STAN ELDON

LIFE ON THE RUN

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Stan Eldon

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The book is dedicated to my parents, my wife of forty-four years Marion, my family and those women in my life I have mentioned in this book.

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Foreword

By Len Runyard, formerly Hon. Secretary, Eton AC, Windsor and Eton AC, and Windsor, Slough and Eton AC.

I have much pleasure in writing this foreword to, *'Life on the Run'*. When I joined the Eton AC, over fifty years ago, there was a small band of very enthusiastic young athletes who coped extremely well despite a complete lack of facilities. One of these was the fourteen years old Stan Eldon, a pupil from the Windsor Boys' Grammar School. Even at this stage of his athletic career, his potential was obviously outstanding, while apart from this, his enthusiasm and dedication to athletics was boundless. Essentially, I remember him as a cooperative, keen and loyal club member and a very generous natured and nice person; he hasn't changed in the interim!

In 1952 the club moved to Windsor and became Windsor and Eton AC, it was under this name that Stan gained his great athletic reputation. In 1954 he was called up for two years' National Service in the Army. Each week, whether it be track, road or cross-country races, Army duties allowing, Stan would travel considerable distances to represent the club. It is worth remembering that in those days, athletes were completely amateur and paid their own expenses! With increasing fame, Stan was pursued by several leading athletic clubs, but he always refused the offer, and remained completely loyal to his small town club (happily no longer small, and now one of the major clubs in the country). After leaving the Army in 1956, he joined the police force, which because of the long working hours, made training difficult, but somehow Stan coped and continued to run his way to the top.

It is impossible for me to list all his many achievements, so I will restrict myself to picking out one special success which was winning the Southern Counties Three Mile Championship, which was held at the Hurlingham track in London, in June 1957. Unable to obtain the necessary time off, he was on traffic duty at the Royal

Ascot races on an extremely hot day. As a concession he was allowed to leave an hour early at 1 p.m., after which he had to rush back home to wash, have a meal, and then get to Hurlingham track ready for a 4.30 p.m. start. I was waiting for him by the entrance, and getting more and more anxious as the minutes ticked away. Suddenly, at 4.10 p.m., he came rushing up asking «Am I too late?» He barely had time to do no more than just jog up the track, plus a few bursts of speed before being called to the start. Taking the lead immediately, he raced away to easily win the title, well ahead of the second runner, and breaking the six mile championship record by over a minute!

The year 1958 was special for Stan, for after brilliantly winning the International Cross-Country Championship, at the age of twenty-one years, he had a series of major wins on the track, including the AAA three mile and six mile titles. However 1959 was his special season (if only the Olympic Games had been held in that year, for in 1960 he was plagued by illness). After winning many of the major distance races in Europe, he was later honoured by being selected as the World Athlete of the Year by the prestigious Society of USA Athletic Statisticians. Only three other British athletes have been so chosen; Roger Bannister, Seb Coe and Jonathan Edwards.

The rest of his athletic career is now part of athletic history. Stan, indeed, has devoted his life to the furtherance of athletics and he is still actively coaching and advising today; he was (and still is) the Best in British athletics!

Chapter One: The Early Years

I was born on 1st May 1936 in Windsor. My father was a retired soldier and had been stationed in Combermere Barracks, Windsor, the home of the Household Cavalry, and that is how I ended up being born in the Royal Borough. My mother, Flora Ivy Tremaine Marshall, had left her home in Tisbury, Wiltshire, where she was one of fifteen children and went to Windsor as parlour maid to the then Dean of Windsor in Windsor Castle at the age of fourteen years. My parents were married in Tisbury on 25th August 1934, when she was twenty-eight, and described on the marriage certificate as a cook; and he was forty-seven years old and listed as a salesman. Their respective fathers, Uriah Marshall, retired insurance agent, and Francis Howard Eldon, retired drayman.

My father, William Frank Eldon, was born at Eton on 18th October 1886 and had enlisted in the Army at the age of fourteen years (he should have been fifteen) in 1900 during the Boer War in South Africa. His father was wounded serving there and his wife took advantage of the free passages for the wives of wounded soldiers, and Dad signed up as a bugle boy so that he could go out as well. As he falsified his birth date, he had two birthdays for the rest of his life. His family also had various spellings of the surname, and when he was born, his birth certificate had his name as ALDEN, but the family had generally accepted ELDON or ELDEN, and when he joined up, he had to select one permanent name, so he settled on ELDON, although his brother and sister kept with ELDEN. Uncertain spellings of surnames were apparently quite common at this time. After he returned from that war, he signed up for the 'real' Army in 1903. He joined the Royal Field Artillery, probably because he had grown up with horses working with his father on the brewers' drays, and horses were still very much in use to pull the guns by the artillery in the early part of the Great War. He went to India and was a sergeant car driver for King George V and Queen Mary on their Coronation Tour of the country in 1911,

for which he was awarded a specially engraved Coronation Medal. While in India, he was a British Army Boxing Champion. He then went off to fight in the First World War and was wounded in 1915 and returned to Windsor, where he helped to train the Household Cavalry in horsemanship.

According to his Army discharge papers, he was a 3rd Class Gymnast; obviously not very good, and something that I must have inherited, as gymnastics was never one of my strong activities, but he was a 1st Class Equestrian. He left the Army in 1918 when he had completed fifteen years' service; twelve years with the Colours and three years in the Army Reserve, and settled in Windsor. He kept up his interest in boxing and often went to the Star and Garter Gym in Peascod Street, Windsor, where all the great champions trained right up to Sugar Ray Robinson in 1952. My father was a strange mixture; brought up as a Wesleyan or Methodist, he never touched alcohol and in spite of his years in the Army as a sergeant, I never heard him swear; and I mean never. On the other hand, he had been a smoker from the age of about ten, starting off on Woodbines and progressing to Players, and about twenty a day. He smoked all his life until his death age eighty-eight years in 1974. Because he smoked, none of his children have ever smoked and I have never even tried a drag behind the bike sheds.

