

Moloney's Memories

When Mike Moloney saw the front cover of the October edition of *Modern Athlete*, he immediately recognised the photograph in the background as the start of the 1946 Jackie Gibson Marathon, with his father, Gerald, in the small group of runners. That photograph took him back to the good old days of South African running, just after the Second World War, when long distance runners were still considered a bit crazy and the Comrades Marathon was only run by a handful of hardy characters. He decided to share the trip down memory lane with us.

At the cessation of hostilities in 1945, returning ex-servicemen began to pick up their lives, which had been interrupted by six years of war. Most were demobilised with a brown double-breasted suit, five pounds Stirling and very little else. Jobs had to be found, families regrouped and relationships restarted. Some found it easier than others, but for most, it was a time of financial struggle in an economy suddenly filled with job seekers.

My father was one of these men. A member of the South African Air Force in the Abyssinian and North African Campaigns, he was demobilised in poor health, a victim of malaria and the many diseases particular to Libya and Egypt, where he and the Afrika Korps chased each other backwards and forwards across the Western Desert. When his squadron was deployed to Italy, he spent many months in recovery in Palestine before being returned

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MIKE MOLONEY SECONDED BY HIS WIFE IN THE 1976 CALLIES 25KM IN GERMISTON.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Moloney was born in 1942 and like his father, ran for Germiston Callies Harriers, from 1972 to 1998. He ran his first Comrades in 1974 and went on to finish his tenth and final run in 1988, being awarded the permanent Green Number 2955. He did five 'up' and five 'down' runs and won ten bronze medals, with a best finishing time of 8:24 in 1976 – a time which would have given him tenth place in 1950 and beaten his father's time that year by 13 minutes. In 1988, he also represented South Africa in the World Veteran Championships in Israel.

to South Africa. Back home, he was lucky enough to get his pre-war job back, albeit at a very poor salary, a common problem with ex-servicemen at the time. While 'up North', the Union government had contributed to the family's living expenses, which included the house in which we lived, and we were able to get going again in civilian life.

My father had been a member of Germiston Callies before the war and, as a track athlete, had specialised in the mile and three-mile events. As a miler, he was running times around 4:09, a few seconds outside the World Record, which was set at 4:06.4 by Sydney Wooderson of the United Kingdom. Callies had all but closed down during the war so, with Fred Morrison and Cecil McLean, he set about getting the club back on its feet.

They ran everything from one-mile to marathon, as there were so few members, but the club slowly began to grow. Having lost the speed which had brought him world-class times before the war, he began concentrating on longer distances and, eventually, the Comrades Marathon.

Apart from a few runners who excelled at long distances, the Callies runners ran cross-country in the winter and track in the summer, with the odd marathon when it came up. They did no special training for the long road races and got by on talent and the 'Corpse Reviver', a drink devised by Wally Hayward, Alan Ferguson and the rest of the 'hard boys' of athletics. It was a mixture of lemon squash, castor sugar, salt and other secret ingredients favoured by each individual runner. Looking at it now with the benefit of 50 years of research and not-so-subtle marketing, it seems a little crude, but it worked pretty well then in the absence of any commercial offerings.

No one was commercially interested in the few marathon runners who were considered to be completely daft by the general public. However, the Comrades Marathon was reasonably well-known and the runners held in quite high regard. I was 'the boy' in primary school, as "his dad runs Comrades!" After each Comrades, I'd get quite a few, "How did your father do?" queries from classmates. Well, to use a colloquialism, he did pretty damn good.

FIRST GOLD

My father's first run was in 1947, but I don't remember much about it – I was six years old, so that's not surprising. The details have been gleaned from various sources and discussions with people who were involved, so inaccuracies, for which I don't apologise, may have crept in. Of the 47 entries, only 23 would be classified as finishers. With small fields like this, it was possible for a runner to run for hours without seeing another competitor. The only link a runner had with the race was the public at the side of the road, of which there were few, and his second.



GEORGE BURDETT (11) AND GERALD MOLONEY (9) RUNNING THE 1948 COMRADES MARATHON.

No marshals, except at the start and the finish, no seconding tables, no distance markers, just the endless undulating road ahead, stretching on and on. Even the leader could have run much of the race alone.

