



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

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Our new columnist, cancer thriver and witty Insta queen Emma Campbell, marvels at the strength of her body and her new title: a runner

I've got to say, this isn't quite the first contribution I had in mind for what's quickly come to be my favourite magazine. This first column was supposed to be all marathon this, marathon that... 18, 19, 20-mile training runs done at time of writing. Endless sickly sweet gels consumed and lost toenails at every turn.

Scrawled in my diary in big, bold print for 26 April 2020: the Virgin Money London Marathon. My first marathon. Bugger.

Life changing

But I'm not here to complain. We're all reeling from the impact of Covid-19 – so many aspects of our lives changed in ways we could never have imagined and it goes without saying that having to temporarily let go of that particular dream isn't the biggest of challenges.

Indulge me for a moment or two though, if you don't mind. The training was going really well. I was loving

it – even on the torturous days. Every time the words oh so casually came out of my mouth, "Yeah, I'm doing the London Marathon in April," I had to pinch myself, wanting to either laugh or cry – depending on how hormonal my cancer drugs were making me feel on that particular day.

I'm a cancer patient, you see. Technically, Stage Four, but let's brush over that for now. I brush over quite a lot of cancer terminology to be honest. It doesn't do much to contribute to the



positive mindset I've fought so hard to establish. After years of low level depression, crippling anxiety and battling with catastrophic thoughts of a premature death, I've come a long, long way.

It dawned on me the other day that I'm a 10 year survivor. Hard to believe, but definitely something to acknowledge. My body has been through a lot, as has my mind. And that, my friends, is where the numerous benefits of running come into play.

It's all taken me by surprise really. Still reeling from last year's third diagnosis, running was not something I ever imagined would be on the agenda for 2019. New chemo was planned and scheduled along with major surgery, and hoping to stay alive was my only aim for a year that had gone way off track before it had begun.

My first experience of chemotherapy for breast cancer back in 2010 left me physically battered and broken, as did looking after my baby triplets and older son as a single mum. Chemo five years



London was to be Emma's first marathon – here's hoping for October

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Emma is on the Covid-19 vulnerable list – but that hasn't stopped her running

//Running has given me hope. Focus. Determination. It's shown me anything is possible. That we are all limitless//

ago when I had my first recurrence had a similar affect. All consuming. Terrifying. Crippling. I remember my oncologist encouraging me to exercise through treatment and if I'd been able to crack a smile I might have actually laughed in his face. Was he crazy? Exercise through chemo? Curl up in a ball and hide away through chemo, more like.

Unloving relationship

This time round? Fortunate enough to be on one of the very clever new types of targeted treatment, I found myself wanting to gently introduce a physical activity into my life.

I'd crossed paths with running before, but let's just say it wasn't the most loving of relationships. Generally linked to a loathing

of my thighs or muffin top or guilt about the giant sized bars of chocolate regularly consumed, it was more of a punishment than a pleasure.

Not anymore. Something clicked in my addled, foggy brain and marvelling at how I could encourage my body to work for me, and remind me of its utter brilliance, became a thing. I was hooked.

"Look at me!" I'd want to shout as I took off for my three, four and sometimes five times-a-week outings round the local park. "I'm running! Yes, I've got secondary breast cancer, yes things ain't great, but look, I'm RUNNING!"

My legs were working, my lungs were working, my heart was working. My brain was buzzing with endorphins and all the feel good feels around and, wow, I was actually doing it. Walk for two minutes, run for one minute slowly but surely became walk for one, run for two, walk for one, run for five... which led to my first 5K, 7K... Hang on, did I just run 10 flipping K? Er yes, and not only that, but in my Primark pants and bra for the wonderful Mental Health Mates charity-inspired Celebrate You wave of the Vitality 10K in June along

with hundreds of other brilliant, barely dressed, women.

That was the day it struck me. I'm a runner. And not because I'm fast or graceful or because I find it easy. But simply because I run.

And so we currently have a tentative new date for this 40th anniversary of the London Marathon. I'm praying for 4 October, as I'm sure lots of you are too. As a cancer patient and therefore technically on the vulnerable list, I'm not really supposed to be leaving the house at the moment. Will you judge me if I admit I've continued to go for the odd very early morning run? It keeps me so sane, you see. And reminds me my body is working for me. That I'm not cancer. That my legs, lungs, heart and smile are cancer free.

We are limitless

Running has given me hope. Focus. Determination. Friendship. Running has shown me that I'm capable of so much more than I realised. Running continues to show me that anything is possible. That we are all limitless.

Hopefully, by the time you read this, we will have emerged from lockdown. Hopefully, we'll be high five-ing each other as we pass on paths and pavements. We'll be signing up for parkruns, halves and god knows what else. Because we can. As long as we can run, we can do anything. 🏃‍♀️

Next issue, Anna McNuff is back to tell us how she's been coping through lockdown. Emma returns in the summer to let us know how her training's going.