

YMCA 175

Oral Histories and Stories

Story teller David Gracie

Subject Personal Reflection

Date 11 March 2019



Miles: You tell me your name David?

David: David Gracey

Miles: And where were you born David.

David: I was born in Boning Bridge.

Miles: And what year?

David: 1927.

Miles: Wow. Right. Okay now that seems to be just about right. Right. We will commence. I'll just start doing the formal bit. All right. So this is Miles top interview in David Gracie. And we're at the 11th of March and we're going to be talking about a little bit while we talk about you a bit about your life David. And then a little bit about Larkhall and how you got into running. So, you've already if you just tell me again where you were born?

David: Boning bridge in Stirlingshire but moved to at an early age to Storehouse in Lanarkshire and then in the mid 1930s to Larkhall. I was of always been interested in running at school. Probably why I was instead because I was invariably the best. But I'm not trying to blow my own trumpet. The war came along of course and all sporting activities were virtually given up. 1945. I went off to the Royal Marines. And did two years' military service coming out in 1947 when I started a veterinary career at Glasgow College in the spring of nineteen forty-eight. I thought oh golly. I must get back to running I so enjoyed it. And taking my nerves on my hand. I know to a local wooden door of the Larkhall YMCA at Harriers on a Tuesday evening someone came to the door and I said "I'm interested in running You think I could join you" and they said Of course come in. That was the start of six years. Oh very happy and enjoyable period of my life. There were approximately 20 of us who were all there because we were interested in running during the winter. It was cross country Autumn and the spring road running. And then a summer track and field.

So in nineteen forty-eight I started by a first running and many many amateur games that you had an east coast of Scotland. Mainly the police Glasgow police Motherwell police Hamilton police Lanarkshire all had open and major athletic meetings and I ran 100 and 220. But I wasn't particularly successful the following year I was running at the YMCA games at Alloa Peter and Baldwin. And I was running in a hundred yards as it was at that time. And I had two false starts so I was disqualified so I ran into 440 yards which I never done before, won it. A month later I run in the Scottish Championships at Hampden and won the Scottish title 1949. The college when I started was an independent college but nineteen forty-eight the veterinary and surgeons act meant that to qualify as a veterinary Surgeon used to go to university and have a degree as opposed to a diploma so I was then able to run for Glasgow University.

Miles: Of course

David: And so nineteen, nineteen nineteen fifty I lost my Scottish title but I was running for the university and in fifty one in the spring of 1951 at the freshers meeting at Glasgow University. The champion did not run in his own event so I couldn't really run in for 440 yards. So, I thought What will I do. So, I run in the 440 hurdles which I've never

done in my life but having been high jump and long jump hump champion at Hamilton going over the three foot hurdles was no obstacle so I ran in the race not only won it. But set up a Scottish university Glasgow record currently. Fortnight later I was running at St Andrews against Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh. And the four Scottish universities and I won the title with a new Scottish universities record a fortnight later I ran at Hamden and the Scottish Championships won the race and brought a Scottish record that stood since nineteen twenty-seven and the autumn of that year and the British Olympic Association and I know still Olympic probable's and my name was down as a probable for the 400 metres although I was running for the university there all my training all my interests were with Larkhall. YMCA Harriers.

I knew the chaps university was a long way the Westlands was an hour and a half in the car to go and put your hurdles. It was a non-event.

We had no hurdles at the Harriers but a very good friend Ian Duncan apprentice Joiner made me a wooden hurdle and I did all my Olympic training over that.

Miles: That's amazing

David: Never once ran four forty hurdles before in practice before I went to Olympic Games. As I say there were about 20 of us at the harriers, a school teacher Helped us. But all the rest of us were just late teens early 20s.

Miles: Right.

David: And there was no coaching. We just ran because we enjoyed running. And we used to, to run up a lap one of the lads would run the first 220 and another lad would take over and run the next 220 to try and pull me out as much possible.

Miles: So that was your techniques.

David: There was no absolutely no. Nobody had any knowledge. But especially my event of 440 the huddles which is a fairly specialised event. First of all, you've got to you've got to manage your technique of huddling and then you've got to get your stride Pattern right. So you don't go like this. But nobody including myself would ever experienced that. So, it was purely trial by error but.

Miles: Because in this day's people have specialist coaches, they have all this don't they.

David: I was a student. When you finish your morning lecture. You went into the refectory you picked was probably the cheapest thing available whether it was nutritious it was advantageous it didn't matter two hoots. And occasionally I used to go home. I to go about an hour on the bus to go into Glasgow. When I go home at half past five a Tuesday or Thursday night. I thought I thought oh gosh more training at half past seven. I better not eat too much but sometimes I was hungry. I did eat and of course what happened when your training. You were sick but that was that was the level. It was a totally and utterly a different world from today.

