

## Never say never in life!

Well how did this DCM journey begin? I was never into the long stuff probably for 2 reasons – don't have the patience and not very good at it!

I have been at the Walkinstown roundabout at the halfway mark of DCM for the past 3 years supporting family, friends and ATC members and was still never inspired to do one!



Padraig came home from his first DCM last year and said he would love me to experience DCM so then the seed was sewn!

I would never have been able to do DCM 2017 without Liam Kelly's marathon training plan and his support, my training mates Suzanne, Maggie and other ATC members and of course the support of Padraig, Shane and Chloe.

Liam's training plan began on June 5<sup>th</sup> for 21 weeks. Each week consisted of 4 sessions – an interval and tempo run, a strength and conditioning session and a LSR at weekends. At the end of every week I sent stats to Liam so I was never able to tell lies! Liam always replied back with training tips and words of encouragement.

I had an injury to the left knee in July so stayed off the roads for 6 weeks so changed to the canal and river banks to run on during this time.

Suzanne was fantastic at organising routes etc. and I just had to turn up at GAA and say to Suzanne

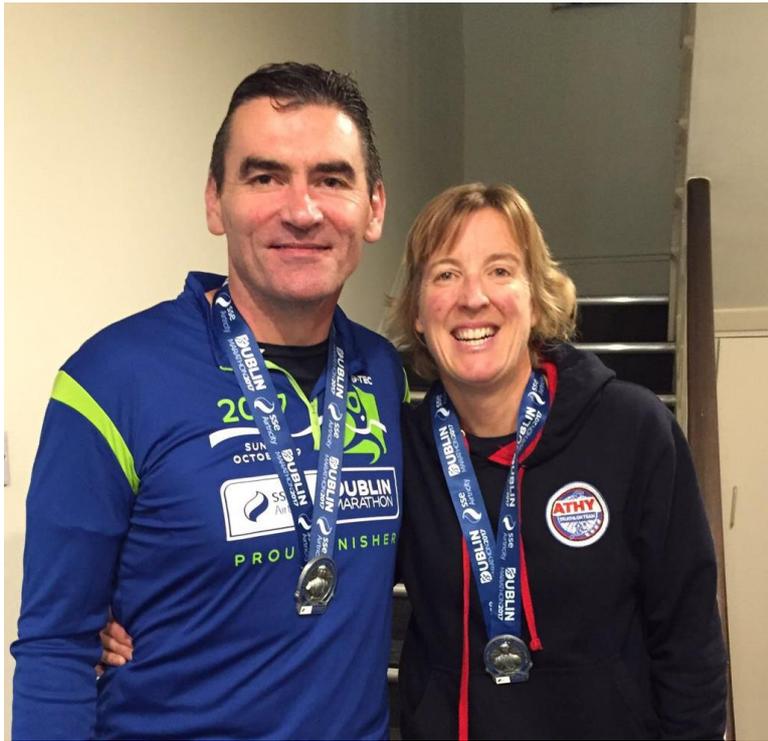
"Where are we off to today for our LSR?" and she would have it all mapped out. Maggie always put a smile on my face throughout the long runs with her witty comments and I remember towards the end of a 25km run along the canal, the 3 of us singing "Ole, Ole, ole..." to distract us from some of the mental and physical pain. On 27<sup>th</sup> July Liam gave a very informative talk re: marathon and things became more real – gels, electrolytes and training belts were now a necessity.

When I decided to do the marathon initially I always said it would be one and one only, as training went on throughout the summer, this was reinforced in my mind with knee injury, time and family commitment etc. so if I was going to do one and one only I was going to do it properly, so I followed Liam's plan diligently.

Eamon organised the DCM transport, Conor Harrington as physio on the day and Seamus provided us with his office space on Northumberland Road as base – this was the icing on the cake – food, coffee machines, showers etc. I am very grateful to all three.

Our last long run was on Sat Oct 21<sup>st</sup> with a 16km. The week before DCM I didn't realise I would feel SO proud on reaching the start line with everyone asking, "Are you doing the marathon?" It also helped that there were 4 colleagues at work doing the marathon too. I was extremely grateful and touched by all the good wishes before the big day.

So, the DCM weekend began. Padraig and I travelled to Dublin on the Saturday leaving Shane and Chloe with my sister in Dublin for the weekend enroute to the Expo. Registration was so well organised. Everything for the day was set up the night before. My plan of action for the race was to go out and enjoy, soak up the atmosphere, take in supporters, route etc and try to come home under 5 hrs.



Alarm went off at 5am, then Padraig and I headed into Athy for 6am collecting Arnold on the way. I didn't feel the bus journey up to Dublin with the chit chat etc.

We arrived at our luxurious base camp at 7.30 am where we all had more breakfast and then got ready for the race. Most of us walked down to the start which was only 1 km away from Seamus' office with John, Eithne and Peadar having to go earlier for their wave start. I was in the last wave, wave 4 but a good few of us skipped into wave 3 to get started earlier.

