

The Shoe Fund by Peter Hobden

The Hilton Harrier Shoe Fund emanated from a Jog and Grog discussion about the number of social media requests we had seen from Hilton people looking for secondhand running shoes for people who could not afford running shoes but ran or intended running marathons or comrades. It was apparent to us that people making these requests were very well meaning, but clearly, they were not runners. We managed to put Attie off his burger special by imagining putting our feet into the running shoes of an average Hilton Harrier. Likely they would have run a comrades, a marathon or two, cross country and trail. They would be muddy, have holes and of course stink. They would house the fungus that had eaten the original owner between the toes. Worse still they could have been Jenny Patrick's. After another beer or possibly two, we decided that we had to give a gift of a new pair of shoes to a deserving runner. We wanted the gift to come from us, the Hilton Harriers runners, not sponsorship and we wanted to give the experience that only a runner knows, of putting on a new pair of running shoes.

We therefore set about raising the money. We cleared out the ashes of the urn, which housed the ashes of Dave Nicholson's great aunt. We then carried the urn wherever the Harriers went. We made runners feel so guilty that they put in their loose change when buying beer or cheap wine after Jog and Grog. On most Harrier occasions we had "fines" and the urn was passed around. We always insisted on coins as we did not want big donations and they rattle nicely in the urn. It never got left when the Harriers travelled. On a visit to the Brass Bell in Cape Town, to attend the post Two Oceans lunch and fines, it was such a hit that a man insisted that he put in a R200 note. He claimed that he believed that clubs like the Harriers, with such spirit, no longer existed. Lauren Corcoran even managed to get her runners in England to put their mommy hands in the urn. (Bless the exchange rate)

Hilton Harriers put forward motivations when they came across someone who they felt needed a new pair of shoes and a "committee" evaluated and made a decision. The criteria really amounted to good old gut feeling. The "committee" was "chaired" by Peter Hobden for some obscure reason which no one remembers or cares, and people got on the committee by saying they wanted to be on the committee. The meetings consisted of sitting around a table at Crossways after Jog and Grog and making a decision and then organizing for people to go with the runner to Poobies. The Poobster, coming to the party with a few specials. Mike tipped the urn upside down, got the money out and we paid.

Mike and Steph looked after the urn, which their interior decorator tastefully incorporated into the feel of their third lounge. Strict financial controls were not adhered to, but every time Mike emptied the urn, we had more than we thought we did. Even John Holliday was impressed. At present the fund has money for about 2 pairs of shoes, which should have already been spent.

The original intention was one pair of shoes. We did it. We got momentum and we were having fun, and then realized we had gifted 5 pairs and then we stopped counting. We have always gone with the person to Poobies to choose the shoes they want. Interestingly, there has not been one runner who has chosen a particularly expensive pair and it is amazing to see people realise that there are more comfortable shoes than the brand they have always dreamt about. Vincent at Poobies makes sure they get to try on every brand. We have witnessed more than one person putting on new pair of shoes for the first time in their life.

Then came COVID and like so many things, it all went quiet.

Hilton Harriers are however back up and running and it is time to polish the urn and bring it out.

So, what can you do?

- put your loose change in the urn – which does mean you need to attend Jog and Grog and HH events
- do something remarkable, abnormal or wear a puffer jacket and drive a Land cruiser so you can be fined
- message Peter Hobden if you would like to be on the “committee” – you only need a sense of humour and no sense of decency
- motivate if you come across a runner in need – put it in an email or WhatsApp and give it to anyone on the HH committee, anyone on the “committee” or temporarily join the “committee”
- plot and execute a coup so you can be the “chair” of the fund

Existing committee: Peter Hobden, Attie Kruger, Lauren Corcoran, Sandy Boschhoff, Steph (the grumpy one) Botha, Dave Nicholson