

## Those Odd Looking Feet by Donna Bailey

My mum says that I never bothered to crawl as a baby. The story goes...I just stood up and got moving at the age of 9 months and to be honest I've never stopped moving since 🤪. She was quite relieved to be honest that I walked. I was born a healthy baby, but with two deformed toes on my left foot, stacked in a strange manor. For the first few weeks of my life, these two toes where strapped together in hope that then would correct. This didn't work. As soon as the strapping was removed, they'd just ping right back into their original obscure place. My mother was told that I may have trouble walk until I was old enough to have these toes operated on. So you can imagine her relief when I got going 😊

My early years of school, I recall gathering my class mates to race me in the playground. I'd always win, I'd even beat the boys 😊. To be honest I was never top of the class in any of my other subjects, but I was always the most sporty and definitely the fastest runner. It wasn't long before I was running for my school. I can feel the tension now, dressed in burgundy PE knickers and a navy blue top, a scrawny kid aged 11 on the starting blocks. My legs tremoring with nerves waiting for the gun to sound. With winning or placing high regularly came pressure and anxiety. I found as I approached my mid-teens, I'd struggled with the pressure that I'd created in my mind and the expectations of my coaches. Running competitively very soon took a back seat as I'd tired of this feeling. Life carried on, bringing up a family, keeping active in many ways but rarely running.

Fast forward nearly 20 years. A friend suggested we pop down to Sweatshop at Xscape, "I hear they hold a running club down there" she said. So nervously and not particularly enthusiastically I attended. I was surprised by the warm welcome from strangers and some familiar faces that I had met over the years working in the fitness industry.

My first race was encouraged by Wendy and Steve Berry. I can remember it like yesterday. Wearing Steve's Sweatshop T-shirt (I hadn't earned min yet). Hadn't raced for years, with a few friends cheering me on, I did really well and realised what I'd missed. That was it, I was hooked. The fun was back in the run! Clocked up over the years many runs now. A few stick in my mind in particular.

Ferriby 10 mile with Wendy Berry. Running wearing our plastic bags. There was wind rain and snow that day! My jaw locked as my mouth froze. A complete stranger had to undo my soggy wet sports bra in the changing rooms after the race, my arms and hands so cold they wouldn't work. Me and Wendy still talk about that race today with great amusement.

London marathon 2016 and 2017, which I believe I still hold the club record for in my age category, for now anyhow (but that's ok 😂).

Windermere marathon 2018, 2019 with my amazing running pal Stephen Wong, who knows me so well, knows just what to say when I have doubt 😊. And so many more 😊.

Steve and Wendy suggested we try it out at ARR. Again I was a bit reluctant. "Aren't they a proper running club" I'd ask, presuming it would come with the pressure I recalled as a child. On arrival we were greeted by a friendly lady named Pat 😊 who believed Steve and Wendy were my parents.... I'll take that 😂😂.

Over the years that I've been a member, I've made many super friends, the list would go on for ever, and it keeps on growing all the time.....You're my kind of people 😊.

I believe that the lovely ARR team allows you to be whatever kind of runner you want to be. It's no secret that I do still struggle with those anxious feelings at the start of a races, that's why I'm a bit unpredictable with my times. But once in a while, a race falls into place, the anxiety attached from so many years ago subsides and I feel like that super fast kid again, I'm flying and I bloody love it!

But most of the time I'm happy plodding along, running with friends and cheering you guys over the finish line, celebrating all your achievements. So that's my running journey in a nutshell and don't judge me on my feet. 😂 Take care.

Donna Bailey, May 2020