

A New Normal by Mark Leadbeater

A new normal is a statement very current in the news headlines as we go through the Covid-19 pandemic, but a new normal started for me over 6 years ago.

In December 2013 after taking up running some 4 months earlier I was diagnosed with a benign brain tumour. Some 6 weeks later I was in surgery for 18 hours, followed 10 days later by a subsequent 5-hour operation to partially remove the unwanted lodger I had named BOB (2 points if you know what BOB means!). I was in hospital for 32 days, 28 of them bed ridden, so due to muscle memory loss I lost the ability to walk and left hospital in a wheelchair. I also had to learn to write again (some would say I am still learning).

My rehabilitation started then as I had signed up for the Jane Tomlinson 10K series and the Yorkshire marathon later that year and whilst in hospital I found out I had gained a place in the Great North Run. These were to be my first ever half and full marathons. I told my consultants what I had entered, and they said maybe try next year we cannot see you doing it this year!! Well I am a stubborn Yorkshireman and like a challenge.

Daily trips to the gym in the early days and walking with the aid of a walking pole around a reservoir in Halifax I had a silly idea. I had really bad balance' hence the stick, but remembered that riding a bike you need momentum to keep upright. Much against my wife's wishes I threw the stick to the ground and started to jog. I managed this better than walking, it was the first time I saw light at end of the tunnel and just maybe I could try some of the events I had entered.

I started back at SRC in the April and was so well looked after by many people, a lot of whom are now Ackworth members. I saw running as my lifeline to a new normal. I used to play badminton in the Bradford and Yorkshire leagues for over 30 years, but balance issues put an end to that sport.

I managed to run all the 10K events and met some inspirational people along the way, all from varied backgrounds and all with a similar love/hate of running! I was paced for 7 miles at the Great North Run by a fellow Ackworth member before she needed a loo break (another 2 points for guessing who that was?). Finally, my biggest challenge was the Yorkshire marathon and even having a slight meltdown at mile 18 and a brief walk my brain uttered these words, " You were in a hospital bed 8 months earlier, get over yourself, its only 8 miles to go". I had done it **YES**, crossing the line under the 4 hour mark, running was my salvation, totally helping my mental health issues. My journey to a **New Normal** was complete.

I owe a massive thanks to the **NHS** who saved my life and the total dedication, professionalism of these superheroes so it is easy for me to "**Stay at Home**" "**Save Lives**" "**Protect the NHS**"

Mark Leadbeater, May 2020