

The Gunner Shaw Story – A Legend Never Dies

Have you ever wondered the impact that Gunner Shaw has infused within the Victoria running community? In 1978 he initiated and founded the Prairie Inn Harriers Running Club, one of the largest and most successful athletic associations in Canada. In 1980, he initiated, founded and ran the first Harriers Pioneer 8K Road Race, a popular event that celebrated its 41st anniversary this year. Also, in 1980, he initiated, founded and ran the first Royal Victoria Marathon, an event that celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2019 and unfortunately the 2020 race was cancelled due to Covid-19. Gunner has successfully introduced and encouraged hundreds of people to the simple joy of running, all of whom became part of his army of new personal friends. Few people realize the importance and longevity that he has quietly offered to Victoria's running population.

His real name is Steven Bruce Shaw and he was born in Esquimalt in 1946. I went to school with "Gun" starting at Lampson Street Elementary School, then on to Esquimalt Junior High and finally graduating from Esquimalt Senior Secondary. He was one year ahead of me graduating with the 1964 class while I graduated in 1965. The 1960's were renowned for the best cars ever manufactured and the best music recorded in the world - '57 Chevys, Corvette Stingrays, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, the Beatles, the Stones and many more classic cars and singers.

We were both active in all sports including baseball, basketball, badminton, bowling, softball and running. Gun would often win the distance races while I would win the sack races at school and I'd try to keep up with him on the trails in "Esquimalt Transfer Park" both with running and racing our one-speed bikes on a hand-made dirt track in the forest near Colville Road where he lived.

He got his nickname of "Gunner" from basketball where he liked to shoot. He and his brother, David, would play one-on-one for an entire weekend at an outdoor court and, after school, the janitor would finally have to kick Gunner out of the gymnasium at 5:00 pm after he'd spent 2 hours of shooting hoops by himself every night.

Gunner and I played on the same Little League all-star baseball team in 1957 when I was 10 years old and he was 11; the team was primarily comprised of 12-year-olds so we were the youngest two kids. Gun was our left-handed pitcher and I was the shortstop and the team advanced to the District finals. Over the years we played on the same basketball and softball teams and ran many, many miles together on the trails of Esquimalt and Thetis Lake Park.

He was tragically killed in a car accident on March 29, 1984 when his car went off the road and hit a large tree at the corner of Stelly's Cross Road and West Saanich Road while driving home from work. Gunner fell asleep at the wheel after a late shift overnight as a pressman at the Times Colonist newspaper where he had worked for 20 years since graduating from Esquimalt High.

In 1972, Gunner began his serious, high-mileage running before the "running boom" hit Victoria. He could frequently be seen running with his two Irish setters, Sean and Streusel, while running along the Pat Bay Highway with "his boys" that ran everywhere with him including regular Saturday morning trail runs at Thetis Lake Park with 5 other friends.

He had nicknames for everyone such as "Mother Marshall", "Alfred the Rat", "Stud Palfrey", The Whimp", "The Frog" and many more always perfectly fitting their description or personality.

To Gun, I was “The Reider” or “The Bobber” and feeling quite privileged to have two of Gunner’s nicknames, rather than just one. Gunner had an incredible memory for names, places and people. My first marathon was in Seaside, Oregon in 1979. We went out for dinner the night before the race and he promptly introduced all 24 people at the table by name, some of which were from other cities and he had just met them during a training run earlier in the day.

The small act of running was dear to Gunner’s heart and he encouraged many people to run and always ran at their pace regardless of how fast or how slow it was. Employees at the Times Colonist, like John McKay, and at the nearby Victoria Fire Department, like Doug Gregory and Big Jimmy Meadows, took up the sport and did many runs with Gunner in the early mornings after work. The interest spread throughout the Fire Department to where they started their own running club and they topped the corporate division at the Vancouver Island Road Relay and at the Haney to Harrison Hot Springs Road Relay.

Gunner ran 36 marathons between 1970 and 1980 and his 2:20:13 in 1974 would have been described as world-class 10 years earlier. It was one of his best marathons; it was the Canadian Championship held in St. John’s, Newfoundland, on a snowy day. His personal best 10K time was 32:30 but, on this day during the marathon in the pouring rain and snow, he ran a 10K split time of 30:06 between the 15 and 21-mile markers, more than 2 minutes faster than his P.B. He had guts! Gunner’s personal best marathon time was 2:19:01; in today’s standards this is very respectable and quite difficult to attain for most Canadian high-performance runners.

