

5 Reasons to Love Running

Sugar and spice and all things nice. That's what little girls are made of... unless they aren't. Unless for some seemingly unknown reason they are made to feel different. Outcast. Opportunities missed with a dwindling lack of confidence and a growing retreat to food and drink. But this is not a story of woe; this is a story of awakening. In true runner's style it will be told quickly, darting from moment to moment as the in between parts blur away.

2013 and sat watching London Marathon with a man who is now my husband, I remarked that one day in my life I would like to be able to do something like that. With a wave of his magic iPhone, he'd signed us both up for Birmingham Half Marathon later that year. Super! Except we didn't own trainers and we weren't runners (or so we thought). Runners to us were those people with short shorts, long legs and swishy ponytails that glide elegantly and never seem to perspire. I was more of a vertically challenged, over dressed, sweaty tomato that had careered into a bush. Number 1 reason to love running: running doesn't care what you look like.

After following a run/walk guide, we made it to the distance. Each time I ran a further distance I believed more in myself. That year I completed Birmingham Half in 2:00:19. I wasn't even bothered about the 19 seconds so quell your gasps. It was then that I joined Lawley Running Club. Me? Allowed in a running club? But they're for proper short shorts, long legs runners surely? From that first moment of joining a bunch of shady folks in a dimly lit car park, this assumption has been flattened year on year. If you run, you're a runner. Number 2 reason to love running: running has the power to bring us together, allowing us to be part of something bigger whilst still allowing us an individually unique experience. Your run is not the same as the person's next to you even though parts of your experience are shared.

Over the years I learned a lot. I got a better pair of shoes instead of that first pair that you could literally fold in half; I stopped running with my headphones in whilst carrying a gallon of water; I learned that I had a very wonky leg; I started to run round in circles outside my house to get to a round distance. As all runners who have been running a few years, you start to make yourself goals. You have good years and bad years and periods of injury when you might as well have had both your legs chopped off as time seems to move backwards and everyone else is running around, even your Great Aunty Dorris whilst you just sit. Number 3 reason to love running: it allows you to be dramatic.

2017 came and I was finally on fire (not literally). I got my half time down to 1:33:22, 10k to 42:12, 5k to 19:57 and marathon to 3:34:17. I started to actually win things. I ran my first ultrarace and won it! I am unashamedly proud of it because I worked hard and when I think back to being a child bullied for having the wrong kind of brand in her PE kit, I never would have thought that I could do that. Number 4 reason to love running: you are capable of so much more than you know.

At this point I moved back to Yorkshire and everything changed. Not for the quicker, but for the better. I joined Ackworth Road Runners and felt a true sense of community with some of the kindest people I know. I also became pregnant with my first child. People told me I wouldn't have time for running once she was born. The

thing is, people don't know everything. Running is an integral part of me and our family. Obviously we have had to make many adjustments: running silly miles with a buggy; finding extra places en route to have a wee; breastfeeding in the middle of a field at Harewood House before running the National Cross Country Championships...but it has made me appreciate it all so much more. It is an escape and a reminder that I am so totally insignificant in this vast planet. When all that's left is the pounding of your heart and the sound of your body connecting with the Earth, the fact that your child has managed to wee down your sleeve whilst the dog is being sick on your foot seems to glide away on the wind.

We connect routes across our Strava maps like blood pumping through arteries, conquering the space around us; Kings and Queens of our running territory. Our personal stories woven into the landscape, "Remember the time I tripped and cut up my arm on the pavement outside the Toby Carvery but managed to pause my Garmin before I hit the ground." Number 5 reason to love running: it connects us to this planet.

By Elly Roberts, April 2020