

CLAIRE DANIELS

## RUN SWEARY RUN



The tales of an average plodder

BY

Claire Daniels

## **Run Sweary Run**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Is this a story of how I've shed half of my body weight and gone on to become one of the fastest women runners in the UK? . . .no.

Is this a life affirming story of how I've achieved 100 marathons, countless ultra-marathons and I've unlocked the secret to easy running? . . .also, no.

This short book is for everyone out there who has struggled and pushed, red faced to every finish line, to those who will never know a podium finish or a headline in the runners' magazines. This is for everyone like me, with that dogged determination (or sheer stubbornness) will never quit – and yes, you are all amazing bad-asses!

Goodbye to most of you, now to the morbidly curious – thanks for sticking with me. This book, for me is a look back at the long road to becoming the runner I am

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today, full of ups, downs and hilarious disasters. I'm still just an average plodder but that's ok, I am lapping everyone on the couch, and we can't all be Mo Farah can we!!

My journey begins at the tender age of 32, I had spent most of the previous decade partying hard and ignoring the fact that I was getting a bit older and I needed to start looking after myself. Weekends were for football and lager, weekdays were for nights out and drinks not to mention my treat every couple of months to a spa weekend, girls' trip or jolly abroad. I was eating and drinking like Hagar the Horrible. My Husband (yes, I managed to at least acquire one of those) is a very laid back guy so he is happy as long as I am which is why he has never stepped in to say "don't you think a water and a salad would be better?"

Anyway, I had reached 32 and decided I was getting a bit fed up of it and I took a good look in the mirror and the first thing that went through my mind was "who's that fat bird looking at me?!" then I thought that I needed to do something about it. That afternoon I saw an advert campaign for Birmingham Big Bikes, a scheme where you could apply and be given a cycle for free as long as you used it correctly and gained some health benefits, I signed up to the scheme there and then. A few days later I had an email – I had been chosen to receive a bike "hooray" shouted my waistline!

I went along and collected my shiny, Orange bike, it was lovely, and I couldn't wait to ride it, so I keenly jumped in the saddle and headed out for its maiden voyage . . . its first and last! After 2 miles in the saddle I got home, took a long hot shower and wondered if I'd be walking like John Wayne forever or if the effects would wear off – it was awful, if I think about it long enough I can still feel that saddle (the horror!) the shiny orange bike was sent back that very week and I was back at square one, fat and knackered.

The glimmer of hope came when a friend had sent me a screenshot of a social media post advertising a couch to 5km course, totally free and in Cotteridge Park which is practically on my doorstep . . .and that is where my story and journey begins.

So, let us get into it, first thing I had to do was create running Claire so she could kill party Claire, for one cannot live if the other survives . . .

## Couch to 5km

“You want me to run for how long??”

January 2017

I am standing in Cotteridge park, it is pitch black and I have roped my good friend Sally into joining a couch to 5k course with me. We are wrapped up warm and standing around whispering to each other about all the other people, like us, standing there nervously scanning the car park. A big, booming voice then silences the whispers, its Mick the run leader for this session, he explains who he is, what the aim of the course is and then he ushers us into some tennis courts in the park for us to begin our running journey.

The courts have a large perimeter fence and he explains that we are simply going to walk and run around the edge of that fence, our first effort is going to be 30 seconds of running and 2 minutes of walking. 30 seconds? No sweat! Ha, wrong! After three of these sets, I had stripped all my layers to just a vest and I was sure my lungs were on their way out of my mouth, this was hard. I managed to get to the end of the session, and I have to say I loved it, I was hot, sweaty, tired and proud. Mick then announced we had to do this three times a week not once, I had

missed that bit! Party Claire came straight out and said nope, I have no time for three but in that tennis court that night runner Claire was born, and she whimpered “just try it for a couple of weeks”

We skip to week 4 of the program, by this time me and Sally are really getting in to the swing of it, we are masters of two- and three-minute running, confidently saying hi to everyone on the way past giggling with our friends and thinking we are the best. We have also been released from the cage that is the tennis courts and we are running square loops of the park. The loop starts with a lovely downhill, two flat sides and then an incline back to the start, I affectionately named this “Bastard Hill” oh how I hated that hill, it almost always beat me on our first sessions. I would get halfway up and then my lungs would almost explode and I was walking again, along with a string of colorful words that would probably make a sailor blush - and now you know how I got the name “Sweary Claire”.

We get to the end of the session and Mick announces that we are going to run for 5 minutes next week – that was my first big wobble, me and sally looked at each other and thought how are we going to run for 5 minutes, its impossible (I do laugh when I look back at that day)

The weeks rolled by and soon enough we found ourselves in the final week, the whole group were feeling buzzed and the once whispering pack were now a mad rabble in the car park – the atmosphere was electric. Mick finally got us all to shut



up and he offered us the choice, run for 30 minutes or get to 5km, we all chose 5km - naturally. We had to complete 12 and a half laps of our park course to reach that magic number – me and Sally being mouthy gits shouted back “Halves?? We don’t do halves Mick – lets have 13 instead” you think I would have learnt not to be so cocky by that stage

We set off, the first few laps were easy but as we progressed that Bastard hill kept putting me off and then it just got harder and harder but by some miracle I had dragged my sorry ass around that track 13 times, I had achieved my first ever running Medal – the Park Lives 5km course completion medal, I was so proud. All those dark evenings running round with a torch strapped to my head (I had affectionately named us the headtorch wankers) and those early Saturday mornings shuffling around a course had all finally paid off. I was now a runner, I was capable of 5km non-stop, albeit slower than a herd of turtles in peanut butter but I could do it.

For the first time ever I felt an overwhelming sense of achievement, I had accomplished something wonderful and I was absolutely beaming with pride, I joined straight up to the Cotteridge park runners group as I wanted to keep running with my new friends even though the course had finished. It was then announced that the Cotteridge Canter race was to be held shortly, it would be my first ever

5km race, my first taste of competition – about 100 runners on a local course, I was thrilled.

Race day came and I lined up with everyone else, the first time I encountered other runners that were not my safe little group, they set off and I thought “how bloody fast are they?” as they quickly disappeared into the distance. I did spot the lead runners from a club called Bournville Harriers running the wrong way so with all my finesse and tact I shouted “oi, you’re all going the wrong way” and started laughing. They soon caught back up and went on to finish in the top 5. Little did I know how much Bournville Harriers would be a part of my life and that the 1<sup>st</sup> runner, that strip of wind whippet would end up being one of my very good friends, Tom. I came across the line in 52 minutes (in my defence it was hilly) my first 5km race was ticked off, now I wanted more – maybe I was ready to take the huge leap from 5 to 10km, I was bitten by the running bug.



**Me, Leslie and Sally with our Couch to 5km Medals (L to R)**

## **From Cotteridge Park to Cofton Park Runners**

“I think I can get to 10km”

July 2017

I had continued running with Cotteridge park runners but now the seed was planted that perhaps I could get to 10km, after speaking with the run leader Mick he had suggested that perhaps I join his Wednesday group over at Cofton Park. Cofton was a much larger group with a much broader spectrum of running abilities so he thought this would benefit me and I could join his 5k to 10k progression group held there.

I remember the first time I stepped into that group, I sat in the car and watched everyone all chatting and laughing and I did feel a little nervous but I'm not the shy and retiring type so I thought I'd better just get in there and make a good impression. In hindsight I think I made a very loud and chatty impression! The group were very welcoming and friendly, and I soon settled into our training sessions each week.

After a couple of weeks, I was invited along to my first Friday social run, running and a beer after, this was perfect! I turned up on the Friday evening and I recognised a few faces from the Wednesday training group, and I was introduced to the others. After a round of friendly hellos it was time to head off, as expected

they all zoomed off and I naturally went to the back of the pack, not a problem as the group mustered to let us slower guys catch up which I thought was lovely. I thought to myself as I was chuffing along like an old boiler that if I stick with these guys then I would certainly see improvements in my running – just for fear of being left behind.

That first run I remember making my way back to the pub and I was told we had to run up a hill that was part of a Strava challenge (if it's not on Strava it doesn't count!) this section was called Ivor the Engine and it is a long hill back up to the pub. Remembering how much I struggled up "bastard hill" I had a little wobble and I didn't want to look totally shit in front of my new running buddies so I gritted my teeth and thought just keep pushing! A lovely lady called Jen must have known I was struggling because even though she was one of the much quicker runners she had looped back to me and said "right, you can do this - you will get up that hill." She stuck by my side all the way up to the top with me constantly doubting that I could do it but I prevailed and did it, I really didn't want to let this lady down after she had come back for me. I think I must have chatted her poor ears off, unfortunately I am a nervous talker, I use chat and sarcasm to try and mask my nerves. The beer after made it all worthwhile

Thankfully I hadn't disgraced myself (yet) and I was welcomed into the fold by everyone, I was now a Cofton Park Runner. Being a CPR member was without

doubt one of the most important times in my life, I was welcomed into this world of supportive, like minded and brilliant people. Where once party Claire would have laughed and scoffed at “those idiots” out running on a Friday night I was now one of them and I couldn’t wait each week to finish work, lace up my trainers and pound the pavements with my friends. We would chat about how our week had been, well they would chat, and I would huff along with one-word answers and a series of grunts, I still sounded like an old asthmatic donkey whilst running.

I went on to complete the 5 – 10km course with CPR and I was now, in my mind a serious runner. I had bought the trainers, the proper sports bra (much to the relief of everyone watching me run) and a GPS watch. This was now a new life, a life as a runner and I had never felt so alive.

At last I had found where I belonged, a community where I felt accepted without having to prove myself to anyone, it was wonderful. I have made many friends within CPR and some of them are now lifelong friends, I started using a phrase whilst I was a member of CPR – running family, that’s what I called them all, my wonderful running family. I must mention my running mom, she is a wonderful lady called Sarah, such an inspiring lady and a brilliant runner and even now she still encourages, supports and inspires me to just grit my teeth and keep going. It’s funny how these people who I have only known a short time can be more

supportive and have better intentions for me than some people who I have known my whole life.

