented with an 8-page saga, and that was just the beginning! We did trim the second part and postponed the third and final part until there was more certainty about the fate both the Melbourne and Adelaide Marathons this year. I think the interviews with three people dedicated to the sport of marathon running and the Spartan concept combined with a strong ambition to make their mark (in three very different ways) finishes the series of articles nicely.

Thanks to David Staehr, Kirsty Gwynn-Jones and Stephen Dunn for your participation and willingness to respond to my request for further information. I know you will achieve your stated goals sooner or later.

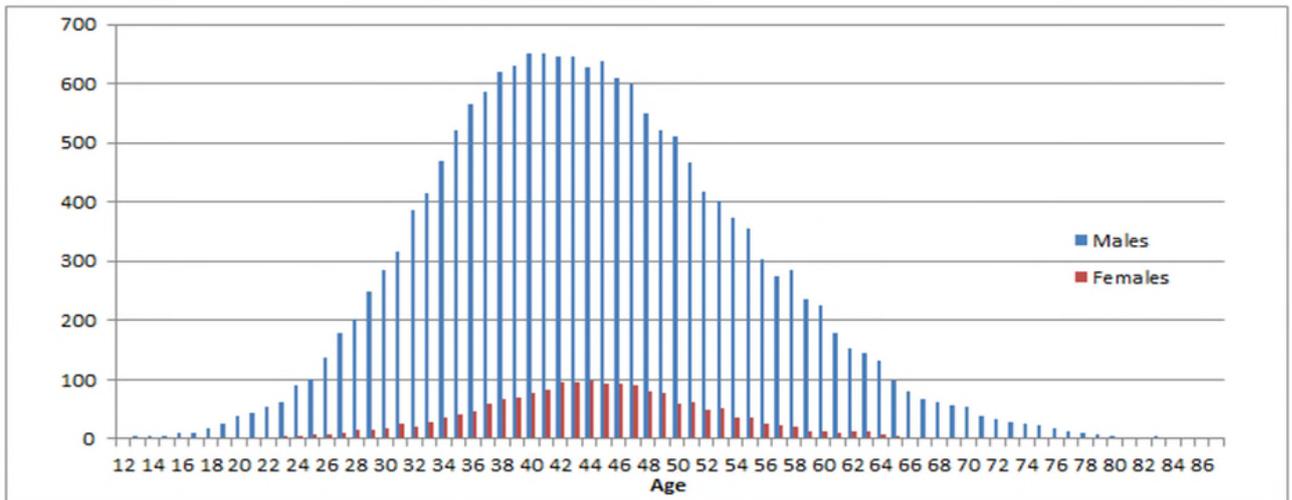
The following resources were invaluable – ausrunning.net and the 100 Marathon Club in compiling the table on page 2 and locating actual marathon times to go with statements made in the interviews. Several photos from all three parts came from the (unofficial) Pichi Richi Marathon Facebook group managed by Peter Kotsoglous, a Warrior with 19 Adelaide finishes and 17 at Pichi Richi. It is a little known fact that during 14 of the 15 years between 1997 and 2011 Pichi Richi was the *only* other marathon to be held in SA which is one reason why it is mentioned so often in this article.

Finally my thanks to Michael Peters for his suggestion to David and I must reveal that David’s musing about my slow time was, unfortunately the result of an ankle injury I sustained during the Centenary Marathon and stubbornly carried over to the Adelaide Marathon four weeks later!

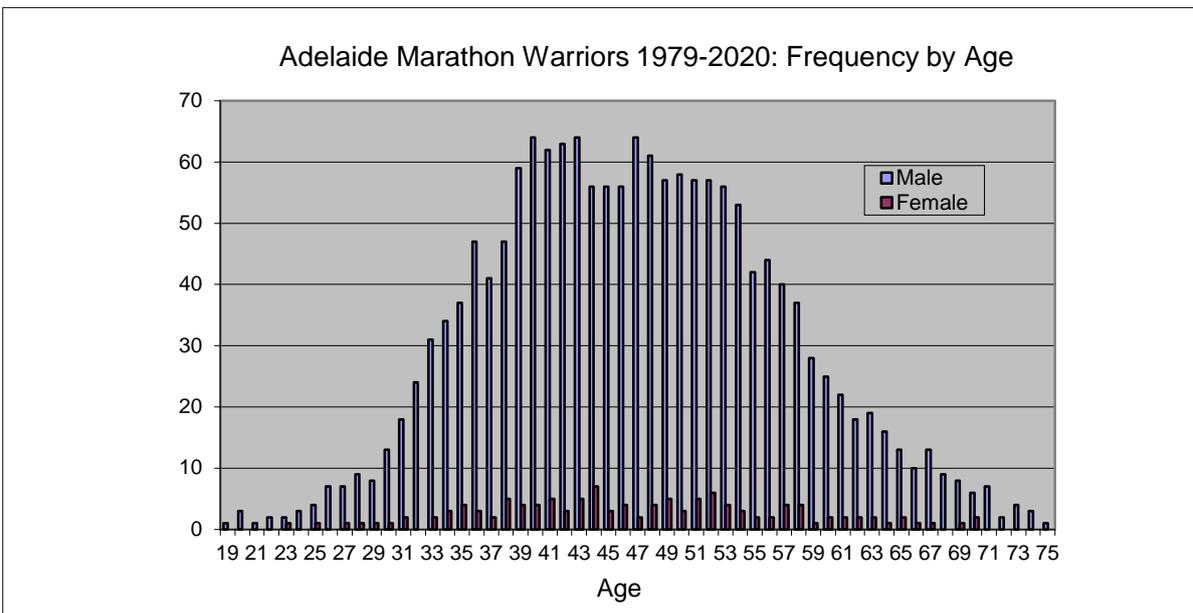
APPENDIX

The dimensions of the following graphs of frequency by age of *all* marathons finished by Spartans and Warriors have been adjusted so that each is *visually* comparable with the other bearing in mind the Spartans comprise more than ten times as many data points. Ages line up reasonably well.

Melbourne Marathon Spartans 1978-2019: Frequency by Age



Adelaide Marathon Warriors 1979-2020: Frequency by Age



Both graphs comprise data over a 42 year time span. The Spartans' curves for both men and women form a symmetrical normal distribution with some slight skewing at the older end. The Warriors' graph *looks* like a ten percent sample of the Spartans where there are simply not enough data points to form the same smooth distribution! The slightly twin-peaked aspect is an artefact of this. Nevertheless the Warriors do show a distinctly older peak of around 45 years for men compared to 40 years for the Spartans. From the sparse data distribution the Warrior women appear to be more evenly spread and no age peak is apparent. No Warriors ran the marathon as a child or teenager under 18 years.