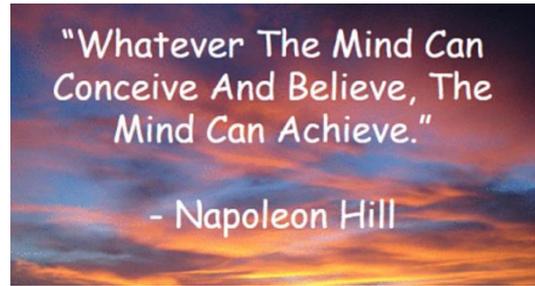


Napoleon Hill once quoted 'Whatever the mind can conceive & believe, the mind can achieve'.

This is a quote I have often read but now fully understand from first-hand experience. DCM, Sunday Oct 29th, 2017 was one of the proudest moments of my life. For those that know me, you will know I am not a natural runner, I do not love it & it does not come easy to me. I see it as a challenge.



In my school days, I used to take part in cross country running, mainly to skip a few classes rather than for the love of it. During my college years, a series of palpitations, brought on by the slightest bit of exercise, resulted in numerous cardiologist exams and a diagnosis of having an extra heartbeat, probably stopped me taking part in any strenuous exercise. It was always a worry at the back of my mind (and my Mothers). As the years went by, my main form of exercise was walking, which I enjoyed.

This all changed following a Christmas get-together in fellow Tri Club member Karen Kavanaghs house c 2011, whereby she was looking for a running buddy. I said, 'I walk, but I don't run'....she said, 'You will by the end of the week!!'. And there it began – I recall being very impressed with my first outing – a slow jog from St. Vincent's Hospital, Athy to Athy Garda Station. A far cry from 26.2 miles.!! In hindsight Karen, I owe you a big Thank You!. Things steadily progressed to joining Athy Tri club, which probably had about 10-15 members at the time, completing Tri a Tri, the odd 5k, Kildare 10K, after which I swore 'Never Again'. It did take a few years before I got the courage to do a Half Marathon, the Gingerbread Run 2014 – where again I said 'never again' as I found it pure torture. I instead forgot about longer distance running and continued with triathlon, progressing to Sprint & Olympic distances. I always found the run element however, extremely hard.

To try and improve on this weak leg of triathlon, (pardon the pun!), I signed up for Liam Kelly's running sessions on Tuesday evenings at Athy GAA. To be honest, I made more excuses about not being able to go than I should have. I hated going, I found them tough, but always felt good after these sessions. For the past 2-3 years, I have watched the news reports and listened in awe of other people's experiences in DCM. For the past 2-3 years, every October Bank Holiday w/end, I always thought I would LOVE to experience that – even to walk it, BUT my heart issue previously mentioned would never hold out for 42k. It was during Liam's Tuesday sessions and talking with other members who had completed DCM that I was convinced that with the right training plan and commitment, anyone could complete a marathon. The more I heard, the more I believed "this itch is going to be scratched" – even if I had to walk it!! And so over a glass or two of wine one Friday night I entered – there was no going back now!

A few of us from the Tuesday running group approached Liam Kelly to do up a training plan for DCM for us. Liam advised he would be glad to help on the condition that we get ourselves a running watch and send him stats after each run. For this Liam Kelly, I am forever grateful. As Liam is aware, this is the pressure I needed. I treated each session on the plan as 'homework' or an 'assignment' – all leading up to a very big final exam on October 29th. Had I not been answerable to Liam, a couple of times per week, I would have given up a long long time ago. But knowing that "Big Brother" was watching gave me the drive to want to succeed, and so the homework was done, mainly on time. I

am proud to say that looking back on the plan set, I only missed 2 sessions & cut 2 others short. I do admit, I was lazy on the S&C – this was mainly due to time constraint due to work/family commitments. I downloaded the 7min app and at best I completed it twice per week. However, I do believe this did stand to me on race day.

