

Chapter 4

Some stalwarts and characters

“By their deeds, you shall know them”

-- The Bible, Matthew 7:20

In many ways, the heart and soul of the Club consists of the people who simply turn up week after week. They enjoy a friendly chat, get a bit of exercise (or a lot), enjoy the fresh air and the Balmoral scenery, and maybe have a dip after their run or walk, with the added bonus of indulging their competitive instincts as often or as rarely as their inclinations dictate. On Sunday mornings, people’s weekday jobs become irrelevant. There is no hierarchy of talent, or wealth, or origin, or occupation. Everyone is “just” a Jogger.

Over the years, there are, however, some characters that have particularly stood out. Some of those, such as Alan Farrell, have already been discussed in earlier chapters, but here is a representative rundown of just some of the other characters that have been attracted to the club over the last 40 years.

A remarkable character

The Joggers have been blessed with an amazing array of characters over the years, but perhaps the most charismatic of them all was Jim Bell.

Jim was born in 1902. The youngest of 12 children, he remembered his mother reminding him that “you were the scrapings of the barrel, son”. He left school at 14, got a job at an optical firm and learned his trade on the job. He would keep working as an optometrist until he retired at the age of 85, and was still walking 500 km a year in his 90s.

Jim was one of those enviable people who seem to be naturally gifted in whatever sport they pick up. In the 1920s, he achieved eminence in Rugby Union, playing first grade for Petersham, and Rugby League, playing first grade for Newtown RLC for five years, and representing New South Wales in representative games. He later played first grade hockey for Randwick and was selected for the Metropolitan representative team against Country NSW. He played cricket for the premiership winning Moore Park, represented North Narrabeen Surf Club in the State championships, and played golf off a respectable 12 handicap. In his 50s he joined North Sydney Bowling Club and remained a member for over 35 years.

Jim certainly made an early impression on the Joggers. In December 1967 Jogger Jargon reported that “another runner that continues to amaze is ‘youngster’ Jim Bell, who can still be seen running long after other runners have packed up and left. Jim was heard to remark recently, towards the end of his five mile run: ‘I’m trying to

make myself tired, but I seem to be running out of patience'. Jim, who was 65 at the time, would often go off for a game of bowls after finishing his run.

By 1969, when he was nearing 70, Jim was covering six miles in the allotted hour. On one occasion, he heard a coach berating the members of his young football team who were complaining about being tired. "You should be ashamed of yourselves", the coach said, "look at that old pensioner over there – he'd run you into the ground!"

After each run, Jim would go over to the middle of Balmoral Oval and do a series of exercises on the grass. One of these involved lying on his back and waving his arms and legs frantically in the air. The precise benefits of this were known only to Jim, but he reminded many onlookers of Louie, the dying fly in the old Mortein fly spray advertisements. However, Jim's performance did have some unexpected advantages. One morning he came back from his session with a big smile on his face. He had been resting flat on his back after his exercises when an attractive young woman came over, thinking he'd collapsed, and wanting to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. We never found out what Jim told her.

Strangely enough, Jim never entered the City to Surf. In 1982, Running Bear reported that "we try but cannot influence our oldest member to compete". Jim response was that he only had another 1,000 miles left in his legs, and he didn't want to waste any of them on longer runs!

Jim had a naturally dry wit – some describe him as the most genuinely funny person they'd ever met. Once during the 1970s Jim had got bitten by a dog, but assured the doctor that he wouldn't need tetanus shot because he'd already had one. "When would that have been, sir?" asked the doctor. "Oh", said Jim, "I think it was about 1926!" He also had a lot of characteristic sayings. Reg Conway recalls that on his birthday, Jimmy would come out with "Another year closer to looking at the lid". When he wanted to sit down, it would be "Time to anchor the acre".

Although Jim was as sharp as a tack, the introduction of daylight saving in the 1970s threw him a bit. For a while he used to go to the watchmakers to get them to change his watch every six months. After a few times of this, he thought they might be getting sick of him, so he bought an extra watch which he kept on daylight savings time, and just swapped it with his "real time" watch whenever the clocks changed.

