

# Frank McCabe: A Front-Runner Loses

By DOROTHY MAUK

He wasn't afraid to live—and he wasn't afraid to die. He did both with a gently, quiet dignity, leaving behind a legacy of pride and dedication to sustain both his family and friends in the years to come.

Dr. Frank McCabe departed this earth last Wednesday in much the same way he had lived the last 13 years of his life—surrounded by those he loved, dreaming of the mountains he had conquered, his heart filled with unbridled passion for the taskmaster of his later years: running.

No respecter of persons, cancer can overtake the front-runners of the world swiftly at times and never look back at the gaping hole in which its devastating passage has left in the ranks.

Thus it was with the 63-year-old southeast Denver dentist who, remarkably, hit "the wall" in his final race only six weeks after participating June 27 in the 15-kilometer St. Mary's Glacier alpine test and only three months after an impressive 3:38.54 performance May 4 in the Mile High Marathon.

"I don't think we realized how much of an effort that was for him," said Dr. McCabe's 27-year-old son, Bill, who ran the last 6 miles of the marathon with his father. "Sometimes you're too close. But it didn't seem to be more of a struggle at the end than usual. His knee was bothering him a

little bit. But he was still pretty excited about it."

Born in Aspen, Frank McCabe was the youngest of six children. Fatherless at the age of 2 and orphaned at 15, he came to Denver to live



Frank McCabe finishing the U.B.D. Mile High Marathon in 3:38.54.

with an aunt. Subsequently working his way through Regis College and Creighton University Dental School, he spent the next 2½ decades concentrating on his practice.

It wasn't until 1968, therefore, that running seriously captured his fancy via the Run for Your Life program at Schlessman YMCA, a facility he later would serve as a board member for 15 years and president twice.

From the time he collected his first plaque for 100 cumulative miles of running in October 1968, McCabe logged 33 marathons and scores of shorter races, starting with the 1971 national 15-kilometer run at Littleton where he finished last but later pointed out that younger runners had to drop out.

A month later, he joined his good friend Roger Gerard and 15 others in the inaugural run to the summit of Mount Evans, and although he was the eldest man on the course, he was the ninth one to complete it.

Learning about the American Medical Joggers Association program while attending a sports medicine meeting the following year in Las Vegas, the indefatigable dentist made his marathon debut with a 3:04 first-place time for his 50-55 age group.

"He had vowed he would never be last again," recalled Mary Helen McCabe, who shared bicycling and cross-country skiing with her husband. "He was euphoric. On the way back, we decided to go to Boston in April with

the kids. I just said 'If it means that much to you, then we'll go.'"

The 1972 Trip was memorable as the then 54-year-old dentist broke three hours with a 2:56 clocking, just 1½ minutes off the world record for his age group, and promptly became an avowed addict.

"I was 14 when he started and I thought he was nuts for a while," said Bill. "But finally, in 1977, when I wanted to do something with him, I started. I think the only time he ever watched a marathon was when I ran my first one in Omaha. He had a stress fracture at the time."

McCabe was sidelined two other times during his running career after he broke his ankle skiing and then, two years ago, underwent serious knee surgery. Bill remembers his 2-mile "walks" on crutches following the former accident when an offered ride wasn't at all appreciated.

"When I think of how much he went for it every day and how much he put into it, it makes me look at myself and try harder," said Bill.

McCabe never lost his fondness for Pikes Peak and Mount Evans and ran the St. Mary's race, in fact, as a training event. His last words, therefore, were not surprising.

"Mount Evans," he murmured softly again and again. Finally came the fateful lament, "My legs are heavy."

A lot of folks are certain Frank McCabe then ran all the way to heaven.

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