I have had many wonderful adventures with CPR, some of which you will read about further on (if you haven't got bored buy then and chucked the book)

We have had races, day trips, many parties and lots of fun and laughter – as well as some tears and trying times, and they have really helped shape and define the person I am today, I have taken many pearls of wisdom from each and every one of them, not just in running but in life in general and no matter where I end up and what I am doing I will always be Cofton Park Runner blue in the middle. I will always know where home is and that will never be forgotten.



**Cofton Park Runners**

I cannot talk about CPR without mentioning our Mike.

Unfortunately, we lost Mike in November 2018, he had suffered a massive heart attack whilst out on the usual Sunday social run and could not be revived.

Mike was the most lovely, funny and inspirational man. I met him when I first joined Cofton Park Runners. He was in the air force and he had survived heart attacks and hip surgery to bounce back and start running again – and he was very good at it. He ran a lot for the cardiac athletes to help raise awareness and funds for the charity.

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If ever I was struggling I would hear “ come on Claire bear, keep going” he was always on hand to help push me through those barriers, he was also always around to take the piss out of me every time I fell over, needed a wee in a bush (that happened a lot) and he was always so quick to get the jokes in, and I loved him for it.

He was a great friend, who always had the biggest smile and the warmest hug. Even now when I’m out running, I often think of Mike, especially when it is raining, he had a saying “if it aint raining it aint training” and those words run through my head on every soggy run.

Mike is survived by his lovely wife Wendy, another absolute gem of a lady and their two children, who are a credit to them both.

I still miss him now, and I am sure everyone who knew him does.

Rest easy big guy.



**Memorial park run for Mike at Arrow Valley, his favourite course**

## **Worcester 10km – my 1<sup>st</sup> 10km race**

“The quest for silverware begins”

September 2017

The Worcester 10km was my first race of that distance, I remember getting myself up early and thinking right, I need a good breakfast, this is a long way to run (I know, it's only a 10km) I choked down some porridge and then a banana, I hate eating first thing but I knew I needed the energy. I got dressed in my running gear and pinned my number on my vest before I left the house, I felt like a proper athlete – strutting around with my number like I was warming up for the Olympics, I must have looked like a right prat!

I made my way to Cofton Park to meet up with my friends and get into car sharing groups, we were going mob handed – we were to flood Worcester with CPR blue vests and proudly represent our running group. We arrived in Worcester city and there were runners everywhere – tech shirts and KT tape as far as the eye could see, the air smelt of deep heat and the hope of a thousand PB's (personal best) this was a big event and then I suddenly started to get nervous, imagining myself coming last out of these thousands of people, I starting looking round for people also doing the 10km that looked like they would be slower than me (I know, how can you tell?) this is when I had a moment of inspiration and came up with the

runners prayer. I gathered everyone into a circle, all holding hands and I began to recite what my brain had just thrown together ...

**The Runners Prayer**

*Now as we walk through the valley of the shadow of the start line*

*Let me fear no broken pavement or dodgy portaloos*

*And deliver us safely through water stations*

*For ours is the goody bag, the medal and the T-shirt*

*Forever and ever . . . Amen.*

A huge cheer of amen went up and we all gave out hugs, this was really a special moment. We had runners in the half marathon and the 10km that day, I was in awe of the half marathon runners – no way could I imagine running that far. The half marathon was to set off first, we walked down and watched our runners get into the start queue. I felt a small pang of envy – I could almost imagine myself in that line, ready to go but then my senses came back, and I remembered that they had to run twice as far as I did, no thanks! We cheered the pack off as the airhorn went off and then it was our turn to line up, I had never been in a starting line up so large – this was exhilarating. I was taking pictures of me and my friends for some fun on social media bragging later and I was half arsing the warm up that we were being instructed to do by someone fast and famous with a megaphone (I really wasn't

paying any attention) all of a sudden the countdown started 10, 9,8 ... this was it, let's do this!

I started off, mindful of not getting swept up with everyone and setting off too fast, other runners had warned me about this but I assured them that at my astounding level of athleticism that I'm sure it wouldn't be a problem – I'm not known for my blistering speed. My friend Fiona and I headed around the course, merrily chatting, people watching and taking in all the lovely sights of the city. Fiona is my pal who has run the most races with me, she always knows how to keep me going and even though she is a much better runner than I she always sticks with me – as you will see further on. We were about halfway round when I spotted a lady in a racing wheelchair, I know that face I thought – its Tanni Grey-Thompson, we had heard she was here competing and now here she was, right next to me. I couldn't help myself, I had to say Hello, and I'm glad I did – she was the most warm and welcoming person I have met. She asked about my running and I told her I was new at it and this was my 1<sup>st</sup> ever 10km event and after a few more moments of chatter I took the opportunity and asked for a photo – she happily obliged and we had a mid-race selfie (or a runfie as I call it) she then wished me luck and we carried on our efforts to get to the finish. I crossed the finish line with all of the crowds cheering and my faster CPR buddies all at the finish cheering me in, I felt ten feet tall in that moment and tried my best to get my arse across that finish line.

I crossed that line, ground to a halt, put my hands on my knees and said “fucking hell” my face as red as the now blushing Marshall waiting to give me my medal.

This has come to be the style I generally finish most races in now.

I looked at the official timer, I had done it, I had gotten that PB I was after – 1hr 14mins for my 10km, I was thrilled. I had celebratory hugs and medal pictures with my friends - I was on top of the world, I couldn't wait to sign up to my next event just so I could have a taste of that feeling again. As we were making our way out of the finisher's enclosure, I heard some hustle and bustle, it was Tanni – she had come to find me to see how I had done, what a really fabulous thing to do, I told her my PB news and she was really pleased for me and told me to never quit. She had made my day.

When all of the CPR runners had regrouped, we made our way back to the convoy of cars and headed home, straight to the pub for the traditional medal and a pint – something I take very seriously, I will run for beer (and sausage rolls!) the atmosphere in that pub that afternoon was amazing, lots of happy runners with tales of their races, who nearly fell over, who nearly crapped themselves, who got PBs etc. it was brilliant. And of course, we were all scouring the internet to see what race we could all book on to next. My first real running medal was safely around my neck, I headed home ready for a hot bath and maybe a few more beers – I had earned them after all.



**The wonderful Tanni Grey-Thompson and I halfway through the race**

Worcester 10km 17/09/2017



**Me and my friends showing off our new 10km and half marathon medals**



## **Alcester 10km**

“Food poisoning + cider = success”

October 2017

After the highs of the Worcester 10km my friend Fiona and I had signed up for the Alcester 10km, it promised a fairly flat and picturesque route with an awesome medal and a quite a nice tech top. I had been running 10km each weekend at this point, so I had done a few and thought I was invincible.

The night before the race I had gone out with Lee, I had successfully managed my quota of lager – a good few pints, and then we had gone on to a restaurant I had found on Groupon and bought a voucher for – who doesn't love a bargain meal! I happily demolished my Pakora starter and a Chicken Tikka Masala main course, swilled just one more beer down and then headed home with good intentions of an early night, ready for the run in the morning. Ha – guess again!

I woke up at about midnight in a cold sweat, the pain in my stomach was horrendous. I ran into the bathroom and well, the whole world fell out of my arse –

or at least it felt that way. I spent the rest of that night backwards and forwards to the bathroom. Morning came and my alarm went off – I think I called it a whore for daring to disturb me. I dragged myself up and started to get dressed in my race attire, Lee looked at me and said” are you sure that’s a good idea as there is no way you will make it today?” I half wanted to agree with him, but stubborn Claire reared her head and was adamant that I was getting my medal!!

I arrived at Fiona’s to pick her up, she opened the car door, looked at me and went “you are bloody grey – what on earth has happened to you?” so it would seem I still looked like shit at this point I replied. She got in and I told her we needed to find a shop with Imodium asap as I feared for the safety of the seats in the car. I pulled in at the little shop close by, grabbed my emergency pills and sat in the car where I took 4 Imodium instants in the hope they would quickly set in, we made our way towards the race and we decided that we needed somewhere to stop for the loo to check the pills had worked plus I needed to put something in my stomach if I was going to have any chance of running. We saw a McDonalds coming up, so we pulled in, I ran straight to the loo – an emergency test squeeze was needed, and I left Fiona to order. It would seem the chemical intervention was starting to work, and I was no longer afraid to fart. I managed to get half a bacon roll in the system, so we then headed off for the race venue. It was quite busy at the start line and I remember just feeling awful, I had produced a small can of Lucozade from

somewhere, so I chugged that down as the race was starting in a few moments.

Everyone else around me were chatting and laughing all buzzed ready for the start, I was still a funny shade of off-white and not really saying much. Fiona asked me again if I wanted to pull out as I still looked terrible and she really wasn't confident I would finish, I assured her that I would be fine – any minute now the bacon and Lucozade would kick in and all would be right again.

5, 4, 3, 2.....1 the claxon sounded, we were off. I thought to myself just get going and try to hold on, Fiona kept trying to keep the conversation going as I was fairly mute at this point, one-word answers were just about coming out. I settled in after a couple of KM's and started to feel a little better, so the chat soon returned which was nice, I was almost enjoying myself again. I was approaching the 5km marker when, out of nowhere, I tripped over, I don't know what I'd tripped over, but I was quickly well acquainted with the tarmac. I was so embarrassed, Fiona was trying to help me up and there were a couple of marshals' who had seen me fall making their way over, I said to Fiona "please tell them to fuck off, I'm fine" by now my pride was hurting way more than my knee, and I'd ripped my favourite leggings – fuck!