Rob Nolan recalls that about this time, Jim was in his mid 70s, "his hair a shock of snow white, not a grain of fat on him", still running on the streets and working as an optometrist. When Jim went for his customary swim after the run, he'd emerge from the sea with water streaming through his hair. Rob says that "you'd swear he was a skinny King Neptune coming up the beach". Phil Worrall remembers that Jim always swam out further than anyone else – "we all speculated that it was only his sinewy frame that spared him from being sampled by sharks". Ann Satz recalls with a laugh that Jim apparently liked nothing better than a lung-clearing cigarette after a hard run.

Jim liked competing and yarning with the “old blokes” down at the bowling club, and he marvelled at their longevity. “Some of them must be well into their seventies”, he commented, admiringly. Jim himself was well over 80 at the time.

Jim died at 96, a legend in his own lifetime.

The Digger

Denis “Digger” Garland, one of the club’s true gentlemen, is another of our original 1967 members. Denis had endured the extreme misfortune of being captured during World War II and being imprisoned in the infamous Changi Prison in Singapore. Many did not survive this ordeal, and Denis returned from the war weighing just 6 stone – less than 40 kg.

Despite all this, Dennis was a wonderfully talented runner. In 1986, when he was nominated for the Presidents’ Shield award, Denis had competed in every one of the 16 City to Surfs held to that stage, and had run 33,000 km. He never quite achieved his aim of breaking the magic 60 minute barrier, though went agonisingly close a number of times.

Alan Farrell recalls that “out of all the Joggers in the early days, it was Denis Garland who gave me the most trouble. He must have been well into his forties and had spent time in Changi prison during the war, so one can only imagine how good a runner he would have been in his younger days”.

Dennis’ other great interest was sailing. He competed in three Sydney to Hobart yachting classics and countless other ocean races. His Presidents Shield nomination really says it all: “Denis epitomises what a true sportsman should be, a great competitor, ever courteous and a thorough gentleman always”.

A veteran performer

Jim Hogan was a member of the club for more than 20 years, racking up prodigious distances of between 2,000 and 3,500 km each year. On an age-rated basis, Jim was probably one of the best performed runners in the Club, staying competitive in the Open Championship even into his 60s. With a best City to Surf time of 52 minutes, and a marathon PB of 3:05 (set at age 50), Jim had many age category fun run wins. One particularly memorable one was the 30 km Palm Beach to Manly run, where he ran the last 8 km with the sole of one shoe missing. In another run, Jim was able to prevail in a close tussle with a competitor, distracting them by exclaiming “look at that money!” and pointing to a 20 cent coin lying on the road. Jim, with his wiry frame, always retained a well-developed eye for the ladies. He was our nominee for the President’s Shield in 1991.

A great clubman

Rob Nolan, whose name appears many times elsewhere in this book, was our Club Secretary for 17 years from 1984. This involved taking responsibility for an extraordinarily wide range of Club activities, including handicapping, writing Jogger Jargon, preparing the race calendar, choosing the weekly runs, organising nominations and attendances at President's Shield, arranging for trophies and uniforms, as well as all the other Secretary's duties.

Rob got interested in running in his 30s, after going in the City to Surf on the basis of a solitary training run. He joined the Joggers in 1976 and, from then on, running and gym became his fitness regime for life. He became a regular fun runner, culminating in an impressive 53 minute PB for the City to Surf. In the early 80s, urged on by the ubiquitous Alan Farrell, Rob ran his first half marathon and later his first marathon, after minimal training, in an impressive 3:27. He still wonders what he could do if he'd trained properly!

Rob was honoured by being awarded the President's Shield in 1992, one of only six Joggers who have won this prestigious award. Rob still runs regularly, and provides major assistance with race judging, recording and post race BBQs. It was primarily due to Rob's friendly persistence – and meticulous record keeping! -- that this book eventually came into being.

A great bloke

Henry "Lal" Lawson, the father of our current member Carole Coulter, started his sporting life as a boxer at Ushers Gymnasium. After winning nine of his 12 bouts, he retired and joined City Tatts where he worked out regularly and ran under the tutelage of the legendary George Daldry. He joined the Joggers when he was 63 and for the next 20 years or so logged up at least 1,000 miles a year, and sometimes 2,000 miles.