I was the first of my father's second family. By his first marriage he had a daughter and two sons, and his wife died when the youngest one, my half-brother Bernard, was seven years old, in 1933. He remarried in 1934 to my mother Ivy, and I came first in 1936, followed by two sisters; one in the year before the war, 1938, and one as peace came in Europe in 1945. I was born in the end terrace house at 25 Elm Road, Windsor, which backed on to Combermere Barracks, which was literally just a few feet away; so I grew up to the sound of bugles playing 'reveille' and 'lights out'. There was no electricity and only gaslights in three rooms; two downstairs, and one upstairs in my parents' bedroom. In the bedrooms of us children, there was a single torch light bulb attached to a picture

frame above the bed, that worked from a small battery, or there was a small night-light candle. There was no bathroom and the toilet was outside, although it was within the main structure of the house and not in an outbuilding as many were in those days. I remember the squares of newspaper torn up and tied with string—the substitute for toilet paper. Bath night was a tin bath with hot water heated up by the 'copper' in the kitchen (or was it the scullery?). I seem to remember it was youngest first and oldest last, so the younger you were, the cleaner the water.

I have always liked fresh-baked bread, and the smell of the bakery on the corner of Elm Road, can still be remembered. The little bakehouse at the back of the corner shop, run by the North family, was opposite our local, but as my parents did not drink, my only visit there was at Christmas time to buy a bottle of stout for the Christmas puddings. I did make frequent visits to the bakery, where I would watch the rolls come out of the giant oven and then run the few yards home with them before covering them with butter and eating them while they were still very warm. They cost a halfpenny each and I have never tasted better bread in my life. I cannot remember very much from before the war; I was only three when war broke out, but I do remember my sister Janet Athol being born on 18th December 1938. I remember because there was a lot of snow on the ground and my mother was in the front bedroom overlooking our little road with my new sister. Dad built a huge *Queen Mary* out of snow, and we spent Christmas that year in the small bedroom at the front of the house.

The Sunday that war was declared, I was apparently in All Saints' Church, Windsor with my parents, although strangely enough I do not remember the details. I do however have memories of the war years. My father was in Dad's Army; he had previously served in the Boer War and the Great War, and he used to leave home at night with his rifle and go off to the ack-ack guns in Windsor Great Park, which were presumably there to protect Windsor Castle. My mother and elder brother went off, on the nights my father was not on duty, to man the stirrup pumps at our church and the laundry

where Dad worked. I often wondered what the little flow of water that came from the pump, would do in the face of a real fire. At home when the siren went, it was under the stairs where we had a supply of food and other essentials. If there were too many in the house at the time, then the dining-room table was the protection for some.

My early school days were at Spital Infants' School in Windsor, where I started in 1940. My memories there are of Miss Meanwell the headmistress; the introduction of school dinners at five pence a day (2p); and the smell of cabbage. Towards the end of my time there, I remember how we used to be kept informed by the headmistress on the progress of the war. I only remember one occasion when the school was informed about the death of a father of one of the pupils. This was strange really, as Windsor was a garrison town and the barracks were opposite the school. I remember well my last year at Spital School, where we were graded by our arithmetic achievements. I could recite up to about my fourteen times tables.

At the start of the war, we were all supplied with gas masks. I had a Micky Mouse one with a large tongue, but my sister, who was two years younger, had a large one that she could fit inside for the first part of the war, before switching to the Micky Mouse model. These of course had to be carried to school each day in case of the expected gas attack.

Each day when the siren went, we all trooped down to the underground shelter, which was damp and open to the sky at the far end; I presume to let in fresh air.

Windsor was reasonably spared in the war as far as bombs were concerned, except for a few accidental bombs. One major incident was when the railway was bombed and some cottages near the Great Western Station were wiped out.

The biggest disaster was one Saturday afternoon towards the end of the war. I was at home with my father listening to a football match on the radio and my mother had gone shopping in the town. There was a huge explosion that shook the house and we later

found out that a V-2 had hit the destructor chimney about a mile from home and destroyed a number of homes in the Dedworth area of Windsor. Not knowing what had happened, I remember waiting for my mother to arrive home. She did come home safely and knew much more than we did about the bomb. News travelled fast by word of mouth in the town.

My brother Bernard, attended the Windsor County Boys' School, first of all at its old premises in Trinity Place, Windsor, and later at the new school which opened in 1938. He looked after the nature hut at the school, where fish, mice and other creatures were kept. He came home one day after a bombing raid very upset, as all the glass containers had been shattered by the blast and all the pets were dead.

Other memories of the war concerned the wounded soldiers from the military hospital who were allowed into town when they were recovering and they were all dressed in bright blue suits. Then there was the death of a friend's father who was a policeman. He was stabbed by drunken Canadian soldiers in a fight in the town.

In 1943, I had joined the choir of All Saints' Church in Windsor, where my brother had preceded me. He had a wonderful voice and had been compared to Ernest Lush of "Oh for the Wings of a Dove" fame. It is always a problem when one member of a family has to follow someone with a great talent, and I suppose that was a problem that my own children eventually had, keeping up with my athletic talent.

I was actually introduced to the choirmaster on St John's Day at the Parish Church in Windsor, St John the Baptist. I went along to the next choir practise and duly got taken into the choir and started to earn my shilling (5p) a month by attending three practise sessions a week and two services on a Sunday.

