

LIZ FELDMAN

This article was written by VRWC member Heather Carr and was published initially in the Victorian Masters Assn newsletter Footprints. Thank you Heather for allowing me to add it to our VRWC archives...Tim Erickson...August 2014

Converting from long distance running to racewalking is one decision Liz Feldman should be inordinately proud of. Her success on the international stage as a result of this choice has been achieved through dedication, commitment, sheer hard work, as well as a natural ability for this athletic activity.

Born in Kerang in 1948, Liz's schooling during the sixties was as a boarder at Sacred Heart College, Ballarat. At Sacred Heart she became involved in team games; tennis, basketball and marching! Married in 1969, and taking up residence in Gladysdale, Liz and husband Peter led a basic existence on a 2 acre block. Here she became actively involved in the community, playing squash, tennis, badminton and bounce ball (similar to playing volley ball on a trampoline). Another activity was astride her bicycle, accompanying husband Peter along country roads on his quest to partake in marathons, with Liz constantly wondering 'are we there yet?', as Peter pounded out the kilometres, Peter was already 'addicted' to running, and it wasn't very long, in 1980, and having moved to Gruyere with more acreage that Liz succumbed to the magnetism of running, gradually increasing the distances she covered. It was during this time that she was began toying with the idea "would I be capable of managing 'the holy grail of running, the marathon?'" At this time, Liz was introduced to Veteran Athletics by "a lovely couple, Bob and Belle Moss", who were members of the Croydon venue and invited Liz to participate.

In 1982, Liz and Peter welcomed their daughter, Bec. Their baby spent a considerable amount of time in the Royal Children's Hospital, and it was during this time that Liz found "running to be my saviour. I could recharge my batteries with a good run". Playgroup became an integral part of Liz and Bec's life, and it was through playgroup that Liz met Jenny Scott, wife of the Hawthorn footballer Don Scott. Jenny, was a "fellow female runner, just as obsessed as me." Liz and Jenny joined forces to combine babysitting and training together. Liz comments "I don't think that Don was too impressed when we told him that he would have to babysit while we went for a quick run!"

Liz's interest in running evolved into the intrigue of actually tackling this endurance distance. Liz met with resistance when she told Peter that this was her desire, however with Liz's perseverance and dedication she continued to pursue her goal of running the 42.195km (26 miles 385 yards) distance of the marathon. In their first marathon, Liz and Jenny crossed the finish line together, holding hands in the time of 4 hours, 20 minutes. A fine effort for inaugural competitors and the result also positively answered the question of whether she was capable of running a marathon.

Since that initial marathon, Liz has completed 35 marathons with a best time of 3 hours 20 minutes. Ultra marathons have also been attempted and achieved; highlights including the 6 foot track ultra marathon, running from Mansfield to Mt.Buller with Peter and Bec riding a tandem bike alongside and the Frankston to Portsea run.

A solid, firm friendship developed with Ron Boyne, a training partner and good friend. They spent many hours preparing together and solving world problems as the kilometres slipped by. The training areas were on country roads, through the bush and trail running to towers used for fire spotting.

Another special, devoted training partner, always willing to train come rain, hail or shine was Liz's beautiful, faithful dog Gemma Lou. Her constant companion only asking for a pat and a hug.

Misfortune struck in 2000, with Liz requiring knee surgery. Surgery was essential, and the Specialist's orders were to swim, ride or walk. Thus began Liz's entry into racewalking. The founding of a completely new challenge for Liz. With the support of Ken Walters, a renowned racewalk competitor and prominent coach, (coach of the most recently highly successful athlete Rhydian Cowley), gave Liz the realistic expectation that "it will take a couple of years to get the technique right, but I guess you will want to compete in 6 months!"

Ken was completely accurate in his estimation of Liz's desire to meet the challenge, and to her credit, fortunately did listen and considered his perceptive and thoughtful advice.

