Simon McGarvie

In Focus
with Carmel Meyer

From the time I could walk Dad called me *Scurry Legs* because I was always running everywhere, so it was little wonder I got into athletics.

As a kid, I was sports mad and tried everything, enjoying early success as a fast bowler and later as a lifesaver competing in beach sprints, malibu and surf ski. Mum, who had been a schoolgirl sprinter and loved sport, was my biggest fan.

Amid the variety, athletics was a constant. In early primary school I lived in the town of Stawell in Victoria and at the age of seven got to run on the famous Easter Gift track with my classmates. A few days later I watched the professionals tear down the same grassy track at a speed that was awe-inspiring.

Moving back to Melbourne, I was mobbed on the oval in my first week at school when the year three sprint champion, who was also handy with his fists, challenged me to a race. I preferred running to a pummelling and so lined up beside him. He just pipped me, but a decent turn of speed earned me my stripes with my new classmates.

I joined Little Aths as an under 10 and did all the track and field events, continuing with athletics and cross country throughout school; including a couple of decathlons. The only record I set, which I think I still hold, was in the under 17 javelin at my school, where I threw the spear fifty metres when my bowling arm was still in good shape.

Athletics pretty much ended with school. After surf skiing my way through tertiary studies and a couple of years of work, I followed my childhood dream of exploring the world. For fifteen years I worked in several countries including Japan, Zaire, Germany and Scotland; and travelled in dozens more. I kept fit with jogging and the odd fun run, returning briefly to run my first marathon in Sydney with my brother Ross in the mid 90s.

Simon enjoys a run on a warm evening at ECAC

Image: Carmel Meyer

Having settled in WA with my English wife Sara, and nearly forty years after my last athletics competition, I went to a Masters meet at the WA Athletics stadium. I tried sprints, middle distance, shot put and high jump. I enjoyed it all with the enthusiastic and welcoming people, although crashing all three times through a low bar wasn't how I remembered jumping at school.

I had spent the previous few years running Parkruns and longer road races up to the marathon. I was fit but my body announced in the days afterwards that track and field was another matter altogether. I returned first to the physio and then to road running, often with Masters on Sundays, and a few shorter triathlons.

After building back into speed training, I had another go at sprints when the Australian Masters Games came to Perth and loved it; not least meeting fellow athletes from across the country. I started going to some of the weekly Masters meets, and in an effort to minimise the risk of injury, narrowed my focus to events from 800m to 5000m.

A picture of relaxed concentration, Simon competes in the M55 800m at the 2024 National Championships in Hobart

60m at Australian Masters Games
Image: Graeme Dahl

I enjoy the challenge of the relatively short middle distance races that require being on my mettle from the gun, especially as I'm usually aiming for a Masters PB. Although well adrift of my school times in the 800m and 1500m, over the past couple of years I've pared a few seconds from my Masters times and hope to go further. There's so much pleasure in chasing small increments while dreaming of big ones.

Running regularly with familiar faces at Masters is inspiring. The friendly 'elder statespeople' of our club, some more than twenty years my senior and still vigorously competing, are role models for me as I look to the future.

Despite being prone to injury, I love athletics and running generally because it's one big adventure. Haring after a new PB, discovering new trails far from any town, competing at the National champs, as I did for the first time this year in Hobart, and meeting new people, are all wonderful forays into the unknown. I'm looking forward to competing in a new age group as a sixty year old this season.

Tasting 5000m bronze in Hobart

With our teenage kids Ella and Liam both keen on sports and our son involved in athletics at school, most satisfying of all is being part of a relay, once again passing the baton down the line.

Hobart Images courtesy Hobart Nationals photographers