I hobbled off again checking to see which bits were bleeding, I wanted that medal, I didn't care if I had to walk. I got running again after a moment and soon enough I was at the 7km Cider station – yes, a race that gives you cider towards the end, it is

fabulous! The volunteer gave us a cup each and then took pity on my ripped leggings and grazed knee and gave me another, I also had Fiona's too as she really wasn't keen on the cider so after 3 cups, I felt much better. The last 2km of the course is downhill into the high street and I was starting to flag a little bit, Fiona kept saying "come on, keep pushing" half of me was grateful for the support but the other half wanted to push her in the bush so I could slow down a bit. We came down the last hill and took the sharp right back into the finish line, I could see the finish and the clock, was the clock right though? At this rate I was on for a new PB. I looked at Fiona and she just shouted "why do you think I kept telling you to move your arse and keep going" she had been watching the pace and knew I was on for a new 10km personal best. We both put a last spurt on and crossed the finish line, where yes, hands on knees I exclaimed "fucking hell!" I was handed my medal and ushered through the finish to collect my protein bar, banana and a non-alcoholic beer. The non-alcoholic beer was given back, and I headed straight to the pub that was 20 metres from the finish line. I needed a proper pint! I had earned a new PB OF 1hr 13mins for a 10km and I'm not sure how, I told Fiona that maybe I ran so fast as I was scared of shitting myself – whatever works eh!



A few pictures from the day

Alcester 10km 08/10/2017



### **Medal and a pint, keeping with tradition**

Alcester is still my favourite 10km race to this day, and it usually my PB course too. Great run, great route, well organised. You should run it if you get the chance.

## **Wolf Run**

### “A toast to Daphne”

April 2018

At this point I had been running for just over a year when one of the CPR crew had come up with the idea of us all doing the Wolf Run, as soon as they mentioned mud, I was in. Cofton park runners and some of the Cotteridge park runners had booked up and we were taking a wolf pack of about 35 people, we were bringing the mob. Martin, one of my friends at CPR had managed to get the scouts minibus for us for the day which was fabulous. We all met at Cofton park that morning and boarded the bus, the rest of the crew all following by car. We had singalongs on the way, jokes, laughter and just endless silliness, I loved it! We arrived at the grounds and parked up, we all poured out of the minibus and gathered everyone up for a team photo, we then made our way over to the registration tents. We were pinning our numbers on when a marshal came up and advised us to write our numbers on our faces as our actual paper ones would be destroyed by the finish.



### Looking fresh and clean at the start

We all got ourselves together and waited to start our warmup that they led before they set your group off, we were all giggling like children it was great fun. We shortly set off along the course and the main body of the group stuck together, helping each other over the obstacles and through the muddy bogs. Mike (our Mike) had to help pull me out of one or two of the big mudsuckers, at this point I had mud in every nook imaginable (and in some unimaginable ones) I have to say the waterslide was probably my favourite, you had to go down on your stomach,



face first – it was hilarious, I felt like a kid again, carefree and splashing through all the water and mud, I could see why this was so popular.

We got to the lake swim and this was something I was looking forward to as I enjoy swimming a lot, we were carefully escorted into the water and told to make sure we were fine to breath before setting off, as the water was so cold it was taking some peoples breath away and you could hear them snatching at breaths in a panic. If you couldn't catch your breath you had to get out and walk round the lake. I set off through the water and my friend Trish and her husband Dil were behind me, we got about half way across and I could hear Trish starting to breath a bit faster, she was starting to struggle a little bit so I turned round and ushered her onto the rope at the edge of the swim lane. Dil came on to the rope with us and we all used the rope to pull along to the edge as quick as we could as I needed to get Trish out and warmed up, we got to the bank and I helped her out to the water's edge where some of our Wolf pack were waiting for us. I advised coating ourselves in mud to act as a thermal layer (trust me, it really works) and they were both soon warmed up and feeling a bit better. We carried on around the course and we were soon at the last obstacle and muddy ditch, we all wanted to cross the line together for the photo so we started gathering on top of the muddy mound that we had to crawl up. I had stood there and helped several people up on to the mound so they could slide down the other side into the water and across the finish, we almost had

our full pack on the hill when I turned round and lost my footing and slid, on my stomach, arse first back down the hill – unfortunately straight into my Friend John – that poor man! All he saw was my backside hurtling towards him down the mud, he must have shit himself! It still makes me laugh now, it really was a moment, all you heard was John shout “bloody hell Swear!” We helped each other back up onto our feet and scrambled back up the hill, still laughing (thankfully) we all then made the last big jump into the big, muddy bog that was the finish, bloody brilliant!

We traipsed out of the mud and collected our finishers T-shirts, then we headed to the showers and by showers, I mean a bloody cold spray down with something that resembled a garden hose. We had left our warm clothes and wash facilities in the minibus, so we went back to the bus and started to clean up. Wet wipes, flasks of warm water you name it, we had it. I had got myself dry, semi clean and warm again and I tucked into the celebratory picnic I had bought with me, a Jumbo Sausage Roll and a can of cider – I know, proper athlete me! I felt fantastic, what an ace day out, how things can quickly change.

I turned my mobile on and found I had a lot of missed calls from my brother and my parents and I had one answerphone message. My stomach quickly went into a knot, something must be wrong, I listened to my voicemail and as I was listening to the message I crumbled and tears were rolling down my face, I wanted them to

stop as I was getting embarrassed by everyone looking at me – it had now fell silent and all eyes were on me, the tears wouldn't stop. My Nan had passed away that morning, she had slipped off this mortal coil in her sleep.

I tried my best on the way back to the pub to keep jovial but I fear I didn't do too well at it, my friends were trying to keep everything light and there were hugs a plenty and boy they were needed that afternoon. To start the day on such a high to have it all crash down with a bang was a real headfuck to be honest. I was still really hyped from my run and then I felt bad for still feeling that way. What a day! We got back to the pub and I thought I'm definitely having a pint now.

I sat there with the group and looked around them all, I felt so lucky and blessed to have these amazing people around me and I knew that if my Nan could have seen me around that course she would be shouting and cheering me on, she would have loved it, she was a tough old bird and she loved seeing women get stuck in with the boys. After a bit more chatter we all raised our glasses – a toast to Daphne. Gone but never forgotten. R.I.P Nan.

Wolf Run 07/04/2018



**Our proud Wolf Pack**

## **Joining Bournville Harriers**

You're a runner Clairey . . . .

August 2018

I had been running for quite a while at this point, and I had convinced myself I was happy doing a 5 – 10k a week, chatting along with my friends all the way and not really putting in too much of a ground breaking effort. I had got used to my runs being a plod as it was more about catching up with all my friends and going to the pub afterwards, I was a fully-fledged social runner and I loved it.

It was on one of these social runs where I was chatting to my friend Stewart, I've known him and his family for years from before running but oddly enough He and his sister Louise (fabulous lady who will be featured later on) had joined the same couch to 5km course as me. Stewart hadn't been at running for a while as he had joined an official running club, he was now a proper, affiliated runner (ooooooh ark at him!) he had joined up with Bournville Harriers and came to one of the Cofton sessions full of enthusiasm about them, how much better he had got, all his race times had improved etc. I thought crikey – he must be on commission!

Now I vaguely knew of Bournville Harriers, as I live 400m from the club I had seen them out running, many a time I'd been plodding up and down the road by the

house and all of a sudden the ground would start to rumble, the sound of approaching trainers growing into a crescendo, likened to a stampede in the Serengeti, and then whoosh, I'd find myself practically standing in the hedge trying to let all of these "real runners" whizz past, trying not to get sucked into the drag as they all flew by. Every time I thought to myself "do I smile and wave? Do I knowingly nod? Do I just disappear into the hedge and play dead?" and I think every time I just stood there with some strange, awkward grimace on my face – half smile, half gurning with a weird wave come pointy gesture – not my best look ( although not my worst! Ha ha!)

I remember my reply to Stewart when he asked me to join, and my honest answer was "me, join them? They look like a bunch of stuck up, elitist pricks who would hate me in a second as I'm far too slow"

Stewart as persistent as ever, (like a dog with a bone!) kept on and on at me to at least give it a go, "come on Claire – just turn up for one session, you'll love it" I finally caved in and agreed to join in for a session. What was I thinking! I was due to go for my first club run with them on a Monday evening and for the whole day I was wracked with dread. What would happen if I got left too far behind? Would I get lost? What happens if I get struck by runner's trots!! (a subject we will touch upon later)

I turned up at Rowheath Pavillion, the Harriers home club, a place I'm very familiar with as they have a lovely little bar which I frequent quite often! Anyway, I turn up and look around – there were a wave of runners all stood around, chatting, stretching, all manner of strange contortionist moves going on around me – I must have looked a little out of place as a nice lady waved at me and said “Hi – are you ok?” I replied, “yes thanks, my friend Stewart told me to come along and try a session and a run with you” the lady then introduced herself as Linda, the club's treasurer. I told Linda that I wasn't exactly what you call fast and I didn't know the proposed route so she invited me to run along with her and a few others in her group, she assured me that no-one would get lost or left behind, I began to relax a little and thought hmmm, I may actually enjoy this.

After a moment of chatter the clubs Chairperson stood up and shouted for everyone to be quiet, he then proceeded to deliver announcements – club members weekend endeavors, park run times, race results, PB's etc., this was all very new to me and as I was listening to some of the times that were being applauded I felt a huge sense of imposter syndrome creep in –in my head I was saying to myself “how fucking fast?!?! I'm out of my depth”

The shout of “right, let's get going” soon snapped my brain back into reality and I thought shit! Time to run. We all filed out of Rowheath on to the pavement and within a flash the runners had all set off like whippets, thankfully the group I had

said I would run with all waited to set off together and we did so at a much more relaxed pace than the other groups. About 2km I started to settle in, and I was talking to the others on the way round, my nerves had slipped away and so had the feeling of not belonging – I was enjoying it! Before I knew it, we had reached the halfway turn around point on our 10km and we were heading back to the club – well, the bar to be specific! Our group arrived back and there were still a host of runners outside chatting, it was a lovely warm summers evening and the day was just turning to dusk as we turned up, I checked my watch – a 10km PB! I was thrilled, instead of my usual plod and piss about id put some effort in – without going mad. That was the point where I thought ok, you should seriously consider joining.