To start with I spent time in the organ loft watching the service and learning about the procedures. I always enjoyed this and was fascinated by the organ, its four keyboards and all the stops; sometimes I was allowed to pull out a stop to assist the organist.

There were some strange initiations for choirboys in those days. The process at All Saints' where I had joined, was supposed to involve a dead cat being hung around the neck of the 'victim' but it never happened in my time.

I did not have the voice of an angel or the voice of my brother, but I did progress and eventually became senior chorister with the improved pay of five shillings (25p) a month. Funerals and weddings could boost this as we received two shillings and sixpence for each of these extra duties.

One of the most enjoyable events of the year, was singing carols at the King Edward VII Hospital in Windsor at Christmas time. We would visit all the wards, including maternity, and I would often have to sing solo on these visits. I wonder how many premature births resulted. Other highlights of my years in the choir were the trips to London. At least once every year, the priest in charge at my church, the Reverend Sidney Smith, would take a group from the choir to London for sightseeing, which was always enjoyable, especially when it came to eating, as we always ate both lunch and tea in one of the Lyons Corner Houses. The knickerbocker glories were fantastic and I developed a liking for ice cream, which has never gone away.

It was on some of these outings that I experienced London theatre for the first time. The first show I ever saw was 'Oklahoma', but 'Carousel' and many others followed, either on these choir outings or later with the Church Youth Club.

In the early 1940s while at the infant and junior school, I always had a party on my birthday, which was the 1st May. The weather must have been a lot warmer than now, as every year the party would be in our small back yard and I would have school friends of both sexes attending. We always had a large bath of water to play in and we did not bother with costumes. In fact it was frequently so hot, that Dad used to tie a sheet or blanket over the garden to keep us from the hot sun. I do not remember a bad 1st May from

those early days. I no longer strip off in the garden on my birthday; fortunately for the neighbours.

I moved on in 1944 and went to the Royal Free School in the centre of Windsor for the next three years. The headmaster here was a Colonel Frome who ruled the school with his swagger stick and did not mind using it on girls as well as boys.

My memories from this stage of my life were of the large number of Dr Barnardo boys in their uniform; black boots and navy-blue clothes.

By the time I reached the middle of the school, which would have been the last year of the war, there must have been a terrible shortage of teachers; the classes were large and I remember that for days on end there was not a teacher in our class and the head would sit me at the front of the class on a high stool at the teacher's desk and tell me to keep an eye on the class of around forty. I think it was because I was one of the tallest in the class and was less likely to be bullied, even though I was only nine or at the most ten years old.

Even during the war, we made the journey to my mother's old home in Wiltshire, and on one trip down there, my Aunt Mary who was a sergeant in the ATS, was on leave and took me by train to Salisbury just fourteen miles away. It was a very eventful day as bombs were dropping on the old city that day, and while I was outside Woolworth, a stray German plane machine-gunned the street. We made our way back to the station, only to find a number of bombs had fallen on or near the railway track. After a long delay, we caught a train, and as we pulled out of the station, I remember seeing a large crater in a back garden only a few yards from the line. We eventually arrived back in Tisbury very late, and to the great relief of my parents, complete with a box of day-old bantam chicks I had bought in Salisbury Market.

These were the first livestock I owned, and when I got home, I did get into trouble, when I tried to see if bantams could swim. The little chick was rescued by my mother, wrapped up to keep it

warm, and it survived. These bantams were my first pets and I had them for some years; providing their special little eggs. Later I had pet black mice, racing pigeons, rabbits, and when I was married, a large number of chickens and two very special black Labrador dogs, Simon and Berry; one before we had children and one after.

Our family had many holidays in the little cottage that my mother grew up in with her fourteen brothers and sisters. This was one of a row of five cottages, stone built with two rooms on the ground floor, two bedrooms on the next floor and one attic room that had to be accessed via what was not much more than a ladder. The children slept three up and three down in a double bed. There was no gas, electricity or water in the cottage, and of course no bathroom or other facilities. About thirty feet from the back door, there was a long corrugated shed which spread behind all the whole row. Each of the homes had part of this and in it was a copper (for the washing) and a toilet which needed frequent emptying. My grandfather would carry the slop bucket up to his allotment and he grew some marvellous vegetables and fruit! The water supply was one tap shared by all the occupants of the five cottages. The only hot water came from the range or a Primus stove, that seemed to be forever on the go. The atmosphere in this lovely old cottage was great and I had some of the best holidays of my life there; although I must admit I never stayed there during winter months, when I am sure it lived up to its name of Windwhistle.

After the war, when I was on holiday at Tisbury, I used to go with my Uncle George, who lived in the family cottage, on his cattle truck taking and collecting cows, mainly from Shaftesbury Market but sometimes Salisbury. I assisted with driving the animals on and off the lorry and I always remember him being very precise as to how this was done, and he always warned me to be very careful because two or three cows could crush you and cause a lot of damage or worse.

On one of my holiday visits, I had a driving accident, and I was only about eight or nine years old. The crash was in a cousin's toy pedal car which I had borrowed. I thought I would try and go

faster than normal by taking it down a steep hill on a sideroad and down into the High Street in Tisbury, which was also downhill. It started all right, but soon the car was out of control and my feet had to come off the pedals, which was the only way to stop the car. I swept down the first hill, going faster and faster, and took the right-hand turn into the High Street all right, but the little car was totally out of control and I knew that if I did not stop, I would be going downhill for perhaps a half a mile before it would stop on its own. As I reached the Village Hall on the left-hand side, I took a decision that I had to turn into the road alongside, which was flat. I swung to the left and the car rolled over several times throwing me onto the road. A large bump on the head, and then I had to make a return journey up the hill to take the car back. It seems crazy today, not least because taking a toy car down onto any High Street, even in a village, would seem to be mad in today's world with heavy traffic, but in those days, there were very few cars around. It was good lesson in driving and taught me to be careful of taking corners too fast!