Whilst Liz was adapting and adjusting to this totally different way of moving, her daughter Bec was successful in competing in wheelchair racing. Bec proved, like her mother, to have the talent and commitment to compete at an elite level. Together they trained, Liz on her bike and Bec in her wheelchair, training at Croydon venue on a Tuesday night. This proved to be integral in Bec's success in the Sydney 2000 Paralympics; Bec winning medals of all three colours, gold, silver and bronze. What an incredibly amazing achievement!

Once Liz mastered the 'art' of racewalking, the competitive side kicked in. Liz has competed in numerous Victorian, Australian and ultimately World Masters Athletic Championships. With her history of training over long distances, Liz continued in this vein and has become the virtuoso of the endurance event, that being the 20 km racewalk. A testament to this ability are the two 50km World Records that Liz created and of which she is incredibly proud.

Liz's first international competition began in Riccione, Italy in 2007, and was awarded with a W50 20km Gold Team Medal alongside Lyn Ventris and Heather Carr.

The second foray into international competition was in 2009 in Lahti, Finland. Liz was not the red hot favourite going into this event, but somehow Liz, determined to beat the odds, walked the walk(s) of her life, bringing home 3 personal gold medals, and a team gold medal; a total of 4 medals.

1st W60 5km Race Walk in 30:28.77

1st W60 10km Race Walk in 1:02.55

1st W60 20km Race Walk in 2:12.10

1st W50 20km Race Walk Team, again with Lyn Ventris and Heather Carr

Sacramento, 2011, was the next international meet, again bringing success for Liz, who travelled back to Australia with 2 personal silver medals, one bronze, a team gold and a team silver, a total of 5 medals.

2nd W60 5km Race Walk in 31:02.31

3rd W60 10km Race Walk in 1:02.11

2nd W60 20km Race Walk in 2:10.35

2nd W60 10km Team Race with Heather Carr and Joan Purcell

1st W60 20km Team, with Heather Carr and Joan Purcell

"The Worlds are such an exciting thing to be part of. You meet up with other Aussie athletes from all round Australia, some you know from previous trips and others become new friends. We all look out for each other and go along to support where possible. Word soon gets around about where is the best place to eat, how the transport system works, where the bargains are to be had for the shoppers amongst us. Many of us are now looking forward to going to Porto Alegre, Brazil to fly the Aussie flag and we will all come home richer for the experience".

Liz has been cross training for three years, training including cycle class, cross fit, boxing, mobility, (the use of foam rollers to roll out tight muscles), road cycling, and of course racewalking on the track and on the road, both short and long distances. Liz describes her cross training enthusiastically "It's a way of life for me. Gym is a great way to make training buddies".

Of course, all the hard work places stress and strain on the body, and Liz has received her fair share of injuries, including hamstring tears and tight piriformis muscles. Liz 'manages' these problem areas with acupuncture, regular massage, mobility classes and discovering the techniques of applying pressure to "trigger release points throughout the body"; utilizing "this technique at any time, even with a simple tennis ball".

Liz enjoys gardening at her home in Bayswater, playing the guitar and ukulele, and regularly frequents a live music gig - 'Mountain Pickers', this embodies blue grass music and is a relaxing and pleasurable pastime.

Other interests include a love and devotion to a variety of animals and a devotion to donkeys! This interest began in 1969 to protect feral donkeys, trapped around waterholes in Northern States then being trucked down to the Southern States to be sold for pet meat. "The Australian Donkey Breed Society" was founded, Liz became an avid member, and gave a home to three feral donkeys, taking them to country shows demonstrating that donkeys are clever and intelligent animals when given hospitable environments.

Occupations past and present have been many and varied! A bank clerk, home help, gym worker, apple and pear picker and packer, real estate, stock and station agency, medical receptionist, integration aide, disability worker, and now, a house cleaner.

Liz leaves us with this quote "The race is not only to the swift but to those who keep on going" - this certainly epitomizes Liz's attitude to life and her athletic career. We wish Liz continuing success during the XX World Masters Athletic Championships, Porto Alegre, Brazil, South America during October 2013.