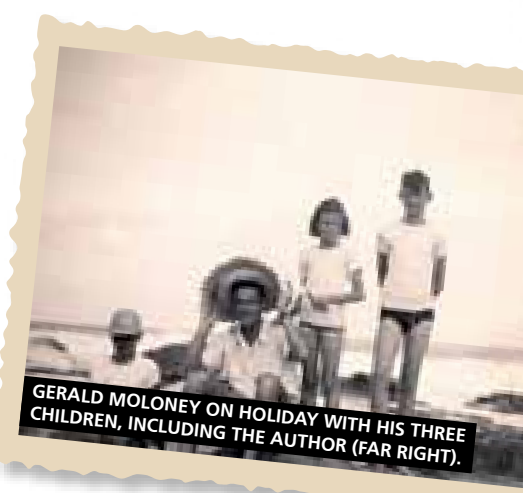
In a race like Comrades in the early days, the role of the second could not be overemphasised. A good second would support the runner throughout the race, not only with water and Corpse Reviver, but also morally and physically. It meant that seconds sometimes had to run quite long distances with the runner and then back to the car, drive past the runner and wait for him to come along about half an hour later. He had to help the runner through bad patches and keep going all day. Without seconds, no runner could hope for a trouble-free run, let alone to do well.

The 1947 race was a 'down' run, the first in eight years. Hardy Ballington dominated from early on and my dad went through Drummond in 11th place, running with his Callies team mates Carl Pace and Eddie

Hofmeyr. As members of the Callies Gunga Din team, they ran together for 60km before Hofmeyr pulled away to finish third behind winner Ballington, with Reg Allison the second gold. Next came LA Nel of Durban and then my dad in fifth place for the first of his gold medals. Along with Hofmeyr, Pace and Fred Morrison in eighth place, the Callies team scooped the coveted Gunga Din Trophy, which stood in our lounge for three months, shared by the four team members. Now that doesn't happen these days! Callies had done extremely well winning the Gunga Din Trophy so soon after being re-established and the mood among the members was buoyant.

PEDAL POWER

By now, we had moved from our house in Primrose to a mine house a hundred metres or so from Geldenhuis railway station. My dad was still working at the Rose Deep Mine between Primrose and Germiston, and not owning a car, he had no option but to ride to work on his 'trapfiets'. On with the bicycle clips, sports jacket buttoned up, and he'd be off at the crack of dawn to get to work by eight o'clock. His bike was nothing like the



GERALD MOLONEY ON HOLIDAY WITH HIS THREE CHILDREN, INCLUDING THE AUTHOR (FAR RIGHT).

current offerings. No lightweight frames with adjustable suspension and disc brakes. No Shimano multi-speed hubs, just a solid, 29-inch, single speed bicycle with a saddle and handlebars seemingly fabricated from cast iron tubing filled with lead. To brake, you turned the pedals backwards. It was really hard work.

I started school at the beginning of 1948. I was enrolled at Primrose English Medium Primary School, which meant that my dad had to drop me off at school. Not having a car meant it had to be done on the bicycle.



MIKE MOLONEY RUNNING HIS FIRST COMRADES IN 1974, FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS.

At seven in the morning, my dad would arrange a pillow on the crossbar, I'd climb on and we'd be on our way. A short dirt section and we'd be on tar, uphill all the way to the school in Primrose. By the time we got to school, my bum was deeply grooved by the unrelenting crossbar, which had, by some miracle, forced its way through the pillow. My dad then had to ride all the way back to the Rose Deep Mine offices to start his day's work.

At lunchtime, he'd have to ride back to school, pick me up and ride back home again. Fortunately, it was now mostly downhill but I was always relieved to hear the gravel of the dirt road crunching under the tyres. For me, it meant that the ordeal was over, but for my dad, it was only half done. He still had to ride back to work and all the way back home at the end of the day. All in all, he rode 180km in the six days of his work week. This probably made him one of the first cross-trainers in South Africa and must have helped boost his fitness. A lot of people rode bicycles after the war, as few of them could afford cars.

