

"BOWELED" OVER BY RUNNING

I've been meaning to get around to writing this for a while, and I'm now finally putting pen to paper as it were...

We (myself and wife Sarah) moved to Todmorden from Kent in May 2008. A few months after our migration back to the North (both originally from the Red Rose County!) I started to notice an increase in my toilet visits of the number 2 variety. Horrible subject I know, but this was about to turn my whole world upside down. I will apologise now for what might come across as a little graphic but in order to tell the story properly, it's really unavoidable.

After a month or so of hogging the throne, I decided it would be best to visit my doctor. Following a rather inconclusive discussion with the GP I was referred to the Gastroenterology department in Huddersfield Hospital to have various tests. After becoming more intimately familiar with the appearance of my own insides than I'd like, during multiple colonoscopies and barium meals amongst other things, I was eventually diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis in August 2008.

For those unaware, Ulcerative Colitis is a form of chronic Bowel Disease which causes inflammation of the bowel leading to ulceration of the bowel wall. This ulceration means that the bowel struggles to remove fluid from your excrement which results in diarrhoea often mixed with blood (urgh...yes I know!).

Over the next couple of months, I was put on a series of different treatments most of which were Aminosalicylates which are an anti-inflammatory used to suppress the ulcerative nature of the disease. I tried a multitude of different types of these, some for oral use, others which were of the less desirable and unpleasant suppository/enema format. Unfortunately none of these worked and my symptoms were getting worse by the day.

In September 2008, my wife became pregnant with our first child. We were thrilled to be expecting a baby and it gave me a real lift and something to look forward to. Unfortunately, my symptoms got worse still and I was frequenting the toilet between 10 and 15 times a day. I started to feel incredibly weak all the time. It was a real effort just to do simple things like having a shower, driving or even eating a meal! With toilet troubles aside, the lethargy was really like nothing I'd experienced. My body felt like it was filled with lead, though ironically my weight tumbled, as did my appetite (a poor appetite is very unusual for me!). I lost around 2.5 stone in as many months.

Work was becoming more and more difficult - but I carried on in the vague hope that things would get better (I didn't feel I really had any other option). It was a living nightmare.

I was still turning up for work most mornings, having carefully planned out my toilet stops along the 25mi commute to the office but it was becoming hard to focus properly and just getting through to the end of the day was a real challenge, let alone make a positive contribute whilst there.

Some days I had to make arrangements to work at home as I just couldn't face people at work - I would feel drained, lethargic beyond what I thought was possible and couldn't risk the journey to work in case I needed to pay a visit or 5 along the way!

At its worst, I would be visiting the toilet around 20-25 times a day with at least 5 times during the night. Something had to be done...surely it couldn't be like this for the rest of my life I thought?!

The consultant eventually put me on a course of corticosteroid tablets which are a strong steroidal treatment that helps eliminate the inflammation but unfortunately carries an exhaustive list of long term side-effects which essentially rules it out from being appropriate for extended use. Within just a couple of days on this medication, I had an incredible new lease of life...the toilet visits became normal; I was down to toilet visits in the region of 3-4 times a day which is obviously a remarkable improvement on what I'd become accustomed to and the lethargy had started to lift. Amazing!

Once my condition stabilised, the consultant tapered me down off the corticosteroids and introduced another anti-inflammatory drug to try with a view to using it on a more long term basis. Within 4-5 days, my symptoms went down hill again and I was soon back up to over 10 trips to my favourite seat in the bathroom. I knew it was too good to be true. This pattern was repeated several times...back to normal on the steroids, then during taper and ramp up on the next drug to try, the symptoms came

back.

In June 2009, my wife gave birth to our first child, Thomas...we were thrilled and it was such a joy to finally meet our first child, but obviously I could barely look after myself let alone a baby. Thankfully my wife became a naturally good mother and despite the challenges of a 9 month pregnancy, a difficult 36 hour labour resulting in a 10lb5oz baby boy (I kid you not! – poor wife!) and everything else that comes with the sharp learning curve of parenthood, she continued to support me throughout.

To cut an even longer story short, in January 2010, I was put on Asathiaprine which would be my miracle drug that would bring my illness under control once and for all on a long term basis. This is an immune-suppressant usually associated with transplant patients to prevent organ rejection. I'm still to this day on Asathiaprine and touch wood it will continue to treat me well. The illness will never go away but it can be managed through treatment and eventually bowel surgery (if required). I still have periods of lethargy and occasional flare ups which can at times affect my running (how dare it!) but I'm absolutely loads better than before and also in better physical shape than I've ever been, even before the diagnosis!

Following on from this dreadful period of illness, my health and fitness were on the floor. I could barely walk a flight of stairs without needing to sit down and catch my breath.

In September 2010, my wife encouraged me to try the gym to build some fitness and strength back up. I started going a couple of times a week, spending time on the treadmill, rowing machine and a little on the weights. My first attempt on the treadmill resulted in a 0.5mi plod which nearly put my lights out. Slowly but surely, over the next 12 months I increased my time on the treadmill to a point where I could run 5k non-stop. It felt so liberating! At this stage I decided I'd brave the streets for my running and started to get really into it and leave the monotony of the treadmill behind.

I entered my first 10k in March 2012, the Keighley BigK 10k and was so pleased to finish. I'd got the bug!!! So much so, I went on to run several more 10k's and 4 Half Marathons in the same year! It felt great to feel so fit and strong after all that I'd been through.

I joined Tod Harriers in April 2012 and I've never looked back. I've been overwhelmed by the great people within the club, the fantastic support and encouragement I've received throughout and the friends I've made along the way. Thank you to everyone for making me feel so welcome and for the great advice I've received.

John L, Paul B, Robin T and Nick B have been especially helpful, plying me with some top tips, countless nuggets of advice and encouragement, especially in the lead up to my London and Chester marathons this year. John L was the one who got me to pluck up the courage to write this story which can hopefully be used to inspire people to some level or other!

Just 2 years ago I never in my wildest dreams would have thought it were possible for me to run a marathon...let alone 2 in one year! Now I'm setting my sights on another....Manchester Marathon in April '14 maybe?!!

I'm now at the end of my racing season for 2013 and I can proudly say I've done the following 10 things this season:

- 1. Ran in 20 races (16 road, 2 trail, 2 fell)**
- 2. Ran over 13 miles for the first time ever (well longer than 13.1 atleast!)**
- 3. PB'd 12 times in the 18 races I've participated in**

4. Ran 3 Half Marathons – and broken my 1:30 target I set myself (1h29:55 at Capethorne HM)
5. PB'd 3 times on 10k (41.08 current PB)
6. PB'd 3 times on 5k and broken 20 minutes (19.23 current PB)
7. Ran 2 x 20 milers (2h24 current PB)
8. Ran 2 x Marathons (3.26 in both, PB'ing in Chester)
9. Enjoyed every single mile despite how hard some of them have felt
10. Been overwhelmed by the support of Tod Harriers in everything I've done

Also, here's some finishing stats from London which really made me smile...

Gun Time to Start time 13mins 24 sec

Chip Time = 3:26:10

Finishing Position =4091st

5699th person across the finishing line.

Total number of finishers = 34,278

31,030th to cross the start line

Apparently only 5 that started behind me finished in front of me!

No. of people overtaken = 25,326 people!!.....particularly pleased about this one!

Happy running folks. Here's to a successful 2014 for Tod Harriers!



Here's me overtaking one of my many victims during the London Marathon in April 2013...



Here's me on the finishing podium in London!...