I sometimes stayed with another uncle, Eric, his wife Marion and family in a small sweet shop in the village. I always enjoyed that stay, and it was not just because it was a sweet shop. I sometimes cycled there from Windsor, and on one occasion, I did travel by train, and for the journey home I had to get the train from Tisbury; but for some reason we were late at the station and my uncle, who ran a car hire business as well as the shop, decided he would get me to Salisbury Station ahead of the train. He had one good leg and one artificial leg, but he could drive and he made it to Salisbury Station after racing around the bending country roads, by seconds, and I ran on the platform and just caught the train.

In 1944 my father and brother made the journey to Reading for their medical examination, to see if they were fit to be called-up for active service. They went together on the same day and they both came back A1. Dad was the most pleased I think, as he thought he

might see active service in his third war. My brother wanted to be a pilot, but neither got the call as the war was coming to an end.

My youngest sister Judith was born on 5th May 1945, and within a couple of weeks my father received a War Office telegram to say that my elder stepbrother Leslie, a quartermaster sergeant, who was serving on detachment from the Royal Berkshire Regiment with the Africa Rifle Corps had died in Africa on 29th May; just one week after my other brother Bernard's nineteenth birthday. I had never seen my father so upset and although I got on well with Leslie, I think my main concern was the loss of my regular supply of chocolate when he was on leave. He had only been married a short while before his return to the oversea's posting and his new wife May had a son David after Leslie's death and he grew up to be a very successful international banker in the Middle East and Hong Kong.

I suppose ability in whatever field must come from parents and forebears and I think my running ability must have come from my father who had been an Army Boxing Champion in India and who at the V-E celebrations in Windsor, outsprinted all the opposition, even though he had a broken toe and was sixty years of age. I remember the victory celebrations in Windsor. All school children were entertained in the Holme Park by Uncle Mac of 'Children's Hour' fame and I have never forgotten the singing of 'Jerusalem'. I remember our own V-E celebrations in Elm Road.

There were the above ground air-raid shelters spread down the road, one for every four or five houses and the one outside my home was used as the launch pad for a firework display as part of the street's celebrations, but disaster struck when a firework went off in the box containing the rest of the fireworks; it gave a very spectacular but short display. Although only a small terrace house, we had a flagpole in both the front and back gardens, and the Union Jack was hoisted on both as it was on all royal occasions during my father's life. We never actually lined up to salute the flag but it came pretty close!

When I was about eight to ten years old, I used to go to work with my father at the local laundry where he was a van driver. We often travelled over what seemed in those days to be quite long journeys, although in fact they were all within the Windsor/Ascot area. I quite liked loading the bundles and baskets of washing on and off the vans and there was a unique smell about laundries which had a strange attraction.

There was another attraction at the laundry. It was a 'what-the-butler-saw' machine that preceded television; I enjoyed winding the handle and seeing the moving pictures.

At the end of the war, both my maternal grandparents died, and as my grandmother died when the primroses were out, many of her children (she had fourteen) and grandchildren, including me, went and collected buckets full of the flowers from the local woods. There were masses of them; and then her sons wired the inside of the grave before putting bunches of primroses every few inches around the wire mesh.

I remember other details of early life in Windsor. On a Saturday the Co-op came round the road with a horse and cart selling bread, cakes and provisions. Most Saturdays I would be given a halfpenny to spend on a very nice little fruit cake that they sold.

The milkman delivered the milk by churn and my mother would take a jug out to him, and the milk would be scooped out from the churn into the jug.

On Sunday, a man would come on his cycle cart selling cockles and seafood.

From school we used to go swimming (not that I could swim), and the swimming 'pool' was a backwater of the Thames that was cut off by a wooden pole across the river; but it did have changing rooms, diving boards, and the water was graded by depth. Later we went to proper swimming baths at Maidenhead or Burnham Beeches, although I did not learn to swim until just before I joined up, and then it was thanks to girlfriend Marion who was a very

good swimmer. Just as well, as it was pretty essential when I joined the police and I remember having to swim in the sea in early November as part of training.

About a year after the war ended, ice creams came back on sale and I remember when as a family we were walking along the river and my parents bought a couple of choc ices that were cut in half so that we could have a taste. They cost 4d, which was about the same as a loaf of bread.

When I was about nine or ten years old, I used to go on the River Thames in my brother's canvas boat; it was a sort of canoe/kayak but not that stable. On one occasion as we were pulling back into the millstream near Clewer Church in Windsor, we were passing a jetty where there was a small craft tied up. Suddenly we saw a naked boy on the jetty and he jumped off with the intention of landing on the tied-up boat. He missed his footing and pushed the boat away, to end up in the river which was around ten feet deep at this point. I remember seeing him sort of swimming around under the water, almost like a water baby, but he obviously could not swim. My brother knew he was drowning and we pulled over as close as we could to where he was submerged, and as he came up to the surface for the second time, my brother grabbed him while I tried to keep our boat upright. We both succeeded and got the lad, who was about my age, to the bank. I remember the reaction of that boy to this day. It was really quite strange; he thought he had enjoyed the experience floating under the water and did not realise how close he had come to disaster. Somebody collected him from the jetty, and a quick thanks and we were on our way.