It was 9.20 when I crossed the start line. I started off with Suzanne and was watching our

pace – unfortunately my watch was not showing same pace as Suzanne and others. I started to panic a little and after 5km I gave up on my watch and told Suzanne to go ahead as I didn't want to go out too quick!

Since I was not following any watch now I was just keeping 2 large blue balloons 4hr 20mins pacemakers about 150 m ahead of me. I then bumped into Diarmuid Flynn along the way. He was now my watch! I felt quite strong at this stage through the Phoenix Park. I stayed with Diarmuid until 18 km. I bumped into the friendly Mike Ryan, a colleague and Racing 795 member in Kilmainham.

I remembered when I hit Crumlin, it was the first time my body felt under pressure. I then passed the spot near the Walkinstown roundabout where I always cheered from for the past few years and this time I was the participant!

I came to the 25km marker in Terenure and met Jackie an old school and running friend from Dunleer AC who was spectating. She started running with me giving me loads of encouragement. She was telling me that from the tracker I was due home in 4 hrs 27 mins! Then I told her my watch was acting up and my 2 blue balloon markers had gone out of sight!



This is when my tactics for DCM changed, if I was only going to do one marathon I wanted to try to get a good time, but I knew I had to try to run under 6 mins / km from 25 km on. She had a watch, while both of us were running together she put it on my other wrist and set it up – my lifesaver!

She then let me off and here's where I started to race! The watch was keeping my pace right on target.

I knew Shane and Chloe would be in Rathgar at the 18-mile mark with my sister Julie and husband Sean and their kids to support, just before I got to them, Maria Mc Cambridge spotted me and cheered me on, I gave her a big hug in return – support like this can't be bought.



I had decided I was going to get rid of my water belt as all was empty at this point to my family, I held onto some “power jellies”! The kids ran with me for a short while for company which gave me a lift!

I don't remember much of the surroundings from Rathgar to the 22-mile marker, I was so in the zone! Memories of my running days with Dun leer AC during my childhood years came flooding back and especially of Larry Mc Gill, RIP, our coach from those days was very much in my mind. Those days probably inspired me to do PE teaching!

When I reached the Stillorgan dual carriageway I had 6 km to go and my memories from here were of cars beeping at us! This was driving me mad as I kept thinking to myself did they know how much pain we were in! I still remained extremely focused, I had got this far and was determined not to let the 4 hr 30 mins balloons pass me! I never looked behind me once! I didn't know if they were seconds or minutes behind me at this stage. I was only keeping an eye on pace. I was still motoring going by the RDS and was taken aback by a “Go on Ms. Mc Donnell”. This must have been a past pupil of mine from Manor House, Raheny where I taught before I got married!

We were always encouraged to put in a strong finish from my running days which I was determined to do here! I set off with approx. 1 km to go on my lap of glory! I think I went too early as when I came to the 26 mile mark there was a sign for 400m to go! I slowed up then and then put another great spurt for the finish line! Tears flowed freely on the home straight and I looked up to heaven to Dad in thanksgiving. I crossed the finish line and stopped my watch to see 4 hrs 22 mins 9 secs –I was over the moon with this time.

When I finish any race I always have to put my hands on my knees to get my breath back for a few minutes. Next thing someone came over to me to check to see if I was alright. I looked up to see it was Jim Haughney the DCM race director. He was extremely nice and I congratulated him on a well organised race! The first face I recognised after the finish line was Pdraig who was sitting outside the white tent! I was so glad to see him and then discovered he was not long in before me!

I have no regrets, I emptied the tank and ran the race of my life as I will definitely not be repeating!

I am already back doing 5 km's where I am loving the shorter distance!

The support along the DCM route was immense from family members, Shane, Chloe, my mother, sisters Michele, Julie, Nicola and Linda, brother James, nieces and nephews, college friends Michelle

and Maureen, school friend Jackie, ATC members and their families – Vivienne, Paul Mc Donald, Niall Foley, Pdraig O’Cleary, Donna Kane, Niamh Mulhall, Karen Cardiff, Michelle Dooley, Mary Fennin, Michelle and Liam Brennan. Thank you all.

I was also overwhelmed by the flood of messages of congratulations on my achievement.

It is my one and only marathon which I am extremely proud of – that sounds like I didn’t have a very enjoyable experience. I loved the whole DCM journey and the race itself and since then I have so much respect for all marathon runners. I never had to go to a physio until I started my marathon training. My left knee is still giving me trouble but still I am very lucky it has not stopped me from running so I will stick to triathlon to preserve the body!



I am extremely grateful to Liam Kelly who invested so much time into our training programme, to Pdraig who inspired me to do it in the first place and who supported me throughout along with Shane and Chloe. I would highly recommend this once in a lifetime experience and I look forward to resuming my rightful place standing on the wall just before the Walkinstown roundabout supporting you all in the future!