Linda, the lady who had taken me under her wing asked if I was going to stop afterwards for a drink in the bar with everyone, of course I was! The bar was my territory, they may be elite runners but I'm an elite drinker, I can hold my own here. I peeped through the window and the bar was packed, I thought just go in, grab a beer and see what is what – I'm not sure if I was expecting shape shifting lizards or robots but I walked in and I was met with a sea of normal, smiling faces, a couple of people said Hello and then Stewart appeared and in his usual quiet and subtle manner (I hope you can feel the sarcasm radiating from that comment) he



shouted “Alright Mate” and then introduced me to everyone in the room. I was soon invited to join a table and the conversation around it.

I remember going home that night and thinking, that was actually really fun and how wrong I had been to assume that everyone at the club was an elitist prick ( I have told them at club about this, I hope they can laugh about it – sorry again guys)

I turned up for a few more taster sessions and I really started to feel like a part of the furniture very quickly, I had made my decision, I was joining up! The social plodder was joining a proper running club, this was also the day my competitive running side appeared – oh how I wanted one of those shout outs and round of applause at Monday announcements. I broke the news to my Cofton Park Running family and they all wished me well and told me “Cofton Park will always be your home and we will always be your running family”. Can you see why I love those guys so much readers?!!

I soon got stuck into everything I could at club, I also signed up for my first half marathon – The impending Worcester Half. I put myself forward for the road relays team and the cross country team (you’ll read about these later) and I started volunteering my help with club activities more and more until eventually a spot became available on the clubs committee as the Kit Secretary, a role I still hold now.

I think at first I was a bit of a culture shock for some members, and I am pretty sure I'm still too loud for some of the quieter members but most people at club are used to me now, I'm sure I am now part of the furniture.

I have made some fabulous friends at Bournville Harriers, lifelong friends and I couldn't imagine myself not being a part of the club now. I would describe us as a wonderful bunch of oddballs who make one fantastic big family. We have your crazy aunts, mother hens, wacky uncles, crazy cousins, brothers and sisters united in our search for running perfection and PB's, not to mention the fastest and fittest bunch of over 60's I have ever seen (they still put me to shame now)

I feel privileged to be part of something so wonderful and far reaching, whenever I tell people that I'm a part of the club I still swell with a sense of pride that being a member of the Teal army gives you.

I still stay in touch with Cofton Park Runners, and I join in when I can with some of their social runs, a few have joined up to the Harriers themselves which is great.

I wasted a few months agonising over whether I was good enough to join a real running club and I tortured myself with lots of self-doubt over my abilities and whether I would be shunned by the group as I didn't match their athletic abilities, how wrong I was, I was welcomed in to the group from day one and thanks to the

wonderful coaches my running has greatly improved, I have the most wonderful and supportive team mates and I have met such a broad and diverse bunch of people who I now call friends all through this fantastic club.

My advice to anyone sat there not sure if they should join a club, team or group because of self-doubt is to just jump in both feet and do it, you will not regret it.

Yes, it can be a touch daunting at first (even for a gobby loudmouth like me) but you will be fine. Life is a rich tapestry of experiences – get out and weave a good one!



**My First club vest, I'm officially a Bournville Harrier**

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## **Worcester Half Marathon – My First one**

### **“The Mayor of Worcester”**

September 2018

I had signed up for Worcester half marathon as I was transitioning from a Cofton runner into a Bournville Harrier, Worcester half would be one of the first races I had done in a Teal vest. As far as training plans go, I didn't really have one – I was told if I have run at least one ten mile run I would be fine . . . Ha! So naïve!

(mistake number 1)

I had built myself up over a few weeks from a 10km distance to 16km, thinking right – I've hit ten miles I'm good to go, however a couple of weeks before the event I had developed a nasty cold that had turned into a chest infection, just what I needed, I couldn't run very far or fast without coughing up a lungful of crap. Being stubborn as a mule I decided I would carry on regardless (mistake number 2!)

I reached the weekend before the half and tapered down to a 10km, nothing major – keep my legs fresh, I had almost got back from my run and the inevitable happened, I fell over!! I had smashed both knees up quite badly, they were cut, bruised and very sore. Now at this point most sensible people will have pulled out

and moved their place until the next event, oh no, not this genius! (mistake number 3!)

As I was still new to BVH I travelled to Worcester in the Cofton mini bus with all of my friends, the atmosphere was electric, everyone was buzzing and I was that nervous and hyper you could have peeled me off the ceiling – I remember my Friend Jen telling me to try and keep calm, it was just the nerves making me feel like a shook can of pop.

I won't lie, I was feeling nervous, my first real big distance, a half marathon, it was huge. My friend Fiona had agreed to run it with me (thankfully), as we were stood in the starting line-up I remembered being there a year before for the 10km event and looking at the half marathon runners with awe, thinking there is no way I could run that far, they are all hardcore! And now here I was, stood in that line up of awe-inspiring half marathon runners. I had treated myself to a camel pack for the event – I was a proper running “full kit wanker” now and I was strutting round with my little back pack of water with a built in straw feeling like a boss, that feeling was not to last . . . . .

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 . . . . 1 Go!

We were off, I went out a little too fast as I had got swept up with the crowds, Fiona soon pulled me back into check and after a mile I had settled into my usual rhythmic plod. We eventually started nearing the halfway point – the loop out of the City Centre, I was still feeling ok, but my knees were aching a little and my breathing was terrible – due to the remnants of the chest infection. I kept having to cough a little bit, nothing major but it was really started to piss me off. As we reached the 10km marker the road was split by cones straight down the middle as on the other side was the 20km marker, I looked on the other side and there was a familiar figure approaching – it was our Head Coach at the time – Nic and she looked awesome! Striding in looking strong and focused and smiling, how was she smiling?! She spotted me heading out on the loop and as we passed each other she gave me a hi-five (which nearly took my hand off it was that strong) and said “keep going, you can do it” in that moment I 100% believed her, if Nic said I could do it then I could absolutely do it. Nic went on to win the whole event, she is an amazing runner.

That euphoric moment with my team teal buddy carried me through to about 13km and then, alas, the wheels started falling off! My knees had gone from slight ache to “why are you doing this to me, stop it!” and my little cough had now been replaced by stops to cough and hack up my lungs. At one road crossing I had to stop and cough up what can only be described as something likened to a dead

jellyfish at the side of the road (I know, sexy eh!) and as I gained composure again with my red face and watery eyes I spotted the Volunteer marshalling that junction, a young volunteer from the Local Cadets with a look on her face that will stay with me forever, I think I personally traumatised and mentally scarred the poor thing for life with what she had just witnessed. She nervously stammered “are, are you ok??” I felt so sorry for her and in my head, I thought, no love – are you ok! But I smiled and politely responded “yes, thanks I’m ok now” and I carried on with the rest of the awful journey

We had now reached the 10mile (16km) point and I was acutely aware that I had never run further than this ever and whoever suggested that one ten-mile run would be enough in training was an asshole! My running was turning into a run, walk, moan and shuffle and the new bloody camel pack that I had thought was such a brilliant idea had steadily rubbed the skin off my one shoulder where the strap had kept bouncing around. It was this point where the meltdown happened, I threw a massive strop!

I stopped running and looked at Fiona and said” that’s it, I’ve had enough! I’ve had enough of running and I’ve had enough of this fucking backpack – I’m going to throw it in the bloody hedge!” I started to unclip the camel pack and I was getting ready to swing it into the hedge and Fiona realised I was serious – it was going! She told me not to throw it, it would be a waste – I still wasn’t having it so in the



end Fiona said” look, I will wear the camel pack, you won’t have to wear it or carry it anymore” this was a very wise move by Fiona, as she pointed out when we got back to the minibus, my car keys were in there – my only set of car keys, that could have been fun trying to find my discarded bag in a hedge in the middle of nowhere.

I was soon calmed down and we set off again, Fiona doing her absolute best to keep me moving. At 17km we reached a big hill – this was supposed to be a flat course – lying Bastards! I walked up the hill and kept on plodding, by the time we reached the final mile I was plodding from lamppost to lamppost, van to van with Fiona gently coaxing “come on, just to that van, you can do it” I’m telling you now she has the patience of a saint!! Eventually we had reached the bridge where we could see the final 800m stretch – I had to dig deep and try and smile, I just needed to finish! As we got to about 400m away I could hear my name – it was the Cofton runners, on the right hand side of the course and they were all cheering me in, but then I heard my name from the left hand side too, it was the Bournville Harriers team – they had stayed and waited for me and they were leaning over the Barrier cheering me in. I could hear Richard from the Harriers shouting something and a few of them put their hands out for a hi-five, I headed straight over, I was tired, 200m from the finish line and I wanted my hi-five! As I got to them and went to reach out this strange man appeared, stood on the opposite side of the barrier,

actually on the course and he was blocking me from getting to my team mates, well, I barged past him, elbowed him in the face as I slung my arm back and I told him rather unceremoniously to “fuck off!” I was aware at this point that a few people had started to look at me in horror. I didn’t care, I had reached my teammates and I was now heading to the finish line – at last. As I crossed that line my friend Sarah was there (my running Mom) and I looked at her and burst into tears “oh Sarah, that was awful, I’m never doing that again” which then made Sarah well up with tears and she gave me the biggest hug.

After blubbing like a child, I made my way to the finishers area where I found my Bournville Harrier teammates, and they all burst out laughing when they saw me. “what on earth are you laughing at?” I had asked them. Suzanne, who had been stood there patiently waiting for me to finish (and who got a parking ticket because she had to wait that long for me – ooops, sorry mate) asked me why I had hit the man at the barrier? I told her “some nutter isn’t going to break onto the course and stop me from getting to my pals” . . . it turns out that it wasn’t some nutter who had hopped the barrier, it was in fact the Mayor of Worcester who was waiting to congratulate me for making it to the finish line. Ah, I had just assaulted and verbally abused the city’s Lord Mayor.

Now, in my very weak defence, it’s pretty stupid to stand in the way of a runner 200m from the finish line – your just asking for trouble, he could have waited the

other side of the line next to the lady giving out the medals, a far safer position. He could have also worn a name badge or a something to identify himself. To this day it is a standing joke at our club, Richard will never let me forget it and often asks “hit any Mayors today Sweary?”