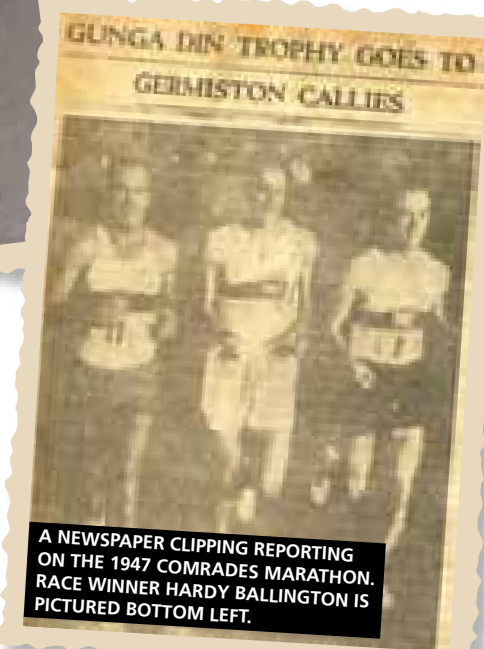
When it rained, my dad had to enrol the help of his friend, Ross Baird, who had an MG TC, to take me home from school. Ross had been an armoured car commander in North Africa. His war ended when an enemy shell penetrated the armour and bounced around the interior, killing his crew and taking his right elbow, part of his hand and three of his fingers before running out of energy. Three of us jammed into the tiny MG with rain leaking through holes in the canvas top was almost as much of an ordeal



GERALD MOLONEY IN UNIFORM 'UP NORTH'.

toll on the runners, with many falling by the wayside. As they approached Maritzburg, my dad lost sight of Burdett and without the companionship, his pace started to slow. With about a mile to go, he spotted Burdett's second at the roadside and asked how George was doing. "Oh, George has finished", he said.

// The Callies team scooped the coveted Gunga Din Trophy, which stood in our lounge for three months, shared by the four team members. Now that doesn't happen these days. //



A NEWSPAPER CLIPPING REPORTING ON THE 1947 COMRADES MARATHON. RACE WINNER HARDY BALLINGTON IS PICTURED BOTTOM LEFT.

could be third place. Unfortunately, the frantic encouragement of the large crowd in the stadium failed to help him past Burdett and he finished two seconds behind in a close fourth.

Reg Allison, the pre-race favourite, didn't win. Old-timer and 1938 winner, WER Savage did, with Allison second, George Burdett third and my dad fourth. And that was it. Fourth spot for his second gold medal and his name on the Gunga Din Trophy again, giving Callies their second team win in as many years. All in all a sterling effort all round.

LONG ROAD

The Comrades experience in the 40s was very different to today. It wasn't easy to get time off work and runners needing to travel to the race had to 'make a plan'. As most people worked on Saturday mornings as a matter of course, there wasn't much weekend time for a trip to Durbs and back. Staying in hotels was out of reach financially for most runners and accepting assistance or sponsorship was death to anyone's sporting aspirations, Wally Hayward being the best-known sufferer of the amateurism rule.

as the bicycle ride, but at least it was quick.

SPRINT FINISH

The 1948 Comrades was an 'up' run and the Callies team was expected to do well again. My dad was tipped to give the favourite, 21-year-old Reg Allison, some competition. 45 runners lined up at the start and my dad ran all the way to Camperdown with team mate George Burdett, who later won the Jackie Gibson Marathon and the Pieter Korkie Ultra Marathon. As they left Camperdown, George felt strong and pulled away. The heat was incredible and was taking its

My dad hadn't planned to run in 1949 as he was concentrating on cross-country and six-mile track races. These plans fell apart when, three weeks before Comrades, a knock on the door revealed Fred Morrison in a mild panic. One of the Callies team members had pulled out and the team was short of a runner good enough to contend for the Gunga Din. Fred could be very persuasive and, for the next three weeks, he dragged my dad mile after mile around the hills of Bedfordview. Fred managed to get him entered and, on top of all this, made him team captain.