He was a legend. At Gunner’s funeral service at St. Paul’s Church in Esquimalt, one of his best training partners, Andre “The Frog” Gerard, opened the ceremony of life with these words:

Bruce "Gunner" Shaw is gone. With his death in a car accident March 29, 1984 we've lost more than just a friend. We've lost a legend. We've lost a man who lived hard and who did everything to the fullest. We've lost an all too rare and vital individual who could charm and bully us into giving life its full value. With Bruce, there were no half measures. He was a perfectionist. You had to enjoy more. You had to feel more. You had to do more.

Andre’s full tribute can be read by visiting the Prairie Inn Harriers website pih.bc.ca and selecting “Race” and then “Gunner Shaw – The Man”. At the ceremony, it brought tears to the majority of Gun’s hundreds of friends that overflowed the church and filled the entire parking lot.

Gunner started our running club in 1978 after a run through Central Saanich cow pastures and trails with Alex “Mother” Marshall and Robin “Recorder” Pearson. When the three finished, they stopped by at the Prairie Inn Neighbourhood Pub to clean off the mud and rehydrate. Gun suggested that they start a running club and they should look for a sponsor to help with start-up fees. The pub owner, Dave Duncan, overheard the discussion while he was serving at the bar and asked, “How much?” Gunner replied, “A hundred bucks for stationery and a club logo for new uniforms.” Dave said, “I’m good for a hundred”, and that day in 1978 the Prairie Inn Hash House Harriers Running Club was born with Gunner as President, Alex as Treasurer and Robin as Recording Secretary. “Hash House” was dropped from the club name in 1980.

The first meeting of the Prairie Inn Harriers was held at Gunner’s house on May 20, 1978 and, besides the three founding fathers, Gunner Shaw, Mother Marshall and Recorder Pearson, new

members included John "Say Hey" McKay, Mike "Creaky" Creery and Chris "GP" Garrett-Petts. The second meeting was held at the Victoria Press building on September 12, 1978 and the club had grown to 11 members with new attendees Jack Farrell, Ray Baillie, Paul Bowler, Garth Ball and myself. In the second year, 1979, the Harriers boasted 53 members complete with a phoning list to deliver announcements on upcoming events. New members included Tom Michell, Andre Gerard, Vladimir Pomaizl, Rintje Raap, David Weicker, Don Gillman, Bob Cook and Dick Palfrey just to name a few key individuals, all of which were excellent runners.

By the third year, 1980, the club had grown to 92 members and PIH adopted a new motto, "Don't drive yourself to drink, run to drink". The club meeting minutes warned runners, "If you run in front of a car, you will become tired. If you run behind a car, you will become exhausted". Also, in 1980, Gunner founded the Pioneer 8K in Central Saanich and the Royal Victoria Marathon. He placed 4th at Pioneer in 24:06 and 4th of 681 finishers at the Marathon in 2:33:36.

Today, over 4 decades later, our Harriers database includes 1,364 names since Sylvan Smyth designed the software to capture addresses, phone numbers, birth dates and email addresses for the entire membership from 2003 onward to 2020. We regularly have between 250 and 300 active members annually and it is estimated that well over 1,500 runners were club members including the pre-computer runners that joined PIH between 1978 and 2002 prior to Sylvan's database. Many of the early members have long since come and gone.

Of the 1,500 past and present members, 3 are still active and participating in club activities after joining Gunner, Alex and Robin in 1978. They include John McKay, Garth Ball and myself and more recently several provincial, national and world-class runners have worn our club's uniform. These athletes include Lori Bowden, Lucy Smith, Natasha Wodak, Jon Brown, Simon Whitfield, Kelvin Broad and phenomenal master runners Maurice Tarrant and Rosamund Dashwood, both of whom have set numerous National age category records. At 90 years old, Maurice just set his remarkable 76th Canadian age class record in January at the 2020 Harriers Pioneer 8K and at the club 2020 Harriers Awards Dinner he received a special plaque for his "Canadian Record Achievement Award". We sincerely thank you, Gunner, for the foresight and leadership to start a long and endless run for the Prairie Inn Harriers Running Club, one of the most successful and innovative clubs in British Columbia for runners of all ages and all abilities from kids to vets and from joggers to Olympians.

After Gunner's passing in 1984, Alex Marshall and I recommended that our club set up a bursary in Gunner's honour and we initiated the first annual Gunner Shaw Cross Country Memorial race at Thetis Lake Park in 1985 to raise funds for the new bursary in athletics at the University of Victoria. Several journalists at the Times Colonist including Max Low, Gorde Hunter, Jim Gibson, Gordon Stewart, Ernie Fedoruk and Jim Reid wrote columns on their friendship with Gunner while he was working at the press. They were saddened by his loss.