So, there we have it, I had managed a half marathon, a long, painful awful experience that I vowed never to repeat! 10km was my distance, you can keep your half marathons (how long do you think that lasted? Ha ha).

I hadn't trained enough, I was injured and I was unwell, any normal sensible person would have trained more and waited until they were rested and recovered but as I am sure you've all guessed by now I am not sensible and I have never been remotely normal. I owe everything that day to the incredibly, patient and calm Fiona, I would not have been able to do it without her, the Thelma to my Louise, the Romy to my Michelle and the saviour of my bloody car keys!



**Worcester half – I started with the camel pack; Fiona finished with it!**



**Worcester Half Marathon, celebrating with my Cofton Buddies**

## **Road Relays**

“The bra and pants brigade”

September 2018

Road Relays, they are not something I had heard of until I had joined an affiliated running club. The road relays are a huge race, where you compete against all the other running clubs in your region, and then nationally in a relay race and it is very competitive with lots of silverware up for grabs. As I was embracing all things running when I heard about them, I thought yeah sure, it's only a 5k-ish, sign me up! I spoke to the team manager, a lovely lady called Jude. Jude stands at a lofty stature of just under 5ft I'm sure, but mess with her at your own peril! She is wonderfully fast, wickedly intelligent, hilariously funny and a black belt. My kind of woman!

My first experience of road relays was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2018, and it is a day I will never forget. I had arranged to catch the train to the venue, Sutton Park, along with my other teammates. I usually drive everywhere but I thought it would be fun to get the train with everyone and have a drink on the way back. I met up with Jude at the train station that morning and a few more Harriers appeared just as the train arrived, so we all boarded and picked an empty carriage - a carriage we quickly took over! We seemed to collect harriers at every stop and soon it was the team Teal train.

We reached our destination, and all clambered off, lots of chatter and noise following us as we started the procession to Sutton Park. As we got to the park's entrance the traffic jam trying to get in was all the way out of the gate, I hadn't realised how big an affair this was. We weaved our way past cars up the congested pathways until we finally found what can only be described as a tent village, there were a sea of different colour tents, gazebos and pop up shacks all with massive flags outside them displaying each teams logo and colours, it was quite a sight. We were waved over to our spot, a club member had gotten there early and bagged us a great pitch right by the finishing straight (which was uphill!!)

I remember thinking how brilliant it all was and for the first time ever I felt like a real runner. I was taking lots of pictures and shameless selfies in front of our clubs banner, all dressed up in my official club colours with my number pinned on - these would be great on my social media pages, I wanted everyone to see how proud I was to be there. I was in the one of the lower teams, the C team, teams are ranked by the speed of the runners so naturally I was not in the top set by a long shot, our club has some absolutely stunning female runners so I was more than happy to cheer them on as they would be the ones to score for the team – my role was more of a make the numbers up for a complete team, as we get points for that too.

I stood on the side lines cheering on our runners, our team pitch was right on the finish so we could all hang over the barrier shouting and cheering, we also had BvH Cowbells that we were waving around like maniacs, and believe me you can hear them things ringing from a mile off. All too soon I was being told I had to go to the start pen, it was my turn, the runner before me was just setting off so get ready. I had a little wave of nerves but thought it's only a 5k so I will be fine. I got into the start pen and looked around me, to say I stuck out like a sore thumb was an understatement, the other ladies were all in tiny little crop tops and shorts no longer than their vaginas! I glanced down at my full length men's vest (the only one that would go over my boobs) and my cropped leggings that were still over the knee, I



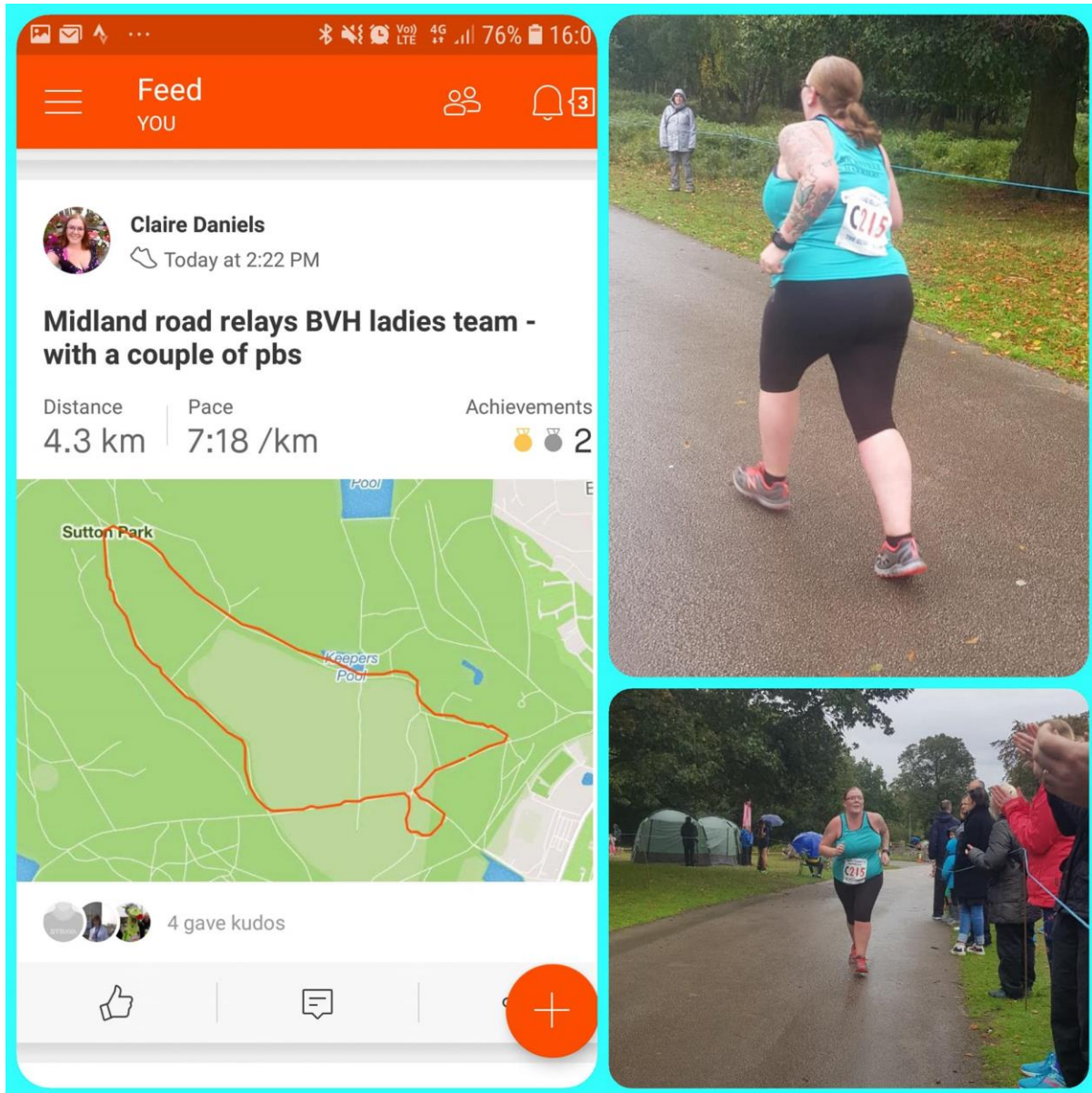
really felt out of place now as I'm sure I was the only lady in the pen with a BMI higher than their age. They also all seemed to have very swishy ponytails, bouncy and flowing – twitching away like the tail of a magnificent fox, whilst mine was more likened to a limp rat's tail. From that moment on I called them the bra and pants brigade (and still do) I was still mesmerised by the swishy hair of the bra and pants brigade when the really bad loud speaker crackled into life and I heard my number being called, my runner was approaching, I was called to stand on the start line. I stood next to the marshal on the start and I looked back to see if I could spot my runner, I was chastised immediately “Runner look forward, I will tell you when to go!” boomed the marshal. Wow, these were a serious bunch of individuals, inside I was dying to laugh, I don't know how I didn't laugh in her face when she shouted at me, it was probably the thought of telling Jude I had been disqualified that kept me in check. “ok runner, GO!!” I shot off with my ears still ringing from the command.

The first few hundred metres were ok as it was slightly down hill, I must have looked impressive as I set off, I was confident, using large strides and making good speed – I checked my watch, blimey my pace was quick! That was the last time on the day that I thought that as what goes down must go up, and up it did, a long, calf burning, sweeping path up for about a kilometre.

I was red faced and huffing away like an asthmatic donkey, I had gone off too quick and I was now suffering. I was quickly passed by the other runners, who all seemed to be about 7ft tall, taking amazing easy looking strides past me – I felt like Frodo Baggins stuck in a land of giants, at one point It felt like I was running backwards and I am sure I heard a spectator in the park say “ ah look, she’s having a go, bless her” well that just boiled my piss!! Having a go!! Did they want to come and “have a go”?

The torturous hill soon flattened out and eventually the course started to come gently back downhill, I had managed to catch my breath (only just) and I could soon start hearing the familiar sound of cowbells and cheering. The finish sweeps down past a little pond and that is where you come in to view for the finish line, just one more push up the hill to the end. As I got to the pond I thought ”right, you can’t look shit in front of everyone so smile and suck it up” I dug deep and I pushed myself up that hill – my teammates cheering me in all the way, I had finished, and boy I was proud. I treated myself to a huge burger form the snack van and went to join my team. My time was in – this was my fastest run yet so I had really pushed myself, no wonder I was done in. We all headed back home when the last runners had finished, we had a wonderful jovial journey on the way home and couple of drinks to celebrate, what a day.

I regularly take part in road relays and since I am now the kit secretary I like to decorate my club vest for the occasion (I have a couple ) much to the worry of poor Jude who thinks “what has she put now?” all of my vests have my name on the front “SWEARY” but I think my favourite one, and the one that worried Jude the most is my vest that says “IM ONLY HERE FOR A DAY OUT” on the back. Ha ha! I did change it before the start of a race just in case I got myself disqualified. Road Relays are a fabulous day out, I take my camping chair, a jumbo sausage roll and some tinnies for after (proper athletes’ food). I must admit, I do get a few funny looks when I sit there with my feast amongst the cross legged runners sat on the floor with their salad boxes and protein snacks but I don’t care, it’s my day out and I will enjoy it to the max!