If that was a near-death experience for that young boy, another incident happened much closer to home a little later. My family and I were at home one weekend when there was a knock on our front door. Dad opened the door and the lady next door staggered in covered in blood. I remember my parents getting a bucket of water and towels and tea towels to try and stop the bleeding. We

did not have a telephone but someone, probably my older brother, must have gone to the phone box on the corner of the road, because an ambulance came, and later the police. The man next door had tried to kill his wife by hitting her over the head with a hammer, and a little later he was taken away. I remember he was only out of circulation for a short time and seemed to be back with his wife at their home next door very quickly. He was an old soldier from the First World War and had apparently had some temporary mental problem and was not detained for very long.

I mention elsewhere that I have never been a great fan of football, but as a young boy my father did take me to watch Windsor and Eton FC matches at Stag Meadow on the edge of Windsor Great Park. The club were know as the Royals in those days before the name was somehow highjacked by the county town and Reading Football Club. Windsor had a reasonable team and I will always remember one player, Billy Griffiths, and wonder what modern referees and players would make of him. He was a hard man and in almost every match he would end up knocking a player down with a punch, and I can only very rarely remember him being sent off. He was a good footballer and other players would be going for him, and it was not surprising that he took his revenge in this extreme way. He seemed to get away with it most of the time, and his skill probably helped to keep him on the pitch. He was a sporting character and I did meet him once very much later in life when we were both at an athletic event where one of his family was competing, and like so many sportsmen, he was very much a gentleman off the pitch. Footballers had a lot to put up with in those days; there were the very heavy dangerous football boots with those lethal studs made from leather and nails. Then there was that solid toecap; no soft leather like the modern boot. Tackling was hard but I do not recall seeing any more players injured, in fact probably less than today.

After the war, there were the 1947 floods in Windsor following a really bad winter. I lived about a mile from the River Thames and one Sunday afternoon we went for a family walk. Someone had told us that the river was high and there was some flooding, but we had only gone about a quarter of a mile towards the river when we found everywhere covered in water. Most of Windsor was underwater and in some areas nearer the river, the water was at first-floor level.

Quite naturally boys of my age turned the floods into a game, and we took a tin bath down to the flood water, a long way from the river, and paddled around in it, while my brother and others were involved in more serious activities; getting food and supplies to many of the homes underwater, in some cases up to the first floor.

A couple of years after the war, my family were hit by the plague; or rather it seemed like it. It was in fact scarlet fever. I was the first to go down with it around Christmas, but the doctor called it tonsillitis to avoid me going to hospital. I remember taking some rather large unpleasant pills (that was when someone was watching, otherwise they were hidden under the bed), but the ones I took did eventually improve the condition. But it did not help my mother, brother and sister who all picked it up from me, and all had to have a stay in the isolation hospital at Maidenhead.

By now I was better, and spent a lot of my time keeping my youngest sister amused. The funny thing I remember about this period, was the way we were partly treated like lepers. A very well-meaning friend and neighbour used to come along and put food she had cooked for us on the windowsill at the front of the house, tap on the window and run away. She had three children of her own, so this was an understandable precaution, although I found it strange at the time. After the scarlet fever had been diagnosed, and after my mother and brother had been removed to hospital, in came the local council to fumigate the house room by room. Each

room was completely sealed and given the treatment; it really was like having the plague.

In September 1947, I had started at the Windsor County Boys' School, the local Grammar School. I had done reasonably well at the Royal Free School, where only two subjects were put onto the chart showing performance. Blue for Maths where I was always at or near the top, and red for English where I probably hovered below the halfway mark. There was then an interview in the library of the Grammar School and I thought I did OK. This was confirmed when I was awarded a place at the school. There were three classes at entry A, B, and C and I made it to the B class. I always thought, and still do, that I got there on merit, but my mother told me years later that I got there because we lived opposite the town mayor, Fred Fuzzens, and the headmaster thought I was related.

The cost of new school uniform and other clothes, were out of the reach of my parents, but fortunately we had friends who were quite well-off coal merchants in Windsor. They had two sons and their quality clothing was always passed on to me.

I started my new school in the September, and I well remember the watermarks in the classrooms where the school had been flooded. It had been rumoured that there were initiation ceremonies connected to the goats that were tethered on the school field, but I never suffered from this or other bullying. I remember just one occasion when someone did approach me on the field at break, but before I knew what was going on, one of the school rugby players gave him a flying tackle and sent him packing. I am not even sure he was going to pick a fight with me but I never had trouble again.

Rugby was the school game, and at the end of the very first term, I went with a school friend and his father to Twickenham for the Varsity Match. It was packed, standing room only and we were tucked in one corner behind a lot of other people. Fortunately my friend's dad was a big man and throughout the match he would lift us onto his shoulder in turn so that we could at least see something of the match, as well as soak up the atmosphere. It did something,

because I have always enjoyed rugby far more than that other game of "football".

At my previous school, I had mostly gone home at lunch time, but at my new school I had dinner most days and it was very good, especially on Fridays; partly because we always had excellent fish and chips and probably jam tart and custard (I might have four or five helpings); but there was another attraction. The wife of my games master would be serving the lunches that day, and she was very attractive, wearing revealing low-cut dresses. In an all-boys' school this was a big attraction! As was the once-a-week session in the school gym for the girls of a neighbouring school, who came in for their PE lessons in their navy-blue knickers.

About the same time, my brother Bernard, who had completed his two years' National Service with the Tank Corps, was now a commissioned officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. He had always wanted to fly, and was very disappointed not to have had the chance while the war was still on. He became a glider pilot and was very good. I used to go with him to a small airfield at Bray near Maidenhead, and go out on the jeep to bring back the launch cable after it had been dropped from the gliders. He used to do displays and perform some very tricky manoeuvres when he was flying. He never crashed, although I remember one of my jobs was to stick patches on the glider after the outer skin had got torn on occasions. He always promised to take me up, but I was only around twelve years old, and whenever he was going to give me a flight in a two-seater, there was always some 'top brass' around, so the promised flight never happened.

