

Great North Run - 16th September 2012

Funny how things can change from seemingly one moment to another....two weeks ago, I was actually – yes, really – weeping by the roadside at mile six of the Jelly Tea. Yesterday, I whooped for joy as I ran over the finish line (with Lesley Richardson) of the Great North Run 2012 in a most wondrous two hours and twenty minutes! (Our official time was two hours twenty-six minutes, but we're not counting the time taken to answer the call of nature at about mile six!)

This was the race I'd been training for since March....everything I've done this year since I started running in January was for this moment. I knew I was ready, I knew the weight was coming off, my stamina increasing with every run. What I wasn't sure about was how well I would hold up psychologically over the thirteen miles. I have a tendency to fold when it gets tough, you see – I think 'Now why would I put myself through this?' and then I walk away. So learning to run has been a whole new way of thinking for me, and one that was about to be put to the test.

After an hour of inching towards the start line, we finally crossed it at 11.36am. We were so far at the back of the field that I could see the sweep wagon! As we picked up our feet and began to run, I could feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins. The weather couldn't have been more different from the Jelly Tea – it was raining, what bliss! The first couple of miles just flew by, I hardly remember them. We hit the long, slow slog of the Felling by-pass, but still fairly flying by my standards – managing to maintain a ten-minute mile. I was barely conscious of the people lining the route, barely conscious of dodging and weaving in between the runners we were overtaking – yes, me, overtaking! Now the pragmatists amongst you will be thinking 'Well, they DID start at the back, of course'...but never before have I overtaken anything other than....nope, nothing!

Alice and Amanda, Lesley's daughters, were full of youthful exuberance, leaping and skipping their way through the throngs. All three of them were just magnificent in their determination to keep us all together, and as we approached mile 9, about the point I started to hallucinate – I swear I could smell lemon cake and freshly brewed tea – they took it down a notch so I could keep up with them.

The Wall of Sound was, well, loud. I think I picked up the pace at that point just to get away from it! The 800m flags for the desperately needed Powerade station appeared soon after – by then, I was repeating the mantra (culled from the previous night's X Factor!) 'I CAN succeed, I WILL succeed, I AM success' and that kept me going. Lesley couldn't help but laugh as she caught me muttering the words over and over, rictus grin on my face as I did so. But they served me well, and by the time we hit the slope down to the sea, I'd found my rhythm again, 'I CAN, I WILL, I AM' in perfect time with my legs.

As we approached the finish line, we grabbed hands and whooped and hollered our way over it...what an unbelievable feeling of relief, joy, pride, exhaustion...My legs had taken on a life of their own at this point and kept churning away – my brain had clearly given up the fight and had forgotten to let 'em know we were done for the day!

Yeah, I know I haven't said much about the crowds, the Red Arrows, the iconic landmarks, but this was MY race, my time to find out if I could actually, properly, really do it, ALL the way, no walking, no folding, no wimping out, no fear. And I did it! I really did, with a lot of help from my running buddies both on the day and in the months leading up to it.

This week, I'm having a rest! I'm eating chocolate, cake and crisps with wine on the side – then Saturday, I'm back on it. There's a marathon to train for, after all.

Ruth Whiteside, proud to be a member of Stocksfield Striders