**My first Road Relays event with my non swishing ponytail! 😊**

## **Cross Country (XC) Debut**

“Mud, mud glorious mud”

October 2018

After enjoying my first outing on the road relays team so much, when I was asked to think about giving the XC team a go I thought sure, it will be great fun – I was 100% right. I bloody love it!

I had not really run XC before, I had however competed in Wolf Runs and in some filthy girl mud runs so I wasn't fazed by the whole getting dirty and muddy issue.

XC though is much tougher, a lot of these obstacle races you don't run all that much as you usually end up stopping and waiting to cross the obstacles on the course, you get a nice break every few hundred metres. XC you must just get going as fast as you can, don't stop until the finish line and the terrain is tough. Some of the courses I have been on are brutal, ankle snapping, hamstring pulling, boggy up to your knees and generally bloody hilly. You will read about a couple of my favourites – and not so favourite races.

My debut was on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Wolverhampton. It was the men's and the women's team in the first race of the XC season, it was a relay race. I had drove

myself and a couple of team mates to the event this time, as it was a bit further out and not as straight forward on the trains to get to. We arrived at the leisure Centre it was being held at and not unlike the road relays there were tents, banners and shelters everywhere. It was quite a chilly morning and we were all stood huddled in the field whilst the event shelter was being put up, soon enough though it was all set up and we had our base. I had been issued my number and I had pinned it on, I was all set. I watched the first leg runners go off – the start looked a little tough, it was uphill and went straight into another field, I looked at my shoes – my attempt at trail shoes weren't actually that great, this was later confirmed when the staff in the Derby runner tent (selling trail shoes) took one look at mine and told me not only were they crap and as heavy as bricks they were also too small and I should always size up in running shoes (who knew?)

I put the thought of my terrible trail shoes to one side and I got ready to set off for my leg, even though this was as competitive as the Road Relays the marshals seemed much friendlier and relaxed which in turn helped put me at ease for the event. My runner soon appeared from around the corner and that was me being sent off to the sound of cheers from team members, I practically floated off at the start – elevated by the feeling of comradery.

I found running on the grass properly for the first time like running through treacle, it was energy sapping and my legs felt like lead, this was tough but I just had to grit my teeth and get on with it, as I was much slower than the others I quickly found myself on my own, truth be told, that's how I prefer it, the course to myself. I soon relaxed into the run as I knew there was no pressure to win and the sun had started shining too so the course was becoming more beautiful as I was venturing round it. The course then turned left into a pathway lined either side by trees, creating an arch across the top and the scenery felt like it had been lifted straight from the pages of a Tolkien novel, it was stunning. I was looking up at the sky, streaks of dappled sunshine peeping through the leaves, all different shades of green illuminated above me, a gentle breeze wafting the smell of the fresh earth beneath me that seemed to ensnare the senses – I was mesmerised, so much so I didn't see the whacking great big tree root that appeared from nowhere.....

Thud! I had gone over sideways on my foot and I had hit that lovely, leafy carpet that was the floor. My first thought was thankfully no one saw me, that was embarrassing, my second thought was oh shit – that hurt! I picked myself up and dusted off, at this point my ankle had swollen up and I couldn't put much weight on my foot. I hobbled my way around the course as I did not know where to cut off to get back to the start any quicker. I eventually came out of the trees and saw the marshal who instructed me to walk back into the finish line (it was a 2 lap course)

and come off, he would send my teams next runner out (queue a harrier having to start very quickly and throw her long trousers at one of our spectators!) I sat down on the floor; I had received my first ever DNF - did not finish. my friend, and fellow team mate Suzanne asked to have a look and said “ we need to go to the first aid tent” I wasn’t having any of it, I was too embarrassed, Suzanne being as stubborn as ever (she is, trust me!) went and fetched the medic who gave me an ice pack and an official St Johns yellow form, it was like having a certificate to tell me I was a clumsy oaf.

After a while the swelling had gone down and I stood back up, I wanted to keep cheering the runners in. It was still a great day out, but it taught me a lesson, when running it is best to pay attention to where your putting your feet and not get distracted by the scenery – especially on uneven ground.





### 1<sup>st</sup> DNF and yellow St Johns Form

Sadly, this was not my only DNF when it comes to cross country. In 2019 I took part in a race at Burton Dassett, and if you have ever run this course, I'm sure you have just shuddered at the memory of it too. It was a very wet, grey and drizzly day to start with and we arrived at the course I had never seen anything so hilly, the hill to get down to the event shelter area was bad enough, it was muddy and slippery everywhere. We lost 2 members of the team in the warmup, with some quite serious ankle injuries. I set off in the mass start with everyone and the terrain was

just awful, I was running in spikes that day and they made no difference whatsoever. I had slipped a couple of times but managed to stay upright, then of course the inevitable happens and I do fall over (a lot of us did that day). I survived the first fall, pick myself up and carry on. I was freezing cold as I couldn't get going fast enough to warm up and my legs were feeling very tight. The second fall came as I was trying to run the section of the course that was across quite a steep hill, if you can imagine the camber was very slanted and it was very muddy and I was trying to aim straight. I fell again, only this time my one leg slid down the hill in the mud and my other leg stayed still and I ended up landing on my knees. The swear words I used at that moment were epic, I made whole new words that were brilliantly offensive. I picked myself up the second time but knew I could not carry on, I had pulled my hamstring and I was hurting, and getting colder by the second. I almost cried when I got back the start (another 2 lap course) to come off the course, I saw our team manager who had just finished and I just felt like I had let her down, I apologised and headed back to the shelter, dejected, beaten. I hated every second of Burton Dassett.

Of course I do have some very fond memories of cross country, my first one is Churchfields Farm, that was such a wonderful day out – it wasn't an easy one by any stretch, parts of the course were that badly flooded they resembled lakes and the course had to be rerouted, we were wading through deep, boggy mud

everywhere – well I say mud, more like a mix of mud and cow shit, the smell was wonderfully awful. My team mates gave me little boosts when they came past with their words of encouragement and I had found someone just like me to run with, we were about the same pace so we had a lovely chat all of the way round. The best bit for me was that for once, at a cross country event, I had not finished last! I was thrilled.

My second favourite was Trentham, this again was a remarkably hilly course and quite tough, but it was more trail than mud, so it was right up my street. The whole day from start to finish was brilliant, the marshals were lovely and friendly – the first aid chap kept popping out of the woods on his quad bike and we had built up a rapport with lots of banter back and forth,

Me: “oi, give us a lift will ya”

Him: “come on, aint you finished yet”

Me: “have you had a bet that ill cark it before I finish?”

Each time he appeared there was a comment, it was hilarious. When I eventually crossed the finish line to the smiling face of Linda H he appeared again, gave me a massive hug and said “what a superstar, well done”

I had finished dead set last of course, but that did not matter. Trentham was just great fun.



**Churchfields Farm, Me and the lovely Ali**



**Churchfields farm, the joy of not coming last**



**Trentham, coming in for the finish.**



**The fabulous XC team I'm so proud to be a part of.**

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## **A couple of my favourites**

“I’ve found my sprint finish”

### Liverpool Half Marathon, May 2019

Liverpool Rock and Roll half is my Current PB half marathon course and my absolute favourite, I was due to race there again in 2020 but unfortunately due to the Rona (my little term for Covid-19, the global pandemic) my return is now hopefully in 2022.

This was such a brilliant weekend, I had travelled down with my 3 friends: Fiona, Louise and Janice, Louise as I mentioned earlier I have known for many years and is a great friend and Janice is a lady we met through Cofton Park runners – we call her Savage Nan. She is in her sixties; she can power walk as fast as most people can run and she has a sharp tongue with an even sharper wit.

We had all booked to stay over in Liverpool for a couple of nights so we were really making the most of the weekend, we did behave ourselves on the eve of the race however, only a few glasses of wine and a couple of beers on race eve. Race morning arrived and unfortunately the weather was a bit against us, it was a grey and drizzly wait in our estimated time pens to get to the start line, we were cold

and wet for the start of the race but soon enough we got going and warmed up. The four of us split into pairs as I had trained properly for this race my friend Louise said she would run it with me and help me get my PB, Janice and Fiona ran together as Jan had just come back from 2 weeks all-inclusive in Spain and Fiona was in recovery from an injury. The atmosphere was brilliant, as was the route, all through the city and then out through Sefton Park, with a live band playing at every mile.

I reached the halfway point in the Park and the supporters were out in their droves, one of them spotted my name on my bib and started cheering “come on Sweary”, I quickly inhaled a banana (yes, I know, not as handy as a gel but friendlier on the stomach) and we headed out of the park and back towards the finish line.

Louise was brilliant, she kept me running the whole way round, the last 3 mile stretch was on the path next to the River Mersey and the headwind was brutal but she was there in my ear, “come on Claire, there’s the pacer, you can still get your PB!”

We eventually came to the finishing stretch where out of nowhere a friendly face appeared and started cheering me in, it was Emma, a fellow Bournville Harrier who was there supporting her Partner Dave (Dave is another astonishing runner, and one of our BvH coaches) It made me so happy to see her, I started waving like a maniac. We got to the last couple of hundred Metres and Louise said “Right then,

sprint finish” my reply was “I don’t have one” but then a second later my brain said oh yes you do! I start sprinting, Louise joined me, and we came running in. I had gotten my PB of under 3 hours (2h 56m) and I had finished confidently and smiling. The best bit was after, I went and claimed my free pint of beer – along with everyone else’s as they didn’t drink it and we enjoyed the free concert put on for the athletes. If ever you want to do a well organised, fun and brilliantly supported half, do this one.

Oh, and we made it into the Liverpool Echo!