At the age of 71, Lal was the subject of a major feature in the Manly Daily, which tipped him as likely to be the oldest starter in the 13 km Giant Jog, after having achieved that distinction in the three previous years. The Daily's story, accompanied by a photograph of a beaming Lal jogging, positively radiating good-health, continued:

“ ‘Nowadays, I set myself a target of running 1,600 km a year --- about 33 km a week”, Lal said. Running is part of my life. It keeps me fit and trim and gives me a feeling of well being. The age of 71 does not sound old to me, as I believe one should not growl about growing old because it is a privilege denied to many people’.

The training program adopted by the ageless athlete in preparation for the Jog is a testing one, to say the least. He leaves his North Balgowlah home at 6.30 am and covers eight kilometres round the Manly Dam before returning home in a 45 minute period. Lal then does a session of exercises, which includes lifting small weights, in his backyard gymnasium.

A former electrician, Lal's secret to a long life is to eat ordinary foods and drink two schooners of beer each day."

Lal would go on to win the Giant Jog veterans award seven years in succession. In 1989, when 80-year old Lal was successfully nominated the Presidents Shield, he was one of the few people to have run the City to Surf each year, with a best time of 70 minutes at age 62. He would not retire from that race until he was 81.

Lal, who passed away in 1996, was one of the very select group that has been awarded life membership of the Club. As Running Bear commented at the time, he was one of our elder statesmen, and a wonderful character who was loved by all for simply being a great bloke. He was friendly to everyone and enjoyed nothing more than a chat on the run, sharing his homespun philosophy and down to earth humour. Lal was a great believer that the enjoyment of competing is lost if you lose the joy of just doing it.

In 1985 Lal had some troubles with his eyes. Running Bear reported that "one member took a ride home with Lal one Sunday morning and after they had unexpectedly driven straight through the traffic lights said 'Didn't you see the red light at the intersection, Lal?' 'Eh, said Lal, 'I didn't even see the intersection!'"

Lynn Wall, who would go on to win the World Triathlon Championship in Hawaii in 1991 (50-55 age group), was first encouraged into running when Lal suggested that she come and run with the Joggers. "Becoming a World Champion was a big, unexpected thrill", she recalls, "It occurred because I learned to persevere, to never give up, follow my energy source, preserve inspiration and turn it into energy and adventure. These are the things I learned from Lal".

A terrific team

Doug and Betty Ford have contributed immeasurably to the continuing success of the Joggers over the years.

Doug is one of the "Class of '67". He was the first President of the Club when it formally became aligned with the Leagues Club in 1971, and continued in that role until 1973 when his work commitments took him interstate. He was also the first Jogger to achieve the "impossible" target of 1,000 miles in a year (see the full story in Chapter 2). Doug was nominated for the Presidents Shield in 1983 and was made a life member in 2007.

Doug came to the Joggers after a brilliant cricketing career, representing New South Wales as a wicketkeeper from 1957 to 1964, and challenging strongly for a place in the Australian team. Just like the advertising jingle for his namesake Ford cars, he has never lost his "trim, taut and terrific" appearance.

In recent years, Doug still occasionally runs the bush track, but on most Sundays he joins the walking brigade. With Reg Conway, he masterminds the barbeque each race day.

Doug's wife Betty's association with the Joggers also began right back in 1967, when the club started with only a few members, including Doug. At that time, due to the restrictions of a young family, Betty's club activities were confined to a support role. However, she had always enjoyed sporty interests and had participated in athletics, basketball and tennis. So, when she started "serious" running in 1979, even though at a relatively senior age, it was perhaps no surprise that her success was almost immediate, with a victory in the Combined Points Score Championship. Her talents also shone through in other fun runs, such as the City to Surf, and winning her age group in the Bridge to Balmoral Run. Betty's running career was cut short by a fall, but she still kept fit walking several times a week.