For the first memorial Gunner Shaw race, I would act as Race Director while Alex would handle communications and, on race day, Alex would do what he does best – Mother Marshall would marshal at the famous fuddle-duddle puddle, midway through the challenging 10K course. The historic event had an unexpected weather setback in the first year as, two days before the race, Victoria received two feet of snow, paralyzing most local drivers and runners. Times Colonist sports writer, Max Low, called me and said he would like to let his readers know if the race is

being cancelled due to the heavy snowfall. I replied, "Absolutely not, this race is for Gunner and, if he was here today, he would not consider cancelling it under any circumstances!" Gunner was a pure character runner. The sports headline by Max one day before the race was *Weekend Cross Country Race a Definite Go in the Snow*.

To set up the course in 1985, the inaugural year, a fearless five Harriers team comprised of Alex Marshall, Jack Farrell, Dan Harlow, Doug Gregory and myself ran the full course the day before the race. Not a single visitor at Thetis Lake Park had attempted to walk or run in the two feet of snow over the past 2 days. Our race marking team used no flagging whatsoever and no flour arrows as flour is white and snow is white. Jack Farrell was a crusty old Scottish runner and he was adamant about winning the master's title the following day. We caught him running off course on an incorrect trail then running out backwards so that his footprints would all be facing in the same direction. He was deliberately trying to fool other masters by sending them the wrong way to lure them off course! This was just one of many of Jack's racing tactics. By the way, Jack did win the master's division at the first Gunner Shaw race in 43:15 as he managed to lure two of his PIH team mates, Dan Harlow and Mike Ellis, to go off course while they were leading and Dan and Mike had to settle for second and third places in 43:50 and 43:58 as they both lost a minute or two backtracking from Jack's bogus footsteps on the wrong trails.

On race day, I instructed the 69 runners just to follow the footprints in the snow as there were no other markings or course marshals. Tom Michell, 36:54, and Andria Schreiner, 49:53, emerged as the male and female race champions; not a bad effort for Tom as we all would have a difficult time running 36 minutes for 10K on the trails without two feet of snow to contend with! The headline for the race in the Times Colonist the next morning was *Michell and Schreiner Mush Through Snow to Victory*. Several other headlines in the TC and other local newspapers have described the race over the first decade including:

It Made for a Great Picture but Runners Disturbed Some Coho *Campbell Wades to Victory*
Running Fun in the Mud *A Wet and Wonderful Finish* *Making a Splash in a Dash*
Running for Gunner Cross Country Style *Reid's a Winning Name in Shaw Memorial Race*

I am particularly fond of the 1988 report about the Reids winning as Rob Reid and Cynthia Reid were the race champions while Bob Reid and Susan Reid (my wife) were the first masters to finish. None of the four Reids, besides Susan and I, are related to each other but it made for a great TC headline and race report.

Financially, the first Gunner Shaw Memorial Cross Country race was a complete success for, despite the smaller "snow attendance field", \$5,000 was raised from entry fees and bursary donations by Gunner's family and friends. Within the next five years our club had raised another \$5,000 to bring the fund to \$10,000 and the Harriers Foundation was born in 1985. Today, the balance of the Gunner Shaw Bursary is \$26,400 and \$1,000 is given to 3 students.

The criteria set by UVic's Director of Student Financial Services for the bursary is as follows: *The Gunner Shaw Memorial Bursary, an award of approximately \$1,000 annually is made on the basis of financial need and academic performance to a Vancouver Island resident entering the first year of the Physical Education program. Selection of the recipient will be made by the Senate Committee on Awards upon recommendation of the Faculty of Education.*

The history of the Gunner Shaw Classic over the 35 years is very colourful and unique. In the first race, 1985, it was the “Year of the Snow” where 69 hardy runners showed up to toe the line. Course blazers were picking up their dogs and throwing them ahead to break the ice on the frozen puddles, and as mentioned earlier, there were only footprints for the participants to follow with no pink surveyor’s flagging, flour arrows, signage or course marshals, yet every runner managed to find their way to the finish line by simply following our footprints in the snow.

The second race, 1986, it was the “Year of the Frost” when the temperature was 6 degrees below zero. Mike Creery, one of the leading runners, slipped off a frosty bridge and fell into the freezing cold lake and, in doing so, he lost his glasses and snapped the elastic holding up his shorts which were now around his ankles. Unfortunately, Mike had to hold his shorts up for the remaining 4 miles while running half-blind and he lost 16 positions to finish in 20th place before he left for home while sobbing and whining about his experience. Believe it or not, one of the following runners spotted a shiny object under the slippery bridge and jumped into the lake to recover a pair of glasses which he turned in to “Mother” at the finish line and they were returned to Mike one week later. One of our Junior members, Chad DePol, fell while half way through the large puddle at about the half way point in the race and cut his knee badly on some sharp rocks. He got up and finished the final 5 kilometres by passing 5 runners to place 5th overall and win the junior age category before being rushed off to the nearest hospital for 16 stitches to close his large gash. Gunner would have been proud of Chad’s courage and his determination.