Miles: So, it's very much about your natural skills attributes wasn't it?

David: Well as I said I was sports champion at Hamilton Academy that was only 1945 there was the war on there was nothing but I won the high jump. I won the long jump the one of the sprinters are tied with a chap in 220 but I had I had natural ability

nothing to do with me just a God given gift natural ability.

Miles: And did you have that? Did you start that when you were in primary school were you?

David: ah Yes. Well at Stonehouse I remember used to run round a block of houses and the Half the time you disappeared out of site because you go around in a circle but invariably when I Came around the last bend I Was first. I'm no please don't think a conceded.

Miles: No, no not at all.

David: My father had been a good athlete in his Day

Miles: Right.

David: So, it was a horrendous Factor.

Miles: Did he encourage you to run?

David: No. No he didn't. He left it up to me.

Miles: But I'm you're obviously a very, very modest man. But I'm interested to know Are you competitive once you get on the track?

David: Oh no. I Ran to the best of my ability and I used to see coming around the last bend. But remember the other four. I'm tired too. But in those days if you lost you lost, The British Empire then fall apart. But you made up your main goal I'll try and do better the next day.

Miles: But I did it because I've read that you that you broke a record. Was it white city stadium.

David: Tells you right there I have that picture. No, no There was. I held the Scottish record for 440 Hurdles. And I held the British record for a year.

Miles: Right!

David: Then held the British record for a year. Yeah.

Miles: I wonder if that's the one that was down in London. White City that you might of run.

David: Well, yes well, after the Olympic Games. There used to be at that time. A meeting between the USA and the British Empire not.

Miles: Right!

David: And The winner of the gold medal in Helsinki was the American Charlie Muir. Right. Through Charlie who led the three Americans and I was Angus Scott and Harry Whittle were the three British people.

Miles: Right.

David: We ran of course Charlie Muir won the race but I was second and coming second broke the British record.

Miles: that's amazing I was just reading wherever. Sorry to interrupt. But there was a 40000 crowd.

David: Yes. 40,000 crowd probably 40,000 locked outsides. You know maybe ten thousand, twenty thousand.

Miles: So, did that not faze you having all those people.

David: No. Once you got down there in the track and the gun went.

Miles: Yeah,

David: I'll tell you a wee story just a shut it off.

Miles: I was going to ask you, the amount. Did you get very tense just before the gun went off?

David: Well I told you was disqualified for two false starts that the Scottish Y.M.C.A. No, it. Is amazing once, OK. You're worked up beforehand then if you're not worked up there's something wrong. But once that one's once the gun goes, you're sure your show tied up with running that. Everything else is, is out with you. No, no I do I do. You'd just try your best and that's that. It was. It was a, it was a highly enjoyable period of my life. The war, the war you know we would live you know Mari and I had lived through the war finished 1945. 1948 things were still quite tough in this country there was still food rationing still a tremendous number of people away in the forces. I had done my two years of military service started a new veterinary career. The world was a. And Mari and I were seeing each other occasionally and my life was good yes. Life was good wasn't it. A more fit than healthy and illness wasn't a problem.

Miles: No no.

David: So but then of course after the Olympic Games 54. I ran on but the desire, the desire. If I'd started with the European Games of the Commonwealth Games, I would still of had the Olympic Games to look for but the desire to train at half by six in the morning. The desire to train half by 7, 8 o'clock at night had gone.

Miles: Right.

David: and they these people that compete. And. Of course it's different. Now they get financial support

Miles: Yes

David: But it too. People going to do four, five Olympics. It's the sheer determination that these people have got that you've got not the ability to take part in a particular event but to be able to do. To be sure so self-centred to do it. That's what goes that goes. And of course, I qualified 54 and a new life beckons and we got married in 55. That

was my athletics gone.

Miles: Well let's take you back to the Olympics because um you reached the semi-final?

David: And it was really unlucky

Miles: You were in the wrong half of the semi-finals, weren't you?

David: It's all changed since then. I didn't. I didn't run a good race though because of my inexperience. I made a botch of a hurdle I was lying Third and would have qualified but made a botch of a hurdle the fifth or six hurdle.

It's your stride pattern. You just hit your stride pattern right.

Because if you find your coming up to huddle and you're too far away you've got to put in an extra two- and that's-time loss

Miles: Yeah, of course.

David: But I was really desperately unlucky. There were two, 2 semi-final run just one after the other. I was in the first semi-final and I was lying third for some considerable time and we didn't qualify for the final but I made a mess of a hurdle. Can't blame anybody except myself and I finish fourth.