Even overshadowing her sporting achievements, Betty's major impact was in the unstinting service she gave to the club for over 30 years. The closest conventional description would be a social secretary, but that title is totally inadequate to describe her true worth and contribution. Betty took on the responsibility of arranging the catering for barbeques and special occasions. She also kept records of birthdays, and ensured that all major ones (the ones ending in a zero) were marked appropriately with a morning tea. She did countless "behind the scenes" jobs that are essential for the smooth running of any voluntary club, and always took a lively interest in the younger, newer members that were coming through.

<p>Betty once commented that she could easily be the mother of most of our Joggers. Husband Doug's response? "I'd like to know which ones!"</p>

Betty was a lady who hated to be made a fuss of, and it took the Joggers Committee many years to finally convince her to accept a nomination for the Presidents Shield. To Betty's stunned surprise, she was announced the 1996 winner – probably the only time Betty was speechless. The announcement of the award was greeted by a roar from the Joggers that nearly took the roof off. It was a very proud moment for the club. Betty sadly passed away in 2005. She will always be missed.

Have you heard this one?

Reg Conway became the first Secretary after the club became formally affiliated with the Leagues Club in 1971 and took over as President in 1973. Reg served in this role for almost 30 years – an astonishing achievement – steering the club through decades of changes and challenges.

Apart from his many duties as President, Reg enthusiastically maintained the Mileage Book and, for many years, in his guise as "Running Bear", wrote the Jogger Jargon news item in the regular Leagues Club Journal. For more years than anyone can

remember, Reg has doubled with Doug Ford as the unbeatable kings of the race day barbeque. He was awarded life membership of the club in 2007.

Reg also has some prodigious running credentials. He ran in the inaugural City to Surf and went on to compete in 19 of the first 20 times that event was held. He ran more than 1,000 miles a year for more than 20 years. At the time he was nominated for the Presidents Shield in 1985, he had over 35,000 kilometres to his credit! These days, despite some health problems, Reg is still an enthusiastic and regular walker

Reg Conway is one of those larger-than-life characters that are so essential for a club to survive and prosper. Right from the moment he joined the club, he became known for his steady stream of jokes and banter. Jogger Jargon often reported on how Reg “Have You Heard This One” Conway kept everyone’s spirits high during a tough run with his funny stories, though it once lamented that “he has been dropping so far back we can’t hear the punch line!”

[some jokes here, Reg?]

A most pleasant companion

John “Ando” Anderson is another of our Class of ’67 founder members, a Presidents Shield nominee, and one of only five Life Members of the Club.

John served as Treasurer for over 30 years, from 1971 to 2002, a task he carried out with exemplary efficiency. With his partner Marj Kiely, John also played a vital role for many years in providing much needed refreshments after the Sunday runs. During the winter months, Marj’s renowned hot soup kept many Joggers going

John’s great year in running came in 1984, when he came from the clouds to win the Handicap Championship. As Jogger Jargon reported at the time, “after years of running in the wilderness, the club’s Mr Nice Guy staged the biggest recovery since Lazarus to perform a miracle nearly every race. Some indication of his performances can be gauged by the fact that his handicap times were reduced by 5 minutes over the year, and even that didn’t stop him. This year, we’re going to attach a brick to each leg!”

Although he is now over 80, John is still a keen believer in the benefits of regular exercise, and the adage “if you don’t use it, you lose it”. Apart from his regular Sunday walk, he completes a challenging course round the streets of Mosman every day, despite some injuries that would have stopped less determined souls. To top it off, John also does a gym workout each week.

Early on, John acquired a legendary status for swimming in the coldest of weather. Jogger Jargon once reported that that “on these winter mornings, when the majority of us are in and out of the water quicker than Arch Punch can say gin rummy, J.A. leisurely floats on his back, spouts water, makes noises and all that kind of nonsense. Sometimes he stays in the water so long his voice is unrecognisable when he comes out!”

Blessed with a phenomenal memory and a keen interest in other people, John has acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Balmoral locality. After a walk in John's pleasant company, you will be fully clued up on all the latest real estate deals, all the local celebrities and all the latest local news.