“We made the papers”

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“The fab four”

### Silverstone 10KM, November 2019

Silverstone 10km was a brilliant run for me, and it is still currently my 10km PB. I had been training hard at club, and I had been attending track sessions hosted by my friend, and BvH coach Tom. I went to the race with the sole aim of getting a PB, so a lot was riding on this for me, I put myself under a bit of pressure to perform. The actual event was fantastic, we were running on the iconic race circuit, they had all the track cars out, Aston Martin, Porsche, Ferrari, BMW all the big

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names were on display and they were gorgeous. It was another grey and drizzly day; I can certainly pick them can't I! I did start the race wearing my glasses but after a couple of miles they were off and in my hand for the rest of the race due to the rain.

I settled into a good steady pace from the start, I kept an eye on my watch every few minutes to make sure I was running even and on schedule to beat my old 10km time. I shunned each water station that I passed, I reasoned that I couldn't spare any seconds and that it wasn't exactly hot and sunny so it wouldn't hurt, I kept my head down and kept turning my feet over, they had found a comfortable rhythm so who was I to stop them. I was aware of two people chatting behind me for most of the race, amongst the white noise of the crowds and other runners I could hear most of their conversation, I couldn't help but tune into it, it almost took my mind off the job in hand.

The 10km course was over on distance by 300m and as we were nearing the final stretch to the finish line I heard the two people behind me pipe up "come on, we can take her!" well, that absolutely enraged me! I thought you're a cheeky pair of fuckers, oh no you won't! I had been ahead of them most of the race, there's no way I was going to let them overtake me at the finish! I dug deep and started sprinting, lungs bursting, arms swinging, I was determined! I then heard one of them say to the other in a strained and desperate tone "on no we can't!" I smiled to

myself and I crossed the finish line with a flourish, I had achieved my PB, my new 10km time was 1:10.03 I was thrilled, all my hard work had paid off and I had saw those two vultures off!

I quickly found my BvH friends, some were doing the 5km and some the half marathon, and we all swapped our race stories. Another brilliant day out, and a much needed PB. I will run this again.



**L to R- Me, Tom, Ruth, Kristy and Miriam**

## **London Marathon**

“The first attempt”

October 2019

I had always vowed that I would never run a marathon, it was too far, too hard and not for me, a few of my friends however have heard me vow to never run more than a 10km or to never do another half marathon after my first attempt so it's obvious that I am easily persuaded.

After watching all the fabulous runners compete in the 2019 London marathon, I had let my friend Louise talk me into entering the 2020 Ballot. We are part of a group chat – Louise, Fiona, Janice, Michelle and I, and we were pinging messages back and forth, I had sunk a few alcoholic beverages and had we all decided to go for it, we would all enter. It's worth mentioning that it's always Louise who talks me into these things, she is a terrible influence and she always seem to get me when I've had a few. Coincidentally, the same person who talked me into entering rung me as she crossed the finish line of her first marathon to say, “never run a marathon, it's horrible” and yet here she was – talking us all into it.

A few months had passed, and it was ballot time, we would soon find out if any of us were successful in getting a place. I was secretly hoping that I hadn't, the thought of having to do it made me feel a bit sick.

One by one the rejection emails started to come through, none of the group had got a place and then, I came home from work to find my you're in or you're out magazine on the doormat – I hadn't got in either! “Thank fuck for that” Was my first thought, I breathed a massive sigh of relief and admired my loser's top. You must pay to enter the ballot and if you are unsuccessful you can donate your fee and receive a top rather than a refund.

Fast forward another couple of months and we get to Christmas 2019, the annual Bournville Harriers party was looming and as we are an affiliated club, we are awarded so many places for London marathon depending on how many members we have. I saw the club chairman's email reminding everyone who didn't get a ballot place to send in their rejection email and they would be put into the Club draw for a place, again, after a one or two (or seven) glasses of something strong and fizzy I thought “why not, I never get picked anyway” and I sent my details in.

A few people knew I had put my name in the draw, and they knew I had also sworn never to run a marathon and had spent most of the evening at the party teasing me, Richard and Tom in particular who are massive wind up merchants kept saying “we have got everything crossed for you sweary, it would be hilarious if you got a place”

We were soon ushered to our tables ready for the yearly announcements and of course, the London Marathon draw. Dave, the club chair was up on stage in a fabulous bright suit – he looked every inch a game show host, it was brilliant. This was no simple name out of the hat draw, a random person was picked to pull a raffle ticket out of a pot, the number on the ticket related to a number stuck to a balloon and once you had found the corresponding balloon you had to burst it, the person’s name was inside that balloon, it was all good fun!

A volunteer was called up to pull the first ticket and find the balloon, there was cheesy game show music and lots of scrabbling through a pile of balloons before they found it and burst it – Dave picked the ticket up and announced....

“our first winner is..... Claire Daniels”

The whole room erupted into cheers and laughter, Richard and Tom who were sat on my table were laughing like a pair of hyenas – as were the rest of the table to be fair. I was stuck between feeling awesome and sick at the same time – I had got a

place in London, brilliant! But then, shit! I've got a place in London. The draw was also broadcast live over social media and soon the messages were rolling in.

“Well done sweary, you can do it”

“Amazing sweary, if anyone can do it, it's you”

“From couch to 5k, to marathon, so proud of you”

Seeing those messages, and how many people were pleased for me I thought right, now you must do it, and do your best. This was real, it was happening.

I started my training in January 2020, I thought I would enjoy the rest of my Christmas break before I got stuck in to training, and boy did I get stuck in. I worked myself out a plan, checked it over with a couple of the coaches and set off each week – determined to hit each jump up in distance I had set myself.

In January and February 2020, you will all probably remember we were plagued with some pretty awful storms, generally with the worst winds and downpours happening on a Sunday – my long run day, Typical! They didn't stop me, every Sunday I would put my cap on in a vain attempt to keep the rain off my glasses, layer up and just head out there on my own, I have decided I am much better training on my own, I can focus more and I can just keep going.

I remember one particular shitty Sunday where a group of people, huddled under big coats and umbrellas were watching me, staring at me as if I had lost my mind, just out there running against the wind and rain trying to move forward, I felt like such a badass in that moment – not so much later on in the run where my hat kept blowing off and I had to keep chasing it down the canal path. It must have looked like a sketch from Mr. Bean or something.

Despite all of the storms my training was going well, I was increasing distance by a couple of miles a week and really pushing hard, then, the weekend I was going to attempt my first 18-mile training run the news hit that due to a new virus that was sweeping the globe we would all be entering a lockdown and London Marathon was cancelled, due to be rescheduled later in the year.

It was like falling from the top of a building and hitting the floor, I felt so low and so upset. I had trained hard, I was ready, this was the best I was going to be, and it wasn't fair – it was supposed to be my time! I had messages of support from friends who knew I would be down in the dumps but I couldn't shake the blues, so on the Sunday that should have been marathon day I went for a run with my friend Suzanne, another club member. She was brilliant, Suzanne chatted to me all the way round and really helped to pick me up, she could understand how I was feeling and assured me that the training wouldn't go to waste.

It was a run and chat that was sorely needed.



When I got home I had found that another member of Bournville Harriers, Stacey, had dropped a book off for me and a card – with such a lovely message on it, I still have it now and every time I think I can't do something or I'm not good enough I read it again. That simple gesture of kindness meant so much and it helped make my mind up that I would keep my training going and do the marathon Virtually, as Virgin money had decided they would make that year's event a virtual one. I also had a behind the scenes supporter, Emma, who I have mentioned previously (Liverpool Half), her messages of support and advice were gratefully received and knowing that she was watching and wishing me well made me want to achieve the marathon so much more, I wanted to make her investment in me a good one, I wanted to make her proud.



**L to R: Me, Jude, Stacey and Ali – Sunday long run crew.**

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L to R: Clare, Me, Stacey – more Sunday long run crew

## **Virtual London Marathon**

“Why did I pick this route?!”

London marathon was now going to be a virtual event, I decided that I was in, I want to do it, I couldn't waste all of the training I had put in so I worked out a new plan that would take me up to October 4<sup>th</sup> – Marathon day.

This time I trained with my friend Suzanne, she is a seasoned Ultra marathon runner and was training for a 50 mile event herself so we thought it would be good to do so together, I would help keep her pace down and she would help push me on when I was floundering – and flounder I did at times!

I had chosen to do my marathon in 4mile loops of my home, Bournville, that way I could invite people to run a loop with me, we could have little cheering stations, I could have my car as the aid station and most importantly I could finish at the door of the club bar – perfect! The only problem with my loop is that it was bloody hilly. In my head I thought I could handle a hill and walk if I must but then it means I get some good downhill too so it would get me going again. In hindsight that probably wasn't my best idea, the total elevation for my marathon was 1523 feet (464m) this was my hilliest event of 2020 and I did the Exmoor trail 12k two weeks after virtual London. Talk about making things hard for myself, I clearly don't like doing things the easy way.

The training went well again, but not as well as previously, I had a niggle on my left hamstring (Burton Dassett started that off!) and the hilly route was proving tough, but I was far too stubborn to admit that I had fucked up, plus people had now arranged to run laps and cheer me on and they had memorized the route – it was too late. All too soon the weeks had passed by and I was now on Marathon eve, I remember feeling nervous about the whole thing but strangely calm as I knew I had 24hours to complete it and I was never more than 2 miles away from home, it was like having a comfort blanket.

Morning came, I put my running kit on – I had my club T-shirt printed up specially for the occasion, across the back it said “powered by carling” in the style of the Carling logo, this was my marathon so I was doing it my way, in my style. I packed the boot of the car up with my gels, squash, sweets and everything else I thought I would need. I pinned my number on and headed out of the door – this was it. I drove round to club and parked my car up, the aid station was now in place, I could pit stop every 4 miles. I met Suzanne outside club, she had entered the virtual marathon too – her reasoning was that she was running it with me anyway so she may as well get a medal for it. Another tealie, Rob, had met us there as he was running the first two laps with us. I switched the official app on, and we set off, I was running a marathon.