I had been a Wolf Cub since I was eight years old, and had reached the dizzy heights of being a 'Sixer'. I moved up to the 2nd Windsor Scouts in 1947 and rapidly became a 'Patrol Leader' (mainly because I was taller than most).

Camping became an important part of my life for the next few years. There was very good camp site in Windsor Great Park, Bears Rail, and many weekends in the summer we would pull our heavily-laden cart, loaded with tents and equipment, from Windsor to Old Windsor and camp for the weekend; a distance of at least three miles. I was lucky to get the opportunity to go to camps further afield with the other scout troops in the town. One of these was to Porlock in Somerset, where we used to go into Minehead and where we could buy baked beans on toast for about a shilling (5p). After camp food it always tasted so good, and I suppose that is why I still enjoy beans on toast today. Another camp took me across the water for the first time to the Isle of Wight.

Between scout camps, there were occasional trips to the coast as choir outings, and as mentioned before, I had a great liking for ice cream, probably due to being deprived of it during the war, and the Lyons Corner House knickerbocker glories. Our trips were usually to Brighton or Southend, and I remember on one such trip eating something like thirty ices of various sorts during the one day. Maybe this contributed to my health problem later in life.

In about 1950, the magic of electricity came to our road and we had electric light for the first time, but the tin bath in the kitchen continued for the rest of my time at home.

I had a very happy childhood, even though we had very few comforts and six of my formative years were in the war. There was no bathroom, an outside loo, no electricity, no central heating and no washing machine or fridge; and a family income of just about £5. My parents must have done a great job of bringing up the family with so little money, because we always had enough to eat and had great Christmases. Our pillowcases that we used to hang up, were always full to overflowing with regular presents, like a toy post office, sweet shop, toys and a stocking filled with whatever small items were available; later fruit and chocolate, but not much of that during the war, unless my half-brother Leslie, who was in

the Army, had brought some home. Even our holidays to Tisbury continued throughout the war.

Christmas was always magic, and when I had my own family, we managed to keep the magic alive for our own children. They would go to bed on Christmas Eve and nothing would be done; there would be no tree, no decorations nor any other sign of Christmas. When they were all asleep, the work would start to transform the house, so that when they woke up, very early next morning, everything was there and ready for them. Frequently we would only get to bed about an hour or two before they were rising. Normally the first thing we did on Christmas morning was to go to church, and then the presents would be distributed on our return.

By the time I was twelve years old, I was delivering groceries for a long-established family grocer in Windsor; Trudgeons. I remember my rate of pay, which was one shilling and three pence (6p) per hour, and I earned ten shillings (50p) a week for an hour after school on four days and four hours on Saturday morning.

My main task was riding one of several ancient delivery bikes, which either had two wheels the same size, or one that had the small wheel at the front so that it could have an even bigger load. Whichever bicycle I was on, I was always carrying the maximum load, delivering mainly to the large houses in the better areas of Windsor. Although I say it myself, I was good at the job and never fell off or lost my loads, and worked faster than other delivery boys who came and went, while I soldiered on for the whole time I was at school.

The only problem that my employer had with me, was that I did enjoy the biscuits, that in those days were weighed and put into open bags. Frequently the bag would be short of biscuits by the time I got them to their destination. The strange thing was, I never got told off about this, and I think the manager used to overweigh the biscuits in the first place to allow for those that he knew would disappear. I cannot have been too bad at the job as I collected many

tips at Christmas, most of them around two shillings and sixpence, or the equivalent of two hours' work.

As well as the deliveries, I did carry out other work, including the weighing out of dried fruit (which I often sampled) and sugar. I also worked in the cellar of the shop, scraping the wax from the rind of the cheese and repairing the damage mice made to the cheese to make it presentable to the customers.

There was a row of glass-top biscuit tins in front of the counter, so that customers could select what biscuits they liked.

The owner of the shop was a dapper little man with a stiff winged collar, and he and his wife used to trust me with taking the money to the bank. I well remember those big white £5 notes, but I did deliver them all to the bank and did not do what I did with those biscuits. It was an interesting time and I think it probably helped to shape my future in retail trade.

In those early days in Windsor, I had my only short-lived interest in playing football and ran my own team. I got all the lads in the street together, and we went off to play against other similar teams in the area where I lived. Although we only had small back yards, we never played in the street and always went off to find a field or recreation ground for our games.

I enjoyed cycling and bought my first bike from the money I got for my grocery round. Sometimes alone, and sometimes with a friend from the scouts, I would cycle quite long distances. On one occasion with this friend, we cycled to Southampton and back; a total distance of over 100 miles in a day to see an aunt of mine. My lone trips took me to see other relatives in Wiltshire; about eighty-four miles away. Most of these trips were when I was twelve to thirteen years old; before I really got the running bug.

I was good at saving my money from my grocer's round, and when I wanted to buy my first running spikes, I went off to the Eton College sports shop. This was a shop that specialised in supplying the Eton boys with their sports clothing and equipment, so it was all top of the range kit. The sports at the college were always held

before Easter, and as soon as they were over, boys would sell back to the shop those very expensive spikes bought for them by their wealthy fathers. They had probably only run one or two races in them, and so the shoes were virtually new but secondhand. I bought a pair of G. T. Laws handmade white snakeskin shoes for £3, and they remained my treasured possession for some years.