On the weekend of the race, my dad got home from work on Saturday at one-thirty, had a hasty lunch and packed his running shorts, Callies vest and canvas takkies in a small brown suitcase he used to carry his sports gear in. Add a towel, toothbrush and toothpaste and he was ready for Comrades. At three, Fred, who wasn't running that year, arrived in his 1948 Hudson with three other team members, loaded up my dad and headed for Pietermaritzburg, a journey of ten hours in those pre-free-way days. Had it been an 'up' run, the trip would have taken another hour and a half, winding down the Comrades route in the dark to the start in Durban.

They arrived at one o'clock the morning of the race and tried to get a few hours of sleep, jammed five in the car, before lining up at the start at six on Sunday morning. Despite all the drama and lack of training, my dad had a great run, one of those blunders that come far too infrequently, when you just don't get tired. Apart from an hour-long dice with Morris Alexander for

Tired and extremely hot, my dad decided to stop at a garage and have a splashdown at the tap. He knew he was well ahead of the next runner and couldn't be caught. A minute or so later, he was on the road again and as he entered the stadium, to his surprise, he saw George staggering towards the finish line, totally exhausted. He accelerated to as close to a sprint as anyone can manage at the end of Comrades and rapidly closed the gap to what

the cuckoo clock, the prize for fourth place, which Alexander had been instructed by his wife to win, he had an uneventful run. He looked so good after a wash and change that he was asked why he didn't run. Perhaps there's some benefit to being undertrained...

The race was won by Reg Allison, the previous year's runner-up, with J Ballington second, Alan Ferguson third, Alexander fourth and my dad fifth. Callies won the team prize again and the Gunga Din Shield stood in our lounge for another three months, sadly for the last time.

After the prizegiving, they jammed themselves back into the Hudson and set off into the sunset for another ten hours driving through the night, four stiff, cramping runners trying desperately to find a comfortable position in the car. They arrived back on the Reef at five on Monday morning without any sleep, just in time to stagger off to work. Marathon runners have always been a tough bunch, considered the hard men of athletics, but in those frugal post-war times, they had to be just that much tougher. Today's runners take for granted being able to take a few days leave, spend them in a hotel with the family and run Comrades with seconding tables every few kilometers. Comrades will always be tough, no matter how you run it.

SUPER-DAD

In 1950, my dad was running track and cross-country in the winter. He also ran whatever marathon came up, but it was

GERALD MOLONEY'S COMRADES RECORD

1947	Down	7:59:07	Gold
1948	Up	7:42:45	Gold
1949	Down	7:22:19	Gold
1950	Up	8:37:59	Silver

He always ran with the race number 9 in Comrades, but did not qualify to keep it as a permanent number, since he only ran four times. The number was subsequently awarded to another Germiston Callies runner, five-time winner Jackie Mekler, who used it for the first time in 1952.

mostly track and cross-country. For this, his training was running around the hills of Bedfordview a few times a week. In February, his leave came up and we planned to go on holiday to East London, where he had spent much of his youth. The SA Track Championships were being held in Bloemfontein at the same time and he had entered to run the six-mile race. We were stopping overnight in Bloem anyway, so why not have a go at the SA Championships?

My Dad had by now managed to buy a car. It was a 1948 Dodge Special Deluxe bought from Sidney Clow in Germiston. He'd ordered it in 1948 and had to wait a year for it as there was a long waiting list and, as can be imagined, it changed our lives.

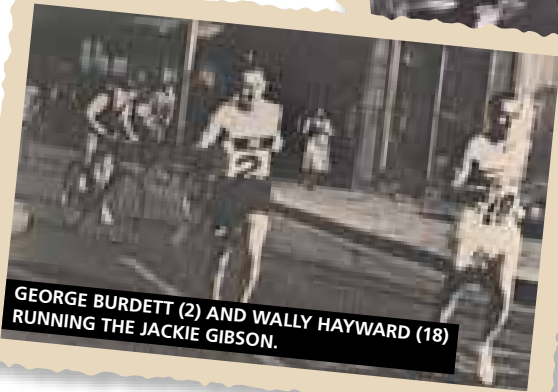
We loaded our holiday 'gereedskap' into the boot and headed for Bloem and the SA Champs. I don't remember the trip or the holiday, but I clearly remember sitting in the stands watching the race. I was sure he was going to win – he was my dad, after all. There were about 15 runners in the field and they ran the 24 laps in the blistering heat, in takkies and on a hard, cinder surface. My dad finished in the middle of the field, which was pretty good, considering his best years were behind him. Sadly, the speed that had taken him to within seconds of the world one-mile record was gone.

