

## **My Most Important Medal** by Cary Bernard

I don't have many medals. I don't enter many races!! My most important medal, though, wasn't for a race, except against myself. I'd never quite understood the attraction of virtual medals until 2018.

I always forget when I jokingly say that a run was drug fuelled that people won't quite understand what I mean unless they know that I have dodgy lungs!! And the best (and worst) drugs my NHS dealer gives me are the steroids tablets that kick those dodgy lungs back into action. It always feels like cheating .... but it always feels like freedom.

And so, it was yet again at the start of 2018. Turbo boosted!! My lungs were working and giving my legs the oxygen they needed to run. And they were running, they were running fast, they were going to break that 60min 10k at the Wakefield Hospice 10k.

Just one more week to go, one more week before my legs and lungs took me flying to the finish line ... only they never got that far. An inevitable side effect of years of the magic bullet is osteoporosis and my ankle didn't quite stand up to the new found speed. So that was that, not running fast but limping slowly with a stress fracture. And that took months to heal, probably not helped by more drug fuelled limping speed! But finally, after about 6 months it was declared healed ... be on your way and don't do it again!!

I started slowly building up again, fast walk, run walk, running ..... bugger, legs working now lungs gone again! I had to have a target to make me get out and try to run so I looked to a virtual medal. One company released just one a month and they were always lovely. I decided running a total of 25 miles during December would be my aim, though I wasn't sure if I could do it. I waited to see what the medal would be, not realising just how much it mattered to me.

When December's medal was announced it was beautiful, just what I'd imagined, just what I wanted, just what I needed. I immediately burst into tears at the thought of working for that beautiful medal and really earning it. I planned my routes, I planned my days, I planned to get that medal. Slowly I ticked the miles off, slowly I reached my target and slowly I waited for my medal to arrive. When it did arrive, I was so excited opening the packet. My hands were actually shaking as I ripped it open. And there it was. My medal!! It was beautiful. I'd earned it, I deserved it and I'd also learned something even more important. I wasn't ready to give up trying ..... ever.

Cary Bernard, May 2020