I also saved up and paid for a ski trip out of my earnings, and we were due to travel out on a Christmas Eve, but at the very last minute it was cancelled, due I believe to lack of numbers after some of my school mates pulled out. I was very disappointed but I did get my money back.

Chapter Two: The Start of Running

My athletic career started in 1948 when I was twelve years old. I saw part of the Olympic cycle race held in the area of Windsor Great Park, and then I remember going to the Playhouse Cinema in Windsor with my school to see the film of the 1948 Wembley Olympics.

I saw the marathon on the film, and at that ripe old age of twelve years I made up my mind that was what I wanted to do. Little did I know that someone in that film was to play a part in my future athletic career; Stan Jones, who finished seventeenth in that Olympic Marathon, helped me considerably in later years. It was the end of 1948 and I started running.

My first race was a Windsor Scouts Cross-Country in the early part of 1949, which I won. At school I was playing for the Colts Under 15 rugby team, but at every opportunity I was running. My games master 'Chick' Evans, was fairly quick to recognise that I was a better athlete than rugby player, and gradually I got more and more into athletics.

For a while I did follow my father and did some boxing at school. I only ever had one official fight, and that was very early on at school in an inter-house competition, which I did win quite easily. Official boxing contests were banned at school not long after this, but we had many unofficial fights in the school gym at lunch time with the supervision of a games master. I always matched up with the two biggest boys in my years because those of my size and weight were not much competition.

One of the big events at school was the annual cross-country race; an inter-house competition that scored points towards the overall competition between the houses, that were named after four boys who lost their lives in the First World War. My housemaster wanted me to run for the house, but no boy under fifteen had ever been allowed to run.

Appeals were made to the games master and eventually to the headmaster, and finally they decided that it would not hurt this thirteen-year-old boy to run three miles. I ran on Windsor racecourse alongside the river. I was running against boys from fifteen to eighteen years of age. I did not win but came third, only being beaten by two boys around four years older than myself, and it was well received by my housemaster and my house 'Burnett'.

The following year, although still 'under age', I ran away with the annual race and did so for the rest of my time at school.

My early track successes came in 1950, when I won eight athletic events in the District Scout Sports. In 1950, I progressed through to the District School Sports and won the 880 yards in a new record time of 2:26.2.

The following year 1951, I started to train with a purpose, and kept records of my training and races. I was only fourteen years old, but I ran against seniors in most club races and generally finished in the first three places. I was running 3.5 miles in about 19 minutes and up 4.75 miles in about 29 minutes. In March I won a schools cross-country race at Maidenhead, and recorded 13 minutes for the 2.5 miles, which was 51 seconds in front of the second boy.

Shortly after this it was the annual school race again, and this time there were no arguments about me running, even though I was 'still under age'. I won the 3.5 mile race in 19:18, which was 90 seconds faster than my nearest rival. I won the club road championship on 7th April with 12 minutes 40 seconds for the 2.3 miles. A win in the school sports 880 yards came next on 28th April; the winning time was 2:17, and then in May I won the District race in the same time, before moving on to the South East Berkshire 880 yards, which was won in the slower time of 2:22.8. It was slow, but was still a record for the under 15 age group.

The Berkshire race was next, and I reduced my record of the previous year to 2:13.1, and went to Southampton for the All England Schools, representing Berkshire. I won my heat quite

easily in 2:8.4, and went into the final next day very confident. I will always remember the superb grass track at Southampton and that race for two reasons. The first being that I realised how good runners were when you competed nationally, and I remembered the race because of what happened as we all fought for positions around the last bend. A shot-putter dropped the shot on his foot and fell onto the track, blocking the two inside lanes, and some of us saw the obstruction and others did not, and I got knocked to the outside lane. I could only finish seventh out of a field of nine in the much slower time of 2:12 against the winner's 2:6.9. A time which I knew I could match. In my very next race, an 880 yards, running for Eton AC against Reading, I ran 2:8, in second place.

I carried on with playing rugby until 1951, and I think it was that year when I went over the handlebars of my bike outside Windsor Police Station on my way to the grocers for my Saturday morning work. They had just freshly gravelled the road and I think I picked up most of it in my lips. I went to work and did my Saturday morning, before going off to school in the afternoon to play rugby. I did not play, as my headmaster saw me and the state of my face, and refused to let me play; probably just as well.

In March 1952, I was invited to represent Berkshire in a special Olympic Fund Raising event; an indoor athletic meeting at Haringey Arena. This was my once only run indoors in my whole running career. The event I was running in was the 600 yards, and it was not easy. The track was flat with very small laps and no banking as they have today. I started on the outside virtually off the proper track, and could not get into the lead as I liked to in the first fifty yards. I had quite a good run though and enjoyed the experience. I remember the occasion, as on the same programme, were the big names of athletics in this country at the time, Arthur Wint and E. McDonald Bailey.

I won the Berkshire Schools 15 to 17 years age group 880 yards in 2:1.6, and went to Bradford for the All England Schools again.

It was a very windy day for the heats, and running from the front, I paid the price not for the last time in my career, and just failed to qualify for the final.

Training in those early days consisted mainly of long steady runs; my favourite run was up the Long Walk in Windsor Great Park to the famous Copper Horse and then back again. Depending on where I started from, home or school, the return run was about six miles. I did a little training on the track, and when I was included in the Berkshire team for the All England, I had to travel to Reading by train and trolleybus to be coached at Palmer Park, Reading. The coaching here for the 880 yard runners was by Mike Dunhill, a runner from Oxford City AC. The school paid for my travel, which was just about four shillings (20p) for the train fare.