The weather that day was awful, it was wet and cold – in true Claire fashion it was another wet and windy one. I had done the first lap when another tealie, Rachel joined us for a lap – this was brilliant, it was so lovely to run with different friends, despite the hills I was enjoying the run. All along the course runners from Cotteridge and Cofton park appeared and ran with me for a stretch, it was like a wonderful runner’s reunion. My friends Trish and Dil, from Cofton Park Runners, had set up a cheering station on the route and their daughter Poppy had made the most wonderful banner, it said “you can do it Sweary Claire” with a picture of me on it, it was so heartwarming.

The feelings of euphoria quickly vanished at around 16miles, the niggling hamstring was now turning into quite a pain and thanks to the rain and drizzle my sports bra had rubbed all of the skin off from where the chest band was, my socks were also so wet, my feet had started to blister up on the bottom. Why didn't I think of spare socks for the aid station? I had reached the 17 mile point and my friend Alison was cycling alongside us for a section, I had to ask her for tissues to put underneath the band on my sports bras to stop it touching my skin, it felt like acid on my chest.

I plugged on for another mile and then had to stop to stretch, this was no fun at all, I felt like an imposter, who was I kidding? Why would I think I could do this? I'm not a real runner. Suzanne snapped me put of it, so did my friend Anna who had joined us for some laps. We got going again and as I came back up the hill to the start/finish of another loop, I was hitting the 20mile point and feeling quite grim. I spotted a familiar figure smiling and waving at me – it was Fiona, my running buddy, I have never hugged anyone so hard in all of my life, I welled up with tears and told her that it was too hard and I was struggling and in her always calm and cheery fashion she told me that I was doing just fine and there was just a 10k left – I could do it.

I set off again, I would do it even if it killed me! I was joined on the last lap by Suzanne, her partner Mike, Richard from club and Linda H from club – and I

needed all of them. The last 4 miles of the course I was down to a strange shuffle/walk, everything hurt, and I desperately wanted to stop. If you'd have seen me, you'd have taken me to a field and put me out of my misery! I had also lost the ability to talk for about a mile, I think I was contemplating the murder of everyone telling me to just keep going, ha ha, thankfully those thoughts soon passed. At 22 miles my friends Stewart and Louise (yes, it was all her fault!) had made a cheering station with their families which lifted me up, but I was soon back to feeling awful.

We were reaching the final stages of the distance, the road I was coming down that led to the finish is quite a long, tree lined road and I could hear the distinctive noise of a BvH cowbell coming from behind a tree – had I cracked up?

Thankfully not, it was Barrie he is one of our older Club members he is also a member of the clergy and I think a little eccentric – in a good way. He was running to each tree, hiding behind it and ringing the bell, it was all very surreal.

I finally had Rowheath, our home club, in sight and I could see a crowd had gathered outside to cheer me in, only I was still about 400m short so I would need to do one lap of the lake behind the club house, I motioned to everyone that I needed to do a lap but I would be back in a moment, ready to finish at the door of the bar.

As I got half way around the lake my legs found a sudden urge to just run and get it over with, Suzanne piped up behind me and said “oooh, she’s running again” and the support crew started to run along with me. The noise of people cheering, cowbells ringing, my name being called “come on Claire, you’ve done it” was amazing, then I heard the official app in my pocket ping into life with recorded cheers stating that I had done it, I had completed the distance just as I got to Lee, who was stood waiting for me with the others, I looked at him and just burst into tears!

“Lee, it was so hard” was all I could say, he gave me a massive hug and I managed to belt up and stop crying.

My friend Sally had filmed me coming in and she was there cheering like a madman, with a nice, cold pint of carling for me, I took a massive gulp of it, it had never tasted so good. Lee then produced my favourite snack to refuel with, a jumbo Sausage roll, proper athlete me! It almost felt like a real event, I had cheer stations, a support crew of runners and a crowd to cheer me in to the finish, I was so touched by how many people turned out that day to run and cheer and to top it off, Richards partner, Katy, had gotten me a lovely medal in our club colours saying “Bournville Marathon” with the date on it and my name engraved on the back, it was so thoughtful and kind of her and I love that medal as much as I love the official medal that was posted out to me shortly after.

I spent the rest of that day sat firmly on my arse drinking beer, it was well earned, I had now run a Marathon – me, Claire, the average plodder, I had achieved the revered distance of a marathon, now I felt like a real runner.

I did go to work the next day, however with two flights of stairs to my office I probably shouldn't have, it took me longer to get up the stairs than the drive to the office! I will know better for next time....



**Suzanne, Rob, Sian, Janice and Sally, much needed support**





**Suzanne, Richard, Linda H, Trish, Dil, Poppy, Fiona and my amazing pint!**



**Marathon medal and a pint**

## **What's next?**

As I write this, we are still currently under national lockdown due to the Covid-19 virus and whilst it is an uneasy and frustrating time, I can honestly say it hasn't been all bad.

At the start of the first lockdown in April 2020 the amount of rubbish that was being strewn across our green spaces had increased due to the volume of people now using them so that prompted me to start a litter picking group, affectionately called my "Literati"

We were meeting in the permitted groups of six people and heading out to clean up our parks and streets, but not only were we cleaning up it was an opportunity to get groups of people together, people who wouldn't necessarily get together for a walk and talk across the club and it was wonderful. I had a Wednesday group and a Saturday group and we had lots of fun, yes, we were picking up crap but the social interaction was wonderful - and we had competitions each week of who could pick up the strangest or most vile item and whilst I won't mention some of the horrors that I've found and binned (soiled thongs amongst the nicer of that category) we have had some oddities like one volunteer, Clare, finding a Don Mclean Album!

It was during one of these litter pick walks that Run Sweary Run had been created, I was out with my fellow runner and Literati member Steve Doswell, we were chatting about the novel he is working on, *Running Me, running EU* – it documents his running and travels through all of the EU countries before Brexit happened, it promises to be a fascinating read! Anyway, I was talking with Steve and telling him how I would love to get some of my thoughts and experiences down on paper and he convinced me that I absolutely should and even if no-one read it, I would find the process very cathartic (he was right) so thanks Steve for the inspiration to do this.

My next challenges are the Macmillan Mighty hike in September, 26.2 miles of the glorious Wye Valley for charity in September and then I have London Marathon itself in October 2021 (I didn't want to do one, now I'm on for three!)

Due to races being postponed everything has all come together at around the same time so I need to make sure my training is on point and that I stay injury free.

Beyond that I don't plan on any more marathons, my favourite distance is a 10km and I can throw in the odd half marathon now and then just to make sure I can still get to those bigger distances.

Running has been the best gift I could have given myself, and I will continue to run for as long as I possibly can, it has also bought me the most wonderful friends.

I try and remember this on the bad days, because not every run can be a great one – and I should know. I’ve had my share of disastrous runs, a park run at Arrow Valley cut very short due to an attack of the runner’s trots (yes, it’s a thing, a vile thing) I’ve also probably peed in most of the woods all around Cofton Park and along the Hopwood Canal!

I’ve also suffered a bit of “fat shaming” whilst out running, I’ve had a few instances where moronic arseholes have shouted things out of their car windows at me: “run fatty” (imaginative eh!) “I wouldn’t bother love it isn’t working!” (what isn’t? your brain?) I usually stick the fingers up at them, tell them to fuck off and I carry on regardless, if anything it stokes the fires and makes me run further just because I can.

None of that could put me off though, it’s too important to me and my wellbeing, my friend Linda G has a wonderful saying, when we run we “leave it all on the pavement” and we do, we discuss all of our problems whilst running along, well, I mainly nod, throw the odd word in and huff as I’m usually blowing out of my arse trying to keep up.

I plan on working on my speed once all my long-distance training is done, whilst I will never be on the finishers podium, I do plan on making my way up to liven up the mid pack.

To anyone struggling to find motivation to start running, or to continue running I say this, no one has ever regretted a run – good or bad, and we all must start somewhere. Put your trainers on and just promise yourself you will get to the end of the road, that's all, if when you get there you can get to the end of the next road then fabulous, do it.

Running is like a relationship, I love it, I sometimes hate it (usually in the middle of a muddy, hilly XC race whilst trying to keep up with the bra and pants brigade) and like any relationship it needs nurturing, time and effort but it's all worth it and if I can do it, so can you!

The whole journey has been a wonderful roller coaster for me, a mixed bag of running euphoria and the lows of feeling like an inadequate imposter, thankfully I've conquered the imposter syndrome now and I don't get those waves of feeling shit anymore. There are a few people I'd like to thank, (yes, it's that soppy bit at the end)

Steve Doswell – for inspiring me and giving me the courage to get this all out and on paper

Linda Goulding – for being not only a great friend but a mentor and someone to look up too.

The Spa Ladies – Louise, Fiona, Janice and Michelle, I would be lost without you guys, your unwavering support and friendship means so much to me

Suzanne Bunn – for sticking with me through all my training and of course, the virtual marathon. Your poor ears having to listen to me each week.

Cofton Park Runners – for giving me a wonderful running family and helping to shape and define the runner I am today. I love you guys.

Bournville Harriers – for welcoming me into the fold, for helping to develop my skills and for being patient and encouraging whilst I try and improve my running. We truly do have the most wonderful and inclusive club, go Team Teal!

Sally Devey – for starting this incredible journey with me and being such a wonderful, supportive friend. I'm blessed to call you friend.

And of course, Mick Sherratt – for teaching me how to run, and for not throwing me in a hedge every time I told you to “fuck off” when you made me run up hills.

And I was definitely part of your BEST group ever

I want to thank you all for taking the time to read this, hopefully it raised a smile and gave you a glimpse into life at the back of the pack, as well as a strange insight into the mind of Claire – Scary eh!

Will I turn pen to paper and write a follow up to this? I'm not sure (I can hear the moans and groans, "oh no, not another one!") Will I eventually go on to unlock the secret of effortless running and compete in countless marathons and ultra-marathons – oh hell no! you can put good money on that.

I will, however, continue to run and enjoy every step I'm out there for. I will never take it for granted, rain or shine I will be out there with a smile on my face and a song in my heart because I appreciate all the things running has given me.....and the pint waiting for me at the bar! Cheers!



**Love Sweary. xxx**

THE END

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