

The only way is up

I sit here today reminiscing on what an amazing year I have had so far. However, my journey started months ago.

I will never forget the evening that changed my life and started off this amazing journey. It was a Monday evening and I was travelling home on the train after a day at work. I was on my way to an evening class but my back was aching so bad, I decided not to go. My back had been aching for some time and I had come to the realisation that it was because I had put on so much weight. You see, in 2000, I had corrective spinal surgery for my Scoliosis. I knew that I needed to keep the weight off but still I would attempt to eat my feelings away and in 2017 in December I was at my heaviest. I decided there and then, on that train, that I needed to do something. My darling brother, kindly came to the gym with me whilst I explained to Natalie with tears in my eyes that I needed to join the gym. I had joined twice before but never stuck at it but this time I felt that it would be different. I didn't know how but deep inside me I knew that I was ready for change. The idea of going up in the gym and having a look round made me so upset that we didn't. Natalie kindly took me round the pool and was full of encouragement. I told her that I would start swimming the next day with my brother Michael. For around the next three months, that is what we would do. Michael would come to the gym with me, I would go for a swim and Michael would train upstairs in the gym. I wouldn't start my swim until I saw Michael at the window waving at me. Sometimes he wouldn't be there as he would already be training but it didn't matter, I knew he was there and that gave me comfort. I was only ever swimming a small distance, 10 or 20 lengths sometimes 30 but afterwards I felt amazing. Slowly but surely my confidence was rising and when my size 16 skirt got loose, I knew that I was on to the road for success.

That's when I decided to join some classes. I absolutely love meeting people and I'm a sociable person. Being in that group setting was amazing. I made friends and would chat to people before and after my workout.

In May 2018, Michael and I went to Enduroman, a festival of ultra events held in the New Forest. We had been the year before and I loved the atmosphere so much that I wanted to return with Michael. The way I would describe it, is an amazing place, where anything is possible. A magical place full of theoretical glitter and where I would imagine unicorns would dance around. I think in pictures, love glitter and unicorns. That's how I see this place, I imagine others would see it differently. However, what was clear was how much the organisers would encourage the participants and it's an absolutely lovely weekend. I can't wait to go again next year. After two years of being support crew, I plan on taking part next year.

Now, let's go back to this year. Our amazing friend Graeme was taking part in a triple ironman distance event and we told Graeme that we would be part of his support crew. It's there that I saw my amazing endurobud Maria Greaves not only complete the triple but win it. However, it wasn't until I saw on Facebook that there was going to be an ironman 70.3 in Greece, that I decided to enter the amazing world of triathlons. I am half Greek Cypriot and I went to University in Crete. I had some of my best and worse moments in Crete and when I returned to England I was tired, broken and left with very little confidence. It was a no brainer that I would take part in this first ever half in Greece. I decided there and then to sign up and between the end of May until last week I worked on getting ready. Last Friday I entered and it feels so exciting and real now. However, until I paid I made lots of little changes.

Firstly, I chose an amazing personal trainer. All the personal trainers at my gym are amazing but I knew that I had to find the right personal trainer for me. I had seen Rosita around the gym and I thought yes, she's the one I want to train with. I contacted Rosita and we met up and went for a coffee. I told her about my goals and explained why this is so important to me. Rosita is an amazing lady. She has helped me with my confidence, self-belief, has taught me about nutrition and has pushed me harder than I have ever been pushed. Our personal training sessions are amazing. So rewarding and so much hard work. We have also become good friends. I call her hun boss. She's my hun when we go for coffee and laugh. When we train she's my boss. I listen to her, I trust her and I know that she is invested in helping me reach my goals.

Secondly, I started running with Michael. Not far, just 5km at a time but I felt amazing. I started enjoying it and remembered just how much I loved running. When I lived in Crete, I used to run regularly. The worse I felt, the more I would run. Up and down the sea front, I would run and my fears would melt away.

Thirdly, I started lake swimming. I suffer with panic attacks and quickly found that when I put on my wetsuit it would induce a panic attack. I have since started psychotherapy and I have been taught a technique which helps with it. I have also found that when someone speaks to me, I don't have a panic attack. I now don't fear the lake swims as much and I'm determined not to be defined by my poor mental health moments. I also feel that the more we speak about these things; the more people will feel supported. I believe that we all have our fears and by speaking about them we take away the power that they can have on us.

Fourthly and the last stage was getting my bicycle. I absolutely love my bicycle. She is a she of course. I've named her Ellada which means Greece in Greek. She is blue and white like the Greek flag. Michael and I started going to the cyclopark which I absolutely love. I actually fell off my bicycle a few weeks ago and being the over dramatic person that I can sometimes be, I started crying hysterically. Looking back at it it must have looked very funny but the truth is I was scared. Michael checked I was ok and then told me to get back onto my bicycle and we went around the same corner again. However, a few days later I had pains when we went out for a run and I was so worried it was shin splints. I found an amazing physio who reassured me that it would be unlikely to be shin splints but did tell me not to run for three weeks. I then saw him twice more and I would try to always follow exactly what he told me. I told him how much the half ironman means to me and that I trust his expertise and will listen to his advice. Yesterday, I had an appointment with him and he gave me the good news. I am allowed to go back to running, half an hour at a time and I'm allowed to cycle one hour at a time. I'm so pleased. I was so worried that I had injured myself so badly that I wouldn't be able to take part in the half. I realised then and there that I needed to re evaluate my goals and not be so focused on them. Don't get me wrong, it's good to be focused but I think it meant a little too much to me. I felt so upset when I wasn't able to train as before, my heart felt broken and I felt like my dream was fading away.

From this week I am back to my aim of training 5 to 6 times a week and I am loving it. This year has been such a journey. Last year I planned on taking a world trip. I think because I felt like I would find myself. However, I have just done just that and didn't have to leave the UK. I have learnt so much about myself this year and have learnt to love myself just a little bit more.

Life can be hard, so very hard but it can also be beautiful, ever so beautiful.