Mainly, the two mid-week runs were completed alone and I found myself looking forward to the company of fellow Club members for the LSR's. These were good days, numbers were good at the start and new friendships formed tips, fears & intimate stories shared. Memories from these runs include the bulk buying of bottled race belts (as modelled by John Cuddy), putting extra talc in socks to prevent blisters, applying copious amounts of Vaseline supplied by Maggie to prevent unwanted chaffing. Online shopping increased, buying items I didn't know of before - zero tabs, EVB shorts, Foam Rollers, Boxes of Hi-Five Gels & Calf Sleeves. These same calf sleeves (bright blue) caused huge embarrassment among my kids who begged me not to train around the GAA wearing them whilst they were training with friends.

As the summer progressed, I was actually shocked to find myself doing the interval/fartlek sessions of my own accord - these same sessions and longer, that I hated on the Tuesday evenings. There was



always a feeling of satisfaction once completed. It was always a bonus if my "whatsapp Marathon Buddies", Maggie or Karen were available at same time as I found the company made it easier.

I did find the whole journey very consuming, it took over my every thought, I went to bed thinking of running, dreamt of it and it was my first thought on waking. I even found myself looking at signposts and thinking 'Yeh, I could run that'. The one that stands out is the one outside the Clanard Court on the Dublin Road, saying Kilcullen 21K – so each day coming out of work, I was reminded that I had to complete that, not

once but TWICE!.

The only runs entered in preparation for D Day were the Kildare Thoroughbred Half Marathon back in June; this was extremely tough due to the heat. Also, the Longwood $\frac{3}{4}$ Marathon which I found to be great preparation in that it gave me the opportunity to run in a crowd, to run with pacers & to know when to pull back and not get pulled along by others. I felt comfortable throughout this run and it gave me great confidence to believe that Yes, maybe I CAN run this full marathon.

The more training I completed, the more convinced I was that 42K is only a number and that 50% of these running sessions were controlled by the head and the other 50% by the legs/body. I found it worked to break each training session up into manageable parts, i.e., $\frac{1}{4}$ way there, $\frac{1}{2}$ way there, double digit KM's, single digit KM's counting back, i.e. anything that would get me through, and when the going got tough, there was always a decade or two of the rosary said – always a good way to pass 1-2km without noticing!!.

As the weeks rolled by, excitement was building and Race Day soon was upon us. Athy Tri Club had 38 members taking part and we were spoilt firstly with the offer of a bus organised by Eamonn

McEntee and secondly, by Seamus Rowan allowing his offices to be used as Base Camp. This made logistics very easy and took a lot of stress out of the day. On top of this, we had the services of Conor Harrington, Sports Physio, who I would highly recommend; to rub out any niggles before and after the race.

Little sleep was had the night before race day, which I read is perfectly normal. I was glad to have banked a good 10 hours the night before. Alarm rang at 5.15am and after the usual breakfast, I knew it was going to be a good day when I was able to give the thumbs up before leaving the house – Arnold Kane will understand the relief of this!!!. Surprisingly, all fellow club members were very calm (or still asleep) on the bus. A quick change, cup of coffee, top up of food & squirt of Rescue Remedy for good measure and black sack - we were all now set and off we went to the start lines. The buzz and colour was amazing. Liam's encouraging words still rang in my head 'just to think of it as another weekly LSR ...just with 19,999 others!!!...and to believe in yourself'. The gun sounded at 9:20am and we were off. As I ran alongside Karen, it felt surreal that we were amongst thousands of people in a sea of colour actually running through the streets of Dublin in DCM – our dream, which we thought was unachievable was now in motion. A few technical watch issues between myself and Karen meant the first 3K was gone by before I knew it. Already, another positive thought entered my mind – that I only had 39K more to do, I was done with the 40's +.

We soon came upon Diarmuid Flynn at Blackhall Place and it is here I lost my club mates. Within 500mtrs, I found myself running alongside a Northern Chap who was also a member of a Triathlon Club and has also signed up for Barcelona '18 (and no he was not recruited by Mr. McEntee). Oh Dear!, Did someone mention deer – they surely did, there were shouting 'look out for the deer' – and that very second a deer with HUGH antlers ran past us on the right, very close to the crowd. I later heard he got up close & personal with Karen & Diarmuid as he ran through the crowd.