But if I'd been in the next semi-final I would have been second. And after that that's why it's the first two in the six fastest losers.

Miles: What a shame!

David: The person that got is. I would never have got the bronze medal. I would never have got a gold medal. I would have never got the silver medal. But I had already beaten the chap Jo Holland from New Zealand who got the bronze medal and I might have got the bronze medal was with luck. But I was just too inexperienced.

Miles: And did you have any? You must have had coaching from other people at that stage did you.

David: No, no, no, no. I had never had a coach. I never once run for four forty hurdles in a practice. But first of all you've got to have ten hurdles doors and if you're going to put out ten hurdles at the right distance then it's a day's work in itself, almost, and the only place you could do it was Westlands Glasgow University It was a grass track which was totally different to gravel track.

Miles: It's interesting that you really relived you hit in that hurdle and it's obviously still quite in your mind!

David: Oh yeah. So, I didn't hit it. I just misjudged it. You're supposed to take it in your 13th step. But as the race goes on you get tired and your stride shortens and you should say to yourself I'm going to manage this huddle on 13. Or do I prepared a long way are we to go over my 15th

Miles: Right.

David: And I didn't do that. So when I come up to the huddle I realized there was ???.
And I'll show you a photograph of the semi-final games.

But of course as the technique has all now changed you can take it with your left or your right.

Miles: I see, right!

David: But you see I didn't know about these things. If you see it collapse should keep this with my right. But I'm going to be short so you put in an extra step so you take it with your left or right.

Miles: And did you have in terms of getting to Helsinki were you given any funds to get to Helsinki

David: Oh no! Actually when I plowed my pathology exam you know the professor said?

Miles: No

David: This is one race you're not winning

Miles: That's harsh.

David: I said to him you bugger under my breath. No. Well that was one. I didn't want my veterinary diploma in my CVS to be in any way diminished by thinking your well at least he's a good runner we'll ease the passage for him.
No, No, No, So.

Miles: What did the fellows think back at Larkhall of your?

David: Oh, they were very kind, they gave me some books. Surgery books. I don't know. Some Veterinary books. You know there wasn't a lot of money. Nobody had much money but no they were kind. But I'll show you what the citizens of Larkhall gave me. But the people were nice to me too.

Miles: And of course, the Helsinki Games well it was Zatopek wasn't it was the big star.

David: He was a hero says it says there.

Miles: And you saw his races.

David: Zatopek Zatopek Zatopek 5000, 10000 and Marathon. All within seven days. And I've always said to my hero but I've read a biography of hi.,
And things in the 1950s were beginning to change.

Miles: Right.

David: As an old sport you know tennis, cricket. And the amateur game was being the amateur game was being pushed aside. Some people were true armatures such as I was. But Zatopek was in the Czechoslovakian in the army or cardinal or a major.

Miles: All right.

David: I wonder how much Army work he did as opposed to athletic training. People were getting cynical jobs but 100 percent devoted to athletics. So.

His reputation maybe in my mind maybe slightly tarnished because I wonder how he know you to compare it like. I mean you're competing against professionals not on.

Miles: And it was professionalism by the back door wasn't it?

David: That's right that's right. That's right. That's right. That's right.

Miles: So, do you still have an interest in athletics.

David: No not just me it says it's a different world. A different world. It's probably a better world and it's opened up to more people who never had the chance. We went to Buckingham Palace before went to games for afternoon tea along with Canada Australia and New Zealand athletes.

But nobody from Africa is saying is that it's much wider field. No. More people are getting the opportunity and then making money out of it. So good luck to them. But I was just reading recently some of them now when their athletic career is over or sort of. Wondering what they do they do now what they haven't prepared for it.

Miles: And of course this is the different.

David: I have finished and I graduated and well qualified fifty-four. And immediately moved into a veterinary career. Athletics. I hadn't time to worry about not running and that's one of the big dangers of professional sport. Usually you see with a lot of these well Gascoigne of Glasgow Rangers great name playing football and his football days over lost.

Miles: So you when you stopped. Did you miss it?

David: Oh no no well we went away down to Kent in general practice

Miles: Right. So go if I'm going to make a lot of mistakes I'm going to be as far away from larkhall as possible. You were protecting your reputation I can see that

David: If I inject a pig and it dies then I better get away first. Well Mari kept saying you're very fast in the running track. But what about what about the finger.

Miles: She beat you to the tape with that one.

David: It was it was good fun. Yes, it was good. Good fun, you you've got to be very careful it doesn't become an obsession.

Miles: And I suppose it does with some pull it does with some people.

David: Yes, it does. I've seen it in the golf course. Yeah. With young lads playing well and not handicap coming down they can't go at the golf course quick.