

Fran's Story

What running? Have never run in my life and not ever had the inclination to. –

What happened aged 57... the worst nightmare ever, the sudden loss of a child, namely my lovely lad aged a mere 29, only married 18 months, who was about to be a father. No time to say goodbye for either of us. My world fell apart. How does one cope (you don't). You feel completely on your own – you need to talk – no-one to talk to. Friends (or so called friends disappear) they don't know what to say to you. You know what is in their minds. "Thank goodness it is not me".

Husbands tell you to get on with your life they seem to cope in different ways with the grief - not easy. Albeit you know they are hurting but they can't help. You can't come to terms with what has happened

Three years on and I joined the gym hoping to make a few acquaintances, which you do to a certain extent but everyone is content on doing their own thing.

I was watching the London Marathon and thought may be I could do that to try and unload all this grief. A customer of the shop I own kept trying to get me to go along to a running group, but like the gym, it was very difficult to go along on your own. You need a little support.

Then a beginners group was advertised and coincidentally I met the leader at the gym.

I eventually bucked up the courage to go along. What a fantastic group of girls everyone talks to you, we have a laugh – all ages young and old alike. They even did a small charity run for my cause not long after joining and are of tremendous support to me. What a boost when one of the more experienced runners even did the New York Marathon for my charity and raised £1000. OK, yes, you get the more serious runners but you run at your own pace and you are never left on your own as the faster ones always come back for you.

You may occasionally hear the words "keep going –don't stop", "come on you can do it". "Look at the wonderful view" when you eventually stagger to the top of the incline (not allowed to call it hill!) What on earth am I doing here? I must be mad, I'm too old to be doing this, goes through your mind.

I have been running for just over a year now whoever thought I could run 8 miles (the best so far). I don't think I could run 26 – but one never knows. I have found a new group of friends. I go out, have a gossip (between the breaths) clear your head and it doesn't make things better but it definitely helps you carry on.

Oh, and what a buzz you get afterwards, you feel so good, so proud of what you have achieved even though the hurt will never go away. I feel he is egging me on "Go on Mum you know you can do it" - he would be hooting with

laughter not believing his eyes at his old Mum. I can see him now running alongside me.

Who would have thought it at my time of life!

2009

Two years later and I now have a ½ marathon under my belt and raised £500 for Epilepsy. I wasn't first nor last but I got round with the support of such a fantastic and enthusiastic crowd.

I must have enjoyed it so much that I have entered the 2010 Great West Half and hope to get lots of sponsors and may beat last year's sum of £500.

Wow, I now have a ½ marathon under my belt, age 64, running for only 3 years and have never succumbed to any physical exercise in my whole life. So I don't want to hear any of you saying, "I could never do that" (those used to be my words). If you have the will and determination "yes you can".

My inspiration has been my lad Nige. It has been 7 years now since he left us. The grief never leaves. There are many times that I feel I should be with him.

The running group has been my lifesaver. I have been with them approximately 3 years now and the support and encouragement has been overwhelming. The girls are such a wonderful bunch as are our leaders. I don't know what I would do without them.

The Great West Run in Exeter on the 3rd May was to say, the least, one of my best achievements. The weather was kind, the crowds lining the streets were stupendous, you could not have asked for more. Bands playing, jelly babies galore en route, along with an array of other sweetie sustenance. People calling my name and egging me on, cheering, clapping, majorettes waving their poms – a wonder to behold. Nige was with me every step of the way, although a few tears were shed at the finish.

And, no I was not last and I was not first, but I finished whereas some did not. Yes it does make me feel good about myself and no, the grief will never end, but every little helps as they say.

2015

I have been asked to up-date my achievements now aged 70, so here goes. Still running with approximately 18 races under my belt. Not that I have done it for that – I am in no way competitive. In some cases it has been just to join the girls, sometimes just a challenge, may be to give someone a bit of company and just to keep fit. I am never in front, never in the middle always at the back end but at least I have managed to finish all of them. And, usually finish with a smile on my face and may be a tear. I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE BOASTED AND SAID I DID THE London but up until now that has not been

the case as it is very difficult to get into these days besides which, I am not sure I am up to it anymore.

I go out now approx. 2-3 times a week. It always much more fun in the summer as we go through all the lanes to places never heard of before. You certainly get to know the surrounding areas, nosing at the luxurious houses dotted about. Shooing away the odd nose cow or chicken, that always turns out to be a bit of fun. Losing a shoe in the odd muddy puddle when we occasionally go off-road gives everyone a good laugh.

We always have a sweetie stop usually admiring the views after panting and puffing up a hill (not allowed to call them that), incline I am told, still a bloody hill to me. I just imagine my lad calling to me at the top – that always does it and I get there eventually. There is always looping, whereby you are never left on your own the faster girls loop round to meet you, which means they get a longer run which they are usually glad of.

I have dragged the grandchildren along with me on a couple of occasions for Race for Life, they thoroughly enjoyed it trying to beat there old gran. Quite an emotional day, as well.

Running helps clear your mind and puts away all the daily stresses of life. It helps with trauma, personal circumstances and it certainly beats going to the quack or counsellor. The heartache never goes away though, but it is suppressed by the social whirlwind that you experience with the group. We try to end up at a coffee house during our away runs and some of the girls indulge in cream cakes or even a full breakfast. Try, give it a whirl, the adrenaline flows through your body after a run, albeit it jog/walk. You feel good about yourself ready for a new day.

One of my aims, and I realise it entails a lot of hard work, which I don't have the experience for, would be to organise a run in support of my small charity, to highlight awareness of epilepsy. There are so many sufferers but it always appear to be an unsaid word.