

## **Blame it on the Dog** by Chris Hartley

'Twas on the 9th of June 2009 - Blaydon Race day on Tyneside. A runner friend rang after the race - taking that call in local woods, Murphy my Irish Water Spaniel ran away. Now Durham is hilly. I ran this way and that. Darkness fell. An hour passed - I found him. Back home Age 47 and 15 stone I looked in the mirror. If I could run round Durham that night I could run some more. 3 months later I'd lost 3 stones.

I told my friend when I could run 5 miles in 40 mins, I'd get a personal trainer. She introduced me to Dan. PT and his running club sessions followed. I got fitter. Entered races. 5k 5 & 10 mile, The Blaydon Race then my first Great North Run. With just 4 hrs sleep, on a hot day I blew it. Off too fast - for the first and only time I hit the wall after mile 8. Walked drunk for 3 miles - Jogged the rest missing 2 hours by seconds. Gutted. More races and even a couple of marathons in Geneva. 5 a side soccer and swimming too.

Born in Hemsworth and raised in Fev and Ponte, I joined my sister Wendy Berry for runs with ARR when back home. It was all going SOOO well until: Back in the North East, Dan sold his gym, his running club folded. I was solo again.

Work got busy - two years passed. Just as my fitness was waning, Dan got in touch. A new gym and now coach of Blaydon Harriers. I joined them - I was back but life has its twists - just as I was ramping it up, within months, 4 years ago disaster struck. My knee gave way. Bone on bone Arthritis. On crutches I did 2 half marathons - including Liverpool Rock'n'Roll with members of ARR. Six months of no running or gym followed. Advised to move to Cycling, I crept up to 5k - beating my orthopaedic surgeon at the Newcastle park run. The long road back to fitness followed. More runs in Yorkshire with ARR - In my Blaydon vest I became known as the man dressed as a bee!

2019 brought The Grasmere Gallop and Leeds 24 Endure. I Joined the Social Running Group in Gosforth and Great Run Runners Newcastle Quayside plus more half marathons than ever in a year -4. I dipped below 2 hours once again. Met Brendan Foster at the Gibside great run local - the start of the Great North Run Weekend. Got a start line pass for the GNR itself. That year I'd joined ARR as a second claim. It's a fabulous club. I've made great friends. Even won the winter handicap in 2020!

2020 should have been busier still. More halves, the Edinburgh Marathon, Leeds 24 Endure plus the rest. The Covid inspired Carnivorous League has been a life saver - a great incentive. Though the knee complains every day, I'm now fitter than any time since I turned 50.

You'll no longer see the bee vest when I'm back in Yorkshire - but you'll spot the ever present knee tape. I'll finish by raising a glass to the committee and my fellow Area 9s

Sadly, my dog isn't alive to see this. RIP Murphy. It's all down to you.

Chris Hartley, May 2020