The third race, 1987, it was the “Year of the Dry Spell” where Dave Campbell set a course record of 28:59 which may never be broken. Alex and I were completely disgusted that there was so little water to add to the runners’ enjoyment as most competitors were able to skirt around the edge of the fuddle-duddle puddle, usually 3 feet deep, without even getting their socks wet! This was unacceptable as it didn’t add to the “character” of the race course. If it ever happened again, we would phone the View Royal Fire Department to fill the puddle one day before the event. Fortunately, rain has greeted us every year except 1987 and we have been able to offer a wet and enjoyable fall cross country challenge to everyone.

The fourth race, 1988, it was the “Year of the Lost Runners” where a few of the competitors were looking down at their feet instead of looking up at the flagging marking the race course. Tom Johnston left the course in third place overall with less than one minute to go to the finish line for him. He mistakenly climbed to the Rock Cairn and up Seymour Hill, the highest point of Thetis Lake Park, only to see a stream of slower runners below on the correct trail. By the time Tom scrambled back down the hill, he had to settle for 30th place instead of a bronze medal. Also, in the “Lost Runner Year”, Janis Shisito, missed the final turn onto the Lower Thetis Lake Trail and continued on Trillium Trail to Highland Road. An hour later she was picked up soaking wet while walking and crying on the Trans-Canada Highway by Bryan and Norma Scharbach who returned her to the finish line for a cup of hot chocolate and her warm, dry clothing.

Every year of the Gunner Shaw Classic XC leaves us with a different twist and a different story to tell. Some years it snows, some years it rains, one year it was dry. Some participants vow to come back every year, others vow never to return. The positive features are many including the incredible Gunner Shaw Bursary at the University of Victoria and the smiles of the record number of 464 finishers in 2007 making it one of the largest cross country races in the province.

Performance highlights include Dave Campbell's dry-weather, "short" course record of 28:59 in 1987 and Sally Balchin's 1986 short course record of 35:15. The course was lengthened in 1997 and both of the men's and women's records were set in 2007 by Harriers club members Jim Finlayson (30:36) and Lucy Smith (34:43). These two Gunner Shaw course records still stand 13 years later.

In the 1970's and early 1980's there were only two running clubs in Victoria – the Flying Y and the UVic Vikes. Gunner ran for the Flying Y for 4 or 5 years before starting the Harriers in 1978. From that point forward, he dropped other club affiliations and could always be seen racing in a white and blue Harriers t-shirt thanks to the Prairie Inn Neighbourhood Pub and owner, Dave.

Vancouver had three or four running clubs in the '70s and '80s including UBC and Lions Gate Road Runners, who initiated the Vancouver International Marathon in 1972. Wearing his Flying Y singlet, Gunner ran the inaugural Vancouver Marathon and finished in a respectable 7th place overall in 2:34:33. Just ahead of him was Jack Taunton who finished 6th in 2:33:42 and Tom Howard, a bus driver from White Rock, who won the race in 2:24:08. At that event, Gunner and Jack became good friends and faced off in many subsequent marathons. Jack invited Gun to become a part of the Lions Gate team in the second Vancouver Marathon and Gunner got his revenge over Jack in 1973 by finishing second overall to the returning champion, Tom Howard. Their times were 2:21:45 and 2:22:16 where Gunner showed an improvement of over 12 minutes while Jack finished in 6th place in 2:25:28 with an 8-minute improvement in his time from the previous year. The 1972 course involved 5 circuits around a road loop in Stanley Park.

Gunner was very proud of running with LGRR while racing in Vancouver and, in his usual style, he made many new friends all appropriately nicknamed. They included Jack "Jake" Taunton, Duff "The Duffer" Waddell, Wolf "Wolfer" Schamburger and Andre "The Frog" Gerard. Gunner respected "Jake" as both of them were fairly equal in abilities and, when it came to a marathon, the race was decided by who felt the best on any given day as to which one would cross the finish line first. "The Jaker" has finished 62 marathons with a P.B. of 2:25:29, while Gunner completed 40 marathons with a P.B. of 2:19:01. Besides Jack being an excellent marathoner, more recently he was inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame as an athlete and a builder. He is a renowned sports doctor at many events including 8 Olympic Games where he was the chief medical officer and he has assisted at several local events, too many to count. Currently, Jack oversees the Sports Medicine Centre at U.B.C. and manages the doctors' surgeries at the hospital including my hip replacement 14 years ago in 2006. It was the best thing that I ever did to cure arthritis and I was running again completely pain-free within a month with my new stainless-steel joint.

