

Challenges make triumphs sweeter

By Peter Thornton

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Trish Sutherland

Gave up the smokes and ran first half-marathon

Trish Sutherland admitted that she was "scared and petrified" to make her debut in the half-marathon of the Auckland Marathon in November. "Just thinking about it is starting to make me hyperventilate," joked the 57-year-old office manager.

Sutherland began her running career in 2013 at the tender age of 56. She took on the quarter-marathon of the Auckland event and completed it in 1h 23m 51s. It was some achievement for the mother of two, considering she had given up smoking the same year. One of the main reasons she started running was to help with giving up the smokes.

"Before that I would see people running and think to myself, 'Are they mad?'" she said. "It was just a matter of running until I couldn't run any more, which to start off with was only about two to three lamp-posts." She said the main thing about giving up smoking was that you had to be ready to do it. "Other people can nag you until they are blue in the face and if you aren't ready it is not going to happen," she said.

Sutherland finished the half-marathon in three hours. She offered simple advice for people looking to leave the nicotine behind and get into some fitness. "Do it for yourself first and then your family second. It is all about you and that's okay. It will probably be one of the hardest things you will do in your life but once you come out the other side it will be worth it."

Julianne Wilson

Running through the pain barrier

Australian expatriate Julianne Wilson is an example of what you can achieve when someone believes in you before you believe in yourself. The 55-year-old from Auckland has been training for the past two-and-a-half years with triathlon coach Ben Eitelberg.

When she first started, she could barely run a lap of the field. To make it more challenging, 10 years previously she had broken her ankle and had become accustomed to having pain down the side of her leg for years whenever she'd attempt to run.

"The pain was extreme," she said. "I had joined a running group and was trying to keep up but the mission was impossible. The pain was sharp and stabbing and it would shoot up my left leg. I had many injuries and they all just seemed to collide at that point. I was totally overwhelmed."

The mother of two, who put on weight and suffered from a lack of self-esteem and confidence, attempted her first running event in 15 years when she took on the ASB Auckland Half Marathon. It was an emotional and rewarding journey. "When I finished my first 17km run I was totally shocked that I had done it. I am amazed but I would never have managed it without Ben."



Ian Coventry takes on a triathlon at Port Ohope. Photo / Lisa Castle-Tauroa

Wilson's advice for others who are struggling: "Find a trainer like Ben – they are few and far between I can tell you – and just stay with it. Never give up and be prepared for good days and totally horrible days."

Sarah-Jane Lowrie

Super-mum shakes off scoliosis to take on 100km ride

Sarah-Jane Lowrie is a 32-year-old mother of five (Bambe, 13, Poppy, 11, Frankie, 10, Noah, 8, and Neva, 4). "Six, counting my husband Beau," she said with a laugh. Lowrie discovered a love for mountain biking four years ago. In 2014, the super-mum took on the toughest mountain bike race in New Zealand.

"Beau started riding a year before me and he and his mates were mainly into down-hilling," she remembered. "I thought that was what mountain biking was all about but once I realised it wasn't about risking life and limb, I was unstoppable." Her first race was a Hamilton Mountain Bike Club event last summer. In her second race she crashed, leaving her with a gaping hole in her elbow requiring intravenous antibiotics. The injury kept her off the bike for six weeks but she loved it and was hooked. She regarded the NZO Whaka 100 on October 25 as the ultimate challenge. "I really want to show others with disabilities that with dedication and commitment you can overcome and do anything." Lowrie suffers from scoliosis, or curvature of the spine. She has a titanium rod in her back screwed to five vertebrae, fusing them together. "I used to live in constant pain but now that I am fit and strong it is much better," she said.

Janine Joubert

Turned her life around through running

Janine Joubert lives by a simple mantra. "Success is not about being better than someone else, it's about being better than you were yesterday," said the 36-year-old administrator from Te Awamutu. A year ago she was depressed, on medication, overweight, unfit and sick with asthma and high blood pressure. In May she ran her first marathon in Rotorua in 5 hours 9 minutes. Joubert has been on a life-changing journey and lost 37.9kg.

"Every day I strive to be better than I was yesterday, not just in running but in everyday life – being kinder, more understanding and just happier than I was yesterday. No one knows what tomorrow will bring, so go run today because tomorrow it might not be possible."

It's an attitude that, with the help of her family and her "running family", has seen her turn her life around. She recommended other people looking to get into fitness should join a group – or three. "For me it is Weight Watchers and Hamilton Road Runners. They are like family to me, they know my ups and my downs, they have seen me laugh from joy and they have seen me cry from sheer exhaustion and disappointment and they never stopped believing in me."

Richard Bird

Swimming away the pain

Richard Bird had a different start to last year than he was expecting after suffering a stroke on January 1. The 35-year-old from Bayview was determined it would not mean the end of his swimming days. He entered the 2013 King of the Bays for the first time and in 2014 looked to achieve a personal best in the 2.8km swim.

"Swimming definitely helped me recover," said Bird. "I started swimming at the beginning of July last year and before I knew it I had worked my way up to 60 lengths in the pool." He recommended swimming to anyone who had suffered a stroke. "I would say to all stroke victims that where possible they must try and attend hydrotherapy."

Ian Coventry and Neve Power

Share common bond and overcome the odds

Although they don't know each other and live different lives, Ian Coventry and Neve Power share a common bond. Four years ago they were both diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, a condition that has significantly changed the way they live. They met when they participated in the inaugural Ohope Express. The running and walking event was established to raise awareness and funds for the Diabetes Exercise and Sport Association (Desa). Coventry, 48, and Power, 10, were selected as event ambassadors as they have learned to cope with type 1 diabetes while maintaining active lifestyles. Coventry ran the half-marathon course with wife Justine, while Power will complete the 5km course with her mum and dad.

"I like this event because it will help people know more about diabetes," said Power. "Having diabetes doesn't change who I am but it does mean I sometimes have to do things differently."

Coventry admitted the months after his diagnosis were very tough. "My greatest achievement is completing a six-hour adventure race six months after being diagnosed," he said. "I'm living proof that diabetes is something that can be managed successfully with some slight lifestyle adjustments. I can't emphasise enough how important it is to stay fit and healthy."

Charlotte FitzPatrick

Lost weight to become a running convert

Charlotte FitzPatrick has been on a rewarding weight loss journey. The 32-year-old started her new lifestyle of healthy eating and regular exercise in September last year and has lost 28kg in less than eight months. "I was tipping the scales at 111kg, it was the unhealthiest I had ever been in my life and I am pleased to now be at 83kg," said FitzPatrick, who took on the Taupo Half Marathon. "Last year I wouldn't have been able to run to the letterbox, so the fact that I am already running 10km non-stop is awesome."

The senior communications account manager from Cambridge was working for a health company at the time of her inspiration. On a daily basis she would hear the burden that diabetes and heart disease were placing on New Zealand's health system.

"I knew that I was at high risk of developing diabetes or cardiovascular disease if I didn't start eating healthier and exercising. Once I started to think about my lifestyle more seriously, I realised I wasn't in good shape physically or mentally and that it was time to change."

FitzPatrick said running is great because it's a scenic way of exercising and escape. "It takes away a lot of the stress of my daily life. My endorphins start working and I completely switch off from the problems of my day."

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