In 1949, I had joined the then Eton AC (now Windsor, Slough and Eton), where we trained and raced on a recreation ground grass track, and the cross-country races were run along the Thames on the north side of the river. I remember athletics was real fun in those days; I enjoyed racing and I enjoyed training.

The club was a very compact, small family, with the majority of members coming from two families; the Robsons and the Smiths. It also had a great secretary who became my mentor and guiding light, Len Runyard.

The changing accommodation for cross-country was the British Restaurant in Eton High Street. In those days there were no showers, just a tin bath of normally cold water, unless someone poured in a jug of hot water. There was also a big advantage in being back first, as the water would still be reasonably clean. After a few very muddy runners had been through, you were more likely to come out dirtier than when you went in. This primitive washing facility was commonplace at all cross-country venues, including major championships like the Southern Counties and National races at Parliament Hill in London and elsewhere.

Although the club track was marked out on the recreation ground at Eton, there was a cinder track at nearby Eton College,

that was very little used and was frequently covered in weeds. I did occasionally go there for some training on my own. The site of this track is where the new Thames Valley Athletics Centre, the home of Windsor, Slough, Eton and Hounslow AC is now situated. The new facilities are certainly one hundred per cent better than the old.

While at school, I took part in various sporting activities including athletics, hockey, boxing and rugby. We had a strong 'house' structure and there was tough competition between the houses on a whole range of activities, including music and drama, as well as sport.

I played my part and took part in the solo singing competition. I chose quite a tough piece for this solo effort; the largo from Handel's Xerces. It was a very difficult piece and had been selected by the organist and choirmistress, who must have thought I could do it justice. I practised quite hard, singing it from the organ loft at All Saints' Church, where I was still in the choir. I did not win but did get some points for my house, Burnett, by coming third.

We had some interesting teachers at the Windsor County Boys' School. There was just one lady teacher and she taught Latin, but it was reputed that she was well equipped to teach a few non-academic things as well; although I was not privileged to the special tuition and was only in her Latin class for one year. One of the masters had a reputation that went before him, and I remember stories from my brother about his behaviour in class. He was a great Maths master, but was a very strict disciplinarian, and had bouts of violent behaviour, supposedly breaking the arm of one boy, before my day. He did frequently throw the wooden-based blackboard wiper with extreme venom and accuracy at anyone who stepped out of line. Needless to say his reputation was enough to keep order, and every class of boys that ever came in contact with him behaved impeccably. I never had any trouble with him, but then Maths was my favourite and best subject.

There were some great teachers and characters at school. The Chemistry master was a very strong man and reputed to be an ex-wrestler. He could pick at least two boys, whatever their size, up at a time; one in each hand like weights, and if need be, literally bang heads together. I kept on the right side of him as I delivered his groceries, and his wife was always very generous with her tip at Christmas. The Physics master later became Mayor of Windsor, and in 1958 presented me with an Illuminated Address from the Royal Borough for my contribution to English Sport. My housemaster, who was also my History master and one time form master, wrote a special book on the history of Windsor later in his life, and I featured in his special book where I appeared in the index between the King Edwards and Queen Eleanor.

I wonder how some of these very dedicated and splendid teachers would have dealt with teaching today, in a world of over protection, lack of discipline, liberalization and legal redress for the slightest assault, real or otherwise, on a pupil?

Football with a round ball was banned at school, and no one was supposed to play soccer for a team in their own time. It came as a bit of a shock to Mr Fairhurst, the headmaster, when on one occasion boys from the Grammar School made up all but one of the schoolboy football team for the town of Windsor. To make matters worse for him, one senior prefect, who was also a very good rugby player, broke his arm playing in goal with this soccer team. The rule about playing this nasty game with a round ball outside of school, was then reinforced. Maybe some of this rubbed off on me, as I have never been able to get very passionate about the game either.

The highlight of 1951 was going on the school trip by train to Waterloo from Windsor, and a day at the Festival of Britain. Although we did not meet then, and unknown to me, my wife Marion was on the train with the girls from Windsor Girls' School, but of course boys and girls were segregated. Our only contact was by waving our trousers out of the carriage window!

The Festival itself was a great experience, and the timing of it was right; just six years after the end of the war. It is a pity the Millennium Dome did not take off in the same way, but sadly people's expectancy today is a lot more than fifty years ago, and only six years after war, that had deprived us of many of the pleasant things in life.

In 1952, I was in the fifth form at school, and I remember one PT lesson in particular. We had just come out of the gym to change and our games master came into the changing room very stern faced and announced that the king was dead. There was a deathly silence and we were then sent home. I remember the day of George VI's funeral in Windsor. Kings and queens are brought down from London on such occasions by train to the railway station in the centre of Windsor, which is kept open mainly for that purpose, and the processional route from there to the castle passes the Windsor Guildhall and Parish Church. As I mentioned earlier, I had an association with the Parish Church in Windsor, as I had been in the choir of its sister church All Saints' since I was seven years old.

On the day of the funeral, the Parish Church of St John the Baptist, had sold seats in the churchyard so that people could pay their respects as the cortege passed the church on its way from the railway station to the final resting place, and to enable the church to make "a bob or two" for the roof fund. I was on 'duty' at one of the gates, when a very colourful man approached me in his white robes and offered me a lot of money (wads of the old white £5 notes) to allow him in. The man was the well-known racing tipster Prince Monolulu. I called over to a church warden who was in charge and a deal was done; a few of those big fivers changed hands, and the 'Prince' took his place in the churchyard.

It was the same year that Eton AC added Windsor to its name, and became Windsor and Eton AC.

My final race at school was the one mile in the Annual School Sports. The record had stood for a little while at around 5 minutes