Both Gun and Jake believed in high mileage training of well over 100 miles per week and they ran 8 to 10 marathons annually. They were rewarded by posting several outstanding race times in all distances coming off 120 m.p.w. training sessions. When Gunner was working downtown at the Times Colonist, he was living in Metchosin and running to and from work, a total of 20 miles daily, 5 days a week or 100 miles while commuting, then he'd do a long 20 to 30 miler on Sundays besides his 10 mile Thetis Lake trail run on Saturday mornings. He was a running machine and it didn't take long for his training mileage to pile up.

When we lost Gunner in 1974 and later that year, "The Duffer" Waddell introduced an Inter-Club Challenge between LGRR and PIH and he set up a course on the trails of UBC. The concept of the challenge was simple, the first 5 runners from each club would count in the standings and the lowest score based on their finishing positions would win the trophy. Races would alternate between Vancouver and Victoria with Lions Gate hosting a 10K in December at Jericho Beach Park and Prairie Inn hosting a 10K in November at Thetis Lake Park. Roger "Browner" Brownsley, yet another new and well-respected friend of Gun's, took on the leadership of the Vancouver event and has been involved for 36 years, while "Mother" and I have managed the Victoria event for 35 years since 1985.

Alex moved to Youbou in 1994 and turned the reins over to me for future Gunner Shaw races. Over the 35 years of the Victoria Gunner Shaw Classic, 8,389 runners have participated and enjoyed our unique, but challenging, event.

At the inaugural 1984 Inter-Club Challenge race at UBC, Harriers Dave Campbell and Sheron Chrysler emerged as race champions, while team mates Steve Barr, Brian Connon, Sandra Berry and myself secured the Harriers victory. In the second year at Thetis Lake, once again the Harriers dominated anchored by the team of Tom Michell, Phil Nicholls, Lawrence McLachlan, Bob Cook and Joyce Burghardt. Gunner would be extremely proud of the progress and success over 35 years as the plates on the trophy list the Harriers recording 32 team victories while the Lions Gaters have recorded 3 team victories.

Moving forward from 1985 to today, an incredible 105 projects have been completed over four decades by the Harriers Foundation since its inception at the first Gunner Shaw Cross Country Classic race at Thetis Lake Park. More than \$522,000 has been donated by our club towards scholarships, bursaries, community projects, charitable causes, youth team development and Harriers athlete travel support to participate at high performance events. Eight scholarships and bursaries, at both Camosun College and the University of Victoria, have been established to commemorate club members who we have lost too soon with a special attention paid to their interest in life starting with the Gunner Shaw Memorial Bursary in Athletics. Seven others followed including the John Thipthorpe Scholarship in Computer Science, Susan Reid Bursary in Civil Engineering, Arthur Taylor Memorial Award in Track and Field, Rosamund Dashwood Bursary in Dramatic Writing, Dave Reed Memorial Award for Cancer Research, Ken Smythe Bursary in Cross Country and the Sandy Auburn Scholarship in Environmental Studies.

Gunner was inspirational; he was a legend and a legend never dies. We thank you Gun for starting the Prairie Inn Harriers, for starting the Royal Victoria Marathon, for starting the Central Saanich Pioneer 8K, for starting the Vancouver Island Race Series and for starting the Harriers Foundation, but why did you have to leave us at such a young age in the prime of your life?

Farewell my friend, you have changed my life by introducing me to the love of running, something I will continue to do daily for as long as I can. Ten years ago, in 2010, I moved to a home on McKenzie Lake at the very end of a road on the border of Thetis Lake Park. I run and hike the trails daily reminiscing of all the good times we had running these very same trails every Saturday morning beginning in 1974, some 46 years ago. Besides me, you have influenced countless other people by introducing them to the joy of running. We thank you for your friendship, for your leadership and for your running legacy to our running community.

Some day we can all look forward to running another lap with you above the clouds. You will always carry a warm spot in our hearts, and although you have left us too soon, you will never be forgotten and your bursary and friendships will last forever. Happy trails, Gun.

Prepared by Bob Reid, Race Director, Gunner Shaw Cross Country Classic, 36 years and counting (1985 to 2020).

October 1, 2020