

My Running Journey by Annabelle James

I was never a fan of running as a kid - I preferred field events and threw things at county level until I went up an age category, my fellow competitors and the things I was throwing got bigger and I didn't. Running was something we were made to do as a punishment for talking in netball and of course there was the dreaded cross country... I thought I was being clever hiding in a bush and returning, mud and sweat free, when an appropriate amount of time had passed. My plan was foiled when they put me on the cross-country team - I didn't last long.

Any sporting skill I had faded into the dim and distant past when work life took over. Living on mainly caffeine and nicotine, the most exercise I ever got was walking up the odd flight of stairs at work when the lift got stuck in the basement. But then I started martial arts training and eventually started to work towards my black belt in kickboxing. The need to be able to run 2 miles in under 20 minutes seemed like an insurmountable task. But I practised and by the time I took my grading in September 2013 I did the timed run in 18:13. And somewhere along the way I realised I didn't hate running quite as much anymore.

The next year I was dared by a colleague to enter the Great North Run - I'm never one to back away from a dare and thought I had better do some training. At this stage a friend at kickboxing mentioned this thing called parkrun to me where you could turn up, run 5k round a park and get a time and free t-shirts. I duly signed up and rocked up at Dewsbury parkrun (my nearest one in the pre-Nostell and Thornes days). I'd never run 3 miles before so thought I'd better be prepared - not sure what the other runners thought when they saw me turn up clutching a bottle of water and a gel... The Run Director said go and I pegged it up the hill. Which was longer than it looked. Much longer. Eventually I got to the top, there were only about 4 people in front of me - yay, I thought, must be nearly 3 miles and I'm looking at a top 5 finish, I love running. That's when I looked at my watch and saw I had run just over 0.1 miles (my perceptions of distance and pacing have not improved). I eventually finished in 32 minutes or so and vowed never to return.

Roll forward to 2020 and I'm now on 198 parkruns, have done 2 marathons and a bunch of halves, 10ks and other races. I smashed my leg up quite badly in 2016 but eventually got back to form last year getting PBs at most distances. I'm still not sure if I like running but must do just a little bit as I keep on doing it!

Annabelle James, May 2020