At approx. 15k myself and Mr. Northern Tri Club came upon Arnold & Ciaran who were running very comfortably. I introduced them to their competition for Barca'18 and they ran together for a bit. I lost the guys about 18k and found myself running on my own for the remainder of the race. I took the sound advice of the pro's – John & Ethna Sourke and took a gel every 8k, I kept hydrated regularly with zero tabs I had in each belt bottle, these were refilled as and when required.

Leo (my husband) had said he would defo be out on the course to cheer me on but did not know where due to road closures. I found myself passing the time trawling the crowds of supporters looking for them. It was at Walkinstown Roundabout my sister, niece & nephews were based and I



was given a great lift/boost in seeing them. So much so I got a great spring in my step and soon could not believe my eyes when I saw Padraig & Eamonn in front of me around the Terenure mark. These guys were veteran marathoners and I had caught up with them – this should not have happened in my game plan! My confidence was lifted, so much so that I even managed a sprint to photobomb Kavanagh as he posed for a pic.



I was still feeling good and cracked on, all the time overwhelmed by the support of the crowds. Special mention to Paul Mc, Niall Foley, Kavanagh/McDonnell families, Dunne/Cardiff family's, Michelle Brennan, Trilogy, Adrenaline Club & Lots & lots of randomers (apologies if I left any one out). It was at the 30/32k mark I remember needing to use the bathroom – after a very brief stop, I found it hard to get going again, people all around me were walking & slowing down. I had read about 'hitting the WALL' and figured Ok this must be it, so I allowed myself to walk for about 100mtrs and took another gel. This again proved to work and kick started the engine & I was back running, yet my legs were getting achy. I came upon Eamon AGAIN, who reassured me Fosters Ave was not as bad as people talk about, that we had ran worse already and I am thankful to Dr. McEntee for his sound advice to take painkillers if needed for sore leg but to take them NOW – this kept the pain at bay to get me to the finish line.

Leo & kids, true to their word were there at mile 22, Roebuck Road, just as I needed to see them as I was just getting over the 'wall' feeling. Hugs & Kisses all round & reassurance that I was doing great & that I was going to do this and how proud they were of me, gave me the lift I needed & off I trotted with a feeling of YES, I am going to do this. A couple of decades of the rosary to pass a few KM's, now had me down to single figures – 9K, 8K, 7K...the roars from the crowd, the lovely breeze in my face when we turned onto Stillorgan Road, hearing strangers shouting my name, come on Athy, you can do this, you have this, my pace quickened with each step.



Nutley Lane, RTE, Vincents Hospital, Merrion Road – all familiar territory from my collage days. 4k, 3k, 2k...the crowds were getting bigger, the roars louder, the emotion, oh the emotion, I welled up so many times on that final stretch from Merrion Road in. I felt like the magic porridge pot about to spill over.

600mtrs, 500mtrs – finish line in site. Roars of support from Michelle Dooley & Family, Donna Kane & Niamh Mulhall, Karen's twin Michelle, was almost enough to cause that pot to overflow. And there it was 4hrs13:11

– Mission Complete - Dream & Challenge Accomplished. I had done it. I was proud....I was happy....I was SORE!. One more golden moment, the placing of the medal around my neck – again a surge of emotion. This one would be worn with PRIDE.

21 weeks.....66 Training Runs.....858KilometersDCM COMPLETE!!

None of this would have been accomplished without the love & support of my husband and children, my marathon whatsapp buddies Karen & Maggie, who continuously helped and encouraged me, My partners in crime for the ¾ Longwood Marathon, Caroline, Gemma & Lily, all the LSR runners & all at Athy Tri Club. Last but not least Liam Kelly, for his continued advise, support, coaching & encouragement & belief in me. Congrats to each and every runner of the DCM, I hope your journey was as memorable as mine.



**The mind truly
can achieve
what the mind
believes!!!**

