

WHO IS EMMA?

Emma is a runner, a writer, a mother and a cancer thriver. Her book, *All That Followed*, describes her ongoing cancer tug of war and how she manages that while bringing up four children. Follow her @limitless_em



THE FAB FOUR TICK OFF LONDON

Covid-19 has seen the best-laid plans go to waste, but Emma Campbell and her friends weren't going to let a global pandemic ruin their dreams

Towards the end of last year, I remember being out for a run one grey, drizzly morning and thinking about 2020 and all of the amazing things that I wanted to achieve. I do this a lot when I'm running. I get such a quick mood boost from even the shortest runs that planning and visualising good things happening feels easy, fun and – well, I almost treat it like a game, daydreaming my desires into existence. I heartily recommend it, and it certainly beats tarnishing that precious me time by going over the dreaded, endless to-do list or even worse, the list that starts every sentence with 'what if'.

Anyway, back to how *this* year was supposed to pan out. I was going to remain well and in remission, with cancer playing a delightfully insignificant part in my life. I was going to do lots of travelling. I was going to write another book, which would inevitably become an international best-seller before being made into a blockbuster movie... oh, and I was going to run the London Marathon. The 'proper' London Marathon. The one that takes place on a Sunday morning in

April with thousands of spectators lining the streets watching 40,000 runners fulfil a magnificent dream. The real life, pinch me it's happening, London Bloody Marathon.

But then the other Big C happened. And 2020 unfolded very differently for every single one of us. Needless to say, not much travelling this year. And the book? Well, I'm working on it, kind of.

But, BUT my friends. I can proudly tick off one giant achievement from my 2020 wish list. The Marathon! I only went and did it, and do you know what? As a first-time marathon participant, I wouldn't swap the magic of the virtual event for the real thing if you paid me. There was something so poignant about taking part in such an iconic event in the midst of a global pandemic.



Celebrating completing the big one with Deborah James

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our extremely enthusiastic Marathon Chat WhatsApp group.

"Yeah, or we could just push on through til lunch, then have a burger and a glass of wine," was another bonkers suggestion answered with champagne emojis pinging back and forth. We were clearly deluded and in denial about the challenge we'd decided to take on with very little proper training.

We met outside the Royal Marsden Hospital at 7am. It was still dark. We snapped some 'before' pictures on the famous front steps, all of us giddy and displaying signs of mild hysteria, before huddling together, opening our official marathon apps and pressing 'start'.

I now realise that once you start running a marathon, it really isn't very wise to stop. It became clear very early on that we wouldn't be pressing pause

on our running time for scrambled eggs, bacon and a nice hot coffee. There would be no double cheese and bacon burger with chunky chips and a glass of wine.

It's okay. You can laugh. You can scoff, mock and roll your eyes in disbelief. I don't know what the hell we were thinking either. We just kept going, as the rain kept falling. The weather could not have been worse. It was comically diabolical, but actually added to the beauty of the day.

"We're doing it!"

"We're actually doing it!"

And we did it. In six hours and 41 minutes. Fuelled by friendship, determination and Wotsits (don't ask).

Perfect day

We ended where we began, back at the hospital that keeps so many of us going. With buckling knees, we snapped the 'after' pictures, holding each other up, half giggling, half crying. Then we found somewhere warm to sit and share pizza. The champagne and wine emojis came to life and everything that very special day felt really, really good. ☺

No stopping now

We were running in a group of four: me and Deborah James (aka @bowelbabe) both as stage four cancer patients hoping to raise as much money as we could for our beloved Royal Marsden Hospital, along with Deb's sister and best friend.

We'd had this mad idea in the weeks before of 'making a day of it' – seeing as it was going to be such a different experience from the 'real' thing, with the only stipulation being that we complete it at some point over the 23 hours and 59 minutes of 4 October.

"How about stopping for a nice breakfast somewhere after the first 10K?" was one bizarre idea that appeared in