I don't remember him ever doing any speed training. The fartlek training system was just taking hold but coaches were unheard of for even top athletes like my dad. Runners just did what they thought was best for them, based on what they'd read about in imported publications or what they'd heard from runners competing overseas.

LAST RUN

Soon Comrades came along and 'us kids' stayed with my grandmother while ma and pa trundled off to Durban in the blue Dodge. My mother didn't drive and a second had been arranged for my dad. The poor bloke didn't know what he was in for. He reported for duty in a brown suit and stout brogues, believing he was to drive the car and, standing on the side of the road, hand my dad a drink every now and then. Well, he was right about driving the car.

It was an 'up' run, attracting a field of 29 runners. A notable entrant was veteran Wally Hayward, back in the race after



GEORGE BURDETT (2) AND WALLY HAYWARD (18) RUNNING THE JACKIE GIBSON.

his win at 21 in 1930, to begin a remarkable comeback. But Wally was a remarkable person, as anyone familiar with South African distance running will know. Endowed with exceptional talent and a physique seemingly unaffected by age, he was a quiet, unassuming and modest man, always approachable and willing to assist anyone who asked for his help.

The race was run in hot and windy conditions, making the going tough. Wally was in the lead at Hillcrest and, battling a strong headwind, broke the tape in Maritzburg in 6:46, only the fifth runner to break seven hours for the up run. My dad came in 11th, the first time outside the gold medal positions, after having run most of the way with the Callies Gunga Din team. Callies lost the Gunga Din to Collegians and five years would pass before they won it again. My dad's second ended the day in much worse condition than the runners, having run with the Callies team at race pace at least ten times while handing out drinks, which, for a non-runner, was a pretty good effort.

It was my dad's last Comrades and he slowly withdrew from competitive athletics. He maintained his association with Callies for many years while tennis became his competitive sport. Never one to blow his own trumpet, he rarely spoke about his achievements. When we went to the coast on holiday and got to the last part, which was the Comrades course, he'd say, "Still running," once or twice and that was it. Now whenever I drive between Maritzburg and Durban, I think of that. Still running. //A

PUTTING NAMES TO FACES

When Mike Moloney saw his father Gerald on the cover of the October edition of Modern Athlete, he immediately wrote to us to tell us the who's who of that line-up for the start of the 1946 Jackie Gibson Marathon.

- 1 Carl Pace, a member of the 1947 Callies Gunga Din winning team.
- 2 Sarel Saayman. He had a war injury and ran with a homemade wire ankle support and a handful of spares.
- 3 Solly Bezuidenhout.
- 4 Johannes Coleman, Comrades winner in 1937 and 1939.
- 5 George Burdett, winner of the Korkie and Gibson Marathons, and second in this race to Wally Hayward.
- 6 Arthur Hampton.
- 7 Fred Morrison, Callies post-war founder and member of Gunga Din winning team in 1947.
- 8 Allan Ferguson, sixth in this race and still running today, age 88!
- 9 Unknown.
- 10 Eddie Hofmeyr, member of Callies Gunga Din winning team in 1947 and nephew of wartime Cabinet Minister JH Hofmeyr. He later became a noted Test Match rugby referee.
- 11 Liege Boule, third highest Comrades finishes (39 medals).
- 12 Wally Hayward. At the time, he was running for Wanderers and later changed to Callies. He lived near Fred Morrison, who could be very persuasive.
- 13 Gerald Moloney, my dad, founder of post-war Callies and member of the Gunga Din winning team in 1947.
- 14 Issy Mark.
- 15 George Luckin.
- 16 Gordon Morrison, brother of Fred and father of Dennis Morrison who 'owned' the Korkie in the 70s, winning it five times.
- 17 Nick van Deventer.
- 18 Pat Patricinio.
- 19 The starter with the pistol is Ian Balfour, SABC sports commentator, mainly rugby and athletics.

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